

interpretation

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Volume 13 number 3

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Leo Strauss's *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*

DAVID LOWENTHAL
Boston College

Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy. By Leo Strauss and others, with an introduction by Thomas L. Pangle. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. 264 pp.: cloth, \$25.00.)

I

This collection of essays was arranged by Leo Strauss a year before his death in 1973. Thirteen of the fifteen have already appeared in journals or elsewhere, five here in *Interpretation*. Only two short pieces on Maimonides seem to be printed for the first time. A complete bibliography of Strauss's writings appears at the back.

Again we are indebted to Joseph Cropsey for executing his mentor's wishes so faithfully and seeing to this publication. He has at the same time transmitted a puzzle arising from the fact that the essays were placed in a somewhat obscure order and given the title, "Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy," by Strauss himself. Two additions had also been contemplated by the author—a chapter on Plato's *Gorgias* and an introduction. Neither was written. No doubt the introduction would have indicated how essays on Husserl, the Bible and Machiavelli, among others, can be Platonic studies. To make up for this lack, a long introductory essay has been prepared at Cropsey's request by Thomas Pangle, known for his work on Plato and Montesquieu. Pangle found that to explain the title and order of the subjects nothing less than a comprehensive analysis of Strauss's overall teaching was needed.

Pangle tries to show the manner in which Strauss became a follower of the Socrates described by Plato (and Xenophon). Starting with Plato's doctrine of ideas, he explains how Strauss conceived Socrates' turn from natural philosophy toward the study of human things. But if Strauss resurrects political philosophy and the philosophic way of life, setting them once again on the foundation they had for Plato and Xenophon, he also seems ready to shake that foundation. Pangle is forced to cope with the mortal threat to philosophy presented by faith and revelation—a threat more powerfully argued by Strauss than by any other philosopher or theologian. Accepting this argument, so contrary to the antireligious bias of modern philosophy and science, Pangle tries nonetheless to find a Socratic justification for philosophy's continued existence, and hence for Strauss's "Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy."

These are the highest highpoints of Pangle's complex exposition, and we must be grateful for his willingness to undertake a task so fraught with difficulties of

collation and interpretation. In fact, assisted by his numerous cross-references, I often found myself disagreeing with the analysis. But I was unprepared for the critical asperity with which Harry Jaffa greeted Pangle's essay in the Fall of 1984 issue of *The Claremont Review of Books*. Does Pangle, as Jaffa charges, drastically underestimate Strauss's interest in political action? Does he so far abandon Strauss's position as to adopt an Epicureanism that under modern conditions must lead to nihilism, thus promoting the extremes of both corruption and tyranny? And is Jaffa right in claiming that Strauss's lifework was primarily aimed at rescuing modern political practice from modern political theory? that he favored placing modern political practice on a foundation derived from classical political philosophy? that he actually shared Yehuda Halevy's passionate interest in morality and consequent longing for revelation? For it is true that these assertions are not to be found in Pangle's essay.

Differences of opinion about Strauss's teaching can stem from many sources: from its complexity, from its having unfolded over time to some degree, from differences of emphasis required for different circumstances, from the interests and capacities of the interpreters themselves. We can assume that differences of opinion between men like Pangle and Jaffa, however unfortunate in some ways, will prove instructive and helpful in others. But where shall we begin? Let us return to the main body of the work under review to get a better idea of its contents. Most of its essays merely extend—though with characteristic profundity and originality—Strauss's treatment of subjects he has dealt with extensively before. Most of these subjects are premodern—Plato, Thucydides, Xenophon and Maimonides—to which must be added an essay on Machiavelli and one on the natural law, premodern and modern. By comparison, the first and last of the fifteen deal with subjects little treated elsewhere: with Husserl and Heidegger, on the one hand, and Hermann Cohen, on the other. The same is true of the essay on Nietzsche, and of at least the part of "Jerusalem and Athens" analyzing the Bible. All these have the special interest that comes from novelty.

While the order of the chapters is generally chronological, there are some exceptions to this rule. The first chapter is clearly meant to demonstrate the failure of modern philosophy and the need for returning to the origins. The next two chapters enter Platonic political philosophy directly through three dialogues, the most important of which by far is the *Apology of Socrates*. After this, the chapter on the gods in Thucydides is slightly out of chronological order—perhaps because of the need to establish the Platonic foundation first. But the chapter most out of place, as Pangle notes, is the one on Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, which, by succeeding "Jerusalem and Athens" and preceding the three Maimonides Notes, appears in what might be called the medieval section of the book.

II

Before modern political philosophy becomes moribund, and, so to speak, enters a coma in the twentieth century, it suffuses the world of action and becomes

commonplace. Strauss introduces Husserl with remarks about Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger to show what happens to historicist philosophies after Hegel. He ends these remarks somewhat darkly: "One is inclined to say that Heidegger has learned the lesson of 1933 more thoroughly than any other man. Surely he leaves no place whatever for political philosophy." "Let us," he adds, "turn from these fantastic hopes, more to be expected from visionaries than from philosophers, to Husserl" (34). Now by "fantastic hopes" here he certainly means the view of the future he had ascribed just before to Heidegger, anticipating a new era in human life facilitated by the combined efforts of the thinkers of East and West, and marked by the return of the gods. But "fantastic hopes" is probably meant to apply as well to the "visions" of the future he had ascribed to Marx and Nietzsche before that. By what peculiar inversion, we may ask, does the realism with which modern philosophy originates in Machiavelli, Bacon and Descartes turn entirely visionary as it works its way through historicism toward existentialism? "Fantastic hopes" may be the natural consequence of false oversimplification masquerading as "realism"—a realism which begins by reducing man to certain passions, denies the rationality of the universe as well, and ends by making philosophic reason itself impossible.

Husserl's thought seems to have rested on the idea of a theoretical philosophy or science that is not historically determined. For purposes of action, however, this science must be augmented, in the foreseeable future, by *Weltanschauungen*—a kind of historically variable wisdom in the conduct of life that cannot meet the rigorous standard of science. Here Strauss's criticism of his teacher becomes expansive. Having approached a point requiring political reflection, Husserl seems to have rested instead on assumptions derived from the Enlightenment and liberalism. He did not wonder about the necessary effect of rigorous science on the *Weltanschauungen*, or about the political conditions necessary to their existing in diversity side by side. Husserl's concern for the fate of philosophy grew after 1933, but he was confident that "ideas" were stronger than the "empirical powers," so that ultimately those in the "circle of philosophic human beings" would win out in the political struggle with "those who are conservatively contented with the tradition." In this connection, Husserl refers to the persecution that set in at the very beginning of philosophy as archetypal. Strauss does not object, as well he might have, to the implicit likening of Nazi Germany to Periclean Athens, and of the fate of philosophy in both. Instead, he calls for examining the political conflict between Husserlian philosophy and the alternative to it—presumably "the tradition," generally understood. I take this to be Strauss's way of indicating the original and perennial character of the conflict between philosophy and the opinion-based sphere of politics. He is beckoning the reader to move beyond the assumptions of Enlightenment and back to the Socratic beginnings of political philosophy. With an absence of political philosophy in Heidegger capable of engendering his support for the Nazis, and its near-absence in Husserl, enfeebling his grasp of even the effects and conditions of his own philosophy, the stage is set for a new look at the ancients.

Strauss's treatment of Plato's *Apology* begins on the next page. One is amazed, as usual, at his capacity for observation and inference, but somewhat disappointed to find him staying so close to the text and abstaining from broad conclusions of the kind found in *Natural Right and History* and *What is Political Philosophy?* When Pangle deals, in his introduction, with the threat posed by faith to philosophy, he even uses the *Apology's* Delphic Oracle as the symbol of Socrates's "new hearkening to the voice of authoritative piety" (p. 21). Socrates does, in fact, portray his public philosophizing as a mission commanded by the Delphic god, but the evidence in the dialogue hardly supports any such "new hearkening." As Strauss indicates, it was Socrates himself who decided to test the Oracle's affirmation that no one is wiser than he, and who chooses, on his own, the route of publicly confronting politicians, poets and craftsmen (41–42). Instead of taking the claims of piety seriously, Socrates seems merely to use piety to excuse these confrontations. And I think it also true that only prejudice in Socrates' favor keeps us from admitting how politically and morally irresponsible such confrontations really were. Certainly no one has ever repeated them, nor are we tempted to now. By always confounding his victims with his questions, Socrates keeps drawing the conclusion that we human beings only know that we know nothing. After this, he gives indications that "human wisdom is more than the insight into the worthlessness of human wisdom" (45)—that is, into our ignorance of the most important things. And in the process of exhorting people to virtue—indeed, "His philosophizing consists chiefly in exhorting people to virtue as the most valuable thing"—he lets them believe they already know what virtue is. Yet has he not already cast doubt on the possibility that virtue could prove an exception to our general ignorance? From the outset, then, the Platonic Socrates presents a deep implicit or explicit challenge to traditional piety, traditional politics and even traditional morality, and with little assurance that these can be replaced by knowledge, except, perhaps, regarding virtue. If philosophy proves incapable of making progress from this point onward, Socrates has set the stage for tradition's re-entry into this vacuum with a vengeance.

Jaffa seems unwilling to admit that Strauss, as a follower of this Socrates—we are not discussing his relation to Aristotle yet—is essentially like Socrates. Jaffa cites modernity's prejudice against "traditional piety" and "traditional moral philosophy," and condemns the "questionable status of philosophy divorced from the morality of 'the Bible and Greek philosophy'" (p. 20, col. 2). But Strauss's study of the *Apology*—the anchor of these "studies in Platonic political philosophy"—reveals a Socrates whose questioning is intrinsically antithetical to anything called "traditional piety" or even "traditional moral philosophy," and whose expressed interests do not even include the guidance of political life Jaffa considers so vital to Strauss and himself. By Jaffa's logic, Socrates should be added to Strauss and Yehuda Halevi as still another example of moral man yearning for revelation—as the best of "believers." But is this not to misconstrue entirely the Socratic spirit—the spirit of philosophy? Even Pangle, who

tries to preserve the fullness of this spirit in both Socrates and Strauss, speaks too loosely in referring to Socrates' "new hearkening to the voice of authoritative piety."

According to Pangle, the new or mature Socrates of *The Apology* admits his "idiosyncratic" way of life has to be "justified according to standards acceptable to the city and its moral-religious beliefs" (14). He tells us Socrates does this in two ways: first, by claiming that as a gadfly he recalled the city to its highest aspirations (to virtue, presumably); second, by claiming "that his life is the unexpected summit of human existence" and offering to the city the life of the philosopher (or a "noble image in speech of that life") as the "otherwise unrecognized standard" in the light of which moral disagreements can be arbitrated and moral questions clarified. Now Socrates does explicitly claim that "no greater good ever came to pass in the city than my service to the god"—meaning his "gadfly" function of interrogating everyone he meets and spurring them to virtue (30a). In support of this he does say that virtue or the perfection of the soul is good for individuals and cities, and the source of "money and all other good things to man" (29d,e; 30b). And we find him adding that conversation about virtue and the other things concerning which he examines himself and others is the "greatest good to man" (38a). But Socrates' second justification—the principal one, in Pangle's judgment—never explicitly appears in the dialogue, however valid it might be as a studied inference from what does transpire there, or as a transcription of what Strauss says elsewhere. It's a *claim* Socrates never makes, and is in no position to make.

So the "gadfly" claim is philosophy's *sole* means of justifying itself before the city, and the gadfly is said to be sent by the god of the oracle. The philosopher is on a religious mission that becomes a *public* good only through the gadfly function. The philosophizing he engages in is therefore understood as essentially a social activity, done with others, aiming at the mutual improvement of their souls in the direction of virtue, and of benefit to individuals and the city of Athens alike. Most important, and most surprising to us, philosophy as the open inquiry into all things, or even into all human things, including political things, forms no explicit part of what Socrates defends. What we would call ethics rather than physics or politics is made to appear his sole subject, and ethics publicly understood as presuming, rather than having to prove, the supreme goodness of virtue. The result at this point is to give this search for virtue a traditional cast, and also to democratize it through the impression that it can be undertaken and brought to fruition by all men. After this it comes as a distinct shock to hear Socrates pronounce not virtue itself but talking—philosophizing—about virtue the highest good, fully realizing he will be unable to convince his audience of such a radical departure from what they take for granted (38a). Otherwise, the positive part of his mission finds him being less offensive than in the interrogations testing knowledge that caused such consternation in the first part.

Let us frankly acknowledge something extravagant in Socrates' mission gen-

erally. Someone who thinks all men can be made to examine their own lives, actively search for virtue, and actually improve in virtue is extremely impolitic in the precise sense of the word. He does not seem to realize that the virtue or corruption of large bodies of men is a function of the political regime and its condition, rather than of efforts to improve made by individuals through thinking and talking. Socrates may have been led into this apparent difficulty by two considerations. One is the very politic recognition that democratic Athens lacks the capacity for dedicating itself to virtue. He seems also to have decided against attempting to justify his activity as fit only for a few—as an aristocratic activity in some sense. Justification before the city of Athens seems to require an inherently democratic appeal—“alike to rich and poor” (33b)—and hence a calling of all men to what can only be accomplished by a few. Here the philosopher seems to act as a responsible part of the city, as an Athenian, just as he does in accepting the authority of its laws over him (48, 49, 51).

Yet Socratic self-examination is treated as a general human possibility—a potentiality of men everywhere and at all times, independent of the city itself. Such independence of, and even superiority to, the city is another part of the impression Socrates leaves for philosophy. He himself is sent on his mission by a being the city acknowledges as its superior, and is guided by his *δαιμόνιον* as well. He impudently challenges the knowledge of politicians and others in public view, and establishes his own authority by defeating them in verbal battle. He appeals to a standard of goodness that is human (or by nature) rather than simply Athenian. He looks down upon the goods sought in political life, refuses to participate in the injustices constantly required by political life, and will not be intimidated by the threat of death itself if the price is abandoning philosophic examination. He even assumes a certain superiority to the greatest of those dwelling in Hades, as he anticipates subjecting them to similar examination: at the end he is *nervier* than at the beginning.

It would have been easy to move from the concern for virtue to a concern for politics, as the classic always do in their writings, but Socrates does not take this step at his trial. In keeping with the nature of democratic Athens, virtue, while urged on all at the god's behest, is left to private pursuit, like wealth. And philosophy, as the means of attaining virtue, is limited to certain things on the earth rather than in the heavens or under the earth. Respect for philosophy thus understood will derive either from piety on the part of the many, or a love of virtue on the part of the few. But preserving this respect seems to depend on the philosopher's walking a tightrope—venturing observably in his expression neither too close to impiety, too far from virtue, or too much into politics. Such restrictions will make it difficult for political philosophy to emerge. Even direct guidance of the philosopher's own society goes beyond, and therefore endangers, the political impartiality required for the circumscribed area in which he can safely operate.

Socrates defended philosophy only by limiting it to the pursuit of virtue. How

good a defense is this? According to Plutarch, in a passage Strauss likes to cite, Plato gave currency among the peoples to all philosophic studies, including the generally-suspect natural philosophy. He did this by the sterling reputation of his own life, and by his having “subjected natural necessity to divine and more excellent principles” (*Nicias*, 23). Strauss himself puts it even more strongly. What defense of philosophy has been required “always and everywhere, whatever the regime might have been”? It is: “In satisfying the city that the philosophers are not atheists, that they do not desecrate everything sacred to the city, that they reverence what the city reverences, that they are not subversives, in short, that they are not irresponsible adventurers but good citizens and even the best of citizens” (*What Is Political Philosophy?*, p. 126).

By this standard, Socrates’ defense was inadequate. If he fended off the charge of impiety, he nevertheless made all too plain his dissatisfaction with the city’s worldly pursuits and injustices, and, above all, with the claims of its politicians, poets and artisans to have knowledge. But Socrates may have wanted to do more than defend philosophy against the city. He may have wanted to make clear, once and for all, that the first human need is for philosophy, for knowledge of the chief good, for perfection of the soul. To win the city’s approbation or even admiration for this transcending of itself, Socrates may have used a novel shock treatment, public examination, softened, to some extent, by its subsequent restriction to the search for virtue. And he may have used his death as he used his life. We always remember three things about Socrates: the Socratic method; his talking back to the city, even somewhat defiantly; and his obediently drinking the hemlock. After Plato, political societies would concede unlimited scope to a Socratic philosophy that supported the rule of a divine principle in the universe, affirmed the dignity of the city itself, and, to the extent possible, avoided the imputation of political partisanship by weighing impartially the claims of the partisans themselves. Only in modern times were the political prerequisites of philosophy completely removed by the combination of enlightenment and liberalism.

III

As Strauss observes, the *Apology* tells us nothing about Socrates’ pre-Delphic philosophy, on the basis of which he was already accounted wise. For Chaerephon had asked the oracle whether anyone is wiser than Socrates, and this was before Socrates began publicly questioning one and all. Against the background provided by Strauss’s *Socrates and Aristophanes*, Pangle assumes that the earlier Socrates was the “pre-Socratic” philosopher ridiculed in Aristophanes’ *The Clouds*—ridiculed for undermining the social conditions necessary to philosophy, for ignorance of the soul, and for atheism. “The new Socrates,” says Pangle, “has learned the lesson in political and psychological prudence that Aristophanes sought to teach. He has recognized his manifold dependence (both erotic and calculative) on those who are not philosophic. . . .” (15). As the

means of accounting for Socrates's interest in human things, and hence his originating political philosophy, those curious words "erotic" and "calculative" need to be made much clearer. In his "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*," Strauss had described the combination of detachment from human things, and attachment to them, experienced by the philosopher. To protect his philosophic detachment, the philosopher has only to show respect for the religion and other things dear to the city. But the philosopher is also a human being who not only depends on others but has a natural concern for all men. While wishing to mitigate the evils all men experience, he naturally "cannot help being more attached to his family and city than to strangers," and will "give advice to his city or to other rulers. Since all advice of this kind presupposes comprehensive reflections which as such are the business of the philosopher, he must first have become a political philosopher" (*What Is Political Philosophy?*, 120, 118–26). The special attachment experienced by the philosopher is to well-ordered souls, and particularly to those whose souls can be perfected through philosophy. Finding and teaching such people is his natural love—the social side of his love of wisdom.

Pangle concludes his discussion (17, 18) of the nature of Socratic philosophizing by drawing upon Strauss's distinction (in another essay from the same volume, but written nine years earlier) between two meanings of "political philosophy." One is philosophy that is politic, the other philosophy that has politics as its subject. They represent different views of why the philosopher turns to the study of human things. At some point after philosophy in its original form arose, it had to reflect upon the sphere of opinion out of which it had arisen, and also demonstrate just why it was necessary to human life. This meant showing that "the well-being of the political community depends decisively on the study of philosophy" (*What Is . . .*, 93), which in turn, addressed as it was to citizens, required an understanding of political things "exactly as they are understood in political life." So the deeper meaning of political philosophy is the first rather than the second.

These two essays, back to back in the same volume, give different accounts of political philosophy, but they share the principle that philosophy is higher than political philosophy. The earlier account allows Pangle to emphasize a Socrates (and, by implication, a Strauss) whose main interest remains philosophy proper and whose life is essentially solitary. On the other side, as if to overcompensate, we have Jaffa insisting that Strauss's life work aimed *mainly* at redeeming modern political practice—that it was more concerned with political benefit than with anything else. Consequently, as Jaffa tends to regard him, Strauss remains closer in spirit to Aristotle's political teaching than to either Socrates or Plato. But why is it that Strauss himself called this new book studies in *Platonic*, not Aristotelian, political philosophy?

Strauss thought that Aristotle, as distinguished from Plato, limited the questioning character of political inquiry, both with respect to its beginning and its end points (*Natural Right and History*, 156–57; *City and Man*, 21). This effort

to make political inquiry more responsible, more political, naturally led to an increased interest in the actual variety of regimes and of problems facing statesmen. Now the subjects in these essays of Strauss range from the most immediately political (for example, the account of Xenophon's *Anabasis*) to the only remotely so (the note on Maimonides' *Book of Knowledge*). The first essay deals with highly abstract thinkers, Heidegger and Husserl, but against the background of modern politics in general and Hitler in particular. The last ends a difficult examination of Cohen's Jewish philosophy with a reflection on the plight of the Jews under Hitler and in the Soviet Union. This range of considerations from the most practical to the most theoretical seems to indicate a conscious adoption by Strauss of the term "Platonic," so that no questions, including the basis of morality, are beyond it—while still preserving the Aristotelian closeness to political action. Whether Strauss did so because of the theoretical problems that must be faced today or on more general grounds is not clear.

Strauss's rejoinder to Kojève about the detachment and attachment of the philosopher is of course intended to apply to himself. The practical motive of helping other men can, in great crises, supplant philosophy itself. Sometimes the cause of philosophy and the cause of the nonphilosophers coincide, and so it was for Strauss in the great wars and revolutions of the twentieth century. This is why his last word to Kojève is a call for the warriors and workers of the world to unite against communism—with the help of philosophers (131–33)! As for the compatibility of the philosophic and political dispositions, it is true that the one is disposed to inner tranquility, the other to emulousness; the one to harming no one, the other to striking out against enemies; the one to gentleness, the other to harshness. These divergent dispositions Strauss did combine in himself—perhaps more naturally than Shakespeare's Prospero. Jaffa suggests that nourishing the combination is the unique function of political philosophy (15, col. 2). If so, Strauss's studies must have themselves contributed to developing so extraordinary an appreciation of political greatness, civil and military, on the part of one whose customary actions consisted of turning pages in an armchair.

The West is engaged in a great political struggle to preserve liberty, decency, philosophy, religion and every element of civilization. At the same time, it is undergoing an intellectual crisis by which its confidence in the modern rational principles that have made it what it is has been badly shaken. Pangle's introduction does understate Strauss's interest in these overarching and intertwined issues of our time, as Jaffa charges, and, perhaps for similar reasons, the Aristotelian element in his teaching. As for the first and more directly political issue, it is possible to collect from Strauss's writings the powerful and persistent expressions of his concern for the survival of the West and the Jews. The second issue (the "crisis of the West") is so often in the forefront of Strauss's attention that it has been repeatedly discussed by others. Perhaps this fact, along with his decision to concentrate single-mindedly on Strauss's Platonic conclusions, caused Pangle to neglect Strauss's long critique of modern political philosophy, past and present.

His emphasis is much more on the theoretical solution Strauss arrived at than on the long way to it. Nor would we, then, expect Pangle to be particularly interested in the possible political effects today of a revival of Platonic political philosophy—that is, in a coming together of the two issues.

By contrast, Jaffa never lets us lose sight of these active political and philosophical concerns of the present—Strauss's and ours. Accordingly his restatement of Strauss's legacy ends with a stirring commentary on his marvellous eulogy of Churchill. But the corrective Jaffa offers has problems of its own. One can be found in his basic conviction that "Strauss's entire work pointed toward rescuing the *political practice* of the modern world from the consequences of the *political theory* of modern philosophy" (14, col. 2). If "pointed toward" means "primarily aimed at," this view is somewhat off the mark. Jaffa draws attention to Strauss's statement (at the beginning of *The City and Man*) that "the crisis of our time, the crisis of the West" is what impels us to turn to the political thought of classical antiquity. And Strauss certainly does want to help guide the "practice" of the modern world. But what motivates him is the wish not simply to do this, or even to save the West: it is to discover the true principles required for the guidance of human life generally—principles that must necessarily be related to an understanding of realities beyond human life. Repeatedly and constantly, philosophy is understood by Strauss as the effort to gain knowledge of the most important things, and especially of the whole (*What is Political Philosophy?*, 39). Political philosophy is the crucial "core of philosophy or rather the 'first philosophy,'" opening out to philosophy generally (*City and Man*, 20). The crisis of the West is the crisis of modernity as such, and comes down to this: having given a new basis to all of life and thought, modern philosophy proceeds, by an internal logic, to undermine itself, thus leaving life and thought without rational foundation. Strauss turns back toward classical political thought to discover how the philosophic tradition overthrown by modern philosophy began, and whether it rests on better foundations. His intention is philosophical even before it is practical. It includes but goes beyond Jaffa's concern for current political guidance, however vital and urgent.

It is even more questionable to claim that Strauss's work "can therefore be understood, at least in one of its fundamental aspects, as a refutation of all those false modern theories that prevent gentlemen from exercising the authority that is rightfully theirs" (16, col. 1). The beginning of Jaffa's review dwelled on the importance of the Declaration of Independence for Lincoln, and for Strauss's understanding of America's present intellectual plight as well. But the quoted passage has a practical political connotation that is adverse to Lincoln, untrue of Strauss and impolitic in itself. It suggests, if it does not say, that the true political philosophy held by Strauss wants to see the gentlemen of the modern world "exercising the authority that is rightfully theirs"—an authority of which they have been stripped by "false modern theories" (like the doctrine of the rights of man?). But the hallmark of classical (as distinguished from most modern) political phi-

losophy is to deny that what is abstractly best has universal applicability or indeed any necessary applicability in a particular set of circumstances. Moreover, the rule of philosophers—as the only true embodiment of wisdom—was much more basic to the classics than the rule of gentlemen: does it follow that Strauss, in their name, made or should have made a prior call for *philosophers* to exercise “the authority that is rightfully theirs?” Again, there is no classical principle that establishes the practical basis of political authority in all time and places, and hence that has any direct applicability to the United States whatsoever, whether involving philosophers, gentlemen, or anyone else. So the notion of allowing gentlemen to exercise “the authority that is rightfully theirs” is in principle—in classical principle—entirely ungermane to American politics. It raises the spectre of a shock to both the Declaration and the Constitution that is surely unintended by the author of *Crisis of the House Divided*.

In this country, the idea of the gentleman as a person of wealth, leisure and education survived the end of aristocracy, and was widely believed compatible with and perhaps beneficial to democracy—but not because of any “authority” that “rightfully” belongs to such persons. Today little remains of even the attenuated form of that idea, identifying a gentleman with good manners or politeness. Consequently, attempts to revive the term and the institution of “the gentleman” risk being interpreted as restoration of something alien and dangerous to democracy. Adding notions of rightful political authority would conjure up images of both George III and Bastille Day. Few things could do more harm to Strauss’s legacy than to cause it, however unintentionally, to be linked with a regime the American Revolution was intended to overthrow. If classical political philosophy is to rescue modern political practice—a practice formed by modern political philosophy—it cannot directly replace modern with classical terms or ideas. If a city or nation is originally formed in a certain way, it cannot be transformed midstream into something different and antithetical. This is itself a classical principle.

Jaffa’s study of Lincoln already provides the guideline: to perpetuate our political institutions, the master statesman must make use of powerful political elements at hand, like the spirit of liberty and the spirit of Christianity. The classical spirit and its kindred elements remain among us in nothing like the same strength. The assistance furnished by classical political philosophy must therefore be of another sort. It can provide the broad framework for political understanding, suggest the moderation of extremes needed by liberal democracy, and inspire moral and political virtue. It can supply an additional incentive to revive those notions of wisdom and virtue the founding fathers connected with liberty and thought essential to republican government. But Lincoln’s example forbids direct attack on the principle of natural rights underlying such government. The political defense of this principle is simply that it is the source of much good and still, for the most part, remains the intellectual life-blood of the nation. Even “intellectuals” who reject its form still accept and subsist on much of its content.

But however much others fall away from it, the defenders of all that is good within “modern political practice” will, like Lincoln, remain ever faithful to it, while—again like Lincoln—understanding better than anyone else its possible defects. In short, the standpoint of politics must remain different from the standpoint of philosophy, even where it is philosophy that has fashioned politics.

IV

Now let us look a little more closely at what preceded Socrates and the changes he wrought—what Pangle, following Strauss, calls “the problem of Socrates.” Philosophy as such, the kind of philosophy Socrates first pursued, began when a few men questioned the ancestral codes of their own and other societies, and insisted on looking, with their own eyes and minds, for the natural causes of things—particularly for the originating causes of all things, or for “nature” as the first things. Strauss’s account of this beginning of philosophy, this very discovery of nature (Ch. 3 in *Natural Right*) is certainly among the most amazing and far-reaching of his reflections. It forms the background of what he calls conventionalism—the first philosophical view of justice and the city, according to which they are against nature and stand only on human agreement or convention.

Pangle gives an extensive description of pre-Socratic conventionalism (6, 10–12), but Jaffa takes the description to be a statement of Pangle’s own philosophy, presumably some form of Epicureanism (18, col. 2, to 19, col. 2). This error is inadvertently encouraged by Pangle’s direct mode of expression there, combined with his failure to say plainly whose views he was expressing. Jaffa might have pointed out the possible confusion for the sake of those not so well versed in Strauss. Instead, he presses home the charge of Epicureanism against Pangle and sounds the full alarm. Under modern conditions, he insists, Epicureanism necessarily points in the direction of Hugh Hefner, nihilism and the tyranny of Hitler and Stalin—that is, the worst evils of the modern world. Whether an innocent Epicureanism is impossible these days is an interesting question, but the context of the passage in Pangle’s essay, his repeated defense of the nobility of virtue (6, 10, 14), his manifest devotion to Socratic and Straussian principles—the same devotion that brought him to write this essay—suffice to free him from the imputation of any Epicureanism at all.

Against the background of the philosophy of nature, Pangle does clarify Socrates’ turn toward the forms, and in the process toward words, conceptions and opinions. Whatever the varieties of pre-Socratic philosophy, they all seem to have understated or even overlooked the importance of the obvious—of a world divided into different kinds of things that are mirrored in language, and that have to be understood in themselves before any effort to explain whence they came (3, 5), or the whole of which they are parts. The “class, or the class character, is the cause *par excellence*” (*City and Man*, 19). Now this is the view Strauss ex-

presses time and again, but his students will have to make their own study of the pre-Socratic philosophers to be able to speak with similar confidence. We should also note, beyond what is said above, that discovering just why Socrates turned away from them all to the study of human things remains exceedingly difficult. Was it for a theoretical reason—for example, because human things are more readily known than the natural things, or because they are the key to understanding the whole (Pangle emphasizes knowing the human soul—pp. 5, 13, 18, 19, 23)? Or was it for a practical reason—such as protecting theoretical philosophy, or justifying theoretical philosophy, or, more broadly—and we would suppose naturally—because such knowledge is the most useful and necessary for mankind? These all have a basis in one or the other of Strauss's writings, and are mentioned in different places by Pangle (e.g., 8, 10, 12–15, 18), but I was unable to form a clear idea of their relation to each other and order of priority.

We should also ask whether the turn to the forms and the turn to the study of human things occurred together, as one and the same move, or separately. Pangle (4–6) follows the former alternative, as Strauss usually does too. But it is not that clear from the *Phaedo* and *Parmenides*, and at least once Strauss himself (*Socrates and Aristophanes*, 4) suggests that the turns were separate. In addition, the logic by which Strauss moves from noting the class character of things—their *εἶδος*—to having to work one's way through the opinions about them dialectically, needs to be elaborated by us step-by-step. We want to be sure we can fully justify the paradox of moving from the visible looks of things to what is said about them (*Natural Right*, 123–24)—that is, to the realm of the political. Are all the things we see already wrapped in city-formed opinion, as in *The Republic's* image of the cave? Or does the political become an object of study simply by virtue of the need of already-formed theoretical philosophy to understand the realm of opinion, from which it arose (*What Is Political Philosophy?* 92), and before which it must justify itself? Or do the practical questions about the city and the good life somehow have an independent manner of origin—either on their own or in response to conventionalism? Why is it that Strauss himself does not attribute Socrates' turn to his directly raising the question, what is the best way of life, or the good life? When Socrates meets with Ischomachos, in that dialogue of Xenophon's Strauss calls *the* Socratic discourse, he is interested in discovering not what the good life is but what the perfect gentleman is—and in the context of household management. The biggest question seems concealed in what at first looks like a much more restricted one (*Xenophon's Socratic Discourse*, 27–28). Was it important not to challenge the city by implying a possible difference between the best way of life and the one it provides?

V

Of the essays in this volume, all except that on *The Apology* presume, without retracing or rearguing, the Socratic turn that justly preoccupies Pangle in his In-

roduction. The others explicitly closest to the center of Platonic political philosophy are those dealing with Plato's *Crito* and *Euthydemus*. *Crito's* presence is the link between them, but the former seems as serious as the latter seems frivolous. In the *Crito*, Socrates argues Crito into accepting his refusal to escape from prison with his help and therefore magnifies the authority of the city of Athens and its laws. In the *Euthydemus*, after farcically sophistic interrogations, Socrates seems prepared to make himself a pupil of two insuperably eristic brothers. And Strauss concludes only by reminding us that, according to Socrates, it was the multitude and not the sophists who constituted the greatest enemy of philosophy.

The figure of Socrates becomes important in four other places as well. Comparing him with Xenophon is one of the main reasons for Strauss's treatment of the latter's *Anabasis* (112–13, 119, 128, 135). In "Jerusalem and Athens," Socrates's mission is compared to that of the Hebrew prophets (167–73). Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* is understood as an attack on Plato and Socrates for the sake of freeing philosophy from the illusions of reason, truth, goodness and nature. And the final appearance is in connection with Machiavelli's attack on the political teachings Socrates engendered (210–11, 227–28). So Strauss persists in keeping him at the center of everything: of the contrast between the political and the philosophic life, of the attacks coming from within philosophy, of the alternative to philosophy found in Biblical revelation. And the degree to which Strauss draws conclusions varies from one instance to another. With the help of Xenophon's account of his "ascent," he corrects Socrates by adding a political element otherwise absent from his nonharming view of justice and virtue. He suggests the impossibility of Nietzsche's accomplishing what he sets out to do without self-contradiction. He explicitly criticizes the narrowing of horizon and vision that gives Machiavelli's philosophy its entirely novel look. But "Jerusalem and Athens" ends abruptly and ambiguously.

The great alternative indicated by the last-named title bears on much in the volume, going well beyond this particular essay. Strauss, Pangle tells us, declared in 1965 that ever since his first work on Spinoza (1930) "the theological-political problem has remained *the* theme of my investigations" (19). It involves the conflict between the two roots of Western Civilization—revelation and reason, Biblical faith and philosophy. Each on its own demands to be the ruling principle of life, dominating every part of life, from politics downward. Is this conflict essentially the same as that between Greek poetry, speaking in the name of divine wisdom, and Greek philosophy? Pangle says yes (10–12, 20), Jaffa no (*Claremont Review* 17, 18), and here Jaffa's position at once looks stronger. But does it completely overcome the central point in Pangle's? Let us go from one to the other. In "Jerusalem and Athens," Strauss has occasion to compare the teaching of the Bible with that of the Greek poets and philosophers, and he does so in such a way as to make almost visible his belief that the gulf between the poets and philosophers is much less considerable than that between them both and the

Bible. So the mystery of the one omnipotent God seems to change the entire picture. Moreover, we could be excused for having formed the impression that Socratic philosophy, like the philosophy of nature before it, had rationally discounted the existence of the gods, whereas Strauss hammers away at the general inability of philosophy (pre-Socratic and Socratic, Greek and modern) to defeat Biblical monotheism. Strauss's argument to this effect is most fully presented in two places: in "The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy" (1954), and the new introduction to his re-published book on Spinoza (1962). In the former Strauss says: "Philosophy and *Bible* are the alternatives or the antagonists in the drama of the human soul" (114).

All this for Jaffa. Yet it is also true that if we lay less stress on the Greek poets as something like makers of the gods and look instead to the divine things they report, these are remarkably similar in the Greek and Biblical worlds. Pangle's point is that miracles, revelations, prophecies have their place in the one as in the other, thereby rendering them comparable, and thus accounting for the epigraph from Avicenna that Strauss uses in his work on Plato's *Laws*: "the treatment of prophecy and the Divine Law is contained in . . . the *Laws*." Viewed in this way, the Bible may have brought to perfection in a reality or possibility rather generally known before. This implies that the apparent differences in power and knowability between the Greek gods and the Biblical God—the poets are constantly describing the actions, words and even thoughts of the gods—do not suffice to make them totally different. After all, the same word "god," signifying superior beings with mysterious powers of action, is used in both. It is a final corollary of this comparability that the view Socrates or Plato had formed of the gods might apply in the Biblical case as well—as Avicenna, and Strauss, seem to suggest in the epigraph Pangle quotes.

In capsule form, Strauss's view of the argument between philosophy and the Bible is this. Philosophy must admit it cannot prove the impossibility of the God of miracles, cannot provide a comprehensive rational account of the world. Revelation is therefore possible. But if possible, the choice of philosophy and the philosophic life as opposed to revelation and the life of faith is an arbitrary preference, resting on an act of faith (in reason) rather than on reason per se. In this case, philosophy shows itself inconsistent with its own distinctive claims to being the evidently right way of life, while faith remains consistent with itself. So philosophy must concede victory to revelation. Now Pangle does not question the compelling character of this demonstration, nor does Jaffa (19, col. 3). To Pangle it poses a grave difficulty for philosophy. To Jaffa whatever difficulty might be posed is overcome by Strauss's support of Jewish orthodoxy and Greek philosophy together. Pangle had quoted Strauss's remark about moral man being the potential believer—a remark made in connection with Halevi's objection to philosophy on moral grounds. Jaffa does not think he goes far enough: "Pangle recognizes that the defense of Jewish orthodoxy is moral, but not that it may be Strauss'." He means that Strauss makes the same defense of Jewish orthodoxy as

Halevi—that both, as “moral man,” are potential believers. In fact, Jaffa claims Socratic skepticism is the “rational ground” for both classical political philosophy and Biblical faith (17, col. 2), and seems willing to accept, as a consequence, the superiority of the latter over the former: Socratic philosophers “would not only support, but if possible direct the appeal to revelation” (20, col. 2).

Just what Jaffa intends by this seeming submission of philosophy to faith—whether it is really the serious outcome of the argument against philosophy—is not clear. At any rate, it is a route Pangle does not choose to take. Instead of resolving the antagonism of faith and philosophy in favor of one or the other, Pangle settles for finding a means whereby philosophy can continue in good conscience—that is, consistently—without succumbing to faith. In fact, Pangle claims it was the “mature” Socrates who first realized how dire the consequences were for philosophy of its inability to produce “a comprehensive account of things” (22). He suggests, without directly saying, that Socrates found the solution too. Choosing philosophy would not be arbitrary if the philosopher kept seriously examining the “phenomena and the arguments of faith.” He must both scrutinize the strongest claims of the faithful, and show he has a fuller account of their most significant moral experiences: his dialogue with the faithful will always return to the human soul and its longings. It is not perfectly clear from Pangle’s proposed regimen whether its intention is to save philosophy, hold revelation at bay, or win victory for philosophy by another route. Nevertheless, having thus brought his inquiry into Strauss’s Platonic political philosophy to a conclusion by which it can persevere with consistency, Pangle proceeds to apply his interpretation to the order and content of Strauss’s essays in this volume. The proposed Socratic examination of faith or piety is what Pangle takes to be the central theme holding the fifteen essays together, and he ends by indicating the particular contribution of each to this theme.

Stated more fully now, Pangle’s interpretation requires that the Platonic philosopher devote much time to a “painstaking, critical examination of intelligent spokesmen for, and students of, the various forms of poetry.” Yet this is hardly true of these essays: often the piety is there but not the “critical” examination, and sometimes neither. The *Crito* and *Euthydemus* do not contain much on the subject at all, but even *The Apology*—where piety is of great importance—does not treat it “critically.” The same is largely true of the Thucydides essay, which refers to the gods in its very title. There Strauss does undertake a kind of critical examination of Thucydides’ own “theology” as compared to two extremes followed by certain Athenians he describes (96, 100–101). But it is all conducted on a moral and political rather than a strictly theological plane: it never questions the existence of the gods, but simply asks whether the gods favor the strong, the just, or the just who are also strong. Similarly, the essay on Xenophon makes much mention of his piety, but its leading purpose seems to be to study Xenophon the military commander and statesman as a whole, and to compare him with

his teacher, Socrates. His apparent belief in the gods—so vital to the political man—is again not subject to deeper critical examination.

Even the essay on Nietzsche has a primary purpose anterior to the theological one Pangle emphasizes. It is properly placed after “Jerusalem and Athens,” but not because Nietzsche “continues and surpasses biblical thought in some critical respect,” as Pangle surmises without explaining (24). He himself notes that Strauss introduces *Beyond Good and Evil* as Nietzsche’s (and hence modern philosophy’s) final attack on Socratic and Platonic philosophy, taken to be the model for philosophy per se. After completely denying reason’s access to the true, good, and beautiful, and to nature itself, while also rejecting the Bible, Nietzsche tries to deify man the creator with the help of a religiosity closely related to that of the Bible. This is the other side of the statement Pangle finds Strauss reiterating, that “the doctrine of the will to power is in a manner a vindication of God.” But Nietzsche could only be said to “surpass” the Bible if this atheism is true, and it cannot be true unless his attack on reason and nature is false, since atheism itself requires them. At least this is what Strauss implies toward the end: “As we have observed, for Nietzsche nature has become a problem and yet he cannot do without nature” (190, and 183). Strauss’ study of Nietzsche as the last stage of modern philosophy seems to have the effect of compelling a return to the two great alternatives—Jerusalem and Athens—that preceded modern philosophy, and is therefore appropriately coupled with the essay on this subject. Nor is it evident, finally, that even this essay—so directly and continuously devoted to the most important religious subject—involves the kind of “critical examination” Pangle thinks both Socrates and Strauss call for. On the contrary, it can only be described as an astounding appreciation of the amazing consistency of thought to be found in the first Book of the Bible. It is the kind of understanding, strangely enough, that a Platonic philosopher would be much more likely to look for, perceive and elaborate than a man of the most intense piety. If it is the necessary prelude to criticism, as well it might be, its function is to show how admirably thought out and comprehensive in scope *both* of the main alternatives are. It certainly makes us wonder about the place of thought within revelation: does revelation foresee philosophy, already know philosophy, in a way include philosophy in order to counter it so thoroughly? But in this place Strauss confines himself to comparison, summarizing the points of similarity and dissimilarity between the Bible, on the one hand, and the Greek poets and philosophers, on the other.

VI

I mention these difficulties in applying Pangle’s interpretation of the theological-political problem to these essays not for their own sake but because they bear on the accuracy of the interpretation itself. Did Socrates, long before Strauss, come to the same conclusion about philosophy’s inability to refute “revelation”?

If Plato's *Euthyphro* is any indication, not only polytheism but certain features it shares with theism are hard put to survive Socratic questioning: are we sure Socrates would not apply similar questioning to the God of the Bible? Would Socrates be compelled in the end to admit a fundamental arbitrariness in the choice of the philosophic way of life, as Pangle suggests? And while Socrates is surely eager to examine our common moral experience—the experience the pious may have in unusual strength—he does not often do so in the context of a critical “preoccupation” with “the phenomena and the arguments of faith” (22). As to how Socrates might have confronted the Bible itself, perhaps Strauss thought the answer lay with Maimonides, to whom three pieces of very unequal length are devoted in this volume, all with their usual difficulty.

In his own explicit accounts elsewhere of how philosophy and the Bible confront each other, Strauss himself surely makes the Bible the winner over modern philosophy in one (new Spinoza preface) and Greek philosophy in the other (*Mutual Influence*). Now the consequence of this for philosophers should be their surrendering philosophy and going over to the side of revelation, or at least conceding that philosophy can only operate in a sphere allowed it by revelation. Without spelling out all the details, this seems to be the direction in which Jaffa is prepared to move. Pangle, on the other hand, wants to keep philosophy's independence, but does he establish its rational right to do so? The fact of philosophy's defeat and need for submission seems to be obscured but not undone by his solution. He claims that, in “Jerusalem and Athens,” Socratic philosophy “is fully capable of meeting biblical faith” (24), but what does he mean by “meeting?” And his solution concedes to victorious piety points of little interest to it: from the outset piety disclaims the possibility of—and need for—philosophy's giving a better “account” of moral experience than it does. As for Strauss himself, his own continuing studies—his studies in Platonic political philosophy—seem to belie the necessity of the conclusion favorable to revelation that his own argument compels. Sometimes he even goes so far as to follow the classics in reducing the great alternatives to philosophy and the political life, or in praising philosophy, with little if any regard for revelation (compare *What is Political Philosophy?*, 40, with *City and Man*, 29, and this volume, 176).

This suggests the likelihood that Strauss thought philosophy could do more than he allowed in his own argument. Thus, in “Jerusalem and Athens,” he seems to include himself among “all of us who cannot be orthodox” (150) and who must therefore approach the Bible critically. Yet he opens *The City and Man* by saying it is not enough to obey the “Divine message” of the “Faithful City”: to spread that message among the heathen and to understand it as fully as is humanly possible, one must consider the extent to which man can discern the “outlines of that City” if left to his own natural powers. The first passage, without explanation, allows at least an independent place to philosophy; the second allows philosophy only a place subordinate to revelation, where, nevertheless, it is required to apply nothing but our natural capacity for understanding. Strauss's

overall position hardly seems consistent. But much of it presupposes the possibility that philosophy can indeed extricate itself from the argument favoring revelation. In what direction might this extrication lie? Let us consider the problem and the alternatives. The problem is that philosophy cannot disprove the possibility of the Biblical God, along with all His mystery, miracles and revelations. Assuming this to be the case, what follows? Is the philosopher to go searching for a revelation he can personally experience? What if it never comes? How can he judge among past revelations? And what should he do with the reason naturally welling up in him, that still demands evidence? Since, apart from this abstract possibility of a mysterious God, the life of philosophy *is* the evidently right life, why should he not pursue it? Would God punish such inquiry with eternal damnation? Strauss says the philosophers of the past were “absolutely certain” an all-wise God would not do this (*Mutual*, 113). Would God endow men with reason and command them not to use it, but to rely entirely on what He has told them?

Now what are the possible ways of disproving the possibility of revelation, according to Strauss? Altogether he mentions four: by an appeal to experience, by applying the principle of contradiction, by providing a total philosophical explanation of things, and by showing that miracles are incompatible with the nature of God (Spinoza, 28–29; *Mutual*, 116–17). The first two seem utterly hopeless, and the third completely impracticable. The fourth involves natural theology, and there the main obstacle is overcoming the view (asserted by Strauss in his own name) that God’s perfection requires His incomprehensibility, which in turn makes revelation possible (*Mutual*). Strauss says natural theology was never able to get rid of God’s incomprehensibility. Earlier in the same piece he had argued from God’s omnipotence to His being One to his being unknowable to man: “But an omnipotent God who is in principle perfectly knowable to man is in a way subject to man, in so far as knowledge is in a way power.” Such statements as these all form part of what Strauss later calls natural theology, which seems to be the philosophical study of the nature and attributes of God. Part of this study comes down to the meaning of words or conceptions, such as omnipotence, incomprehensibility, wisdom, perfection. Its fundamental assumption is that reality must follow the logic of words or ideas—that verbal incompatibilities necessarily involve real ones. For example, if God is omnipotent, and man’s knowing God would involve power over God, then man cannot know God. The Biblical position, as Strauss states it, calls God omnipotent and mysterious or unknowable. For the thought involved to be tested, its parts must be clear—as in any statement. If by God, for example, we mean a being who always exists and reigns over us, then we are making a claim to know something about Him, and the same holds for calling Him omnipotent, and even mysterious. It follows that He must, in certain respects at least, be intelligible.

We normally assume that the principle of contradiction applies to all things without exception, and must be granted by all men as a principle of being as well as thought. This is probably why it is mentioned by Strauss as a possible means

of disproving revelation, though he immediately and flatly dismisses it as not obtaining: "The orthodox premise cannot be refuted by experience or by recourse to the principle of contradiction" (28, new Spinoza preface). By this Strauss could not mean that finding a contradiction in the premise would fail to refute it, but that a contradiction cannot be found—implying that finding one *would* refute it. God cannot be both God and non-God, both omnipotent and limited in power; he cannot both exist and not exist. If, as Jaffa claims for the God of the Bible, "He is One," and "unknowable precisely because He is one," and if it can be truly said that He is "absolutely separate from the universe He has created" (18, col. 1), then on two accounts He is not unknowable. For He is known to be both One and separate, and cannot be both knowable and unknowable in the same respect. This is, of course, quite different from saying that He is in any way knowable by natural means. It does mean God is bound by a requirement derived from the nature of being as such: He is the supreme being, not supreme over being. A counterpart can be found in Strauss's insisting at one point: "But there can be only one truth . . ." (*Mutual Influence*, 114), not two or more contradictory truths. Why not? Because it is the nature of being to be this but not that, to be something, to be in a certain way, and so on (*Natural Right*, 122). It is what it is and cannot at the same time not be what it is. In this sense, to be is to be intelligible.

Every statement about God—that He is one, eternal, separate, even of unfathomable will—implies that He has a fixed nature and is therefore, in principle, wholly intelligible. As to God's will, what is meant by unfathomable, and in what sense is God thought to have a will at all? Is it compatible with His perfection? And does mysterious mean arbitrary, or uncaused, or irrational, or simply puzzling to man? In general, for God's nature to be possible—that is, not involved in contradictions—not only must all such attributes be consistent with each other, but each must be free of inconsistencies within itself. The claim about God's justice meets with a special difficulty not different from one raised by Socrates in the *Euthyphro*. It is whether God commands the just (or holy) things because they are so, or whether they become so by His commanding them. The latter alternative leaves no independent standard by which actions or people can be judged, hence destroying the essential idea behind justice. God's omnipotence suggests that there is nothing independent of Himself, no other thing that He cannot either make or destroy. But if He is to be just, must the model of justice not be independent of His making it? The alternative suggests that God could have commanded murder without its being less just than commanding its prohibition. It is surprising to find that Strauss's two extensive discussions of revelation's challenge to reason state its main claim in terms of God's omnipotence and mysteriousness, omitting His justice, and even His omniscience or wisdom. This attribute is added in "Jerusalem and Athens" (162; cf. 166, 153), where God's mysteriousness is stressed more than ever, yet without speaking of His omnipotence as such. With regard to the question of justice, Strauss gives the impression that the model for understanding such things is God's

creating the world by His word, rather than by looking first to the eternal ideas (166). Perhaps with this in mind, he never speaks of God's reason, only of His will, and does not usually speak of His perfection (the main exception is *Mutual Influence*, 117).

By paying almost exclusive attention to God's omnipotence and mysteriousness, Strauss may have several things in mind. One of these leads in the direction of posing the theoretical problem as to whether philosophy can prove the necessity of causation, or the absence of arbitrariness, in the universe at large: does the universe proceed by necessity? could it disappear at any time, or change into something utterly different at any moment? This goes back to the very idea of "nature" as first things, or the permanent underlying causes, and the omnipotent God only gives the difficulty of proving nature something like a personalized form. Another and perhaps more obvious reason for Strauss's concentration on these attributes is to indicate a fundamental psychological difficulty within the Bible as a whole. In the interest of inspiring awe, it must stress God's power and mystery, and extend them as far as possible. But in the interest of relevance to human concerns—to justice and love, especially—God's power and mystery must be directed toward ends that are morally intelligible to human beings, even if the particular applications often elude their understanding. The God of faith is the God in whom they can have faith, in whom they can trust, and they cannot trust a being whose sole attributes are power and mysteriousness.

Perhaps this is where Socratic moral philosophy shows a strength that Strauss's rendition of the struggle between philosophy and revelation drastically understates, and that Pangle's suggested solution tries to deploy. As an effort to clarify the moral experiences all people have to some extent, and pious people take more seriously than most, Socratic philosophy has a firm anchorage in what we immediately know. It can therefore judge the moral aspects of religion by this knowledge; it may also be in a position to render an impartial verdict as to how the various religions actually function in life, and whether any given religion or form of piety lives up to its own expectations. Of such interests there are many prominent examples in these essays. Nicias' theology is based on the idea that the gods support the just and virtuous, but he and his army met a miserable end: Strauss says "his theology is refuted by his fate" (101). If so, ordinary facts do have a bearing on theological truth or falsity! Or again, concerning Xenophon's piety, Strauss says that it is totally different from Nicias', and hard to distinguish from Xenophon's combined "toughness, wittiness and wiliness" (118). Soon afterward, Strauss wonders about how Xenophon's extraordinary piety went along with his extraordinary wiliness, asking whether a man can be wiler than a god, and whether attributing omniscience to the gods may not itself be a part of man's wiliness. He concludes this discussion by noting that Xenophon and his Socrates characterize the pious man as one who knows the laws regarding the gods but never asks "what is law?—adding that neither Xenophon nor his Socrates ever asks the still more fundamental question, "what is a god?" (122). This is the

point, one surmises, at which Socratic philosophy would confront polytheism and monotheism together, but even more directly than Pangle had anticipated.

Pangle may not allow sufficiently for the direct power of Platonic philosophy, in Strauss's sense, to undo philosophy's apparent defeat at the hands of revelation. But we are now in a better position to appreciate what he has in mind when he speaks of the "fuller account" philosophy can provide of the moral experiences valued most by the pious (22). After elaborating its own natural understanding of human things, starting from experiences that are extensively if not completely of the same kind, philosophy can offer a comprehensive comparison of the alternatives offered to human life by itself and revelation. It can point to internal inconsistencies within revelation, and incompatibilities with facts likely to be acknowledged by everyone. It can clarify and compare the assumptions underlying different parts of revelation. If this is what Pangle means when he says that "Socratic philosophy is fully capable of meeting biblical faith" (24), he may be right, and right as well in the importance he attaches, for this purpose, to both "Jerusalem and Athens" and the Maimonides pieces.

No doubt Strauss intended to raise the position of revelation to its greatest possible heights—in fact, he has done more by far than anyone else in centuries to strengthen both "roots" of Western civilization: the Bible and Greek philosophy. The overall impression he leaves is that classical philosophy wins out over modern—Plato over Machiavelli (227–28)—but then itself succumbs to revelation. We must not, however, accede to his arguments simply because he made them. Rather, we must examine all the complications of all his arguments with the greatest care. It will take a long time before we are able to decide—if we ever can—whether Strauss's argument for revelation is that of a philosopher or a statesman. Certainly he knew that the modern prejudice against revelation is even stronger than the one against Greek philosophy, and that religion, so vital to a healthy society, is something philosophy cannot provide from within itself. Certainly he believed that the life of western civilization depended on the coexistence, in tension, of revelation and philosophy. We should hasten to add that this tension is also threatened, from the other side, by exaggerating what Strauss says against philosophy in forcing its loss to revelation. It is not that the case for turning to philosophy, before Biblical revelation came on the scene, was weak. On the contrary, it was compelling. Nor does Strauss argue that Socratic philosophy makes little progress, or learns nothing of importance. Its sole defect is that it cannot refute the possibility of revelation, either by way of direct theological argument or by producing a complete rational explanation of all things (*Spinoza*, 28–29; *Mutual Influence*, 16–117: notice that the requirement in one place is even greater than in the other). Nor does Strauss fail to point out the defect in revelation's victory: it is a victory for *any* orthodoxy rather than a particular one (*Spinoza*, 30).

Jaffa goes too far in making Socratic skepticism—the knowledge of our ignorance—the "rational ground" for both classical political philosophy and the

“argument for faith in the Biblical God” (17, col. 2). Nevertheless, at some point we do have to wonder about the extent of philosophy’s worth if, while moving beyond a knowledge of ignorance, it must stop at a partial knowledge of parts, or a knowledge of the fundamental and permanent problems but not of the solutions, and so on—to use Strauss’s own expressions. Is there nothing less limited about human life and the world that philosophy can know definitively? Certainly Strauss’s explicit words indicate not, but is this also true of what he says in treating particular subjects? Many such points appear in Pangle’s presentation. Is the “enigma of the soul” the “clearest signal of the elusiveness of the whole for man”—or is the enigma itself also elusive (5)? What do we *know* here? Is the distinction between nature and convention sound—forever sound—as in the reference to “the unfailing nature of things” (12)? Was Socrates’ turning to his “What is” questions sound—forever sound (5, 6)? Was Socrates’ expertise on the soul’s needs—on erotic matters—definitive (20)? In *Natural Right and History* (89), Strauss said it was a “fundamental premise” of original philosophy that “no being emerges without a cause”: what made the first philosophers think so, and how certain is this most important truth? In *The City and Man* he said: “. . . the city is the only whole within the whole or the only part of the whole whose essence can be wholly known” (29). There is nothing small or tentative in this claim for philosophy!

In reviving the philosophic way of life, Strauss had to turn from the failed certainties and systems of modern philosophy and reestablish the simplest, most evident and most solid basis for philosophy. This is the importance of Socrates for him and for us. In his argument with Kojève, Strauss maintains that the sectarian is born at the moment when a philosopher’s “subjective certainty” of a solution becomes stronger than “his awareness of the problematic character of that solution” (*What Is Political Philosophy?*, 116). A few pages later he says that “Philosophy, being knowledge of our ignorance regarding the most important things, is impossible without some knowledge regarding the most important things” (121). The warning against sectarianism could not be stronger. And yet it is also true that the hope of attaining definitive and certain knowledge of the most important things, far exceeding the dim awareness from which we begin, is what inspires philosophy. Nor can we know for certain, in advance, whether all such knowledge is beyond us. This dilemma applies not only to the quest for knowledge generally but to the quest for knowledge of Strauss. Few philosophers have done so much for their students, restoring depth and subtlety where there was only shallowness, and covering so wide a range of experience and reflection. None has done so much to revive the serious study of all previous thought, spanning so many centuries. None has, to the same degree, rescued all forms of human greatness from the mire. None in our time has inspired so much deeper hope for mankind. In following such a master, our duty and interest is to preserve the freshness of his approach even more than his conclusions, until we can make those conclusions our own on the basis of slow and painstaking thought.

These possibly final essays by Strauss, taken together with these often complementary efforts at overall comprehension by two of his best students, prove the task to be exceedingly difficult. Yet the objects of our common devotion require us to persevere in it, together.