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## Jerusalem and Athens: In Defense of Jerusalem



*Abstract: The historiographical and theological-political contrast between Jerusalem and Athens has at times been understood as an opposition between, respectively, revelation, which necessarily demands pious obedience, and reason, which, as such, conveys the freedom of critical thought. The focus of this paper is to ascertain how faithful such an understanding is to reason, religion, the Bible, and the Hebraic tradition.*

He whose fear of sin precedes his wisdom, his wisdom will endure; but he whose wisdom precedes his fear of sin, his wisdom will not endure.

—*Pirke Avot* 3:11

### I.

The terms “Jerusalem” and “Athens” have often been used to designate two traditions constitutive of Western civilization: prophetic religion (the biblical tradition of revelation) and philosophy (or reason), respectively. There is, of course, much to recommend this designation as historical fact, although today variations of the terms are often employed—for example, religion and science. Even so, other currents have been crucial to the formation of the West, for example, Roman law, conceptions of the liberty of the individual and his or her associations (both of which owe much to the medieval English and German traditions of a limited state with the attendant beliefs in individual and associational rights),<sup>1</sup> our

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Pollack and Frederic William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1895); Otto von Gierke, *Johannes Althusius und die Entwicklung der naturrechtlichen Staatstheorien: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Rechtssystematik* (Breslau: W. Koebner, 1880).

understanding of the extended order of the free market (with the recognition of the significance of private property),<sup>2</sup> and industrial capitalism.

To be sure, some of these historical developments were known to varying degrees in antiquity. The ancient Greeks, for example, knew of the rule of law that Plato, in *The Statesman*, distinguished from the best form of justice.<sup>3</sup> In ancient Mesopotamia, one finds at least as early as the nineteenth century B.C.E. the use of contracts, commercial partnerships for long-distance trade, and silver as a medium of exchange.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition know of the rule of law, while the prophets acknowledge a justice that can be distinct from it—for example, the “circumcision of the heart.”<sup>5</sup> It further seems that the accounts of King David and Araunah’s threshing floor in II Samuel 24:18–24, Naboth’s vineyard in I Kings 21, and Jeremiah’s deed of purchase of the field of Anathoth in Jeremiah 32:6–15 imply a developed, biblical conception of private property.

The presence, already in antiquity, of these and other features constitutive of civilization today suggests the likelihood of perennial problems with our understanding of the character of human conduct and social relations as evolving over time. That said, some of our understanding of the importance of these features—for example, the significance of the extended order of the market for human affairs or the merit of a limited state for the freedom of the individual and his or her associations—is a result of subsequent human experience and our reflection on that experience. Thus, a proper understanding of our civilization and, more generally, human conduct must reject an intellectually unproductive contrast between, on the one hand, an unchanging human nature and, on the other, a radical historicism that asserts a human conduct entirely unique to any corresponding, particular historical period. To properly understand what it means to be human, one must steer a middle course between these two alternatives. There are indeed perennial problems—for example, the relation between man and woman; the political distribution of power; or how to understand the place of the human being in

<sup>2</sup> F.A. Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1287; Herodotus, *The History*, III.80; Plato, *The Statesman*, 293ff.

<sup>4</sup> Klaas R. Veenhof, “‘Modern’ Features of Old Assyrian Trade,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40:1 (1997), pp. 336–366.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 4:4; Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6. For example, “Esau [Rome] slew by his own impulse, whereas he [David/Israel] would slay only on the sentence of the court!” *Genesis Rabba* (London: Soncino Press, 1977), LXIII.8, p. 563.

the universe, because of which one cannot avoid positing an empirically unverifiable meaning to our existence (for example, an existential equality of all human beings)—and yet, the responses to those problems are diverse and subject to change; needless to say, not always for the better.

In fact, both the recognition and simultaneous embrace of these two alternatives are characteristic of “Jerusalem,” and the Hebraic tradition developed in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> There is the noble assertion of the unchanging, meaningful universal: human beings are created in the image of God in Genesis 1:27 and 9:6. But there are also the historical and political vicissitudes of the existence of Israel as a nation, which are, in turn, reflected upon in light of that universal—for example, Deuteronomy 11 and 30, and Amos 3:2 and 9:7. For Judaism, the simultaneous embrace of these two alternatives is acutely unavoidable, for unlike doctrinal Christianity and Buddhism, there is no goal to flee from the joys and sorrows of this world. Jews are meant to prosper in this world; they are to be fruitful and multiply in their land,<sup>7</sup> in contrast to the life-denying asceticism of both Buddhism, in the pursuit of Nirvana and the Christian Gospels, where, for example, one is told to strive to be a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the contingencies of the historical are unavoidable components of the conceptually paradoxical “national universalism” of Jewish monotheism, as is manifestly clear not only in the description of Moses’ historical engagement with politics, but also in the lives and writings of all the other prophets. A just society in the biblical and Jewish traditions is by no means merely an ideal, a concern only “in speech,” if this is how Plato’s *Republic* should be understood.

The relationship between these two simultaneously held orientations within Judaism (described over the years in various ways, such as the unique and the universal)<sup>9</sup> is necessarily tension-filled, and recognized as such in both biblical and Jewish reflection, succinctly expressed, for example, in Exodus 19:5–6, “for [while] all the earth is mine, still you

<sup>6</sup> Steven Grosby, “The Biblical ‘Nation’ as a Problem for Philosophy,” *Hebraic Political Studies* 1:1 (2005), pp. 7–23; Grosby, “The Nation of the United States and the Vision of Ancient Israel,” in Grosby, *Biblical Ideas of Nationality: Ancient and Modern* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002); Anthony D. Smith, “Nation and Covenant: The Contribution of Ancient Israel to Modern Nationalism,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 151 (2007), pp. 213–255.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 1:28, 9:7; Deuteronomy 30:5.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 19:12.

<sup>9</sup> Jacob Talmon, *The Unique and the Universal* (New York: George Braziller, 1965).

will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”<sup>10</sup> It is the character of this reflection that interests us here in our consideration of how the terms “Jerusalem” and “Athens” have been employed, especially when they refer to a stark contrast between biblical revelation and philosophical reason, such as in the work of the political philosopher Leo Strauss.

## II.

Strauss considered there to be a “fundamental opposition” or “radical disagreement” between Jerusalem and Athens, which “compelled one from the very beginning to make a choice” between “incompatible claims to our allegiance.” He characterized that opposition as one between “the Bible and Greek philosophy,” that is, between “revelation and reason.” Even though Strauss rightly recognized that religion and philosophy agreed about “the importance of morality,” he insisted time and again that there could be no agreement between them regarding “the basis of morality.” This was because he understood biblical revelation as consisting of a “life in obedience,” an “unhesitating obedience,” a “pious submission,” where “we abandon the attempt to understand,” and “no possibility of independent questioning arises or is meant to arise.” In stark contrast, philosophy, according to Strauss, is a “life of autonomous understanding,” a “life in human freedom.”<sup>11</sup>

The first matter to be taken up here is to determine the accuracy of Strauss’ characterization of the biblical and Jewish tradition. Is his characterization of “Jerusalem” as “absolute obedience”—putatively required by religion to the point where the questioning dialectic of reason (for example, in the Platonic dialogues, which “imitate the manyness, the varieties, the heterogeneity of being”)<sup>12</sup> must be excluded—an example of perhaps a crude and, as such, inaccurate description of the biblical and

<sup>10</sup> For the parallel formulation in Deuteronomy, see Deuteronomy 10:14–15.

<sup>11</sup> Leo Strauss, “Progress or Return?” (1952), in Thomas L. Pangle, ed., *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Strauss, “On the Interpretation of Genesis” (1952), reprinted in Susan Orr, ed., *Jerusalem and Athens* (Lanham, Md.: Rowan & Littlefield, 1995); Strauss, “Jerusalem and Athens” (1967), in Thomas Pangle, ed., *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); and Strauss’ previously unpublished “Reason and Revelation” (1948), in Heinrich Meier, ed., *Leo Strauss and the Theological-Political Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also Strauss, “Preface to the English Translation,” in Strauss, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 61.

Jewish tradition? And if so, does such a contrast rest upon a misunderstanding of both revelation and reason?

A biblical event that may strike the reader of the Torah as an example of “absolute obedience” required by religion is the death of Moses. Despite leading Israel out of the Egyptian house of slavery and transmitting—or giving, as the case may be—the law to Israel, Moses is told by God that he must die before Israel crosses the Jordan River into the land necessary to make Israel complete. The demand of Moses’ death at the moment when Israel is about to realize the fruits of forty years of wandering in the desert strikes the reader as seemingly arbitrary, if not cruel. To be sure, the reader is given a reason in Numbers 27:12–15 (and 20:12) for why Moses must die outside the Promised Land: to atone for the sin of Israel at Meribath-Kadesh, where Israel “quarreled” with God by demanding water to drink—a demand to which Moses acquiesced, but at the command of God.<sup>13</sup> The description of Israel’s lack of trust in God in the wilderness of Zin at Meribath-Kadesh and the attendant sentence of the death of Moses in the land of Moab is not our primary concern here in an examination of the unequivocal contrast between a putatively submissive “Jerusalem” and a questioning “Athens”; although even in this instance it is noteworthy that the biblical account explicitly provides the reason for the sentence. In fact, it does so no less than three times, in Numbers 20:12 and 27:12–17 and in Deuteronomy 32:50–51, as if justification for God’s actions were expected; that is, the obedience of “Jerusalem” requires explanation and understanding. More to the point in determining the nature of the obedience characteristic of “Jerusalem” is the description of Moses’ response to God.

If, in fact, Judaism requires unhesitating obedience, then one expects that Moses piously submits, without questioning, to the sentence of his death in the land of Moab. Such a submission appears to be what one finds, for there is no description of Moses’ objecting to God in either the three accounts cited above or the conclusion in Deuteronomy 34:5, “So Moses the servant of the Lord died there, in the land of Moab, at the command of the Lord.” The problem with what might be viewed as a clear example of the absolute obedience demanded by “Jerusalem,” where there is “no possibility of independent questioning,” is that we are told elsewhere in Deuteronomy that Moses strenuously objected to the commanding sentence of his death in the land of Moab.

I pleaded with the Lord at that time, saying, “O Lord God, you who let your servant see the first works of your greatness and

<sup>13</sup> Numbers 20:9.

your mighty hand, you whose powerful deeds no god in heaven or earth can equal! Let me, I pray, cross over and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan, that good hill country and the Lebanon.”<sup>14</sup>

Now, in this instance (in contrast to, for example, Exodus 32:9–14, where—note well—in response to Moses’ plea not to destroy Israel, God is described as changing his plans), Moses’ objection does not fall on receptive ears: “But the Lord was wrathful with me on your account and would not listen to me. The Lord said to me, ‘Enough! Never speak to me of this matter again!’” There thus is a limit to Moses’ (and the reader’s) questioning—a limit that we will have to examine later. Nevertheless, despite this limit and Moses’ eventual, obedient acceptance of it, it is clearly inaccurate to characterize his relationship to God as one of unhesitating obedience with no possibility of questioning. Moreover, and significantly, the reader is left with a sense of injustice, precisely because of the inclusion of Moses’ pleading questioning of God in the biblical account.

In an accurate determination of the character of “Jerusalem,” one ought to acknowledge not only this description of Moses’ objection to God in Deuteronomy but also the fact that, for generations of subsequent commentators within the Jewish tradition, this sense of injustice over Moses’ death served as a catalyst for further questioning of the biblical narrative. In the second-to-third-century-C.E. *Sifre* on Deuteronomy (paragraph 339), the midrash on God’s telling Moses that “he will die on the mountain”<sup>15</sup> elaborates further upon Moses’ objection:

Moses said to God, “Master of the Universe, why must I die? Would it not be better for people to say ‘Moses is good’ out of personal knowledge rather than as mere rumor? Would it not be better for people to say, ‘This here is Moses, who had brought us out of Egypt, had split the Sea for us, had brought down manna for us, and had performed miracles and wonders for us,’ rather than say, ‘Moses was like that, and did such-and-such?’”<sup>16</sup>

In this case, the focus of Moses’ objection to God’s demand that he die in the land of Moab is a plea for the prolongation of his life. Interestingly, in this midrash God’s response has nothing to do with Moses’ atoning for Israel’s quarrel with God at Meribath-Kadesh; rather, the rabbis *justify*

<sup>14</sup> Deuteronomy 3:23–27.

<sup>15</sup> Mount Nebo, in the land of Moab. Deuteronomy 32:50.

<sup>16</sup> *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*, trans. Reuven Hammer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

God's command for Moses to die by grounding it in a rational appeal to the natural end of all human life: "Enough, Moses. Such is my decree, which applies equally to all men," as it is said, "This is the law: when a person dies in a tent."<sup>17</sup> Subsequent commentaries contain numerous examples of this kind of questioning of the biblical account of God's command for Moses' death in Moab, such as in *Deuteronomy Rabba*, *Tanhuma* (ninth century C.E.), and *Yalkut* (thirteenth century C.E.).

From this example alone, there is reason enough to conclude that the unequivocal opposition between putatively unquestioned revelation and questioning reason is too simplistic a characterization of a complicated relation of modes of thought *within* "Jerusalem." It certainly misrepresents the biblical and Jewish tradition. True enough, and importantly, there is the depiction of Abraham's obedient acceptance of God's command to leave his home in Haran in Genesis 12, which even so, as is well known, subsequent commentaries sought to account for through stories about his youthful recognition of the one and only God. And there is the troubling *Akeda* of Genesis 22, which nonetheless did not escape the rabbinic evaluation that "it is unnatural that he [Abraham] should slay his son [Isaac] with his own sword."<sup>18</sup> Yet there is also the persistently questioning Abraham, apparently with his own moral expectations, of Genesis 18:23–25, "Will you sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?... Far be it from you to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that the innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" True enough, there is Israel before God at Mount Sinai,<sup>19</sup> where there is "no possibility of independent questioning arising or [being] meant to arise"; and yet, one rabbinic commentary goes so far as to question the validity of the Sinai covenant precisely because of the presumed absence of freely given consent.<sup>20</sup> In this regard, one should remember that in the biblical descriptions of the subsequent covenantal ceremonies in Joshua 24 and II Kings 23, where in both cases Israel is asked to give its consent to the covenant, God is not present. In these two instances, Israel, facing a choice of how to live its life, is described as freely consenting to the covenant in what is portrayed as nothing less than a national convocation. In these covenantal ceremonies, instead of the presence of God there is the "book of the law," which, in turn, must be not only understood but

<sup>17</sup> Numbers 19:14.

<sup>18</sup> *Genesis Rabba*, LVI.5, p. 495.

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 19.

<sup>20</sup> *Babylonian Talmud*, Shabbat 88a.

also applied to changing historical circumstances through interpretation that necessarily involves questioning reasoning. As we shall see, to question, to reason, and to choose is certainly characteristic of the tradition of “Jerusalem.”

### III.

One difficulty for any analysis of the relation between “Jerusalem” and “Athens” is the question of what is meant by the terms “revelation” and “reason.” The proper way to clarify these terms ought to begin with an examination of biblical and rabbinic materials. To begin, rather, with the assertion of abstract categories risks achieving little more than the affirmation of one’s initial assumptions. This clarification is further compromised if the examples sought are those that serve only to justify one’s present understanding of the categories under examination. Let us begin with the biblical material that might serve to elucidate our terms.

To understand biblical revelation, one must turn to its textual and historical manifestation: prophecy. It is obvious enough—from even a superficial reading of the Bible—that, as Strauss rightly observed, “the true prophets speak and act by the spirit and in the spirit of *ehyeh-asher-ehyeh*” (“*I am who I am*” of Exodus 3:14).<sup>21</sup> However, to leave the matter here is to suggest that one encounters in prophecy nothing more than a free-floating eruption of uncertain character to which only “absolute obedience” is supposed to be possible. Nothing could be further from the biblical account. First, prophecy conveys a response to a problem, for example, slavery in Egypt or the military sieges of Jerusalem by the Assyrians and, later, the Babylonians, the latter addressed respectively by Isaiah and Jeremiah (and not, let it be noted, without sharp dispute over what the proper response to the problem should be). Second, and importantly, the Bible presents two criteria by which one should evaluate the merit of prophecy so that one can distinguish between true and false responses to the problem at hand. These criteria will be briefly examined below.

In response to the problem of whether or not a prophet speaks the word of God, we are told that if he speaks in the name of God, but what he says does not come about, then that prophet has not spoken the word of God.<sup>22</sup> The criterion here is one of reason, as the prophecy is subjected to empirical verification. Revealing, I think, for properly understanding

<sup>21</sup> Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens*, p. 170.

<sup>22</sup> Deuteronomy 18:21–22; see also Jeremiah 28:9.

the tradition of “Jerusalem,” the problem of whether or not to accept a prophecy is explicitly anticipated as a problem: “and if you should ask yourselves....”<sup>23</sup> Of course, the criterion of subjecting prophecy to empirical verification to determine its validity does not help one to know how to act in response to the prophecy when what is prophesied concerns the distant future. However, this same difficulty confronts all action, irrespective of how it is motivated, if for no other reason than the unintended consequences of whatever is done.

The second criterion poses a different and conceptually more complicated problem. In this case, even if a prophecy turns out to be true but the prophet nonetheless speaks in the name of “another god,” that prophet is to be rejected.<sup>24</sup> The consideration of this possibility indicates a further and now acute biblical awareness of the problems surrounding revelation. The reason empirical verification cannot be the sole criterion in the determination of true prophecy is that the monotheistic tradition of the God of Israel, who freed Israel from Egyptian bondage and gave Israel the law, must take priority. It is, of course, precisely this elevation of tradition and, above all, fidelity to its continuation that is objectionable to one who insists on “autonomous understanding,” thereby rejecting tradition except perhaps for some utilitarian reason.<sup>25</sup> Let us examine more closely this elevation of tradition, and the limit—but not the elimination—to questioning that it implies.

As we have already seen and will see again, the fidelity to the tradition of Israel has never been uncritical, even within the Torah. At times, the questioning can, in fact, be radical, within both the Tanach (for example, the book of Job) and the Talmud (see below). Nevertheless, it is a questioning within a tradition that, in turn, develops, as it must, for Israel faced and faces the changing challenges of the vagaries of life as it is historically experienced. Recognizing the historical experience of a living tradition brings us to the crux of the problem. The actual reason for the rejection of tradition by a serious rationalist cannot be that tradition demands absolute obedience. This would be too crude and inaccurate a reason, as any reader of the biblical and rabbinic material ought to be able to easily ascertain. Such an objection does little more than accept the fashionable, scientific prejudices against religion, and dangerously so

<sup>23</sup> Deuteronomy 18:21.

<sup>24</sup> Deuteronomy 13:2–5, 18:20.

<sup>25</sup> See Strauss, “Progress or Return?” p. 246. For the rejection of tradition, see Strauss, “What Is Political Philosophy?” in Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 27; and Strauss, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, pp. 24–25.

against the empirically unverifiable truths about the character of human existence conveyed through religion, for example, the sacredness of all human life because humankind is made in the image of God. The actual reason for the rejection of tradition by the rationalist is that revelation “puts emphasis not on the universal, but on the contingent”; that is, it both arises out of historical vicissitude and appeals to a tradition that, as such, is particular.<sup>26</sup> For Israel, to what does this objection to “contingency” amount? It is, in the name of consistency, an objection to the particularity of being a chosen people. It is an objection to the historical fact that the nation of Israel has brought the law into the world—a law that recognizes limits to human conduct out of regard for the sacredness of life. Of course, the recognition of this contingent fact of history as a bearer of meaning is not to be demagogically conflated with relativistic historicism; it does, however, raise history, tradition, and the reception of tradition from one generation to the next as problems of life to be pondered.

The question that now arises is this: might it be the case that the historical accomplishments of Israel—the truths about human existence that it embodies—both presuppose and reaffirm a national tradition? To raise this question is to call into doubt the possibility of a “life of autonomous understanding” as being dangerously unrealistic; for such a life raises humanity, at least theoretically, to the level of God, thereby eschewing the limits placed upon humanity by the tradition, both moral (against wanton murder) and political (against empire). The tradition of “Jerusalem” recognizes that every plan of humankind inevitably bears the probability of some eventual evil<sup>27</sup>—an evil that cannot be avoided through, for example, proper education. To put the matter differently, the tradition of “Jerusalem” bears the “modern” recognition of Acton that “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” The biblical recognitions of this truth are many, appearing both in the universal context of Genesis 3:22 and 11:6 and politically in the history of Israel with Nathan’s denunciation of David in II Samuel 12 and Naboth’s vineyard of I Kings 21.

In contrast to the rationalist rejection of tradition, one should recognize two possibilities: (1) tradition is a necessary, fertile ground for insight, including that of limiting human aspiration; and (2) the pre-conceptual basis of our experience, both individually and collectively, can never be fully conceptualized—that is, there is an unavoidable

<sup>26</sup> Strauss, “Progress or Return?” p. 265.

<sup>27</sup> Genesis 6:5, 8:21.

incompleteness to our understanding.<sup>28</sup> If so, then we have cause for skepticism about reason, by no means to reject reason but for the sake of reason. Furthermore, if there is merit to these two possibilities, then one should also reject the fashionable prejudice against “myth,” for myth may convey (a non-rational, but *not* irrational) truth that is both constitutive of and borne by tradition. While we may never fully know what actually took place at Mount Sinai and certainly the events surrounding the covenant with Noah, both assert meanings—truths—fundamental to a never to be fully understood human existence, which conceptually safeguard humanity from the horrific dangers of otherwise unrestrained aspiration.

Thus, it is likely that myth is not a phenomenon only of the past, but is to be found in every age of humanity, not because of the necessity of the Platonic “noble lie” in the face of the *hoi polloi*, but because of humanity’s uncertain and always partly inaccessible place within a mysterious universe. However, recognizing this requires a richer understanding of religion than what is conveyed by the unequivocal contrast between “Jerusalem” and “Athens.” It is, of course, possible for the philosopher to reach a similar conclusion by observing that these intellectual components *within* “Jerusalem” represent philosophy. If so, then let us be clear that the philosopher has ripped apart the complicated relation between modes of thought and experience *within* “Jerusalem” merely to serve his or her own purposes, which, in turn, must be ascertained.

What is finally at stake here is, I think, the following. The atheistic philosopher of the more serious kind (one whose atheism is publicly restrained, for example, Strauss) accepts the oracle of Delphi, “Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must keep silent.” In contrast, while Judaism recognizes the ultimate mystery of God and human existence, it dares not remain silent. Its response, to “choose life”—which of necessity is

<sup>28</sup> As Strauss also often recognizes, when he describes in numerous places that Socrates thought the whole was unintelligible; its problems are not solvable; that is, “the truth that there is an ultimate mystery.” See, for example, Leo Strauss, “Why We Remain Jews,” in Kenneth L. Deutsch and Walter Nicgorski, eds., *Leo Strauss: Political Philosopher and Jewish Thinker* (Lanham, Md.: Rowan & Littlefield, 1994), p. 61. Obviously relevant here is Maimonides’ discussion of God, or rather, what God is not. See Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 1:50–60. However, it is difficult to ascertain just what Strauss thought in this regard, for the most prominent, modern interpreter of the insolvable problems of the whole is, in fact, Max Weber, whom Strauss bitterly criticizes. Of course, Weber thought that life compelled one to choose a solution. Strauss also thought a choice was necessary; hence his arguments in favor of natural right (itself ambiguous); but the reason for his choice is not clear. Was it on utilitarian grounds? Thus, Strauss insisted that “in a well-ordered society it is required that one tell untruths of a certain kind [not only] to children [but also] to the grown-up subjects” (Strauss, *City and Man*, p. 68); but what is the truth, if truth it be, that Strauss concealed?

dependent upon legal and moral order,<sup>29</sup> however grounded in the myth of the purposeful order of the world as conveyed in Genesis 1—is one of meaning to human existence and is, as such, coherent; that is, it partakes of being rational. Once one puts aside the conceptual straitjacket of the dichotomy of reason and revelation, one sees clearly this rational component within “Jerusalem,” for how could it be otherwise? And it may very well be that this component was acknowledged by Aristotle’s pupil Theophrastus when he said that the Jews were a philosophical people.<sup>30</sup> The meaningful coherence of monotheism is obvious enough when contrasted with the lament of the Mesopotamian ark-building Atrahasis’ polytheistic conceptual dilemma, “My god does not agree with your god, Enki and Enli are constantly angry with each other.”<sup>31</sup> It is the latter’s incoherence that requires obedient passivity in the face of meaningless chance, and not “Jerusalem,” however tragic its life has been and will be in this world; for “Jerusalem” to be “Jerusalem” requires reason.

Consider, to take one among numerous examples, the twice-told account of Jacob’s morally suspect theft of his brother Esau’s birthright: first, as the price for feeding his starving brother; and second, through his mother Rebekah’s devious plan to trick her blind husband, Isaac, so that the younger Jacob would receive his father’s blessing.<sup>32</sup> At one level, the reader is aware that these narratives are in the service of accounting for the emergence of Israel vis-à-vis its older, geographical neighbor, Edom.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, separate from such an awareness is the behavior of both Jacob and Rebekah as described in the course of the narratives—a behavior that provokes judgment. It is possible to suspend, as some have done, harsh judgment of Jacob and Rebekah because one assumes that they are carrying out the plan of God, which, as such, is not to be questioned. However, such a suspension is *not* what one finds in the tradition of Judaism, where, in fact, judgment is rendered.

<sup>29</sup> Deuteronomy 30:15–20.

<sup>30</sup> Theophrastus’ quotation appears in Porphyry’s *De Abstinentia* (Paris: Société d’Édition “Les Belles Lettres,” 1975), vol. 2, II.26.3, p. 93.

<sup>31</sup> W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), tablet III, i. 42–43.

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 25:29–34 and Genesis 27, respectively.

<sup>33</sup> For the geographical boundary between Israel and Edom lurking within the biblical account of the relation between Jacob and Esau, see Steven Grosby, “The Successor Territory,” in Athena Leoussi and Grosby, eds., *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Zecharia Kallai, “The Southern Border of the Land of Israel—Pattern and Application,” in Kallai, *Biblical Historiography and Historical Geography* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998).

The midrash on Isaac's realization that he had blessed the younger, smooth-skinned Jacob instead of the older, hairy Esau in Genesis 27:33 states,

R. Levi said: Our father Isaac felt misgivings, thinking, "Perhaps I did not act rightly in making him [Jacob] the firstborn who is not so"; but when he [Esau] said: "He took away my birthright,"<sup>34</sup> he [Isaac] exclaimed: "Rightly did I bless him."<sup>35</sup>

Thus, justification is sought and found for Jacob's (and Rebekah's) deceit, namely because Esau had earlier sold his birthright to Jacob for a plate of red lentils. Even within the Tanach, Jacob's actions are subjected to moral evaluation, receiving the rebuke of the prophet Hosea: "and the Lord punished Jacob, requited him for his deeds. In the womb he tried to supplant his brother" in Hosea 12:3–4. Distinct from Hosea's judgment of Jacob based on moral criteria, the primary problem for Hosea was to provide a coherent accounting for Israel's historical vicissitudes. Now, one may or may not agree with Hosea's accounting, just as one may or may not agree with the rabbinic justification for the deception of Isaac; but in either case, it most certainly has nothing to do with a putatively unquestioning submission to the authority of tradition. In fact, as is so often the case with "Jerusalem," the reception of tradition by subsequent generations entails scrutiny and modification—for example, the adaptation of tradition to subsequent historical events in the development of the rabbinic formulation of the Noahide covenant as a means to justify establishing relations with non-Jews, specifically Christians and Muslims.<sup>36</sup> Thus, to think that the transmission of tradition from one generation to the next is a matter of passive acceptance, as if humans were unthinking brutes oblivious to the ever-changing demands of life, is simply wrong. Moreover, this is not how "Jerusalem" has understood its relation to its own tradition; for example, "see how ancient words become new in the mouth of the sage."<sup>37</sup>

"Jerusalem's" refusal to remain silent in the face of the mysteries of life has, once again, not meant a putatively unquestioning obedience, as is abundantly clear from the Babylonian Talmud. One finds repeatedly in the Talmud differing arguments, for example, between Abaye and Rava. The implication of presenting competing views of a problem of law, often

<sup>34</sup> Genesis 27:36, referring to Genesis 25:31–34.

<sup>35</sup> *Genesis Rabba*, LXVII.2, p. 608.

<sup>36</sup> See Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

<sup>37</sup> *Genesis Rabba*, LXIII.9, p. 565.

with no obvious conclusion presented to the reader, can only be to qualify the authority of the Torah and Mishna precisely through the introduction of differing lines of questioning that were not initially apparent in either. Whether to clarify the basis for a given law or to provide justification for a ruling, the questioning argumentation of the Talmud asserts a prerogative of deliberation over mishnaic law.<sup>38</sup> At times, this deliberative procedure is explicit.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, and importantly, the presentations of different lines of reasoning through different interpretations are not merely consequences of the commonplace recognition of the gap between Scripture and our understanding of it. It is much more than that; it is to agree with the Talmud that truth is not always certain, even when confronted by the voice of heaven. As the talmudic dispute over the oven of Achnai makes clear, even the appeal first to miracles and then to heaven to justify a legal ruling is rejected in favor of a decision of the majority arrived at through deliberation.<sup>40</sup>

It is curious that the implications of the differing arguments over law and over Torah within the Babylonian Talmud are not appreciated by the philosopher. Strauss, for example, has some penetrating insights into the implications of the compositional technique of the Platonic dialogues, observing that the number of them and the dialectical exchanges within each “imitates the manyness, the variety, the heterogeneity of being”—a being that is ultimately mysterious and, as such, can be articulated only approximately.<sup>41</sup> However, surely the very same can be said about the Talmud. There are, of course, differences. The point of departure for the Talmud is both the written and oral law as authoritative sources of truth. But that should be the *beginning* of our problem of ascertaining the character of “Jerusalem,” certainly not the conclusion, especially in light of the competing lines of argumentation within and with the tradition and a skepticism toward miracles. For “Athens,” tradition, while superficially tolerated, is, in fact, rejected out of what appears to be a faith, however grounded if at all, in unassisted reason.

<sup>38</sup> David Kraemer, *The Mind of the Talmud: An Intellectual History of the Bavli* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 45, 146.

<sup>39</sup> For example, “Rava says, ‘The reward for repeating what one has heard [tradition] is in reasoning about it’” (*Babylonian Talmud*, Berachot 6b); “Rava said, ‘and I can state my reason and also state theirs’” (*Babylonian Talmud*, Eruvin 8b); and “Abaye observed, ‘From this incident it may be learned that when a scholar gives a ruling, he should also indicate his reason, so that when he is ever reminded of it, he will recollect it’” (*Babylonian Talmud*, Nidda 24b).

<sup>40</sup> *Babylonian Talmud*, Baba Metzia 59b.

<sup>41</sup> Strauss, *City and Man*, pp. 61–62.

If an examination of the relation between “Jerusalem” and “Athens” must attempt to clarify what is meant by revelation, so, too, must the meaning of reason be clarified. If one characterizes philosophy to be the love of *evident* truth, then the question arises: what makes the truth evident?<sup>42</sup> The answer to this question is not straightforward.

Strauss, for example, argued that in order for a statement to be true, it cannot be “opinion” or “belief,” but knowledge based on sufficient evidence from one’s own experience.<sup>43</sup> One can certainly understand “sufficient evidence” to mean here a conclusion based on empirical verification, as in one of the biblical criteria for true prophecy. And one can further understand, as economists do, that acting rationally involves a proper calculation of the most efficient means of achieving a particular end. However, for many philosophers, including Strauss, other criteria can also make a proposition reasonable or evident. A proposition may be truthful if it is logical, that is, if it is not contradictory. Finally, and related to the previous possibility, a proposition may be viewed as truthful if it coherently follows from other propositions.

Numerous difficulties follow from these possible understandings of what makes truth evident. Sufficiency of evidence is rarely obtained, especially when a particular context is complicated; yet one must still act. For rational, economic behavior, one may attempt to calculate the efficient means of obtaining a desired end, but that calculation is often compromised by a lack of sufficient information. Moreover, how is the desired end to be determined? More importantly, what is the relation of one desired end to another? Is it rationally evident that numerous ends or self-evident goods can be neatly ordered by degree of preference, or might they exist in tension with one another, such that the pursuit of one results in unavoidable regret? After all, do we not distinguish between regret and our response to accident? Do we not think the latter could have been avoided, if only we had sufficient information, while the former is a response of a different kind?<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, a set of propositions may logically cohere, where various considerations are rationally subordinated to a norm, but on what basis is that very end or norm justified? What are the assumptions upon which

<sup>42</sup> For philosophy as the love of *evident* truth, see Strauss, “Reason and Revelation,” p. 171 (emphasis in original).

<sup>43</sup> Strauss, “Reason and Revelation,” p. 171; see also Strauss, “What Is Political Philosophy?” pp. 12–13.

<sup>44</sup> For a stimulating discussion of regret, accident, and biblical law, see Calum Carmichael, ed., *The Deed and Doer in the Bible: David Daube’s Gifford Lectures* (West Conshohocken, Pa.: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), pp. 53–91.

that end or norm is based? For example, for “Athens,” why should one accept both “necessity,” rather than contingency, and the dualism of mind and body (for example, *Phaedo* 65–66) as the assumptions upon which the logical coherence of Greek philosophy is based? Are those assumptions so “evident”? As is well known, “Jerusalem” recognizes contingency, and the Jewish tradition certainly does not disparage the body.

The intent of these brief remarks was not to settle once and for all what is meant by the terms “revelation” and “reason.” Rather, it was to make clear that the use of these terms is often unclear, and all the more so when they are exploited in contrasts such as between “Athens” and “Jerusalem.” It is, once again, clearly the case that “Jerusalem” is characterized by a conceptual coherence that not only tolerates questioning but considers it necessary and invites it. This coherence may, in part, rest upon empirically unverifiable assertions constitutive of and borne by tradition; but it is likely the case that this is unavoidable.

It may be that despite his clear choice of “Athens” over “Jerusalem,” which entailed his apparent acceptance of the existence of a natural hierarchy, “the good,” and even a physically ascetic perfection (for the philosopher), all of which is rationally evident, Strauss undermined that choice when, following Max Weber, he surprisingly observed that “it is prudent to grant that there are value conflicts which cannot in fact be settled by human reason.”<sup>45</sup> If Strauss meant this and was not merely characterizing Weber’s thought, then it seems to me that there can be no radical disagreement between “Athens” and “Jerusalem”; indeed, “Jerusalem” is for a second time justified as being rationally necessary, the first time being the mystery of the whole. Insofar as there remains a disagreement, it is because “Jerusalem” properly asserts a limit upon the potentially dangerous “Athens,” where the latter’s investigation into and manipulation of nature, in the name of consistency, knows no limits (as portrayed, for example, in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*). Furthermore, Weber’s recognition was not a matter of “prudence,” for he never thought that monotheism rested upon unquestioning opinion. In contrast, Weber rightly recognized that “Jerusalem” asserts coherently, and as such rationally, a meaning to our world without which human existence would cease to be human.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Strauss, “What Is Political Philosophy?” pp. 22–23.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Max Weber, “The Social Psychology of the World Religions,” in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

## IV.

It is all too obvious that a tradition for which conceptual coherence is integral to its continued existence can be taken to an ideological extreme: where otherwise acknowledged limits are abandoned out of an uncompromising fidelity to a consistency that runs roughshod over the obduracy of human existence and the historical vicissitudes of that existence. There are tragically too many historical examples of the attempt to quench such a thirst for order, not only in the name of “Jerusalem” but also based on the putatively self-evident reason of “Athens.” Strauss rightly recognized that rationalism posed a potential danger to humanity and attempted to deflate this potential with references to the mystery of human existence and the universe.<sup>47</sup> How faithful such an attempt is to the logic of classical political philosophy is another matter.

It may very well be that the potential for ideological fanaticism is paradoxically more likely to be realized within a context of humane, empirically unverifiable propositions about the character of human existence, when the pursuit of realizing such otherwise attractive propositions comes at the expense of the tradition that bears them and, above all, the heterogeneous conceptual orientations within them. “Jerusalem” has certainly been accused of fostering fanaticism, a consequence of a putatively unquestioned obedience required by religion. This fanaticism has been characterized as “enthusiasm” or “zealotry,” where the individual is wholeheartedly devoted to an ideal, thereby disrupting the rule of law on God’s behalf, or so the individual assumes.<sup>48</sup> The classic, biblical example of this zealotry is when Phineas executes an Israelite and his Midianite lover in Numbers 25. However, not to be overlooked is that the tradition of “Jerusalem” recognizes the danger that such zeal poses, as the talmudic commentary makes clear in Sanhedrin 82a–b. Despite the authority of the Torah, the rabbinic attitude toward such zeal is at best troubled, even ambivalent. This ambivalence indicates not only the critical reception of tradition, as has been discussed above. It also indicates that “Jerusalem” cannot be reduced to a single, all-encompassing proposition.

It is legitimate to recognize the existence of a culture, nation, or civilization, the conceptual core or center of which is coherent. In fact, this is the basis of the so-called historical or cultural sciences. However,

<sup>47</sup> See note 28, above; and Leo Strauss, “An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism,” in Strauss, *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, p. 42.

<sup>48</sup> R.A. Knox, *Enthusiasm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950).

there has been an analytical tendency to assume that a culture, including “Jerusalem,” is unitary. One gets the sense that this is how Strauss understood “Jerusalem.” However, to do so is wrong, for no conceptual center can exist without various tensions within it. The qualitatively different orientations of humanity, for example, the recognition of the equality of all human beings and the fidelity to one’s own family, may be brought into a conceptual alignment, but only relatively so. The attempt to order those orientations such that they become unitary, where they are subsumed under a conception of “the good” or only one truth, runs the risk of propagating a catastrophically dangerous, ideological politics that, as such, willfully rejects what it is to be human. Now, from this important vantage point, one recognizes the tensions of differing orientations within Jewish and, for that matter, Hebraic tradition: (1) the transmission of life through kinship and historical uniqueness—a uniqueness that, yet again, was neither simply accepted nor without justification;<sup>49</sup> (2) the freedom of life, succinctly expressed repeatedly in Exodus by the phrase “Let my people go,” which implies the historical particularity of tradition; (3) the order of life as conveyed through the law that elevates Israel and humanity (the rabbinic Noahide covenant) but also limits both in the face of evil; and (4) the equality of humanity as a consequence of monotheism.<sup>50</sup>

While these differing orientations have been brought into harmony with one another in both Judaism and its reception in the Hebraic tradition of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, it is a discordant harmony. This relative discord is at the basis of much of the questioning within Jewish tradition; for example, should Israel be politically organized into a state (to have a king), should the Assyrians and Babylonians be militarily opposed, should one revolt against the Romans, how should one understand the Messiah, what should be one’s attitude toward the Gentiles, and on and on. It also explains why there has never been a Judaism, but always Judaisms: Rechabites, Nazirites, Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Karaites, Sabbateans, Musarniks, Hasidim, and so on. One gets a sense of this discord in two descriptions of God juxtaposed within just eight biblical verses in Deuteronomy: “For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God,” and “Because the Lord your God is a merciful God.”<sup>51</sup> It is precisely

<sup>49</sup> See Amos 9:7 and *Babylonian Talmud*, Avoda Zara 2b.

<sup>50</sup> Steven Grosby, “The Chosen People of Ancient Israel and the Occident: Why Does Nationality Exist and Survive?” in Grosby, *Biblical Ideas of Nationality*.

<sup>51</sup> Deuteronomy 4:24 and 4:31, respectively.

this discord within the only relatively ordered coherence of Judaism that provides a safeguard from ideological exploitation.

Nonetheless, it is a safeguard, not a guarantee; for the potential for ideological exploitation, precisely because of its rational component, is unavoidable. This is as much the case for “Jerusalem” as it is for “Athens” and vice versa. To be human is to dream of a better world; but, alas, some dreams are nightmares. They become nightmares when the reality of freedom—notoriously difficult to substantiate through philosophy—is ignored. They also become nightmares when the reality of evil—also notoriously difficult to substantiate through philosophy—is ignored.

## V.

Just why did a perceptive scholar like Strauss insist on an unequivocal contrast between “Jerusalem” and “Athens”? It is difficult to attempt to ascertain the intentions of an author, and especially so when one is dealing with a subtle thinker who argues for the necessity of the wise to dissemble.<sup>52</sup> If one chooses to proceed with such an attempt, then one is forced to speculate on those intentions. I will do so, but warily.

It may be that Strauss, as have so many other intellectuals of the twentieth century, concluded that religion was a thing of the past, having been rendered nothing more than superstition during the last several centuries, contributing, for Strauss, to the crisis of “modernity.”<sup>53</sup> In his adoption of the category of “modernity,” Strauss followed Heidegger, thereby also accepting, despite his objection, the latter’s historicism as a given.<sup>54</sup> A further indication of this historicism is Strauss’ insistence upon an opposition between “ancients and moderns”—an overwrought opposition that whatever its merits in the analysis of some texts is nonetheless historically exaggerated, as implied in my opening observations, and certainly antithetical to Judaism.<sup>55</sup> However, in contrast to Heidegger, Strauss

<sup>52</sup> Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952); and Strauss, “Exoteric Teaching,” in Pangle, *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*.

<sup>53</sup> For example, see Strauss, “Progress or Return?” p. 245; Strauss, “Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism,” pp. 42–43.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture” (1938) in Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper, 1977). For Strauss on Heidegger, see Strauss, “Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism.”

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Leo Strauss, “The Three Waves of Modernity,” in Hilail Gilden, ed., *Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1975); Strauss, “What Is Political Philosophy?” pp. 53–54; and Strauss, “On the Basis of

attempted to check the consequences of a radical historicism through a turn to the understanding of natural right and human nature in the work of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>56</sup> It appears that he did so with admirable intention: “to find a solid basis for rational liberalism.”<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, the question arises as to whether this turn can only be a “rearguard action,” if the underlying assumption is that both Nietzsche and Heidegger were fundamentally right about the utter exhaustion of “Jerusalem.” It remains unclear whether or not this is what Strauss thought, even though it is perfectly clear that he abhorred the consequences of such an assumption. If he did, can this be the reason for his opposition between “Jerusalem” and “Athens,” the intention of which appears to be to discredit “Jerusalem” through an inaccurate, even conceptually clumsy caricature? If so, then Strauss succumbed to an impressionistic historicism by turning his back on what it means to be human; for if there is no religion, with its assertion of meaning to human existence, then there ceases to be humanity. It is difficult to be certain of the merit of this interpretation of Strauss’ intentions; but if there is merit, then he likely thought that “Jerusalem” could no longer provide the basis for a humane order to our civilization; only “Athens” might be able to quench his thirst for order.

But which “Athens”? Surely not the Athens of Themistocles, “whose greed for money was insatiable.”<sup>58</sup> And we take for granted not the “Athens” of the tragedians who balked at philosophy’s insistence that there can be only one truth. No, by “Athens” Strauss did not mean its historical existence, with its complicated, conceptual crosscurrents. He meant philosophy and, above all, the dialogues of Plato. Having thus collapsed “Athens” into Platonic philosophy and then opposing it to a simplified understanding of the Bible, Strauss committed a fundamental error by comparing and contrasting incommensurable categories.

As important as the Torah is for Judaism, Judaism is not to be collapsed into the Torah. It is a living tradition that as such has always been in the world; for otherwise there would have been no Israel, no Mishna, and no Talmud. There would not have been so many Judaisms arising out of and in response to the historical problems confronting Israel and its understand-

Hobbes’ Political Philosophy,” in Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Essays* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959), p. 172.

<sup>56</sup> For example, Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

<sup>57</sup> Strauss, “Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism,” p. 29; and Strauss, *Natural Right and History*.

<sup>58</sup> Herodotus, *The History*, trans. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 8.112.

ing of Torah in the face of those problems. In other words, and to repeat an earlier observation, Judaism is most certainly not an ideal “in speech.” This is why it is inappropriate to compare it or “Jerusalem” in general to philosophy. The latter, if we correctly understand some of Strauss’ arguments, requires retreat from the world; for the self-evident truth of philosophy cannot be realized in the world except under the rarest of circumstances. In contrast, Judaism has never retreated from the world, nor could it ever. A Jew may agree with Strauss that “one might realize the *insoluble* character of the fundamental riddles and still continue to see in the understanding of these riddles the task of philosophy”;<sup>59</sup> however, he or she will see that this is also the task of religion. But Judaism goes further, for it took upon itself the burden of organizing life in this world in light of those riddles;<sup>60</sup> hence Hebraic political studies.

Nevertheless, the recognition of the wonder, the mystery, or the riddle of life is not all that Strauss had to say; for he qualified this insoluble character by insisting that “there cannot be natural right if human thought, in spite of its essential incompleteness, is not capable of *solving* the problem of the principles of justice in a genuine and hence universally valid manner... of a final knowledge within a limited sphere or genuine knowledge of specific subjects.”<sup>61</sup> Even if one is inclined to follow Strauss here, the extent to which natural right solves the problems of justice is not as universally valid as he claimed. As any careful student of the tradition of natural right knows, it can logically lead to recognizing rights as inalienable either to the individual or the people, on one hand, or to the sovereign state, on the other. This is not the place to enter into this ambiguity, except to note its bearing on one’s understanding of the covenant (and contract theory); for example, did Israel in some sense exist before the covenant at Mount Sinai with corresponding rights and duties, or was the people formed entirely through that covenant, its rights and duties arising from it? This ambiguity aside, one is left wondering how “essential” the “incompleteness” of thought is for Strauss, or how “limited” the subjects of thought. Are the riddles soluble or insoluble? If, in fact, insoluble, are we not led back to “Jerusalem” and its traditions?

Where are we left if one concludes that thought is capable of final knowledge, albeit within a limited sphere, the scope of which is presumably restricted to where there is “sufficient evidence”? It appears that, for Strauss, we are left with the possibility of “the perfection of reason

<sup>59</sup> Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, pp. 29–30, my emphasis.

<sup>60</sup> For a striking example of the worldliness of Judaism, see Deuteronomy 23:13.

<sup>61</sup> Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p. 24, my emphasis.

and therefore that philosophy is the perfection of man.”<sup>62</sup> What “came to maturity in Greek philosophy” is “the possibility that man can find his happiness, or his peace, by eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.”<sup>63</sup> Now, here we do indeed come upon a much different and certainly evident truth conveyed through “Jerusalem” to the world; for while the philosopher occasionally refers to evil as a problem,<sup>64</sup> it is “Jerusalem” alone that recognizes its radical depth and danger.

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<sup>62</sup> Strauss, “Reason and Revelation,” p. 141.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>64</sup> Strauss, “What Is Political Philosophy?” p. 28.