Article

Evading Secularization: Prophecy as a Theological-Political Figure

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Abstract: Carl Schmitt proposes a political theology founded on the paradigm of secularization. In an attempt to evade secularization, Strauss responds to Schmitt's approach in *Philosophy and Law* by subtly recovering the Maimonidean prophet. By doing so, Strauss points to the prophet as a theological–political figure who, as a ruler, survives the secularization of the Enlightenment. Following the trajectory laid out by Strauss, this article explores prophecy as an unsecularizable figure. By approaching the prophet as an unsecularizable figure, the objective of this paper is to: (1) explore prophecy as a theological–political figure through Strauss's particular interpretation of Maimonides' prophetology in *Philosophy and Law*; (2) examine the Enlightenment secularization thesis in the light of prophecy; and (3) vindicate the anarchic character of prophecy in postmodern and post-secular times.

Keywords: prophecy; secularization; Strauss; post-secular; political theology; law

1. Introduction

Carl Schmitt proposes a political theology based on the paradigm of secularization in his famous words 'all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.' (Schmitt 1985, p. 36). Attempting to evade secularization, Strauss responds to Schmitt's approach in *Philosophy and Law* by alluding to the Maimonidean prophet. Strauss points to the prophet as a theological–political figure who, as a ruler, survives the secularization of the Enlightenment.

While the complex relationship between Schmitt and Strauss, which has been analyzed by scholars such as Meier or Vatter (Meier 1995; Vatter 2021), entails a wide-ranging debate on the theological–political *topos*, Strauss's tacit rejoinder to Schmitt in *Philosophy and Law* deals specifically with matters that are pertinent to the formulation of alternative political theologies that diverge from the notion of secularization.

Strauss's proposal, while not without difficulties, paves the way for debates such as the possibility of non-secular theological–political models -and therefore also post-secular ones-, the rethinking of the figure of the sovereign as an unavoidable figure in political theology, or the emergence of 'new political theological imaginaries.' (Poljarevic 2023). In this regard, the figure of the prophet, as delineated by Strauss, does not fall under the scope of the secularization thesis, yet it fails to fully transcend it as well, thereby encapsulating the tension of the unsecularizable. In this context, delving into prophecy as a figure that evades secularization expands the scope of contemporary discourse on political theology.

Following the line traced by Strauss, this article explores prophecy as a non-secularizable figure. However, since modernity reduces prophecy to the gnoseological plane, interpreting prophecy as the ability to predict future events, prophecy is reductively misunderstood as divination of the future. Moreover, the Enlightenment submits religion, and therefore prophetology, to the judgment of reason, entrusting the prophetic task to the philosopher. In doing so, modern philosophy assumes the thesis of secularization as its great prophecy. However, the thesis of secularization seems not to be fulfilled in a post-secular world. As a result, the philosopher-prophet of modernity is not dependable. In this regard, I argue that the figure of the prophet still exists through a postmodern political theology of sacred anarchy founded on the anti-sovereign paradigm.

2. Strauss Hermeneutics of Maimonides' Theory of Prophecy in *Philosophy and Law*: A Theological–Political Interpretation

In order to comprehensively examine Strauss's proposal in *Philosophy and Law*, it is imperative to first delve into Maimonides' theory of prophecy,[1] which Strauss utilizes to construct a theological–political argument against the Enlightenment (Strauss 1995). While Maimonides does touch upon the subject of prophecy in his early writings, the majority of his analysis on this topic is found in the second part *The Guide for the Perplexed* (Cf. Maimonides 1968; Kreisel 2001). Given that Strauss exclusively draws upon the *Guide* to formulate his theoretical framework concerning prophecy, it is crucial to present a succinct summary of the *Guide*'s prophetology before proceeding with the Straussian interpretation.

As Howard T. Kreisel points out, the topic of prophecy is the backbone of all his thought since 'it serves as the link between many of the topics that preoccupied him, ranging from the biblical anthropomorphic descriptions of God to the nature of human perfection, from divine providence and the Law to political philosophy.' (Kreisel 2001, p. 155). For Maimonides, prophecy consists of divine overflow, i.e., the gift of pure intellectual form (Maimonides 1972, pp. 418–19). While this overflow requires human perfection in terms of rationality, imagination, morality, courage, and governance as the disposition of the receiver of the gift of prophecy, prophecy cannot be achieved by human action; it has a divine foundation (Maimonides 1963, chps. 32–48).[2]

In *The Guide*, the ruling character of the prophet seems to be one more aspect of his perfections. Maimonides is more concerned with distinguishing the prophecy of Moses from that of the rest of the prophets and, in turn, with distinguishing the characteristics and requirements of the gift of prophecy. In that sense, the prevalence of the political over the theoretical is not explicitly clear in *The Guide*. However, by pointing to Moses, the giver of the law to the Jewish people, as an exceptional prophet and by taking the law as the frame for developing his thought, Maimonides suggests the accentuated juridical character of prophecy.[3] Nevertheless, since the law has already been given, only Moses is the legislator of the divine law.[4] The rest of the prophets have the mission to govern the people by interpreting the Mosaic law with their charisma. Thus, given the public mission of the prophet, it can be argued that the intellectual overflow is subordinate to the political purpose.

Maimonides veils the political interpretation of prophecy by camouflaging it as a further requirement for the recipient of the gift. As Kenneth Hart Green argues, Maimonides conceals his most radical arguments and conclusions out of prudence (Green 1997, p. 43). Nevertheless, his theory leaves many threads open for the understanding of the relationship between politics, philosophy, and religion. These include philosophy as a prophetic task, the political character of the content of revelation, and the theological character of the figure of the ruler.

On this basis, Leo Strauss recovers the figure of Maimonides' prophet in *Philosophy and Law* as a part of his critique of the Enlightenment and the secularization thesis.[5] In doing so, he attempts to develop an alternative modernity that does not exclude religious thought. Similarly, in light of the hidden dialogue between Strauss and Carl Schmitt,[6] Beau Shaw argues that although Schmitt only appears in a few footnotes, *Philosophy and Law* is an implicit response to Schmitt's proposed political theology, which, for Strauss, would represent the culmination of Enlightenment modernity (Shaw 2017). Specifically, as noted by Miguel Vatter, Strauss critiques Schmitt for his inability to transcend the conceptual parameters of modern liberalism (Vatter 2021, p. 192).

In turn, it is noteworthy that Strauss's critique is directed not against modernity per se but against Enlightenment modernity. In the same manner, Strauss posits the possibility of diverse forms of Enlightenment, as evidenced by his characterization of Maimonides' thought as a 'medieval religious Enlightenment.' Strauss further asserts that the Age of Enlightenment was a transfer from the Medieval Enlightenment rather than the reverse (Strauss 1995, p. 102). Consequently, Strauss' critique is delimited to the 'Modern Enlightenment,' which he also refers to as the 'radical Enlightenment.' By doing so, he

leaves the door open to the exploration of various modernities and forms of enlightenment.[7] Maimonides' thought, in this context, would be one potential alternative.

Joel L. Kraemer underscores that Strauss incorporates Maimonides into his interpretation of *Philosophy and Law* for his 'ultra-modern thoughts.' (Kraemer 2009, p. 147; Strauss 1995, p. 38).[8] Strauss aims to develop an alternative modernity to that of the radical Enlightenment, as well as an alternative political theology to that of the Schmittian sovereign (Schmitt 1985). As Vatter observes, "Strauss is after a "legal" concept of constituent power, not a "sovereign" one as formulated by Schmitt." (Vatter 2021, p. 221).

Furthermore, three contextual notes shed light on Strauss's proposal. Firstly, this book was published in 1935 with a clear and strategic intention -to support his candidacy for a position at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Leo Strauss sought to demonstrate his expertise in Jewish Thought (Zank 2002, pp. 13–14). Secondly, it should be noted that during Strauss's time at the University of Marburg, he was part of the so-called Marburg Constellation, as Dieter Henrich coined it. He was surrounded by different figures with interest in certain intellectual issues that shaped his thinking and approach to philosophy. Among them were Heidegger and Bultmann as scholars, as well as Gadamer and Löwith as students (Bormuth and Bülow 2008, pp. 28–53; Zank 2002, p. 7). The critique of metaphysical thought, the hermeneutic method, and the development of history in terms of secularization appear to be critical themes in Strauss's intellectual sphere. Thirdly, it should be emphasized that in *Zionist Writings* (1921–32), Strauss builds his argument against the rational approach to theology through Rudolf Otto's reflection on the idea of the holy, specifically in his essay *Prophetic Experience of God*.[9] In this sense, the approach to theology through prophecy is, for Strauss, part of a broader dialogue that goes beyond Jewish philosophy.[10]

Contrary to the book's subtitle, 'Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and His Predecessors,' *Philosophy and Law* does not solely focus on Maimonides or earlier Jewish or Islamic philosophy. Rather, it is primarily concerned with Strauss's critique of the Enlightenment. Strauss employs Maimonides and his contemporaries to construct an argument that moves beyond a simple exegetical task.[11] Maimonides is used as part of his argument against Enlightenment and Schmitt's *Political Theology*.

Strauss's main argument is that the Enlightenment proposes a rationalism that is contrary to orthodoxy, which ultimately creates a dichotomy between orthodoxy and atheism. According to Strauss, Enlightenment atheism has more to do with a defensive strategy than a direct attack (Strauss 1995, p. 32). His argument unfolds as follows: since the existence or non-existence of the divine cannot be ascertained through inquiry, God is no longer a matter of the intellect, as Kant radically exposed.[12] By making God an epistemological problem, the Enlightenment does not leave any theoretical space for God.[13] However, for Strauss, God is fundamentally a political issue rather than an epistemological claim. Therefore, the theological realm survives the secularization of Enlightenment in the political sphere.

For Strauss, modernity fails by establishing a radical idealism that can only approach the world through human consciousness. In this sense, every approach based on human consciousness inherits the atheism of the Enlightenment. Strauss turns to Maimonides to avoid this modern aporia. It is necessary to return and discover a rationalism that escapes from the secularizing consciousness and takes into account the political foundation of philosophy through law and, therefore, through the figure of the prophet. This rationalism, for Strauss, has its point of departure in Maimonides.[14]

With this argument, Strauss implicitly suggests that strong scholastic thought with an apologetic natural theology cannot reverse Enlightenment atheism since the problem of Enlightenment atheism begins with scholastic thought: by attempting to reduce God to a matter of human knowledge, in other words, by developing a natural theology.[15] In that sense, Strauss draws a difference between Christian and Jewish thought: while the former is a truth-centered system, advocated for an atheistic and secularized form, the latter inscribes a political paradigm through the given law.

Thus, insofar as prophecy has to do with revelation, it is essential to elucidate the content of revelation in medieval Jewish philosophy. From this arises the distinctive feature of Jewish philosophy, shared to some extent with Islamic philosophy: the content of revelation is not intellectual but juridical. To put it differently, revelation is not epistemological but political. In this sense, if the content of revelation is the law, this content is not only for intellectuals but for an entire community. The prophet, who is the recipient of divine law, a super-rational issue, must be a 'philosopher/legislator/seer/miracle-worker in one.' (Strauss 1995, p. 71). He is, therefore, the perfect ruler.[16]

Moreover, Strauss claims that the medieval Islamic and Jewish philosophers are 'pupils of Plato and not pupils of Christians.' (Strauss 1995, p. 73). In doing so, he draws a parallel between the figure of the prophet and the Platonic philosopher-king, the only difference being that Plato's philosopher-king is utopian, and the Jewish prophet is a historical figure: Moses. Nevertheless, despite the clarity of such a correlation, it should not be forgotten that for Strauss, the prophet is an essentially juridical figure. In this way, Strauss separates himself from the Platonic philosopher-king, or, more accurately, he interprets the philosopher-king from a juridical foundation. In this vein, Philipp von Wussow argues that *Philosophy and Law* constitutes a reinterpretation of Platonic political theory in the light of the *Nomoi* versus the *Politeia*.[17] Consequently, Strauss provides a Platonic foundation for medieval Jewish thought.[18]

With veiled references to Schmitt's decisionism, Strauss interprets the miraculous foundation of the Maimonian prophet as a political question: the prophet must be a philosopher, but not all philosophers are prophets. The gift of prophecy is under God's decision and thus has a political foundation. In the same way, Maimonides' prophet must not only have intellectual perfection but also have the ability to communicate revelation figuratively since not all members of the community have intellectual capacities, and the revelation is addressed to a whole political community. Furthermore, since prophecy is superior to natural knowledge, the philosopher must follow the prophet. To put it differently, philosophy is subordinate to prophecy, which, being a political figure, is the 'union of theoretical and practical perfection.' (Strauss 1995, p. 119). As Corine Pelluchon argues, for Strauss, 'political philosophy is first philosophy in the sense that political life is the beginning point.' (Pelluchon 2014, p. 214).

Thus, drawing on Plato's philosopher-king, Strauss claims twice that the prophet is 'the founder of the ideal state.' (Strauss 1995, p. 74; 2013b, p. 215). In other words, the prophet's mission can only be understood in the light of a political theory based on the law since, as already noted, Plato's philosopher-king is reinterpreted primarily as a juridical figure. Moreover, Plato's philosopher-king is reformulated and sublimated through the Maimonian prophet. Furthermore, through Maimonides, Strauss finds in Plato's philosopher-king a theological–political figure.

Although *Philosophy and Law* is not Strauss's best exegetical work, his hermeneutics around the figure of the prophet in the light of Enlightenment criticism raises questions that need to be examined. Leaving aside, for another occasion, the Platonic question or the juridical foundation of Islamic and Jewish philosophy versus the theoretical character of the Christian approach, it is worth asking whether Strauss is constructing a political theology around the figure of the prophet whose foundation is juridical, as opposed to Schmittian political theology of the sovereign whose foundation is divine omnipotence.

In that respect, three aspects require special attention. First, it is pertinent to ask whether the political theology that Strauss proposes between the lines succeeds in avoiding the secularizing effect of the Enlightenment. Secondly, given that, as Strauss points out, modernity reduces religion to the judgment of conscience (Strauss 1995, p. 23), can it be said that philosophy assumes the prophetic task and that its prophecy par excellence is the thesis of secularization? Thirdly, if this is the case, where is the figure of the prophet in post-secular postmodernity? Where is the figure of the prophet if the prophecy of secularization appears as unfulfilled, and if, as Dominique Janicaud states, we are now witnessing the theological turn in contemporary philosophy? (Janicaud 2000).

In what follows, I attempt to address the issues raised by focusing on the Straussian approach to the figure of the prophet, taking into account its political foundation and considering the prophet as a theological–political figure.

3. The Prophet–Philosopher of Enlightenment

Enlightenment subordinates religion to reason, subjecting the content of revelation to the judgment of reason.[19] As has already been pointed out through Strauss' critique of modernity, this reduces the question of God to a theoretical question. However, this epistemological reduction is still a political issue. The submission of religion as an object of knowledge ultimately inaccessible to human consciousness grants human reason the sovereignty previously held by God. As John D. Caputo aptly puts it, in the Enlightenment, 'God is brought before the court, like a defendant with his hat in his hand, and required to give an account of himself, to show His ontological papers, if He expects to win the court's approval.' (Caputo 2019, p. 46).

Thus, the political and not only epistemological character of the Enlightenment is underlined. This political turn, through which human reason is proclaimed sovereign, is especially emphasized in Kant's brief text addressing the question of what the Enlightenment is.[20]

Therefore, once religion is subordinated to reason and philosophy, the latter assuming the tasks that were previously proper to religion, it is pertinent to ask what occurs with the figure of the prophet. In this sense, Caputo states that there is always tension between the prophet and the philosopher, between the Jewish and the Greek (Caputo 2000). This tension is resolved by Maimonides by subordinating the philosopher to the prophet (Maimonides 1963, chps. 36–37) and by the Enlightenment philosophers by prioritizing reason over the content of revelation.

Prophecy in the Enlightenment is not eliminated but rather taken up by the philosopher. While Maimonides argues that the prophet must be a philosopher (Maimonides 1963, chp. 37), the Enlightenment implicitly reverses this assertion, stating that the philosopher must also be a prophet. Just as the prophets of the Bible do not consider themselves philosophers, the philosophers of the Enlightenment do not consider themselves prophets either.

However, as Reinhart Koselleck notes, the term *prophète philosophe* was used in the 18th century to refer to a citizen freed from the tutelage of the Church (Koselleck 1985, p. 22). In this regard, Jean-Louis Carra, an 18th-century French politician, wrote *Systeme de la Raison: ou le Prophete philosophe*, relating the prediction of progress to prophecy (Carra 1791). Nevertheless, the Enlightenment philosopher seems to reject prophecy as valid knowledge due to its lack of a rational basis. This theoretical rejection does not imply, however, that philosophy in the Enlightenment is free of the prophetic figure.

On the one hand, Spinoza criticizes prophecy in his *Theological-Political Treatise*, in which he attempts to separate philosophy from theology, arguing that revelation is not sufficient for human nature (de Spinoza 2007, chp. 2 § 20). As Strauss argues, Spinoza understands prophecy in terms of exegesis, and therefore, the prophets seem to limit the free interpretation of Scripture, that is, the rational approach to religion.[21] Since, for Spinoza, there is no authority other than reason, philosophy must replace the prophets in this exegetical task.[22] On the other hand, Kant opposes prophecy to a prediction when it comes to history in *The conflicts of Faculties* (Kant 1979, p. 141). Likewise, Hegel, in his ambivalent attitude towards the Enlightenment,[23] criticizes prophetism contemptuously for its lack of a scientific and rational approach (Hegel 1977).[24]

Thus, in modern philosophy, prophecy is understood as a form of knowledge, and its political implications are highlighted by Kant.[25] However, prophecy is primarily concerned with divining the future, which is viewed through a Greek rather than a Jewish lens. As Koselleck notes, 'terminologically, the spiritual *profectus* was either displaced or dissolved by a worldly *progressus*.' (Koselleck 1985, p. 265). This indicates that prophecy was not eliminated but displaced by rational prediction, specifically the progress of history through reason.

This conceptual displacement has significant implications for the relationship between philosophy and religion. Firstly, the task of the prophet is reduced to a theoretical question. In the Enlightenment, the prophet is not a ruler, even if rulers, lacking scientific knowledge, may use a prophetic interpretation of history. For rationalist philosophers, prophecy is political only to the extent that it is used by politicians as an a priori representation of the facts for the people.[26] Therefore, an attempt is made to subordinate politics to knowledge.

Secondly, prophecy is opposed to both scientific knowledge and rational prediction. Thus, reason replaces prophecy in terms of predicting the future. The content of revelation is subject to rational prediction, and reason's capacity for prediction opens the door to the expectation of progress away from divine providence. As Koselleck points out, 'progress thus combined experiences and expectations.' (Koselleck 1985, p. 266). The experience of the past is instructive for the future.

Third, the conceptual displacement of prophecy to progress entails the displacement of its legal aspect. Just as divine revelation becomes rational knowledge, God-given law is replaced by rational human law. Thus, although prophecy is reduced to an epistemological aspect, it does not lose its political character. Reason is elevated as legislator and ruler.

Finally, in assuming this prophetic task, reason, as ruler, submits the contents of revelation to its judgment. Thus, in the concept of progress, which is situated between rational prediction and expectation, modernity makes its great prophecy: the thesis of secularization. According to Talal Asad, this thesis is characterized by a normative dimension, which asserts that for a society to be modern, it must be secular (Asad 2003, p. 182). Asad's conception of secularism emphasizes its political doctrine rather than treating it as a purely epistemological postulate, with secularization serving as the central project. This argument resonates with the political dimension of prophetism.[27]

Thus, if rational law is above divine law, then everything religious, even God himself, is subject to the rule of reason. It is along these lines that Strauss argues that the rationalism of modernity inevitably leads to atheism (Strauss 1995, pp. 37–38). While for Schmitt, secularization refers to a divine origin, for Strauss, secularization leads to atheism. In this sense, Strauss recovers the figure of the prophet from Maimonides since he considers that the prophet, because of his intrinsically political character, survives the secularization brought about by human consciousness, but, above all, because prophetism survives the atheism that secularization entails.

Considering the thesis of secularization as a prophecy opens up a new perspective for examining secularization, distinct from the Schmittian figure of the sovereign. While the modern concept of the sovereign exemplifies the thesis of secularization, the figure of the prophet shows the impossibility of secularization. Accordingly, prophecy cannot be secularized for two main reasons.

On the one hand, Daniel Weidner explores the rhetoric of secularization and relates it to prophecy by analyzing different statements of secularization in which the prophetic purpose is clearly intended (Weidner 2014). Rather than eliminating the prophetic task, the statement of secularization through a rhetoric of prophecy reaffirms it.

On the other hand, while the sovereign is a secularized concept of the theological notion of omnipotence, Strauss argues that the theological and political are identified in the prophet through the law (Strauss 1995, p. 78). Nonetheless, as will be developed later, the prophet resists being secularized not because of the law itself but because of the character of donation inherent in revelation and, therefore, in the law. In contrast to the sovereign occupying God's place on earth, the prophet is not a figure analogous to God. The prophet refers to a gift that has been granted to him for an entire people.

4. The Secularization's Thesis as the Prophecy of Enlightenment

The thesis of secularization as prophecy has significant implications. Firstly, it entails a reinterpretation of historical times, anticipating the disenchantment of the world and imminent atheism that culminates in Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God (Nietzsche 2007, §125). However, above all, the thesis of secularization underscores an unfulfilled

prophecy: modernity has managed to put God in parentheses, but only on an abstract and rational level. Since God transcends the empire of reason, he eludes rationalist reduction, thereby resisting its secularization. In this section, I examine the thesis of secularization as a prophecy and to what extent it constitutes an unfulfilled prophecy.

It is essential to note that the unfulfilled status of prophecy pertains not only to its divinatory aspect but, more importantly, to its political character. In other words, the thesis of secularization as an unfulfilled prophecy highlights the impossibility of reason, and hence the philosopher, to be the perfect legislator and ruler of the community.

On the one hand, the secularization thesis replaces the Judeo-Christian notion of providence with that of progress. Karl Löwith, in his work *Meaning in History,* examines this transfer that occurred in the philosophy of history (Löwith 1949). Although this secularization remains unfulfilled in philosophical thought, the theological turn of French phenomenology clarifies this (Janicaud 2000). Löwith brilliantly demonstrates how this thesis of secularization is enveloped in prophetic thought, as he asserts in the introduction of his monograph:

> We of today, concerned with the unity of universal history and with its progress toward an ultimate goal or at least toward a "better world," are still in the line of prophetic and messianic monotheism; we are still Jews and Christians, however little we may think of ourselves in those terms. But within this predominant tradition we are also the heirs of classic wisdom. (Löwith 1949, p. 19)

Even within the paradigm of secularization, the prophetic structure is unsecularizable and persists in the face of the assault of rationalization. Although there are many enunciations of the secularization thesis, the Weberian one stands out in a special way. It predicts a disenchantment of the world through the development of rationality, in other words, the domination of reason over religion until its disappearance.[28]

As argued by H. C. Greisman, Max Weber recovers the figure of the Jewish prophet to state secularization from a neo-Kantian approach, although it is claimed that the process of secularization begins with the individualistic approach of the Protestants (Weber 2002, p. 61).[29] Thus, Weber, in a lecture delivered in 1917 at the University of Munich, shows his repulsion to the elaboration of prophecies by academic professors and, at the same time, formulates the thesis of secularization in a prophetic key.[30] Furthermore, Weber argues that the disenchantment of the world has a prophetic foundation by relating it to Jewish prophecies.

In addition, the prophetic aspect of the secularization thesis is reinforced by Weber himself, who in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* announces the emergence of new prophets by stating that 'no one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development, entirely new prophets will arise.' (Weber 2002, p. 124). In other words, the disenchantment of the world is not incompatible with the existence of prophets.

On the emergence of new prophets, Allan Megill identifies Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida as the prophets of extremity that emerged in response to the failed Enlightenment. It is worthwhile to understand Nietzsche's assertion of the death of God in the context of Weber's new prophets (Megill 1985).

Similar to the secularization thesis, Nietzsche's anti-Enlightenment atheism also emerges as a prophecy. Löwith argues that the death of God is the prophecy of nihilism (Löwith 1997). Nietzsche announces the death of God through the character Zarathustra, who was an ancient Persian prophet. By using prophetic language, Nietzsche emphasizes rhetoric over rational argumentation, disarticulating the prophetic task of philosophy assumed by the Enlightenment rationalism (Nietzsche 2022, §2).

Nietzsche's prophecy of the death of God appears to take the secularization thesis to the extreme. However, as Strauss points out, Nietzsche's prophetic negation is not epistemological; it does not amount to saying, 'God does not exist'.[31] Through this negation, Nietzsche makes God a central question for philosophy.

The death of God marks the end of the iron rationalism of modern thought. Furthermore, the reintroduction of God into philosophy opens the door not only to postmodernity but also to a post-secular era.[32] Paradoxically, the prophetic thesis of secularization is revealed to be unfulfilled in the proclamation of the death of God.[33] Therefore, it becomes apparent that reason, through prediction and scientific knowledge, cannot undertake the prophetic role. At this juncture, it is crucial to examine where prophets position themselves in postmodernity and the implications that the death of God has for their prophecy.

5. Prophetical Anarchic Task in Postmodernity

Following Strauss, who posits that prophecy has a political character, modernity rejects prophecy on gnoseological grounds for not being scientific knowledge. However, as a political resource, prophecy is not entirely abandoned by modernity. In this sense, the thesis of secularization constitutes a political claim more than a rational premise. Postmodernity, with a proposal distinct from Strauss's writings, turns to prophetism as a means to transcend the rationalist excesses of modernity. Nonetheless, Strauss deserves credit for having identified prophecy as a non-secularizable figure before postmodern thought did.

The figure of the prophet thus weaves together a dialogue between Strauss and postmodern philosophy that has yet to take place. Caputo, in particular, has emphasized the need to recover the figure of the prophet in philosophy. For Caputo, the prophet represents the reconciliation of the Greek and the Jewish in what he calls 'Jewgreek.' (Caputo 2000, p. 566). He argues that the prophetic character of postmodern philosophy derives from the thought of Emmanuel Levinas.[34] This is not an incidental occurrence. As Leora Batnitzky maintains, both Levinas and Strauss share the same intellectual horizon: 'they each grapple with these questions in dialogue with previous Jewish thinkers, including first and foremost Moses Maimonides, Baruch Spinoza, Hermann Cohen, and Franz Rosenzweig.' (Batnitzky 2006, p. xviii). This shared intellectual horizon enables the revival of a non-explicit dialogue on the figure of the prophet. In this regard, postmodernism's rejection of secularization, which for Caputo constitutes the core of postmodern philosophy, has an intellectual horizon of Jewish thought that cannot be ignored (Cf. Caputo 2000, p. 549).

In its post-secular strand, postmodernity emphasizes that the thesis of secularization is an unfulfilled prophecy and recognizes the prophetic character of philosophy, which modernity dismisses for its lack of scientific rigor. However, as argued, modernity cannot rid itself of prophetic thought.

Both Strauss and postmodernity view prophecy as essentially political, as it is intended not for the individual but for an entire community. While Strauss opens the door to an alternative rationalism to that of the Enlightenment in *Philosophy and Law*, postmodernity does not emphasize reason but impossibility. Similarly, while Strauss focuses on the figure of the prophet and the content of prophetic revelation, postmodern approaches emphasize a 'prophetic character' or 'prophetic grammar' and elide both the prophet and the prophecy. Jacques Derrida even claims to be: 'a prophet without prophecy, a prophet without being a prophet.' (Dooley and Derrida 2003, p. 27).

In postmodernity, the figure of prophecy addresses three main aspects: as a vehicle of impossibility, as linked to the thought of the gift, and as presented in a disseminated form. Each of these aspects has significant implications for the political sphere.

Firstly, in postmodernity's post-secular strand, the concept of impossibility, introduced to the intellectual discussion by Derrida, stands in opposition to the possible, understood as the thinkable and rational (Cf. Mason 2006). Impossibility reveals the limits of the rational and abstract. It is not a matter of denying reason and advocating irrationalism but of defending its limits (Caputo 2019, p. 61). Furthermore, the concept of impossibility has biblical roots. Caputo notes that the Bible follows the scheme of impossibility in Sarah's infertility or in Mary's virginity, where both give birth in their corresponding impossibility (Caputo 2000, p. 552).

Moreover, the death of God highlights the motif of impossibility. God, being omnipotent and immortal, dies. In this way, as Montserrat Herrero points out, the death of God in Nietzsche opens up the possibility of thinking of political theologies that break with the paradigm of possibility, that is, with the political theology of omnipotence (Herrero 2020b). Therefore, the prophetic character of postmodernity constitutes an anti-sovereign paradigm.

It is important to note, in line with Herrero, that there are different political theologies derived from the death of God. However, while it is true that Herrero argues that the death of God in Nietzsche does not constitute a prophecy but a judgment on an event in history, the sense of prophecy recovered through Strauss's reading of Maimonides is broader than its mere divinatory sense. Following Allan Megill, I am more inclined to hold that the death of God is a prophecy of extremity. In this sense, the judgment of the historical event to which Herrero alludes is not incompatible with its prophetic character (Herrero 2020b, p. 128). Precisely, Nietzsche strips prophecy of its predictive reduction, whereas, as Koselleck argues, the Enlightenment had attempted to translate prophecy into temporal prediction, and the death of God in Nietzsche rescues it from predictive rationalism and restores its theological–political sense. The death of God in Nietzsche has theological consequences for the community and not only for the individual. The impossibility it entails gives rise to what Herrero calls 'negative political theology.' (Herrero 2020b, p. 136). Thus, the death of God implies a rejection of the hierarchical order, although this does not imply the absence of power.

On the other hand, thinkers such as Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, John Milbank, and Caputo raise the question of the gift as a proposal to renew or overcome metaphysical thought (Derrida 1994; Marion 2013; Caputo and Scanlon 1999). Through the gift, the given character of things is revealed, which goes beyond human consciousness and creates bonds between those involved in the event of the gift. Maimonides and Strauss emphasize that prophecy is not the result of human intellect but a divine overflow. In this sense, prophecy is something overflowing and given. Although reflection on the gift is particularly profuse in postmodernity, the idea of revelation as a gift appears already in Jewish thought, such as that of Franz Rosenzweig.[35] What changes in the postmodern proposal is the character of the given, which is impossible and non-hierarchical.

This non-hierarchical form of the given detaches prophecy from the law. The prophetic is political, not because of its juridical content, but because of the communal bonds generated by the debt of the gift. In this regard, Caputo notes that 'a gift happens when the singularity of the *tout autre* calls upon and solicits me, and I answer with a gift, I give the answer of a gift.' (Caputo 1997, p. 177). To put it differently, what is given does not necessarily generate a legal bond but a responsibility, understood as a response, around the event of the gift. The prophetic does not demand fulfillment of the law; it may, in its impossibility, remain unfulfilled, but it does demand a response. This response always has a theological–political dimension.

Thus, prophecy in postmodernity is unsecularizable not because it has a juridical content but because it constitutes an overflow, a gift. The given surpasses human consciousness, it is always in excess, and therefore, it is unsecularizable. The figure of the prophet refers, hence, to something given, be it the law or an anti-sovereignist paradigm of impossibility.

Finally, prophecy appears in a disseminated way, without a prophet, and without prophecy. Only the prophetic character remains. This approach is in line with the definition of post-secularity as 'religion without religion.' Caputo defines the postmodern as the post-secular and draws on Derrida's words 'religion without religion' to account for the post-secular realm (Derrida 1995, p. 49; Caputo 2000). However, if the figure of prophecy appears disseminated in its theological aspect, it also appears disseminated in its political aspect. Thus, postmodernity is framed in an anti-sovereign paradigm (Herrero 2022). Just as the figure of prophecy appears disseminated, power is presented anarchically. Through this prophetic grammar, Caputo proposes a sacred anarchy in which God and religion do not belong to the hierarchical order but to an anarchical structure (Caputo 2015, p. 21).

Sacred anarchy is thus a transference of the motif of impossibility: political impossibility breaks with the hierarchy of power and opens the possibility to the unexpected, that is, to what is above the order of the possible. This same anarchic structure is pointed out by Vatter as inherent to Jewish political theology. For Vatter, it is precisely in the law, promulgated by the prophet, that anarchy is founded (Vatter 2021, pp. 285–86). Thus, just as prophetology can appear in a hierarchical form, it can also appear in a disseminated and anarchical form.

6. Conclusions: Prophecy as a Theological–Political Figure That Cannot Be Secularized

The thesis of secularization can be observed to be enacted through prophetic grammar. This highlights how the Enlightenment can be considered a political system where reason takes on the role of governance. In other words, epistemological rationalism is, first and foremost, a political philosophy.

On the other hand, the interpretation of prophecy as a figure that cannot be secularized in postmodernity reveals the prophet to be detached from the law, both from divine law and the law of reason. In this context, the prophetic in postmodernity is not divinatory but rather a sign of the impossible and the unexpected, that which surpasses the limits of reason. Therefore, postmodern prophecy is closely related to Maimonides' concept of 'overflow,' where prophecy is the given that overflows us.

The concept of overflow is closely linked to the idea of a gift. Prophetism always refers to and announces something that exceeds and goes beyond the announcement itself. This reference to excess is what places the figure of the prophet at the intersection between the theological and the political.

In postmodernity, the figure of the prophet is dispersed. There are neither prophets nor prophecy. However, prophetic grammar can be observed in different spheres. It is in this sense that the prophetic character in postmodernity announces and is a sign of sacred anarchy. An example of this anarchical power is the pandemic (Herrero 2020a), which has a prophetic character without having a prophet or prophecy.

Therefore, it can be concluded that as long as civilization exists, the position of the prophet may change, and the prophet may be a religious figure or a philosopher. Nevertheless, it will never be vacant due to the intrinsic political nature of the prophet.

Postmodernity rescues prophecy as a figure of the post-secular: without the figure of the prophet as such, a prophetic grammar announces the overcoming of the thesis of secularization. In this sense, Clayton Crocket claims that 'from a certain perspective the histories of both modernity and postmodernity are religious histories (not histories of religion), organized around an essentially religious secret—a religion without religion.' (Crockett 2003). To paraphrase him, we can state that although modernity avoids prophetic knowledge and postmodernity disseminates prophecy, from a certain perspective, both modernity and postmodernity are prophetic histories organized around a prophecy without prophets or prophecy.

Notes

[1] While the most relevant points for understanding Strauss's *Philosophy and Law* are presented here, for an extensive exegesis of the topic of prophecy in Maimonides, see: (Kreisel 2001, pp. 148–315).

[2] For a more detailed discussion of this aspect, see: (Kaplan 1977).

3   Cf. "The revelation of the Law and the revelation of prophecy are both immediately traced to the same source." (Kreisel 1999, p. 24).

4   There is a distinction, therefore, between the Mosaic role of legislator and the ruling task of the prophets (Kreisel 2001, p. 258).

5   As Leo Strauss himself notes in a footnote, it should be observed that the last chapter of his book was written with the intention of being published in 1931 and was eventually published in 1934, prior to *Philosophy and Law*. He further notes that the objective of this chapter was not to provide a precise interpretation of Maimonides' prophetology, but rather to "clarify the presuppositions." Hence, this chapter is fully integrated into Leo Strauss's philosophical project, which transcends the interpretation of Maimonides (Strauss 1995, p. 145).

6   The discussion between these two thinkers has been especially studied by Heinrich Meier, who focuses on the confrontation that arose from the publication of *The Concept of the Political*. See: (Meier 1995). However, scholars such as Michael Zank or Facundo Vega specifically address the theological–political question of this hidden dialogue (Zank 2012; Vega 2017).

7   The exploration and construction of diverse forms of enlightenment and modernity are not peripheral concerns, but rather integral elements of Strauss' philosophy (Cf. Pelluchon 2014).

8   Cf. "Nur neue, unerhörte, ultramoderne Gedanken unsere Verlegenheit beseitigen können," (Strauss 2013c, p. 27). The original text's rhetorical charge gives rise to ambiguity regarding the reference to 'ultra-modern.' With Kraemer, I am inclined to think that it refers to Maimonides as truly modern, in contrast to the modernity of the Enlightenment. However, Beau Shaw argues that those words refer to Carl Schmitt (Cf. Shaw 2017).

9   Although Otto's approach revolves around the idea of the numinous, his essay relates prophecy to the kingdom of God. In other words, the numinous for Otto has theological–political dimensions (Strauss 2002b, p. 112; Otto 2009, pp. 151–64).

10   Strauss had also previously dealt with prophecy, commenting on Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (Strauss 2002a, pp. 139–61).

11   A more exegetical and textually closer interpretation of Maimonides' theory of prophecy can be found in Strauss' later work, such as "How To Begin To Study *The Guide of the Perplexed* (1963)" or "Notes on Maimonides' *Book of Knowledge* (1967)." (Strauss 2013a, pp. 491–568).

12   Cf. "We thereby admit that the supreme being, as to what it may be in itself, is for us wholly inscrutable and is even unthinkable by us in a determinate manner; and we are thereby prevented from making any transcendent use of the concepts that we have of reason as an efficient cause (through willing) in order to determine the divine nature through properties that are in any case always borrowed only from human nature" (Kant 2006, § 58 AK IV, 359).

13   Although Strauss omits it in his argument, this does not mean that the Enlightenment eliminates God in its practical philosophy. While Strauss claims to recover God as a political figure, Kant's Enlightenment places religion and the existence of God as a postulate of practical reason. Cf. "Hence here remains indeed a cognition of God, but only in a practical reference." (Kant 2002, p. 174. AK, KpR, 138).

14   Strauss draws inspiration from Cohen, who earlier pointed to Maimonides as the "classical rationalism of Judaism." However, Strauss's understanding of Maimonides' rationalism differs from Cohen's (Strauss 1995, p. 21). For a discussion of the Maimonides-Cohen-Strauss relationship, see: (Hollander 2021).

15   At this point, an open discussion can be glimpsed as to whether there is a natural theology in Jewish philosophy and whether Christian philosophy about God is reduced to natural theology. Maimonides' thought includes reflection on the divine essence and attributes, a question that in Christian thought has been approached from natural theology. On the other hand, proposals such as the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion or the Theological Aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar seek to overcome a strictly metaphysical approach to the question of God (Maimonides 1963, pp. 50–70; Frank 2013; von Balthasar 1983; Marion and Jacobs-Vandegeer 2020).

16   It should be noted that when Strauss refers to miracles he is implicitly alluding to Schmitt's state of exception. In this sense, for Strauss, being sovereign is embedded within one of the prophetic tasks, rather than the other way around. On the other hand, although Strauss does not aim to justify theocracy as a regime, his proposal of divine law as foundational through the figure of the prophet is still problematic in this regard. His ambiguous position has given rise to various interpretations in this sense. Vatter asserts that Strauss's prophetology presents a viable solution to what he terms the "paradox of theocracy." In contrast, Pelluchon firmly maintains that Strauss's exposition in *Philosophy and Law* bears no relation to theocracy (Cf. Vatter 2021, pp. 221–22; Pelluchon 2014, pp. 135–36).

17   Cf. "Medieval Islamic and Jewish philosophy suggests a particular interpretation of Platonic political philosophy, which not only places the *Nomoi* before the *Politeia* but also understands the *Nomoi* by way of its medieval reinterpretation and modification. Hence, the project of *Philosophy and Law* was also a genealogical effort to uncover why the political tradition of Plato's *Nomoi* had been lost to modernity" (von Wussow 2020, p. 123). See also: "Not only is the foundation a 'modification' of Plato, but this modification implies a 'critique of Plato': it exposes some flaw in Plato and achieves progress beyond him." (Shaw 2017, p. 796).

18   Vatter argues that it is through the reception of Aristotle rather than Plato that Strauss responds to Schmitt's political theology. For Strauss, the prophet is more than the philosopher, as he has the ability to figuratively communicate the content of revelation, that is, he has oratorical skills (Cf. Vatter 2021, pp. 191–236).

[19] It is noteworthy that the Modern Enlightenment espouses and employs a unique conception of 'reason' that distinguishes it from other intellectual traditions. Specifically, this understanding of reason is characterized by its radically self-contained nature, which results in a direct opposition to faith and revelation. This understanding of reason, with its inherent self-sufficiency, situates it as supreme. Nonetheless, there are alternative conceptualizations of reason that do not ascribe to it such an eminent status (Cf. Pelluchon 2014, p. 87).

[20] Cf. "I have portrayed *matters of religion* as the focal point of enlightenment, i.e., of man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. This is firstly because our rulers have no interest in assuming the role of guardians over their subjects so far as the arts and sciences are concerned, and secondly, because religious immaturity is the most pernicious and dishonourable variety of all." (Kant 1991, p. 59).

[21] Strauss also argues that Spinoza critique of prophecy is an argument against Calvinist *via beata* (Strauss 2002a, pp. 156–87).

[22] This attitude is contrary to that of Maimonides, who subjects reason to prophetic revelation.

[23] Although Hegel does not accept all the postulates of the Enlightenment and, in particular, rejects its disparagement of faith, it plays a very important role in the development of his thought. As John D. Caputo notes, "by insisting on the historically situated character of reason, and by criticizing the abstract and ahistorical thinking of Enlightenment rationality, Hegel was clearly on to something. However, Hegel never questioned Kant's Enlightenment idea that reason is a "system," which led Hegel to argue that the historical process was governed from within by a law of Divine Reason" (Caputo 2019, p. 50). See also: (Moggach and Lledman 1997; Martín Sisto 1996).

[24] Although Hegel rejects prophetic revelation as scientific knowledge, his commentators have seen a prophetic character in his thought. On the one hand, Popper argues that precisely with Hegel philosophy acquires a prophetic character, brought to its climax in Marx (Popper 2020). On the other hand, Danto suggests the prophetic key of the Hegelian thesis of the end of art (Danto 1997).

[25] See: "So far as their influence extends, our politicians do precisely the same thing and are just as lucky in their prophecies." Kant 1979, p. 143).

[26] See: "Rational prognosis assigns itself to intrinsic possibilities, but through this produces an excess of potential controls on the world" (Koselleck 1985, p. 19).

[27] It is worth noting that there is no singular form of secularism, but rather multiple variants (See: Calhoun et al. 2011).

[28] See: "It means that in principle, then, we are not ruled by mysterious, unpredictable forces, but that, on the contrary, we can in principle *control everything by means of calculation*. That in turn means the disenchantment of the world." (Weber 2004, pp. 12–13).

[29] See: "For Weber, disenchantment was an inexorable process which found its origins in the critical approach of the Hebrew prophets; it emerges from his work as provocative and fragmentary philosophy of history, as the 'fate' of the modern world" in (Greisman 1976, p. 495).

[30] Cf. "If he then asks why he cannot deal with both sets of problems in the lecture room, we should answer that the prophet and the demagogue have no place at the lectern." (Weber 2004, p. 20). Löwith suggests that he is pointing to communism in this critique. In addition, Löwith raises Weber's incoherence in rejecting prophetism for its lack of science and at the same time proposing the thesis of secularization in a prophetic key (Löwith 1993, p. 46).

[31] It is remarkable that Strauss, in his lectures on *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, makes no reference to the question of prophecy being Zarathustra a prophet (Strauss 2017, p. 198).

[32] The term post-secular is attributed to Habermas. He uses it to describe a condition in which secularism can no longer be understood as the dominant mode of modern society. According to Habermas, in a postsecular society, religion re-enters the public sphere as a source of cultural and moral pluralism (Habermas 2008). Nevertheless, the term 'postsecular' is a contentious concept. Similar to secularism, it encompasses various meanings. In this regard, José Casanova outlines three interpretations of the postsecular derived from three distinct understandings of the secular (Casanova 2013). Additionally, the controversy surrounding this term is due not only to its different connotations but also to its feasibility. Scholars such as Khaled Furani propose that 'postsecular' is merely a variant of the secular (Furani 2015). For this article's purposes, Caputo's definition, inspired by Derrida, will serve as a reference for comprehending the postsecular. In this sense, it is understood as 'religion without religion.' (Caputo 2000).

[33] See: "Religion was dead or dying fast among its learned despisers who confidently predicted that it was destined to disappear as science progressed and the general level of learning rose. But it just did not work out that way" (Caputo 2019, p. 56).

[34] Cf. "Can the whole of Western humanism pass for a secularization of Judaeo-Christianity? Have the rights of man and of the citizen and the new spirit that conquered in the eighteenth century not fulfilled in our minds the promises of the prophets?" (Lévinas 1997, p. 278). See also (Caputo 2000, p. 557).

[35] Cf. "Therefore it must also come for man as His Truth, and as such he cannot experience it otherwise than by appropriating it as his in the Truly. For only that which one receives as gift, only this teaches one to recognize the giver" (Rosenzweig 2005, p. 415).

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