
Part IV
Knowledge and
Its Foundations

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Foundationalism and Foundation in Strauss and Maritain

...[W]hen...[uncultured persons] argue about anything, they do not care what the truth is in the matters they are discussing, but are eager only to make their own views seem true to their hearers. Plato, *Phaedo*, 91A.

Today, democratic liberalism forms the premises of most competing political theories in the West because it comprises goods that most are eager to share, but celebrating democratic liberalism is not philosophy. Indeed, it need amount to no more than sophistic demagogy, "making one's own views seem true to one's hearers." In order to avoid begging the question, as a philosopher one must ultimately show "what the truth is in the matters [one is] discussing." To the extent of one's commitment to (a) liberal values or (b) some moral tradition that comprehends them, one must show how not the values themselves, but rather the realities on which they are based, can certify one's political agenda. Thus if one is to make sense of Leo Strauss's and Jacques Maritain's continued impact on political philosophy, one must analyze the discourse of democratic liberalism, insofar as it presupposes democratic-liberal values. This is our first and main task. In its wake, we shall indicate how Strauss and Maritain think that natural law philosophy rightly avoids begging the question of liberal values, and then more briefly compare Strauss and Maritain on two issues about natural law theory.

I. On Foundations in Foundationalism/Anti-Foundationalism

In order to introduce the distinctiveness of Strauss and Maritain, we shall first sketch today's foundations conflict through Alasdair MacIntyre's foundationalism and Richard Rorty's anti-foundationalism.

Because of the theory of objectivity within his concept of edifying

philosophy, Rorty would reject natural law politics. For that implicates metaphysics of the type that he refers to as both traditional and Platonic. Rorty regards this metaphysics as false, because, among other reasons, it depends upon a discredited view of objectivity. His concept of objectivity is axiological and praxiological: for him, knowledge is essentially a conversation aimed at preserving the values of individual freedom, creativity, and interpersonal communion. Knowledge is not, because for Rorty it cannot be, *adequatio intellectus ad rem*. So, in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, we find him rejecting the epistemological distinction between the objective as what is non-mental and the subjective as what is mental. Late in that same book, Rorty claims that "the distinction between epistemology and hermeneutics [which edifying philosophy is, in part] should not be thought of as paralleling a distinction between what is 'out there' and what we 'make up.'"¹ Rorty develops his notion of objectivity by (i) interpreting virtually the whole tradition of metaphysics and epistemology as based on the false premise of representationalism and (ii) replacing epistemic/doxastic representation with liberal values as the basis of philosophy. In its urgent sense philosophy is *edifying conversation*: it is dialogue and community because it is conversation; it edifies by recognizing and supporting those goods, as well as by affirming individual creativity. Philosophy so understood should aim at keeping a conversation going, generating new descriptions. That enables us creatively to deal with the world and ourselves as moral agents. Philosophy should not entail commitments to truth understood *Platonically* --namely, as being in contact with permanent, ahistorical objects and their qualities.² For Rorty, *Platonic* objectivity dehumanizes: it closes conversation, and so stifles individual freedom and creativity.³

¹Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 342.

²*Ibid.*, 373-79.

³Thus although Rorty's critique of natural law politics would extend beyond Popper's, it flows from the same reaction to Plato: one should not try to erect a society based on objective knowledge (in the Platonic sense), because a perfect theory of reality is impossible. For an outline of Popper's reaction to Plato, see his *The Open Society and Its Enemies. The Spell of Plato*, fifth, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 21-34.

Thus for Rorty, the liberal values mentioned simply are given. For him they are objective and foundational, because he replaces traditional foundations with them. So we note first that Rorty's anti-foundationalism is incomplete. It is a foundationalism of value, an anti-*episteme* foundationalism.

Alasdair MacIntyre has become a leading foundationalist in ethical theory, and our claim that Strauss and Maritain would object to his foundationalism might seem strange. For MacIntyre espouses virtue ethics, which bears close affinities to the natural law politics of Strauss and Maritain, but the following two passages from MacIntyre's *After Virtue* suggest the disagreement between him and Strauss and Maritain. First he writes: "[I]f my account of moral tradition is correct, a tradition is sustained and advanced by its own internal arguments and conflicts."⁴ And second: [A]ny adequate teleological account [of virtue] must provide us with a clear account of the *telos*; and any adequate generally Aristotelian account must supply a teleological account which can replace Aristotle's metaphysical biology."⁵

Now, as we understand MacIntyre's concept of moral tradition, that object is either a political order or includes one; so it corresponds in part with a rational and humane politics in Maritain's and Strauss's sense. Furthermore, foundation in the sense that interests MacIntyre is the moral tradition itself, as opposed to the sort of Platonic-Aristotelian foundation that he challenges. For MacIntyre, a moral tradition sustains itself by its own elements and conflicts; so for him, moral traditions themselves are foundational to a sound politics. This ordering of foundation and structure reverses the Platonic model of *Republic*, Book Six, wherein "our constitution will have its perfect and definitive organization only when such a guardian, who knows these things, oversees it" (505E7-8).⁶ In terms of today's foundations issues, Plato's image of the Divided Line means that a moral tradition is to be shaped by a sound philosophy, wherein not opinion (*doxa*), but only knowledge (*episteme*),

⁴Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, second ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 260.

⁵*Ibid.*, 163.

⁶Line reference to Burnet edition (Oxford: 1902); translation from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

can authorize a particular conception of the political good. By that account, a moral tradition is not self-sustaining and cannot be. Nor is a rational and humane politics self-sustaining. Plato and Aristotle are radically committed to true metaphysics as foundational. A moral tradition, or some form of government included in it, might provide conditions for one's pursuing first philosophy; but that does not mean a moral tradition actually includes first philosophy, or is one, or is directly responsible for the content of one.

True: MacIntyre targets Aristotle more than Plato, especially when he remarks that an adequate teleology of virtue requires clarity about the human *telos*, free of "Aristotle's metaphysical biology"; but Aristotle places theoretical and specifically metaphysical knowledge above practical cognition. This MacIntyre seems loath to do, because of his notion of a moral tradition as self-sustaining. More directly and more importantly, Aristotle's metaphysics grounds principles used in most of his natural treatises. In this case, MacIntyre's own foundationalism is ambiguous. MacIntyre appears to believe that theoretical knowing is prior in the intelligibility of its objects to practical, and he is nothing if not generally Aristotelian in his theory of virtue. Yet simultaneously, he doubts a principle of Aristotle's theory of virtue: that the good of an object is its natural *telos*, a principle that holds across the theoretical divisions of knowledge, from biology to theory of human nature and ethics.⁷

MacIntyre is, thus, a foundationalist within the sense of today's foundationalist/anti-foundationalist controversy. His own foundationalism notwithstanding, MacIntyre appears to believe, with Rorty, that the discourse of a moral tradition, rather than the objects of the discourse itself, adequately grounds politics.⁸

⁷For a recent discussion, see our *Human Nature and Eudaimonia in Aristotle* (New York: Lang Publishing Co., Inc., 1989), 24-47 and 63-85.

⁸MacIntyre's discussion of *prudentia* in St. Thomas Aquinas might appear to contradict this observation because he does outline conditions under which the content of that intellectual virtue can be generalized. See his *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 192-98, esp. 196; but that discussion contains the same ambiguity in MacIntyre's understanding of the primacy of theoretical cognition, insofar as he observes that the Thomistic principle of justice "is ultimately grounded on a theological understanding of the ordering of

If that is so, then no matter how vigorously each might deny it, Rorty and MacIntyre are subjective idealists in the sense that they take beliefs in values and justifications of those beliefs (Rorty), or whole moral traditions constituted of the same (MacIntyre), as foundations. Thus insofar as Rorty and MacIntyre express its opposite poles, today's foundationalist/anti-foundationalist dichotomy is doxastic rather than epistemic. Accordingly, no apology for liberal democracy, or for the moral tradition supporting it, could be stronger than that doxastic basis.

This all suggests that, ultimately, neither Rorty's nor MacIntyre's is anything but a conventionalist position. That is what Plato, in the opening quotation of the *Phaedo* and the quotation of the *Republic*, 505E7-8, so strongly opposed. For as those dialogues, not to mention *Gorgias*, powerfully remind us, conventionalism is practically inseparable from power politics. Nor can a Rorty or a MacIntyre maintain his ethical-political position without adequately showing that an epistemic foundation for politics is in fact impossible. We turn now to those issues.

II. Foundation in Strauss and Maritain

Strauss's polemic against thought that, in his view, refracts the intelligibility of politics, indicates his rejection of doxastic foundationalism. Strauss believed that classical political philosophy, which he deems essentially Platonic,⁹ has an objective, natural view of politics. If Strauss believed that his own thought was not distorted by modern rationalist egoism (Hobbes, Locke),¹⁰ or revelation to the extent one's philosophic

things" and on a "metaphysical theology" (198). Other things being equal, that foundation should be subject to the same criticism as "Aristotle's metaphysical biology."

⁹See Leo Strauss, "Distinction between Facts and Values" in *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 78-80; and "What is Political Philosophy?" in *What is Political Philosophy?* (New York: Free Press, 1959; repr. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973), 27-28.

¹⁰The following states Strauss's view that modern natural right differs essentially from that of Plato, Aristotle, or Aquinas, because Hobbes's and Locke's form(s) is egoistic, whereas their predecessors took human perfection, man's natural (and supernatural) *telos* as the immediate object of politics: [For Hobbes and Locke] "Death must then be the

position is inseparable from it (Aquinas),¹¹ or an incoherency in the fundamental premise of historicism (Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and others),¹² he believed so for one reason: nature is the only foundation of a rational and humane politics, the truly best politics.¹³

Strauss's development of that belief commits him to others outside

greatest evil: Not the natural sweetness of living but the terrors of death make us cling to life. What nature firmly establishes is that from which desire moves away, the point of departure of desire; the goal toward which we move is secondary. The primary fact is want. But this want, this lack, is no longer understood as pointing to something complete, perfect, whole." Leo Strauss, *Natural Right*, 250.

¹¹Strauss distinguishes Socratic-Platonic natural right from Thomistic natural right (not to mention a third, Aristotelian version). This passage indicates the difference of the Thomistic from the Platonic form of natural right, which, as he argued in the work quoted here and many later writings, is the truest form because it was the original form of natural right: "...[T]he ultimate consequence of the Thomistic view of natural law is that natural law is practically inseparable not only from natural theology—i.e., from a natural theology which is, in fact, based on belief in biblical revelation—but even from revealed theology," Leo Strauss, *Natural Right*, 164 .

¹²Leo Strauss, *Political Philosophy*, 59-60: "The most common form of historicism expresses itself in the demand that the questions of the nature of political things, of the state, of the nature of man, and so forth, be replaced by the questions of the modern state, of modern government, of the present political situation, of modern man....Since it is hard to see, however, how one can speak adequately of the modern state, of our civilization, of modern man, etc., without first knowing what a state is, what civilization is, what man's nature is, the more thoughtful forms of historicism admit that the universal questions of traditional philosophy cannot be abandoned. Yet they assert that any answer to these questions, any attempt at clarifying or discussing them, and indeed any precise formulation of them, is bound to be 'historically conditioned,' i.e., to remain dependent on the specific situation in which it is suggested."

¹³This may be summarized under two headings: (i) Strauss's principles of philosophy and justice, and (ii) his principles of knowledge and virtue. Concerning the first: for Strauss the classic natural right of Plato

the mainstream of Platonic-Aristotelian-Thomistic natural law. We do note, in passing, that he distinguished those thinkers and, for his own part, believed that Plato's was the purest natural law theory.¹⁴ His own foundationalism is a unique and, to some, compelling form of Platonism, wherein (i) the philosophic life is unequivocally the highest human good;

maintains (a) that politics and political objects (virtues; good and evil; human nature; governments, insofar as they reflect or deflect the necessary attributes of human nature) are intelligible to man *qua* philosopher and, in a qualified way, to man *qua* citizen; but political theories that abstract from such a canon of intelligibility cannot lead to a rational, humane politics (See *Natural Right*, 78-80 and *Political Philosophy*, 27-28). This same natural right proposes (b) that only the good man (or the philosopher, if and when a true philosopher rules) properly judges politics, because virtue is the only proper claimant to political rule (See *Political Philosophy*, 36-38). Platonic natural right also requires (c) a strict political hierarchy, wherein the virtuous (that is, the philosopher or the good man) rule because the virtuous possess virtue in an active sense, whereas all others have a passive, obediencial form of virtue. That is, a rational and humane politics requires the same hierarchy (See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right*, 130-44).

Strauss's principles of knowledge and virtue propose that true virtue is philosophic virtue, because philosophy is without qualification the highest human good. Citizen-morality merely clears the way for philosophy, although it is not necessarily, nor entirely, incompatible with philosophy (See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right*, 150, n. 24, and again, 130-44, especially 142 on the citizen's contempt of philosophy). Thus to repeat, true virtue is theoretic, not civic, and philosophic, not moral. Moral virtue, Aristotle's *ethike arete*, is, in fact, "merely political or vulgar virtue" (Leo Strauss, *Natural Right*, 151-52).

¹⁴ See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right*, 146-64. For a detailed outline of this point of Strauss's interpretation of classic natural right, see Victor Gourevitch, "On Natural Right" in *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy*, ed. Kenneth L. Deutsch and Walter Soffer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 30-47, esp. 42. For reasons that become evident below and we have expressed elsewhere ("Review of Deutsch and Soffer," forthcoming in *The Thomist*), Strauss's classification is incomplete and proceeds from questionable premises.

(ii) this same life is marked by a Socrates-like agnosticism about the paramount questions of philosophy; (iii) true justice is, correspondingly, a kind of Socratic self-examination;¹⁵ and (iv) political justice, which is not necessarily true justice, is the rule of the philosophically enlightened. It is rule of the virtuous or, given a strict Socratic notion of virtue as knowledge, nearly virtuous, gentlemen.¹⁶ Strauss believes that political justice can flow only from those objective features of the human situation. Because Strauss simply presumed that Plato accepted the Socratic pro-

¹⁵To summarize this consequence, which, to put it mildly, seems paradoxical to many students of Plato, let us only cite Strauss's beliefs that Xenophon, first, naturalized Plato's theory of Forms as subsistent entities, and, second, did so rightly. So, contrary to much evidence in the Platonic corpus, for the philosopher (that is, Plato's Socrates as corrected by Xenophon's pragmatic agnosticism), knowledge of the eternal ideas is no more than knowing certain "fundamental and permanent problems" that affect philosophic investigation. In essence, Strauss extends the aporetic quality of some Socratic dialogues of Plato to philosophy itself and to true philosophy. He justifies that logical move as follows. First, humans as humans--that is, potential philosophers--are torn between (i) imposing order on the cosmos by the norms of mathematical knowledge and the productive arts and (ii) "the charm of humble awe, which is engendered by meditation on the human soul and its experiences. Philosophy is characterized by the gentle, if firm, refusal to succumb to either charm" (*Political Philosophy*, 39-40). Second and correlatively, "philosophy as such is nothing but genuine awareness of the problems, i.e., of the fundamental and comprehensive problems. ...Therefore the philosopher ceases to be a philosopher at the moment at which the 'subjective certainty' of a solution becomes stronger than his awareness of the problematic character of that solution." (Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny* [Glencoe: Free Press, 1-63; repr. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968], 210.)

¹⁶True virtue, again for Strauss, is philosophic knowledge. Given that strict Socratic notion, we can reasonably infer Strauss thinks that (i) the attitudes about life, philosophy, and politics and (ii) the corresponding moral habits, of those who are well-born, leisured, and liberally educated reflect true justice. Because for Strauss, the support of such people is necessary to all forms of political stability, true justice is imitated by this

fession of ignorance, he attributes, illicitly, metaphysical agnosticism to Plato.¹⁷ His position is, in consequence, difficult to reconcile with Plato's belief that man can have knowledge (*episteme*) of absolute intelligibilities (for example: the second proof for the soul's immortality in *Phaedo*, especially 74A-75E; the view that the illumination of the Good certifies our knowledge of all other intelligibilities in the downward path of dialectic, *Republic*, VI, 511 C, VII, 533B-D; the parallel idea in *Symposium*, conjoined with the ascent to Beauty and all other true realities spoken of in *Phaedrus*, 246D-248C¹⁸). However all this may be, Strauss's Platonic foundation for politics is a foundation of things, rather than beliefs about

same rule of the well-born and the educated. Strauss seems to imply as much in his essay, "What Is Political Philosophy?" Therein, he concludes a discussion of the anti-democratic nature of Platonic and Aristotelian natural right by observing that it is good inasmuch as it allows the education and leads to the rule of gentlemen: "Now to the extent to which democracy is aware of these dangers [radical egalitarianism and conformism], to the same extent it sees itself compelled to think of elevating its level and its possibilities by a return to the classics' notion of education: a kind of education which can never be thought of as mass-education, but only as a higher and highest education of those who are by nature fit for it. It would be an understatement to call it royal education." *Political Philosophy*, 38; see 36-38 for the whole discussion. For compatible evidence suggesting this concept of political justice as over against true justice, see above, n. 13.

¹⁷ Which attribution we have analyzed in detail in "Critical Discussion: Leo Strauss on First Philosophy, the Forms, and Politics in Plato," currently unpublished, and "Review of Deutsch and Soffer," *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy*, forthcoming in *The Thomist*, 23.

¹⁸ Following Guthrie's lead on the interconnection of *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* on the intelligibility, to us, of the realities (*ta onta*); see his *A History of Greek Philosophy. Plato: The Man and His Earlier Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 392, 402-03. This is not to overlook that for Plato this intelligibility characterizes the fleeting *episteme* of man's incarnate state. Still, the weight of Plato's evidence requires that Plato not be the metaphysical agnostic whom Strauss believes he is, if only because Plato time and again uses *episteme* in reference to knowledge in our incarnate state: fleeting *episteme* is still *episteme*.

them. It is a foundation rooted in the facts of human nature. Attributing metaphysical agnosticism to Plato, Strauss implicates the matter or content of first philosophy; but he accepts the formal dependence of justice on first philosophy, as Plato indicated that foundation at *Republic*, VI, 505E7-8.¹⁹ Strauss's position transcends today's foundationalist/anti-foundationalist dichotomy for that very reason. His is a foundation of real, as opposed to rationally, objects; it is an epistemic rather than doxastic foundationalism.

It goes without saying that the same is true of Jacques Maritain. Accordingly, let us focus both on his agreeing with Strauss (and natural law theorists generally) that only epistemic foundations suffice for sound politics, and also two nuances of his concept of foundation for politics.

The first of these nuances was foundation, understood ontologically. The basis that Maritain attributed to human rights indicates his ontology of the natural law. Rights derive from "the true idea of natural law, as looked upon in an ontological perspective and as conveying through the essential structures and requirements of created nature the wisdom of the Author of Being."²⁰ Maritain included the principles that (i) man has a specifically human and a permanent nature, identical in all men, which (ii) includes intelligence and free will, and to which (iii) there corresponds a specifically human supreme good, within this ontological foundation.²¹ By the same term, Maritain pointed to "the normality of functioning which is grounded on the essence of that being: man."²²

Maritain called the second aspect of foundation gnoseological. As expressed in *Man and the State*, this concept included at least three items. First, however complete and true the natural law might be in itself, i.e. ontologically, still that law as known admits of degrees of truth and certitude in the individuals who know it.²³ Second, the natural law is known *per inclinationem*. In order to know it, one needs an elaborate social network. Only that device allows the best human inclinations progres-

¹⁹Line reference to Burnet edition (Oxford: 1902).

²⁰Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 84.

²¹*Ibid.*, 85-86.

²²*Ibid.*, 88.

²³*Ibid.*, 89-90.

sively to emerge, and those inclinations are necessary conditions of moral illumination.²⁴ Third, the sole condition of the natural law's fulfillment occurs "[o]nly when the Gospel has penetrated to the very depth of human substance."²⁵

Thus in their own minds, both Strauss and Maritain would anchor politics on *episteme* of human nature. Maritain no less than Strauss would deny the tacit premise of today's foundationalist dichotomy--namely, that beliefs and their justifications, rather than the objects of belief, constitute adequate foundations.

This gains importance when we notice that both Strauss and Maritain thought that our century's horrors signalled the political climax of a uniquely modern rationalism. In their view, that rationalism, initiated by Descartes, simply is subjective idealism. Doxastic foundationalism of the sort already discussed, including Rorty's variant of it, is one of its consequences. When its premises are unchecked, this idealism declines into intoxication with the self. Thus, if Strauss and Maritain are right, ultimately neither subjective idealism nor its foundationalist/anti-foundationalist offspring could avoid power politics, because in politics subjective idealism and its offspring form conventionalisms. More, they might even celebrate power politics, as we see in Nietzsche; and if it is plausible to view Nietzsche in that way, then whether it be a moral tradition in MacIntyre's sense, or liberal values in Rorty's sense, no mere doxastic constellation could adequately respond to power politics. Thus, to avoid begging the question in one's commitment to a moral tradition or liberal values, one must return to first philosophy with Strauss and Maritain.

True: Rorty denies the very possibility of doing so, and MacIntyre appears to deny it; but neither actually disqualifies an epistemic foundation of politics. Moreover, Rorty develops his critique on the basis that the traditional concept of objectivity is representationalism. Because he acknowledges that Aquinas, and perhaps Aristotle, escapes the fallacies of representationalism,²⁶ his not taking precise aim at them, too, merely is to dismiss a venerable strain of epistemic realism, however unpopular it might be currently. We do not here suggest that Strauss's or Maritain's epistemic realism is in fact right. That requires separate proof. We simply

²⁴*Ibid.*, 91-94 .

²⁵*Ibid.*, 90.

²⁶Rorty, *Mirror of Nature*, 40-41 (and n. 8 therein), and 45.

have outlined some of their principles in that area and urged that, first, Rorty has not actually overcome them, and second, by his logic, he should have tried. Where MacIntyre is concerned, while he generally acknowledges the primacy of theoretical cognition, he does not cogently reject its obvious consequence for the moral tradition that impresses him most, the Aristotelian.

III. Postscript: Strauss and Maritain on Knowing the Natural Law

In 1988, Professor Mortimer J. Adler urged this association to consider whether Strauss's natural law position is itself adequately grounded.²⁷ Adler's challenge obviously requires another paper. Nevertheless, we have said enough here to draw two distinctions between Strauss and Maritain, and now we turn to stating them briefly.

As we saw for Strauss, true virtue is philosophic virtue. This results in a consequence that Strauss readily admits, namely, that either one knows the principles of the law as an agnostic Socratic-Platonic, or one knows a mere vulgar reflection of them. Maritain's distinction between the ontological and gnoseological aspect of the law provides a way around the Straussian dilemma. The reason is, in a word, context. For Maritain, historical circumstances form necessary conditions of the law as known, promulgated, and obeyed—the only sense in which the law actually functions as law. In other words, from a Maritainian perspective, Strauss would appear to overlook the reality-determining function of man's always being situated in a specific time and place. It is true that Strauss fought a particular understanding of context, that in the historicism of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger; but Strauss seems to have been unaware of a Maritainian notion of what we are calling context, according to which actual existence is the first perfection of the real, which existence includes the historical and contingent. From this viewpoint, Strauss's dichotomy would flow from an exaggerated Platonic rationalism, one that denies reality to the contingent.

This same oversight leads us to Strauss's and Maritain's different views of philosophy and revelation. For Maritain, the law as law is

²⁷ Our manuscript, "Strauss on First Philosophy," takes up the same question in detail, though in the narrower context of whether Strauss's natural law position is adequately grounded in Plato's thought.

ultimately perfectible only in terms of its ultimate foundation; it is perfectible only when the Gospel's message penetrates "the very depth of human substance"; but Strauss appears to have adopted a neo-Averroist position on the distinction between philosophy and faith.²⁸ Because he never directly acknowledged neo-Averroism in print, Strauss might be technically innocent of ignoring Aquinas's—not to mention Maritain's—argument that the cognitions of faith are higher than those of philosophy, but Strauss's position surely appears incomplete, just as a natural law position, because it again ignores context. Three contextual issues are crucial here: God's freely choosing to become man; the potential reasonableness of Christian belief in incarnational theology; and the consequence of that belief for the gnoseology of the natural law (this is not to mention the gnoseology of philosophy itself). In light of those issues, it is reasonable for a natural law philosopher to propose that the law can remain law, even as extrinsically perfected by grace. Strauss's categorizing the law, so understood, as only a vulgar reflection of natural right is not adequately nuanced, and, once again, the reason is inattention to historical context and development of law and of philosophy.

Put simply, Strauss ignores some components of the natural law position as it has actually evolved. In order to identify the natural law in its purity with Plato, one must imply that natural law philosophy has not evolved. Obviously that claim needs support. Thus, Strauss's natural law position is comparatively ill-grounded. We have already suggested that there is reason to suspect its adequacy on Platonic grounds alone.

²⁸ For a brief statement and critique, see our "Review of Deutsch and Soffer," forthcoming in *The Thomist*.