

Note on the Publication of Leo Strauss's Courses

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While at the University of Chicago, Leo Strauss taught about 70 courses; about 40 of them were recorded, and transcripts based on the tapes were circulated among his students. Like his writings, Strauss's teaching had an enormous impact: dozens of his students went on to teach and write in political science, classics, & philosophy departments. Accounts of the impact of his teaching were presented by former students of Strauss—from the 1940s through the 1970s—at the Leo Strauss Center's conference on "LS as Teacher," April 22-23, 2011 at the University. The conference was attended by well over 100 people from around the country and abroad soon to be on video at the Leo Strauss Center's website: <http://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu>

Strauss is increasingly recognized as one of the most important thinkers of the 20th century. Major books on his thought have been published in recent years not only in the US but also in France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and elsewhere; there have been conferences on his thought in Germany, Italy, Poland, Japan, and Korea. His books have been translated into many languages. Heinrich Meier, professor of philosophy at the University of Munich, has edited so far three volumes of Strauss's collected writings, including unpublished writings and correspondence.

The Leo Strauss Center was established in the of fall of 2008 when his heir, his daughter Jenny Strauss Clay, asked me to serve as her father's literary executor, in which capacity Joseph Cropsey, Strauss's close associate and colleague, had faithfully served for the 35 years since Strauss's death. The Center's mission is to promote the serious study of Strauss's work primarily through the preservation and publication of the audio and written record he left behind. When Jenny Strauss asked me to serve as her father's literary executor, we discussed the online publication of the re—mastered tapes and the editing and print or online publication of the transcripts. We agreed that given the increasing circulation of the old often inaccurate and incomplete transcripts, and the continuing controversies over what Strauss did or did not teach his students, it would be a service to his memory as well as to interested scholars and students for us to proceed with their publication. We were

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encouraged by the fact that Strauss himself signed a contract with Bantam Books to publish four of them, although in the end none were published. Listeners and readers will still have to make allowance for their oral character, including possible careless phrases, slips of the tongue, and mistranscriptions.

In the early 1950s mimeographed typescripts of student notes of courses of Strauss were distributed among his students. In winter quarter 1954, the first audio recording was done: Strauss's course "Natural Right" was transcribed and distributed to students. Professor Herbert J. Storing obtained a grant from the Relm Foundation to support the taping and transcription, which resumed in the winter of 1956 with Strauss's course "Historicism and Modern Relativism." Of the 39 courses Strauss taught at the University from 1958 until his departure in 1968, 34 were recorded and transcribed. After he retired from the University, recording of his courses continued at Claremont Men's College (although the tapes for his last two courses there have not been located) and at St. John's College up until his death in October 1973.

The original audio record that survived varied widely in quality and completeness. When Strauss moved away from the microphone, the volume of his voice would sometimes diminish to the point of inaudibility. The microphone sometimes had difficulty picking up the voices of students asking questions, but often captured doors and windows opening and closing, papers shuffling, airplanes overhead, and traffic in the street. When the tape was changed, recording stopped, leaving gaps. If Strauss's remarks went beyond two hours and some minutes, the tape ran out. The audiotapes, after they had been transcribed, were often reused, leaving the audio record incomplete. And over time, the audiotape deteriorated.

Beginning over fifteen years ago, under the supervision of Joseph Cropsey, Stephen Gregory, then the administrator of the University's John M. Olin Center for Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Democracy, with financial support from that center, initiated the re-mastering of the surviving tapes to ensure their preservation and improve their audibility, in order to make possible their eventual publication, a project he continued for a couple of years under the auspices of the Center for the Study of the Principles of the American Founding, and which he brought to completion recently as administrator of the Leo Strauss Center. It is now possible for students around the world once again to audit courses from Leo Strauss, to hear him comment on texts—including many he wrote little or nothing about—and respond generously to student questions and objections. The Strauss Center's website receives about 150 visits a day, most of them to download audio files of Strauss's courses. Transcripts based on the re-mastered tapes will in many cases be far more accurate than the old transcripts: the new Hobbes transcript is twice as long as the old one.