

Conclusion

In the conclusion to her penetrating book about Leo Strauss, Professor Leora Batnitzky writes, “The enduring importance of Strauss’s thought . . . lies in the questions he poses, and not in any of the answers he might seem to provide.”¹ This collection of responses, we hope, validates her point, at least with respect to Orthodox Judaism. While the essayists did not accept Leo Strauss’ answers, they do see the questions raised by his formulation of the conflict between Spinoza and Orthodoxy as ones of enduring importance.

We asked: From an Orthodox Jewish perspective, is the Straussian defense of Orthodoxy valid? Are his arguments more or less the same ones Orthodox Jews make for themselves? Or do serious Orthodox Jewish thinkers think about their commitment to Judaism in a different way?

The answers that came back aggregated around a few common themes: faith vs. knowledge, the Oral Law and the plasticity of Orthodox belief, the argument from tradition, religious belief as morally transformative, and the extent to which a Jew needs to answer for his or her religious belief in the first place.

Many of the respondents highlighted that Strauss’ defense of Orthodoxy turned on his distinction between knowledge and belief. According to Strauss, so long as Jews relegated themselves to the arena of belief, and accept “that they cannot claim to possess the binding power peculiar to the known,” then they are on safe footing. Once Jews assert, however, the irrefutable knowledge of God’s existence, they have – according to Strauss – overstepped their bounds.

1. Leora Batnitzky, *Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophy and the Politics of Revelation*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, page 204.

Some contributors accept Strauss' distinction between belief and knowledge but disagree with his claim that Judaism rests on belief alone. Jack Abramowitz, with an assist from Plato's *Meno*, argues that Orthodoxy does claim to know (and not merely believe) its core tenets, even if the attainment of this knowledge is the province of a select few. He writes that belief is "a way station on a turnpike whose ultimate destination is knowledge. . . . Our goal is to know, not just to believe." For Abramowitz, belief and knowledge are not contradictory, but rather are two points on the same continuum.

Along these lines, and within the writings of Maimonides specifically, Shmuel Phillips develops the view that Judaism seeks objective knowledge as its goal, even if that knowledge is the product of a lifetime of intellectual effort and character refinement. Knowledge is, to some extent, subjective, but such subjectivity does not mean there is no way to differentiate truth from falsehood. Rather, "such subjective influence can be diminished, though not entirely removed, by a lifetime of balancing character traits and training the intellect, primarily through study of the Oral Law." Engaging in character refinement is not merely an exercise in good manners, and Torah study is not merely an intellectual pursuit. These endeavors allow someone to achieve truth and knowledge – rather than just belief: "Maimonides maintains that a rigorous curriculum of character development and intellectual training can gradually elevate the human mind from the realm of subjectivity, and provide a person with a degree of objective knowledge as to religious and philosophical truths."

In contrast, Ari Kahn rejects the premise of Strauss' defense, arguing that the distinction between knowledge and belief is the product of later vintage. Medievalists like Maimonides and the *Sefer Ha-Chinuch*, and even moderns like Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, did not necessarily see daylight between the terms "knowledge" and "belief" (*yediah* and *emunah*); rather the terms are interchangeable and nearly synonymous. Therefore, Kahn challenges the absolute root of Strauss' formulation, questioning why we should accept the modern dichotomy between these two terms in the first place.

Phillips and Kahn therefore appear to disagree about Maimonides' perspective on the relationship between belief and knowledge. Phillips seems to argue, like Abramowitz, that belief is a rest stop to the ultimate destination, which is knowledge. In contrast, Kahn quotes from Rabbi Soloveitchik: "I am convinced therefore that Maimonides did not mean

that every Jew had to become a philosopher or, in modern parlance, a theologian.” The term “to know” (*leida*) does not mean philosophical certitude, but rather speaks to one’s religious experience; quoting again from Rabbi Soloveitchik: “our conviction of the existence of God should become a constant and continuous awareness of the reality of God, a level of consciousness never marred by inattention.”

Kahn, at the end of his essay, opens a line of argument that runs through a number of the contributions: within the canon of traditional Jewish texts, there are a wide range of legitimate views that can be used to construct a worldview that maintains the integrity of Orthodox Judaism without having to abandon what we, as moderns, know; the Jewish tradition from Scripture, Talmud, Midrash, philosophy, Zohar, and onward, is so robust, that a wide range of philosophical and scientific claims can find support within the canon of legitimate sources and readings.

Gil Student also raises the question of whether faith is superior to knowledge or whether knowledge is superior to faith. The *Sefer Ha-Chinuch* argues that knowledge (the ability to prove God’s existence) is superior to faith, while the *Kuzari* argues the opposite: a belief that does not require external philosophical support is superior to one that does.

Running through these contributions we see two interpretations of “knowledge” (*daat*). The Greek view of knowledge tends to be that which can be rationally and logically proven. This definition of *daat* was accepted by towering Jewish figures such as Maimonides (at least in a simple reading) and *Sefer Ha-Chinuch*. However, other authorities have argued that the proper Jewish understanding of *daat* does not lie purely in the intellectual domain, but rather in the relational and experiential plane (Nachmanides, Rabbi Soloveitchik).

Paul Franks also offers a meditation on the status of knowledge in Judaism, locating in the I–Thou relationship of the commandments an important type of knowledge. He writes that someone “who is involved in an I–Thou relationship can have *knowledge* of that relationship and at least some of its features – knowledge that is both non-observational and that involves the commitment of the will. Whatever exactly knowledge requires, it is not demonstrative certainty. If so, then, contrary to Strauss, traditional Jewish faith is not merely an irrefutable ‘act of will’; it is will-involving knowledge.”

Josh Golding’s essay is unique for at least two reasons. First, he offers a working definition of Judaism (which is perhaps an exercise many of us

should engage in, at least once). His definition in part reads as follows: “‘Judaism’ is that religion or way of life which affirms as true the ‘traditional Jewish understanding of Tanach.’ In turn, the ‘traditional Jewish understanding of Tanach’ runs as follows: The Torah of Moses is God-given, it is an accurate and true record of historical events that happened to the Jewish people, and it represents the divine will for how the people of Israel should act.”

Second, he argues that Spinoza and/or Strauss ignored the following seven considerations: (1) The Oral Tradition as a basis for religious commitment, (2) faith – or in Hebrew, *emunah* – which interestingly Golding defines as a stance that “goes beyond reason – or rational considerations,” (3) appreciation of Judaism’s strength and beauty, (4) the argument from tradition, or the “Legacy Argument,” (5) the argument from rationalism, (6) the appeal to religious experience, and (7) a pragmatic justification of religious commitment, modeled along the lines of Pascal’s Wager.

Alec Goldstein rejects Pascal’s Wager, quoting from William James: “Surely Pascal’s own personal belief in masses and holy water had far other springs; and this celebrated page of his is but an argument for others, a last desperate snatch at a weapon against the hardness of the unbelieving heart.” While Golding combines the Jamesian pragmatic approach together with Pascal’s Wager, Goldstein presents the Wager as quite limited, arguing that Pascal’s faith emerged from the mysterious Night of Fire. Golding, in personal communication with the editors, responded that Goldstein’s chosen quote represents James’ initial thinking, but James himself ultimately proposed a pragmatic justification of faith that is not too distant from Pascal’s approach.

Sam Lebens raises another objection to Pascal’s Wager, namely that the choice is not between non-belief and belief, but between non-belief and Judaism, Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism, and any other belief system: “It’s not a coin-toss, it’s more like the roll of a many-sided die.” Therefore he argues that people should limit their consideration set to live options, and for the Jewish Undecided, the only two options worthy of consideration – barring extraordinary evidence to the contrary – are non-observance and Judaism. For most Jews, converting to Christianity or Islam just isn’t realistic.

He also notes that even this limited version of the Wager cannot overcome the objection that belief might be “ridiculous.” To counter this, he not only defends mysticism from detraction and misinterpretation, but also shows why mysticism is necessary: “logic and language themselves point

to their own limitations. You try your hardest to draw, in language, using logic, a picture of how language works, but, in so doing, you realize the limitations of language and logic. You'll realize that there are things beyond the limits of language, which you might experience somehow, but which you cannot discursively describe." In other words, he creates space and argues for the necessity of mysticism, and quotes the Izhbitzer's distinction between *daat*, which refers to tangible knowledge that can be seen with the eyes or touched with the hands, and *binat ha-lev*, or "intuition," things that can be known even if they can't be proven.

The difference between knowledge and intuition is present in other papers as well. Jeremy Kagan also defends intuition as a valid source of knowledge (though he uses the word *daat* to refer to "intuition" where for Lebens *daat* refers to tangible knowledge). Kagan writes, "Before our capacity for abstraction developed and we gained the ability to clearly and distinctly grasp pure ideas, we retained in the act of thinking an awareness of the emerging intuition behind any given thought. We therefore perceived ideas as a handle on something essentially incomprehensible."

Similar to the distinction between knowledge and intuition, Alec Goldstein asks what causes people to "convert" which he defines as "someone's metaphysical beliefs are fundamentally altered – beliefs about God, the origin of the universe, and Providence." He argues that rational argumentation will often not be persuasive, and that the first move towards belief is "a move of pre-philosophy."

Another major topic in the collection is the role of the Oral Law. Josh I. Weinstein adopts something very similar to Golding's first argument, namely that the Oral Tradition is a source of knowledge. Weinstein observes that Strauss' decision to remain a non-participant in the thought world of the Oral Law and talmudic interpretation led him to construct a straw man Orthodoxy quite different from the one that Orthodox Jews actually inhabit: "Strauss seems to have identified real Jewish knowledge – the kind he found lacking from his home – not with talmudic, halachic, midrashic, or kabbalistic Judaism, but quite specifically with Jewish philosophy narrowly understood."

Meir Triebitz continues the discussion of the role of the Oral Law in his essay, arguing that Spinoza's attempt to narrow the scope of knowledge exclusively to universal and ahistorical truths fails to account for the unique kind of knowledge that emerges from a living tradition of interpretation. This tradition, the Oral Law, was "embedded in the Bible itself at the time

of Revelation” and the study of this tradition is not a rote, mechanical act, but a creative one: “If by ‘tradition’ we mean the mere transmission of laws and stories, then we haven’t provided any reason to reject Spinoza’s critique; each generation is merely preserving a set of lifeless historical artifacts and nothing more. If, however, tradition implies an evolving hermeneutical process generated by reason and interpretation, then we will have uncovered the ontological truth of the creative dimension of self-identity and national consciousness. This creativity, self-awareness, and nationhood is entirely unaccounted for in Spinoza’s world view.” Engaging in the creative process of the Oral Tradition is itself a source of knowledge.

Jeremy Kagan, based on his studies with Rabbi Moshe Shapira, points out that every civilization has its own assumptions on how to perceive truth and humanity’s relation to truth. Strauss and Spinoza based their writings on Greek assumptions about civilization and humanity. Aristotle fundamentally views man as primarily a thinker, while the Bible views man primarily as a worshiper (a priest). As moderns, we don’t always realize that we have internalized the Greek assumptions, elevating the value of the intellect at the expense of Torah’s emphasis of worship and devotion. Knowledge, for Greeks, is abstract and impersonal, but for Judaism *daat* “refers to understanding that is completely integrated into the self of the person.” Knowledge in Judaism is not abstract, but intimately personal. Knowledge is not outward-facing, but inward-facing.

In other words, Kagan argues that there are crippling limitations in being an intellectual. Strauss’ question presumed that *emunah* was a matter of working out the logic sufficiently. Like the person who says a miracle could make them a believer, Strauss’ question required, in order to vindicate *emunah*, someone to tip the scales away from the axioms of modernity and towards the axioms of Judaism. But according to Kagan, that impulse is actually a mistake. It sets up the issue in a way that already tilts the playing field towards a Western conception of reason and intellect to adjudicate the issue. We can’t think our way to the truth because the truth is coming from a different and deeper dimension of existence. Therefore, Kagan pivots from *emunah* as an abstract idea one merely thinks to *emunah* as an experience in which one participates: “Strauss’ ‘binding power’ refers to the sense of externally grounded necessity inherent in a logical deduction. The Torah allows us to go beyond this. With Torah one can ‘be’ the veracity of God’s existence, where it is inextricably bound up in our experience of being – the gateway to God, Who is the ground of all being.”

Through our participation in Torah and *mitzvot*, we can *be* the truth, to the extent we participate in God's existence. This also explains why Judaism links character and intellect in a way that is not intuitive coming from the West. If a person is seeking the truth in the sciences, why would any kind of personal immorality impact his intellectual progress? But with the truth of *emunah*, immorality *does* detract from attaining the truth because the problem is one of participating in the existence of God and not simply a matter of intellectual comprehension.

Returning to the tension between faith and philosophy, Gil Student quotes two responses. First, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (the *Beit Ha-Levi*), great-grandfather of the namesake associated with Yeshiva University, points out that belief is not something that can be achieved through rebuke or demonstration: "Man lacks the ability to vanquish disbelief. We cannot transmit faith to another, or cure him of his heresy. No amount of argumentation can bring another to faith, because every logical argument, every philosophical proof, can take a person only so far, at which point he needs faith." This view, however, gets us no further than Van Inwagen and Plantinga, who defended belief as valid, but who do not go on offense to argue why people should believe.

Student's second argument is from Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer, who argues that philosophy has value ("Faith without inquiry lacks depth") but at the same time, "Philosophy is entirely man-made, which means it is subject to human frailty." There are no pure Cartesians, Kantians, or Hegelians today – their thoughts have been refined, rejected, or superseded – though their methods of thinking contribute enduring value: "Rabbi Kalischer does not wield this argument about the 'shifting sands' of philosophy against the philosophic endeavor itself, which he embraces. Rather, he uses it as a caution against certainty. No argument, no approach can yield conclusive results. The history of philosophy demonstrates that amply." An analogy can be drawn to science as well: while Michelangelo, Galileo, and Newton contributed to science, would anybody agree to have invasive surgery based on such theories?

Another group of authors make the case that the axioms of belief in God are, in fact, superior to those of non-belief. For example, Eliezer Zolbin argues that the axioms of belief are necessary because they are the only way to talk about anything having meaning in the first place. In an innovative reading of Maimonides, Zolbin points out that the opening passage of the *Mishneh Torah* "employs no philosophical reasoning or scientific proof for

God's existence; rather it simply proclaims that God is 'the foundation of all foundations, the pillar of all wisdom.' Maimonides... is asserting that before all wisdom, all knowledge and understanding of the world – be it inductive or deductive logic, science, or morality – there rests an axiom upon which all attempts to make sense of existence rest. That there is an assumption needed to be adopted to even allow one to simply think and reason: That there is a First Being, and that all of reality emerges from Him. Only after stating faith in God as the most basic axiom of all, does Maimonides then delve into a philosophical, scientific discussion of faith."

Avraham Edelstein takes Spinoza head on and argues Spinoza's philosophy is profoundly flawed. According to Edelstein, Spinoza adopted a determinism that was so enveloping that even one's thoughts could not be freely exercised; in Spinoza's words, "In the Mind there is no absolute, or free, will, but the Mind is determined to will this or that by a cause that is also determined by another, and this again by another, and so to infinity." It is true that there is an extremely small minority of religious thinkers who deny free will – the heavy majority accepts free will as a fundamental religious doctrine.² Even from a non-religious perspective, the idea that people are incapable of changing, developing, or evolving – as an act of their own volition – is alien and distasteful. The idea that people have the ability to make intentional change is at the core of religion, psychology, and many other disciplines.

Moshe Koppel draws a crucial distinction between trivial and non-trivial beliefs, and in doing so takes on Bertrand Russell. For example, while it might be possible that a tiny teapot is orbiting the moon, believing in such a thing has no consequence for our lives beyond that particular – and particularly trivial – fact. Belief in God, however, is the opposite of trivial. It potentially transforms a life of nihilism into a life of meaning and purpose. Though Koppel does not use this as an example, it is no coincidence that Abraham, the first monotheist (or at least the first in an unbroken chain of monotheists), is also the Jewish paragon of *chesed* – love, kindness, and loyalty. Belief in God is – or at least is supposed to be – transformative and morally enriching. Simi Peters writes something similar, namely that a proposition can be "theoretically perfect, but morally void; technically true, it tells us nothing worth knowing."

Alec Goldstein makes a forthright case for the validity of personal

2. See, e.g., Rabbi Netanel Wiederblank, *Illuminating Jewish Thought* 11, p. 85.

religious experience (which was also touched on by Josh Golding in his sixth argument). There is an asymmetry, because many people teach about the existence of God through classical and medieval formal proofs, but many people convert, not through didactic proofs but through a personal encounter.³ He quotes from Pareto: “Logically, one ought first to believe in a given religion and then in the efficacy of its rites, the efficacy, logically, being the consequence of the belief. Logically, it is absurd to offer a prayer unless there is someone to hearken to it. But non-logical conduct is derived by a precisely reverse process. There is first an instinctive belief in the efficacy of the rite, then an ‘explanation’ of the belief is desired, then it is found in religion.”

The first-hand religious encounter is persuasive, so much so that for people who have had them, they are undeniable. For those who have not had compelling personal religious experiences, Goldstein argues that there is less reason to be skeptical of them than is commonly believed.

Goldstein and Golding do not devote significant space to exploring how someone can come to such religious experiences. Eliezer Zabin starts to fill in that gap by advancing a concept of *yediah atzmit*: “Chasidic thought therefore advocates for a person to engage in self-contemplation, an almost mystical experience in which one immerses oneself in one’s own sense-of-self. A person, upon self-reflection, can become aware of the Divine within themselves and connect to it on a level that is akin to real self-knowledge, which Chasidic thought calls *yediah atzmit*.” This mystical union of self and Divine in the form of knowledge was discussed by Jeremy Kagan as well.

Shalom Carmy broadens the scope of religious experience, writing that “the primary areas in which contemporary human beings may encounter God are Torah, Israel, and God.” In Torah study, “we glimpse the prospect of a true insight into the questions of man’s nature and destiny.” In “the mysterious story of God’s connection with the Jewish people” we see God’s hand in history. “And then,” he writes, “there are moments of ‘religious experience’ when we sense palpably His presence and sometimes His absence. In all these areas, the divine initiative somehow corresponds to our questions and preoccupations. Always, however, we are confronted by the divine otherness: neither we, nor our concept of ‘philosophy,’ is in control. To the contrary, we are confronted by mystery, we are in over our heads.”

3. The limited persuasive impact of formal religious proofs was touched on by other contributors as well, including Gil Student.

A different line of argument is taken up by a couple of the essayists who make updated versions of the *Kuzari's* argument that the basis of Jewish belief is the tradition handed down through the ages. Josh Golding makes the case for what he calls the Legacy Argument; in other words, we are born into a tradition, one that is a plausible starting point for our lives and should remain such unless proven untenable. (One wonders if our resistance to this argument might have something to do with the desire for control mentioned by Carmy. The fact that we are born as Jews – implying, perhaps, that Judaism should be the first place we look for answers – is beyond our control and an affront to our desire to see ourselves as blank slates working out the meaning of life from scratch.)

Along these lines, Simi Peters distinguishes between proof and evidence. While we don't have absolute proof that Judaism is true, she finds the "strongest evidence for the validity of Orthodox Judaism" in the tenacity and persistence of the Jew's belief. "Clearly," she writes, "something in the consciousness of the Jewish people will not allow us, as a people, to abandon God. Our passionate insistence upon an identity that demands so much of us, at such a high price, cannot be explained by reason alone." Jews can "choose to recognize the traces of the spiritual Big Bang that was the giving of the Torah, or ignore them."

Mark Gottlieb's essay represents a wide-ranging consideration of Strauss' relationship with Orthodox Judaism. While Strauss' defense of Orthodoxy might not be our own, Gottlieb argues we can claim him as a friend and be grateful for his interrogation of intellectual pretensions of secularism.

Moreover, as Gottlieb points out, there are a number of themes in Strauss' work that should encourage us to be more thoughtful about our own Orthodoxy, both at an individual and communal level. Strauss decried the efforts of his contemporaries to make Judaism palatable by "internalizing" or reinterpreting the core ideas of Judaism to fit their prejudices. Gottlieb sees a similar tendency at work today in some Orthodox circles. Laws that challenge contemporary sensibilities, especially in the area of sexual ethics, are drained of their force, either by historicizing them as the relics of a less enlightened age or by "kicking them upstairs." Quoting from Rabbi Aryeh Klapper, he calls this process the "chokification" of Judaism. This too, we might add, connects to the questions of knowledge, belief, and morality. Are all laws that don't – at first glance – make sense to be considered antiquated relics that need to be worked around by modern-day legalistic hairsplitters, or are the laws in the Bible designed

to instill a holistic sensibility and value system even concerning some of the most pressing and sensitive questions of the hour?

Shalom Carmy, while not dismissive of Strauss himself, does dismiss his defense of Orthodoxy. Strauss' philosophical machinations, in his view, are quite distant from the inner religious life of actual Orthodox Jews. "Real people," Carmy writes, "do not live and die for a remote hypothesis." (This point is very similar to Koppel's argument that a hypothesis should not be tested just for validity, however trivial, but for the consequence and moral implications of such a hypothesis being true.)

Carmy critiques Strauss on another point. Strauss says that while belief in revelation can tolerate philosophy as a source of knowledge, the reverse is untrue – philosophy on its own cannot tolerate revelation as a source of knowledge, or as Strauss writes, "philosophy cannot leave it at a defense; it *must* attack."

Carmy also points out that Strauss takes a condescending view of "business-men," meaning non-specialists. And this growing dichotomy of laypeople and specialists (especially academics) should give us pause. Education, *talmud Torah*, and scholarship are paramount in Judaism – regardless of one's vocation. Non-specialists learn Torah regularly, have religious experiences, and engage in a search for meaning in their own way, whether or not the academics approve.

This collection was created and edited by non-specialists in an implicit effort to bridge the gap between specialists and regular, educated Jews. The Straussian method of leaning hard into scholarship and academia presents a double-edged sword. True, Torah learning is paramount, but one shouldn't need a Ph.D. in order to be an Orthodox Jew. Many of today's Jews are caught between Socrates' declaration that "The unexamined life is not worth living" and Wordsworth's plaint "We murder to dissect" – meaning that we engage in esoteric and irrelevant hairsplitting, when we could engage in equally rigorous examinations that are uplifting, satisfying, and spiritually edifying.

On one level, perhaps the questions raised in this collection are redundant or – despite our best efforts – too far removed from the concerns of the average Jew. As Simi Peters writes at the beginning of her article, "As a rule, Orthodox Jews are not preoccupied with the need to justify their faith. Like happily married couples for whom marriage is an essential part of life, believing Jews tend to live their faith rather than agonizing over it."

At the same time, we expect a lawyer to be able to explain the law, voters

to verbalize their political choices, and parents to explain their educational philosophies. If for no other reason than to explain to an inquisitive but respectful friend or co-worker, it is not unreasonable that Jews have a baseline ability to explain what they do and why they do it. Every Jew is responsible for his or her own religious choices and spiritual path and we often find a need to explain what we do and why we do it, not just to friends or co-workers, but to ourselves as well. Gil Student has written in many places that people need to learn to be adults and take responsibility for their Judaism. The articles in this collection, we hope, do not merely rehearse obsolete philosophical theories or engage in esoteric hairsplitting beyond the grasp or benefit of the common reader. Rather, these articles were designed to represent thoughtful contributions to particular questions raised by Strauss, specific criticisms by Spinoza against Orthodoxy, and wider questions about religious belief, knowledge, and practice.

Strauss, while not Orthodox himself, has done more than most to make Orthodox belief an intellectually viable option; for that we owe him a tremendous debt of thanks. At the same time, the inner or private life of faith, for an Orthodox Jew, does not resemble the good-natured defenses that Strauss proposed. It differs in some key features:

- Faith and knowledge are not necessarily antonymous or antagonistic, despite Strauss' presentation. Faith can be a stepping-stone to philosophy (Abramowitz), faith and knowledge may be effectively synonymous (Kahn), knowledge may be superior but not antagonistic (*Sefer Ha-Chinuch*), or faith unbuttressed by philosophy may be superior (*Kuzari*);
- Knowledge does not emerge merely from classical and medieval philosophy, but also from the living experience of engaging the Oral Law. Knowledge is not merely memorization but also interpretation, integration, and renovation. This point was made by many people, including the *Chazon Ish* and Rabbi Soloveitchik.
- Knowledge is not just an intellectual pursuit, it is a moral one as well. It is morally transformative and brings one closer to God (Moshe Koppel, Jeremy Kagan).

Perhaps more than anything else, these essays show that how specialists sometimes consider the proposition of God often has very little to do with how religious Jews – even ones versed in science and philosophy – establish

a basis for their belief, understand their commitment to Judaism, and inhabit and transmit their private life of faith.

As mentioned above, Professor Batnitzky has observed that Strauss' questions have had greater traction than his answers. This is pretty understandable: for modern Jews living in the shadow of the West, with Athens and Jerusalem constantly competing for our attention and allegiance in various ways, Strauss articulates a very fundamental version of our predicament. This itself is an important achievement and is not diminished by the fact that Strauss did not have the resources to outline robust answers to his questions from within Judaism. But for us, a generation after Strauss, there is a need to both reflect on the questions and strive to find viable answers. Hopefully, these essays, provoked and inspired by Strauss, provide readers some useful resources to do so.