This dissertation demonstrates that Leo Strauss, in *The City and Man*, continues his response to Carl Schmitt’s arguments concerning the affirmation of the political, as outlined by Strauss in his 1932 article on Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political*. In affirming the political, Strauss spoke of the “theologico-political problem”, or the question regarding who, or what, should rule society. Strauss outlines six criteria in his 1932 “Comments”, which he argues can be found in Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political*, as essential for the recovery of the political. In raising the question of the political, both Schmitt and Strauss return to the fundamental question regarding how one should live. In so doing, Strauss rejects Schmitt’s reliance on conflicting faiths and returns to the Socratic description of the best regime (*politeia*), understood as the best way of life, that is devoted to contemplation, peace and justice. In his argument in *The City and Man*, Strauss satisfies the six criteria outlined in his “Comments”: (1) the acceptance of moral evil within human nature; (2) the problem of opposition among groups; (3) the possibility of a non-neutral, transprivate obligation; (4) the need for a content that determines the distinction between friend and enemy; (5) a content that leads to a quarrel over the question of “what is Right?” and (6) that the political must address “the order of human things from a *pure and whole* knowledge”. This thesis demonstrates that Strauss’s 1964 book, *The City and Man*, indirectly addresses Schmitt’s general criteria, using an interpretation of Thucydides’s, Aristotle’s and Plato’s best regime – which is linked to the pursuit of wisdom, or the philosophic life – to provide a transpolitical standard that opposes Schmitt’s insistence on “concrete” experience, that relies on historical destiny, and faith, as the guide to political life.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1. The Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate that Leo Strauss, in *The City and Man*, continues his 1932 response to Carl Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political* regarding the recovery of the political. It demonstrates that Strauss discusses six criteria in his 1932 “Comments”, which Schmitt outlines as essential for the successful recovery of the political. This thesis shows that those criteria are present, but not developed, in Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political* and that Strauss fully responds to them in his arguments in *The City and Man*, which was published in 1964. Furthermore, the thesis shows that the structure and content of, *The City and Man*, convey his answer to Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political*, especially regarding the best regime as described by Strauss’s interpretation of Aristotle, Plato and Thucydides.

Both Strauss and Schmitt define the political as “the order of the human things” that refers to the ordering principle, which determines fundamentally different ways of life.¹ According to Strauss, this ordering of the human things is equivalent to the regime (*politeia*), or to the question regarding the best way of life.² For Strauss, there are only two alternatives that represent the best way of life. These are the life dedicated to perfecting one’s reason, i.e. the philosophic life, and the life dedicated to biblical faith,

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² Ibid., p. 118. Strauss implies that the question of “what is right” is akin to the best political order.
which means the life devoted to obeying the commandments of the Bible. This thesis demonstrates that Schmitt is a Christian political theologian and that his recovery of the political meant a return to faith, while Strauss, as a political philosopher, preferred Socratic philosophy as the foundation of his recovery of the political. These two fundamental alternatives can be reduced to “faith”, represented by Jerusalem, and “reason”, represented by Athens. Strauss sometimes used the expression “the theologico-political problem” to indicate the problem regarding who or what should rule a community. The ultimate theologico-political problem, for Strauss, is whether biblical faith (Jerusalem) or reason (Athens) should be the highest authority for human beings.

It is not the objective of this thesis to demonstrate the superiority of Athens over Jerusalem, but to show that Strauss gives his mature response, regarding the meaning of the political, to Schmitt in The City and Man. The structure and content of that book provide evidence that Strauss is responding to Schmitt’s concept of the political. However, it is important to recognize the dispute, as it motivates Strauss’s answer to Schmitt, particularly since Strauss thought that Socratic political philosophy offered a better guide to practical political life. This is crucial, since Schmitt, having failed to comprehend the nature of tyranny, supported the Nazi regime, because he did not possess knowledge of the best regime. Strauss saw Schmitt’s active support of the Nazis as evidence of the failure of Schmitt’s recovery of the political.

In outlining, and knowing, Aristotle’s, Plato’s and Thucydides’s best regimes, as a way of life of the wise, Strauss attempts to provide an alternative universal order to Schmitt’s reliance on historical necessity and faith, as the foundation of the political. In

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his 1963 lecture on Plato’s *Symposium*, Strauss had stated clearly his interpretation of the political. He states:

“The political in the political is the phenomenon which the Greeks called *politeia* (the title of Plato’s *Republic* in the original). The word means, loosely explained, something like constitution. The politeia designates the character of the government, the powers of the government. Secondly, however, and this is the more important meaning, politeia designates a way of life. The way of life of a society is decisively determined by its hierarchy – its stratification, as it is now called. The most massive form of this stratification is expressed by this question: Which type of men predominate in broad daylight and with a view to compel power and obedience and respect? Which habits are fostered and admired by the society as a whole as it expresses itself in its actions as a society? Which moral taste is operating through the political order? We see immediately, on the basis of our present day experiences, that there is a variety of such regimes. The conflict among them is only a conflict in the minds of men. Thus the question arises of what is the best regime”.

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As Strauss relates, the most important characteristic of the politeia is that it signifies a way of life. Strauss had already stressed the importance of the regime in Natural Right and History, confirming his definition of the regime as the politeia, or “the way of life of a society, rather than its constitution”, being “the source of all laws”. In the same book he argues that, for Plato and Aristotle, the regime (politeia) includes “certain habits or attitudes as most respectable” to those who rule. Although Schmitt does not use the word, politeia, both thinkers were ultimately concerned with the most authoritative opinions that a society respects. According to Strauss, the conflict among the different ways of life raised the question regarding the question, who or what should rule society?  

This thesis demonstrates that The City and Man is a theologico-political treatise that attempts to answer the question regarding who or what should rule society, taking into consideration the six criteria found in Schmitt’s The Concept of the Political. In arguing that The City and Man is a theologico-political treatise, that has a subtle structure, this thesis shows that Strauss addresses the question, “how is one to live?” especially relating to the meaning theology has in political life. For Strauss and Schmitt, ruling presupposes an answer to the question regarding the best way of life that is based on the highest authority – the divine. In The City and Man, Strauss follows Socrates and defines the divine as nature, whereas Schmitt ultimately defines the divine as the Christian God. This explains why Strauss and Schmitt make a connection between theology, defined as what is said about the divine, and the question regarding the political rule. What links Strauss to Schmitt is the issue of the divine and its influence on politics, since the divine is the highest authority for human beings, or the

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5 Strauss, Leo, Natural Right and History, University of Chicago Press, 7th Impression, with Leo Strauss’s new “Preface”, U.S.A., 1971, pp. 136 & 137.
regime. In attempting to understand the divine, both Schmitt and Strauss begin with the most authoritative opinions of society in the quest for knowledge of “the order of human things”.

This thesis shows how Strauss answers Schmitt’s attempt to restore the political as one based on conflicting faiths, which are part of human destiny, defined as historical necessity. In challenging Schmitt’s reliance on faith as the foundation of the political, Strauss calls for a return to nature and classic natural right, or natural justice, blaming Schmitt for remaining within the horizon of liberalism in accepting much of Hobbes’s political theory. Strauss argues that Schmitt believes that it is impossible to transcend the “systematics of liberal thought”, because no other system has replaced liberalism.

According to Strauss, Schmitt also relies on historical fate, implying that he accepts historicism where thinkers cannot transcend the “concrete situation” of their particular age, or moment in time. By destiny, or historical fate, Schmitt means that history, as a series of historical events, provides the mysterious revelation of God’s divine providence that cannot be fully understood by any human being. In contrast, Strauss argues that the best regime is timeless, because it is “natural”, and hence universal, rather than being based on a unique historical situation. In response to Schmitt, Strauss defines “nature” as what comes to light through the examination of authoritative opinions that can be accessed at all times and in all places. He defines these opinions as the pre-theoretical description of things available to common sense, which are always fundamentally political in the moral sense. The most authoritative opinions include “the divine law”, or the ancestral customs, found in all societies. Hence, Strauss and Schmitt

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8 Ibid., pp. 93, 117 & 119.
share a similar interest in “the divine law”, but unlike Schmitt, Strauss follows Socrates in questioning the authoritative opinions of the city. According to Strauss, the problem of deciding what is the best way of life is solved by Socrates asking the question in terms of what is the highest good for human beings. This then leads to a discussion of existing regimes, or ways of life, and finally to the question of the best regime that Socrates argues replaces the endless conflicting opinions, or beliefs, that all claim to be true. The best regime turns out to be the equivalent of the best way of life, or the philosophic life. More importantly, for Strauss, because the best regime is just, and can be demonstrated (rationally) to be the best way of life, he suggests that it offers a better guide to political life than Schmitt’s reliance on potentially conflicting faiths.9

In partial agreement with Schmitt, Strauss begins his response to Schmitt by taking seriously morality, which represents the authoritative opinions held by society. It is these revered opinions that form the basis of Strauss’s investigation into what constitutes the best regime, or what it means to live the best way of life. This is why Strauss concludes The City and Man by raising the question regarding god, because it is the fundamental belief of the pre-philosophic city and underpins the most authoritative opinions. The gods are the authorities that the superstitious city takes most seriously. The authority of god is also the theme of Schmitt’s concept of the political that comes to light as political theology. Thus, in partial agreement with Schmitt, Strauss concludes The City and Man:

“For what is ‘first for us’ is not the philosophic understanding of the city but that understanding which is

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inherent in the city as such, in the pre-philosophic city, according to which the city sees itself as subject and subservient to the divine in the ordinary understanding of the divine or looks up to it. Only by beginning at this point will we be open to the full impact of the all-important question which is coeval with philosophy although the philosophers do not frequently pronounce it – the question *quid sit deus*”.

In turning to the authoritative opinions of society about the gods, Strauss indicates that he raises the issue of rule, because the gods, or the divine authorities, rule human beings by demanding obedience. This link between the gods and their ruling of society is another way to express the “theologico-political problem”, or who or what should rule the community. According to Strauss, whatever, or whoever, rules has to be authoritative and provide for stable, moderate government. Thus, Strauss is not concerned with the question whether biblical revelation refutes philosophy, but whether political philosophy provides a better guide to political life than Schmitt’s concept of the political, which is based on historical necessity that includes divine providence.

This thesis demonstrates that, for Strauss, the best regime, that is according to nature and can exist in all places and at all times, provides a rational model for political life, even though the best regime may never be adopted by the most civilized society. Given that only the philosophers can fully comprehend the best regime, but refuse to partake in political life, and given that few people recognize the philosophers, Strauss

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10 Ibid., p. 241.
11 Ibid., pp. 17, 25 & 49.
does not think the best regime will ever be implemented by modern societies. This simply means, for Strauss, that “the best regime” only exists in speech and is not likely to come into being. In The City and Man, Strauss openly states, “. . . the best regime is not possible”, but this does not imply that it cannot be used to judge various existing regimes. According to Strauss, the best regime exists in the souls of the best human beings and is better described as a way of life that involves the search for the truth behind all things. As an unending quest that focuses on the highest questions relating to justice, wisdom and other virtues, Strauss understands the best regime as one that comes to light as a life of discussion and a search for wisdom, and hence, emphasizes moderation as opposed to political action. However, Strauss argues that the best regime has been lost in the historical discussion that occurred from Machiavelli to the present day, which emphasized the “opposition between goodness and virtue”. By this paradox Strauss means that virtue was no longer associated with perfection through understanding the best regime, but with the unlimited human desires that stressed the “insoluble conflict between the good of the individual and the common good”. Thus, virtue became associated with the self-preservation of both the individual and society.

In his “Introduction” to The City and Man, Strauss tells the reader how this came about. Both Strauss and Schmitt thought that Western Civilization in the twentieth century was in decline, because the political, defined as the quest for the best life, had become submerged in concepts such as “economics” and “culture”. In essence, the political had disappeared as a theme of social science. Strauss states that he had “seen that the

12 Ibid., pp. 49, 124, 125 & 127.
13 Ibid., p. 131.
14 Ibid., p. 88.
15 Ibid., p. 7.
modern mind had lost its self-confidence or its certainty of having made decisive progress beyond pre-modern thought”. Strauss goes on to say, “I saw that it was turning into nihilism or what is in practice the same thing, fanatical obscurantism”. In the “Introduction” of The City and Man, Strauss refers to this problem as “the crisis of the West”, where the West has “become uncertain of its purpose”. One major reason Strauss gives for this, in The City and Man, is that political philosophy has become “ideology”. By this, Strauss means that political philosophy is no longer the recognized leader of the social sciences, but “has been replaced by the history of political philosophy”. Strauss calls this “an absurdity”, as it replaces “a doctrine which claims to be true by a survey of more or less brilliant errors”. This means, for Strauss, that readers of philosophic works no longer attempt to read those works, particularly those written by political philosophers, as their authors intended them to be read. Strauss’s complaint is that readers already think they know beforehand that those works are not true, in contradiction to the views of the authors. Thus, Strauss argues that the crisis of Western Civilization has something to do with “culture” or, more specifically, with the rejection of “high culture”, described as “the highest possibilities” of human thought. In his “Introduction” in The City and Man, Strauss traces the development of culture, described as “the comprehensive culture” that was synonymous with Western Civilization, to culture in the plural, meaning the acceptance of many cultures that were traditionally seen as barbaric. Strauss attacks what he sees as cultural relativism that no longer recognizes “the culture of the mind”. Furthermore, he argues that “the fundamental riddles” confronting human beings have not been solved, believing that Platonic political philosophy, in asking the fundamental question, “what is something?”, offers an alternative way of clarifying those riddles. Given that the crisis is linked to

17 Strauss, Leo, The City and Man, op. cit., pp. 2, 3 & 8.
cultural relativism, Strauss addresses the development of “culture” in one of the key
divisions in his chapter on Aristotle in The City and Man. This thesis demonstrates that
the issue of “culture” is a common thread between Strauss’s “Comments” and his final
response to Schmitt in The City and Man.\textsuperscript{18}

2. Strauss’s and Schmitt’s Art of Writing

In the 1930s, Strauss had turned to the writings of Thomas Hobbes, because, “Hobbes’s
political philosophy is the first peculiarly modern attempt to give a coherent and
exhaustive answer to the question of man’s right life, which is at the same time the
question of the right order of society”.\textsuperscript{19} It was while pursuing his interest in Hobbes
that he became interested in Schmitt’s ideas on Hobbes. In his 1965 “Preface” to the
German translation of his 1936 Hobbes book, Strauss reminds readers that Schmitt had
stated in The Concept of the Political:

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. . . that Hobbes is ‘by far the greatest and perhaps the
only truly systematic political thinker’. Schmitt’s
judgment about the greatness and the significance of
Hobbes, a judgment which corresponded to my feelings or
taste at that time, strengthened, understandably, my
interest in Hobbes”.\textsuperscript{20}
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It was through Hobbes, and his reading of mediaeval political philosophy, that Strauss deepened his understanding of Hobbes’s teachers, Aristotle, Plato and Thucydides. In reading the political works of those authors as the authors understood themselves, Strauss concluded that they used a peculiar form of writing that was designed to say one thing to some readers and another thing to others. Strauss called this the art of esoteric writing. Esoteric writing simply means the art of writing between the lines, or using various techniques to hide one’s true thought on an issue. In his book, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Strauss argues that esotericism “is based on the assumption that there is a rigid division of mankind into an inspired or intelligent minority and an uninspired or foolish majority”.²¹ Strauss outlines some of the techniques used to attract those inspired readers. They include: contradictions, the use of structured chapters, omissions of something crucial to an argument, intentional sophisms and ironical statements, the importance of passages found in the centre of chapters, or books, “blunders” that are intentional, but would “shame an intelligent school boy”, and a hidden structure of a book.²² According to Strauss, those books that contained such techniques were written to attract “young men who might become philosophers”. Strauss thought that the art of reading and writing was linked to the art of thinking, or the philosophic life. Thus, the art of writing, for Strauss, was connected to the question of the political, or the best way of life for the wise. This thesis demonstrates that Strauss uses some of those techniques of writing to disguise the fact that he is responding to Carl Schmitt throughout much of *The City and Man*.²³

Some commentators on Strauss’s works have demonstrated that he does not reveal everything he knows to the general public and that he is a prudent writer. Larry

²² Ibid., pp. 25, 30, 36, 74 & 75.
²³ Ibid., p. 36.
Peterman demonstrates that Strauss’s book, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, is very carefully written, noticing the author’s careful arrangement of his chapters and crucial omissions of details from Machiavelli’s books that require explanation, or what he lists as Strauss’s “numerological patterns, garbled quotations, pregnant silences, [and] deliberate self-contradictions”. Peterman’s explanation for Strauss’s literary style is that it serves “an educational purpose”. Peterman argues that Strauss’s literary style is the connection between the political and the “purely theoretical”, meaning that Strauss recognizes the importance of orthodoxy and the unsettling tendency of philosophic (theoretical) investigation. This thesis demonstrates that *The City and Man* is a carefully written book, which is structured as a reply to Schmitt. Strauss divides some of the sections, in chapter one, using an obscure method that has been overlooked by some scholars, while he uses a book title and favourite Schmittean words to highlight that he is responding to Schmitt’s arguments. In dividing his book into seventeen sections, Strauss has the reader reflect on the use of that number and how its use might contribute to the theme of his reply to Schmitt’s concept of the political.\(^{24}\)

Strauss knew that the number seventeen represented “nature” for the mediaeval philosopher, Maimonides, suggesting that Strauss’s purpose in providing seventeen divisions in *The City and Man* was to highlight “nature” as his fundamental alternative to Schmitt’s concept of the political as destiny.\(^ {25}\) Strauss had warned readers of philosophic writings that they must look to the individual texts for instruction on how the book must be read.\(^{26}\) It is no accident that Strauss dedicates a whole section to the

\(^{24}\) Peterman, Larry, “Approaching Leo Strauss: Some Comments on *Thoughts on Machiavelli*”, *The Political Science Reviewer*, vol. 16, Fall 1986, pp. 322 & 324.


art of writing and reading in *The City and Man*, allocating thirteen paragraphs in his sixth division, “On Plato’s *Republic*”, to the issue of how to read a Platonic dialogue. Strauss also devotes much of the longest chapter – the third chapter of *The City and Man* – to the question of how to read Thucydides’s history. Strauss’s art of writing, which he uses in his “Comments”, and in *The City and Man* is central to discovering his response to Schmitt.27

Seth Benardete provides the only guide to Strauss’s technique of writing in *The City and Man*, arguing that Strauss has carefully written and structured the book. He warns of Strauss’s irony that is always “incompatible with science”, but “at home in political philosophy”.28 This is significant because Strauss dedicates the beginning of his second chapter, “On Plato’s *Republic*”, to a discussion regarding the use of irony in works that are dedicated to one or two readers.29 Benardete also provides one hint for readers of Strauss’s *The City and Man* in the form of a quotation from Strauss’s *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, calling it a “golden sentence”. It reads, “The problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things (*Thoughts on Machiavelli*, p. 13)”. Benardete’s point is that Strauss’s hidden messages can be found in the surface meaning of the words that appear in the text.30

It was the German scholar, Heinrich Meier, who first explored Strauss’s hidden dialogue with Schmitt. He argues that Schmitt responded to Strauss’s criticism, after Strauss had read Schmitt’s 1927 edition of *The Concept of the Political*, by making numerous changes to subsequent editions. Meier lists a number of changes, ranging

27 See Appendix 1 for a complete summary of Strauss’s 17 divisions of his book.
from a restatement on Hobbes to deleting inverted commas around key words. These changes did not include any footnotes referring to Strauss. Schmitt continued to make changes after Strauss’s “Comments” appeared in 1932, culminating in the third edition of *The Concept of the Political*, published in 1933.\(^{31}\) Having joined the Nazi Party in 1933, Schmitt could not afford to recognize Strauss’s improvements to his concept of the political, given that Strauss was a Jew. In recognizing Meier’s work on the hidden dialogue between Strauss and Schmitt, this thesis builds upon that scholarship by continuing the investigation into Strauss’s response to Schmitt’s definition of the political, that eventually takes the form of Strauss’s 1964 “theologico-political treatise”, *The City and Man*.

Meier also demonstrates that Schmitt knew how to read Strauss and took note of Strauss’s suggestions from the “Comments”.\(^{32}\) There is also evidence that Schmitt knew how to write and read extremely carefully, providing evidence that Strauss suspected that Schmitt would read, and understand the purpose of, *The City and Man*. Ernst Hüsmert and Piet Tommissen suggest that Schmitt was an accomplished satirical writer, who wrote poems under the pseudonym of “Erich Strauss”, or sometimes, “Erich Strauß”. Schmitt borrowed the Christian name, “Erich”, from his former Bonn University colleague, Erich Kaufmann, and used Leo Strauss’s surname. In writing such poems, it could be interpreted that Schmitt hoped that Strauss would respond to his overtures of friendship, and forgive him for his 1933 mistake. Nevertheless, there is no


\(^{32}\) Ibid., pp. 61 & 62 (footnote 64).
evidence that Strauss read the poems, and even if he had read them, there is no evidence that he responded to them.\footnote{33}

3. The Six Criteria Discovered

In demonstrating that Strauss responds to Carl Schmitt in \textit{The City and Man}, this thesis investigates three works: Schmitt’s \textit{The Concept of the Political}, Strauss’s “Comments” on Schmitt’s \textit{The Concept of the Political} and \textit{The City and Man}. All three are linked to Strauss’s understanding of the theologico-political problem and Strauss’s transcendence of the political through his interpretation of the best regime. Strauss agrees with some of Schmitt’s arguments on the political in \textit{The Concept of the Political}, but more importantly, he outlines six criteria that he sees in Schmitt’s book that must be satisfied for the successful recovery of the political. In demonstrating that there is evidence that Strauss is referring to Schmitt in \textit{The City and Man}, it is necessary to identify a connection between that book and Strauss’s “Comments” on Schmitt’s work, \textit{The Concept of the Political}. In the “Comments”, Strauss outlines the criteria as: 1) one must affirm the political in recognizing the “dangerousness of man” as the “ultimate presupposition of the position of the political”. This means that human beings must be demonstrated as being “evil”, in terms of “moral baseness”, and therefore in need of government (rule);\footnote{34} 2) The political requires “a concrete opposition”, i.e. it


presupposes the "dire emergency" ("Ernstfall"), or "the potential for war";\textsuperscript{35} 3) The political, when expressed as "decision", must have "the character of transprivate obligation", meaning a public obligation, which is "removed from all arbitrary, private discretion". It cannot be neutral;\textsuperscript{36} 4) It follows that this decision has a content that is decisive and not neutral in determining who is a friend and who is an enemy;\textsuperscript{37} 5) The political presupposes the existence of "the quarrel over the right faith", or the battle concerning "what is right"\textsuperscript{38} and 6) The political must articulate "the order of human things from a pure and whole knowledge".\textsuperscript{39} For convenience these six criteria can be listed as: (i) Evil, (ii) Ernstfall, (iii) Decision, (iv) Content, (v) Right and (vi) Order. Since Strauss's works are often cryptic, it is necessary to interpret his summary of the six criteria for the affirmation of the political.

(i) Evil

In turning to the first criterion, the necessity of moral evil, Strauss argues that the Socratics: Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon were very aware of the dangerousness of human beings (the natural acquisitiveness of human beings) that Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke took as the foundation of their respective political doctrines.\textsuperscript{40} In agreement with Schmitt, Strauss accepts the overall goodness of the presence of evil in the world, both in natural catastrophes and in human, moral weakness.\textsuperscript{41} However, he challenges

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., pp. 65, 67 & 68. Cf. "Comments" pp. 114 & 118.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., pp. 1, 37 & 67. Cf. "Comments" pp. 91, 115 & 119. Strauss's emphasis.
\textsuperscript{40} Strauss, Leo, The City and Man, op. cit., pp. 17, 23 & 88.
\textsuperscript{41} In Strauss, Leo, Thoughts on Machiavelli, University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Edition, U.S.A., 1978, p. 299, Strauss states, "the opinion that there occur periodic cataclysms in fact took care of any apprehension regarding an excessive development of technology or regarding the danger that man's inventions might become his masters and destroyers. Viewed in this light, the natural cataclysms appear as a manifestation of the beneficence of nature".
Schmitt’s requirement that the exception must be based on Original Sin, or what Schmitt saw as the universal presence of evil. In accepting the Platonic idea of human evil, but in remaining silent regarding the necessity of Original Sin, Strauss argues that the best regime is possible for individual human beings, who perfect their reason and become good individuals, whether as philosophers or noble and good people ("hoi kaloikagathoi - hoi aristoi").

In contrast to Schmitt’s emphasis on the exception as evil, Strauss’s definition of the political emphasizes both good and bad, especially the goodness of the political philosopher, as well as the idea of the good that is the goal of the best regime and the goodness of friendship that exists among noble and good people ("hoi kaloikagathoi - hoi aristoi"). In opposing Schmitt, Strauss argues that in Plato’s opinion, “the cessation of evil” requires the rule of philosophers as kings rather than the hope of the divine intervention of a god or gods. However, Strauss is adamant that philosophers will never rule their societies, thus admitting that evil will be a constant factor in political life.42 In The City and Man, Strauss does not take up a discussion concerning the possibility of miracles, preferring to rely on Plato’s conclusion that chance and nature play important roles in determining outcomes. He does so because nature and chance provide a better guide to political life than either biblical faith, or the belief in miracles.43

In drawing attention to Schmitt’s concept of the political, Strauss is grateful for Schmitt’s recovery of Hobbes’s “state of nature”. For Strauss, it was Schmitt who provided a window into the Greek understanding of nature through Hobbes’s “state of nature”, or what Strauss calls, “the secret, humble beginning, to undamaged, noncorrupt

43 Ibid., pp. 117, 122 – 129.
nature” that distinguishes between good and bad. Strauss had praised Schmitt for recovering the importance of “the state of nature” for the study of politics. Strauss uses “the state of nature”, as a means to return to the Greek idea of nature that provides a timeless, universal standard. In this way, Strauss uses nature, defined as “a pure and whole knowledge”, as his alternative to Schmitt’s concept of the political that highlights the potential conflict among friends and enemies, based on warring faiths. Strauss argues that he challenges Schmitt’s interpretation of an historical providence, defined as destiny, by providing an alternative universalism that includes the distinction between good and evil. In this way, the thesis demonstrates the importance, and significance, of Schmitt’s affirmation of the political as Hobbes’s “state of nature” and how “the state of nature” is connected to the evil nature of human beings.\(^44\)

(ii) *Ernstfall*

In the second criterion, Strauss attempts to satisfy Schmitt’s extreme situation, where potential war and opposition call for a response that Schmitt calls the “dire emergency” or “*Ernstfall*”. Schmitt argues that groups, or nations, are always in the extreme situation, or *Ernstfall*. In replying to Schmitt, Strauss asserts that Schmitt remains “trapped in the liberal system”, because he does not argue that there is only one true end worth fighting for. In following liberalism, Schmitt denies that nature points to only one end, or perfection, for all human beings. In dismissing ends as the result of mere belief, Schmitt makes potential fighting an end in itself, causing Strauss to conclude that Schmitt's criterion only stresses fighting as such, and not what is being fought for. In contrast, in *The City and Man*, Strauss presents reasons why the Spartans went to war

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with the Athenians, while he has Socrates’s warrior class, in Plato’s *Republic*, fight for the best regime against potential invaders. According to Strauss, by following the liberalism that he criticizes, Schmitt falls into contradiction and confusion that is best seen in Strauss’s example highlighting the absurdity of Schmitt’s concept of the political as mere fighting. In defending the political as orientated to a potential fight, Strauss demonstrates that Schmitt remains neutral on the issue of what is being fought over, arguing that Schmitt would then admire dangerousness for its own sake. Strauss’s example, to refute Schmitt’s apparent neutrality, is the Roman general, Luscinus Fabricius, who, when informed by a Greek philosopher that pleasure was the greatest good, replied, “If only Pyrrhus and the Samnites shared this philosopher’s opinion as long as we are at war with them!” Strauss’s point is that people do not fight for their own dangerousness, but for the sake of being rescued from danger and that peace is consequently superior to war. Strauss’s solution to the requirement of the *Ernstfall* is to propose the best regime, where the philosopher, or the wise ruling under good laws, can recognize, and deal with, threats to the highest ends of the best society.45

(iii) Decision

Criterion three means that the political must have a content that is expressed as a decision. The decision needs to include “a transprivate obligation”, which means that the obligation must be a public one. The decision must not be neutral and it must be made in the context of the *Ernstfall*, or dire emergency, that leads to potential war. Both Strauss and Schmitt suggest that a decision needs to be based on a commitment that transcends the personal views, or the tastes, of an individual, unless it is founded on

an authority, such as divine right or natural right that claims to be universal and true. In making a decision for a return to nature and the best regime that is not neutral, Strauss takes a position that creates “a concrete opposition” to Schmitt’s decision to rely on faith in God as the foundation of the political.

(iv) Content

In criterion four, Strauss and Schmitt define “content” as what the ruling class of a society looks up to, be it the divine right of kings, equality and freedom or nature. Both thinkers argue that the most important decisions are founded on a content that is decisive and not neutral for a group, city or nation. However, in turning to the regime, or what a community looks up to, such as honour, nature, the gods or God, Strauss subtly provides Schmitt with an order of things that can lead to the question regarding the best regime, founded on nature and knowledge. In recovering the theoretical perfect regime, or best regime, that is according to nature, Strauss implies that one can then judge the content of any regime, particularly those that aim at tyranny.

Harry Neumann is helpful in explaining Schmitt’s doctrine of nations battling over life and death issues, which arise from radically different ways of life. Schmitt would have admired the war of content that took place in the battle of Verdun, in World War One, where the French and German armies were decidedly not neutral in determining the enemy and the friend concept. Winston Churchill noted the stupidity and waste of lives in this battle, but few realized that it was the decisive battle of World War One. In Schmittean terms, the battle represented two nations facing off in a desperate war that was between the French way of life and the German way of life, or The French
Republic opposed to the Prussian Monarchy. According to Neumann, all the battles after Verdun, including those fought during World War Two, lacked the horrific intensity at Verdun. Neumann’s Schmittean explanation is that France and Germany never recovered from the loss of troops at Verdun, explaining why each side refused to use tactics, or strategy, to avoid such carnage. It was noticed by some, such as Churchill, that the Germans could have used Verdun troops in the East to defeat Russia first, but the battle between the French way of life and the German way of life remained more important than considered strategy.  

Although Schmitt might admire the moral dedication and seriousness that were demonstrated at Verdun, Strauss goes further in The City and Man, arguing that one can use a hierarchy of ends to judge such political action. According to Strauss, the best way of life (“the best regime” based on nature) provides a standard, and content, to judge such political actions that represent battles of faith. Strauss, with his emphasis on nature and the best regime, would agree that the battle of Verdun was a senseless waste and that both sides could have employed their troops more intelligently. Even as an ex-German, and an ex-Prussian, Strauss, in arguing for a rational standard of human rights (natural justice), would agree with Churchill that the worse regime was the Kaiser's, for making militarism the content for the decisionism that was a cause of World War One.

(v) Right

In criterion five, Strauss rejects the modern expression “ideology” in the battle over what constitutes the right faith. For both Strauss and Schmitt, ideology does not address

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the issue of the battle over the right faith, or the right way of life. Strauss addresses ideology in his “Introduction” of *The City and Man*. According to Strauss, the word is convenient for social scientists, but it is a word associated with a particular view that all value systems are relative, except ideology itself. Ideology, for Strauss, is not relative as it is the absolute standard that remains constant. Strauss argues that its use may be limiting in truly understanding faiths, or contents, that claim to be the truth, since ideology already denies that any faith, or content, is the truth, except the implied true faith in the final truth of ideology. Strauss’s objection to ideology is that it inhibits a serious search for truth, since those familiar with its meaning already know that all faiths are wrong, or not true. Strauss uses it because it is a familiar term, but for Schmitt, it is an expression of our very forgetting of the political - as he defines it. Schmitt argues that ideology is “neutral” to any decision taken by a group because it denies the decisive content of faith – i.e. its perceived truth. According to Schmitt and Strauss, it would be false to understand Britain and the United States fighting for an ideology in World War Two, especially since ideology holds that no way of life is superior to any other. However, in transcending Schmitt’s historicism, Strauss argues that what constitutes the battle over what is right must be universal and apply to all places and to all times. Strauss’s answer to the necessity of including “Right” takes the form of natural right, or natural justice, that is articulated in the best regime, and hence, in the best way of life. The right way of life turns out to be contemplation, or philosophizing. In returning to this standard of right, as seen through the eyes of the political philosopher, or noble and good rulers (“*hoi kaloikagathoi* - *hoi aristois*”), Strauss argues that one can recognize, and minimize, the evils that befall modern states, especially the evil of militarism.
(vi) Order

The key words in criterion six are “pure and whole knowledge” in articulating “the order of human things”. Strauss’s immediate response to this criterion is that Schmitt cannot find the answer by turning to historicism, described as “concrete political existence”, or what Strauss calls “the situation of the age”. Instead, Strauss calls for a return to original nature, demonstrating that Plato recognized that nature had provided two necessary parts to the soul, the idea of good and bad. In short, Strauss’s affirmation of morality is based on nature that allows for natural goodness, as opposed to Schmitt’s concept of the political that begins with the universal evil of all human beings, caused by Original Sin. Thus, the key to Strauss’s “order” is that it is natural and includes the criterion of the “dangerousness of man” in terms of “moral baseness”, without having to fall back on biblical sin. However, in rejecting Original Sin, but in accepting the possibility of natural evil, Strauss agrees with Schmitt that human nature does not change; hence, the propensity of human beings to disagree and fight among one another. This explains Strauss’s heavy emphasis on Thucydides’s history of Greek warfare in The City and Man. Yet, Schmitt denies nature and the possibility of human beings becoming good and self-sufficient through their own efforts, because of his Christian belief in Original Sin. The knowledge and order of the political, for Schmitt, is the battle of faiths, or in Schmitt’s own case, his acceptance of historical providence and biblical revelation. In contrast, Strauss argues throughout his book, The City and Man, that Socrates spoke of good and evil, contrary to the other natural philosophers,

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49 Plato, The Laws, Pangle, Thomas L., trans., Basic Books, U.S.A., 1980, p. 295, Book 10, 896e7. Plato’s Athenian Stranger tells Kleinias and Megillus that the soul is found in all things in motion and is represented by two things, the “good” and “another capable of doing the opposite”, i.e. the bad.
who saw no cosmological support for the political described as good and evil. Strauss argues that Socrates agreed with the early philosophers that there was no cosmological support; however, in his new approach to philosophy, Strauss argues that Socrates examined the most authoritative opinions (pieties) and discovered that there was something in the soul, or in human nature, that was universal (divine). According to Socrates, the nature of human beings was characterized by a possession of universal reason that pointed to a concern with the good and with justice. This initially led to Socrates recognizing the conflicting answers to the best way of life, and hence to the question, which one is the best and represents the most reasonable order? Since all claimed to be true, they raised the question of truth and the question regarding the best order. Strauss argues that the claim of many regimes to be the right regime raises the question of the good and the best regime. According to Socrates, the best regime has to be discovered by the use of reason, thus satisfying Schmitt’s criterion that it must be connected to knowledge, or rather a quest to know the whole. In this way, the philosophic life, for Strauss, then becomes the order of the human things, defined as discussion, or dialectics. Although Strauss stresses Socratic scepticism regarding the possession of “the truth”, he implies that his interpretation of Socratic political philosophy does not rule out the possibility that his interpretation of classical political science can recognize dysfunctional “faiths”, such as Nazism, Stalinism and other forms of modern tyranny.

4. Strauss’s Silence on Schmitt

Strauss rarely publicly responded to contemporary thinkers, the most notable exceptions being: Alexandre Kojève, Martian Heidegger and Carl Schmitt. Strauss only openly,
and publicly, responded to Schmitt in detail before he joined the Nazi Party in 1933. The fact that Schmitt was addressed in 1932 suggests that Strauss had good reason for publicly outlining Schmitt’s arguments regarding the political in the “Comments”. Until Schmitt’s entry into the Nazi Party in 1933, Schmitt and Strauss were on friendly terms. Schmitt even helped Strauss secure a scholarship to leave Germany. Both shared a deep interest in the political writings of Thomas Hobbes and political theology. However, after 1933, there is no evidence that Strauss communicated with Schmitt and only rarely does Strauss refer to him by name in his later writings. One can easily speculate why Strauss – a Jew - refused to forgive Schmitt for his pro-Nazi writings and Nazi collaboration, because he must have felt bitterly betrayed. Furthermore, most of Strauss’s Jewish family, and relatives, were murdered by the Nazi regime and Strauss himself was very lucky to have escaped their fate. It was Schmitt’s recommendation of Strauss for a Rockefeller scholarship that contributed to preserving Strauss’s life. When safely in the United States, in 1941, Strauss gave a seminar where he referred to writers, such as “Carl Schmitt”, who had unintentionally, or intentionally, undermined liberal democracy through their criticism of it and consequently had helped pave the way to German militarism and the rise of Hitler.50

Although Strauss recognized the challenge of political theology, there are only five occasions where he mentions Schmitt by name after 1933. The first was in a footnote in Strauss’s 1935 book, Philosophy and Law, indicating the “Comments” on Schmitt’s The Concept of the Political that focuses on the importance of the political.51 The second appears in his chapter, “The New Morality”, in The Political Philosophy of Hobbes.

50 Strauss, Leo, “German Nihilism”, op. cit., pp. 362, 372 & 373. The first third of the seminar is addressed to Schmitt, given Strauss’s use of Schmittean terms such as “Ernstfall”.
published in 1936. Using a footnote, Strauss calls attention to the “Comments” as an explanation regarding the reasons why the bourgeois have forgotten the terrors associated with Hobbes’s state of nature.52 The third took the form of an oral admonishment that Strauss did not publish. Strauss argued in a graduate seminar, given in the United States on February 26th 1941, that, during the Weimar Republic, young students needed good teachers, who articulated their students’ youthful “aspirations” by using “positive” “language”, and not just “destructive” speeches. In condemning Schmitt, Strauss states that the young “found such teachers in that group of professors and writers who knowingly or ignorantly paved the way for Hitler (Spengler, Moeller van den Bruck, Carl Schmitt, Alfred Bäumler, Ernst Jünger, [and] Heidegger”).53 Strauss’s fourth mention of Schmitt is found in Strauss’s new “Preface” to his 1965 German publication, Hobbes Politisch Wissenschaft (The Political Philosophy of Hobbes).54 This took place one year after the publication of The City and Man. Strauss’s last mention of Schmitt appears again in 1965, in Strauss’s English translation of his Spinoza book, where he included his original 1932 “Comments” on Schmitt’s The Concept of the Political after the appendix.

When Strauss did mention Schmitt’s name, it was mainly to distance himself from Schmitt. In the new “Preface” of the German translation of his Hobbes book, Strauss argues that it was Julius Ebbinghaus’s discussion of Hobbes, in his 1922 lecture on “the Reformation and the Enlightenment”, that “caused” him “to take notice” of Hobbes.55

55 Ebbinghaus was a German lecturer at Freiburg, who introduced Strauss to the works of Thomas Hobbes in the summer of 1922.
Strauss’s purpose in mentioning Schmitt is to clarify the origins of his interest in Hobbes. It was Ebbinghaus, and not Schmitt, who had shown Strauss Hobbes’s “originality” and “unconventional way” and how Hobbes’s teaching had become “vital”. We learn that Strauss’s “study of Hobbes” began with his investigations into the supposed success of Spinoza’s seventeenth century “biblical criticism”. Strauss states his relationship with Schmitt regarding their shared interest in Hobbes:

“Carl Schmitt, in quite unconscious opposition to Ebbinghaus, asserted in his essay, ‘The Concept of the Political’ (‘Der Begriff des Politischen’ Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, 1927) that Hobbes is ‘by far the greatest and perhaps the only truly systematic political thinker’. Schmitt’s judgment about the greatness and the significance of Hobbes, a judgment which corresponded to my feelings or taste at that time, strengthened, understandably, my interest in Hobbes”. 56

However, Strauss draws attention to his fundamental difference with Schmitt. Strauss was not a Hobbesian, whereas, Strauss makes it clear from Schmitt’s use of the superlative that he thought Schmitt was a Hobbesian, although he indicates in his “Comments” that Schmitt did not fully understand Hobbes. It also establishes that their association “at that time” was based on their shared “interest” in Hobbes’s “greatness” and Hobbes’s “significance”. Still, Strauss admits that Schmitt’s judgement confirmed his earlier opinion concerning Hobbes’s work, demonstrating Strauss’s respect for

56 Strauss, Leo, Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity, Green, Kenneth Hart, editor, op. cit., p. 453.
Schmitt’s intellectual discernment regarding the significance of Hobbes at the time. Whereas Schmitt remained a Hobbesian of sorts, Strauss’s “fate” led him to England and gave him access to the sources of Hobbes’s political writings, in particular Plato’s, Aristotle’s and Thucydides’s political works, which became the foundation of *The City and Man*.\(^{57}\)

In the same “Preface”, Strauss announces his philosophic interest in theology that turned him to “true politics”, again confirming his 1934 footnote about the “theologico-political” theme of his later investigations. By “true politics”, Strauss means returning to what is first for us, or the authoritative opinions that form the moralities of societies and their claims of being the best way of life. This explains why he says that he “did not write about Hobbes as a Hobbesian”. Strauss gives two reasons for this, one stated, the other obscure: the first is that Hobbes’s “famous clarity is limited to his conclusion, while his presuppositions are shrouded in obscurity” and secondly, Strauss indicates that one should read Kant’s original quotation (see below) that Strauss uses in speaking of “true politics”. In drawing attention to Hobbes’s obscure premises, Strauss implies that Schmitt’s works are those where the “presuppositions are shrouded in obscurity”.\(^{58}\) Strauss confirms this observation in his “Comments” on Schmitt’s book, *The Concept of the Political* by exposing Schmitt’s hidden premises and judgements. However, Strauss’s reference to Kant’s statement regarding “true politics” is puzzling, given that Strauss is not a Kantian.

The expression, “true politics”, comes from Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*, which states:

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\(^{57}\) Ibid., pp. 453 & 454.  
\(^{58}\) Ibid., p. 454.
“Thus true politics can never take a step without rendering homage to morality. Though politics by itself is a difficult art, its union with morality is no art at all, for this union cuts the knot which politics could not untie when they were in conflict. The rights of men must be held sacred, however much sacrifice it may cost the ruling power”.  

In reading Kant, Strauss’s point is that morality and politics should be inseparable, but more importantly, Strauss implies that morality must include natural right, or justice, if it is to be the true morality. However, unlike Kant, Strauss understands “true politics” to be truly just (moral) because it is based on nature that can be located at all times and in all places. Nature replaces the “sacred”. This is why he returns to the best regime, in The City and Man, that is not only the best way of life, but also the most just way of life. This contrasts with Schmitt’s political theology that does not recognize natural right as essential for the recovery of the political. Strauss implies from Kant that avoiding the moral, or justice, leads to political instability and disaster. Furthermore, in linking morality to “true politics”, Strauss indicates how “true politics”, or what he calls the political, is discovered. Morality, or the sacred opinion of society, is where Strauss begins his investigation of the best way of life, described as the best regime that is according to nature. Strauss argues that the political philosopher must begin with the most sacred opinions of society in order to discover the best regime. Hence, for Strauss, “true politics” is linked to the best regime that includes the most moral way of life – the philosophic life. Thus, Strauss demonstrates to the reader the importance of political philosophy that is linked to morality and right. The implication, for Strauss, is that, had

60 Strauss, Leo, The City and Man, op. cit., pp. 5 & 7.
Schmitt accepted this connection between politics and right, particularly Strauss’s interpretation of natural right that is synonymous with the best regime, he would never have joined the Nazi regime in 1933 and supported a regime that abused “the rights of men”.

Apart from these exceptions, further evidence that Strauss did not mention Schmitt’s name, while presenting his arguments, is found in Strauss’s semi-autobiographical “Preface” to his Spinoza book, written in 1962. Strauss begins the paragraph that contains a quotation from Schmitt arguing, “It is safer to try to understand the low in the light of the high than the high in the light of the low”. By this, Strauss means that the “latter one necessarily distorts the high, whereas in doing the former one does not deprive the low of the freedom to reveal itself fully as what it is”. Strauss then explains that the Weimar Republic was inspired by classical German thought, not all of which supported liberal democracy. Strauss argues that Hegel’s Philosophy of Right provided Germany with a constitutional monarchy, based on “the rights of man”. It is within the context of mentioning Hegel and that “the government is in the hands of highly educated civil servants appointed by an hereditary king” that Strauss states, “It has been said, not without reason, that Hegel’s rule over Germany came to an end only on the day Hitler came to power”. The author of that statement is Carl Schmitt, but Strauss chose not to mention his name.61 In refusing to use Schmitt’s name, Strauss directs our attention to his argument, and not to his historical role as a former Nazi, and Catholic Christian, thus avoiding any prejudice that might accompany the argument. Strauss does this by adding the conjunction, “But”, after Schmitt’s statement, arguing that Rousseau was responsible for Hegel’s philosophy. Hence, Strauss criticizes Schmitt’s

61 The statement is found in Schmitt, Carl, Staat, Bewegung Volk: Die Dreigliederung der Politischen Einheit, Hanseatische Derlagsanstalt, Hamburg, Germany, 1935, pp. 31 & 32.
statement by presenting his interpretation of the philosophical and political forces that were the cause of the failure of Weimar. Strauss argues that it was Rousseau who “prepared” classical German philosophy, particularly German romanticism, which was “that extreme reaction to the French Revolution”. In answering why Hitler came to power, Strauss goes back to the Holy Roman Empire and the “humiliation” that Germany felt when it was deprived of that Empire in 1806. It was the German longing for a return of the middle ages that “pointed towards a third Reich”, according to Strauss, noting that Catholic Christianity “was the bond of society” of the Mediaeval Reich. Strauss then reminds readers, “The action most characteristic of the middle ages is the Crusades”, which ended “in the murder of whole Jewish communities”. He also says that the Weimar Republic gave political rights to the Jews for the first time.62 Here, Strauss warns Schmitt that a return to the political, defined as conflicting faiths, has a devastating effect on minority groups that also base their legitimacy on revelation. Given Schmitt’s desire to see faith become the bond of German society, it appears that Strauss is still responding to Schmitt’s political theology outlined in The Concept of the Political.63

As early as 1935, Strauss had connected the political with religion. In indicating the relationship religion and the political had with culture, Strauss mentions Schmitt, even though Strauss knew that Schmitt was a member of the Nazi Party. However, Strauss relegates Schmitt’s name to a footnote at the beginning of chapter one in his 1935 book, Philosophy and Law, showing how he will eventually address the issue of the political. In the body of the text, Strauss argues that religion is “one crux of philosophy of

63 Schmitt, Carl, The Concept of the Political, Schwab, George, trans., op. cit., pp. 29, 65, 67 & 68. These issues will be demonstrated in chapter three.
culture”, 64 but Strauss chose to keep the other “crux” (“the political”) in his second footnote, rather than in the body of the text. He states:

“The other crux of philosophy of culture is the fact of the political (cf. my “Anmerkungen zu Carl Schmitt, Der Begriff des Politischen”, . . .) If ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ are the facts that transcend ‘culture’, or, to speak more precisely, the original facts, then the radical critique of the concept of ‘culture’ is possible only in the form of a theologico-political treatise’, - which of course, if it is not to lead back again to the foundation of ‘culture’, must take exactly the opposite direction from the theologico-political treatises of the seventeenth century, especially those of Hobbes and Spinoza. The first condition for this would be, of course, that these seventeenth-century works no longer be understood, as they almost always have been up to now, within the horizon of philosophy of culture” . 65

In agreement with Schmitt, Strauss argues that religion and politics have been replaced by the unity of culture that has obscured the tension between them. Strauss suggests that his first task was to understand the “theologico-political treatises” of Spinoza and Hobbes, not from the viewpoint of “culture”, but as political works. In Philosophy and Law, Strauss already shows his answer to the political question regarding the best way

64 Strauss, Leo, Philosophy and Law - Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and His Predecessors, Adler, Eve, trans., op. cit., p. 42.
65 Ibid., footnote “2”, p. 138. Strauss’s emphasis . Notice that Strauss mentions Schmitt’s name as the author of The Concept of the Political following the first sentence of the quotation, only because Schmitt’s name appears in the title of Strauss’s “Comments” (“Anmerkungen”).
of life. He argues that Aristotle and Plato agree that “the specific perfection of man consists in pure contemplation and understanding”, the very thing he fully demonstrates in *The City and Man*.66

5. The Significance of the Thesis

While many commentators on Schmitt and Strauss have written about their differences and similarities regarding the political, no one has demonstrated that Strauss’s book, *The City and Man*, is a reply to Schmitt’s concept of the political. This is because scholars have overlooked the six criteria that Strauss outlines for the successful recovery of the political, as well as underestimating Strauss’s art of writing. In discovering Strauss’s art of writing and in examining the structure of *The City and Man*, this thesis demonstrates that Strauss’s book is a considered reply to Schmitt.

Furthermore, few commentators have discovered the partial agreement that both thinkers have on the friend and the enemy concept in Strauss’s *The City and Man*.67 No one has discovered that Schmitt takes his definition of the political, i.e. the friend and enemy problem, from Book One of Plato’s *Republic* and that Strauss partly agrees that Schmitt’s definition of the division between friend and enemy is characteristic of political life. In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt reduces the political to the conflict between friend and enemy, borrowing from Polemarchus’s definition of justice. Socrates refutes three definitions of justice in the *Republic*: giving back what is owed (Cephalus’s definition), helping friends and harming enemies (Polemarchus’s definition) and justice as the advantage of the stronger (Thrasymachus’s definition).

66 Ibid., p. 132.

Although Strauss admits, in *The City and Man*, that the Socratic best city will have external enemies, he notes that Socrates refutes Polemarchus’s (practical) definition of justice as helping friends and harming enemies. In transcending Schmitt’s friend and enemy concept, and in finally defining justice, Strauss makes it clear that Socrates argues that the philosopher harms no one. Yet, it must be remembered that Strauss’s presentation of Plato’s best regime transcends the world of politics that we experience. It is found only in speech, and only in the speeches of a few people, like Plato, Thucydides and Aristotle, who understood it. However, in the context of existing cities, Strauss clearly argues that the political problem cannot be solved in any final way for those cities, without a transcendence of the political through philosophy. As Strauss points out, cities cannot philosophize, or become philosopher cities. There is no transcendence for the cities or nations. In terms of Schmitt’s emphasis on groups, the only group that is able to transcend politics is a group of philosophers. Thus, on the political level, as found in the first Book of Plato’s *Republic*, Strauss agrees with Schmitt that the division between friend and enemy is natural. This is why Strauss indicates that only Polemarchus’s definition, of helping friends and harming enemies, is included in Socrates’s perfect city that is described as the city ruled by philosopher-kings. Furthermore, according to Strauss, evil is a part of human nature, and consequently cities, or nations, are bound to clash over boundaries or other interests. Thus, Strauss’s partial agreement, and fundamental disagreement, with Schmitt, motivates Strauss to continue his response to Schmitt’s concept of the political.68

The reason many commentators fail to see Strauss’s response to Schmitt is because Strauss is rarely read in the same manner that he outlines in his suggestions on how to

68 Strauss, Leo, *The City and Man*, op. cit., pp. 11 & 12, 70 – 73.
read significant books on political theory. The fact that Strauss dedicates an entire sixth division of The City and Man to the art of reading and writing, as well as concentrating on how Thucydides wrote his history, suggests that The City and Man requires a careful reading. In this book, that takes the form of a “theologico-political treatise”, Strauss outlines the importance of “the literary question” as:

“One must postpone one’s concern with the most serious questions (the philosophic questions) in order to become engrossed in the study of a merely literary question. Still, there is a connection between the literary question and the philosophic question. The literary question, the question of presentation, is concerned with a kind of communication. Communication may be a means for living together; in its highest form, communication is living together. The study of the literary question is therefore an important part of the study of society . . . The literary question properly understood is the question of the relation between society and philosophy”. 69

The expression, “the relation between society and philosophy”, is similar to the title of The City and Man. According to Strauss, the city is the home of stability through the belief in the gods, or cherished opinions, whereas, “philosophy is subversive” and is “transpolitical, transreligious and transmoral, but the city is and ought to be moral and religious”. In choosing his title carefully, Strauss indicates that the literary question is

69 Ibid., p. 52. Strauss’s emphasis.
connected to the political and theological problem. Strauss’s caution in writing is through his realization that very few people are able to live the philosophic life – a life that includes questioning the revered opinions of the community.  

In The City and Man, Strauss outlines his definition of “good writing”. He states:

“But ‘good writing’ is only the genus of which the Platonic dialogue is a species. The model for the good writing is the good conversation . . . If the good writing must imitate the good conversation, it would seem that it must be addressed primarily to one or more men known to the author”.  

Since Strauss knows exactly what constitutes “good writing”, and given that he carefully structures his book, he can address The City and Man to Schmitt as well as to the general reader. Therefore, Strauss indicates that reading his books requires the same concentration that Socrates taught in the Phaedrus, where Strauss recalls the art of “good writing” as that which complies with “logographic necessity”, or what he defines as recognizing that “every part of the written speech must be necessary for the whole”. This means that every detail in some philosophic books has been chosen carefully. Strauss argues that good writers do this in order “to talk to some readers and to be silent to others”. This is another reason why he specifically addresses Schmitt’s arguments, while refusing to mention him by name in The City and Man.  

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71 Strauss, Leo, The City and Man, op. cit., p. 54.  
72 Ibid., pp. 53, 54 & 60.
6. The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis comprises nine chapters and includes an Appendix that outlines Strauss’s structure of *The City and Man*. As an introduction, **Chapter One** outlines the objectives of the thesis in relation to the structure, and art of writing, that Strauss uses in *The City and Man*, as well as outlining the six criteria that must be satisfied, if the political is to be successfully recovered.

**Chapter Two** investigates the relevant literature concerning Strauss’s relationship with Schmitt under the headings: “The Political as Propaganda”, “The Political as History”, “The Political as Religion” and “The Political as Knowledge”. These categories were chosen because they illuminate the various theoretical perspectives that commentators have used in linking Strauss and Schmitt. Although all commentators do add useful insights on how to read Strauss, most have missed Strauss’s post 1933 response to Schmitt’s concept of the political. Nearly all of them have overlooked the importance of the structure and Strauss’s art of writing, in *The City and Man*, which provide crucial evidence that Strauss is addressing Schmitt’s arguments concerning the political.

**Chapter Three** outlines Schmitt’s arguments relating to the recovery of the political found in *The Concept of the Political*. These arguments can be divided into six criteria that are essential for the recovery of the political. This chapter attempts to elucidate Schmitt’s reliance on Plato and Hobbes for his definition of the political as the conflict between friend and enemy and his rediscovery of “one’s own form of existence” that is similar to the regime, or way of life. In drawing attention to political theologians, and
Original Sin, together with his discussion of Oliver Cromwell’s divine faith, Schmitt outlines the essence of the political defined as the potential conflict over differing faiths. This also includes an argument supporting the case that Schmitt accepted Original Sin as the foundation of his return to political theology, which understands human beings as morally evil, rather than merely dangerous like amoral animals. The chapter also demonstrates Schmitt’s preference for historical providence, referred to as “destiny”. In turning to history, Schmitt believes that any natural transcendence of the political is impossible as changing events determine the content of the political. This means, for Schmitt, that in the final analysis, nothing can escape the political, defined as the potential for conflict.

**Chapter Four** outlines Strauss’s interpretation of Schmitt’s recovery of the political under the same six criteria that Schmitt outlines in his book, *The Concept of the Political*. This chapter demonstrates that Strauss understood Schmitt’s political theology as the basis of the political, but chose to rely on Plato’s political philosophy as a guide to political action. It demonstrates that Strauss knew, in 1932, that his answer to Schmitt must take the form of a “theologico-political treatise” that recognized the centrality of the question who, or what, should rule. Strauss shows, in his “Comments”, that the key to Schmitt’s complaint against non-political liberalism pointed in the direction of the founder of liberalism, Thomas Hobbes, and the importance of Hobbes’s doctrine of “the state of nature”.

**Chapter Five** examines Strauss’s “Introduction” where he defends political philosophy as a reasonable alternative to ideology and the history of political philosophy. It shows how Strauss also outlines the problems associated with a return to political philosophy,
particularly in having to address the concept of culture, as defined in the plural. In recognizing the structure of the first chapter on Aristotle in *The City and Man*, this chapter demonstrates that Strauss raises the issue of culture as religion, or conflicting faiths, and is able to continue his response to Schmitt in presenting Aristotle’s discussion of regimes within the context of political philosophy. Chapter five outlines Strauss’s structure of *The City and Man*, which includes seventeen divisions that use sub-titles and a full stop and a dash to indicate those divisions. Discovering Strauss’s divisions aids in understanding the themes that Strauss introduces, such as the theme of the city and culture in the second division. It also points out how the sixth division, dedicated to the art of good writing, actually occurs in the first chapter on Aristotle, and near a subtle reference to Schmitt’s book, *Legality and Legitimacy*. In explaining the structure of *The City and Man*, this chapter also highlights Strauss’s method of writing that demonstrates his indirect manner of addressing Schmitt’s failure to recognize tyranny. It also shows how Strauss begins to address the six criteria for the affirmation of the political through the investigation of culture and the recovery of its equivalent – the city or *polis*. It illustrates the comprehensive nature of the polis and its connection to the regime, or *politeia*, as well as the limitations of Strauss’s use of the *polis* as a solution to the political.

**Chapter Six** describes Strauss’s response to Schmitt’s call for the affirmation of the political by arguing that nature and human nature provide a reasonable, and universal, basis for understanding political life. In particular, chapter six shows that “nature” is the basic foundation of criterion six that addresses “the order of human things”. Strauss’s discovery of “order” requires a return to a whole and pure knowledge that also calls for a distinction between “the divine law”, as the ancestral laws traceable to the
gods and “the divine law”, based on the philosophic laws of nature. This chapter examines the difference between the two forms of divine law within the context of Strauss’s analysis of Thucydides’s history. For Strauss’s understanding of Plato, Aristotle and Thucydides, “nature” guarantees the possibility of philosophy. Strauss’s return to classical political philosophy is dependent on the reasonableness of his demonstration that “nature” is neither a romantic myth nor a noble lie. This chapter also discusses Strauss’s unique interpretation of the Socratic ideas, that come to light through asking “what is?” questions. According to Strauss, Socrates posing the question, “what is something?”, eventually led to a coherent account of the things being investigated. It further demonstrates that Strauss’s response to Schmitt’s rejection of culture finally leads to Strauss’s discovery of Socrates’s second sailing that took seriously the authoritative conventions, or nomos, of the city. Socrates used these opinions as the beginning of a rational discussion regarding various topics, but in the end he transcended those opinions. Unlike Schmitt, who accepts faith, or conflicting faiths, as final authorities that underpin the political, Strauss looks for the most coherent opinion that can be discovered from the most authoritative opinions regarding the political.

In recovering nature, especially human nature, according to Strauss, classical political philosophy discovers the universal behaviour of human beings that do not change from place to place or in different times. In this way, Strauss endeavours to overcome Schmitt’s reliance on historical necessity in the form of historical providence. Strauss uses Thucydides’s reflections on war to respond to Schmitt’s reliance on historical providence. In partial agreement with Schmitt on group pieties, Strauss argues that Thucydides is closer to the initial religious experiences that citizens have about the
gods, but Strauss provides a foil to Schmitt’s understanding of the political as conflicting pieties, or faiths, by giving an alternative that relies on the concept of nature.

**Chapter Seven** demonstrates the climax of Strauss’s comprehensive response to Schmitt’s criteria, beginning with the recovery of nature through the presentation of the best regime and concluding that the best regime only exists in speech. In responding to the six criteria for the affirmation of the political, this chapter demonstrates Strauss’s interpretation of the Socratic best regime and why Strauss agrees with Socrates concerning the necessity of war and its effect on the best regime. It discovers Strauss’s three Platonic definitions of justice, the central one being Polemarchus’s definition of helping friends and harming enemies. It shows, that in opposition to Schmitt, Strauss stresses Socrates’s definition of justice, which states that the philosopher harms no one, while at the same time helps his, or her, friends.

**Chapter Eight** shows Strauss’s discovery of the best regime in Thucydides’s *The Peloponnesian War* that meets Schmitt’s definition of the political regarding the potential for war among groups. Even in turning to “the greatest motion” – war – where necessity dominates political life, Strauss associates the best way of life with peace and with the wisdom of Thucydides. In continuing his argument that the best regime is found in speech, Strauss demonstrates that Thucydides’s best regime resides within the speeches of wise speakers, such as Hermocrates and Diodotus, or even in the unwise speech of Athenagoras. Strauss further shows that the best regime partly resides in Thucydides’s own comments on the virtues of Athens and Sparta and Thucydides’s preference for an Alcibiades-led polity. Strauss also argues in his analysis of Thucydides’s history, that Thucydides includes the recognition of natural right (justice).
More importantly, this chapter demonstrates that Strauss makes it clear that “Rest, not motion, peace, not war, is good” and that the pinnacle of civilization is wisdom. This chapter shows how Strauss argues that Thucydides’s wisdom, which “grasps the limits of all human things” and “the nature of all human things”, provides a better guide for political action than Schmitt’s doctrine of the division between friend and enemy based on conflicting faiths.  

Chapter Nine addresses the conclusions that can be drawn from the thesis as a whole. It includes a short summary of the investigation, drawing together all the evidence presented and the implications of Strauss’s response to Schmitt within the context of Strauss’s theologico-political enterprise. It points out the implication of Strauss’s recovery of the best regime, arguing that Strauss provides practical guidance to actual political life in discerning bad regimes. The theoretical implications are also addressed, particularly relating to the reason why many commentators on Strauss and Schmitt have failed to examine Strauss’s “Comments” and The City and Man. The conclusion also addresses the limitations of the thesis, especially relating to the problem of demonstrating Strauss’s subtle response in addressing Schmitt’s concept of the political. Finally, the conclusion suggests that further research into Strauss’s other books may reveal a continued response, by Strauss, to Schmitt’s political theology.

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73 Ibid., pp. 156, 157 & 160. In his lecture, “German Nihilism”, Strauss equates civilization with “learning” and “the conscious culture of reason”. Thus, “science and morals” are “the pillars of civilisation” – see Strauss, Leo, “German Nihilism”, op. cit., p. 366. Strauss’s emphasis.