Revolt Against Modernity
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The affinities between Voegelin and Strauss are strongest in their diagnosis of the modern crisis. With few variations, each has rounded up the usual suspects and charged them with the same crimes. Despite differences in emphasis, the diagnoses of Strauss and Voegelin are very close. Their answers to the crisis—their more positive philosophies—point in different, but by no means opposite, directions. In this chapter I examine Strauss's philosophy and his solution to the problem of modernity; the next chapter deals with Voegelin's answer. If Strauss offered conservatives the most extensive and persuasive diagnosis of the maladies of modernity, Voegelin offered them the most useful cures.¹

"Then let me follow the intimations of the will of God." The final words uttered by Socrates in Crito point to the decisive political truth: a political order rests upon laws that, in turn, depend upon unprovable beliefs. Socrates, the familiar story goes, was brought to court on charges of impiety and corrupting Athenian youth. The second charge depended upon the first, so Socrates defended himself by making the singular claim that he philosophized on behalf of the gods—or more precisely, that he philosophized by divine command. Socrates' divine mission made him unpopular with the most powerful Athenians. By examining all claims to wisdom and knowledge, Socrates exposed the conceits of powerful men who took their opinions for knowledge. Socrates suffered no such delusion. He understood the distinction between opinion and knowledge and the condition that fated humans, or at least the vast majority of humans, to live in the dimly lit cave of opinions (conventional truths). Although
Socrates' examination of others' opinions made powerful enemies, he remained loyal to Athens and its gods only when he followed the divine command to examine himself and others. As a loyal son of Athens and its gods (and the laws), he would not abandon his post. At least this is the story Socrates told in his defense.

One understands more fully Socrates' attachment to Athenian conventions after reading *Crito*. While discussing with Crito the wisdom of fleeing the death sentence, Socrates answered for the laws. The laws, we should know, referred to the specific laws of the city and to the conventional beliefs that gave the city its cohesiveness. In this sense, the laws were divine—that is, they flowed from the most profound beliefs of the people, which were about the gods. In one revealing section Socrates answered for the laws:

"Tell us what complaint you have to make against us which justifies you in attempting to destroy us and the state? In the first place did we not bring you into existence? Your father married your mother by our aid and beget you. Say whether you have any objection to urge against those of us who regulate marriage?" None, I should reply. "Or against those of us who regulate the system of nurture and education of children in which you were trained? Were not the laws, who have the charge of this, right in commanding your father to train you in music and gymnastics?"

Socrates not only agreed that he owed his being to the city and the laws—and in this sense owed allegiance in the same way one owes allegiance to one's father—but said that throughout his life he had taken full advantage of the city and its laws. Socrates had, in effect, made a contract with the laws since he never left the city. Even the philosopher, who by nature is less a creature of convention than others, was beholden to the city. Since social order rests upon a foundation of opinion—especially opinion about the good—a philosopher is obligated to defer publicly to conventional beliefs and their divine support. The questioning, doubting, and searching that define the philosophical life depend upon laws, which restrict the range of questioning.

If the philosopher qua philosopher lives in a paradoxical (not to say precarious) relationship with the social order, that is, if the phi-
Philosopher is necessarily something of an outsider, consider the condition of a Jewish philosopher in a Christian society. Beyond the obvious tensions arising from one's heritage, such a person is caught between the commands of the law and the philosophical quest to replace opinion with knowledge, i.e., between belief and unbelief. This tension, symbolized by Strauss as the quarrel between Jerusalem and Athens, dominated Strauss's philosophical enterprise. With this "problem" he began his career, and with it he ended.

Strauss's first book, written between 1925 and 1928, examined Spinoza's *Theologico-political Treatise.* "The author," Strauss wrote of himself, "was a young Jew born and raised in Germany who found himself in the grips of the theologico-political predicament."³ The Jewish problem, as some people labeled it, took on particular urgency for Strauss during the Weimar Republic. The liberal Weimar regime should have solved the problem since liberalism, as Strauss understood its essence, rested upon public morality but not public religion.⁴ In what sense would a Jew be an outsider in a society dedicated to tolerance and pluralism? "Prior to Hitler's rise to power," suggested Strauss, "German Jews believed that their problem had been solved in principle by liberalism: the German Jews were Germans of the Jewish faith, that is, they were no less German than the Germans of the Christian faith or of no faith." But if liberalism prevented the state from interfering with Judaism, it also prevented interference with anti-Judaism. Liberalism as manifested during the Weimar regime proved too weak to solve the Jewish problem.⁵

In this context, then, Strauss began his long struggle to understand what it meant to be a Jew—or more specifically, to be a Jew in the modern, Christian world. Although his contemporary conditions pointed up these tensions, the modern era was not unique in this respect. The problems were universal. Strauss wrote: "Finite, relative problems can be solved; infinite, absolute problems cannot be solved. In other words, human beings will never create a society which is free from contradictions. From every point of view it looks as if the Jewish people were the chosen people, at least in the sense that the Jewish problem is the most manifest symbol of the human problem insofar as it is a social or political problem."⁶ Despite the universality of the problem, we must not let Strauss deflect us from the very personal, difficult, and therefore nonuniversal questions of his own Jewish identity—that is, of his attitude toward his culture.
and, above all, his religious heritage. Strauss belonged to Jerusalem in the same way Socrates—or at least the old Socrates-belonged to Athens. In his own way Strauss called for repentance and a return to the God of Moses. More precisely, Strauss became a new Moses—a prophet and founder.

The subtleties of Strauss's discussion of subjects related to this problem necessitate a scrupulous devotion to the key texts. The lines of his argument crisscross, leaving the careful reader dazed but invigorated and the sloppy reader lost and helpless—which is exactly what Strauss intended. The "Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion" is Strauss's most self-revealing work and is, I think, the proper beginning and ending place for a study of Strauss's thought. To begin at the end: Strauss wrote the Preface in the 1960s, some forty years after he began his investigation of Spinoza. Looking back at the beginning he pointed to the problems that drove the study and obliquely pointed to Nietzsche as the source or origin of these problems.

The hierarchy of moralities and wills to which the final atheism referred could not but be claimed to be intrinsically true, theoretically true: "the will to power" of the strong or of the weak may be the ground of every other doctrine; it is not the ground of the doctrine of the will to power: the will to power was said to be a fact. Other observations and experiences confirmed the suspicion that it would be unwise to say farewell to reason.  

If Nietzsche, the heir of a Christian tradition, served as the chief symbol of the modem dilemma, Strauss sought to begin his exploration of the problem by reference to Spinoza. Spinoza stands in relation to European Judaism as Machiavelli does to European Christianity. Thus the Jewish problem, "the most manifest symbol of the human problem insofar as it is a social or political problem," traces its modem roots back to Spinoza. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Jewish thinkers had two options: assimilation or Zionism.

In what sense were these Jewish options? What does a Jew risk with either option? Their souls? Strauss wondered. Liberals chose assimilation and embraced the minimalist state dedicated to protecting rights. Such a state is neutral about religious beliefs but rests
upon a common morality. Weimar rested upon a Judea-Christian moral foundation, but there was little or no concern about the substructure of beliefs that grounded the foundation. But for German Jews assimilation meant more than freedom from state-sanctioned persecution, it meant an active involvement in German cultural life. German Jews became Germans who were Jewish. Wrote Strauss: "The political dependence [of Jews] was also spiritual dependence. This was the core of the predicament of German Jewry. Such dependence did not spare Jews from—and indeed may have fostered—their hideous fate. The Jewish problem represented more than a political problem, or rather, such a problem can be addressed successfully only as a socioreligious matter. Any regime that ignores the religious roots of conventional morality is vulnerable, i.e., is spiritually weak. Strauss understood this fact in terms of Nietzsche's dictum that Christian morality must eventually go the way of Christian cosmology, for the latter spawned and sustained the former. Not only was Weimar so constituted on the separation of religion and morals, but so also the members of the Jewish community who devalued their religious roots and beliefs by subordinating them to their German cultural aspirations.

The Jewishness of German Jews still mattered, even for the most acculturated. In response to the failure of assimilation to solve the problem, many Jews turned to Zionism. Strauss emphasized that they, too, cast the matter in human and political terms. Although the Zionists in some measure sought to tether their movement to traditional images of restoration, the goals were different and the traditional motif of God's chosen people had given way to a secular struggle over land and power. Zionism suffered from being a non-Jewish response to the Jewish problem, a state of affairs that was not, moreover, appreciably changed by the overlay of cultural Zionism. Strauss emphasized that the construction of a Jewish culture that was considered worth celebrating went forward without the central or defining cultural belief; that is, cultural Zionists approached the Jewish religion as a product of a nation or a people. By contrast, orthodox Jews understood that the Torah made the nation, and by thinking of the Torah as a cultural relic, cultural Zionists emptied it of its defining content. Thus, both political and cultural Zionists attempted to solve the Jewish problem—the problem of being a Jew in
a Christian society—in a way that violated the most basic Jewish inheritance.

The Jewish problem, Strauss maintained, is insoluble, but "there is a Jewish problem that is humanly soluble: the problem of the western Jewish individual who or whose parents severed his connection with the Jewish community in the expectation that he would thus become a normal member of a purely liberal or of a universal human society and who is naturally perplexed when he finds no such society." The Jewish problem is insoluble, Strauss seemed to argue, because one necessarily belongs to a particular society. Moreover, a Jewish problem is solved by embracing one's community. For the individual cut off from his society, the solution to his problem is return to the Jewish community, the community established by the Jewish faith and the Jewish way of life. The reader is bound to wonder how Strauss applied this solution to his own situation. He clearly connected the solution to orthodox faith—the community springs from faith—but because Strauss was a philosopher, which made him a skeptic about all beliefs, we must understand that Strauss's own relationship to his Jewishness was ambiguous. Nonetheless, as I will show later, Strauss did call for repentance, a return to the ancient faith.

Strauss's ensuing discussion of orthodoxy advances in a most perplexing manner. In the space of eight pages (pp. 231-239), the reader encounters Hegel, Franz Rosenzweig, Heidegger, Martin Buber, Nietzsche, Moses Mendelssohn, Maimonides, and Spinoza. The primary question concerns the defensibility of orthodox faith before philosophy (both modern and ancient). In the paragraph in which Strauss set out the solution to a Jewish problem he noted the difficulty facing Jewish intellectuals: "While admitting that their deepest problems would be solved by that return, they assert that intellectual probity forbids them to bring the sacrifice of the intellect for the sake of satisfying even the most vital need. Yet they can hardly deny that a vital need legitimately induces a man to probe whether what seems to be an impossibility is in fact only a very great difficulty." At least as early as his second book, Philosophy and Law, Strauss emphasized the moral posture that prevents modern intellectuals from seeing clearly. The term for this posture is "intellectual probity," and in the above quote one notices how Strauss thought
this moral posture kept intellectuals from satisfying "the most vital need." Intellectual probity served to close intellectuals to religious beliefs, which they understood as irrational, superstitious, and backward. Thus, the agnosticism of modern intellectuals took the form of a mocking that served as part of a larger project of enlightening people. All careful thinkers had to grant the impossibility of disproving revelation, but Enlightenment intellectuals embraced their own epistemology with such tenacity that they eliminated all room for revelation. In short, these thinkers failed to understand revelation as believers understood it. They placed their faith—and, it is a crucial point that Strauss considered it faith—in modern scientific epistemological conventions. By presenting the image of Enlightenment rationality as a faith that undermines religious beliefs through mockery, Strauss held up orthodoxy as an intellectually defensible alternative—one that, moreover, serves a vital need.

Having thus established a proper role for orthodoxy, and having defended its intellectual if not philosophical integrity, Strauss warned of one formidable challenge. "Vague difficulties," he wrote, "remained like some far away clouds on a beautiful summer sky. They soon took the shape of Spinoza—the greatest man of Jewish origin who openly denied the truth of Judaism and had ceased to belong to the Jewish people without becoming a Christian. It is not the 'God-intoxicated' philosopher, but the hardheaded, not to say hardhearted, pupil of Machiavelli and philologic-historical critic of the Bible. Orthodoxy could be returned to only if Spinoza was wrong in every respect." A bold claim. The reader, now nearly midway through the chapter (paragraph twenty-four out of fifty), must determine whether Spinoza was wrong in every respect. Strauss did not make the task easy, and he never answered the question directly.

In this chapter, Strauss approached Spinoza by way of Hermann Cohen. The reader is thus distanced from the primary subject, but also brought more squarely into the intellectual debate in which Strauss participated. The issues emerge with greater clarity, but Strauss's own position remains ambiguous, or perhaps just sheltered. Strauss stressed that Cohen and others misunderstood Spinoza in decisive ways. First, as heirs they could not properly understand Spinoza. His most scandalous claims appeared truistic to nineteenth-century Jewish philosophers, and thus the spirit of his philosophy, as well as the goals his arguments served, got lost in the
commonplaceness of his argument. Second, Cohen never understood the role persecution played in shaping Spinoza’s writing.14

According to Strauss, Spinoza was "the first philosopher who was both a democrat and a liberal." Whatever differences separate Spinoza from later liberal democrats, his philosophical enterprise contained the articulation and defense of a regime grounded on natural rights and dedicated to freedom. Like other modern philosophers, Spinoza jettisoned the notion of natural human ends: "man's end is not natural, but rational.15 A liberal society dedicated to rational ends requires the subsuming of religious and cultural particularities. A liberal political society requires a good that cuts across these boundaries and bonds a nation together. A society dedicated to rational ends leads, in principle, to "the universal and homogenous state."

There are two questions to ask Strauss: Why did Spinoza advocate a liberal democracy? and What means did he employ or advocate to achieve this society? To the first question the simple answer is that Spinoza considered a liberal, democratic state the best possible order for philosophers.16 Such a state transcends religious differences and provides the freedom for theorizing (theoria). In this sense Spinoza reflected premodern philosophical predilections, and moreover, to this degree one can see interesting parallels between what Spinoza tried to accomplish and what Strauss advocated in contrast to other modern thinkers who rejected theory). With regard to the purpose of Spinoza's 'Il'eatise—that is, to the means of achieving the liberal state—Strauss emphasized the need to read Spinoza esoterically. Whereas Cohen was disturbed by Spinoza's one-sided attack on Moses lone-sided insofar as Christian doctrines were equally vulnerable) and his flagrant contradictions, Strauss detected a deeper message. Living as a Jew in a Christian society, Spinoza had to fight "Christian prejudice by appealing to Christian prejudice . . . against Judaism." Spinoza constructed a foundation for a liberal order by means of seven biblical dogmas (i.e., beliefs common to both testaments) accepted universally. For more than political reasons—though these figured prominently—Spinoza found reason to favor the Christian faith. Strauss wrote: "The establishment of such a society required . . . the abrogation of the Mosaic law insofar as it is a particularistic and political law and especially of the ceremonial laws: since Moses' religion is a political law, to adhere to his religion
as he proclaimed it is incompatible with being the citizen of any other state, whereas Jesus was not a legislator, but only a teacher."[1] A liberal society requires the dampening or elimination of tribalism, and Jewish law as law would always contend for the hearts of Jewish citizens. They would suffer as perpetual outsiders. Meanwhile, Christianity offered a more universalistic dogma that need not threaten a liberal society. Spinoza answered the Jewish problem by advocating the destruction of Judaism. Of course the creation of a rational society will require the sundering of Christianity as well. In short, a liberal society is a necessary stage in a history leading to the rational society.

The great Jewish philosopher held certain charms for Strauss. Spinoza brilliantly navigated treacherous philosophical waters. He wrote with such devious indirection as to change, like Machiavelli, the thinking of those who followed him without his followers' understanding fully how he had changed them. For Jewish thinkers, Spinoza's textual critiques became commonplace in due course. He more or less settled the matter of the revelatory authority of the Torah, and he also established the compelling logic for Jews to assimilate into the larger Christian culture. Strauss possessed great respect for Spinoza but found his answer to the Jewish problem—and by extension, the human problem—unacceptable.

Strauss rejected the liberal cum rational society—recall the passage quoted earlier in which Strauss noted the difficulty faced by a young Jew set loose from the Jewish community to "become a normal member of a purely liberal or of a universal human society and who is naturally perplexed when he finds no such society." Strauss understood the need to belong to a particular society, to be part of an identifiable community. Such community rests upon some faith—belief in a common good more or less rooted in divine or natural law—and the proper response to the Jewish problem is a return to the ancient faith. Spinoza presented a daunting challenge to such a return because he seemed to have "proved" that the ancient faith was superstition. But this idea, too, Strauss denied. Even the people who were critical of Spinoza, like Franz Rosenzweig, did not challenge thoroughly enough the beliefs handed them by Spinoza. Those attempts at "return" that Strauss witnessed in his own time struck him as too dependent upon modern (in contrast to Jewish) faith. "Rosenzweig," Strauss pointed out, "never believed that his return
to the biblical faith could be a return to the form in which that faith had expressed or understood itself in the past. For Strauss, return meant return to the form of the ancient faith, and this form, or way, of belief offered the best sociopolitical alternative to the Enlightenment. In other words, classical philosophy requires the assistance of traditional religion to supplant the Enlightenment. Spinoza employed esotericism to erode faith; Strauss and Plato used it to buttress faith.

Spinoza begins to take on the sly, demonic, noble characteristics of Strauss's Machiavelli. Like his mentor, Spinoza used the Bible to undermine its authority; he played "a most dangerous game." Unlike other moderns—though perhaps much like Machiavelli—Spinoza understood religion from the inside. He did not appeal to believers by reference to Enlightenment or modern assumptions—or at least he did not expose those assumptions. In the Theologico-political Treatise, Spinoza worked from the inside by beginning with those things granted to him by believers. Strauss interpreted this text as Spinoza's attempt to "liberate" believers from their "prejudices" so that they might be fit for philosophy: "The Treatise is Spinoza's introduction to philosophy." The seductive way he used scripture to undermine belief in scripture accounts for Spinoza's long-term success, and the authority granted to the Bible made it impossible for those keen minds who took the Bible seriously enough to challenge it to doubt Spinoza's critique—or at least it would take a mind equal to Spinoza's to doubt it. Because Strauss understood this role of the Treatise, he could explain Spinoza's Ethics as beginning from assumptions already established in the Treatise. The Ethics presupposes "the absurdity of orthodoxy" whereas the Treatise does not. Spinoza wrote the Ethics to give "a clear and distinct account of everything," and that book would serve as the philosophical answer to the question raised by the death of orthodoxy.

Was the Treatise successful? Despite Spinoza's brilliance, Strauss contended that a philosophical refutation of the Bible is impossible. Spinoza's use of the Bible against itself—no matter how slyly performed—turned on assumptions alien to orthodoxy. Insofar as orthodoxy rests upon belief and does not claim "to possess the binding power peculiar to the known," it is unassailable. Such cannot be said for Spinoza's philosophy. Notice how Strauss characterized orthodoxy: "All assertions of orthodoxy rest on the irrefutable premise that the omnipotent God, whose will is unfathomable, whose
ways are not our ways, who has decided to dwell in the thick darkness, may exist. Given this premise, miracles and revelations in general, and hence all biblical miracles and revelations in particular, are possible." Strauss emphasized that Spinoza could not refute the Bible except by positing alternative assumptions e.g., accounting for the age of the solar system based upon the assumption that the solar system is natural, not created)-or, more to the point, by reference to beliefs and not to knowledge. Strauss argued that Spinoza, unable to find proofs, fought orthodoxy "by means of mockery. Strauss's claim puts the great Spinoza in the same camp as lesser Enlightenment figures, but because Spinoza argued so well, and thus camouflaged the nature of his critique, he proved more successful than any others.

In the final analysis, however, Spinoza offered no philosophical answer to the questions raised by religion. What is more, Spinoza's attempt to supplant orthodoxy by a clear and distinct account of everything in the Ethics) failed on the grounds that his account could not go beyond the hypothetical—that is, it remained in the same epistemological position as orthodoxy, though claiming much more. Strauss wrote that "philosophy, the quest for evident and necessary knowledge, rests itself on an unevident decision, on an act of the will, just as faith. Hence the antagonism between Spinoza and Judaism, between unbelief and belief, is ultimately not theoretical, but moral."

As modern philosophy began to challenge for moral authority, the political and social order became the prize, and slowly, the philosophical alternative was eclipsed by the furor of the battle between two faiths, or acts of will. One can understand the issues better if one examines the end of Strauss's chapter on Spinoza. Strauss noted how modern philosophy altered an old antagonism, one characterized broadly as orthodoxy and Epicureanism. The term Epicureanism came from the old Jewish designation for the critique of religion generally. It was "cautious" and "retiring." The old atheism sought to relieve people of their religious delusions so that they might more fully enjoy life. Somehow, a new, more virulent and evangelical atheism, suffused with moral fervor, emerged. The genealogy of this atheism Strauss left unclear, and the reader is left perplexed even about the role Spinoza played, if any, in its evolution. Nonetheless, Strauss described a new atheism that displayed a hostility toward all
religion, not on the ground that religion prevents the enjoyment of life, but because it shields people from the awful truth. The new atheism called for an honest, unblinking examination of existence, yet it was an understanding of existence created by the war against religion. These atheists sought to deny a transcendent realm that gave humans their dignity (e.g., made in the image of God) and to project in its place a world ripe for human control. Human creativity—the highest objective of modern rationalism—could be released fully only when all transcendent models or standards lost their persuasive power. Such an agenda required a fervent evangelicalism, complete with a moral attitude.  

The connection between these important themes is best illustrated by the following quotation from the penultimate paragraph in the chapter. Few paragraphs present as interesting a puzzle.

This new fortitude, being the willingness to look man's forsakeness in its face, being the courage to welcome the most terrible truth, is "probity," "intellectual probity." This final atheism with a good conscience, or with a bad conscience, is distinguished from the atheism at which the past shuddered by its conscientiousness. Compared not only with Epicureanism but with the unbelief of the age of Spinoza, it reveals itself as a descendant of biblical morality. This atheism, the heir and the judge of the belief in revelation, of the secular struggle between belief and unbelief, and finally of the short-lived but by no means therefore inconsequential romantic longing for the lost belief, confronting orthodoxy in complex sophistication formed out of gratitude, rebellion, longing, and indifference, and in simple probity, is according to its claim as capable of an original understanding of the human roots of the belief in God as no earlier, no less complex-simple philosophy ever was. The last word and the ultimate justification of Spinoza's critique is the atheism from intellectual probity which overcomes orthodoxy radically by understanding it radically, that is, without the polemical bitterness of the Enlightenment and the equivocal reverence of romanticism. Yet this claim, however eloquently raised, cannot deceive one about the fact that its basis is an act of will, of belief, and that being based on belief is fatal to any philosophy.
Take a deep breath. This terrible and exciting passage tells us much. We must come to a fuller understanding of "intellectual probity," since Strauss considered it the defining or at least most dangerous characteristic of modern unbelief. One notes that "the ultimate justification of Spinoza's critique is the atheism from intellectual probity." Whatever that phrase means, one can detect a relationship between probity, biblical morality, and the "final atheism"—a term Strauss used in the next paragraph to suggest Nietzsche and the end or logical conclusion to the Enlightenment. A reexamination of the chapter exposes internal clues near its center. Concerning Nietzsche, Strauss wrote that "biblical morality as veracity or intellectual probity [was] at work in the destruction of biblical theology and biblical morality." Whatever probity means in this context, Strauss understood it to be a product of biblical morality; atheists inherited this morality and used it against their own religious heritage.

Strauss essentially lifted the material discussed above from his own book, *Philosophy and Law,* in which one finds an extended discussion of intellectual probity. It is a posture—a new form of bravery—that examines human fate unblinkingly. More important, Strauss connected it with dogmatism, with an unshakeable attachment to beliefs not provable (the absence of a transcendent standard). The contrast with the older atheism (Epictureanism) is important. The old atheism did not demand an answer; it did not create a dramatic either/or. The intellectual probity of the new atheism presents just such a dichotomy—one must believe in God or believe there is no God. In a footnote Strauss explained the salient distinction between the two forms of atheism.

The opposition between probity and love of truth can be understood in the sense of this objection. The open confession that one is an atheist and the determined intention to draw all the consequences therefrom—especially the rejection, with all its implications, such as the belief in progress, of that half-atheism that was the dogmatic and dishonest presupposition of the post-Enlightenment synthesis—is doubtless more honest than all reconciliations and syntheses. But if one makes an admittedly unprovable atheism into a positive, dogmatic presupposition,
then the probity that is thereby expressed is obviously something other than the love of truth. 

Epicureanism was skeptical, not dogmatic; withdrawn, not evangelistic. It emerged out of the philosophical culture of Greece. Modern atheism, on the other hand, "is a descendant of the tradition grounded in the Bible; it concedes the thesis, the negation of the Enlightenment, on the grounds of an attitude the Bible alone made possible." What is this biblical attitude? How does it relate to probity? The new atheism developed as a moral contender to orthodoxy. Recall that the "antagonism between Spinoza and Judaism ... is ultimately not theoretical, but moral." That statement, however, does not hold true of the antagonism between Jerusalem and Athens. Philosophy proper offers no moral alternative to religion, as philosophers qua philosophers) are unconcerned with moral matters except insofar as they become political philosophers -Le., concerned with the nature of the polis. The Enlightenment, as a perversion of philosophy, sought to overthrow orthodoxy on moral grounds. Consequently, the Enlightenment could not accept an accommodation with orthodoxy -the two were intimately connected as combatants. That is what Strauss meant when he argued that the Enlightenment was a descendant of the tradition grounded in the Bible. "Just because of its conscientiousness and morality," Strauss wrote, "this atheism with a good, or even a bad, conscience must be distinguished from the conscienceless atheism at which the past shuddered. Strauss considered Enlightenment philosophy an act of will, or a belief. Enlightenment thinkers proceeded from unevident assumptions, championed a moral objective, and sought to restructure Western civilization in accordance with their moral vision. Orthodoxy and the new enlightenment fought over a common territory; only enlighteners dreamed of utopias.

Strauss lived after the demise of the Enlightenment, and it was only from this perspective -as he fully understood -that he could make claims about its meaning. One begins to understand, perhaps, his more categorical claims in light of the end of modernity. If one takes Strauss's ubiquitous reifications of the Enlightenment to suggest an inherent logic (not always visible to the participants who accepted the modern project), one can account for his odd often in quotes) use of the word "atheism." By atheism Strauss meant, vari-
ously, modern unbelief and the culmination of this form of unbelief in a final either/or. One comprehends his point better by glancing at his most simplified—and earliest-schema of modernity and the problem it (modernity) leaves for the philosopher.

The relationship between orthodox believers and Enlightenment philosophers turns out to be more complicated than Strauss let on. He differentiated between the radical Enlightenment (Hobbes, Spinoza, Bayle, Voltaire, and Reimanus—and later, of course, he included Machiavelli) and the moderate Enlightenment. The philosophers of the radical Enlightenment had the literal inspiration of the Bible—and the doctrines associated with this belief—as a prominent target. Thinkers of the moderate Enlightenment sought to bridge the two positions, but the utter failure of this project (doomed from the start) meant that any compromise between the two would be accomplished on Enlightenment ground (one thinks of the "return" of Rosenzweig and of Cohen). More to the point, the apparent pluralities of options (especially those offered by the thinkers of the moderate Enlightenment) reduced to the either/or of the radical Enlightenment once the dust had settled. That is, the only live options in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—well after the death of the Enlightenment—were modern unbelief (atheism) and orthodoxy. Because of the way conflict had developed between the two, the option for thinkers was hardly an option at all. How then did the quarrel between the Enlightenment and orthodoxy develop? This history exposes, Strauss believed, the nature of his contemporary intellectual environment.

In Philosophy and Law, Strauss emphasized the impregnability of orthodoxy on the familiar grounds that believers rest their faith on irrefutable presuppositions. Philosophers of the radical Enlightenment thus argued upon grounds that a priori rejected these presuppositions. In short, they did not disprove orthodoxy but laughed it out of bounds. Perhaps more important, Enlightenment philosophers successfully defended their assumptions from orthodox counterattacks. The significance of this success rests with how this part of the struggle exposed more clearly the faith foundations of orthodoxy. The orthodox could not claim the authority that comes from knowledge, but what went unnoticed was that Enlightenment thinkers suffered the same fate. Still more important, whereas "pre-Enlightenment science was in a certain harmony with the teachings of
faith, the new science (the weapon of the Enlightenment), which had proved itself in the fight against orthodoxy ... stood in an opposition to belief that was often concealed, always basically effective, and therefore always re-erupting. This disjunction, which developed slowly, created a problem that required attention. Science could no longer affirm the claims of orthodoxy, but neither could it satisfy human needs-spiritual needs. The common ground, what Strauss called "natural knowledge," no longer existed whereby "a meaningful quarrel between belief and unbelief is possible."

To redress the problem (i.e., the inability of science cum Enlightenment to satisfy human needs) Enlightenment thinkers were "compelled to reconstruct a world." They had to account for the whole in a manner similar to the old partnership between orthodoxy and Aristotelian science. Strauss addressed the issue with surprising clarity. "If one wished to refute Orthodoxy, no other way remained but to attempt a complete understanding of the world and life without the assumption of an unfathomable God. This means that the refutation of Orthodoxy depended on the success of a system."

The need for a system forced those thinkers into a confrontational mode with the moral and political foundations of Western civilization as the stakes. Thus the quarrel between the Enlightenment and Orthodoxy, as Strauss liked to call it, was decidedly confrontational-a matter of hegemonic control. By contrast the quarrel between Jerusalem and Athens, of which the former quarrel was a perversion, supplied a mutually beneficial tension. One understands, then, why Strauss emphasized the attempt by Enlightenment philosophers to "overcome" orthodoxy. They had to explode the old myths about nature and God in order to create a new civilization and a new type of human, and this project—or rather its failure-established the moral horizon for the young Strauss.

The new comprehensive understanding (system) incorporated the new science that, Strauss suggested, the moderate Enlightenment made acceptable. Understood in this fashion, the project began with an ideal and employed (or created) modern science as a tool, which was the Enlightenment's undoing. "Modern natural science could be the foundation or the means of the victory of the Enlightenment over Orthodoxy only so long as the old concept of truth, which the Enlightenment had already destroyed, still ruled the dispositions of men." Modern science, while not useful for the support of the old
metaphysics (as the thinkers of the modern Enlightenment hoped), operates in cold silence about ends, about the ought. Strauss concluded:

If, therefore, modern natural science cannot justify the modem ideal, and if, correspondingly, the connection between the modem ideal and modem natural science is unmistakable, then the question must be posed whether, on the contrary, the modem ideal is in truth not the ground of modem natural science, and whether it is not also precisely a new belief rather than a new knowledge that justifies the Enlightenment.14

If this modem project kindled a flame by which humans might guide their steps, the source of illumination was the human ego—or the will to power. Thus the flame and the path it illumined proved delusory. If the ideal of the Enlightenment stood exposed as naked and foundationless in the end, the thinkers who shaped the ideal did so unaware of their vulnerability. They used tactics that exposed the fragile supports to orthodoxy, and more precisely, they argued that orthodoxy fails to sustain because it rests upon beliefs. In their attempt to fill the vacuum thus created, the philosophers of the Enlightenment "scarcely noticed the failure of [their] attack on orthodoxy"35 or their own vulnerability. Nonetheless, quickened by an image of a better world, these thinkers put on the moral urgency appropriate for a revolutionary, and this urgency took the shape of intellectual probity—the imperative to look upon things as they are, not as one dreams them to be.36 When the ideal self-destructed, the moral urgency remained as a fixture of the modem condition.

With this early construction of the modem dilemma, we are prepared to look again at the lengthy and difficult quote from Strauss's "Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion." The new atheism of which Strauss wrote referred to post-Enlightenment thought—especially Nietzsche and Heidegger—and post-Enlightenment thinkers retained the intellectual probity of the Enlightenment, which forced them into an atheism. This understanding helps us make sense of part of the quote: "The last word and the ultimate justification of Spinoza's critique is the atheism from intellectual probity which overcomes orthodoxy radically by understanding it radically, that is, without the polemical bitterness of the Enlightenment and the
equivocal reverence of romanticism." To restate the point, Spinoza's critique and the moral posture that generated it culminated in Nietzsche's new atheism: no more romantic ideal or bitterness toward the enemy, only a painfully clear understanding of the old gods and their human roots. The failure of the new system to replace the old superstition left all the foundations useless. The sole remnant of the modern project was a moral integrity that, given these conditions, forced the unblinking eye of the philosopher to look at the dark abyss.

This new atheism did not allow for philosophy in the classical sense. Its peculiar understanding of the groundlessness of all fundamental claims forces—or appears to force—a choice between an acceptance of God or a rejection of God. This modern problem confronted the young Strauss. Yet hope appeared in the form of Nietzsche, whose will to power "was said to be a fact"\(^{37}\) rather than another belief. Strauss sought to escape the modern prison by opening up the dusty old books and entering the premodern world. In an amazing footnote in *Philosophy and Law*, Strauss exposed more about the problem and his search for an answer than any published source of which I am aware.

That natural foundation that was intended by the Enlightenment but that precisely the Enlightenment itself buried can only be made accessible in the Enlightenment's battle against "prejudices"—a battle that has been prosecuted above all by empiricism and by the modern discipline of history—is carried appropriately to the end. The enlightened critique of the tradition must be radicalized, as it was by Nietzsche, into a critique of the principles of the tradition (the Greek as well as the biblical); thereby the original understanding of these principles may again become possible. The "historicization" of philosophy is therefore, and only therefore, justified and necessary. Only the history of philosophy makes possible the ascent out of the second, "unnatural" cave (into which we have fallen, less through the tradition than through the tradition of the polemic against the tradition), into the first, "natural" cave that Plato's image depicts, and the ascent from which, to the light, is the original meaning of philosophizing.\(^{38}\)
Strauss became a part of a historical process that he hoped would culminate in the uncovering of philosophy—or rather, the necessary conditions for philosophy. First the "enlightened critique of the tradition must be radicalized." Nietzsche's radicalization made possible the "original understanding" of Enlightenment principles—that is, the principles perverted by Enlightenment thinkers—and a full recovery of this original understanding required a history of philosophy. Nietzsche cleared away the clutter, but he did not see clearly the object. A historian of philosophy, Strauss's role was to recover philosophy. In this sense he was a philosopher, but one who suffered the handicap of having to recover something lost. He was like Socrates. Socrates discovered philosophy; Strauss rediscovered it. Still, in one important respect Socrates had the easier task. Notice Strauss's cave imagery. He occupied initially, by virtue of being a modern, a cave beneath Plato's cave, and this sub-cave was the "unnatural" cave designed by Machiavelli and Spinoza and built by Hobbes and Locke. The original or natural cave represents the conventional world—the world as constituted by faith in the law, i.e., divine law. Strauss largely dedicated himself to the ascent to this cave. He, the philosopher seeks to ascend to the light but remains, in important and decisive respects, tethered to the cave. At any rate, the unnatural cave does not allow ascent to the light. One must first recover the understanding essential for the philosophical ascent. Those are natural assumptions found in the poorly lit cave—the very cave to which Plato, in the *Republic*, claimed that the philosopher must return.

The distinction between the two caves remains ambiguous. To clarify, somewhat, I turn to the fuller but still evasive discussion found in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. In an essay about Spinoza's *Theologico-political Treatise*, Strauss interrupted his examination to justify his historical methods. "Reading of old books," he wrote, "becomes extremely important to us for the very reason for which it was utterly unimportant to Spinoza." This elusive statement makes some sense in the context of the following claim: "We remain in perfect accord with Spinoza's way of thinking as long as we look at the devising of a more refined historical method as a desperate remedy for a desperate situation, rather than as a symptom of a healthy and thriving 'culture.'" The apparent riddle of Strauss the historian of philosophy attacking "history" and modern historical
consciousness is solved by reference to the "desperate situation." Spinoza lived in the natural cave where the obstacles to philosophy stood clearly visible to the philosopher. The "natural" enemy of philosophy—superstition—did not engage in a systematic attempt to suppress or annihilate philosophy until this point in our investigation the word "philosophy" has not been fully explicated). Who, then, created the "artificial obstacles" that obscure the philosophical life—and why? Strauss hid behind the most vacuous reifications. He wrote that "superstition, the natural enemy of philosophy, may arm itself with the weapons of philosophy and thus transform itself into pseudo-philosophy"—suggesting that somehow, someone used philosophy, or ideas philosophical, to bolster the enemies of philosophy. With the actors hidden behind the reified "superstition," the reader cannot hope to understand how, why, or who constructed the unnatural cave that damned late and postmoderns to a life cut off from the philosophical life, i.e., from the highest form of life. Moreover, so "long as that pseudo-philosophy rules, elaborate historical studies may be needed which would have been superfluous and therefore harmful in more fortunate times." 40 History, in Strauss's nonhistoricist sense, is the ladder from the pit to the natural cave. Only the pit dwellers really need the ladder. 41

The "who question" Strauss answered only indirectly, yet the reader learns something about the kind of person hiding behind Strauss's use of the word "superstition." "People may become so frightened of the ascent to the light of the sun, and so desirous of making the ascent utterly impossible to any of their descendants, that they dig a deep pit beneath the cave in which they have been, and withdraw into that pit." 42 Modern thinkers suffer from the anxiety of life created by philosophical doubt and seek refuge in ideologies. They deny the worth of the philosophical life of questioning. Strauss, in other words, considered these people spiritually deficient, to borrow one of Voegelin's favorite terms. Life in the natural cave, with its dimly lit interior, includes for some the nagging question about the reality outside. The tension of existence supplies the desire to create a new world (the deep pit or unnatural cave) in which all things are known because human hands made them and the outside reality is so far removed as to present no tangible attraction.

We remain in the dark, so to speak, concerning the precise meaning of "natural" and "artificial," but Strauss embedded a few clues
in several paragraphs. In the natural cave most people are "naturally" hostile toward philosophy but not systematically or obsessively so. This natural hostility takes the form of "superstition." Moreover, the "artificial" obstruction to philosophy emerges as a fortified or virulent superstition, or to put the matter more clearly, a class of thinkers developed who sought to control or manipulate the world. They could accomplish this task only by eliminating philosophers, who live in chronic awareness of problems that have no final solutions. To this end these modern thinkers transformed superstition into a "pseudo-philosophy," thereby obscuring the truths expressed by true philosophers. In sum, these thinkers won the battle and created an intellectual atmosphere so opaque as to eliminate all evidence of nature. The collapse of the modern project did not create a new natural environment, and it left future generations of potential philosophers in a dark intellectual and spiritual cave, completely cut off from natural light. The only illumination in such circumstances came from old books.

Even with this interpretive overlay, the careful reader still yearns for sharp definitions and some concrete details, but oddly, one gets precious few of either from this historian and philosopher. Whether the fault rests with the reader or the author is a matter of perspective. For Strauss, to attempt to understand and fail is an indictment of the reader. The author of important books cannot or ought not help the lost reader. Still, we readers have not exhausted the clues Strauss left behind. We have reason to hope. Spinoza, we learn, lived in the natural cave, and he understood the philosopher's natural obstacle to be "man's imaginative and passionate life." This kind of life produces superstition as a security against the chaos of the experienced reality. Thus, Spinoza understood the production of superstition to have the same spiritual source that Strauss considered pseudo-philosophy to have. The difference, one must assume, is that the former emerged from the many while the latter emerged from the few (potential philosophers).

The immediate question concerns the inability of philosophers to withstand or rebut pseudo-philosophy. The relationship of the three—superstition, philosophy, and pseudo-philosophy—emerges with reasonable clarity in one paragraph. "The alternative that confronts man by nature," Strauss wrote, "is ... that of a superstitious account of the whole on the one hand, and of the philosophical ac-
count on the other." The reader cannot be certain that Strauss really agreed with this statement, since it forms part of his interpretation of Spinoza, and one should keep in mind that Strauss often wrote of philosophy being the quest for a knowledge of the whole rather than an "account of the whole." Nonetheless, he emphasized that philosophy and superstition have in common the assumption that life must be lived in light of some account of the whole. He wrote that "philosophy finds itself in its natural situation as long as its account of the whole is challenged only by superstitious accounts." Pseudo-philosophy, whatever "it" is, hides this ground: "the one plane of truth"—which is common to the old antagonists.

One gets the sense that the new antagonist is something other than the Enlightenment. It is the intellectual residue left from the collapse of the modern project, or to put it another way, it is a modern form of sophistry. Sophists refuse to play by the rules; the old rules and goals have become "meaningless or absurd." Two reifications, examined in some detail earlier, provide the contemporary alternatives to the old antagonists: science and history. Both reject the quest for the whole, but history proves more damaging to philosophy because it overcomes or subsumes philosophy. "Philosophy—that is, the life of philosophy has an erotic search)—associated with Socrates—becomes the flower of a particular historical soil, and one understands it in relation to the context that gave it life. Understood this way, the historicist must reject the Socratic ideal on the ground that Socrates erred with regard to the nature of reality. The point that was most significant for Strauss was that "once (historicism) has become a settled conviction constantly reinforced by an ever-increasing number of new observations, the idea of a final account of the whole (not historically conditioned) . . . appears untenable....

Thereafter, there no longer exists direct access to the original meaning of philosophy, as quest for the true and final ground of the whole." Like Husserl and Heidegger, Strauss sought to dig deeply enough to recover the original meaning—in this case of philosophy—which has been lost through the years. He had to escape the provincialism of modern assumptions, and the fresh view for which he yearned was found between the lines of the old, great books. His contemporaries saw nothing in those spaces. How could they?

Strauss's ascent to the natural cave (the only cave that can sustain philosophic life), which he sought to accomplish through history,
began with Maimonides. To escape modern provincialism Strauss examined "the medieval Enlightenment." He wrote at the end of his fascinating introduction to Philosophy and Law: "We will attempt to direct attention to the guiding idea of the Medieval Enlightenment that the modern Enlightenment and its heirs have lost. Through an understanding of that idea, many modern convictions and considerations lose their power: It is the idea of Law." 50 In Maimonides, Strauss found a Jewish model of a philosopher and a man who lived the tension of the West (Jerusalem and Athens).

Strauss's return to the law reminds the reader of his Jewish context, but it is more than that; it is a critique of Christianity. Strauss devoted little space to an examination of Christianity. He often employed a most expansive language designed to suggest to the uninitiated reader a broad Judea-Christian tradition when he meant the Jewish heritage simply. Nonetheless, near the center of his understanding of the nature of modernity and the modern limitations imposed on the would-be philosopher rests his harsh critique of Christianity. The great quarrel between Jerusalem and Athens—not Rome and Athens—is the root of Western civilization. Rome undermined the law, and the effects of this action on the many people who depend on the law to direct their actions are complicated and beyond the range of Strauss's analysis. More important, without the law philosophers could not as easily ground their own intellectual freedom in a secure epistemological-social foundation. Moreover, and this is speculative, Christian universalism and the emphasis upon individual faith might have seduced philosophers like Spinoza into dreaming of a new sort of society in which philosophers might live in complete freedom—that is, with no need to justify their lives to society. 51 The Christian society, theoretically, can be the tolerant society.

The contrasts Strauss drew between Judaism (and Islam) and Christianity concerned the sociopolitical role performed by the law. For the Jews, the Torah regulated their actions and thoughts; Christians operated by faith, which oriented them as individuals to a personal savior. The Christian orientation had two effects: it demolished Jewish tribalism and replaced it with a universalism (the God of all humans—all humans have access to saving grace), and it devalued the sociopolitical power of the law by a peculiar form of individualism and by chiliasm. 52 Yet with respect to the fate of philosophy, the influence of Christianity is not without some paradoxes.
Here, we are touching on what, from the point of view of the sociology of philosophy, is the most important difference between Christianity on the one hand, and Islam as well as Judaism on the other. For the Christian, the sacred doctrine is revealed theology; for the Jew and the Muslim, the sacred doctrine is, at least primarily, the legal interpretation of the Divine Law (talmud or fiqh). The sacred doctrine in the latter sense has, to say the least, much less in common with philosophy than the sacred doctrine in the former sense. It is ultimately for this reason that the status of philosophy was, as a matter of principle, much more precarious in Judaism and in Islam than in Christianity: in Christianity philosophy became an integral part of the officially recognized and even required training of the student of the sacred doctrine. This difference explains partly the eventual collapse of philosophic inquiry in the Islamic and in the Jewish world, a collapse which has no parallel in the Western Christian world. 53

The attempt by Christians to incorporate philosophy into the Christian account of the whole ruptured the integrity of both religion and philosophy. The life of faith is utterly alien to the life of reason (skepticism).

In Philosophy and Law, Strauss addressed the subject of Christianity three times—twice directly and once indirectly. The first reference takes the form of a faithful report on the argument made by Julius Guttmann in his book Die Philosophie des Judentums: "The biblical conceptions could be more successfully defended in the element of philosophy only after medieval metaphysics, stemming from pagan antiquity, was replaced by the metaphysics of the Enlightenment, stemming directly from Christianity and indirectly from the Bible." 54 If this statement represents Strauss's belief—and I believe it does—then we must note that he connects the Enlightenment to Christianity, which we are expected to contrast with medieval Enlightenment (i.e., the Jewish Enlightenment).

The second reference is unambiguously in Strauss's voice: "The Islamic and Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages are 'more primitive' than the modern philosophers because they are not, like the latter, guided by the derived idea of natural right but rather by the original, ancient idea of the Law as a unitary, total order of human
life—in other words, because they are the disciples of Plato and not the disciples of Christians. Third, in a footnote Strauss wrote that the remarks in the text following the note "about the 'medieval Enlightenment' orient themselves to the representative Islamic and Jewish philosophers." The cumulative effect of these passages is to emphasize the difference between the Jewish Enlightenment and the (Christian) Enlightenment, the former drawing its inspiration from Plato, the latter from Christianity. We are left with the following paradox: philosophers-incorrigible free thinkers—thrive in a tribal society grounded on a socioreligious law that controls both the actions and the thoughts of its people.

A corollary to that paradox is the claim that freedom of thought is "being menaced in our time more than for several centuries." By contrast, Maimonides, who submitted to the law, lived in a society that tolerated freedom of thought. If the law, however, controlled not only people's actions but their thought, then one must assume that the condition of freedom is an adjunct of firm belief. Thus understood, the law is prior to philosophizing. The confusions created by such claims do not disappear easily (nonetheless, the point is crucial for Strauss), but paying attention to the various meanings of key words helps. One does not, for instance, associate philosophy with Judaism. Indeed, Strauss never tired of posing the Jerusalem/Athens dualism. In the context of his study of medieval Jewish philosophy (though the philosophers did not so define themselves), Strauss explicated the complicated relationship between philosophy and the Mosaic law in the thought of Maimonides. Still, the truths Strauss found in the writings of the great Jewish thinker extended beyond the specific context. Strauss usually meant the Torah when he used the word "law," but the application went well beyond that meaning, and he told his readers as much when he suggested that in a decisive respect Maimonides was a Platonic thinker.

The larger "human" meaning of law is the divine law. At least from Maimonides' perspective, not just the Jewish people but all people live with some understanding of divine law, yet the gods of Athens (or any pagan gods) were no match for Yahweh. For both Strauss and Strauss's Maimonides the superiority was important for philosophers as well as for believers. The significant differences between the Torah and the laws of the other gods meant that Maimonides lived in a socioreligious context toward which Plato
had pointed but did not occupy. Because Strauss believed that Maimonides operated with Platonic assumptions (but not presuppositions) and that he lived in a political order outlined by Plato (in the Laws and the Republic), Strauss's interest in Maimonides takes on a special significance.

Strauss liked to emphasize that the "fact" of revelation preceded Maimonides' attempt to understand it. By "fact," I take Strauss to mean that the Torah effectively regulated the social, political, and spiritual lives of Jews. Revelation created an inhabitable world by effecting a moral code that oriented a people toward some transcendent object, but what is more important is that revelation encouraged a transcending of self. The object of that transcendence may not be important except that different objects produce different degrees of fidelity. Most important—Le., most important for humans—is that revelation operates as a law which regulates the sociopolitical lives of the people. The reason Strauss tended to equate morality with political matters becomes clear. Moreover, his concern about two modern phenomena—the separation of morality from religion and the increasingly egoistic quality of modern morality—becomes important in light of Strauss's belief that a stable politicosocial order depends upon a transcendentally anchored morality. We understand now why Strauss considered the Torah the foundation of an inhabitable world.

Born into a world created by the law, Maimonides began his philosophical journey by finding justification for philosophy in the law. The law commanded him to philosophize. This was no universal command but related to specially gifted people. In the realm of "human things" (this world rather than the heavens), philosophers search for knowledge, but the law did not free them entirely. The philosopher must not teach publicly. The prohibition required that philosophers teach verbally so as to judge the worthiness of the pupil and be able to adjust to the abilities and preparedness of the listener. Maimonides, in deference to the demands of the law, could only write a book that incorporated the ways associated with verbal teaching. He therefore wrote a book that exposed the truth to some and hid it from the many; he wrote esoterically.

Although the law precedes and authorizes philosophy, philosophers do not exclude the law from their examination. The philosopher's charge is to examine all human things, and since the law
came from a human prophet, it is the divine law as understandable and applicable to humans. To this degree, the law is a part of human things. But unlike Plato, Maimonides did not consider the law to be the center of his inquiry. The reality of the law meant that Maimonides experienced no great desire to understand the political questions and instead devoted himself to the theoretical life primarily and to "practical" or political philosophy only secondarily. In this sense, the medieval Jewish philosophers were more Aristotelian than Platonic. They devoted themselves, more or less, to theory. Plato demanded that the philosopher descend back to the cave (i.e., engage in political matters); Maimonides could de-emphasize Plato's requirement only because Moses had already met it. Strauss, on the other hand, sought a new "cosmos" after the death of God, and unlike Maimonides, he felt compelled to create, which means that his esotericism played a different role than Maimonides' did.

Strauss's examination of Maimonides' prophetology led him to conclude that Moses functioned in a capacity similar to Plato's philosopher-kings. Moses had—whatever sense one can make of this image—seen the reality beyond the cave. Or, in a more appropriate metaphor, he had been to the mountain top. Maimonides, as Strauss presented him, established that only Moses was a true prophet. Moreover, while the so-called prophets relied upon "imagination" to prophesy, Moses did not. He was both philosopher and prophet—one who saw the general (theory) and the partial (practical or political). The matter is confused. Strauss's emphasis upon Moses' prophecy as "natural," along with the claim that Maimonides' book was a critique of the power of imagination, leads one to the assumption that, in Strauss's characterization of Maimonides, Moses was not a prophet as traditionally understood but an especially gifted philosopher (a philosopher plus leader). Humans need prophets because "man is by nature a political being and, in distinction to the rest of the living beings, he needs association with others by nature." But humans are also individuals, and they think of their individual needs ahead of the needs of the whole or the many. Consequently, humans require a lawgiver, and the law must be of a sort that directs fractious human natures toward communal harmony. "The Law intends to make living together possible. Therefore, the prophet is the founder of a society that is directed to the proper perfection of
man.\textsuperscript{162} This perfection is philosophy. Philosophers do not exist outside of societies, and in this sense the divine law, which is the ground for sociability and political order, is directed toward the same end as philosophy. Moses provided the divine law, and thus addressed the practical philosophical needs. Because Plato lived in a society that had no equivalent law, he pointed to the need for a lawgiver who was more than philosopher—a philosopher-king.\textsuperscript{61} All subsequent philosophers must defer to the lawgiver.

What should one make of the ambiguity concerning Moses' divine law? If he was a philosopher who possessed the gift of leadership, then the divine origin of the Torah is no longer self-evident. As a great philosopher Moses recognized that a social order requires a normative order that supersedes individual conceptions of right and wrong and that binds a people together in a common goal or purpose. To supply a law to create this order he had to employ his imagination. Only in this way could he reach the many. His law thus orients an entire people, demanding obedience from the many and apparent obedience from the few. The mystery of Moses' God requires that the few instruct the many about proper beliefs in heavenly matters. The talmudic tradition allows for nearly infinite teachings since once the philosopher had established the legal foundation for his search he is free (indeed, by the law, commanded) to reinterpret the literal meaning of a text to accord with his theoretical insights. The Torah is thus enormously flexible, and the philosopher lives bound to the law, but entirely free.

The freedom made possible by the law stands in sharp contrast to the freedom presented by the Enlightenment. Strauss emphasized that for the Jewish and Islamic philosophers of the Middle Ages, the superiority of theory over practice meant they did not try to reshape the world radically.\textsuperscript{64} They did not seek to "enlighten"; they lived and taught privately. But during the Enlightenment, thinkers reversed the priority and sought to reconstruct the world. Their hope for such a transformation rested on the astonishing advances in knowledge. The distinctions of the few and the many imposed by fate on an earlier people no longer need apply since through modern methods the mysteries of the universe were unraveling in such a way as to be understandable to all.\textsuperscript{65} Knowledge and reason could replace superstition and faith as the compass of human action. No imperative remained in this environment to teach esoterically.\textsuperscript{66} Freedom
for the many then became the object of modern thinkers. What, from Strauss's point of view, the moderns did not realize was that the human race is divided into the vast majority and the very few and that freedom of thought is impossible for the many. By disabusing them of their beliefs, the enlighteners cut the many off from their moral roots. They became, not enlightened thinkers, but alienated and egoistic creatures. Some gravitated to mass movements, others to crass consumerism, but whichever way they went, the normative center fell apart. Not reason but passion ruled.

We can now understand Strauss's oblique calls for return. The differences in context help explain why he could not more openly call for repentance. The law was no more. God had died. Strauss found himself in that sub-cave, and all he could do was to recover the natural horizon that had been lost to the modern world. We are compelled, then, to amend the earlier comparison between Socrates and Strauss. Socrates belonged to Athens, surely enough, but Strauss could not belong to Jerusalem. He was not limited because he was a philosopher but because the world created by the Torah had ceased to exist. Without the law morality is groundless, and as a transcendent morality fades, the prospect of a stable political order fades as well. Strauss the political philosopher displayed grave concern about moral questions even though Strauss the philosopher was unable to champion a specific transcendent morality. But, then, his objective was, not to provide a new moral foundation, but to secure a rationale for other people to reconstruct an old one. Who could tell what the remodeled universe would look like?

NATURE AND NATURAL RIGHT. OR HOW THE PHILOSOPHER LEARNED TO DISSEMBLE

Nothing stands out quite so clearly from a reading of Strauss's book on Maimonides than the extent to which Strauss avoided metaphysical questions. Overriding the matter of Maimonides' philosophical-theological beliefs was Strauss's concern for practical or moral-political matters. What should we think about Maimonides' personal beliefs? The effect of Strauss's book is that Maimonides must have had no opinion on the divine source of the law. As a philosopher—in this case, a philosopher in deed but not in name—Maimonides could
not have believed. So runs the logic springing from Strauss's definition of philosopher. At any rate, one realizes that the source of the law is unimportant for the philosopher. As a commentator on Maimonides' work, Strauss refused to take seriously the metaphysical matters about which Maimonides wrote. And so it went with nearly everything Strauss wrote. He might have been honest when he claimed he was no philosopher; he certainly seemed unable or unwilling to explain the philosopher. So, while philosophy preceded political philosophy, Strauss remained fixated on the latter. The reason is obvious. Political philosophy concerns the conditions that make philosophy possible. Socrates came to political philosophy because his philosophical life so alienated him from the city that the conditions could only be secured by attending to the needs of the many. Maimonides, by contrast, lived in such a stable political order that he did not need to question radically the political arrangements. But Strauss lived in the pit beneath the cave. Philosophy in the modern era could not emerge until natural conditions returned, so Strauss found himself in the odd position of making claims for the philosopher that he could not know from personal experience. Strauss knew enough about the life of the philosopher to recognize the need for political philosophy.

One can begin to understand his philosophical assumptions by glancing, one last time, at the debates in European phenomenology during Strauss's formative years. He began his last book with an essay that rehearsed these debates because for him, they were the central questions. By beginning with these debates, Strauss established the problems his philosophy addressed. Political philosophy, he claimed, is all but dead. Killed in the cross fire of the positivists and historicists, Strauss sought to resurrect it by disarming the latter (the positivists had long since faded away as a philosophical challenge). The historicists posed a serious threat because they were family; they and Strauss shared many of the same assumptions. Husserl, Heidegger, and Strauss oriented their philosophical inquiries to the world of commonsense or phenomena. The world as experienced forms the primordial ground of all understanding. The scientific spirit rejects this prescientific ground, and the people who are captured by this spirit distort the phenomena, but more important, they are blind to their utter dependence on understandings belonging to this ground and reducible to nothing else. By returning
to the prephilosophic understanding, Husserl thought that he had located the objective (i.e., experience common to all! core of human reality. 69 "Scientific" knowledge, as Husserl understood it, could rest upon this foundation. Strauss explained it this way:

The adequate theory of knowledge must be based on scientific knowledge of the consciousness as such, for which nature and being are correlates or intended objects that constitute themselves in and through consciousness alone, in pure "immanence"; "nature" or "being" must be made "completely intelligible." Such a radical clarification of every possible object of consciousness can be the task only of a phenomenology of the consciousness in contradistinction to the naturalistic science of psychic phenomena. Only phenomenology can supply that fundamental clarification of the consciousness and its acts the lack of which makes so-called exact psychology radically unscientific, for the latter constantly makes use of concepts which stem from every-day experience without having examined them as to their adequacy. 70

Strauss remained close to Husserl in his hope of understanding, as Lawrence Berns called it, "the true, or intelligible, world underlying the world of ordinary experience. 171 Perhaps this desire amounts to little more than ontological realism, but at any rate, "the intelligible world underlying ordinary experience" suggests a universal ground or context or experience: "nature"-to use Strauss's but not Husserl's language. Moreover, the task begun by Husserl, and continued by Strauss, presupposes human access to this ground. In the language of Plato, this search is "science," and the knowledge Husserl sought through science would provide a sturdy ontological foundation for all philosophical knowledge. 72

The ontological enterprise, as Strauss understood it, begins with a thorough and critical examination of all givens. The failure of scientists to acknowledge or even understand their dependence upon the givens of human experience leads them and the whole modern gaggle to accept uncritically (unscientifically) the truth of their claims. Even after Nietzsche exposed the groundlessness of modern reason, the "true" science of ontology remained obscure. Husserl reinitiated the search for the ground, and following Husserl's lead,
Strauss understood philosophy to be the rigorous examination of 'our common understanding of the world, [or] our understanding of the world as sensibly perceived prior to all theorizing.' 172 Husserl understood that this science proceeds slowly with the hope that eons hence it will produce pure rational norms. Strauss never expressed a similar hope about the cumulative enterprise. Indeed, his emphasis upon the discovery of the perennial problems suggests the severe limits of his optimism.

Therein rests the largest problem with Husserl's philosophy, as Strauss understood it. The inability of science to produce norms here and now force the scientist (i.e., philosopher) to accept the norms that emerge from the particular social and political order (Weltanschauung). 74 'Hence the temptation to forsake [philosophy as rigorous science] in favor of weltanschauungsphilosophie is very great.' 75 Heidegger abandoned philosophy as science, as the search for supratemporal truths; Husserl, for his part, failed to grasp fully the limitations on philosophy as rigorous science imposed—or potentially imposed—by society. Consequently, Husserl did not understand either the philosopher's precarious status in society or the larger danger created by the withdrawal of philosophers from political concerns. Strauss reconnected ontology, which defines philosophy simply, with political philosophy. In short, the rigorous science of philosophy must proceed with the protection of, and in the form of, the changing Weltanschauung without capitulating to it. Although a private affair, philosophy must have a public face. 76

The identification of philosophy with ontology is a reminder that philosophy is very different from political philosophy. Yet the close connection Strauss found between the two suggests that a philosopher who is willing to give up on ontology has no need of political philosophy. If philosophy emerges from the cultural soil of a given society its rootedness limits its goal as it makes political philosophy unnecessary. Perhaps that is what Strauss meant when he wrote, concerning Heidegger, that "he leaves no place whatever for political philosophy." 77 One comes to learn that the radically transcendental or unrooted nature of philosophy requires that the philosopher seek temporal or social accommodations. Since all good ontological exercises bring to doubt conventional or common sense constructions of being, a philosopher necessarily threatens a social order. Failure to understand this relationship dooms one to a misreading of Strauss.
The bringing to doubt, rather than the claim to knowledge, moved Strauss to advocate political philosophy as an important response to modernity. In this way Strauss could remain faithful to the beliefs of the American regime and to the doubts of the philosopher.

To speak of philosophy forces one back to philosophers, to individuals who live philosophically. In spite of Strauss's obsessive use of abstractions and reifications, e.g., "philosophy," "Jerusalem," "Athens," he understood philosophy to refer to the existential condition of individual philosophers. Philosophy is a way of life rather than a set of beliefs or even a deeply reflective attitude toward the fundamental issues. Philosophers form a distinct class whose interests become luminous with reference to the object or goal of their lives. Philosophers are erotic. Driven by a passionate desire to have what is missing, they live in apperceptive awareness of an object of their desire. Of course not all erotic people become philosophers. Many—probably the vast majority—look to inadequate objects for their satisfaction, and a sense of incompleteness sends many in search of power or other vulgar pursuits. But for the philosopher, knowledge is the object of satisfaction—knowledge of the "whole." The philosopher seeks to be a god. Naturally he lives in full awareness of the limitedness of his perspective, and this attraction to the unattainable or to the hidden engenders a curious piety. The philosopher's peculiar piety and his wisdom amount to the same thing, a silence concerning the unknown. Socrates was wise because he lived in full awareness of his ignorance; he was happy because he accepted the conditions of life.

If philosophy is dedicated to the life of reason—because only reason supplies self-evident knowledge—it is not itself self-evidently the best life. Strauss took seriously the genuine and irresolvable tension between Jerusalem and Athens. In a revealing part of a lecture before an audience in Jerusalem, he said that "while being compelled, or compelling myself, to wander far away from our sacred heritage, or to be silent about it, I shall not for a moment forget what Jerusalem stands for." The question of compulsion, with its shades of that Platonic cave, leaves some doubt as to whether Strauss's stance toward religion sprang from an act of will. The problem for Strauss, insofar as he sought to undermine modern "existentialism," was that his analysis of religion in the form of Christianity and Judaism (even in their most orthodox presentations) established
the impregnability of faith. I have already noted his argument concerning Spinoza's attack. In the present context, one realizes that such a claim reduces both religion and philosophy to the status of faith or, more precisely, the will to believe. If they are both acts of the will, how could Strauss defend the philosophical life against the claims of Heidegger?

Here we find ourselves at the very heart of Strauss's philosophical life. All of his monographs on philosophers ancient and modern have as their genesis the resolution of this problem—the "theological-political" problem. In the end neither "faith" can argue away the other. The genius of the West, Strauss told us, is the tension between Jerusalem and Athens, and modernity is the name given to the progress of philosophers seeking to resolve this tension in favor of philosophy. Modernity is deicide. The attempt to enlighten the cave and to make its inhabitants philosophers—or at least practitioners of enlightened self-interest—not only failed to create a rational society Ian unwalled city—but it exposed the ground of faith or will upon which reason rests. With Nietzsche the light was extinguished, or nearly so. Strauss emphasized Nietzsche's own reliance upon nature—which points to some transhistorical reality. Nonetheless, God was dead and knowledge, as such, appeared mortally wounded. Even "science" rested upon historically conditioned assumptions. Neither philosophy nor religion emitted much light, and in this dim twilight, where even the shadows flicker, Heidegger clutched to the one thing remaining—faith. But in what does one believe? Heidegger left no room for philosophers because they sought to escape faith to transcend the cave. In silence he sat in this darkness, waiting.

Yet Strauss sought to recapture the Platonic concept of philosophy in spite of, or because of, its existential origins. The example of Socrates thus provides the starting place for understanding Strauss on this point. Socrates could not reject any claims to divine wisdom on the same ground that he could not accept them—they are neither evident to unaided reason nor open to falsification. But can one avoid taking a position on a matter as urgent as belief in revelation? Is not avoidance tantamount to rejection? To reject something without sufficient grounds violates the "idea of philosophy." Strauss's answer exposes much.

The philosophic reply can be stated as follows: the question of utmost urgency, the question which does not permit suspense,
is the question of how one should live. Now this question is settled for Socrates by the fact that he is a philosopher. As a philosopher, he knows that we are ignorant of the most important things. The ignorance, the evident fact of this ignorance, evidently proves that quest for knowledge of the most important things is the most important thing for us. Philosophy is then evidently the right way of life. This is in addition, according to him confirmed by the fact that he finds his happiness in acquiring the highest possible degree of clarity which he can acquire. He sees no necessity whatever to assent to something which is not evident to him.  

Strauss argued from Socrates' existential position, i.e., Strauss argued that he was a philosopher. His failure to believe in revelation sprang from his faith that the philosophical life is "the right way of life." This life rested upon a rejection of revelation since philosophy can only be the right way of life when one comes to understand one's ignorance. To attest to one's ignorance in the context of a society oriented toward revelation is tantamount to claiming knowledge that disproves the truths of revelation. Philosophers understand revelation from the point of view of the philosopher and judge divine claims by the canons of human reason. "In other words, the quest for evident knowledge rests itself on an unevident premise." 

Thus we return to the question of the philosophical life after understanding that neither the skeptical nor the pious life appears self-evidently good. Or, rather, neither may be understood as universally good. Yet one cannot live without choosing one or the other; no synthesis is possible. For Socrates and Strauss the philosophical life was preferable because it made them happy. Each made his choice, and it was easy.

Strauss's insistence that philosophy is a way of life rather than a rigid set of doctrines makes the subject slippery, which in no way indicates an evasiveness. The many and often thoughtless animadversions hurled at Strauss for his crude elitism, his perverse construction of a high priesthood of philosophers, too often miss the point entirely. Great is the temptation to laugh at Strauss's pretensions and to dismiss his esoteric readings—which is to dismiss Strauss. At the very least he has good company in the gallery of comical and misunderstood philosophers. However much abuse Strauss's philo-
sophical and hermeneutical claims warrant, they ought not be dismissed because Strauss was "antidemocratic" (whatever that means) or because he wrote in a manner as not to make himself immediately clear.

By entertaining, however briefly, the claim that philosophers experience different desires, or seek after different objects, than other people, then the difficulty of describing their way of life appears plausible if not self-evident. The same limitations face someone who endeavors to describe a deeply religious way of life. To draw in an unforgivably loose fashion from William James, the once-born and the twice-born experience life differently. A satisfactory rendering of the experience of one to a member of the other group is surely challenging. If we accept Strauss's contention that genuine philosophers live with a "mania" or an existential imperative, then the frame of reference would be too small to make the way of life fully intelligible to most readers. Indeed, Strauss surely considered himself to be an observer who sought to present a faithful rendering of the experiences he observed.

Nonetheless, the duty to describe Strauss's philosophy is not discharged in this manner. I established earlier the Husserlian foundation of Strauss's philosophy; the ontological enterprise requires that one begin with the presumption of a whole that is, in principle at any rate, intelligible. But, is this presumption warranted? Perhaps not. Strauss responded by reference to Socrates, "who knew that he knew nothing, who therewith admitted that the whole is not intelligible." The quotation does not end there. Strauss moved from an all too easy acquiescence to an assertion of something very near a rebuttal - "[Socrates] merely wondered whether by saying that the whole is not intelligible we do not admit to have some understanding of the whole, for of something of which we know absolutely nothing, we could of course not say anything, and that is the meaning, it seems to me, of what is so erroneously translated by the intelligible, that man necessarily has an awareness of the whole." 186

The philosopher's life depends upon this awareness of the whole, and at the very least he must adopt it as a necessary fiction. The question of the source or manner of this awareness can only be answered - so far as I can tell - by a throwing up of one's hands. It is too primordial to uncover and may as well be described as a recollection or a remembering. Whatever the source, the whole may be rendered
in many ways. Most people inhabit a cosmos thick with gods or otherwise attached to a divine source. In an enchanted universe, human obligations turn on the highest duty—to obey the gods. Consequently, the "philosophical" questions are resolved by reference to divine authority and, more prosaically, to the conventions and laws that emerge in a society dedicated to the gods. But appeals to the authority of an unseen and unheard divinity do not satisfy philosophers. They do not, in the first place, know which gods—or which claims about the God—to believe. Moreover, without direct access to the divine, philosophers have only human reports to test. Philosophers turn to "nature" as a means to understand the whole without appeal to authority. Strauss described the dialectical "ascent" in this manner.

The philosophers transcend the dimension of divine codes altogether, the whole dimension of piety and of pious obedience to a pregiven code. Instead they embark on a free quest for beginnings, for the first things, for the principles. And they assume that on the basis of the knowledge of first principles, of the first principles, of the beginnings, it will be possible to determine what is by nature good, as distinguished from what is good merely by convention. This quest for the beginnings proceeds through sense perception, reasoning, and what they called noesis, which is literally translated by "understanding" or "intellect," and which we can perhaps translate a little bit more cautiously by "awareness," an awareness with the mind’s eye as distinguished from sensible awareness. But while this awareness has certainly its biblical equivalent and even its mystical equivalent, this equivalent in the philosophical context is never divorced from sense perception and reasoning based on sense perception. In other words, philosophy never becomes oblivious of its kinship with the arts and crafts, with the knowledge used by the artisan and with this humble but solid kind of knowledge.

The complaint that modern scientific tendencies abstract and thus distort human experiences is implied in this passage. By contrast, the philosopher must begin from experiences of the whole that emerge from everyday life—from commonsense. The oft employed
"commonsense" must be taken literally—those things humans sense in common. From this universal frame of reference philosophers examine and test the various opinions about some part of the whole (e.g., What is justice?) to ascend from the partial to the universal. By examining these opinions dialectically, the conventional dross separates from the universal or commonly apperceived core. The participants in this process have made some progress from opinions to knowledge. At the very least they have come to understand how much their views partake in the spirit of their time and culture. They have become skeptics. Because the first step toward philosophical knowledge is recognition of opinion as opinion, the newfound ignorance is a transcendence of one's culture and the spur to fill the void left by exposing opinion as such.

Philosophy is derivative of convention because the philosopher must begin with opinions—or how the whole appears to a particular society. Only with this understanding can we make clear the meaning of Strauss's adaptation of Plato's cave. If the cave represents the "natural" state of society—before scientific or philosophic abstraction—then the conventions or mythical representations of the cosmos and all its parts provide the only proper starting place for philosophical investigation. Strauss's image of a sub-cave suggests a society deformed by modern, scientific abstraction. Modern society needs the historian of philosophy (Strauss) to recapture the natural conditions of social and political life. It was at the beginning of philosophical investigation, then, that the issues emerged with greatest clarity.88

However dependent on conventions, philosophers strive to transcend them. "The opinions," wrote Strauss, "are thus seen to be fragments of the truth, soiled fragments of the pure truth. In other words, the opinions prove to be solicited by the self-subsisting truth, the ascent to the truth proves to be guided by the self-subsistent truth which all men always divine."89 One faces conflicting opinions about some truth, which points to an answer beyond the particular answers. From this concrete starting point the philosopher seeks the universal characteristic of the object under investigation. The answer to this question is the "nature" of the thing. Nature refers to the defining characteristic, or the appropriate end of the object. Phenomena may be conventional or natural. Philosophy is the search for the crucial or defining way or custom of a thing—that
which makes it what it is. By isolating the class character, or nature, of a phenomenon one also identifies or points to its proper goal or purpose.

We must never stray far from the knowledge that for Strauss nature had to be presupposed—an apprehension of a transhistorical order in which the parts have a defining "way." However, Strauss's seemingly idealist ontology was not idealist nor even, in a formal sense, an ontology. When discussing Strauss's relation to Husserl's ontology, Stanley Rosen correctly noted that "the Straussian desedimentation is intended to take us back to nature as a discovery by the individual philosopher qua historical human being, not by the transcendental ego." Strauss emphasized that humans have no justifiable reason for doubting the reality of common experience, but he was clearly referring to a human reality—any larger reality has no bearing on human life and therefore remains beyond the scope of philosophical examination. In this sense Strauss remained always in the human realm, with all attempts at "transcendence" referring to transcending the historical or the partial. Like Socrates, Strauss left to others the examination of divine things (though he examined divine claims). Theologians pursue their questions upon the basis of experience, and since philosophers do not share this experiential frame of reference (otherwise, how could they be philosophers), theological questions cannot be part of their examination of human things. On no other point is the contrast with Voegelin more instructive (as I will show in the next chapter).

How was Strauss's thought "Platonic" if most people associate Plato with the doctrine of ideas-self-subsisting forms? A purer example of idealist ontology one could not hope to find. Strauss understood "ideas" to refer to classification—the nature of something. The "idea" of something is the answer to the "what is" question. By asking, What is man? one points to some nature that defines humans in the abstract. Yet in a few passages Strauss equated "ideas" with permanent problems, and still more curious is a section on ideas in which Strauss admitted to not making full sense of them.

The doctrine of ideas which Socrates expounds to his interlocutors [in the Republic] is very hard to understand; to begin with, it is utterly incredible, not to say that it appears to be fantastic. Hitherto we have been given to understand that justice is funda-
mentally a certain character of the human soul or of the city, i.e., something which is not self-subsisting. Now we are asked to believe that it is self-subsisting, being at home as it were in an entirely different place from human beings and everything else participating in justice. No one has ever succeeded in giving a satisfactory or clear account of this doctrine of ideas. It is possible however to define rather precisely the central difficulty. "Idea" means primarily the look or shape of a thing; it means then a kind or class of things which are united by the fact that they all possess the same looks, the same character or power, or the same "nature"; therewith it means the class-character or the nature of the things belonging to the class in question: the idea of a thing is that which we seek when we try to find out the "What" or the "nature" of a thing or a class of things. . . . This does not explain however why the ideas are presented as "separated" from the things which are what they are by participating in an idea. 94

This quotation comes from a discussion of a section in the Republic in which Socrates is discussing justice with Glaucon and Adeimantus. For Strauss the nature of the participants in a discussion is crucial to uncovering Socrates' real intention. In this case, Strauss noted that "those who have come to accept . . . theology are best prepared for accepting the doctrine of ideas." 95 In other words, in this section Socrates gave "ideas" a meaning that would satisfy his listeners and help make them better citizens by establishing the idea of justice. Although Strauss dismissed this understanding of idea as mythical or theological, he did not reject Platonic ideas in the two forms noted earlier. Thomas Pangle has supplied the best explanation of Strauss's beliefs: "Strauss does take the doctrine [of ideas] seriously insofar as it appears to provide a sound way of conceiving our experience of the nature of things." 96 Pangle argues that ideas can be understood as both class character and permanent problems since one can never comprehend the nature of something outside of its relation to the whole. The whole comes into full view only after comprehending all the parts—the whole being the totality of heterogeneous parts. 97

Now we are in a position to put the parts of Strauss's Platonic philosophy together. It begins in wonder and doubt. Competing cosmol-
ogies point to a commonly experienced whole but present the cosmos through conflicting myths. The philosopher, refusing to accept hearsay or any authority, begins his own investigation with existing opinions about the parts of the whole. The conflict of opinions leads, at least when led by a philosopher, to a synthesis that partly purifies the opinions of their conventional or historical properties. But this ascent does not lead to complete knowledge, even of one or more of the parts, because the whole remains beyond the scope of human ken—if not theoretically, then practically. The philosopher can, however, discover the permanent problems and the range of answers available to humans. By understanding the problems as such the philosopher transcends the particular answer of his society even as he learns the basis or ground of this answer.

Philosophers annoy. Doubting and questioning the most obvious truths, they feel no attachment to the things valued by the regime. Strauss highlighted the strange or alien character of the philosopher and noted that Socrates appeared comic or perhaps mad to many of his fellow Athenians. But, of course, we have more than one Socrates—those presented by Aristophanes, Xenophon, and Plato. Strauss found only one. Although all the reports about Socrates are artful and in some cases idealized, the different images presented by Aristophanes, on the one hand, and Plato and Xenophon, on the other, merely expose the difference between the young and the mature Socrates. The differences, Strauss would have us believe, are more cosmetic or political than substantive. Accordingly, Strauss found the different accounts of the Socratic life very revealing of how the philosopher learned to become the political philosopher. Or, to put the subject in a different light, Plato presented the philosopher who learned from the poet.

Aristophanes presented a Socrates lacking in prudence (phronesis), knowledge of souls and hence the needs of those souls, and knowledge of political, moral, and conventional matters. Plato and Xenophon defended Socrates by describing the philosopher as having acquired all these things he lacked. Strauss left unclear the degree to which this transformation constituted a change in life as opposed to a superior esotericism. Because a philosopher concerns himself with the whole as understood through the totality of the parts, Socrates must have moved to a greater concern for, and awareness of, souls and their natures. Such an awareness necessarily implicates the po-
litical realm since the conventional city appears as a necessary and, in that sense, natural part of human perfection. By turning his attention from the physical to the human realm, Socrates necessarily complicated the search for nature. Nonetheless, to whatever degree Plato created a Socrates whose philosophical life had changed substantively because of his confrontation with the poet, Socrates most clearly learned to accommodate himself better to the city. Socratic political philosophy emerges as both a politically astute presentation of philosophy and a philosophy of politics. Separating out the parts—there is the trick.

Strauss's classic work of political philosophy is *Natural Right and History*. With a grand scope Strauss traced the history of natural right from its classical origins to the modern (or postmodern) rejection of all claims to nature. For our purposes, the more focused analysis of Plato's *Republic* found in *City and Man* better exposes Strauss's understanding of the Socratic political philosophy. This book's three chapters concern, in order, Aristotle's *Politics*, Plato's *Republic*, and Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*. Strauss arranged the subjects so that the more recent appears first and the more ancient last, with Plato occupying the central position. Strauss often, even in his histories, arranged his material in such a way as to upset chronology, but in this case his reason for doing so is unclear. Strauss's only obvious clue, if indeed it is a clue, is expressed thus: "The quest for that 'common sense' understanding of political things which led us first to Aristotle's *Politics*, leads us eventually to Thucydides' *War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*." Socrates, who occupies the center of this book, is here conspicuous by his absence. Aristotle and Thucydides had in common a desire to express as clearly as possible political life as it emerges in real political situations. But Aristotle was a philosopher—a follower, in some respect, of Plato—so his understanding of politics was much influenced by political philosophy. Thucydides, who lived prior to philosophy, described the political realm in its original or prephilosophical state. Strauss wrote: "For what is 'first for us' is not the philosophic understanding of the city but that understanding which is inherent in the city as such, in the pre-philosophical city, according to which the city sees itself as subject and subservient to the divine in the ordinary understanding of the divine or looks up to it. Only by beginning at this point will we be open to the full impact of the all-important
question which is coeval with philosophy although the philosophers
do not frequently pronounce it—the question *quid sit deus*. By go-
ing back to Thucydides the historian, we see more clearly the pre-
philosophical world—or the world as it appears to commonsense.
Moreover, Strauss emphasized that by returning to this nonab-
stracted vision we come into contact with the reason for philoso-
phy—the search for God.

In the central chapter Strauss discussed political philosophy. The
centrality of Platonic thought is evident on the first page of the first
chapter where instead of Aristotle, Socrates is the subject. Toward
the end of that early examination of Socrates, Strauss pointed out
that "not Socrates or Plato but Aristotle is truly the founder of polit-
ical science: as one discipline, and by no means the most fundamen-
tal or the highest discipline, among a number of disciplines." Aris-
totle, Strauss emphasized, did not approach political questions from
a philosophical perspective. "Aristotle's cosmology, as distin-
guished from Plato's, is unqualifiedly separable from the quest for
the best political order. Aristotelian philosophizing has no longer to
the same degree and in the same way as Socratic philosophizing the
character of ascent. Aristotle's political writings differ from Pla-
to's in that the latter sought a more thoroughgoing investigation of
political matters with an eye toward philosophy, i.e., toward philo-
sophical matters. In this sense, then, Plato (or Socrates) founded po-
litical philosophy in its two meanings.

Strauss insisted that the context or setting of the *Republic* sup-
plies the first, and in some sense decisive, clue as to its purpose. Most
important in this respect is the fact that Socrates engaged in
this conversation about justice unwillingly. Being forced to answer
questions put him in a position similar to his defense before the city
in the *Apology*. In both cases the circumstances—a forced public pre-
sentation of belief—required that Socrates express himself with
great evasion and with numerous pregnant silences. Above all,
Strauss insisted that Socrates often expressed himself ironically.
He spoke differently to different people, in each case attempting to
move them in one or another salutary direction. In other words Soc-
rates spoke justly insofar as justice means to give to each person
what he needs. Thus Socrates considered it necessary to provide
Glaucon with a view of justice that would induce him to believe that
justice is worth pursuing without regard to the consequences. Soc-
rates helped make Glaucon a good citizen while making himself appear equally virtuous. Of course the definition or nature of justice remains maddeningly elusive in this rather "poetic" presentation of philosophy.

Because justice cannot be found in any existing city, Socrates created a just city in speech in order to understand better the nature of justice. In the middle paragraph of the decisive section of this essay, Strauss insisted that according to Socrates, "the just city is . . . impossible." Throughout the essay Strauss emphasized the need for Socrates to "abstract" from real life, ignoring the very important differences between men and women and the very important human attachment to family. Only philosophers can ignore these things because they live in constant attraction toward universals toward the whole. The just city presented in speech "holds no attraction for anyone except for such lovers of justice as are willing to destroy the family as something essentially conventional and to exchange it for a society in which no one knows of parents, children, and brothers and sisters. . . . the Republic conveys the broadest and deepest analysis of political idealism ever made."

In Strauss's interpretation, Socrates argued against a city ruled by philosophers—that is, against the possibility of a city ruled by philosophers. Moreover, the idea of justice emerges from this study as a rather ambiguous object. Socrates created the just city with a definition of justice that fitted the life of the philosopher. Justice is every person minding his own business, i.e., doing that which he ought to do according to his nature and talents. This definition of justice requires an understanding of different natures (the guiding task of philosophers) and an understanding of the hierarchy of natures in accordance with the good. The philosopher lives erotically toward the good, subordinating all parts of his life to contemplation in an effort to understand the good. In short, the philosopher naturally lives justly, which we know because he orders the parts of his soul in proper relationship and because he acts toward others in a way that is best for them—including the use of noble lies for souls like Glaucon. But the justice found in a philosopher's soul cannot be extended to a city without violating the nature of a city (with all its attachments to conventions).

Justice, though, necessarily remains a primary object or goal of the city. All cities must order themselves around some higher principle
that allows them to form laws that govern the citizens. These laws run along the conventional understanding of justice. Consequently, Socrates identified a second meaning for justice—obedience to the laws. It goes without saying that, unlike the first definition, this second is not "natural" as it issues from the opinions that dominate the city. The philosopher has great interest in the justice of the city, an interest that springs from his concern for the good, or the good life. Philosophers represent the highest form of human life because they fulfill human nature. Thought or contemplation is the defining human characteristic, and since no person can live a contemplative life in the absence of political society, the city is a necessary condition for the perfection of human nature. As a consequence, the philosopher must concern himself with the health of the city, which is coeval with the health of philosophy.

The reason for Strauss's great concern for political philosophy should by now be clear. Although all political regimes are conventional, they are the necessary condition for a natural life. Cities cannot promote the skeptical life and long survive; laws emerge out of authoritative opinion about good and evil, right and wrong, which in turn depends upon some myth about the nature of reality. In this sense, then, political questions are always moral and religious. If liberal democracy—at least in its twentieth-century manifestations—leads to doubt about once-sacred truths, or even worse to dogmatic assertions about the impossibility of metaphysical truths, and to a dissociated society in which individuals pursue their own brand of happiness without regard to a social myth, then society will slowly lose the means of protecting itself. By introducing political philosophy to such an environment, Strauss hoped to reinvigorate the search for knowledge of transhistorical truths in order to secure a political and moral center.

The political philosophy of Leo Strauss moved along two parallel tracks. First—and this is where his book *Natural Right and History* succeeded so brilliantly—he wanted to breathe new life into the quest for natural right (i.e., justice). It is unnecessary and undesirable to secure a final answer to this permanent problem. One hopes only to point to the goal as worthy and thereby engage social leaders in the healthy task of discovering the truth to which the problem points. A political and social leader must believe that justice (however understood in its particulars) is worth pursuing without regard
to personal consequences. I do not mean that natural right is altogether nonsense to the philosopher. The philosopher understands the problem of natural right as secondary to his private pursuits, but nonetheless necessary. A philosopher of necessity must be a political philosopher.

Strauss aimed also at reviving the second part of that great tension of the West-religion. As indicated earlier, he focused his rehabilitative efforts at Judaism, and whether doing so meant that he found Christianity too weak a religion to serve the purpose is uncertain, but likely. In a more general way he recognized the need for a defensible religious faith because political societies depend, in the end, upon some metaphysical construction. Philosophers, as such, cannot provide for this need. Yet, lest this claim be read cynically, Strauss, I think, displayed a genuine respect for religious faith—or for the people who possess such faith. To him the natural or commonsense experience of the world is bound up in a religious/mythical expression of reality. To recapture the experiences of the cave Strauss had not only to attack the atheistic dogmatism as expressed in historicism and positivism but also to repair the damage done to the cause of faith in the interest of enlightenment.

Strauss deserves the label conservative. He lived a largely private life in search of the truths locked away in great books. That was his reaction to modernity. But he emerged in public on numerous occasions, especially with his most influential book, *Natural Right and History*. Strauss was forced to speak to his society because Heidegger could not. Strauss felt compelled to answer Heidegger's silence. To the degree that his work influenced politicians and their advisers to respect and seek to recover the founding generation's mixture of classical assumptions and religious beliefs, he was happy. It is not a simple matter of Strauss's having fooled some people—though there is a good bit of that—but rather that he had a deep concern that the United States, and the West more generally, return to the guiding principles and problems that gave them vitality.