

Leo Strauss and the East–West dialogue

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Chapter 3: Leo Strauss and the East-West Dialogue

In May 1601 Matteo Ricci, Jesuit priest and Founder of the Catholic missions of China was invited to be advisor to the Ming Emperor Wanli of China, becoming the first Westerner to visit the Forbidden City in Peking. Ricci remained in Peking until his death in 1610 and by special dispensation was buried there. One of the first Western scholars to master classical Chinese, Ricci is famous for his world maps, Chinese translations of Euclid, and importantly, for introducing Western science, especially mathematics and astronomy, to the Middle Kingdom.¹ He also contributed significantly to the introduction of Chinese thought to Europe with his Latin translation of Confucian works.² This early and remarkable example of East-West dialogue is not unique.³ Consider, for example, Yen Fu, scholar and translator, who after Japan's victory over China in 1895, argued that Western wealth and power was founded not on technological innovations but on ideas and institutions, and therefore sought to introduce Western political thought to China. His summaries and translations of seminal Western works, including those of T. H. Huxley, J. S. Mill, Adam Smith, Spencer and Montesquieu, had a great influence on subsequent Chinese political thought (see generally Schwarz 1964; Shaw 2016). But perhaps the most striking example of the East-West dialogue is the People's Republic of China itself, which came into being in 1949 after a protracted civil war and was founded on Western Marxist-Leninist principles by its revolutionary leader Mao Zedong. Mao was introduced to Marxism by the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, who were on the faculty of Peking University, an institution originally established in 1898 as Capitol College by the Qing Emperor Guangxu to modernize and reform China's imperial system.

These examples of philosophical and political exchanges are of course not confined to China. There is a long history of dialogue between East and West that has taken many forms – philosophical, literary, legal and political. The subtle and complex nature of the East-West dialogue can be seen in its diverse articulations, from the influence of Hindu sacred texts on German Idealists (such as Schelling, Fichte and Hegel) and English Romantic poets (including Coleridge, Shelley and Byron), to the contribution of German jurisprudential thought on Japanese, Chinese and Thai constitutionalism, to the Daoist and Hindu influence on leading figures of modern quantum theory,

such as Wolfgang Pauli, Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg and Erwin Schrödinger (see generally Clarke 1997).

The East-West dialogue we have noted above prompts us to ask about the possible role of Leo Strauss in this conversation. What contribution, if any, did Strauss make to this dialogue? Reflecting on the political philosophic thought of Leo Strauss in general it would seem that Strauss did not directly engage in or contribute to such a dialogue. Having completed his doctoral work in Hamburg in 1921, Strauss left Germany in 1932 to finally settle in the United States in 1937, where he taught principally at The New School for Social Research in New York and later the University of Chicago.⁴ Strauss's scholarship had an extraordinary breadth. He examined classical political philosophy, especially Plato and Xenophon, but also Aristotle, Thucydides, Aristophanes and others. His research also engaged the writings of famous Jewish and Islamic Medieval philosophers, including Avicenna, Farabi and Maimonides. But he is perhaps best known for his investigation into modern political thought, from Machiavelli, Spinoza and Hobbes, to the late moderns including Nietzsche, and especially his contemporaries such as Schmitt and Heidegger. This general overview would suggest that though we have extensive Straussian reflections on the tradition of Western philosophy in its most comprehensive or synoptic sense, Strauss did not engage with Eastern political thinkers or thought. Does this mean that Strauss has nothing to contribute to the East-West dialogue? Though not having written directly on Eastern philosophy, I will argue that Strauss can make an important contribution to this conversation. To examine this claim, and to suggest the different forms this contribution may take, I want to pose two separate but related questions. The first is to ask what students of Eastern thought can gain in engaging with or confronting the works of Strauss? The second and related question is, what can students of Western thought familiar with the writings of Strauss learn from engaging with Eastern philosophy?

In the discussion below I first take up the question how students of Eastern thought may benefit from engaging with Strauss by posing the problem or question of 'modernity'. In the first instance, it would seem that our unreserved endorsement of the benefits of modernity elicits a powerful commitment to its political and philosophical foundations, both in the East and West. At the same time, however, there are increasingly profound questions raised concerning the claims and ambitions of modernity that pose a formidable challenge to modernity itself. Because modernity and the 'crisis' of modernity form such an important part of Strauss's thought, students of modern philosophy, especially those from the East, will benefit from his reflections on the extent and seriousness of such a crisis. In the second part of the chapter I take up the question of what students of Western thought, especially those familiar with Strauss, may gain from engaging in the East-West dialogue. Here I will argue that Eastern thought provides a rich philosophical tradition and therefore a valuable means for students of Western thought to interrogate and test their insights into major

questions of political philosophy. These include the fundamental question of the relationship of the individual to the community and the problems it may raise regarding philosophical education, the problem of 'nature' and its implications for 'natural right' and philosophy, and finally, the tension between piety and philosophy evident in Western thought and its presence in the East. My overall argument is that Strauss provides an important modern articulation of some of the most profound philosophical challenges presently confronting political philosophy in both East and West and therefore makes an important contribution to the East-West dialogue that will benefit all students of political philosophy.

West-East Dialogue: The Problem of Modernity

A cursory examination of contemporary politics in Asia yields a curious observation: Asian politics does not immediately or obviously seem to reflect or reveal the influence of the great traditions of Eastern thought. For some it is still possible to see such an influence, even if more evident in a mixture or amalgam of Eastern thought and Western innovation. But for most there is less ambiguity – the case has been decided in favor of the West. Leaving aside social and cultural practices and traditions, frequently struggling against the tide and too often retained as touristic and historical curiosities, there appears to be nothing specifically 'Asian' in Asia. Consider, for example, the Marxist, that is Western, thought that until recently dominated the major countries in the region. It is true that Marxism has been largely repudiated or is under challenge in these countries, displaced by what appears to be an indigenous or autochthonous nationalism. The allure and power of nationalism in Asia, albeit in a variety of forms or aspects, cannot be denied, but one must equally concede that nationalism itself is an adopted concept, tracing its origins to the West. Comparable arguments can be made regarding the increasing authority of democracy and liberal constitutionalism in the region. This Western influence, and perhaps dominance, may be more accurately seen to be an aspect of 'modernity', a consequence of the Enlightenment that favors foundational conceptions of progress, universal and equal rights, separation of church and state, combined with free markets sustained by scientific innovation. Whatever the specific circumstances affecting the reception of these Western or modern ideas in any one country in Asia, what seems evident and undeniable is the extent to which Western thought is ubiquitous in the East, or more provocatively, may be said to have comprehensively replaced or ousted Eastern thought in contemporary practice.⁵

Yet at the very height of modernity's success and dominance in Asia, it is important to remind ourselves that in the West, the historical origin of modernity and where it is most advanced, there are profound philosophical reservations regarding its premises and promises. These range from concerns regarding the legitimacy of modern liberal constitutionalism, the apparently uncontrolled nature of

global capitalism founded on modern technology or ‘technicity’, to questions as to the very possibility of reasoning itself – whether we have any sound basis for making claims regarding what is just or moral, or even asking such questions in the first place. If we can capture all these concerns under the general heading of the ‘crisis of the west’, then it seems reasonable to suppose that those questions presenting formidable challenges to contemporary Western political philosophers will, sooner or later, also become a pressing concern for students of Eastern thought. Indeed, for some of the foremost Western philosophers who diagnosed these problems, the answers were to be found in the East – perhaps the best known example being Heidegger’s turn to Eastern philosophy (see Parkes 1990; May 1996). It should not surprise us, then, that contemporary students of Eastern thought familiar with these critiques have also turned to the East to repair what they see as the deficiencies of modernity.⁶ In addition to confirming the continuing importance of the East-West dialogue we have noted above, this scholarship underlines the salience of the crisis of the West theme in contemporary politics. It is in this context that Strauss can make an important contribution to the debate.

Modernity is an important theme in Strauss’s scholarship. In his essay *Three Waves of Modernity*, Strauss (1964) argues that modernity is a radical modification of pre-modern thought, inaugurated by Machiavelli, followed by a second wave beginning with Rousseau, ‘who changed the moral climate of the west as profoundly as Machiavelli,’ and finally by a third wave initiated by Nietzsche (1964, 89; 94).⁷ Strauss’s overarching assessment of the trajectory of ‘modernity’ is initiated by his view of a ‘crisis’ of modernity. This crisis is on one level a consequence of contemporary political problems, because as Strauss notes, “The crisis of modernity reveals itself in the fact, or consists in the fact, that modern Western man no longer knows what he wants – that he no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong.” (81) But it soon becomes clear that what may appear to be a moral, cultural or political crisis is primarily “the crisis of modern political philosophy.” (82)⁸ Modernity and the crisis of modernity is therefore more than a problem of contemporary politics; it is rather a profound challenge to philosophy, requiring an impartial and comprehensive examination of the works of modern political philosophers in the light of classical political thought. Students of Eastern thought would therefore benefit not only from Strauss’s understanding of the problem of modernity, but importantly, from his detailed and close interpretation of modern political philosophers.⁹

An important aspect of this scholarship is evident in his comprehensive statement of the problem in *Natural Right and History* (1953), where Strauss diagnoses the crisis of modern natural right not only as a challenge to justice or natural right, but to philosophy itself.¹⁰ In *Natural Right and History* Strauss sees two major challenges to natural right and philosophy. The first is the contemporary social scientific distinction between facts and values, most clearly articulated by Max Weber.¹¹ The second is the challenge posed by ‘history’ or the historical approach. The seriousness of

the challenge presented by radical historicism is evident not only from Strauss's discussion in *Natural Right and History*, but also in his other works examining Nietzsche and poetry's challenge to philosophy,¹² and Heideggerian existentialism.¹³

Informing this confrontation with modernity is Strauss's insights into the origins of Western political thought, in particular the possibility of the recovery of classical natural right and specifically Socratic *zetetic* or erotic philosophy. Strauss's extensive examination of classical political thought, especially of Plato and Xenophon, but more generally his close readings of Aristotle, Thucydides, and Lucretius, provide provocative interpretations of these seminal thinkers.¹⁴ Strauss here shows how modernity can only be understood in the light of its confrontation with ancient philosophy, reanimating such an engagement to allow clearer understanding of the nature of the debate and the merits of the directions taken by modern philosophers. Students of Eastern thought will therefore not only find in Strauss a powerful articulation of the nature of the crisis of modernity, but also in his recovery of classical Western philosophy an opportunity to reassess these origins in the light of Eastern thought.

East-West Dialogue: Hermeneutics, natural right and revelation

Our discussion above has sought to show how students of Eastern political philosophy who will inevitably have to enter into the East-West dialogue may benefit from Strauss's reflections on modernity. There are also benefits, however, for students of Western thought, especially those familiar with the works of Strauss, in confronting Eastern political philosophy. In the discussion below I explore three major themes for such dialogue and engagement: hermeneutics; natural right; and piety.

Strauss, as we noted, did not directly engage in the East-West dialogue. But this lack of engagement did not represent a repudiation of Eastern thought; rather, it may in part be accounted for by the simple fact that he lacked sufficient command of Asian languages to do justice to Eastern political philosophy. But does one need the original language to explore the political thought of a specific thinker? Can we not rely on translations? Arguably a competent translation may be more than adequate for engaging with the thought of those who wrote in different languages.¹⁵ It is true, however, that in using translations one is always confronted with the problem of evaluating the competence of the translator – all translations, however faithful to the original, are only accurate to a greater or lesser degree, and to this extent we have to rely on the judgment of others regarding the fidelity of the translation and whether the meaning of important passages has been rendered with sufficient accuracy and sensitivity. Translations therefore inevitably force us to depend on others, to

understand works mediately. As such they will unavoidably place a glass – more or less opaque or occluded depending on the translation – between a work and a reader. But for Strauss the problem of translations is also a question of hermeneutics and therefore raises larger philosophical problems. Leaving aside the profound question of whether some languages are inherently more philosophical or indeed, ‘sacred’, writing at best is only an approximation to personal philosophical discussion, where one can exercise discretion and judgment in conversation by taking into account the nature of one’s interlocutor. But writing, in addition to its inability to respond to questions, speaks to everyone. Thus truly philosophical writing will inevitably need an art of writing that allows the written work to, in a sense, answer questions posed to it, and speak to the different audiences.¹⁶ But to say this is to assume that there may be different audiences – that there is a fundamental difference between the philosopher and others, or, put somewhat differently, it is not possible to enlighten everyone. Therefore at the core of the question of translation, or the need to have unmediated access to primary works of philosophy, is a deeper philosophical problem regarding the nature of philosophy and its place in the city. Perhaps one of the most well-known and arguably misunderstood aspects of Strauss’s thought has been his insight regarding the need to exercise care in the reading of philosophical works precisely because of this problem of the tension between the ‘city’ and ‘man’ (Strauss 1988; 1978; Melzer 2006; 2014). Strauss’s insistence that we must first understand a thinker as he understood himself, and we must read carefully, noting inconsistencies, repetitions and errors, have certainly sounded curious to those of us raised in the spirit of the ‘open society’ and more familiar with the philosophical tradition of the ‘treatise’ and ‘encyclopedia’ than the dialogue. It is here that the East provides the first helpful challenge to students familiar with Western political thought. Our initial observation that Strauss did not write on Eastern philosophers therefore leads us to a deeper question on Strauss’s thought on the art of writing, and in doing so poses the question of whether these insights apply equally to the East. Did Eastern thinkers write esoterically? What is their understanding of the role of the ‘wise man’, or the sage? A close study of classical Eastern works will therefore provide an important test for the claim of esotericism, and its implicit understanding of the fundamental question of whether, and to what extent, we can all philosophize.¹⁷

A philosophical engagement with Eastern political thought also provides an important opportunity for exploring Strauss’s conception of philosophy itself. In *Natural Right and History* Strauss argues that the diversity in opinions regarding what is right or just, is employed by conventionalists to argue there is no natural right (Strauss 1953, 9). Yet for Strauss the ‘realization of the variety of notions of right is *the* incentive for the quest for natural right’ (Strauss 1953, 10; emphasis in original). The very diversity of views regarding what is just give rise to the question or problem of whether there is a natural basis for right, and in doing so reveals the underlying question or problem of ‘nature’. “The idea of natural right must be unknown as long as the idea of nature is

unknown. The discovery of nature is the work of philosophy. Where there is no philosophy, there is no knowledge of natural right as such.” (Strauss 1953, 81) Nature, or the idea of nature, remains a question for Strauss.¹⁸ This explains why Strauss turns to classical political philosophy: if Socrates “is said to have been the founder of political philosophy” he was also the “originator of the whole tradition of natural right teachings.” (Strauss 1953, 120) But is the discovery of ‘nature’ specific to Western tradition, and is it essential for the possibility of philosophy simply? And turning to the East, is there a conception of ‘nature’ in Eastern political thought? Would this be definitive for our assessment of whether Eastern thought is ‘philosophical’? Related to these questions are those concerning the problem of natural right or justice. How has the question of natural right been posed in Eastern political thought? Are the answers proffered in the East comparable to those in the West? Or are they so radically different that they raise fundamental questions regarding Strauss’s understanding of philosophy? Finally, in the light of this argument, should we return to classical political rationalism or to the East in confronting the modern radical historicist challenges to natural rights? As these questions indicate, Strauss’s conception of natural right and philosophy provides a useful starting point for understanding Eastern thought, but in doing so it also presents a valuable means of confronting and evaluating his teaching.¹⁹

The final theme I want to explore concerns the question of piety, and specifically the challenge revealed religion poses for philosophical thought. In a personal autobiographical statement that prefaces the English edition of his book on Spinoza, Strauss notes how he found himself “in the grip of the theological-political predicament.” (Strauss 1965, 1; Meier 2006) In his discussion of Spinoza, Strauss notes that Spinoza dogmatically dismisses, rather than philosophically confronts the challenge posed by piety. The character of this confrontation between philosophy and piety, and its implications for each, therefore becomes an important theme in Strauss’s scholarship. This confrontation has a number of aspects. As noted, an important question for Strauss is whether modernity adequately repudiates piety. Equally important is the challenge piety presents to ‘pagan’ or classical political philosophy. This challenge proves to be especially problematic in any attempt to return to or recover classical political thought. One way Strauss seeks to understand this question is by turning to medieval Jewish and Islamic scholars such as Maimonides and Farabi, students of Plato and Aristotle who were compelled to confront this problem as it manifested itself in their communities. The non-dogmatic common ground for such an engagement, it would seem, is the concern of both classical political philosophy and of revealed religion for natural right or justice. Or in the concluding words of *The City and Man* (Strauss 1978, 241), the all-important question of *quid sit deus* is coeval with philosophy. It is on this basis that Strauss, taking seriously Avicenna’s remark that the treatment of prophecy and divine law is contained in Plato’s *Laws*, seeks to explore the Platonic treatment of

piety; his last work is an especially subtle commentary on Plato's *Laws* (Strauss 1975; Meir 2014; Pangle 1993).

This philosophical engagement with the challenge presented by piety allows Strauss to reflect on the nature of Western thought in general. In his well-known essay *Jerusalem and Athens*, Strauss (1983, 147-173) argues that the Western philosophical tradition has been shaped by two divergent sources, Jerusalem or the tradition of piety, and Athens, or the Socratic tradition.²⁰ What is notable about Strauss's remarks is his observation that the vitality of thought in the West is due to the tension between these traditions. This observation prompts us to wonder what Strauss means by such 'vitality' and what exactly in each tradition was the spring or engine for such dynamism. And importantly for our purposes, what are we to infer from this statement regarding non-Western traditions? Does Strauss mean to suggest that other traditions have resolved the tension between philosophy and piety? If they have, and are not therefore 'dynamic', does this mean that in their dogmatism they reveal the victory of piety over philosophy? Put somewhat generally and therefore inaccurately, is Eastern political thought fundamentally 'religious', however this term is understood? These questions make us wonder whether important aspects of political developments in East and West can be explained in terms of this vitality. Perhaps the modern ambition to 'conquer nature', and therefore Western 'science', is not conceivable without the challenge of Abrahamic revealed religion? If so, can we speculate that it is the absence of Abrahamic religion in the East that explains why it did not embrace scientific 'method' and 'technology'?²¹ What then is the difference between Abrahamic piety and Eastern religion? These questions also allow us to ask once more but in a different context whether philosophy is historically contingent, shaped by accident and circumstance, or in an important sense transcends these limitations. Whatever the conclusions we may draw, these reflections, prompted by Strauss's assessment of the complex nature of Western tradition, will direct the gaze of Western scholars to the East, and allow Eastern scholars to view their tradition in a new light.

Continuing the East-West dialogue

Civilization scholars, informed by Hegel, usefully focus our attention on the different traditions that have informed and continue to shape and influence dealings between different communities, nations and states. Yet their approach, precisely because it posits 'civilization' or its variants, rather than political thought or political philosophy as the mediator for such engagement, will arguably always be constrained by the limitations imposed by demands for respect and especially 'recognition' or honor. Indeed, to the extent that we are animated with the powerful thumotic desire to love and defend our 'own', whether as 'East' or 'West', it is perhaps inevitable that the civilizational approach will foretell or issue in agonism.²² It is therefore not clear whether 'civilization', to the extent that it is not founded

on excellence that transcends one's own and therefore makes possible philosophical conversations, however constrained, tentative or limited, can lead to true friendship and potentially political amity.

In our brief discussion we have endeavored to acknowledge the complex and long-standing political philosophical nature of the East-West dialogue. In doing so we have also attempted to show how an engagement with the political philosophy of Leo Strauss provides a number of opportunities for continuing this dialogue. For scholars familiar with the Eastern tradition, Strauss allows a re-assessment of modernity in all its aspects. For Western scholars, Strauss directs our attention to those traditions not informed by the tension between Jerusalem and Athens, and in doing so invites a critical review not only of his understanding of the tradition, but more fundamentally, the ambitious claims he makes in recovering the very possibility of political philosophy.

Notes

¹ For Ricci's scientific contribution see Bernard 1973; on his mnemonic technique see Spence 1984.

² On the influence of Chinese thought on European thinkers, especially Malebranche, Bayle, Leibniz, Wolff and Voltaire see Rowbotham 1945; Clarke 1997; Hobson 2004.

³ We will employ the terms 'East' and 'West' as only approximate or short-hand expressions, focusing in particular on the influence of Chinese thought in the 'East' (on the use of such locutions see Hobson 2004, Metzger 2005, Parel and Keith 2003). The limitations of employing geographical terms to capture different philosophical traditions can be seen when we reflect on the debt the European Renaissance owes to the Arab scholars who preserved the Greek tradition, literally in the form of manuscripts, and more generally through commentaries and summaries. Greek and Hellenistic philosophy, science and medicine, along with Indian and Persian works in mathematics and literature were preserved in the Near East and Persia due to the support of the Abbasid caliphate (750-1285). Thus in the tenth and eleventh centuries translations and commentaries by al-Kindī, al-Rāzi, al-Fārābi, Avicenna and others sustained this philosophical tradition. In addition, Muslim Spain (al-Andalus) and its capital, Cordova, began to vie with Baghdad as the center of learning, giving rise by the eleventh century to eminent philosophers such as Avempace, Ibn Ṭufayl and Averroes. Thus

Cardova and more generally Iberia became a bridge across which Arab-Greek philosophy and science crossed into Western Europe. It was through the commentaries and translations of Averroes that Aristotle was introduced into Europe, making possible Latin scholasticism and ultimately the Renaissance.

⁴ Strauss was a research fellow at Columbia University in 1937. From 1938 to 1948 he was a member of the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research. In 1949, Strauss joined the University of Chicago as a professor in the Department of Political Science, and in 1959 was appointed Robert Maynard Hutchins Distinguished Service Professor. He moved in 1968 to Claremont Men's College for a year and a half, and in 1969 to St. John's College-Annapolis, where he served as the Scott Buchanan Distinguished Scholar in Residence until his death in 1973. For general or introductory works on Strauss and his thought see Meir (2006); Smith (2006); Zuckert and Zuckert (2006); Pangle (2006); Tanguay (2007).

⁵ On the problem of legitimacy generally see Gilley 2009; on the nature of legitimacy in Asia see Kane et al 2011.

⁶ For recent attempts to draw on Confucianism to remedy, repair or even replace aspects of Western thought see Chen 2007; Bell 2008; Sole Farras 2013; Angle 2012; Tang 2015.

⁷ Machiavelli initiates the modern project according to Strauss. On the importance of 'propaganda' for Machiavelli and his 'anti-theological ire' and therefore his philosophical immoderation see Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1965); Merrill (2000); Tarcov (2010).

⁸ See for example, the essays 'What is Political Philosophy?' and 'Political Philosophy and History' in *What is Political Philosophy?* (Strauss 1959), the collection of essays in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Strauss 1968) and *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Strauss 1989).

⁹ For a bibliography of Strauss see Pangle (1983, 249-258). For his collected works see: *Leo Strauss: Gesammelte Schriften* (Meir 2003). Strauss's original work on Hobbes is *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes, its basis and its genesis* (Strauss 1952). For his subsequent re-assessment of Hobbes see, for example, the essay in *What is Political Philosophy?* (Strauss 1959), which includes works on Xenophon, Farabi, Maimonides and Locke. His other book-length examinations of modern thinkers include *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (Strauss 1958); *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Strauss 1965).

¹⁰ For thoughtful engagements with *Natural Right and History* see Kennington (1981); Lenzner (1991); Velkley (2011); Pangle (2006).

¹¹ On Weber and Strauss see Merrill (1999); Behnegar (2003).

¹² Strauss's *Socrates and Aristophanes* (1966) consists of a detailed exploration of the plays of the Greek comic playwright Aristophanes. As the introduction notes, the discussion has significant implications for Nietzsche's and therefore modern, political thought. On Strauss and Nietzsche see Lampert (1996).

¹³ See, for example, his essay *Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy* (in Strauss 1983); and the essays *Relativism* and *An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism* (Strauss 1989).

¹⁴ Consider the discussion of classic natural right in *Natural Right and History* (1953), the essays collected in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Strauss 1983) and *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (1989); the *City and Man* (Strauss 1978) and his works on Xenophon (Strauss 1970; 1972).

¹⁵ Consider, for example, Saint Thomas Aquinas, who commissioned William of Moerbeke to provide a Latin translation of Aristotle.

¹⁶ See the discussion in Plato's *Phaedrus* and the *Laws* regarding the limitations of writing and the need for written laws. Contrast the Platonic invention of the 'dialogic form' as philosophical mediation between poetry and plays, and the modern reliance on the treatise. If taken seriously this argument suggests that individual conversation is essential for philosophy; that 'books' will always be philosophically inadequate and therefore are to this extent a concession to the exigencies and vagaries of chance.

¹⁷ Consider, for example, the dialogic form of Confucius's *Analects*, and the meaning of allusive or poetic accounts in the seminal works of Daoism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

¹⁸ See chapter III of *Natural Right and History* and Kennington (1981) on Strauss's specific use of 'idea'.

¹⁹ For an introductory exploration of the themes of 'nature', 'philosophy' and 'theology' in Asian and Islamic thought see Anastaplo (2002).

²⁰ See Orr's (1995) commentary on this essay, as well as Strauss's essays in Part Three of *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Strauss 1989), the notes on Maimonides in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Strauss 1983) and Pangle (2003).

²¹ See in this context the famous edict by the Qianlong Emperor repudiating Western technological innovations in the course of responding to the representations by Lord Macartney's Mission to China in 1793. On Chinese metaphysics see Li and Perkins (2015).

²² On 'civilization' see Toynbee (1970); Huntington (1996); Patapan (2011).

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