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### Travelling philosophy : from literature to film

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## Part I. A Clockwork Orange

### I. Self and State: The Political Philosophy of *A Clockwork Orange*

In a speech delivered at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1954, Jewish German-American philosopher Leo Strauss stated that:

...political philosophy deals with political matters in a manner that is meant to be relevant for political life; therefore its subject must be identical with the goal, the ultimate goal of political action. The theme of political philosophy is mankind's great objective, freedom and government or empire-objectives which are capable of lifting all men beyond their poor selves.<sup>58</sup>

Here, Strauss identifies the subject of political philosophy with the end of political action, which he later defines as either preservation or change: "When desiring to preserve, we wish to prevent change to the worse; when desiring to change, we wish to bring about something better" (10).

Classically defined, Strauss argues that political action has a "directedness" towards knowledge of the good, and if people make it their explicit aim to obtain knowledge of the good life and the good society, then political philosophy surfaces. In other words, classical political philosophy is guided by the question of the best regime, or state, and the practical notion of the best regime is problematized when one considers the imprecision of the term "good citizen."<sup>59</sup> Strauss attempts to clarify this ambiguity when he refers to Aristotle's definition (*Constitution of Athens*) of the good citizen as a patriotic man who serves his country without any regard to the change of regimes (34-35). In *Politics* (1984), Aristotle further argues that the good citizen is defined relative to the regime, whereas a good man is not (86-88). Only in the best regime does the good regime parallel the good man.<sup>60</sup>

While virtue is the pivot upon which classical political philosophy turns, modern political philosophy endeavors to take a more realistic approach in light of its bleaker view of man who is inherently depraved. Generally considered the founder of modern political philosophy, Italian writer Niccolò Machiavelli rejected the classical endeavor of seeking the improbable, utopian actualization of the best regime based on virtue.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 4. Published in this work, Strauss' speech comes from his Judah L. Magnes Lectures delivered in December 1954 and January 1955.

<sup>59</sup> Johannes Althusius, *Politica*, translated by Frederick S. Carney (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Incorporated, 1995), 12. German political thinker Althusius defines the State as the "consociatio universalis," or the commonwealth, which is an association inclusive of all other associations (families, collegia, cities, and provinces) within a determinate large area, and recognizing no superior to itself. While I agree that it recognizes no superior, I define "state" as distinct from the commonwealth. It is merely the regime, or administration that governs, in one way or another, the families, collegia, cities, and provinces within its sphere of influence.

<sup>60</sup> Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 45: "It appears that 'citizen' is relative to 'regime,' to the political order: a man who would be a citizen in a democracy would not necessarily be a citizen in an oligarchy, and so on. (...) What is true of the citizen is true of the good citizen, since the activity or the work of the citizen belongs to the same genus as that of the good citizen: 'good citizen,' in contradistinction to 'good man,' too is relative to 'regime'; obviously a good Communist cannot but be a bad citizen in a liberal democracy and vice versa."

<sup>61</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1979), 127: "...for there is such a gap between how one lives and how one ought to live that anyone who abandons what is done for what ought to be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation: for a man who wishes to

Rather, in *The Prince* (1513), Machiavelli aims to realize the opulence, constancy, and freedom from foreign ascendancy that is sought by all societies. Machiavellian virtue is the sum of procedures necessary to achieve more practical ends, and it is precisely these ends that make our actions virtuous. Thus, the end justifies every means. Strauss sees Machiavelli's political philosophy as:

...guided exclusively by considerations of expediency, which uses all means, fair or foul, iron or poison, for achieving its ends – its end being the aggrandizement of one's country or fatherland – but also using the fatherland in the service of the self-aggrandizement of the politician or statesmen or one's party (1987: 297).

For Machiavelli, virtue is civic virtue, and patriotism is devotion to "collective selfishness" (1955: 42). Since man is inherently selfish and not naturally patriotic, devotion to the fatherland hinges on education, which often takes the form of compulsion. What is more, an egocentric desire for glory makes man malleable, which permits patriotism through a kind of forced education. Thus, it is selfish ambition that drives transformation from social badness to social goodness, which is to say from the bad to the good citizen.

Framed by both classical and modern political philosophy, Burgess filters his narrative through a philosophical lens that focuses on the tension between the will of the individual and that of the collective. Burgess believes that the denial of original sin leads to an unnatural distinction between those who are criminal and those who are not. In an interview published in the *Transatlantic Review* (1972), Burgess stated:

It was the sense of this division between the well us and sick them that led me to write, in 1960, a short novel called *A Clockwork Orange*. It is not, in my view, a very good novel... but it sincerely presented my abhorrence of the view that some people were criminal and others not. A denial of the universal inheritance of sin is characteristic of Pelagian societies like that of Britain, and it was in Britain, about 1960, that respectable people began to murmur about the growth of juvenile delinquency and suggest (that the young criminals) were a somehow inhuman breed and required inhuman treatment (Dix: 183).

This notion harks back to an old division, perhaps best represented by the antithetical theological poles embodied by Pelagius (350-420) and Augustine (354-430).<sup>62</sup> Pelagianism, named after the British heretic Pelagius (Morgan), denied that God had predestined, or pre-ordained human existence.<sup>63</sup> The effect of this is that salvation is

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make a vocation of being good at all times will come to ruin among so many who are not good. Hence it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain his position to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge or not to use it according to necessity." Calvin E. Beisner, "The Foundations of Liberty Reader" (Ft Lauderdale: Knox Seminary Press, 2005), 5: "Machiavelli, son of a Florentine lawyer, was elected in 1498 as the second chancellor of the republic. (...) He achieved the establishment of a Florentine militia in the *contado* in 1506 and became secretary of the *Nove della Milizia*. His close association, from 1502, with Piero Soderini cost him his post when the Medici returned in 1512. Arrested on suspicion of conspiracy in 1513, he was released when Giovanni de Medici became pope. (...) He died shortly after the republican restoration in 1527. His works, besides *Il Principe*, the *Discorsi*, and the *Istorie Fiorentine*, include the *Arte della guerra* and Italian poetry and plays, notably the *Mandragola*."

<sup>62</sup> S.E. Frost jr., *Teachings of the Great Philosophers* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 276: "Aurelius Augustine was born at Tagaste in Africa. He became Bishop of Hippo and wrote with great force against all he deemed as heretics."

<sup>63</sup> James P. Mackay ed., *Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 386: "The name "Pelagius" is most likely the Greek form (pelagios, "of the sea") of the Welsh name Morgan or Morien." John Ferguson, "In Defense of Pelagius" (*Theology* 83, 1980), 115: "Although Pelagius did

functionally within human power, which inevitably leads to a rejection of original sin. Repudiation of this view eventually came from Augustine who ardently upheld the doctrine of original sin and defended the orthodox concept of predestination; by virtue of the Fall, humankind lost its autonomy and every generation after Adam is bound to sin as the result of evil dwelling in every human heart.<sup>64</sup> Thus, it is God alone who makes the selection of who will be saved. Furthermore, that choice is not coerced by any accomplishment measured on a scale of human self-righteousness, but rather determined only by what God justly desires.

In his interview, Burgess implied that he advocated the Augustinian concept of universal inheritance of sin. This preference manifests itself in his "abhorrence" of the (Pelagian) perception that some humans were criminal while others were not. In response to the Augustinian notion of universal inherited sin on the one hand, and the Pelagian espousal of free will on the other, Burgess also stated that he believed in "a kind of residual Christianity that oscillates between Augustine and Pelagius" (Dix 1972: 184). This sentiment is echoed in the introduction to *Clockwork* in which Burgess discloses both his endorsement of Augustinian and Pelagian views: "It is as inhuman to be totally good as it is to be totally evil. The important thing is moral choice. Evil has to exist along with good, in order that moral choice may operate" (Burgess 1986: ix). Burgess, then, loosely defines humanity by the ability to use our Pelagian free will to make moral choices despite the universality of Augustinian original sin.

It appears that Burgess not only oscillates between Augustine and Pelagius, but also between classical and modern political philosophy. For both Augustine and Machiavelli promote the universal depravity of man and, as a result, find classical philosophy based on virtue overly idealistic.<sup>65</sup> Confirming this position, Strauss wrote: "Augustine's critique of the classical tradition resembles in many ways that of the early modern political thinkers, beginning with Machiavelli, who likewise took issue with that tradition on the grounds of its ineffectualness and impracticality" (1987: 182). However, in contrast to Machiavelli, Augustine does not aim to develop the practical value of his teaching by lowering the standards of human activity. Strauss concurs with Augustine's contention that classical political philosophy failed not because it did not take into account the evil character of man's behavior, or that it made unreasonable demands on human nature, but because: "it did not know and hence could not apply the proper

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not state explicitly that we could be saved by our own efforts, he did insist that we 'freely' choose the saving grace of God."

<sup>64</sup> Augustine, "On the Gift of Perseverance," in *The Fathers of the Church: Vol. 86: St. Augustine - Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, translated by John Mourant and William Collinge (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1992) 324: "This is the predestination of the saints, nothing else: plainly the foreknowledge and preparation of God's benefits, by means of which whoever is to be liberated is most certainly liberated." James Wetzel, "Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 53. In his essay, Wetzel elaborates on the Augustinian view of election in light of God's selection of Jacob over Esau. If God favored Jacob over Esau, one of two brothers formed in the same womb, then God has decided to make Jacob into the brother worth choosing. In other words, God both foreknows and predestines Jacob's redemption (53). Additionally, Frost (1989) wrote: "In Augustinianism, God makes the choice among those of whom He will save and those of whom He will permit to be destroyed because of (original) sin. This choice is not influenced by any act of an individual, but is determined only by what God wants. The concept of God's choosing an individual for salvation is commonly referred to as 'election'" (136).

<sup>65</sup> Strauss, *The City and Man* (1964), 41. In describing the (classical) Aristotelian view of man's relation to the City, Strauss wrote: "One may describe this view of the relation of man to the whole as 'optimism' in the original sense of the term: the world is the best possible world..." Althusius, *Politica* (1995), xxxvii. Like Machiavelli and Augustine, Althusius also saw the impracticality of the classical view and advocated a political philosophy that was more in harmony with the principal forces of nature.

remedy to man's congenital weakness" (182). In other words, while both Augustine and Machiavelli believed that the classical view of the best regime based on virtue to be an unrealistic vision, Machiavelli failed to understand how the concept of love, as the "proper remedy," could figure into the political equation.<sup>∞</sup>

This idea is developed by Niebuhr who argued that the self, in its dialogue with others, confronts certain invariable conditions of self-fulfillment and self-giving (1955: 31). Niebuhr sees this dialogue as a three-fold enumeration; related to my corpus, the self completes the other through mutual love (*Clockwork*), the self uses the other as a completion for its incompleteness (*Fight Club*), and the self sees the other as a mystery that can never be fully penetrated (*Solaris*). For each dual-medium pair, I apply the relevant dialogue to better understand my analysis and interpretation. In his discussion of mutual love, Niebuhr wrote:

The most obvious solution to the self's dependence upon others is a relation of mutual dependence which satisfies each self without making one the mere instrument of the other. Even an ideal relation of mutual helpfulness cannot satisfy one condition in such a dialogue. The self cannot be truly fulfilled if it is not drawn out of itself into the life of the other. Mutual love seems to be a satisfactory solution of this problem, but insofar as mutual love may involve only cool calculations of reciprocal advantage of the kind Aristotle describes in his analysis of *Philia*, it is always in danger of degenerating into a relation of mere calculation (31).

Niebuhr's description of mutual love appears the kind of remedy that Augustine implicitly advocates, as opposed to the more Machiavellian degenerative form of "mere calculation" based on selfish ambition. *Clockwork* demonstrates how this manipulative relationship between self and other inexorably leads to selfish oppression, or the self's the attempt to make an instrument of the other to achieve its ends. In light of these ideas, Burgess' work explores how such a relationship affects the self's free will when there is no mutual love, but rather a relationship of mere calculation. Finally, *Clockwork* juxtaposes this Machiavellian oppression with the notion of how a nobler, altruistic love can be a means to foster the transformation of unredeemable criminals into not only good citizens, but also good men.

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<sup>∞</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1958), 443. Similar to Aristotle in *Politics* (1984), Augustine claims that to rule is nothing other than to altruistically serve and care for the utility of others in the manner parents are expected to rule their children. Althusius, *Politica* (1995), 199. However, Althusius notes that parents can also become tyrants, and a parent who abuses power can be rightfully deprived of it.