

A Symposium on Rasoul Namazi's *Leo Strauss and Islamic Political Thought*

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Author's Introduction

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Scholars' engagement with Leo Strauss's writings has gone through a gradual transformation in recent times in response to two parallel but often complementary developments: (1) Strauss's reflections on thinkers like Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Nietzsche, mostly documented in his minor writings and course transcripts published by the Leo Strauss Center, have begun to receive scholarly attention. (2) The ongoing effort to publish Strauss's unpublished writings kept at the University of Chicago Library: These manuscripts complement Strauss's published writings on Plato, Maimonides, and Hobbes, but sometimes deal with thinkers on whom Strauss never published independent studies, such as Lessing or Pascal.

My book is part of this new trend, showcasing an aspect of Strauss's writing that deserves more serious attention while benefiting from unpublished materials discovered through archival work. Apart from providing those readers familiar with other aspects of Strauss's writings with fresh material and hopefully new insights into his engagement with Muslim authors, my book contributes to the vibrant field dedicated to the study of Islamic political thought. Due to the diverse factors discussed in the book, Strauss's contribution to this field is mostly unknown to scholars and readers of Islamic political thought. This study aims, therefore, to remedy a gap by addressing an audience unfamiliar with Strauss's work.

To this end, the introduction provides a panoramic view of Strauss's thought, with special emphasis on Islamic political thought. Next, the book draws on two substantial unpublished manuscripts and several other shorter ones discovered through archival work on Strauss's papers. Chapter 1 is dedicated to the interpretation of Strauss's unpublished notes on Averroes, whose political reflections, after considerable neglect in the past decades, are being studied again. An interpretation of Strauss's unpublished notes on the *Arabian Nights*, the classic of Middle Eastern thought, in chapter 2 is prefaced with a discussion of the place and reception of this famous work of Islamic civilization in Western scholarship since the eighteenth century before introducing the readers to Strauss's unique politico-religious reflections on this text. Strauss claimed that this collection of fantastique stories, contrary to the common scholarly consensus, far from being a medley of unconnected tales borrowed from different sources, is a coherent whole carefully designed by a consummate author to convey a specific teaching. Finally, Strauss's published writings on arguably the most important political thinker of Islamic civilization, Alfarabi, are discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4, integrating supplementary information from unpublished manuscripts.

The volume thus provides a wide view of Strauss's engagement with Islamic political thought and hopes to initiate a dialogue with readers who are open to exploring the thought of one of the most original thinkers of the twentieth century.