



REMEMBERING HARRY V. JAFFA

Editor's note: To honor the Claremont Institute's Distinguished Fellow Harry V. Jaffa, who died in January of this year, we published in our Winter 2014/15 issue the eulogies offered at his memorial service by Larry P. Arnn, Edward J. Erler, Michael M. Uhlmann, and Thomas G. West, and the reminiscences of a more recent student, Michael Anton. Here, we have invited more friends and colleagues to share their memories of our late teacher.

William B. Allen

REMEMBER HARRY JAFFA AS HE REMEMBERED himself: Leo Strauss's best student. In nothing did Jaffa so powerfully affect the imaginations of near colleagues as in that claim of precedence. Perhaps, though, his putative rivals misunderstood the nature of his claim. Rather than the affectation of a teacher's pet, Harry Jaffa's thinking turned on his appreciation of what it meant to further Strauss's project. He believed that he had advanced that project more substantially than any other of Strauss's acolytes. What he revealed at bottom in his claim, therefore, is that he was pre-eminently an acolyte. He never affected to achieve beyond Strauss. He claimed only to realize the goal of Strauss's teaching, having experienced a conversion like unto that of Saul's on the road to Damascus.

Jaffa began with his focus on mediaeval scholasticism, writing *Thomism and Aristotelianism* in mimesis of Strauss's work on Maimonides and Plato. He discovered in the method of the "disputed question" an esotericism like unto Strauss's discernment of Maimonides's writing between the lines. Nevertheless, we justly hesitate to embrace this youthful demonstration as the justification for Jaffa's claim to be Strauss's best student. For, although he continued to return to *Thomism and Aristotelianism* in his mature years, he never explicitly connected his claim with that work. He seemed rather to urge his subsequent work as the justification.

What Jaffa seemed to mean when he described his reaction to a "physically insignificant little man with a weak voice" in terms of a conversion as dramatic as that of Saul's was that the unreflective historicism of his Yale education crumbled away like the shavings of a newly sculpted ambition. While that ambition must generically have been to become such a soul as the great soul that emerged from the "little man," in particular it seems rather to have been connected with the acquisition of a new direction or target in the search for truth. He was like the woman of Samaria who reported to her friends that she had met "a man who told me all things that ever I did." Dragging his boyhood friends, Francis Canavan and Joseph Cropsey along with him, Jaffa enlisted in the train of this messianic figure.

Key to understanding what Jaffa became under this influence is some appreciation of what he had been before. A cultural Jew of secular ambition, a patriot of moderately progressive inclinations, and an academically gifted intellect, he sought a pathway other than that of his father's restaurant business but not one that was intuitive to him. As his intellectual gifts developed he was cautioned that there was no room for a Jew in the U.S. academy. Consequently, he had no clear designs on such a course prior to coming under influences that made him heedless of the obstacles that supposedly obstructed the way. He began to envision the life of the scholar as his own life; he, too, could be an Arnold Brecht and a Harvey Mansfield, Sr. More importantly, un-

der the influence of Strauss, he came to imagine that as the only possibility for himself.

ONE OF THE STORIES THAT JAFFA FREQUENTLY told with a glint in his eyes was the story of Joe Louis's response to criticism of his work in support of U.S. military forces during World War II. Louis was charged with ignoring the severe problems of racial injustice in the U.S. while he supported the country's foreign endeavors. Louis responded, according to Jaffa, that the U.S. "had no problems that Hitler could solve." This frequently repeated tale speaks to influences that shaped Jaffa before he came under the influence of Strauss. Just as he had applied to Yale though being advised that Jews were not admitted, he saw Louis's "defense" of the United States in the same light as his own expectations of the American dream. America had already become for him a source of salvific aspiration, social indications to the contrary notwithstanding. Jaffa, then, united his patriotism with the philosophic quest he acquired from Strauss's instruction. His conversion was not to conservatism but to philosophy as a way of life.

What made Jaffa Strauss's best student, however, was not the embrace of philosophy alone. Jaffa himself avowed that "philosophers cannot be heroes." A more particular development led to Jaffa's claim, and that has to do with the specific bearing of his own scholarship in light of Strauss's teaching. Jaffa described his discovery of the Lincoln-Douglas debates in a used book



store as an epiphany, in which he realized that these deeds and speeches of statesmen could contain all the elements of a Platonic dialogue, the *Republic* in particular. With that discovery he opened a window on Strauss's teaching that was to structure all of his work thereafter. That work was to unlock the door to philosophy through reflection on politics (quite the opposite of the conventional approach of unlocking the doors of politics by reflecting on philosophy).

THIS IS THE APPROACH THAT LED HARRY to see in the Declaration of Independence the *locus classicus* of philosophic insight for the modern soul. Insofar as the understanding of politics is central to political philosophy, then his claim to have unfolded a comprehensive understanding of politics is the key to understanding his teaching. As he said, everything that one needs to know about politics is contained in the expression of the Declaration that

We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they

are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

It hardly bears observing that it was the prosecution of this insight that created the greatest controversies in Jaffa's teaching career. But it would be helpful to recall that he had to be persuaded to produce the "Bicentennial Cerebration," having an initial reluctance that was influenced by awareness of long-standing friendships. Among the things that eventually decided the case for him was the discovery of

his rival's personal efforts to recruit adherents, which hardly seemed to evidence a philosophic disposition. It was in that context that he embraced wholeheartedly Aristotle's preference of truth above Socrates as his own watchword.

Where Jaffa stood on the more abstruse questions of Strauss and Straussianism will perhaps require the immense labors of scholars-to-come to unfold. It would be hard to conceive of Jaffa being subjected, à la Strauss, to lengthy debates over whether he were an atheist. While a Yale undergraduate Jaffa spent a year in an extra-curricular Bible study, which subtended a particular bent toward Biblical application in his work. If he was an atheist, he was an atheist with a God (as are even the fallen angels), not an atheist without God; for he was never victim to the intellectual slovenliness that produces atheism without God, than which nothing could more unsuitably be attributed to Harry Victor Jaffa.

William B. Allen in professor emeritus of political philosophy at Michigan State University.

Hadley Arkes

IN THAT LINE SO FAMILIAR IN OUR CIRCLES, Socrates brought philosophy down out of the clouds as he brought it to bear on the questions of the just and the unjust, and the nature of the good regime. In the same way, Harry Jaffa and Walter Berns brought Leo Strauss down out of the clouds for me. In different ways, they showed how that vast learning in philosophy, ancient and modern, could illuminate the American Founding and the terms on which we would live together yet in what Harry finally called the "best" practicable regime. From Walter, that illumination came for me in his remarkable essay on the "voting studies" in the *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*. And from Harry it came of course—and came in a life-changing way—with *Crisis of the House Divided*.

With the launching of the *Wilson Center Quarterly* years ago, I was asked to do a piece on classic books that deserved to be re-read and re-discovered, and naturally I took the moment to evangelize again for *Crisis*. I took that question from the *New York Times*: what book would you take with you to the moon if you could take only one? (I thought that the question should be revised for writers, who should be permitted a certain self-love of their own work: what book would you take to the moon along, of course, with one of your own?) I made the case for *Crisis*

in this way: that Harry Jaffa managed to show how the vast tradition of political philosophy would bear on the gravest crisis of the American regime, the crisis that truly took matters to the deepest premises of the political order. In that book, Lincoln finally found a writer whose poetic gifts could mirror his own, and whose depth of learning could bring out, to another generation, the true depth—and reach—of Lincoln's thought.

With that book, Harry rescued Lincoln from the obscurity of the historians, who had absorbed "historicism" as a second nature. They could not take seriously the notion that the central "truth" of the Declaration of Independence was indeed, as Lincoln thought, a truth "applicable to all men and all times." The settled orthodoxy was that the Civil War was quite an unnecessary war: that slavery would not survive as a viable system of labor; that the war came only because zealots chose to stage a crisis over a "moral question," which has no legitimate place in politics, for as every educated man knew by then, there really were no moral truths. The illusions over slavery would be exposed later with the studies of how efficient in fact slavery was as an arrangement of labor, and how versatile slavery could be when transplanted to the cities and to labor in factories. But the denial of moral truths hangs on to our own day. It has become indeed the source of another deep crisis in our own time, chal-

lenging again the premises on which our own freedom rests.

ONE WOULD THINK THAT, BY NOW, everything that could be said about Lincoln and his works has indeed been said. And yet, the books keep coming out, in what seems an endless stream. They can be weighed for different virtues, but as good as they may be in their own ways, the simple truth of the matter is that *Crisis of the House Divided* is the best book that has ever been written on Lincoln, and that will ever be written, for this reason: Biographies may give us different angles on Lincoln, in his relation with his father, or his temperament, his neuroses, his engine of ambition that knew no rest. But *Crisis* gives us an account of Lincoln at his highest pitch by taking seriously the substance of Lincoln's thought on the highest questions he had to face as a political man: Jaffa gave us a compelling account of truths that formed the grounds of Lincoln's judgment and his understanding of his political ends. To explain in that way the reasons for Lincoln's mission, and the justification for his acts, is to explain the most important things that give the meaning to Lincoln's life.

Since Harry's death, friends have picked out different passages in *Crisis* or *A New Birth of Freedom*. There are so many to cite, but if I were to take just one, I would recall Harry's exposition of the "House Divided" speech, which was



of course central to *Crisis*. The deep lesson was that the moral substance of a democracy may be removed, while the outward forms remained the same. A regime that could enslave blacks could disfranchise certain whites as well, until the democratic features of the regime became ever fainter, and the authoritarian features more pronounced. Harry Jaffa sought to condense Lincoln's understanding here in this way: that "a free people cannot disagree on the relative merits of freedom and despotism without ceasing, to the extent of the difference, to be a free people." In a related passage, he remarked that "if the majority favors despotism, it is no longer a free people, whether the form of the government has already changed or not." In 1932 Germans went to the polls to vote. In their outward acts, they were acting in the form of a democratic people casting votes. But a good number of them marked their ballots for a party that was willing to strip voting rights and civil rights—and finally even the protection of natural rights—from other

people around them in the voting booths. These voters were registering their political choices. But what they were not doing is affirming their understanding of the rightness of a regime of elections. For they were not affirming their commitment to the equal rights of all people around them to a regime marked by "the consent of the governed." These Germans were acting in the style of a democratic people, but they had lost the souls of a democratic people. As Jaffa had it, they were no longer a free people, even though the forms had not yet changed.

TO GRASP THAT POINT IS TO UNDERSTAND that the crisis will always be with us as long as there may be a falling away from the principles of the founding. It would take a certain obtuseness not to recognize the moral erosion in our day, marked by the deepening of the "culture wars" and the polarization of our people. But to recognize those moral changes all about us is to take seriously the possibility that

the crisis we are in now may be as grave as the crisis of Lincoln's day. For some of us the casualties bring this matter down to earth: For some of us, the killing of 1.2 million small human beings in abortion each year mark yet another instance in which the protections of the law are removed from a whole class of human beings. For others the crisis may be seen in the discrediting of marriage and the further destruction of the family. Whether this crisis finally expresses itself in a civil war is not the sole measure of the crisis, for the moral problem faced by Lincoln would not have dissolved had there been no civil war. Whether we come to see the current crisis in our politics with that kind of gravity will depend finally on how we understand the lessons taught by Harry Jaffa about the standing of the "human person" as the bearer of "natural rights," grounded in enduring truths.

Hadley Arkes is the Edward Ney Professor in American Institutions at Amherst College.

Allen C. Guelzo

PEOPLE OFTEN ASK WHETHER I WAS a pupil of Harry Jaffa, since so much of what I've written about Lincoln has a certain Jaffa-esque resonance. I have to tell them, no, regrettably. After all, I am a history person and Harry was a political science person and ne'er the twain shall meet. But buying a copy of *Crisis of the House Divided* at Baldwin's Book Barn in 1980 was something of an epiphany for me: the book convinced me that Lincoln was a thinker worth taking seriously as a man of ideas, and that the Lincoln-Douglas debates were not just the political brushfire that so many historians of the Civil War era (notably, David Potter) had written them off as being. It took many more years before I finally turned my attention fully to Lincoln, but the impress of that conviction stayed with me as a certainty. But that was as much of a contact as I had with Harry, and I can't recall ever having read any of his other writing.

My first major foray into Lincoln scholarship was *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President*, in 1999. That, entirely without warning, generated a late-evening phone call from Harry Jaffa, who presumed at once that I knew who he was. (He was right, of course, but it was still a surprise). It was a pleasant conversation, all the more so for putting me at my most deferential. That began a pattern of phone calls, usually after I had published something, and he began sending me

pieces he had written. I agreed to serve as commentator on a panel that featured him at the American Political Science Association's annual meeting in 2000, where I got my first vivid display of the pugnacious Harry. I also got a vivid display of his intensity, since after the panel closed, Harry was crowded by questioners, and grew so focused on replying, that he worked his way absent-mindedly to the edge of the platform and fell off. I grabbed his arm and kept the fall from being a complete crash; but that taught me another thing about Harry, because that arm was amazingly muscular and powerful for an 80-something professor. No one is ever going to be able to say that about me.

IDEAS, HOWEVER, WERE HIS MEAT AND DRINK. After the publication of *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation*, Harry called me at home, entirely out of the blue, and without any introductory preliminaries, launched into his own review of the book—what it should have had here, what it needed there. He was irked that I said in the preface that I was not a Straussian. "Harry, how could I be? I've never read Leo Strauss!" That bothered him not at all. "Well," he replied, "you've read me, haven't you?" Maybe that was just a slight exaggeration. But for many, many people, Harry really did speak for that enigmatic émigré who had been his mentor, and who feared that without a mooring in moral substance, the American democracy was vulnerable to the same undermining

which had occurred in Strauss's own Weimar Germany. Strauss, and Lincoln, taught Harry to care very deeply about liberty and equality, about Socrates and Thrasymachus, about the Declaration of Independence and the Lincoln-Douglas debates.

HE CALLED ME MANY TIMES OVER THE ensuing years, and I would always listen to his characteristic coal-raking of what I'd written—not because he didn't like it, but because he always wanted it to be better. I saw him for the last time in 2009, at Villanova University, where he at once chided me for not emphasizing more clearly in my own book on Lincoln and Douglas the connection between Lincoln and the Declaration. At one occasion, in Princeton, I was asked to give a toast to Harry, and I remembered how much Lincoln had admired another western Harry—Henry Clay, his "beau ideal of a statesman"—and so I offered as the toast a campaign slogan from Clay's 1844 presidential bid, "To Our Harry of the West." I would be happy to lift that toast again, and look beyond horizons for that demanding, unapologetic man, Harry Jaffa.

Allen C. Guelzo is the Henry R. Luce Professor of the Civil War Era at Gettysburg College, and the winner of the Lincoln Prize in 2000 for Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President and in 2005 for Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America.

Lewis E. Lehrman

AS MR. LINCOLN SAID OF MACBETH, IT shall be said of our very own Prince Harry: nothing excels Harry Jaffa.

Our Harry may not be surpassed when contemplating Aristotle, Shakespeare, and Lincoln. His influence will live in the minds of the English-speaking people unto the latest generation.

Lewis E. Lehrman is a senior partner of L.E. Lehrman & Co., co-chairman of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, and the author of *Lincoln at Peoria: The Turning Point*.

Ken Masugi

THE PASSING OF HARRY JAFFA AND WALTER Berns reminded me of a Jaffa witticism. Berns and Allan Bloom, he remarked, are the two faces of Rousseau—Geneva and Paris.

Jaffa's two cities were the city of the best regime of course and Claremont—Claremont, the home of the west-coast Straussians or the Jaffanese Americans. While Jaffa is indeed the soul of west-coast Straussianism, his soul resided in a body in Claremont. And I believe how Jaffa became Jaffa, as Tom West, following Harry Neumann, aptly puts it, is impossible to explain without knowing the effects of Claremont on him.

In Claremont, the Harry Jaffa who wrote *Crisis of the House Divided* changed and came to write his deepest book, *A New Birth of Freedom*. (*Crisis* is actually a better book, but *New Birth* goes beyond it and thus acquires its peculiar distinction.)

The historian Paul Gottfried, who gets so much wrong, reports an interesting story from the late Fr. Francis Canavan, a boyhood friend of Jaffa's. Jaffa told Canavan "Frank, I'm inventing a myth and I'll make people believe it." Now a myth is a false story that tells the truth. What Jaffa learned since this disclosure is that the whole truth is greater than what he originally knew.

Claremont improved Jaffa, bringing his poetry down to the city. A couple instances—more could be elicited—bear mentioning. His students Peter Schramm and Bill Allen variously influenced Jaffa. Ed Erler and John Marini were indispensable, as was the late John Wettergreen. But it must be said that at first Jaffa didn't think Peter's project with the Claremont Institute would work. Nor did he think, once Larry Arnngot the Institute established as a going concern, that Larry should go to head up Hillsdale. Again, his students changed Jaffa's mind. And I need not mention Charles Kesler's *Claremont Review of Books*.

To focus on one example, consider the late recognition of the baneful effects of Progressivism on American political institutions. This was a Claremont view, not one of the pre-Jaffa Jaffa. Recall that *Crisis* cites Woodrow Wilson approvingly.

Jaffa's students reflected a hopeful America. Jaffa's students and the Claremont Institute have shown him wrong on some important

practical matters; now their focus is to teach America how he was right on matters of principle. During Jaffa's "turn," he became aware of the bad effects of what came to be known as east-coast Straussianism on students' souls. He saw it in Martin Diamond's narrowing focus on the low but solid American Founding. He saw it in some of Bloom's effects on his students, and he saw it in Tom Pangle, with whom he had a notorious exchange.

Earlier in Pangle's career, when he was up for tenure at Yale, William Buckley, who was asked to rally support for Tom, told Jaffa he had heard Pangle was a Nietzschean. Jaffa responded, with a half-truth, that he was merely understanding Nietzsche as he understood himself. Tom gave a couple talks in Claremont back in 1982. In the first he declared that "Socrates didn't give a hoot about Athens." (He actually used another four-letter word.) Jaffa's and his students' exchanges with Pangle in Claremont back then and years later in the pages of the *Claremont Review* had some temporary effect on the way Pangle disclosed his grievances with America.

THE CLAREMONT STUDENTS AND THE Claremont Institute in particular played a key role in Jaffa's "turn" toward America and politics. In the face of stigma and disdain, this is the Institute's enduring role in American conservatism.

Having touched on Jaffa's two cities, let me turn to the federal city, Washington D.C. Here, one prominent political man here took Jaffa seriously: Clarence Thomas. But the regnant view of him in this town appears on the Hudson Institute celebration of Harvey Mansfield few years ago. *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat opened his comments by recalling his days as a Claremont Institute Publius Fellow. Jaffa asked him whether it was true that Mansfield stands alone at Harvard. After Ross agreed, Jaffa asked him, "But what does he stand for?" The shocked reaction on that panel, George Will, among others, was of howling astonishment.

Amidst his justice and generosity, one Mansfield remark in his eulogy of Jaffa in the *Weekly Standard* stands out:

One might think it impossible to exaggerate the importance of [*Crisis*] if Jaffa had not shown us how. In other books he made the

understanding of Lincoln's America the solution to all difficulties, the combination of all good things: democracy and aristocracy, ancients and moderns, prudence and principle, Christians and pagans, philosophy and statesmanship, the good and one's own. The only dualities he left intact were liberal and conservative, Jew and Gentile. These he kept in order to maintain or, more accurately, appease his excess of fighting spirit.

Mansfield might have been channeling Alexis de Tocqueville himself on the Declaration, from his letter to Chabrol, July 16, 1831. The 4th of July parade and the reading of the Declaration he experienced had moved him as "deeply felt and truly great." But then came a "rhetorical harangue pompously parading all of world history to its consummation in the United States, seated at the center of the universe. It sounded just like a piece of humbug in some farce..." "I left," Tocqueville goes on, "cursing the speechifier whose gab and fatuous national pride had dampened the vivid impressions the rest of the ceremony had made on me."

Harvey, however, was not merely channeling Tocqueville, because he is wiser than the French observer. But in light of Jaffa's and his students' work his claim that *Democracy in America* is the best book on America is just impossible.

EVEN IN LIGHT OF HIS REVOLUTIONARY understanding of the Civil War as an instance of the theologico-political question, Jaffa's most grievous error is that he didn't fully appreciate Christianity. He remained convinced that Allan Bloom's essay on the *Merchant of Venice* was spot-on. In his later years Walter Berns was active in his Episcopalian Church.

The Gospel of Mark reports Christ's touching and thereby cleansing a leper. Contrary to Jesus' instruction, the healed man reported the miracle, and subsequently "it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere."

Thus, following his miracle, Jesus is, like the lepers, forced into the desert. I conclude by daring to address you: "Fellow lepers...."

Ken Masugi is a senior fellow of the Claremont Institute.



Lucas E. Morel

“DO YOU RIDE A BIKE?” WAS THE FIRST question Professor Jaffa ever asked me. I had just transferred to Claremont McKenna College from Harvey Mudd College, and had heard of Harry Jaffa from Bill Allen and Ken Masugi, but was not prepared for a question unrelated to the world of political philosophy. Alas, I never got the chance to ride with Jaffa, making the circuit around the Puddingstone Reservoir Loop west of campus. But I did get the privilege of Jaffa’s instruction, both in and out of the classroom.

Professor Jaffa taught—above all in his *Crisis of the House Divided*, and by studying Lincoln’s speeches—that Lincoln’s devotion to his country was not mere patriotism, “his country right or wrong.” In the words of the British biographer Lord Charnwood, Lincoln’s public life sought “the restoration of his country to its earliest and noblest tradition, which alone gave permanence or worth to its existence as a nation.” Charnwood highlights this happy coincidence of the American Founding—its oldest tradition being its noblest as well—to show that Lincoln loved his country not merely because it was his, but because it was good in its original aspirations. This nobility of the American experiment in popular government, however, required statesmen to keep self-government on track, to keep it from slipping into what Jaffa called “permissive egalitarianism.” As Jaffa noted, “Without enlightened leadership, capable of enlisting people in the ser-

vice of a principle higher than their own selfish interests, a leadership which would prevent them from incorporating injustice into those opinions which, by their universality, became the foundation of most men’s sense of justice, popular government would not be worth saving.”

Crisis remains an important book today because it promotes the civic education of the American people. It elucidates the principles that forced the nation to choose what kind of government and hence what kind of people it would be. Key to this was the presentation of the salient issues of the debates with Stephen Douglas: in particular, the controversy over the legitimacy of slavery in the federal territories and therewith the fate of freedom in America and hence the world. By presenting the country with a clear choice regarding the future of slavery, Lincoln not only dashed Douglas’s hopes for the presidency, he also offered the nation an opportunity to preserve its founding principles as “the last, best hope of mankind.”

JAFFA EXPLAINED THAT LINCOLN’S CONTRIBUTION to American history came “when the nation, as he believed, was tempted to abandon its ‘ancient faith.’” The self-evident truth that “all men are created equal,” or as Jaffa famously put it, “no man is the natural ruler of anyone but himself,” forms the basis of our national creed. What Lincoln taught his countrymen in his day remains a subject worthy of study, and was certainly a mainstay of Jaffa’s thinking as long as I had the privilege of knowing him.

Along these lines, one memorable occasion occurred on February 11, 2005, the day before Lincoln’s birthday, when President and Mrs. George W. Bush welcomed the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission to the White House. Professor Jaffa and I joined other members of the Commission’s scholarly advisory board for this event. We watched President Bush land on the White House lawn via a Marine One helicopter, and later toured the Lincoln Bedroom, with its hand-signed copy of the Gettysburg Address. After hearing the president deliver impromptu remarks about how much he admired Lincoln, Bush left and the advisory members enjoyed a dessert reception, at which Professor Jaffa leaned over to me and said, “Guess how old I am this year.” After a pause, he answered, “Four score and seven.”

In his 1916 biography, Lord Charnwood said of Abraham Lincoln, “no man ever pondered more deeply in his own way, or answered more firmly the question whether there was indeed an American nationality worth preserving.” Almost a century later, this can now be said of Harry Jaffa. His *Crisis of the House Divided* will stand as a milestone not only in the study of Lincoln, but also in the study of the American regime. “Our Gallant Harry of the West” has fallen, but his words live on, and will continue to teach those who have ears to hear about the promise and challenge of American self-government.

Lucas E. Morel is the Class of 1960 Professor of Ethics and Politics at Washington and Lee University.

Anthony A. Peacock

LIKE SO MANY OTHER STUDENTS OF THE Claremont Graduate School, I was influenced by both the teaching and the person of Harry Jaffa. I first got to know Jaffa through his written work but not through what many consider to be his best and most influential book, *Crisis of the House Divided*. Rather it was his essay on Aristotle in the second edition of Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey’s *History of Political Philosophy*. I had become interested in Strauss’s writings in the last year of my undergraduate degree and came across Jaffa’s essay in the process of reviewing Strauss and Cropsey’s classic survey of political philosophy.

I was unaware at the time I read Jaffa’s commentary on Aristotle, and frankly quite surprised given the nature of academic specialization today, that Jaffa was best known not for his familiarity with ancient political philosophy but rather for his Americana, specifically his work

on Abraham Lincoln and the Declaration of Independence. Given the encyclopedic quality of what Jaffa had written on Aristotle and his familiarity with Strauss, I was eager to discover just what he had to say about the American Revolution, the Declaration, the Constitution, the Lincoln-Douglas debates, constitutional interpretation, and the numerous other subjects he wrote on throughout his long and prolific career.

Jaffa’s writings did not disappoint. There are obviously many things that could be said about the significance of his work but given the limitations of space here I will focus on what I believe to be the most important: his defense of America as both principled and high-toned politics. What is singularly remarkable about Jaffa’s work, and this applies not just to the *Crisis* but to almost all of his commentary on the question of America—what it stands for, why it remains at the height rather than the depths of civilization as so many of its detractors old

and new have proposed—is how compellingly and comprehensively Jaffa was able to make the case for the principled foundations of American constitutionalism as well as its openness to the highest elements of civilization.

To give just one example. In *American Conservatism and the American Founding* Jaffa made the case for distinguishing the Declaration of Independence from the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who followed Hobbes in assuming that man did not have a natural end or *summum bonum* but simply sought to avoid the *summum malum*—death, and especially violent death. Critics such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau saw the absence of a *summum bonum* as a fatal defect in Hobbes’ and Locke’s political philosophy. However, as Jaffa responded, Jefferson differed from Locke in making the pursuit of happiness rather than the pursuit of property or estate an unalienable right. “If man in the state of nature, or by nature, pursues happiness, then by nature he



pursues a *summum bonum* and does not merely flee a *summum malum*. This theoretical defect in Hobbes' and Locke's teaching is then not a necessary defect of the Declaration."

AS JAFFA SUGGESTED, THIS DIFFERENCE between the Declaration and Locke made all the difference in the world, demonstrating how the United States pursued a high-toned politics of an Aristotelean variety, replete with a *summum bonum* and all of the potential elements of high civilization that went along with it. Strauss, as Jaffa pointed out in this same essay, understood America in these same high-toned terms. Unfortunately, too many in-

terpreters of America, including too many of Strauss's students, have forgotten that today.

I also knew Harry Jaffa the person. I was a graduate student at Claremont but also taught briefly at Claremont McKenna College while using Jaffa's office. Jaffa by that time was an emeritus professor at CMC and had moved his "office" to the main library at the Claremont colleges. Nevertheless I saw him fairly regularly. As those familiar with his legacy are aware, Jaffa was known to criticize other conservatives and was described by William F. Buckley, Jr., as so argumentative that even trying to agree with the man was no easy task. But Jaffa's criticism of conservatives was usually well-founded

and whatever public persona he had, his private persona was affable and as much as any other faculty I have known Jaffa made himself accessible to students. His colleagues joked that once Jaffa got ahold of your ear, he wouldn't let go until he finished his argument, which could take hours. But as many of us who learned from Jaffa knew, those hours were well spent and involved some of the most honest discussions many of us ever had at Claremont—or anywhere else. The eminent professor will be missed.

Anthony A. Peacock is a professor of political science at Utah State University.

Michael Platt

WHAT HARRY JAFFA WROTE WAS wonderful to read, for what he would discover, and also for a peculiar quality of his prose all his own, on the march steadily. Reading his and Allan Bloom's book, *Shakespeare's Politics*, in September 1968 as I was leaving Yale, confirmed my "prophetic soul" that Shakespeare really does address the great questions of life, including justice, something seldom said in the Yale English department, and soon to be denied outright there and in most places since. Jaffa's essay on the statesmanship of Lear frees one to suffer

even more when Lear cannot be wholly a statesman to Cordelia's plain defense of natural right (or "bond"). Soon I discovered Jaffa's Lincoln, the Lincoln, so rightly revered for binding in national life what our Declaration and our Constitution bind in thought and creed. I believe his work on Lincoln must surely be one of the very few things by a student of Leo Strauss that he would not only approve of, of course, but learn from. There exists a letter of Strauss's from around 1961 to some source of wealth pointing out that the best time for a man to go on with the forecast completing of work (on Lincoln) is when he's already done most of the study. Surely there must be some

letter in which Strauss says what he learned from Lincoln. Jaffa was also wonderful to be with. I am very glad my son Winston could hear him, with a big photo of the ships in the Atlantic, talking about the meeting at sea of Churchill and Roosevelt and that my daughter Molly could meet him, at a talk of mine on Nietzsche, and after which we took Jaffa to dinner at his favorite restaurant. Towards the end of my *Seven Wonders of Shakespeare*, I say "and just the thought of Harry Jaffa is encouraging." Ever will be.

Michael Platt is professor of political science, philosophy, and literature at George Wythe University.

Norman Podhoretz

BILL BUCKLEY ONCE SAID "IF YOU THINK Harry Jaffa is hard to argue with, try agreeing with him." To this Harry replied: "If Bill had lived to be a hundred, he could not have found better words to express the purpose of my life." I take this reply as a license to preach a little sermon on Buckley's text. But as one who has known the consequences both of arguing with Harry—about Robert Bork and Antonin Scalia—and of agreeing with him—about natural law—I would presume to say that both Bill and Harry were at least half wrong. In my admittedly limited experience, arguing and agreeing with Harry Jaffa are equally hard.

Now, it is of course easy to understand why disagreeing with Harry is so hard. He is a very brilliant polemicist who, moreover, writes beautifully—and I say this as a sometime practitioner of literary criticism. It is therefore perilous in

the extreme to take issue with him. Anyone who has the temerity to do so will soon find his heart sinking as he is bombarded with philosophically rigorous arguments fortified by seemingly impregnable barriers of evidence. Such a reckless opponent will also expose himself to barbs whose sting always leaves a long lingering mark. And to make matters worse, the characteristic Jaffa retort to a critic is invariably delivered in prose so well turned and so witty that its target is in danger of being seduced by it alone. Here is an example:

On one occasion [Harry writes] I crossed swords with Ernest van den Haag, that resolute and unflinching advocate of scientific positivism. Our dispute had its origins at a Philadelphia Society meeting, when I was lecturing on "We hold these truths to be self-evident...." Van den Haag stood up and declared "There are no self evident truths...." I then asked him,

"Is it not self evident to you that you are not a dog?" He replied, "No." I then said, "Don't you know that you are not a dog?" He again replied, "No." I concluded the dialogue by saying "If you don't know that you are not a dog, maybe you don't know that I am not a fire hydrant."

Ernest van den Haag was no mean polemicist himself which is why I suspect that he appreciated the elegance of Harry's thrust even though he was its victim.

BUT IF IT IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND WHY arguing with Harry Jaffa is so hard, it is not at all easy to understand why agreeing with him should also be so hard. Writing during the Cold War, Buckley's explanation was that "He studies the fine print in any agreement as if it were a trap or treaty with the Soviet Union." And to this Harry replied that Buckley was not making "a negative comment":



[For Bill] knew that as an interpreter of the Declaration of Independence, and of the Gettysburg Address, I was concerned with subjects far more consequential than any treaty with the Soviet Union. At bottom, the disagreements concerning the American political tradition were disagreements concerning the nature of the human soul. And it did not take any argument to convince Bill Buckley that, when you came to the human soul, you did not fool around.

It is in the light of this comment that we can begin to understand why it is so hard to agree with Harry. When dealing with what he calls the most consequential subjects, everything is at stake. And when everything is at stake, every

detail counts. It is not enough to agree in general: the particulars, each and every one of them, have to be got right. An imprecise formulation, a misplaced emphasis, an inadvertent implication can and does lead one astray, not only into intellectual confusion but into dangerous and destructive courses of action.

ONCE UPON A TIME, AND IN ANOTHER context, such errors were called heresies and they were taken with the utmost seriousness because they were seen to threaten the human soul both in this world and the next. Harry Jaffa, so far as I know does not overly concern himself with the world to come. Yet to him it suffices that in this world these errors conduce to misreadings of the Declara-

tion of Independence and the Constitution and the Gettysburg Address which then eventuate in harm to the gloriously blessed Republic to which the first two gave birth and then, after the carnage of the Civil War, the third gave a new birth—"a new birth of freedom" in Lincoln's words.

So let me conclude by thanking Harry Jaffa for all the magnificent work he has done as a philosopher, a scholar, and a writer who, I devoutly hope, will unearth nothing heretical in this little tribute of mine to him.

Norman Podhoretz is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and editor-at-large of Commentary magazine. These remarks were delivered at a 90th birthday celebration for Harry V. Jaffa.

Richard H. Reeb, Jr.

ONE HARDLY KNOWS WHERE TO START in recounting the virtues of Harry V. Jaffa and the profundity of his scholarly work. I knew him first as an essayist, next as an historian and political philosopher, then as a teacher, and, finally, as a friend. To say that he affected and even changed my life in numerous ways would be an understatement, for his immense contributions to our understanding of the human condition in general and of our political situation in particular will live on, "far above our poor power to add or detract."

In the midst of the moral and intellectual confusion of the 1960s, especially on college and university campuses, Jaffa's essay "On the Nature of Civil and Religious Liberty" was a stout defense of the freedoms to speak, publish and assemble but even more of the regime of which they are an essential part. Jaffa made clear what these freedoms are for, not merely for their own sakes but for the perpetuation of the Constitution that guarantees them. His most telling point was that, for all of Abraham Lincoln's wartime suppression of free speech and press, not to mention suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, he acted to preserve liberty and ultimately end slavery. Jaffa combined the wisdom of the political philosopher with the prudence of the statesman. Ironically, it was recommended to me by a philosophy professor strongly critical of Professor Jaffa's thesis!

Next for me was *The Crisis of the House Divided: An Analysis of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, a work recommended by Professor Robert Sasseen during his course at San Jose State College on American Political Thought. I was completely captured by Jaffa's

interpretation and especially taken by Jaffa's suggestion that Lincoln exemplified the "great-souled man" noted by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. American politics had never struck me as petty, but now the human greatness I had believed in against the trend of most political science writings had become real. Politics was not merely about "power, rule and authority" or "who gets what, when, why and how." It was the pursuit of the common good, defined by the historical and political circumstances, yes, but no less genuine. "Natural right is changeable," Aristotle wrote, "but its essence is always the same."

FORTUNATELY PROF. JAFFA WAS TEACHING at Claremont Men's College, along with his colleague Martin Diamond and their teacher Leo Strauss. My acquaintance with the writings of these gentlemen was the sole basis for my enrolling there in the fall of 1968. I looked at no slick brochures nor listened to any sales pitches, I just followed my goal of learning the most important things from the most intelligent people around. Barely speaking to the world-famous Strauss, I got on pretty well with Diamond. But I best connected with Jaffa who, as a classmate observed, strikes one at first as somewhat stiff, but once you get to know him, you have, as Jaffa once said to me, "a friend in the logos."

Friends "warned" me that Jaffa was not "serious" in his classroom teaching, coming unprepared, late, or not at all. But it made no sense to miss the opportunity to take a class from him, and I was never disappointed. On any given night in his course on Theories of American Democracy we might review the argument of *The Federalist*, the theories of John C. Calhoun

or the political philosophy of Abraham Lincoln. He inspired me to write a paper evaluating the competing interpretations of American government and politics of Jaffa and Walter Berns, no less (yes, their differences were apparent even then). On the merits, I favored Jaffa.

No less valuable was a course with the remarkable title of Psychological Foundations of Political Philosophy, which consisted of an examination of the writings of Hans Jonas on the limitations of modern science for understanding what Jonas referred to as *The Phenomenon of Life*, as well as Aristotle's *Treatise on the Soul (De Anima)*. Between his informal guidance in class and my familiarity with the clarity of his numerous writings, I believe I wrote my best papers.

MY TRUST IN THIS MAN WAS GREAT and my appreciation greater. When I removed from Claremont to take my first college teaching job, my wife, Patricia, and I, and our two young sons paid a visit to the Jaffas, expecting to be greeted warmly, of course, but they insisted that we stay for lunch. We were not among his closest friends, but during our time with him we felt that we were. When my wife passed away nearly 10 years ago, Harry Jaffa made the trip to her memorial service. She had gotten to know Jaffa more when she took a course in which Platonic dialogues were translated from the original Greek into English. One cannot overvalue Jaffa's genuine friendship.

My trust in Jaffa was so great that I asked him to supervise my dissertation on the political role of the mass media in American democracy, a matter that escaped the attention not only of most political scientists but more than a little questionable from the point of view of



political philosophy. But he encouraged me by reminding me of Aristotle's "method" of examining opinions for their internal consistency and their conformity to the truth, which I proposed to do with those of the controllers of America's leading journalistic organs. In one of his recommendations for me a few years later he called my thesis "striking and original." That was much better than "boring and derivative," at least!

THERE ARE MANY MOMENTS WORTH recounting beyond these in my long association with him over the years, but one stands out. Sometime in the mid-1970s when many of us were despairing of American democracy and beginning to believe that its flaws were not eccentric but traceable to its foundations, Jaffa was speaking in the large lec-

ture hall at CMC. One of my classmates said, in the form of a question, what many of us were beginning to believe, namely, that the principle of equality was ultimately incompatible with good government and human liberty. Thereupon, Jaffa produced a book containing an account of the Spanish Inquisition and began to read. A Jew had been forced to admit that he believed in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. (It helped that there was a rope around his neck.) But instead of being spared, he was immediately garroted! Why? In order to save his soul. For if he had later renounced that decision made under duress he might be consigned to Hell. Being killed before he changed his mind was his good fortune. That, Jaffa declared as he closed the book, is what the American Revolution saved us from.

So, when he published *How to Think About the American Revolution: A Bicentennial Celebration*, we were ready for his rethinking of his argument in *Crisis* that a serious defect in the American Founding was corrected by the classical statesmanship of Abraham Lincoln. As *Founders' Son*, Richard Brookhiser's current work on Lincoln also emphasizes, Lincoln drew upon the founders in the troubled circumstances of mid-19th-century America, at most "updating" but certainly not repudiating or replacing them. The memory of Harry Jaffa is a great gift to America and the world, and for those of us who had the good fortune to know him, it is a source of real pleasure and genuine goodness.

Richard Reeb, Jr., is an emeritus instructor of political science and philosophy at Barstow College.

Colleen Sheehan

HARRY V. JAFFA ONCE REMARKED THAT "George Washington was a perfectly public-spirited man before there was any public to be spirited about."

This conjures up an image of George Washington as Father of the Country and America's First Citizen. Despite George Washington's indisputable importance to our nation's history, Harry Jaffa wrote more about Abraham Lincoln than he did about Washington, or about the American Founders generally. In fact, he wrote more about Lincoln than he did about anyone—though it must be said that he was always writing about Aristotle, even if the name did not appear on the page.

Ultimately, however, Jaffa attended to and celebrated the unique political greatness of the American Founding. This celebration was years in the making. I remember being at a Liberty Fund event in Charlottesville, Virginia, in the late '80s, at which an august company of scholars took turns sending Mr. Jefferson to the woodshed. But not Harry Jaffa. He stood apart in his insistence: "All honor to Jefferson...."

Jaffa's focus on American political principles and statesmanship led some of his colleagues in political philosophy to declare him too much a patriot and not sufficiently philosophical. Even worse for some of them, he talked a good deal

about morality and religion. It was as if he preferred Meletus to Socrates.

Like Lincoln, and the founders before him, Jaffa understood that the success of the American polity proceeded from a philosophical cause. He also understood that the success of that cause depended on its being translated into a way of life practiced by the American people. In essence, Americans must understand how to live the principles of republican self-government. As Robert Frost once put it, it is the task of Americans to teach others "how Democracy is meant."

The founders succeeded, and so did Lincoln, and so we have immortalized their names and honor them throughout time. While their success constitutes our inheritance, it is not our success until (and if) we carry on their work of demonstrating to the world the capability of a people to govern themselves.

This is the practical work to which Harry Jaffa devoted his life, and that he tasked his students to carry on in the vineyards of America.

This is simply the everyday work of a republican citizen. I suppose such work is more the labor of the good and plain citizen, rather than the uncommon citizen. But I also suppose that it takes an uncommon citizen to understand the souls of the people among whom he lives, and to know what is most needed in a given moment in time.

It might be said, perhaps, that Harry Jaffa was a public-spirited man, even when—or especially because—in his age philosophy had severed the bonds of public friendship and declared the death of the spirit.

HARRY JAFFA DENIED THAT DECLARATION of death in favor of another declaration, a declaration of life, or more accurately, a declaration of the good life, which sets up a standard maxim that gives hope to all people, of all colors and creeds and conditions, everywhere. In an academic and popular environment dominated by various shades of relativism, Jaffa inspired Americans, and indeed all who would listen, to reclaim the spirit of philosophy and to remember the conditions of freedom.

Harry Jaffa deserved the appellation of good citizen. As I wrote to his son Philip, upon hearing of his death: I could not have asked for a better teacher or imagined a better American.

But we should remember too, that for all intents and purposes, Harry Jaffa served throughout his long life as America's Philosopher Laureate. That was his calling. And for the service he rendered the land in which he happened to be born, America became a better country for it.

Harry V. Jaffa, RIP.

Colleen Sheehan is the director of the Matthew J. Ryan Center at Villanova University.



Bradley C.S. Watson

UNLIKE SO MANY ACADEMICS AND INTELLECTUALS, Harry V. Jaffa had America in his bones. He was certainly one of her most able and important interpreters. He was a scholar who was there at the founding of modern American intellectual and political conservatism, and whose teachings and writings have influenced generations of students. It's well known that Jaffa's sharp pen was responsible for everything from powerful academic tomes to the most memorable and controversial part of Barry Goldwater's 1964 acceptance speech.

But Jaffa would have thought the label "conservative" senseless apart from knowing just what it is that we have a duty to conserve. Above all else, he was committed to the truth. He knew it was the truth that must be conserved, and the truth that would set men free. For him, political truth was best captured in the document that issued forth from Philadelphia in July 1776: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..." Too egalitarian for many a conservative, and not egalitarian enough for any liberal, Jaffa had many intellectual adversaries, but saw them as adversaries only to the extent they did not see the truth and implications of human equality. In pursuit of the truth, he taught that nature

takes pride of place over history in any conservatism worthy of the name, and that the American Founding takes pride of place in any American conservatism worthy of the name. Unlike so many political scientists, he knew a mountain from a molehill. He laid the groundwork for the reconsideration of Abraham Lincoln as a political thinker and statesman of the highest order, and for the "Claremont school" of political science that has flourished in the rich soil he so meticulously tilled.

JAFFA DIED WITHIN HOURS OF ONE OF HIS great intellectual antagonists, Professor Walter Berns. Many have pointed to the similarly close passages of Jefferson and Adams, and noted that unlike them, Jaffa and Berns apparently never reconciled. One thing is certain: the comparison with the two presidents would not have been lost on Jaffa. But another thing seems equally certain to me: Jaffa was kind, and took friendship seriously, which means he never allowed kindness or friendship to obscure the truth. I recall one day when I was a new assistant professor, working in Vermont, the phone rang, and on the line was Professor Jaffa. He had spoken to a friend of his, another senior scholar, who had just reviewed the first book manuscript I ever submitted for publication. Jaffa had been impressed by what he had heard from this trusted source, and he

wanted me to know that. Years later, when I was standing solidly on my own two feet, I was the target of one of Jaffa's famously pointed letters, printed in the *Claremont Review of Books*. In his judgment, I had been insufficiently critical of the late Judge Robert H. Bork in my review of Bork's last book. My error lay in not recognizing precisely enough the extent to which the Declaration of Independence was the Constitution's moral compass. He wanted me, and the readers, to know that—and why. Each incident was vintage Jaffa.

In writing this reminiscence, I half expect a Parthian shot, perhaps in the form of a midnight apparition, from the other side. So best to close by noting that Jaffa understood politics to be an eminently practical science, and so devoted his life not to the satisfaction of personal *eros*, but to writing and teaching to ensure that America's edifice of liberty and equal rights would be undecayed by the lapse of time and untorn by usurpation. For such indeed he understood to be a task of gratitude to our fathers, justice to ourselves, duty to our posterity, and love for our species in general. Unlike so many academics and intellectuals, Harry V. Jaffa had no contempt for ordinary men.

Bradley C.S. Watson is professor of politics and Philip M. McKenna Chair in American and Western Political Thought at Saint Vincent College.