BOOKREVIEWS

Introductory Note

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Book Review for Perspectives on Political Science


“This is the story of a man.” So begins an old tale which here becomes the basis for a new one: “This is the story of Mankind.” The storyteller is Patrick Deneen of Princeton, a bright new star in the crowded firmament of political theorists. He began to work on it at Rutgers with Carey McWilliams and Benjamin Barber, and the APSA rewarded his labors by naming it the best dissertation in political philosophy for 1995.

About the time Patrick began his own life’s journey and my students and I were reading The Odyssey in the College Seminar at Notre Dame (early ’60s), the classicist Kenneth Rexroth said of it: This “is entertainment of the highest order” and more. “The Odyssey says: This is life…and it is full of meanings.” My teaching notes include many fragments prognostic of the book under review: “Homer’s intention—more than to entertain?... He wants to teach us something. What is it? And how does he go about it?... A quest for order: How am I going to order my existence?—particularize life. How are we going to order our existence?—universalize life.... Comparisons with today.”

Did the spiritual holocaust of the late ’60s change anything in that simple discussion outline? No and yes. While the questions are perennial, our cultural revolution swept away enough of the old order to free us once more to do what our predecessors have done over the past three millennia—turn to Homer to recover our bearings while we also rediscover an art of storytelling that recovers the unity politics, philosophy, and poetry had at the beginning of the humanist tradition.

If Deneen (and Plato) are correct, Homer was the first political theorist, and the history of political philosophy begins with him. By trying to
understand Odysseus we place ourselves in a distinguished line of interpreters (and also some notable misinterpreters) from the School of Athens to the School of Emile to the Frankfurt School. All have sought in the School of Homer an understanding of human life in its political dimension. Traveling with Odysseus and coming home with him, we gain rich insights into great polarities such as nature and convention, and especially, for Patrick, universal and particular.

If he has a “case” to make, it could be stated this way: Beware of hidden shoals in the enticing advertisements for cosmopolitan, communitarian universalism (read “globalism”); Homer teaches why the local and traditional are bound to endure even if “the cosmopolitan gaze” is a “temptation of temptations” never fully quieted. As E. F. Schumacher put it, “small is beautiful.” The way Homer worked out this dialectic in The Odyssey, Deneen thinks, enables us to cut a clear path through the debates spawned by the cultural revolution.

A good place to find Deneen’s own theory of the long journey across the wine-dark sea of history is the concluding section of the Introduction, which conveys in ten pages the book’s dialectical heart: “The Political Theory of The Odyssey, and the Odyssey of Political Theory.” Instead of a conventional narrative, we have a story to be told, and Homer as guide. Deneen tells it with the charm of authentic honesty and directness after doing his homework in the relevant literature, traditional and contemporary. The result is a rich feast of reason sustained through six chapters of scholarly interpretation. Ample notes follow each chapter, and there is a carefully selected bibliography and index.

John A. Gueguen
Illinois State University
Book Review for *The Review of Politics*:


Many of Father James Schall's books have long subtitles. This one informs us that the "unserious" things include "Teaching, Writing, Playing, Believing, Lecturing, Philosophizing, Singing, Dancing." Josef Pieper could have given a similar work of his (*In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, 1965) the same subtitle, as Father Schall suggests by including it in his bibliography. Evidently the "unserious" things in life are not necessarily less "solemn" than the "serious" ones. In part, this book wants us to see how solemn the unserious things truly are.

Since writing book reviews fits several of the unserious categories, the reader should not be surprised to find this review equally unserious, if not downright playful. The reviewer feels doubly justified in doing such a thing as he recalls the admonition of more than one former teacher, "Don't be so serious!" For Father Schall, everything having to do with a liberal education, whether acquiring or imparting it, is among the most "unserious" of human occupations, and therefore—as he is at pains to disclose—the most important. He will be most pleased if a reader of this book has plenty of fun along the way and finishes by taking himself a bit less seriously.

To the many who have known him and have studied with him in his classrooms, on his walks, and in his books, Father Schall is above all a teacher and therefore also an habitual reader and inciter to reading and the wisdom it opens us to. Do not open a Schall book unless you are prepared to open many more books toward which he gently compels. What makes his own books distinctive is this combination of listening to others while searching for fresh ways to teach the old and familiar truths. And herein lies a second justification for this unserious review: What goes on in his Georgetown classroom cannot be much different from what this reviewer's own students experienced for forty years.

Regular readers of this journal have already met Father Schall in one or another of the print versions of his larger "classroom." One could open any of his books from the back and recognize its author at once by glancing through the bibliography, index, and especially the short list of "These-People-Tell-the-Truth Books." When a book has no index, readers must search to find its implicit index, but for Father Schall a bibliographical index is not just a convenience; it is an essential component both of the book and of his continually evolving catalogue of authors most gifted in the art of the unserious. Besides his oldest and most cherished literary friends, this
continuing conversation is always welcoming new participants. Anyone who is “serious” about the unserious things merits attention.

In this latest version, for instance, we meet a representative of contemporary British “radically orthodox” critics of postmodern philosophy, Catherine Pickstock. She is the author of what Fr. Schall considers “the most remarkable book written in recent years.” Its very title embraces three unserious themes—writing, prayer, and philosophy (p. 163).

One might imagine someone encountering the “Schall Library” for the first time and asking a little irreverently, why does he write so many books about the same thing? The answer, of course, is that their author is escorting us through a magnificent castle room by room, tower by tower, gallery by gallery, all of them interconnected. It is, indeed, the same castle each time, but one has to experience all this wealth little by little and examine the many stories it wants to tell about itself.

What, for instance, is special about this latest addition? As many of his other books do, it draws together a number of previously published short pieces, re-working them and weaving them into still another new lesson. Eleven chapters are grouped between five briefer interludes which bind up the whole: “On the Fate of Academic Men;” “Contemplata Tradere” [handing on the fruits of one’s contemplation]; “Order;” “Self-Discipline;” and “The End of All Things.” Accordingly, the chapters themselves deal primarily with such matters as intellectual poverty, education, teachers, teaching and teachability.

Besides the Introduction and Conclusion, the penultimate chapter appears to be entirely new: “A Last Lecture: On Essays and Letters.” The rest of this review briefly considers how Father Schall enlarges upon that suggestive title. Since it is safe to assume that the present work in not likely to be his last one, a good time has come for him (and for us) to ask, “But what if it were?” And so the composition of the last lecture, the long process of thinking about it, begins here, and that, most likely, is far more interesting and entertaining than what must necessarily turn out to be anticlimactic when the time finally comes to present it.

“Clearly,” the author writes, the question (what if it were?) “brings up in another way the unseriousness of human affairs....We would want our ‘last’ lecture to be ‘serious,’ but only in the sense that it pointed to the highest things and to our place within them....Whether we think of the ‘last lecture’ of one’s life or the ‘last lecture’ of one’s academic days, we naturally suppose that anyone would want, on such an occasion, to leave something lasting, something profound, something altogether serious, though not neglecting the delight of being and the amusement of our lot” (p. 139).
Father Schall’s last lecture would begin, he says, with a passage from a favorite letter or essay. Why? Because a line from a Belloc essay or a Tolkein letter can perform the perfectly essential service of saving us, generally in unsuspected ways, from mere information (that is, serious matters). The same can occur with a parable by Charles Schulz, a conversation with Eric Voegelin, a meditation by Mother Teresa or Thomas à Kempis.

What those forms of address have in common is the presupposition of privacy; they allow us, they encourage us, face to face with another, with a friend, to “be alone with the highest things…where we are most ourselves.” And by remaining “by ourselves” we “become alive.” For “the quality of our interior lives is the first thing…about our relationship with others, including God” (pp. 141-143, 147). He illustrates by citing essays of Cicero, Belloc, Chesterton, Lewis, Camus, Jaki, Dorothy Sayers, and Samuel Johnson; letters of Flannery O’Connor and Walker Percy.

This unserious review has settled on thoughts about one’s last lecture because they bring to light so well what Father Schall himself has been up to all these years (if we didn’t already realize it): He is concentrating (quite seriously) on getting to know your soul, letting you in on his, and so helping you the better to know your own. He cannot think of anything more worth while than to keep the serious things at bay a little longer, to “waste our time” with him and his literary friends—not in idleness, but in leisure—which is “the activity of reflection, wonder, and contemplation” (pp. 146-147). Or in the final words of a fine old hymn, “wonder, love, and praise.”

– John A. Gueguen

John A. Gueguen is professor emeritus of political philosophy in Illinois State University and senior mentor of Lincoln Green Foundation, Urbana, Illinois.
Liberty, Wisdom, and Grace: Thomism and Democratic Political Theory

*John P. Hittinger*

Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002 (314 pages)

This book is the seventeenth volume in the publisher’s distinguished series, Applications of Political Theory. It is a topical rather than systematic collection of essays spanning twenty years of writing and teaching. Its purpose is to bring philosophy and religion, broadly understood, to bear upon contemporary issues in American public life, principally the meaning and experience of freedom. Since 2001 the author is serving as provost and academic dean of St. Mary’s College, Ave Maria University, Orchard Lake, Michigan. He is establishing a scholarly reputation as critic of contemporary liberal thought.

Considered as a whole, these essays provide a comprehensive survey of the political thought of recent Thomistic philosophers, Jacques Maritain—the book’s central figure—and his colleague, Yves Simon, principally their understanding of the theory and practice of modern democracy. Secondarily, Professor Hittinger considers other thinkers in the classical tradition (Leo Strauss and John Paul II). The author also uses the occasion to treat some philosophical critics of the classical tradition (principally Aurel Kolnai) and the opposing Lockean tradition as represented by several constitutional scholars.

An autobiographical preface sketches the heritage which informs the author’s thought and sets forth his personal, political, academic, and religious credentials for undertaking these studies. He does not mention a noble feature which this reviewer counts among Hittinger’s principal distinctions—the gifts of common sense, intellectual simplicity, and plain speaking which manifest his Hoosier origins and his upbringing in the Virginia Tidewater.

The book’s sixteen essays are presented under three broad headings: 1) the response of Maritain and Simon to the political crisis of the twentieth century; 2) the contrasting views of liberty and democracy in the Aristotelian-
Thomistic and Lockean traditions; 3) the treasure of wisdom and grace the author has found in his mentors, which include, along with Maritain, Simon, Strauss and John Paul II, John Henry Newman, Flannery O’Connor, Marion Montgomery, and James Schall. Montgomery has provided the phrase, “the very graciousness of being,” which comes close to describing the purpose of this book (p. ix).

In remarks providing a Foreword, Father Schall portrays the author as heir and transmitter of a tradition that is continually in danger of submersion under the superficial and sometimes dishonest scholarship churned up by a hostile cultural and ideological environment. Hittinger regards with a sense of family honor the tradition he defends and enhances in light of certain inadequacies recent developments have brought to light. As he puts it with characteristic succinctness, the world and especially our country have gone in a different direction from the one Maritain and his colleagues did their best to point out. Hittinger considers it a humbling privilege to accept his generational duty to perpetuate and strengthen the family line which those philosophers did so much to enrich.

The author finds a wonderful convergence between that intellectual patrimony and his own family’s background—especially its military distinctions across several generations in defense of our foundational principles, and its open-eyed recognition under our dominant Protestant culture of the original Catholic inspiration of those principles. This latter trait suggests why Hittinger chose for his mentors other converts famous for blunt and carefully argued positions (Newman, O’Connor, Montgomery).

Hittinger’s characteristic facility for seeing “where ideas go” (Schall’s expression) also helps to understand his choice of adversaries who are guilty of doing their best to bastardize that patrimony. Their names are not the ones most students of these matters would identify as the culprits chiefly responsible for distorting the American Founding, thereby causing serious deviations from the classical-Christian tradition in our contemporary political
culture. The authors Hittinger has selected are chiefly David Richards, Edward Wilson, Richard Rorty, John Rawls, and Steven Hawking.

The ideological character of those thinkers and the legions like them who “reduce reality” to the dimensions of self-interested agendas is manifest, Father Schall suggests, in the “closed curricula” of our universities, while unclouded openness to the world as it is lies at the root of Maritain’s work and of Hittinger’s other mentors. As Schall points out, “the fault line of modern social thought runs through our theory of rights and hence our understanding of natural law and its foundations” (p. xv). While classical natural right is always linked to corresponding duties, the moderns ground it in will. Here is one area Maritain left for his worthy successors to elaborate.

Hittinger is among the growing number of younger scholars, many of them associated with him in the American Maritain Association, who are hard at work on that project. One of America’s best friends from abroad, Maritain is well chosen as the centerpiece of this redemptive work because he took up all the questions associated with liberal democracy and traced them back to Aquinas (and thence to the Bible and Aristotle).

It should also be noted that Maritain (like Hittinger) was a layman fully at home in the world, and even (by his own admission) an “old layman” (in Maritain’s late apologia pro vita sua). Not just “old” chronologically, but consciously enshrining an enduring tradition capable of sustaining the high hopes of World War II era philosophers for a new democratic constitution for persons living in freedom.

John Hittinger is showing that the same is true in our post-cultural revolutionary era at the dawn of the twenty-first century, for our civic tradition cannot be correctly understood—and probably cannot survive—unless it is reconnected to classical metaphysics and Judeo-Christian revelation.

John A. Gueguen, Jr.

Illinois State University (emeritus)
What distinguishes this collection from similar studies is the emphasis on consensus rather than diversity of theories that developed in the Founding period. The authors refer to that consensus as “the theory of the social compact.” Its components are three “basic principles” which embody the following “permanent truths”: Human beings are by nature free individuals; legitimate government is the product of their free choice and voluntary consent; its purpose is to protect those individuals and secure their natural rights and liberties.

This volume seems to do for the social compact era in modern history what Aristotle did in the Politics for the polis era in the ancient world. Even as Aristotle so eloquently set it forth, that theory (the original “political philosophy”) was yielding to a new imperial way of organizing life. Future historians may well discover that something analogous was happening to the democratic republic wrought by the Founders and their successors at the juncture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is already becoming clear that the executive and judicial branches are boldly attempting to re-frame the Framers’ constitution to accommodate our new “hegemonic” role in the world and our new domestic culture of ideological “diversity.”

As the first of three projected volumes, the present work is conscious of some such “great debate over the destiny of America.” Subsequently the authors intend to address nineteenth-century challenges to the Founding theory, and then its twentieth-century “defeat” by the contentious rivalry of liberals and conservatives. The project is supported by the Philip M. McKenna...
Foundation and guided by the Claremont-Dallas branch of contemporary political theory.

The nine contributions fall into three equal parts: the development of the social compact theory by eighteenth-century European thinkers, mainly Locke, Blackstone, and Hume; the “official” American version of that theory, with primary attention to Jefferson; and the sometimes dissenting contributions of Hamilton, Adams, and Franklin. In the Index of names, Locke appears far and away the most often, followed by Jefferson.

The authors proceed in the conventional commentary style by quoting and paraphrasing “the usual suspects” for students of the Founding. The reasoning and disputation that made them authorities is generally accepted without question. If, however, it has become necessary to demonstrate the superiority of that first American Founding and its doctrine of social compact with some hope of its eventual restoration, some deep and searching new thinking will also be needed. We are left to hope for some of that in the forthcoming volumes.

For this observer, there may be cogent reasons to argue that whatever its inherent theoretical merit, the first American Founding was the result of a historical and cultural coincidence of the European Enlightenment with the need to constitute a new republic on the far shores of the Atlantic. We must now wait to see if some new American Founding is just as likely to emerge from very different historical and cultural coincidences, and if so what its merit may be in the broad sweep of that fascinating and maddening discipline Aristotle founded.

John A. Gueguen
Illinois State University (emeritus)
This manual was assembled from More’s literary corpus in order to present the passages that best convey the mind of Thomas More to teachers and students concerning the important matters he treated in his published work and private correspondence. A 20-page sketch of More’s life and significance introduces the collection, and brief explanations precede all thirty-two selections, as gathered in six major sections. Digests of content and marginal numeration of the texts further adapt the collection for classroom discussion. Three appendices (chronology, maps, and a study outline based on William Roper’s Life of Sir Thomas More) add information useful for textual interpretation. All of this is meant to help “recover the theory that lay behind the drama of More’s controversial and often paradoxical life.”

It will be difficult to surpass this Source Book and its numerous technical and conceptual advantages over previous attempts to capture More’s genius under one cover. The editors take full advantage of Professor Wegemer’s and his colleagues’ recent scholarship, as well as the enormous achievement represented by the Yale edition of The Complete Works of St. Thomas More (1963-1997), as supplemented by Mary Gottschalk’s translations of The Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation and the Tower Works (1998-2002), and the well known compilation of More’s Correspondence by Elizabeth Rogers (1947).
The selection of texts is governed by the editors’ desire to illuminate More’s qualifications as contributor to the tradition of Renaissance humanism: 1) his ability to set a high standard of statesmanship by combining personal and political integrity; 2) his preservation of the ideal of peace by playing a leading role in English and European public life; 3) his construction and lived example of a “coherent political philosophy” meant to educate citizens in friendship, freedom, and respect for consciences. Throughout, More’s daring, irony, wit and wisdom are emphasized, as well as his loyalty and appreciation for the same virtue in others.

Professor Gerry Wegemer of the University of Dallas is well known to the readers of this journal and to the world of More scholarship. Now in mid-career he has achieved a rank of distinction among More scholars through his teaching and other educational initiatives, including the Center for Thomas More Studies, of which he is founding director, and research that has issued in several major publications and frequent participation in conferences in Europe and America. Both personally and professionally, Dr. Wegemer’s life mirrors and promotes among his students and colleagues the qualities of character he sees and admires in Thomas More.

Wegemer’s co-editor and former student, Professor Steven Smith, began his teaching career in English literature at Hillsdale College in Michigan after completing his doctorate at the University of Dallas in 2001. Both began their More studies as undergraduates at the University of Notre Dame.

The editors let More speak for himself and in his own idiom, making use of modern translations of Latin, and whenever necessary providing assistance with the 16th-century English. The introduction and explanatory notes are concise and engaging. Professor Wegemer, who initially conceived of this collection and got it under way, is evidently anxious to reach as many readers as possible so as to share with them his well-informed interpretations and their basis in his own and others’ research. Like every More scholar, he is aware that one cannot touch this saint “for all seasons” without being indelibly imprinted with his ideal for life.
The mature scholarship informing this collection makes it a treasure for teachers eager to introduce their high school or college students (of English literature and history, of classical and modern political philosophy) to Thomas More and his milieu. Having discovered the genius of More within his biographical, cultural and religious context, Dr. Wegemer is in a commanding position to move among the textual parts of that whole so as to present their orderly relation to each other in the six sections of the book: earliest accounts of More’s life, his writings on love and friendship, on education, government, and religion, and the dramatic sequence that closed his life.

The first section, nearly half of the entire volume, encompasses the July 23, 1519 letter from Erasmus to Ulrich von Hutten; William Roper’s 1556 Life in its entirety; and the five-act play, “Sir Thomas More,” composed by Anthony Munday, Henry Chettle, William Shakespeare, and several other London collaborators. Never previously have these sources been brought together.

The next four sections present in 150 pages briefer selections on the topics indicated above. These are drawn from letters, poems, and More’s prose works. Some of these are well known, but others have been brought to the surface by Dr. Wegemer’s mining of the Yale edition of the Complete Works. In the section on government, special attention is drawn to More’s defense of lawful liberty and promotion of free speech. The anthology omits Utopia, which could well be read and greatly illuminated as a companion text.

The last section is an admirably judicious presentation of More’s mind and his sense of an obligation to posterity as recorded by him and by others between the letter to Erasmus of June 1533 (after resigning his office) and the “Paris Newsletter’s” account of the trial and execution (August 1535). Along with More’s accounts of the three interrogations, special attention is given to his profound sense of conscience as captured in an exchange of letters between his daughters Alice and Margaret in August 1534.

Following the three appendices, the bibliography confines itself to works cited. As is suitable for a classroom manual, documentation is kept to a necessary minimum. The extensive index is an indispensable guide in finding
one’s way through More’s life and thought, although those who consult it should beware of typographical errors.

Having revealed the content of this treasury, what more can the reviewer do except say, “get it for yourself!” Besides its usefulness as a classroom text, it will become a well-worn sourcebook on the shelf of every self-respecting More collection, and a trusted companion for the conscientious lawyer, politician, and general reader fascinated by the reputation of Thomas More and desirous of knowing him better.

The moral of this story is easy to summarize: Very intelligent men can make awesome errors about the most important human things if they are deprived of faith in God.

The story’s author can back that statement with a lifetime of dedicated thinking, reading, writing, and teaching. He has previously expressed the story from just about every angle in a whole shelf of books and innumerable articles—each fresh statement more lucid than the last. He is like a man who is constantly sifting what he knows and refining his measure of what is most worth preserving and handing on.

Why, you might ask, does it all sift down to such a negative summary? But if you ask that, you need to be introduced to the “real world,” spinning out of control, as it has been doing from the beginning. The history of mankind is a history of errors and the disorders they have caused everywhere you look. It’s enough to browse the front page of any daily newspaper. Where is the evidence of things that very intelligent men have gotten right? A few have, and still do, no doubt. But they only highlight by contrast the errors and disorders that more powerfully influence our lives and give us a hard time trying to save our souls and as much else as we can.

It’s a salvage operation. Schall has spent his life engaging in it and drawing to the task as many bright young minds as he can possibly reach by inviting them to reflect on their own experience and on the legacy of the great minds of the past—as he himself has been doing for 50 years. It’s not an overstatement to say that nobody in our country today has more fully absorbed the great books, and more assiduously labored to promote them, than he.

One of those great minds for whom Shall has special admiration belongs to GKC: His mind was “original, delightful…, of incomparable depth, never to be neglected….” He showed why philosophy and humor “require each other…, especially in the highest things” (xvi). Who else but Schall and his students would consider Chesterton a “political philosopher”? We must see what this author means by “political philosophy” and especially “Roman Catholic political philosophy.”
By political philosophy, Schall means the same thing as its founders meant by it 2500 years ago, and their most sober students down the ages: **the public search for truth about the highest human things.** It’s not a branch of some other discipline; it is the necessary orientation for every other discipline. And when you add Roman Catholic, you say that the search looks into **what God has revealed** as well as what reason can find out. Revelation gives the fullest and most correct answers to the questions politics raises. When revelation is allowed in, politics is freed to “be itself” (xix)—freed precisely from the underlying source of errors and disorders, what Schall calls the “intellectual despotism” the “most dangerous fanatics” (modern relativists) strive to impose on human reality. Chesterton saw clearly, and persistently diagnosed, the tyranny that must follow when “those who think there are no absolutes” (now in the ascendancy everywhere) succeed in removing from the world everything but Man (42, 133).

In order to counter their work, “the first intellectual task” is to articulate “a coherent relation between revelation, politics and morality” (133); hence the purpose of this book: “Each of the eleven chapters…deals in one way or another with the interrelation of reason, revelation, and political philosophy” (xvi), thus bringing us to “the threshold of all practical and theoretical sciences” on our way to the truth about “the things that cannot be otherwise, that simply are for their own sake” (xviii).

If you want the supporting evidence, get the book and read it, chapter by chapter. Or do the much harder work of gathering that evidence yourself in the pages, not only of Chesterton, but of Etienne Gilson, Eric Voegelin, Stanley Jaki, Christopher Dawson, Leo Strauss, C. S. Lewis, Jacques Maritain, Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II), and Josef Pieper. Most likely, you won’t find such a top ten in any other book of political philosophy, let alone political science or some other discipline—especially not in what passes for “philosophy” among academics these days.

Here in large part is what makes Schall unique; his best friends in politics, philosophy, literature, history, and theology make his interpretation of reality sole occupant of the field. With their help he undertakes in these pages the central task of Catholic political philosophy—to spell out the true enlightenment of which Chesterton was a herald in the way he courageously faced, loudly proclaimed, and gallantly challenged all the errors that ever were. Besides those ten, numerous other thinkers from whom the author has learned are listed in a 14-page bibliography that constitutes a lifetime reading plan for anyone who wants to know how to change the world.
Schall’s concluding chapter goes to the origins of political philosophy in the famous warning of Socrates: “To deceive oneself about the most important things is what we should least want in our souls…. The spirit of this book [is], in this sense, Socratic—the spirit that does not wish to have a lie on our souls about the highest things, the things that are” (177). That warning is what has to be courageously faced, loudly proclaimed, and gallantly challenged today and every day. For readers who want to join him, Schall presents in 3 pages 33 practical maxims and aphorisms that can serve as a manual of instructions. Chesterton provides one of them: “It is better to tell a man not to steal than to tell him the thousands of things he can do without stealing” (187). (In the context of this book, GKC won’t mind if we substitute “lie” and “lying.”)

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