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THREAD on Strauss' Epilogue: I promised awhile ago a thread on why one should read Leo Strauss. I'll probably make a more general thread on that, but 1st, here is one on "An Epilogue"—an essay Strauss wrote for an edited volume called "Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics"

This essay is Strauss' critique of contemporary political science. Why's that important for anyone outside the university? Because how we study political phenomena determines how we judge, and ultimately act, on political things.

What Strauss does here is comparable to Schmitt's Concept of the Political. Schmitt shows how the modern liberal order attempts to conceal and abolish the essence of the political. Strauss shows that it also distorts the study of political things.

First, Strauss describes the old political science, the kind that prevailed from Aristotle to the end of the 19th c. The old pol. sci. (which was not distinguished from political philosophy) was a practical science. It's purpose was architectonic—to order all other arts.

This pol sci depends on man being a political and rational animal. He is fundamentally different from other animals because he is receptive of praise and shame. He knows, to a greater or lesser degree, something about right and wrong beyond mere self preservation and breeding.

Strauss imagines up a "man from Missouri" who represents common sense and common opinion. The man from Missouri trusts his own eyes: he takes for granted that he lives other humans and they can understand each other to a degree bc of their humanness. He has no time for...

"speculations based on extrasensory perception." The man from Missouri, for example, is better equipped to tell you that the 2020 election would be close than the pollsters and political scientists were. Strauss point isn't that common sense or common opinion is perfect.

Rather, that the old political science started with, built upon, and refined, common opinions about justice, nature, law, virtue, and everything else political. It begins with the premise that experience of political things can give us insight into them. This is pre-scientific.

The new pol sci, otoh, denies this form of knowledge. The only true knowledge is scientific, i.e., things that are measurable and empirical. Data is objective. Notions about justice, law, etc. are subjective “values.” These values are all equal bc they are equally unscientific.

The old pol sci understood nature in two ways: the way things are, untouched by human techne (e.g. physics and metaphysics), and as a standard for how one ought to live and act (ethics). The new pol sci denies the latter part of nature.

Therefore it must depoliticize politics by elevating nonpolitical modes of study—psychology, sociology, modern economics, etc. But in trying to break from the pre-scientific origins of pol sci, the new pol sci runs into trouble, see what Strauss says here:

Strauss shows that the distinction between facts and values is a particular form of nonsense. It is democratic (in the sense that Plato uses the word in book 8 of the Republic) and egalitarian. It therefore wrongly assumes that egalitarianism is the rational standard.

Strauss is writing this essay during the Cold War. These western political scientists can’t tell you the difference between communism and western democracies and why the latter is superior to the former! They can only understand these two types of regimes by “measuring”...

the amount of freedom and coercion in each. A kulak in 1929 Ukraine (the man from Crimea?), on the other hand, could tell you that the difference between communism and liberal democracy is fundamental, not a difference in measurable degrees.

This leads to a major problem in the new pol sci. It takes for granted that all political societies produce men of similar nature, and therefore assumes that by studying men in western democracies it can derive universal, scientific rules of human behavior.

The new pol sci rejects any telos, any natural end that can unite men together in a political community. It therefore rejects any serious conception of a common good. It condemns itself to vagueness in language and thought bc it cannot take seriously nonmeasurable things.

The new pol sci, by claiming that values are arbitrary things, papers over the crisis of liberal democracy.

The famous final paragraph of the Epilogue. Strauss saw modern political science for what it is: a playground for midwits.

There’s a lot more in this essay in need of careful digestion. One word of caution: what Strauss describes here is not applicable to all of contemporary politics (BLM, for example, is certainly not value-free). But, much of what he describes still applies to contemporary pol sci,

as well as the mindset of the managerial elite and even to some degree the popular imagination (a graph on a screen is more real to many people than what they can actually see with there own eyes). Tl:dr, the recovery of nature as the standard for law is still a task for our time