

CHAPTER ONE



The Theological-Political Problem, Strauss's Critique of Modern "Jewish Philosophy," and the Legacy of Kant

In a provocative reading of his teacher, Stanley Rosen has this to say about Strauss's "exoteric flirtation with Hebraic tradition":¹ "Strauss identifies as coeval with philosophy the question *quid sit deus*? But he never suggests that the philosopher, the archetypical citizen of Athens, is also a resident of Jerusalem . . . No competent student of Leo Strauss was ever in doubt as to his teacher's choice . . . At the same time, it does not follow that there was not for Strauss a real problem in choosing between Jerusalem and Athens. Neither does it follow that Strauss was an unmitigated 'ancient' or resident of Athens."² For Rosen, Strauss's investigation into the political rhetoric and esoteric teachings of classical philosophers shows that he was at bottom a modern.³ This means that Strauss understood philosophy and religion "to rest upon an act of the will."⁴ He deduces support for this view from Strauss's 1967 lecture "Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections," where Strauss holds that "We are . . . compelled from the very beginning to make a choice, to take a stand"⁵ in the matter of Jerusalem and Athens. The decisive quality of our inhabiting one or another city therefore suggests (what Rosen argues at great length earlier in the book) that Strauss's "return" to the ancients is itself an exoteric doctrine concealing the fact that our allegiance is ultimately premised on a conception of "will" deriving

from Kant (and “set free” by Nietzsche).⁶ The names “Jerusalem” and “Athens” would therefore refer to arbitrary choices indexed to nothing other than one’s own faculty of decision making. Seen in this light, the choice between Jerusalem and Athens, whatever else one might say about it, is less significant than the fact that it is a willful choice.

If I take issue with this reading of Strauss, it is certainly not because of Rosen’s contention that Strauss is a modern. Rather, I believe that the manner of Strauss’s “modernity” and the status of Jerusalem and Athens in his thought need to be reexamined. I agree, for instance, that Strauss was a citizen of Athens. However, Rosen’s rhetorical posture (that is, Strauss’s “competent students” recognized this fact), situates the discussion within the context of ancestral authority rather than conceptual analysis; differently stated, Rosen’s claim is a species of religious rather than philosophical argument. One must, instead, leave “the closed and charmed circle of the ‘initiated’” and deal with Strauss’s thought as it comes to sight (WIPP, 114). I further contend that Strauss’s citizenship in Athens in no way relegates his relationship with Jerusalem to a merely exoteric status. That Strauss was not himself a believer does not mean that he took the possibility of Jerusalem to be philosophically insubstantial.

Again, I agree that Strauss’s thinking is deeply informed by the modern, German tradition of philosophy, beginning with Kant; the very fact that he seeks to make a *return* to classical philosophy and the Hebraic tradition situates his thinking in the German philosophical tradition from Kant to Heidegger.⁷ However, that Strauss’s thought originates in a modern horizon in no way means that it is reducible to the modernity of willful subjectivity; the philosopher, for Strauss, is precisely *compelled* by the philosophical life: “The philosopher therefore has the urge to educate potential philosophers simply because *he cannot help* loving well-ordered souls” (WIPP, 121; my emphasis).⁸ What is it that draws the philosopher to the philosophical life and the believer to religion? Far from being the product of an arbitrary and capricious will, the choice between Jerusalem and Athens is characterized by human *desire*. In elucidating what Strauss understands by Jerusalem and Athens, therefore, one also gains for oneself a sense of what fundamental “things” human beings desire. Strauss’s return from modern thought to Jerusalem and Athens can ultimately be understood as a return to the fundamental question concerning the form of life humans desire to live.

In order to show the importance of this return in Strauss's thought, this chapter will discuss (1) his usage of the distinction between Jerusalem and Athens; (2) his lifelong genuine interest in the theological-political problem (a problem to which the choice between Jerusalem and Athens serves as its proper response); and (3) how the Kantian character of modern "Jewish philosophy" (in its Cohenian and Buberian iterations) simultaneously occludes and necessitates a return to (and recovery of) this distinction. The first section can be characterized as intellectual history, the second as intellectual biography, and the third as philosophy. My contention is that this movement through the first two is necessary *for us* in order to begin to see Strauss's properly philosophical position.

Insofar as Strauss is not the first thinker to refer to the mutual relation of, and difference between, Judaism and Hellenism (nor even the first thinker to employ the specific terms *Jerusalem* and *Athens*), it is necessary to provide a brief discussion of some major prior formulations of this distinction.

Jerusalem and Athens

"Jerusalem and Athens" refers, in the first instance, to Tertullian's famous statement "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians?"⁹ In this polemical context, the distinction functions primarily theologically. For Tertullian, there can simply be no relation (save oppositional) between the human search for wisdom embodied in the name "Athens" and the revealed word of Christ embodied in "Jerusalem." While Strauss denies that there can be simple concord (let alone synthesis) between the two, he does not unqualifiedly privilege one over the other as Tertullian apparently does.

One might be tempted to understand Augustine's distinction between the City of God and the city of man as analogous terms to Jerusalem and Athens. In *City of God*, perhaps responding to the fall of the Roman Empire, he writes: "I classify the human race into two branches: the one consists of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God's will. I also call these two classes the two cities, speaking allegorically. By two cities, I mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign

with God for all eternity, the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil.”¹⁰ The immediate difference with Strauss’s treatment lies in the allegorical usage that Augustine makes of the two cities—that is, they not only refer to different ways of living but to different historical, teleological, and eschatological trajectories. To the extent that the two cities are (for Augustine) analogous to Jerusalem and Athens, we might say that (as for Tertullian) the distinction between the two has already been decided in favor of the City of God.

When one considers Augustine’s account concerning the origin and development of the two cities, it becomes immediately clear why the historical, teleological, and eschatological character of his discussion both (1) essentially characterize his account and (2) cannot be analogous to the Jerusalem/Athens distinction. Augustine’s account takes its departure from the scriptural narrative of Cain and Abel: “Now Cain was the first son born to those two parents of mankind [i.e., Adam and Eve], and he belonged to the city of man; the later son, Abel, belonged to the City of God. It is our own experience that in the individual man, to use the words of the Apostle [Paul], ‘it is not the spiritual element which comes first, but the animal; and afterwards comes the spiritual,’ and so it is that everyone, since he takes his origin from a condemned stock, is inevitably evil and carnal to begin with, by derivation from Adam; but if he is reborn into Christ, and makes progress, he will afterwards be good and spiritual. The same holds true of the whole human race. When those two cities started on their course through the succession of birth and death, the first to be born was a citizen of this world, and later appeared the one who was a pilgrim and stranger in the world, belonging as he did to the City of God.”¹¹ Augustine’s account is essentially historical, teleological, and eschatological because it comes essentially from a Biblical context; just as, according to Strauss, there is no word for *nature* in the Hebrew Bible (JPCM, 119), there is also no great emphasis on *historical* teleology or *historical* eschatology in classical philosophy.¹² While Augustine’s scriptural interpretation is clearly a *doctrinally* Christian one (e.g., the Pauline relation between *carnality* and *spirituality*), the pure categories used in his interpretation have closer analogues in the Hebrew Bible than in Greek philosophy.

A closer analogue to Jerusalem and Athens is provided in Augustine’s *Confessions* (the account of his conversion to Christianity).

In the words of Hannah Arendt, Augustine was “the first man of thought who turned to religion because of philosophical perplexities,”¹³ and nowhere, in his work, is the tension between Greek philosophy and Christian faith (as based in scripture) more clearly focused than in Book 7. Augustine’s reception of Plato is Neo-Platonic in the same measure and to the same extent that his interpretation of scripture is Christian—that is, he understands the one/good that gives rise to the ideas in symmetry with the Father and the Son. Nonetheless, the distinction between Greek philosophy and the Bible comes through clearly. Athens is “where the books [of the Platonists] came from”;¹⁴ this is true, for Augustine in more than simply a geographical sense—“By the Platonic books, I was admonished to return into myself . . . I entered and with my soul’s eye, such as it was, saw above that same eye of my soul the immutable light higher than my mind.”¹⁵ This self-examination and access of the light of the one/good, however, lacks a *crucial*¹⁶ element—what Augustine did not find in the Platonic books was, quite simply, God’s self-emptying revelation in human form and sacrifice for the sins of humanity.¹⁷ Again, that Augustine’s account is *doctrinally* Christian is less significant for the present discussion than the conceptuality undergirding that particular doctrine: what the Platonic books lack is a divinity who is historically active and compels humans toward obedient love¹⁸—in short, there is no *relationship* between humans and a divine persona in “Athens.” Again, Augustine’s conception (like Tertullian’s) is decided on theological grounds.

In 1869 (*arguably* just past the high point of European Enlightenment culture), the English poet and essayist Matthew Arnold articulated the relationship between “Hebraism” and “Hellenism” in a far more similar manner (save one decisive respect) to Strauss. In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold describes Hebraism and Hellenism as two civilizational “instincts” or “currents,” which “the more we go into the matter . . . seem to converge, and together to bear us along towards culture.”¹⁹ For Arnold, these two forces exert a dialectical tension that produces the resources available for education and promoting cultivation—that is, “com[ing] as near as we can to the firm intelligible law of things, and thus . . . get[ting] a basis for a less confused action and a more complete perfection than we have at present.”²⁰ There are, in fact, some passages in which one can *almost* hear pre-echoes of Strauss: “Hebraism and Hellenism,—between these

two points of influence moves our world . . . The final aim of both Hebraism and Hellenism, as of all great spiritual disciplines, is no doubt the same: man's perfection or salvation."²¹ "The governing idea of Hellenism is *spontaneity of consciousness*; that of Hebraism, *strictness of conscience*."²² Intellect, therefore, properly belongs to the realm of Hellenism, while ethics or morality belongs to the realm of Hebraism. The decisive qualification, in the comparison with Strauss, is Arnold's emphasis on culture. The modern concern with culture, for Strauss, is brought about by the occlusion of the fundamental human situation that finds its highest expression in Jerusalem and Athens.²³ For now, one can say that this situation involves the irremediably political character of human life; for Strauss, Jerusalem and Athens are two responses to this political character. Therefore, while (1) Hebraism resembles Jerusalem (to the extent that both involve moral considerations), (2) Hellenism resembles Athens (to the extent that both involve the use of intellect), (3) both together resemble Jerusalem and Athens in their "productive" effects on civilization, and (4) one discerns a preference in Arnold for Hellenism (as one does in Strauss for Athens), Arnold's distinction, in Strauss's account, operates at a derivative and "post-political" level. In a well-known footnote to the first nonintroductory essay to *Philosophy and Law*, Strauss writes that: "If 'religion' and 'politics' are *the* facts that transcend 'culture,' or, to speak more precisely, the *original* facts, then the radical critique of the concept of 'culture' is possible only in the form of a 'theologico-political treatise,'—which of course, if it is not to lead back again to the foundation of 'culture,' must take exactly the opposite direction from the theologico-political treatises of the seventeenth-century, especially those of Hobbes and Spinoza."²⁴ Whereas Arnold finds Hebraism and Hellenism as modes of culture applicable to culture (thus continuing the arc of thought initiated by Hobbes and Spinoza), Strauss seeks to trace culture back to its origins in the dual relation that religion and philosophy have to the political. One might say, therefore, that Strauss's project *largely* takes up the *content* of Arnold's distinction but radically recasts the *horizon* in which it occurs.

Closer to Strauss's own time, Lev Shestov, Hans Kohn, and Erich Auerbach have all made analogous distinctions. Shestov's *Athens and Jerusalem* (1937),²⁵ Kohn's *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background* (1944)²⁶ and Auerbach's *Mimesis: The*

Representation of Reality in Western Literature (1946)²⁷—written on the eve, during, or in the wake of the Second World War—all attempt to recover the origins of Western civilization in the wake of massive destruction and the perceived failure of Enlightenment conceptions of progress. Each of their descriptions of (what for Strauss will be formulated as) the Jerusalem/Athens distinction is therefore accompanied by a sobering aura of uncertainty.

For Shestov, the distinction is an actual opposition that manifests itself simply as the difference between rational thought and revealed, prophetic faith: “The fundamental opposition of biblical prophecy to speculative philosophy shows itself in particularly striking fashion when we set Socrates’ words. ‘The greatest good of man is to discourse daily about virtue’ (or Spinoza’s *gaudere vera contemplatione*—‘to rejoice in true contemplation’) opposite St. Paul’s words, ‘Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.’”²⁸ This opposition is, for Shestov, irreconcilable. His “answer,” in the light of his backward glance, is to cease tarrying with the past; Shestov maintains (in Nietzschean fashion) that an excessive backward-looking philosophy is unhealthy for thought—it is “the end of all philosophy.”²⁹ One needs, instead to forge ahead and (in Kierkegaardian fashion) take the leap of faith into the radically unknown—“Philosophy is . . . struggle. And this struggle has no end and will have no end. The kingdom of God, as it is written, is attained through violence.”³⁰ At first blush, Shestov’s statement appears to be a precursor to Strauss’s oft-quoted remark that humans must “live th[e] conflict” between philosophy and theology (JPCM, 117). I will return to this.

For Kohn and Auerbach, the distinction between reason and faith becomes manifest as the distinction between space and time. Kohn’s statements are of a programmatic nature in the service of elucidating the origins of the tribal (Hebraic) and universal (Hellenic) civilization-forming impulses: “For the Greek, the stone with which he built was a symbol of space and perception; for the Jew, the stream into which he dipped was a symbol of time and becoming . . . Thus God personified himself to the Jews, not in the image, but in the call . . . Sight is the sense of space; hearing, the sense of time.”³¹ Auerbach makes a similar point from the perspective of the history of literary representation: “[There are] two kinds of style [present in] the representation of reality in European culture. The two styles, in their opposition, represent basic types: on the one hand [i.e., the

Homeric, exemplified by Odysseus] fully externalized description, uniform illumination, uninterrupted connection, free expression, all events in the foreground, displaying unmistakable meanings, few elements of historical development and of psychological perspective; on the other hand [i.e., the Old Testamentary, exemplified by Abraham], certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, 'background' quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation . . . [and] development of the historically becoming."³²

Common to Kohn's and Auerbach's accounts is an emphasis on the *difference* between (as it were) the illuminating spatiality characteristic of Greek philosophy and the opaque historicity characteristic of the Hebrew Bible. Differently stated, Greek philosophy emphasizes seeing what is in front of you, whereas Biblical thought emphasizes listening for the historic(al) call from the Wholly Other. The former is accessible through a combination of reason and intellect, the latter by faith alone. For Kohn, and Auerbach, both impulses (or "styles", or "types") have together formed the essential historical trajectory of the European West. I can, at this point, summarize these two accounts by invoking Kohn's words: "All the great turning points in the history of Western humanity started by, and expressed themselves in, a reinterpretation of the inheritance from Hellas and Judea."³³ At first blush, this sounds suspiciously like the opening words to Strauss's 1967 lecture: "All the hopes that we entertain in the midst of the confusions and the dangers of the present are founded positively or negatively, directly or indirectly on the experiences of the past. Of these experiences the broadest and deepest, as far as Western men are concerned, are indicated by the names of the two cities Jerusalem and Athens" (JPCM, 377).

The purpose of this review is neither to reduce Strauss's account to a historical trajectory nor to argue that it "fell from the sky" perfect and fully formed. Rather, it is to give a philosophical introduction to Strauss's account by viewing it within a community of like-minded thinkers. Historically speaking (i.e., from his own references), we can assert without qualification that Strauss was familiar with Arnold.³⁴ Given Strauss's deep and abiding knowledge of the history of philosophy, it is difficult to believe that Strauss had only a cursory familiarity with Augustine.³⁵ Given Strauss's ordering of the two terms in his distinction, it is reasonable to suppose that he had some familiarity with Tertullian (at least with chapter 7 of

The Prescription Against Heretics).³⁶ Given the cultural connections between Auerbach, Kohn, and Strauss (all German Jews), it is not unreasonable to assume that Strauss was most likely familiar with their thought. Whether Strauss was familiar with Shestov remains an open question³⁷—he was at least familiar with Shestov’s sources, including particularly the late modern writings of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Philosophically speaking, this is all somewhat beside the point. If, as Strauss claims, truth is “necessarily anonymous,” then these thinkers form a community simply by virtue of the proximity of their accounts of what Strauss refers to as Jerusalem and Athens.³⁸ In clarifying this relation, one begins to see the uniqueness and significance of Strauss’s own account.

Strauss conceives of the relation between Jerusalem and Athens in terms of (1) exclusive citizenship concerning reason and revelation (like Tertullian, Augustine, and Shestov), (2) a dialectical relationship between “natural” impulses (like Arnold), and (3) a sensory distinction—that is, between hearing the historical call of revelation (WIPP, 186) and seeing nature³⁹ (like Kohn and Auerbach). Yet he *simultaneously* rejects (1) the *complete and utter* exclusivity of *all aspects* of the two cities (as purported by Tertullian and Shestov), (2) the grounding of both cities in culture (as in Arnold and, to an extent, Auerbach), and (3) the fundamentally historical-geographical or theological *topos* of the cities (as in Kohn in the first case, and as in Augustine and Tertullian in the second). For Strauss, Jerusalem/Athens is not essentially a historical or geographical distinction but refers rather to a “fundamental tension” (JPCM, 117) that is present in civilizational life insofar as it refers to “a fundamental dualism in man” (JPCM, 120), to “alternatives or antagonists in the drama of the human soul” (JPCM, 123).⁴⁰ Whether we conceive of these alternatives in the manner of Platonic ideas or Aristotelian potentialities is, for the present discussion, not terribly important. The distinction is, for Strauss, philosophical in one respect and transphilosophical in another: it is philosophical insofar as it allows one to *view* “the drama of the human soul.” Unlike Shestov, this drama need not issue in violence (although, descriptively speaking, it certainly has at times led to it). Rather, it asks the following question of human beings: Which alternative compels you? What do you desire? Stated differently, the distinction refers to a choice that issues in self-knowledge. It is transphilosophical insofar as it refers to a choice *between* the philosophical form of life and its alternative.

Finally this drama does not require a decision (contra Carl Schmitt) based on nothing other than an act of will (as Rosen claims), because (in Aristotelian terms) this drama is based in the “desiring intellect” that *is* the human soul.

In a rare moment of prescription, Strauss offers the following account of the Jerusalem/Athens relation and how humans *ought* to respond to it: “The very life of Western civilization is the life between two codes, a fundamental tension. There is, therefore, no reason inherent in the Western civilization itself, in its fundamental constitution, why it should give up life. But this comforting thought is justified only if we live that life, if we live that conflict, that is. No one can be both a philosopher and a theologian, or for that matter, a third which is beyond the conflict between philosophy and theology, or a synthesis of both. *But everyone of us can be and ought to be either the one or the other, the philosopher open to the challenge of theology, or the theologian open to the challenge of philosophy*” (JPCM, 117; my emphasis). To say that we *ought* to be one or the other is to acknowledge the possibility that we might currently be neither (thus, the prescriptive character of this statement). To say that the life of Western civilization depends on this conflict⁴¹ (i.e., that it would be “given up” without it) is to focus the question on how this life might *continue* (which suggests that it could, effectively, die). If Western civilization is indeed based *in* this conflict, it is unclear how Shestovian violence between the two cities would enhance the life of Western civilization (if only because such violence presumably abolishes one side or another). It is also unclear how the modern tendency of occluding the difference between the two cities would enhance such life, insofar as it would obscure the different “grounds” on which the two cities are “built”. The only philosophical way to maintain the conflict in its productive tension is to *understand* it, to keep it constantly in view. The search for wisdom therefore becomes central to the life of Western civilization.

The search for wisdom, in fact, serves as the proper goal of both cities (JPCM, 379). That they have radically different starting points, and therefore define this proper goal differently, points to the different desires at which they aim to satisfy. ““Jerusalem” is the name that indicates the desire to live a life based in the mercy characteristic of obedience to (divine) law (JPCM, 118)—that is, in action. Athens” is the name that indicates the desire to live a life

based in free human inquiry and contemplation—that is, in thought and speech. I bracket the term *divine* for now, since both names acknowledge the import of divinity (as Rosen acknowledges), and since the question of law is as much a *political* question as it is a *theological* one. We can, however, reiterate that both Jerusalem and Athens (in the latter's specific modality as Socratic political philosophy) are responses to the same theological-political problem and both take "wisdom" to be the goal. For Strauss, the task is to keep the question—whether this wisdom comes from reason and intellect or alternatively from obedience to divine law—continually before one's eyes. Even if one can only inhabit one city, one needs to be continually open to the possibility of the other city. The choice between the two cities is thus based (contrary to Rosen's claim) in this search as it manifests itself in the particular makeup or proportion of desires comprising an individual's soul.⁴²

One needs, therefore, to be on the *border* of the two cities. This is not a term that Strauss uses, but he does provide a comparable image: "the prophets . . . had run the same risks in Jerusalem as Socrates in Athens. They had shown by their actions or by their speech that the man who loves perfection and justice must leave the cities inhabited exclusively by the wicked, to search for a city inhabited by good men, and that he must prefer, if he does not know of such a city or if he is prevented from bringing one about, wandering in the desert or in caverns to the association with evil men."⁴³ Within the context of the present discussion, we can say that—in order to live in a manner affirmative of the life of the civilization that we inhabit—we must be located at the periphery (or border) of the city rather than its center.⁴⁴ One might even wonder whether, for Strauss, the center of the city is where evil men reside; might Strauss be saying that an overzealous patriotism toward (i.e., love of) one's own city is evil? At any rate, whether one adopts the life of hearing the divine word or of seeing intelligible object, one must always be stationed where one can be most challenged by the other city. If we wish to refer to this position as a "battle" stance, it is clearly an intellectual (rather than a physical) one.

At this point, I am open to the charge of interpreting Strauss along Weberian lines. For Weber (on Strauss's reading), while the alternative between "human guidance and divine guidance" (NRH, 74) is fundamental and unresolvable (either by synthesis,

harmonization, or victory of one side over the other), it leads ultimately to despair and the pretense of neutrality with respect to the two terms (NRH, 64–65, 74–76). Strauss directly opposes Weber's view (in "Farabi's Plato") when he asserts that Farabi's "[philosophical] suspend[ing] of judgment as to the truth of the super-rational teaching of religion" is simply exoteric (FP, 372–373). In his own name, Strauss writes that "I do not know whether there ever was a 'philosopher' whose mind was so confused as to consist of two hermetically sealed compartments" (FP, 734). If, for Strauss, Farabi and Maimonides were thoroughgoing rationalists, if "the classics demonstrated that truly human life is a life dedicated to science, knowledge, and the search for it" (FPP, 78), the philosopher cannot (and, we might say, ought not) remain neutral—that is, they must continually attempt to refute the form of life based on revealed law. What, then, can Strauss's statement about citizens of one city being "open to the challenge" of the other mean?

I will provide a more detailed treatment of this issue in chapter 5 (when I discuss the work of Heinrich Meier, the most significant proponent of this reading of Strauss). This much can be said, however: I believe that Strauss's claim regarding the challenge of Jerusalem and Athens affirms the philosopher's imperative to refute the claims of Jerusalem *as well as* affirms the philosopher's need to continually face the claims of Jerusalem. The philosopher comes to knowledge of his or her own position precisely through the engagement with the religious claims concerning divine law. Put differently, there can be no Athenian refutation of Jerusalem without an Athenian exposure to—and undergoing⁴⁵ of—the claims of Jerusalem. In this respect, Athens needs Jerusalem for the good of Athens. Moreover, the philosopher (to the extent that he or she needs to be concerned about the civilization in which philosophy occurs) needs to continue the productive tension constitutive of that civilization. In this respect, Athens needs Jerusalem for the good of Western civilization. Finally, insofar as philosophy (by virtue of its focus on the articulation of the questions and problems over the solutions) is not a sectarian enterprise (WIPP, 116), the philosopher must engage others in a nondogmatic manner; in this way, the philosopher both awakens the desire for moderate action in nonphilosophers as well as awakens the contemplative desire in potential philosophers. If Jerusalem is that "city" singularly susceptible to religious fanaticism, this

engagement promises to be beneficial both to intra- and interpolitical aspects of Jerusalem. In this respect, Athens needs Jerusalem for the good of Jerusalem.

This short digression was necessary in order that I address the charge of inadvertently reading Strauss along Weberian lines. For Strauss, the citizen of Athens is neither neutral nor myopically at battle with Jerusalem. Philosophy depends on *divine* law for its own recognition; and, politically speaking, philosophy also depends on divine *law* for its own survival. The critics of my view are, however, correct in one particular respect: I have not spoken about whether Jerusalem needs Athens as much, or in the same way, as Athens needs Jerusalem. That question serves as the limit case of my investigation.⁴⁶ Insofar as he identifies himself as a citizen of Athens, we do not know how Strauss conceives of a Jerusalemite engagement with Athens. It is, one might say, a fundamental problem coeval with the thought of Strauss. All I have tried to do is to show that, *as a citizen of Athens*, Strauss is committed to both a nonneutral and nondogmatic engagement with Jerusalem. This claim ought to be substantial enough on its own; for what it highlights is nothing less than (1) the philosopher's need to attempt to refute revelation, (2) the philosopher's need to remain nondogmatic and *zetetic*, and (3) the philosopher's recognition of the fundamental need/desires of the human soul (to which Strauss gives the names "Jerusalem" and "Athens"). The first two are properly philosophical; the third is properly transphilosophical.

I return to my discussion. In between the grounds or premises and the goal of both cities, surface similarities come to sight; this is the reason why Strauss cannot simply affirm Tertullian's and Shestov's characterization. Both cities manifest the concern over justice; both cities make use of rational means in order to legitimate their ways of life;⁴⁷ finally, both cities acknowledge the need of a divine foundation for law. I can put the point as follows: When Jerusalem makes use of reason, it issues in Kalam (rational discourse justifying belief in divinity); when Athens makes reference to divine myth, it does so with the aim of producing good citizens. While Strauss certainly distinguishes the two cities, his presentations of them makes clear that he does not subscribe to the view that they are exclusive *in every respect*: "What Plato says in the tenth book of the *Laws* about man's inability to escape from divine retribution is

almost literally identical with certain verses of Amos and Psalm 139. In this context, one may even mention . . . the kinship between the monotheism of the Bible and the monotheism toward which Greek philosophy is tending, and the kinship between the first chapter of Genesis and Plato's *Timaeus*" (JPCM, 106). The analogous concerns over divine retributive justice and divine creation through "fashioning" shows that the two cities are related *as alternatives to each other*. Moreover, in the 1967 lecture, Strauss shows that the Genesis narrative is approachable in a reasoned manner (if not completely from a rational horizon), while presenting Hesiod's *Theogony* (as well as the Parmenidean and Empedoclean fragments as the representative of Athens (JPCM, 382–398)! Also of relevance here, and in a reversal of what we might expect, Strauss's presentation of Genesis deals primarily with human issues while his presentation of the Greeks focuses on the divine.⁴⁸

Finally, in the same lecture, we find the remarkable statement that "the 'pure reason' in Plato's sense is closer to the Bible than the 'pure reason' in Kant or, for that matter, Anaxagoras' or Aristotle's sense." (JPCM, 396). That Strauss, as a citizen of Athens, would prefer Anaxagoras and Aristotle (we can also add here Farabi and Averroes) to the (mythical) narratives of Plato and the Bible is clear enough—but why does he add Kant? Are we to understand Kant and Aristotle as philosophical brethren? Not without qualification. To the extent that they are both *philosophers*, the answer is yes (in which case, they would, similarly, be brethren of Plato). However, *insofar as Kant's philosophy is modern*, Strauss registers a negative answer. I will show in which ways Strauss reacts against Kant in the section of this chapter titled "The Kantian Character of 'Jewish Philosophy.'" Already one can discern the emergence of a fourfold distinction: Jerusalem, Athens, ancients, and moderns. The ancients/moderns distinction functions horizontally in Strauss's discourse; it is a *historical* distinction that, *as historical*, obscures the theological-political problem and its point of greatest tension—the Jerusalem/Athens distinction. In contrast, Jerusalem and Athens is properly (trans)philosophical insofar as it names permanent and fundamental forms of life as they originate in the human soul. A major aspect to Strauss's project of recovering Jerusalem and Athens is to work back through the distinction between the ancients and the moderns. Far from according modern philosophy and modern Jewish thought a

subordinate status, however, Strauss holds that it is precisely by taking one's point of departure from modern thought that one might, in some sense, *depart* from modern thought. This will, again, become clear in the section below titled "The Kantian Character of Jewish Philosophy."

If the Jerusalem/Athens distinction ultimately amounts to alternative responses to the theological-political problem, Strauss cannot simply take one term as primary or esoteric and the other as derivative or exoteric. To do so would amount not simply to a rejection of one of the cities but rather to a rejection of the distinction as *a genuine problem at all*. Even a brief consideration of Strauss's intellectual trajectory suggests a different narrative. Differently stated, Strauss's engagement with Jewish texts and thought is coeval with his entire philosophical path—from beginning to end.

Strauss's Path to the Theological-Political Problem

The wealth of recent scholarship concerning the young Strauss makes possible the brevity of my discussion.⁴⁹ I do need, however, to sketch the contours of Strauss's path to the theological-political problem, in order both to establish Strauss's lifelong engagement with Judaism and then to proceed to our main discussion concerning Strauss's critique of modern "Jewish philosophy."

Strauss's early years illustrate a story of conflicts that arose for a young Orthodox Jew first discovering philosophy (in the form of Plato, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche) at gymnasium, and subsequently being swept up into the whirlwind both of neo-Orthodox discussions of religion (involving the works of Rudolf Otto, Karl Barth, and Franz Rosenzweig), and political Zionism.⁵⁰ Does Strauss's youthful embrace of the three signal an inability to simply inhabit Jerusalem (to the extent that an Orthodox upbringing comes to be seen as one modality of that city)? Rémi Brague is, I believe, correct when he holds that "the only question we have to face is the Jewish nature of Strauss's enterprise."⁵¹ His writings of the time (engaging with figures as diverse as Jacobi, Otto, Max Nordau, Theodor Herzl, Paul de Lagarde, Hermann Cohen, Sigmund Freud, Franz Rosenzweig, and Julian Ebbinghaus) certainly suggest such tension regarding Jewish thought. This tension, though,

did not prevent Strauss from engaging with Jewish thought on the highest level. He joined Franz Rosenzweig's Fries Jüdisches Lehrhaus during the 1925–26 academic year, and led a reading group on Cohen's *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*;⁵² at the same time, Strauss was appointed to the Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, where he studied medieval Jewish texts with Julius Guttman (in particular, Joseph Albo's *Book of Roots* and Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*).⁵³ Finally, new documentation discovered by Thomas Meyer shows that, during his appointment to the Akademie, Strauss was sent to Kassel during a seven-month period in 1925, where he offered courses in Biblical Hebrew and a seminar on German Judaism since Moses Mendelssohn.⁵⁴ This basic information tells us that the Weimar years saw a struggle and conflict for Strauss about Jewish thought, but not an unqualified rejection.

Ultimately, however, this struggle and conflict does show that Strauss understood his thought to inhabit Athens rather than Jerusalem. In his correspondence with Gerhard Krüger (December 27, 1932 draft) appears Strauss's now well-known statement, "Our difference has its ground in this—that I cannot believe, that I must search for a possibility where I can *live* without belief."⁵⁵ For Strauss, this raises the question as to whether the ancients or the moderns provide the resources for such a life.⁵⁶ Moreover, Strauss's emphasis on the word *live* appears to support the claim that an engagement with the Ancients/Moderns distinction is necessary, in Strauss's thought, in order to recover the more fundamental distinction between Jerusalem and Athens. This is not to suggest that, at such an early stage, Strauss was already working with a definitive and fully formed conception of this distinction (and the recovery of it). It is reasonable to suggest, however, that these statements are early articulations of the problematic. Regarding his engagement with neo-Orthodoxy, this is confirmed, in large measure, by Strauss's 1962 retrospective account: "The reawakening of theology, which for me is marked by the names Karl Barth and Franz Rosenzweig, appeared to make it necessary to investigate how far the critique of orthodox theology—Jewish and Christian—deserved to be victorious. Since then the theological-political problem has remained *the* theme of my investigations" (JPCM, 453). Regarding his engagement with political Zionism, one only has to turn to his 1962 Chicago Hillel

lecture, "Why We Remain Jews," where he recalls an early meeting with the revisionist Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky: "He asked me, 'what are you doing?' I said, 'Well, we read the Bible, we study Jewish history, Zionist theory, and, of course, we keep abreast of developments, and so on.' He replied, 'And rifle practice?' And I had to say 'no'" (JPCM, 319).

If one considers information about Strauss's early work together with his later reflections, one finds that his struggle consists in the discovery of a form of life supple and subtle enough to simultaneously affirm philosophy as well as the challenge to it from revelation in general and revealed law in particular. Strauss's ultimate turning away from modern Jewish figures like Rosenzweig and Cohen, if construed as a wholesale rejection of Judaism, is as misunderstood as his answer to Jabotinsky is if construed merely as a retreat from the necessity of bearing arms. Both his movement away from neo-Orthodoxy and Zionism are aspects of Strauss's philosophical critique of modernity. Insofar as neo-Orthodoxy ultimately ties religion to personal experience, it derives from the same modern emphasis on individualism one finds in thinkers such as, in Strauss's account, Hobbes and Spinoza. Similarly, insofar as Zionism amounts to an advocacy of a practical, historical, and worldly solution to the so-called Jewish problem, it is a continuation of the Enlightenment project of progress through historical teleology. Both avenues, for Strauss, amount to an occlusion of the theological-political problem by ideologies of modern individualism and historical progress. *These* are the impulses that are the source of conflict for Strauss. While neo-Orthodoxy might provide a phenomenology of subjective religious experience, it does not address the question of the religious *way of life*. And while a state of Israel might very well be a *modern political* answer to the Jewish problem, it is neither a *philosophical* nor a *Jewish* answer to the Jewish problem. What Strauss says explicitly about the state of Israel holds for neo-Orthodox Judaism: "[it] is . . . a modification of the *galut* . . . but it is not the end of the *galut*. In the religious sense, and perhaps not only in the religious sense . . . [it] is part of the *galut*. Finite, relative problems can be solved; infinite, absolute problems cannot be solved . . . 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” (JPCM, 143).

This “social or political problem,” which admits of no worldly solution, is (for Strauss) the theological-political problem—the problem concerning human association. This problem concerns the most just form of life for humans. However, given the manifest plurality of individuals and groups, this form of life needs laws for its organization, arrangement, and continuity. Given the fallibility and plurality of human opinions, human laws continually run the risk of being either apparently or actually unjust. This noncoincidence of law and justice leads to what Strauss calls “the problem of justice” (NRH, 150–151). This points to the conclusion that “there cannot be true justice if there is no divine rule or providence” (NRH, 150n24). That this conclusion, for Strauss, points beyond the realm of politics leads to the further implication that “the justice which is possible within the city, can be only imperfect or cannot be unquestionably good” (NRH, 151). The problem of the noncoincidence of law and justice within the city constitutes the problem of divine law, which is, paradoxically, “the common ground between the Bible and Greek philosophy . . . They solve that problem in a diametrically opposed manner” (JPCM, 107). This problem is philosophical insofar as it seeks a view of “the whole” problem of human association (with its center of gravity in the problem of justice). It is theological insofar as it acknowledges that divine law constitutes the only authority powerful enough to bring “true justice” to individuals and groups living in proximity to each other. It is political insofar as it refers to question over how human differences can be justly negotiated at the individual and group level. And it is a fundamental problem insofar as (according to Heinrich Meier), it amounts to an “existential challenge” between philosophy and revealed law which “does not [simply] concern the question of whether philosophy or religion should rule . . . [but rather] the question: *What is the right life?*”⁵⁷ If neo-Orthodoxy and Zionism obscure the theological-political question, they do so because they fail to recognize the permanence of the problem *as a problem*. In both cases, Judaism manifests “spiritual dependence” (JPCM, 140) on the Enlightenment.

In his introduction to Moses Mendelssohn’s *Morning Hours* and *To the Friends of Lessing* (finished in 1937 for the Jubilee Edition of Mendelssohn’s *Collected Writings*, but published only posthumously

in 1974), Strauss provides an eloquent, if sobering, testimony to this spiritual dependence. The context for this testimony concerns the heated and fiercely polemical debate between Mendelssohn and Friedrich Jacobi over whether their mutual friend Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was or was not a Spinozist. Mendelssohn argued that he was not (or at least not in an unqualified sense), while Jacobi argued that he was. Further, Jacobi mentioned that Lessing had confided in him to the effect that he had never told Mendelssohn his true views (insofar as he perceived Mendelssohn to be overly rigid and dogmatic). Strauss derives transbiographical significance from the hurt and betrayal that Mendelssohn felt.⁵⁸ The relevance of this account to the present discussion makes Strauss's passage worth quoting at length:

The pure expressions of the pain of the friend are more perceptible to our ear than the strained outbreaks of the annoyances of the outsmarted whose carefully devised tactic has come to naught. The pain over the barrier that separated [Mendelssohn] from Lessing, of which he had only now become aware, was so deep that words failed him for properly describing the brutality with which Jacobi had brought this barrier to his awareness. Not merely had there fallen on his friendship, which was the greatest happiness of his life, a shadow that, in a truly forgivable manner, crushed his self-esteem. Together with this, his trust toward the non-Jewish world had been shaken: after all, unreserved friendship with Lessing was at the same time also the oldest and most trustworthy bridge that connected him with that world at all, the testimony most precious to him of the possibility of complete understanding between men of the opposite background. One can appreciate again by now how great the hurdles must have been, despite which Mendelssohn kept working on his trust in non-Jewish friends—he who was as free of pathological sensitivities as a mere human can be, who bore no greater distrust than what is justified sufficiently by the experiences of the Jews at all times. Without assuming such a justified distrust toward the non-Jewish world, one cannot, as things stand, understand his behavior in the quarrel with Jacobi, nor for that matter, his behavior

toward Bonnet in the quarrel with Lavater. To be sure, the same natural hatred against the Jews did not then yet have the principle of nationalism at its disposal; but even so, the anti-Jewish theory and practice of the Christian Churches supplied it with weapons scarcely less effective . . . For the proper understanding of his reaction to Jacobi's public communication, . . . one has to keep in mind Mendelssohn's experience of the distrust of the non-Jewish world toward the Jews, no less than his own distrust as a Jew toward the non-Jewish world. (LSMM, 104–105).

In this passage, Strauss understands Mendelssohn's experience as a sort of archive or registry containing insight into the problem of "spiritual dependence" from which Enlightenment Judaism suffers. Put differently, the reason that Mendelssohn felt so betrayed is because he harbored the hopes that hatred of Jews admits of a modern political or modern religious solution;⁵⁹ Strauss does not harbor similar hopes. This in no way signals despair or cynicism on Strauss's part; rather, it suggests that one needs to keep the theological-political problem (as well as its inadequate "solutions") ever before one's eyes in order to understand the way things are. That Strauss's project does not claim to provide an answer to this question simply means that he rejects the modern emphasis of practicality over contemplation. If we look ahead to the introductory paragraph of "What Is Political Philosophy," however, we see that this rejection of the modern solution is not a wholesale rejection of the theological-political problem in general, let alone of Jerusalem in particular: "But 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*" (WIPP, 10; my emphasis). While Strauss critiques the modern character of Enlightenment Judaism, he does so in the service of recollecting Jerusalem as one possible response to the theological-political problem (insofar as it is one possible response to the problem of justice). In other words, he remains open to the challenge of Jerusalem even when he speaks from the standpoint of Athens.

One sees this recollective process at work in Strauss's above-mentioned 1962 Hillel lecture "Why We Remain Jews." In his introduction, Joseph Cropsey notes the strangeness of the title (JPCM,