Recent publications bespeak an abiding interest in the Judaic thought of Leo Strauss and Joseph B. Soloveitchik.1 As Martin Jaffe reminds us, Strauss submitted twentieth century Jewish thought, as embodied in the writings of Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, to a relentless critique from the dual standpoints of philosophical consistency and traditional Jewish authenticity. His call for unflinching recognition of the traditional Jewish posture concerning the primacy of the externally imposed law, and his insistence on the stark irreconcilability of the Bible’s orientation to obedience and the philosophical attitude of “checking” and “investigation,” advise the modern Jew of the grave difficulties attendant upon even the most sincere attempt at a return to tradition.2 The re-issue of Soloveitchik’s major works and the continuing compilation of his oral discourses could be interpreted as evidence of his ongoing status as orientational figure for signifi-


cant segments of the modern orthodox community, as well as of the regard in which his thought is held by non-orthodox students of theology. A comparative inquiry into the respective profiles of the ideal Jew proferred by Strauss and Soloveitchik, then, may shed new light not only on the views of these two thinkers, but also on "what is being looked up to," or considered an unavoidable challenge, by certain segments of the Jewish community.

On the face of it, Strauss and Soloveitchik seem unlikely candidates for a comparative study. Leo Strauss, though born to a traditional Jewish family, and though actively occupied in Jewish research at the Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums between the years 1925-1932, went on to establish his reputation in the area of political philosophy, contributing major studies on Plato, Xenophon, Marsilius of Padua, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and others. Certain statements of his give one the impression that he regarded Judaism as just one more myth, born of the collective imagination, whose (noble and useful) purpose is to undergird the allegiance of the members of a given society to those norms which ensure the stable survival of the group. Despite certain attempts to turn Strauss into a "man of faith," or to claim him as a Jew in search of a rational Judaism other than the kind portrayed in modern Jewish thought, he seems to present himself as a philosopher in search of wisdom who cannot, by definition, proceed on the basis of any prior religious or societal commitment. Soloveitchik, on the other hand, the scion of long line of outstanding Talmudic scholars stemming from the Lithuanian Yeshivot, employed the extensive philosophical knowledge he began to acquire during his stay at the University of Berlin to both articulate and justify rigorous and unswerving commitment to

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4 Strauss's own reflections on his early life and intellectual concerns can be found in "A Giving of Accounts" with Jacob Klein, in *The College* (Annapolis and Santa Fe) 22, 1 (April, 1970), pp. 1-5. A more extensive intellectual autobiography can be found in the preface to the English edition of *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, (New York, Schocken, 1965), pp. 1-31. For an appreciation of Strauss' contribution to the study of the great philosophical works of the western tradition, see Thomas Pangle's introduction to the collection titled *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*.

5 See in particular Strauss's characterization of Jewish belief as "noble delusion," "dream" and "what is most needed" in contradistinction to "truth" in "Why We Remain Jews," unpublished lecture to Hillel Foundation of the University of Chicago, transcribed 1964.


7 See Ralph Lerner's introduction to the English edition of *Philosophy and Law*.

8 In his address "Jerusalem and Athens," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, pp. 149-150, Strauss says the following: "Where then do we stand? We are confronted with the incompatible claims of Jerusalem and Athens to our allegiance. We are open to both and willing to listen to each. We ourselves are not wise but we wish to become wise. We are seekers for wisdom, 'philosophoi.' By saying that we wish to hear first and then to act to decide, we have already decided in favor of Athens and against Jerusalem." For an evaluation of Strauss as a philosopher, and not a follower of revelation see Pines, Shlomo, "AI Leo Strauss" (Hebrew) in *Molad*, Vol. 7, #37-38, (Fall, 1976), pp. 455-457.