

Strauss's Criticism of Modernity and His Admiration of Classical Natural Rights

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Abstract: Strauss, the advocate of classical political philosophy, made the accusation of “nihilism” against “modern rationalism” initiated by Machiavelli and Hobbes' enlightenment rationality, and advocated returning to the virtue and wisdom of Socrates of Plato in classical Greece. Strauss' political philosophy tries to return to Plato's Socrates, guide the justice with the good of natural justice, educate the legislator to return to the state of universal political community, restore the natural state of human beings. The classical natural rights lie in that the value difference derive from the hierarchy of desire, and the hierarchy of this natural value difference is regarded as the proper good and justice, just as Plato's “justice lies in the division and performance of each”. According to Strauss, the good life is consistent with human nature, that is, natural law. This is justice.

1. Introduction

Leo Strauss, the advocate of classical political philosophy, made the accusation of “nihilism” against “modern rationalism” initiated by Machiavelli and Hobbes' enlightenment rationality, and advocated returning to the virtue and wisdom of Socrates of Plato in classical Greece. Leo Strauss's understanding of Plato's Republic is based on the premise of deconstructing the convergence of the city-states in the words and maintaining the true original justice. In his book *City State and Man*, he believed that as a response to Aristophane's satire on the destruction of politics by philosophy, Plato deconstructed the the city state which was degenerated by the city state in Socrates' words, which showed that it was politics that corrupted philosophy, not philosophy[1]. Thus, Plato maintained the demeanor of the real philosopher king and the true justice and virtue. As a Jewish scholar with Jewish tradition, he hoped that philosophy of Plato's Socrates and classical Judaism would be interrelated, and rejected the inheritance relationship between Plato's philosophy and Greek rationalism and Christian universalism. In ancient Greek reason, Socrates had the virtue of “knowing ignorance” and the virtue of “getting not available “, that is, “knowledge is virtue”, which was changed to the idea of “knowing getting” by Plato, and then deviated from the ancient Greek spirit and was rationalized by Aristotle. After the three waves of modernity in Strauss's eyes, it went to the absolute essentialism and nihilism arbitrary rational arrogance. The original Judaism has the enlightenment of pure faith and good, but in the process of Hellenization after the birth of Christianity, it was illuminated by the light of Greek rationality and became rational and universal, discarding the elements of Jewish fundamentalism. Strauss questioned Socrates, knowing God why did not go to God's wisdom, but actually hoped that Socrates, like the LORD, would integrate revelation and reason. In fact, he wish

Socrates revelation was higher than reason, and would go to classical political philosophy and even political theology, so as to restore the classical virtue of the fundamentalism of Judaism. In this way, we can avoid falling into nihilism, and thus restore the classical natural hierarchy of the upper and lower levels, gold, silver, copper and iron, so as to counter the rootless state of Christianity's secularization, universalization, homogenization of popular desire, and technological rationalization. Because, according to Strauss, "modern rationalism" starting with enlightenment rationality is actually "historical relativism", which in the final analysis is nihilism, which leads to the demise of classical natural justice. Therefore, he returned to Plato from the perspective of political philosophy, from post-Plato and Aristotle modern rationalism to Plato, the political philosopher who adhered to the original virtue, to reorganize the political and legal relationship between the philosopher and the city-state, and to retrieve the lost classical virtue and wisdom of modern people.

Strauss advocated the Plato-Alphrabi-Memonid route and hoped for the connection between Plato's philosophy and Jewish orthodoxy. Why? The Plato-Aristot-Augustine and Thomas routes can only lead to technological utilitarianism, throw away classical wisdom and virtue, and mask truth. In order to avoid this bias, Strauss' intention is to combine Plato's Socrates with the classical Hebrew Jewish divinity, return to the original Jewish fundamentalism of divinity, and reject its inheritance relationship with Greek rationality. Plato's Socrates was recalled from heaven and made to serve as the task of educating the people. In his eyes, there is only one best system, which is noble, but not necessarily legal. Because there are many legal systems, but they are only legal, and legal is not noble. Nobility and legality show the difference between natural law and customary law. Legality is not noble. That workers and peasants work are only legal, not noble. He hoped to establish a hierarchical system of aristocracy and elite, fight against democracy that violated natural law, and avoid democracy creating a general state of individual belief like a pack of sand. Therefore, it is necessary to restore from the "general individual belief state" caused by the enlightenment reason to the general political community state. Strauss is determined to return and uncover the original justice and the supreme good under the cover of the enlightenment reason in the way of phenomenology, to make it unconcealed and restore the original justice and truth. Here, Strauss opposed the philosophical "enlightenment" of intellectuality and sincerity, including the enlightenment of the philosopher of the city in Socrates' words. Of course, the intellectual sincerity of Heidegger and Nietzsche also became the object of Strauss' criticism[2].

Strauss re-examined the history of western philosophy and put forward a classical political philosophy based on natural rights, which is different from Heidegger's differential ontology. He criticized the three waves of modernity represented by Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau and Nietzsche. It points out that the first wave of modernity represented by Machiavelli and Hobbes lost classical virtue and reduced moral and political problems to technical problems; The second wave of modernity represented by Rousseau reduced natural law to positive law, making the law of universal became the code of conduct, and the universal rule made the legitimate good of primitive nature lose; In the third wave of modernity, Nietzsche pointed out that the philosopher lacked a sense of historical responsibility. He revalued all values with his historical human planning, made man the master of fate, and dispelled truth, justice with his powerful truth, thus became thorough nihilism. The dispute between the ancient and the modern caused by Strauss tried to examine how the "good precedes right" of classical philosophy changed into Hobbes's "right precedes good", and how the legitimate natural law of classical nature was lost. He refuted Rawls's "right precedes good", and at the same time refuted the western modern theory of "natural rights" and "natural human rights" since Hobbes. So why did he refute Rawls and others? The liberalism represented by Rawls, whose "right precedes good", actually moves towards legalism, regards right as good, treats all customs and traditions with tolerance, and drives good into the personal field. There is no standard of good and evil in society, which leads to pluralism of value and the indeterminate state of truth. In fact, it is nihilism and

relativism. Today's right-based liberalism has transformed the classical natural law with the supremacy of good into the modern liberalism and nihilism with "right before good". The rejection of natural law, which is justified by nature, leads to liberalism and relativism based on tolerant natural human rights and all historicism based on historical conditions. The individualism of universalization of rights and conditionalization of truth has led to essentialism, relativism and historicism. In the final analysis, it is the nihilism of truth without standards. Strauss appreciated Augustine's view that "good Christians are better than good citizens", that is, virtue is higher than law. In order to pay attention to the question of virtue and goodness, his political philosophy centered on classical virtue. For him, it is unreasonable for a country with universal integration. Political society is a natural cave in the sense of Plato. Society is rooted in opinions and cannot be replaced by knowledge. The opinion and common sense of the society strengthen the responsibility of the philosopher. The philosopher should carry out different education to different people in two ways: "vulgar teaching" and "implicit teaching", such as the midwifery of the philosopher Socrates. Strauss paid special attention to these two different ways of writing and education. These two ways of writing are out of the need of scholars' self-protection and education to educate different people, and are of profound social significance in particular[3].

2. Strauss' Criticism of Modern Philosophy and Modern Politics

Strauss believed that modern philosophy and modern politics abandoned the virtue and wisdom of classical political philosophy, attempted to transform the world with philosophy, replace opinions with philosophical knowledge, and replace "noble lies" with thorough intellectual sincerity, so that politics started from philosophical theory and doctrine, leading to "politicization of philosophy" and "politicization of politics", and philosophy became the weapon and ideology of modernity. Therefore, Strauss hoped to return to classical philosophy to prevent philosophy from "going crazy", because philosophy has madness, and philosophy as a pure intellectual rejection, doubts moral customs and religious sanctity. Therefore, Strauss's shift from philosophy to political philosophy is precisely the hope of returning from crazy philosophy to the world of common sense and opinion, and to the world of clearness and gentleness. Socrates was the first to call philosophy down from heaven and force it to study life, manners and customs, good and evil. Socrates is the combination of wisdom and gentleness that keeps philosophy virtuous. Machiavellian "immoral political view", Hobbes' social contract theory, Rousseau's theory of public will, Kant's "immoral historical view", Nietzsche's "superman" view of good and evil, and Weber's "immoral social view" are all manifestations of modernity in Strauss' eyes. The reason is that these modernity theories have led to the universal integration of human rights and the theory of general will, and have lost the classical and legitimate virtue and justice. The special is said to be universal, and the universal is said to be dominant, so that the dominant of universalization becomes justice and truth, and the public will and power rule become truth and justice. Although Heidegger has a new vision of refuting technical rationality and returning to Pre-Socrates, his "ethics under modernity is impossible" is still regarded by Strauss as "complete intellectual and sincere historicism" and is included in the list of "modernity". And Spinoza's free real world, Descartes's universal suspicion of "I think so I am", Kant's transcendental moral subject of "free will", Rawls's "original position", and "veil of ignorance" also suspend the common sense world with complete intellectual sincerity, and replace the good and justice in the sense of natural rights with the universal knowledge of valueless universal legislation, which naturally cannot escape the fate of modernity crisis.

Strauss absorbed the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger, but it was different from them. He respected Aristotle's famous saying that "man is a natural political animal". He disagreed with Heidegger's criticism of Plato's metaphysics. Heidegger believes that the end of philosophy and the

way to save philosophy lies in the former Socrates, and he hopes to move towards “philosophy of poetry”. On the contrary, Strauss believed that it was necessary to move towards political philosophy and that the way to save philosophy was to reinterpret Socrates. He reverted to the political world of “pre-science, pre-philosophy and pre-theory” in the way of phenomenology, that is, Plato's Socrates' cave world - the state of universal political community. He hoped to use political philosophy to curb the obsession of philosophy. His young Socrates and adult Socrates have different styles. Young Socrates, as an immature Socrates, has the insanity of philosophy and despises politics and morality. Aristophane's *Cloud* attacks young Socrates, that is, Socrates who “attacks justice and piety”. Adult Socrates is mature and concerned about politics and morality, that is, Socrates in Plato and Xenophon's writings. Whom Nietzsche attacked was the sober and gentle adult Socrates who “maintained justice and piety”. Because, in Strauss's eyes, the modern western enlightenment philosophy is the young Socrates who “attacks justice and piety”. Enlightenment philosophy tries to replace opinions with knowledge, transform politics with philosophy, replace concealment with light, and replace the original classical virtue, wisdom and justice with universal non-goodness and non-value. Liberalism is rampant in modern society. The universal principles of natural human rights, freedom and equality are unrestrained in tolerance of various customs. They fight against natural rights and values for the reason of respecting diversity and individuality. Customerism prevails. Unrestricted personality is extended[4]. There are no standards for good and evil, value, justice and truth. Historicism negates the eternal principles of justice, the supreme good and truth with the subjective truth of relativism, which is based on the specific time, space and region. Customerism, historicism and intellectual sincerity have led to the prevalence of essentialism and nihilism.

3. Strauss's Admiration of Classical Natural Rights and Classical Political Philosophy

In *Natural Power and History*, Strauss said that natural rights are based on respect for human nature and oppose the destruction of the true order of justice by artificial customs and laws. His view of natural rights is the inheritance of Stoic school's sacred theory of providence and human nature. He mentioned the original natural rights and secondary natural rights. He said that although we should respect natural rights and oppose the over-emphasis on artificial law, when wise people go down the cave, we should lower the standard of wisdom, make wisdom reach a reconciliation with the consent of the people, and dilute natural rights with customs. Because there is a fundamental conflict between natural rights and human customs. The original natural rights have the original justice and naturalness, and the human custom, regardless of good or evil, takes the value as the yardstick, and is the supplement after the fall of the human mind. In order to coordinate the sacred natural rights with the civil society, we must lower the natural rights and make them adapt to the artificial customs of society. Therefore, for the wise man who has seen the essence of the supreme good and truth, he must aggrieve himself, put his eyes down to be compatible with the ordinary people in the opinion world, and be able to live in harmony with them. He must not forget his mission to save the ignorant people, educate and improve the people with the supreme good he has achieved, help many people to shape their souls, make them play the good end of their hearts, and improve the level of their hearts. Strauss called Plato's cave as a natural cave, and the technological rational world since the Enlightenment of Reason as the second unnatural cave. The second cave discards classical wisdom with its thorough principle of intellectuality and sincerity. Only by returning to the natural cave from the second cave, returning to the natural common sense world, and restoring the common nature of human beings, can we upgrade to the best rational world and enable a few people to reach the realm of philosophical speculation and live a meditative life. Strauss hoped to return to Plato's Socratic period and reinterpret the issue of the *Sugolates*. He transformed modern philosophy into political philosophy and let Socrates enter the world of opinion.

Strauss' political philosophy tries to return to Plato's Socrates, draw out the goal hierarchy with the desire hierarchy corresponding the natural justice of to the value difference, guide the justice with the good of natural justice, educate the legislator to return to the state of universal political community, return to the natural state of human beings, restore the common nature of human beings, and then go out of the cave and rise to the contemplative life of philosophical nature. The good of modern conventionalism is equal to happiness, while the classical natural right opposes hedonism and believes that the good is more fundamental than happiness. According to Strauss' view of classical natural rights, in view of the hierarchy of desire for natural order, the level of understanding of happiness is determined by the level of human character. Justice and rights come from nature, and there is no artificial self-interest and calculation. However, modern liberalism is rampant, lacking in morality, and without standards of good and evil. Only when we are in awe of nature, seek natural conscience and exercise restraint can we return to Socrates' classical virtue. Good precedes right, not right precedes good. Wisdom is superior to the "consent" of the public, and not universal rights are superior to wisdom. The classical natural rights lie in that the value difference derive from the hierarchy of desire, and the hierarchy of this natural value difference is regarded as the proper good and justice, just as Plato's "justice lies in the division and performance of each". According to Strauss, the good life is consistent with human nature, that is, natural law[3]. The good life is consistent with human nature. There is no artificial and calculating mind. This is justice. This view of justice has the original natural and legitimate meaning of justice. Of course, true justice will not be universal integration, nor does it lie in the diversity of opinions under the democratic system. It lies in the good contrary to evil, and is a virtue with ethical significance. In the classical city-states, according to the different levels of nature, it is conducive to the harmony and order of society, with its rationality and justice. Of course, Strauss emphasized that the pursuit of justice is focused on the pursuit of the moral significance of justice, which is a natural and legitimate good. Although Strauss also emphasized the moral significance of justice, his emphasis on the legitimate rights of classical nature deviated slightly from the original good meaning of justice. After all, there are some differences between justice and goodness and natural rights. Justice and good have their inherent natural ethical yardstick, while the right of natural justice is different from justice and good after all, and they cannot be completely equal. In addition, Strauss overemphasized the existence of eternal and unchanging standards of justice while denying certain changes under certain historical conditions, which is also somewhat metaphysical [5].

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