

character may not derive from theoretical innovations. Instead... that character derives from the way he relates the Jewish tradition to philosophy" (MS 4). The most radical break between medieval and modern thought is not theoretical but political, that is, the relation of philosophy and the city. By extracting and comparing theoretical claims of Spinoza and Maimonides, modern scholars such as Pines are able to ignore the radical political differences between them which come to light only in their respective presentations.

To take just one of several examples offered by Parens, the question of miracles raises a host of issues about nature, physics, and metaphysics. If we compare Spinoza's and Maimonides's view of miracles, we can find several instances where their arguments are similar if not indistinguishable. But if we look at their respective presentations, the differences are dramatic. In chapter 6 of the *TTP*, Spinoza asserts the fully determined and permanent status of the laws of nature; consequently, miracles are impossible and betray the ignorance of the biblical authors. Maimonides's view on miracles is more difficult to work out. He presents a variety of possible opinions, and in the *Guide* his "arguments that seem to permit miracles effectively deny miracles in the true sense" (144). Nor is his caution simply a question of deception as Spinoza alleges. Rather, Parens shows that Maimonides teaches us to reflect on political questions even before turning to metaphysical questions, lest we fail to consider the needs of the entire community, which may not benefit uniformly from a metaphysical discussion of providence. In other words, the political question necessarily precedes any metaphysical questions (see also 128n9, 163n29, 178).

Contemporary scholarship has followed Spinoza so closely that it runs the risk of not reading him carefully enough. By recovering Strauss's argument, Parens teaches us that political philosophy is not simply our point of entry into medieval thought, but also the most profound presentation of its wisdom.

Response

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It all comes back to what one means by "political philosophy." Daniel Tanguay has generously and calmly taken me to task for arguing that political philosophy could really be "first philosophy." Strauss means by "political philosophy" a number of different things: (1) that part of philosophy concerned with human affairs, (2) the exoteric defense of philosophy, and (3)

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