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Three Books on Leo Strauss

Steven Frankel

Xavier University - Cincinnati

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**Steven Frankel**  
Xavier University  
frankel@xavier.edu

Several years ago in *Interpretation*, an amicable but fierce debate played out between Werner Dannhauser and Hilail Gildin over the alleged atheism of Leo Strauss: Dannhauser leveled the charge of atheism, which he claimed that Strauss concealed, or at least muted, out of “his reverence for Judaism.”¹ The evidence against Strauss is that he was a philosopher and that all philosophers are atheists.² At the risk of some inconsistency, Dannhauser asked readers

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² Strauss was publicly accused of atheism in *Commentary* magazine in 1959. His reply, which was never sent, was circulated among his students and later published by Kenneth Hart Green. Like Socrates, Strauss does not directly refute the charge of atheism; instead, he raises the question of the meaning of the charge: “My accuser has not even tried to prove his accusation. If he should be induced by this remark to try to prove his accusation, I warn him in advance to keep in mind the difference between revealed theology and natural theology or to make himself familiar with it.” See Green, *Jew and Philosopher: The Return to Maimonides in the Jewish Thought of Leo Strauss* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 238.

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for leniency on the grounds that Strauss encouraged his students to take revelation more seriously and that as a result, many (including Dannhauser) left Strauss’s classroom with a greater appreciation for the Bible. But why would a philosopher encourage his students to believe revelation?

Charging philosophers with impiety and atheism is as old as philosophy itself; however, the meaning of impiety changed dramatically in modernity as exemplified by the life and work of Spinoza. Here, I refer not to the fact that Spinoza himself was accused (and convicted) of not believing in the God of the Bible, a charge for which there is compelling evidence. Rather, I mean the modern version of the charge that Spinoza leveled against Maimonides and medieval philosophy. Spinoza may have been the first philosopher to use freely the accusation of impiety to defame others. In chapter 7 of the Theologico-Political Treatise, Spinoza takes particular aim at Maimonides. He reports that Maimonides “supposes that the Prophets agreed among themselves in all things and were the highest caliber Philosophers.”3 To prove this, according to Spinoza, Maimonides developed a simple hermeneutical trick, namely, wherever the literal sense of scripture appears to contradict reason, the interpreter should abandon the literal meaning in favor of a symbolic interpretation.4 Maimonides realized, according to Spinoza, that the nonrational multitude would never willingly submit to the authority of philosophy, so he devised this hermeneutical strategy to conceal philosophy and present it as theology. Maimonides’s real motive was not piety, nor even the preservation of philosophy; rather, he was interested in power. He wished to create a “new kind of priest,” who could establish the authoritative reading of scripture. Maimonides’s strategy was soon adopted by other unscrupulous and ambitious men who turned the interpretation of scripture into a violent sectarian affair. Spinoza reports that in his day, “the love of propagating divine religion [had] degenerated into sordid greed and ambition, and likewise the temple itself into a theater where…orators were heard, none of whom was bound by a desire for teaching the populace but for carrying them off in admiration for himself.”5

Strauss’s verdict on the “case against Spinoza” concedes that Spinoza’s critique of scripture, including his attack on Maimonides, is “amazingly

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4 See ibid., 97.
5 Ibid., preface, xix.
By this he means that Spinoza uses scripture to undermine the belief in scripture by refuting the Maimonidean claim that it contains theoretical wisdom. But why did Spinoza attack Judaism and Maimonides so ferociously? Spinoza’s broader strategy was to separate completely philosophy and religion, and build a society that allows for freedom in both realms. Forcing scripture to abandon its claims to theoretical truth was the price for that society, which Spinoza gladly paid in the hope that freedom would create more stable and tolerant communities: “the humanitarian end seems to justify every means: he plays a most dangerous game; his procedure is as much beyond good and evil as his God.” By undermining scripture and promoting freedom, Spinoza may have unwittingly undermined the foundations of justice.

The success of Spinoza’s project can be attributed in large part to the stilted account he presents of Athens and Jerusalem: if Athens represents the universally true and demonstrable account of the whole and Jerusalem stands for a partial, superstitious account based on a particular (and therefore disputed) revelation, it is hardly surprising for Spinoza that reason or science prevails. With the victory of philosophy, a scholarly consensus emerged on Maimonidean political theology as a relic of the past, a misguided attempt to harmonize philosophy and religion so that philosophy had the upper hand. By the time Strauss wrote his first book on Spinoza’s critique of religion, few scholars—with the notable exception of Hermann Cohen—took Maimonides seriously as an alternative to Spinoza’s account of the theological-political problem. To understand Strauss’s thought, Kenneth Hart Green and Jeffrey Bernstein have written detailed accounts of how Strauss managed to recover Maimonides’s teaching and reinvigorate the debate between Athens and Jerusalem.

According to Kenneth Green, Strauss’s Herculean effort to recover Maimonides is among the greatest scholarly achievements of the twentieth century. He estimates that the recovery of Maimonides is “one of four great scholarly rediscoveries of the 20th century in Jewish Studies, on par with [Strauss’s] friend Gershom Scholem’s recovery and presentation of Kabbalah, with the rescue, retrieval, and editing of the treasure trove of medieval materials stored in the Genizah of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, and with the accidental uncovering…of the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls of the Second Temple-era Judea” (Complete Writings, xviii). Green’s scholarship has certainly

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7 Strauss, JPCM, 161.
helped to establish Strauss’s place in Jewish studies, but his latest books have achieved something else: by collecting Strauss’s most important writings on Maimonides, Green has made it possible for students to follow the development of Strauss’s thought and evaluate each of his discoveries.

Green is well positioned for this project, having spent his career developing a rich alternative to Spinoza’s account of the relation between Athens and Jerusalem by examining Strauss’s thought. Green’s first book, *Jew and Philosopher: The Return to Maimonides in the Jewish Thought of Leo Strauss*, presents Strauss as a “cognitive theist” rather than an atheist. This designation preserves Strauss’s openness to the truth of revelation which Spinoza had attempted to foreclose in the name of reason. According to Green, Strauss learned from Lessing that Spinoza’s rationalism had become dogmatic and as such became the very sort of authority that philosophy rebels against. To restore the ancient, truer meaning of philosophy, Lessing advised the use of revelation against the dogmatism of the Enlightenment. Green shows how Strauss, following this strategy, was able to remain loyal to Judaism and pursue philosophy. With the addition of these two volumes, *Leo Strauss and the Rediscovery of Maimonides* and *Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings*, Green further demonstrates how Strauss learned from Maimonides a strategy for remaining loyal to both cities without compromising the claims of either. In other words, Maimonides presented Strauss with a compelling alternative to Spinoza’s account of the relation between Jerusalem and Athens. Strauss’s recovery of Maimonides, in Green’s presentation, allows simultaneously the recovery of ancient philosophy and the restoration of revelation.

In *Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings*, Green has collected Strauss’s sixteen major essays and lectures on Maimonides, some of which have never before appeared in English. As Green admits, however, the title of the collection is somewhat misleading since “the aspiration to completeness could not be achieved perfectly” (xv). This is because Strauss made so many references to Maimonides and medieval philosophy throughout his career that any attempt to gather all of them would require several additional volumes. Instead, Green has collected the pieces that illustrate Strauss’s gradual rediscovery of Maimonides as a thinker of the highest caliber, who surpassed in depth and audacity not only Strauss’s contemporaries but also Spinoza.

To appreciate the value of Green’s collection, consider Strauss’s essay “How to Begin to Study The Guide of the Perplexed.” It appeared in 1963 as the introductory essay to the monumental English translation of the *Guide*...
Book Review: Three Works on Leo Strauss

by Shlomo Pines. Naturally, most newcomers to Maimonides and Strauss would see fit to begin their study with this essay. For one thing, it represents Strauss's most extensive and complete account of how to approach the Guide. Strauss seems to suggest as much and begins the essay by presenting a detailed outline of the work: “I believe that it will not be amiss if I simply present the plan of the Guide as it has become clear to me in the course of about twenty-five years of frequently interrupted but never abandoned study” (493). Strauss’s title should not be misconstrued. The essay is hardly intended for novices who are just beginning their study of medieval philosophy. Strauss’s study presumes, like the Guide itself, years of prerequisite study and demonstrates how careful students of the Guide speak publicly about the text. (Strauss appears to present his findings in an esoteric style: the surface of the essay looks chaotic but is undergirded by a hidden structure.) Strauss's essay is so complex—Green describes it as “the most impressive effort ever made to map the plan and structure of Maimonides’ great book”—that Green does not even attempt to summarize it (63). Rather, he offers twelve clusters of questions or perplexities for the reader to ponder.

If Strauss’s essay represents the peak of his lifelong study of Maimonides, Green’s collection helps us approach this summit gradually. Strauss’s essays are arranged chronologically so that the reader can see how he managed, step by step, to recover Maimonides’s thought. In addition, Green has chosen several pieces that Strauss himself did not choose to publish during his lifetime but which show the difficulties that he encountered and how he managed to overcome them. Among the earliest pieces, Green includes unfinished notes from a lecture in Berlin on Hermann Cohen and Maimonides. One reason Strauss did not finish these notes is that he was still struggling to understand how to read Maimonides. In sharp contrast, the collection also includes Strauss’s masterful lecture nearly thirty years later in Chicago, modestly entitled “Introduction to Maimonides’ Guide of the Perplexed.” Here we see Strauss in total control of the content and the presentation. In less than thirty years, Strauss learned to read the Guide and, as Green observes, “overturn several centuries of entrenched conventional scholarly wisdom” in the process (xix).

Green explains in detail the obstacles with which Strauss contended: scholars tended to view Maimonides as a thinker who prepared the way for subsequent thinkers, who presumably surpassed him. From their point of view, one may admire Maimonides’s contributions to intellectual progress, yet also admit that the same progress has rendered his thought obsolete. One way that modern thought has surpassed Maimonides is by separating reason
from revelation, a prerequisite for clearing out superstition and promoting scientific and moral progress. Our freedom, particularly from superstitions such as the belief in revelation, is one hallmark of our progress. The alternative to this view was virtually lost until Strauss entertained the possibility that medieval and ancient philosophy achieved a “natural perspective...[an] enduring perception of human things as they present themselves in their unchanged, essential manifestation” (23).

Nor did Strauss dodge the most compelling parts of Spinoza’s critique, such as his account of the prophets as individuals who could rely only on their imaginations because of their severely limited knowledge of nature. In his 1935 essay “Maimonides’ Doctrine of Prophecy and Its Sources,” Strauss coins the term “prophetology” to describe the Maimonidean approach to divine law, which resembles the Platonic approach to political science whereby prophecy is viewed as a branch of it. Whereas Spinoza insists that reason and imagination cannot be combined in a single human being, Maimonides argues that the best lawgiver combines both and is the most perfect human being. The prophet, like the Platonic philosopher king, is the most perfect individual and as such most qualified to establish the best society. The divine law combines religion and politics to order society in the most rational way. Nor could the best society be ordered in any other way since rationality has limited authority among the nonrational individuals who are always the majority.

To describe the divine law as the best law means that its rationality is balanced by its ability to appeal imaginatively to nonrational individuals. This is what Green describes as a “unique balance” between reason and revelation; the tension between them is managed in such a way as to maintain the integrity of both (26). Maimonides “first accepts and obeys the Law,” by whose authority he finds justification for a “life devoted to reason” (27). In Philosophy and Law (1935), Strauss argues that modern political thought had discredited this delicate balance such that the only compelling alternatives appear to be “orthodoxy or atheism.” Neither alternative appealed to Strauss; instead he sought to rediscover another possibility that could be embraced “by rational people...and not merely as an extravagant gesture or act of will, bespeaking despair, muddle-headedness, distress, or loss of nerve” (30). Such a possibility entails an approach to scripture and Law that does not cut them off from reason.

Following the thought of Maimonides led Strauss to another unexpected discovery. In contrast to the scholarly consensus that insisted on seeing Maimonides as a disciple of Aristotle, Strauss discovered from Farabi that
Maimonides was instead closer to Plato: “Plato had already discovered the principles that were vital to advance the freedom of philosophic thinking in its theological-political context” (32). In “The Place of the Doctrine of Providence according to Maimonides” (1937), Strauss shows how Maimonides adapts the Platonic distinction between the few and the many to his interpretation of the Law. His dual teaching of providence includes a general sense of providence for those who follow the Law and contribute to the collective order, and particular providence for those who are intellectually excellent. Intellectual virtue remains preeminent, but it does not undermine moral virtue.

As Strauss became more attentive to the demands of Platonic philosophy, his care in reading Maimonides became even more rigorous. Reviewing a new translation of Maimonides’s Mishneh Torah in 1939, Strauss complains that the translator has not paid enough attention to the precision of the author in numbering paragraphs, translating key terms consistently, and in general assuming that Maimonides’s writing was anything but as “careful, precise, artful, deliberate, and thoughtful as it is possible for a human author to achieve” (43). Within two years, Strauss would publish his discovery, in “The Literary Character of the Guide of the Perplexed” (1941), that the literary style of the Guide was the key to unraveling its political teaching. Maimonides had openly admitted to choosing every word of the Guide deliberately and carefully. Even where he appeared to contradict himself, he had assured readers, this too was deliberate. The fact that the surface of the text appears disorganized or haphazard should not discourage us from observing the profound depths of the book. In other words, Maimonides’s esotericism is hidden in plain sight. Why then had it been so completely neglected by modern scholarship? The assumptions that inform that scholarship have an important source in Spinoza’s hermeneutics, particularly chapter 7 of the Treatise, which explains how to read the Bible. According to Spinoza, the chaotic surface of the biblical text does not conceal any profound depth. Rather, the surface is exactly what it appears to be, that is, a hastily compiled amalgam of sources: “faulty, truncated, adulterated, not consistent with itself, [and] we have only fragments of it.”9 Despite subsequent efforts to harmonize the text, there is little point in searching for wisdom beyond the surface. Modern scholars are trained to confirm that the Bible mostly reflects the cultural background and prejudices of its authors, as well as a simple teaching of caritas. Spinoza has trained us moderns to stop our interpretation at the literal surface of the text.

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9 Spinoza, Theologico-Political Treatise, 14.
Maimonides’s account invites us to consider that, however rare it may be, wisdom is a permanent, trans-historical possibility, and that such wisdom is contained in revelation, including knowledge of the best human life and the best form of political organization. Nor is scripture naive about the threats to that life, particularly that posed by superstition. It offers the most powerful program ever conceived to limit superstitious ignorance and enlighten humanity. Another hallmark of the wisdom of scripture is its recognition of the limits of enlightenment and the permanent divide between the few and the many. According to Maimonides, this wisdom is embodied in a literary style that simultaneously addresses the different desires and needs of each group. The apparent chaos on the surface of the Bible is actually a brilliant strategy to address individuals of varying rationality. Such a style can be achieved only by the most perfect individuals, the prophets, who miraculously achieve perfection of the intellect and imagination— the very possibility that Spinoza denies at the beginning of the *Treatise*.

In addition, the literary style implies a profound concern for the well-being and the enlightenment of everyone, regardless of one’s level of rationality. The lexicographic chapters at the beginning of the *Guide* indicate a basic level of knowledge that everyone is obliged to accept lest he transgress the law by committing idolatry. The public dimension of Maimonides’s teaching gives way to the secret teachings of the Torah, but these secrets are concealed with extraordinary care (see Green’s catalog of these means at *Complete Writings*, 47). Those who take care to penetrate the secret teaching are presumably obliged by their wisdom above all not to divulge things that may undermine the well-being of the others (or the stability of the society). The fact that teachings are allegedly hidden, and that those who discover them may not divulge their discoveries, leads to endless speculation about the true meaning of the Torah. Can we ever be certain that Maimonides means what he says? As in a Platonic dialogue, the literary style emphasizes questions and the quest for certainty—even more than answers. This helps explain why it is so difficult to get to the bottom of Maimonides’s project, even with Strauss’s analysis.

Strauss had misgivings about the choice between atheism and orthodoxy that he faced as “a young Jew born and raised in Germany.”¹⁰ Both choices demanded commitments that Strauss was unwilling to make. The atheism of his peers was based not on love of truth, but on a love of cruelty turned inward, that is, a willingness to suffer as a sign of rectitude. Such a commitment could have been justified if Spinoza had been successful in giving

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¹⁰ Strauss, *JPCM*, 137.
a full and rational explanation of the whole. Since he was not, it was a mere act of faith not necessarily superior to religion. To make matters worse, this version of atheism was not moderated by reason, and tended to gravitate toward extreme political teachings. On the other hand, Spinoza’s success in criticizing Maimonides appeared to render the choice for orthodoxy even less palatable, since it rested on belief in revelation that appeared to be no more than an irrational and fantastic dream. Strauss set out to restore both Jerusalem and Athens, as Green persuasively argues, with Maimonides as his guide.

This explains why, as we saw above, Strauss’s students left his courses with renewed respect for both reason and revelation. But Green’s account, while persuasive, also raises some troubling questions. The defense of Maimonides involves showing the possibility, contra Spinoza, that scripture contains theoretical wisdom. But apart from his posthumously published lecture “On the Interpretation of Genesis,” Strauss makes relatively little effort to do so.\textsuperscript{11} In addition, Green’s collection reveals that Strauss did most of his work on Maimonides in the thirties. After 1941, there are relatively few studies devoted exclusively to Maimonides. There is, to be sure, the important effort Strauss made to have the \textit{Guide} translated into English in 1963—an effort that leaves no doubt about his reverence for Maimonides. But Strauss’s prodigious scholarly output is primarily devoted to Athens. One might wonder whether Strauss turned from Maimonides to Plato as a result of his “rediscovery” of Maimonides. Or, as Spinoza suggests, whether respect for Jerusalem merely conceals an attempt to establish the authority of Athens. Green insists otherwise:

Strauss expresses his conviction that, however much Maimonides made use of Greek philosophy, what he presents as his definitive teaching is affirmatively Jewish. This is not merely Greek philosophy with a Jewish veneer, but is an attempt to wrestle with the challenge of ancient Greek thought, and with what the best Greek thinkers taught about God, man, and the world in order to, if possible, make it consistent with Jewish teachings. (61)

Green’s two volumes establish the importance of Strauss’s rediscovery of Maimonides and, more generally, the need to study medieval rationalism in order to grasp the limits of modern rationalism. At the same time, and

to Green’s great credit, his collection and commentary do not suppress the central questions about the relation of Athens and Jerusalem.  

Indeed, Green has pursued theoretical alternatives openly and vigorously as the director of the SUNY Press series The Thought and Legacy of Leo Strauss, inviting a range of serious contributions from scholars of Strauss’s thought. The most recent addition to this series is Jeffrey Bernstein’s Leo Strauss: On the Borders of Judaism, Philosophy, and History. Like Green, Bernstein affirms the centrality of Maimonides for understanding Strauss (51, 162–63). He also argues that Maimonides made it possible for Strauss to recover both Jerusalem and Athens and this recovery makes him a most original and important critic of modern Jewish thought (see 34). In addition, Bernstein’s account supplements and extends Green’s analysis. For example, in an original and penetrating reading of What Is Political Philosophy?, Bernstein shows that Strauss deliberately avoided mentioning Maimonides during his lectures at the Hebrew University in 1953 in order not to upset his audience (130). This helps demonstrate that Maimonides plays a central role in grasping the meaning of Strauss’s mature thought, even when he is hidden from view (127).

But Bernstein’s account of Maimonides and his relation to Spinoza diverges from Green’s in interesting ways. Taking as his starting point Strauss’s correspondence in the thirties, Bernstein argues that Maimonides represents for Strauss a philosopher “who is theoretically uncompromising in his advocacy of philosophy and who also wrote exoterically in order not to upset the community in which he lived” (xxvii). Maimonides recovered Platonic political philosophy and moved into Athens, where Strauss found him and also took up residence (47–48): Maimonides “was a citizen of Athens donning the outfit of Jerusalem” (131). Strauss too, following Machiavelli, conceals his blasphemy and thereby “compels the reader to think the blas-

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12 Green has rightly pointed out in a recent interview that it would be foolish to interrogate Strauss to discover his view of Jerusalem: “If some people might be inclined to set up a Jewish inquisition, and suspect every Jewish thinker or even every Jewish person, and to examine or interrogate them for how much, or how precisely, they believed in every article of the faith as defined by Maimonides, I can’t vouch for what the exact result would have been in the case of Leo Strauss. But I also don’t think that this is a very Jewish thing to do. Rather, we should judge Strauss by his actions; and in terms of these, we would see that he was a profoundly loyal Jew during his entire life” (https://kavvanah.wordpress.com/2013/07/18/why-maimonides-matters-kenneth-hart-green-part-i/). But, while relentless inquiry and theoretical boldness are unseemly for a citizen of Jerusalem, do such traits not characterize (leaving aside the violence) the spirit of inquiry in Athens?
phemy by himself and thus to become [his] accomplice.” Bernstein makes an even bolder argument in chapter 5, where he suggests that according to Strauss, both Spinoza and Maimonides shared the same “compulsion” for the truth, “be it construed as Platonic eros…or Spinozan conatus” (150). In this reading of Persecution and the Art of Writing, the “differences between the two…appear to be historical rather than philosophical. Differently stated, the divergence between the two thinkers concerns their modes of presentation more than the content of their thought” (153).

As for the differences between Spinoza and Maimonides, Bernstein argues that they are more apparent than real. Spinoza’s radical critique of religion, for example, was not original; rather it had been rediscovered by Machiavelli who in turn had learned it from medieval and pagan philosophy (127). In fact, it had been well known to Maimonides, who chose to conceal it from all except his more careful readers. Strauss says that Maimonides “brought the greatest sacrifice” by defending the Torah against the philosophers. Bernstein interprets this sacrifice to be Maimonides’s political and religious accommodation of his philosophic thought to the Jewish people, even though he affirmed the superiority of intellectual to moral virtue (129–32). From this point of view, the conflict between Jerusalem and Athens appears to be a version of the tension between the imagination and reason, which Spinoza describes as the problem of superstition. The fact that each presents a different solution to the conflict represents the historical or accidental circumstances in which each thinker found himself: “In another age, or even in another country, Spinoza would have been compelled by his principle of caution to make entirely different proposals for the protection of philosophy, without changing in the least his philosophical thought.”14

Had Bernstein merely portrayed Strauss as an advocate of Athens, his account would have been nearly identical to Heinrich Meier’s presentation of Strauss “as a political philosopher who never wavers from his attempts to disprove revelation” (137).15 Instead, Bernstein devotes much of his analysis

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13 This is Strauss’s description of Machiavelli, but Bernstein uses it to describe Strauss’s treatment of Maimonides (see 127–28).
15 In chapter 5, Bernstein distinguishes his position from Meier’s presentation of Strauss as a modern atheist political philosopher in Leo Strauss and the Theological-Political Problem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). According to Bernstein, Meier’s presentation claims that Strauss does not take revelation seriously as an alternative to philosophy, but rather “holds that philosophy needs the existence of revelation only insofar as that existence allows philosophers to better see the
to Strauss’s preoccupation with Judaism, particularly his efforts to rescue modern Jewish thought from its devotion to historicism and the belief in progress. One of the most fascinating sections of Bernstein’s argument is his chapter “Strauss’s Maimonides,” which shows both Strauss’s debt to his fellow scholars of Jewish thought and his radical rejection of their work. Bernstein also shows how Strauss’s stay at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1954–55 culminated in his attempt to address the meaning of Zionism without undermining the modern Jewish state. In short, according to Bernstein, Strauss may not have been a believer, but he was certainly devoted to the study of Jewish thought (83, 23, 34). This paradox, that Strauss remained devoted to Judaism without being a believer, rests at the heart of Bernstein’s inquiry. How did Strauss manage to reconcile the love of one’s own with the love of the good?

Fittingly, Bernstein crafts his answer from Strauss’s own remarks explaining that the prophets and Socrates do not live in the center of the city, but at the periphery: “The man who loves perfection and justice must leave the cities inhabited exclusively by the wicked, to search for a city inhabited by good men, and he must prefer, if he does not know of such a city or if he is prevented from bringing one about, wandering in the desert or in caverns to the association with evil men.” According to Bernstein, Strauss chose to live “on the border” so that he could seek the good in full view of other alternatives. Some borders are more lasting and comprehensive than others. National borders, for example, are not as comprehensive as the border between reason and revelation, a border upon which the West itself was founded. Even though Strauss settled in Athens, he lived on the border where he had a full view of Jerusalem, where the attraction of revelation was perpetually in view. As a result, Strauss was able to resist dogmatism and sectarianism; in fact, this appears to be the precondition for philosophy, one shared by Maimonides, Spinoza, and Strauss.

To live on the border, for Bernstein, means to take seriously the tension between reason and revelation, and the centrality of this tension is easy to identify in the work of Maimonides and Strauss. The case of Spinoza is more challenging because the “chief purpose” of his *Theologico-Political Treatise* is alternative to the philosophical way of life; in seeing this alternative, philosophers better understand their own way of life” (137).

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to redraw the borders. On this new map, revelation surrenders to reason all claims to the truth. Spinoza’s residence may still be located on the outskirts, but the map seems to have changed dramatically. Furthermore, according to Strauss, Spinoza lived in temporary housing while he built a new city and a new church. The foundation for this city was a new conception of God. Spinoza “showed the way toward a new religion or religiousness which was to inspire a wholly new kind of society, a new kind of Church. He became the sole father of that new Church which was to be universal in fact.”

Bernstein admits that it appears “Spinoza’s thought is the precise rejection of Maimonides’s thought,” but in fact remains closely attached to Maimonidean thought in maintaining the superiority of the theoretical life over the practical life (136). This philosopher does not move his residence, even if his neighbors—the particular form of superstition—move. Spinoza’s claim that Maimonides wished to create “a new form of ecclesiastical authority,” namely reason, turns out to apply equally well to Spinoza himself.

One might wonder whether Spinoza, in redrawing the borders and founding a new church, has managed to resist the temptation to dogma or, in other words, whether the revolt of philosophy initiated by Machiavelli remains located in Athens. Such questions and many others raised in these stimulating and important volumes are well worth pondering as we decide, as Strauss urges us to do, which city to live in: “No one can be both a philosopher and a theologian, or, for that matter, some possibility which transcends the conflict between philosophy and theology, or pretends to be a synthesis of both. But every one of us can be and ought to be either one or the other, the philosopher open to the challenge of theology, or the theologian open to the challenge of philosophy.” Bernstein and Green have done a great service for students seeking residence in either Jerusalem or Athens by clarifying the fundamental issues that separate them.


18 Strauss, *JPCM*, 156.
