

CONCLUSION

The name of Leo Strauss is generally associated with the attempt to revive the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns and with the proposal for a return to ancient natural right in order to protect liberal society against the deviations induced by relativism, radical historicism, and nihilism. We have sought to show that this theme certainly does not constitute the essential problem in Strauss' thought, which can be genuinely understood only to the extent to which it is put into relation with its central problem, that is, with the theologico-political problem. Strauss himself claimed that this was *the* theme of his inquiries. However, to understand this claim it is necessary to have a broad conception of political theology and not to forget that it represents a problem or question for Strauss more than it does a solution. He was not a political theologian: if he had been, political theology would have been for him not a problem or a question, but rather a stance or political program. Indeed, an attentive reader will not find in Strauss a political ideology in the form of a political theology. This is why we labored to present the problematic character of political theology at each one of the stages in the development of Strauss' reflection, our ultimate goal being to illustrate Strauss' often discreet but always present invitation to acquire for oneself the freedom of "the philosopher." To conclude, we will briefly review the principal stages of this development with the goal of again bringing out the zetetic spirit that animates Strauss' Platonism.

The first level of the theologico-political problem is intimately related to the problem of the Jewish condition in modern liberal society. Strauss'

first interest in the theologico-political is therefore connected with what is called "the Jewish problem," or the "Jewish question." But his interest in the theologico-political problem cannot be reduced to a reflection on the Jewish condition. The theologico-political problem raises questions that go beyond the Jewish world. The Jewish condition is emblematic of a larger problem in modernity, that is, the problem of the relation between religion and politics, between theology and philosophy.

Here, in its major outlines, is how the theologico-political problem appeared to Strauss as a young German Jew. Modern liberalism had attempted to settle the Jewish problem by driving faith into the private sphere and making the state indifferent to the religious affiliation of its citizens. By virtue of this liberal solution, each citizen, be he a Jew, a Christian, or something else, is a full member of the state; but, by the same stroke, his religion, his faith, must withdraw from the public sphere to hide itself in the private sphere. Even though Strauss recognized certain merits to this liberal solution, he judged it insufficient. According to him, liberalism is incapable of bridging the gap between legal equality and the fact of social inequality. Liberalism cannot get rid of real discrimination; it can at the most protect the political rights of those concerned. In addition, the liberal solution ultimately leads to assimilation, which is the negation of Jewishness. Moreover, even in the case of total assimilation and the complete renunciation of his Jewishness, the Jew could never be assured of effective protection against social discrimination.

Because it does not involve the sacrifice of his Jewishness and because it is based on the dignity and assertion of being Jewish, the Zionist solution appeared at the time to the young Strauss as the most honorable solution and, so to speak, more realistic than the liberal solution. In his youth, Strauss was himself engaged in the Zionist cause. But his engagement was a critical engagement, for, as he remarked, the Zionist solution is a limited solution because it is still and always will be a political solution to the Jewish problem. Yet the Jewish problem, like the theologico-political problem, cannot be reduced to its political dimension. In his critique of political Zionism, Strauss first recorded the response of cultural Zionism: according to this movement, a Jewish state without a Jewish culture, without the heritage and national spirit, is "an empty shell." Yet