



Insights and Coordinates from the Perspective of Intellectual History

—Strauss' Theoretical Journey to *Natural Rights and History*

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Abstract. The intellectual history is a rigorous and open theoretical perspective. Strauss's "Natural Rights and History" is mixed with many conceptual knots and fragments of experience within the scope of political philosophy. The trap game behinds the transition from "natural justice" to "natural rights" and the examination of the "debate between the past and the present" are the two coordinate anchor points that run through the beginning and end. Meanwhile, the comparison of reflections by historians such as Skinner, the layered dissection of the boundary between nature and customs and the individual insights under the "annotated classic" writing style are the steel mesh eyes that bind Strauss's work on the intellectual history. Through the rotation and re examination of the perspective, "Natural Rights and History" has been reexamined and elaborated.

Keywords: Strauss, "Natural Rights and History", Political Philosophy, History of Thought

1 Introduction

Huang Jinxing, the director of the Taiwan Institute of History and Philology, once described the current state of intellectual history research as "old soldiers never die; they just fade away" [6] (p198) by Michael Arthur. Ge Zhaoguang believes that this may be limited to the West. Since Hu Shi stepped into the field of intellectual history during the May Fourth Movement, the study of intellectual history in China has been on the rise. Strauss's "Natural Rights and History" is based on the "fabric"[23] (Intro.p7) of Western intellectual history. It is a secret medicine found in the classical tradition of Western philosophy to treat the crisis of modernity. The writing style of "hidden and visible" [16] (pv) perfectly balances the expression of the essence of historical thought and the display needs of contemporary insights and judgment, which help to open up Strauss's "micro universe" in the conflict between "historicism" and "natural law", so that later generations can better grasp the essence of this political philosopher's reasoning. In the vertical integration of classical and modern and

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the horizontal comparison of intellectual history, Strauss's coordinates also have a fixed pivot and increasingly obvious anchor while drifting and floating.

The description of Strauss' political philosophy theory in the field of intellectual history has followed a relatively clear trajectory. Before 2010, the deduction of logical thinking such as natural rights, natural law and modernity dilemma was the main focus of scholars' research. After 2010, the intersection of philosophy, history and law gradually increased. Since 2020, more attention has been paid to the analysis of Strauss' theoretical ideas and the application or comparison of specific concepts. The brilliance of intellectual history is reflected not only in the excavation process of some classic connotations within Strauss' theoretical works, but also in the migration and evolution of theories in the historical background inside and outside the text.

2 Political Philosophers and Political Philosophy: Strauss's Silence and Exploration

As a Jewish political philosopher born in Kirchhain, Hessen, Germany, Strauss retained a unique concern for the "Jewish Political Restoration Movement" and classical philosophy. His development trajectory has also gone through many paths, including Germany, Paris, England, the United States and other places. He has written works such as "Spinoza's Critique of Religion," "Philosophy and Law," "Reflections on Machiavelli," "Socrates of Xenophon: Memoirs of Socrates," "The City State and Man," and "Plato's Debate and Plot on Justice." *Natural Right and History* (1953) is a highly condensed and focused work belonging to Strauss. In the preface written by Gan Yang, he pointed out the crisis of modernity, the crisis of the West and the crisis of Western civilization^①[13] (p.1-12). It is a topic that Strauss has long been concerned about, manifested in the impermanent standards of "good and bad", "right and wrong", "good and evil", etc, which reduce the depth of human life, leading to flatness, dilution and emptiness. At this time, returning to the source and capturing the classics has become the preferred response strategy. Heinrich Meier's "Why Strauss?" reveals the important position of political philosophy in Strauss's ideological system, which revolves around "questioning the best political system, the right way of life, fair governance, prestige, knowledge, and the necessary influence of power"[16] (pvii). The book "What is Political Philosophy" has a dedicated chapter discussing classical political philosophy, with people's pursuit of a good life and social knowledge as the cause of the emergence of political philosophy.

Strauss believed that political philosophy aims to address the philosophical issues of "the nature of political affairs" and "the best or just political order"[15] (p.47), in order to distinguish it from the historical issues that focus on the individual. "Natural

^①See Gan Yang's note: The original text is taken from *Leo Strauss, The City and Man* (The University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp.1-12.

See also his *Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization, In An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, edited by Hilall Gildin (Wayne State University Press, 1989), pp.249-310.

Rights and History" regards vague historical experience as the foundation of the philosophical position of natural rights, and Strauss's "history" that combines classical intellectual skepticism and modern people's turning intentions is mainly "political history"[18] (p35) .

The deep cultivation of political philosophy is largely inseparable from Strauss's interest orientation and the twists and turns of his experiences. When he was in Germany, the young Strauss was still an unknown scholar. After traveling around, he moved to the United States in 1938 and became a lecturer at the New School of Social Studies in New York. In 1949, he was hired as a professor of politics at the University of Chicago, with many disciples^①[29] (p44) .After the 1970s, Strauss gradually made a name for himself in the Western academic community. In May 1985, the New York Review of Books published Bunye's criticism that Strauss's long essay on Plato's research, "Sphinx without a secret" [18] (Intro.p36) ,had reversed the mainstream academic neglect of Strauss.Due to Strauss' complete use of English in writing after arriving in the United States, the German translation of "Natural Rights and History" (Frankfurt, 1977) was only released many years after the original work was published. Although different from the rising stars of Western mainstream political philosophy such as Rawls, the Strauss school gradually emerged in the struggle with the prominent schools of thought, represented by J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, such as the "Cambridge School" or the "Republican Historical School". Especially in recent years, the Chinese academic community has also paid increasing attention to the practical significance of Strauss's entry into China to "reshape classical nature"[21] (p59) .In Liu Xiaofeng's article "The Gentleness of Hedgehog", Strauss' understanding of social sciences is better clarified by comparing it with Berlin, who is known for his research on the history of thought,and the direct consequence of the cancellation of good and evil moral choices by the principle of historical relative values is that the "knowledge of politics (political science or disguised political philosophy)"[23] (p30-31) has become "decadent", while Strauss's understanding that philosophy is essentially political has been accepted by more later generations with the continuous intervention of practical experience.

3 Strauss in the Chain of Intellectual History

R.G. Collingwood regards the "history of thought" as the "only history"[7] (p1) .The past may have been destroyed by historical time, but the ideas that have been passed down in previous generations can continue to stack and self renew. It should be noted that there are still potential conflicts between the history of thought and the history of philosophy, ideology, and logic, which are not completely inclusive relationships. This is also evident in Strauss' writings.

^①The Strauss School adheres to the enlightenment plan of "coexistence of educational theory and practical life".

3.1 Conjugation on the Trap Layer: From "Natural Justice" to "Natural Rights"

The core issue discussed in "Natural Rights and History" basically follows the evolution trajectory of western moral and political theory from "natural law", "natural rights" to "human rights" (i.e. "human rights"), starting from the distinction between contemporary natural rights theory and historical methods, facts and values, tracing back to the origin of ancient natural rights concepts and the exposition of classical natural rights theory, and returning to the exploration of crises in natural rights theory represented by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Burke in modern times. The transformation from the classical political philosophy of "good before right" to the modern Western concept of "right before good" is a core thread underlying the "debate between ancient and modern times" in this book. Strauss pointed out in his commentary on Karl Schmitt's "The Concept of Politics" (1932) that the field of political affairs "is something that everyone needs to face"[10] (p52), the primary question of human beings still lies in reason and the individual themselves. Translator Peng Gang discovered that the semantic category of "natural right" in Strauss had already undergone a two opposing split. The classical natural right theory used in the first half of this book can be translated as "natural correctness" and "natural legitimacy", while the modern natural right theory used in the second half of chapters five and six should be translated as "natural right" and "innate right".

Gan Yang further summarized that the title of "Natural Rights and History" essentially argues for the rise of the Western modern "natural rights" or "innate rights" theory since the 17th century and the resulting "historical concept," which led to the decline of Western classical "natural justice" or "natural law."^① However, in his early works such as "Hobbes' Political Philosophy," Strauss mostly used the concept of "natural law," but later he largely reserved it for the Christian Thomism tradition, using "natural right" to refer to both ancient Greek Plato and Aristotelian theories, as well as the modern "innate rights" theory since Hobbes. What kind of "discourse" hidden behind the transformation? When they are placed in the dimension of political or legal intellectual history, can the original cracks and fissures be rebridged?

The fundamental premise for the emergence of "natural rights" is the different understandings of "right and wrong"[18] (p11) concepts among different eras and ethnic groups. According to the classical view, the existence of "natural rights" requires a consensus among normal people on the principles of justice, and Strauss pointed out that the floating and inconsistent ideas of justice among humans are the dependence on the effectiveness of "natural rights". The harmony of the same inevitably means the reduction of the different. When people talk about right, their first concern is still their own interests. "The natural rights of human beings stem from their rationality (or nature)"[3] (p46). The essence of restraining the pursuit of private desires is to hope

^① Strauss often used the concept of "natural law" in his early works such as *"Hobbes' Political Philosophy"*, but later he largely reserved natural law for the Thomism tradition of Christianity, and used "natural right" to refer to both the Platonic and Aristotelian theories of ancient Greece and the "natural right" theory since Hobbes in modern times.

to awaken others' goodwill and sharing through the sacrifice of self-interest. Hobbes believed that the natural state of humanity is a "war of all against all", and therefore natural law is more like an endorsement of "self preservation" achieved through the reconstruction of the cornerstone of trust.

In Strauss' view, "justice" is the result of human actions or customs rather than nature. Socrates did not believe that "justice is the natural order or similar thing of the human soul," and that "the only natural good" is personal interest^①[22] (p389) [8] (p26). Aquinas' "Encyclopedia of Divine Law" regards "ius naturale" as an activity of "achieving equality with others" (adaequantur=iustari) arising from the "natural nature of things" (ipsa natural rei) [20] (p231). In Thomas' sense, the norm of "natural law" equates the power of constraint with the "ratio debit indebiti" of "practical reason"[20] (p258). In modern Western society, "natural rights" are reflected. The stronger connection power embedded in the national contract, freedom, life and property have become innate rights for people to escape authoritarian interference and cannot be transferred. If the pursuit of profit and avoidance of harm, the pursuit of hardship and pleasure, and vanity and self-interest are regarded as natural instincts that conform to the standard of "goodness", everyone's equal freedom to act according to their will inevitably fall into the boundary trap of "natural rights".

The so-called boundary is based on the essence of "justice" reciprocity, which accompanies the interaction between people. Suicide and violent disobedience are also based on community relations, derived from the boundary failure caused by the trap being pushed to the extreme. "Natural rights" are the rational supplements that participate in the intangible agreement of "natural legitimacy" and adapt to the highly developed civilized society. In Rousseau's thought, which Strauss regarded as the source of the modern crisis of natural rights and the first crisis of modernity, the following statement is made: "If the state of nature is a pre human state, then returning to the state of nature in order to find human standards in the state of nature is absurd"[22] (p172). Therefore, to maintain the landscape order of modern politics, the first thing to do is to confront the possible conflicts between human desires and social order. While reaching the realm of "freedom", it is necessary to re-establish a natural person contract that combines social, political and rational characteristics, in order to build a logical and realistic corridor bridge between the complex concepts of "natural justice" and "natural rights".

3.2 Comparative Analysis and Coordinate Anchoring

The general topic of concern for historians of thought is "the study of past ideas"[4] (p13). The confrontation and convergence between ideas is the most common

^①Selected by Liu Xiaofeng, "Strauss and the Crisis of Modernity," East China Normal University Press, 2010 edition, p389.

"The study of the soul expounded by Strauss can be said to be Plato's study of the soul, and his natural justice thought is based on nature and justice, taking the soul as the destination." Han Tangtang, *Exploration of Leo Strauss's Natural Justice Thought*, Lanzhou University, May 2020, p26.

and effective method for establishing individual references and coordinates. Quentin Skinner, a professor of political science at the University of Cambridge, believes that "we should not limit our gaze to text or conceptual units, but should focus on the overall social and political vocabulary of a specific historical period"[4] (p15) . Michel Foucault's advocacy for "discourse" research can be regarded as a powerful support for the study of "political thought history". John Hopkins University history professor Pocock pointed out that "political society will produce a continuous flow of language and discourse"[4] (p17) . The use of the term "discourse" means to reconcile the turnover of "speech" and "literature" in different contexts, thereby refining the history of intellectual activity to actions, debates, and political practices under different conditions. Strauss's "Natural Rights and History" is mixed with fragments of "common sense" and ideological essence compiled and translated from ancient classics. At present, the academic research on Strauss from the perspective of intellectual history mostly adopts the approach of mainline introduction, core differentiation and concept focus. There are few specialized sections for detailed reading and comparison, and the perspectives mainly focus on basic positions, theoretical methods and textual levels. If we make a little detailed exploration on this basis and advance the above perspectives to the dimensions of theoretical orientation, intellectual history methods and textual interpretation, perhaps we can glimpse more of Strauss' thinking and intentions beyond the barriers between China and the West.

There have been many comprehensive discussions in the academic community regarding the theoretical framework of natural law. Skinner's "Appeal to Natural Law" argues from the reality of Calvinist and Huguenot sects that "the primitive and fundamental state of the people must be a state of innate freedom"[26] (p454) , gradually revealing the rational order hidden in natural law. "Natural Rights and History" adheres to the ideas in Strauss's "Hobbes' Political Philosophy" and discovers that the concept of natural law has been transformed from the "objective" meaning of classical tradition to the "subjective will" with highly modern characteristics. In Chapter Five, Strauss understood "natural law" as the object that prompted Hobbes to restore political moral principles at the level of Machiavelli's "realism," and believed that "natural law" should be sought from the "primum naturale," which is emotions beyond reason. In the structure of Hobbes' political philosophy itself, mechanistic psychology precedes political philosophy. It denies freedom of will in the negative aspect, believing that human behavior under any conditions is "determined by his sensory impressions and his instinctive reactions to those impressions (his desires and passions), rather than by reason"[19] (p3) . Therefore, the naturalness of "altruism" is denied. In Strauss' view, natural "rights" rather than "laws" and desire are the starting point of Hobbes' political philosophy. The principle of "rights" actually lies between the moral principles of traditional natural law and the natural principles of happiness, desire, or even utilitarianism. Machiavelli continued the tradition of political idealism similar to Hobbes, and his "rationalization" of the requirements of "realistic" political philosophy is based on the reflection of civil society and the modification of the concept of "natural rights". "Natural public law is based on the concept of a just social order, replaced the concept of the best system"[19] (p195) , as seen in Chinese and foreign texts, the emotional

elements of ancient and modern reality have undergone a reversal, achieving a new separation and harmony with the rationality generated by order.

In terms of methodology for the study of intellectual history, compared to the particular universality sought by the "Cambridge School" represented by Skinner, Strauss's philosophy is more like searching for the particular universality. For the study of intellectual history, especially political thought history, the approach of "philosophy" at the abstract level is quite common, focusing on "Unit Ideas"[11] (p3) . Lovejoy, the founder of the classic American "history of historical ideas", paid great attention to the research and utilization of materials from "classical thinkers". Strauss's "Natural Rights and History" also approached the text from a metaphysical perspective, drawing on various schools of thought^①[18] (p86) ; using Rousseau's views in "On Science and Art" to contemplate the relationship between "science or philosophy" and "free society" and "virtue"; Using the Epicurean Lucretius' "Treatise on the Nature of Things" to infer the customs and trust of the "world walls" that protect the environment from natural disasters; exploring the historical landscape of the "state of nature" based on Locke's "Treatise on Government", clarifying that the "law of nature" originates from reason and adheres to the essential commandment of human "peace and security". Skinner affirmed the contribution of the Strauss school in the interpretation of "intellectual history" texts, but he believed that delving too deeply into texts could easily overlook external historical contexts. In his evaluation of Hood, Skinner applied the "historical" research method to the normative argumentation of political theory. He cited the example of Leviathan to illustrate that the direct consequence of the lack of historical positioning is that "conclusions that are historically absurd will seriously attract audiences"[11] (p19) . Therefore, Skinner's contextual rhetoric focuses on a longitudinal approach to history. By examining the details and extracting universal philosophical ideas, Skinner emphasizes that, the Strauss school does not care about the writing background and thematic causes of the text. The biggest problem with its textual approach is that it "uses the text as an expression of the author's beliefs" [25] (pxi) . However, it cannot take into account the historical understanding of the work. He even pointed out that Strauss did not understand Italian at all but wrote a book about Machiavelli, which is not very rigorous in academic reference value. However, from another perspective, this approach, which is not limited to specific historical frameworks, actually makes Strauss' text interpretation often innovative and self explanatory, and when it comes to simplifying the text, it often leads to new ideas and interpretations. During the process, the philosophical examination that precedes the text is like a handle needle or a spoon, it has long transcended the context of historical examination, transforming the philosophical perspective that embodies the spirit of the times into a macro to micro ink line.

① such as Plato's "Law" to expound on the theme of "The Republic": "Nature. Power, or the pinnacle of political philosophy and political philosophy, replaced the Zeus Cave.

3.3 The Distinction Between Nature and Customs

In "Natural Rights and History," the pairing of "physis" ("nature") and "nomos" ("customs") runs through the entire book. The "customs" of natural objects are seen as their nature, while the "customs" of different human tribes are seen as their customs[18] (p91). Laws or customs "have a tendency or function to conceal nature....."[28] (p73). Strauss pointed out, nature was initially experienced or "given" as a "habit". Traditionalism is a special form of classical philosophy, which refers to the fact that different societies have different concepts or principles of justice, which is the foundation of the existence of natural rights. Before the discovery of nature, the constant "habit" or "way" happened to become the "counterpart" of fundamental initial thoughts, such as "barking and wagging the tail is the way of dogs, menstruation is the way of women, and the strange things that crazy people do are the ways of crazy people [.....] Not eating pork is the way of Jews, not drinking alcohol is the way of Muslims"[18] (p83). In the argument of "conventionalism", "right" undoubtedly plays a transitional role, because it is not only limited to individuals, but also seen in collective city states. Strauss briefly summarized the basis for the rejection of the theory of natural rights by conventionalism, including the natural desires of people primarily characterized by the pursuit of self-interest, the "natural rights" limited to the customary units of city-state members and serving specific groups, and the universal reference to "rights" or "justice" confirmed by the concretization of customs. For a city-state, justice has a certain degree of narrowness or universality, which means not harming others, helping others, or caring about the public interest. This altruistic and uniform idea seems to contradict nature. In the enclosed space of the city-state, in order to maintain the stability of the existing order and safeguard the public interest, strong authoritative opinions have become inevitable. The simple experience of justice or right has thus slipped to the edge of relativity, that is, to what extent can the public interest reflect public demands? Are the minority groups that are reduced to it a deceitful compromise based on customs or a collective self-interest based on nature? According to Strauss' ideas, although the laws of the city-state pursue justice, this pursuit still hides internal conflicts. Natural justice carries the traces of primitive contracts that uphold human nature, while conventionalism requires people to give up their selfish desires in order to achieve the interests of some people who falsely represent the interests of the city-state or the collective.

If viewed from the perspective of Strauss's intellectual history, the relationship between "customs" and "nature" cannot be simply summarized as "differentiation". In the pre philosophical period, the boundary between physis and nomos began with humans and continued to diverge and close. Customs establish authority through ancestral traditions and systems, while nature, starting from human nature, sees inconsistencies between established authority and recognized standards of justice or goodness. "Natural things come before customary and man-made things, human manufacturing and production are based on nature as a prerequisite"[24] (p37). When discussing natural society, Li Meng also paid attention to the dialectical perspective of the theory of "state of nature", which suggests that there are two completely opposite directions to the "state of nature" itself. One takes into account both the defense and

infringement issues of self preservation and others' preservation. By focusing on self preservation, the possibility of endangering others is reduced, leading to the construction of a peaceful state with mixed forms of mutual assistance in reality; the amplification of the competition for survival between people, in order to obtain a more favorable environment, has led to a prolonged state of war by sacrificing the survival of others to preserve one's own life[20] (p67). In Rousseau's view, "the needs of natural persons are very simple and do not necessarily lead to the desire to compete with each other, let alone the ambition to surpass others"[20] (p66). Hobbes' extreme conclusion is essentially the result of confusing the natural state and the social state. In his attempt to distinguish between "nature" and "customs," Strauss found that the emergence of "nature" was both the beginning of differences and a necessary condition for the emergence of the concept of "natural rights"[18] (p94). Returning to the period of individual or racial life before customs, the connection between rights and civil society became very important, which was also related to the emphasis on the origin of classical schools. People's exploration of the origins and emergence of civil society or right and wrong happened to connect the different foundations of "nature" and "customs".

When discussing the "classical theory of natural rights," Strauss returned to the exploration of the Socratic and Platonic political philosophy frameworks. He believed that although equating law (customs) with nature, justice and legality had a reflective meaning, "this viewpoint mistakenly regarded Socrates' ambiguous origin or his ambiguous research results as the essence of his thoughts"[18] (p122). In the chapter on "modern theory of natural rights," Strauss combined his theoretical thinking on the "three waves of modernity," and the two classical concepts used by Rousseau, the initiator of the second wave of comprehensive criticism of modernity, to attack modernity in name of city states, virtues, and nature. From the perspective of some ancient commentators, true political historians are not dominated by the spirit of the city-state. They must be outsiders (apolis), stateless people (cityless), and people who transcend the city-state. "What is Political Philosophy" also discusses the "natural" characteristics of classical thought, stating that "if what guides a person is nature, not customs, inherited opinions, or traditions, let alone pure sudden ideas, people say he is 'natural'"[15] (p19). The understanding of the concept of "city-state" has not yet emerged from the context of city-state debates. If the city-state is abstracted as a collection of collective wills, a man-made entity existing through customs and a "natural state". As society develops to the stage of modern nation, natural inequalities arising from innate talents can only be replaced more and more frequently by customary equality. However, when customs become prevalent, nature can reveal a naked truth that is opposite to nothingness. Strauss's doubts and concerns about Rousseau's return to the city-state or to nature are largely rooted in this, and the meaning of the distinction between nature and customs is also refined and expanded through concealment and manifestation, freedom and restriction.

3.4 The Original "Profound Meaning" in Mixed Writing

The two teaching paths followed by Strauss' political philosophy are "subtle" and "visible". As claimed by Lessing, plain language is the method of expressing truth used

by ancient philosophers and Leibniz, because it is more cautious, majestic, and communicable, although these simple parts themselves are somewhat "obscure and difficult to understand"[17] (p120). Schleiermacher's subsequent introduction of Platonic style is to equate "the natural order of dialogue with the sequence of their elaboration"[17] (p121), thus differentiating what classical philosophers call "the natural order of dialogue". The "noble lie" and the modern philosopher's preference for "intellectual sincerity", as seen in "Lost Fingers", many people can understand the emphasis placed on subtle and esoteric teachings by the ancient philosopher Maimonides^①[14], who once borrowed the teachings of Cohen from Strauss.

Even Strauss' disciples were differentiated due to the teacher's understanding of "subtle" and "obvious" and the inheritance of his teachings. Rosen used the metaphor of a golden apple under a silver wire net to describe Strauss's "subtle teachings"[32] (p81), which is reminiscent of Laozi's viewpoint on thoughts that cannot be easily expressed and the "Yin Xiu"^②theory in ancient Chinese literary theory. Respecting and carefully reading classical texts is Strauss' attitude towards his ancestors' preconceptions. This type of hermeneutic technique, similar to Gadamer and Likol's, has gradually been widely used. Many scholars view Strauss's philosophy as a form of hermeneutics, characterized by the ability to separate the surface and deep meanings of classical texts. Due to its frequent use of the "annotated" writing method, it is prone to confusion and difficulty in distinguishing between classical and personal ideas. In "The Art of Writing and Persecution," Strauss already revealed a dialectical view on the implicit and explicit expression of language, such as the need for philosophy to conceal its own intelligence to avoid persecution from political mediocrity, and to educate and guide future young people through the discernment of "political legitimacy"^③[12]. It is a formal armor for political considerations, and philosophy needs this armor to appear safely. The use of "implicit writing" maximizes private communication. The author who speaks to the thinker only needs to write it so that only those with a heart can understand its meaning. In recent research on the history of thought, understanding the era closely in terms of terminology itself is a habit displayed in the domain of knowledge. The author attempts to bury the hidden meaning beneath the surface words, which is often the desire of modern scholars to search for public opinion. Strauss believed that the way political philosophers convey their ideas is like another bridge to look into. The contradictions and deviations that appear on other pages of the book may indicate the author's deformation and entanglement within the framework of the individual's pre-existing ideological system. The seemingly plain statements of the author can be analyzed by the reader's hidden meaning, which may reveal the potential thoughts outside and inside the text's bite line.

In Chapter 4 of "Natural Rights and History," Strauss read Cicero's "Laws" and "States," reflecting the individual sorting and appropriation of mixed original ideas. As Strauss stated, "Viewing Cicero as a supporter of the Stoic natural law doctrine is a

① Refer to Maimonides' subtle teachings of the 1930s.

② From Liu Xie's "Wenxin Diaolong": "The hidden is the essence beyond the text; the beautiful is the unique essence within the text."

③ This statement is also found in Strauss' rhetorical commentaries.

misunderstanding of him"[18] (p158) . The third volume of "The Nation" and the first two volumes of "The Law" contain "a more gentle natural law doctrine than the original Stoic doctrine"[18] (p156) .In language expression, "simile simili gaudet"^①is used to summarize the natural basis of human goodwill towards others, in order to interpret Cicero's interpretation. According to Cicero's ideas, a kind and just person would follow "true" justice rather than "recognized" justice, "giving everyone their rightful place"[2] (p100) .However, from the diversity of laws in different countries and the changing laws of a country over time, "utility" has a stronger governing power than "natural justice" or "natural law" because the standard of "entitlement" is often controversial. When people fear and distance each other, lack confidence in the power of "self preservation", and ordinary people and those in power.....Some kind of transaction will be reached, thus forming the "mixed form of government" recommended by Scipio, which precisely weakens the rigid possibility of implementing "justice".Strauss highly valued the position of Scipio in Cicero's works, pointing out that Scipio "demonstrated the original undistorted Stoic theory of natural law, which is incompatible with the demands of civil society"[18] (p158) .Civil society is based on natural law diluted and diluted with a lower principle, while Stoics believe in the existence of universal axioms. All humanity is about to be governed by such "rational" laws, and national laws have traces of reference and imitation of natural laws.

In terms of language expression, Strauss clearly used words with literary color, such as the small forest and the oak tree of Arpino mentioned by Atticus in the "Law" section, and the debate between Scipio and Philous about the two suns in the "State" section as the background starting point for segmented exposition: the "Law" section, which focuses on the Stoic natural law theory, discusses taking place in summer, "Cicero and his companions searching for shade"[18] (p156) ,while the "State" section, which Plato freely imitates, discusses taking place in winter, "the interlocutors chasing the sun"[18] (p157) . Returning to the specific ideological context, we can see the detachment of Cicero's concept of "natural law" within Strauss's spiritual path. His works have many discussions on rationality, and the principle of the Natural Law series is "Reason". History and customs are often buried in reason, the customs and systems that enabled the Roman Republic to maintain its rule for a long time are also derived from reason. The introduction of the English translation of "The State" lists the outline of the entire book, and discusses Cicero's exploration of human reason in the preface section, which provided a connection for the development of Strauss' discourse on natural rights. Cicero used "lex" to express "law", as the "highest rationality inherent in nature"[30] (p67) , it directly affects the political structure of reality. Strauss stated that the term "politeia" itself covers many meanings such as constitution "regime", "community way of life", etc.Natural law pursues correct rationality, while a state based on the unity of law and the common set of interests cannot fully achieve "just" and indiscriminate distribution. As a part of political rights, natural rights also seek a state of peace or goodwill, but they also need to balance with practical rationality, penetrate the obscure and complex terminology, and find concise building blocks

① It means that birds of a feather flock together.

that can be interspersed and grafted in the obscure and mixed concept group, in order to build a creative landscape with strong individual characteristics.

4 Progress or Return: The Focus and Follow up of the Debate between Ancient and Modern Times

The issue of the "debate between ancient and modern" permeates the overall discourse framework of "Natural Rights and History", mainly manifested as Strauss's resistance to the crisis of modernity centered on theological political issues by backtracking on ancient positions. This debate is about the universal theme "'from French classicism to the German classical period', which was initially limited to the field of literature and 'broke through the requirement of using ancient Greek and Roman culture as a model'"[9] (p145-146) .

Guo Zhenhua's translation of "Progress or Return?" further extends Strauss' classical political rationalism. The article starts with the translation of the Hebrew word "t'shuvah" to interpret Strauss' widespread concerns about Jewish philosophy and "historicism". Among them, several lines of the first chapter of "Isaiah" describe a city-state's cycle of falling from perfect loyalty to betrayal and returning to perfect loyalty[17] (p297-298) .The great classical era existed in the past, and Judaism also returned to perfect loyalty. Focus on regression rather than progress. "In the past, the people were originally trustworthy or loyal; now, they are in a rebellious state. In the future, the people will return, and God will restore them to their original place"[17] (p300) .This reverence for classical literature mainly responds to the problems existing in "Western modernity" and "contemporary mainstream American academia". In his book "Natural Rights and History," Strauss understood "historicism" as another philosophical cave, where only purely subjective standards can withstand the scrutiny of the web of meaning and survive, just as "the pinnacle of historicism is nihilism" [18] (p19) .When all value standards are shattered and lose their meaning, the "natural justice" that attempts to exist in eternal change is also overturned by "historical concepts," and the historical "experience" comprehensively determined from scattered historical knowledge is "nothing but a history of thought. The previous narrow concept believes in the inevitable process (or rather, that people cannot return to their previous thinking) "[18] (p23) , In essence, human thought is limited, but this limitation will lead to the emergence of a boundary through the connection of specific historical moments.

Classical "political philosophy" not only transcends political life, but also returns to the theoretical consciousness of Strauss's contemporaries. Its primary meaning is "not to deal with politics in a philosophical way, but to deal with philosophy in a political or popular way, or to explain the political guidance of philosophy"[27] (p170) .This can also provide some details why Strauss placed more emphasis on regression. Returning to the starting point, people can try to avoid being influenced by the previous generation's explanatory works, have a macro grasp of the overall path, experience the situation of facing history directly, and thus may have a clearer understanding of the problem itself. In this process, reflection, criticism and progress have not disappeared, but

have hidden deeper. For example, Strauss' discourse on the "Jerusalem and Athens conflict" problem "starts from the source of political philosophy, the Socrates problem, and the interpretation of the Bible's source, *Genesis*"[5] (p202). Scholar Chen Jianhong believes that Strauss's reflection on returning to the ancients through modern times is a "modern tune that has already been made public"[1] (p89). When it comes to modern philosophy, the way of thinking is different. The first crisis of modernity emerged in the thought of Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Nietzsche thus predicted the second crisis of modernity - the crisis of our time. According to Strauss' summary, Rousseau attacked modernity in the name of two classical concepts: on the one hand, the city-state and virtue, on the other hand, nature. Modern countries present themselves as artificial beings that exist through customs, compensating for the various deficiencies of the natural state and returning to the natural state from the artificial and customary world.

The analysis of Weber's proposition in Chapter 2 of "Natural Rights and History" to some extent reveals Strauss' dialectical view on the relationship between historicism and natural rights, just as each choice is supported by a specific value system. The various rights and principles of goodness that are historical and deeply embedded in human thought conflict with each other and are secretly related. Therefore, when facing the crisis of current life and science, thinking about the human situation and grasping the natural world that precedes science or philosophy at its roots, it is necessary to go back to the past, to classicism. This is not only based on the needs of the real situation, but also Strauss's choice and judgment in the perspective of intellectual history.

5 Conclusion

In recent years, the academic understanding to Strauss' political philosophy has become more closely connected to reality, and the theoretical perspective of intellectual history has been nested into natural logical assumptions in a more lively and subtle way. In Chapter 5 of "Natural Rights and History," Strauss first noted the relationship between Hobbes and tradition. Generally speaking, Hobbes' accepted tradition inherited the lineage of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Tacitus and Plutarch. He identified traditional political philosophy as the kind of "idealism"[18] (p171) that is imbued with the public spirit. He agreed with Socrates' view that political philosophy is concerned with natural rights. Scholar Zhao Ke introduced McPherson's theoretical model as a control, by "exploring the rebellion of Hobbes' political philosophy against classical political philosophy"[31] (p121), latecomers may be pushed to further consider how humans actually live, how to grasp the changes of spirit in the chain of intellectual history and present themselves.

Overall, "Natural Rights and History" is a highly inspiring work by Strauss that entered the Chinese academic community. Its sharp and fluent writing, meticulous inferences, and down-to-earth and unique perspective have opened up a path for future generations to study classical political philosophy. What is even more meaningful is that it also has reference value for China's local theoretical practice and literary understanding. Referring to Liu Xiaofeng's statement, it goes beyond the "Enlighten-

ment ideal" and "breaks away from the pursuit of various doctrines in Western modernity"[21] (p59) . Strauss may not have proposed a complete and systematic theory of his own, but his way of reading classics, his approach to organizing materials, and his detailed and profound insights have provided a solid foundation for anchoring his coordinates in the field of intellectual history.

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