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Eugene Sheppard. *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher.*
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who now teaches at Humboldt University in Berlin, has been instrumental in calling back to life the ideas of a philosopher that for many years were considered virtually defunct. There were, of course, occasional glimpses of Cassirer's spirit in the English-speaking world: Suzanne Langer's 1942 *Philosophy in a New Key*, and Nelson Goodman's 1978 *Ways of Worldmaking* (the first chapter of which Goodman read at the University of Hamburg on the occasion of Cassirer's hundredth birthday). These cases aside, serious scholarship on Cassirer in the English-speaking world has been rare indeed.

Why this is so deserves some reflection. Perhaps it is attributable to the fact that what counts as "continental philosophy" on *this* continent continues to draw much of its inspiration from the works of émigré intellectuals whose primary focus was political and social thought (Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, etc.), while Cassirer's thoughts on politics were comparatively uninspired. His posthumously published *The Myth of the State* (1946), written during his final phase of exile in the United States, is surely his *least* successful work. Perhaps it is also because, ever since the famous Davos disputation of 1929, Cassirer's reputation has seemed irreparably damaged. His interlocutor, Martin Heidegger, cast a strong spell over the audience in Switzerland, and even today it remains a commonplace view that Cassirer lost not only the debate but also the guarantee of an enduring intellectual legacy. In the postwar era, existentialism and phenomenology gained a significant following in the United States, whereas neo-Kantianism, along with Cassirer's post-neo-Kantian cultural philosophy, seemed nearly forgotten.

Not so in Germany. With communism's collapse and the (eventual) success of reunification, a newly moderate strain of cultural philosophy has arisen for which Cassirer is arguably the most formidable representative. New scholarship on Cassirer includes works by Heinz Paetzold, Andreas Graeser, Oswald Schwemmer, Steve Lofts, and Michael Bösch, a critical volume edited by Dorothea Frede and Reinold Schmücker, and another by Dominic Kaegi and Enno Rudolph. Even Jürgen Habermas has acknowledged his debt to Cassirer in an essay, "The Liberating Power of Symbols" (originally in German, 1997). Into this crowd already thick with commentaries arrives Thomas Meyer with his thorough and painstakingly researched biography. It is a welcome addition, and truly indispensable for anyone interested in the details of Cassirer's life and work.

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Eugene Sheppard. *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2006. 188 pp.
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Looking at the flurry of recent books on Leo Strauss, one cannot help feeling that Strauss has arrived in the United States once again, only this time with

considerable fanfare. Since Allen Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind* (1987), Strauss has been taken increasingly seriously as a conservative political thinker and has been received as such by both friends and foes of his work. In any case, today the name has a divisive, that is, politicizing, effect whenever it is mentioned. For a major ultraconservative political thinker and anti-Bolshevist to be dusted off thus vigorously may have something to do with the collapse of communism as public enemy number one and the ensuing crisis of orientation, that is, because of what one might call a Schmittian moment in American politics.

But Strauss has also recently arrived among students of modern Jewish thought. Long known as a maverick among students of medieval Jewish philosophy, Strauss was a household name already during his lifetime and a voice that could not be ignored (David Novak) despite, or because, of his rather quixotic claims about the method by which to ascertain Maimonides' true opinions.¹ In this more recent reception, Strauss has become the subject, inspiration, or *bête noir* for a younger generation of American Jewish scholars devoted to the study of modern Jewish intellectual history and religious thought from Spinoza onward. The trend began with Kenneth Hart Green's remarkable Brandeis dissertation, written under Martin Fox, who had been a student of Strauss's in Chicago. Green's book *Jew and Philosopher: The Return to Maimonides in the Jewish Thought of Leo Strauss* (1993) was the first to take Strauss seriously as a modern Jewish philosopher who spoke to a contemporary crisis of orientation, even when he wrote about seemingly remote topics such as the Platonic political philosophy of Maimuni and his Muslim predecessors. Green was also the first to read carefully the youthful writings of Strauss as the sources from which to reconstruct the intellectual path of the "young German Jew who," as Strauss writes less than ten years before his death, in America, "found himself in the grips of the theologico-political predicament."² Green realized that a full revival of Strauss as a Jewish philosopher was impossible in the American academy of today without providing Strauss's German (Jewish) writings in an American translation and his scattered essays on Jewish themes in the form of a focused collection.³

Green's work is sustained by the assumption that it is a good thing for Strauss to be taken seriously as a Jewish thinker. He hoped that access to Strauss's writings on Judaism would lead to a consideration of Strauss as a powerful source for a collective return to Maimonides, that is, an inspiration for a return to the reasoned orthodoxy of the great medieval Jewish thinker.

Green's project has recently been boosted by the work of Leora Batnitzky, for whom Strauss is not just the pathbreaker toward an antihistoricist return to a Jewish philosophical defense of orthodoxy à la Maimonides but also a radical critic of

1. Cf. Michael Zank, "Arousing Suspicion against a Prejudice: Leo Strauss and the Study of Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed," in *Moses Maimonides (1138–1204)—His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts*, ed. Görg K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraise (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2004), 549–71.

2. Preface to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, published 1965.

3. Thus the important and influential five-volume series on the *Jewish Thought of Leo Strauss* (1995–2004), edited by Kenneth Hart Green.

modern pseudo-philosophy. In her recent book, *Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas*,⁴ Batnitzky is right on at least three counts in her characterization of Strauss' thought: Strauss was, indeed, one of the most brilliant critics of modern conceptions of philosophy; he felt that, contrary to the consensus among liberal Jewish thinkers, an authentically Jewish concept of revelation would need to privilege the law; and he claimed that imbuing philosophy and politics with salvific (or utopian) qualities may have set us on the disastrous course of twentieth-century totalitarianism. This latter point is, of course, widely shared among conservative thinkers, who tend to regard the French Revolution as the beginning of the end of civilization, with the difference that Strauss considered this end to have begun much earlier.

But not everyone believes that Strauss ought to be taken seriously or that he is "one of the best friends democracy has ever had" (Steven B. Smith).⁵ For example, in her recent book on Spinoza, Nancy Levene argues that it must be possible to read Spinoza as a liberal without paying any attention to Strauss's claims to the contrary.⁶

Into this fray, Eugene Sheppard steps as an intellectual historian of Weimar Jewish thought. Based on his University of California, Los Angeles, dissertation under David Myers, Sheppard's *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile* takes a step back from all ideological and philosophical positions and attempts to tell the story of "the making of a political philosopher." Un-Straussian to the core, this historical narrative is based on the belief that, Strauss's critique of historicism notwithstanding, Strauss needs to be historicized before one may proceed to claim him for this, that, or another position in the current struggle for reorientation. If Batnitzky reads Strauss for a theory of "Jewish revelation" (i.e., *hitgalut*), Sheppard argues that Strauss can be understood as a theorist of "exile" (i.e., *galut*) and hence as a thinker whose thought is driven by the *conditio iudaica* par excellence. Strauss is thus returned to his beginnings as a Zionist, and his mature political thought, as crystallized in his American writings, is shown to be rooted in his youthful German Zionist writings.

What is poignant about this project is the broader question it raises for Jewish thought today. Since 1948, and with the exception of ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionism, Jewish thought can no longer be driven by the experience of exile. Jews are at home in Israel. They have a state. Or they are at home elsewhere, and they have a choice to live in the Jewish state but prefer not to. Exile is therefore no longer the real and inevitable *conditio iudaica normalis* but rather a metaphor. Strauss took the fulfillment of the Zionist project in the establishment of a state for granted as early as 1935, but at the same time, he dismissed it as something that could not provide a lasting solution to the Jewish problem. In this, he anticipated the disorientation that was to arise for Jewish thought in the age of post-Zionism.

4. *Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

5. Steven B. Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), ix.

6. Nancy K. Levene, *Spinoza's Revelation: Religion, Democracy, and Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

It is therefore understandable why one would turn to Strauss in the expectation that he not only foresaw our crisis but also provided a way out of it. Batnitzky and Green believe that the outlines of Strauss's solution can be found in *Philosophy and Law*. Sheppard tries to show that things are more complicated. Strauss's political thought, conceived when a political solution of the Jewish problem had become available (Strauss turned to Zionism in 1917, the year of the Balfour Declaration), anticipates the need to rearticulate the problem of exile under the condition of its dissolution as a reality.

As Sheppard demonstrates, the first phase of Strauss's writing (1921–32) coincides with the treacherous promise of a full integration of the Jews into a society whose language and ideals they had imbibed to such a degree that even their Jewish nationalism was not simply Jewish but *German Jewish*. The young Strauss, with perfect sobriety, prefers to acknowledge the ironies of this situation to hiding them behind pseudo-authentic forms of what Martin Buber had called the Jewish renaissance.⁷ At the same time, Strauss dramatically deepens the discussion in his academic studies on the roots of modern political thought in the critique of religion of the Enlightenment. Equipped, as Sheppard clearly shows, with careful tools of analysis honed under the influence of Ernst Cassirer, Max Weber, Edmund Husserl, Franz Rosenzweig, and Martin Heidegger, Strauss soon matures to become "one of the few to be taken seriously," as Walter Benjamin and others noted. His maturation from Zionist critic to political philosopher becomes evident in the 1932 essay on Schmitt's "Concept of the Political," originally published in Weber's *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft* and later included in translation in the 1965 version of the Spinoza book, originally published in 1930, that is, representative of the same phase in Strauss's intellectual biography as his first monograph.

Sheppard continues to trace Strauss's development through the 1930s and 1940s. Chapter 3 describes the theorist of exile in exile ("European Exile and Reorientation"), and Chapter 4 delineates Strauss's "New York years" under the heading of "Persecution and the Art of Writing." The intuition behind this arrangement of Strauss's intellectual development is, first of all, that the situation of the 1920s (described in Chap. 2) decisively determined Strauss's thinking. Less obvious but no less plausible, furthermore, is the second intuition, namely, that Strauss never considered himself other than in exile, even after he arrived in the United States. Psychologically, this would be a trivial insight. Most German or German Jewish intellectuals who left for the United States in the 1930s or 1940s had a hard time getting used to their new homeland. After all, they were refugees and had to make it in a society whose culture they had been predisposed to disdain and that they needed to learn to appreciate. Some refugees famously overcompensated, such as when Thomas Mann joyfully announced the new age of Americanism, much to the dismay of Pearl S. Buck, who, from an entirely different perspective, clearly anticipated the ugly implications this word was to

7. Cf. Asher Biemann, "Aesthetic Education in Martin Buber: Jewish Renaissance and the Artist," in *New Perspectives on Martin Buber*, ed. Michael Zank (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 85–110.

have later on. Strauss, of course, focused his efforts not on criticizing the American mind but the modern mind in general. The tools by which to critique were already in his baggage, so to speak, when he crossed the Atlantic. The “second, much deeper cave” had already been identified as the modern condition (an “exile” from the “natural difficulties of philosophizing”?) and the need to reopen the “old tomes” and the art of careful writing had already been rediscovered. Most importantly, Strauss brought with him to his American years the conviction that exile is the inevitable fate not so much of the Jew but of the philosopher who either speaks the truth openly, but then is likely to be banished or executed (the ultimate and irreversible exile?), or hides the truth from all but a few, making his existence precarious and ultimately lonely. The Strauss who emerges from this portrayal is a lonely man of unbelief whose companionship is with all the great minds of the past but not with many of his contemporaries.

If something critical needs to be said about Sheppard’s fine and pathbreaking study of Strauss, it would be that the often sharp insights of its author are buried under reams of names, facts, and bits of information, not all of which seem pertinent. Furthermore, I am ultimately unconvinced that Strauss’s thought is driven throughout by the desire to understand the *conditio iudaica*. Exile, while a central and useful metaphor to describe Strauss’s concerns, is not just a Jewish condition but a human one. To be sure, Sheppard knows this. In his own very apt, and duly moderate, words,

Acknowledgment of exile carries with it a heightened concern for the fragility of human life under stressed and impoverished conditions; it also makes one wary of the growing coercive and invasive power of the modern state in the name of national security. But the direction and contours of such a politics have yet to be fully engaged. And it is this unexamined legacy of Strauss I offer for rediscovery. (130)

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Shaul Magid. *Hasidism on the Margin: Reconciliation, Antinomianism, and Messianism in Izbica/Radzin Hasidism*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005. xvii, 400 pp.
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Shaul Magid’s *Hasidism on the Margin* is a rich and erudite study of the Izbica/Radzin literary tradition, one of the most distinctive and radical streams within Hasidism. While there have been a number of studies of Mordekhai Yosef Leiner of Izbica and his *Mei ha-shiloah*, these studies have generally focused on the author’s well-known deterministic pronouncement that “all is in