STRAUSS, Leo (1899-1973)

Born in Kirchhain, rural Hesse, Leo Strauss came of age amidst the intellectually febrile atmosphere of Weimar Germany, completing his dissertation under the supervision of Ernst Cassirer at the University of Hamburg in 1921 followed by courses with Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger at the University of Freiburg. Strauss’s early work was largely concerned with Jewish themes: he produced numerous critical essays on Zionism, as well as a number of works on Spinoza, including his first book, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion* (1930). After brief stints in Paris and England, Strauss immigrated to America in 1937; after a decade at the New School for Social Research, he joined the University of Chicago in 1949. Strauss’s later thought is oriented around a number of dichotomies—between “Jerusalem and Athens”; ancient and modern conceptions of natural right; and the theologico-political dilemma, by which he meant the competing claims of religious fidelity and political obedience—and characterized by a marked hostility to historicism and relativism. Underpinning Strauss’s thought was a belief in the persistence of “fundamental problems”: insoluble, timeless questions such as the nature of justice and the best political order. Strauss is also known for his controversial doctrine of esotericism, which holds that philosophers commonly veil the true meaning of their writing in order to avoid political or religious persecution.

Bibliography: <http://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/files/pdf/Strauss_Bibliographie_3-5-09.pdf>

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