

Interpretation

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Political Philosophy or Self-Knowledge? *Comments on Schmitt and Meier*

Carl Schmitt, *Glossarium: Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947–1951* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1991), vii + 364 pp. Heinrich Meier, *Die Lehre Carl Schmitts: Vier Kapitel zur Unterscheidung Politischer Theologie und Politischer Philosophie* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler Verlag, 1994), 264 pp.

HARRY NEUMANN
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The best thing in the world is a command and no law.

Carl Schmitt (p. 274)

From the days of the *Bible* on, there was always the conflict between prophet and priest, between the inspired and the uninspired, between profound subterranean Judaism and official Judaism. Official Judaism was legalistic and hence rationalistic. Its rationalism had received most powerful support from the philosophic rationalism of alien origin which had found its perfect expression in the Platonic conception of God as an artificer who makes the universe by looking up to the unchangeable, lifeless ideas. In accordance with this, official Judaism asserted that God has created the world and governs it *sub ratione boni*. Precisely because he believed in the profoundly understood divinity of the *Bible*, Spinoza revolted against this official assertion in the name of the absolutely free and sovereign God of the *Bible*—of the God who will be what He will be, who will be gracious to whom He will be gracious and will show mercy to whom He will show mercy. Moved by the same spirit, He embraced with enthusiasm Paul's doctrine of predestination . . . Spinoza's God is simply beyond good and evil. God's might is His right . . . because of His infinite power beyond good and evil.

Leo Strauss¹

Maimonides was, to begin with, wholly unintelligible to me. I got the first glimmer of light when I concentrated on his prophetology and, therefore, the prophetology of the Islamic philosophers who preceded him. One day when reading in a Latin translation Avicenna's treatise, *On the Division of the Sciences*, I came across the sentence (I quote from memory) the standard work on prophecy and revelation is Plato's *Laws*. Then I began to understand Maimonides' prophetology and eventually, as I believe, the whole *Guide of the Perplexed*. Maimonides never calls himself a philosopher; he presents himself as an opponent of the philosophers.

Leo Strauss²

The research for this review was assisted by a grant from the Earhart Foundation.

Meier has shown that Schmitt's most intelligent critic was Strauss.³ I want to clarify the grounds of their opposition as revealed in *Glossarium*, in Meier's work and in the above epigraphs by Strauss and Schmitt. Their fight is grounded in the fundamental opposition always and everywhere. No neutral third alternative exists by which the two represented by Strauss and Schmitt could suffer mediation. Honest men are one or the other depending upon their self-knowledge.

Unlike most commentators, Meier knows that Schmitt's core is his catholicism, not nihilism, relativism, historicism or nazism. Schmitt's main criticism of liberalism is of its unwillingness to acknowledge the religious ground of all serious politics whose partisans—even if they claim to be atheists—always assume the absolute justice of their cause: Without theology, no morality, and without morality, no politics. Thus Schmitt calls would-be atheists such as Bakunin theologians of antitheology, absolute antiabsolutists.⁴ Atheist politics is an oxymoron.

Serious politics means that the morality to be empowered—the god of one's faction—is in itself good and not the product of arbitrary will, prejudice. It implies God, the eternal, nonarbitrary moral-political standard. Only enemy gods are bigotries, special interests, politically incorrect!

Meier notes Schmitt's agreement with Tertullian's demand that God's commands be obeyed not because of their intrinsic goodness but because he commands them (*Die Lehre*, pp. 146–47). Their God, like Spinoza's, is beyond good and evil. The ultimate authority is divine will, not inherent goodness. Schmitt's dictatorial God whose will is law informs his preference for dictatorship and totalitarianism over the rule of law. This tyrannic theology is a form of Spinozist-Christian Judaism against which Strauss opposes his official Platonic Judaism; the Jew-hater, and Spinoza despiser, Schmitt, represents a version of Judaism's Spinozist strain.

Meier rightly calls Strauss a philosopher and Schmitt a theologian. I doubt his ascription of *political* theology to Schmitt. Informed by a God beyond good and evil, an omnipotence of unchecked and uncheckable will, Schmitt's politics are better described as *apolitical*. No such problem exists for Strauss's political theology. He was a practitioner of what Jaffa calls "Socratic *kalam*," the philosophic defense of one's faction's religion against the temptations of *apolitical* theology such as Schmitt's and, in general, against the temptation of something like Spinozist Judaism.⁵

Schmitt's religion, a racial Catholicism, is the religion of his fathers into which he was born (*Glossarium*, pp. 131, 80). Thus conversion is far more problematic for him than for traditional (nonracial) Catholics—and, as noted below, for Jesus. Schmitt was convinced that his piety saved him from the rootlessness, the atheism, of modern philosophy and politics. His piety's crux is not its subordination to eternal law or to an idea, doctrine or even a religion. Its center, and therefore the center of his life, is rather a unique historical event, the Incarnation, God's instilling meaning, infinite meaning, into an oth-

erwise barren human life by becoming fully man, suffering crucifixion and death to redeem human sin. Only the Incarnation prevents politics and history from sinking into the void (*Glossarium*, pp. 283, 269; *Die Lehre*, pp. 140–41, 241–42). Since God, the ultimate authority, is essentially an individual unbound by anything outside his individuality, man too is not bound by objective superhuman standards (laws), for man is created in God's image. In this world of divine and human individualism, the legalism of official Platonic Judaism has no place. Thus Schmitt maintains the necessarily Christian character of existentialism which asserts the priority of individual existence over any common or universal essence. He finds Kierkegaard a better existentialist than Sartre or Heidegger (*Glossarium*, pp. 80, 71). In Schmitt's world neither essence nor existence can exist without the miracle working will of God's omnipotent individualism.

Put differently: For Schmitt individualism is primary; God, the omnipotent individual, is not bound by law which is a necessary evil to punish fallen mankind, the inheritors of original sin. By contrast, for official (Platonic) Judaism, eternal law *sub ratione boni* (under the rationality of the good) informs the good life, true happiness. Opposing Schmitt's devaluation of law to a necessary evil, a punishment, Strauss experiences law essentially as a positive good, ultimately the greatest good (*Liberalism*, pp. 242–43).

Nothing better characterizes the irreconcilable opposition between Platonic and Spinozist Judaism than their respective evaluation of law: necessary evil or positive good. Thus Meier wrongly stresses the antitheistic bent of law as such (*Die Lehre*, p. 256 n. 137). Not law in itself, only law seen from Schmitt's extremist perspective, is antitheistic. Official (Platonic) Judaism's *Gesetzreligion* (Religion of Law), whose God governs *sub ratione boni*, does indeed verge on atheism for Schmitt's Spinozist-Christian Judaism.

Schmitt's Christianity requires creation *ex nihilo* by divine omnipotence (*Glossarium*, pp. 60, 212; *Die Lehre*, p. 142). Apart from God's absolute free will, man, like all creation, is nothing. Sin is the satanic presumption that one is anything in oneself apart from God. This rebellious craving to be somebody on one's own is responsible for all determination to orient oneself by one's reason, for all heresies about human progress or evolution, for atheist assertion of human freedom and dignity and man's duty to create a world in which the only thing to fear is fear itself. Schmitt opposes elimination of fear, danger, insecurity, things which recall men to their nothingness without the Incarnation (*Glossarium*, pp. 95, 183).

It is the Incarnation, a unique historical event, not some transhistorical truth, which endows all historical events with infinite meaning. Human life is totally historical, always confronted, morally and politically, with the decisive choice between God or Satan, salvation or damnation. Life's heart is this battlefield which informs Schmitt's teaching about power and power politics.

For Schmitt, all power is a divine mystery, since life, the power to be and to act, is a miraculous gift of God. Consequently Schmitt condemns as the worst

atheism Burckhardt's contention that power is, in itself, evil (*Glossarium*, pp. 201, 242, 139; *Die Lehre*, pp. 120–21). Nobody, including Burckhardt, ever regards the empowerment of his faction's morality as evil. Like all men, Burckhardt was a partisan of his political faction whose justification for its power implies gods, absolute moral standards. For similar reasons, Schmitt condemns Nietzsche's atheist will-to-power doctrine as existential stupidity (*Glossarium*, p. 49; *Die Lehre*, p. 153).

Schmitt's notion of power springs from his faith in the redemptive virtue of Omnipotent Individualism, whose Providence has ordered history and its political struggles for the best. Since the ways of Providence are humanly unfathomable, however, men cannot know in any given political fight which side is satanic and which godly—at least not in this life. The best any partisan can do is to have faith in the Incarnation, which guarantees that history is not a tale told by an idiot, but one of divine redemption and damnation. So, no matter what happens, the Christian has already won even before he begins to fight (*Die Lehre*, pp. 189, 253). Only unregenerate sinners would ask why fight if one has already won. Their blindness, shared by all non-Christian political partisans, precludes comprehension of Schmitt's notion of the enemy, his most influential and least understood teaching.

Schmitt insists that his most famous (or infamous) work, *The Concept of the Political*, is impenetrable to those denied his pious grasp of what an enemy is. As his epigraph, Meier quotes Theodor Däubler's definition, which Schmitt affirms: the enemy is the external representation of one's internal questionable-ness, he who casts one's very being into doubt (*Glossarium*, pp. 213, 217, 215, 190, 199, 157). The real enemy compels the always terrifying confrontation with one's nothingness, a shocking awakening for the sinful *Ich-Verpanzerung* of the *Ich-Verrückten-Rechthaber* (Schmitt's characterization of modern thinkers from Descartes to Heidegger).⁶

The enemy's assault on one's *Ich-Verpanzerung*, one's self-esteem, if successful, leads to the only genuine self-knowledge, awareness of one's nothingness without divine redemption. Nothing prevents self-knowledge more than teachings such as Spinoza's equation of God and nature. Spinoza taught that his being, and indeed anything's being, was a mode of God's omnipotence. Schmitt denies that anyone who really knows himself could believe this. However great Schmitt's Jew-hatred undoubtedly was, he hated Spinoza more than he did Jewish orthodoxy, whose excommunication decree he endorsed (*Glossarium*, p. 28).

Teachings, such as Spinoza's, which make men gods, spring from satanic pride, the original sin. Men who by God's grace really know themselves are immune to this delusion, for genuine self-knowledge triggers the terrible awareness of death in life, of being no more than a void in a void. Those not alive to this horror cannot accept Schmitt's theological extremism, his orientation not by the normal or natural, but by the extreme, the exceptional, the miraculous, the radically individual decision. Here is the root of Schmitt's preference for

dictatorship or absolute monarchy over republics. Had Spinoza or Nietzsche, or for that matter Strauss or Plato, really known themselves, they would have been overcome by the pious dread of Kierkegaard whom Schmitt cherishes as “a true, authentic Christian, a father of the invisible church” (*Glossarium*, p. 80; *Die Lehre*, pp. 155–56).

Consider Kierkegaard’s tale of the pious idol-worshipper who has never heard of the Bible or the Incarnation.⁷ But this savage’s despair, his realization that his life is death, sparks his desperate prayer to his idol. For Kierkegaard and Schmitt, this pagan is more Christian than those who regularly pray or participate in the latest moral-political crusades but who lack the dread sparked by his self-knowledge. For him, all moral-political concerns are subordinated to the desperate need awakened by self-knowledge.

Meier highlights Schmitt’s contempt for moral-political life unenlightened by his pious extremism when calling attention to the only illustration chosen by Schmitt for the dust jacket of one of his books, *The Leviathan in Thomas Hobbes’ Teaching Concerning the State* (1938) (*Die Lehre*, pp. 177 n. 139, 262). Schmitt took a twelfth-century picture of Jesus astride the head of a dead leviathan caught by God’s fish hook. He eliminated God and Jesus from the picture, leaving a dead fish with a hook in its head. The result was so unimpressive that the publisher of the 1982 reprint substituted a more attractive etching. That publisher understood Schmitt no better than did most of his critics (generally all except Strauss and Meier).

The rejected 1938 cover illustrates the radical, apolitical nerve of Schmitt’s theology and therefore the impossibility of political theology for his piety of desperation, a dread unknown to Maimonidean prophetology, Strauss’s Platonic Judaism. Neither Plato nor Maimonides saw themselves confronted by apolitical “enemies” as did Schmitt, agents of divine providence necessary for self-knowledge. Schmitt interprets Cain’s fratricide in this way: A man’s enemy always is his brother, not to say himself.

Without enemies, sin would abound. Satanic arrogance would certify human reason as adequate to deal with life’s decisive questions. Men would embrace the Antichrist’s promise of humanly engineered peace and security, the tower of Babel’s illusion of this worldly fulfillment: “I loathe a world made by men for men” (*Glossarium*, p. 264). For Schmitt, man cannot merit salvation either by his own creativity or technology or by his obedience to the prescriptions, the divine laws, of his moral-political faction. This is the satanic temptation of *Gesetzreligion*, and all men unenlightened by Schmitt’s dread see themselves as part of factions, each of which has its *Gesetzreligion*. For example, partisans of a humanly created universal peace and good-will, like their enemies, bow to the gods of their faction.

Satan in *Job* and Mephisto in *Faust* reflect the opposition between *Gesetzreligion* and Schmitt’s extremist, apolitical piety.⁸ Faust’s God needs Mephisto to make men strive for anything. Without satanic prodding, men would do nothing in a universe lacking any reason to be or to do anything. So God

encourages Mephisto to go to extremes to force men to be serious morally and politically. To this end, he is authorized to wrench Faust's soul from its very foundations. By contrast, Job's Satan is forbidden to touch Job himself; he may only harm Job's possessions. Faust's world resembles Schmitt's and Kierkegaard's; Job's, that of Strauss and Maimonides.

Schmitt's notion of enemy seems stupid to those not tortured by his dread. He does not mean enemy in the political way in which Strauss does. Against Schmitt, Strauss observes that men do not want strong enemies. They prefer them as ineffectual as possible.⁹ This is the normal or political (prudential) view. But Schmitt's understanding is not so much political or prudent as providential and personal. The enemy is sent by providence to make men aware of the satanic character of their egoism: "Le Moi est satanique par sa nature et insociable par son caractère. Dans l'enfer il n'y a pas d'autre pronom que moi" (*Glossarium*, p. 21). A man desiring honest self-knowledge will want the strongest enemies, those making his very being problematic, thereby sparking his desperate need for salvation.

Here Schmitt parts company with Strauss, who represents the position of common-sense, political prudence. Only those requiring Schmitt's extremist Christianity will subscribe to his notion of enemy. Strauss, on the other hand, is a Platonic Jew, the most thoughtful Jew of the last few centuries. Like all moral-political factions, official (Platonic) Judaism believes itself grounded in God (the absolute good), a nonarbitrary standard (natural right) not subject to change even by divine will. Platonic natural right means that man has a natural good or perfection towards which his life naturally tends. All mankind's serious political fights are over what constitutes man's true God, his natural perfection or happiness. Hostile gods threaten the hegemony of one's own gods, one's moral-political absolutes.

In contrast to Schmitt's piety, political piety means a form of *Gesetzreligion*, faith in one's faction's moral absolutes, in its basic laws, as nonarbitrary, eternally just and true. Political absolutes are not seen by their partisans as individuals who suffer incarnation and death as the center of Schmitt's piety does. Thus his suffering, crucified God is blasphemy or atheism to the Jews and ridiculous to the Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:22–23). An essentially political theology points to something like Platonic Judaism whose God creates and governs *sub ratione boni*, not *ex nihilo*. Political piety, if it reflects on its need for nonarbitrary, eternal standards, precludes the omnipotent individualist of Spinozist-Christian Judaism, the answer to Schmitt's and Kierkegaard's cry from the abyss.

Schmitt's piety is closer to Nietzsche's atheist extremism than to Straussian political theology, Maimonidean prophetology. If anyone ever separated wisdom from moderation, it was Schmitt: Omnipotent Individualism experiences no need to moderate itself. The moderating influence of law is a necessary evil, the punishment for man's original sin. Schmitt's lack of prudence accounts for

the frequent ascription to him of relativism, nihilism, historicism and even atheism. He himself denies that his Christianity is, in essence, a matter of doctrine or morality or even religion in the normal sense. Furthermore, he prefers what he calls “Volks-Christendom” (sign of the cross, ringing of bells) to “Kirchen-Christendom” (the official church hierarchy and sacraments) (*Glossarium*, p. 62). Meier observes that Schmitt’s catholicism is, in crucial respects, hardly traditional, more Kierkegaard than Aquinas. In this sense, it is not the religion of his church fathers.

Schmitt’s Christianity makes men radically historical, not dependent on transhistorical absolutes *sub ratione boni*, but on the Incarnation. Consequently he claims a god-given freedom from all ideas and ideals for his pious individuality. Life’s core is the individual, forced by Providence to the historical-political decision for Satan or God—without really knowing which is which in the wars of one’s age. Thus for Schmitt, as for Kant, intention is everything, not the actual moral-political faction espoused.

If one’s intention is fired by faith in divine providence, one is doing God’s work against Satan insofar as humanly possible, even if one does not correctly discriminate between the divine and satanic in contemporary politics. Men are compelled by Providence to choose blindly. This blind choice is the true meaning of free will for Schmitt, the self-styled Christian Epimetheus. No eternal law exists to guide one’s decision, only one’s faith: “Providence does not rule by means of a universal law” (*Die Lehre*, p. 256. On the blindness of free will, see *Glossarium*, pp. 314, 316.).

Schmitt’s revulsion against *Gesetzreligion* sparks his virulent Jew-hatred—before, during and after Hitler. He endorsed Hitler’s contention that true piety demands hatred of Jews. Like Hitler, he denied the possibility of Jewish conversion, “since Jews always remain Jews” (*Glossarium*, pp. 18, 205, 208, 210, 232, 253–54, 259, 262, 264, 268, 290, 306, 313; *Die Lehre*, pp. 231–40).

Unlike Spinoza, for whom Jews are more opposed to philosophy than Christians, Schmitt insists that both Judaism and philosophy are enemies of Christianity. Schmitt fails to see that his Christianity (unlike, for example, that of Aquinas) is, in reality, what Strauss calls Spinozist Judaism, for which nothing is higher than always unique individual-historical existence: “The highest form of knowledge which Spinoza calls intuitive knowledge is not of the one eternal substance or God, but of individual things or events: God is fully God, not *qua* substance or even in his eternal attributes, but in his noneternal modes The knowledge of God as presented in the first part of the *Ethics* is only universal or abstract; only the knowledge of individual things or rather events *qua* caused by God is concrete” (Strauss, *Liberalism*, p. 240). In other words, only unique individuals, not their common nature, are real.

For Schmitt, politics is totalitarian because man is a totally historical (providential), not a natural, being. Indeed, in Schmitt’s world, there are no natural beings; everything human is historical and, as such, always confronted with the

necessity to choose between the divine and the satanic in one's historical-political situation. In this sense man, for Schmitt, is totally political because he is totally historical and not natural. Natural beings belong to natural species, each with the natural good or fulfillment proper to it: puppies desire to become dogs and children to become men. By nature, people are not primarily individuals with no goal outside their individuality. They are, by nature, the children of their parents, part of a species whose natural good or perfection is their fulfillment.

All serious political fights concern what constitutes man's fulfillment, the happiness natural to him. In each case, the individual is subordinated to the god, the notion of human fulfillment, advocated by his moral-political faction. Nobody—including those who so claim!—ever fights for “the individual” or the individual freedom of all men. Men fight for the individuality or freedom of those who share their notion of man's true fulfillment, his natural good. Nazis and democrats do not fight for each other's individualism or freedom! Unlike Schmitt's miraculous providential politics, natural politics always subordinates the individual *sub ratione boni*.

By the grace of a miraculous Incarnation, Schmitt's individual, like Kierkegaard's, is not essentially part of a species or part of anything, but an individual created in the image of the Omnipotent Individual. As in the case of Spinoza, only individuals really exist. History arises from the political choices of individuals compelled by Providence to choose between the forces of God and Satan as they present themselves in one's politics. Here God and Satan too are individuals; they are not “the unchangeable lifeless ideas” according to which the universe is created and governed *sub ratione boni*. God is an individual with a (omnipotent) will of his own. Hence politics and its history is primarily not the wars of hostile factions, but God's testing of individuals, a test whose outcome is determined beforehand by his omnipotence. Man's erotic desire for his natural fulfillment is not decisive for Schmitt; true love (*agape*) is for the Omnipotence whose Incarnation makes one's solitary historical-political decision something of infinite importance independent of natural desire and natural right.¹⁰

Schmitt's hatred of *Gesetzreligion* is responsible for his preference for Rome over Athens and Jerusalem. He lauds the Romans for assassinating their best man (Caesar) without recourse to law; he despises the Greeks and Jews for legally executing their best (Socrates, Jesus) (*Glossarium*, p. 227). Judeo-Greek legalism rests upon a *Gesetzreligion* which denies the hegemony of Omnipotent Individualism, curtailing its liberty *sub ratione boni*.

Caesar's assassination reflects the lawlessness of Rome's founding. Rome was founded by a fratricidal bastard, the son of a whore who claimed Romulus' father was a god to cover up her crime and his illegitimacy. The parallel lives, the similarity of Romulus' and Jesus' birth, death and resurrection, surely would have struck a Machiavellian Plutarch.¹¹ Like Schmitt, Machiavelli pre-

ferred Rome's lawless founder and his creation to the *Gesetzreligion* implicit in the founding of Athens and Jerusalem. Since citizenship in a faction founded by the bastard son of a whore is, for obvious reasons, open to all, Rome had the possibility of unlimited expansion. Its creator's spirit, the heart of his creation, discouraged "elitism" or "discrimination"; it was radically "inclusive," open to "diversity" and "multiculturalism." In Romulus' Rome, foreigners, even slaves, could become king, and religious law was an afterthought, the invention of the weak foreigner who succeeded the powerful Romulus as king.

As opposed to Jews and Greeks, Romulus' heirs were less likely to dismiss an incarnated, crucified god as ridiculous or atheist. Once compelled by their enemy (in Schmitt's sense) to confront their baseness, they might well experience the need for the Incarnation as salvation from their lawless, hateful selves, their *Moi haïssable*.

More than Greeks or Jews, Romans were potential Christians. For Schmitt, Roman lawlessness springs from a more realistic assessment of man's fate than Judeo-Platonic attempts to comprehend man not as a unique historical individual, but as a natural member of a family which itself is part of a species subordinate to the naturalistic platonic God, the idea of the good. Rejection of this platonic naturalism prompts Schmitt's preference for legitimacy over legality. Legitimacy's ultimate legitimation is the will of the omnipotent God who creates *ex nihilo* whatever he wills, who saves and damns whoever he wills.

Impossible for Platonic Judaism, Schmitt's omnipotent, incarnated deity is also at odds with Schmitt's insistence on interpreting Christianity as patriarchal (the religion of his fathers) or racial. For Jesus, his mother and brothers were those with faith in his Incarnation (Matthew 12:48–50; Luke 14:25–27). His notion of family arose from individual commitment (faith), not from natural ties, and was therefore untainted by Schmitt's racial emphasis on paternal inheritance. Thus conversion is far more important for Jesus than for Schmitt: there is no inborn Jewish class or species character which compels Jews always to remain Jews. Faith is given solely by divine grace, not paternal inheritance.

Schmitt's de-emphasis of conversion, his stress on "the religion of his fathers," is closer to the naturalistic orientation of Strauss's Platonic Judaism than to Schmitt's otherwise Spinozist Judaism. In a similar context, Harry Jaffa observes that Mel Bradford, a Christian defender of traditional, antebellum Southern rights, was more Jewish than Christian: "In his loyalty to the Old South—to the South of which he knew from what he regarded as the only ultimately reliable authority, namely 'our fathers'—he was perfectly intransigent. He believed in tradition in the absolute sense in which the fundamental ordering of society, and above all its convictions on the ultimately important things, such as God and the universe, were transmitted by the family I pointed out to him that the only regime that was purely patriarchal . . . was that of ancient Israel. This regime alone, in the form of orthodox Judaism, has survived into the modern world. 'You ought to be a Jew, Mel' I said Of

course, Mel couldn't become a Jew because it was not his inherited religion. That, however, illustrated the difficulty When Jesus asked 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' (*Matthew* 12:49), he transformed the family . . . into one constituted not by blood, but by faith"—that is by individual commitment, not by natural familial ties.¹² These ties constituted perhaps the chief ground for rejection of Christianity by the *Gesetzreligion* of pre-Christian regimes of which only (orthodox) Judaism survived, as a hated relic, in Christendom.

At bottom, Schmitt's aversion to *Gesetzreligion* is responsible for his hatred of Jews for whom the Torah's divine origin is proved by filial trust of a patriarchal line, an unbroken tradition, beginning with God's giving the law at Sinai.¹³ In each generation pious fathers told their sons of that divine origin. And it is both unnatural and opposed to God's law for sons to disbelieve their fathers, to accuse them of lying, especially about something so sacred. To be sure, it is easy for Jesus, whose father exists by faith not nature, to disbelieve his natural father and thus to dismiss the most natural tie a son can have. But this is a terrible sin for (orthodox) Jews—and not only for them! In any case, Schmitt hated Judaism's *Gesetzreligion*, its rejection of the center of his piety.

Schmitt encouraged Hitler's persecution of those whom he, not the anti-semitic Hitler, condemned as "Christ-killers." He did not realize how much his patriarchal piety (the religion of his fathers) had in common with them. *Gesetzreligion's* heart is not the unnatural, extremist individualism of Schmitt's God and his creation. It is rather the normal natural world in which fathers have sons whom they educate according to what their faction deems to be nonarbitrary, divine law which as such is not subject to change by God or man. A consistent Schmitt or Bradford would, like Jesus, recognize as mother or brother only those sharing his desperate, extremist faith. Consequently he would cherish Kierkegaard's pious idolater as a closer relative than natural parents lacking that faith. Here Kierkegaard's pious individualism was more consistent than that of Schmitt or Bradford.

Both Schmitt and Bradford attempt an impossible combination of what Strauss calls Platonic and Christian Judaism. Erik Petersen noted that Schmitt's Christian individualism precludes political theology: "Something like a political theology is possible only on a Jewish or Pagan basis" (*Die Lehre*, p. 260 n. 144). Political theology is a theological defense of politics. This always means defense of one's moral-political faction against its enemies foreign and domestic. Schmitt too insists that political theology—and therefore all serious speech—is polemical. But, for him, the enemy is not political in the non-miraculous, natural sense. The enemy is rather affirmed as a brother (Cain), a friend, a providential means to awaken men to their desperate condition. Thus Schmitt rejects Strauss's contention that men want weak, ineffectual enemies. For Schmitt, this is true only of the unregenerate, especially Jews whose orthodoxy, official (Platonic) Judaism, rejects Schmitt's historicist-individualist pi-

ety and God as blasphemy, if not atheism. Like all political men (that is, all men lacking Schmitt's self-knowledge), Jews believe that salvation lies in obedience to their faction's laws, its moral-political absolutes.

Schmitt's Jew-hatred is not antisemitism. It arises from a traditional Catholicism compromised by his racial emphasis on religion as paternal inheritance. The difference between Jew-hatred and antisemitism resembles that between atheism and nihilism. Antisemitism and nihilism are literary, academic words of relatively recent coinage. They reflect the atheism of the modern scientific ethos invented by men such as Bacon and Descartes. The more traditional (and more political) words are "Jew-hatred" and "atheism," which do not abstract, as "nihilism" and "antisemitism" do, from the religious heart of all morality and politics.

Antisemites are Jew-haters who fancy themselves too enlightened (scientific) for traditional Christian Jew-hatred. Usually they regard all orthodox (fundamentalist) piety as prescientific superstition. But there is no reason to hate Jews more than Christians, if one despises religion as such. Indeed consistent hatred of religion means, as Schmitt insists, rejection of all politics and all morality, which are meaningless without God. Thus antisemitism springs from an impossible, because atheist, attempt to single out Jews for hatred. Like other words coined by intellectuals cowed by academic (scientific) authority, antisemitism is an effort to appear up to date, liberated from medieval superstition. It is an attempt to justify atheistically a hatred which makes sense only on fundamentalist religious grounds.

Similarly, nihilism replaces atheism for those who fancy themselves too modern (atheist) for outdated fundamentalist prejudices. But men aware of the religious grounding of serious politics see atheism, not nihilism, as the worst crime. For them, the nihilist assertion that nothing exists is caused by atheism and not vice-versa. Atheism stresses God's nonexistence, while nihilism stresses nothing, a wholly apolitical-amoral orientation. On honest political horizons, both nihilism and antisemitism constitute apolitical-amoral obfuscation of the serious life and death issues raised by atheism and Jew-hatred.

Schmitt, too, regards atheism as the worst crime, but he is more open than ordinary political men to the use of nihilism, since it recalls man's nothingness (*Glossarium*, p. 68: "Out of the depths of Nihilism, Christiainity arises."). This deviation from traditional political usage reflects Schmitt's ultimately apolitical standpoint. If everything is nothing without God's omnipotent individualism; if nothing, therefore, is by its own nature good or bad, then God (as the eternal, nonarbitrary moral-political standard) does not exist. Thus Schmitt's piety is atheism for all nontyrannic (republican) politics whose partisans experience no desperate Kierkegaardian need for redemption from their *Moi haïssable*.

Strauss's effort to rescue Schmitt from that atheism is akin to Farabi's Socratic *kalam* in Islam, Maimonides' in Judaism, Aquinas' in Christendom and Jaffa's in America.¹⁴ In each case, the political theologian stresses the abso-

lutist, nonarbitrary presuppositions of his faction's politics to prevent, insofar as possible, its infection by its particular strain of Schmitt's extremist, tyrannic piety. Jaffa's latest polemics, beginning with *How to Think about the American Revolution*, constitute the only contemporary American political theology (or political philosophy) known to me. Of course, Schmitt would deny that Jaffa or Strauss were political theologians, since they shared neither his theology nor, therefore, his politics. Nor did he regard political theology and political philosophy as essentially alike, for his theology was deeply opposed to philosophy.

Schmitt's theology is radically apolitical. An adherent of Platonic (philosophic) Judaism, Jaffa defends normal politics against Schmitt's tyrannic theology. Is Schmitt's Christianity atheism? Not for Schmitt, who traces atheism to satanic self-assertion, original sin, which refuses to acknowledge its nothingness without God. This *Ich-Verpanzerung* is the hallmark of philosophy ancient and modern (*Die Lehre*, pp. 149–56). Insofar as the moderns reject an eternal, nonarbitrary nature and natural right, they are closer to Schmitt's world. Theirs is an emptiness filled not by divine omnipotence, however, but by sinful, because merely human, creativity and technology. No genuine self-knowledge would succumb to this. How can men make something out of nothing! Schmitt hated Nietzsche's superman as the apotheosis of this delusion. For Nietzsche, the superman would be the first man capable of honest self-knowledge, the first to endure atheism's horror without despair or insanity. To Schmitt, this travesty of self-knowledge was monstrous, a machine, created by radicalizing the sinful ethos of Baconian-Cartesian technology.

Rejecting the charge that the superman's main creation, the Eternal Return, was mysticism, Heidegger also likened it to a machine.¹⁵ However, for Socratic *kalam*, even the technological wing of Spinozist-Christian Judaism is mystical (irrational) and, as such, responsible for a conquerable, historicized "nature" which does not exist *sub ratione boni*. As a Platonic Jew, Strauss had no high opinion of the intellectual honesty of Spinozist-Christian Judaism in either its scientific or unscientific (mystical) modes. Thus he rejects G. Scholem's contention that the Jewish mystics (Kabbalists) had a better grasp of Judaism than philosophers such as Maimonides.

Against Scholem, Strauss accuses Kabbalist, and by implication all Spinozist-Christian, Judaism of believing "that intellectual honesty is nothing to be cared for."¹⁶ Like Schmitt, the Kabbalists emphasize individual experience, rejecting its subordination to eternal rational law *sub ratione boni*. Schmitt would insist—rightly I believe—that any such appeal to individualism, history or experience (the three are the same), including the Kabbalist appeal, requires his incarnated God, the omnipotent individualist. Absent that justification, individual experience and history are, as such, meaningless. Thus Strauss observes that "it is perhaps not altogether insignificant that Jewish [medieval] philosophy has proved to be much more impervious to the influence of the Christian dogma than the Kabbala."

For official Platonic Judaism, Spinozist-Christian (mystical) Judaism precludes intellectual honesty because its omnipotent deity, like his disciple, Schmitt, claims an ultimate freedom from intellect, from all ideas and ideals, from the moderating influence of rational limits. Thus E. Fackenheim wrongly suspects Strauss of succumbing to “new thinking” (Spinozist Judaism) against “old thinking” (Platonic Judaism) grounded in rational knowledge (a tautology for Strauss) *sub ratione boni*.¹⁷

Fackenheim, not Strauss, feels himself compelled by the Holocaust’s horror to abandon the old thinking. A unique historical event drives him to subordinate or to seriously doubt, if not to deny, the old thinking’s God whose hegemony is *sub ratione boni*. This all-consuming emphasis on a particular historical event drove Fackenheim to Scholem’s mysticism. It leads finally to something like Schmitt’s faith in the Incarnation, if universal insignificance and accidentalness are to be avoided. In this crucial sense Schmitt was more consistent than Fackenheim and Scholem.

Strauss did not encourage Schmitt’s consistency, since it was even more opposed to his Platonic Judaism than the inconsistency of Fackenheim and Scholem. Thus in a talk, cited by Fackenheim, which, for obvious reasons, Strauss never published, he recommended Scholem to some Jewish intellectuals under the spell of the new thinking.¹⁸ That recommendation probably was a makeshift solution for a Judaism fallen on hard times: prudence compels recommendation not of the best, but of what the traffic will bear. For example, Maimonides “presents himself as an opponent of the philosophers.” Given the consistent alternative (Schmitt’s extremist Christianity), Strauss probably opted for the inconsistency of Gershom Scholem, Emil Fackenheim and Hermann Cohen as the best available medicine for the contemporary theological-political illness.

However much that illness varies from regime to regime, Socratic *kalam*’s main problem always is the inability or unwillingness of most men to be philosophic, to live with the question never seriously raised by the unphilosophic: *Quid sit deus?*¹⁹ To be sure, all men, including philosophers, are political; that is, they belong to one of mankind’s moral-political factions, the one cherished as politically correct by them. But only philosophers seriously question their faction’s gods. Whether democrats or nazis, racists or humanitarians, sexists or feminists, unphilosophic partisans never really doubt their faction’s theology. Only philosophic partisans do that. But they too remain partisan, since their inadequate knowledge of what truly is good for their faction prevents outright rejection, reduction of their faction’s piety to mere factionalism, prejudice.

For philosophic partisans, *the* question always is whether philosophy is better than politics, whether serious doubts about the currently politically correct theology are preferable to whole-souled fidelity. Once a philosopher considers this question adequately answered, he ceases to be philosophic and becomes political, another unquestioning partisan, now perhaps an oxymoronic advocate

of “philosophy” or freedom of inquiry. He now feels free to do what the unphilosophic always do: indulge his scorn or even his indignation against his enemies, for example, those, like Schmitt, who hate philosophers, for he now is convinced of the superiority of the philosophic way of life. Consequently he does not realize how unphilosophic all denigration (whether secret or open) of politics is.

To appear politically correct to the unphilosophic, Socratic *kalam* presents philosophy according to what the traffic will bear. Thus philosophers may present themselves as opposed to “philosophy” and as such to be defending politics and morality. Or, to appear credible to the unphilosophic who always are factional, they may present philosophers as a faction with absolute claims against hostile factions, what Allan Bloom calls the class or party interests of philosophers.²⁰ But why would philosophers who, after all, realize that their questioning may be wrong—that the life of politics may be best for men—why would they champion philosophy’s class interest, as if there were such a thing!

In any case, unphilosophic partisans neither have nor want experience of philosophy in which serious questioning and unquestioning political piety collide: the real fight between philosophy and politics occurs only in the souls of philosophers. It is philosophy’s hallmark. Meier’s *Inter auctoritatem et philosophiam nihil est medium* (Between authority and philosophy there is no mean.) holds only for the unphilosophic, not for philosophy which is a kind of mean between itself and authority which always is political because it is theological (*Die Lehre*, p. 261).

Meier’s work is a welcome antidote to superficial interpretations of Schmitt as a simple moral or legal relativist, historicist or nazi. While not wholly inaccurate, these interpretations do not do justice to the heart of Schmitt’s world, its extremist piety, its desperate need for a tyrannic God who, as such, is absolutely lawless, governed only by his unchecked and uncheckable individualism. Schmitt’s preference for Roman lawlessness over Judeo-Platonic *Gesetzreligion* mirrors his preference for dictatorship in politics.

Man’s gods, the ultimate justification for his moral-political factionalism and its wars, are conflicting answers to the crucial question of self-knowledge.²¹ In Schmitt’s case (and Kierkegaard’s) self-knowledge confronted him with the terrifying awareness of death in life, triggering an all-consuming need for divine omnipotence to remove this horror: only omnipotence can make something out of nothing. Schmitt represents one of mankind’s two main alternatives with respect to self-knowledge and, therefore, with respect to serious thought about anything. The other is Strauss’s Platonic Judaism which is informed by a self-knowledge irreconcilably opposed to Schmitt’s or Kierkegaard’s. Strauss’s prudent, republican orientation experiences little need for omnipotent saviors.

That need sparks Schmitt’s denial that he (or anyone plagued with his self-knowledge) can sympathize with, or have any meaningful access to, the Jewish soul, the essential being (*Wesen*) of Jews (*Die Lehre*, pp. 232–33 n. 77). By

Jew, he basically means *Gesetzreligion*, Strauss's official, Platonic Judaism which has little, if anything, in common with Schmitt's Spinozist-Christian Judaism. Their opposition is well-nigh total, each having no real sympathy with, or access to, the other's core, their respective self-knowledge. Each cannot but condemn the other's piety as atheism. The crucial opposition is not between philosophy and authority (politics) but between apolitical (Spinozist Judaism) and political (Platonic Judaism) theology (*Die Lehre*, p. 261).

NOTES

1. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Ithaca, 1989), pp. 242–43. On law, cf. Plato, *Laws* 713E–714A.

2. Strauss, "A Giving of Accounts," *The College* (St. Johns College Bulletin) 22 (April, 1970): 3. Cf. D. Biale, "Leo Strauss: The Philosopher as Weimar Jew" in *Leo Strauss' Thought*, edited by A. Udoff (Boulder, 1991), pp. 37–38: "The secrets of the *Torah* that constitute the truth of the Jewish tradition are, for Strauss, none other than the truths of platonic philosophy . . . It is in the Straussian academy that the counter-tradition of philosophy that had begun with Plato and was inherited by Jews and Arabs in the Middle Ages finds its proper modern home."

3. Meier, *Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss und Der Begriff des Politischen* (Stuttgart, 1988).

4. On theology, morality, and politics, see Meier, *Die Lehre Carl Schmitts* (Stuttgart, 1994), p. 29; Harry Neumann, "Eternal and Temporal Enemies: Carl Schmitt's Political Theology," *Political Communication*, 9 (1992): 279–82. On would-be atheists, see *Die Lehre Carl Schmitts*, pp. 19–23; Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II: Die Legende von der Erledigung jeder Politische Theologie* (Berlin, 1970), pp. 109–15; Harry Neumann, *Liberalism* (Durham, 1991), pp. 92–95. Consider Nietzsche, *Joyful Science*, 125, 344.

5. Harry Jaffa, "The Legacy of Leo Strauss," in *The American Founding as the Best Regime and other Essays in Socratic Rationalism*, forthcoming.

6. Schmitt, *Glossarium*, pp. 26, 8, 43, 58, 98, 111, 193, 278; cf. Meier's review of *Glossarium* in *Der Spiegel* (July 29, 1991), pp. 171–72. *Ich-Verrückten-Rechthaber* can be roughly described as someone who always insists on being right while whoever opposes him is wrong, a kind of universal egomania.

7. Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated by D. Swenson and W. Lowrie (Princeton, 1968), part 2, chap. 2, "Truth is Subjectivity," pp. 179–80.

8. *Job*, 1:1–12; Goethe, *Faust*, I, 324–44, "Prologue in Heaven." On Goethe, cf. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Seattle, 1969), p. 329 n. 1. The same opposition divides Homer's Achaeans and Trojans (barbarians). See Seth Benardete, "Achilles and Hector: The Homeric Hero, I," *The St. Johns Review* 36 (Spring, 1985): 38–42.

9. Strauss, "Comments on *Der Begriff des Politischen* by Carl Schmitt" in *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York, 1965), p. 342.

10. *Glossarium*, p. 87 (against Nietzsche's platonic claim that all passion or desire [*Lust*] wants eternity). Thus, in a note (November 10, 1970), Schmitt stresses the fact that Jesus uses *agape*, not *philia* in his command to love one's enemies (Matthew 5:44). Loving enemies (a real respect for "diversity"!) is miraculous, not natural.

11. Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, translated by A. Selincourt (Baltimore, 1974), pp. 37–40, 51. On the Machiavellian lack of elitism or discrimination of Romulus' regime, see pp. 53–54, 72–80.

12. Jaffa, "In Abraham's Bosom: Mel Bradford RIP," in *The American Founding as the Best Regime*.

13. Yehuda Halevi, *The Book of the Kuzari*, translated by H. Hirschfeld (New York, 1946), part I:24 (p. 41); Cf. below, note 17.

14. Harry Neumann, "Political Theology?" *Interpretation* 23, no. 1(1995): 82–84.
15. Martin Heidegger, "Who Is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" in *The New Nietzsche*, edited by D. Allison (New York, 1977), pp. 78–79.
16. Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Chicago, 1989), p. 215; *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1953), p. 10 n. 3.
17. E. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World* (Bloomington, 1994), pp. 89 n., 262–66, 253 n. On Fackenheim's opposition to Halevi's "outworn theology," see pp. 301–2 and Halevi, *The Book of the Kuzari*.
18. K. Deutsch and W. Nicgorski, editors, *Leo Strauss: Political Philosopher and Jewish Thinker* (Lanham, MD, 1994), pp. 78–79.
19. Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago, 1964), p. 241; Plato, *Republic*, 505A–509C.
20. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago, 1988), pp. 140–41; Jaffa, "The Legacy of Leo Strauss"; A. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York, 1987), pp. 275–76; Neumann, *Liberalism*, pp. xiii–xxiii. 106–7.
21. Meier, *Die Lehre*, p. 52. This opposition is responsible for the fight between Strauss and Schmitt (insofar as Schmitt's piety is not compromised by its patriarchal-racial elements), Faust and Job, Achaeans and Trojans (above, n. 8). Indeed it is at the heart of all serious theological—and therefore political—fights.