

**Political Studies Program, Summer 2012
LEO STRAUSS AND THE ART OF WRITING
Instructor: William Kristol
Washington, D.C.**

Leo Strauss is famous for rediscovering “the art of writing.” What is it? Why is it important? What does its use suggest about politics and philosophy? What is the relation of the art of writing to some of Strauss’s other famous rediscoveries—including his revival of the tradition of political philosophy, and his emphasis of the clash between ancients and moderns?

We’ll consider these questions through a close reading of Leo Strauss’s 1952 book, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*—especially chapters 1 and 2.

No previous knowledge of Strauss’s work is presupposed, but students unfamiliar with Strauss might want to read two essays about his work--“Leo Strauss and the History of Political Philosophy,” by Nathan Tarcov and Thomas Pangle, in Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds., *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd and revised edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), and “What Was Leo Strauss Up To?” *Public Interest*, Fall, 2003 (longer version available in *Perspectives in Political Science*, Fall, 2004). You might also enjoy a book review of *Persecution and the Art of Writing* by Irving Kristol in *Commentary* magazine, October, 1952 (“The Philosophers’ Hidden Truth”). Those seeking more familiarity with Strauss might want to take a look at *On Tyranny* and *Natural Right and History*, two other books written around then by Strauss.

Mr. Steven Lenzner of MIT, a leading expert on Strauss, will join the discussions.

Monday, July 16, 2012, 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Leo Strauss and the Art of Writing

Reading:

- *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Preface and Introduction (Chapter One)

Discussion Questions:

1. Why might “the relation between philosophy and politics” be a problem?
2. What does it mean to “state this problem from the side of philosophy,” as Strauss claims he will do in the Introduction?
3. Why do you suspect Strauss chose to have as his Introduction to this book an essay mostly about Farabi's Plato?

Tuesday, July 17, 2012, 9:00 am to Noon

Leo Strauss and the Art of Writing

Reading:

- *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Introduction (Chapter One) and Chapter Two

Discussion Questions:

1. How does religion fit into the study of the problem of philosophy and politics?
2. What are the implications of the distinctions Strauss draws between Christianity, Judaism and Islam?
3. What is the relationship of persecution to the art of writing?
4. What are other reasons for engaging in the art of writing?

Assignment (due Wednesday)

Choose one, and write no more than three pages:

1. What is the “art of writing,” according to Strauss? Is it really necessary for philosophy?
2. Is “persecution” key to understanding the “art of writing?” Why does Strauss emphasize it?

Wednesday, July 18, 2012, 9:00 am to Noon

Leo Strauss and the Art of Writing

Reading:

- *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Chapter Two

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the relation of philosophy or education to the art of writing?
2. What does Strauss mean by “freedom of thought?”
3. What guidance does Strauss supply for distinguishing between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” “reading between the lines?” Is it helpful?

Thursday, July 19, 2012, 9:00 am to Noon

Leo Strauss and the Art of Writing

Reading:

- *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Chapters Three to Five (we will focus on particular sections of these chapters, to be specified in the first class meeting)

Discussion Questions:

1. What do we learn from these chapters about the art of writing?
2. What is the “literary character” of the Guide for the Perplexed?
3. Part IV of Chapter Three is titled, “A Moral Dilemma.” What is the dilemma? How does Strauss resolve it?
4. What do we learn from Strauss’s interpretation of the Kuzari about “what philosophy is or what a philosopher is” (first sentence of Chapter Four)?

Friday, July 20, 2012, 9:00 am to Noon

Leo Strauss and the Art of Writing

Reading:

- *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Chapters Three to Five

Discussion Questions:

1. According to Section One of Chapter Five, what is the relation between the art of writing and what Strauss calls there “historicism?”
2. Strauss notes that “as a general observation people write as they read.” What does this imply about reading Strauss?
3. Is the book *Persecution and the Art of Writing* a coherent whole? Where does it lead one in thinking about the history of political thought? About philosophy? About politics/?