Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness
Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness
Identities, Encounters, Perspectives

Edited by
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# CONTENTS

Abbreviations ............................................................... viii
List of Contributors .................................................... ix
Introduction 

*Andreas Gotzmann and Christian Wiese* ....................... xiii

## Part I
The Emergence and Function of a New Scholarly Paradigm

1. Moses Mendelssohn and the Polemics of History
   *Jonathan M. Hess* ................................................. 3

2. Outside and Inside the Nations: Changing Borders in the Study of the Jewish Past during the Nineteenth Century
   *Nils Roemer* .......................................................... 28

3. *Glaube und Geschichte*: A Vexed Relationship in German-Jewish Culture
   *David N. Myers* ................................................... 54

4. Two Persistent Tensions within *Wissenschaft des Judentums*
   *Michael A. Meyer* ............................................... 73

## Part II
Jewish Historiography and Its Encounter with Other Disciplines

5. Rabbinic Literature, Rabbinic History, and Scholarly Thinking: *Wissenschaft* and Beyond
   *Richard S. Sarason* .............................................. 93

6. *Religionswissenschaft* and Early Reform Jewish Thought: Samuel Hirsch and David Einhorn
   *Gershon Greenberg* ............................................... 110

7. “The Best Antidote to Anti-Semitism”? *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Protestant Biblical Scholarship, and Anti-Semitism in Germany before 1933
   *Christian Wiese* .................................................. 145
### Contents

8. Fashioning a Neutral Zone: Jewish and Protestant Socialists Challenge *Religionswissenschaft* in Weimar Germany  
   **Marc A. Krell** .......................................................... 193

9. The Absence of an Encounter: Sociology and Jewish Studies  
   **Pierre Birnbaum** ................................................. 224

10. Jewish Thought, Philosophy, and the Holocaust  
    **Michael L. Morgan** .............................................. 274

11. “Jewish Literature” and “World Literature”: *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and its Concept of Literature  
    **Andreas B. Kilcher** ............................................. 299

### Part III  
Ideology and Popularization in Jewish Historiography

12. Historicizing Emancipation: Jewish Historical Culture and *Wissenschaft* in Germany, 1912–1938  
    **Christhard Hoffmann** ........................................... 329

13. Historiography in a Cultural Ghetto: Jewish Historians in Nazi Germany  
    **Michael Brenner** .................................................. 356

14. From Text to Edition: Processes of Scholarly Thinking in German-Jewish Literature in the Early Nineteenth Century  
    **Gabriele von Glasenapp** ....................................... 368

### Part IV  
*Wissenschaft* and Jewish Identity

15. Dimensions and Varieties of Orthodox Judaism  
    **Aviezer Ravitzky** ................................................ 391

16. Which *Wissenschaft*? Reconstructionism’s Theological Appropriation of Sociology and Religious Naturalism  
    **Robert M. Seltzer** .............................................. 417

17. Postzionism and Postmodern Theory: The Challenge to Jewish Studies  
    **Laurence J. Silberstein** ..................................... 445
CONTENTS

Part V
New Concepts and Perspectives

18. Responsive Thinking: Cultural Studies and Jewish Historiography
   JONATHAN BOYARIN. ................................. 475

19. Historiography as Cultural Identity: Toward a Jewish History beyond National History
   ANDREAS GOTZMANN. ............................... 494

20. The Impact of Feminist Theory on Jewish Studies
   SUSANNAH HESCHEL ................................. 529

   ANTHONY D. KAUDERS .............................. 549

Bibliography ............................................. 569

Indices

Index of Subjects ................................. 633
Index of Names ................................. 642
ABBREVIATIONS

AAJR  American Academy of Jewish Research
AHR  American Historical Review
AJH  American Jewish History
AJHQ  American Jewish Historical Quarterly
ASSR  Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions
AZJ  Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums
BLBI  Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts
CAHJP  Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People
HUCA  Hebrew Union College Annual
IdR  Im Deutschen Reich
JJS  Journal of Jewish Studies
JNUL  Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem
JPS  Jewish Publication Society of America
JR  Jüdische Rundschau
JQR  Jewish Quarterly Review
JSQ  Jewish Studies Quarterly
JSS  Jewish Social Studies
JTSA  Jewish Theological Seminary of America
LBIYB  Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook
MGDJ  Mitteilungen des Gesamtarchivs der deutschen Juden
MGWJ  Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums
PAAJR  Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research
PAJHS  Proceedings of the American Jewish Historical Society
REJ  Revue des Études Juives
RHICOJ  Association pour la Recherche sur l'Histoire Contemporaine des Juifs
RRC  Reconstructionist Rabbinic College
SAJ  Society for the Advancement of Judaism
TJHSE  Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England
WZJT  Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie
UCLA  University of California, Los Angeles
YMHA  Young Men’s Hebrew Association
ZGJD  Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland
ZRGG  Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte
ZTHK  Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche
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To reflect upon Jewish history as a historian at the beginning of the twenty-first century implies having an awareness that our perceptions of Judaism and Jewish culture are shaped by a specific, distinct historical tradition that has developed since more than two hundred years. Although it is true that this perspective underwent strongly divergent developments within the respective disciplines of the humanities as well as in different political and cultural contexts, there is one characteristic element that can be found in all of them: Since the beginning of modernity, a completely new pattern of interpretation was developed that united the different approaches to the multitudes of Jewish cultures. This new form of understanding focused on a different, more dynamic interpretation of history that increasingly distanced itself from the older, paradigmatically ethical discourse; it explicitly turned against the static image of history produced by the rabbinic tradition which—by means of its religious methods of interpretation—integrated historical events into a predetermined frame of reference. Often inspired by the non-Jewish discourse, the European societies, including Western European and especially German Jewry, increasingly advanced the historical-critical approach to traditional texts which—starting from the methodological debates within historicism—became accepted as the predominant means to secure an objective perception of the past, within the realm of both, scholarship and society. This historical approach has to be considered as one of the crucial aspects of the discourse on modernization within Judaism. It gained special importance for the initially small but - since the Haskalah - rapidly growing small circle of Jewish intellectuals, since historiography soon developed into a discourse that was accepted within general society and thus constituted a cultural and religious meta-discourse which also became a central, unifying element of the social debates about the equal status of cultural minorities. Furthermore, by virtue of its new critical method guaranteeing objectivity, this approach was increasingly detached from the older cultural patterns of interpretation, for instance,
the religious tradition, and was successfully, albeit not without opposition, established as a widely accepted master discourse that achieved the authority to assess even the truth and relevance of the former interpretative approaches.

Since the turn of the nineteenth century—especially after World War I and, later on, since the 1970s with its increasing debates on the very concept of Wissenschaft—significant changes emerged with regard to the assessment of methodological questions as well as the specific concept of history. Yet, for Jewish history, it can be said that the scholarly approaches remained tied closely to their own historiographic origins: This is true to such an extent that even nowadays we can hardly think of any other interpretations than historical ones, while other possible expressions of or approaches to culture—e.g. shaped by a completely different understanding of history—remain for the best secondary.

This sense of attachment and continuity applies in a particular way to historiography itself, which still considers itself as part of the tradition of historicism, and which, from the point of view of post-modern theory, has—to put it bluntly—considerable difficulties even with the fundamental shifts of paradigm toward cultural studies as being guided by theory. It nevertheless succeeded in tying the other humanities’ traditions closely to this past. And even though other traditions of history without any doubt did survive parallel to the one defined by actual scholarly research, these were, and still are to this day, regarded as secondary or even deficient forms of historical thinking. This is the case not just because the scholarly discourse was able to assert its claim to be the actual and only model of interpretation. At the same time, the other forms of constructing history were soon orientated toward this one, and classified within a hierarchy of relevant approaches. This occurred to such an extent that intra-cultural and even private perceptions of the past remained closely tied to the scholarly perspective, even if—quite in contrast to the exclusive claim of an exclusive right of interpretation made by academic research—they were in no way congruent. This means not only that scholarly research elevated the new understanding of history to the status of forming the general standard for evaluating tradition, including, of course, the current developments within Judaism. Rather, it has to be emphasized that the external view of Judaism and, even more important, the self-perception of the own tradition, had changed quite decisively.
Although the scholarly concept of history has become the central interpretative model of the modern era, within the field of Jewish studies the preoccupation with the history of historiography is—despite the abundance of recent works—still in its initial phase; at least it had a markedly late start in the 1980s, and has gained increasing importance only in the last decade. This is not only due to the fact that most of the humanities-based approaches to Jewish cultures dealing with the general aspect of historiography tend to be rather conservative. Particularly as regards questions of epistemology and awareness of new methods, it frequently lags years behind the development of the respective disciplines. There are certainly many reasons for this, ranging from a continuing lack of integration into university institutions and the relevant fields of research to the specific tradition of minority discourses. In spite of the growing interest in such methodological questions that led to a variety of new interesting approaches, it can be said that up until now, particularly in the discipline of Jewish history, fundamental epistemological self-reflection has occurred only to a limited extent. Even the recently advancing research into the history of Jewish historiography, which has undoubtedly made considerable progress particularly in interpreting, for instance, the tradition of Wissenschaft des Judentums, or Zionist historiography, seldom devotes its attention to thoroughly reflecting on its own assumptions. It rather focuses on describing the methodological changes as well as the redefinition of historical concepts and priorities that occurred in the past, and—where it pursues political aims directly—increasingly exercises criticism of the ideological implications inherent in existing approaches.

The volume that is presented here is not intended either to make up for the lack of a comprehensive history of Jewish historiography, nor can it, as it were, catch up on the entire range of overdue theoretical debates. In its varied contributions, it nonetheless illustrates the decisive steps in the development of modern historical thinking. At the same time, those central characteristics as well as breaks and changes of directions are addressed which are characteristic for the path of Jewish historiography in the various disciplines and the diverse social groupings that form their basis. Besides this necessary historical orientation, this book also offers a deep insight into the status of the debates, and in fact with a breadth of scope that will hopefully foster future research. Furthermore, many of the contributions characterize not only decisive paradigm shifts in the approaches to the Jewish past;
rather, central aspects of a post-structuralist concept of scholarship which sees methodological self-reflection as an essential constituent of scholarly endeavor and whose essential feature is a critique of analysis, relying on the deconstruction of the statements made, are investigated and implemented. With this, the readers are introduced to the present-day state of research on the various aspects of modern historical consciousness; above all, this volume is intended here to provide stimuli for theory-guided, self-reflecting research.

Furthermore, the volume aims at achieving two goals that certainly deserve to be specially mentioned: While attempting to inspire an interdisciplinary dialogue regarding the influences, the developments, the particular dynamics and breaks that characterize modern historical thinking in the various disciplines—from science of history, through literary studies, philosophy, the various theologies, religious studies, to rabbinic literature as a field of literary research that is specific to Jewish studies (a few, such as the investigation of Jewish mysticism and Jewish art history as a visual representation of history, are unfortunately missing), the different contributions are at the same time likely to emphasize the overall connection of all these different areas of research on Jewish cultures. Even though the individual subjects such as for example Jewish history, Jewish philosophy or rabbinic literature are no doubt directly related historically (a connection that is quite often additionally secured via institutional education), the rather limited scope of the discipline as well as the necessary, largely even overdue incorporation into the respective general areas of the humanities lead to a fragmentation of the various perspectives on Judaism. The intention here is to provide it once more with a perspective which reflects, beyond the common heritage of a concept of history that has developed in a surprisingly parallel manner, not just on the specific characteristics of the different disciplines and on the connections and structures that unite them, but at the same time addresses new scholarly objectives and directions.

Although all attempts at interdisciplinary exchange are, as we know, faced with the problem that the different perspectives and focal points tend to drift apart and that the different scholarly terminologies are quite often rather exclusive, it is hoped that reading this volume will provide a generally accessible and truly comprehensive insight into fundamental common questions as well as into general developments within the historiography of Judaism. This is no doubt also due to the systematization of the contributions into central aspects both of the
history of scholarship as well as the theory debate. The first part of the book is devoted to the emergence and function of *Wissenschaft* as a new paradigm within historiography since the Haskalah, including redefinition of the relationship between faith and history, religious and secular as well as national and transnational elements in the writing of different Jewish histories. The second part deals with the complex relationship between Jewish historiography and other scholarly disciplines, such as research on rabbinic literature, the new phenomenon of religious studies in the nineteenth century, Christian theology, sociology, philosophy, and literature, and explores the specific role the concept of *Wissenschaft* played in these interdisciplinary encounters. The third part assembles reflections on the process of ideologization and popularization, i.e. the way history, especially in a form that was accessible to a general Jewish audience, has been used in order to shape ideological orientation, foster Jewish identity, or develop a historical culture that would serve as a medium of self-definition and self-assertion for Jews in a rather secular modern society dominated by non-Jewish cultures. A fourth part reflects upon questions concerning the relationship between historical scholarship and Jewish religious and/or political identities, including the responses of Orthodoxy and Reconstructionism to a pluralist world shaped by rational, scientific approaches, and the role of postmodern concepts in Jewish studies as embodied, for instance, in postzionist views of history and political reality. The final part consists of four separate contributions which, based on new approaches of gender or cultural studies, reflect on the current status of Jewish studies, explore new developments and persisting limitations, and attempt to offer new perspectives for future research and methodology.

All this can only lead to fruitful exchange between the disciplines if sufficient space is left for the respective approaches, views, and perspectives of authors from often quite different backgrounds, for their specific interests and interpretations. Therefore, this volume places central aspects and debates, as well as broad overviews of specific developments within the historiography of Judaism, alongside one another, hoping that in spite of their necessary heterogeneity they will convey overall a clear impression of the developments of historical thinking and the relationship between modern Judaism and historical consciousness in the past as well as in the present. This aim is supported not only by the systematic specifications undertaken by the individual contributions but also by the way they overlap
and supplement one another, each from their own perspectives. For all the desirable wealth of perspectives, the image that emerges is that of a surprisingly uniform development of historical thinking, which even transcends the disciplinary boundaries, and which, after the emergence of a historical paradigm and the definition of the objects of historical research, appears to have undergone quite a parallel if not even identical process. Although the initially heavily overlapping and mutually dependent approaches of literary studies and historiography increasingly laid claim to their own areas of research, the fundamental uniformity of development becomes apparent in an exemplary way on the basis of some central factors that characterize the exploration of Jewish cultures to this day: One should mention here the establishment of history as an integrative discourse aimed at the non-Jewish society, namely as a political instrument within the context of claims for recognition of legal and social equality of the Jews as individuals as well as of Judaism and Jewish history as a central part of the cultural inheritance of humankind. This discourse was, at the same time, based on increasing hopes for an integration of Jewish scholarship and Jewish scholars into the ranks of an imagined community of researchers, which included, in quite practical terms, the demand for an equal participation in their institutions, particularly the universities. At the same time, it is the strong, immediate relation between identity and scholarly research on many levels which is based on the inheritance, still influential today, of a national understanding of the Jewish past that is ultimately associated with Idealism. Furthermore, all areas are also characterized by the attempt of defining a self-determined, independent perspective with regard to Jewish history in contrast to negative external representations, which oppose both political adversaries and denigrating religious and historical depictions of Judaism—a constant challenge that lent Jewish studies, overall, the particular character of a minority history or of a postcolonial counter-discourse, with all the typical characteristics. The fact that history as a medium of self-assertion simultaneously functioned as the basis for inter-religious encounters and as a common political platform, led to characteristic dynamics and contradictions. This also caused the specific mutual relations, for example between Jewish religious or philosophical models and those of Christian authors. At the same time, the inwardly-directed aspects, for instance of religious criticism, just as the confrontation of Christian models of interpretation, had an
enormous influence: Thus the instrumentalization and popularization of scholarship was not only a characteristic element of the historical approach of the religious Reform movement, but documents a fundamental rejection of ahistorical (as a rule, religious) models of interpretation, such as those still harbored to this day within ultra-Orthodox circles.

For all the vehemence with which the new cultural model of interpretation of text-critical historiography asserted itself, in the Haskalah period, as well as within the context of different Orthodox movements, and finally in the wake of tendencies critical of modernization, there were repeated attempts to put a stop to historicity as the agent of a modernity that was basically perceived as destructive. It seems more than doubtful whether this was really successful or whether these were not just attempts at setting limits to historical thinking rather than efficiently suppressing them. The most striking attempts at such a refusal are doubtless represented by Orthodox attempts to dissociate the interpretation of law and thus also the history of law from historical and even natural processes. At the same time, even for those who embraced this dynamic model of interpretation, history served as a means of defining meta-historical contents. These range from securing religious contents as fixed points of orientation in the historical flux, through to ideologized constants of Jewish tradition and of communal life. Finally—as was typical for historicism—the largely stereotyped evolutionary-historical constructs acquired, in their teleology itself, a supra-historical, almost religious character. In the religious debates not only within Judaism, but above all also in the exchange with Christian perspectives and critics, this seemed ultimately indispensable, since claims to relevance and truth were negotiated via these power discourses. The extent to which modern historical thinking and a corresponding awareness of methods won recognition—both in literature as well as in historiography, no doubt most tentatively the closer one approached those areas perceived as sacred, such as rabbinic literature, the Pentateuch or the Halakhah—is in no way reflected in the still intense relationship between belief and religion. The aspect of a power discourse acting via sovereignty of interpretation and claims to objectivity as well as institutionalization and representation remained decisive, and accordingly runs through almost all the contributions.

It should be emphasized that the focus on the relationship between historical thinking and religious questions and debates, hitherto
strongly neglected yet decisive for the modern era, represents a further novelty of this volume. This relation is surprisingly strong compared with the general development in Jewish studies, albeit appropriate in our view. Since historicity and religion outwardly and inwardly represent lines of conflict and reference points of modern Judaism which are in permanent competition but also merge with one another and are mutually dependent, particular weight was given to the appropriation and the redefinition of scholarly concepts of history, not only with regard to the different religious camps of Reform Judaism and Orthodoxy, but also with regard to the school of American Reconstructionism that is prominent here. This is assisted historically by studies of cultural comparison and history of philosophy, which examine the relevance of religious models in the social debates, and at the same time search out the patterns of legitimation, for example of the new religious-historical and cultural-historical models. On all levels—even in respect of a post-modern approach—the question of advancing specific perspectives and arguments as scientifically relevant presents itself either covertly, but as a rule quite openly, as a power discourse, in whose framework political, religious and intercultural conflicts were negotiated; within this context, the scholarly approach was usually understood simultaneously as a neutral plane and thus as a medium of pacification.

Apart from describing the defining characteristics of self-perception via the construction of the past on the basis of one of the text corpora or binding interpretations—which initially acted ethnically or nationally, but beyond that for the most part also developed transnational and pluralistic patterns of thinking—an important element of this volume is the analysis of the historicization of the own discipline. This is undertaken not only by depicting crucial lines of development, but also by reflecting historical thinking as it for example represents a specific Jewish historical culture in relation to its surroundings, i.e. by analyzing the different developments in Jewish historiography in the wider European context as well as the further development of the Wissenschaft des Judentums, which was founded in Germany, in the United States. Decisive cesura with regard to the relationship between Jewish historiography and non-Jewish views on Jewish history are no doubt the general rejection of Jewish interpretations of history, the attempts at "dispossession" and destruction of an autonomous historical view, taken to its extreme by Nazi historians.
For their part, the ideas concerning new possibilities for future development in historical research within the broader discipline of Jewish studies typically work historically too, in that in the first instance breaks, limitations and contradictions within the development of historiography until now are analyzed. That intra-Jewish ideological criticism, for example within the context of post-Zionism, will really succeed in calling the existing historical paradigm into question, seems rather unlikely. That reflection on women’s history in the context of gender-historical theory-formation, however, certainly contains a particular driving force and perhaps even an explosive potential for the established approaches and perspectives seems just as convincing as the post-structuralist reference to perspectivity that sees a precondition and an opportunity for research in the disclosure of historical legitimization processes. If historiography does not wish to be continually thrown back to its starting point, in contrast to blanking out the tight connections between identity and historical thinking that has been characteristic of the analytical process to date, it will be forced to press for their deconstruction. The same applies for the misjudgement of the subliminal references to historical thinking’s own power discourses with a simultaneous adoption of a cultural studies-based understanding of discourse models, which are once again essentialized, and thus undermined and annulled. All these future-oriented critiques of research to date show exemplarily how crucial it is to know about the respective developments of the subjects within Jewish studies against the background of their common historical tradition, and that this, as a part of the continual analytical processes of self-reflection, will become the real dynamic force of scholarly thinking.

The intellectual endeavor embodied by this volume, of exploring the issues at stake with regard to the interpretation of the complex relationship between modern Judaism and historical consciousness, has required the committed involvement of those many scholars who participated in an international conference that—organized by the chair of Jewish studies at Erfurt University—took place at the Berlin Jewish Museum in September 2003, and later agreed to continue elaborating on their intriguing topics. All of them acknowledged specialists in their respective disciplines, they took it upon themselves to contribute to this interdisciplinary project and to devote their time and energy to an area of research that is certainly very important and has only recently begun to be addressed in more detail.
We would, therefore, like to thank sincerely all the authors for their enthusiasm, for the brilliant and original research undertaken for the sake of interpreting this topic, as well as for their patience and openness with regard to our requests during the process of editing the volume. This book would have been impossible without their outstanding intellectual efforts. Furthermore, we would like to express our gratitude to Brill Publishers, especially to Michiel Swormink, for recognizing the importance of the topic and for including the book in their expanding program of publications in Jewish studies. The entire staff of Brill publishers, particularly Igor Nemirowsky who combined patience and slight pressure, and Michael J. Mozina who thoroughly read and edited every single text, has been extremely helpful in producing this book. As editors, we would hope that it will serve its purpose in engendering new controversial and fruitful debates both about the situation and future of Jewish studies and the relevance of historical thinking for the field.

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Part I
The Emergence and Function of a New Scholarly Paradigm
Almost inevitably, discussions of Moses Mendelssohn’s relationship to the German Enlightenment’s burgeoning interest in history and historicism begin by invoking his 1765 correspondence with Thomas Abbt. In this letter, as is well known, Mendelssohn responded to Abbt’s own interest in history by expressing his sheer boredom with all things historical, underscoring the soporific effects that historical writings had on him. “I always yawn when I have to read something historical,” Mendelssohn wrote. “I believe that history is one area of study which one can master without instruction.”¹ In his magnum opus Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism (1783), Mendelssohn extended this apparent lack of interest in the particulars of historical scholarship to an ostensible disdain for the broader methodological questions that arose out of the Enlightenment’s project to conceive of human history as a totality worthy of serious intellectual study. Taking on Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s The Education of the Human Race (1780), a text that subsequently became pivotal for conceptions of history in German idealism and beyond, Mendelssohn seemed here to articulate a position even more out of sync with the thinking of his peers. Writing here in a first-person voice laden with apparent self-deprecation, he questioned the belief in progress underlying Lessing’s schematic vision of human history:

I, for my part, cannot conceive of the education of the human race as my late friend Lessing imagined it under the influence of I-don’t-know-which historian of mankind. One pictures the collective entity of

the human race as an individual person and believes that Providence sent it to school here on earth, in order to raise it from childhood to manhood. In reality, the human race is—if the metaphor is appropriate—in almost every century, child, adult, and old man at the same time, though in different places and regions of the world.²

Global philosophies of progress, it seems, held as little interest for Mendelssohn as the arduous task of reconstructing historical particulars. The German Enlightenment, to invoke the title of Peter Reill’s classic study, may indeed have been inseparable from the “rise of historicism,”³ but this was a dimension of Enlightenment thought that failed to capture Mendelssohn’s interest. It should not be surprising, in this context, that Jerusalem and other of his writings reveal little concern with either the seriousness with which so many of his peers approached the task of reconstructing the past or the increasing skepticism they brought to their study of Scripture. In his definition of Judaism as a “revealed legislation” in Jerusalem, for instance, Mendelssohn dealt with the question of the reliability of historical transmission only cursorily, asserting that the “credibility” of the “narrator” of the “historical truth” of the revelation at Sinai was simply beyond dispute.⁴ In this respect, Mendelssohn clearly recognizes the rising authority his peers conferred on history, but, as Allan Arkush has demonstrated, ultimately he dodges rather than engages the challenges to revelation raised by the radical historicism of Hermann Samuel Reimarus and others.⁵ Here and elsewhere, David Sorkin has contended, Mendelssohn is “historical without being historicist: he acknowledges history in the Pentateuch rather than the Pentateuch as a product of history.”⁶ By the time Mendelssohn


⁴ Mendelssohn, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 160; idem, Jerusalem, 93.


published \textit{Jerusalem} in 1783, moreover, contemporaries such as the Göttingen Orientalist Johann David Michaelis and his protégé Johann Gottfried Eichhorn had already inaugurated a tradition of viewing the Hebrew Bible as a product of ancient Israel in its historical and geographical specificity.\footnote{On Orientalist scholarship in eighteenth-century Germany, see Jonathan M. Hess, \textit{Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), especially 51–89.} Michaelis drew on an immense body of historical, archaeological, and geographical scholarship and other contemporary empirical sciences to read the Hebrew Bible much as one would approach profane texts from antiquity. Eichhorn, going further, stressed the corruption of the original biblical text and the need for historical reconstruction and correction—a position diametrically opposed to Mendelssohn’s unflinching insistence on the authority of revealed legislation. As Sorkin has argued, Mendelssohn clearly resisted the historicism of his peers, and he did so by taking refuge in arguments typical of the religious Enlightenment of the 1730s and 1740s. For Mendelssohn, the credibility of the Hebrew Bible and its account of the revelation at Sinai simply stood beyond question; in this respect history could be used to support tradition but not to challenge it.

The main question here is how to evaluate the apparent disjunction between Mendelssohn’s approach to questions of history and those of his peers. For the most part, recent scholarship has tended to move beyond the indictments leveled at Mendelssohn by the nineteenth-century historian Heinrich Graetz. Like many others after him, Graetz complained that Mendelssohn failed to contribute in any meaningful way to the nascent interest in historical thinking that came to fruition in the \textit{Wissenschaft des Judentums} decades after Mendelssohn’s death. For Graetz, “there was but one feeling wanting in Mendelssohn—and this deficiency was detrimental to the near future of Judaism. He lacked an appreciation for history.”\footnote{Heinrich Graetz, \textit{History of the Jews} (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1895), vol. 5, 301.} Now clearly, Mendelssohn’s vision of Judaism as a “revealed legislation” did fail to allow for any significant historical development, and this made it of limited use to his nineteenth-century heirs. Unlike many of his successors, Mendelssohn did not assert that Judaism had an “essence” distinct from the law that unfolded and might continue to...
unfold in the course of history. For Mendelssohn, rather, the essence of Judaism was the law, and, as he asserted toward the conclusion of _Jerusalem_, in opposition to contemporary Orientalist scholarship’s emphasis on the “time, place and circumstance” of the genesis of Mosaic Judaism, historical thinking was inadequate to grasp the strict obedience that Jews owe tradition. For Mendelssohn, Judaism was an inappropriate object for historical scholarship, and it is precisely this vision of Judaism’s _resistance_ to historicism that has come to interest many recent scholars. In his 2003 book, _Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought_, David N. Myers thus appropriately casts Mendelssohn as exemplary of the misgivings about history that would unsettle so many later German-Jewish intellectuals from Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig to Leo Strauss and Isaac Breuer. Arguing in this fashion, Myers enables us to recuperate Mendelssohn’s misgivings about history as a strategic move. Edward Breuer, similarly, has stressed Mendelssohn’s challenge to the prominent tendency in Enlightenment thought to dissolve historical particularity in teleological views of history that inevitably celebrated the European Enlightenment. Mendelssohn may have harbored objections to historicism but, as Breuer points out, he was hardly a thinker lacking an appreciation for the eighteenth-century’s nascent interest in history. He needs to be seen, instead, as a significant critic of the “epistemological implications of progressive historicism” and the often “self-serving triumphalism of the Enlightenment.”

The present essay seeks to reassess Mendelssohn’s reflections on history and historicism by looking primarily at his _Jerusalem_, a work that was an integral part of the debates over the “civic improvement” of the Jews unleashed by Christian Wilhelm Dohm’s 1781 treatise. Mendelssohn, we shall discover here, may indeed have been indifferent to the particulars of historical scholarship. He was, however, keenly aware of the political and ideological uses of historical writing,

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9 Mendelssohn, _Gesammelte Schriften_, vol. 8, 199; idem, _Jerusalem_, 124.
12 Some sections of the remainder of this essay draw heavily from material presented in my recent book, _Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity_ (see note 7).
particularly when it came to the writing of Jewish history. Indeed, Dohm’s *On the Civic Improvement of the Jews*—a work in whose genesis Mendelssohn was deeply involved and whose early reception he helped to guide—very much linked the proposed emancipation of the Jews to a distinct vision of Jewish history. Dohm’s concept of “civic improvement” hinged on the notion that the degenerate state of contemporary Jewry was a product of historical and political circumstance. As Dohm stated in his preface, his ambition was to “encourage state governments to increase their number of good citizens by no longer causing the Jews to be bad ones,” and he sought to demonstrate the viability of this project through a historical argument, one that demonstrated that the “Jews are only corrupt as human beings and citizens because they have been denied the rights of both.” To this end, much of his treatise consisted of a sketch of Jewish history from the beginnings of Mosaic law up to the present day. Drawing liberally from disparate contemporary and ancient sources—Johann David Michaelis, Anton Friedrich Büsching, Montesquieu, Jacques Basnage, Flavius Josephus, and scores of Latin and German legal records and historical chronicles—Dohm articulated a blueprint of the Jews’ relation to the political world both before and after the onset of Diaspora that supported his argument for emancipation. The result of this exercise, not surprisingly, was a teleological vision of Jewish history culminating not in messianic redemption and national restoration but in the incorporation of the Jews into a distinctly modern political order. As was the case with so many other grand philosophies of history circulating in the eighteenth century, moreover, Dohm managed to locate a precursor in antiquity for his project. He celebrated the liberal polity of the Roman Empire as a model for the separation of church and state, finding in the Roman victory over Jerusalem a paradigmatic moment for modernity. In his account of the struggle between Rome and Jerusalem, Dohm’s sympathies did not lie with the Jews, whose enmity toward the rest of the human race apparently caused them to “stubbornly defend their freedom and capital city” and fight against the Roman “destroyers of Jerusalem”

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with “raging national-hatred.” He narrated the destruction of the ancient Jewish commonwealth, rather, entirely from the perspective of the victors, presenting Rome as the desirable antithesis of the chauvinistic politics of Jerusalem, a political order grounded in a tolerance for religious difference. The Romans, he noted, wisely recognized the proper distinction between religious and political societies, and in the centuries before Christianity became a state religion, the “wise and mild politics” of the Roman Empire did not just refrain from punishing the Jews for their insurrection; the Romans gave the Jews an unprecedented opportunity for participation in civic life, allowing them to enjoy all the rights and duties of citizens.

Clearly, any work defending Judaism and entitled Jerusalem did not just enter into the debates on the pragmatics of Jewish emancipation unleashed by Dohm’s treatise. By its very nature, Mendelssohn’s treatise was also addressing this symbolic dimension of Dohm’s project, articulating an alternative to the Rome-centered historical master narrative underlying his peer’s vision of the civic improvement of the Jews. Not surprisingly, Jerusalem did not represent Rome in Dohm’s heroic terms. Like Dohm, Mendelssohn too sought to legitimate life in the Diaspora, and he did so in a manner that has few precedents in previous Jewish thought. But when Mendelssohn spoke of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, he presented it not as a model for Jewish emancipation but as an event that exemplified the violence of empire and the destruction of religious difference. Mendelssohn, we shall discover later on, cast the separation of church and state as a Jewish invention—as a product of Jerusalem—and when speaking of the Romans, he invoked the “conquerors of Jerusalem” who “plundered the Temple” and “saw everything with the eyes of barbarians.” Precisely that historical moment that Dohm cast as exemplary of the promise of Enlightenment, modernity, and religious tolerance, then, becomes here a reminder of modernity’s dangers and potential violence. Mendelssohn, to be sure, did not engage in dialogue over the particulars of historical reconstruction here, but he did strategically present a radically different interpretation of a

14 Dohm, Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung, vol. 1, 40.
15 Ibid., 45
17 Mendelssohn, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 180; idem, Jerusalem, 114.
pivotal historical event, showing a keen awareness of the political and ideological uses of the past in contemporary political debates. Attuned to the polemical value of historical writing, he sought, as it were, to reconfigure cultural memory of Judaism and Jewish history. He attempted to reformulate the dominant culture’s historical memory of Judaism by offering to the non-Jewish public a vision of Jewish history radically different from the deeply ingrained understanding of the ancient Jewish world that played such a crucial role in debates over the political status of contemporary Jews.\footnote{For a fuller theoretical discussion of my use of the terms “memory” and “history” here, see Jonathan M. Hess, “Memory, History and the Jewish Question: Universal Citizenship and the Colonization of Jewish Memory,” in The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Culture and Society, ed. Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsch (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 39–61.}

Mendelssohn, in other words, was clearly not a modern historian in the making, but he did engage in extensive, polemical memory work, sketching out a vision of Jewish history for the non-Jewish world that was radically at odds with both received notions about Judaism and, more importantly, the novel approaches to Judaism and Jewish history that arose out of the Enlightenment’s nascent historicism. And while Mendelssohn obviously sought to offer a subtle critique of Dohm—both in the passage considered above and in his insistence elsewhere that contemporaries speak of the “civic admission” of the Jews rather than their “civic improvement”\footnote{See here Jacob Katz, “The Term ‘Jewish Emancipation’: Its Origin and Historical Impact,” in idem, Emancipation and Assimilation: Studies in Modern Jewish History (Westmead: Gregg, 1972), 21–45, especially 34–35.}—it is important to note that he saw Dohm as a great proponent of “reason” and “humanity,” not as the enemy.\footnote{Mendelssohn, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 4.} In this sense, the relative differences between Dohm’s program of civic improvement and Mendelssohn’s vision of civic admission are less important than the differences between Dohm and Mendelssohn, on the one hand, and those who opposed them to argue that Judaism by its very nature made Jews unfit for citizenship. By examining Mendelssohn in this respect, the polemical thrust of his strategic resistance to Enlightenment historicism will come even more clearly to the foreground. Mendelssohn, we shall see in the pages that follow, does more than express misgivings about the damaging effects of historicism on Judaism. He does not merely resist historicism. Ultimately, he claims it as his own, creating with
his *Jerusalem* a dynamic form of memory work that both engages with contemporary historicist treatments of Judaism and also adopts the strategic tools of historicism in order to subject Christianity to its gaze.

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Before evaluating *Jerusalem* in this framework, it will be necessary first to consider some of the unique challenges Mendelssohn had to face in issuing his defense of Judaism. For particularly in the years leading up to the composition of this work, Judaism occupied an idiosyncratic position in Enlightenment culture, figuring *both* as the historical religion par excellence—an antiquated, “Oriental” legal system uniquely suited to be the object of historicist scholarship—and, increasingly, as an unsettling force that was at times equated with historicism itself.

In exploring the faultlines of this dual position, let us begin by considering the novel strategies that Enlightenment historicism produced to contain Judaism within the past. Christian Hebraists, of course, had seen ancient Judaism as their privileged object of study long before the eighteenth century, but with the rise of historicism and the burgeoning European interest in the Near East, Orientalist scholarship underwent a crucial shift. Starting in the eighteenth century, as we mentioned earlier, pioneering Orientalists such as Johann David Michaelis, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Johann Gottfried Eichhorn began reading the Hebrew Bible as a product of ancient Israelite culture in its historical and geographical specificity. In this context, Judaism came to be seen not just as an antiquated religion long since superseded by Christianity but as an essentially “Oriental” legal system, one that may have had value in its time but was now radically out of sync with the spirit of the modern age. Operating in this framework, Michaelis, for instance, stressed the close relationship between Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, and other Semitic languages. He drew widely on archaeological, geographical, and historical writings in his efforts to portray Mosaic Judaism as a product of the ancient Near East, and he paid particular attention to travel writing, even helping to launch the first major modern European
scholarly expedition to the Near East.\textsuperscript{21} From 1761 to 1767, without ever leaving his chair at the University of Göttingen, he served as the official director of an expedition to Yemen sponsored by the Danish crown. The goal of the expedition was to research the language and customs of the modern Near East in order to gain insight into the culture of the ancient Israelites, which was, Michaelis assured his patrons, alive and well in remote areas of Yemen. The image of the Near East that emerged from this expedition, not surprisingly, was uncannily similar to that which launched it. In the travel journals of Carsten Niebuhr, the journey’s sole survivor, we find countless instances of an area of the globe that was stagnant, childlike, and immune to the progress Michaelis and his peers identified with northern Europe, and this worldview subsequently helped inform Michaelis’s magnum opus \textit{Mosaic Law} (6 vols., 1770–1775) as well. In understanding Judaism historically, Orientalists such as Michaelis were making it inextricable from the “time, place, and circumstance” of its origin, rendering the very notion of a Judaism that would be compatible with modernity an oxymoron. For Michaelis, to be sure, Mosaic law was clearly superseded by Christianity, by Jesus’ apparent destruction of the law, and he made this explicit, insisting on a radical opposition between Judaism and Christianity reminiscent of Marcion that would later rear its head in Immanuel Kant’s \textit{Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone} (1793) as well. But for Michaelis, Judaism was not just superseded by Christianity. It was also surpassed by a more humane—and more secular—civilizing spirit urging juridical reform, a spirit that enabled historically oriented modern European scholars such as Michaelis to recognize Mosaic Judaism for what it was: a model of legislative wisdom appropriate to the customs and culture of the “childlike” ancient Israelites—and to them alone.

For Michaelis and the Orientalists who followed him, accordingly, Mosaic Judaism provided an ideal object for historicist scholarship, and much of his oeuvre sought to marshal the historical evidence that would allow modern scholars to appreciate Mosaic law as a form of jurisprudence worthy of being studied on its own terms as a product of ancient Israel. Focused as it was on a tradition already consigned to the past, Michaelis’s historicism failed to provoke major opposition among his contemporaries. Indeed, \textit{Mosaic Law}, his

\textsuperscript{21} On Michaelis, see Hess, \textit{Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity}, 52–89.
multi-volume German Translation of the Old Testament with Annotations for the Uneducated (1769–1785), and his other writings were all enormously popular, translated into English, French, Dutch, and Danish during his lifetime and reprinted in Germany well into the nineteenth century.

For Michaelis and Mendelssohn’s peers, it was one thing to transform Old Testament criticism into an investigation into the politics and culture of ancient Israel and regard Judaism as a legal system bound to the ancient Orient. It was another thing entirely, however, to subject the New Testament to the same historical-critical scrutiny and reflect on the extent to which Christianity might be a product of such local historical circumstances. Since the late seventeenth century, to be sure, there had been a long tradition among deists and their followers of challenging the credibility of Scripture and presenting Christianity as a rational religion stripped of supernatural elements such as Jesus’ divinity and resurrection. A historical-critical approach to the New Testament with an interest in reconstructing the life of the historical Jesus, however, did not emerge in Germany until much later, not until the controversial piece “On the Purpose of Jesus and His Disciples” that Lessing published in 1778 as the last of a set of excerpts from Hermann Samuel Reimarus’s Apology for the Rational Worshipers of God.

A full discussion of Lessing, the Reimarus fragments, and the origins of the Protestant quest for the historical Jesus they unleashed lies beyond the scope of this essay. My interest in what follows lies solely in the ways this historicist challenge to Christianity was regarded as a “Jewish” offensive and linked at times to Mendelssohn himself, as this will, along with our discussion of Michaelis above, provide crucial context for understanding the way Jerusalem engages with contemporary historical scholarship. Like Michaelis, Reimarus

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too inherited the suspicion toward the text of Scripture inaugurated by Spinoza and the radical deists, but he proved significantly more radical than the Göttingen Orientalist. He subjected both the Old and New Testaments to rigorous scrutiny with the aims of discrediting their claims to contain a coherent revealed religion and a reliable account of the historical record. In the section of the *Apology* dedicated to Jesus and his disciples, Reimarus critiqued the teachings of the apostles about the life and purpose of Christ by juxtaposing them to his historical reconstruction of the life of Jesus. It was this methodological move that distinguished his work from the arguments of his deist precursors. Jesus was, Reimarus claimed, not the founder of a new religion but a Jew preaching within Judaism who never wanted to abolish the law, a Jewish messenger of rationalist morality and tolerance. In presenting himself as the Son of God and announcing the imminent kingdom of God, for instance, Jesus was not proclaiming a universalist revelation or making any sort of metaphysical claims. Rather, he was speaking to a Jewish audience, who understood his message within the context of first-century messianic movements as a mission to seek deliverance from political oppression and establish a worldly kingdom for the Jews. Early Christianity, Reimarus contended, had its origins thus not in Jesus but in the work of his disciples, in the disingenuous tactics they resorted to when confronted with his unexpected death and crucifixion. Jesus himself never spoke about suffering and dying, and his death thus caught his followers by surprise. Suddenly finding themselves without a leader, his disciples stole and hid his body so as to invent the myth of resurrection and predict his return, all of which was made possible by the Jewish apocalyptic traditions of the day. Viewed in this context, Christianity and Christian dogma mark an obvious betrayal of Jesus, a fraudulent tradition rooted in internal conflicts in first-century Judaism.

Reimarus’s goal in insisting on Jesus’ historical Jewishness, of course, was not to promote Judaism but to attack Christianity and pave the way for pure rational religion, and Lessing’s publication of the *Anonymous Fragments* from 1774 to 1778 unleashed an enormous controversy among theologians and state authorities. After the release of the fragment on Jesus and his disciples, Lessing was forced to turn in the complete manuscript of the *Apology* to the authorities and submit all his further writings on religion to close censorship. Before we move on to examine how Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem* participates in this controversy, let us briefly consider two responses to Reimarus
relevant for the way Mendelssohn presents Jesus in this work. In his *Reply to the Anonymous Fragments, Particularly That on the Purpose of Jesus and His Disciples* (1779), the Halle theologian Johann Salomon Semler followed Reimarus’s attempt to position Jesus within first-century messianism; like Reimarus, Semler stressed Jesus’ Jewish context and offered an historical reconstruction of Jesus’ life. At the same time, he also set limits to Reimarus’s historicism. Emphasizing Jesus’ break with the Jews’ narrow nationalism and his investment of the law with transcendent spirituality, he rigorously separated the historical Jesus from the divinity of Christ. What ultimately mattered for Semler was the transcendent “spiritual power” and divinity of Christ, not Jesus’ historical relation to Judaism, and the latter became significant only insofar as it could be used to demonstrate the former.

Lessing offered a different response to Reimarus but one that similarly qualified his profane treatment of Christian origins. Lessing’s goal in publishing the fragments was not to give unequivocal support to Reimarus but to lay the ground for his own attempt to salvage the concept of revelation apart from the question of its historical foundation as transmitted by Scripture—a position that the Lutheran orthodoxy of the day found equally unacceptable. Lessing, importantly, did not challenge Reimarus’s account of the historical record. He did, however, shift the emphasis of the debate away from the question of historical credibility. In *The Education of the Human Race* (1780), the first section of which he published in 1777 as a rejoinder to Reimarus’s diatribes against the Old Testament, he redefined revelation as a human capacity for religion that needed to be understood historically, as part of humanity’s progressive development toward pure, rational religion. Rather than conceiving of rational religion and revelation as potentially or necessarily at odds with each other, Lessing viewed them as interrelated over time. “Revelation,” he claimed, “gives the human race nothing that human reason would not discover if left to itself: but it gave and gives humanity the most important of these things only earlier.”

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revealed religion and limited its claims to absolute truth, displacing the very question of its credibility. Indeed, Lessing had as little interest in “who the person of this Christ was” as in the resurrection and miracles ascribed to him;25 Jesus’ Jewishness and other aspects of his historical existence were irrelevant in this context. Jesus was important neither as a Jew nor as the divine Christ but as the “first reliable practical teacher of the immortality of the soul,” a human being who gave the Jews and eventually the rest of humanity a religious doctrine that far surpassed the “primer” of the Old Testament.26 Unlike Reimarus, Lessing had no need to denigrate Judaism and Christianity and reject their truth claims. Proposing a philosophy of history in place of Reimarus’s historicism, he interpreted Judaism and Christianity as successive stages in the education of the human race, with Christianity able to be overcome by pure rational religion just as it had once superseded the primitive and childlike understanding of God characteristic of ancient Judaism.

Now clearly, as we remember from the passage which we cited in the introduction, Mendelssohn challenged Lessing’s particular view of progress, which, like Michaelis’s Orientalist scholarship, clearly relegated Judaism to the ancient past and left no room for the continuation of Judaism in modernity. But this is not the only section of Jerusalem that engages with the controversy over the Reimarus fragments. In Jerusalem, Mendelssohn presented Jesus as a Jew who exemplified the rabbinic principle and who never abandoned Judaism or sought to abolish the law—much to the chagrin of Michaelis and many other contemporaries.27 Mendelssohn’s position on Jesus here derives from a number of Jewish and Christian sources that were all available to him long before the publication of the Reimarus fragments, and to be sure, the passage critiquing Lessing’s philosophy of history is the only section in Jerusalem that expressly alludes to the controversy. Appearing in the aftermath of the uproar over the fragment on Jesus and his disciples, however, Mendelssohn’s appropriation of Jesus as a Jew inevitably participated in the larger controversy over the historical Jesus raging in Protestant theological discourse of the

25 Ibid., 89–90.
26 Ibid., 89.
27 For a more general discussion of the reception of this aspect of Mendelssohn’s Jerusalem, see Hess, Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity, 128–135.
period, and it needs to be understood in this context as well.

From the beginning of the turmoil unleashed by the fragments, moreover, Mendelssohn was never far from the center of controversy. He was one of the few contemporaries to have the opportunity to read Reimarus's *Apology* in its entirety; Lessing showed him the text in Wolfenbüttel in October 1770—four years before any of it was published—and he allowed him at that point to take the *Apology* back to Berlin with him to read through it at his convenience.\textsuperscript{28} In the minds of many of his contemporaries, even more significantly, the challenge of historicism that the fragments issued to orthodox Christianity constituted a “Jewish” attempt to slander Christianity and its founder, and this put Mendelssohn, Lessing’s friend and the foremost Jewish figure of his generation, in a conspicuously vulnerable predicament. One view circulating through the rumor mill, in fact, held that the Jewish community of Amsterdam had paid Lessing one thousand ducats to publish these slanderous fragments.\textsuperscript{29} In his polemics against Lessing, the orthodox Hamburg pastor Johann Melchior Goeze argued on a different level but supported a similar view of the “Jewish” function of the fragments. Goeze sought to dismiss the fragment on Jesus and his disciples by representing Reimarus’s historicist critique of the New Testament as a continuation of medieval traditions of Jewish rewritings of the Gospels. “The Jews,” he wrote, “will welcome the last fragment in particular. By confirming them in their unbelief and hostility toward Jesus and his religion, it will be more useful to them than even their *Toledoth Yeshu*.”\textsuperscript{30} Goeze here claims Jesus as the founder of Christianity by denigrating Jews, and by branding Reimarus’s historicism as a “Jewish” rebellion against Christian doctrine. There was, not surprisingly, one Jewish writer whose name frequently came up in the widespread speculations over the authorship of this modern-day *Toledoth Yeshu*: Mendelssohn himself.\textsuperscript{31}

Historicism, we have seen here, thus, constituted a challenge to Judaism at the same time as it was perceived as a Jewish challenge to Christianity. Appearing in this atmosphere, *Jerusalem* obviously did


\textsuperscript{29} Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. 5, 322.

\textsuperscript{30} Quoted according to Altmann, *Mendelssohn*, 562.

\textsuperscript{31} See ibid., 565–566; also Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. 5, 322.
much more than defend Judaism. It also negotiated a position for Mendelssohn in the debates on the historical Jesus, staking out a Jewish appropriation of Jesus that spoke to the more general theological and political challenges of the day. Building on the attention Reimarus and Semler gave Jesus’ Jewish historical context, Mendelssohn claimed for Jesus a position of prominence in Jewish history. In this way, he neutralized some of the more explosive claims made by Reimarus at the same time as he confronted contemporary Christian resistance toward Reimarus’s “Jewish” appropriation of Jesus. In this sense, he clearly challenged the attempts of Semler and Lessing to resist Reimarus’s historical claims and reinstate traditional scenarios of Jesus’ supersession of Judaism. Like Reimarus, for instance, Mendelssohn too stressed the disparity between Jesus’ teachings and those of his disciples, who “without his authority … believed they could release from the law also those Jews who accepted their teachings.”

Mendelssohn’s Jesus, however, is hardly the messianic revolutionary of the Reimarus fragments. He emerges instead, as we shall see, as a quiet reformer, a theorist of the proper relationship between church and state who restores Judaism to its original purity and secures it its proper place within—and ultimately as a model for—modernity. It is in this sense, we shall see, that Mendelssohn, for all his obvious resistance to historicism, nevertheless displays a remarkable agility in appropriating historicism for himself. He turns the tables on his Christian peers in such a way as to launch a master narrative of the genesis of modernity that grants Judaism center stage and relegates Christianity to the sidelines as a historical phenomenon representing an aberrant deviation from first-century Judaism.

If we consider the immediate origins of Jerusalem as they are presented in the text itself, moreover, it makes sense that Mendelssohn’s defense of Judaism was inextricable from polemics against Christianity. In his anonymously published pamphlet “The Searching for Light and Right” (1782), the Berlin writer August Wilhelm Cranz responded to Mendelssohn’s interventions in the debates unleashed by Dohm,

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32 Mendelssohn, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 199; idem, Jerusalem, 134.
expressing pleasure that Mendelssohn now seemed ready to destroy
the “cornerstone” of Judaism’s “theocratic form of government” and
abandon the coercive system of “Jewish ecclesiastical law.” The
text Cranz was responding to was Mendelssohn’s preface to Marcus
Herz’s translation of Menasseh ben Israel’s Vindication of the Jews, a
text Mendelssohn published in 1782 as an “appendix” to Dohm’s
work. In this piece, Mendelssohn argued, among other things, that
Jewish law in its pure, original form was devoid of coercive power
and entirely compatible with freedom of conscience; there was, for
Mendelssohn, thus absolutely nothing in Judaism that would stand
in the way of citizenship in a modern political order. For Cranz,
nevertheless, Mendelssohn’s attempt to “purify” Jewish law in this
manner amounted to a decisive step toward Christianity. In his pre-
face, Cranz claimed, Mendelssohn was clearly acknowledging that
Judaism was a system of “armed ecclesiastical law,” and one that
could never be purified or modernized to become compatible with
freedom of conscience. In his open letter to Mendelssohn, Cranz
offered the following speculation:

Perhaps you have now come closer to the faith of the Christians,
having torn yourself from the servitude of iron churchly bonds, and
having commenced teaching the liberal system of a more rational
worship of God, which constitutes the true character of the Christian
religion, thanks to which we have escaped coercion and burdensome
ceremonies, and thanks to which we no longer link the true worship of
God either to Samaria or Jerusalem, but see the essence of religion,
in the words of our teacher, wherever the true adorers of God pray
in spirit and in truth.

In Cranz’s scenario here, Christianity emancipates itself from the
“servitude” of Judaism’s “iron churchly bonds,” instituting a “liberal”
and “more rational” worship of God that marks the antithesis of
Judaism’s geographical fixation on Jerusalem and the ancient Orient.
Quoting John 4:23, Cranz casts Jesus not as a Jew but as the teacher
who emancipates human beings from the bondage of Mosaic

33 [August Wilhelm Cranz], “Das Forschen nach Licht und Recht,” in Mendels-
son, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 77–78.
34 See Hess, Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity, 105–112.
35 Mendelssohn, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 81. Mendelssohn quotes this passage
verbatim, with one small omission, in Jerusalem (Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 153–154);
translation here according to Arkush’s Jerusalem translation, 86–87, except for the pas-
sage not reproduced in Jerusalem.
law, the figure who overcomes the Oriental specificity of Judaism to
inaugurate a rational, liberal, and universal religion for the world.
Viewed in this framework, Mendelssohn’s call for the purification
of Judaism has to mark a step toward Christianity, for in preaching
a religion of love and noncoercion that overcomes the rigid legal
system Orientalists find in Judaism, Mendelssohn is doing nothing
less than following the example of the founder of Christianity. In
this context, it is Jesus’ emancipation from Judaism that gives the
modern state its model for freedom of conscience.

Mendelssohn responded directly to Cranz in Jerusalem, presenting
Judaism, not surprisingly, as the antithesis of the primitive legal system
of “iron churchly bonds” whose historical mission was exhausted
by its prefiguration of Jesus’ emancipatory message. Quoting Cranz
back to himself, he placed himself in the center of contemporary
debates over Christian origins and the historical Jesus. Judaism, he
claimed, constitutes the indispensable foundation for Christianity,
and as such, its status in modernity has to be more than that of a
historical curiosity. As the basis for Christianity, Judaism has enduring
value of its own, and its continued existence is actually essential to
Christianity:

If it be true that the cornerstones of my house are dislodged, and
the structure threatens to collapse, do I act wisely if I remove my
belongings from the lower to the upper floor for safety? Am I more
secure there? Now Christianity, as you know, is built upon Judaism,
and if the latter falls, it must necessarily collapse with it into one heap
of ruins. You say that my conclusions undermine the foundation of
Judaism, and you offer me the safety of your upper floor; must I not
suppose that you mock me?36

In arguing against ecclesiastical law and for liberty of conscience in
his preface to Menasseh ben Israel, then, Mendelssohn was not merely
laying forth the spirit of Judaism in its original pristine form. He was
also presenting his vision of a purified Judaism as the foundation
stone of Christianity, stressing the extent to which Christianity is
itself historically and essentially derived from Judaism. Challenging
Cranz, who celebrated Jesus’ emancipation from Judaism as a primal
moment of modernity, Mendelssohn presents Christianity as a mere

36 Mendelssohn, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 154; idem, Jerusalem, 87.
addendum to Judaism, a religion built on Judaism that still relies on its original foundation.

But what exactly does Christianity build on its Jewish foundation? Mendelssohn insists that Judaism is not a revealed religion but a “revealed legislation” entirely compatible with rational religion, and it is precisely this harmonious coexistence of revelation and reason that Christianity betrays in its doctrinal departure from its parent religion. Indeed, the “characteristic difference” between Judaism and Christianity, he claims, is that whereas the revealed legislation of Judaism lays forth rules of conduct—“laws, commandments, ordinances, rules of life, instruction in the will of God as to how they should conduct themselves in order to attain temporal and eternal felicity”—Christianity prescribes doctrines, truths, or dogmas necessary for salvation. Unlike Christianity, Judaism allows Jews and human beings all over the globe to arrive at the eternal truths of religion through the power of reason. “According to the concepts of true Judaism, all the inhabitants of the earth are destined to felicity; and the means of attaining it are as widespread as mankind itself.”

With its insistence on the universality of the original revelation it ascribes to Jesus, however, Christianity betrays the tolerance that is its Jewish heritage, instituting religious dogma that seeks to displace both the diverse manifestations of global religion and the universality of rational religion. It is, Mendelssohn implies, thus not Judaism but Christianity that uses “iron churchly bonds,” prescribing beliefs and dogmas that stand in the way of human beings’ natural proclivity toward rational religious inquiry. As a supplement to Judaism, Christianity always seeks to supplant Judaism and all other religions, and it does so by sending missionaries to the “two Indies” to bring them a “gospel without which they can … live neither virtuously nor happily,” to “bring them a message which, in their circumstances and state of knowledge, they can neither rightly comprehend nor properly utilize.”

Presented in this manner, it makes sense that Christianity should seek to discredit that religion that is its historical foundation. Indeed, denigration of Judaism seems in this context just as natural as colonial expansion. Both are means of realizing Christianity’s universality

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37 Idem, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 156–157; idem, Jerusalem, 89–90.
38 Idem, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 161; idem, Jerusalem, 94.
39 Idem, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 161; idem, Jerusalem, 94.
and legitimating its originality; both serve to establish its absolute priority over Judaism and all other religions. For Christianity, the question of its historical relation to Judaism is thus always potentially explosive, one Mendelssohn deals with in the remainder of *Jerusalem* by repositioning the question of Christian origins within a sketch of Jewish history. Let us consider, for instance, how Mendelssohn presents what he calls the “basic outlines of ancient, original Judaism”:

Although the divine book that we received through Moses is, strictly speaking, meant to be a book of laws containing ordinances, rules of life and prescriptions, it also includes, as is well known, an inexhaustible treasure of rational truths and religious doctrines which are so intimately connected with the laws that they form but one entity. All laws refer to, or are based upon, eternal truths of reason, or remind us of them, and rouse us to ponder them. Hence, our rabbis rightly say: the laws and doctrines are related to each other, like body and soul. ... The experience of many centuries also teaches that this divine law book has become, for a large part of the human race, a source of insight from which it draws new ideas, or according to which it corrects old ones. ... [L]aws cannot be abridged. In them everything is fundamental; and in this regard we may rightly say: to us, all words of Scripture, all of God’s commandments and prohibitions are fundamental. Should you, nevertheless, want to obtain their quintessence, listen to how that greater teacher of the nation, Hillel the Elder, who lived before the destruction of the second Temple, conducted himself in this matter. A heathen said: “Rabbi, teach me the entire law while I am standing on one foot!” Shammasi, whom he had previously approached with the same unreasonable request, had dismissed him contemptuously; but Hillel, renowned for his imperturbable composure and gentleness, said: “Son, love thy neighbor as thyself. This is the text of the law; all the rest is commentary.”

This passage rehearses Mendelssohn’s well-known argument that Mosaic law helps lead Jews—and others—toward the truths of rational religion, truths which are resistant to codification in “symbolic books” or “articles of faith” as practiced by Christianity. But Mendelssohn also claims for Mosaic law a special position in the overarching history of religion here, highlighting once again the way in which Judaism serves as the foundation for Christianity. Undermining the claim that the commandment of neighborly love marks an innovation of Christianity, he presents neighborly love as the soul

41 Idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8, 167; idem, *Jerusalem*, 100.
of Mosaic Judaism, a Jewish principle of conduct that Jews began to disseminate among non-Jews before the birth of Jesus. In this context, Jesus does not preach a religion of love that overcomes the coercive system of Mosaic law. The founder of Christianity figures here as but a latter-day Hillel; like Hillel, Jesus works within Mosaic law to teach the original essence of ancient Judaism.

In many ways, however, Mendelssohn’s Jesus does more than echo Hillel. In Jerusalem, Jesus disseminates the doctrine of neighborly love in a particular historical context, one that underscores Mendelssohn’s own concerns with fixing the boundaries between religion and politics and reconceptualizing Judaism as a religion devoid of all coercive power. For Mendelssohn, speaking of Judaism as a system of “ecclesiastical law” as Cranz does is blatantly anachronistic; in its inception, the “Mosaic constitution” was not “a hierocracy, an ecclesiastical government, a priestly state, [or] a theocracy,” but a form of politics that has existed only once in the history of the world, a form of politics that did not yet even know the separation between church and state. Like any politics, of course, the Mosaic constitution was not without coercive power, but following Mendelssohn’s own political norms, it always punished actions alone; never did it seek to control the realm of conscience. Ancient Israel was thus not ruled by the brute force of ecclesiastical law; indeed, the “king” of the Mosaic commonwealth was God himself, who consistently showed not his wrath but his benevolence, love, and grace to the ancient Israelites. For Mendelssohn here, however, the political dimensions of ancient Judaism are of limited significance for modernity. What matters most about Judaism’s original existence as a political commonwealth is its historical degeneration and, subsequently, its ability to be transformed and purified into a religion devoid of temporal power. Judaism, it seems, does have a history that manifests significant development, and this history needs to be told.

Already in the days of the prophet Samuel, Mendelssohn points out, the Israelites began to demand a human king, and this shift began to disrupt the original unity between state and religion. As a result, a conflict of duties between religion and politics gradually became possible, a situation that was exacerbated by the destruction

42 Idem, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 196; idem, Jerusalem, 131.
43 Idem, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 187–188; idem, Jerusalem, 122–123.
of the Temple and the suspension of all those aspects of the law that were national in intent:

The civil bonds of the nation were dissolved; religious offenses were no longer crimes against the state; and the religion, as religion, knows of no punishment, no other penalty than the one the remorseful sinner voluntarily imposes on himself. It knows of no coercion, uses only the staff [called] gentleness, and affects only mind and heart.44

Once Judaism no longer exists as a politics, the pristine essence of Judaism as a religion desperately needs to be clarified, and it is here that Jesus enters on the scene:

But let one follow history through all sorts of vicissitudes and changes, through many good and bad, God-fearing and godless regimes, down to that sad period in which the founder of the Christian religion gave this cautious advice: Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s. Manifest opposition, a collision of duties! The state was under foreign dominion, and received its orders from foreign gods, as it were, while the native religion still survived, retaining a part of its influence on civil life. Here is demand against demand, claim against claim. “To whom shall we give? Whom shall we obey?” Bear both burdens—went the advice—as well as you can; serve two masters with patience and devotion. Give to Caesar, and give to God too! To each his own, since the unity of interests is now destroyed.45

In citing Matt 22:32 here, Mendelssohn is not merely speaking the language of the dominant culture and using an example with which Christian authorities will be able to identify.46 Echoing Spinoza, who presented Jesus’ teachings as moral doctrines distinct from the laws of the state, Mendelssohn appropriates Jesus as a Jewish theorist of the separation of church and state. For Mendelssohn here, however—and this marks a departure from Spinoza—the “founder of the Christian religion” is a Jew who purifies the “native religion” of Roman Palestine into its purely religious aspects and sets it in a clear relationship to politics as something external to Judaism. Matt 22:32 represents thus not the beginning of a new religion but the crystallization of the purely religious elements of Judaism,

44 Idem, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 195–196; idem, Jerusalem, 130.
46 Note the contrast to Altmann, who argues in his notes to Jerusalem that Mendelssohn here is merely using an “example … which Christian rulers will respect.” See Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 235n.
the end of the degeneration of the original Mosaic constitution and the beginning of Jewish religious regeneration.

For Cranz, Jesus’ abrogation of the law marked a primal moment of modernity, the very model for freedom of conscience. For Mendelssohn, Jesus also sets up political norms, but he does so working entirely within Judaism, and without ever releasing Jews from the law:

Jesus of Nazareth was never heard to say that he had come to release the House of Jacob from the law. Indeed, he said, in express words, rather the opposite; and, what is still more, he himself did the opposite. Jesus of Nazareth himself observed not only the law of Moses but also the ordinances of the rabbis; and whatever seems to contradict this in the speeches and acts ascribed to him appears to do so only at first glance. Closely examined, everything is in complete agreement not only with Scripture, but also with the tradition. If he came to remedy entrenched hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness, he surely would not have given the first example of sanctimoniousness and authorized, by example, a law which should be abrogated and abolished. Rather, the rabbinic principle evidently shines forth from his entire conduct as well as the conduct of his disciples in the early period. He who is not born into the law need not bind himself to the law; but he who is born into the law must live according to the law, and die according to the law. If his followers, in later times, thought differently and believed they could release from the law also those Jews who accepted their teaching, this surely happened without his authority.  

Mendelssohn deploys the figure of Jesus here to authorize the continued existence of Judaism and challenge triumphant narratives of Christian supersessionism. In his review of Jerusalem in his Oriental and Exegetical Library, not surprisingly, Michaelis took issue with this passage, disagreeing with Mendelssohn’s portrayal of Jesus as an exemplar of the rabbinic principle and reinstating the scenario presented in his Mosaic Law of a clean break between Judaism and Christianity. Challenging Michaelis’s historical containment of Judaism and invoking a picture reminiscent of the Reimarus fragments, Mendelssohn presents both Jesus and his disciples as mere extensions of Jewish tradition. Christianity here is merely something added on to Jesus’ Judaism, a revealed religion constructed after the fact that rewrites and betrays Jesus’ essentially Jewish message.

47 Idem, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 199; idem, Jerusalem, 134.
48 Johann David Michaelis, “Jerusalem,” Orientalische und exegetische Bibliothek 22 (1783), 92–93, quoted according to Altmann’s notes on Jerusalem, in Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 365n.
What, then, is Jesus’ message, and for whom is it ultimately intended? Cranz juxtaposed Judaism’s fixation on the Orient to Christians’ ability to “see the essence of religion, in the words of our teacher, wherever the true adorers of God pray in spirit and in truth.” Mendelssohn responds to this charge by appropriating the words of Jesus to legitimize the particular mission of Judaism to the nations and emphasize the continued relevance of Mosaic law apart from its Oriental culture and climate of origin. Jesus becomes here the spokesman for the Jewish Diaspora:

Give to Caesar, and give to God too! To each his own, since the unity of interests is now destroyed. And even today, no wiser advice than this can be given to the House of Jacob. Adapt yourselves to the customs and the constitution of the land to which you have been removed; but hold fast to the religion of your fathers too. Bear both burdens as well as you can! It is true that, on the one hand, the burden of civil life is made heavier for you on account of the religion to which you remain faithful, and, on the other hand, the climate and the times make the observance of your religious laws in some respects more irksome than they are. Nevertheless, persevere; remain unflinchingly at the post which Providence has assigned to you, and endure everything that happens to you as your lawgiver foretold long ago. In fact, I cannot see how those born into the House of Jacob can in any conscientious manner disencumber themselves of the law. We are permitted to reflect on the law, to inquire into its spirit, and, here and there, where the lawgiver gave no reason, to surmise a reason which, perhaps, depended upon time, place, and circumstances, and which, perhaps, may be liable to change in accordance with time, place, and circumstance—if it pleases the Supreme Lawgiver to make known to us His will on this matter, to make it known in as clear a voice, in as public a manner, and as far beyond all doubt and ambiguity as He did when He gave the law itself. As long as this has not happened, as long as we can point to no such authentic exemption from the law, no sophistry of ours can free us from the strict obedience we owe to the law.49

With his conception of the proper relationship between church and state, Jesus offers Jews the perfect ideology for the age of emancipation, one that upholds Orthodox observance of Jewish ritual law at the same time as it encourages Jews to enter European cultural and political life. Challenging the vision of Judaism as an antiquated legal system inextricably bound to the ancient Near East, Mendelssohn

49 Mendelssohn, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8, 199; idem, Jerusalem, 133.
claims a positive mission for the Jewish Diaspora here, and he does so with the authorization of Jesus himself. In this context, the significance of Mosaic Law clearly cannot be explained in terms of the categories of Michaelis’s biblical scholarship. For Mendelssohn, regarding Mosaic law solely as the product of its time, place, and circumstance of origin fails to account for the ongoing significance ascribed to it by no one less than Jesus himself. In its purified form as articulated by Jesus, Judaism is anything but an “Oriental” legal system that can be juxtaposed to Christian universalism. Challenging the strategy by which Orientalist scholarship seeks to contain Judaism within its view of the ancient Near East, Mendelssohn de-Orientalizes Judaism, presenting it as a religion equally well suited for any place Jews happen to reside in the Diaspora, a religion perfectly compatible with the modern secular state. In presenting the mission of Judaism in this fashion, Mendelssohn obviously calls for a certain degree of cultural and political assimilation. But Mendelssohn here hardly capitulates to the norms of the majority culture. He unsettles, rather, the very opposition between Orient and Occident: Judaism for Mendelssohn is neither strictly Oriental nor European but both—and thus also neither. Jerusalem argues for Jewish emancipation by offering a vision of the Jewish Jesus that is unsettling to contemporary Protestant theological discourse on Judaism and Christianity, a vision of the historical Jesus that seeks to discredit contemporary attempts to reinstate traditional narratives of Christianity’s triumph over the Oriental religion of its alleged founder.

Now clearly, to get back to our original point of departure, Mendelssohn does not make these arguments with up-to-date tools of modern historical research. Nineteenth-century German-Jewish scholars steeped in contemporary historical scholarship may not have cast Mendelssohn as a model, and there was a logic to this position. The keen awareness of the polemical stakes in writing Jewish history that one finds, say, in the work of Abraham Geiger owes little to Mendelssohn when it comes to questions of methodology.  

50 On Geiger, see Heschel, Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus, passim.
But the self-consciousness with which products of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* such as Geiger sought to rewrite the history of Christianity in the mid-nineteenth-century clearly echoes the strategies of that towering eighteenth-century Jewish figure who, they claimed, had little feeling for the value of historical writing. For Mendelssohn, we have seen, does engage explicitly with the political function of contemporary historical scholarship, putting forth a vision of Judaism that both resists its historicist reduction to a product of the ancient Orient and also makes polemical use of the strategies of historicism against Christianity. If contemporaries unsettled by the Reimarus fragments cast them as a “Jewish” offensive undertaken against Christianity and the divinity of Jesus, Mendelssohn seems to have willingly occupied this subversive position, and done so self-consciously, using a vision of the historical Jesus to support his own arguments for Judaism’s claim to modernity and its central role in the history of the West.

Mendelssohn, again, was hardly a budding historian in the making, but he clearly perceived the power of historical writing in shaping cultural memory. With his *Jerusalem* he created if not a memorable work of Jewish history, then certainly a powerful form of Jewish counter-memory, one that engaged directly with contemporary historicist treatments of Judaism and Christianity alike. At the same time as he resisted historicism in an effort to salvage Judaism for modernity, he displayed a masterful ability to make use of the sort of historical master narratives so popular among Lessing, Dohm, and so many others of his peers, forging an alternative history of Western civilization with Judaism as its very core. Writing as a Jew, Mendelssohn did not rest content to be an object of civic improvement; he sought, rather, in an act of political self-empowerment, to set the terms for emancipation himself by staking out a specifically Jewish claim to the power of history itself.
During the nineteenth century, European nation-states demanded the Jews’ religious, cultural, and political transformation in exchange for civic liberties. Viewing the national as the realm of cultural interaction, production, and contestation has underlined the tortuous, conflicted process of the Jewish minority’s integration and self-assertion within the emerging nation-states. Yet at the dawn of modernity, Jewish Diaspora communities grew out of temporal and spatial networks that the nation-states absorbed only in a very limited fashion. As Stuart Hall has observed, for diasporic communities, memories about the past homeland and the interaction between overlapping communities have a decisive impact upon their formation and maintenance.¹

In contrast to European national historians, who, to a large extent, dictated, shaped, and controlled the image of their national pasts as an element in the process of nation-building, the task of redefining Jewish history and identities was less centered in specific institutions and locations, and took shape rather within transnational spaces of communication and exchange. Whereas nineteenth-century German historians chronicled and celebrated Germany’s unification as the culmination of a centuries-long struggle under the leadership of Prussia, Jewish historians in Germany more often composed local community histories and crafted a transnational geographical and cultural space in which they placed the historical agents that shaped

the Jewish past. Their research perspective investigated interactions and entanglements that transcended the boundaries of nation and nation-state.²

The proliferation of modern Jewish historiography during the nineteenth century across national and cultural boundaries facilitated the refashioning of a common past and the imagining and maintaining of relations with other Jewish communities. The process of reception and adaptation at the same time created distinct Jewish histories within existing nation-states, when, at the end of the nineteenth century, new research agendas emerged in Germany, France, England, and America. Nevertheless, the formation of “nationalized” Jewish heritages continued to be enmeshed in a transnational context. Mutual influence played an essential role in constituting the different heritages.

Mirroring the interconnected modes of production, the historians, despite their best efforts at times, created histories of Jewish communities that constantly transgressed cultural and political boundaries. As Jewish historians discovered their traditions and mythical ancestors as co-constitutive to the national heritages, they placed the history of their communities in the context of histories of exchange, contacts, displacement, and migration. For these historians, combining local, national, and transnational concepts envisioned the Jews’ heritage in shifting but interconnected realms.

Confronted with emerging European nationalism, scholars of Wissenschaft des Judentums countered the narrow confines of German nationalism by adopting a global perspective in their writing. Anticipating calls for the transnational perspective on national histories, during the 1820s, the leading figures of the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden (Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews) took Europe as their point of reference instead of Germany.

Responding to the predicament of delayed emancipation in the Germanic lands, the Verein failed to make Germany a focal point for its scholarly investigation. Nine years to the day after Prussia’s emancipation edict of March 11, 1812, Eduard Gans assumed the presidency of the Verein and delivered a programmatic speech in which he postulated that one would have to clarify “what is the present Europe” and “who are the Jews.” Insofar as members of the Verein adopted a European perspective, they effectively created a transnational frame of reference.

During this time, Jews also embraced the currents of cultural renewal and religious reform within the parameters of the cities and regions they inhabited and expressed their German patriotism and their sense of Jewishness within these local spaces. They articulated the relation between Jews and Germans through local cultures. For example, in 1826, the first public synagogue in Munich was inaugurated in the presence of King Ludwig I of Bavaria. A commemorative coin showcased on one side, the synagogue’s façade and on the other, an inscription that thanked the Bavarian rulers. A dedicated Torah shield featured two reclining lions of Judah as well as Henry the Lion, recognized as the founder of Munich, together with oak and palm branches, representing “Germanism” and Judaism. The branches underscore the belief in the compatibility of Judaism with German traditions, viewed through the prism of Bavaria and its rulers Maximilian I and Ludwig I. The celebration thus fused local patriotism and Jewish tradition with German nationalism.

This mediation of Jewish and German traditions through local cultures remained a powerful form of Jewish self-understanding in historical narratives during the nineteenth century, alongside a transnational perspective that governed the more comprehensive research disseminated by scholars of Wissenschaft des Judentums. Isaak Markus Jost, the first author of a comprehensive history of the Jews, entitled Geschichte der Israeliten (History of the Israelites, 1820–1829) initially distanced himself from the term “nation,” but nevertheless could not do without it. During the 1830s and 1840s, scholars like

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5 Isaak M. Jost, Geschichte der Israeliten seit der Zeit der Maccabäer bis auf unsere Tage nach den Quellen bearbeitet, 9 vols. (Berlin: Schlesinger, 1820–1828), vol. 1, vii–vi; idem,
Julius Fürst contended that, as world citizens, Jews could not neglect the non-European history of the Jews.6

This transnational orientation did not override the Jews’ attachment to Germany. Jews who fought for emancipation professed their loyalty to the German nation as a means to overcome the slow progress of legal improvements across Germany’s regions. Expressions of German nationalism served the ongoing fight for civil and social emancipation during the 1830s, when Gabriel Riesser declared, “We are not immigrants; we are native born …. We are either German or we are homeless.”7

Nevertheless, multiple expressions of belonging maintained their concurrent importance and governed the deliberations at the rabbinical conference at Brunswick in 1844. Participants emphatically proclaimed their allegiance to the German nation and underscored their commitment to a cosmopolitan orientation. They solidified the idea of Jewish universalism at a subsequent meeting in Frankfurt, when religious reformers reshaped traditional messianic expectations into the “mission theory” that became a cornerstone of Jewish historiography. As Ludwig Philippson declared at the conference, “Every nation has its mission in history. The Jews have their mission as well: they are the people of religion.”8 Thus, even during this period of heightened nationalism in the Vormärz, expressions of the German Jews’ patriotism was balanced by their cosmopolitan leanings and declarations of their enduring role in world history.

Even in the midst of the debates in the Frankfurt National Assembly of 1848, various democratic deputies coupled their support for a centralized nation-state with the admission that a certain level of regional diversity represented an important facet of


8 Protokolle der ersten Rabbiner-Versammlung, abgehalten zu Braunschweig (Brunswick: Vieweg, 1844), 61; and Protokolle und Aktenstücke der zweiten Rabbiner-Versammlung, abgehalten zu Frankfurt am Main (Frankfurt am Main: E. Ullmann, 1845), 74.
the new nation. In the aftermath of the failed revolution in 1848, the nationalist orientation lost significantly in its appeal, and Jews had to wait until the 1860s and even the 1870s before their legal emancipation was fully complete. In the meantime, the protracted battle for emancipation proceeded on the local and regional levels. Even Gabriel Riesser, who turned in despair to national politics during the 1840s, retreated again to the local level after 1849. Hamburg became again the realm in which the Jewish “national Hamburger” (Nationalhamburger) operated. The completion of Jewish emancipation in the 1860s confirmed the Jews’ patriotic support for their Hanseatic homeland.

This regional grounding of the Jews’ association with the German people, however, did not preclude the infatuated expression of Germans’ and Jews’ elective affinity during the course of the Schiller festivities in 1859. It was in particular the founder of neo-Orthodoxy, Samson Raphael Hirsch, who cast Schiller as the pure embodiment of German and Jewish cultures. In as much as the German and Jewish traditions appeared to fuse in Hirsch’s passionate celebration of Schiller, other contributors like Riesser celebrated simultaneously the national and universal in the poet.

These celebrations thus offered a venue in which Jews articulated their relationship to German culture, the idea of the nation-state, and universalism, while on the level of the politics of emancipation, the focus remained local and regional. Quite characteristic for the period, on the occasion of the dedication of the Stuttgart synagogue on May 3, 1861, Rabbi Dr. Joseph Maier concluded

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his special sermon with this homage to his home town: “Yes, hail to thee, beloved Stuttgart, our Jerusalem!” Individual cities and regions featured prominently in historical research, and a plethora of community studies appeared from the 1860s onwards. Jewish communities engaged in a virtual competition to demonstrate that their roots reached back to antiquity and the much-celebrated Middle Ages, widely seen as the birthplace of modern Germany.

Alongside this local research, between the 1850s and 1870s, Heinrich Graetz composed a history of the Jewish diaspora that went beyond German Jewry. As Graetz argued, the world-historical role of Jews and Judaism manifested itself not within the framework of national histories, but in Jewish history as a whole on the eve of Germany’s unification. In contrast to Gans, however, the relationship between Jews and Europe was reversed. Quoting extensively from Heinrich Heine’s *Shakespeares Mädchen und Frauen* (Shakespeare’s Girls and Women, 1839), Graetz turned the relationship between Judaism and Europe on its head:

> The rest of Europe, too, raises itself to the level of the Jews. I say raises itself—for even in the beginning the Jews bore within them the modern principles which only now are visibly unfolding among the nations of Europe.

To be sure, Graetz’s account of modern history was to some extent idiosyncratic and contested, but his explication of the enduring Jewish mission was widely shared. The universalism of the Jews’ particularism, however, did not impinge on their profound German patriotism. During the wars leading up to the German unification, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* arduously counted the number of

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Jews who served and earned Iron Crosses and memorialized their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the nation.18

The creation of a nation-state, with its juridical machinery, a centralized administration, and new governmental institutions and associations, fundamentally altered the power of national identifications. Berlin rapidly became the new center of German-Jewish life and culture after Germany’s unification had also universalized Jewish emancipation. Yet the nation-state that Bismarck created was little more than a federation of largely sovereign states, and, even under Wilhelm II, Prussia’s political dominance did not dampen the strength of regional cultures and identities.19 The integrating power of the state meant that individual Jewish communities had to confront the challenge of replacing their existing regional political alliances with a new loyalty to the Kaiserreich. In response to these expectations, several of the southern Jewish communities expressed anxiety over their potential domination by Prussia and its Jewish communities as early as 1871. Tensions between regional communities and Berlin continued to destabilize attempts to unite Jews in national organizations.20

Germany’s unification affected the development of Jewish scholarship when German-Jewish history acquired an unprecedented importance in the face of renewed challenges during the late 1870s and early 1880s. In the midst of what emerged as a powerful anti-Semitic movement, Heinrich von Treitschke, one of Germany’s foremost historians of this period, presented Germany’s recent history as culminating in the foundation of the Kaiserreich under the auspices of Prussia. While Treitschke had the reputation of a liberal who rejected theological and racial attacks upon the Jews, he constructed

18 Gedenkbuch an den deutsch-französischen Krieg von 1870–1871 für die deutschen Israeliten (Bonn: Selbstverlag der AZJ, 1871); “Gedenkbuch an den deutsch-französischen Krieg von 1870–1871 für die deutschen Israeliten,” AZJ 35 (1871), No. 25, 495–496.


the image of an “international Judaism” that obstructed the ideal of German unity.21

In the ensuing wide-ranging public debate of the so-called Berliner Antisemitismusstreit, Jewish commentators like Moritz Lazarus seized on the model of regional diversity to forge a framework for a multiplicity of German traditions that allowed for the assertion of Jewish particularisms. To him, the Volk was not an ethnic homogenous entity but an intellectual and cultural construction based on a common language. By renegotiating the concept of nationhood, Lazarus’s defense, which was unanimously praised in the Jewish press, put forward a vision of the German society that radically differed from the view held by many German liberals insofar as it promoted cultural diversity. Lazarus thus overtly placed Jews alongside other regional German minorities. Yet at the same time, he defended Jewish particularism when he called upon Jews to preserve the “peculiarity they possessed as a tribe and the inherited virtue and wisdom they possessed as a religion.”22

The desire to inscribe the Jews into a postulated pluralism of German regional diversity once more fashioned them as a group with a heritage and culture that crossed national boundaries. A similar tendency also came to the fore when the Deutsch-Israelitische Gemeindebund launched an initiative to alter the public’s perception of Judaism. On the occasion of Mendelssohn’s 150th birthday, the Gemeindebund called for the commemoration of the Jewish Enlightener. The 1879 celebration of Mendelssohn’s 150th birthday apostrophized and memorialized him in tandem with Lessing to represent the German-Jewish symbiosis. As the many contributions indicate, Mendelssohn became the prism through which German Jews illustrated, above all, their place within the German society.23

Notwithstanding the more narrow focus of the German-Jewish past, the Gemeindebund called for the establishment of new Mendelssohn societies to “awaken and maintain an interest for Judaism and its noble ideas, and a feeling of unity and community . . . among our younger generation.”24 Thus the celebration of Mendelssohn that otherwise illustrated Jews’ affinity for Germany facilitated the recollection of the Jewish past in general.

The Gemeindebund also established the Historische Commission in 1885 that came to represent the first concerted effort to inscribe the history of the Jews into the annals of the German past. The Commission’s announcement explained that most historians lacked the ability to understand German-Jewish history as an integral part of German history. Despite the obvious political aspect of this initiative, the Commission failed to secure sufficient support. Notwithstanding the communities’ reluctance, the organization got off the ground, and following the model of Monumenta Germaniae Historica, published valuable sources during its few years of existence. None of the Commission’s activities, however, found a wide reception, and toward the end of 1892, Breslau announced that the organization would disband.25

The communities’ refusal to support the Historische Commission highlighted the fractious relations between individual communities and the Jewish institutions in Berlin, as well as the tensions between competing local, national, and transnational historical narratives. These strains were evident when, during the Kaiserreich, the collection and preservation of documents became an act of filial piety. Following upon these sentiments, Eugen Täubler founded the Gesamtarchiv der deutschen Juden (Central Archive of the German Jews) in October 1905 with the support of the Deutsch-Israelitische Gemeindebund, the B’nai B’rith, and the financial assistance of several larger Jewish communities like Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, Breslau, and Hamburg.26

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25 Roemer, Between History and Faith, 95–96.
26 “Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Gesamtdarchivs der deutschen Juden,” Mitteilungen des Gesamtdarchivs der deutschen Juden 3 (1911), 55–84.
However, the new perspective inaugurated by the Gesamtarchiv in Berlin faced the difficulty of circumscribing the history of German Jewry within a national past. The very definition of the subject matter proved elusive. Even before the Gesamtarchiv, Moritz Lazarus’s programmatic 1894 speech “Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man jüdische Geschichte und Literatur?” (What Is and to What End Do We Study Jewish History and Literature?) sought to address these difficulties. Alluding to Schiller’s lecture “Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?” (What Is and to What End Do We Study Universal History?) at Jena in 1789, Lazarus did not engage in a debate regarding the universal significance of the history of the Jews. For him, this history had ended with the destruction of Bethar, the last Jewish stronghold in the war against Rome, and thereafter, only Prussian, German, or French history existed. Lazarus contended that only a history of Judaism continued to exist, instead of the history of the Jews.27

Underlying Lazarus’s concept was the realization that existing concepts in historical study, such as state, nation, or church, did not apply to the case of the Jews in Germany, a view that also governed Täubler’s reflections. With the foundation of the Gesamtarchiv, Täubler aimed to incorporate local histories into the German and Jewish pasts. He suggested analyzing the Jewish past in Germany according to concepts of settlement, assimilation, and particularism. The history of the Jews in Germany would be studied as a historical experience shaped and influenced by German and Jewish history.28

Täubler’s work confronted the tenuous and conflicting relationship between German-Jewish heritage and local tradition when it came time to move archival collections from the communities to the central archive in Berlin. The Jewish historian Martin Philippson noted that several communities refused to hand over their archives out of an “unjustified particularism and local self-consciousness.” Täubler branded such opposition to the Gesamtarchiv as “poorly thought out local patriotism.”29 The friction between the assertion of localism and the impetus for centralization indicates that the work of archives involved more than the collection of neglected material.

29 Ibid., 60 and 65.
In attempting to unify local collections, the Gesamtarchiv aimed to demonstrate the close ties between Jews and Germans on the national level.

The ascent of Berlin’s Jewish community occasioned the formulation of a new research agenda. In a city that according to Ludwig Geiger was marked neither by a historical legacy of disgrace nor the dignity of other German cities, establishing these new research institutions signaled the goal of transferring historical remnants and research to the new center of Jewish life.30 Germany’s unification brought about a new sense of belonging, while, at the same time, the military conflict that preceded it strained the relationship between French and German-Jewish scholarship. This clash between Abraham Geiger and the emigrant German-Jewish scholar Joseph Derenbourg during the Franco-Prussian War made these tensions evident. French and German patriotism not only widened the gap between the two scholarly camps, but French-Jewish scholars of the Third Republic saw themselves in opposition to their German counterparts.31

National conflict threatened to fragment Jewish solidarities and unravel the fashioning of a Jewish past that crossed cultural and political boundaries. Conflicts erupted particularly over Alsace-Lorraine, when, in the spring of 1871, Ludwig Philippson welcomed Jewish coreligionists in Alsace and German Lorraine. While he accepted that Germany’s conquest was not particularly welcomed, he felt compelled to point out that France had been the aggressor in the last war and that the rights of nationalities had not been violated by the annexation in light of the essential German character of these territories. In particular, the Jews in these regions were intimately related to German Jews, Philippson claimed.32 In contrast, Isaac Levy, the Grand Rabbi of Haut-Rhin, unfailingly preached French

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patriotism in the synagogues of Alsace and Lorraine. He compared Germany’s conquest of these territories to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile. Levy, who opted for France and relocated to Paris, expressed the hope that others would join his protest to prove the enduring love for the French fatherland amongst the Alsatian Jews.

Within this charged atmosphere, scholarship acquired an immediate political function. To reaffirm French pre-eminence in the wake of military defeat, the world exhibition in Paris in 1878 showcased its culture and people. The inclusion of Jewish ceremonial objects featured items from the private collection of the Alsatian Isaac Strauss, while the *Archives israélites* documented in its pages French Jews’ achievements, contributions, and, above all, their patriotism. The French-Jewish orientalist, James Darmesteter, believed that a nation leading in the sciences would also dominate all other areas. For this reason, Darmsteter reminded his readers in 1883 of the contributions French scholars had made to the development of Oriental studies and described the advancement in this field as a military contest between the German and French scholarly communities.

Infused with a similar national rhetoric, in 1879, the founders of the *Société des Études Juives* (Society for the Study of Jews) publicized their goal to pursue “patriotic interests” in an attempt to create a “French library of Jewish science and literature.” Accordingly, the *Revue des Études Juives* sought to “relieve France of its inferior position” in comparison to German-Jewish scholarship. In line with this nationalistic vision, Théodore Reinach, secretary of the *Société des Études Juives* and son of the German-Jewish banker Hermann Reinach, declared the inclusion of the Jews of Alsace and Lorraine

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as natural for a society “French in language and at heart.”

Motivated by similar patriotic sentiments, Léon Cahun, who was born in Haguenau in 1841, romanticized Alsatian Jewish life in his *La vie juive* (1886). In Cahun’s partly nostalgic portrayal of local Jewish customs and festivities, he voiced hope that French troops would recapture Alsace, even if this required the killing of German Jews on the walls of Strasbourg. The simultaneous explosion of studies on the history of the Jews in Alsace was undoubtedly motivated and marked by the contested status of this region in the aftermath of the German unification.

The onset of anti-Semitism in France, particularly in the writings of Eduard Drumont and the Dreyfus affair, ushered in a plethora of publications of chronicles of past persecution, ritual murder accusations, and charges of usury. However, as Paula Hyman has noted, the political role of Jewish scholarship during this period did not, with a few notable exceptions, lead to studies of the history of French Jewry. Instead of detailed historical studies, French-Jewish scholars like James Darmesteter equated the biblical prophetic traditions with 1789 and the French Republic, whose ideals they defended in the name of universal rights and the Jewish tradition. As pointedly stated by Isidore Cahen, the French Revolution was the “second


law of Sinai.” Moreover, French scholars investigated the Jewish past from a universal and comparative religious and ethnographic perspective. They became enthralled with documenting the Jewish presence in the French medieval landscape and chronicling the mutual interaction between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim folk cultures. Mirroring similar developments in Germany, the convergence of French ideals with Jewish customs articulated a sense of a French universal tradition that became equated with the Jewish heritage.

In Britain, too, the contested status of nationalism, universalism, and Jewish self-understanding strengthened the Jews’ interest in their past. In the early 1880s, following recent challenges to Benjamin Disraeli’s patriotism, Goldwin Smith, an Oxford-educated professor of English literature and constitutional history at Cornell, published an article in *Nineteenth Century* that contained glaring misrepresentations of medieval Jewish history. Smith, who reviewed the German anti-Semitic movement, critically analyzed contemporary Jewish life and culture within a larger survey of Jewish history in general and the Anglo-Jewish past in particular. In response, Jews in England highlighted the need for historical studies to rebut these challenges.

The existing research produced in France and Germany in particular provided an additional impetus to the study of the Anglo-Jewish past. In 1886, the historian Lucien Wolf, who was instrumental in fostering the study of Anglo Jewry, referred to French-Jewish and German-Jewish historians who had done research on the history of the Jews in the British Isles and had expressed their dismay at the prospect of ever receiving “from English Jews any worthy historical account of themselves.” Eager to remove this blemish from British Jewry, Wolf argued for the creation of an Anglo-Jewish historical association on par with existing Continental organizations that furthered the study of their communities.

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Consequently, an unprecedented interest in the Jewish past manifested itself in England. Whereas Heinrich Graetz, concluding his lecture at the Anglo-Jewish exhibition in 1887 in the Royal Albert Hall in London, marveled at the prospect of a Jewish academy that would engage in a critical study of Jewish religion, philosophy, and history, many Anglo Jews were concerned with a more narrowly defined research agenda.48 If the founders of the Jewish Historical Society of England cited Graetz’s address as the Society’s inspiration, they artfully veiled the fact that their association operated in various ways in opposition to Graetz and the German-Jewish community of scholars.49

Organized by the folklorist Joseph Jacobs and Wolf, the Anglo-Jewish historical exhibition collected material to “facilitate the compilation of a history of the Jews in England” and to promote the “knowledge of Anglo-Jewish history,” as well as a “deeper interest in its records and relics.”50 The exhibition undoubtedly signaled the beginning of a new scholarly agenda, and the newly inaugurated *Jewish Quarterly Review* called upon Jewish scholars in 1888 to devote attention toward Anglo-Jewish history and to overcome the “discreditable and dangerous” neglect of the study of the Anglo-Jewish past.51 These first initiatives eventually led to the foundation of the Jewish Historical Society of England in 1893 to more permanently sustain an interest in Anglo-Jewish history.52

English Jews not only began to study their past, but as the honorary secretary of the Jewish Historical Society reminded his readers, new research was conducted by scholars “on English soil to [sic] whom England is their home.”53 For the Society, he explained,

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50 *Catalogue of the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition, Royal Albert Hall, 1887* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1887), vii; *Papers Read at the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition, Royal Albert Hall* (London: Jewish Chronicle, 1887); and “Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition,” *Jewish Chronicle* (April 8, 1887), 9–10.
turning to the study of Anglo Jewry represented taking “possession of our rightful inheritance.”

The importance of Englishness as an instrumental element in the construction of an Anglo-Jewish past became even more apparent when, in a separate article, Israel Abrahams explained that historical truth was only attainable if scholars shared their “general Jewish sentiments,” as well as their “local patriotism.” Jewishness and Englishness were thus woven into the fabric of scholarly inquiry and Jewish self-assertion.

During the fin de siècle, the new fascination with the Anglo-Jewish past ignited interest in the Jews’ re-settlement story. In their attempts to amalgamate Jewish and English patriotism, Anglo-Jewish scholars became enchanted with the accounts of resettlement, which they widely celebrated in 1894. These historians did not simply chronicle the readmission process, but strove to establish that Jews had embarked on their resettlement journey with the approval of Oliver Cromwell. At the same time, they emphasized the centrality of Menasseh ben Israel for this task. Establishing Cromwell’s precise role was vital to British Jews, who wholeheartedly subscribed to the liberal reevaluation of him during the second half of the nineteenth century. For them, Cromwell’s greatest accomplishment was the “realisation in practise of the Puritan ideals of freedom of speech and liberty of conscience.” The Jewish Chronicle considered this former chancellor of the exchequer and his Puritanism the “very essence of the English character,” inspired by the Old Testament. Inscribing Anglo-Jewish history into the annals of the British past

54 Ibid., 14.
57 The 1887 exhibition included Rembrandt’s painting of Menasseh ben Israel as well as Menasseh ben Israel’s petitions and correspondence with Oliver Cromwell. See the Catalogue of the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition, items 947–951, part I, section k: Portraits, 47.
thus “judaized” British history, especially when the Chronicle claimed that the “Puritans became the People of the Book.” The Bible was their “charter of freedom,” and the Puritans intended to “translate the aspiration of the Prophets into the actual life of the English people.” The rhetorical convergence of Jewish and English traditions ultimately transformed England into the Holy Land, when the article continued with “Puritans enter[ing] the Council Chamber … [singing] the songs of Zion.”

The fusion of Jewish and national traditions also dominated British Jewry’s public commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the 1656 Whitehall Conference in 1906. Wolf regarded Cromwell and Menasseh ben Israel as the true authors of the conference: “It was their spirit of toleration and justice which invested it with all it had of dignity and usefulness.” In attributing the Whitehall Conference to these two figures, Wolf simultaneously presented them as the originators of modern English history, “standing together in the dawn of English liberty.”

Pride in the Anglo-Jewish heritage and competition with German-Jewish and French-Jewish scholars motivated the emergence of Anglo-Jewish scholarship. The mutual influencing of the different communities of scholars proved to be as important as the anti-Semitic challenges that confronted them. The efforts to forge an Anglo-Jewish heritage thus justified similar developments in the United States that were deployed to dismiss the notion that Jews were latecomers to the American shores and to fend off the revival of anti-Semitism. During the Gilded Age, several immigrant groups scrutinized their past and created resettlement myths. These middle-class immigrants strove to appear as the first, most self-sacrificing, and most genuine Americans, in order to rebuke the reigning nativism that claimed Anglo-Saxons were the sole and true founders of America. As in England, Jews in America had to contend with

59 “The Cromwell Tercentenary,” Jewish Chronicle (April 21, 1899), 17. MP James Bryce continued along these lines when he reminded his audience that Cromwell was moved to grant Jews entry by his “love for the literature of the Old Testament.” See “The Whitehall Conference: Celebrations of the 250th Anniversary,” TJHSE 5 (1902–1905), 275–300, here 283.


Goldwin Smith, who publicized his views in a lengthy article in the *North American Review* that engendered a wide-ranging debate in the American and American-Jewish press.  

Encouraged by the Reform rabbi Bernhard Felsenthal, Cyrus Adler, professor of Semitic studies at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, wrote to American-Jewish leaders and rabbis in the spring of 1892 and proposed the organization of a society for the collection, preservation, and publication of works dealing with the settlement and history of Jews in America. In his invitation, Adler noted that the Anglo-Jewish exhibition had provided the impetus for research on British Jewry and expressed the hope that an American-Jewish historical society would accomplish the same. Shortly thereafter, the American-Jewish Historical Society was founded and, in 1892, its president, a graduate of Columbia Law School and member of the famous New York retailing family, Oscar Straus, stressed that its objective was “to throw an additional ray of light upon the discovery, colonization, and history of our country.” The Society aimed in its formative years to underscore the significance of the Jewish presence in America from the colonial period onwards. Seeking to defend the Jewish status in the United States, the Society countered the claim that Jews had arrived there too late to contribute to the creation of the republic.

Mirroring the Cromwell cult in England, American-Jewish historians strove to demonstrate the Jews’ active participation in the discovery and colonization of America. In an initial letter to the German-Jewish scholar Moritz Kayserling in 1891, Straus noted that it would be most appropriate and of great practical utility if Kayserling could “bring to light the extent to which our race had

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a direct part and share with Columbus in the discovery of our Continent.” If this could be done quickly, it would be the “answer for all time to come to any anti-Semitic tendencies in this country which will doubtlessly come to the surface sooner or later as a result of the large Russian immigration to our country.” During Kayserling’s research trip to Spain in 1892, Straus cheered him on with a telegram that simply stated, “Do not spare any expenses for the accomplishment of your wonderful task.” As the celebration approached, Straus urged Kayserling to publish his preliminary findings in American journals, while at the same time reassuring him that “we must always hold ourselves prepared to find that the result does not fulfill the prospect. I say this much so as not to lead you to feel that I expect too much, but rather that I am prepared for any result.”

As the anniversary was celebrated throughout the United States, Americans attributed to Columbus all the virtues most prized at this time of geographic and industrial expansion, heady optimism, and an unquestionable belief in progress. A century before, Columbus had been the symbol of American promise; now he was the symbol of American success. The Columbus exhibition opened in 1893 in Chicago and outdid both the Philadelphia centennial exhibition in 1876 and the Paris Exposition of 1889 as it displayed the power and energy of great American machines and the productivity of the country’s fields. Whereas Catholics in both America and Europe launched a campaign to canonize Columbus on the grounds that he spread the Christian faith to half of the world, American

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66 Oscar Straus to Moritz Kayserling, December 2, 1891; and Oscar Straus to Kayserling, March 2, 1892, JNUL, Moritz Kayserling Collection, V 894.

67 See the undated telegram of Oscar Straus to Kayserling, May 13, 1892; and Oscar Straus to Kayserling, June 3, 1892, JNUL, Moritz Kayserling Collection, V894.

68 Oscar Straus to Kayserling, June 3, 1892, JNUL, Moritz Kayserling Collection, V894.


70 Bushman, America Discovers Columbus, 175–179; and Wilford, “Columbus and the Labyrinth of History,” 80.
Jews seized the opportunity to link themselves with the nation’s most celebrated hero.

Unfortunately, Kayserling’s publication was not completed until 1894, two years after the Columbus anniversary. Nevertheless, Straus assured the public that the work “will doubtless bring to light the part taken by the Jews in the voyages which led to the discovery of our continent.” For him, the Jews, like the Marranos fleeing Spain and Portugal, were comparable to the Pilgrims in their flight for freedom. With Kayserling’s book still pending, Straus wrote several articles elaborating on the contribution of the Jews to America’s discovery. His conception departed from the reigning view of the American historian Herbert Baxter Adams, who described the discovery as foreordained in Greek philosophy. Like Straus, Kayserling understood the landfall as part of God’s providence, with the events unfolding in relation to the Jewish calendar. On the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av, the national day of sorrow for the destruction of the Temple, half a million Jews left their Spanish homeland. One day later, on Friday, August 3, Columbus sailed off in search of India, thereby discovering the Americas.

According to the newspapers *American Hebrew* and *Deborah*, special Shabbat services were held in New York to mark the beginning of the festivities. Sermons delivered in New York on this occasion in synagogues and temples underscored the providential aspect of Columbus’s expedition by linking the discovery to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. The sermons highlighted the Jewish share in the discovery of America and associated Columbus with the ideals of liberty and freedom, so central to American Jews. At the Reform Temple Emanu-El in New York, the sermon described Columbus

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73 Ibid., 1–2.
as Moses, and thereby turned America into Zion: “America is the promised land because it is the fruition of the world’s hopes and aspirations fostered during thousands of years. Here have been realized the world’s great ideals of a true republic and of civil and religious liberty. This is the Zion from which goes forth the law.”

The infusion of tropes of the original homeland with the new center of Jewish life and culture created a narrative of homecoming that sidelined the traditional view of Jewish exile as a temporary state and the postponement of return. Within these celebrations, America appears as the fulfillment of biblical prophesies and the home of an ambitious Jewish community that asserted its particularism by highlighting its newly fashioned role as the center of modern Jewry. At the same time, the celebration intrinsically linked the American-Jewish experience to the history of Jews in England, Spain, Portugal, and Holland. If the advent of migration represented a rupture in the lives of the new community of migrants, the historical narratives about their origin mediated discontinuity and authenticated Jewish heritages in England and America as compatible with the dominant Anglo-Saxon tradition. The “Jewish” Cromwell, inspired by Jewish traditions, found his equivalent in the postulated participation of Spanish Jews in the discovery of America. These traditions created an ennobling ancestry for the Jewish communities that firmly wove them into the fabric of the respective national histories.

Notwithstanding the unprecedented prevalence of a national perspective in the study of Jewish history in Germany, France, England, and America, the national aspect did not become the sole realm of production. Transnational contacts and exchanges continued to play a major role in the creation of national Jewish cultures. In France, Jewish scholars, infatuated with the French Republic, also strove to provide French Jews with a comprehensive sense of their heritage. To this end, a French translation of Heinrich Graetz’s history of the Jews appeared. For the translator, Graetz belonged neither to Germany nor to Poland, but to all Jews. Anglo-Jewish historians

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employed Heinrich Graetz to bestow significance upon the Anglo-Jewish exhibition and translated Graetz’s text into English. The publication of Lady Katie Magnus’s *Outlines of Jewish History* (1890), the first publication of the newly founded Jewish Publication Society of America, illustrated the ephemeral importance of British Jewry as a model for the formation of an American-Jewish heritage. Originally, Magnus’s work included a brief and rather disparaging reference to American-Jewish history. Yet in the American publication of her work, Cyrus Adler, in conjunction with Bernhard Felsenthal and Henrietta Szold, supplemented it with chapters on American-Jewish history. Likewise, the American version of the English translation of Graetz’s *History of the Jews* included an augmented account of American-Jewish history: Graetz’s original footnote on the American-Jewish past was expanded to one page.

The English, French, German, and American communities invented their past as co-constitutive of the emerging national cultures of their surroundings without restricting their heritages to national boundaries. They engaged with the traditions of the nations and imperial states from the perspective of their universal heritage to assert their cultural and religious differences. For example, the Anglo-Jewish perspective, did not exhaust the ambitions of the organizers who had hosted the Anglo-Jewish exhibition. The Royal Albert Hall showcased the collection of the Alsatian Isaac Strauss as well as other artifacts “illustrating Jewish antiquities of nearly all times and countries.” The incorporation of a significant number of objects about Jews in India, moreover, underlined the imperial infusion of Anglo-Jewish patriotism. Opting for a more regal orientation, the chief rabbi of England, Hermann Adler, explained that the exhibition aimed not only to stimulate interest in the annals

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83 *Catalogue of the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition, Royal Albert Hall* (1887), xxv.
84 Ibid., 44–47.
of the Jews in England, but to acquaint the larger society with “the history of our race in the British Empire.”

Despite the fervent nationalism that powered the fundamental reorientation in Jewish historiography, historical research continued to operate with a multifaceted perspective of the past. In Germany, the study of German Jewry intensified primarily in the study of local communities, and the more wide-ranging research agenda of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* retained its importance. Competing with the German-Jewish school, French scholars, too, devoted themselves to local histories and excelled in the study of Judaism, while comprehensive historical accounts of German and French Jewry maintained comparatively low profiles. In England, where the size of the London community dwarfed other congregations, studies of individual communities remained limited. In contrast, in America, the post–Civil War process that Alan Trachtenberg has called the “incorporation of America” coincided with the rise of preindustrial nostalgia in the face of the homogenizing and leveling power of industrialization. As Michael Kammen has pointed out, local pride was “much more likely to energize the observances that really engaged people; so place-specific activities served as strongest impulse to memory” during this period. Local studies flourished, promoted in no small part by the burgeoning field of tourism, which forged a national image mediated through the depiction of regions and towns. Mirroring this local orientation, Felsenthal, who had been instrumental in the founding of the American-Jewish Historical Society, devoted much of his scholarly energy during this period to Chicago, when he chronicled the lives of celebrated men and women and described the city’s Jewish community, societies, and lodges.

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87 Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America’s Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 189.
At the same time, the formation of hyphenated Jewish heritages created possibilities for new alliances. When the Anglo-Jewish scholar Israel Abrahams described the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the settlement of the Jews in the United States in 1906 as an “English celebration,” English and American Jews viewed themselves as part of an extended English culture. This new understanding bestowed additional significance upon American Jews, who gladly accepted this attribution when they responded, “We are proud to learn that you are willing to claim our celebration as, ‘after all, an English celebration.’”

The invocation of a more comprehensive English tradition that united Anglo and American Jews initially helped legitimize the Jewish community in the New World. Yet this idea should not be taken too far, since both communities inserted themselves into the respective national societies. By crafting the histories of the Jews in England and America, Jewish historians created models of succession that made Anglo and American Jewry heirs to the Continental Jewish experience. Far from viewing their pasts as separated, self-enclosed entities, they appeared as the telos of modern Jewish history. Turning away from the model of historical writing about famous individuals, Wolf in England argued that the study of the Jewish past had to focus on the history of communities, and that the local and national contexts provided clues for the history of Judaism in general. Yet even this attempt at refocusing the Jewish past became attached to a more universal orientation when Wolf noted in the same essay that Anglo-Jewish history was the product of “many converging migrations.”

Joseph Jacobs, the co-organizer of the Anglo-Jewish exhibition, believed that the Anglo-Jewish past encapsulated the whole experience of the Jews in the Diaspora, including expulsion, readmission, and emancipation. For Wolf, too, Anglo-Jewish history was the key to the study of the Jewish past as a whole.

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Pride in the respective Jewish communities charged the work of the national historical association with a desire to venture beyond the national horizon. The quest for a colonial past saw their research progress into transnational trade routes, migration, and settlements. American-Jewish scholars, therefore, chided Lucien Wolf for neglecting existing scholarship, and argued that Cromwell’s mission could not be understood without the impetus from America. These scholars opined that in addition to negotiations about the resettlement of the Jews in England, Cromwell was fixated on the question of employing Jewish merchants in the newly acquired English colonies of Jamaica and Surinam. What Wolf had considered only a side issue in his study of Menassah ben Israel had thus been turned on its head. Wolf indeed already anticipated American-Jewish claims to the resettlement story when he stated that

one of these days some member of the American-Jewish Historical Society might arise and startle us with a theory not less revolutionary.
I picture him coming over here and telling us that we were mistaken in imagining that our community stood in parental relation to that of the United States; that, as a matter of fact, we were a mere offshoot of the American Jewry.

Recognizing these borders crossings between Anglo- and American-Jewish histories, members of the historical societies widened their initially limited research scope. In England, the Historical Society passed new bylaws in 1900 to spur the publication of works on general Jewish history and literature. Similarly, the American society debated the geographic boundaries of its research remit. At the society’s founding meeting, the majority of members opted for a narrowly defined research agenda. Dismayed by the limited programmatic statement, Cyrus Adler was keen to point out that even a narrow focus would have to include an account of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal, the changing fortunes of Jewish life in Poland, as well as an examination into the causes of the German-Jewish Eastern-European migration. At a subsequent meeting

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95 Lucien Wolf, “American Elements in the Re-settlement,” *TJHSE* 3 (1899), 76–100, here 76.
in 1908, a compromise was reached that included the provision to foster research of Jewish history in general, preferably as it related to the American-Jewish history.97

The newly created centers of research thus reinscribed themselves into a transcultural scientific community that researched the Jewish past inside and outside the nation-states. The London-based Jewish Quarterly Review had initially bemoaned in its opening pages the neglect of Anglo-Jewish history. Nevertheless, the publication fostered international research on all aspects of Jewish history. The wide-ranging interests of the journal continued when the periodical began to be published in America, from 1903 onwards. Existing and revitalized memories, networks of contacts, and research agendas were not reduced to the political-cultural boundaries of the nation-states, despite the fervent declaration of national affiliations. Collaboration and translation of vital core literature like Heinrich Graetz’s History of the Jews balanced apparent differences with similarities, as mutually implicated communities of scholars produced Jewish heritages in an entangled and evolving process. Instead of viewing Jewish cultures as fixed and the borders of Jewish studies as defined, they remained throughout the nineteenth century indeterminate and in flux.

The foundation of Jewish associations for historical research in Germany, France, England, and America reflected the anxieties about the unraveling of Jewish identities and the anti-Semitic challenges of the fin-de-siècle period. Their respective national historical contexts, however, only partly explain their creation. Viewing the national as the sole realm of cultural interaction, production, and contestation has unduly sidelined the importance of these interstices, the spaces between the nations, as realms of Jewish historiography and Jewish self-fashioning. Situating Jewish heritage production within a transatlantic space of cultural transmission and collision underscores the interrelationships among Jewish communities that fostered transnational loyalties and accentuated and fermented cultural differences.

97 Liberles, “Postemancipation Historiography and the Jewish Historical Societies of America and England,” 52–53.
CHAPTER THREE

GLAUBE UND GESCHICHTE: A VEXED
RELATIONSHIP IN GERMAN-JEWISH CULTURE

DAVID N. MYERS

This essay begins and ends with tension—no better represented than by the building of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, which housed the conference on which this volume is based. It is not the tension that we have come to know, following Yosef H. Yerushalmi, between history and memory. Yerushalmi’s classic distinction posited a rupture between the rich fabric of premodern collective memory and the modern historian’s impulse to unravel that fabric in search of a single contextual strand. But in this building the tension between the seamless and the disjunctive is reversed.

The bottom floor expresses—through its Axes and Voids, the Holocaust Tower, the Garden of Exile—not only Daniel Libeskind’s raw genius, but also the jagged edges of Jewish memory, fractured by displacement, persecution, and genocide—altogether lacking in seamlessness or holism. The floors above, notwithstanding their “Libeskind moments,” seek to convey a somewhat comprehensive and coherent narrative of the Jewish historical experience in Germany. The latter quest, it turns out, is a constant feature of contemporary history, born of the narrator’s demand to salvage discrete contextual fragments from an abyss of incoherence or meaninglessness by swathing them in a tight narrative fabric. In this building, the disruptive nature of memory and history’s quest for coherence clash—and here I must respectfully dissent from the Museum’s catalogue, which insists that “the architecture and the narrative of the museum accord, where each supports and strengthens the other.”

Rather, the relationship between architecture and historical narrative is rife with tension and yields a most intriguing and provocative museological experience.

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1 This article draws on my Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).
2 Stories of an Exhibition: Two Millennia of German-Jewish History (Berlin: n.d.), 22.
The *bouleversement* to which I have alluded has implications beyond this building. History, in its modern incarnation, has not only become the arbiter of the past, but its narrative glue. Meanwhile, the collective memory of old has been broken into a series of mnemonic shards, each trying to find its place in a coherent historical narrative. One important consequence, to use the terms of reference provided by the editors of this volume, is that *Judentum* must now pay homage at the temple of *Wissenschaft*.

Of course, the state of affairs is more complicated than this. After all, the edifice of *Wissenschaft* has itself incurred significant structural damage over the past century and a half. It is not only the Shoah that damaged—or, according to Jean-François Lyotard, destroyed—this edifice, and the tools of historical measurement that built it. Nor is it the postmodern sensibility that alone erodes the epistemological foundations of *Wissenschaft* (and its disciplinary companion, history). The seeds of discontent with *Wissenschaft*, and more broadly historicism, were also sown from within—from the competing impulses to create an idiographic science, on one hand, and a linear chain of historical events with teleological (and perhaps predictive) aspirations, on the other.

Our task ahead is to chart the discontent with historicism in modern Jewish culture, with a particular focus on its German-Jewish variation. We do so mindful of a statement made by the great Jewish historian, Salo W. Baron, nearly seventy years ago. Baron declared with blithe confidence that “the entire problem of *Glaube und Geschichte* (faith and history), so troublesome to many modern Protestant theologians, loses much of its acuteness in Judaism through the absence of conflict between the historical and the eternal Christ.”

Though he later modified this claim a bit, Baron’s pronouncement defied a certain amount of historical logic. It was indeed true that Jews did not face the difficulty of reconciling the flesh and blood of the

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3 See Salo W. Baron, “The Historical Outlook of Maimonides,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 6 (1935), 5–113; the article was republished in Salo W. Baron, *History and Jewish Historians* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1964), 109–163, here 109. It is interesting to note that Baron had modified his views by 1963 when he observed that “the problem of history versus faith, which has so deeply agitated Christian theologians in recent generations, has also affected some thinking of Jewish students.” See Baron, “Newer Emphases in Jewish History,” *ibid.*, 90–106, here 106.
historical Jesus with the mythic Christ of faith; but it was also true that the methods and theoretical underpinnings of critical historical study had been subjected to wide-ranging and often withering attack for decades. These attacks culminated in the 1920s and 1930s when defenders of the historicist faith like Ernst Troeltsch acknowledged a “crisis of historicism” in their day.4

Could it be that Jewish intellectuals were so disengaged from the prevailing intellectual culture of Europe (and Germany in particular) as to bypass this crisis? That would be very hard to believe, especially since the critics of historicism were not restricted to churchmen or theologians. Over the last quarter of the nineteenth-century and into the twentieth, history came under criticism from a wide range of German scholarly voices: philosophers (e.g. Friedrich Nietzsche), economists (e.g. Carl Menger), and historians themselves (e.g. Karl Lamprecht). For many of these critics, history and historicism came to be seen as debilitating symptoms of modern culture—and of the culture of modernity—in whose center stood the atomized and eviscerated individual as chief victim.

Were there no Jewish critics of historicism who recoiled at the application of historical methods to classical Jewish sources and who lamented the clinical dissection of the once-inspired Jewish past? The full answer is multifaceted, and requires that we follow different and often meandering currents of thought into German, French, and Eastern European Jewish intellectual discourse, exploring thinkers ranging from Henri Bergson to Micha Yosef Berdyczewski. This is not our task here, but still a partial answer can be given to the question. Indeed, it is clear as day that there was a problem, if not an outright crisis, of Jewish historicism from the mid-nineteenth-century, and that the tension between *Glaube und Geschichte*, contra Baron, has agitated Jewish thinkers from that time up to the present. I would like to examine this phenomenon by tracing a number of the overlapping currents of dissent that emerged out of the new historicist orthodoxy.

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Before embarking on our study of historicism and its discontents, it might make sense to offer a brief working definition of historicism itself. It is a term that we first hear from Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel at the turn of the eighteenth century, although it was not until the end of the next century that it entered common intellectual parlance. Since that time, the term has bred many progeny, to the point that one observer, Calvin Rand, insisted that different interpretations “have distorted whatever clear meaning the term might have developed.” Still, Rand himself attempted to provide definitional clarity by differentiating between historicism as a worldview and historicism as a particular methodological regimen. In the first instance, historicism bespoke an important shift in causality, from a view of the Divine Hand as the engine of history to a new appreciation for mundane causal agents. Accompanying this shift was a new set of methods designed to situate a discrete historical organism in its unique and particular context.

It is this pair of causal and methodological assumptions that has exercised and agitated modern defenders of the Christian faith, who have wondered how the Son of God could be reduced to a local historical context and rendered purely human. The trend toward naturalizing Jesus, evident from Samuel Reimarus in the late eighteenth-century through David Friedrich Strauss in the 1830s to Ernst Troeltsch in the early twentieth century, stimulated its own rich body of criticism that has continued up to our own day. Surprisingly, and again contra Baron, a similar body of criticism can be discerned among Jews, especially among those whom we might call traditionalists.

The traditionalist critic rejects the underlying premise of historicism, that truth can issue from the labors, and shifting perspectives, of the critical scholar. And yet, we should remember, as Michael Silber reminds us, that the very category of traditionalism—with its demand for an originary authenticity—is itself a modern construct; its adepts are themselves immersed, perhaps unwittingly, in the culture.

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of modernity.\(^6\) It is in this regard that I would like to consider the notable neo-Orthodox thinker, Samson Raphael Hirsch.

What makes Hirsch so interesting as a critic of Jewish historicism is not his stirring traditionalist credo: “Rather a Jew without Wissenschaft than Wissenschaft without Judaism.”\(^7\) It is that his opposition to the desiccative effects of historicism is couched in the language of historicism itself—a hint to us of historicism’s poignant inescapability. Unlike critics of the late eighteenth-century Maskilim—the Measfim, for example—Hirsch operated in a world in which the contextualizing logic of historicism had become pervasive. And so, for all of his effort to rein in the excesses of historicism, he could not, or chose not to, evade its basic terms of reference.

To wit, Hirsch’s withering critique of the man whom he identified as the arch-historicist: his erstwhile student from Oldenburg, Heinrich Graetz. Hirsch had no Jesus to defend, but he did have the Oral Law, the sacred fundament of traditional Jewish observance. And in Graetz he saw an opponent, which of course carries its own ironies. After all, a young Heinrich Graetz, not yet twenty years old, made his way to Oldenburg in 1837, deeply intrigued by Hirsch’s negotiation between tradition and modernity in his Neunzehn Briefe.\(^8\) Hirsch mentored Graetz for three years, laying out an exhaustive course of classical and modern studies. Toward the end, the relationship soured. A month before leaving Oldenburg, Graetz wrote of Hirsch in a French aside: “Il a peu de connaissance hors de ses enormes livres ‘poskim.’”\(^9\) Although Graetz chose to dedicate his 1846 dissertation on Gnosticism and Judaism to Hirsch,\(^10\) the


\(^10\) Graetz dedicated his dissertation to “the profound fighter for historical
two men had already parted ways and moved in sharply divergent directions: one toward embrace of the vocation of the historian, and the other toward criticism of the historicist orientation of contemporary Judaism.

This divergence is clearly signaled in a review that Hirsch wrote of his one-time student shortly after the appearance in 1853 of volume 4 of Graetz’s *Geschichte der Juden* (the first of the multi-volume series that he wrote). Hirsch excoriated Graetz for depicting the Oral Law not as a divinely transmitted legacy, but as “the product of individuals of greater or lesser creative or spiritual talents.” Rather predictably, Hirsch took exception to Graetz’s willingness to naturalize the Oral Law and expose the “personal frailties” of the Sages. But what is a good deal more surprising is Hirsch’s rationale for undertaking such a careful and critical review of Graetz; his aim was to “show novices in the field of historiography how not to treat documentary sources, how not to establish facts, and how not to interpret historical events and personalities.” In other words, Hirsch seemed intent on saving history for future historians—and from the hands of a young Jewish historian named Graetz.

We can debate whether Hirsch’s recourse to the professional standards of the historical discipline was tactical or principled. He surely was not a proud practitioner of *wissenschaftlich* scholarship in the tradition, say, of the Hildesheimer seminary in Berlin. Still, his criticism of Graetz is instructive for a number of reasons: first, it gives us an indication that by the mid-nineteenth-century, historicism had become ubiquitous enough in Jewish intellectual culture for a traditionalist response to take rise—a response at once critical and yet, in typical fashion, framed in the very language of the polemical target. Second, Hirsch’s criticism of Graetz inaugurated a very interesting lineage of Orthodox resistance to historicism that extends up to the present. This lineage passed through Frankfurt, where Hirsch established a separatist community, his son-in-law Salomon Breuer founded a yeshivah, and his grandson Isaac Breuer reframed

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Judaism, the unforgettable teacher, the fatherly friend.” Quoted in Ismar Schorsch, “Ideology and History,” in Heinrich Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1975), 1–62, here 36.

Hirsch’s resistance to historicism in the form of the ideal of *Metageschichte*. It extended to Israel, where a one-time student at the Breuer yeshivah, Baruch Kurzweil, gained renown as a stern critic of the hubris and subjectivity of Jewish historians. And this lineage also wended its way to the United States, where the Breuer community, of which Samson Raphael Hirsch was the inspiration, relocated in 1939. For example, a veteran leader of the Breuer community of Washington Heights, Rabbi Shimon Schwab, gave renewed vigor to Hirsch’s attack on Graetz when he declared: “Rather than write the history of our forebears, every generation has to put a veil over the human failings of its elders and glorify all the rest which is great and beautiful.”

To be sure, this lineage of traditionalist dissent from historicist orthodoxy is not limited to the Hirsch-Breuer camp. Among thinkers of or near our time, we might also mention Rabbi Joseph Baer Soloveitchik, who distinguished between “etiological” and “covenantal” versions of history. According to Rav Soloveitchik, “Jewish history is pulled, as by a magnet, towards a glorious destiny; it is not pushed by antecedent causes.” Hence, the historian’s search for origins must give way to the believer’s faith in a *telos* toward which Jewish history is inexorably drawn.

We could marshal more examples of Orthodox thinkers, from the left and right flanks, who sought to dissolve the thick sap of historicism as an act of affirming their own timeless faith. Part of that longer tale of Orthodox antihistoricism would, of necessity, include its opposite: the curious and substantial growth in Orthodox and *haredi* historiography, a literature which bears the outward form, if not always the underlying suppositions, of critical historical scholarship. That story, alas, must await another day.

The point to be made in our excavation so far is that there was in fact a considerable tension among modern Jews between *Geschichte* and *Glaube*. Like their Christian counterparts, German Jews of the Orthodox persuasion struggled to make sense of their tradition while

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unconsciously absorbing and consciously rebuffing the dominant
mode of historicist cognition. At one level, that should come as no
surprise; it is the *peshat* of our story. The *drash* requires that we exit
the world of traditionalists, even the most avowedly modern among
them, and enter the world of the secular academy, where historicism
found its most hospitable home—and, ironically, some of its most
trenchant opponents.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a widening circle of
philosophical critics gave voice to their discontent over history's
rise to primacy within the German *Geisteswissenschaften*. One of the
more notable and pungent among them was a young philologist-
turned-philosopher named Friedrich Nietzsche, who had come to
the realization in 1868 that philology was but “the misbegotten son
of the goddess philosophy, born an idiot or a cretin.”

His growing alienation from the empiricist pretenses of philology led six years
later to a piercing critique of history. Fearful of the numbing effects
of historicism, Nietzsche rhetorically asked in his essay *Vom Nutzen
und Nachteil der Historie* (1874): “What if, rather than remaining the
life-promoting activity of an historical being, history is turned into
the objective uncovering of mere facts by the disinterested scholar—facts to be left as they are found, to be contemplated without
being assimilated into present being?” Nietzsche sensed that his
fears were coming true, that the prevailing culture of historicism was
failing to “serve life” as long as its leading practitioners dissected
grand and inspired values from the past.

I might add that one realm in which the defects of this culture had
become apparent, and a somewhat surprising one given Nietzsche’s
pronounced intellectual irreverence, was religion. Nietzsche declared
that a religion which is “to be transformed into historical knowledge,

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14 Nietzsche uses this description in a letter from October 1868 to his friend, Paul
Deussen; quoted in Peter Levine, *Nietzsche and the Modern Crisis of the Humanities*
a religion which is to be thoroughly known in a scientific way, will at the end of this path also be annihilated.”\(^\text{16}\)

How does Nietzsche’s concern relate to our excavation of Jewish antihistoricism? In the first instance, it hints at the earlier traditionalist critique that we just spoke of. But it also points to a wider philosophical critique of historicism that focused on methodological defects. In fact, it is a mix of theological and methodological concerns that animated one of the first and most important of the nontraditionalist Jewish critics of historicism, the great neo-Kantian thinker, Hermann Cohen.

Cohen does not usually leap to mind as a front-line critic of historicism, surely not in comparison to his student and partner, Franz Rosenzweig. But throughout his career, Cohen was frequently unsettled by history’s play for dominance within the German Geisteswissenschaften. It is important to recall that a key question addressed by philosophers in the late nineteenth century was whether and how a replicable “scientific” protocol could be established for history, as was the case for the Naturwissenschaften. This, indeed, was a central point of discussion for the group of neo-Kantian thinkers known as the Baden or South-West School (Heinrich Rickert, Wilhelm Windelband). By contrast, the neo-Kantian school that Cohen had a major hand in founding, based in Marburg, was less exercised by the methodological problems raised by history. Nonetheless, Cohen did feel compelled to express his concern over the negative effects of history’s reach. In one of his first published writings as a neo-Kantian philosopher in 1871, he declared (in prescient anticipation of Nietzsche):

If an age allows itself to be dominated by the trend of history, it will find its full satisfaction in the fulfillment of this trend, and the longer this state of affairs lasts, the less will it be affected by the question: what will be, and even less by the even more urgent question: what must be?\(^\text{17}\)

History’s growing dominance, along with its eschewal of a prescriptive function in favor of dispassionate description of the past, rendered

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 39.

it suspect, or at least subordinate to philosophy in the ordering of the human sciences. History, Cohen continued, had value only to the extent that it could assist philosophy in posing and answering important normative questions. If it could not, then its worth was cast in doubt. Later in his career, Cohen would express an almost visceral aversion for historicism’s love of the particular, as opposed to philosophy’s appreciation for the unvarying universal.

Curiously, Cohen’s aversion often arose in discussions of his one-time teacher from the modern rabbinical seminary in Breslau: Heinrich Graetz. In a recollection of his youthful studies, Cohen recalls his shock at Graetz’s efforts to historicize revered figures from the ancient and medieval past—and in a sense, the shock never wore off. Cohen accused Graetz of impulsivity and “frightening perversity of emotional judgment,”18 two qualities that fueled the historian’s pursuit of what Cohen called the saftige Frucht of history—that is, the sensual, the transitory, the individual. By contrast, Cohen the trained philosopher was intent on capturing the logical, the permanent, the universal.19

Graetz’s personification of the defects of historicism made him a convenient target for Cohen, as he had been for Samson Raphael Hirsch previously. In fact, in one of the most controversial moments in Cohen’s career, he criticized Graetz in 1880 after the latter had come under attack by the German nationalist historian, Heinrich von Treitschke, on what most Jews of the days deemed anti-Semitic grounds. While a full discussion of this episode is not possible here, we would be remiss not to mention that part of what agitated Cohen about Graetz was a feature that he noticed with growing alarm in others in later decades: the attraction to a form of Jewish identification that was at odds with the surrounding German culture and that would come to be known (in its various guises) as nationalism. Graetz, who had himself visited Palestine and briefly joined Hibat Zion, lived in a pre-Zionist era. Nonetheless, Cohen, who would gain renown as a leading anti-Zionist, saw fit to accuse him even before the advent of Zionism of a “Palestinian” sensibility—a codeword

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for the kind of gritty particularism that seemed to go hand in hand with, and perhaps even result from, a historicist disposition.\textsuperscript{20}

Hermann Cohen’s resistance to historicism can be traced to an admixture of temperamental, methodological, and even political preferences. Like the traditionalist criticism of Samson Raphael Hirsch, Cohen saw danger lurking in the historian’s dissection of Judaism, which he would later portray as a grand ethical system with deep structural affinities to Kantian philosophy. In fact, in the last decade and a half of his life, culminating with his decision in 1912 to move to Berlin after forty years in Marburg, Cohen devoted himself with increased intensity to Jewish rather than purely philosophical questions—and concomitantly, to lifting the yoke of historicism from the study of Jewish philosophy and ethics. And thus, Alexander Altmann seemed on the right track when he offered the following encomium to Cohen in 1956:

\begin{quote}
It is in no small measure due to his influence that twentieth-century Jewish theology in Germany emancipated itself from a sterile Historicism and recovered the almost lost domain of the Absolute, of Truth and faith in the Truth.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

And yet, in distinction to Hirsch and other traditionalists, Cohen remained from beginning to end an unreconstructed believer in the clarificatory powers of \emph{Wissenschaft} (especially under philosophy’s supervision). While it was indeed possible for Cohen to imagine \emph{Glaube} without \emph{Geschichte} (or at least without a thick haze of historical data), it was unimaginable for him to envisage \emph{Judentum} without \emph{Wissenschaft}. Without the logical \textit{a priori} and epistemological clarity of philosophy, Judaism was less a grand ethical system than a random collection of laws.

The period in which Hermann Cohen lived (1842–1918) was an era of European history marked by dramatic change, instability, and transition. Among many other upheavals, this period witnessed a major shift in philosophical orientation, as the call to “return to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[20]{Cohen’s letter to Friedrich A. Lange from 5 September 1874 is discussed in Hans Liebeschütz, “Hermann Cohen and His Historical Background,” \textit{LBIYB} 13 (1968), 3–33, especially 3–4, note 2.}
\end{footnotes}
Kant” that so galvanized Cohen and others of his generation gave way to a *Kehre*, a sharp turn toward a philosophy of Being in the early decades of the twentieth-century. This turn was accompanied by a shift from deep faith to deep skepticism in *Wissenschaft*, as well as by a third current of Jewish antihistoricism, more robust and unruly than the two predecessors that we have examined hitherto.

This third current of historicist resistance reaches its crest in the aftermath of the First World War, at that fascinating crossroad of crushing despair and apocalyptic hope that was Weimar. It is smack in the middle of this period that Ernst Troeltsch looked around him and declared a “crisis of historicism.” Unwilling to surrender his own historical methods, Troeltsch was nonetheless aware that historicism had become, in his famous phrase, “the leaven, transforming everything and ultimately exploding the very form of earlier theological methods.” So great was its influence that “we are no longer able to think without this method or contrary to it.”

In point of fact, many critics of historicism did struggle to think “contrary to it.” One of those who did was Hermann Cohen, who in the penultimate year of his life waged a battle against Troeltsch’s attempt to historicize the great Israelite prophets by ascribing their worldview to the “peasant morality” of rural Palestine in antiquity.

But those Jewish intellectuals who came after Cohen perceived the burdens of historicism even more acutely. The formative experiences of their lives were the devastation of the First World War and the tumultuous early years of the Weimar Republic. Beset with a deep “crisis-consciousness,” they saw little value in the historian’s meticulous

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23 Ibid., 16.

reconstruction of the past. The quest for the historical seemed to
them to pull further and further away from the present, from their
own demand for a life of being and action. And yet, it was well-nigh
impossible to escape the ubiquitous effects of historicism.

The resulting predicament prompted a number of Jewish think-
ers to challenge afresh the causal logic of historicism. There was
a new urgency in their voices, as they came to the realization that
the problem of historicism was a high-stakes affair, closely linked
to pressing theological and political questions of the day. Conse-
quently, we might suggest that the problem of Jewish historicism
after Hermann Cohen became, to borrow an overworked phrase, a
“theological-political” question.

To illuminate this proposition, I would like to offer a brief triptych
of Weimar-era Jewish thinkers, beginning with Hermann Cohen’s
student and partner Franz Rosenzweig. It is important to recall that
as a young man, Rosenzweig was a serious student of history who
wrote a dissertation on Hegel and the state under the supervision
of Friedrich Meinecke in Freiburg. Rosenzweig’s immersion in the
historicist culture of the German academy made his subsequent
flight from it all the more striking, as did his imminent decision to
embrace a fuller and richer Jewish life. In Rosenzweig’s first publica-
tion after the tumult of the summer and fall of 1913 (“Atheistische
Theologie”), he signaled his new calling by bemoaning the “curse
of historicity” that afflicted humanity.25 It was no longer study of
the past but living the Jewish present that animated him.

This reorientation inspired Rosenzweig’s effort to create a new
institutional framework for Jewish learning, one in which he could
“place the (classical) sources in the center and history on the mar-
gins.”26 Initially, Rosenzweig hoped to found such an institution
in Berlin. But this plan did not come to fruition, and Rosenzweig
shifted his sights to Frankfurt, where he moved in 1919 to become
the first director of the Jüdisches Lehrhaus in that city.

25 The essay was published posthumously in Franz Rosenzweig’s Kleinere Schriften
(Berlin: Schocken, 1937), and republished in the third volume of the recent edition
of his collected writings; see Franz Rosenzweig, Der Mensch und sein Werk: Zweiströmeland

26 See Rosenzweig’s letter to Richard Ehrenberg, father of Hans and Rudolf
Ehrenberg, from December 28, 1917, in Der Mensch und sein Werk: Gesammelte Schriften
I: Briefe und Tagebücher, vol. 1, ed. Rachel Rosenzweig and Edith Rosenzweig-Schein-
Around the same period, Rosenzweig delivered a series of lectures in his hometown of Kassel in which he sharpened his antihistoricist tone. The call was not simply to redirect the historicist tack of Jewish education. It was to acknowledge that Judaism and the Jewish people defied the gravitational pull of history. They inhabited a kind of eternal present in which “the Jewish spirit breaks through the shackles of time. Because it is eternal and aims for the Eternal, it disregards the omnipotence of time. Indeed, it walks unperturbed through history.”

Not only did the Jewish people resist the weight of historicity; it required no territorial grounding either. Its “battle …[was] against descent into the contingency of land and time” alike. It is hard not to see this claim as a cudgel in the intensifying debate among German-Jewish intellectuals over Zionism, particularly in the wake of the near-epic polemical bout several years earlier between Hermann Cohen and Martin Buber. Obviously, much more could and should be said about Rosenzweig’s attitude toward Zionism. But what is clear is that Rosenzweig did not share the goal of Zionists to return the Jews to history, as measured by mundane (read Gentile) time and space.

Rather, he insisted that Jews were, paradoxically, at home in their extrahistorical and extraterritorial existence—an existence, incidentally, that blunted the tools of the historian’s trade. This proposition was echoed by other Weimar-era Jews of diverse perspectives, all of whom sought liberation from the “the shackles of time,” as well as from the clutches of history. To take an example from Rosenzweig’s adopted city of Frankfurt, Isaac Breuer advanced the notion that the Jewish people skirted above the plane of history occupied by the nations of the world. Breuer, a university-trained lawyer with a penchant for Kant, operated from within the confines of the separatist community in Frankfurt created by his grandfather, Samson

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28 Rosenzweig, “Geist und Epochen der jüdischen Geschichte,” 537.
Raphael Hirsch. Whether his own sense of physical and psychic segregation informed his view of the Jews and history is something about which we can productively speculate but not confirm. In any event, Breuer was emphatic in his belief that the Jews resided in the realm of Metahistory (Metageschichte). This means that they were immune to the vagaries of political and social change, and in fact not only survived but thrived in dispersion. “Golus,” Breuer once declared, was “the most creative epoch that the Jewish nation ever had.”

Of course, a more anti-Zionist statement one could not find. And yet, the grand irony of Breuer’s life is that for all his fierce opposition to Zionism—manifested in his leadership role in the Agudat Yisrael—Breuer immigrated to Palestine in 1934 (prompting Matthias Morgenstern to identify in him an “alternative Zionism”).

Breuer’s *aliyah* required him to engage in a delicate balancing act by reconciling his claim that Zionism did not mark the fulfillment of Jewish history, on one hand, and his conviction that specific historical events of his day, including the Balfour Declaration, had triggered the messianic process, on the other.

There is in Breuer something of the traditionalist antihistoricist, who fits naturally into the trajectory that we identified first with his grandfather. But there is also plenty of the Weimar intellectual in Breuer, absorbing osmotically from the explosive environment around him and attempting to navigate amidst the theological and political shoals. His ceaseless intellectual agitation, his condemnation of the pettiness of bourgeois culture, and, to be sure, his desire to pierce through the haze of historicism seem of a piece with that Weimar culture. Across the denominational spectrum—from Breuer to Rosenzweig in the Jewish world, and more expansively, from Rosenzweig to Martin Heidegger to Karl Barth in the broader intellectual culture—historicist methods and historicist modes of cognition came under attack. For the atomizing effects of historicism appeared to many symptomatic of the malaise of modernity itself, an ailment that ended in the total alienation and isolation of the individual from the whole.

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29 Isaac Breuer, *Messiaaspuren* (Frankfurt am Main: Rudolf Leonhard Hammon, 1918), 44, 63.

This, it turns out, was a diagnosis shared not only by Jew and Christian, but by left and right. To conclude our triptych, I would like to discuss briefly the subject of much contemporary attention (and conspiratorial imagination), Leo Strauss. The Weimar Strauss is not the Chicago Strauss, who has come to be seen, in rather exaggerated fashion, as the godfather of American neoconservatism. That said, Strauss’s political inclinations were fostered in the midst of a period marked not only by stark political divergence, but by a serious new intellectual conservatism (as in the “Conservative Revolution”) whose adepts sought to avoid the forsaken routes of socialism and liberal capitalism. The early signs appear in Strauss’s dissertation on Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi from 1921, when he chose to detour from the path and project of his mentor, the neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer, and appreciate anew the traditionalism of a key Counter-Enlightenment figure. The more mature signs come later in the Weimar era, when Strauss wrote a book that revealed more of his conservative intellectual disposition. This was his 1930 study of Spinoza’s critique of religion, with its justly famous English introduction. It is here that Strauss signaled his rebellion against the triumphalism of modern science, principally the historical science, as against Scriptural faith. “But is it not the case,” Strauss asked in *Die Religionskritik Spinozas*, “that Scripture itself calls science into question?” His question hinted at “a task of life quite different in kind from science, namely, obedience to God’s revealed Law.”

Now it is a bit of a curiosity, in light of this articulated task, that Strauss remained scrupulously committed to unbelief after leaving his family home in Kirchhain. But the underlying politics of faith—the hard-edged and enduring traditionalism—appealed to him much more than *Wissenschaft’s* shallow pretense to objectivity. This politics was related to his growing disenchantment with the modern Enlightenment project, traces of which we noticed in his dissertation.

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Coming of age in a period of fecund political theorizing across the ideological spectrum, Strauss was drawn to the weaknesses of the modern Enlightenment project whose liberal agenda spawned disregard for the old authority of religious faith and regard for the new authority of scientific, and historicist, observation. An important marker of Strauss’s movement in this direction was his next book, *Philosophie und Gesetz* (1935), in which he criticized the biases of the modern philosophical enterprise, with its strong historicist underpinning.

While a full examination of Strauss or of strains of conservative political thought in his day (symbolized, above all, by his “conversation partner,” Carl Schmitt) cannot be provided in this context, it suffices to say that Strauss, like Breuer and Rosenzweig, felt himself in the throes of a theological and political storm. The Weimar opening toward liberalism afforded both freedom of thought and iconoclasm, but also generated dark fears of ideologies, methodologies, and technologies gone awry. It is against this backdrop that the three distinctive thinkers we have examined—Rosenzweig, Breuer, and Strauss—all sought escape from the clutches of historicism, both from its pervasive methods and its larger causal logic. It is not accidental that all three expressed lesser or greater degrees of willingness to remain in *Galut*, for it enabled (as Gershom Scholem famously proclaimed in a different context) a life lived in temporal and spatial, and thus historical, deferment. In perhaps the most enigmatic affirmation of this principle, Strauss once described Exile as that condition which permitted the “maximum possibility of existence by means of a minimum normality.”

This definition of *Galut* must be seen within the context of an impassioned debate over Zionism among German-Jewish intellectuals in the 1920s. And as we suggested earlier in the case of Rosenzweig, the Zionist agnosticism of our three thinkers from this period may well be of a piece with their ambivalence toward historicism.

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We began our discussion with tension and promised to conclude with it. And so, in contrast to Salo W. Baron’s assertion from 1935, we maintain that there has been a steady and protracted tension between Geschichte and Glaube in modern Jewish intellectual culture, between the impulse to historicize and the impulse to attain at least a measure of transcendence. It is this tension that feeds the snaking current of antihistoricism that we have traced here.

And yet, before closing, there is a final tension to note. It is that antihistoricism does not only arise in reaction to historicism; at times, it becomes barely distinguishable from historicism—a testament, if nothing else, to the malleability of the term. I think here of perhaps the most famous and interesting of Weimar Jewish intellectuals, Walter Benjamin. While taking aim at a dispassionate historicism that produced a set of neatly contextualized shards strung like “beads of a rosary,” Benjamin advocated his own distinctively engaged form of historicism, epitomized by the famous “Angelus Novus,” that rescued the obscure and forgotten actors of the past from oblivion.

Benjamin was not alone in seeking to salvage historicism from its own defects. Leo Strauss would later develop his own radical historicist hermeneutic, based on his practice of reading grand philosophical texts entre les lignes. Strauss did not surrender his concerns over the inflated historical claims of modern scholars, but he did believe in the possibility of grasping a thinker as he understood himself in his own discrete context. And the others whom we have explored here—Rosenzweig, Breuer, Cohen, and Hirsch—all acknowledged at various moments the inescapability of historicism. In fact, in every case, they made use of historicist method or logic even as they explicitly endeavored to banish one or the other from their worldview.

This is because historicism, as Friedrich Meinecke would proudly declare, had become the bedrock of modern intellectual consciousness in the West, the foundation upon which we observe the past.

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and, by extension, the present. The thinkers whom we have explored—all indebted in some way to historicism—nonetheless chiseled away at that bedrock, leaving behind small fissures. Subsequent to their time, a much larger crater was left in the foundation by the Shoah, generating temblors and aftershocks that are felt to this day. Can historicist tools adequately measure an event of the Shoah’s magnitude? And if not, if that event cannot be measured, does the whole edifice of historicism collapse? These broad questions continue to be posed under the pressure of various postmodern challenges, which seem to reduce parts of the historicist bedrock to quicksand, thereby preventing the observer of the past from gaining a fixed perch. Of course, historians—as distinct from the avatars of philosophy, theology, literary criticism, or cultural studies—are the last to acknowledge this, for understandable reasons of self-justification. But then again, it is modern historians, and their underlying historicist credo, that have presided over a reformulation of Judaism no less dramatic than that offered by the ancient Philo or the medieval Maimonides—a point that sets in stark relief the tension-filled relationship between Wissenschaft and Judentum.
CHAPTER FOUR

TWO PERSISTENT TENSIONS WITHIN
WISSENSCHAFT DES JUDENTUMS

MICHAEL A. MEYER

Many years ago, when I was a graduate student, one of my professors, a Jew whose field was European history, told me that when he was deciding on a topic for his dissertation he suggested to his adviser that he would like to write on the Jewish migration from Eastern Europe to the United States. His adviser rejected that idea. “As a Jew you will not be able to treat that subject objectively,” he was told. “Why not write about the Irish migration instead?” And so he did.

In the nearly 200-year-long history of Wissenschaft des Judentums—the modern critical study of Jews and Judaism—the relation of scholarly Jews to their texts and traditions, their history and sociology, has indeed been fraught with issues relating to the character of that relationship. Is the insider’s view necessarily different? Should it be different? Does Wissenschaft des Judentums for the Jew transcend the purposes contained within the ethos of Wissenschaft itself? Does the Jew who is committed both to Judaism and to Wissenschaft des Judentums have to deal with two internalized value systems that negate or at least modify one another? Is critical inquiry to serve the Jewish faith and the Jewish people or, rather, to serve only itself? Can a non-Jew be successful at Jewish scholarship? It seems to me that these issues lie at the heart of Wissenschaft des Judentums as it has developed through about half a dozen generations in Europe, in America, and in Israel. I shall deal here with two tensions created by Wissenschaft des Judentums that seem to me the most essential ones: the first is that between religious and secular approaches, and the second is that between efforts directed inward toward Jewish life and outwardly focused goals.

1 A slightly different version of this chapter appeared in Modern Judaism 24 (2004), 105–119.
We have increasingly come to realize that, for all its novelty and even iconoclasm, Wissenschaft des Judentums for most of its history was to varying degrees and in very different ways predominantly a religious enterprise.\(^2\) Not only were nearly all of its leading practitioners in Germany rabbis (the Christian scholars teaching Semitics at universities did not consider themselves to be involved in the same enterprise), but they considered their work to be either in the service of religion or intrinsically a religious task—or both. Its leading scholars were on the faculties of seminaries, where their students were mainly Jews who were preparing to become rabbis.

The close connection between Wissenschaft des Judentums and Jewish faith is to be found most explicitly at the middle-of-the-road Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau. There, unlike among the Orthodox, Wissenschaft des Judentums was affirmed wholeheartedly, even if critical study of the Pentateuch was deemed out of bounds and history was closely linked to theology. Rabbi Zacharias Frankel, the first head of the seminary, set the tone when he wrote as an introduction to the first issue of its scholarly periodical, the *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, that the history of Judaism revealed “a manifestation of the divine, a revelation of religion.” To study Jewish history was to become more aware of God’s plan for Israel, to recognize from the survival of the Jews the efficacy of divine Providence. It is not an exaggeration to say that for Frankel, Jewish history was *Heilsgeschichte*. But not only would readers of the *Monatsschrift* gain a better appreciation of God’s presence in Jewish history; they would also come to realize the “power of the will to believe” among Jews throughout their history.\(^3\) Thus, Wissenschaft des Judentums would inspire Jews to attach themselves more closely to their religious past. Frankel’s position finds its continuation and

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most extensive application in the historical work of his colleague, the historian Heinrich Graetz, for whom the “finger of God” is discernible in Jewish and general history, and the survival of the Jewish people is virtually a metaphysical struggle of good against evil.

In slightly different form, the religious purpose of the critical study of Judaism appeared, as well, among more radical religious reformers like Rabbi Abraham Geiger. Although, unlike Frankel, Geiger set no limits to historical criticism, his study was directed toward uncovering what he regarded as the genuine religious spirit of the Jewish people, which he believed to be the product of divine revelation. It is worth recalling in this regard that, unlike Leopold Zunz, Geiger wanted Wissenschaft des Judentums established within the university as a Jewish theological faculty, not as a chair in the faculty of philosophy, and that he named his first scholarly periodical Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie.

That the motivations and consequences of the work of both Frankel and Geiger were religious made their scholarship the more insidious in the eyes of those who opposed any reconceptualization or practical revision of Jewish beliefs and traditions. Whether they rejected Wissenschaft des Judentums completely, as did Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, or despite general affirmation assigned it a peripheral position where it could not conflict with a broadly defined revelation, as did Rabbis Esriel Hildesheimer and David Hoffmann, the Orthodox leaders were fully aware that their opponents were not simply secularizers but were using Wissenschaft to lay the foundation for a nonorthodox religious rival.

To be sure, the implicit or explicit understanding of Wissenschaft des Judentums as a theological enterprise met with opposition from the very start. Although Leopold Zunz himself possessed rabbinical credentials and served briefly as a rabbi in Prague, and although his work dealt almost exclusively with religious literature, he famously


called for an “emancipation” of Wissenschaft des Judentums from the theologians. Zunz’s model was the university, not the seminary; his engagement with the nineteenth-century Jewish community in Germany, whose identity was defined in terms of religious belief and morality, increasingly declined. He did not wish to participate in rabbinical conferences or to teach at a rabbinical seminary. Similarly, the historian Isaak Markus Jost expressed concern regarding what he believed to be the constraints on scholarship created by theology. Religious belief, he held, may “cast the historian in chains,” from which one must break free if one is to be true to the critical method, “which must guide the historian through the realm of history.” But as a teacher of Judaism who was very much involved with the communal life of Frankfurt Jewry, Jost also noted that “criticism no more does harm to religion than a closer examination of the laws of nature and their variability threatens to shatter faith in the Creator.”

The most vociferous and unmitigated objection to the close bond between Jewish faith and Jewish scholarship came, as is well known, from Moritz Steinschneider. The son of an observant Jewish family, Steinschneider became not only a sworn opponent of Orthodoxy but a despiser of all Jewish theologies and ideologies. In introducing his periodical, *Hebräische Bibliographie*, he wrote that its character would be neither religious nor theological but, rather, purely literary. The disengaged scholar par excellence, Steinschneider did not attend a synagogue and, like Zunz, did not want to play any role in a seminary. His ideal was the untrammeled academic freedom that he believed could flow only from uncompromised independence. Like Zunz, he held that Jewish studies belonged among the secular disciplines of the university. But he went beyond both Zunz and Jost in the extent of his withdrawal from religion. In nineteenth-century Germany, Steinschneider represents the closest approximation of a secular scholar of Judaism.

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8 Moritz Steinschneider, *Hebräische Bibliographie: Blätter für neuere und ältere Literatur des Judentums* 1 (1858); 2; Gotthold Weil, “Moritz Steinschneider,” *Jüdische Rundschau* 12, no. 6 (February 8, 1907), 53–55.
Zunz, Jost, and Steinschneider, however, represented a minority view. The connection between Wissenschaft and theology remained strong enough in the twentieth century for some scholars to adopt it and others to feel a compulsion explicitly to reject it. With the continued exclusion of Wissenschaft des Judentums from German universities, Sigmund Maybaum, a leading faculty personality at the Liberal Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums—the seminary most devoted to free inquiry—saw it as necessary to list the advantages contained in such exclusion. Unlike the university, which breathed the air of either Orthodox Protestantism or secularism, the rabbinical seminary, by virtue of its task of training rabbis, was bound by the “positive,” that is, the revelatory basis of the Jewish religion. Maybaum echoes Frankel’s position, and he was not alone in his views. In his earliest writing on the subject of Wissenschaft des Judentums, his colleague, the historian Ismar Elbogen, a rabbinical graduate of the Breslau seminary and writing in its Monatsschrift, went so far as to suggest that the term Wissenschaft des Judentums could usefully be replaced by the term Jewish theology, concentrated as the subject area was on the Jewish construction of the awareness of God. Theology would provide the focus for an endeavor that was in danger, he believed, of disintegration. This continuation of nineteenth-century views about Wissenschaft des Judentums as a religious enterprise on into the twentieth-century is apparent, as well, from the ever louder voices of opposition to it—which did not emanate from Zionist circles alone. In 1917 the historian Eugen Täubler branded Wissenschaft des Judentums, as it was practiced in the rabbinical seminaries, “a disguised theology.” And as late as 1934 the liberal journalist Fritz Friedländer deplored the fact that “Jewish historiography, for the most part, lies in the hands of theologians.” Two years later the intellectual historian Fritz Bamberger

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noted perceptively that the ongoing process of theologizing Jewish scholarship while the average Jew became ever more secular had created a growing rift between Wissenschaft and life.13

During the Weimar period the close bond between Wissenschaft and theology did loosen, but it was generally replaced not by secularization but, rather, by a broader sacralization of the scholarly enterprise itself. In 1925, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Hochschule and a few years before the corruption of Wissenschaft by the National Socialists, Elbogen declared that the goal of Wissenschaft is holy, for it is the determination of truth. To be sure, Wissenschaft is no longer the handmaiden of theology; he notes that it possesses “sovereignty.” But he also writes: “That which is final and ultimate in Wissenschaft, as in art, is revelation.” The task of Wissenschaft in general, Elbogen insists, is a messianic one. It will overcome hatreds and bridge antagonisms among peoples. Within this universal redemptive task, the scholars of Wissenschaft des Judentums are to play their role in helping spiritually to reconstruct the world.14

The sacralization of Wissenschaft des Judentums itself proceeded even among severe critics of its theological perspective. The Russian secular Jewish historian Simon Dubnow wrote in his diary that “historiography is for me like a temple which in reverent silence I help to build.”15 David Myers has noted that the founders of the Institute of Jewish Studies of the Hebrew University likewise saw its mission as a sacred one, thereby blurring the boundary between Torah and Wissenschaft when they gathered to dedicate a new institution for Jewish studies in the holy city of Jerusalem.16

For all of his criticism of Wissenschaft des Judentums as it developed in Germany, Gershom Scholem—who called himself “a religious person”—did not lack religious motivation for his scholarship. He never denied that his attraction to Kabbalah went

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beyond scholarly curiosity or the mere desire to fill a gap in Jewish historical memory. It was a source of inspiration, which he treated dialectically, at the same time from a distance and from a stance of identification.17 The implications of his religious motivation were most clearly obvious to the Orthodox literary scholar at Bar-Ilan University, Baruch Kurzweil. According to this acute critic, Wissenschaft des Judentums—and Scholem within its midst—was guilty of creating “a sort of new pseudo-sanctity which seeks to fill a vacuum emptied of religious faith.” But for Kurzweil it is not a genuine Jewish faith that Wissenschaft des Judentums sets forth but, rather, a form of idolatry, a “cult” of historical and philological writings, a worship of the academic paper whose method remains external to the true Judaism that is based on a revelation that cannot be relativized or historicized. Despite their pretenses, its scholars, Kurzweil believed, are not spiritual leaders within Judaism but, in fact, slaves of their own private interests and of the small circles to which they belong. What irritated him so deeply was the pretension of Wissenschaft scholars to claim for themselves the mantle of the Jewish religion, to assume that they were the legitimate inheritors of Torah scholarship. According to Kurzweil, critical historians of Judaism had no right to claim that they differed from the national historians of England, America, and other countries. The essence of Judaism, he concluded, remained impervious to scholarly dissection. It was better grasped by poets than by scholars.18

To conclude this section of my analysis, let us look at the religious-secular tension from a different perspective, that afforded us by the work of the Israeli scholar Moshe Halbertal.19 The Jews have always been a “text-centered” community, Halbertal maintains, and therefore the relationship to canonical texts has been crucial. Authority rests in these texts and in the interpreters who interact with them. These interpreters, the Torah scholars, are allowed varying degrees of flexibility, but they may not substitute new texts for old

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or employ tools of interpretation that shatter those given initially by revelation and included in the canon. Medieval Jewish philosophy and mysticism challenged the canon by adding competing sources of religious knowledge gained by philosophical contemplation, in the one instance, and personal religious experience, in the other. Wissenschaft des Judentums, I would suggest, offered a similar challenge, as it gave a new elite the right to interpret texts, sometimes radically, on the basis of external historical knowledge. Had it been wholly secular in its orientation, it could have been more easily dismissed by champions of the traditional interpretations. But because it sought to be critical and at the same time to locate itself within the tradition that it criticized, it became so serious a threat for Orthodox Jews like Kurzweil. For that reason, too, its practitioners were constrained to ask themselves repeatedly whether, and, if so, in what way, Wissenschaft des Judentums, for all of its devotion to scientific standards, was still a religious enterprise.

The second major point of tension that has inhered in Wissenschaft des Judentums from its beginnings down to the present is one of direction and goal. Does it face inward toward the Jewish community, the Jewish people, and the Jewish religion with the intent of strengthening these, or does it face outward? And if the latter, is its outward glance likewise motivated by Jewish concerns, as in the case of apologetics for the sake of emancipation or combating anti-Semitism, or is it directed at integration into the larger academic world with little or no regard for any Jewish connection? Put differently and perhaps a bit crudely, is the goal of Wissenschaft des Judentums “Wissenschaft” or “Judentum”?

Janus-like, modern Jewish scholarship has persistently faced in both directions, with disputes raging from time to time when critics came to believe that one direction was being favored at the expense of the other. Once again it is Zacharias Frankel and his school, which, as we have seen, so closely linked Wissenschaft to Jewish faith, that most decisively focused on the internal benefits of critical Jewish scholarship for Jews and Judaism. Twice in a single essay Frankel uses the word lever (Hebel) to describe the relationship. In the first instance he writes: “History and Wissenschaft des Judentums, these manifest themselves as the most effective lever to set weary spirits back into motion and to awaken renewed interest in higher things [das Höhere].” In the second instance, he writes even more forcefully: “Wissenschaft des Judentums is [Judaism’s] most powerful lever,
without which there is no Judaism: it decays when the love for its Wissenschaft is lost.”

Subtly eliding the distinction between the old Torah learning and critical study, Frankel has here attributed to Wissenschaft the same status of indispensability that traditional Jewish learning held in the past.

Rabbi Wolf Landau, a colleague of Frankel, who succeeded him in his pulpit in Dresden, waxes yet more ecstatic about the potential benefits of Wissenschaft for Judentum. He writes in Frankel’s Monatsschrift: “Indeed, Wissenschaft and its daughter, enthusiasm, are the soul of Judaism and the focal point of Jewish unity! It, Wissenschaft, the clear, pure understanding of religion, is the only justification for our existence as a people.” For Landau, and to some extent also for Frankel, Wissenschaft des Judentums is a panacea that will cure all Jewish ills and even bring about a Jewish spiritual renaissance. Or, to use Landau’s language, it will provide the sustenance and infallible protection that will ensure the eternal survival of Jews and Judaism.

Abraham Geiger’s direction as a Wissenschaft scholar, like Frankel’s, was also dominantly inward. Like Frankel and his school, he placed an inordinate faith in the ability of Wissenschaft to regenerate Jewish life. To be sure, Geiger saw its task initially as a project of liberating Judaism from the constraints of what he believed to be an excessively rigid and often historically inaccurate tradition, but its ultimate purpose was to strengthen, not weaken, Judaism. Wissenschaft des Judentums was for Geiger—if we may resort once again to Frankel’s metaphor—the lever for raising religious reform from arbitrariness to systematic progress; and religious reform, in turn, served as the lever for raising Judaism to the level of contemporary thought and sensibility, thereby assuring its survival in modernity. Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that Frankel’s and Geiger’s scholarship was motivated solely by their concern for Jewish religious life, but I believe that for both of them, perhaps because of their positions as active religious leaders within German Jewry, it was the dominant influence.

The external focus appears most clearly in the work of Leopold Zunz. At the very beginning of his career, he wrote the often-cited

words: “Here we are setting up the whole of Jewish literature in its fullest compass as an object of research, without worrying whether the total contents should be or can be also a norm for our own judgments.” Zunz here makes it clear that, unlike Geiger and Frankel, he is not interested in using Wissenschaft des Judentums as a lever for raising up out of the past a reconfigured tradition that will be binding for contemporary Jews. His reading of the past will be not selective but comprehensive, without ulterior motive, in line with the program articulated by Immanuel Wolf, as it appeared in Zunz’s Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums, that Wissenschaft des Judentums “treats its object for its own sake alone, not for any special purpose or with any predetermined intent.” Zunz himself did not fully adhere to this programmatic statement. Not only was some of his work aimed at hastening Jewish emancipation, but it also is not free of internal Jewish concerns, especially in his early years when, as a recent book on Zunz suggests, his work served to regenerate Jewish memory. Even as late as 1870 he could tell the Berlin Jewish community that “the cultivation of Wissenschaft alone guards against such aberrations as superstition, excessive literalism, and kabbalistic caprice.” Nonetheless, his justification for Wissenschaft des Judentums is predominantly taken from the outward perspective. The lifting, in his case, is not of Judaism through Wissenschaft but, rather, of Jewish study to the level of other Wissenschaften. For Zunz the goal of what he poignantly called “our Wissenschaft” was to gain its proper place among the Geisteswissenschaften that belonged to others. To that end he wrote for fellow scholars, Jewish and non-Jewish, in the German language and in a style that could scarcely attract lay readers. Insofar as he saw Jewish benefits to be derived from Jewish scholarship, he thought mainly of external ones. As is well known, he argued that the emancipation of the Jews would occur only in the wake of the emancipation of their Wissenschaft. His motive was also apologetic. He wanted

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recognition for Jewish spiritual achievement on the part of non-Jews in particular. Using an oceanic metaphor, he wrote: “If the totality of spiritual activity be the sea, then Jewish literature is one of the streams from which water flows into it.”26 The principal mission of Zunz’s scholarly life was to reveal the existence of that stream and to describe its waters.

Again it is Moritz Steinschneider who carried Zunz’s position to its extreme expression. He too wanted to bring Jewish scholarship out of isolation and gain recognition for it in the world of general scholarship. But he went further than his older colleague. Not only did he write in an even less engaging manner than Zunz, but he was totally uninterested in any possible effect of Wissenschaft des Judentums on contemporary Jews and Judaism. And he did not acknowledge any apologetic motives. He did not see his role as that of a defender of Judaism against the slurs of non-Jews. His own words could not be more blunt: “I have undertaken my research in the first instance for myself. There have always been men who regarded research as among those things that are done for their own sake, just as other people have other pleasures … I write about Jews, but not for them, not pro domo. One does not enlighten enemies of the Jews, least of all through history.”27 Likewise, to a greater degree than Zunz, Steinschneider was interested in the historical relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish traditions and expanded the bounds of Jewish creativity well beyond strictly religious literature.

In the last years of the nineteenth century, with the recrudescence of anti-Semitism in Germany, it is not surprising that the apologetic motive should have gained ascendancy. It had already been noticeably present in Geiger’s later writings, which constituted a powerful subversion of the dominantly Christian master narrative of Western civilization.28 In the last decades of the century it seemed necessary to employ Wissenschaft for a twofold purpose: to show that the Jews

26 Idem, Zur Geschichte und Literatur, 2.
had contributed more than their share to modern culture and to refute the resurgent claims of anti-Semites that the Talmud contained pernicious doctrines and that Judaism countenanced ritual murder. Wissenschaft des Judentums was a tool that would show the world, as David Kaufmann, the broadly ranging scholar at the Budapest Jewish seminary, put it in 1891, that “Jews did not always live from selling old pants and from usury.” Unlike Steinschneider, Kaufmann did believe that it was possible to enlighten at least average people, if not sworn anti-Semites, about Judaism. Of course, that meant reading the Jewish past selectively, leaving untouched those texts thought to be morally or intellectually offensive, what Kaufmann called “antiquated worthless trash buried in slimy mudholes [versumpften Pfützen].” Despite the author’s explicit denial, Moritz Lazarus’s Die Ethik des Judentums, which appeared in 1898 after a gestation process of nearly fifteen years, was also a selective reading of Jewish tradition that served an apologetic purpose. Apologetics was likewise an acknowledged motive for the formation of the Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums in 1902.

In Weimar Germany the apologetic motivation was less apparent, though it did produce the five-volume collection of sources Die Lehren des Judentums. The rise of Nazism, of course, discredited apologetics entirely. What remained, though, in the Weimar period and throughout the twentieth century is the question of whether Wissenschaft des Judentums is to serve the spiritual and cultural needs of the Jewish community or to serve only—or at least predominantly—its intrinsic scholarly purposes.

Much recent attention has been given to differences of opinion on this question as they developed after World War I. Arrayed on one side of the issue were Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, who believed strongly that Wissenschaft des Judentums failed in its mission

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if it did not serve the contemporary Jewish community. Like some of the German Liberal rabbis, they complained that Jewish scholarship, mired as it was in detailed studies, had neglected its function as an educator of the Jewish community. For Rosenzweig, this abdication of responsibility led him to found the Lehrhaus in Frankfurt, which represented a partial return from Wissenschaft back toward a more traditional form of textual learning. For Buber, it meant advocating the creation of an institution for adult education in the land of Israel, which he judged as potentially more valuable for the yishuv than an institute of Jewish studies founded on the German model of impartial scholarship directed toward a small elite. On the other side of the divide stood the historian Eugen Täubler, who directed the work of the Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, founded, initially on Rosenzweig’s urging, in 1919. Täubler’s principal aim was to free Wissenschaft des Judentums from its intellectual ghetto and raise it to the level of other Wissenschaften. He thereby stood in the tradition of Zunz and Steinschneider, not Frankel and Geiger.

Within this confrontation Ismar Elbogen occupied an intermediate position. Like Täubler, Elbogen believed that Wissenschaft des Judentums had to see itself as a species of the genus Wissenschaft, whose differentiation lay only in the material to be studied, not in its method. It should not descend from the higher level of Wissenschaft to the old Gelehrsamkeit. But he was also influenced by contemporary trends in general scholarship, perhaps especially in the work of Wilhelm Dilthey, that called for a more intimate relationship between the historical scholar and the object of research. The historian, Elbogen believed, must be able to relive (he uses the term nachempfinden) the experiences of the historical characters about whom the historian is writing. Wissenschaft des Judentums, he wrote, does not carry its significance within itself. It is rather a Zweckwissenschaft, its purpose being to sustain a “living Judaism.” Exceptionally among

German-Jewish scholars of his generation, Elbogen took an interest in the publication of Jewish scholarship in the Hebrew language, serving as an editor of *Devir*, the first scholarly Hebrew periodical to be published in Germany since the long-forgotten *Tsiyon*, issued by Michael Creizenach and Isaak Markus Jost back in the early 1840s.\(^{36}\) Jewish scholarship in Hebrew, which developed principally outside of Germany, ranged from the conservative, as in the case of the Italian Samuel David Luzzatto, to the extremely radical, as in the case of the Galician Joshua Heschel Schorr, but in all cases it was clearly directed inward. The nineteenth-century Hebrew designation for Wissenschaft des Judentums—*Hokhmat yisra’el*—in itself implied internality and possession. It was a channel of expression that belonged to the Jewish people.

The conflict over the place and task of Wissenschaft des Judentums migrated from Germany to the land of Israel, focusing there on the establishment of the Institute for Jewish Studies at the newly created Hebrew University. Was it to be a transplantation of German Wissenschaft or an intellectual force yoked to Zionist ambitions? Here too there was a spectrum of opinion. Zionist ideologues like Joseph Klausner and Ben Zion Dinur stressed purposes beyond pure Wissenschaft, whereas others like Yitzhak Baer and Gershom Scholem, though certainly Zionists, at least paid lip service to a Wissenschaft freed of ulterior motives. Indeed, the latter were critical of German Wissenschaft des Judentums precisely for its lack of independence.\(^{37}\)

\(^{36}\) This neglected periodical, issued in Frankfurt am Main from 1840 to 1841, suspended publication on account of Creizenach’s death. It was devoted to “words of wisdom, exceptional studies of our holy faith, and the history of the nation.” Among writers represented were Samuel David Luzzatto, Joshua Heschel Schorr, Moses Hess, Samuel Reggio, Zevi Hirsch Kalischer, and Zevi Hirsch Chajes. It deserves an independent study. On the language issue, see most recently Henry Soussan, “Wissenschaft des Judentums in welcher Sprach[e]?” in *Jüdische Sprachen in deutscher Umwelt: Hebräisch und jiddisch von der Aufklärung bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Michael Brenner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 56–67.

With the establishment of the State of Israel, Wissenschaft des Judentums—already for a generation called mada’e ha-yahadut—increasingly played the role of providing a Jewish foundation for what claimed to be a Jewish, albeit secular, state. It also continued to serve as a tool for Jewish self-understanding. According to Scholem, speaking to Diaspora Jews in London in 1959: “The Wissenschaft vom Judentum means for us a recognition of our own mode of being and history.”38 For Scholem that mode of being and history had to be broadened to include Kabbalah. But his colleagues did not expand it to include what for them were the other Jews, those who had recently immigrated from Arab lands, whose historical identity remained largely unexplored until decades later.39

More recently, an observer of the Israeli academic scene has argued that student interest in Jewish studies declined or became stagnant in Israeli institutions of higher learning during the 1980s and early 1990s, with the exception of the religiously oriented Bar-Ilan University.40 Mada’e ha-yahadut, Anita Shapira holds, no longer served an inwardly directed identity function, either for secular Israelis, who increasingly orient themselves trans-Jewishly, or for religious ones, whose link to Judaism is through the old textual tradition, not the modern scientific one. In the last decade, however, there has been a limited revival of interest in university-based courses, and professors of Jewish studies now regularly participate in the work of new Lehrhaus-like institutions that have sprung up in the major cities.

In Germany, remarkably, Jewish studies have been broadly established in universities where they scarcely existed at all before the Holocaust. Even more remarkably, the large majority of the scholars are non-Jews, which throws the issues I have raised into a new perspective altogether. With the often anti-Semitic non-Jewish scholars of his day in mind, Elbogen in 1927 branded their work as necessarily inadequate because they lacked enthusiasm for their subject and also what he called an “indispensable inner feeling for the spirit of the Hebrew language.”41 The non-Jewish scholars of

41 Ismar Elbogen, Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (1927), 1. Hermann
Jews and Judaism today, whether in Germany or elsewhere, are certainly not anti-Jewish, and increasingly they know ancient and modern Hebrew as well as their Jewish colleagues. Nonetheless, there seems to be some hesitancy about attaching this new, less Jewishly bound scholarship to a movement that hitherto has reflected all of the tensions and dilemmas that lie between faith and secularity, between lived Jewish existence and the study of historical Judaism and the Jewish people. Thus, the editors of a recent collection devoted to Jewish studies in Germany after the Holocaust write in their foreword that they must surely eschew the designation Jüdische Wissenschaft and even Wissenschaft des Judentums in favor of Wissenschaft vom Judentum, which seems to them a bit more distant from a scholarly tradition that they can only “approach” but not quite join. Thus, in Germany, the birthplace of Jewish studies, its contemporary descendant continues to search for its role both in the academy and in the tradition of Jewish learning.

Finally, there is the case of Jewish scholarship in the United States, which in a generation has mushroomed from very modest beginnings to a position of equality with Israel. When a handful of Jewish scholars for the first time created a grassroots professional organization in 1969, the Association for Jewish Studies, the establishment of academic respectability for Jewish scholarship within academia was the foremost consideration. Whether located in a department according to discipline or, less frequently, in a Jewish studies department, American Judaica scholars sought to satisfy academic colleagues and only secondarily, if at all, to serve the needs of the Jewish community. Exceptions were to be found principally, if not exclusively, among scholars teaching at rabbinical seminaries and

Cohen likewise believed that a non-Jew could not do serious research on Judaism, but his reason was because the non-Jew would lack the commitment of faith; see Myers, “The Fall and Rise of Jewish Historicism,” 111.

42 Brenner and Rohrbacher, eds., Wissenschaft vom Judentum, 8. The use of vom occurs sporadically earlier, for example, in Bamberger, “Wissenschaft vom Judentum”; and Scholem, “Wissenschaft vom Judentum einst und jetzt.” See also the discussion on the contemporary non-Jewish German scholar vis-à-vis his or her Jewish counterpart in Christoph Schulte, “Über den Begriff einer Wissenschaft des Judentums: Die ursprüngliche Konzeption der Wissenschaft des Judentums und ihre Aktualität nach 175 Jahren,” Aschkenas 7 (1997), 277–302, especially 296–299.

43 This statement is based on my own experience within the organization during its early years, but see also Leon Jick, ed., The Teaching of Judaica in American Universities: The Proceedings of a Colloquium (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1970).
other Jewishly sponsored institutions. Nonetheless, Jewish donors of academic chairs in Judaica hoped, perhaps in vain, that they were thereby contributing to the enrichment of American-Jewish life. Recently, given a very large but for the most part Jewishly-ignorant community, there has been some severe criticism of this stance. The issue was included in a conference, held at Stanford University in 2002, whose chair once again asked the old question in a new guise: “For whom does the university scholar toil?” Thus, in America of the twenty-first-century, as in Germany of the nineteenth, the tensions remain unresolved, without doubt because they are inherent in the very enterprise of Jewish scholarship itself.

44 Steven Zipperstein, “Jewish Studies in the University: Past and Future,” Taube Center for Jewish Studies, Stanford University, Newsletter (Fall 2002), 3. The most vociferous champion of the involvement of Jewish university scholars in the work of educating Jewish laypeople has been Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, first in a paper delivered at the meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies in Boston in 1998 and then again in a second but similar paper at the Stanford conference in 2002. (These papers were made available to me by Tirosh-Samuelson.)
Part II
Jewish Historiography and
Its Encounter with Other Disciplines
CHAPTER FIVE  
RABBINIC LITERATURE, RABBINIC HISTORY, 
AND SCHOLARLY THINKING: 
WISSENSCHAFT AND BEYOND

RICHARD S. SARASON

When, in 1818, the young Leopold Zunz published his first programmatic essay on the tasks of a nascent Wissenschaft des Judentums, his primary object of concern (according to the title) was the study of rabbinic literature. To be sure, in the course of the essay Zunz’s focus turns out to include all of the cultural (and particularly the literary) productions of postbiblical Judaism, both sacred and secular, that would display the Jewish contribution to human civilization.

1 The present article is an annotated and slightly revised version of the paper that I presented at the international conference on “Judaism as Wissenschaft/Wissenschaft as Judaism: The Development and Concepts of Historical Thinking” at the Jewish Museum in Berlin in September, 2003. I wish to express here my profound gratitude to the organizers of that conference, Drs. Christian Wiese and Andreas Gotzmann of the University of Erfurt, for inviting me to participate and for their gracious hospitality during the conference. I also wish to thank my colleague at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati, Prof. Michael A. Meyer, then president of the Leo Baeck Institute, for his encouragement and critical reading of earlier versions of this article. Any remaining errors are my own.


3 Specifically, Zunz’s research program wished to demonstrate to their Romantic “cultured despisers” in central Europe that premodern rabbinic Jews had indeed produced a “high” literary culture with spiritual and aesthetic value that could stand up under modern scholarly scrutiny. The canon of study accordingly was to be expanded beyond halakhic-rabbinic works to all forms of cultural-literary production. That is why much of Zunz’s scholarly output deals with medieval Hebrew liturgical poetry and with the aggadic, nonhalakhic aspects of classical and medieval rabbinic literature. See Leopold Zunz, Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt: Ein Beitrag zur Altertumskunde und biblischen Kritik, zur Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte (Berlin: Asher, 1832; 2d ed., Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1892); idem, Die synagogalen Poesie des Mittelalters (Berlin: Springer, 1855–1859); idem, Literaturgeschichte der synagogalen Poesie (Berlin: Gerschel, 1863). See also the remarks of Nahum N. Glatzer, “The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Studies,” in Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA:
But, for acculturating German Jews, rabbinic literature in the narrow sense and the distinctive culture it both encapsulated and supported were a particular source of ambivalence, for they embodied that very uniqueness that set Jews apart from the German Christian majority, both in the eyes of the Christians and of the Jews. To justify the persistence of Judaism as a separate religious culture, to provide a scientifically (that is, in context, historically) grounded norm for its contemporary reform, to promote the civic betterment of its adherents, and to demonstrate the worthiness of its study in the context of the German university—for all of these reasons, Zunz saw the necessity for rabbinic literature to give a thorough accounting of itself before the bar of “universal and objective” Wissenschaft.4


4 It is noteworthy that the early Wissenschaft scholars for the most part avoided academic study of the Hebrew Bible. There were several reasons for this. First of all, Scripture (particularly in the context of Protestant Germany) was seen to embody the very foundations or “essence” of Jewish religion and identity. In the cultural politics of the age, both internal and external, these were deemed to be sacrosanct. But academic biblical criticism at this time was also perceived to be the provenance and method of Protestant theologians. The cultural-political stakes involved in entering this religiously charged area would have been seen as too high. See the remarks of Glatzer, “The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Studies,” 32–33; and Nahum M. Sarna, “Abraham Geiger and Biblical Scholarship,” in New Perspectives on Abraham Geiger: An HUC-JIR Symposium, ed. Jakob J. Petuchowski (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1975), 17–30, especially 17–21; and the extended discussions of Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, “Science of Judaism, Biblical Studies and Jewish Biblical Theology” [Hebrew], in Studies in Bible Exegesis: Arie Toeg In Memoriam, ed. Moshe Goshen-Gottstein and Uriel Simon (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1980), 243–255; and idem, “Modern Jewish Bible Research: Aspects of Integration,” in Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies, 1981, 5: Panel Sessions: Bible Studies and Hebrew Literature (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1983), 1–18; Alan Cooper, “Biblical Studies and Jewish Studies,” in The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14–35; S. David Sperling, “Modern Jewish Interpretation,” in The Jewish Study Bible, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1908–1919; and Christian Wiese, Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 217–285. The notable exception to this reticence was Abraham Geiger, whose Urschrift und Übersetzung der Bibel in ihrer Abhängigkeit von der innern Entwicklung des Judenthums (Breslau: J. Hainauer, 1857) examined early Bible translations as witnesses to the original fluidity of the biblical text and tradition, the history of which was deemed to remain visible within the text itself. Geiger’s hermeneutics also justified ongoing and contemporary changes in Jewish tradition in response to changing temporal-cultural imperatives. On Geiger’s Urschrift, see now the trenchant analysis of Ken Koltun-Fromm, Abraham Geiger’s Liberal Judaism: Personal Meaning and Religious Authority (Bloomington: Indiana
In *Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur* (1818) he writes:

> How is it possible that at a time when all science and all of man’s doings have been illuminated in brilliant rays, when … the most obscure languages [have been] studied and nothing seems too insignificant to assist in the construction of wisdom, how is it possible that our science [the academic study of postbiblical literature] alone lies neglected?

Theological and social animus, certainly, was the larger contextual answer to that question, but the characteristics of rabbinic literature itself are also relevant: the literature is voluminous, dense, multilayered, and hermetic, with few, if any, obvious analogues in Western culture. It is a professional, rather than a popular, literature, the product of the rabbinic “guild” that was intended for internal use; thus, it is full of ellipses, shorthand, and implicit cultural knowledge. In order to make sense out of this literature one must be socialized into it (thereby recapitulating one aspect of its original use, as we now construe it). Only someone eminently fluent in two cultures, both the culture of the literature and the target culture, in this case that of Western Europe, can adequately “translate” it from one to the other. Zunz’s generation in fact was the first to achieve that kind of academic-cultural bilingualism.

In 1818, Zunz could bemoan the lack of proper *Vorstudien*, of “critical editions of manuscripts, good translations, accurate reference works, biographies and the like,” as well as comprehensive surveys, histories, and other works of broad synthesis. A little over a hundred years later, Ismar Elbogen, writing in 1922 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Berlin *Hochschule für
die Wissenschaft des Judentums,\(^8\) and Alexander Guttmann, writing in 1934 in the Berlin C.V.-Zeitung,\(^9\) could express satisfaction at some of the progress that had been made toward achieving Zunz’s goals. The libraries of Europe had been scoured, bringing to light many important Hebrew manuscripts. These had been significantly augmented by the spectacular finds from the Genizah of the Ben Ezra synagogue in Cairo and the recovery of many works previously thought to be lost. Many of these discoveries broadly confirmed earlier scholarly reconstructions of the relevant texts, the most dramatic examples being Zunz’s own reconstruction of the Byzantine Palestinian midrash _Pesiqta deRav Kahana_,\(^10\) and David Zvi Hoffmann’s reconstruction of the tannaitic halakhic midrash _Mekhilta deRabbi Shimon bar Yohai_\(^11\)—both from citations in medieval Hebrew literature. The power and utility of modern philological tools thereby were vindicated.

While appreciative of the groundbreaking work of the first generation of modern scholars—Zunz’s massive historical study of the midrashic and homiletical corpus; Abraham Geiger’s study of the early Bible versions and translations as evidence for the fluidity of, and disputation in, early Judaism; and Zacharias Frankel’s historical study of the Mishnah and literary study of the Palestinian Talmud\(^12\)—both Elbogen and Guttmann expressed disappointment that the grand research programs of Frankel and Geiger in particular had ground to a halt after their first installments. No comprehensive historical study of the development of the halakbah, as Frankel had proposed, or of the development of biblical and talmudic Judaism, Geiger’s goal, had been forthcoming. And both bemoaned the lack

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\(^8\) Ismar Elbogen, _Ein Jahrhundert Wissenschaft des Judentums_ (Berlin: Philo, 1922).

\(^9\) Alexander Guttmann, “Das Forschungsziel der Talmudwissenschaft,” in _Central-Verein Zeitung_, Sonderbeilage, no. 36 (September 6, 1934). I am grateful to my colleague Prof. Michael A. Meyer for calling this article to my attention.


\(^11\) David Zvi Hoffmann, _Mekhilta deRabbi Shimeon bar Yohai: Ein halachischer und haggadischer Midrasch zu Exodus, nach handschriftlichen und gedruckten Quellen reconstruiert und mit erklärenden Anmerkungen und einer Einleitung_ (Frankfurt am Main: Kaufmann, 1905).

\(^12\) Zunz, _Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge_ (see note 10 above); Geiger, _Urschrift_ (see note 4 above); Zacharias Frankel, _Darkei hamishnah: Hodegetica in Mischnam librosque cum ea coniunctos_ (Leipzig: H. Hunger, 1859–1876); and idem, _Mavo hayerushalmi: Einleitung in den jerusalemischem Talmud_ (Breslau: Schletter, 1870).
of a comprehensive, *religionsgeschichtliche* study of Judaism in general and of rabbinic religion and culture in particular. While the field has burgeoned too much since that time for a single person to master it all, there has been subsequent progress in the phenomenological, history of religions approach to the material, particularly in the work of Jacob Neusner, among others, but this did not take place until the full entry and greater integration of Judaic Studies into the setting of the university in the last three and a half decades of the twentieth century.

Elbogen’s and Guttmann’s surveys provide, for our purposes, a useful brief overview of the scholarly study of rabbinic literature and tradition in Europe down to the Nazi period. Since more detailed methodological appraisals of work in the areas of midrash, tannaitic and talmudic literature, and liturgy are available, I want to focus

13 Neusner’s voluminous writings have been articulately self-conscious about method. A good summary introduction for our purpose can be found in *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature* (see note 6 above). While published twenty-seven years ago, the broad methodological reflections articulated in the first volume of the series *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), particularly the essays on pp. 21–57, remain particularly insightful and characteristic. Many of Neusner’s methodological debates with other scholars in the field have been gathered in the series of volumes entitled *Ancient Judaism: Debates and Disputes* (Chico, CA, and Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1984–1996); *Judaism in Late Antiquity, III: Where We Stand: Issues and Debates* (Leiden: Brill, 1999–2002); and *Contemporary Views of Ancient Judaism: Disputes and Debates* (Binghamton, NY: Global Publications, 2001).

my remarks in this essay on only a few methodological issues and modes of thought characteristic of early Wissenschaft that still have repercussions in current academic work and discourse in the field. I shall confine my examples mostly to the first two generations of modern scholars, since they set the parameters for both what was to follow and what later would be critically reacted against. I will refer shortly to some of the distortions caused by various contemporary extrascholarly agenda, but wish to point out as well some problematic aspects of the scholarly agenda, methods, and habits of mind proper. Specifically, I would single out the following: (1) oversystematization and credulous readings of partial and ambiguous evidence; (2) oversimplified, evolutionary models of historical development; and (3) rigid application of heuristic generalizations, particularly in philological and literary criticism. All of these flow out of what appears today as a somewhat naïve epistemological certainty, characteristic both of a Jewish scholarly mindset in transition from the yeshivah to the Western academy but also, in some measure, of European civilization generally in the nineteenth century.

Let me now elaborate these characterizations and then provide some examples. First, there is a marked tendency in early modern scholarship to oversystematize data from various sources. A bit like the blind man confronting the elephant, early scholars frequently treated rabbinic materials as if they were all pieces of a single jigsaw puzzle that could be made to fit together, without sufficiently acknowledging the gaps and discontinuities among them.15 Closely related to this, they tended to impose monolinear evolutionary schemes on the data; to propose, with great confidence, highly specific

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15 In the context of traditional rabbinic study, this is a long-established reading practice, going back to the Talmuds’ harmonistic treatment of diverse and contradictory received tannaitic traditions, and epitomized in the medieval Tosafists’ approach to contradictory talmudic passages. The practice regrettably persists in some quarters of academic scholarship in rabbinic literature today, despite contemporary recognition of irreconcilable diversity and multivocity within this literature.
answers to fundamental literary-historical questions for which the evidence in fact is ambiguous; and to totalize what should be seen as aspectual or partitive explanatory schemes. We might characterize all of this together as a kind of explanatory monomania, for too often these scholars leave the impression of having reduced or underestimated the complexity of the rabbinic materials that are, to borrow a Freudian term, culturally “overdetermined.”

It is noteworthy that, to some extent, one may detect here a carryover into modern scholarship of the premodern deterministic mindset of talmudic study that can answer ingeniously every complex question it poses. What we see is the translation of the talmudic shittah (explanatory systematization) and hiddush (novel interpretation) into the language of historicism. These same traits of mind are to be found in the talmudic literature itself, where late antique rabbinic redactors impose logical order and system on the untidy mass of disparate traditions they have inherited. To be sure, many of these same reservations about oversystematization can be directed at the scholarly mindset generally. Postmodernism’s direction of our attention to the telling detail or instance that will not fit into the larger explanatory scheme should be regarded as a useful corrective to our shared professional “blessed rage for order” (to use the felicitous expression of Catholic theologian David Tracy).16 Still, it is characteristic of early modern scholars that, in their first flush of virtually messianic enthusiasm for the powerful “scientific” explanatory and interpretive tools afforded by philological and historical methods, they often tended to employ them in unrefined and rigid ways. (Of course, the refinement and qualification of these tools would be the work of subsequent generations of scholars in the general university context as well.)

Having spelled this out in generality let me now give one characteristic example of the rigid imposition of an oversimplified, evolutionary historicist explanatory scheme onto data that, from our perspective today, will not support it. I refer to Zunz’s evolutionary understanding, later elaborated by Elbogen and Louis Finkelstein, of the development of the Amidah, the rabbinic liturgical prayer par

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Some brief background: This prayer-sequence is made up of nineteen benedictions: a set of twelve petitions that are framed fore and aft by three benedictions apiece of praise and thanksgiving (as construed in the Talmuds: *b. Berakhot* 3:4a, *y. Berakhot* 2:3, 4d; cf. *Midrash Tanhuma, Vayera*, 1). Within the petitionary sequence itself, the final six address a detailed scenario for Israel’s redemption and the first six ostensibly relate to more general aspects of well-being. These twelve petitions are omitted on Sabbaths and festivals, since it is deemed inappropriate to petition God on these days. Now the Babylonian Talmud already provides a kind of opening for an evolutionary, historicist reading of the *Amidah*, as follows: While the common designation for the sequence is *Shemoneh Esrei*, or eighteen benedictions, Babylonian custom knows nineteen. The Babylonian Talmud (*b. Berakhot* 28b–29a) accounts for this discrepancy by identifying the nineteenth benediction as the malediction against heretics (*Birkat Haminnim*) and positing the circumstances in which it was separately composed at the request of Rabban Gamaliel at Yavneh. With this cue, Zunz applies an evolutionary scheme to the entirety of the *Amidah*, identifying each of the thematic groupings of the sequence as a temporal layer, and viewing each temporal layer as having accreted over time. Zunz thus separates out as the earliest stratum the first and last three framing benedictions, since they are common to both the weekday and Shabbat prayer-sequences, and dates them to the Seleucid period. The second stratum is that of the personal or generalized petitions, since it would be “natural” for the individual to insert such petitions. The third stratum, the national petitions, would have been added around the time of the destruction of the Second Temple. This would bring the total number of benedictions to eighteen. The final step would have been the addition at Yavneh of the nineteenth benediction, according to the Babylonian

Talmud’s account. (Parenthetically, we now know, on the basis of evidence from both the Cairo Genizah and Palestinian rabbinic literature, that the Babylonian Talmud’s explanation is a rationale after the fact and not historically accurate; it explains a Babylonian custom in contrast to a Palestinian one. Since the malediction against heretics is already attested in Palestinian tannaitic literature, it is not the nineteenth, Babylonian, benediction.)

The fallacy of Zunz’s scheme is its unquestioned assumption that every separate thematic articulation must be construed temporally. By contrast, most contemporary scholars of Jewish liturgy view the Amidah as an integral whole of post–70 C.E. rabbinic provenance, with separate rhetorical moments, to be sure, but framed as a sequence.

The same historicist proclivity to construe diachronically differences in literary style, theme, and genre is evident, for example, in Louis Ginzberg’s later determination (following on that of David Zvi Hoffmann) that the anonymous, “archaic” narrative style of the Mishnah tractate Tamid must indicate that it is older than the rest of the Mishnah. Ginzberg does not adequately consider the function
of diverse styles in this text, nor does he distinguish between the content of a tradition and its formulation.\textsuperscript{21} The same proclivity may be seen in the assertion of Zacharias Frankel, Hoffmann, and Jacob Z. Lauterbach (among others) that the midrash-, or exegetical, form of framing a legal statement must be “older” than the mishnah-, or apodictic, form, if one assumes that the law derives from Scripture.\textsuperscript{22}

Another characteristic example of a forced reading of the evidence, one that recapitulates and translates a rabbinic logical schematization into a historicist one, is David Zvi Hoffmann’s “two-schools” interpretation of the corpus of tannaitic, halakhic midrashim.\textsuperscript{23} This instance has been analyzed thoroughly and brilliantly by Jay Harris.\textsuperscript{24} Hoffmann had reconstructed the lost \textit{Mekhilta deRabbi Shimon bar Yohai}, a midrash to the book of Exodus referred to by a number of medieval authors including Maimonides, as well as a putative \textit{Mekhilta} to Deuteronomy on the basis of materials appearing in the thirteenth-century Yemenite midrashic anthology \textit{Midrash Hagadol}, and needed to account for the apparent redundancy in halakhic midrashic compilations:\textsuperscript{25} Why should there be two (or more) such compilations for each of the three biblical books that contain legal material? The question was exacerbated by the discovery in the Cairo Genizah manuscripts of yet more midrashic materials relevant to the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Hoffmann perceived that some of these materials could be grouped together


\textsuperscript{23} David Zvi Hoffmann, \textit{Zur Einleitung in die halachischen Midraschim} (Berlin: M. Driesner, 1887).

\textsuperscript{24} Jay M. Harris, \textit{How Do We Know This?: Midrash and the Fragmentation of Modern Judaism} (Albany: State University of New York Press 1994).

into two contrasting “families,” each sharing among its members some common rhetorical terminology, hermeneutical traits, and attributions to particular rabbinic masters. A qualification that was pointed out by subsequent scholars is that these traits tend to be relative and not absolute, particularly as regards attributions, and that one of the “families” coheres more closely in its stylistic traits than does the other. Still, allowing for this greater stylistic fluidity, Hoffmann’s literary groupings have held up relatively well. But to fully account for the existence of these families, Hoffmann was compelled to provide a historical explanation: they represent the divergent schools of biblical and legal interpretation of the two second-century masters Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva that are identified in the talmudic literature. The problem with this construct, as Harris has demonstrated, is that it reifies historically what originates in the talmudic literature (and particularly in the Palestinian Talmud) as a relatively late scheme for the logical classification of divergent inherited legal-hermeneutical materials. As early as 1927, Chanoch Albeck had demonstrated clearly that the historicist “Ishmaelian-Akivan” characterization does not hold, for sound literary reasons. But, because this thesis was taken up again unquestioningly almost thirty years later by Jacob N. Epstein, it has passed into several generations of Israeli scholarship in particular, where it still holds sway in many quarters to this day.

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26 See Chanoch Albeck, Untersuchungen über die halakischen Midraschim (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1927); and Ben Zion Wacholder, “The Date of the Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael,” HUCA 39 (1968), 117–144.

27 See now the important qualification of Menahem Kahana, “The Tannaitic Midrashim,” in The Cambridge Genizah Collections: Their Contents and Significance, ed. Stefan C. Reif (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 59–73, particularly 65–66, on the basis of yet further manuscript evidence from the Cairo Genizah.

28 Harris, How Do We Know This?, 25–72, 228–234.

29 See note 26 above.


31 See, for example, the recent work of Azzan Yadin, Scripture as Logos: Rabbi Ishmael and the Origins of Midrash (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), and of Menahem Kahana. In addition to Kahana’s article cited in note 27 above, see in particular Hamekhiltot lefarashat ‘Amalek (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1999), and “Muva’ot mimidrash tanna’i hadeser devarim veyahasan leisfri zutta,” in Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies, 1993, Division C: Talmudic and Rabbinic Literature (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1994), 23–30. The theory famously formed the basis for the historical-theological work of Abraham...
Broadly speaking, the approach of the early modern scholars to the issue of redundancy in rabbinic literature—be that the “synoptic” relationship among the multiple halakhic midrashim or the relationship between the Mishnah and the Tosefta—was to assume that the redundancy was in some way intentional or tendentious and represented schematically divergent approaches to the material or task at hand. Redundancy by itself, without a clear Tendenz behind it, seemed inconceivable. As we have noted, this represents a “translation” into the language of historicism of a typical hermeneutic within rabbinic literature and tradition that accounts for redundancy by “localizing” an unattributed redundant opinion as that of Rabbi So-and-So, or a redundant text as the version taught in such-and-such a school, in order to reduce the number of imponderables that had been inherited.

Because historical understanding among the early practitioners of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was not at all disinterested, but quite explicitly a cultural tool for justifying normative stances and identities in a problematic present, it was never applied in what we today would consider to be a fully critical (that is, secular or “value-neutral,” albeit sympathetic) fashion. Nor, to be fair, was this really possible


To be sure, contemporary postmodernist approaches to literary and historical scholarship problematize the very notion of “value-neutrality” or “objectivity,” since all scholarship is culturally located and, consciously or unconsciously, betrays in some measure the values of its practitioners. Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, “Modern Jewish Bible Research” (see note 4 above), in 1981 already made the salient point that the idea of “value-neutrality” in biblical scholarship was itself a strategy for the integration of Jewish scholars into the field: “[I suspect] that the type of neutralized, common-to-all, academic Bible study may be, to a considerable extent, a figment of wishful thinking on the part of secularized Jewish scholarship—underpinned by some frustrated Christian ex-theologians who wish to justify shedding the black cloth. Could it be that for the past two generations it has suited us to elevate a minority phenomenon into the majority model, whereas the majority of non-Jewish Old Testament scholars would not at all agree with the picture of one common-to-all task and method of Bible research?” (p. 13). The drift of cultural politics in the West and in academe over the past generation has writ this question large across the board. The postmodernist Gestalt itself may be understood as an expression of this drift.

See, for example, the discussions of Michael A. Meyer, “Jewish Religious Reform and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*: The Positions of Zunz, Geiger and Frankel,” *LBIYB* 16 (1971), 19–41; idem, “Jewish Scholarship and Jewish Identity: Their Histor-
in context: the political and cultural stakes simply were too high. The consequences, however, were distorting. Frankel and Hoffmann, for example, who sought, for normative purposes, to demonstrate the antiquity and continuity of the rabbinic halakhic tradition as a single historical entity—notwithstanding their very untraditional acknowledgement of change and of the important role of human agency in the process—essentially “translated” into the language of historicism large swaths of Sherira Gaon’s tenth-century apologetic for the antiquity and continuity of the rabbinic halakhic tradition. Hoffmann’s uncritical rhetoric in *Die erste Mischna* (1882) is characteristic. He writes in one instance:

> R. Sherira Gaon states that in the earlier time of the Second Temple in the days of the Rishonim the traditional teaching had been taught in the form of the Midrash as we have it at present in *Sifra* and *Sifre*. … He is so definite about it that he must have had a reliable tradition as basis.

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There is no hermeneutic of suspicion applied here; the ideological basis and rationale for Sherira’s depiction of the linear development of rabbinic tradition is never problematized, mostly because it is shared by his traditionalist nineteenth-century successors:

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both are combating a contemporary group that rejects the authority of rabbinic tradition. Geiger, for his part, in embracing the historical precedents of Karaites and Sadducees for his reformist approach to contemporary issues of Jewish religious identity, inevitably distorts the historical data in the same fashion, but in the other direction, as Zunz himself was quick to point out. In a similar vein, Heinrich Graetz’s treatment of the classical rabbinic period in the fourth volume of his Geschichte der Juden naively translates into historical narrative the various stories in talmudic literature about the Rabbis without ever inquiring about their ideological and didactic functions. The text is mostly treated as a neutral medium, and verisimilitude in any degree, as fact.

The handmaiden of historical criticism of ancient literature in the early nineteenth century was philology, as that discipline was pioneered at the University of Berlin. Philological tools also were often wielded in a heavy-handed fashion: the rules of thumb that the simpler version of a text is earlier than the more complex version and that the more difficult reading of a textual witness is likely to be the original (lectio difficilior) are only that—heuristic rules of thumb, not rigid, objective laws, though they were frequently employed that way in both classical and Judaic scholarship. The goal of reconstructing an Urtext, most scholars would agree today, was predicated on an anachronistic understanding of how texts were produced, transmitted, and used in late antiquity.

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36 See Koltun-Fromm, Abraham Geiger’s Liberal Judaism, ch. 2; Meyer, “Jewish Religious Reform and Wissenschaft des Judentums,” 35–41; and idem, “Jewish Scholarship and Jewish Identity,” 186.


Interestingly, most Wissenschaft editors of rabbinic texts did not attempt to produce full critical editions, in the classical sense of that term (as Chaim Milikowsky has repeatedly bemoaned). The earliest practitioners of Wissenschaft in fact were more interested in the prehistory of texts such as the Mishnah than in their post-redactional manuscript histories. Both Frankel and Hoffmann, for example, attempted to identify traces in the Mishnah as we have it today of putative earlier versions, going back to the time of Akiva, in the former case, or to the Houses of Hillel and Shammai before 70 C.E., in the latter. The most significant domain in which an Urtext was sought was, again, that of prayer-texts. Here, too, the reasons were not disinterested, but had to do, in part and for some practitioners, with the contemporary reform of the liturgy through pruning and abbreviation. In the chapter on the prayers of the synagogue in his Gottesdienstliche Vorträge, Zunz reconstructed a brief version of the Yotser benediction (the first benediction recited before the recitation of Shema in the morning) that eliminated all references to the angelic Qedushah as a secondary accretion. This version was taken up in Reform liturgies, referring to Zunz’s work whenever “scientific” justification was needed. Later, Louis

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42 Cf. Elbogen, Jewish Liturgy, 310; David Ellenson, “How the Modern Prayer Book Evolved,” in Minhaq Ami / My People’s Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries. I. The Sh’ma and its Blessings, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1997), 45, 48–49. The first Reform prayerbook in England, Seder hatefillot / Forms of Prayer: Used in the West London Synagogue of British Jews, 5 vols. (London: J. Wertheimer, 1841–1843), ed. David Woolf Marks for the West London Synagogue of British Jews, makes explicit reference to Zunz’s researches to justify its abbreviations and alterations of the liturgy. See the introduction to the first volume, particularly vii–ix: “Of the several portions of the existing liturgies, attributed to the men of the Great Synagogue, the Amidah or Shemonah Esre has been the most generally considered to belong to that remote time; yet the learned Dr. Zunz, after a most masterly review of the subject, establishes the conclusion, from the internal evidence of this prayer, that we have in the Amidah the labours of five successive epochs, in part at least posterior to the time of its supposed composition, and embracing a period of 300 years; and, by a collation of the existing formulae with the quotations scattered through the
Finkelstein would notoriously reduce five of the benedictions of the Amidah to seven-word original versions apiece. The theory that the rabbinic Amidah was initially instituted with an original, fixed text was convincingly argued against by Joseph Heinemann, but has recently been revived, on nonphilological grounds and somewhat controversially, by Ezra Fleischer (though even Fleischer would not claim that such a text is recoverable).

To conclude: Nineteenth-century Wissenschaft scholars, particularly the pioneers, were supremely confident about the ability of their new “scientific” epistemological tools to answer complex literary and historical questions about origins and development. Driven in part by their own contemporary religious, cultural, and political needs, they wrote works of massive, encyclopedic erudition coupled with considerable, often oversimplified, naive, and ideologically motivated speculation. The best scholarship today is generally more modest in its epistemological claims. After Marx, Weber, and Freud, there is greater recognition of cultural complexity, historical contingency, and the unavoidable role of the situated observer in the acts of scholarly observation and interpretation. Due to the partial and often skewed nature of the surviving evidence, many fundamental historical and

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43 Finkelstein, “The Development of the Amidah” (see above, note 17).
literary-historical questions are acknowledged to be insusceptible of determinate answers. Rabbinic literature is extremely complex, with many voices and many overlapping and intersecting threads. It is certainly not a neutral medium. Its interpretation is likely best served by a variety of aspectual, perspectival studies that resist the urge to totalize their findings. But it would be an act of extreme hubris and ingratitude to deny that, even in dissent or revolt, we continue to build today on the work of our nineteenth-century Wissenschaft predecessors.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{45} Not only does contemporary scholarship in rabbinics stand on the shoulders of its predecessors in the obvious ways (including being reactive, both positively and negatively); but it also carries forward, in different keys, the methodological and epistemological controversies of the nineteenth century. Specifically, as can be gauged in particular from the overview and controversy essays of Jacob Neusner, Seth Schwartz, and Steven Fine enumerated in note 14 above, the tension between credence (or credulity) and skepticism—between reading with the text and reading against the text—very much persists in contemporary work and continues to reflect, in large measure, the Vorverständnisse and global orientation (including religious and political commitments) of the scholars concerned. The postmodern approach, indeed, is to acknowledge these “prejudices” or “commitments” at the outset and admit them self-consciously into the discourse of scholarship, since the ideal of value-neutrality or objectivity is deemed to be chimerical. The work of Daniel Boyarin, in particular, embodies this approach. See his Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); idem, Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); and idem, Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
The use of the newly available data of Religionswissenschaft by early Reform Jewish thinkers has been overlooked by scholarship in the field.1 Here I will open the subject for research by looking at the work of Samuel Hirsch (1815–1889) and David Einhorn (1809–1879).2 Their interest in data about ancient religions was at least in part apologetic. The philosophic systems of importance to early Reform, those of Hegel and Schelling, used the data to fortify Christocentric positions and challenged the likes of Einhorn and Hirsch to support Judaism-centered history.

Neither Einhorn nor Hirsch drew from the primary texts of ancient religions, translated or otherwise. Hirsch relied on the scholarship

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1 The exception appears to be Geiger; see Abraham Geiger, Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentum aufgenommen? (Bonn: F. Baaden, 1833); and Jacob Lassner, “Abraham Geiger: A Nineteenth-Century Jewish Reformer on the Origins of Islam,” in The Jewish Discovery of Islam, ed. Martin Kramer (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1999), 103–136.

of Hegel, Johann Gottlieb Rhode (1762–1827)—which did include lengthy portions of Johann Friedrich Kleuker’s translation of the Zend Avesta—and Peter Feddersen Stuhr (1787–1851). Einhorn drew from Friedrich Creuzer (1771–1858); and both Hirsch and Einhorn drew from Karl Christian Wilhelm Felix Bähr (1801–1874) and most likely (albeit without attribution) from Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860). Einhorn’s treatment was concise, some thirty pages in length. His citations were specific, and he continued his interest in ancient religions after he left Pesth for Baltimore in 1855. Hirsch’s treatment was lengthy, some three hundred pages, and while his citations of rabbinic sources were precise, his citations of Rhode, among others, were vague. He did not continue his interest in the data after he left Luxembourg for Philadelphia in 1866 (where he succeeded Einhorn at Reform Congregation Keneset Israel). They both employed a priori measurements for authentic religiosity, Hirsch from his teacher Karl Immanuel Nitzsch (1787–1868) and Einhorn from Franz Joseph Molitor (1779–1860). Of the various religions each dealt with, they both dealt with Hinduism, Buddhism, and the religions of Zoroaster and Egypt—and this article will focus on those religions.

A. Hirsch

1. Nitzsch

In introducing his major work, Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden (1841), Hirsch stated that he would be using the terminology of Karl Immanuel Nitzsch, who had introduced him to the Wissenschaft of theology at the University of Bonn. In his System der Christlichen Lehre (first edition, 1829), Nitzsch wrote:

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The original constitution of humanity is such that it seeks after God, who allows Himself to be found. … i.e., man does not shun God; but ever strives after a more perfect communion with Him; and this amounts to active religion (not actualis practica) …. Such is the kind of subjectivity which divine revelation always employs, either in a wider or more confined sense, as its individual means. Passive or pathetic subjectivity (passive pathetica), which can only be pursued and constrained by conscience and truth, is alone the cause of unbelief or of superstition …. The consciousness of God abiding in the human spirit, considered as a mere disposition or power, requires, in order to attain development and activity, motives and experience, without which there is in general no development of the finite spirit. By means of impressions and experience, however, self-consciousness is unceasingly excited at once or primarily in its sensitive faculty; and self-consciousness may continue passive or active, as relates to this Divine feeling incited simultaneously along with it. In proportion as a feeling of dependence on God, in a free and conscious manner, is blissful, in the same proportion is a feeling of a purely necessary and servile dependence unblissful.

In “passive” (false or pagan) religion as defined by Nitzsch, God-consciousness was imposed upon the individual from without. Pagan religions venerated the nature which was external to them. Feelings for divinity were stimulated from the outside and developed in a non-conscious manner and with a sense of necessity. In “active” (or true) religion, the supernatural divinity and revelation, perceived as coming from the outside, were apprehended or processed by human consciousness—although, it turns out, they were already present in the individual. Hirsch adopted the distinction and characterized passive (equivalent to pagan) religions with a self-alienated mind or spirit, one too indolent to grasp itself in truth, and passive in the encounter with outside experience. Active religion involved self-consciousness and active encounter with the outside.

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5 Samuel Hirsch, *Das System der religiösen Anschauung der Juden und sein Verhältniss zum*
2. Pagan Religiosity

Passive religiosity for Hirsch ranged from magic to the religion of Rome and fell into either abstract, concrete, or abstract-concrete religions of nature. The abstract religions of nature included magic, fetishism, and shamanism, which dwelled on nature without reconciling it with consciousness. Specifically, they focused on deriving the most pleasure possible from the environment, and the relationship to divinity amounted to acts of sacrifice intended to mollify the divine jealousy incited by the human beings’ deriving pleasure from nature. Abstract religions of nature also included the Chinese religion, which ordered the universe so as to derive maximum pleasure from nature; the religion of India, which renounced the pleasures of nature altogether in the face of overwhelming variety; and Buddhism, which focused on the pleasures by identifying them as evil. Concrete religions of nature included the Near East, Persia, and Egypt, where nature was restored to cosmic or divine form, without integrating it with human consciousness in this life. Greece and Rome combined characteristics of abstract and concrete religions of nature. In Greece, nature included divinities which were derived from human consciousness and did not return to the process of consciousness. In Rome, nature was utilized by the state for its pleasure, remaining separate from consciousness.

Active religiosity was found exclusively in the religion of Israel, where it began with Abraham’s identification of religion as a relationship to God in freedom which unfolded according to a conscious spiritualizing of the natural world. To demonstrate his view, Hirsch wrote, he would draw from the new wissenschaftliche and historical data—something not possible in the medieval period, when any source other than Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers was automatically set aside. Hirsch mentioned that sources about

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6 In addition to works cited below, Hirsch cited Rudolf Heinrich Klausen, Aeneas und die Penaten: Die italischen Volksreligionen unter dem Einfluss der griechischen (Hamburg: F. und A. Perthes, 1839), and Karl Gerhard Haupt, Allgemeine Wissenschaftliche Alterthumskunde oder der concrete Geist des Alterthums in seiner Entwicklung und in seinem System (Altona: Hammerich, 1839). Bähr remarked that Joseph von Görres’s two-volume work Mythengeschichte der asiatischen Welt (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1810), which
fetishism and shamanism were scarce and that he would therefore be using recent treatments (Stuhr, Rudolf Heinrich Klausen, Karl Gerhard Haupt, Bähr, Hegel) word-for-word. Presumably, with the addition of Rhode, those would be his sources for Hinduism, Buddhism, and the religions of Zoroaster and Egypt as well.\(^7\)

3. Hinduism

For his appraisal of Hinduism, Hirsch relied on Hegel. Hegel’s sources were the Code of Manu, portions of the Mahabharata, including the Bhagavad Gita, and various scholarly studies published in the journal *Asiatic Researches*.\(^8\) He described how the religious universe began with Brahman, the self-determining, undifferentiated, immeasurable,
universal, all-pervading and all-powerful substance. Brahman externalized Himself in the Trimurti (triad): Brahma (active, generative father), Vishnu (manifestation, incarnation), and Shiva (creation and destruction). Innumerable particular sensual powers emerged, finite but more than human, with bizarre, wildly fantastic and confusing forms. They could neither be reconciled with universal substance nor express the spirituality of Brahman, leaving a chaotic, uncontrolled constellation of particular, differentiated deities at odds with the Brahmanic unity. Nature (sensual divine entities) could not be synthesized with spirit (Brahman). Split apart, Hegel’s measure of comprehensive consciousness could not be met.

The split was duplicated on the anthropological level. The human being, a product of Brahma, sought to share the absolute power of Brahman: “I am Brahman.” To do so, individual natural existence had to be negated, emotions and will annihilated; there was no question of reconciling the natural with the spiritual in a positive way. Instead, the Hindu sought to achieve some form of “hazy consciousness”—akin to the delirious bliss, Hegel wrote, which opium gave to the individual who found normal existence intolerable and was driven to create another world. The negation took the forms of self-mortification and self-sacrifice. Hegel cited mothers who drowned their children in the Ganges in order to end their lives with entry into holiness; men who flung themselves before moving vehicles carrying the image of Vishnu, and yogis who slept in standing positions for twelve years or sat amidst fires for several hours. Essentially, pure absorption into abstract, spiritual Brahman required the destruction of concrete actuality of spirit and human consciousness. Thus, while on the higher level it was impossible to integrate the determinate natural deities with Brahmanic spirit so as to produce divine consciousness and cosmic self-consciousness, on the human level concrete and natural reality had to be destroyed before they could become reconciled with spirit and develop consciousness either anthropologically or ontologically.9

Hirsch adapted Hegel's finding of nature-spirit alienation on the cosmic and anthropological levels but focused on the Hindu's alleged obsessive tie to finite nature, which precluded the development of consciousness. He wrote that the non-determinate Beyond (Brahman) moved from pure existence for-itself to existence for-the-other, and thereby assumed finite, determinate, and impure form. While the transition from non-determinate to determinate being could not itself be defined, there was a de facto explanation in the form of bridging the world beyond and this world. These were the three deities of the Trimurti: Brahma (represented by light), Vishnu (represented by water), and Shiva (representing perishability). The human being was a microcosm of Brahma, mediating between Brahman and the constellation of innumerable impure determinate divine entities. It sought to remove that aspect of its nature which was finite, including its sensuality and desire, close itself off from this world and enter the world beyond. Ultimately, it sought to be overwhelmed by Brahman, where the object Brahman turned into the conscious human subject. The human being would then become an "Atman," an individual entity which was absorbed in the Beyond—saying to itself (Hirsch imagined), "If I withdraw myself into myself, twist my feet around the thigh, looking at heaven, quietly raising my thoughts, folding the hands without speaking, and reciting Om within myself, then I am Brahman." But Hirsch considered these aims unachievable. Instead, the very quest to transcend finite nature turned against itself. Obsessed with nature, it became impossible for the individual to transcend nature and be subsumed into Brahman. How could finitude be transcended, if it remained the focal point? Indeed, the inability to transcend intensified in proportion to the fever of the quest. This frustration set off insane frenzies, a turning against nature with a vengeance, submerging into it in terms of indulgence or venerating nature without control. Having labored hard to overcome naturality to enter the Beyond (which, from the perspective of the world, was also nothingness), sometimes through extreme penance and self-denial, the Hindu ended up instead plunging into the lust, sensuality, and licentiousness represented by the god Shiva.\footnote{Johann Gottlieb Rhode, Über religiöse Bildung, Mythologie und Philosophie der Hindus mit Rücksicht auf ihre älteste Geschichte, vol. 1 (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1827) 55–56, 87, 153–380; and idem, Die heilige Sage und das gesammte Religionssystem der}
Hegel spoke of the unresolved relationship between nature and spirit, where individual deities could not be reconciled with Brahman alone above while finite nature below was destroyed before it could be brought into the process of consciousness. Hirsch channeled these failures into a process where the attempt to escape naturality turned into a trap. Without discernible factual basis, he concluded that becoming an Atman was impossible and that the individual sought refuge in destroying or surrendering to the flesh in reaction to the failure. It followed that Hinduism represented an extreme form of passive religion—where nature acted upon the individual and the individual was unable to actively integrate external nature into its process of consciousness. Hinduism, for Hirsch, was a prime example of the world’s need for active religiosity.

4. Buddhism

Hegel’s sources for interpreting Buddhism included the historical work of Joseph-Anne-Marie de Moyriac de Mailla and English travel reports. He distinguished the Buddhism in India founded by Sakyamuni in 1000 B.C.E. (a dating error repeated by Hirsch) from the Buddhism in China founded by Siddharta Gautama, which he named the religion of “Fo” (the Chinese name for Buddha). Everything in the universe emerged from and returned to objective absolute substance, being-within-itself, the infinity of spirit, “Nirvana.” Insofar as Nirvana


was a universalistic negation of particular and finite being, as distinct from being a comprehensive totality of determinate existences, it was also nothingness. The Buddhist sought to liberate himself from the finite world and phenomenal existence, filled with the miseries of stress, sickness, old age, and death, for the eternal serenity of absolute substance/nothingness. Buddhism’s drawback, according to Hegel, was the absence of the spiritual reality of consciousness on the level of Nirvana. For divinity to be authentic, it had to be absolute spirit, a crystallization of consciousness grounded in subjectivity. Nirvana lacked pure subjectivity, the joining of subject and substance which constituted consciousness. Subjective consciousness was present only among individual Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who were bounded by determinacy and empirical reality.

Hirsch, basing his description on data from Hegel and Stuhr, identified Buddhism as a response to Hinduism. According to his interpretation, the Hindu performed masochistic acts of self-denial in order to reach the Brahmanic spirit, only to be thrust back to the realm of nature which remained unreconciled with spirit. Thus Buddhism avoided the trap whereby an attempt to escape nature ended up with becoming imprisoned by it, and denied that nature had any actuality at all. The determinate world never existed, it was only an evil illusion. There were individual figures (Buddhas, Bodhisattvas) who passed from the (illusory) world of time and space to Nirvana, but they were exceptional. Hirsch drew his own conclusions. As the Hindu was driven back to nature because he could never become totally reconciled with spirit, the Buddhist was driven back to the illusory, unstable space-time world because it was impossible to remain in the emptiness of Nirvana. While in Hinduism the world of nature, unprocessed by consciousness, ended up dominating, in Buddhism the illusory world dominated. Hirsch shifted Hegel’s identification of the absence of subjective consciousness in the higher level of Nirvana over to the human level. Individual consciousness could not endure in Nirvana above, and could not unfold in the illusory world of time and space below. Only Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

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were capable of doing so. Hirsch averred further that Buddhist morality was confined to (an ultimately unsuccessful process of) excluding and overcoming sensuality. It was purely negative, while an authentic moral process used sensuality as positive content for the spiritual development of consciousness and freedom. The individual remained passive in all respects—in the face of Nirvana, in the face of the (illusory) world of time and space, and in the face of sensuality considered constructively. In making his assertions Hirsch did not refer to sources, primary or secondary. Nor did he explain why Nirvana was unachievable for the ordinary Buddhist or why an illusory world precluded consciousness thereof.\textsuperscript{13}

5. Zoroastrianism

For his interpretation of the Zoroastrian religion, Hegel used Johann Friedrich Kleuker’s German translation (1776–1777) of Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil Duperron’s French translation of the Zend Avesta.\textsuperscript{14} Hinduism involved the attempt to destroy finite, human consciousness, leaving the concrete and natural realms ineligible for reconciliation with spirit on the human level. The religion of Zoroaster advanced beyond Hinduism by preserving determinate existence (nature) and relating it to universal being (spirit). Nature and spirit underwent a process of reconciliation, such that consciousness was developed. Zeruane Akerene, unlimited, eternal being above, emanated cosmic light and goodness, Ahura Mazda. Ahura Mazda implied the existence of its opposite, dark and evil Ahriman, an “antithesis” which served to identify and clarify the “thesis” Ahura Mazda. In this emanative process, Zeruane Akerene objectified itself in concrete reality (Ahura


Mazda, Ahriman), while concrete (determinate) existence entered into the consciousness of the subject (Zeruane Akerene). Humanity was the finite expression of the Ahura Mazda-Ahriman dialectic (both were originally infinite and then turned finite with the onset of opposition), a further (indirect) objectification of Zeruane Akerene. As the subject, humanity had consciousness of the object Zeruane Akerene. If in Buddhism subjective consciousness was limited to particular existences (Buddhas, Boddhisatvas), in the Zoroastrian religion it was present both cosmically (Zeruane Akerene vis-à-vis Ahura Mazda) and anthropologically (humanity vis-à-vis Zeruane Akerene). Further, the cosmic and anthropological levels related dialectically. Through the light of Ahura Mazda, the infinite being of Zeruane Akerene entered finite entities and maintained them; while to the extent that the individual, finite human being maintained goodness and light, it sustained the infinite reality of goodness. Ideally, all individual human beings would express their goodness, filling universality above and particularity below with light. Hegel found the religion of Zoroaster limited, only in the sense that the ideal would never be realized. Cosmic reality above and human reality below would never be purely synthesized. The objectification of Zeruane Akerene as Ahura Mazda in human and finite form would never be reconciled with the objectification of finite humanity in the higher light. Complete subjectivity of consciousness would never be realized on either level. Nor, for that matter, could the antithetical relationship between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, or that between Ahura Mazda/Ahriman and Zeruane Akerene be resolved. Consciousness (or spirit) would never become absolute.\footnote{Hegel, “Das Zendvolk,” in idem, Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, 179–185; Hodgson, “Editorial Introduction,” in Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion; and ibid., 298–310.}

For his interpretation Hirsch drew primarily from Hegel, but also from Rhode, Stuhr, and Bähr. Zoroastrianism was an advance over both Hinduism and Buddhism. Brahman, the indeterminate Beyond, empty of content and form, repelled the human being back to the finite and natural realm. Zeruane Akerene did not instigate a division but rather participated creatively in bringing life about through the struggle between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. In turn, Ahura Mazda created (more correctly, emanated) the finite world

through thought, will, and word, providing grounding for active consciousness on the part of the finite human being. The Buddhist sought escape into the being/nothingness of the beyond, only to be cast back to the (illusory) world of time and space where illusion precluded consciousness. Here, the finite, concrete world was a positive arena for human development of consciousness. Specifically, Ahura Mazda (good, thesis) and Ahriman (evil, antithesis) came to a standstill in their opposition: Ahura Mazda could no longer create because Ahriman prevented him, and Ahriman could no longer destroy because Ahura Mazda prevented him. Zeruane Akerene relieved the paralysis, fostered a struggle between them, and then brought the finite world into existence to contain it. Finite existence followed upon the mutually limiting struggle between infinite light and infinite darkness, and the human being participated in the struggle on the finite level. The fact that Ahura Mazda was grounded in Zeruane Akerene (Ahriman, antithesis of Ahura Mazda, was not) provided ontological grounding and incentive for the human being to defeat Ahriman and expand Ahura Mazda’s light in the universe. For thirty thousand years, in three ten-thousand-year cycles, Ahriman would struggle with Ahura Mazda on the cosmic level, and the light within the human being would struggle with darkness on the anthropological level. Ultimately Ahura Mazda would overcome Ahriman—and the finite universe which came out of their struggle would blend into the infinite.

Rhode had written that the Zend Avesta proclaimed a moral doctrine which was set from above. It was based on principles of holiness and purity, according to which the human being was created as pure and holy as Ahura Mazda and was to remain so by overcoming evil. The Zend Avesta, he explained, summed up all its laws with the instruction that the human being was to be pure in thought, word, and deed, where pure thought (i.e., adhering to the purpose for which Ahura Mazda created things by overcoming evil and impurity and glorifying the good) included pure word and deed. Hirsch relocated the source of morality from Ahura Mazda’s infinitely-based purpose for creation to the realm of humanly measured forms of morality. Without citing sources, Hirsch contended

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that reconciliation between finite (natural) and infinite (spiritual) in terms of light was purely formal and lacked specific moral content. While the creative relationship between the infinite and finite, and the concrete reality of finitude available to human consciousness, were both potential sources for active religiosity, the specific moral values required for the freedom at the core of active religiosity were missing. Despite the dialectically intertwined universe and the development of consciousness throughout reality, Zoroastrianism, for Hirsch, belonged to the category of passive religiosity. To him, the centrality of finitude’s role was not a strength, but a weakness. Zoroastrianism’s goal was to transform the finite (darkness) into the infinite (light), but whether the transformation was charitable, political, agricultural or any other sort of activity did not matter; the moral weight was the same. All that mattered was the formal transformation. Further, since Ahura Mazda and Ahriman had equal cosmic power—infinite light entered finite darkness in the same degree that finite darkness entered infinite light—the choice between them was insignificant. Good was as real and meaningful as evil.

The matter of finitude, it may be noted, had already been addressed by Baur and Bähr. In 1825 Baur wrote that in Persian religion ideal existence preceded the reality of creation. Creation made the invisible ideal visible and externalized the internal, and brought plurality into unity. In terms of consciousness, creation meant transition from a primordial indeterminate form to a determinate one, as higher spirit developed consciousness through the finite world. Specifically, it objectified itself in the real, divided world and sublimated finite consciousness back into itself. Infinite and good were identified with Ahura Mazda (light) and finitude and evil with Ahriman (darkness). Their encounter transformed their infinite characters into finite ones. In turn, the production of finite reality and visibility (i.e., the creation of the world with its mixture of light and dark) all belonged to Ahriman. In effect, the battle between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman became one between the ideal (infinite) and the real (finite). The finite human being participated in the battle, and its victory went beyond self-transcendence into infinity.17 In 1839, Bähr wrote about surrendering finitude. In India, Veda-study

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constituted sacrificial worship. In Persia, the soul immersed itself in the revealed word of Ahura Mazda, surrendering soul and life to the universal source of life.18

6. Egypt

Hegel based his discussion of Egyptian religion on the writings of Herodotus and Plutarch. In the religion of the Near East (e.g., the Phoenician funeral festival for Adonis), death was immanent to the divine. God died (pain) and was resurrected (life-joy), making what was negative into an aspect of deity and balancing out death and life.19 In the religion of Egypt which followed, the opposition between Osiris (positive being) and Typhon (negative being) resulted in the death of Osiris: the positive yielded to the negative. But then Osiris transcended finite nature, with its opposition between positive and negative being, and entered the eternal realm of spirit where spirit moved beyond nature and coalesced with itself. In Egyptian religion, the dead were preserved forever, alive within the infinite spirit beyond nature.20 Hirsch, obviously drawing from Hegel, wrote that in Near Eastern religion (Sabianism specifically) death and life had equal power; nature forever lived and died. Osiris overcame the life-death opposition and transcended the natural cycle of life and death. Hirsch’s description echoed Hegel’s. But he implied that Egypt did not qualify as an active religion, because the dimension of spirit (in which Osiris resided) did not reconcile with nature in this life. Nature was not drawn into consciousness, leaving freedom still unavailable.21

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7. Judaism

With Nitzsch’s categories as his measurement, Hirsch worked the data of Religionswissenschaft in such a way as to prepare the stage of history for Judaism’s arrival—and to defend not only its ongoing presence but its centrality to religious history. With regard to Hinduism, he channeled Hegel’s points about nature-spirit alienation on cosmic and human levels into a plight wherein human beings were chained to natural, sensuous existence, and mastered by it. The result was passivity in terms of consciousness. He turned Hegel’s observation about the absence of absolute spirit or consciousness in the Nirvana-realm of being/nothingness into the assertion that consciousness was cut short from above by Nirvana and below by the illusory world, precluding integration of nature and spirit in consciousness. In relating to naturality only negatively, moreover, spirit could not employ its content in the process of freedom. Hegel’s view that the religion of Zoroaster was limited because the finite (natural) and the infinite (spiritual) could never truly be synthesized was set aside by Hirsch. Possibly influenced by Baur and Bähr, he focused on the surrender of finitude, which overlapped with the darkness and evil of Ahriman. Overlooking the moral doctrine of the Zend Avesta as presented by Rhode, he asserted that formal surrender itself was all that counted, and that specific moral values were neutralized. This disqualified the religion of Zoroaster as an active religion, which required specific development of moral freedom. In addition, the categories of good (Ahura Mazda) and evil (Ahriman) were equal in terms of power. In the case of Egypt, Hirsch, like Hegel, found evidence of self-consciousness in the spirit’s coming to itself in terms of death’s integration into life; the antithetical relationship resolved itself in the name of immortality. But the pursuit of freedom as conscious integration of nature into spirit was available only in life after death, not during it. This would disqualify it from becoming an active religion.

After exploring the “passive” religions and identifying their respective failures in terms of different forms of consciousness, Hirsch proceeded to Judaism. For Hirsch, as with Hegel, culture progressed with time. In addition to their substantive limitations, the religions of India, China, Persia, and Egypt yielded (or should yield) naturally to the religion of Israel, which extended into the future. In other
words, the ancient religions cleansed religious history of its potential errors and prepared the way for Abraham. Abraham was instilled with the concept of freedom, with its premise that the human being was the spiritual image of God and that nature did not have value for itself. Abraham, Hirsch declared in 1847, was alone in proclaiming the freedom of the human being, and that the human being was called upon to master the earth and have spirit freely administer the flesh. He was the first to release himself from the control of nature’s laws of necessity and from the assumption that the human being was a creature of nature.22 Among his examples, Hirsch pointed to the event where Sarah, considered beautiful by the Egyptian Pharaoh, was taken into his house. Pharaoh “dealt well with Abram for her sake,” until the Lord issued plagues because of Pharaoh’s conduct (Gen 12:14–17). The incident demonstrated Abraham’s ability to sacrifice his natural desires out of allegiance to God and his commitment to the history of the children of Israel in Egypt. Here, the element of naturality served as content for Abraham’s spiritual relationship to himself and to God. A second example was the Akedah (binding of Isaac). Out of spiritual commitment to God, Abraham surrendered his natural feelings to the point of being prepared to sacrifice his son. There were different levels of sacrifice. To surrender one’s life in momentary enthusiasm for a great ideal was not unusual in history. To sacrifice one’s entire life in serenity for a higher purpose was less frequent and of greater weight. The greatest achievement of all was to sacrifice one’s own child with one’s own hand, calmly and cold-bloodedly, for a greater purpose, to make freedom one’s own by overcoming all natural feelings. Abraham became the paradigm for the people of Israel. The granting of Torah created a form of life where the natural could be subsumed into the spiritual, and made it possible for an entire single nation to do so in terms of its relationship to God. Once this internal-to-Israel process was completed, the nation was to turn to the rest of humankind and enable and encourage the universal development of freedom.23

22 Samuel Hirsch, Der rechte Kampf für die Wahrheit: Gast-Predigt in der Synagoge zu Schwerin und Mecklenburg gehalten am 31 October 1846 (Schwerin: n.p., 1847).
23 Idem, Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden, 514–515.
8. Christianity

Christianity, according to Hirsch, was the means for Israel to turn to the world, the “extensive” form of Israel’s “intensive” (internal) active religiosity. Israel itself was unable to effectuate worldly change, because the struggles of the world, its idolatry and lies, belonged to a realm alienated from God and outside Israel’s grasp. Israel “should not build its home in the home of another.” Christianity, however, was able to simultaneously implement Judaism’s ideal active religiosity and participate in worldly relationships so as to communicate the ideal to pagans. Specifically, Jesus actualized Judaism’s principles of moral freedom by transforming a non-free life of nature into nothingness, and Paul delivered Jesus’ example to the pagans. Paul falsely asserted that human beings were naturally sinful and unable to liberate themselves from their imprisonment in nature, and that Jewish law failed to spiritualize nature—rather, it deepened despair and created a wrong sense of pride. But his doctrines of inherited sin and death as well as of supernatural grace stimulated awareness among pagans that they could become free of their miserable plight. Hirsch regarded the Catholic Church as the institutional means of bringing freedom to the consciousness of the pagan world, and the Evangelical (Protestant) Church as the means of instilling the state with the spirit of the Gospels.

B. Einhorn

1. Creuzer and Molitor

Einhorn’s a priori standard for measuring a religion’s quality was the “principle of centralization,” which included centrifugal and centripetal dynamics, as stated in his major work, Das Princip des Mosaismus (1854):

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26 Einhorn’s interest in Religionswissenschaft and symbolism is a subject for a separate study. See Bähr, Symbolik des mosaischen Cultus, vol. 1, 15, 23–30; vol. 2, 211–213; Friedrich Creuzer, “Allgemeine Beschreibung des symbolischen und mythischen Kreises”; idem, “Ideen zu einer Physik des Symbols und des Mythos”; idem, “Von den Arten und Stufen der Symbole und Allegorien,” in idem, Symbolik und Mythologie,
Our task is to determine precisely the essence of Mosaic doctrine. It is to establish a principle which endures as the innermost soul of, and the primary source for, all formations of Mosaism without exception. This principle reads: Centralization of different existences without willful impairment of any individual existence.\(^\text{27}\)

The “centrifugal-centripetal” index appeared in brief form in Friedrich Creuzer’s Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders des Griechen of 1810 (Einhorn used the third edition, 1836–1842).\(^\text{28}\) In describing the original Brahmanic faith, for example, Creuzer wrote that God divested himself of himself, emanating from infinitude to finitude (centrifugal force) and then (through Vishnu, the renewer) returned to himself, moving from finitude to infinity and becoming restored (centripetal force).\(^\text{29}\)


\(^{27}\) Einhorn, Das Prinzip des Mosaismus und dessen Verhältnis zu Heidenthum und rabbinischem Judenthum (Leipzig: C. L. Fritsche, 1854), 13.


\(^{29}\) Creuzer, Symbolik und Mythologie, vol. 1 (1836), 435–436.
Rücksicht auf die Kabbalah (1827) by Franz Joseph Molitor (1797–1860), the Catholic philosopher and kabbalist. Einhorn knew about Molitor. Speaking of the kabbalists’ distinction between movement of light which descended from the spiritual realm above into the world below (Or hayashar) and the movement of light which ascended back (Or hahozer), he cited Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert’s Die Geschichte der Seele (1833)—and Schubert cited Molitor as his source. Molitor, according to Gershom Scholem, “considered the kabbalah to be that part of Jewish tradition which had preserved, in relative purity, those ultimate truths of primeval religion which tend to be more and more revealed with the progress of history.” Ultimate truths, for Molitor, involved a distinction between real and ideal powers of human existence. Real powers provided for time-defined individualities, for centers which were independent of the eternal center with its comprehensive unity provided by ideal powers. The individualized centers, in turn, sought by means of free will to harmonize their existence with ideal unity. They arose out of centrifugal force, and returned to the eternal center by centripetal force. In other words, God revealed himself, developing his eternal ideas outside himself as productive principles in nature (centrifugal), and simultaneously withdrew his creations, rescuing them from the brink of creaturely nothingness and returning them to the source of life (centripetal). The human being was thus born to double activity: creation and revelation (centrifugal) and redemption (centripetal).

As described by Christoph Schulte, Molitor’s centralization process was reminiscent of the dynamics of the inner prehistory of the kabbalistic Tsimtsum (self-limitation), where creation was an ongoing self-negation of God’s exclusive being. Molitor spoke of an inner life of the Christian Trinity prior to the world’s creation. Before creation, God the Father limited himself to beget the Son (Christ) and release the Holy Spirit. With the world’s creation, God the

Father revealed his omnipotence in nature in terms of and through Christ, who represented ongoing centrifugal activity. As revealed in and with his Son, God’s love and grace drew his creatures back to the source of life in an ongoing centripetal movement. When the Holy Spirit poured itself over creatures, they became redeemed, fulfilling their longing to be drawn to the source of life. In this process creatures were reborn, becoming enlightened and serene. As a microcosm of higher existence, the human being included physical (Nefesh) and spiritual (Neshamah) dimensions, as well as a mediating force which transformed Neshamah into the physical realm through centrifugal power, and Nefesh into the spiritual realm by centripetal power.34

2. Pagan Religiosity

Einhorn presented his understanding of paganism in the context of Bähr’s work. Bähr (who went to the University of Heidelberg and presumably attended Creuzer’s lectures) identified the central idea of paganism as the unification of all parts of the universe into a single whole.35 As a religion of nature, it deified the entire range of natural reality. He cited Creuzer: “All [pagan] religious action and thought relate to the special existence of natural things, to their preservation and life as reflected by the human mind-spirit.” For Bähr, not only was divinity revealed in the natural world; the essence

35 Bähr studied philosophy and theology at Heidelberg (1818–1821) and then Berlin, and subsequently entered the ministry; see Holtzmann, “Karl Wilhelm Felix Christian Bähr,” in *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliographie*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humboldt, 1875), 772.
and existence of nature converged with divinity. Paganism amounted to pantheism. Divine existence did not belong to a speaking, acting self-conscious and self-determining essence, but to an “Impersonal” entity, to an “It,” a neutral abstraction which was at once everything and nothing. Natural necessity consumed morality. Ethics belonged to the physical level and focused on the human surrender to absolute necessity and human adaptation to nature-divinity. Ethics also sought to reflect macrocosmic absolute unity and harmony of particularities in the microcosmic life of the individual human being, and to blend the latter with the former.36

Einhorn applied Bähr’s description to naturalistic paganism, where divinity immersed itself into naturality. Here (presumably referring to fetishism and shamanism), God blended completely with nature. No trans-worldly dimension existed, and there was no place for the independent human being within the arena of sanctity. Centralization took place, with deity as a centrifugal force blending with nature as a centripetal force. The independent human individual remained outside the process, abandoned to a universe of caprice and war of all against all. But paganism also had an idealistic strain for Einhorn. Here, the pre-worldly God produced the world out of himself in an act of self-expression. For example, as the universal deity Osiris did—whom Creuzer described as situated above the world. In pagan idealism deity stepped forth into nature from out of itself, out of the abyss of the unknown, to manifest itself as nature and world. It objectified itself by moving into a space which became identifiable after it did so. But the centrifugal process did not imply a centripetal response. God-in-himself, primordial being, ended up opposed to divine-life-become-existent. The objectification took on a life of its own. Individuals belonged to the realm of God’s expression which fell away from him. While in pagan naturalism the individual stood outside the centralization, in pagan idealism the individual belonged to a realm outside God which contained no centripetal movement.37

According to Bähr, paganism had a concept of evil but not of sin.

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Divinity was holy and creator and creature, universal and individual realities each converged into one another. There was no space for sin, something mutually exclusive of holiness. Evil, however, was a condition of being, equivalent to finitude (including the finite human being) in and of itself, as it confronted the universal. It was overcome when the opposition between infinitude (eternal) and finitude (temporal) was itself annulled. This took place through atonement, which produced harmony between divine life and naturality. It had two forms. In one, unbroken cosmic harmony was restored by repairing the break in finite essence’s internal, vital connection with deity. In the second, opposing powers were balanced out by surrendering human life to deity, destroying the finite essence which contained destructive, hostile power.38

Einhorn did not distinguish between sin (as opposed to holiness) and evil (as opposed to infinity). In both pagan naturalism and idealism the human being was born under the curse of sin and was evil. In naturalism, sin-evil belonged to the plight of the unsanctified independent self. In idealism, it came with the human being as part of the world which fell from God. Whether God was one with the world (naturalism) or an absolute existence which stepped forth from itself to express the world (idealism); whether the human being stood opposed to God/world or stood with the world opposed to God, the human being was inherently and directly responsible for a disruption of divine, universal life and therefore evil-sinful. In pagan naturalism, evil-sin was a matter of separation from the ongoing process of centralization, confirming independence and finally asserting its own transcending identity. Einhorn’s term for this was Selbstheit or selbstisch. In pagan idealism, evil-sin meant assertion of individual self-interest before God, as part of the world which emerged out of and then away from God. For this, Einhorn used the term Selbstsucht.39

3. Pagan Idealism: Hinduism

Creuzer (following his University of Heidelberg colleague Joseph von Görres) identified Indian religion as the first and purest expression of monotheistic revelation, “obviously not the monotheism offered

38 Bähr, Symbolik des mosaischen Cultus, vol. 2 (1839), 264–266.
by speculative reason … but still, unmistakably, that of one God inherent to everything, of the soul of the world.” In Indian religion the highest essence was worshipped in a pious way, in holy innocence—simply, plainly and purely, not with bloody sacrifices but with the first of the worshippers’ fruits and the milk of their animals. Specifically, Brahman divested himself of himself, descending from his infinite self to finitude (centrifugal). This process of divestment was then reversed (centripetal), and the self was restored to Brahman. It continued repeatedly. In this ongoing cyclical process, the emanation itself, an act of love, was personified by Brahma. Siva personified the act of divestment, restriction and reduction, and Vishnu personified the centripetal action.

Brahma, God-as-imminent, was a macrocosmic entity, of which the human being was a microcosm. The spirit of the human being came from the spirit of Brahma, and its flesh came from Brahma’s body. Once the individual human being recognized the presence of the divine spark of Brahma in its soul, it sought rebirth in Brahman. This was possible, because while Brahma was located in the flesh, he was not of it. The microcosmic soul of Brahma could be extracted from the microcosmic body. As such, the descent of Brahma in the form of Brahma included the spiritual ingredient required for ascent on the part of the microcosmic human being. As Brahma’s salvific principle, Vishnu served to restore the equilibrium of the universe, where God was reabsorbed into himself, and this service granted Vishnu higher status than Brahma. Vishnu both rescued the world and kept it from descending into potentially absolute chaos. Vishnu also functioned existentially, within the human microcosm, providing incentive for the human being to recognize the presence of Brahma in the soul. For Creuzeer, then, the pure monotheism of Hinduism provided for Brahman’s restoration and the ascent of the individual soul into Brahman—thanks to the microcosmic character of man which included Brahma’s soul, and the supportive activity of Vishnu.

This pure monotheism, Creuzeer observed, “could not be preserved on this evil earth.”40 The Trimurti (triad) of divinity (Brahma, Siva, Vishnu), whose non-unity already compromised Brahman, inevitably split up into infinite parts. As pointed out by Richard Payne Knight (1836),

40 Creuzeer, Symbolik und Mythologie, vol. 1, 381.
when simple theism turned into a trinity, the trinity had to be maintained constantly by divine revelation (which was absent), lest divinity subdivide into endless, particularized entities and attributes (a theme which Hegel, Creuzer’s friend and Heidelberg colleague, also addressed). Creuzer followed Johann Christoph Gatterer and Joseph Görres, who held that the Hebrews west of the Euphrates (including Abraham and Sarah) fled the east to escape persecution and originally worshiped Brahman: “The pure Jehovah worship of Abraham was nothing but a branch extended from very ancient Brahmanism.” The absence of metaphysical definition for God, creation, preservation, and destruction in the religion of Moses resembled Indian doctrine as well. But like the Indians themselves, the Hebrews were unable to preserve monotheism in purity. Monotheism did not disappear from human history, but it was submerged. It resurfaced with Christianity.41

Einhorn considered Hinduism as a paradigm of pagan idealism. Brahman expressed himself, subdividing into objective existence (the world) and self-withdrawn self (subjective) and producing opposition between primordial existence and emanated existence. As Brahma, divinity descended into the flesh of the human being, where it became enveloped by lust. Atonement and restoration were possible, but meant killing off the flesh and its associated egoism. The only way to divest the human microcosm of its egoistic selfishness, its striving to assert itself (with some inconsistency, Einhorn applied the term selbstisch) was for self-consciousness and individuality to end entirely. With individuality destroyed, lower existence could merge

into higher existence. Loss of self could not be achieved by blending the individual into humanity, since humanity was itself self-centered (selbstisch) and opposed to pure divinity.

Einhorn’s point was that Hinduism, contrary to Creuzer’s description, failed in terms of centralization. The descent into fleshly lust was too steep for the individual soul to be retrieved. It had to be destroyed for cosmic restoration to become possible. Einhorn’s observations resembled Baur’s, who had written that once the spirit entered finite existence and turned from primordial being for the enticements of a deceptive world, egoistic lust emerged. The individual was dragged toward the abyss of nothingness, steeped in selfishness (Selbstsucht) and with the notion that something could exist outside eternal being and for itself. The delusion that the real could separate off from the ideal, that the human being could reside independently in finitude, constituted the fall of sin. For Einhorn as well, the attachment to ego and flesh in Hinduism was extreme, too extreme for the individual to participate in any centripetal movement.42

4. Pagan Idealism: Buddhism

Creuzer, following Stuhr, Edward Upham and John Davy, identified Buddhism as a development of Hinduism. There was no supreme, self-existent or eternal being, creator and preserver of the world. The highest realm, eternal and indestructible, was that of nothingness (Nirvana). But it was also the ultimate cause for the existence of the world, insofar as it was the grounding for realms of enlightenment which issued seeds for existent entities. Following laws of destiny, Nirvana produced the creative realms of enlightenment out of its infinite being (which was also nothingness) periodically. The worlds produced from the enlightened realm were perishable. Indeed, they had no reality. They were even evil—illusory and intentionally misleading the senses. Individual intellectual entities (human beings) could nevertheless seek to purify themselves of the illusory environment and reunite with the eternal, indestructible spirit of Nirvana. The Buddhas were those who successfully shed the material qualities of the illusory worlds and immersed themselves in Nirvana. Some

of them returned to the illusory worlds to rescue others, intending to rescue all intellectual entities ultimately and put an end to the history of the worlds.

While Buddhism developed out of Hinduism, it differed in important ways. The Trimurti of Hinduism was set aside, because it included the creator Brahma who would have prevented the illusory world from perishing. Whereas the individual of Hinduism could ascend to Brahman, Buddhism, Creuzer averred, annulled individuality completely. It also replaced the fullness of being which was Brahman with nothingness-being. He cited Wilhelm von Humboldt, that ascent to Nirvana required separation from individuality and extinction of all human desires and efforts. The world of finitude, with all its constructions, had to be abandoned in the quest for the apex of the universe. The goal was Sunya, an (indivisible) emptiness which simultaneously included everything.43

Einhorn classified Buddhism as pagan idealism. The world of space and time came about as a descent from the source and became opposed to it. While in Hinduism atonement could raise lower existence (excluding individuality) into higher existence, in Buddhism there was no centripetal action at all—whether for the time-space world, nature, or individual. To the contrary, the finite world was illusory and the individual had to destroy itself in order to ascend to Nirvana. While for Creuzer Nirvana was the apex of the universe, the indirect source of (illusory) existence, a blend of being and nothingness, for Einhorn it amounted to nothing more than some airy formation (luftiges Gebilde) which could provide no centrifugal power.44


44 Einhorn, Das Prinzip des Mosaismus, 17.
5. *Pagan Idealism: Zoroaster*

Drawing from the *Zend Avesta* (Kleuker’s translation) and Görres, Creuzer described how Zeruane Akerene, the self-contained and eternal unity, produced light-goodness, Ahura Mazda, who reflected and served Zeruane Akerene. As light, Ahura Mazda (thesis) implied darkness, Ahriman (antithesis). Ahriman turned evil only when he became envious of Ahura Mazda. Zeruane Akerene did not create evil, directly or indirectly. But he did allow Ahriman’s freely chosen jealousy to play itself out as a means of clarifying and glorifying it through struggle. The battle which followed meant de facto limitation of the infinite entities, producing finitude. The human being was a crucible of the struggle, containing good and evil together. The pre-Socratic philosophers Heraclitus and Empedocles were correct, Creuzer noted: finite existence included strife. Since the struggle was of finitude and therefore belonged to time, it would end, and when it did so would all finite existence. The universe would become a realm of pure light, love, and goodness, of Zeruane Akerene expressed as Ahura Mazda. Ahriman would continue to exist, but as an antithesis forever emptied of all jealousy; the jealous Ahriman, according to the *Zend Avesta* myth, would be destroyed by molten iron along with the hell he created. The removal of impurity included mortality, and the dead would be resurrected in body and soul. Symbolically, Ahura Mazda and Ahriman (cleansed of jealousy and evil) would offer sacrifices to Zeruane Akerene.\(^{45}\)

Einhorn drew from Creuzer, but while Creuzer focused on jealousy, struggle and finitude, Einhorn focused on the defeat of self-assertion. Zoroastrianism radicalized the opposition between absolute and emanated existence found in Hinduism and Buddhism into a universe split between light and darkness. Zeruane Akerene allowed the jealousy of Ahriman (resembling Cain, Einhorn noted) toward Ahura Mazda (resembling Abel) to serve as a catalyst to generate ethical life. The jealousy of Ahriman, neither part of creation nor natural law, but a matter of his free choice (albeit allowed by Zeruane Akerene), was an act of extreme self-interest (*Selbstsucht*). Instead of keeping to his own territory, Ahriman, dark antithesis of Ahura

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Mazda, breached the boundary, attacked Ahura Mazda, and disrupted cosmic harmony. Ahura Mazda retreated, leaving Ahriman to rule. The finitude delineated above was reflected microcosmically below in the human mixture of light and darkness (which included mortality). While itself finite, the human being struggled against Ahriman who was responsible for finitude. Ultimately Ahriman would disappear along with finitude above, and finite individuality in the form of the human being would disappear below. By combating Ahriman in the name of light and overcoming his Selbstsucht, the human being contributed to the restoration of cosmic harmony. As finitude was subsumed into infinitude, the human being would be subsumed as well—and this included the free will which catalyzed evil and the struggle above.

Einhorn thought that Zoroastrianism offered a view of morality superior to that of Hinduism and Buddhism, and one akin to Mosaism. For Mosaism, human nature contained the ability to sin and the free will to choose either good or evil. But sin was not part of human nature, and the ability to sin was itself not sinless and in fact served the pursuit of sanctification. Also, the telos of the universe was good. In Zoroastrianism, each human being was influenced by Ahriman’s jealousy and transcending identity. But like Ahriman prior to his struggle against Ahura Mazda, the human being was not originally or by nature evil or sinful. As with Mosaism, the human being was free to choose between good and evil. And the telos of the universe was of light and goodness. Still, Zoroastrianism was insufficient in terms of centralization. There was centripetal action in terms of the return of the emanated universe of finitude to its infinite source. But with the defeat of Ahriman and the subsumption of the human being into the light of Zeruane Akerene-Ahura Mazda, individuality, finitude and free will were sacrificed. The achievement of moral existence meant the end to discernible human identity. From above, Zeruane Akerene ultimately drew back into himself, removing centrifugal force from the world.46

6. Pagan Idealism: Egypt

Creuzer described an emanative process in which the eternal, highest essence revealed itself in its attributes, each of which had its own personality: Amun (omnipotence), sun, who gave light to prototypical ideas; Ptah (wisdom) who brought the world of ideas into reality and completed everything according to truth; and Osiris (goodness), who caused everything which was beneficial and was the source of all life and blessing. Osiris was assaulted by evil when his jealous brother Tryphon (representing nature’s evil powers) killed him and tried to steal his throne. Osiris’s death, however, also constituted an act of love, for his suffering and death enabled him to share in the human experience of mortality and draw humanity with him as he was being resurrected. Osiris also shared in the parched desolation of the desert, such that his own revival meant the creation of a blessed land with a powerful Pharaoh. His death and resurrection were enacted on the individual level in the embalming process. Osiris was embalmed by Hermes, father of all priests. The human body, a microcosm of the holy universe, was embalmed as well. Indeed, embalming was the direct work of divinity, a sacred act which purified the human being. The mummified body belonged to eternity (over against fleeting earthly life) and was an act of consecration to Osiris (as over against Tryphon).47

Einhorn included Egyptian religion under the category of pagan idealism. The highest essence resembled Brahman. The tripartite division into Amun (omnipotence), Ptah (wisdom), and Osiris (love) resembled the Trimurti of Brahman’s self-reflection and self-emergence. Hinduism and Egyptian religion differed with regard to the individual. Brahma provided the flesh and soul of the microcosmic human being. The soul became enveloped by lust, but while in the flesh, the soul (of Brahma) was not of it (the human incarnation of Brahma’s soul and body together meant the infection of the soul from the subjective human perspective but not from the objective perspective of Brahma); the human being sought to return the soul of Brahma to Brahman by killing off the flesh. Vishnu provided the means and perspective for the human being to transcend the human condition set in place by Brahma. In India, the physical body was

sinful, the corpse the impurest of all, as was individual dependence (again with some inconsistency, Einhorn applied the term Selbstheit). In Egypt the body was a sacred microcosm into which the individual soul blended in positive fashion. It was temporarily at home in this world and eternally at home after death; less than purely sacred in this life but totally pure in the mummified body in the world to come. Egyptian religion resembled that of Zoroaster, insofar as for both evil came about not naturally but with a voluntary act of jealousy which breached the boundary between the good deity and the potentially bad deity. The result was the disruption of cosmic harmony.

The religion of Egypt did not fail, as did that of Zoroaster, when it came to the centrifugal thrust of divinity. But it did share the limitation of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism in terms of the centripetal process. As with them, the individual became lost in the restorative process; in Egypt the individual of this world was secondary to the mummified human being of the world to come.48

7. Mosaism

Einhorn asserted that Mosaism, rather than Hinduism as Creuzer thought, had the centralizing dynamics to capture the concept of one God inherent to all. It did so at Sinai, when the principle of centralization (the cycle of centrifugal and centripetal forces) was set in place for the entire nation. The principle of centralization was, according to Einhorn, natural to human existence, but only Judaism was able to preserve it. In June 1857 he made the point that Judaism was older than the Israelite stock which defined itself at Sinai, in the sense that it identified with the original outflow of divine spirit in humanity and the origin of the human species—the divine spirit being subsequently explicated in the cycle of centralization. The religion of Israel was rooted in Adam, and drew from the divine breath and primordial revelation he received. Accordingly, the nation of Judaism concentrated humanity in its purity into itself and the nation’s beginning and path of development was an epitome of the

human spirit: “On Mt. Sinai a nation of religion, not a religion, was created. It was a nation of priests, designed to imprint the primordial doctrine of God deeper within itself, and then make it universally dominant.” To make the claim that because Israel was the first to make the divine truths known it held some sort of national patent on them was no different than for some astronomer to claim that the light of some planet belonged to him because he was the first to observe it.49

Einhorn’s categorical distinction between Mosaism and the ancient pagan religions was reminiscent of Bähr’s. Bähr wrote that in paganism, the real was the ideal. Nature was deified, and the natural world and the sacred blended. God’s essence and existence coincided to the point of identification with nature. Divine revelation was detected in nature. In these capacities, God was not a personality but rather a neutral abstraction. In Mosaism, by contrast, God was a unity which was not an “it” but a personal “I” who created the world out of nothing in an act of free decision. God alone existed absolutely, while the world existed to the extent that it testified to or revealed God. Hegel, Bähr added, mistakenly defined Mosaism as a religion of sublimity, where God was absolutely above and distinct from the finite world. True, only the God of Mosaism truly existed. He was not at one with the world, the world was not the body in which he lived and died but a disposable garment. But God was still in the world. He permeated and enlivened it.50

Einhorn took this further. He distinguished Mosaism from pagan (pantheistic) naturalism, by the fact that YHWH was reality-in-and-for-itself, a personality fully independent of creation. God’s immanence in the world distinguished Mosaism from pagan idealism. Unlike the airy formation of Nirvana or even the transcendant Zeruane Akerene, Elohim epitomized existence. The Mosaic concept of God was the paradigm of the centralizing process. YHWH was God as existent-in-himself, existence of all existence, a personal essence before and after the world. Elohim was comprehensive power,


such that nothing existed outside God. The God of Mosaism was a synthesis or centralization of the transcendental “I” above nature (e.g., Isa 41:4), a spiritual, centrifugal reality, and Elohim, epitomizing nature, a naturalistic centripetal reality. The two coexisted, complementing one another, integrating and mutually relating without compromising either. The highest realm was not devoid of existence (as with Nirvana), and the lowest realm was not an illusion (as it was for Buddhism). The production of the world was not a destruction of God (as represented by Shiva of the Hindu Trimurti), and the restoration of the world to its origin did not involve the destruction of the finite individual (as in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrian religion). YHWH and Elohim together, centralizing centrifugal and centripetal forces, provided the perfect expression of God. Indeed, to emphasize either YHWH or Elohim at the cost of the other would pervert the meaning of the Mosaic God. Mosaism avoided (what Creuzer regarded to be) a one-sided and false emphasis on either spirit or nature/matter. Paganism’s efforts to make nature and spirit complementary or equivalent, and resolve any dispute between God and world, failed—“and the stone of Sisyphus had to be rolled again.” Mosaism, Einhorn asserted, was the first religion to successfully effectuate a coalescence between materialist and spiritual perceptions. The human being was an image of God.

As the image of God, the human being centralized Ruah (spirit) and Nefesh (animal power). In Hinduism and Buddhism, the individual was, respectively, inherently evil and deluded, and needed to be destroyed. In Hinduism, Brahma descended to give birth to the human body, and the soul became a slave to lust. In the religion of Zoroaster, the human being, finite and free, had to overcome itself to blend with infinite Ahura Mazda as the extension of Zeruane Akerene. In Mosaism, the human being was created good (“The Holy One blessed be he carries the world, and the human soul carries the body. The Holy One blessed be he is pure in his world, and the soul is pure in the body,” Midrash Devarim Rabbah 2:37; see b. Berakhot 10a). In this good creation the body (nature) and spirit or intelligence (Ruah) centralized in the soul (Nefesh, residing in the

51 Creuzer, Symbolik und Mythologie, vol. 2 (1840), 276.
52 Einhorn cited Maimonides, Hilkhot Yesodei Hatorah, Halakhah 1 and Halakhah 2; see Einhorn, Das Princip des Mosaismus, 17–20.
heart). In a portrayal reminiscent of Molitor’s, Einhorn wrote that the soul (Nefesh) was the midpoint between spirit (Ruah) and natural tendencies (body) and centralized them. The body was not evil, opposed to spirit. To the contrary, evil came when either body or spirit (Ruah) established its own center—and this was not part of God’s creation but a function of free will.53

8. Christianity

Einhorn did not believe, contrary to Creuzer, that Christianity succeeded in communicating primordial revelation. Indeed, it failed in terms of both the centrifugal and centripetal sides of centralization. The structure of the Christian Trinity, the triad of creation (God the Father), destruction (Christ), and preservation (Holy Spirit), he observed, mirrored the Hindu Trimurti as well as the triad of Egypt (Amun, Ptah, Osiris). And Christ, like Osiris, was driven by love to suffer as a human, die and be revived so as to become, by means of sympathetic identification, the savior and restorer of his people. But there was no equivalent in Christianity to the Brahman beyond the Trimurti, or to the higher essence beyond Amun-Ptah-Osiris. Instead, the Trinity replaced the oneness of God as the transcending source for centrifugal power. As for the human being, once the originally good angel fell to become Satan, resembling Ahriman’s turning to evil out of jealousy, evil became natural to the world which God had created good. Christianity then blended the sin with flesh (Rom 7:23–25). Next, God sent Christ to free the human being from the power of flesh and undo the calamity wrought by the first Adam. Einhorn also observed a parallel to Hinduism here. The idea of inborn evil was already present in India, where the finite world was not a free creation of Brahman, but a necessary outflow of his essence and a falling away from Brahman, through Brahma, to the point of death and sin. It followed that the human being as a self-assertive entity had to be killed off. The theme was mirrored by Christianity, insofar as the individual of flesh had to be expunged from the restorative process to the world. The individual human entity, as body and soul together, was excluded from the centripetal process.54

53 Ibid., 37–38, 158–159.
54 Einhorn, “Unterscheidungslehre zwischen Judentum und Christentum,” Sinai 5 (1860/61), no. 7 (August 1860), 193–197; no. 8 (September 1860), 225–232; no.
Hirsch and Einhorn each sought to formulate a religious philosophy of Judaism within the context of new scientific data about ancient religion. They used universal a priori criteria, active-passive and centrifugal-centripetal respectively, with the aim of establishing the unique importance of Judaism in world history in the context of post-Emancipation Jewish-Christian culture.

Hirsch found the religion of Hinduism wanting because of the dominant, pivotal role of lustful human nature vis-à-vis the passive position of consciousness and the inability to integrate consciousness with Brahman. Einhorn found Hinduism wanting because access to Brahman required annulling human individuality. For one the issue was existential: the integration of nature into human consciousness and the process of freedom. For the other it was cosmic: centralizing human and divine realities. Hirsch found Buddhism insufficient because this world, as illusory, could not be drawn into consciousness and Nirvana was inaccessible to consciousness. Einhorn found Buddhism insufficient because the quest for Nirvana involved annulling individuality and because Nirvana was but an “airy formation” without being, precluding any centrifugal force. Hirsch found the religion of Zoroaster limited, because overcoming finitude was a morality-specific indifferent process. Einhorn praised the morality of Zoroastrianism, but found it lacking because it meant eliminating finite individuality below and the withdrawal (rather than providing centrifugal impetus) of the deity Zeruane Akerene above. According to Hirsch’s interpretation, the religion of Egypt provided a process for reconciling nature and spirit in consciousness only on the cosmic level, in the afterlife. Einhorn found it lacking because the this-worldly individual was neglected in the process of mumification for immortality.

For Hirsch, the essential deficiency of ancient (equivalent to pagan) religion had to do with the pivotal power of nature and its resistance to the spiritual process—specifically, in Hinduism the inability to escape the flesh, in Buddhism the illusory character of the world of nature, and in the religion of Zoroaster the subsumption

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11 (December 1860), 323–325; no. 12 (January 1861), 355–359; 6 (1861/62), no. 4 (May 1861), 101–105; no. 8 (September 1861), 239–244; no. 10 (November 1861), 299–302; no. 11 (December 1861), 331–333 [Remainder did not appear].
of finite nature at the cost of specified morality. For Einhorn, the essential deficiency revolved around the compromise of individual existence in the centralizing process. The human being, whether as fleshly (India), egoistic (Buddhism), finite (Zoroaster), or mortal (Egypt) was annulled in the centripetal movement. Hirsch neutralized Christianity as the center of active religiosity by making it into an extensive form of Judaism. According to Einhorn, any ultimate source for centrifugal movement was lost with the Christian Trinity (supplanting the role of Brahman or Egypt’s highest essence), while the human individual, sinful in flesh, was excluded from the centripetal process.

The relationship of Hirsch and Einhorn to the newly gathered data of Religionswissenschaft was certainly apologetic. They used it to establish Judaism’s preeminence in history, thereby co-opting the Christocentric position of the likes of Creuzer, Hegel, and Schelling. At the same time, they sought to demonstrate to their Jewish readership how the data validated Judaism and also mandated Reform interpretations and changes. They proceeded from universalistic positions (albeit authored by Christians), using abstract formulations from sources outside Judaism. Their probes of ancient (pagan) religion were not on the level of their extensive, source-based probes of Judaism and Christianity, and their interpretations tended to be arbitrary. Hirsch was unable to understand how Brahman or Nirvana could be accessed and so concluded that they were objectively inaccessible. He approached the system of the Zend Avesta according to the moral-specific mentality typical of traditional Judaism (and not the Zoroastrian categorical mindset) and then pronounced it deficient. Einhorn did not acknowledge Hinduism’s attempt to retain individuality in the form of Atman or Buddhism’s assumption of individuality into the infinity of consciousness and Nirvana. Future study should explore the ramifications of this unbalanced approach for their respective religious philosophies, which were central to establishing Reform Judaism.
“Protestant theology’s biblical criticism is the best antidote to anti-Semitism.” This, at first glance, rather astonishing formulation stems from Hermann Cohen’s essay on “Religion und Sittlichkeit,” published in 1907, in which the famous German-Jewish philosopher presented the main aspects of his neo-Kantian inspired interpretation of Judaism as a modern, universal prophetic religion of mankind with a messianic mission consisting in the moral responsibility for a future of justice and universal peace.1 Since his controversy with the Berlin historian Heinrich von Treitschke during the “Berlin Debate on Anti-Semitism” in 1880–1881,2 he had devoted his work to the intellectual justification of Judaism’s existence in a modern, pluralistic German society and culture, his dialogue partner and—at the same time—adversary being cultural Protestantism. For Cohen, who was friendly with renowned liberal theologians like Martin Rade und Wilhelm Herrmann, and from whose historical perspective the Reformation and Protestantism were not merely an element of Europe’s intellectual and social progress but also an important link between Jewish tradition and German culture, dialogue with


Protestant theology was most significant. Cohen provided the most positive interpretation of Martin Luther and the Reformation ever written by a Jewish author, and he consistently interpreted German Protestantism as Judaism’s partner and ally. In his essay, “Ein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage,” a polemical response to Treitschke’s anti-Jewish attacks, he had attempted to reconcile Jewish and Protestant culture in Germany, at the same time justifying his demand for German Jews’ equality and integration by pointing to the fact that, “in their religious movements, they had conspicuously embraced the Protestant form of religious culture.” “In all spiritual issues of religion,” he emphasized, “we are thinking and feeling according to the Protestant spirit.” In view of Cohen’s affinity to contemporary cultural Protestantism, especially the school of Albrecht Ritschl, David Myers has most convincingly characterized the philosopher’s concept of Judaism as a kind of “Jewish cultural Protestantism” or “Protestant Judaism” that was, however, unfortunately never matched by any positive Protestant response or readiness for dialogue.

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The aim of the historical and philosophical construction that helped the philosopher to adopt the Reformation as an important element of humanity’s spiritual development from the biblical-prophetical tradition through Plato, Maimonides, Luther, and Kant to his own neo-Kantian interpretation of Judaism (an affinity that appeared to him as the warranty for the relevance of Jewish tradition for the “German spirit”), found an appropriate expression in the following words: it was German Jewry’s task, he emphasized, to ward off the “specter” of the notion that “[the Jew] was alien to Christian or, even worse, to the German Protestant culture.” This hope, however, would only have been realistic if Cohen’s ideas had been matched by an equal German-Protestant acceptance of Judaism as a part of German culture. Unfortunately, his assertion of a fundamental relationship between the German and the Jewish “spirit,” so impressively expressed during the First World War in his 1915 pamphlet on “Deutschtum und Judentum,” in which he referred to a specific intellectual affinity between Judaism and a modern, ethically oriented Protestantism, remained a lonely voice that, shortly after 1914, fell victim to German society’s newly erupting anti-Semitism.

The Marburg philosopher was, of course, completely aware of the deep differences between Judaism and Christianity, and sometimes he was even inclined to polemically emphasize them; however, he sincerely hoped for a gradual rapprochement of modern cultural Protestantism with the principles of Jewish “ethical monotheism” which seemed to him the embodiment of a superior religiosity and morality. Although he respected Christianity, the conviction that Judaism was the really forward-looking religion, whose messianic mission consisted, in contrast to Christianity, in firmly maintaining the vision of a future redemption of the world and in assuming ethical responsibility for a future of justice and universal peace, was fundamental for Cohen’s philosophical and political reflections. Interestingly enough, his claim that Jewish “ethical monotheism”

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9 Ibid., 256.
was, ultimately, the most appropriate foundation of modern culture and morality (an interpretation best expressed in his mature 1919 work, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*\(^\text{10}\)) was based on a complex, differentiated discussion of contemporary Protestant biblical criticism that appeared as the culmination of progressive “Wissenschaft” and whose characteristic appreciation of Israelite prophecy provided, from the point of view of many liberal Jewish scholars, an important starting-point for religious dialogue. The decisive link between “German-ness” and Judaism (and this is the reason for Cohen’s aforementioned hopeful description of Protestant biblical criticism as an “antidote” to anti-Semitism) was, for the philosopher, the extremely positive interpretation of prophecy that especially characterized the exegetical school of Julius Wellhausen with its literary reconstruction of the Pentateuch.

Cohen was, of course, not so naïve as to overlook that Wellhausen’s image of Israel’s religious history in particular tended to belittle important parts of the biblical tradition, especially the post-prophetic and priestly layers as well as the Pharisaic tradition, in favor of seemingly objective Christian claims of superiority, and to fundamentally contest postbiblical Judaism’s right to exist.\(^\text{11}\) On the contrary, he knew very well that Wellhausen’s construction of Judaism did not at all cast into doubt the traditional anti-Jewish thrust of Lutheran theology, which was marked by a deep mistrust with regard to anything connected to Torah piety. The fierce controversy between *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and Protestant theology that had been triggered by Adolf von Harnack’s famous lectures on “What is Christianity” [*Das Wesen des Christentums*] at the beginning of the twentieth century, had resulted from the very fact that the Berlin church historian, who was widely perceived as the hero of objective “Wissenschaft” in the field of religion, had simply adopted


Wellhausen’s theories, in order to dissociate Jesus’ personality and message from a Pharisaic Judaism that he depicted as an extremely negative phenomenon, and to dismiss Christianity’s Jewish origins and elements as features that had already been overcome in a distant past. In his obituary written after Wellhausen’s death in 1918, Cohen praised him as a scholar “who has devoted his immense life’s work to thorough research on the Old Testament and who made an everlasting contribution to the understanding of the Israelite prophets.” In the same text, however, he frankly criticized the Christian scholar’s ignorance concerning postbiblical Jewish literature and his lack of awareness of Judaism’s continued existence after the appearance of Jesus, and he pointed to the negative effects of his literary and historical approach to the Hebrew Bible. Cohen’s attitude toward biblical criticism remained, therefore, rather ambivalent: when demanding the establishment of chairs for Jewish studies at German universities and the promotion of independent Jewish biblical research, he explicitly rejected the notion that Judaism should leave “the study of our Bible to Protestant theology.” Instead, he emphasized, it was necessary to point out, that a still-living religion may never again entrust the study of its own sources to a scholarship that is actually and programmatically not pure scholarship, but rather wants to establish and reinforce its own religion, a foreign religion, through this scholarship. We will always keep in mind the merit that Protestant academic theology has acquired for itself from biblical criticism with deep gratitude, but we may not


be untrue to the obligation imposed on us by the preservation of our own possession.\textsuperscript{14}

Despite his ambivalence, Cohen hoped that the great achievements of Protestant biblical criticism would result in far-reaching positive effects regarding the attitude of German society toward the Jewish minority at the beginning of the twentieth century. “Prophecy is seen as the soul of the Jewish religion,” he wrote in 1913 in a review of Alfred Bertholet’s \textit{Die Eigenart der alttestamentlichen Religion}. In view of the anti-Semitic hostility of his time, he felt it as a consolation

that the acknowledgment of our religion in previously unknown profundity has begun to develop and spread, and that it is scholarship, the scholarship cultivated by the Protestant academic theology, that has achieved this knowledge and has thus deepened its own religious insight.\textsuperscript{15}

By shedding light on the scholarly context of Cohen’s almost imploring words, this article intends to explore the significance Protestant biblical criticism had especially for the liberal current of Jewish studies in Germany from the turn of the nineteenth century to the Weimar Republic—this era being the period in which the most intensive encounter between \textit{Wissenschaft des Judentums} and Protestant biblical research in Europe took place. The scholarly and political controversies that characterized the decades before the Nazi rise to power are extremely complicated: apart from the relevant theological questions concerning the interpretation of Israel’s religious history, an appropriate interpretation of Jesus as well as the history of the era of the New Testament and the emergence of Pharisaic-rabbinical Judaism, the most important issues were the academic equality of Jewish studies and the problem of the Jewish minority’s integration and acculturation in the face of the challenge of modern anti-Semitism. The focus of this article is clearly on the Jewish scholars’ perception of the Protestant historical and hermeneutic debate on the value and originality of the Hebrew Bible, while the equally important controversies on the implications of biblical criticism for


the assessment of rabbinic tradition has to be neglected. In terms of the historical context, the assumption underlying the following remarks is that there was a very important political aspect inherent in the historical controversies between *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and Protestant theology, in the course of which Jewish scholars increasingly demanded that their Christian colleagues provide a fair depiction of Jewish religion, history, and culture in past and present, and that they acknowledge the right of Jewish studies to participate in historical-critical research on the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament on the basis of academic equality. Since its very inception, Jewish studies had been forced to defend the Jewish minority against the anti-Jewish stereotypes and attacks of its environment, to convince the non-Jews that Judaism was a valuable religious tradition and thus to demonstrate the legitimacy of its continued existence in modern Europe. The change of the political culture at the end of the nineteenth century, especially political liberalism’s loss of relevance, the spreading of an integral nationalism that aimed at establishing an exclusive Prussian-Protestant “leading culture,” and the emergence of racial anti-Semitism strengthened the will of a whole generation of Jewish scholars to publicly fight against the denigration of their religion that was clearly supported by seemingly “purely scholarly” Protestant images of Judaism. Contemporary sources show that, for most of the rabbis and scholars educated in the 1880s and 1890s, cultural Protestantism’s anti-Jewish theological judgments in particular were the most important intellectual challenge, since it was this current of Protestantism that claimed to define the cultural values of German society. The Jewish scholars were aware of the fact that the controversies concerning the “essence of Judaism” that erupted at the beginning of the twentieth century and continued until 1933 were not just an academic theological discourse, but the expression of a sometimes open, sometimes hidden political debate in which no less than the social and cultural position of German Jewry and Judaism’s future in Germany were at stake. This assumption suggests


two important clusters of questions: (1) what function did the Jewish confrontation with Protestant biblical criticism have for one of the most important projects of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Germany at that time, namely the scholarly justification of the legitimacy of Judaism as an equal religious and cultural factor in society? And what role did the concept of “Wissenschaft” play in this context? (2) Did *Wissenschaft des Judentums* eventually succeed, as Hermann Cohen had hoped, in winning Protestant biblical criticism as a partner in the scholarly fight against anti-Semitism? Was there really a fruitful debate on the Hebrew Bible or even a dialogue that was likely to mobilize Protestantism against anti-Semitic mentalities and politics? How did Protestant theologians respond to their Jewish colleagues’ challenge and to the political circumstances under which they reflected upon the relevance of the Hebrew Bible for contemporary Christianity?

The preconditions for a Jewish-Protestant discourse on the Hebrew Bible were completely different than those in the field of New Testament scholarship. With respect to the latter, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* confronted Protestant university theology with the claim of methodological superiority, eventually forcing the Christian exegetes to consider rabbinic literature and, at least in the long run, to draw a more differentiated image of the Jewish roots of Jesus and early Christianity.\(^\text{18}\) While Jewish scholars succeeded, in this field, in putting Protestant theology on the defensive by their excellent works, Jewish biblical scholarship, contested within Judaism and rather marginal in comparison to the privileged Protestant Old Testament scholarship at German universities with its wealth of literary hypotheses and religious historical methods, seemed incapable of seriously refuting the latter’s image of the biblical religion. No real scholarly controversy on the basis of mutual perception and respect did, therefore, take place, let alone a dialogue. This does not mean that the theses of the Protestant exegetes went unchallenged or that Jewish scholars did not demand to be heard in the research and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. The largely monological nature of their contributions

has to do with the fact that, in this area of research, Jewish studies was taken even less seriously than in the field of rabbinic literature. In the religious-historical discourse on the significance of biblical elements of tradition, Protestant Old Testament scholars were not willing to acknowledge Jewish contributors as equal partners and debate them critically, but considered the historical and critical reconstruction of the literary and religious-historical foundations of the Hebrew Bible their own undisputed domain. Thus, a perception of the rich Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis was entirely beyond their horizon, because they understood the Hebrew Bible not as Judaism’s living tradition, but rather as a prehistory of Christianity that was inferior to it in manifold ways. When, in 1912, the Marburg theologian Martin Rade supported the establishment of a Jewish theological department at the newly founded university of Frankfurt am Main, the Jena Old Testament scholar Willy Staerk welcomed this idea, arguing that it could become the basis of a future cooperation between Jewish and Protestant research; however, he wanted to accept only chairs for the history and literature of postbiblical Judaism and suggested separating biblical criticism, which had been carried out “completely independently and almost entirely outside the world of Jewish scholarship …, even partly in active struggle with it,” from Jewish studies. And the liberal exegete Hermann Gunkel emphasized his opposition to the idea of establishing the Wissenschaft des Judentums at a Prussian university in a private letter to Rade, arguing that Jewish scholarship had not yet demonstrated its right to exist:

Are you really familiar with contemporary Jewish studies? Do you know whether it has reached the stage at which it can occupy a position of honor in a Prussian university? Otherwise the procedure has always been—quite rightly—that new disciplines must first demonstrate their right to exist, and that positions are only created once the subjects exist, not the other way round! But you propose establishing an entire new faculty before the subject is ready! What I personally know of Jewish “studies” has never inspired me with any particular respect. Most of

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our Jewish scholars have not yet got even as far as the Renaissance! The fact is that Protestantism is still the only denomination in which the academic spirit is truly possible.  

In Gunkel’s words, which have to be understood against the background of his political and ideological views on German Jewry, we can hear the arrogance of a privileged Protestant university theology, widespread at the time, which claimed for itself a monopoly on scholarly objectivity even with regard to Judaism and reserved a scientific character solely to itself, while disparaging Jewish studies as an apologetic discipline, rooted in prejudice and hence unworthy to be integrated into the academic world. It is not surprising, therefore, that until 1933 hardly any Old Testament scholar was ready to seriously consider Jewish contributions to the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.

In contrast to this, the Jewish perception of Protestant biblical criticism was highly ambivalent, oscillating between explicit acknowledgment, or even admiration of its scholarly achievements, and increasing opposition to the image of Israel’s history and religion.

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21 Letter from Hermann Gunkel to Martin Rade from March 26, 1912 (Records of Martin Rade, University Library Marburg), Ms. 839.

22 See Hermann Gunkel’s contribution in Die Lösung der Judenfrage: Eine Rundfrage, ed. Julius Moses (Berlin and Leipzig: Modernes Verlags-Büro, 1907), 231–232: for Gunkel, the “essence of the Jewish question” was that “splinters of a thoroughly different people, by race, religion, and history” lived in Germany, who had come closer to “German-ness,” but had refused real assimilation. The “healthy-feeling people,” he argued, felt the ethnic differences and were “jealous” “when foreign elements [gained] a strong influence over her intellectual, social, and political life.” Many Jews—not all, for he himself had “many respected friends who were Jewish or of Jewish descent”—had “certain features” that resulted from their history and which “the German people had every reason … not to let them arise in their own people.” Gunkel claimed the “right of the German people to shape its own matters free of foreign influence,” and demanded closing the border to Eastern European Jewish immigrants on the one hand and the complete assimilation of the Jews on the other—until they give up their “religious special identity.” It was especially desirable “for the Jew to enter a mixed marriage, instruct his children in the Christian religion and not let them become merchants.” Ultimately, the “Jewish question” will disappear in Germany “only with the Jews.” In another letter to Rade, Gunkel emphasized that he would never understand that “German authorities would do well to fostering the Jewish spirit by creating a Jewish faculty,” i.e., reinforcing Jewish identity instead of contributing to its dissolution. Moreover, he wrote everyone who was aware “of how impudently those circles speak out against us,” could understand why Protestant theologians “do not seek any contact with Jewish scholars.” See letter from Gunkel to Rade of June 3, 1913, M. Rade Papers, University Library Marburg, Ms. 839.
drawn by its representatives. Interestingly enough, the Protestant
claim of superiority with regard to the interpretation of the Hebrew
Bible found its counterpart in the fact that well-known Jewish scholars
increasingly lamented the deficits of Jewish studies in the area of
biblical research. A typical statement in this respect, at least for the
liberal trend of Wissenschaft des Judentums, demanding a re-evaluation
of the biblical tradition vis-à-vis the rabbinic tradition, was that of
rabbi Max Dienemann in his 1917 essay, “Unser Verhältnis zur
Bibel.” He listed the reasons why “the work of Jewish scholars in
scholarly research on the Bible and the problems related to it [were]
extremely minimal,” to the extent that “this whole work [was left] to
Christian scholars,” and pointed out the danger inherent in this:

Jewish scholarship does not yet have a place where one can practice
it, free of any spiritual restriction … and unhindered by the compul-
sion of practical tasks; the existing institutes where Jewish scholar-
ship is studied are not free universities, but mostly institutions whose
purpose is primarily to train practical theologians as defined by a
specific religious trend. … On the one hand, it is a certain dogmatic
restriction that prevents dealing with the subject matter as a whole,
the fear of dealing with the question of the emergence of biblical
writings, which is considered untouchable and could shake the belief
in the literal revelation in the five books of Moses in certain circles
of official Judaism; the opinion that the desire to study the Torah in
a scholarly manner had always implied a denial of its holiness and
divinity; the fear that evolutionary thinking would enter minds
and therefore the whole edifice of Judaism would begin to falter. …
Where individuals of these circles have courageously and decisively
made up their minds to begin to deal with the problems of biblical
research, even in reference to the Torah itself, a great deal of com-
mendable work has been created to refute the popular assertions of
professional biblical critics, and prove that the handed-down version
of the talmudic interpretation is the only possible one. But also in
those circles of the Jewish scholarly world … those who, from their
principled religious point of view and their perception of the nature
of biblical research, could get used to that result of biblical research
without being shaken in their evaluation of the ideas and the task of
Judaism, have minimal desire to deal with biblical questions. … Thus
it turns out that Jewish scholars’ academic energy is lavished on the
most diverse areas … but avoids the area of biblical research and at
most limits itself to refuting certain errors of Protestant biblical critics.
… It is a fact that biblical research has become almost completely a
domain of Christian scholars. … That the Jews have kept away from
biblical research for so long necessarily led to certain notions, which
are harmful to Judaism and which began to be considered as generally
accepted and undisputed. … This is all the more dangerous since a new
scholarly reason and justification of the instinctive aversion to Judaism is given and anti-Semitism may cloak itself in the mantle of science. ... From the psychological understanding that one can assume among the Jewish scholars with regard to the cultural power of Judaism ... this dominant system has to be countered by a complete, self-enclosed system of explanation and perception of the Bible ... and of Israel’s history. ... Nor may we start from predetermined assumptions; instead, the research is to be free; however, you are permitted to have the belief in your heart that, when we devote more seriousness and enthusiasm to biblical research, another image than the one tinted by Christians will emerge as the truth.23

The awareness of the scholarly backwardness and marginality of Jewish biblical interpretation in comparison to Protestant scholarship is combined here with the thought that, despite all the honest acknowledgment of the valuable achievements of Protestant exegetes, a specifically Jewish approach was necessary in order to oppose a genuine counter-image to claims of superiority and anti-Semitic perspectives. The assessment that this endeavor was only at its beginning was realistic. Jewish Semitists had indeed made valuable contributions in the area of philological exegesis, but until World War I, even an approach to a Jewish phenomenon parallel to modern historical and critical biblical research had not yet emerged.24

In 1933, in his critical reflections on the history of Wissenschaft des Judentums, Max Wiener, one of the few biblical scholars of that time whose own research was based, despite a certain critical distance, on the assumptions of Protestant biblical criticism,25 quite plausibly described how the traditional belief in the inspiration of the central

23 Max Dienemann, “Unser Verhältnis zur Bibel,” AZJ 81 (1917), no. 25, 289–291; no. 26, 301–302, here 289–290; see Felix Perles, in Abraham Geiger: Leben und Lebenswerk, ed. Ludwig Geiger (Berlin: Reimer, 1910), especially 327: “Even resolutely freethinking Judaism, which acknowledges the critical perspective in principle, has unfortunately failed completely and has left biblical scholarship to Protestant theology as an undisputed domain to this day”; and see Ismar Elbogen, Ein Jahrhundert Wissenschaft des Judentums (Berlin: Philo-Verlag, 1922), 19: “Above all, the deficient concern for biblical scholarship is to be lamented: in the most admirable achievements of the last century in this area, the Jews have had only a minor share.” For a similar judgment, see Hans Liebeschütz, Das Judentum im deutschen Geschichtsbild, 130–132, and Christhard Hoffmann, Juden und Judentum im Werk deutscher Althistoriker des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 1988), 35.


document of the Jewish faith continued to have an effect even among liberal scholars, with the result that the Torah and the other parts of the Bible, as well as the Mishnah, Gemarah, Targum, Midrash, and rabbinic literature aside from the Talmud, “formed, as it were, concentric circles of declining holiness with regard to the concept they dared to criticize.” In this regard, he emphasized, Orthodoxy only gradually distinguished itself from the liberal tradition, to the extent that it let the “taboo of untouchability” radiate from criticism of the Pentateuch to areas that surround the Torah. 26

The religious apologetic assumptions that led to the rejection of historical criticism within Orthodoxy become most visible in the case of the famous exegete David Zvi Hoffmann. Challenged by the destructive consequences of biblical criticism for traditional Torah piety, the director of the Orthodox rabbinical seminar in Berlin used all of his energy and acuity to refute Julius Wellhausen’s literary-critical hypotheses and to prove the Torah’s unity and integrity. In his 1903 work, *Die wichtigsten Instanzen gegen die Graf-Wellhausensche Hypothese*, he showed his outstanding familiarity with the state of research. By attempting to refute the late dating of the so-called “Priestly source” vis-à-vis Deuteronomy, he attempted to call the whole system of separating the sources of the Pentateuch into question.27 In the hermeneutic introduction to his Leviticus commentary (1905/06), he frankly admitted that Orthodox biblical research could not understand itself as being without presumptions, but rather relied on the dominating claim of the principle of *Torah min ha-shamayim* (the Torah from Heaven). Therefore, the *a priori* belief in the divinity of the Jewish tradition definitely excluded the result that “the Pentateuch


was written by anyone else than Moses or after Moses.” 28 Protestant Old Testament scholars who were not at all acquainted with Orthodox hermeneutics were neither willing to recognize that as a challenge that could be taken seriously nor saw it as a basis for common research; instead, a scholar like Bruno Baentsch, in a critical review of Hoffmann’s work, felt “a slight horror” (“ein gelindes Gruseln”) when confronted with such views.29

Other scholars who did not understand themselves as Orthodox and supported a more open attitude toward the assumptions of biblical criticism hardly won more praise. This is also true for the Dortmund rabbi Benno Jacob, a student of Heinrich Graetz and perhaps the only German-Jewish biblical scholar who seriously opposed Wellhausen’s theories, referring critically to the dominant Protestant exegetical school and attempting to develop an independent Jewish hermeneutic approach beyond uncritical reception or fundamental rejection of biblical criticism.30 By subjecting the results of historical and critical exegesis to critical examination in light of the Jewish philological and exegetical tradition, and endeavoring to once again make the Torah a living reality for the Jews of Germany, he assumed a leading role in the development that contemporaries considered to be the hopeful beginning of a “biblical research based on the Jewish spirit.”31 Establishing a Jewish biblical scholarship was necessary, from Jacob’s point of view, because the liberal Protestant hypotheses that differentiated between a universalistic prophetic tradition culminating in Christianity and later unoriginal layers such as the famous “Priestly source” that had allegedly inspired the “legalistic,” “particularistic” trend of postbiblical Judaism, were ultimately

28 David Z. Hoffmann, Das Buch Leviticus übersetzt und erklärt, vol. 1 (Berlin: M. Poppe- lauer, 1905), vii–viii and 1–9, here vii; and see idem, “Thora und Wissenschaft,” Jeschurun 7 (1920), 497–504. For Hoffmann’s approach, see David H. Ellenson and Richard Jacobs, “Scholarship and Faith: David Hoffmann and his Relationship to Wissenschaft des Judentums,” Modern Judaism 8 (1988), 27–40. According to Goshen- Gottstein, “Christianity, Judaism and Modern Bible Study,” 80, Hoffmann revealed a few of Wellhausen’s weaknesses: “This did not make him a Bible-scholar—although in some circles he is regarded as a Jewish St. George to Wellhausen’s dragon.”

29 Bruno Baentsch, OLZ 11 (1908), No. 2, 79–87, here 80.

30 For Jacob, see, e.g., Almuth Jürgensen and Walter Jacob, eds., “Die Exegese hat das erste Wort”: Beiträge zu Leben und Werk Benno Jacob (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 2002).

“not only un-Jewish, but anti-Jewish.” The supposedly scholarly attempt to “disinherit Israel” by means of this religious historical scheme, i.e., by claiming prophecy and the Psalms for Christianity and burdening Judaism with the “evil law,” aimed immediately at Jewish Torah piety and thus at the very heart of Jewish faith and life.32 Jacob’s early writings on the Pentateuch and his later commentaries on Genesis and Exodus are shaped by the polemical confrontation with the exegetical foundations of this arbitrary view of Jewish religion and were devoted to the attempt to promote Jewish biblical studies, an exegesis determined by the Jewish spirit based on the fundamental assumption of the unity and divinity of the Torah, despite literary criticism. In his works Der Pentateuch: Exegetisch-Kritische Forschungen (1905), Die Thora Moses (1912/13), and Quellenscheidung und Exegese im Pentateuch (1916), Jacob criticized the arbitrariness of the Protestant exegetes who tried to prove, by means of a hypothetical construction of Israelite history and religion, their anti-Jewish theory of the transformation of Israel’s prophetical religion into a petrified, legalistic, and theocratic “late Judaism” or “rabbinism.” His own interpretation of the complex process by which the Pentateuch emerged as a literary body, according to which a redactor eventually fused Israel’s manifold traditions into an organic unity that could not simply be mechanically separated into Pentateuchal sources, aimed at the acknowledgment of the Torah as God’s valid revelation to his people of Israel. Even if inspiration and Mosaic authorship were not tenable, Jacob claimed, the Torah was permeated with one spirit, which, in light of the unified pre- and post-Mosaic traditions, virtually made Moses the “juncture and middle” of the Torah, and could be called the “spirit of Moses.”33 But in the final analysis, the fate of the Torah and Judaism’s right to existence were not dependent upon the question of authorship, but rather upon the fact that the Pentateuch was the Torah of God, his teaching, his gift to Israel. No scholarship could provide this testimonial, but only belief and the “divine aura” of the Torah itself—which could not be affected by any literary-critical differentiation. By opposing any denigration of the Torah with the firm conviction of its divinity,

33 Idem, Die Thora Moses (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1912/13), 93–94.
Jacob marked—beyond all methodological distinctions—the crucial theological difference between Protestant research that examined the Hebrew Bible, particularly the Torah, as a more or less valuable preliminary stage of the truth of its own religion, and Jewish scholarship that could not abstract from the vitality of the Torah and its existential meaning for Jewish belief:

The countless glorifications of the Torah in the Prophets and the Psalmist, among the pious and thinkers, apply not so much to the Torah of Moses as to the Torah of God. Their joy is God’s teaching and they reflect on that day and night; it is their way and goal, their delight and their consolation. As the Torah of the eternal, it created and maintained Judaism. It is, therefore, also the true mission and the highest reward of all Torah research, to penetrate its content and grasp that Moses’ teaching is a teaching of God, and that the Israelite who appears before the unfurled Torah can praise God with justification that He “has given us His Torah, the teaching of the truth and planted eternal life in us.”34

Although Jacob in principle accepted a potential cooperation with Protestant scholarship, he deliberately emphasized the important function of Jewish biblical research for Jewish identity, even postulating that only Judaism, by virtue of a spiritual affinity to the Bible denied to Christianity, was able to appropriately understand the Hebrew Bible. “But for us,” Jacob wrote in 1898,

the Bible is a book of life, our life, and we, therefore, need our own, Jewish biblical scholarship, so that it opens new sources of life to us. We need a biblical scholarship that does not merely establish what is right, but rather “refreshes the soul,” is not merely true, but “makes the fool wise,” is not merely correct, but “gladdens the heart,” is not merely pure, but “illuminates the eyes.” Only such research is adequate for the true nature of the Bible, and thus without any sidelong glances, only the Jew … can understand the Bible. Only the Jew is spirit of its spirit, only he has remained unwaveringly loyal and has never broken the connection to it.35

This claim of a special affinity of the “Jewish spirit” to the Bible was not meant as an ethnic usurpation of biblical research, but rather as an appeal to the Wissenschaft des Judentums to devote itself to biblical scholarship more resolutely and with more knowledge, in order to be capable of countering anti-Jewish stereotypes and of showing

34 Ibid., 95 (emphasis not in the original).
that Judaism is the only true heir of the Old Testament religion, namely that Judaism, the center of whose divine worship even today is formed by the Mosaic “Hear O Israel” and the triple “sanctus” in the book of Isaiah, whose God is the God of the Patriarchs and Moses, the Prophets and the Psalmist, and moreover, there is no development for all eternity.\textsuperscript{36}

This apologetically motivated challenge to Protestant exegesis did not evoke a reaction from any of its representatives, but, interestingly enough, called forth a sharp protest from the Jewish scholar Benzion Kellermann, a disciple of Hermann Cohen who sympathized with the Reform Congregation in Berlin. In his essay “Bibel und Wissenschaft,” he rejected the demand for a specifically Jewish biblical scholarship and demanded a “pure scholarly-objective exegesis,” in which Jews and Christians could cooperate equally. He accepted both the methodology and the results of the criticism of the Pentateuch and emphasized that it had removed many prejudices and had especially reinforced the appreciation of prophecy. Jacob himself, with his “old-fashioned apologetics” and his devotional tendencies, according to Kellermann, forfeited his claim to scholarship, thus damaging the cause of the \textit{Wissenschaft des Judentums}.\textsuperscript{37} It is not at all surprising that Kellermann, in a 1907 lecture on “Liberal Judaism,” in which he attacked Jewish Orthodoxy, presented very critical judgments of Talmud “legalism” that almost completely corresponded to the Protestant image of rabbinic literature. The Pharisaic-rabbinic tradition, he claimed, had been shaped by a rigid law of ritual and cult, which a modernized Judaism urgently had to revise in order to prove its own continuing cultural relevance. From his perspective, reconciliation with modern ethical awareness demanded an unprejudiced and self-critical acceptance of the judgments of Protestant biblical criticism, even those against the postbiblical traditions. Jewish studies must admit “that Pharisaic Judaism is not the linear continuation of prophecy that was free of rites and dogmas.” The religion of the Pharisees had “its great ethical weaknesses, and to keep them secret means only to strengthen the opponents in their belief that Pharisaism is not extinguished even today.” Only through

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.

a determined distancing from the legal religious tradition and a
rebirth of the spirit of prophecy, could Jews dispute the claim of
liberal Christianity that this, and not Judaism, was continuing the
heritage of "ethical monotheism."38

This extreme Reform Jewish position, with its uncritical reception
of the typically Protestant emphasis on the antithesis between bibli-
cal-prophetical and Pharisaic-rabbinic Judaism, may be a singular
voice within the Wissenschaft des Judentums at that time; it does, ho-
ever, point to a very important element of its reception of biblical
criticism that is characteristic for more moderate representatives as
well. The "neoromantic understanding of prophecy" as expressed in
the influential studies of Bernhard Duhm was especially attractive:
the focus was on the personalities and individualities of the pro-
phets who had shaped an entirely new ethos for the nation of Israel,
because of their creative religious genius.39 In this universalistic
view of prophecy, the Israelite religion achieved an unprecedented
ethical force, which Jesus could directly refer to. The Old Testament
scholar Carl Heinrich Cornill, coming from the Wellhausen school,
summarized this approach in his 1894 study, Der israelitische Prophe-
tismus, in the following formulation, which was constantly evoked
by Jewish scholars:

The whole history of humankind has not produced anything that can
be even remotely compared to Israelite prophecy: through its prophecy,
Israel became the prophet of humankind. May that never be ignored
or forgotten: the most precious and noble thing humankind possesses,
it owes to Israel and Israelite prophecy.40

The strategy of Wissenschaft des Judentums, visible in Max Wiener’s
works on prophecy, consisted in emphasizing the Protestant appreci-
ation of the Bible’s prophetical layers, while at the same time

38 Idem, Liberales Judentum: Vortrag, gehalten im Liberalen Verein für die Angelegenheiten der
Jüdischen Gemeinde (Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1907), 16 and 21.
39 See Bernhard Duhm, Die Theologie der Propheten als Grundlage für die innere Entwick-
lungsgeschichte der israelitischen Religion (Bonn: Marcus, 1875); and idem, Israels Propheten
40 Carl Heinrich Cornill, Der israelitische Prophetismus: In fünf Vorträgen für gebildete
Laien geschildert (Straßburg: Trübner, 1894; 3d ed. 1909), 175–176. See the review in
AJS 59 (1895), no. 6, 71; Josef Eschelbacher, Das Judentum im Urteil der modernen prote-
tantischen Theologie (Leipzig: Fock, 1907), 5.
protesting against the implicit denigration of the preprophetic origins of Israelite religious history and the negative image of the alleged decline of postexilic Judaism, and advancing the fundamental continuity of the prophetic spirit throughout all epochs of Jewish history. The ambivalent relation to Protestant biblical research is especially obvious in this kind of reception of the interpretation of prophecy. While the depiction of preprophetic times and the negative image of “late Judaism” gave cause for polemics, the extremely positive attitude toward prophecy as the embodiment of “ethical monotheism,” i.e., the belief in one God and his claim to human implementation of his will—provided an important foundation of liberal Jewish identity. Hermann Cohen’s phrase, according to which biblical criticism was supposed to be “the best antidote to anti-Semitism,” was based on the impression that prophecy, with its universalistic social message which Protestant exegetes considered the “core” of the Hebrew Bible, had, since Abraham Geiger, become the foundation of a liberal reinterpretation of Judaism that attributed to the prophetic element a normative function as well, in contrast to the traditional emphasis on Mosaic legislation. This became the most important basis of Jewish apologetics: Judaism had not only created—by virtue of its faith in one God, its universalism, and its social goal of a messianic humankind—the idea of prophetic “ethical monotheism”; it was still the purest representative of this ideal that even Protestantism acknowledged as a valuable Jewish achievement. Hermann Cohen, whose religious philosophy made prophecy “the classical image of Judaism throughout all times,” was, therefore, inclined to praise Protestant biblical criticism, since he was convinced that it contributed to overcoming the biased image of “Jewish particularism.”


42 The term “ethical monotheism” was apparently coined by the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuenen in his two-volume book *De Profeten en de Profetie onder Israel* (Leiden: n.p., 1875).


impact on the stereotypical image of Judaism prevailing in German society, according to which German Jewry was characterized by a “distinctive self-awareness” (Sonderbewußtsein) that prevented full integration. Furthermore, Cohen could point to prophecy in order to underline Judaism’s future significance as a modern religion that was progressive in religious as well as in social and political terms. Thus he used the invitation of his colleague Martin Rade to give a lecture on “The Contribution of Judaism to Religious Progress” at the World Congress for Free Christianity and Religious Progress in Berlin in 1910 to expound the religious and philosophical self-understanding of contemporary liberal Judaism to the attending personalities of German liberal Protestantism. He characterized Judaism as a universalistic religion of reason which permeated the whole society with religious ideas and ethical perspectives. Its ethical monotheism was the most appropriate basis for modern culture because it guaranteed the ethical responsibility of man. Its “mission” was to preserve and foster this ethical monotheism and the messianic vision of the still unachieved “redemption of the world”—the fulfilment of universal peace and social justice on earth. In a cautious but clear critique of Christianity he maintained that the Christian tradition, with its pantheistic myth of Jesus Christ as a personified messiah, had abandoned up this political and social dimension of messianism, reducing it to the redemption of the individual. While Christianity, according to Cohen, had lost its ethical force, Judaism as the true heir of the prophets was the “religion of the future.”

Prophecy also played a crucial role in Leo Baeck’s works, whose main goal was to create an effective counterhistory against the Christian view of Judaism as an outdated, “dead” religion, thereby justifying the continued existence and even claiming the superiority of Judaism as a relevant religious and ethical force of modernity. In 1905, in his book Das Wesen des Judentums (a response to Harnack’s Das Wesen des Christentums), he presented a brilliant apologia for the Jewish religion that gave the Jewish-Christian debate a completely new urgency, since it countered the hegemonic claims of liberal Protestantism and the historical denigration of ancient Judaism (and

implicitly of contemporary Judaism, which was not even mentioned, as if it did not exist) with the postulate of the religious and ethical superiority of the Jewish religion. Although it was rather near to Harnack’s emphasis on the ethical dimension of religion, the book presented a radically different interpretation of Judaism: the “essence” of Judaism, based on “ethical monotheism,” appears, in contrast to Harnack’s verdict on Jewish particularistic “legalism,” as a future-oriented, deeply universalistic faith, in which religion and humanity are indissolubly linked. Central aspects of Baeck’s understanding of Jewish-Christian relations shaping his entire later work and culminating in his polemical distinction between Judaism as a nondogmatic “classical” religion, characterized by ethical devotion to one God, and Christianity as the “romantic” religion, deprived of its moral strength by the deviation from its prophetical origins and by the influence of Greek philosophy, and intellectually weakened by the Trinitarian dogma, found their first systematic representation in this work. Baeck’s later articles on “Romantische Religion” (1922) and “Judentum in der Kirche” (1925) display the enormous apologetical strength of this concept with regard to contemporary liberal Protestantism. The latter used the positive interpretation of prophecy to strengthen the link between Christianity and the Hebrew Bible, viewing itself as the sole legitimate heir of this tradition and claiming that Judaism, as a totally outdated religion, had lost its right to exist as an equal part of modern European culture. By defining

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[46] For the theological affinity of both thinkers, see Liebeschütz, Von Georg Simmel zu Franz Rosenzweig, 64–66.

[47] Leo Baeck, Das Wesen des Judentums (Berlin: Nathansen & Lamm, 1905), especially 1–58. For the role of prophecy and “ethical monotheism” for the “essence of Judaism,” see especially 18–20 and 39–41; for the influence of biblical criticism on Baeck, see ibid., 67–68.


Judaism’s essence as the embodiment of a prophetic religion of “ethical monotheism” and moral strength, Baeck polemically turned crucial insights of Protestant biblical criticism against Christianity, making Judaism—as the creator and most important bearer of biblical truth—the standard of the Christian religion’s loyalty to the message of its founder, the Pharisaic Jew Jesus of Nazareth.

The polemical element of this interpretation shows that the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* let itself be guided by obvious apologetic intentions aimed at fostering Jewish identity in the context of the integration of German Jewry into the German society and at overcoming antisemitic stereotypes. In contrast to Gershom Scholem’s sharp verdict, according to which this strategy was mainly determined by assimilationist aspirations, the challenge of the Protestant construction of Judaism by Jewish scholars was obviously something quite different than a defensive abandonment of a distinctive religious and cultural self-awareness. Rather, it could be argued, on the basis of postcolonial theory, that there was a “postcolonial” impulse inherent in the demand to recognize Judaism as a cultural force at least of the same value as the Western Christian tradition, if not superior in terms of its religious originality and ethical strength, and in the attempt to contest the antipluralist hegemony of Protestant culture in Prussian-dominated Wilhelmine Germany. Instead of apologetic subordination, as implied by Scholem, I would like to argue that the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* started an intellectual revolt against the way Protestant historiography constructed Judaism and tried to impose its own narrative and its own system of meaning and values. One has, of course, to be aware that the concept of “postcolonialism,” as used in the fields of history, literature, and cultural studies in order to examine the political role of European colonization in the creation of literature as well as literarily expressed revolts against political and cultural domination, encompasses an enormous variety of very complex and heterogenous theoretical questions and has been the subject of considerable debate in the last decades. This

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interpretation of the strategies of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* is not to be understood as a contribution to postcolonial theory itself, but as an attempt to apply certain aspects of it as a critical tool in order to better understand the vehement apologetic efforts of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* at that time. As Susannah Heschel has convincingly shown in her most illuminating book on *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, postcolonial theory can serve as a useful instrument for an interpretation not merely of the relation between colonizing (European) and colonized (non-European) nations but also of the relations of ethnic or cultural majorities and minorities within a European nation. According to Heschel, the Protestant representation of Judaism and Jewish history in nineteenth-century Germany can reasonably be interpreted as a colonial ideology aiming at suppressing the voice of the Jewish minority and at displaying the religious and intellectual superiority of (Protestant) Christianity, which was obviously understood as an exclusive leading cultural force or *Leitkultur*. Judaism, not a territorial colony, but an “inner colony,” the “subaltern voice of Europe,” “began its resistance and disruption with the rise of Jewish studies in the nineteenth century, as it not only presented its own history but reconfigured the history and significance of Christianity by undermining its central claims.” By contesting the master narrative of Western history, which is anchored in concepts of Christian religious supremacy and which metaphorically describes Judaism as a “dead,” obsolete, and even dangerous tradition, and by exploring Christianity from a Jewish point of view, Heschel argued, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* served as an important element of Jewish self-empowerment and provided a new version of Jewish and of European history, subversive and disturbing from the Christian, but relieving from the Jewish perspective.

As Heschel has convincingly shown, two important aspects of postcolonial theory can serve as an especially useful tool for interpreting the failed encounter of Jewish studies and Protestant theology in

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Wilhelmine Germany. The first is the relation between knowledge and power. Despite the critical debate over many aspects of Edward Said’s 1978 book *Orientalism*, it must be acknowledged that his “colonial discourse analysis” has rightly emphasized the extent to which “knowledge” about other cultures has been an ideological tool of colonial power, and how colonial stereotyping has been used in order to marginalize and silence the knowledge and belief systems of those who were conquered or subjugated. This description can be applied to the Protestant discourse on Judaism and Jewish integration in Germany, which—even in its liberal variant—largely aimed at silencing Jewish identity by connecting the promise of emancipation with the demand of complete assimilation and by imposing a Christian perspective on Jewish tradition, thus consistently making Jews the “others” in German society. The reaction of Protestant theology to the challenge of Jewish scholars revealed the consistent subordination and distortion of Jewish knowledge by the politically powerful in order to suppress the true voice of Jewish studies: this reaction was characterized mainly by a refusal of discourse, silence of contempt, or the rejection of any kind of Jewish criticism, combined with an emphasis on the prevailing political and cultural power relations.

The second aspect that has to be emphasized with regard to Jewish studies’ response and challenge to Protestantism is the phenomenon of anticolonial intellectual rebellion, i.e., the question of how colonized or marginalized minorities endeavor to subvert the master discourse. One of the main elements of postcolonial studies is the analysis of

the challenge of the intellectual sovereignty and dominance of Western Christian Europe including the challenge of history as an ordered narrative that subsumes all other histories of the world, questioning the literary, historical, philosophical and sociological canons for their exclusions of writings that do not stem from the centre and developing contestatory dialogues between Western and non-Western cultures.

If we assume that German Jewry found itself in what can be called (not in a literal sense, but by analogy) a “colonial situation,”

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54 Ibid., 65–66.
symbolized by the exclusion of Jewish studies from the universities, in which its traditions and identity were consistently marginalized, then it is of special importance to see the Jewish scholars’ struggle for emancipation and academic participation as part of a process of anticolonial resistance, in which the attempt to make the voice of Jewish historiography, literature, and philosophy heard played a crucial role. This does not mean, of course, that there was no “assimilation” to and adaptation of the ideas and concepts of the non-Jewish intellectual environment, but David N. Myers is certainly right when demanding a reciprocal understanding of cultural interaction between Jews and non-Jews, and emphasizing the “creative capacity of minority groups like the Jews not only to adopt, but to adapt cultural norms from the host society to their own needs.”

This corresponds to the findings of postcolonial theory that are valid also for the Jewish anticolonial revolt:

Anti-colonial movements and individuals often drew upon Western ideas and vocabularies to challenge colonial rule. Indeed they often hybridised what they borrowed by juxtaposing it with indigenous ideas, reading it through their own interpretation lens, and even using it to assert cultural alterity or insist on an unbridgeable difference between colonizers and colonized.

The analysis of Jewish studies’ apologetical strategies during the historiographical debates at the turn of the nineteenth century, especially the use of the idea of “ethical monotheism” in the prophetical tradition, does not, therefore, support a simplistic understanding of assimilation, but reveals a very complex process in which Jewish intellectuals tried to simultaneously justify integration and alterity by appropriating the language and concepts of the dominant culture while asserting the right to preserve a distinctive identity. By appropriating the Protestant image of the prophets and their ethical religion, but describing modern liberal Judaism as its authentic

55 See, e.g., Michael Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German-Jewish Responses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), who describes how the “hegemonic discourse” of German Idealism (177) was undermined by German-Jewish responses and how the latter developed an effective “counternarrative” (12); and see Jonathan Hess, *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).


57 Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 174.
and legitimate heir, vested with a “universal mission,” scholars like Hermann Cohen or Leo Baeck established a clear counterhistory or counterdiscourse that can very well be interpreted as a contestation of anti-Jewish colonial constructions of Judaism. Instead of being perceived as an outmoded prehistory of Christianity, Judaism appeared, according to this opposing view, as the true, original universal religion, while Christianity had—in its dogmatic Christological tradition—deviated from its Jewish origins and prophetic monotheism, forming a syncretistic tradition that had to be reformed by rethinking its Jewish origins and thus developing into a modern, ethically oriented religion.

Susannah Heschel, following David Biale and Amos Funkenstein, has interpreted counterhistory as “a form of polemic in which the sources of the adversary are exploited and turned ‘against the grain,’ in Walter Benjamin’s phrase,” in order to establish the own perspective. In this respect, the use of parts of the results of Protestant biblical criticism as a basis of modern Jewish identity and as a tool for defending Judaism’s cultural significance provides an example for a highly effective counterattack against a “colonial discourse” that explicitly aimed at denying Judaism’s right of existence by means of “Wissenschaft,” thus asserting the legitimacy of a hegemonic uniform Protestant culture. The analysis of the scholarly controversies reveals that Jewish scholars, too, were not entirely free from the tendency to distort Christian tradition when espousing an allegedly universal Jewish religion of reason or claiming the superiority of Judaism as the “religion of the future.” One might even ask, as in every postcolonial intellectual revolt, to what extent the polemics of Wissenschaft des Judentums was dependent on the Protestant construction of Jews and Judaism and borrowed its accents from Protestantism, instead of describing Jewish history according to its own interests and categories. Amos Funkenstein has observed that the modern counterhistory of Christianity in a sense posed a threat to Jewish identity because, as he put it, the “forger of a counteridentity of the other renders his own identity [dependent]

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on it.” To what extent Hermann Cohen’s defense of Judaism, for instance, depended on the cultural Protestant interpretation of the prophets as representatives of religious universalism is revealed by his vehement reaction in 1917 against Ernst Troeltsch’s essay “Glaube und Ethos der hebräischen Propheten,” which rejected, from the point of view of religious sociology, the notion of prophetic universalism, pointing instead to prophecy’s particularistic, national elements; while Max Wiener thoroughly revised his earlier interpretation on the basis of these new historical insights, Cohen perceived Troeltsch’s article as an unprecedented anti-Jewish attack that was likely to “destroy Judaism as a religion,” characterizing it as the most serious incident caused by “supposed scholarship in this entire era of anti-Semitism.”

The obvious dependence of Cohen’s or Baeck’s counterhistory on the Protestant paradigm of a universalistic interpretation of prophecy, now undermined by new historical views, points to the complexities inherent in the attempt to formulate a counteridentity and further illustrates the question raised by postcolonial theory concerning the dangers confronted by subjugated minorities when they make their voices heard: “In what voices,” Ania Loomba asks, “do the colonized speak—their own, or in accents borrowed from their masters?” This seems to be a serious question that must, in fact, be reflected upon with respect to the strategy of Jewish studies during the controversies with Protestantism. Apparently, the liberal Jewish

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60 Ernst Troeltsch, “Glaube und Ethos der hebräischen Propheten,” *Logos* 6 (1917), 1–28. For details on this position and for the background of the controversy between Cohen and his student Benzion Kellermann on the one hand and Ernst Troeltsch on the other, see Dietrich, *Cohen and Troeltsch*, 29–43.
62 Hermann Cohen, “Der Prophetismus und die Soziologie,” in *Jüdische Schriften*, vol. 2, 398–401, here 399–400; and see Benzion Kellermann, *Der ethische Monoteismus der Propheten und seine soziologische Würdigung* (Berlin: Schwetschke, 1917). In fact, Troeltsch’s interpretation did lead to a view according to which Christianity raised the ethical approaches of prophecy to a universal scale and brought them into modern culture, while Judaism remained confined to particularism; see Annette Disselkamp, “Das Wesen der Prophetie: Ernst Troeltsch’s Aufsatz, Glaube und Ethos der hebräischen Propheten,” in *Protestantismus und Antisemitismus in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Kurt Nowak and Gerard Raulet (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag, 1994), 85–94.
63 Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 231.
internalization of the Protestant norm of prophetic universalism did not only lead to exaggerated reactions against any questioning of this construct, but also forced liberal Judaism to belittle, reinterpret, and defend the halakhic tradition against the Protestant image of "Jewish legalism" all in the same breath, instead of self-confidently insisting on the right to preserve particular elements and to evaluate the Jewish tradition according to its own categories.

Franz Rosenzweig clearly recognized this dilemma of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in a famous 1923 essay on Leo Baeck’s interpretation of Judaism, acknowledging the strength and the chances provided by “apologetic thinking,” at the same time frankly admitting its problematic nature. Although appreciating the value and dignity of Jewish apologetics as “one of the most noble human occupations,” provided it was performed in the spirit of truth, he pointed to the danger inherent in the inclination to “perceive one’s own tradition as the ideal one while focusing on the broad historical and historically distorted alien tradition.” Furthermore, he deplored its tendency to be ensnared by the categories of the rival tradition, in this case Protestantism, and consequently to idealize its own tradition while suppressing the historical contradictions that made it a living religion instead of a religious theory or system influenced by criticism or stereotypes from the outside. Like Scholem, in his aforementioned sharp verdict against *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Rosenzweig criticized the inclination to interpret Judaism primarily in terms of a purely rational, universal ethical religion in order to legitimize its existence in modern society, thereby suppressing other important dimensions of Jewish history and tradition. But unlike Scholem, he fully understood that German-Jewish scholars were dominated by what can certainly be called the tragedy of Jewish studies at that time, namely that its representatives were constantly compelled to react to the challenges of the non-Jewish scholarly world and their political implications, instead of being allowed to concentrate on their own agenda: “All fear of apologetics could not prevent that the legitimate method of thinking, even here, remained the apologetical one. One did not become a Jewish thinker in the undisturbed circles of Judaism.”

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Apart from the problems of an apologetic interpretation of Jewish identity, the question is whether Hermann Cohen's optimistic expectation that Protestant biblical criticism promised to be “the best antidote to anti-Semitism,” was not permanently foiled by reality, and whether it did, in fact, if understood as an appeal to Protestant university theology as well as to a cultured German public, have any effect. While the controversy about the theories of the Wellhausen school pertained to the scholarly question of the legitimacy of an independent Jewish hermeneutic approach as well as the political and cultural aspect of the existence of modern, liberal Judaism in a pluralist society, a second strand of the debate had a far more vital political significance for German Jewry. The chance of a “purely scholarly” dialogue in which the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* could have accentuated its own perspectives, diminished to the same extent as the contemporary anti-Semitic movement not only attempted to hurt the Jewish minority by agitating against the Talmud, but more and more publicly questioned the moral and cultural value of the Hebrew Bible, denigrating the biblical image of God as the expression of the “decomposing” “Jewish spirit,” determined by an inferior race. Christian theology had to take notice of these views, since they sometimes had anti-Christian implications; Protestant exegetes were, therefore, forced to refer to the Jewish roots and elements of Christianity and to confront the temptation to eliminate them from their own self-understanding. For the German Jews and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, these unprecedented attacks against the religious and cultural significance of the biblical-Jewish tradition posed a crucial challenge not only to Jewish identity, but also to their political and social position.

A first culmination of the discussion of the moral value of the Hebrew Bible was reached as a result of impressive archeological finds in Egypt and Mesopotamia that gave reason to rethink the early history of the Israelite religion and the potential influence of

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ancient oriental cultures on the Bible. Biblical scholarship was now confronted with theses and ideological positions that questioned the previous appreciation of the Hebrew Bible as part of God’s revelation, the validity of which culminated with Jesus Christ. Israel’s religious history threatened, mainly from the point of view of “Pan-Babylonianism,” to be reduced to the weak model of an ancient, Babylonian-shaped uniform mythological conception of the world.67

The conflict inherent in this notion exploded in 1902 in regard to a lecture by the well-known Berlin Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch, given in the presence of Emperor Wilhelm II, on Babel und Bibel; the controversy known in historiography as the “Babel-Bible Debate” was also intensively pursued by Jewish scholars. In this lecture, Delitzsch suggested that Babylonian culture had influenced the Bible not only in a literary sense, but also in terms of ethics; the roots of biblical monotheism were in Babylon, and this monotheism was obscured in the Bible by an anthropomorphism and particularism that was overcome only in the Prophets, the Psalms, and ultimately by Jesus.68 While he still moved on the tracks of liberal biblical studies here, his second lecture, on January 12, 1903, stirred widespread opposition. Historical development and divine revelation now seemed to him to be incompatible opposites: the Hebrew Bible was a purely earthly phenomenon, in many parts even morally inferior to Babylonian culture. Therefore, because of its narrow particularism, it had become obsolete for Christian belief.69 In the concluding third lecture, in November 1904, Delitzsch consistently demanded the removal of most of the Old Testament Scriptures from the canon and characterized Jesus as a reformer who created a new religion by destroying the ethically inferior Jewish tradition.70 Delitzsch’s lectures were immediately exploited in the following years by anti-Semitic circles as a scientific legitimation of a racist rejection of the Old Testament, apparently not against the author’s intention: a few

67 See Klaus Johanning, Der Bibel-Babel-Streit: Eine forschungsgeschichtliche Studie (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1988), 265–290.
69 Idem, Zweiter Vortrag über Babel und Bibel (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1904).
70 Idem, Babel und Bibel: Dritter (Schluß-) Vortrag (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1905).
years later, he adopted elements of the idea of an “Aryan Jesus,” and his book, *Die große Täuschung*, finished in 1914 and published in 1920–1921, was an explicitly anti-Semitic attack against the Bible and against contemporary Judaism.

The vehement reaction of Orthodox as well as liberal Jewish scholars to Delitzsch’s lectures shows the extent to which they experienced the effective public questioning of the cultural and religious originality, as well as the moral nature of the Hebrew Bible, as an unprecedented denigration of the Jewish tradition, worse than previous anti-Talmudic attacks. The shock was mixed with the fear that the emperor’s presence at Delitzsch’s lectures could be understood as a signal for a politically protected attack on the very foundations of Judaism. The ideological radicalization of Delitzsch’s position, with its increasingly pronounced anti-Semitic tones, hinted at the danger of an anti-Semitic use of the debate. Its explosive force was based ultimately on the fact that now, with the claim that Judaism provided a lasting relevant contribution to culture through the biblical idea of God and its ethics, a crucial pillar of Jewish apologetics threatened to collapse. “For us Jews,” Benno Jacob wrote in a series of articles on the debate, “this is a vital matter against which everything else that occupies us is meaningless. For not only are the world historical claims of Judaism denied, but also its foundation, the Old Testament, seems to be withdrawn from it.” Since, faithful to his approach, he wanted to preserve the freedom for critical research on the Bible, he started by attacking the Orthodox rejection of biblical criticism, at the same time paying tribute to

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74 The emperor’s letter to Admiral Hollmann of February 15, 1903 (reprinted in Johanning, ibid., 408ff.), in which he criticized Delitzsch’s attack on the revelatory nature of the Old Testament, contributed to the calming of the discussion; see *AZJ* 67 (1903), no. 9, 100ff. The emperor’s judgment, however, according to which it had to be welcomed that through the advancement of research “a large part of the halo of the chosen people was lost,” became a familiar quotation amongst Protestant theologians. For Wilhelm II’s anti-Jewish feeling, see Lamar Cecil, “Wilhelm II. und die Juden,” in Mosse and Paucker, eds., *Juden im Wilhelminischen Deutschland*, 313–347.
Assyriology as “one of the most glorious chapters in the history of scholarship,” which was extremely important for the illumination of biblical sources. Along with linguistic knowledge and the explanation of previously obscure places or concepts in the Bible by means of Babylonian and Assyrian parallels, it was especially the newly discovered documents of the ancient Near East’s political history that provided extremely valuable information. The political and cultural historical background of the time of the patriarchs and the Israelite conquest of the land had gained contours; with all the corrections that scholarship was now able to implement with regard to biblical historiography, the “truth and authenticity of the biblical tradition” in general had “experienced a brilliant justification” through the archaeological finds. Delitzsch’s crucial error, however, he felt, was the overvalued misinterpretation of parallels in religious history between Babylonian and Israelite culture. He was especially furious about Delitzsch’s assertion that monotheism, and perhaps even the Israelite name for God, came from Babylonian culture. Jacob was convinced that objective scholarly research had to recognize the glaring polytheism of Babylonian religion and finally appreciate Israel’s lasting religious merit:

Ethical monotheism and the one holy God existed only in one ancient nation in the whole world, and it was the only one that took this thought completely seriously and illuminated and clarified all of life in its heights and depths with this light.

In a second series of articles, Jacob protested against Delitzsch’s separation between an immoral image of God in the “Old Testament” and a moral one in the New Testament; instead, he insisted that every reasonable theologian had to admit that no nation in the world had reflected so much on ethics as Israel, “that no nation had such revelations of the divine … and therefore could call its holy scripture a revelation of God and itself the Chosen People, a ‘halo’ all the professors in the world will not deprive it of.”

Important in this context is, above all, Jacob’s perception of the attitude of well-known Protestant Bible scholars toward the debate. Although many of the latter rejected Delitzsch’s arguments, especially

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76 Ibid., 198ff.
77 Ibid., 212.
his demand to eliminate the “Old Testament,” Jacob expressed the opinion that Jewish scholarship alone had to conduct the quarrel over the value of the Hebrew Bible, since, in its debate with Delitzsch, Protestant theology utterly lacked solidarity with Judaism:

For we may not be deceived about that: All the rejections and refutations that Delitzsch’s attack on the Old Testament has experienced, from the most extreme Orthodoxy to the radical criticism, are inspired “not by love of Mordechai, but by an aversion to Haman.” The damage Judaism could receive from it leaves the whole lot of them cold. “If a large part of the halo of the Chosen People is lost in the process, that does not hurt.” Yes, many of Delitzsch’s opponents, forced to defend the Old Testament as an object of their scholarship and the basis of their own belief, thus show a lamentable effort to purge themselves of the suspicion that they are speaking in favor of Judaism. Professor Gunkel, e.g., the latest prophet of criticism, has expressed himself in this manner. We cannot be amazed at this. A Christian, no matter how hard he tries to be unbiased, cannot and may not appreciate the Old Testament according to its absolute value, and to fight for Jews and Judaism is a courage seldom found in our deteriorated times.79

Hermann Gunkel, who was the real target of these bitter words, was but one of the many Protestant scholars who accepted the idea that Israel’s religion had developed in its reception of and confrontation with ancient Oriental religious history, but rejected Delitzsch’s attack against the revelatory character of the Hebrew Bible; he had clarified his position as a liberal scholar in his book *Israel und Babylonien* (1903), whose arguments initially show an abundance of parallels to those of Jacob. He explicitly defends the right to systematically examine Israel’s history in light of ancient Near Eastern history and approves the thesis of a profound influence of Babylon on Israel. Yet, he points out, Delitzsch one-sidedly emphasized the “dependence of biblical material on the Babylonian,” instead of appreciating the independence with which Israel took the material from the milieu and recast it until truths emerged that finally had their impact even on Christianity. Like Jacob, with respect to the mythology of creation and the question of the image of God, Gunkel called Israel “the classical nation of monotheism,” while the Babylonian religion was distinguished by a “generally glaring, grotesque polytheism.”80

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79 Ibid., 197.
He also wanted to establish the understanding of the biblical text in the sense of a revelation—not a supernatural one, but a historical one—and he emphasized the essential continuity between the Old Testament and the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{81} Not least did he see Israel’s religion as “towering above all other religions of the ancient Orient,” because it had profoundly linked belief and morality to each other: “That is Israel’s legacy to humankind and remains so, even if Jud­aism has become disloyal to this powerful idea.”\textsuperscript{82}

The last sentence is reminiscent of what fundamentally distinguished Gunkel’s position from that of the Jewish scholars and constituted its deep ambiguity. Gunkel’s objection to abandoning the Old Testament tradition followed a strategy that developed in the following years into a consistent model of defending the religious relevance of the “Old Testament.”\textsuperscript{83} The two characteristic elements of it are encountered in Gunkel’s position \textit{in nuce}: he strictly distinguished between the Old Testament and contemporary Judaism\textsuperscript{84} and denigrated strata of the biblical tradition which allegedly were not on the same moral level as the prophets or the Psalms, in order to identify them as “Jewish.” It was, as Gunkel insisted, a question of objectivity and justice to emphasize the relative ethical weakness of parts of the Old Testament:

We absolutely do not intend to conceal Israel’s obvious weaknesses from ourselves, which are occasionally expressed in the Old Testament as well, and we have no need to find everything in Israel splendid

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 37–38: “Do we have the right to see such a revelation in Israel’s religion? Of course! For what kind of religion is it? A genuine miracle of God among the religions of the ancient Orient! What kinds of streams flow here with the thrilling excitement for the majestic God, the deep awe of His holy rule and the unshakable trust in His loyalty! Anyone who regards this religion with believing eyes will profess with us: this nation has taken God into itself! Here God has been closer and more clearly known than anywhere else in the ancient Orient, until Jesus Christ our Lord! This is the religion we are dependent on, from which we still have to learn, on whose ground our entire culture is built; we are Israelites in religion as we are Greeks in art and Romans in law. Even if in many aspects of culture, the ancient Israelites are far beneath the Babylonians, they are high above them in religion; Israel is and remains the nation of the revelation.”

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 33.

\textsuperscript{83} See the detailed discussion below.

\textsuperscript{84} See H. Gunkel “Das Alte Testament im Licht der modernen Forschung,” in \textit{Beiträge zur Weiterentwicklung der christlichen Religion}, ed. Adolf Deissmann (Munich: Lehmann, 1905), 40–76, especially 52: one can commit no greater error “than if one would interpret the texts of the Old Testament simply from the style of modern Jews.”
and beautiful. Jewish monotheism, e.g.—we recognize that frankly—is often stained with hatred, and sometimes a blood-red hatred against the heathen, which may be historically understood from the miserable conditions of a Judaism that was always oppressed, but by no means do we want to accept that into our religion.85

Gunkel obviously assumed that contemporary Judaism—largely in continuity with its entire history—was determined by a deep national arrogance of chosenness. In that respect, he traced Jewish apologetics in the context of the “Babel-Bible Controversy” back to Judaism’s fear “of losing the glorious wreath of the Chosen People,” and certified Jewish scholars as incapable of an objective judgment about the history of religions.86 Protestant theology, on the other hand, free from all particularistic motives, could calmly assume knowledge of the significance of the Babylonian religion and even admit that, here, a divine revelation had been effective as well:

Judaism, in which religion and nation are always linked, may be afraid that a pearl will be rolled from its crown; but what do we care about the national claim of Judaism! We gladly and honestly recognize God’s revelation wherever a human soul feels close to his God, in the most miserable and special forms. Far be it from us to limit God’s revelation to Israel! … But we Christians do not go along with the bad habits of Judaism, which believes it is honoring its God by scorning and blaspheming all other religions.87

Anti-Jewish echoes are linked here with the claim that Protestant theology was the true representative of tolerance and scholarship, while Judaism appears as an intolerant, exclusive religion that was capable of considering its legacy, the biblical tradition, only through the lense of its own national interest. There was nothing left for a Jewish scholar like Benno Jacob, but the painful recognition that the Protestant theologians’ defense of the originality of the Hebrew Bible in the context of ancient Near Eastern sources and its validity as a prefiguration of Christianity ultimately had nothing to do with the interest of Jewish studies. His feeling that behind this attack was the intention to distance Protestantism from the Jewish religion, so as not to be suspected of speaking favorably about Judaism and not being identified with this by the anti-Semite, should not be readily

85 Idem, Israel und Babylonien, 32.
86 Ibid., 4.
87 Ibid., 15–16.
rejected. It is not surprising, therefore, that increasingly, especially since World War I, the Jewish scholars’ attention no longer focused on historical and methodological questions concerning biblical criticism, but on the reactions of Protestant theologians to anti-Semitic demands for a “dejudaiization” of German culture.

The dangerous affinity of some of the judgments of Protestant biblical criticism to anti-Semitic patterns of thought were confirmed, from the point of view of Jewish scholars, during a bitter debate on the biblical concept of God that erupted immediately before World War I. It was triggered by the expert opinion that the respected Leipzig Old Testament scholar, Rudolf Kittel, submitted in 1913 during a trial the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens had started against one of the most radical representatives of völkisch anti-Semitism at that time, Theodor Fritsch; in his smear campaigns against the Jews, the latter had projected fantasies about Jewish world supremacy into the allegedly secret, criminal contents of rabbinic literature, ultimately even tracing them back to the Hebrew Bible. Kittel completely disregarded the expert opinions of his Jewish colleagues, David Z. Hoffmann and Adolf Schwarz, denying them the capability of objectively judging the character of the “Old Testament.” Despite his own harsh judgment on Fritsch’s ideology, character, and lack of knowledge, Kittel spoke in favor of acquitting him, justifying this view with factual concessions which he tried to corroborate with religious-historical arguments. Even in their disfigured form, he argued, Fritsch’s statements contained at least “a correct core”—“some element of truth is almost always at their base.” He was especially correct in claiming that the God of the “Old Testament,” from a Christian perspective, should not be understood as a “purely moral being”: “Moral good is indeed also represented in Him, but it does not constitute the core of his character. It does not completely fill his nature.” On the basis of his own research on Israel’s history and religion, published in his two-volume Geschichte des Völkes Israel (1909, 1912), Kittel, in his

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expert opinion, drew a very negative image of certain layers of the
Hebrew Bible which, from his point of view, had to be understood
as the expression of a religiously and morally inferior prehistory of
Christianity, entirely overcome by the New Testament.

Kittel’s theological arrogance and the lack of political instinct
that made him lend support to crucial elements of Fritsch’s völkisch
agitation instead of demonstrating solidarity with Judaism, thus
arguing away the Jewish minority’s right to be protected by the state
against anti-Semitic slander, was, from the point of view of Jewish
observers, the expression of a disastrous downplaying of the ag-
gressive potential of anti-Semitism and of a lack of reflection on
the political effect of negative theological images of Judaism.90 A
dark shadow was, therefore, cast on the relationship between Jewish
studies and Protestant scholarship, since Kittel had ignored the hurt
religious feelings of the Jews and even had put his Jewish critics
on the same level with Fritsch in regard to their scholarly abilities.
This was made unmistakably clear in 1917 by the Viennese rabbi
David Feuchtwang:

For centuries, people have taken pains to disparage Jews and Judaism.
The scholarly persecution of the Jews has been made into a system.
From pulpits and lecterns, non-Jewish theologians, philologists, ar-
chaeologists, and philosophers have pursued “Jew-baiting” to a small
or great extent and they are still pursuing it today. With very few ex-
ceptions, the Protestant school of exegetes has wielded its pen gently
or harshly against Judaism and its old and new literature. Even the
greatest leading minds, whose scholarship evokes unbounded respect
and whose works have given us a countless wealth of knowledge, are
not entirely free of it. It is not as if their biblical criticism, which has
indeed affected us deeply, has gotten us worked up; if it is objective,

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Kittel in Leipzig,” Freie jüdische Lehrerstimme 4 (1915), no. 1/2, 1–4; idem, “Zweiter
offener Brief an den Geh. Kirchenrat Herrn Prof. Kittel in Leipzig,” Freie jüdische
Lehrerstimme 4 (1915), no. 5/6, 63–67; Moritz Güdemann, “Eine späßhafte Prozeßge-
schichte mit ernstem Hintergrund,” MGWJ 39 (1915), 63–76; Jakob Neubauer, Bibel-
wissenschaftliche Irrungen: Ein Beitrag zur Kritik der alttestamentlichen Bibelkritik an der Hand
eines gerichtlichen theologischen Gutachtens (Berlin: n.p., 1917). For a comprehensive in-
terpretation of this controversy, see Christian Wiese, “Jahwe—ein Gott nur für Juden?
Der Disput um das Gottesverständnis zwischen Wissenschaft des Judentums und prot-
estantischer alttestamentlicher Wissenschaft im Kaiserreich,” in Christlicher Anti-
judaismus und Antisemitismus: Theologische und kirchliche Programme Deutscher Christen, ed. Leonore
Siegelse-Wensckewitz (Frankfurt am Main: Haag und Herchen, 1994), 27–94; idem,
true, reliable scholarship, we bow to its results and gratefully accept it into our thinking … as the fruits of pure knowledge. Yes, we have learned a great deal from them and have used their methodology where it seems appropriate. But we must defend ourselves against cursing, slander, disparagement, and libel. This is, quite especially, the case when truly great, acknowledged scholars, who are wrapped in the toga of objective research, are wittingly or not in the service of the crude, violent Jew-hatred of these insults and menaces to our spiritual or even physical life, with their all too often tendentious representation and explanation of Jewish antiquity. … Therefore, we must raise solemn protests against the way and method of Kittel as well, in his assessment and expert opinion of Fritsch’s attacks. … And this protest applies to all of Kittel’s comrades who try to doubt, to disparage, to slander the morality taught and lived by Judaism on the basis of their alleged critical and scientific research of everything concerning ancient Judaism. We cannot tolerate that. We cannot tolerate a scrutiny of our religious or ethical adequacy, which has been demonstrated for millennia, because of these scholarly and critical schools of exegetes and theologians.91

Feuchtwang’s criticism of Kittel for favoring anti-Semitic stereotypes, as well as the unique phrase “scholarly persecution of Jews,” testify to the challenge the ambivalent Protestant judgments posed for the Jewish scholars; on the other hand, they show that the latter were careful to make factual and linguistic distinctions when assessing Protestant images of Judaism. Although they did not have access to the scholarly apparatus of current research on anti-Semitism, they did perceive the manifold nature of hostile attitudes toward Jews and Judaism, as well as their subtle interaction. More clearly than their Protestant colleagues did, they recognized not only the dangerous affinity of many religious historical judgments to anti-Semitic patterns of argumentation, but were also aware of the potential danger that grew out of them for Christianity as well. In an essay entitled “Anti-Semitism and Religion,” published in 1918, the Leipzig rabbi Felix Goldmann indicated the anti-Christian nature of racial anti-Semitism—based on the impression of the rising nationalist movement—in order to make theologians like Kittel aware that belief in the “fate of blood,” which was inimical to religion in general, menaced Judaism, Christianity, and German culture as well.

An alliance with anti-Semitism or an inadequate dissociation from it also raised a danger for Christianity, since its religious documents were based on the Jewish Bible and the “influence of Judaism on important aspects of the Christian religion, especially ethics,” was indisputable. Therefore, a “campaign successfully waged against Judaism and its religious documents” also had “to affect Christianity and force it to react or at least gain an awareness of this danger.” The attempt to finally dissociate the founder of Christianity from Judaism and prove his “Aryan” nature, he hoped, ultimately had to provoke Christian theologians to resolutely resist anti-Semitism and reinterpret their own understanding of Judaism.92

Unfortunately, the hope of challenging Protestant Old Testament scholarship to distance itself from racist concepts, to revise its prejudices, and to remember the Jewish roots of Christian belief failed and was not to be realized in the following period either. When, in the Weimar Republic, questions about how to deal with the nationalist and anti-Semitic movement, its negation of Christianity, and its demand for the “dejudaization” of German culture and society became extremely relevant, the traditional value judgments prevented a justification of the Hebrew Bible’s equality and a politics of solidarity with Judaism. With the exception of a few voices that combined a cultural acknowledgment of the Hebrew Bible with

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92 Felix Goldmann, “Antisemitismus und Religion,” *IdR* 24 (1918), no. 3, 97–104, here 101–103. In 1924, Goldmann distinguished between various forms of anti-Semitism. Along with “economic anti-Semitism,” he diagnosed a “religious anti-Semitism,” which prevailed mainly among the uneducated classes. A new phenomenon, “the most recent game of Jewish religious hatred,” which was distinguished by “an internal strength that is not to be underestimated,” was “scientific anti-Semitism,” which was “especially cultivated in circles of Protestant theology.” This form of anti-Semitism did not draw political conclusions from the attacks against the Jewish notion of God and the contempt of Jewish ethics, but left this to the anti-Semitic agitators. “Only now and then, as a few years ago in the case of the Leipzig professor Kittel …, does it cover a demagogue with its strong arm, who also exploits religion along with his usual indictments.” Yet, Goldmann distinguished between “anti-Semitically biased study” and genuine scholarship, between unfavorable judgments about individual aspects of the Jewish tradition and “the deliberate attack under abuse of the scholarly methods and results”; see Felix Goldmann, *Vom Wesen des Antisemitismus* (Berlin: Philo-Verlag, 1924), 59–61. For Goldmann, “racial anti-Semitism,” as the “instinctive hatred against the minority that is no longer disguised for ethical reasons,” represented a new phenomenon. It was important to him to emphasize that racist and nationalist ideologies considered “all of Christianity reprehensible because of its Jewish origin” (ibid., 74–76.).
a rather positive view of postbiblical and contemporary Judaism, hermeneutic discussion about the value of the “Old Testament” developed into the medium in which “desolidarization” became the dominant method. Instead of understanding biblical criticism as “an antidote to anti-Semitism,” respected German Old Testament scholars allowed their own interpretation of the Hebrew Bible to be poisoned by anti-Semitic views, even if they explicitly rejected racial hatred. The most effective method, in this respect, consisted in appropriating the “valuable” prophetical elements of the Hebrew Bible, while sharply separating them from its supposed “inferior Jewish” features, thus constructing an unbridgeable opposition to Judaism.

Protestant theology’s characteristic strategy of defending Christian convictions against anti-Christian elements of racial anti-Semitism while, at the same time, abandoning the Jewish community to anti-Semitic agitation could be illustrated by adducing sources from very different theological backgrounds. The leading role was now assumed less by liberal scholars associated with the Wellhausen school, but by conservative theologians who were inclined to adopt much more bluntly anti-Jewish elements. As an example, I would like to mention the Old Testament scholar Otto Procksch who, already at the beginning of the Weimar Republic, felt urged to defend the character of the Hebrew Bible against anti-Semitic attacks. A representative of a conservative “salvational” theology (Heilsgeschichte), he understood the “Old Testament” as a preparatory stage of the history leading to Jesus Christ and defined its relation to the New Testament as one of prophecy and fulfillment.93 In his lectures on “Altes Testament und Judentum” (1921), Procksch raised the question whether the “Old Testament,” as a Jewish product, could continue to be considered a “German book of faith” in a time devoted to the fight against the “decomposing forces of modern Judaism.”94 The völkisch tendencies to Germanize Christianity, i.e., the “odd fiction” of an Aryan Jesus and the claim that the God of Christ could not be the God of the


“Old Testament,” were not only “anti-Jewish,” he emphasized, but also “anti-Christian”; as a consequence, anti-Semitism was constantly in danger of “colliding with Christianity.” Whoever did not base his faith on an invented Christ, uprooted from his historical soil, but on the true redeemer, had to accept the “Old Testament” as well. “We have to accept that it has been God’s will to make the poor Jewish people [Judenvolk], alien as it is to our own nature, the womb of the Gospel, not Athens, Rome, or Weimar.”95

The argument of the exegete Procksch aimed at accentuating the historical link between Jesus and Christianity on the one hand and Israelite religious history on the other. Jesus, he claimed, had “deliberately placed himself in Judaism’s intellectual world,” understanding himself as the one who would fulfill the prophetic promises. His self-understanding had been “permeated by images of the Old Testament,” to the extent that the writings of the New Testament could not be understood without considering this. Since Jesus did not proclaim “a new God,” but “the God of the Old Testament as the one who embodied the salvation of the world, … the Jews’ Holy Writ has become the Bible of Christianity”—this being symbolic of “the primordial affinity between Judaism and Christianity,” the common basis for the confrontation with paganism and simultaneously the “battlefield” between both religions.96 Procksch pointed to the moral strength of the biblical laws, praised the prophets as the “torchbearers of the Gospel,” and claimed that especially the Psalms had shaped the language of Christian prayer and “deepened the soul of the German nature [Gemüt].”97 In a later article, he did not even hesitate to usurp the prophetical message and the Psalms, interpreting them as an expression of “Christianity in the Old Testament” and projecting the supposed gulf between Judaism and Christianity that had, from his point of view, emerged “under Christ’s cross” in the Hebrew Bible.98

Procksch was aware of the fact that his plea for preserving the “Old Testament” as a part of the “spiritual world of the German nation,” even if it emphasized important “analogies” between Israel’s

95 Ibid., 309–311.
97 Ibid., 8–10.
spiritual experiences and the national hardship of the German nation after World War I, would hardly be convincing, as long as it was not paralleled by a sharp dissociation from contemporary Judaism. In a political situation in which the “insight into the decomposing effects of Judaism with regard to the German nation” was gradually growing, the opposition between Hebrew and German “national character” [Volkstum] had, necessarily, to be felt in a stronger way than the affinity between Judaism and Christianity. In order to make sure that his appreciation of Israelite religious history as a root of Christianity was not misunderstood as a proclamation of solidarity with the Jewish minority, Procksch postulated a sharp opposition between the “Old Testament” and the “spirit of Judaism”: “only a fool could claim that, here, the same spirit is prevailing.” This strict separation corresponded to the traditional salvation scheme, according to which Jesus was the “final figure [Schlußgestalt] of the Old Testament” who based his message on the Torah solely in order to “liberate Judaism from itself.” The “Old Testament,” wrote Procksch, further sharpening this contrast, ended where the “history of the Eternal Jew” started:

Christ separates the epochs. While the Old Testament has been fulfilled in Christ, the curse of the Eternal Jew is a result of the rejection of Christ. The destruction of Jerusalem, this terrible tragedy, has thrown it back to nomadism. Uprooted from its native soil, it had to become what it became.

These formulations mirror the undiminished traditional theology aiming at disinheriting Judaism by emphasizing the “rejection of Jesus” and the “deicide,” thus claiming the Hebrew Bible for

100 See ibid., 20: “As much as we are shattered, German pride is rebelling against a comparison between our tribe that is rooted, like the felled oak, in the native soil, and the Eternal Jew, homeless as he is, wandering through the world, destroying national life everywhere, responsible, especially in Germany, for the disastrous cosmopolitanism.”
101 Ibid., 20. How representative this judgment is for the attitude of many prominent Old Testament scholars can be seen in the praising reviews by Georg Beer, Theologische Literaturzeitung 49 (1924), no. 1, 23, and Johannes Hempel, Theologisches Literaturblatt 44 (1923), no. 2, 18–19.
104 Idem, Altes Testament und Judentum, 11.
Christianity\textsuperscript{105} and interpreting the history of the Jewish people as a history of God’s wrath. Apart from that, they are an expression of the elaborate strategy of many Protestant theologians in the Weimar Republic and in Nazi Germany who thought it possible to defend the foundations of the Christian faith against the necessary implications of a consistent racialist anti-Semitic ideology by means of a dichotomy between “Old Testament” and Jewish tradition. Procksch accentuated this deliberate desolidarization by mobilizing the entire irrational construct consisting of religious hatred and the social fantasies of a Jewish menace that made the old legend of Ahasver such a popular instrument of anti-Semitic agitation. This late medieval anti-Jewish myth about a Jerusalem shoemaker who was condemned to infinite travels, since he participated in shouting, “Crucify him,” and barred Jesus from resting at his house on his way to the cross, and who hurried around the world as a living witness of Christ’s suffering and power as the Son of God, was deeply rooted in religious prejudice. In its collective interpretation, the myth emphasized the resentment against a demonized, allegedly alien Jewish nation that had, through the centuries, preserved its distinct identity despite the fall of its national existence and its dispersion; in this form, it served as a justification for discrimination and persecution.\textsuperscript{106}

For Procksch, the figure of the “Eternal Jew” served as a symbol of Jewish history from antiquity to modern times that combined different traditional anti-Jewish and modern anti-Semitic stereotypes. His interpretation starts with the notion of a “late Judaism” that, after a long history of decline, ultimately, in opposition to emerging Christianity, “degenerated into a petrified religion of the law, i.e., talmudic Judaism [\textit{Talmudjudentum}].” The “rejected Christ” became the “destiny of the Eternal Jew” who was accompanied by the Torah, symbol of his cursed existence in the “wasteland” of the Talmud.\textsuperscript{107} Judaism’s vitality throughout the centuries had not been preserved

\textsuperscript{105} See idem, “Das Altes Testament im antisemitischen Sturm,” 340: “The Old Testament, however, has to be understood as the genuine foundation of Christianity, not of Judaism.”


\textsuperscript{107} Procksch, \textit{Altes Testament und Judentum}, 21.
by rabbinic literature but by the “spirit of the religion of the Old Testament,” the monotheistic faith that embodied Judaism’s and Christianity’s inalienable heritage. Tragically, however, Judaism had been deprived of its universal strength when, in the year 70 a.d., the homeless “Eternal Jew” left the burning city of Jerusalem.\footnote{Ibid., 24–25.} The “destruction of Jerusalem with its sea of flames … glaringly illuminates the end of Israel’s history,” but from Judah’s ashes “the phoenix of the Eternal Jew rises aloft, an incredibly gigantic demonic figure.”\footnote{Ibid., 35.} In the present, Procksch claimed, Judaism had become an exclusive “community of blood” [Blutgemeinschaft] that continued to understand itself as the “chosen people,”\footnote{Ibid., 24.} but had abandoned the originally religious and moral content of the idea of chosenness, secularizing it and transforming it into a claim to power: “Israel wishes to dominate the world, not by its religious mission but with the help of money.”\footnote{Ibid., 21.}

On the basis of this interpretation of “chosenness” in the sense of Israel’s alleged aspirations to world supremacy, Procksch drew an entirely anti-Semitic image of Judaism that culminated in fantasies according to which the Jews, the “caricature of an international, homeless, and godless humanity,” threatened to destroy the German nation: “The Eternal Jew has become a demon dominating world history.”\footnote{Ibid., 28.} This kind of demonizing of Judaism made the demand to eliminate its influence a vital question of national politics. Even if anti-Semitism erred in attacking the “Old Testament” and spread unscholarly religious historical judgments, it was right in its political aims of limiting Jewish power. Since Procksch described political reality in the image of the irrational historical theology expressed in the myth of Ahasver, an integration of the Jewish minority seemed, to him, impossible without overcoming Judaism as a religion. The tragic destiny of the “Eternal Jew,” a result of God’s will, did not permit him to immerse himself in the “sea of humanity” and to mingle with the “blood of foreign nations” as long as Christ’s curse was unfulfilled.\footnote{Ibid., 36.} However, Judaism, he maintained in opposition
to radical anti-Semitism, could not be overcome by expulsions or political persecution, but solely by means of strengthening Christianity and “subduing” the Jews to the will of Christ. His variant of the solution of the “Jewish question” was: “The Jews remain foreigners in the German fatherland, as long as they refuse to submit to Christianity. As a consequence, they have no right to demand legal equality.” Already the language of the Protestant theologian who imagined the Christian mission to the Jews simply in terms of “power” and “subjugation” reveals his attitude as an expression of the exclusive, antiemancipatory nationalism escalating in the Weimar Republic. The plea for preserving the “Old Testament” as a fundamental source of the Christian faith was transformed, in this context, into the attempt to disinherit Judaism, depriving it of its theological dignity and leaving it behind as a symbol of the demonic powers allegedly menacing Germany. Forming an alliance with Christianity, with “Luther’s German Church,” Procksch concluded, the German nation had to fight the “ideology of human rights,” capitalism, and bolshevism—“otherwise we are lost like the Eternal Jew himself.”

In view of such attitudes, widespread among Christian theologians, the hopes of scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, as expressed in the controversies about the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in the decades before 1933, to forge a scholarly alliance against anti-Semitism and to provoke Protestant scholarship into revising traditional stereotypes, fighting racial thinking, and discovering the Jewish roots of Christianity, were doomed to fail and, at the end of the Weimar Republic and the beginning of the Nazi period, at the latest, turned out to be an illusion. When Protestant theology faced the question of how to react to the radical anti-Semitic movement, its negation of Christianity, and the demands, enthusiastically supported

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114 Ibid., 32.
by the so-called “German Christians,” to “dejudaize” German culture and society as well as Christianity, it became clear that the traditional judgments prevented solidarity with Judaism based on the acknowledgment of the equal religious value of the Hebrew Bible. Even if the “Old Testament” was defended as a part of Christian tradition, the majority of theologians sharply separated “valuable” from “Jewish-inferior” layers. The solution was rather simple: the vital prophetic tradition was not “Jewish” at all—“Jewish” was only the postexilic tradition, with the prophetic element finding its genuine continuation and fulfillment in the message of Jesus of Nazareth.

While the christological usurpation of the “Old Testament” that served numerous theologians of the Confessing Church to argue in favor of preserving it amounted to “dejudaizing” the Hebrew Bible itself, rejecting the Jewish claim to the biblical tradition, others emphasized the total opposition between Christianity and the “Old Testament.” Quite drastically, the well-known German-Christian theologian Emanuel Hirsch formulated his agenda of radical desolidarization in his book, *Das Alte Testament und die Predigt des Evangeliums* (1936). The “whole Old Testament,” he emphasized, was “the document of a foreign religion, annihilated and shattered by the belief in Christ.” As a consequence, he pleaded for preserving it with the intention of revealing that its only viable meaning was to serve as a challenge to Christian self-understanding, namely “as

the eternal image of the legal religion rejected by the Gospel,” i.e., as a pure counterimage, or as an inimical antithesis.120 This way, he was able to construct an unbridgeable opposition between Judaism and Christianity, thereby presenting an effective model embraced by many of his colleagues that immensely contributed to the failure of the Protestant Church to face the anti-Semitic threat and, ultimately, to resist the Nazi politics of discrimination and genocide. The further development of this kind of theology culminated in identification with the Nazi ideology as expressed in the Eisenach “Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on the German Church Life,” founded in 1939 under the auspices of the New Testament scholar Walter Grundmann.121 Those who devoted their work to this institution did not only want to eliminate the Hebrew Bible, but based their theology on absurd theories on the “Aryan Jesus.” By nazifying theology and aryranizing Christianity, they developed an anti-Semitic counterhistory against the attempt of Jewish scholars to interpret Jesus as part of Jewish religious history and to point to the essential affinity between Judaism and Christianity.

At that time, Jewish biblical scholarship was, in the deepest sense, an existentially lonely endeavor, and Wissenschaft des Judentums, traditionally a discipline excluded from German academia, had become the ghettoized voice of a deadly threatened minority, driven into exile, deprived of its institutions as well as of any possibility of effectively asserting its scholarly, apologetic, or polemical counterdiscourse. Benno Jacob completed his commentary on the book of Exodus in his London exile after having decided to leave Germany in 1938, in the wake of the pogrom; his brilliant commentary on the book of Genesis was pulped in 1939 by the Gestapo. In Germany, his research started to be perceived again by Protestant theological discussion


only in the 1990s. Abraham J. Heschel published his extraordinary book on prophecy in 1936 in German, but in a Cracow press; in 1939, he was able to find refuge in the United States. Leo Baeck, who had become the representative of German Jewry during the Nazi era, was deported to Theresienstadt in 1943. By that time, at the latest, the impressive attempt of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* to convince Protestant biblical scholarship as well as German society in general to acknowledge Judaism’s right of existence by accentuating the biblical-prophetical dimension of the Jewish religion, had turned out to be a tragic endeavor, doomed to failure by Nazism’s violent anti-Semitism as well as the deeply rooted “theology of contempt” that resulted in the churches’ disastrous silence. Not only were the Jewish scholars denied a genuine scholarly response to their offer of dialogue; rather, Protestant (as well as Catholic) biblical theology used the hermeneutic debate on the “Old Testament” in order to justify the political and social abandonment of the Jewish minority. With the expulsion and destruction of the German-Jewish *Wissenschaft des Judentums* during the “Third Reich,” Hermann Cohen’s enthusiastic hope for an “antidote” to anti-Semitism embodied by an enlightened Christian biblical scholarship had proved to be a dream: the grand endeavor to legitimize Judaism’s right of existence in modernity through a counterhistory based on modern scholarship was brutally destroyed by an inhuman society that chose to exorcize the “Jewish spirit,” including the biblical values of humaneness, justice, and freedom, through an unprecedented genocide.

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122 Benno Jacob, *Das Buch Exodus*, ed. Shlomo Mayer (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1997); idem, *Das Buch Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken-Verlag, 1934; repr., Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 2000).

While current scholarship on the German-Jewish relationship in Wilhelmine Germany has uncovered an “anti-colonial impulse” on the part of members of the Wissenschaft des Judentums vis-à-vis their Protestant colleagues, Jewish and Protestant socialists in the Weimar period engaged in a joint challenge to the colonialist discourse of bourgeois culture associated with Religionswissenschaft.1 These scholars attempted to infuse social and political institutions with spiritual meaning by fashioning a neutral zone of religious socialism between the liberal historicism of Religionswissenschaft and the ahistorical eschatology of neo-Orthodoxy. This liminal zone between theology and culture transcended the boundaries of Judaism and Christianity and provided an intellectual realm in which Jews and Christians could unite against a common enemy without having to promote their religious particularity in opposition to one another. In regard to the German-Jewish-Protestant relationship, the emergence of religious socialism in the Weimar years represents a dialogical window in time between the earlier ambivalent encounter between liberal Jewish and Protestant thinkers in the Wilhelmine period and the rapid deterioration of any German-Jewish discourse and eventual decimation of European Jewry in the Holocaust.

In order to fully understand the anomaly of religious socialism in the Weimar period, this analysis explores the writings of Martin

1 In his analysis of liberal Jewish and Protestant scholarship in Wilhelmine Germany, Christian Wiese argues that members of the Wissenschaft des Judentums did not simply assimilate into Protestant culture, but rather illustrated an “anti-colonial impulse” in their scholarship, engaging in an “intellectual revolt against the way Protestant historiography constructed Judaism and tried to impose its own narrative and system of meaning and values.” See Christian Wiese, Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 25.
Buber and Paul Tillich, the Jewish and Protestant thinkers who were determined to rebuild the very foundations of modern culture destroyed in World War I by reunifying religion and culture with the intent of reconstructing true community. Together, they occupied the shared discursive space of religious socialism that constituted a bridge between theology and culture, in the sense that its proponents envisioned an infusion of divine holiness into the social and political realms of the secular world. Their goal was to not allow God’s presence to be subsumed by rational categories, while at the same time not allowing God to become a “disembodied spirit” separated from “the demands of the here and now.” These Jewish and Protestant scholars engaged in a symmetrical discourse that had eluded the members of the Wissenschaft des Judentums who employed an apologetic approach in their competition for academic and theological legitimacy with liberal Protestants. At the same time, these religious socialists avoided the dialectical theologies of neo-Orthodox theologians like the Protestant thinker Karl Barth and Jewish thinker Franz Rosenzweig who portrayed a theologically complementary yet contradictory Jewish-Christian relationship based on their mutual rejection of secularization and historicism of religion. Because of its focus on the secular world, this movement also attracted nonre-

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3 When describing the discourse of the Wissenschaft des Judentums vis-à-vis Protestant Christianity in Wilhelmine Germany, Christian Wiese does not refer to the term “apologetics” as an anti-Christian polemic or as a source of derision by Christians toward Jews, but rather views it as an “analytical term” in an attempt to understand the function it had for Jewish scholars at the time. He argues that they understood the apologetic discourse as a legitimate way of defending “their tradition against a repudiation of the religious and cultural value of Judaism that claimed to be scholarly and objective and that represented an enormous challenge to Jewish existence itself.” Using Habermas’s model for intercultural communication, Wiese raises the question as to whether the Jewish-Protestant interchange reflects a symmetrical discourse shaped by mutual respect and recognition or more accurately an asymmetrical discourse reflecting a modernized form of the Jewish-Christian disputation. See Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse*, 27.
ligious Jewish and Christian scholars from the fields of economics, sociology, political science, and history, who along with Buber and Tillich occupied an intellectual “no man’s land” unrestricted by confessional allegiance and guided by Tillich’s general principle of kairos, “a moment pregnant with significance” ushering in a “new, unifying culture springing from socialist soil.”

1. Buber’s Repositioning of Religious Experience between Wissenschaft des Judentums and Neo-Orthodoxy

When not forced to distinguish his Jewish beliefs from those of Protestantism, Buber was able to enter into a more universal realm of religious socialism that he shared with the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, who like Buber had positioned himself between the liberal and the neo-Orthodox wings of his religious community by rejecting the historicism of Religionswissenschaft along with the ahistorical eschatology found in dialectical theology. Buber’s writings on Judaism, and particularly Hasidism, were favored and even emulated by Protestant scholars, yet he clearly expressed an ambivalence toward Christianity in his book Two Types of Faith, where he reclaimed Jesus as a Pharisaic Jew who worshipped a God who could be experienced without mediation. At the same time, Buber accused the Apostle Paul of undermining this immediacy by concealing the imageless God with the imaged God, Christ, who became an object of faith for each individual Christian. In The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation, the Protestant theologian Emil Brunner referred to Buber’s portrayal of Pauline theology as a “major attack upon Christianity” and argued that Buber mistakenly confused the factual event of “God’s self-communication” through Christ “with a

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6 On this, see Marc A. Krell, Intersecting Pathways: Modern Jewish Theologians in Conversation with Christianity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 139, n. 29.
doctrine to be believed.” Hence, Buber appeared to move closer to Christianity than his more conservative coreligionists by reclaiming Jesus as a Jew. However, while reaching across the border between Judaism and Christianity, he reconfigured it at the same time in order to reaffirm Jewish particularity.

Buber and Tillich, along with other founders of the Religious Socialist movement, Karl Mennicke, Eduard Heimann and Leonard Ragaz, blamed the disunity of modern European society after World War I on the radical division between the sacred and the secular spheres, and proclaimed the desperate need to mediate between the everyday “broken” world and the Kingdom of God. While both Buber and Tillich were products of Religionswissenschaft, they rebelled against its tendency to essentialize and reduce the presence of God and religion to a set of rational or moral categories. On the one hand, Buber was clearly influenced by the German concept of die Wissenschaft as a reference to a holistic, comprehensive type of learning that is dedicated to the pursuit of truth with moral implications, as opposed to merely representing eine Wissenschaft, a scientific discipline. German scholars argued that engagement with Wissenschaft should lead to the individual attainment of a Weltanschaung, yet not just as an “integral conception of the world,” but rather a “world of ‘objective Geist’” or spirit wherein several areas of human endeavor are pervaded with value and meaning. The late-nineteenth-century theologian Reinhold Seeberg described this process of attaining a Weltanschaung as a form of “cultivation” for German academics that demonstrated their Geistigkeit, spirituality or “godlikeness.” The prominent University of Berlin philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel, who was Buber’s teacher, asserted:

cultivation comes about only if the contents absorbed out of the suprapersonal realm seem, as through a secret harmony, to unfold only

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that in the soul which exists within it as its own instinctual tendency and as the inner prefiguration of its subjective perfection.¹⁰

Simmel’s “suprapersonal realm” directly resembles the world of Geist described by nineteenth-century German scholars in which an objective and predetermined spiritual synthesis takes place between the knower and the known—paradoxically resulting in “subjective perfection.”¹¹

In his 1906 preface to the collection of monographs, Die Gesellschaft, Buber drew upon Simmel’s wissenschaftliche notion of the “suprapersonal realm” to describe what he considered to be das Zwischenmenschliche, the realm of the “interhuman” that would become the basis for his philosophy of dialogue and community. Just as Simmel described the “suprapersonal realm” as an objective synthesis at work between the knower and the known, Buber explained his concept of the interhuman in a similar way:

Das Zwischenmenschliche is that which occurs between [zwischen] men; in some ways it is not unlike an impersonal, objective process …. Das Zwischenmenschliche can only be properly apprehended and analyzed as the synthesis of the “action and passion” of two or more individuals: the “action and passion” of one are intertwined with those of another, each finding in this abiding tension opposition and complementarity.¹²

Like Simmel, Buber was affirming a truth that was relationally determined, constituting an “ontic reality” defining all human interaction. In this scenario, ideas unfold naturally through human interaction and truths are not imposed by one person upon another in a dogmatic assertion.¹³ This essential ontology of the interhuman, or what Buber would later call “the Between,” became the basis for his philosophy of religious socialism based on the idea of a decentralized, sacred community that arises voluntarily and spontaneously through human fellowship in contrast to a state which preserves itself through coercion.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ringer, The Decline of the German Mandarins, 107.
¹¹ Ibid.
¹³ Mendes-Flohr, “Prophetic Politics and Meta-Sociology,” 69.
¹⁴ Mendes-Flohr, From Mysticism to Dialogue, 46.
Ironically, despite his early affinities with German *Wissenschaft*, Buber wrote a 1901 essay entitled “Jüdische Wissenschaft,” in which he critiqued the very methodological foundation of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. There he argued that this body of German-Jewish scholarship should no longer be entitled to the name “science of Judaism” because it never represented an all-encompassing method of studying Judaism, but rather reduced the study of Judaism to the academic discipline of philology, whose object of study was ancient Jewish literature. He asserted that in its place should arise a “Jewish science,” that is a broad “scientific complex of Jewish matters” comprising the study of Jewish law, legends, customs, and monuments using different methodologies in the western academic canon, such as the general history of law, folklore, archaeology, and art. Moreover, according to Buber, this Jewish science should also encompass the study of contemporary Jewish ethnicity, social stratification, and Jewish spirit and culture using methodologies such as anthropology, ethnology, economics, and historiography.\(^\text{15}\)

In his three *Speeches on Judaism* (1909–1910) Buber directed this criticism regarding a rationalist reductionism against the German movement of Reform Judaism that emerged out of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. He criticized those liberal Jews for their evolutionist conception of Jewish history, which was the basis for their rationalist and anti-nationalist approach to contemporary Judaism. He argued against the *wissenschaftliche* perception that there is a rational process or natural movement toward a more progressive form of religion, instead perceiving history in a Nietzschean manner as an ongoing dialectic between dominant and suppressed forces. Similarly to the Zionist thinker Micha Yosef Berdyczewski, Buber asserted that rather than representing a necessary ritualistic stage in Jewish history that was no longer applicable in the era of post-Enlightenment rationalism, rabbinic Judaism actually suppressed the vital creative forces of Judaism. Instead of replacing rabbinic Judaism with a more modern, rationalized religion as part of this evolutionary process, Buber argued that Jews must now engage in a radical transvaluation of Jewish life and thought with an emphasis on religious faith based on existential freedom, individual choice, and direct religious

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experience. He criticized the liberal Jews for rationalizing faith, simplifying dogma, and abandoning rituals, arguing that this did not constitute a renewal of Judaism, but instead promoted an easier, more bourgeois, “salonlike” form of Judaism.

Essentially, Buber was making a two-pronged argument against the Wissenschaft des Judentums and liberal Judaism as a whole. In one sense, he was criticizing the reductionistic historicism of liberal Jews who failed to account for the vitality of the Jewish people and the ongoing development of their culture. In another sense, he appeared to be faulting the scholars of the Wissenschaft des Judentums for resorting to an apologetic and parochial study of Judaism because of their inability or unwillingness to classify the study of Judaism under the various social science disciplines in the modern academy. In this instance, Buber seemed to anticipate Gershom Scholem’s later criticism of the apologetic stance illustrated by the adherents of the Wissenschaft des Judentums who, he argued, had disregarded “the most vital aspects of the Jewish people as a collective entity.” Yet, whereas Scholem criticized what he considered to be the “liquidation of Judaism as a living organism” by the Wissenschaft des Judentums for the sake of assimilation, Buber actually promoted a more universal and multidisciplinary Jüdische Wissenschaft that would enable Jewish scholars to integrate more fully into the German academic environment. He would later demonstrate this comparative approach to studying Judaism when teaching “jüdische Religionswissenschaft und die jüdische Ethik” at the University of Frankfurt from 1923 to 1933 when he was dismissed because of the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazis. During this period, he taught comparative courses like history of religions, messianism, religion and ethics, biblical religion, faith and custom, and mysticism, among others. In those years,

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17 On this, see Maurice Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work: The Early Years 1878–1923 (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981), 138.
Buber appeared to use the tools of Religionswissenschaft to further his post–World War I agenda of constructing “a true human community,” by moving beyond the intra-Jewish dialogue toward a more universal, interfaith dialogue with German Christian culture.\(^\text{20}\)

In fact, when describing Jewish tradition during those years, Buber preferred the more dynamic, universal term “religiosity” to the term “religion,” which he perceived to be a more essentialist form of thought and praxis associated with a particular religious institution. For Buber, religiosity represents “man’s sense of wonder and adoration, an ever new becoming, an ever anew articulation and formulation of his feeling that … there is something that is unconditioned. Religiosity is his longing to establish a living communion with the unconditioned.”\(^\text{21}\)

However, he argued that this personal experience of the divine-human encounter was continually stifled throughout history by the institutionalized forms and structures of Judaism, whether they were rabbinic halakhah or the rational principles of the Wissenschaft des Judentums and Reform Judaism. When speaking about Orthodoxy and rabbinic tradition, Buber railed against the idea of religion forcing individuals to observe an immutable law that ultimately becomes a “heap of petty formulas and allows man’s decision for right or wrong action to degenerate into hair splitting casuistry—then religion no longer shapes, but enslaves religiosity.”\(^\text{22}\) That is why he disagreed with the neo-Orthodox theologian, Franz Rosenzweig, over the issue of whether divine revelation could ever be understood as divine Law. In one of a series of letters exchanged with Rosenzweig from 1924 to 1925, Buber asserted: “It is only through man in his self-contradiction that revelation becomes legislation.” For him, the law was strictly a human mediation that actually presented a potential

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\(^{20}\) Buber stated the necessity to “construct a true human community” at a conference on Religious Socialism that he organized and hosted at his home in Heppenheim, Germany, in 1928. See Mendes-Flohr, “Prophetic Politics and Meta-Sociology,” 71.


\(^{22}\) Buber, ibid., 91–92. Cf. Silberstein, Martin Buber’s Social and Religious Thought, 84.
barrier to the “unmediated word of God.”\textsuperscript{23} Buber demonstrated his theological position by refusing to identify the Torah as Law in his translation of Psalm 1. He translated it as “instruction” in order to emphasize its dynamic quality as opposed to the static form of law or \textit{nomos}. In “Replies to My Critics,” published posthumously in 1967, Buber pointed out the verbal origin of the word Torah, “to instruct,” and argued that an “objectification of the concept contradicts its essence.”\textsuperscript{24} However, despite his insistence that biblical law was a human invention, Buber wrote to Rosenzweig in 1925 that he could not say “no” to the question, “Is the Law God’s Law?” Instead he enigmatically posited that there is only a “missing Yes” to this question that “is not quietly absent: its absence is noted with terror,” as if to say that the meaning of revelation is precariously and frighteningly dependent upon the existential freedom of the individual human being to interpret it as law.\textsuperscript{25}

In keeping with his religious existentialism, Buber refused to ascribe any fixed, essential form to God, arguing that any effort to either circumscribe God within the world through scientific categories or to classify God as completely beyond the world would be the height of insolence and transgression. In “Replies to My Critics,” he argued against the latter, warning against the “simplification practiced by the ‘dialectical theology’ that God is Wholly Other. One may only so name Him when in the same breath one knows and confesses that He is the not-other, the here, the now, the mine.”\textsuperscript{26} In his classic 1923 text, \textit{I and Thou}, Buber did refer to a “divine form,” but argued that it could only emerge out of periodic, spontaneous divine-human or I-Thou encounters throughout history, cautioning that it “is not man’s own power that is at work here, neither is it merely God’s passing through; it is a mixture of the divine and human.”\textsuperscript{27} He argued that unfortunately,
following these momentary divine epiphanies, human beings and organized religions in particular inevitably turn God as the “eternal You” into an “It” by unwittingly objectifying or conceptualizing God in an attempt to grasp or promote the divine presence. Hence, while disagreeing with the dialectical theology that posits an immeasurable difference between a divine and a human world, Buber ultimately described a dialectic within this world, between an ongoing human dissolution of the divine presence in the world and a willful return back to God.28

Here, Buber’s theology again conflicts with that of Rosenzweig who earlier in his career advocated a dialectical theology along the lines of Karl Barth and indirectly criticized Buber in a 1914 essay for in fact dissolving the difference between God and humanity, which prompted Rosenzweig to refer to it as an “atheistic theology.” Additionally, in a possibly veiled reference to Buber’s theology, Rosenzweig asserted that while the language of God and humanity is retained in liberal Jewish and Christian theologies, the dialectic between the divine and the human becomes an inner-human dialectic that ultimately leads to a mythologization of revelation.29 While later portraying revelation more dialogically in his book, _The Star of Redemption_, Rosenzweig would continue to portray a dialectic between an eternal, metahistorical realm occupied by the Jews and a profane historical realm occupied by Christians that he associated with secular nationalism.30 Rosenzweig’s portrayal of Jewish eternality closely resembled Karl Barth’s ahistorical, eschatological portrayal of the church, presented most clearly in the second edition of his commentary on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans in which he portrayed Christianity as an unhistorical phenomenon belonging to an _Urgeschichte_, a prehistory that is both protological and eschatological.

28 Ibid., 167–168.
Just as Barth claimed that the historical existence of Christianity is absurd because of its original eschatological expectations, Rosenzweig asserted that the Jews cannot grow as a people in the context of history, because that would imply that their perfection as a redeemed nation has not been attained in time. Moreover, just as Barth rejected Protestant attempts to equate Christianity with cultural progress, Rosenzweig largely rejected Zionism as a secular movement that mistakenly equated Jewish messianic aspirations to return to the land of Israel with a political movement. For Rosenzweig, Jews already realize redemption through their immediate relationship to God and therefore do not have to strive for it politically like all other nations in history.

Like Rosenzweig, Buber was also deeply affected by the historical instrumentalism and secular nationalism leading to World War I, and he was also inspired to reconstruct theology in relation to his Christian milieu. Yet whereas Rosenzweig positioned himself as a Jew in a sacred, metahistorical realm ontologically distinct from a Christian realm of secular history, Buber envisioned an integration of the spiritual and the historical in the transhistorical realm of the interhuman or what he would later call the “ontology of the Between.” Just as Rosenzweig opposed the idealization of the state and the mistaken belief that eternity arises through historical conquest, Buber criticized the belief that the spirit is only effective “under the sway of powerful groups, under the dictates of what rules in history, that is, of power.” However, unlike Rosenzweig, Buber argued in his 1938 article, “The Demand of the Spirit and Historical Reality,” that it is misleading to conclude that history “massively opposes and resists the spirit.” For Buber, the real problem is not history itself,


34 Buber, “The Demand of the Spirit and Historical Reality,” in idem, Pointing the Way, 177–191, here 182.

35 Ibid., 181–182
but rather the misunderstanding and subsequent abuse of spirit as an excuse for power within history. To illustrate his point, he contrasts the mindset of the philosopher Plato and philosophers throughout history like Hegel with that of the biblical prophet Isaiah who did not share the belief that spirit or even power is a human possession but rather regarded it as something bestowed upon the individual by God. In fact, Isaiah demonstrated that spiritually influenced prophets do not have perfect souls like Plato, but are indeed powerless and flawed human beings whose mission is to call the powerful to task for dominating the powerless through the perpetuation of social inequality and enslavement. In Isaiah 6, God sends Isaiah to proclaim that King Uzziah’s leprosy symbolized the uncleanness of the entire people, including Isaiah himself, yet tells him that aside from a small remnant, the entire community will misunderstand his message and persist in their disobedience to God. Hence, the prophet Isaiah does not represent God’s people over against the heathens, but rather condemns everyone in the community and is not expected to succeed in redeeming the people in the short term. Unlike the Platonic spiritual figure, the prophetic spirit does not possess a timeless, ideal truth in the midst of a profane world and cannot stand outside of history waiting for the rest of the world to be redeemed.36 Instead, Buber argues that the prophet is directed to address a particular people in a particular place in a specific historical situation, and even though his message will largely be ignored at the time, “it instills the vision in the people for all time to come. It lives within the people from then on as a longing to realize the truth.”37

Juxtaposing the prophetic with the philosophical narrative, Buber cleverly positioned himself theologically between the liberal historicists of religion aligned with the nationalists idealizing the state, and the neo-Orthodox theologians rejecting the historical realm altogether in favor of a Platonic, dualistic historiosophy that was inherently apologetic. Instead, he envisioned the emergence of a liminal zone between theology and culture in which the ideal only momentarily envelops the real, but leaves a lasting spiritual legacy that has universal appeal. Buber describes this revelatory moment in

36 Ibid., 182–190.
37 Ibid., 190.
the following way: “Spirit is an event, something which happens to man. The storm of the spirit sweeps man where it will, then storms on into the world.”38 Based on his portrayal of the prophet Isaiah, Buber seemed to agree with Rosenzweig that the Jew has been a powerless, spiritual figure in history who is often at the mercy of powerful rulers, yet in contrast to Rosenzweig, Buber did not portray the Jew as a purely divine entity that must abandon history in favor of an ideal metahistorical realm. Moreover, Buber tried to show that God does not necessarily reside in the fixed form of the religious institution, or even the people Israel as a whole in the midst of a Christian dominated historical realm that is godless. Instead he portrayed divine revelation in more universal terms as a random event in which the divine spirit fuses with different individuals in the world in different locations at different times throughout history.39

While he still engaged in apologetics vis-à-vis Christianity to an extent when working in the realm of Religionswissenschaft, Buber began to articulate a broader critique of modernity as a whole in an attempt to formulate a more universal, dialogical theory of religion. Willi Goetschel makes the following observation about Buber’s evolving thought during this period:

In rethinking the conditions of modernity, Buber formulates a general theory of religion that redefines the place of religious experience. With Christianity becoming one religion among others, which all share a universal human core, the question of Jewish identity assumes an altogether different meaning. It is Buber’s achievement to have emancipated the Jews from the entanglements of the European apologetic tradition which Rosenzweig, for example, so strongly attempted to revive .... Having broken the spell of ontological difference that deforms the rescue operations of German-Jewish apologetics, Buber opens up the way to think otherness as a dynamic exchange that remakes the involved parties in their respective ever changing images. Turning away from the issues of law, custom, ceremonial habits, and other markers of identity, Buber frees the discussion about Judaism from the theologically problematic straitjacket that confined Rosenzweig’s Judaism to an atemporal and ahistorical essence.40

38 Ibid., 187.
39 Ibid., 188–189.
Buber’s early revisionist notion of Jewish “religiosity” enabled him to penetrate to the depths of Jewish tradition to arrive at what he perceived as the core of religious experience that was common to all religions, the genuine moments of individual encounter with God that are prior to and buried within all religious forms and structures. In rejecting the laws and rituals of rabbinic Judaism, Buber, like other eastern European Jews exposed to secular European thought and culture, saw himself as liberating Jews from the repressive constraints that stifled their spirituality. Yet at the same time, he opposed what he considered to be the “soulless” Judaism of the Reform movement and was determined to “extricate the unique character of Jewish religiosity from the rubble with which rabbinism and rationalism have covered it.” In *I and Thou*, he described the subterranean experience of divine revelation that appears to lay beneath the religious form of Judaism and all other western religions:

> There are times of ripening when the true element of the human spirit, held down and buried, grows ready underground with such pressure and such tension that it merely waits to be touched by the one who will touch it—and then it erupts. The revelation that then appears seizes the whole ready element in all its suchness, recasts it and produces a new form, a new form of God in the world. Ever new regions of the world and the spirit are thus lifted up into form, called to divine form in the course of history .... Ever new spheres become the place of a theophany.

While Buber clearly envisioned a more universal form of revelation, he never denied Jewish particularity, pointing to various instances of Jewish religiosity throughout history illustrated by the following groups: prophets, Essenes, pre-Pauline Jewish-Christians, and Hasidim. Yet, what links these groups of individuals together for Buber is their antiestablishment status as those who rebelled against the institutional leadership and cannot be placed in the traditional, normative forms of priestly or rabbinic Judaism. For Buber, this vital, “hidden Judaism” emerges from the ground up rather than from the

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42 Ibid., 87.
43 Buber, *I and Thou*, 166.
top down at certain points in history with the above groups, thus causing the subterranean divine revelation to erupt spontaneously amidst the community of believers rather than in a form mediated by religious authorities.44

These periodic, historical effusions of Jewish religiosity were seen as models for Buber’s religious socialism following World War I, in the sense that they represented ideal societies that were formed spontaneously and organically around a common ideal based on a shared attraction and gravitation toward a divine center.45 Yet while these communities were ideal, they were not otherworldly. While the members of those ideal societies shared messianic aspirations, their movements were this-worldly, demonstrating a quasi-utopianism. In his 1949 book, *Paths in Utopia*, Buber argued that the more earthly and creaturely the divine center is, the truer it will be.46 Ultimately, those semi-utopian Jewish communities served as precursors to a more universal religious community to be occupied by both Jews and Protestants in the post–World War I period, because of the fact that those Jews appeared to position themselves in a neutral zone of religiosity between the fixed boundaries of mainstream, biblical, and rabbinic Jewish communities and those of the non-Jewish Other in their midst. As Buber pointed out in *I and Thou* and later in *Paths in Utopia*, true community does not emerge by circumscribing a group of people within a periphery or an external border separating it from other communities, but rather grows spontaneously out of individuals who appear as radii in a common relation to a divine center.47

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45 Horowitz, “Ferdinand Ebner as a Source of Martin Buber’s Dialogic Thought in I and Thou,” 131.


2. Tillich “On the Boundary” between Autonomy and Heteronomy

Like Buber, Paul Tillich received his academic training in the liberal Religionswissenschaft school, yet remained, as he put it, “on the boundary” between the autonomy associated with philosophy and liberal theology and the heteronomy of any system of thought, be it religious or secular, that is closed or dogmatic. Tillich’s Christology and dogmatic theology were profoundly informed by the Protestant theologian Martin Kähler’s insight regarding the truly paradoxical Pauline-Lutheran idea of justification that denies every autonomous human claim before God and every attempt to identify God with humanity as a result of divine judgment manifest in the historical event of Christ’s crucifixion. Yet at the same time, this doctrine also proclaims that before God, even the most guilty, estranged human being is just. Tillich subsequently argued that Christian ecclesiastical belief could only be based on the New Testament portrayal of Christ, and not the historicized image of Jesus based on “the shifting and artificial construct of historical research” developed by liberal Protestants. Through his embrace of paradoxical theology and rejection of liberal historicism, Tillich initially found himself in the same camp as the dialectical theologian Karl Barth. As a result, he was referred to as a radical theologian in Germany and then later as a Barthian in America.

However, Tillich disagreed with what he considered to be “Barthian neosupranaturalism that wishes to resurrect the dogmatic doctrines of the Reformation by bypassing the scientific work of the last two hundred years.” He viewed this as a new and unnecessary type of heteronomy that rejects autonomy and thus resembles a diluted version of Catholicism. While disagreeing with liberal theology, he pointed with great appreciation to the historical accomplishments of nineteenth-century liberal Protestant scholars like Julius Wellhausen and Hermann Gunkel whose Religionsgeschichte method enabled him to more fully understand the significance of the “Old Testament”

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50 Tillich, On the Boundary, 49.
for Christianity. Moreover, the philosophy of the German idealist Schelling was a determinative factor in Tillich’s philosophical and theological development. Perhaps most importantly for Tillich, Schelling’s formulation of a Christian philosophy of existence in which history is understood as *Heilsgeschichte* opened the way to a possible unification of philosophy and theology.\(^{51}\) Tillich himself attempted to develop a clear understanding of the logical relationship between philosophy and theology in his 1923 book, *Das System der Wissenschaften*, where he raised the question as to how theology could be considered a science in the sense of *Wissenschaft*. In constructing his response, Tillich placed theology in relation to all the other methodological disciplines within the framework of *Wissenschaft* “by classifying them as sciences of thinking, being, and culture; by maintaining that the foundation of the whole system of sciences is the philosophy of meaning (*Sinnphilosophie*).”\(^{52}\) Tillich defined philosophy of religion as a “normative cultural science” or *Geisteswissenschaft* in an attempt to achieve a synthesis between philosophy and theology by presupposing a “universal interconnection of meaning” that encompasses not only the philosophical categories of religion but also the practical norms and theological foundation of authentic religion within a larger cultural context.\(^{53}\)

Yet for Tillich, World War I and the subsequent German revolution of 1918 severely conflicted with Schelling’s philosophy and idealist thought in general, because it revealed an “abyss in human existence” that a synthesis of philosophy and theology had to explain. Tillich tried to account for this abyss with his philosophy of religion that remained on the boundary between philosophy and theology, autonomy and heteronomy. He constructed this dialectical synthesis by drawing upon the philosophy of Nietzsche, whose autonomous affirmation of existence was welcome after the wartime years of hunger and death, while at the same time retaining the Lutheran idea of justification as a limitation to the radical autonomy of Nietzschean

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\(^{52}\) Tillich, *On the Boundary*, 55.

philosophy. For Tillich, the synthesis is manifest in the notion of theonomy, “an autonomy informed by a religious substance …. In the theonomous, prophetic word, the contradiction between autonomy and heteronomy is overcome.” Theonomy represents the provisional unity between the import of unconditioned meaning found in authentic religion and the form of conditioned meaning found in culture. For Tillich, the term “unconditional” transcends all finite differentiations between subject and object or culture and religion, standing over against all things in the finite world. Yet the “unconditional” simultaneously represents the foundation of meaning and its abyss, because it is constantly shifting, breaking down and reconstructing itself in new forms. Thus, the “unconditional” is involved in a continuous dialectic with the conditional, prompting Tillich to describe their relationship as “the paradoxical immanence of the transcendent.” This dialectic manifests itself in the ongoing conflict between autonomy and heteronomy. Autonomy emerges in a secular culture that subjects itself to the “unconditional demand for meaning” in the form of law or any type of social, political, or religious structure while at the same time revolting against the “unconditional” through self-assertion by absolutizing the conditional. In response to this upsurge of autonomy, institutionalized religion ascribes its sacraments or symbols with unconditional meaning and inviolate authority not subject to autonomous criticism. Just as the autonomy of secular culture revolts against the “unconditional” or divine, the heteronomy associated with religious or political structures opposes the divinely ordained character of autonomous culture by ascribing to itself a status that is equally divine. Tillich describes this counter-divine phenomena as demonic in the following quotation:

Religious dogmatism, including that of Protestant orthodoxy and the most recent phase of what is called dialectical theology, comes into being when a historical religion is cloaked with the unconditional validity of the divine, as when a book, person, community, institution or doctrine claims absolute authority and demands the submission of every other reality; for no other claim can exist beside the unconditioned claim of the divine. But that this claim can be grounded in a

54 Tillich, On the Boundary, 52–54.
55 Ibid., 38, 41.
56 Adams, introduction to Tillich, What is Religion? 20–21, 23.
57 Tillich, What is Religion? 74–75.
finite historical reality is the root of all heteronomy and demonism. The demonic is something finite and limited which has been invested with the stature of the infinite.\footnote{Ibid., On the Boundary, 40.}

By indicting dialectical theology as a demonic type of religious dogmatism, Tillich was making a radical critique of the ahistorical eschatology of Karl Barth, arguing that Barth was in fact opposing the very God he had sought to defend when positing unconditionally the supernatural characteristic of the Christ-event in history. By definitively attributing an historical event, even one involving Christ, with an eternal status, Barth was, in Tillich’s eyes, dissolving salvation history into secular history and thus committing the very type of idolatry that he condemned in his \textit{Epistle to the Romans}. Moreover, he was abandoning the very paradox he had championed by turning faith into an objective and immediate process based on the empirical observation of revelation as a fact. In contrast, Tillich viewed the divine-human encounter as a paradoxical process in which one’s faith is based on a subjective claim that revelation is mediated by certain historical phenomena in religion and culture that point beyond themselves to what Tillich referred to as “eternal source, the ground and abyss.”\footnote{Idem, “Critical and Positive Paradox: A Discussion with Karl Barth and Friedrich Gogarten,” in \textit{The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology}, ed. James M. Robinson, Part 1 trans. Keith R. Crim, Part 2 trans. Louis De Grazia and Keith R. Crim (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1968), 133–141, here 139–141.}

For Tillich, one has to view the divine-human encounter dialectically in the sense that one can never ascribe any positive status or content to revelation even if expressed in the words of Scripture or the church, without realizing that this autonomous human assertion is always subject to the judgment of the divine “No.” Just as Buber rejected any attempt to objectify or institutionalize revelation by turning it into divine law or a set of rational principles, Tillich argued that once the act of faith is viewed as “the recognition of an empirical fact,” revelation becomes compromised by heteronomy, law, and absolutistic religion. Subsequently while one can truly encounter God, revelation must remain imperceptible.\footnote{Ibid., 138, 140–141.}

Yet at the same time, Tillich expressed concern that Barth and his neo-Orthodox colleague Friedrich Gogarten had focused too much

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\footnote{Ibid., On the Boundary, 40.}
\footnote{Ibid., 138, 140–141.}
on the divine “No” in the sense that it actually became a “No” to the historical attainability of salvation in the world, unintentionally leading “beyond the dialectic position to a very positive and very undialectic supernaturalism.” Tillich argued that the “No” can only be carried out together with the “Yes” of divine mercy in relation to the world, not as a spontaneous redemptive transformation that will occur beyond this world.61 Similarly, Buber criticized the neo-Orthodox Jewish thinker Rosenzweig for constructing a dialectical theology that portrayed an unbridgeable gulf between an eternal and an historical realm, while advocating his own historical dialectic between objectification and actualization of the divine presence manifest in the tension between I-Thou and I-It relationships.

Tillich criticized Gogarten for equating the “Spirit of Christ” that he understood as divine revelation with “the name of Christ,” instead of with the more universal image of the Logos.62 In a 1923 dialogue with Karl Barth recorded in Theologische Blätter, Tillich made the following theological statement in which he expressed a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward Judaism:

The Logos . . . by revealing itself in Jewish and in heathen history leads to the complete revelation. Theology should not be forbidden to travel this road and make visible what is even at present revealed of the Logos among heathen and Jews, that is, in the creations and crises of autonomous culture.63

In this critique of Barth’s christocentrism, Tillich argues that Barth fails to recognize that the divine Spirit of Christ not only resides in the person of Jesus, but also in the Jewish as well as pagan communities. Here he recognizes Jewish otherness by attributing to the Jewish people their own legitimate connection to God. However, he lumps Jews together with pagans in the same sentence. He then argues in a supersessionist fashion that while the Jewish people experience revelation as an independent entity, their revelation is only part of a larger revelatory process in which heathens participate, leading to a more complete Christian revelation.64 Additionally, he

61 Idem, “Answer to Karl Barth,” in The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology, 155–158, especially 158.
62 Ibid., 156.
63 Ibid., 157.
64 Ibid.
seems to be associating the heathens, or perhaps more accurately the Greeks and the Jews, with the rise and fall of an autonomous western culture. Yet on the other hand, he alludes to a theonomous unity between culture and religion in which the meaning of God or the “unconditional” is imported into various cultural forms as opposed to the fixed, heteronomous form of Scripture and the church. He goes on to say that this situation forces theologians to become “philosophers of culture” who can only detect allusions to God within the realm of universal culture and not in the particular religious institutions of Christianity.65

In contrast to Tillich’s more universal portrayal of revelation directed toward both Jews and pagans, Barth located divine revelation solely in the church and subsumed Judaism within a Christian theological framework. While Tillich was somewhat ambivalent by attributing to Jews the capability of receiving revelation while associating them with heathens and autonomous culture in general, Barth was unable or unwilling to view Judaism as an independent religion with ongoing validity, instead classifying it as the biblical “Israel” that is the archetype of disobedience. For Barth, Israel and the church together form “one elected community of God” and are theologically interdependent in the sense that Israel retains the biblical covenant upon which Christians depend for salvation, while Israel can only exist as part of the church, “the perfect form of the elected community of God.”66 Just as in Rosenzweig’s theological narrative *The Star of Redemption*, Judaism and Christianity are complementary, yet contradictory opposites for Barth. Both Rosenzweig and Barth portray a dialectical relationship between Judaism and Christianity in which their respective religious communities each represent a metahistorical or eternal association with God while the other represents a human or historical phenomenon that is dependent upon and to some extent inferior to their own religious communities. Ultimately, by rejecting historicism in favor of a metahistorical dimension for their religious communities, Barth and Rosenzweig ironically perpetuated the apologetic discourse of their liberal contemporaries.

65 Ibid.
in the Jewish and Protestant communities. Tillich described this unavoidable situation when discussing the demonic characteristic of dialectical theology in the following statement: “Its demonic character becomes clear as, sooner or later, another finite reality also claiming infinitude opposes it so that human consciousness is severed between the two.”\footnote{Tillich, \textit{On the Boundary}, 40.}

When looking at the dialectical interchange of their theologies, Barth and Rosenzweig appeared to view each other’s religious communities less and less as human beings and more and more as competing paradigms whose historical conflict will only be resolved in an eschatological future.

Like Buber, Tillich began to move beyond the Jewish-Christian dialectic toward a more dialogical, neutral realm by charting a third course between neo-Orthodoxy and \textit{Religionswissenschaft}, a religious socialism based on a prophetic narrative that synthesizes the sacramental attitude of neo-Orthodoxy, perpetuating an awareness of the holy and the rational or “world forming” attitude of \textit{Religionswissenschaft} that seeks to restore the divine presence in this world through the creation of form. For Tillich, the “prophetic message” promotes the transformation of humanity and nature proclaimed by the neo-Orthodox thinker Barth, yet does not relegate it to an eschatological kingdom of God. At the same time, the prophetic approach does not advocate a religious nationalism or utopianism in this world as promoted by liberal Protestants. Instead the kingdom of God is manifest in the form of an historical judgment made upon humanity to transform the social order.\footnote{Ibid., 75–79.}

The foundation for Tillich’s prophetic approach to religious socialism is really an anthropological analysis of the two roots of political thought in tension with each other within human consciousness. The first root is the “myth of origin,” an affirmation that human existence is not simply self-evident, but rather stems from a particular origin of “being” or space that is sacred, whether it be geographical or social in nature. Yet unfortunately the desire to perpetuate one’s being devolves into a power struggle to control and enlarge the limits of one’s space at the expense of others, in which the only norm is “might makes right.” Tillich associated this desire to preserve being at all costs with conservative and romantic political ideologies. He argued that this
power struggle over space can only be offset by the second root of political thought, a prophetic demand for justice that is considered unconditional, because it is not bound within the limits of space, but rather points toward something new in the future that does not exist yet and therefore can only be understood in the realm of time. Tillich associated this demand for justice with liberal, democratic, and socialist ideologies, and he viewed it as an outgrowth and true manifestation of one’s origin in the sense that the self is presented with the responsibility of ensuring the other’s dignity. For Tillich, the “true origin” manifest in the demand for justice must shatter the myth of the “actual origin” that has obscured it and rendered it ambiguous.69

Tillich located what he considered to be the original tension between the actual and true origins of being in the biblical narrative, wherein the Israelites and their ancient Near Eastern neighbors consecrated space, whether in the form of land, lineage or nation, by identifying it with their respective gods and priesthods. He observed that in an effort to compete with the polytheistic nations around them for the power and authority of sacred space, the Israelite priesthood first transformed their limited space into a limitless realm by associating it with a transcendent, universal God in a monolatrous theological framework.70 According to Tillich, the Israelite priesthood ultimately attempted to “overcome polytheism by the imperialism of one god, that is, of one space. The result is the unification of many lands in one cultic union and the merging of lineages, tribes and nations under one sovereign rule.”71 While recognizing the “realities of Jewish national life,” he credited “Jewish prophetism” with conquering the pagan-influenced myth of origin within Israelite culture based on the attachment to sacred space by freeing God from the sacred space of land and nation in order to subject the Israelites to the unconditional demand of justice, the true origin of being. The breaking of the myth of origin is illustrated by the fact that God actually led foreign conquerors into the land of Israel with the intent of punishing the chosen people for their failure to observe the commandments. Moreover, the priesthood was called

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71 Ibid., 19.
to account and the monarchy was ultimately brought down for lack of righteousness, only to reappear transformed in a messianic future. For Tillich, this illustrates the prophetic elevation of time over space, in the sense that the Israelite sacred space associated with divinity was placed in the larger context of an historical process that has a creative beginning, revelatory midpoint, and eschatological end in which the origin will be radically transformed.  

Like Buber, Tillich used the prophetic narrative as a rationale for condemning the consecration of space for militant and nationalist purposes by both political and religious groups in the post–World War I era. Both theologians specifically opposed the established institution of the priesthood and any other normative religious structure whose authority is based on absolute claims and which places constraints on popular piety. Yet unlike their neo-Orthodox contemporaries, neither of them rejected history entirely as the arena for secularism, power, and corruption. Instead, the two existentialist theologians rejected the way spirit or sacred space was manipulated and misused for power and domination in history. Tillich and Buber both appealed to the prophetic narrative to promote a truly universal God who does not only represent one religious community in a timeless, supernatural realm over against a historical “other.” In fact, Tillich asserted, “The claim of belonging to the people avails nothing in face of the unconditional demand, on account of which the alien can be held in equal, indeed in higher esteem.” For Buber and Tillich, the prophetic message is the paradigm for a general type of revelatory event that can happen with any group at any time in history when God bestows the gift of a holy presence in the form of inexpressible and unconditional meaning that is simultaneously received as a demand for action in this world. Tillich used the Greek word *kairos* to refer to the revelatory content of the prophetic message and described it in the following way:

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72 Ibid., 20–21.
It signifies a moment of time filled with unconditional meaning and demand. Kairos is the fulfilled moment of time in which the present and the future, the holy that is given and the holy that is demanded meet, and from whose concrete tensions the new creation proceeds in which sacred import is realized in necessary form. Prophetic consciousness of Kairos in the sense of the words: “Repent: the time (kairos) is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.”

For Tillich, the new creation that arises out of the dialectical moment of Kairos is a theonomous society in which an “existential openness to the divine” pervades every aspect of existence. Yet according to him, a theonomous society is neither an otherworldly nor a this-worldly utopia, but rather a “unity of sacred form and sacred import in a concrete historical situation.” Like Buber, Tillich attempted to portray a liminal zone between religion and culture under the category of theonomy, in the sense that religion and culture come together in a momentary synthesis of unconditional and conditional meaning. It can only be a provisional synthesis because of the precarious balance of divine grace and judgment in the moment of Kairos that is inevitably upset by the need for a self-sufficient human society to possess and incorporate their divine gift in both its religious and cultural forms, ultimately emptying it of divine import and bringing divine judgment upon themselves.

For both Buber and Tillich, World War I represented an apocalyptical warning sign that necessitated the development of the prophetic movement of religious socialism. They both saw the need to move beyond the boundaries of their two religions in order to carve out a neutral zone between theology and culture that would enable divine holiness to flow into the public sphere, where it was desperately needed to combat objectification, instrumentalism, and political domination.

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78 Adams, introduction to Tillich, What is Religion?, 20–21.
3. Fashioning a Neutral Zone of Religious Socialism

While initially supporting World War I for idealistic reasons, both Buber and Tillich were transformed by the event and propelled toward a philosophy of religious socialism based on the concept of Gemeinschaft, a true community governed by a prophetic ethos. They both had been staunch German nationalists who justified the war theologically as a symbol of hidden, metaphysical significance that transcended its social brutality and political imperialism. While both initially supported their country, Germany, in the war, their theological motivations remained Jewish and Christian respectively. Buber believed that Jews should fight in the war, because it would serve as a mystically liberating experience similar to the ancient war of the Maccabees. Tillich served in the war based on his loyalty to God, king, and the Lutheran Church. Yet in response to the destruction following the war and the German socialist revolution of 1918, Buber and Tillich began to seek out a larger community beyond their particular religious confines with a more universal goal of restructuring the social order as a whole based on equality and justice. For Buber and other Jewish scholars, this was an opportunity to rise above the anticolonial challenge of the Wissenschaft des Judentums against liberal Protestant scholarship, and to join together with Protestant scholars like Tillich to combat their shared opponent, capitalistic society.

Buber and Tillich each took similar paths toward their common destination of religious socialism. Both had been influenced early in their careers by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Nietz-
sche’s rejection of bourgeois culture in his classic book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and were further influenced by Karl Marx’s doctrine of human self-estrangement and objectification in capitalist society, while rejecting his antireligious bias. Moreover, Buber and Tillich, along with all religious socialists, rejected the Marxist “revolutionary dictatorship” of the proletariat. This would represent the extreme of heteronomy for Tillich and a political manifestation of the I-It relationship expressed by Buber that is based on human instrumentalism. In opposition to this centralized socialism of Marx, Buber and Tillich earlier in his career were attracted to the “federalist anarchism” of Gustav Landauer who totally opposed the authority of the state, instead opting for a completely decentralized socialist community that emerges spontaneously out of smaller communal cells. From 1918 to 1919, Buber and Tillich would both draw from the writings of Landauer when first articulating their socialist beliefs. Buber would closely align himself with Landauer’s federalism by advocating a social, decentralized framework as opposed to the political, centralized socialism emerging in Russia following the Bolshevik revolution. Tillich initially promoted an “idealistic anarchism” in the sense that he envisioned a theonomous culture arising from “communities themselves and their spiritual substance” instead of being promoted by the state. They would eventually part ways to some extent, with Buber continuing to promote a “federalistic communal socialism” yet not rejecting the political component of social life, while Tillich promoted the possibility of a central government that is not absolute in a theonomous society.

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82 For a discussion of the influence of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* on Buber, see Mendes-Flohr, *From Mysticism to Dialogue*, 15–16. Wilhelm and Marion Pauck discuss the influence of Nietzsche on Tillich in *Paul Tillich*, 52. Tillich discusses the Marxist influence on religious socialists like Buber and himself, while pointing out their rejection of Marx’s antireligious bias and the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat in “Martin Buber and Christian Thought,” *Commentary* 5, no. 6 (June 1948), 515–521, especially 521. Cf. Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, 107.


Regardless of their subtle differences, they both stood on the boundary or, as Buber described it, the “narrow ridge” between the autonomy of a decentralized, anarchistic community and the heteronomy of a centralized, socialist state.86

In order to create an ethical balance between the autonomous and heteronomous forms of socialism, Buber and Tillich articulated the joint discourse of religious socialism that erected a sacred, central zone to which individual citizens and government leaders could gravitate, preventing them from yielding to the extremes of absolute autonomy or heteronomy, and integrating them together in a meaningful and interdependent public sphere. By carving out this neutral zone of religious socialism, Buber and Tillich were enlarging the sphere of religion beyond the particular sacramental realms of Judaism and Christianity and locating it within the more universal culture. Essentially, they were dismantling the traditional barrier between the holy and secular spheres in their attempt to show that religion and culture are indeed interdependent and that holiness pervades all existence.87 In his 1928 essay, “Three Theses of Religious Socialism,” Buber described the interconnection of religion and culture through the movement of religious socialism in the following statement: “Religion without socialism is disembodied spirit, therefore not genuine spirit; socialism without religion is body emptied of spirit, hence also not genuine body.”88 Tillich reaffirmed this viewpoint when stating that as the sphere of religion is enlarged to include the secular world, it is possible that one may more clearly sense the divine presence “in a profane, even anti-Christian, phenomenon like socialism than in the explicitly religious sphere of the church.”89 Moreover, he argued that the purpose of religious socialism is actually to uncover the core religious element in the theoretical and practical aspects of socialism.90

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86 Tillich, On the Boundary, 43–45. For a description of Buber’s attempt to take the middle ground between centralization and decentralization, see Friedman, Martin Buber’s Life and Work, 241.
This integration between religion and socialism clearly pervaded the ethos and membership of his religious socialist group in Berlin from 1920 to 1924, the “Kairos Circle,” which was centered on a common awareness of a religious responsibility for the economy and society regardless of one’s confessional allegiance. The founding members were Protestant clergy, Günther Dehn and Karl Mennicke, the latter being also a social worker who organized the group. Tillich, himself a Lutheran minister, joined the group and later became its head. Yet the rest of the members were laity, both Protestant and Jewish: Alexander Rüstow was an historian and economist; Arnold Wolfers was a Swiss lawyer who became director of the Berlin Institute of Politics; Adolf Löwe was a civil servant in the Ministries of Demobilization, Labor, and Economy and later a professor of economics who was a liberal Jew, and Eduard Heimann was also a Jew who was an important socialist economist largely entrusted with the socialist reconstruction of the German economy by the revolutionary government in 1918. While Heimann identified himself more with Christianity, Löwe was a self-identifying Jew who engaged in various religious debates with Tillich, arguing that the world had never been transformed by Christ and convincing Tillich how destructive it was to try to convert believing Jews to Christianity. Yet they overcame their religious differences to address the greater socialist goals that they shared.91 In fact, as John R. Stumme points out in Socialism in Theological Perspective, Heimann and Löwe were both Social Democrats who were very conscious of the prophetic basis of their tradition and subsequently provided the “substructure” of Tillich’s religious socialism. They continued to work closely with Tillich during the Weimar years and later remained close friends in America after escaping Nazi Germany.92 The biweekly discussions of the circle concentrated primarily on addressing social, political, and some theological issues, including the following: Barth’s theology and the relationship between the eternal and the historical situation, Marxist perspectives on class struggle and its impact upon ethical and religious issues, solidarity with the proletariat, and the formation of a new socialist society. In addition, the group published a small monthly journal from 1920 to 1927, entitled Blätter für den Religiösen

91 Wilhelm and Marion Pauck, Paul Tillich, 70–72.
92 Stumme, Socialism in Theological Perspective, 35–36.
Sozialismus, edited by Mennicke with contributions from members in the circle along with other religious socialists, including Martin Buber. The “Kairos Circle” was only one of many religious socialist groups at the time in Germany, and it was distinguished for its intellectual and nonecclesiastical structure as opposed to Christian-sponsored groups focused on influencing church policy. While it was not overly influential nationally, it represented a miniature version of Tillich’s idealized community with “autonomous religious and socialist people working in a spirit of common responsibility to create the new society.” Unfortunately, by 1933 Tillich’s idealized, religious socialist society came crashing down as he joined his Jewish colleagues on the first list of intellectuals to be purged, although eventually reuniting with many of them in the United States to continue their discussions on socialism. The joint challenge of Jewish and Christian socialists to colonial rule in Weimar Germany failed to yield concrete results in the short term, but just like the prophetic protest described by Buber, the ideal momentarily enveloped the real and left an enduring legacy of dialogue to be realized later.

To conclude, Buber and Tillich temporarily rose above the religious partisanship of their Wilhelmine forbearers in the liberal Jewish and Protestant camps by joining together in the buffer zone of religious socialism to confront their common enemy during the Weimar years: bourgeois culture and its concomitant narrative, Religionswissenschaft. In their common journey toward religious socialism, both Buber and Tillich had to navigate between the perils of historicism and dialectical theology in order to reunite the holy and secular spheres torn asunder by the absolute destruction and domination of World War I. On the one hand, they tried to avoid the rational essentialism and historical objectification of their liberal colleagues who were still competing with one another for intellectual supremacy, while on the other hand, they rejected the dialectic between history and metahistory promoted by their neo-Orthodox contemporaries that reinforced an ontological distinction between Judaism and Christianity. Instead, they forged a middle course predicated on the prophetic

93 Ibid., 34–36.
94 Ibid., 37.
95 Wilhelm and Marion Pauck, Paul Tillich, 131–132; Stumme, introduction to The Socialist Decision, xxiii–xxiv.
narrative that affirms a provisional synthesis between the sacred and the profane manifest in the momentary divine demand for justice. By envisioning a liminal zone between sacred theology and secular culture, Buber and Tillich were promoting the holiness of concrete existence and thereby restoring the value of human life and community that was denigrated in World War I. Ultimately, by turning their attention to the general relationship between God, humanity, and nature, they moved beyond a Jewish-Christian dialogue to reach the level of what Tillich referred to as “concrete universalism,” thus transcending the theological limits of Judaism and Protestantism while retaining their distinct religious identities.96

96 Tillich, “Martin Buber,” 53.
Who is dominating American intellectual life? Eager to address this type of question, sociologists published, in the 1970s, a meticulous study comparing the reputations of different figures of the intellectual elite: Daniel Bell is mentioned first among the ten most important names, listed in alphabetical order, together with John Kenneth Galbraith, Norman Mailer, and Edmund Wilson, with David Riesman as well as Hannah Arendt appearing later. When, a little bit later, in 1981, this time in France, six hundred intellectuals, scholars, or politicians were asked to tell which personality had influenced them most, nearly a quarter of them named, without hesitating, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who received twenty votes more than his friend Raymond Aron, the latter followed by Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Fernand Braudel. Daniel Bell in the United States and Claude Lévi Strauss in France, like the majority of the named figures, testify to the strong influence the social sciences exert today on intellectual life.

Close observers of modern or traditional societies, both scholars are nevertheless very different from each other. Both stemming from European Jewry, they are separated by the fact that Claude Lévi-Strauss, profoundly assimilated according to the logic of the typically French model of universalistic integration, deliberately distanced himself from Judaism, while Daniel Bell represented the quintessential New York Jew whose points of reference continued to be those of

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3 Lire, April 1981.
the Eastern European Jewish world of the past. The author of *Tristes Tropiques* was rooted in the Jewish upper middle class that had once been honorably accepted by Napoleon III and his court. During his youth, spent in Versailles, he lived for a few years with his maternal grandfather, a rabbi. Although he celebrated a bar mitzvah, he was clearly alienated from Judaism, like his parents for whom it "was no more than a memory." He did, of course, "know that he was Jewish," and he belonged to a specific milieu, particularly since he married Dina Dreyfus in 1932. When embarking for Martinique from Marseille in February 1941, he confessed: "I already felt like the hunted victims of the concentration camps," stating that there were other Jews "like me" among the passengers.⁴ Although further emphasizing that "the abominable and devastating catastrophe that befell a part of humankind I belong to … has substantially changed my destiny,"⁵ he placed patterns of thinking characteristic for the Bororos or Nambikwaras in the center of his existence and his work, and he praised the virtues of Buddhism rather than those of Judaism.⁶ The cultural relativism apparently characterizing his ethnographic approach, which tends to exclude the Jews, has prompted the severe condemnation by Emmanuel Lévinas, who wrote:

Modern atheism is not the negation of God. It is the total indifference of the *Tristes Tropiques*. According to my opinion, this is the most atheistic book written in our days, this absolutely disoriented and disorienting book. It menaces Judaism the same way the Hegelian and sociological view of history does.⁷

Even if some insist, via an adventurous psychological exegesis, in seeing in Lévi-Strauss not a prophet but a "theologian in spite of himself,"⁸ it is still true that the theoretician of structural anthropology

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has definitely deviated from a culture linked to his past. Nevertheless, some commentators think they can count him among the “meta-rabbis,” to cite George Steiner’s metaphor, who, since Spinoza, display in their work an implicit Jewish sensibility, even if they explicitly broke with their culture. Others do not hesitate to describe him as a “non-Jewish Jew,” according to the questionable image advanced by Isaac Deutscher. We will keep away from such audacious interpretations. On the contrary, the author of Tristes Tropiques embodies the outstanding example of a thinker who, in his life as well as in the logic of his scholarly approach, has broken with a specific past that does not at all occupy his imagination.

Daniel Bell, by contrast, continued to be the child of the ordinary Jewish people living in the slums of the Bronx and the Lower East Side, and Yiddish was still his mother tongue. He was a descendant of the Eastern European Jewish people, attached to a culture and to traditions that had not been radically transformed by the Enlightenment, that was, at the end of the twentieth century, transferred, nearly as a whole, to the Goldene America, the continent that had not assimilated to the universalistic values which, by then, shaped most of the Western European Jews. He still belonged to that wave of migration that brought, at the turn of the century, more than three million Yiddish-speaking persons to the New World, among them numerous Orthodox Jews, revolutionaries, poets, writers, and musicians, to the extent that “a language without a predecessor in the country surfaced from the sea, being set down at the coast.” Like so many of those poor immigrants, Bell participated in street fights, visited the heder, became a socialist, and fought for the Jewish proletariat after meeting Martin Buber in New York. Together with Nathan Glazer and Irving Kristol, he devoted long evenings, in the presence of their wives, to the thorough study of the Talmud and Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah. Together with his friends,

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the New York intellectuals, he lived in the heart of the “kibbutz of the Upper West Side,” as he himself used to call that part of the
city. Stemming from Poland, his father was called Bolotsky, also
Karlinsky (it didn’t matter), and his mental universe was that of
Jewish humor, of pilpul, of the Torah, but also that of syndicalism
and of a socialism hostile to communism. From his point of view, “They had no yichus … It was important for that generation as it
is for most intellectual generations, to find its own identity …. The
real desire was to find home … in galut, exile.” Citing Maimonides
and the rabbi of Berditschev, invoking the work of the most learned
contemporary commentators like Emil Fackenheim, and rejecting the
“lachrymose” conceptions of a sentimental Judaism that described
itself as an eternal victim, Bell referred to the remembrance and the
loyalty to his father, and he felt responsible for the Jewish past.
Together with Nathan Glazer and Irving Howe, the author of the
classic work World of Our Fathers that tells the story of the Eastern
European Jewish immigrants in America, but also with Seymour
Martin Lipset and Philip Selznick, Bell participated in that epos of
New York Jewish radicalism associated with the journal Dissent which
remained proud of the Jewish heritage resulting from “a tension
between universalism and particularism.” He was the child of the
Torah and of Capital who rejected Columbia University, at that time
an openly anti-Semitic institution. Bell did not complete a normal
course of study, and he was not to achieve anything else than a
doctorate based on already published works; he preferred to incite
industrial action in the streets and identified with the socialist Bund,
at the same time rejecting, for a long time, the Zionist perspective.
In this sense, he was one of the last heirs of the powerful Eastern

12 See Howard Simon, Jewish Times: Voices of the American-Jewish Experience (Boston:
Houghton Mifflin, 1988), 70.
(Cambridge, MA: ABT Books, 1980), 131–135. The yichus represents a favored social
origin.
15 Joseph Dorman, Arguing the World: The New York Intellectuals in Their Own Words
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 11, 35, 110, 148. And see Alexander
University Press, 1986); Terry Cooney, The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan
Review and Its Circle (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); Deborah
Dash Moore, At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews (New York: Columbia
European worker’s movement feared by Lenin and Stalin, a movement eliminated by history and its communist and Nazi catastrophes. Destroyed in Eastern Europe, the Bund hardly survived in the United States, since “where there is no Yiddish culture, no Jewish proletariat, no separate Jewish political activity and no struggle for equal civil rights for Jews, there is no Bund.” Although living in a Jewish universe, Bell, no less than Lévi-Strauss, produced—apart from a few brief texts in which he presented himself as an advocate of a redemptive form of messianism—an œuvre alien to Judaism, as if his involvement in sociology prevented him from participating in a gradually vanishing collective sociability. He became the theoretician of the end of ideologies, of the industrial society and its cultural contradictions, which ultimately led to his holding a chair, first at Columbia University, later at Harvard.

Both Daniel Bell and Claude Lévi-Strauss, despite everything that separates them, illustrate an enigmatic phenomenon: like a cohort of other sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, or historians of Jewish descent, they have, in their work, completely neglected the Jewish factor itself. Representatives of an external view of society, whether they were of privileged or modest social origins, immigrants or belonging to the second or third generation, children of rabbis or of assimilated parents, they almost always turned away from it, more than ignoring the essential features of a distinct Jewish historiography that had developed since the middle of the nineteenth century. Alain Touraine observes that

> it was partly anti-Semitic rejection that prompted the bourgeois Jewish intellectuals to feel distant enough to their society to be able to reflect upon it. It is not a coincidence that sociology in France has been almost entirely Jewish—the same applies to the United States.

This disposition had already been observed by the turn of the nineteenth century by the American radical sociologist of Norwegian descent, Thorstein Veblen, who emphasized the Jews’ “pre-eminence” in intellectual life, resulting from the fact that they were “hybrid,”

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17 See, e.g., Daniel Bell, “A Parable of Alienation,” *Jewish Frontier* 13 (November 1946), 12–19.
or “alien” to the hyphenated social system, as well as possessing features pushing them to distant observation and favoring sociological views.\textsuperscript{19}

This undeniable quality is, however, not restricted to them. Thus Raymond Aron states that

among the sociologists in the United States there is a relatively strong portion of Jews and representatives of minorities. … The minorities tend to be subjective and objective at the same time when it comes to viewing their political group, the country or the culture they belong to.\textsuperscript{20}

Similarly, Claude Lévi-Strauss writes:

I admit that in sociology and ethnology we can count a notable proportion of Jews. Maybe we don’t have to attach more importance to it than to the notable proportion of hyphenated names among anthropologists that has also been detected. Nevertheless, it seems to me that two different explanations could be advanced. First of all, the Jews’ social ascendance in the twentieth century coincided with the establishment of the social sciences as a discipline in their own right. Thus there was a partly vacant “niche”—in the ecological sense of the word—in which the newcomers were able to become established without colliding with too strong a competition. Secondly, we have to consider the psychological and moral effects of anti-Semitism, which I have, like so many others, incessantly experienced at primary school or at high school. To suddenly experience being attacked by a community to which one believed to be an integral part of can prompt a young mind to distance himself from social reality, since he is forced to simultaneously regard it from inside where he belongs to, according to his feelings, and from outside, from where people perceive him. But this is just one way among others to learn to place oneself into a sociological or ethnological perspective.\textsuperscript{21}

“From inside where he belongs to, according to his feelings, and from outside, from where people perceive him.” Never before had the author of \textit{Structures élémentaires de la parenté} so strongly admitted the


\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Le Nouvel Observateur}, July 5, 1980.
particular origin of his sociological interests, never had he evoked this intimate feeling of having been perceived, as a Jew, from “outside,” while “feeling totally and exclusively French,” since his family had been rooted in Alsace for three centuries. This simultaneous feeling of being an insider and an outsider is certainly not restricted to Jews, but it can probably not be understood as merely “one way among others” to place oneself in a sociological perspective, parallel to the way contemporary theoreticians of multiculturalism trivialize the notion of Diaspora and exile, comparing the destiny of the Jews to that of so many other cultural and ethnic minorities which find themselves simultaneously inside and outside.

Even if analogies linked to similar positions impose themselves without any doubt, it is nevertheless true that nowadays the niche for social sciences is shaped more by Jews, or by thinkers of Jewish descent who are being perceived as Jews, than by any other “minority.” Already at the end of the nineteenth century, Ludwig Gumplowicz in Poland and Georg Simmel in Germany illustrated this position of foreigner/sociologist. The former, who had devoted his dissertation to the history of Polish Jewry, after having been excluded from the university, explicitly evoked the integration of the Jews into the host populations and regretted that “our nationality which is long decayed but which for centuries kept creeping after us like a vampire, sucks our blood and destroys our vitality,” had not disappeared more rapidly; shortly after that he converted to Protestantism. Simmel, who, although his parents had both converted, still had to wrestle with the anti-Semitic university, continued to appreciate the position of the stranger. At the same time, the typically French Republican meritocracy gave Émile Durkheim the opportunity to enter academia, and, later on, Robert Hertz, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and Marcel Mauss became famous in this area without devoting any part of their work to Jewish topics, following the lead of Durkheim, who

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22 Ibid.
25 See Birnbaum, Géographie de l’espoir, 85–123.
did not hide his contempt for this old “yūdisch” [sic!] that rejected modernity.\textsuperscript{26} Finally, a little bit later, in Hungary, Georg Lukács and Karl Mannheim encountered Marxism and sociology, although without preserving even the smallest part of their personal history within their academic work; their brief dialogue with Martin Buber and the world of Hasidism had no long term effect. Lukács wrote: “I have always realized that I am a Jew, but it never had a significant influence on my development.”\textsuperscript{27} Mannheim “took distance from Eastern Jews” and displayed a “lack of interest in Jewish tradition.”\textsuperscript{28} They, too, were caught up in the great assimilationist movement that was effective in all kind of ways in Eastern as well as in Western Europe, especially if it developed—in the name of reason—as a response to the mediation of the nation state. In contrast to this, in the vast Russian Empire and within the wide-stretched borders of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire as well as, later on, in the immense decentralized American territory, it seems to have been easier for the memories to persist in these fragmented worlds.

In the United States, the social sciences have long been dominated by Protestant scholars like Edward Ross and William Graham Sumner, Charles Horton Cooley and Franklin Giddings, and Talcott Parsons.\textsuperscript{29} Their sudden importance coincided with World War II, a period in which the immigration of veritable cohorts of specialists in the social sciences, often assimilated German Jews persecuted by the Nazis, was supported; at the same time, others came—directly or indirectly—from those regions of Eastern Europe once situated in the zone of residence (Pale of Setlement) that had been assigned


\textsuperscript{29} On Talcott Parsons, whose father was a minister, see the recent biography by Uta Gerhardt, \textit{Talcott Parsons: An Intellectual Biography} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
to the Jews for a long time. At that time, however, the most prestigious Ivy League universities remained almost completely closed to them, since anti-Semitism was openly displayed and slowed down the Jews’ integration into academia. The context changed radically in the 1960s, when anti-Semitism lost any kind of legitimacy. While no Jew succeeded in becoming professor at Yale until 1946, by 1970, 22 percent of the professors there were Jewish. As a consequence, a real “de-Christianization” of American culture could be observed that added to the visibility of the Jews in the midst of the most prestigious universities, since, according to a report of the Carnegie Foundation (1969), Jewish scholars constituted 17 percent of the faculty members at Ivy League universities, although Jews formed only a minority of 3 percent of the American population. More specifically: 13 percent of the professors in sociology were Jewish, a fact that gave a completely different dimension to the remarks of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Raymond Aron, confirming Jürgen Habermas’s perspective with regard to the specificity of their presence in the different fields of the social sciences.

This is, however, not the essential point. The astonishing aspect is that, despite their strong representation in these areas of research, there are only very few Jews at the universities who have dared to devote a part of their work to the Jewish factor itself; in the United States as well as in Europe, there are not too many who have taken the risk of being perceived as and burdened with the impression of being solely concerned with egocentric ethnicity, and thus henceforth being limited to the ghetto of Jewish studies, far away from the specific and noble camp of general sociology. Thus, still in the

second half of the twentieth century, their strong presence in the social sciences, especially in the United States, had no consequence at all for the legitimacy of Jewish studies. Sociology, political sciences, economics or history appear simply as ways guaranteeing access to fame, serving as a springboard for assimilation and facilitating the entry into general society with the help of universalistic perspectives and positive methods or even methodological considerations that would rightly distance the respective scholar from any exaggerated culturalist dimension. In a short, illuminating article, Seymour Martin Lipset once ironically pointed to the fact that

there are so many Jewish sociologists and so few sociologists of the Jews .... The phenomenon of Jewish scholars ignoring the Jews as a field of study is not unique to sociology, although the gap is more glaring there .... I would suggest in part ... that one reason for the avoidance of Jewish topics by Jewish scholars lies in the fact that for many of them becoming sociologists and anthropologists has been one way of escaping from their Jewishness. Sociology tends to be universalistic rather than particularistic in its underlying philosophical and methodological assumptions .... If these assumptions are valid, then one would not expect men to study the Jews, for doing so would expose them to the possibility of being labeled “Jewish Jews.”

When, during their career, these specialists in the social sciences encountered the question of ethnicity, they almost always concerned themselves with the future of the African Americans rather than the future of the Jews, who were supposed to assimilate in the midst of the open society. In many respects, this iconoclastic interpretation in terms of career and integration—as well as disappearing by means of access to civility and respectability, which implied a dif-

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35 Idem, “Jewish Sociologists and Sociologists of the Jews,” JSS 17 (1955), 177–182, here 177–78. From his point of view, Salo W. Baron, during a talk given in 1958, raised the question in the following words: “Their main question today really is whether Jews can be culturally creative under Emancipation. Can they be creative within their own, as well as within the majority culture? Certainly, there will be Jewish poets and writers, artists, musicians, scientists, and scholars. If the pattern follows past experience, Jews will undoubtedly contribute to the cultures of their environment more than may be expected from their ratio in the respective populations. But will they have enough cultural energy left creatively to cultivate their own Jewish heritage? We can find no answer in history because history has had no precedent of real Jewish emancipation.” See Salo W. Baron, Stoed by Adversity: Essays and Adresses on American-Jewish Life, ed. Jeanette Meisel Baron (Philadelphia: JPS, 1971), 548.
differentiation between private values and a behaviour appropriate to a universalistic public space where modernity reigns—has not lost its relevance, despite its provocative dimension. The universalistic “code of civility” tormenting many Jewish sociologists, ethnologists, political scientists, and historians in their encounter with the “Gentiles” (as once noted by John Murray Cuddihy in an equally clumsy and brilliant essay in which he claimed that “Jewish emancipation involved Jews in collisions with the differentiations of Western society. The differentiation most foreign to the shtetl subculture of “Yiddishkeit” necessarily dissuaded them from dealing with the Jewish factor itself, either by a revolutionary Marxist type choice or, in contrast to this, by searching for principles that would be likely to guarantee the functional integration into the existing social system).36 The entry into modernity seems to have demanded a detachment from the Jewish milieu, especially since in the United States of that time, according to Simon Dubnow, “Yiddish, the popular language, common to those stemming from Russia, Poland and Rumania, constituted, of course, the main unifying factor,”37 as it once did in the far east of Europe, where they often came from, without always having embraced the way of Western assimilation beforehand. The entry into sociology in the heart of the most prestigious institutions like the University of Chicago,38 Columbia, or Harvard, where a code of civility reigned through the predominance of the Parsonian model of differentiation,39 comes to be perceived as a break with the world of a distinctive Jewish identity, with a past burdened by isolation that has to be forgotten or rejected, in order for its heirs to penetrate as equals into a reconciled and functional society or into an academic community shaped by the principles of Enlightenment, and in order for them to adopt an occupation that would

39 John Murray Cuddihy describes the predominance of the Parsonian paradigm, based on differentiation, and sees Parsons—in more than a concise way—as Calvin’s heir; see Cuddihy, The Ordeal of Civility, 9–11.

In the present, Jewish visibility in the social sciences cannot be denied, in the United States even less than in Europe. In France, for example, it is almost a fact of the past, limited to thinkers like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Raymond Aron, Georges Gurvitch, and Georges Friedmann,\footnote{This list includes also Lucien Goldmann and Serge Moscovici, both of them of Eastern European origin. On Lucien Goldmann see Mitchell Cohen, \textit{The Wager of Lucien Goldmann: Tragedy, Dialectics and a Hidden God} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). And see Serge Moscovici, \textit{Chronique des années égarées: récit autobiographique} (Paris : Stock, 1997).} who have abstained, like many of their American colleagues, from devoting any systematic sociological study to the Jewish factor.\footnote{However, Georges Friedmann, sociologist of work, was later interested in Israel’s destiny in his book, \textit{The End of the Jewish People?} (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1967); and see idem, \textit{La puissance et la sagesse} (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 387. On Raymond Aron, see Birnbaum, \textit{Géographie de l’espoir}, 169–199. Dominique Schnapper has, in his book \textit{juifs et israélites} (Paris: Gallimard, 1980) as well as in numerous articles on this topic, done some “general” work on unemployment, the high civil servants, and citizenship.} In the United States and, to a much lesser degree, in Great Britain, the list of well-known social scientists is almost endless. In ethnology, we find Franz Boas and his students, Edward Sapir, Robert Lowie,\footnote{Also Melville Herskovits and Alexandre Goldenweiser.} Abraham Kardiner, and, in Great Britain, Max Gluckman. In sociology, the names are countless, from Daniel Bell through Nathan Glazer, Reinhard Bendix, Lewis Coser, Louis Wirth, Alfred Schütz, Erving Goffman, Paul Lazarsfeld, Alvin Gouldner, Joseph Ben-David, Howard Becker, Eliot Freidson, Leon Festinger, Herbert Marcuse, Kurt Wolff, and David Riesman, as well as William Kornhauser, Herbert Blumer, Kurt Lewin, Erich Fromm, Lewis Feuer, Amitai Etzioni, as well as Albert Hirschman and, like him at the margins of economics, Karl Polanyi and so many others.\footnote{We should name also Philip Selznick, Ernest Nagel, Irving Louis Horowitz, Albert Salomon, Elihu Katz, Abraham Garfinkel, Aaron Cicourel, Erik Erikson, Leonard Reisman, Georges Lichtheim, Sydney Hook, Hans Gerth, Samuel Stouffer, Herbert Hyman, Marion Levy Jr., Gary Marx, Joseph Gusfield, Joseph Blau, Herbert Goldhamer, Melvin Tumin, Immanuel Wallerstein, Anselme Strauss, Arthur Vidich, and Hans Rosenberg.} In Great Britain, the roster includes Morris Ginsberg, Karl Popper,
Thomas Kuhn, Karl Mannheim, Norbert Elias, and Ernst Gellner. 45  
In political science, in the larger sense, we could name Leo Strauss, 
Seymour Martin Lipset, Karl Deutsch, Leo Lowenthal, Hans Mor- 
genthau, Aaron Wildawsky, Michael Walzer, Franz Neuman, Hannah 
Arendt, Otto Kirchheimer, and, in Great Britain, Isaiah Berlin, 
Harold Laski, Samuel E. Finer, Elie Kedourie, and Hans Kohn. 47 

These incomplete and unsystematic lists display all the deficien-
cies that can possibly be imagined. Their usefulness can be doubted, 
since they are based on the most variegated ways of assuming an 
identity that cannot be substantially reified by a simple combina-
tion of disparate names. Any list of names that is assembled in this 
way in order to indicate cultural affiliation has to be perceived with 
cautions, because it artificially assembles ethnologists, sociologists, 
and political scientists who are often opposed to each other through 
strong disputes, or who are—despite a common origin—influenced 
by radically antagonistic concepts of truth and visions of the world 
that cannot by any means be derived from an appropriate histo-
cricity. Thus Karl Popper, Ernst Gellner, and Hannah Arendt have 
harshly confronted each other, like the theoreticians of symbolic 
actions who have turned their back upon those invoking functional-
ism or Marxism. Also, one finds in this list several thinkers of 
developmentalism endorsing modernization conceived as a linear 
process that produces roles capable of limiting the extensiveness of 
destructive inner conflicts: from Karl Deutsch through Marion Lévy, 
from Daniel Lerner through David Apter, and from Gabriel Almond 
through Irving Louis Horowitz; numerous are those who propose a 
pacified vision of history. In contrast to this, others present them-
selves as convinced partisans of an approach based on the normal 
character of conflict, of confrontation, even of the mobilization of 
revolution—from Lewis Coser through Alvin Gouldner, Gary Marx, 

45 Also David Glass, John Plamenatz, and Zygmunt Bauman. 
46 This list includes Gabriel Almond, David Apter, Daniel Lerner, and Nathan 
Leites. 
47 Kohn, after having published, in Germany, his work on the political dimension 
of Jewish history, always devoted long passages to the element of a Jewish nationalism 
turned toward time and universalism instead of focusing on territory, quoting—in his 
classic work The Idea of Nationalism—the Prophets as well as the Talmud. See Hans 
Kohn, Die politische Idee des judentums (Munich: Meyer & Jessen, 1924); and idem, The 
and Herbert Marcuse. In many respects, these lists are, therefore, lacking any meaning.

Nevertheless, what is characteristic for the majority of these specialists in social sciences, despite their profound theoretical differences, and their disparate biographies, as well as their manifold attitudes toward the Jewish tradition, is the fact that almost none of them has devoted a single moment of their long professional life using their immense competence in order to interpret the Jewish factor, however it may be understood. It is the study of social stratification, classes, and mobilization that takes up all of their attention; it is questions about the professions that intrigue them, or the topic of the nature of the interaction within totalitarian institutions or within dissenting groups. In their research, they focus on the dimensions of nationalism, ideology, and development, or on the nature of public politics, bureaucracies, authoritarianism, electoral behaviour, or populism. In the more convenient context of the second half of the twentieth century, the Jews gained access to the social sciences in large numbers, but, like Claude Lévi-Strauss or Daniel Bell (as different as they were), systematically neglected the anthropology, sociology, and political history of past and present Jewish societies. Even more, thanks to innumerable biographies or autobiographies, we could quote the often abrupt declarations or statements of these theoreticians of the social sciences, which reveal their will to do anything in order not to be perceived as Jews in the public space.

Let us consider some examples. The master of anthropology, Franz Boas, born in 1858 and raised in Germany in an assimilated Jewish family that had embraced the republican ideas of 1848, immigrated in the United States in 1884 and became a professor at

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Columbia University in 1896; in 1908, he was the first to speak out against the arrival of Eastern European Jews in the United States, who, from his point of view, had a physical type distinct from that of Northwest Europe and whose norms were profoundly different from those of American Jewry. An adherent of cultural relativism, which he tried to reconcile with the universalism of Enlightenment, as well as an admirer of the customs, traditions and the culture of the Eskimos or the Indian tribes of British Columbia who were open to mixed marriages, Boas predicted the disappearance of the Jews by assimilation. He contributed to the prestige of anthropology and became the president of the American Anthropological Association. Although his face was marked by deep scars caused by the duels he fought during his youth in anti-Semitic Germany, he did not deliberately preserve any part of his own culture, at least nothing other than his rejection of anti-Semitism, which he publicly opposed because it prevented the inevitable assimilation he embraced. Thus Boas devoted a short text to the attempt to demonstrate the transformation of the shape of the heads of “Hebrews” who adapted to the American environment; from his point of view, the dispersion of the Jews had considerably spurred their amalgamation, and their mental reactions corresponded to those of the nations among whom they lived, which led to their rapid disappearance. In this respect he resembled his student Robert Lowie, who had been born in Vienna in 1883 into an equally assimilated Jewish family. Having become

a specialist on the Shoshones, the Washos in Nevada, the Crows in Montana, the Hopis in Arizona, and the Chipewyans in Northern Alberta, Lowie remained quite unconcerned with the Jewish history that continued to develop in his native Vienna under the rule of Karl Lueger. Only in a few miscellaneous texts of journalistic character did he mention the anti-Semitism that had afflicted him, comparing it to the lynching of black Americans. Considering the fact that Marcel Mauss based part of his work on the case of the Maoris in the Western Pacific, that Robert Hertz was inspired by the example of the Nigerian tribes and by the representations of the primitive Christian societies, that Max Gluckman, the founder (in 1949) of the famous department of anthropology in Manchester, chose to work on the South-African Zulus, and that Claude Lévi-Strauss devoted a large part of his life to research on the Bororos or the Nambikwaras, it appears as if the anthropological endeavor followed a logic of turning away from Judaism, of breaking with the culture that had already been almost completely abandoned. It is as if the aim was to embrace a new culture by means of an assimilation that had now become possible, very much in contrast to the thousand-year-old history that seemed to have come to an end in Europe and in the United States. Since then, some have maintained that

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51 On Marcel Mauss, see Marcel Fournier, Marcel Mauss: A Biography (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006). On Robert Hertz, see Alexander Riley, “Whence Durkheim’s Nietzschean Grandchildren? A Closer Look at Robert Hertz’s Place in the Durkheimian Genealogy,” Archives européennes de sociologie 40 (1999), 110–137. The author quotes a letter by Robert Hertz to Alice Hertz from December 1914, when he participated in the “epos” of World War I, in which he speaks about France as the “chosen people” (ibid., 125). And see his letter from November 3, 1914, in which he wrote: “Darling, as a Jew, I feel the hour has come to do a little bit more than my duty. If I asked someone to write a letter favoring my son’s naturalization, it appears to me that this would be the best present I could make him.” See Alexander Riley and Philippe Besnard, Un ethnologue dans les tranchées: Lettres de Robert Hertz à sa femme Alice, août 14, avril 15 (Paris: CNRS-Éditions, 2002), 98.

52 Personal conversation with Gluckman’s son. We should note that, at the end of his life, Max Gluckman taught anthropological studies at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His most famous book continues to be Custom and Conflict in Africa (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955).
the dominating trend of anthropology has not tolerated works in which a Jewish dimension is expressed, their authors mostly being ghettoized and sent back to Jewish studies…. Has anthropology a “Jewish problem”?… Thus the numerous American anthropologists are stemming from Jewish families, but nearly no one among them has done research on the Jews.53

This remark retains its full meaning with regard to many other areas of the social sciences. Does an attraction to the most sophisticated scientific methods, like theories of modernization, express a hope for the possibility of detaching oneself, of a protective neutralization by means of referring to a real, neutral, and objective science that guarantees progress and incontestable knowledge? Paul Lazarsfeld and Karl Deutsch thus asserted themselves in their respective areas by developing an extreme positivism. The first, born in 1901 into a Viennese assimilated Jewish family, emigrated to the United States in 1933, was appointed professor at Columbia University in 1941, and became the most important methodologist in the social sciences. In his lengthy autobiography, Lazarsfeld hardly mentioned the anti-Semitism reigning in Austria when describing his career; he never evoked—in his numerous works—questions linked to his origins. As a result, the collected volumes published in his honor remain almost completely silent about this point.54 In an unpublished interview, however, he admitted his feeling of having remained an outsider because of his “Jewish appearance” and his accent, and he added, not without a sense of humor:

As a matter of fact I was less affected because my being a foreigner overshadowed my being Jewish. I think I would have had more difficulty as an American Jew at that time than as an Austrian Jew. I think I could not have been appointed at Columbia at that time—not really—not if I had been an American Jew. No one thought of me as a Jew because of my foreignness—the accent saved my life.55

55 David Morrison, “Paul Lazarsfeld: The Biography of an Institutional Innovator”
As for Karl Deutsch, in 1960, he was quoted 437 times by the best specialists in the field of international relations. He was born in 1912 into an assimilated Jewish family in Prague, his mother being the first woman elected to the Czech parliament. In 1938, Deutsch, together with his wife, immigrated to the United States, where he became professor at Harvard (in 1967) and president of the American Association of Political Sciences. As a partisan of behaviorist methods, he based his most famous work, *Nationalism and Social Communication*, on quantitative data, later borrowing concepts from cybernetics that allowed him to write *The Nerves of Government*. Inspired by modernizing perspectives favoring the construction of the nation and integration, his work did not preserve any trace of his intellectual origin; this dimension of his life is not mentioned, not even in passing, in the works produced to honor his achievements.56

These examples could be multiplied. Let us again quote Karl Popper, in the field of epistemology, who was profoundly assimilated himself and who declared in 1969:

No, I am of Jewish descent, but ... I abhor any form of racialism or nationalism; and I never belonged to the Jewish faith. Thus I do not see on what grounds I could possibly consider myself a Jew.

Later Popper added: “I do not consider myself ‘an assimilated German Jew.’ This is how the Führer would have considered me.”57 And his rival Thomas Kuhn declared in his autobiography, in order to describe his American childhood: “Remember this is a Jewish family ..., not very Jewish but I mean we were all certified Jews. Non practicing Jews .... So, it was not a big issue ....”58 Even if Popper and Kuhn were engaged in furious debate over the question of truth and relativism, they agreed when it came to avoiding understanding questions concerning the epistemology of the sciences from a Jewish

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point of view, or minimizing the burden of their past. Popper was born in Vienna, like Paul Lazarsfeld, whom he met during that epoch, and like Karl Polanyi, the three of them were active in the socialist milieu. His parents were married in the main Viennese synagogue before converting to Lutheranism. Despite the experience of having been excluded from a school for anti-Semitic reasons, Popper followed his father’s assimilationist project, arguing that “assimilation worked …: But racial pride is not only stupid but wrong, even if provoked by racial hatred.” Anxious to detach himself from this “racial hatred” propagated, according to him, by those many Jews who refused to “mix with the population,” he married a Catholic woman. Eventually, this “passionate defender of the Enlightenment” wrote that the Torah “was the source of religious intolerance and tribal nationalism” and also admitted that Zionism made him “feel ashamed in my origin.”

This determined detachment has been expressed by so many well-known specialists in the social sciences that it almost figures as a leitmotif. Thus Reinhard Bendix, author of works on Max Weber, bureaucracy, and the construction of the state, considered himself, according to Robert Park’s image which he quotes, a “marginal man” on his way to voluntary assimilation. His grandfather had been a professor of Hebrew in a village near Dortmund who observed all the traditions. His father, in contrast to this, decided to break once and for all with Judaism in order to identify solely with Germany: although he married a Jewish woman, he followed the career of a judge assimilated to German society, deprived of any links to Orthodox Jews, because, as he himself wrote, “We in no way felt we were assimilated Jews, but Germans like other Germans.”

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59 Karl Polanyi himself was also completely alienated from Judaism, to the extent that the biography that has been devoted to him does not even mention his Jewish descent; see Kari Polanyi-Lewitt, The Life and Work of Karl Polanyi (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1990).


61 Popper, Unended Quest, 107.

62 Quoted in Hacohen, Karl Popper, 25, 67 and 305.

In 1933 he was arrested and imprisoned in Dachau for almost two years before emigrating with his wife, first to Palestine and later to the United States, where they rejoined, in 1946, their son Reinhard (born in 1916) who had immigrated to America in 1939. The latter considered himself “a political refugee, not … a Jew who had suffered a fate like that of other Jews through the ages,” even though, in 1941, he had to address the German Embassy in order to renew his passport, on which an employee stamped a large “J”; henceforth, he was stigmatized as a Jew from the German point of view, as well as a German enemy in the eyes of the Americans. As a student of Louis Wirth who later would become a professor at Chicago University, Reinhard Bendix met there other colleagues with a similar origin, like Edward Shils, Daniel Bell, and David Riesman. “For me,” he wrote,

> the link is broken between the achievement of ancient Judaism and the modern world. I feel that I cannot be part of the covenant with God .... Yes, I have some affinity with the Jewish tradition. I share the sense of kinship with the afflicted. I think of life as a precious gift .... But these and kindred precepts are general guidelines found in several religions. They do not eradicate my sense of being on the margins of the Jewish tradition. ... In the face of that tragic legacy of past barbarism, wars, and progress one can think of intermarriage as one small step—at the personal level—toward amity, toward reconciliation.

Here again, within two generations, the link to the past has been broken among those profoundly assimilated, often German or Austrian university scholars.

How many fates have to be invoked in order to measure the distance so many specialists in the social sciences felt with regard to their past? When David Riesman, the author of the classic book, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, died in 2002, his portrait was published on the title page of the London journal *Times*, and the *New York Times* wrote that his death meant the disappearance “of the last sociologist ... whose work had an extremely

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64 Ibid., 198.
large influence on the nation.” Reading his autobiography, we learn that Riesman, who was born in 1909 in a prosperous quarter in Philadelphia and whose father was an immigrant from Germany, considered himself “Jewish by birth but without a trace of religious connection. … If there was no religious feeling in my family, neither was there ethnic sentiment.” A devoted sociologist, Riesman studied the nature of the masses and examined the consequences of individualism. After becoming professor at Harvard, he was not only living at the margins of the Jewish world like Bendix; indeed, he was completely alienated from it to the extent that he converted and joined his wife’s Unitarian religion. And Harold Laski bluntly declared: “I am English, not Polish; an agnostic, not a Jew; I cannot reconcile Maimonides with Mill, nor Ann Veronica with the Mosaic Law.” Nothing has to be added to these few words. His parents, Polish Orthodox Jews who were very active in the Jewish milieu in Manchester, broke with him: “You are no longer my son,” his father declared when the young Harold married a non-Jewish woman. After having become a socialist, Laski published famous books like *The Grammar of Politics* and *Parliamentary Government in England, The American Presidency*, but despite his reconciliation with his family and some statements against anti-Semitism and in favor of Israel, his scholarly work, too, does not deal with the Jewish factor.

The conclusion is self-evident. No more than the authors just discussed did Alfred Schütz, Albert Hirschman, Erving Goffman, Howard Becker, Philip Selznick, Alvin Gouldner, Norbert Elias and Karl Mannheim, take account, in developing their œuvre, of the common history they share, beyond their dissimilarities, and of the nature of the specific social facts they inherited and continue to own,

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70 Ibid., 24.
albeit in different ways, in new contexts. Thus Albert Hirschman, starting with his famous typology, could have included the classic example of the Jews in order to evoke the strategies of exit, voice, or loyalty, all the more since he himself had “left” Hitler’s Germany. Furthermore, when he took a sympathetic interest in reactionary language, he could have encountered the question of anti-Semitism which is frequently linked to it, even in numerous authors he cites. Also, when—in pages that became famous—Alfred Schütz examined the figures of the marginal and the home-comer, he was cautious not to invoke cases taken from a history that was nevertheless familiar to him, like Erving Goffman, who only rarely invokes Jewish examples in order to support his reflections on the presentations of self. Howard Becker, whose family stemmed from Lithuania, worked only on jazz and smokers of marijuana because, from his point of view, the outsider is not linked to a determined historical or social situation; the deviance results solely from an interaction between individuals, this being a process in the course of which an individual is labeled as a stranger, yet can then still think that “the judges are alien to his universe.” In other words, one is far away from a historically constructed and less flexible situation in which the Jews, for instance, symbolize the outsider par excellence, from Simmel’s perspective, a historical context that did not attract Howard Becker’s attention, although he studied in Chicago where his immediate heirs had taught for a long time. Similarly, among all the sociologists of the urban who came from the second Chicago school, several of whom were Jews, only Herbert Gans, who had been born in Cologne and immigrated to the United States in 1937, dared to be interested in the world of Jewish suburbs, calling in question the ineptitude of many of the dominant assimilationist approaches.


There is not even a hint of Alfred Schütz’s cultural descent; see Helmut Wagner, Alfred Schütz: An Intellectual Biography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); in contrast to this, see Coser, Refugee Scholars in America, 121.


Finally, an author like Norbert Elias, who received a minimal religious education and was, during his youth, involved in Zionist organizations of a nationalist rather than a socialist background, ultimately becoming one of the leaders of an especially active small group when approaching his thirties, could have treated the court Jews or the question of the French king’s fiscal policies with respect to the Jews in his studies on the court society and the construction of the state; also, he could have addressed the topic of anti-Semitism and pogroms when making a case for the alleged decline of violence. He refrained from doing anything like that, and when evoking the Holocaust, at a rather late stage of his career, he primarily aimed at emphasizing that, from his point of view, it did not challenge his general assumption of an increasing morality. Jewish history has actually almost no place in the work of this historian of modernity who, stemming from the Jewish milieu in Breslau (Wroclaw), fled from Germany in 1933, but, apart from a late short autobiographical text, never treated this specific aspect of contemporary civilization as a sociologist or historian, not even when he was composing an


76 For a critique of this view, see Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 39 and 180. Strangely enough, one of Elias’s most loyal defenders, in his reflections upon the future of violence, he justifies Elias’s silence with regard to the Holocaust: “The Holocaust refutes the theory of the process of civilization nearly the same way that the plague leads to doubt the growth of the continent’s population in the long run”; see Stephen Mennell, “L’envers de la médaille: les processus de décivilisation,” in Norbert Elias: La politique et l’histoire, ed. Alain Garrigou and Bernard Lacroix (Paris: La Découverte, 1997), 213–236, especially 225. See also the defense of Elias by Nathalie Heinrich who, ignoring what this absence might symbolize, strangely apostrophizes Zygmunt Bauman in the following way: “Without considering that one asks oneself what ‘recent history’ means for Bauman: is he aware of the fact that Elias’s theory relies on phenomena that emerged about five or six centuries ago?”; see Nathalie Heinrich, “De quelques malentendus concernant la pensée d’Elias,” Tumultes 15 (October 2000), 161–175, here 164. For a presentation that is much more open to criticism, see Robert van Krieken, Norbert Elias (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1998).
entire book on the Germans. When, among others, he estimates that “it is quite probable that his experiences as a Jew in Germany from early childhood on contributed to his later strong feeling of being attracted by sociology” because it was so difficult for him to “keep distance with respect to the dominant society,”77 we can certainly say that his canonization could probably not have been as complete as it eventually was, had he—in his choice of the objects of his research—preserved his loyalty to what had been his only interest in his youth, even if he could have displayed the same inventiveness.78

The conclusion appears to be irrevocable: in all the branches of the social sciences, the overwhelming majority of the Jews seem to have carefully limited the weight of their own past when practicing their profession and choosing the topics of their research, and to have adopted an attitude that would not place them “outside” of society. This observation obviously applies even more to the historians who devoted their work, for instance, to the Middle Ages. From Marc Bloch to Ernst Kantorowicz, i.e., from the Republican patriotism that led to the Résistance and, on the opposite side, the more radical patriotism that led to becoming part of the corps franc, historians have either favored integration into the Republican public realm or, on the contrary, into an organic or volkish type of a nation. The only common characteristic of these two incomparable historians, whose ideas are utterly antithetical, consists in their similar will to refuse, until the end, the logic of exclusion imposed on them. Born into an assimilated family from Posen (Poznán), a town that nevertheless turned to a traditional, conservative form of Judaism and that came back under Polish administration after 1918, Kantorowicz vehemently protested against his exclusion from the university by

77 Norbert Elias par lui-même (Paris: Fayard, 1991), 151 and 159. See also Elias’s interview, in which he calls himself several times “a German Jew, a Jewish sociologist”; see Herlinde Koelbl, Jüdische Portraits (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1989), 60–62, here 60.

the Nazis, emphasizing his own “enthusiasm for a Reich ruled in a national sense.”79 Rejected by Vichy France, Marc Bloch wrote in the first pages of his book, *L’étrange défaite*: “France, where certain people will enjoy dedicating themselves to expel me immediately, maybe (who knows?) even successfully, will remain, whatever happens, my fatherland, and I will not be able to uproot my heart from it. I have been born there, I have imbibed its culture, I have appropriated its history, I can only breathe under its skies, and I have, on my part, tried hard to defend it the best I could.” A bit later, on March 31, 1942, in a text (signed also by the sociologist Georges Friedmann and the linguist Émile Benveniste) in which he rejected the establishment of the *Union générale des Israélites de France*, an organization imposed by the Germans and their Vichy allies and designed to include the French as well as the immigrant Jews, he declared: “We share France’s hopes and sorrows …, and the French people is our people. We don’t know any other ones.”80 It is understandable that, from the point of view of his son, “in his life as well as his writings not even the slightest trace of a supposed Jewish identity” can be found. “Marc Bloch was simply French.”81 As Saul Friedländer has observed in his own comparison of these two great historians,

their ideological horizons were almost entirely opposed to each other; however, the apparently complete assimilation of these two men as well as their almost mystical loyalty to their countries finally had to confront them with identity problems and provoke similar reactions in them …; apparently, for both of them, the unconditional belief in that mystical entity, the nation, was ultimately designed to heal them


81 Personal letter by Étienne Bloch to the author, January 20, 1996.
and to remove the stigma of an acknowledged, albeit unacceptable
alterity, namely their Jewishness.\textsuperscript{82}

The fact of becoming a historian of national construction in the
midst of a Europe defined by nation-states probably necessarily leads
to reinforcing assimilation to a collective logic and to distancing
oneself from any form of a distinct culture, as shown again by the
example of Felix Gilbert.\textsuperscript{83}

On the old continent, probably only Jewish historians like Arnaldo
Momigliano, living in a weak and decentralized society like Italy, in
many ways analogous to the profoundly localist Anglo-Saxon model
that is so hostile to a strong state and in which the most diverse
cultures can easily express themselves, were free to address the Jew-
ish factor in their general work and, as professionals who enjoyed
worldwide respect, to openly embrace their past. Stemming from
a pious family in Piedmont, a region traditionally open to religious
minorities, Arnaldo Momigliano was born in 1908 into a Jewish
Orthodox family that observed the rituals and celebrated the festi-
vals. He acquired a veritable religious culture, thanks to his uncle, a
reader of the \textit{Zohar}, to whom he devoted his last volume of articles:
“To the one who taught me to study and love the tradition of our
Fathers.” He has, according to his own words, received “a strictly
Orthodox education …. Our religion was all in the family …. This
is why I cannot separate my domestic feelings from the everyday
religious ceremonies that our family celebrated.”\textsuperscript{84} He used to spend
all his Saturdays in a country house his family bought, as he wrote,
“after measuring the distance an Orthodox Jew was permitted to


walk away from home on the Sabbath.” 85 Momigliano read the Hebrew Bible, knew the Pirke Avot by heart, had a bar mitzvah, married a still very young Jewish woman when he was hardly twenty-six years old, and wrote works on the Maccabean revolt as well as on Greek cities during the era of Philip of Macedonia. In other words, Jewish history is a central part of his professional research, like Roman and Greek history, whose interactions he analyses by demonstrating how the Jews have responded to the challenges of those civilizations. 86 To the extent to which Judaism appeared as “the most authentic inspiration of his work,” 87 he rejected any notion of assimilation in the manner of the Orthodox German-Jewish historian Jacob Bernays, who had taught at the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary and to whom he paid homage by declaring, on the occasion of a lecture at Brandeis University in 1977, that the “need to put order between the Jewish and the Italian side of ourselves daily conditioned our life.” In another lecture he added: “I am a Jew myself and I know from my own experience what price Jews had and have to pay to be Jews. I am not collecting facts for academic purpose when I try to understand what moved the Jews to refuse assimilation to surrounding civilizations.” 88 Arnaldo Momigliano used to study the Psalms in Hebrew as well as classical Greek texts every day, devoted a whole year to analyzing Max Weber’s Ancient Judaism in Chicago together with Edward Shils, and did not hesitate (in this city in which he found, according to Peter Burke, a real home in the midst of a “pluralistic” American society respecting minorities) to participate in the Seder ritual during Passover. 89 Shortly before his death in 1987, he wrote: “I solemnly repeat that Jews have a right to their religion, the first monotheistic and ethical religion in history, the religion of the prophets of Israel. To this day, our

85 Ibid., xxvi.
morality depends on it.” Eventually, he himself chose the epitaph on his grave at the Jewish cemetery in the small Piedmontese village Cuneo where his family owned a house: “His faith was that of a free-thinker, without dogma or hate. But he loved his parent’s Jewish tradition with a son’s devotion.” Profoundly integrated in Italy, to the extent that he displayed, in 1938 of all times, openness regarding fascism, like so many other Italian Jews, he remained loyal for his entire life to Jewish history and memory, the account of which played a paramount role in his œuvre.

Is it also possible to claim that philosophers (the examination of whom would be completely different and who have to be neglected here) like Martin Buber, Karl Löwith, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Franz Rosenzweig, and Emmanuel Lévinas, accept the diverse dimensions of their personality more frequently than many sociologists, political scientists, or historians? Or that they indeed attribute to them an essential role for their work, to the extent that the messianic project of striving for redemption and hope that finds so many echoes in Eastern Europe ignores the logic inherent in the

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92 The recent discovery of a letter by Momigliano, addressed to the department of national education on November 3, 1938, in which he expressed his wish to stay in his position despite the new racist legislation, has triggered a strong polemical debate in Italy; it has been fueled even more by the fact that the press also revealed that Norberto Bobbio and Alberto Moravia also tried to arrange a compromise with the fascist authorities. I would like to thank Silvia Berti for having made these documents accessible to me. It is known that Marc Bloch also addressed a similar request to the Vichy authorities and that an exception was made in his case in January 1941; Marshall Henri Philippe Pétain agreed to sign six exceptions for professors of higher education.
93 When Silvia Berti asked Momigliano to comment on Yosef Yerushalmi’s analysis of the relationship between history and Jewish memory, he responded: “Historical research that seriously reflects on these questions necessarily implies a religious dimension.” Quoted in Silvia Berti, “Autobiografia, Storicismo e Verità Storica in Arnaldo Momigliano,” *Rivista Storica Italiana* 100 (1988), 297–312, here 306.
history of the nation-states, in their demanding concept of citizenship, in the neutrality conducive to assimilation, in the reserve that enhances integration, in concerns about social incorporation, and in the need for “civility”? On the contrary, this messianic project receives its strength from another vision of the world which is based on traditional texts, indifferent toward rational modernity and the functional laws guaranteeing a working social system, and, finally, immune to the logic characterizing the European nations.  

Erich Fromm, an heir of this Eastern philosophical tradition oscillating between Marxism and messianism, stemming from the Orthodox Jewish milieu, well-read in the Talmud, did not abstain, after having become a famous American psychoanalyst, from publicly singing Hasidic songs and from writing an entire work devoted to the Old Testament.  

The almost general silence of the contemporary social sciences was, apparently, broken only by Max Weber’s Ancient Judaism. Among the founding fathers of sociology, only a non-Jew who, interestingly enough, lived in a Germany still looking for its national unity, was able to calmly risk publishing this comprehensive erudite work, characterized by a rather favorable attitude toward the pariah people. Only this undisputed historian of religions who came back to Judaism in his Sociology of Religions, writing what Simon Dubnow has not failed to remark, namely that the particular significance of this “pariah people” could be explained essentially on the basis of its historical fortunes, did not hesitate to include such a title among his general sociological works, since he did not have to fear that his position within the German nation could be threatened in any way.  

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97 Max Weber, Ancient Judaism, ed. Hans G. Gerth (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1967; and idem, The Sociology of Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), passim. There is an abundance of literature with regard to the first of these two works. Salo Baron questions the use of the notion of the pariah, emphasizing that the Jews had access to the center of society; see Salo W. Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, (New York:
There are only a few sociologists, for example, some living, in the United States, who took this risk, either by almost imprudently pursuing this course at the beginning of their career (like Louis Wirth in his book *The Ghetto*, devoted to the Jews instead of the African Americans—something unprecedented at the Chicago School; later he devoted himself to other research topics, managing to become president of the American Association of Sociology and even of the International Association of Sociology), or by addressing this topic at the end of their career (like Aaron Wildawsky who, after having gained all the honors in the most neutral field of public politics, chose to live in Israel). The price in terms of career seemed too high, to the extent that it produced a realistic fear that the analysis of Jewish topics would dangerously marginalize those few intrepid scholars who were devoted to them.

In accordance with the universalistic logic advanced by the French Revolution, France incomparably facilitated the career of numerous assimilated and rationalistic Jews (real “Israélites”), such as Adolph Franck, Sylvain Lévi, Israël Levi, and Salomon Reinach. They symbolize a secularized Franco-Judaism that attributed to the year 1789 an almost messianic dimension, although they stemmed, in general, from France’s eastern provinces. Furthermore, France welcomed a number of equally assimilated Jewish intellectuals from Christian Germany, where a career had turned out to be impossible—scholars already influenced by the Haskalah and the Berlin Enlightenment, such as Michel Bréal, Salomon Munk, or Joseph Derenbourg. Since the middle of the nineteenth-century, scholars of both groups, known as the “State Jews” [Juifs d’État], were accepted in the most prestigious academic institutions, from which they were still excluded in Germany, Great Britain, or the United

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98 On Louis Wirth, see Birnbaum, *Géographie de l’espoir*, chapter 2.
States. After, quite often, having overcome the obstacle of a strong competition, they gained access, without converting, to the Collège de France and the École pratique des Hautes Études, where they did not teach contemporary history, a field that had not yet been established as a legitimate discipline, but archaeology, Greek mythology, philology, numismatics, comparative grammar, Sanskrit, law, or even rabbinical Hebrew. They did not, however, teach the study of the Jewish factor in the modern era which, at that time, did not find any place in the heart of a rationalist and soon to be Republican university whose values were characteristic of a universalistic citizenship appropriate for the homogenizing nation state, and hostile to collective identities that would guarantee the historical survival of distinct groups. The Republic thus open to the Jews on the basis of meritocratic criteria—from which they did not benefit, at that time, in the United States or elsewhere—while simultaneously limiting the official expression of collective identities. Is it possible to think that, at the moment the virulent antagonism between church and state became manifest, it was more difficult for the history and sociology of the Jews to find their place, since any references to Catholicism were excluded from the midst of public space? In this sense, the violent political conflicts that dominated France from the

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101 Perrine Simon-Nahum, La Cité investie: La “Science du judaïsme” française et la République (Paris: Le Cerf, 1991). The author judges that “by the end of the nineteenth century, Jewish Studies gradually became obliterated, becoming no more than part of religious education”; during the 1920s, “the distribution of the chairs provided the best sign for the abandonment of the exclusively Jewish areas by the Jews, or at least for the tendency toward the disciplines in which Judaism did not appear to be more than of secondary importance …. Judaism ceased to be the focus of interest of this generation …” (ibid., 268–269). According to Jay Berkowitz, the rationalistic perspective imported from Germany to France and, for instance, applied by Samuel Cahan to his Bible translation, provoked a harsh reaction from the traditional rabbinical milieu; see Jay Berkowitz, “Jewish Scholarship and Identity in Nineteenth Century France,” Modern Judaism 18 (1998), 1–33, especially 18–20. And see Aron Rodrigue, “Les totems, les tabous et les Juifs: Salomon Reinach et la politique universitaire dans la France fin-de-siècle,” Les Cahiers du Judaïsme 16 (2004), 105–118. Rodrigue emphasizes the specific character of Jewish studies at that time, a discipline embedded in the universalistic, republican logic, compared with the German-Jewish scholars. Today, Léon Poliakov, born in St. Petersburg, is one of the few scholars stemming from Eastern European Judaism [see his autobiography, L’auberge des musiciens: Mémoires [Paris: Mazarine, 1981], like Georges Vajda, who studied at the Rabbinical Seminar in Budapest, from where so many members have emigrated either to the United States or to Israel. In contrast to this, Bernard Blumenkranz was part of the assimilated German-Jewish immigration.
French Revolution to the turn of the nineteenth-century, leading to the quasi-expulsion of the religious element from the public space, probably had a strong impact. Since then, all the scholars recruited because of their external competence with respect to Judaism did not write texts on topics other than Rashi and the Talmud, the Kabbalah, or Jews in the Middle Ages, never failing to preserve a universalistic interpretation that would not imply the impression of belonging to a particularistic history. However, this moment that seemed so favorable for the blossoming of Jewish studies lasted only a certain time in the specific context of the nation state à la française. Only a little bit later, the discipline went into decline, while so many other studies, for instance Oriental studies, often embraced by many of those scholars themselves, strongly developed, as if this Jewish dimension that caused so many problems in fin-de-siècle France could not benefit any more from being acknowledged in the midst of public space.  

The few audacious scholars announcing a still incomplete encounter between the social sciences and Jewish studies that, nowadays, is gradually becoming a reality, a fusion between two disciplines otherwise separated by history and prejudice, had to play a pioneering role. Many of them, due to their origins or recent emigration, immersed themselves in a past situated east of Germany, in the Polish regions colonized by the “Reich,” in Russia or Lithuania. They testified to life in the shtetls or in the communities of the large Eastern European cities, influenced by Western modernity and open to the contradictory currents of socialism and Orthodoxy, where sociability is anchored in a culture shaped by Hebrew and the communal practice centers around the religious element as well as a language, namely Yiddish.  

Would it be possible to claim that the majority

102 Since its creation in 1880, the remarkable Revue des Études Juives has focused mainly on philological and palaeographic studies and the history of ancient and medieval Jewry, as well as studies on the Haggadah.

of contemporary sociologists or anthropologists who choose to devote their talents to specifically Jewish topics are coming, directly or indirectly, from that Eastern Europe where the Jews still shared, almost collectively, a specific culture and specific customs modeled by collective traditions and an equally collective marginalization, even if the temptation to escape as an individual to the large urbanized cities, motivated by the desire to embrace modernity, awakens to the same extent that the attachment to—revolutionary or Zionist—movements promising escape grows stronger? Apparently, this part of Eastern Europe still not radically overthrown by the Enlightenment, where assimilation often continued to be an almost inconceivable strategy, even if it sometimes progressed through acculturation and urbanization, is the original home of numerous predecessors of contemporary Jewish studies—a discipline that, nowadays, finds its home mainly in the two dominating centers, the United States and Israel, which are the destination of many scholars who often emigrated from exactly those regions where the communal dimension of Jewish society had retained a stronger impact. From Vilnius through Kiev to Odessa, therefore, from that enormous Eastern European continent shaped by many different Orthodox currents or the Enlightenment, two projects have emerged that are interwoven, albeit distinct and sometimes contradictory. One of them is based on Yiddish, but also and mainly on the Hebrew language that, from David Gordon to Moshe Lilienblum and Ahad Ha’am, permeated


cultural Zionism, the movement that promised, according to Leon Pinsker’s formula, “self-emancipation”;\textsuperscript{106} in the words of the poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik: “Relying on Hebrew, the sciences of Judaism will experience a renaissance, finding the people and serving its present needs as well as its future aspirations.”\textsuperscript{107} The other one intends to re-establish, especially in the midst of pluralistic American society, a Jewish culture based on Yiddish and to reconstruct a historical sociology of the Jewish people that would be capable, in the spirit of Simon Dubnow, of representing its values and its ways of social organization in the Diaspora.\textsuperscript{108}

Is it a coincidence that Alfred Nossig, the first director of the Verein für jüdische Statistik (Association of Jewish Statistics), founded in 1902 by the Zionist movement (a distant source of one of the two contemporary centres of Jewish studies currently blossoming in Israel\textsuperscript{109}), stemmed from Lvov in Austrian Galicia? Or is it a coincidence that one finds, in the office of this organization that aimed at a professional approach to sociological studies on Jewish populations, so many Zionist leaders who also came from these eastern regions, from Chaim Weizmann, the Hebrew cantor (while Leo Motzkin, who was also part of it, claimed that “in Yiddish the very substance of the people has in itself become a language”\textsuperscript{110}), to Nathan Birnbaum, who invented the term “Zionism” and published,


\textsuperscript{109} One could quickly remark that in Israel, too, Jewish studies is almost always separated from the departments of sociology, even of history departments. Shmuel Eisenstadt, for instance, the well-respected “generalist” sociologist who has also undertaken some work relevant for Jewish Studies, taught in a department of sociology at Hebrew University in Jerusalem whose director he was for a long time, as a successor of its founder, Martin Buber. The British sociologist Morris Ginsberg had intervened, giving some advice concerning the establishment of that department. Both Buber and Ginsberg came from a Yiddishist milieu in Eastern Europe.

\textsuperscript{110} Quoted in Paul Mendes-Flohr, Divided Passions, 194.
in 1902, an article entitled “The Significance of Jewish Statistics”? Is it a coincidence that Arthur Ruppin, who became the head of the scientific current of this organization, the author of the classic, very elaborate sociological book, *The Jews of Today*, a work written according to the discipline’s most objective criteria, originally came from Posen, considered himself “the anthropologist of the Jews,” and in 1903 made a long journey to Galicia in order “to learn more about the Jews who are still not touched by Western culture” and who preserved their authenticity—a valuable source of comparative materials, comparable to those found in the wake of other pioneering and romantic travels to that mysterious East accomplished by several researchers who explored the Jewish reality far from modernizing influences? The ethnographic expeditions to the same Galicia, funded by Baron Vladimir Ginsbourg and, starting in 1911, led by the Yiddishist writer S. Ansky, inaugurated, with the help of questionnaires, the folkloric and anthropological studies of that Jewish milieu: by means of collecting songs, stories, paintings, traditions, and superstitions, they made a great effort to collect the materials of a culture threatened by so many massacres. This endeavor was implemented by establishing a sociological study of the Jewish factor drafted in those regions since the beginning of the twentieth century; it reveals the fascination of the universe of the *Ostjuden* shared, at that time, by Franz Kafka and Martin Buber. It gives evidence of the urgent necessity of providing a cartography of this powerless Jewish world, of exploring it in order to count its enormous riches, of employing the new techniques of the social sciences in order to preserve its transmission, of immersing oneself into this world in order to cause the resurgence of a culture that expresses the intensity of the social links, but that belongs to an already distant past of which the assimilated Jews are

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mostly unaware. Contemporary Jewish studies, as the heir of such an endeavor, appears to be the result of a will to save this partially preserved world, which painters like Isidor Kaufmann or novelists like S. Y. Agnon are reviving in their work.114

Is it a coincidence that, at the same turn of the century, but in the other center now provided by the United States, the European Jews’ land of emigration, Franz Boas, coming from a German-Jewish milieu that was fundamentally emancipated and convenient, praised assimilation, while Edward Sapir, his student at Columbia University, born in 1884 in Pomerania (which today belongs to Poland), who never possessed German national rights, devoted all his energies to the preservation of this Eastern European culture? Sapir’s family came from Lithuania. His father had been born in Vilkomir and chanted in the synagogues, and after his emigration to the United States in 1889, together with his family, he was active in several synagogues in New York, where he also served as a rabbi; his mother was born in Kovno, a famous place of culture and tradition. In New York, the Sapir family lived in the popular Jewish quarter, the Lower East Side. Edward Sapir’s mother tongue was Yiddish, his second language Hebrew, which he mastered like the German language. Boas transferred his assimilationist perspective, already implemented in Germany, to the United States and did not harbor any interest in the future of the Jews; Sapir studied the linguistic structures of the Wishram Indians in the state of Washington, as well as those of the Yakimas, but, in contrast to Boas (or to Lowie) he remained loyal to the Yiddish language and to the Eastern European Diaspora for his entire life: his article “Notes on Judeo-German Phonology,” published in 1915 in the Jewish Quarterly Review, is still considered a classic contribution to the field. After having succeeded Boas as president of the Linguistic Society of America, he participated, in 1933, in founding the Yiddish Scientific Institute and became its president, with Simon Dubnow, Albert Einstein, and Sigmund Freud figuring as members of his honorary committee. He established a supporting committee that included Salo Baron, Horace Kallen, and

Louis Wirth, as well as the anthropologist Melville Herskovits, while Franz Boas hesitated to accept his personal invitation to participate, arguing that the Jews did not form a distinct physical or cultural entity: ultimately, he did not become a member of the committee.\footnote{Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Coming of Age in the Thirties: Max Weinreich, Edward Sapir and Jewish Social Science,” \textit{YIVO Annual} 23 (1996), 1–103, especially 80–82.} Sapir also became the linguist of YIVO, the institution founded in 1925 in Vilnius, the Jerusalem of Lithuania, which, from the very beginning, included a department of “economy and statistics” as well as another devoted to history: for a long time, Sapir’s portrait adorned YIVO’s office after its transfer to New York. Together with Hans Kohn and Salo Baron, he also established the Conference on Jewish Relations that gave birth, in 1939, to the journal \textit{Jewish Social Studies}, edited by Baron and still relevant today; Sapir became a member of the editorial board. In the words of David Mandelbaum, one of his students, “Edward Sapir expressed the genius of his people in its first aspect. Jews are, in a sense, born ethnologists.”\footnote{David Mandelbaum, “Edward Sapir,” \textit{JSS} 3 (1941), 131–140, here 140. See Regna Darnell, \textit{Edward Sapir, Linguist, Anthropologist, Humanist} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990). And see Sapir’s main work, \textit{The Psychology of Culture} (Paris-La Haye: Mouton, 2002).} In other words, the research on civility and integration described by John Murray Cuddihy is not accompanied by access to honors: although Sapir, who was exposed to strong anti-Semitic resentment at Yale, especially in the department of sociology, did not reject assimilation, he nonetheless held the view that, in the Diaspora, numerous Jews would continue to lead a distinct life. Until the end of his life, he devoted himself to linguistic and ethnological studies of the Talmud.

While Franz Boas immensely contributed to the legitimization of cultures like those of the Indians by promoting discussion on the ability of multiculturalism to respect all traditions within the nation, thus making the United States “a nation of nations,” other anthropologists like Edward Sapir, who originally came from Eastern Europe and kept the use of Yiddish alive in the heart of the American society, ultimately preserved Jewish identity within this large multicultural nation. On the basis of this perspective, they encountered Jewish sociologists like Horace M. Kallen, the real founder of American multiculturalism, who had published his seminal book, \textit{Culture and ...}
Democracy in the United States, in 1924, and, thanks to Louis Wirth, the author of The Ghetto (1928) who spoke Yiddish with him, became the head of the prestigious Chicago School of Sociology; in 1926, Kallen published an article on the Jewish ghetto in the very professional and learned American Journal of Sociology. Based on the Yiddish language, on Jewish Studies, and a strong involvement in Jewish communal life alien to Zionism, which was, until the Six-Day-War, ignored, and sometimes even rejected or attacked, the journal Jewish Social Studies emerged under the auspices of Salo W. Baron, who—since 1930—held the first chair of Jewish studies established at Columbia University. Later, numerous Jewish sociologists became members of the journal’s directing committee, including Joseph Blau, Lewis Feuer, and above all Daniel Bell and Nathan Glazer, alongside other specialists in Jewish studies like Gerson D. Cohen and Isaac Barzilay. It was here that Hannah Arendt, who had become friends with Baron, wrote her first article on the Dreyfus affair.

This encounter of anthropologists, sociologists, and specialists of Jewish Studies, distant heirs to the German scholars of Wissenschaft des Judentums, brought together professors of most distinguished universities like the University of Chicago, Columbia University, and Yale University, scholars respected by their counterparts and elected as presidents of the American Sociological Association or the American Anthropological Association, who preserved their academic legitimacy despite publishing specialized works on the Jewish world and its culture. It seemed like a unique moment whose seminal importance, in this respect, has not yet been recognized. For the first time, there was an encounter between two schools of thought that had always ignored each other, both turning their back on the movement of assimilation that often eliminated sociology altogether. This original symbiosis oriented toward the social sciences maintained the spirit of the work undertaken by Arthur Ruppin or Simon Dubnow, at the same time preserving the contribution of the generalist and professionalized social sciences. It was strengthened by the characteristic project of Mordecai Kaplan, the most famous theoretician of Reconstructionist Judaism, who, during the same time, although

117 Gelya Frank, “Jews, Multiculturalism and Boasian Anthropology,” The American Anthropologist 99 (1997), 731–745. On Wirth, see Birnbaum, Géographie de l’espoir, chapter 3; on Salo W. Baron, see ibid., chapter 8.
being himself a rabbi, understood Judaism as a civilization rather than just in terms of its theological dimension and attempted, by distancing himself from Orthodoxy, to strengthen the communal structures of American-Jewish life. He was influenced by Simon Dubnow as well as by Franklin Giddings, one of the masters of sociological theory with whom he studied at Columbia University and whose works deal precisely with the structure of social groups as mediums of sociability. In many respects, Kaplan’s endeavor was parallel to that of Horace Kallen: both originated, like so many others, from Eastern European Judaism: Kaplan’s father, born in Lithuania near Kovno, was a rabbi, while Kallen’s father, also a rabbi, had been born in that part of Silesia that nowadays is Polish. Both were influenced by Thomas Jefferson’s ideal of decentralization or by William James’ pragmatism, and both aimed at re-establishing a Jewish community in the United States that would occupy its institutional place in the midst of a broad pluralism composed of the most diverse cultural groups.\textsuperscript{118}

The two centers have their roots in Eastern Europe and even in Germany, where the \textit{Wissenschaft} was anchored in a substantial Jewish subculture surrounded by a virulent anti-Semitism that limited assimilation.\textsuperscript{119} In both large centers, however, the unique moment in which the social sciences and Jewish studies merged remained fragile and almost without long-term effects, since it simultaneously revealed the deep attachment to an increasingly distant past, to a world before the emergence of modernization to which the professional scholars of the different social sciences proved to be attached to such a strong extent. In our days, there are only a few who, like Kurt Lewin, the founder of psycho-sociology, take the Jewish factor into account. Stemming from a small village near Posen, in the German occupied part of Poland, and rooted in an Orthodox milieu, he immigrated to the United States in 1938. He did not hesitate, in his \textit{Resolving Social Conflicts}, to describe in great detail the situation of young Jews in the ghettos or their difficult adjustment,

\textsuperscript{118} Mel Scult, \textit{Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan} (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 55, 87, 143ff., 312–313.

due to a complex identity, to the open American society.\textsuperscript{120} Similarly, Seymour Martin Lipset, whose parents were Orthodox Jews from Kiev, managed, by publishing his \textit{Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics}, to be acknowledged as a sociologist of political behavior and conflicts, eventually becoming professor at Harvard as well as president of the American Association of Political Sciences and of the American Association of Sociology, although he regularly wrote books on the life of American Jews.\textsuperscript{121} Nathan Glazer, stemming from the milieu of craftsman from Poland who spoke Yiddish at home, published his book on the American Jews as well as innumerable articles on that topic, even if he later devoted his professional life to those problems of industrialization and growth and of multiculturalism which made him famous.\textsuperscript{122} Lewis Coser did not hesitate, in his famous \textit{Functions of Social Conflict}, to frequently cite as examples confrontations linked with anti-Semitism. At the height of his reputation as a sociologist and having become professor at Brandeis University, he published an article on the Court Jews in the \textit{American Sociology Review}, as well as a work on sociologists and political scientists, almost all of them Jewish and analyzed as such, who had escaped Nazism and found refuge in the United States.\textsuperscript{123}


\textsuperscript{123} Lewis Coser, \textit{Functions of Social Conflict} (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1956); idem,
Robert Putnam did not hesitate, in *Bowling Alone*, to use terms taken from the Yiddish language in order to discuss the recent strong decline of participation in the United States. To explain the collapse of internal activities in groups (*bonding*) as well as actions that are likely to bringing different groups together (*bridging*), Putnam distinguished between the *machers* and the *schmoozers*. The first, the “doers,” are active in associations, churches, political contexts, or demonstrations, while the latter, the “talkers,” prefer, in contrast to this, to express themselves in informal reunions, in cafés, in soirées with friends, and in clubs where, for example, they play cards. This loyalty, however, became increasingly rare. Erving Goffman, for instance, whose family came from the Ukraine and who was fluent in Yiddish, the language of his childhood, became the most famous interpreter of self-representation, of the roles that organize the interpersonal links of all social agents. Similarly, Edward Shils, who spoke Yiddish as well, like Louis Wirth (his professor in Chicago), chose to compose a sociological work on ideologies and problems linked to national constructs in which he avoided mentioning the Jewish milieu in Chicago or New York, although he was an active member of the Jewish Publication Society where he regularly encountered the most prominent protagonists of Jewish studies.

The unique encounter between the social sciences and Jewish studies was only temporary, since it was mainly profoundly assimilated.

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125 Shils, *Portraits*, passim.
social scientists who, after their emigration from Nazi Germany or Austria, assembled on the new continent. Only a few of them chose to “dissimilate,”126 like Hannah Arendt, who wrote to Karl Jaspers in September 1952: “Judaism does not exist outside Orthodoxy on the one hand or outside the Yiddish-speaking folklore-producing Jewish people on the other.”127 The composition of the present board of *Jewish Social Studies*, which does not include a single sociologist or political scientist, but unites solely eminent specialists of Jewish studies, gives further evidence for this view. Today, the social scientists have often lost the memory of the world of Yiddish, since, after several generations, the links to the past have been severed. The “world of our fathers” has disintegrated, the Lower East Side has been transformed, and spontaneous Jewish sociability rooted in urban life has given way to solitude or, at least, to the dispersion of the suburbs. With rare exceptions, Yiddish is not a natural language any more, and only those who learned it while mastering Hebrew as well will, in the future, have access to the culture these languages transmit. Furthermore, the present normalization of Jewish studies, which are strongly expanding in the United States, only rarely brings the fame Edward Sapir and Louis Wirth enjoyed. Scholars of Jewish studies do not hold the presidency of national or international associations in the broader fields of sociology, political science, history, and anthropology.128

Nevertheless, journals like *Jewish Social Studies* and *Dissent* testify to the slow process of acknowledgement in the United States, far away from Eastern Europe and independent of Israel, of the existence of a specifically Jewish culture and milieu in the Diaspora,

126 This term has been proposed by Shulamith Volkov, “The Dynamics of Dissimilation: Ostjuden and German Jews,” in *Jewish Response to German Culture from the Enlightenment to the Second World War*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1985), 195–211. Salo Baron uses the same notion, albeit in order to designate, quite on the contrary, the process of de-assimilation, of an authoritarian exclusion meant to reject the Jews. See Salo W. Baron, *Steel'd by Adversity: Essays Addressed on American-Jewish Life* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1971), 500.


128 Personal conversation with Daniel Bell (July 2003). This is all the more so because contemporary sociologists and scholars of political studies increasingly abandon the type of purely political commitment in dealing with social questions familiar to the New York intellectuals, between socialism, liberalism, and public politics.
in the midst of open, pluralist societies in which manifold forms of sociability based on diversified milieus are accepted as legitimate and, even more, understood as ways to preserve the democratic structure of society as well as the citizen’s participation on the local level by means of an intensive social life.\textsuperscript{129} Furthermore, such journals express the normality of the Jewish factor in the public space. Thanks to a certain degree of academic networking fostered by the often private status of many of the most prestigious American universities, which enjoy the financial support of numerous private foundations, the recent explosion of Jewish studies prompts only limited hostility within the academic realm while maintaining a visible and accepted presence. This implies, however, the risk of giving up, in the context of the fashionable phenomenon of multiculturalism, a certain centrality, by accepting to be marginalized within a conglomerate of heterogeneous identities presented as equivalent and legitimate, especially since the specialists in the social sciences are increasingly conspicuous by their absence.

A world is growing distant, and the social sciences are again dissociating themselves from Jewish studies, reducing Jewish studies to a field that is certainly accepted but has become marginal,

\textsuperscript{129} A similar and exceptional encounter took place, in fact, at the same time in Great Britain. A much more fragile milieu developed around Lithuanian-born Morris Ginsberg, whose maternal language was Yiddish, a circle much more limited than in the United States, since it was much less enriched by Eastern European immigration. In 1929, Ginsberg, who spoke perfect classical Hebrew as well, became a professor of sociology at the London School of Economics, thanks to his works on the industrial society; eventually he became one of the most eminent British sociologists. While Raymond Aron integrated better into the French nation, in accordance with the logic underlying its form of state-controlled emancipation, Ginsberg came nearer to Bell, whose Eastern European origin and Yiddish culture he shared. In this different Anglo-Saxon society, he had two parallel careers, one devoted to general sociology; the other to research on Judaism. Most of his colleagues in sociology do not know that, in 1958, he founded and led, until his death in 1970, \textit{the Jewish Journal of Sociology}, an erudite journal of sociology unparalleled in France, where the \textit{Revue des Études juives} maintains a focus on pre-modern times. Ginsberg’s journal is comparable to the American journal \textit{Jewish Social Studies}, albeit much more dominated by sociologists and scholars of political science than by specialists in Jewish Studies, who where much more of a minority in Great Britain. The board of editors includes scholars like Nathan Glazer and Shmuel Eisenstadt, and one finds articles and reviews penned by eminent specialists in Jewish sociology, like Samuel Finer, Seymour Lipset, Elie Kedourie, Joseph Ben-David, Leonard Reissman, Nathan Glazer, Marshall Sklare, Ernest Gellner and Georges Friedmann, or non-Jewish scholars like Thomas H. Marshall, Donald MacRae, and Robin William Jr.
especially because specialists in Jewish studies sometimes find themselves confined to specific departments, and they rarely have more than one appointment within a general department. The increasing ethnicization is sometimes accompanied by a new ghettoization that simultaneously limits Jewish studies’ visibility within the maelstrom of a multiculturalism that paradoxically reproduces an earlier situation: “The invisibility of Jewish Studies as an academic field, moreover, is hidden behind the presence of Jews as scholars in all fields.” Does this distance increase also because of the limited links between Israel and the milieu of Anglo-Saxon Jewish studies that forms more and more a complex entity of great creativity, at a moment in which so many specialists in the social sciences are eager to firmly emphasize their distance from that aspect?

In this regard, a long history is probably ending, namely that of the encounter between the Jews and the Enlightenment, understood in a merely universalistic way and anchored in an ambitious vision of a regenerating assimilation. Another often-neglected history is coming to light, which is, nevertheless, also inspired by the Enlightenment (Yosef H. Yerushalmi thus presents himself as a “Lithuanian rationalist”), without justifying the eradication of cultures and especially the end of Judaism. Through some unexpected detours, by authors considered legitimate or illegitimate with regard to the dominant republican tradition, this history of the reinvention of a Jewish presence in the Western world, of rediscovering Jewish historicity, and of power strategies that are likely to guarantee its

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130 In this respect, the situation is very different at different universities. At Yale University or Indiana University, for instance, the nominations are both in departments of Jewish studies as well as in history departments, while at Harvard, New York University and Brandeis University there is no link between them, which means that Jewish history is not taught in the history department. In contrast to this, at Columbia and Stanford University, nominations are in history, even if several professors have a twofold affiliation; Jewish studies is an interdisciplinary program that includes professors from different departments. I would like to thank Steven Zipperstein and Aron Rodrigue for their information.


132 A number of sociologists like Daniel Bell and even Nathan Glazer, despite his brief participation in a Zionist group during his youth, have displayed an enduring hostility to the idea of a Jewish state. See Nathan Glazer, “From Socialism to Sociology,” in Berger, ed., Authors of Their Own Lives, 190–209, especially 191ff.
survival in an intellectual universe that is, in the name of sometimes the best intentions, devoted to its disappearance, makes use of detours and promises a wealth of surprises. It requires turning back to the different sources of the Enlightenment, rethinking the place of the Jews between Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment, asking from which sources contemporary Jewish studies emerged that would testify to a legitimate Jewish existence in the Diaspora, reconstructing the contradictory, surprising genealogy that leads from a reconciled humankind that became rational and functional by being deprived of any kind of Jewish life, to a humankind that interprets the equality of human beings in terms of the acknowledgement of their own cultures and memories. It also implies the necessity of rethinking the “rightly ill-reputed notion of assimilation,” according to the strong formulation of Emmanuel Lévinas who, stemming from Lithuania, deplored that the Jews, after World War II, find themselves “solicited by the angel of Reason” and who came to the conclusion that “Judaism in the Diaspora is empty …. Assimilation apparently has to end in dissolution.”

Looking back over the development traced in this article, it can be said that the way opened by Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, and Émile Durkheim and continued in different directions by Raymond Aron, Hannah Arendt, Isaiah Berlin, and Michael Walzer has, in a surprising manner, crossed the path pursued by Heinrich Graetz, Simon Dubnow, Salo Baron, and finally Yosef Yerushalmi. Therefore, the contemporary discipline of Jewish studies, testifying to the legitimacy of the Jewish presence in the Diaspora, in many respects presents itself as the heir of those giants who were, in the past century, confronted with the most contradictory expressions of the Enlightenment as well as the counter-Enlightenment. Thus, Jewish studies, coming from outside, from social settings that were still not lastingly affected by assimilationist projects, from the Eastern Europe of the Ostjuden that produced scholars like Arthur Ruppin, Simon Dubnow, Mordecai Kaplan, Salo Baron, Edward Sapir, Louis Wirth, Daniel Bell, and Morris Ginsberg; but also Isaiah Berlin, whose intellectual universe goes back to the Hasidic world of Riga, his distant origin; Michael Walzer, whose family stems from Galicia; or Yosef Yerushalmi, whose parents immigrated from Russia, is nourished by

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133 Lévinas, Difficile liberté, 69, 294 and 355.
an imagination and a way of asking questions shaped by a Hebrew religious and literary culture, but also by a maternal language used in everyday life, mostly Yiddish. It is thus from outside, without necessarily subscribing to the way of “de-assimilation” (to which Heinrich Graetz felt compelled in Germany, thus becoming the founder of the historiography of the Jewish people who refused to have his work translated into Yiddish, not to mention Hannah Arendt, who detached herself from the world of Bildung), that they nourish their ambition by pushing the project of German Wissenschaft des Judentums to the extreme, almost subverting it. Attracted by the Enlightenment, by the reforms, and by assimilation, their project definitely was that of the re-legitimization, in the midst of the profound German-Jewish symbiosis and, more generally, in the midst of modernity itself, of a cultural and traditional vision, of a radical counter-history, leading to the decolonization of Jewish history within the emancipatory, assimilationist European history, of a reconquest of its destiny that was intrinsically intertwined with global history.134

From Eastern Europe to authoritarian Christian Germany, which, in reaction, favored the emergence of this counter-history; subversive projects with a very different nature emerged which were, nevertheless, mutually open.135 This counter-history, rooted as it was in the specific histories of non-open societies, hardly touched by liberalism, still very authoritarian and opposed to modernity, would be


135 According to Sylvie-Anne Goldberg, the foundation of YIVO in 1925 “marks the definitive break between the first generations of the German style Wissenschaft des Judentums, the contemporary of the emancipation movement (the Haskalah), and those who were to replace them by a scholarly ensemble of ‘Judaica.’” She quotes an editorial in which Nohem Schtif writes: “The famous science of Judaism founded by Western European thinkers, by German Jews, could not serve us as a model or point of reference …. In Eastern Europe we are dealing with a living Judaism that continues to produce a material and spiritual culture.” See Sylvie-Anne Goldberg, “L’étude du judaïsme: science historique ou religieuse?” Préfaces 19 (1990), 88–95, here 93.
the ultimate way of mocking the assimilation fashionable within the societies that had entered the “Great Transformation” of the market and pluralism much more rapidly, or within those societies witnessing the rapid blossoming of the nation state, of citizenship and the public space. The latter, like France, permitted other, much more radical types of emancipation which soon deprived the world of Yiddishkeit and its intense collective sociability rooted in a distant past. In this sense, Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Raymond Aron, and several other scholars belong to families who had gone quickly to Paris, the capital of modernity, detaching themselves from the world of the past and its culture that was largely irrigated by the contribution of migration from the East.

This counter-history would be like an echo, on a more sociological and less ideological tone, of the choleric words launched, from the center of this world of the past, by Ahad Ha’am (born in the province of Kiev), who for some embodies the slavophile whose cultural perspective devoted to the Hebrew renaissance shapes contemporary Jewish studies in Israel, or by Simon Dubnow, who was eager to maintain a Jewish sociability of mainly Yiddishist colour in modernity and who rather represents the figure of occidentalization. Dubnow’s influence on the same discipline of Jewish Studies is effective mainly beyond the Atlantic, where—thanks to the strong Jewish immigration from Russia—a “Jewish America” emerged very soon. In fact, both

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138 Vicky Caron, *Between France and Germany: The Jews of Alsace-Lorraine, 1871–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988); Paula Hyman, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace: Acculturation and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1991. According to Hyman, the Consistoire de Strasbourg published, in 1848, the *Prières d’un cœur israélite* in order to replace the “corrupt Yiddish” (ibid., 61); she also shows that “because the state … was the guarantor of their equality, the Jews of Alsace were stimulated to acquire French culture as a badge of their civic status” (ibid., 159). And see Pierre-André Meyer, *La communauté juive de Metz au XVIIe siècle* (Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1993), 85–86, who analyses the decline of the Judeo-German language; finally, see Claude Rosenfeld and Jean-Bernard Lang, *Histoire des Juifs de Moselle* (Metz: Editions Serpenoise, 2001), 130ff.
of them launched diatribe after diatribe against the Western Jews. They attacked particularly the French Jews who were profiting so much from the regenerating Enlightenment that those prophets, if we accept to underline extensively the interpretation, considered to be a new form of slavery to the extent that, for those contemptuous critics of assimilation, “the soul is mutilated,” since it does no longer live within a collective sociability and an independent culture. For Simon Dubnow, since the French Revolution, “an inner bondage … has taken the place of the external bondage.”

In the same vein, Ahad Ha’am harshly attacked the Société des Études Juives and its president, Théodore Reinach, as well as Salomon Munk, claiming that the French Jews had “publicly abandoned their national Jewish identity …; this intellectual slavery is the prize for political freedom …; if I don’t enjoy these rights here, I have, in contrast to them, not sold my soul for them.” Pushing his radical reflections to the extreme, he added quite frankly: “The national feeling can no longer support the mask of assimilation.”

Emerging from the depths of the Eastern European societies, this radical, uncompromising criticism of the phenomenon of assimilation that had proved to be so beneficent for the Western Jews, a critique that prefers to ignore the positive aspect of this liberating process, sounds like a vibrant call for dissimilation on the national or collective level by embracing a project aiming at preserving an appropriate sociability.


Here, two textes by Ahad Ha’am are to be quoted, “Servitude dans la liberté,” and “Degrés de la conscience nationale,” in Charbit, ed., Sionismes: Textes fondamentaux, 61–72, 118–126. It is well known that Ahad Ha’am exerted a strong influence on Martin Buber who, once he had emigrated to Palestine, created the first department of sociology at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.
This specific counter-history stemming from different origins, from Odessa to Vilnius, from Breslau to Berlin, from Kovno to Kiev, blossoming in our time in the midst of an American society that is eager to bring to light several counter-histories which all bear witness to the vividness of diverse “nations within the nation,” was eventually acknowledged when Salo Baron became, in 1930, not the first Jew appointed at Columbia University, but the first Jewish professor of Jewish history at that prestigious university, while, at the same time, Harry Wolfson, also coming from a Yiddish-speaking world, was appointed at Harvard. As his friend Hannah Arendt emphasized, Baron had “become the first Professor of Jewish History in this country because [he had] indeed been the first to establish the history of [his] own people as an academic discipline.”

Heir to the “diasporism” strongly defended by Simon Dubnow, this discipline claims explicitly, according to Dubnow himself, to be a historiography considering itself, very much in the Weberian sense, as “sociological” instead of theological or specifically intellectual. It finds, therefore, its entire recognition in the achievement of Salo Baron, Yerushalmi’s teacher, who introduces the latter’s great work on the Marranos by judging that this is “a fascinating contribution to learning” that puts an end to the “isolation” of a strictly Jewish “historical sociology” that has

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143 Simon Dubnow, “The Sociological View of Jewish History,” in *Nationalism and History*, 336–353. Jacob Katz is quite harsh with respect to Dubnow and his interpretation of Max Weber’s sociology, accusing him, among others, of underestimating the factors of change that need to be understood in order to explain Jewish history. From his point of view, Dubnow fell victim to a “misunderstanding of the essential purpose of sociology”; see Jacob Katz, “The Concept of Social History and its Possible Use in Jewish Historical Research,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 3 (1956), 292–312, here 308–309, note 27. He refers also to works by Salo Baron that he considers to be “eclectic,” emphasizing his “failure,” his inability to construct concepts like that of community. Finally, he challenges the notion of accentuating the development of successive centers of Jewish history at the expense of the unity of the Jewish people, especially since in his opinion, the essential episodes do not unfold in the center, but on the periphery (ibid., 306, 310–311).

finally acquired scholarly character, resulting in its “normalization,” as admitted by the best national authorities of the institutionalized sociological profession. Attracted by the social sciences, Jewish studies thus witnessed a profound “reconfiguration.” Based on competing “sociologies,” distinctive and lively visions of history, from the nineteenth century to the present, have been expressed by generations of thinkers whose independent genealogy and surprising encounters have to be traced like paths leading to a Jewish “geography of hope.”

145 Jonathan Frankel retraces the history of this re-mapping of Jewish studies and notes the influence of sociological concepts suggested by Dubnow on Salo Baron in the United States as well as on Jacob Katz in Israel; see Jonathan Frankel, “Assimilation and the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Towards a New Historiography?” in *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Jonathan Frankel and Steven Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1–37, here 1 and 18–19. See also Shmuel Trigano, “Une sociologie historique du judaïsme,” in *La société juive à travers l’histoire*, ed. Shmuel Trigano (Paris: Fayard, 1992), vol. 1, 11–34; and Robert Seltzer, “From Graetz to Dubnow. The Impact of the East European Milieu on the Writing of Jewish History,” in *The Legacy of Jewish Migration: 1881 and its Impact*, ed. David Berger (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 49–60; the author thinks that “America became the home of something close to the spirit of Dubnovism, the place where his central ideas found their main constituency and most applicability in Jewish history” (ibid., 58). Thus, when Baron published *The Jewish Community* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1942), he did not only base his analysis on the *kehilot*, the Eastern European Jewish communities, as well as on material stemming from *responsa* written by rabbis, but also quoted classical works of sociology like those by Ferdinand Tönnies and Robert McIver. At the time of the publication of that book, the *American Journal of Sociology*, edited by Horace M. Kallen, took note of it in an eloquent way, judging that it had been written “according to the methods of Scholarship”; see *American Journal of Sociology* 49 (1943/44), 95.
CHAPTER TEN

JEWISH THOUGHT, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE HOLOCAUST

MICHAEL L. MORGAN

The encounter between Judaism and modern philosophy is complex. Within Judaism, the encounter occurred when Jewish philosophers and thinkers, seeking to articulate the meaning of Jewish existence, either employed philosophical resources for their own purposes or sought to demonstrate what Judaism could contribute to philosophy itself.¹ Within modern philosophy, the encounter occurred when Judaism and Jewish thought were addressed by philosophy directly or when they were shown to be deficient because they failed to do so.² In short, for both parties, the engagement has been vital and intriguing, even if it has not been widely appreciated by either Jewish thinkers or by philosophers in general.

The problem of Judaism and modern philosophy is one dimension of the more general problem of Athens and Jerusalem, of Hellenism and Hebraism. Figures such as Leo Strauss, Emmanuel Levinas, and Emil Fackenheim took this relationship to be deep and important, not only for Judaism but indeed as well for all of Western civilization and culture.³ For Levinas, Judaism and Jewish thought

¹ For the former, one might think of Nachman Krochmal, Ludwig Steinheim, and Samuel Hirsch; for both, I am thinking of Hermann Cohen.
² Hegel is rare in how seriously he takes Judaism; Jean Paul Sartre, in later life, admitted how inadequate was his appreciation of Judaism in Anti-Semite and Jew. Heidegger’s failures are too well known to do more than call to mind.
contained a core of teaching, an understanding of the fundamentally ethical character of social existence, that was hidden from Greek and Western civilization and that needed to be recovered or disclosed. Hence, to him, philosophy and Jewish philosophy were not different enterprises, in a sense. Rather, traditional philosophy was part of a world that needed to recall its roots, so to speak, and in this regard Western philosophy and Jewish philosophy did not differ. All philosophy needed to be refashioned to see its way to a new understanding of human existence and its ethical foundations; all philosophy needed a new first philosophy.

1. Philosophy and the Holocaust

In the twentieth century, an especially important barometer of this complex relationship has been the way philosophy in general and Jewish philosophy in particular have dealt with and responded to the Nazi genocide, the Holocaust, and the death camps. Here we see some large problems come into focus regarding philosophy and evil, philosophy and politics, and philosophy and history itself. Moreover, here, in the case of a genocide in which anti-Semitism and the ideological commitment to annihilate Jews and Judaism were arguably so central, we can see what Judaism thus might have to contribute to philosophy and at what cost philosophy itself ignores or rejects Jewish particularity. These are issues that pervade all modern engagements between Judaism and philosophy; they arise with powerful effect in this case.

At the Eastern Meetings of the American Philosophical Association, held in December of 1984 in Washington, D.C., there was a symposium on the theme “Philosophy and the Holocaust.” The featured speaker was Emil Fackenheim, and the respondent was Berel Lang. At that time Fackenheim was the most important living North American philosopher to have dealt with the Holocaust; his work was then viewed—and still is now—as primarily theological,


but it was extensive and important, including God’s Presence in History, Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy, The Jewish Return Into History, and then most recently To Mend the World.\(^5\) Lang was producing essays on the Holocaust that would ultimately become Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide in 1990.\(^6\) There was some interest among North American philosophers in the Holocaust, the Nazi genocide, and the death camps, but not much. Fackenheim himself began his talk with the remark that by and large philosophers had ignored Auschwitz.

In a certain way and to a certain degree, the interest in the Holocaust by American philosophers has changed. Recent books on evil include discussion of it—e.g., those by Richard J. Bernstein, Susan Neiman, and Claudia Card.\(^7\) There have been several books that deal with Auschwitz by historians, literary critics, social theorists, and others, e.g., Dominic LaCapra and Eric Santner.\(^8\) Anthologies have appeared with essays by philosophers and other intellectuals, and Lang himself has published three books, in addition to his book of 1990 and two anthologies.\(^9\) One must, of course, add to


\(^{9}\) The first anthology of work by philosophers, I think, was Alan Rosenberg and Gerald E. Myers, eds., Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); see also Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, eds., Postmodernism and the Holocaust (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998). Saul
this volume of work many journal articles and, most of all, the influence of European philosophers, whose work, since the 1970s, has had an increasing impact on philosophy in North America: Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Emmanuel Levinas, and more recently Giorgio Agamben, as well as the older but frequently discussed work of Theodor W. Adorno. There has been a great deal of discussion by literary critics and theorists of Auschwitz and its relation to poetry, fiction, testimony, memory, and much else, coming under the influence of these philosophers. At least some of this, furthermore, deals with the “Heidegger question” and with the relations among philosophy, political theory, literature, art and representation, and the Holocaust.

This change of interest has not been dramatic or dominant, but it is significant in part because it largely followed the change of

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An essay on philosophy and the Holocaust in Lang, ed., Post-Holocaust, can still lament the lack of philosophical attention and say that the contribution of “professional” philosophers has been minimal and sparse, and that even when philosophical issues have been raised by historians or literary scholars, the lack of a philosophical voice has been felt. Lang provides a very strange list of philosophers who have made some contribution or are cited: Theodor W. Adorno, Giorgio Agamben, Zvi Bar-On, Emil Fackenheim, Jürgen Habermas, Philip Hallie, Hans Jonas, Steven Katz, Sarah Kofman, Emmanuel Levinas, Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, Gillian Rose, Joan Ringelheim, Nathan Rotenstreich, John Roth, Leo Strauss, Lawrence Thomas, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, and Michael Zimmerman, as well as Lang himself. On the Heidegger question, he mentions Richard Rorty, Tom Rockmore, and Hans Sluga; Victor Farias, Jean-François Lyotard, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. He does refer to a “short list” or canon: Adorno, Arendt, Fackenheim, and Habermas. These names he cites as evidence of the marginality of the theme in professional philosophy. I withhold comment on the lists, which strike me as bizarre—a strange collection of the profound, the odd, and even the silly. It is significant, for example, that none of the most significant moral and political philosophers in the Anglo-American world—e.g., John Rawls, Bernard Williams, Thomas Nagel, Ronald Dworkin, and Joseph Raz—have ever written on the Holocaust. This is evident, even though Susan Neiman, in Evil in Modern Thought, near the end of the book, tries to claim that John Rawls does. She rightfully has some things to say about Arendt and Jean Améry. One might say,
the role of so-called continental philosophy in philosophical discussion in Anglo-American circles and especially the change marked by the impact of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Levinas, and others. French philosophy—and philosophy in Europe generally—has been very concerned about the notions of rupture, disruption, and destruction, and much attention has been given to the grip that systems of thought—naturalist, rationalist, and much else—have had over our thinking and our lives. One can see, then, why the Holocaust and in particular the death camps and what they represent might be viewed as a significant moment of such rupture or break. These themes have penetrated Western, Anglo-American philosophical circles, but only to a very modest degree.

Let me put the matter this way: one of the central themes of continental philosophy since Heidegger is the so-called “end of philosophy” and the questions of what philosophy ought to be doing and whether traditional Western philosophy has not come to an end or reached its limit. There are definitely moments in so-called analytic or Anglo-American philosophy that take these issues seriously, especially issues about the limits of thought and language, the question of what philosophy has been and what it might now be, the issue of the historicity of philosophy and its changing character, and the question of whether philosophy ought not to give way to something else, perhaps, as Rorty would have it, to literature. One certainly thinks of the later Ludwig Wittgenstein in this regard, and, among more recent philosophers, of Alasdaire MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam and Stanley Cavell.

On the other hand, much Anglo-American or English speaking philosophy (throughout the world in fact) still conceives of itself as a close associate of scientific inquiry and takes its projects to be concerned with taking science seriously and building links from science to other domains of our lives—from metaphysics and the

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justifiably, that Arendt is the single figure who has been most exploited as a “bridge” between the Holocaust and some modern philosophers. It is Arendt, Levinas, and Hans Jonas, for example, who provide Richard Bernstein with this link.

11 For a good paper that focuses on Fackenheim and Foucault and the notion of rupture, see John McCumber, “The Holocaust as Master Rupture: Foucault, Fackenheim, and ‘Postmodernity,’” in Milchman and Rosenberg, eds., Postmodernism and the Holocaust, 239–264.
nature of knowledge to ethics and politics. If there is a reigning paradigm in much Anglo-American philosophy these days, it is either naturalistic or some modified version or variation of naturalism. That is, either the foundation of philosophical inquiry is science and physical nature as understood by the sciences, or philosophy is grounded in an appreciation of social, cultural, and historical developments and features that are still ultimately understood by the sciences. In such cases, given this paradigm, atrocities and horrific events are somehow to be understood within the framework of our naturalist or historical or psychological understandings of ourselves and of political and historical reality.

The very way that philosophy might approach Auschwitz and the Holocaust, then, depends at least to some degree upon how philosophy understands itself and what it takes itself to be doing. While it is certainly too simple to put it this way, one might say that among those philosophers who do in fact consider Auschwitz, there are philosophers who take the Holocaust as a moment in which Western culture in general and Western philosophy in particular have been ruptured or broken, leaving us with the question of how one ought to live and think thereafter, and there are other philosophers who approach the Holocaust in order to see how, in what ways, and to what degree that event and its constituent features (its programs, policies, agents, motives, and so forth) can be understood within the framework of our moral theories or our political theories or our metaphysical theories, etc. Another possibility, of course, is that there are philosophers who start out asking the latter types of questions but find themselves, through an honest and probing exposure to the horrors of the Nazi regime and its practices, driven to admit that Auschwitz “shatters” or “fractures” our thinking and leaves us in a “new world,” so to speak. Even if they diverge eventually, then, these two styles of philosophical thinking might share the attempt to understand Nazism, the death camps, and the Nazi atrocities insofar as they are manifestations of evil, and to say what that evil consists in.

One way of putting my point thus far is to say that while we have some understanding of what we all agree the Holocaust is—that it was the systematic attempt in Germany, between 1933 and 1945, by technological means, mobilizing an entire society, and by governmental edict, to dehumanize and exterminate first Jews and then other target populations, we are much less clear about what
we mean by philosophy. During the past twenty-five years or so in North America (and probably in most of the world), philosophy can be divided into two traditions or two ways of exploring philosophical questions. Both can claim to be developments of the traditions of Western philosophy. One takes philosophy to be an extension of science and its associate; here philosophy is about arriving at theories, comprehensive ones or deep ones that underpin science and are compatible with it, and trying to understand the world, human knowledge, human life, and much else. The other tradition takes the world and human experience of it to be intriguing, changing, multifaceted, and surprising, and it sees philosophy itself as one among many ways that human beings have understood and do understand the world, live in it, deal with it, and with each other. The latter view is much more inclined to take the Holocaust as one indication among others that the old philosophical tradition has been broken, has become dysfunctional, is misguided, and can no longer—if ever it really could—help us to live rich and fulfilling human lives. The former view, on the other hand, assumes that the Holocaust is like any other historical or empirical event that may be challenging but that eventually can be understood and hence dealt with using accepted techniques of examination, explanation, and clarification.

Another way of conceptualizing this distinction between ways of understanding philosophy is this. Much of Western philosophy, at least through René Descartes and Giambattista Vico and much of it thereafter, has been conducted from the point of view of a disembodied, detached intellect, or a philosophical point of view, what Thomas Nagel has dubbed the “view from nowhere.” It is the same point of view from which scientific inquiry and much theological thought originates. It abstracts from personal interests and attitudes in order to give the thinker a pure approach to its subject of inquiry or examination, the subject that it seeks to know. At best, along the way, such philosophy accommodates various pieces of evidence or various problems that arise when persons “descend” to the point of view of the experiencing subject, but it then returns to its lofty perspective in order to encompass and incorporate that evidence and that issue into the detached, impersonal system of thought. One can take Plato’s discovery of the Forms and his epistemological views as an early, perhaps the earliest attempt to locate and canonize this perspective (although some might credit Parmenides with its original authorship). Much of Western philosophy,
from Plato and Aristotle to Plotinus, Aquinas, Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel, represent powerful examples of how systematic and comprehensive thinking from this detached and impersonal point of view must go.

With the growth of German Idealism after Kant and the rise of Romanticism, there emerges in powerful forms an alternative style of philosophy, according to which philosophical thinking must be conducted not as a detached and impersonal “view from nowhere” but rather as an embodied and historically situated view from somewhere, in particular from the point of view of the experiencing “I” or self. This view, subjectivist and historicist, is represented best by Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, by social theorists like Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Simmel, among others, and then by figures like Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Heidegger. The idea here was to begin with the way the “I” experienced the world around it and to clarify and understand how that experience worked, as hermeneutical and constructive and responsive, and so forth.

The kind of philosophy that I earlier characterized as akin to science holds firmly to the ultimate centrality of the “view from nowhere” as the controlling standpoint for doing philosophy. The other kind of philosophy, the historical kind, just as vigorously holds to the inescapability of the first person point of view, and in fact to the idea that there simply is no other point of view, that the “view from nowhere” or the objective point of view is an abstraction or a construction. To be sure, there are philosophers whom I would call “scientific” in some broad sense who do think that embodied agency and situated historical engagement are unavoidable and central to understanding human experience. So the earlier distinction is not an exact match with this new one. But there is a rough match, and it does tell us something about how the two styles of philosophy might deal with challenging historical events, one by seeking to assimilate them into overall, objective systems of thought—economic, political, and psychological—the other by their willingness to see such events as outstripping, in the way they are experienced, the languages and the systems that we have developed and that we largely employ. Particularly in cases like Levinas and Fackenheim, I think, this first-person perspective and what it discloses is crucial.

12 E.g., Donald Davidson and John McDowell.
to understanding why they think that the Holocaust challenges us in new and transforming ways.

Of the relatively few important attempts by philosophers to confront Auschwitz and the death camps, the most prominent ones are grounded in continental philosophy and the historicity of philosophy and indeed all human existence. This is true both of older attempts, like those of Hannah Arendt and Theodor W. Adorno, and of more recent ones like those of Emil Fackenheim, Emmanuel Levinas, Giorgio Agamben, and Berel Lang. But while these figures may represent highpoints in the encounter between Auschwitz and philosophy, they are not alone.

Many twentieth-century philosophers whose roots are in the European traditions adhere to a history of Western civilization that takes the period from World War I through World War II, a period of war and totalitarian regimes, as marking a crisis in the modern world.13 History has brought us to a point where science, rationality, our social and political sensibilities, our economic and technological developments and attitudes, and so forth have reached a nadir. Western culture, rational and powerful, has produced catastrophic results: political and technological efficiency made to serve the purposes of dehumanization and destruction.14 We find views like this in the Critical School, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in Georg Lukács, Martin Heidegger, Herbert Marcuse, and, I think, in Hannah Arendt, and if one reads the history of Western civilization and culture this way—as a culture of oppression of minorities, of

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13 What constituted this crisis, what crisis meant, is of course a complicated matter. In his dissertation on Heidegger’s early Freiburg period, 1919–1923, Ingo Farin has discussed what Heidegger meant by crisis, what figures like Karl Jaspers and Georg Simmel meant, what crisis theology was for someone like Karl Barth, and what Hans D. Sluga, in his book Heidegger’s Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) takes crisis to have meant in the immediate postwar period. The vocabulary of “crisis” was not invented by Simmel, but his notion of a “crisis of spirit” was influential. What many, if not all, of these thinkers shared was a sense of having reached a decisive dividing point, when the overarching values and institutions of Western civilization since the seventeenth century, and possibly long before, had reached a moment when they had produced objectionable and even horrific outcomes, so that the old “epoch” had in fact come to an end and something new was on the horizon. Guidance about how the “new” should take shape was needed.

women, of various aspects of our humanity, and of third-world cultures—then the Holocaust can easily be appropriated as an expression or even the most powerful expression of this decline.

Anglo-American philosophy has avoided such grand historicism and such speculative views with a stern sense of Kantian-style self-limitation, and hence if its practitioners ever did turn or were to turn to the Nazi atrocities, it would be as extreme but normal expressions of morally and politically heinous behavior. In Western rational theology and rational philosophical thinking, evil or acts of moral turpitude and cases of extreme suffering, often innocent suffering, are approached in order to see how they can be made to fit our metaphysical, ethical, and theological systems. In theological terms, the word for such efforts to place innocent suffering and evil within such rational systems is “theodicy,” and in recent discussions of this strategy by some continental figures this term has been extended from strictly theological systems to all rational systems and indeed to any attempt to explain, understand, and thereby become reconciled to such phenomena.

2. Hannah Arendt and the Death Camps

To begin, let me turn to Hannah Arendt, who surely was among the first to think seriously about Nazism and the death camps, to ask what was characteristic of them and what they meant, and to place them within a larger account of the history of modern Western culture.15 Hers is a typical kind of German historiography, anything

15 Arendt studied with Heidegger and worked with Karl Jaspers. Her husband Heinrich Blücher was a Marxist and socialist. During the years from 1945 to 1950, when they worked together on her account of modern totalitarianism, it was an effort to identify and articulate the details of such a history of modern culture and of its decline. Arendt, in the preface to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951) put it this way: “Two world wars in one generation, separated by an uninterrupted chain of local wars and revolutions, followed by no peace treaty for the vanquished and no respite for the victor, have ended in the anticipation of a third World War between the two remaining world powers. This moment of anticipation is like the calm that settles after all hopes have died …. On the level of historical insight and political thought there prevails an ill-defined, general agreement that the essential structure of all civilizations is at the breaking point. … This book has been written against a background of both reckless optimism and reckless despair” (vii).
but an empirical one seeking explanations of a narrowly causal kind. What Arendt was looking for were the features of that large design that took shape and became dominant and then, by their unique concatenation, became modern totalitarianism with all its horrific capabilities, what she calls “an absolute evil.” Arendt did not come to Nazism and its horrific policies as a curious and open, empirical investigator. She came with a view about totalitarian regimes, about the decline of Western civilization and hence of modernity, and about the kind of themes she was looking for to characterize that decline and elucidate her understanding of it.

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16 Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, viii–ix: an evil that is “absolute because it can no longer be deduced from humanly comprehensible motives” and that, she says, reveals the “truly radical nature of Evil.”

17 The examination of the Holocaust and the Nazi death camps by the Italian philosopher and intellectual Giorgio Agamben is similar in some ways to that of Arendt. Agamben places the Nazi death camps within an account of modern political life and the crisis of political culture in the twentieth century. The crucial texts are his book, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), originally published in 1995; and the essay “What Is a Camp?” in idem, Means Without End: Notes on Politics (1996; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 37–44; the essay was first published in 1994. Like Arendt, Agamben claims that the camps are paradigms of modern political life and for this reason exemplify the risks and the plight of our world. With respect to the agents of the atrocities and the central institution, the camps, Agamben’s basic claim is drawn from Carl Schmitt, that sovereign political power is exemplified in the capacity to act contrary to law by creating a state of exception. He takes the camps—concentration camps, the death camps, and subsequent episodes that are their legacy—as a unique outcome of such sovereign power, exceptional places that do not remain exceptional. “The camp is the space that opens up when the state of exception starts to become the rule” (Agamben, “What Is a Camp?” 39). As Agamben remarks, the camp is the place where “the state of exception is permanently realized.” He associates this observation about the degree or extent of sovereign power and the camp as its locus with a famous point that Arendt had made in the final section of The Origins of Totalitarianism about the essence of totalitarian domination, that it is only in the camps (concentration and death camps) that the central principle of totalitarianism is verified, the principle that everything is possible (Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, 40). On the one hand, then, for Agamben the phenomenon which he calls the “camp” is the essence of Nazi totalitarianism, the paradigmatic creation of modern politics, and hence the nemesis of contemporary politics and contemporary life. He does not claim that the Nazi death camps were the first such camps, but he does claim they are paradigmatic, and he proposes that they marked a turning point, so that once this phenomenon of permanent exceptionality and unbounded sovereign power was realized there, it has subsequently manifested itself in a host of places in our world that we can also call “camps.” These include, for example, “the soccer stadium in Bari in which the Italian police temporarily herded Albanian illegal immigrants in 1991 before sending them back to their country,” and the ethnic rape camps in the territories of the former Yugoslavia (Agamben, “What Is a Camp?” 42; Homo Sacer, 174, 176).
Let me focus on her major claims about what she calls “absolute or radical evil.” What does Arendt say about the perpetrators, the victims, and the death camps, the central institution of totalitarian domination and terror?18

First, who were the agents of the Nazi persecutions and the annihilations in the death camps? This may be the most famous moment in Arendt’s thinking about the Holocaust and the death camps, since it emerges most provocatively in her later reports on Adolph Eichmann, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. In this work of 1963, Arendt sees certain characteristics in Eichmann that identify him to her as a typical bureaucrat and hence as a person who carried out heinous acts, as she puts it, without thinking, thoughtlessly. Clearly, Eichmann is not the only type of perpetrator, but for Arendt, by 1963, he represented the most typical kind of agent, one who takes ordinary managerial and organizational skills, modes of instrumental reasoning, employed as part of a career of activities motivated by the desire to secure and maintain a good position, to be commended and promoted, to secure one’s income and pension, and so forth, and transports them—without questioning and without thought—to an extraordinary sphere in which they are employed to carry out horrific programs and policies. As Arendt saw him, Eichmann was a man in a business suit, ordinary and in no way noteworthy; he did not perform his duties out of malice or out of evil designs. He performed them for normal, practical, self-interested reasons. Hence, the evil here was not deep; it was not the motive or reason for Eichmann’s actions. It was, in a sense, accidental to Eichmann’s performance at work, not the essence of it. He did not do evil for evil’s sake; he performed his job with prudential motives and the horrific outcomes simply “fell out” as if unintended.

There are a few things to be said about this account. First, by 1963 it is grounded in a view of what counts as genuine human conduct, according to which that conduct is the outcome of rational deliberation and thought; Arendt’s thinking about the ideal human life is Aristotelian and Kantian in this respect, that it features

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rationality and reflection. What Eichmann exemplifies is what happens when the rationality of everyday practical affairs is undercut, when the connection between rational deliberation and one’s decisions and actions is interrupted and the decisions and actions are done, as it were, thoughtlessly, which certainly means not without any thought but rather without the right kind of thought, that is, rational thought about what is good and right. In this sense, Eichmann and all those whom he represents are prudential machines and not real persons.

Second, in this respect Eichmann is a creation of the overwhelming employment of modern techniques of organization and production, which detach thought from action and embrace vast portions of modern daily life with mechanical, thoughtless activity, in the service of any goals set by the system or those who construct the system. Here Arendt’s conception of the typical agent of modern technological society resonates with Heidegger’s treatment of “Das Man” in Being and Time. Third, this view Arendt already held in the 1940s, when she was writing The Origins of Totalitarianism. It is articulated in an early essay of 1946 entitled “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility” which was later incorporated into The Origins of Totalitarianism in its final chapter.19 That is, although her terminology changes—what she called “radical or absolute evil” in the earlier period, she later came to call “banal”—the concepts are the same.

Finally, this typical agent—what she called earlier the “new criminal of the twentieth century”—is not the only agent of the Nazi atrocities and totalitarian regimes. It is the most representative, to be sure, and perhaps the most terrifying, on her view, but it is not the only type of agent. In the earlier period, she was explicit about this: this typical “bourgeois” was not a Bohemian like Joseph Goebbels nor a “sex criminal” like Julius Streicher nor a “perverted fanatic” like Hitler nor an “adventurer” like Hermann Goering. In short, Arendt does not deny that there are many agents and in particular a primary or orienting agency, like Hitler’s, but what is

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really characteristic of totalitarian horror and domination is this other kind, which is a product of modern technological society.

If these bureaucrats are the typical criminals, who are the typical victims? This is our second question. In an article in Partisan Review in 1948, Arendt gives an analysis that she repeats in the final pages of The Origins of Totalitarianism. “The insane mass manufacture of corpses is preceded by the historically and politically intelligible preparation of living corpses.”20 Here Arendt calls these paradigmatic victims, the ultimate product of the death camps, “living corpses.” Elsewhere she describes it as “the reduction of man to a bundle of reactions” and says that “the inmates, even if they happened to keep alive, are more effectively cut off from the world of the living than if they had died.”21 This outcome is the goal of the camps and of totalitarian regimes themselves, to experiment and transform human nature itself, turning human beings into things, inanimate men.22 Arendt explores how this transformation occurs in the camps, as a three-stage process that eradicates, one after another, the juridical character, moral personality, and unique identity of each inmate, creating in the end what she calls “superfluous persons.” But the point is that the typical victim for Arendt is not every inmate, to be sure, but the type of inmate that the system is conceived to create—the living dead, as it were, what Primo Levi would describe so powerfully and influentially as those who lie on the bottom, the Muselmänner.

Finally, then, what are these death camps? What role do they play in totalitarian regimes? What is their central animating principle? What is the crime of totalitarian domination?23 The goal of the death camps is to produce, as Arendt puts it, “superfluous persons.” These are the living corpses, whose character and personality is shown to be superfluous or useless. But why do the camps seek this goal? They do so as the central institutions of totalitarian regimes, whose goal is unbounded expansiveness, or what Arendt calls “total domination.” This is the heart of the crime of Nazism (and of Stalinism),

21 Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, 443.
22 See Morgan, Beyond Auschwitz, 15–17.
23 See ibid., 14–17.
that it seeks to “dominate” or “negate” everything, and that means, in the end, to negate even the human while keeping it alive, to create living corpses. This goal, to dominate without restriction or limit, is what makes totalitarian regimes and the death camps that are their central institutions such unprecedented phenomena. According to Arendt, never before have nations sought to achieve this goal, to show that everything is possible, everything, without any kind of limit or boundary. It is this singlemindedness that directed even the most ordinary people to do what no state and no people had ever done before, to act normally in behalf of such an ideal, which meant experimenting on human beings and transforming them into something that the world had never before seen. If Arendt’s account of Western society and culture and its history is correct, and if her characterization of totalitarianism and the death camps is also correct, then we have indeed seen something new and unprecedented, and there is no turning back.

Arendt was a philosopher and a political philosopher. Her encounter with Nazism and the death camps produced at least these results that we have reviewed. If her account is illuminating, it is because it helps us to see what went on in those years and in those places and what role those events play in our understanding of our history and our civilization. This is more than historiography would tell us. It is a different kind of account. It may seem to be telling us why certain things happened, but more accurately it is telling us what happened and how to see what went on. Arendt gives us a conceptual apparatus to configure events and institutions and persons so that we now understand what has happened and where we stand in terms of them and what preceded them in our history. These are, one might argue, gains in insight and awareness, gains in self-understanding and in our grasp of evil, politics, and human conduct, and hence of our place in the world and in the history of Western society. In short, Arendt’s kind of philosophical reflection helps us to place ourselves in the world. She sees a decline and describes, for us who live on the other side of it, how to understand what we might do to respond to it.
Emil Fackenheim and Responding to Radical Evil

If Hannah Arendt was consumed by the passion to grasp what totalitarianism was and what it had done, Emil Fackenheim was driven to ask how we who live after it, we survivors and quasi-survivors, Jews and non-Jews, can honestly and seriously face the event and still go on. In terms Fackenheim never used, his task was to unite memory with hope. For Fackenheim, going on is necessary and possible only once we have honestly exposed ourselves, our beliefs, our traditions and culture, all that is ours, to the horrors of “Planet Auschwitz” and determined what that exposure means and precisely how to live thereafter. We could ignore Auschwitz, and many find all kinds of strategies to do just that, but even ignoring Auschwitz or diminishing it is a mode of responding to it; it is there, a black hole in our memory, a dark midnight of the soul, and truly there is no avoiding it. Given what it was and the threats it poses to all we believe and understand, how indeed can we go on? These are the issues that for nearly four decades gripped Fackenheim, as a philosopher and as a Jewish thinker.

Fackenheim articulated his views about Auschwitz and the future from the point of view of a Jewish theologian seeking to understand what had happened to the Jewish people and how its past could be recovered for the future. He then tried to show how his account had implications for others who should face Auschwitz and still seek to go on into the future: Christians, Germans, historians and scholars, Americans and other bystanders, and more. For our purposes, I want to try to extract from his thinking what we might call its philosophical core, what he thinks exposure to Auschwitz involves and how we should understand the necessity and possibility of going on.

Fackenheim’s first step is, as an intellectual—a religious thinker, philosopher, psychologist, historian, whatever—to confront the events of the Nazi persecution and the death camps honestly and note the outcome. Here Fackenheim begins with systems of thought and asks how well they are capable of assimilating, i.e., incorporating and comprehending, the events of those dark years. Friedrich W. Schelling, Sören Kierkegaard, and Franz Rosenzweig had charged Hegel and the tradition of systematic philosophy with failing to incorporate the concrete, flesh-and-blood individual and the particularity of the Infinite and hence the immediacy of the relation between the finite and the Infinite. Fackenheim does in fact agree with this
tradition and its charge against the totality of the Hegelian system, but he adds to it a special charge: if Hegel lived today, after the dread events of Auschwitz, he would not have been a Hegelian. He would, that is, have realized that the evil of those years was radical, evil for its own sake, unprecedented, a world of horror that stuns our intellectual capacities. Even the Hegelian system, comprehensive as it is, cannot incorporate it.

What I think Fackenheim means here is this: as intellectuals, our normal response to historical events, even enormous atrocities, is to understand them within our systems of thought; we seek to explain why the agents did what they did, what happened to the victims, and why the institutions were developed and sustained. We seek religious explanations in some cases, and in others we seek historical explanations, psychological or economic or political ones. In this case, Fackenheim claims, the more and more thorough our research, the more we uncover, the more details we unearth, the less we know and the more perplexed we are. Our intellectual scruples and sense of surprise, our intellectual probity, ought to prevent us from being satisfied with what we understand; it is never enough to uncover and clarify the evil itself. It is in this sense, Fackenheim argued, that the Holocaust demands our attention and yet foils our satisfaction. Over a period Fackenheim sought evidence of how noted historians admitted the inadequacy of their understanding and he identified episodes that seem to defy our understanding, but there is nothing decisive in his results, I think. Much will depend on how easily one is persuaded by historical, psychological, and political accounts, how resistant one is to find easy explanations, and ultimately how serious one is about this particular event and how much one feels that indebtedness to its victims forbids easy satisfaction. Thus Fackenheim’s argument that thought ought to feel inadequate in the face of Auschwitz is not going to convince everyone. But it is powerful. In terms Fackenheim does not use, what he argues is that the Holocaust is an event that defies the “temptation of theodicy,” the temptation to respond to this evil by taking sanctuary in some kind of totalizing, satisfying rational explanation.

Facing up to Auschwitz, then, immobilizes us in a sense, or at least it does not allow us to cope with it by classifying it along with other atrocities and setting it aside, or by being satisfied with our having understood why it occurred. But, as Fackenheim regularly points out, it is at this point that “thought must go to school with
life.” In our lives, we must respond to this past; we cannot step into the future without first remembering this past. But if the past immobilizes us intellectually, how do we do what we must do? What thought cannot provide, he says, life already has. During the event and afterwards, some people recognized the assault for what it was and yet opposed it. We can look at what they did and what they are doing, and we can think hard about what kind of action such opposition is. Fackenheim reasons that an uncompromising opposition to the evil persecution and the continued commitment of people to go on, knowing full well what that might mean and the risks it involves, must be understood—by us— not as a matter of whim or nostalgia, but rather as a response to an imperative, as a duty or moral necessity. For us who live after, then, to face Auschwitz is a necessity, and also to go on in spite of it is a necessity.

Moreover, this imperative expresses a duty to oppose Nazi purposes; if the evil was radical, then to oppose it must be radical and is not to simplify or belittle our lives but to ennoble them. In the context of his Jewish thinking, Fackenheim gives this imperative of opposition a very precise character: he calls it a “614th commandment, not to give Hitler any posthumous victories.”24 We need not go into all the complications that this formula involves. But one point is worth making. Fackenheim does not think that for everyone this imperative is grounded in some kind of divine command. Not by any means. Rather, his point is that minimally anyone honest about Auschwitz will acknowledge the necessity or duty of opposing Nazi purposes and evil, e.g., by committing oneself to serving the purposes of human dignity and a sense of care for others, for justice and generosity. Not all will agree about where that norm or principle gets its moral force; some will be aware of the imperative only, without any understanding of where it comes from, so to speak. But the point is that after Auschwitz, human life—the life of Jews, Christians, Germans, and others—operates under this imperative or ought to, and it is up to us to determine what that means in practice and how to perform it in our lives. Hence, the authentic human relationship with Auschwitz for those who live after it involves an ethic of opposition and not the cognitive stance of a mind seeking to understand an object of inquiry.

Much of this line of thought was in place by 1970 if not earlier. But in one very important respect, Fackenheim added something in his magnum opus To Mend the World, published in 1982. In that work, every aspect of his thinking was deepened. But in one respect he attempted to solve a problem that his earlier work had left unsolved. Fackenheim’s earlier work focused on the unavoidability of facing up to Auschwitz with seriousness and honesty and on the necessity of responding to it, of going on in terms of that encounter with it. Increasingly Fackenheim thought about the victims and about those whom Primo Levi called the characteristic figures in the death camps, the Muselmänner. He asked himself what justification we have to think that we can in fact respond to and oppose such evil. If the evil was that extreme, that radical, then surely opposing it and resisting it cannot be easy, and if there were many who succumbed, surely one does not want to demean them. In his earlier writings, Fackenheim had relied upon the Kantian claim that ought implies can, that the existence of a moral duty for all persons entailed their having the freedom to perform it. For Kant, this was virtually an analytic truth about the moral law itself. Or, in religious terms, Fackenheim had thought, one could claim that if the imperative were indeed a divine command, then out of love God had given us human freedom along with the command. Eventually, however, Fackenheim came to see both responses as too glib; he had made it easy for himself and in so doing he had demeaned the victims whose failure to resist suggests either a reprehensible choice or an inability to choose. Neither is satisfactory. Hence, in the central sections of the central chapter of To Mend the World, Fackenheim attempts a dialectical account of the evil of the perpetrators and the suffering of the victims that arrives at a moment of recognition that points to the radical evil of “Planet Auschwitz” as a “whole of horror.” But that recognition, as total and negative and utterly horrifying, cannot simply be the object of some cognitive act, an act of recognition. It must be an act of apprehension that is, at the very same time, an act of opposition—not an awareness of the need to oppose but an act of opposing, of resistance. And once Fackenheim’s philosophical, phenomenological, and dialectical account has arrived at this moment, he turns to find confirmation for it—that there did indeed exist in the camps a case of transparent understanding that was at the same time a moment of resisting action, and he finds it in the testimony of Pelagia Lewinska, a Polish noblewoman,
who testifies to her experience in Auschwitz. We need not explore further Fackenheim’s account or objections to it. The point is that in this case, elucidated through his own philosophical reflection, Fackenheim identifies what he calls an ontological ground of resistance. Resistance is possible for us here and now because it was, at least in this one case, actual then and there.

This ground makes possible, in one sense, the knowing-resistance of those who live after—of us today. To understand that recognition of absolute rupture and the qualified recovery that is the response to it, however, one must turn away, Fackenheim argues, from philosophy, which has no such concept, to Judaism. There one finds just that concept in the Kabbalistic notion of tikkun olam (mending of the world), a mending that is possible despite the cosmic rupture to which it is a response. Hence, for philosophy to continue after the Holocaust, for it to grasp the whole of horror in an act of resistance and opposition, it needs Judaism and this wholly novel concept.

Fackenheim does, on many occasions, use Hegelian language, referring to the Holocaust as an “epoch-making” event. In so doing he implies that our lives and our thought are historical through and through. Auschwitz does mark a momentous event in the history of Western civilization and of the world; something transforming has occurred. But unlike Arendt, Fackenheim’s thinking is not driven by this thought. Rather, that Auschwitz is “epoch-making” emerges as an outcome from the exposure of thought to it; Fackenheim shows little interest in any particular indictment of Western society, bureaucratic rationality, and so forth. Much contributed to Auschwitz, and we ought to be concerned to prohibit such a reoccurrence, but he draws no particular conclusions about forms of government, social policies, political programs, or economic institutions.

25 The experience of Pelagia Lewinska, as she describes it in her memoir (Twelve Months of Auschwitz [New York: L. Stuart, 1968]), is Fackenheim’s paradigm, but he acknowledges other examples of such an act of recognition and opposition in the sections of the book on Jewish, Christian, and philosophical post-Holocaust life.

26 In his 1985 lecture on “The Holocaust and Philosophy”, Fackenheim began by pointing to three reasons why philosophy, at that time and as he saw it, had ignored the Holocaust: because philosophy dealt with universals, while the Holocaust was a particular historical event; because philosophy did not deal with Judaism; and because philosophy was by and large not concerned with negative events. He then went on to explore the uniqueness issue; the question who did it and why; the role of the Muselmänner; and the evil of Auschwitz. From the point of view of Fackenheim’s own
4. Emmanuel Levinas and the End of Theodicy

In his 1982 essay “Useless Suffering,” one of the few places where Emmanuel Levinas discusses the Holocaust directly, Levinas cites one philosopher, Emil Fackenheim, and while he does not agree with him completely, his respect is genuine and serious. Levinas is a philosopher, and his philosophical work involves an attempt to clarify what characterizes the primary relation we have to other persons or, in other words, to uncover the deepest meaning of social life. To him, that involves an inquiry that locates something about human social life that Heidegger and prior philosophy in the West has failed to appreciate. He identifies it, examines it, and seeks again and again to understand it in all its complexity and in the ways it is related to other aspects of our lives. What he claims is that our most “primordial” relation, each one of us to each and every other person, is a relation of responsibility; in each such engagement, the other person pleads with the self to acknowledge and care for it and demands of the self that it do so. Hence, normal everyday social life is a complex network of relationships and experiences, all of which are grounded in the infinite responsibility each of us has to and for each and every other person. To live in society is to act on this normative character of our social relations, to one degree or other, in one way or another, all the time.

What does this have to do with the Holocaust? How is this “philosophical” view of the human social condition in any way thinking about Auschwitz, all of these issues are raised when philosophy exposes itself to the Holocaust and seeks to understand it. What I have tried to argue is that the philosophical contribution of Fackenheim’s thinking and of Judaism only begins here and goes much further. He may not have seen it that way. Or, alternatively, he may have seen that as his philosophical contribution, but not as what traditional philosophy does when it encounters the Holocaust.

27 I have discussed Levinas’s account of the Holocaust and our lives after it in “Levinas, Suffering, and the Holocaust,” in The Representation of the Holocaust in Literature and Film, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (Williamsburg, VA: College of William and Mary, 2003), 73–90. Levinas discusses the Holocaust in “Loving the Torah More Than God,” in idem, Difficult Freedom, 142–145; idem, “Transcendence and Evil,” in idem, Collected Philosophical Papers (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 175–186; and “Useless Suffering,” in Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 91–101. Of course many have claimed that Levinas’s philosophical thought overall is a response to the Holocaust, and while that issue is connected to what he in fact says about Nazism and the death camps, the two issues are not one and the same.
JEWISH THOUGHT, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE HOLOCAUST 295

connected to the death camps and to Nazi atrocities? As I said, some believe that all of it is a response to Nazism, to Heideggerian relativism and historicism, and to the threat of nihilism that the Holocaust exposed as deep within us. That is, one might think that Levinas wanted to “refute” Nazi totalitarianism and all the fascisms and the horrors of the century, to show that they are aberrations or false to the human condition and not genuine expressions of it. This may be true, and there are reasons to think that it has at least some historical validity as a judgment about what motivated Levinas and what he thought his philosophy was ultimately able to accomplish.

But let me turn from this “speculative” matter to more concrete ones. What does Levinas actually say about the Holocaust? Is there any relationship between his understanding of the human social condition and Nazi fascism and the death camps? Here there is much to say. First, Levinas regularly groups the Holocaust together with a number of other mass atrocities of the twentieth century—World War I, Stalinism, Hiroshima, and Cambodia—and expresses his judgment that the twentieth century marked a genuine crisis of spirit, a crisis for Western and European culture and civilization. It marked a moment when justice, respect for human dignity, and responsibility of one for another, generosity and concern, were virtually annihilated; it marked a time when Western culture had sunk as deep as one could possible imagine. And among these events, while the Holocaust was not unique, it was certainly exemplary.

Furthermore, the Holocaust’s primary victim was the Jewish people, and this means that in a sense, the Holocaust is the epitome of anti-Semitism. If Auschwitz exemplifies the total failure of human responsibility and the suffering that is indicative of that failure, then in a sense all people are Jews and all suffer from anti-Semitism. The Holocaust represents all this. It was a world of suffering of unimaginable dimension and hence a world in which humankind abandoned others in the most dramatic way and to an extraordinary degree. If the Jewish people is the barometer of suffering and the failure of human responsibility, then the Holocaust marks the lowest imaginable reading on that barometer.

Even more, this extraordinary evil marks a further watershed. Levinas quotes from the third chapter of Fackenheim’s God’s Presence in History, that thought can find no meaning or purpose in the Holocaust. Levinas does not test this claim to any great extent.
But he does draw an important conclusion, that the Holocaust marks a moment he calls the “end of theodicy.” This is a philosophical claim of importance, but what does it mean? And what does it not mean? To begin with, what does Levinas mean by the term “theodicy”?

Often Levinas takes terms from the theological domain and transports them into the domain of ethics and philosophy in order to emphasize the “sanctity” or elevated status of the claim being made. This is one of those cases. In a narrow sense, a theodicy is a philosophical or theological attempt to justify divine justice in the face of innocent suffering and evil. In traditional natural theology, for example, God is the ground of natural order and of human conduct, in a certain sense. If so, and if God is omnipotent and benevolent, how is suffering from natural evils and disasters and from human evil possible? There are, of course, a host of strategies for dealing with such problems, insofar as they are intellectual or theological problems about sets of beliefs and concrete experience and their coherence. But for Levinas, while the sense of theodicy is rooted in such intellectual efforts, theodicy is not limited to them. It is, for him, a much broader or larger expression. For Levinas, a theodicy is any attempt to deal with suffering and evil by seeking to understand its place in a system of thought, whether that system is theological or not. We might put it this way: to engage in theodicy is to choose to cope or deal with suffering and evil by placing it with some high degree of intellectual satisfaction in an intellectual theory or pattern. It is to deal with suffering by explaining it. The Holocaust, he says, marks the “end of theodicy.” What does this mean?

On the one hand, it means that honest and serious intellectual engagement with the horrors and atrocities of these events leaves us unsatisfied; our theodicies or explanations do not work. They do not succeed. But this conclusion is of less significance than the fact that the suffering that people endured was extraordinary and that it occurred at human hands and also with others—persons, nations, the world—standing by and doing nothing or virtually nothing to stop it. In short, the Holocaust is indicative of the failure of people to come to the aid of others. It exposes, as it were, the “temptation of theodicy,” the lure that intellectualism has over us, so that we respond to oppression and suffering by justifying it or explaining or classifying it and so forth. The real point here is that what suffering demands of us is response in action, acceptance of the claim being made upon us by reaching out to help, to aid, to save—to
feed the hungry, cloth the naked, and defend the integrity of all who are oppressed. This, Levinas says, is what it means to take the Holocaust—and the century of atrocities it signifies—seriously and to understand what it means for us. In our own world, it tells us, to take responsibility for others is not to explain or justify suffering and horrific acts—psychologically, historically, politically, economically, or religiously; it is to reach out to those who suffer.

Levinas himself gives a phenomenological account of what suffering is, and in summary he says that it exceeds all our categories and concepts, is aimed at the one who suffers as an opposing force, and yet is that person’s possession, no matter how she tries to distance herself from it. This is the case with the suffering of each of us, with pain, trauma, and more. In and of itself, then, suffering has no use; it serves no purpose. It is purely bad or evil. Still, he says, we can alter our own suffering, the burden or pain we endure when we work and extend ourselves, if we turn our suffering into suffering for the other person’s suffering, and this is what compassion means. Hence, while intrinsically suffering is useless, we can make it useful; while it is of itself meaningless, we can make it meaningful. We can never make the other person’s suffering useful, but we can make our own useful, by making it the pain of extending oneself in another’s behalf and thereby making it compassion.

In the case of the Holocaust, of course, the victims are dead. The suffering in question is, on the one hand, a matter of memory, given to us in testimony and evidence. But there is, on the other hand, need all around us. We live today in a social situation with others who call upon us to acknowledge them, care for them, reduce their suffering, and deal justly with them. Hence, to respond to the Holocaust honestly and out of our sense of responsibility, we are called to turn our own labors into work for our contemporaries and into acts of generosity and justice for them. We honor the victims of the past by caring for the victims of the present. The challenge of living with others is not to justify or explain the other’s needs, but rather to extend a handful of bread to the hungry person who faces us. This is Levinas’s philosophical lesson, his ethical one, and his religious one, all wrapped into one demand. It is the lesson of the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud, of Jewish texts, and it is for us the lesson of Auschwitz, which exposes the degree to which human beings have abandoned one another.
Like Arendt, then, in part because of the indebtedness to Heidegger’s philosophy of history and modernity, Levinas sees the Holocaust and other atrocities as a watershed for modern Western society. At the same time, like Fackenheim he is deeply interested in how we respond to that event, to that moment of extraordinary suffering, and like him Levinas takes cognitive encounters to be temptations to avoid rather than confront the demons of Auschwitz. But unlike Fackenheim, his conception of responsibility is grounded in a philosophical understanding of the human condition that has universal qualities, for it is about a universal demand for compassion and kindness that characterizes all social existence. For Levinas, then, the Holocaust does show us something about philosophy as it was once conducted and about philosophy as he proposes to do it. And philosophy does encounter Auschwitz and expose our responsibilities as they emerge from that encounter and our lives today. But, finally, Levinas shares with Fackenheim the belief that philosophy needs Judaism to fulfill itself. No authentic understanding of the human condition can avoid engagement with Auschwitz and an openness to Judaism and Jewish ideas.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

“JEWISH LITERATURE” AND “WORLD LITERATURE”: WISSENSCHAFT DES JUDENTUMS AND ITS CONCEPT OF LITERATURE

ANDREAS B. KILCHER

The idea of “world literature,” which the elderly Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, based on Johann Gottfried Herder, defined between 1828 and 1829 in rudimentary formulations, dispersed in journals, diaries, letters, and conversations, soon turned out to be a far-reaching, most effective concept conceived as the very sum of Weimar classicism’s cosmopolitan humanism. The reception of this concept is well known: histories of world literature soon competed with the dominant genre of the history of national literature and opened perspectives on the interdependence of different literatures. Less known is the significance the concept of world literature gained for the further development of the idea of a “Jewish literature” in the nineteenth century. This can certainly be understood in the context of the Jewish reception of Goethe from Rahel Varnhagen to Ludwig Geiger. But while reference to Goethe was usually linked to a strong assimilatory inclination ultimately aiming at the abandonment of any particular Jewish perspective in culture and literature, in the nineteenth century, Goethe’s universalistic concept of world literature permitted, paradoxically, as it seems, the substantiation of the new notion of a specifically Jewish literature.

The Wissenschaft des Judentums, a discipline that emerged parallel to Goethe’s concept of a world literature, and, more precisely,
the establishment of Jewish literary studies by Leopold Zunz and Moritz Steinschneider as well as the creation of a Jewish literary history it inspired (from David Cassel to Gustav Karpeles, to name just the most important German examples), demonstrate that the concept of a specifically Jewish literature was forged, above all things, against the background of the model of world literature. It is symptomatic of this process that, just fifteen years after Goethe outlined his concept, the term “world literature” appeared (in 1845, as the first proof of its reception even before the famous passage in the 1848 “Communist Manifesto”) in those important essays in which Zunz substantiated the discipline of Jewish literary studies according to the paradigm of Wissenschaft des Judentums.3

It is this configuration of “Jewish literature” and “world literature” in the nineteenth century that will be explored in the following remarks. In terms of methodology, the representation has to be based on discourse analysis: it aims at discussing the philological as well as speculative patterns of argumentation that the Wissenschaft des Judentums employed when developing a differentiated view of “Jewish literature” or its agenda of “Jewish literary studies.” The first and most general (philosophical and political) element is the dialectics of universality and particularity. This is, as is well known, a theorem of the Haskalah which the Wissenschaft des Judentums transferred to literary studies, thus coming to new insights, as will be shown later on. Second, this general dialectics became more specific on the cultural level of language and literature, since it aimed at a decentralization of Hebrew literature as a strictly “national Jewish” language and literature by opening it toward a transcultural linguistic and literary concept. Third, this concept had historical and social implications that surpassed and transcended world literature in Goethe’s sense: it was accompanied by a diasporic theory that not only explained the transcultural character of Jewish writing by pointing to the Jews’ extraterritorial position, but made literature the medium of Jewish history in general. Literature, in other words, becomes the organ of transcultural communication in an extraterritorial history. As a consequence, Jewish literature, by virtue of its character as diaspora literature, becomes a paradigm of world literature.

It is important to analyze these three patterns of argumentation occurring in the establishment of secular Jewish literary studies by the Wissenschaft des Judentums as expressed in programmatic texts. As already indicated, I will focus on the German-Jewish philology of Wissenschaft des Judentums, i.e., mainly on Leopold Zunz, Moritz Steinschneider, David Cassel, and Gustav Karpeles, because these scholars first interpreted the older—theological and halakhic—paradigm of Jewish literature from a modern scientific perspective and radically extended it in terms of cultural politics. Furthermore, the analysis of this optimistic model of literature, developed in nineteenth-century Germany, raises the question concerning its reception and significance, i.e., more precisely, the question concerning its continuity and positive reinterpretation as well as the criticism it provoked—not only within but also outside of the realm of German “Wissenschaft,” i.e., in Hebrew, Yiddish, and English literary history. The analysis of the profile the Wissenschaft des Judentums developed in its own programmatic writings will, therefore, be followed by an additional analysis of the way it was perceived and criticized from outside its scholarly paradigm.

1. Dialectics of Universality and Particularity

The philosophical and political disposition of Jewish literature, to begin with the first pattern of argumentation, i.e., the dialectics of universality and particularity, can, according to Zunz and his successors, only be described with a paradox: the simultaneity of identity and otherness, of particularism and universalism. This is almost the logical precondition of a type of literature that reflects on its own assumptions, on the one hand, and its historical and cultural interconnections with the surrounding literatures, on the other. As a consequence, Zunz interpreted “Jewish literature” (which he, at first, called “rabbinic literature,” thus detaching it from “Hebrew literature”)⁴ not simply as a historical, particular phenomenon, but as a communicative, universal one, characterized by the interaction with other, or foreign elements. He first formulated this view in 1834 in an entry in the Brockhaus encyclopedia:

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The beginnings of Jewish literature that was rooted in the Hebrew [literature] … and soon adopted Persian religious ideas, Greek wisdom, and Roman law as well as late Arabic poetry and philosophy, and European scholarship, belonged to the same era that witnessed the transition from Hebraism to Judaism. … National and foreign wisdom, at that time, constituted an incessant development.\(^5\)

Zunz elaborated on this ten years later in his 1845 essay, “Die jüdische Literatur,” in which he more specifically defined this dialectical interconnection between the Self and the Other as the link between Jewish literature and those literatures he called “Gesammt-Literatur,”\(^6\) or “general literature,” later explicitly using the term “world literature” (\textit{Weltliteratur}): 

As such a historically peculiar phenomenon acknowledged by world history, the Jews are, in terms of ethnicity and confession, an entity whose direction is governed by unified laws rooted in the most distant antiquity and whose spiritual achievements are, after two thousand years, permeated by an indestructible fiber of life. This constitutes the right of existence and the justification of the peculiar character of a Jewish literature. It is however, also deeply interconnected with the culture of the ancient forerunners, the origin and development of Christianity, and the scholarly activity of the Middle Ages; by participating in the intellectual currents of the past and contemporary world, sharing its fights and sufferings, it becomes, at the same time, a complementary element of general literature, albeit with its own organism that, understood by general laws, helps to understand the universal. If you compare the totality of spiritual activity to the sea, one of the rivers that are bringing water to it is Jewish literature.\(^7\)

In this passage, Zunz explicated the agenda of a Jewish literature understood as a transcultural literature in a manner that pointed the way ahead for the \textit{Wissenschaft des Judentums}, or Jewish literary studies, until the emergence of Zionism, including the nationalization of Jewish culture it promoted. It is the model of a literature that is not defined by the famous “fence” around a Jewish tradition interpreted in terms of purely national literature, but by the idea of communication with the surrounding literatures, from Greek

\(^6\) Idem, “Die jüdische Literatur” (1845), 41.
\(^7\) Ibid., 42 (emphasis not in the original).
through Arabic and medieval Latin literature to modern European literature.

This mediation between particularity and universality in Jewish literature could also be substantiated in poetological terms. Zunz, at first, referred to Herder’s concept of “ethnic literature” (Volksliteratur). As is well known, Herder considered literature, on the basis of his concept of the “poetry of a nation,” as a nation’s characteristic self-expression; on the other hand, he understood the singular national poetry as the “sound” among the “voices of the nations,” i.e., as a link in an “invisible chain,” a part of the “pandemonium” of “humankind’s” literature in general. Goethe’s concept of world literature has a similar structure, its relationship to national literature being dialectical rather than antinomian. Goethe notes that the “nations” are not supposed to “share uniform thoughts” (überein denken), which means that world literature is not designed as a project aiming at uniformity; instead, the nations should “perceive and mutually understand each other.” The literary theory of Wissenschaft des Judentums is arguing along similar lines when assuming a dialectical simultaneity between Jewish particularity and general literary universality. Thus it rethinks a central theorem of the Haskalah, paradigmatically expressed in Moses Mendelssohn’s Jerusalem (1783), where the problematic logic of integration is dissolved by transferring universality to public and cultural life, while particularity is restricted to private and religious life. The concept of “Jewish literature” in the Wissenschaft des Judentums is revising this model in that it does not separate universality and particularity, attributing them to two different realms of life (public/private) but considers them linked to each other in a complex way in one and the same phenomenon, namely the transcultural system of literature.

The same argument was presented by Moritz Steinschneider in his article “Jüdische Literatur,” published in 1850 in the Allgemeine

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10 Cited in Fritz Strich, Goethe und die Weltliteratur (Bern: Francke, 1946), 370.
11 See, e.g., the separation of state and religion according to Moses Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, or, On Religious Power and Judaism, translated by Allan Arkush (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1983), 61–62.
Encyklopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste; in general, both Zunz and Steinschneider shared important concepts; both intended to apply the concept of Friedrich August Wolf’s und August Boeckh’s *Enzyklopädie der Philologie* on Judaism, and both planned the edition of an encyclopedia of Judaism.\(^\text{12}\) Steinschneider insisted that the transcultural disposition of Jewish literature posed a “problem,” a problem, however, that resulted only from the expectation that Jewish literature should be a homogenous, exclusive, i.e., national literary body. Exactly this expectation, he emphasized, would be thwarted by the historicist perspective of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*:

Encyclopedic scholarship poses manifold difficulties to such a rich literature that, through three and a half millennia, developed, with respect to content and form, orientation and language, time and space, in a distinct way, influenced by the whole nation and by excellent minds, a literature that, on the one hand, follows any available literary developments among other countries and nations, while, on the other hand, creating distinct literary bodies, like the Midrash, the Haggadah, the Talmud, the Masorah, the Piyutim, or the Tosafot, which cannot be based on a corresponding terminology from other sources.\(^\text{13}\)

“Jewish literature,” therefore, cannot (in contrast to the normative program of the Haskalah) be reduced to Hebrew literature, but proves to be, when analyzed from a differentiating, historicizing perspective, a dialectical juxtaposition of identity and otherness, universality and particularity. It is exactly this transcultural disposition that lends it a character of world literature as defined by Herder and Goethe. It is not an exclusive national formation, but a medium in which the Self and the Other are exposed to a mediating encounter and merge, to cite a postcolonial term coined by Homi K. Bhabha, into a “hybrid” construct.


This argument, formative as it is for the concept of literature embraced by the Wissenschaft des Judentums, is also, to mention one last example, adduced by Gustav Karpeles in his Geschichte der Jüdischen Literatur (1886), which represents, in many respects, the sum of Jewish literary studies in the nineteenth century. This example is very interesting because Karpeles, who also composed a book on general literature, the Allgemeine Geschichte der Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart (1891), explicitly adopted Zunz’s terminology. Like Zunz, he linked his historiographical representation of Jewish literature to the categories “world literature” (Weltliteratur) and “general literature” (Allgemeine Literatur), demonstrating that Jewish literature is interconnected with the whole body of world literature, both in terms of literary production and reception. Moreover, Karpeles attributed this dialectics to two classic forms of Jewish literature: Halakhah and Haggadah. Halakhic literature, according to him, embodies the particularistic form of writing, while the haggadic tradition reflects the universalistic version. This is not Karpeles’s own idea; rather, he quotes the following passage from Adolph Jellinek’s “ethnographic study,” Der jüdische Stamm (1869):

In fact, in the Talmudic era we encounter two main currents of the Jewish spirit, both representing, respectively, particularism and universalism: Halakhah and Haggadah. The Halakhah interprets and further develops the national law, like the priest; it operates with the cold and sober rationality that tends, not only in individuals, but also in the nations, to egoism; it uses logic and hermeneutics in order to solve its tasks and naturally strengthens the particular consciousness. In contrast to this, the Haggadah, which enters the realm of philosophy, adorns itself with the blossoms of poetry, directs contemplation toward the works of nature, defends Israel against the attacks of the nations, castigates the weaknesses and flaws of the nations, discusses family affairs, explores the changing destinies of human beings on earth, and attempts to cheer up troubled souls, to dam the stream of human desires, and to fill the spirit with enthusiasm for everything that is humanly beautiful and morally good; the Haggadah, which, like the prophets and poets, makes demands on heart and fantasy, promotes universalism and strongly nourishes it.14

This distinction between Halakhah as the particularistic and Haggadah as the universalistic form of Jewish literature corresponds

to an almost typological distinction between the Talmud and the Bible. While this distinction, from Christian Hebraism to European literary history in the twentieth century, produced an anti-Talmud ideological polemics aiming at monopolizing the Bible as the quintessential universalistic book, whereas the Talmud, the “purely Jewish” book, had to be burned, if necessary, and the whole postbiblical body of literature was rejected as particularistic,\(^\text{15}\) Karpeles explained the Talmud’s halakhic “particularism” as a reaction to inimical surroundings: “The more inimical the outer world, the deeper the inner world.”\(^\text{16}\) This typological confrontation of Halakhah and Haggadah is, of course, problematic; however, Karpeles did not actually intend to polemicize against the Jewish Law’s particularism, but wanted, like Zunz and Steinschneider, to accentuate the transcultural interconnection between Jewish and general literature inherent in the juxtaposition and interaction of Halakhah and Haggadah.

2. Transculturality

The second pattern of argumentation used by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in order to substantiate the concept of Jewish literature is likely to illustrate what exactly the “transcultural” aspect of this interconnection between particularity and universality is, namely the characteristic position between different languages and cultures.

\(^{15}\) Adolf Bartel’s work is not the only example in the early twentieth century. As late as in 1949, a certain Joseph Eberle presented a popular study entitled “Die Bibel im Lichte der Weltliteratur und Weltgeschichte”; the manuscript had the “imprimatur of the Vienna Episcopal Ordinariate.” This seemingly pious book was not at all embarrassed to transmit anti-Semitic stereotypes, including the following: “Judaism, before Christ, is something completely different than postbiblical Judaism. Pre-Christian Judaism still lived on the basis of agriculture and artisanry, i.e., under healthy conditions. Post-Christian Judaism, however, is mainly a people of the diaspora, dispersed in the whole world and mainly oriented toward the circulation of money and trade, i.e., in an anomalous situation. … Pre-Christian Judaism had a strongly spiritual orientation. The focus of post-Christian Judaism is on the worldly and material aspect. … Post-Christian Judaism is petrified in its contrast to Christ and Christianity; it lives under the influence of the Talmud and deviates from the ethos preached by the earlier representatives of the Old Testament.” See Joseph Eberle, *Die Bibel im Lichte der Weltliteratur und Weltgeschichte*, vol. 1 (Vienna: Herder, 1949), 81–82.

Here too, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* revised a position of the Haskalah which, alongside the difference between public and private, relegated Hebrew, as the genuine Jewish language, to the private realm, while associating the European languages with general, public life. In contrast to this, Jewish literature, as defined by Zunz and Steinschneider, proved to be a much more complicated entity; as a consequence, they rejected the agenda of a Hebrew national language as an untenable, historically and philologically simplistic construct. For them, language, in the case of Jewish literature (in contrast to exclusive national literatures), was not a category of demarcation but, on the contrary, of mediation.

This fact is likely to explain the hitherto unprecedented revaluation of translation by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*; until then, traditionalist views of Jewish literature had considered translations as a serious problem, almost comparable to mixed marriages. Even a later author like Lazarus Goldschmidt, who translated the Talmud into German, considered, in this case from a Zionist perspective, the reinterpretation of the Bible by its Greek translation from a national to a universal book to be an almost catastrophic event:

> Earlier, Israel’s “written lore” had been a national property, inspired by God and stemming from Israel’s soil, written by Israelite men and designed as teachings for Israel …; then, it was translated into the Occidental tongue and became common property: it became a book of world literature. In view of the loss of its property, the people was seized by deep sorrow, and the heavenly father, too, was filled with anger. [This is expressed by the talmudic legend cited by Goldschmidt as a proof: “Four hundred to four hundred parasangs the Israelite soil trembled that day, when the prophetical books were translated, and a heavenly voice rumbled: Who is it who has given away my secrets to the children of men?”]17

In other words, from the point of view of an exclusive Jewish culture, world literature appears as a catastrophe.

In contrast to this, already Goethe had praised the cultural transfer achieved by translation as a formative element of his idea of world literature,

since it is precisely the references from the original to the translation that most clearly express the relationship between nation and nation.

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and that have to be excellently known and assessed in order to promote the prevailing general world literature.¹⁸

To return to Zunz, this scholar of the Wissenschaft des Judentums embraced this optimistic view of translation, inspired by the concept of world literature, applying its transcultural work to the historical conditions of Jewish literature. For this reason, he did not identify inner-Jewish, but solely intercultural stages of development: he distinguished (to a certain degree simplifying the phenomenon) between Greek, Arab, medieval Latin, and modern European stages of Jewish literature, noting that the language proved to be a transcultural medium of translation instead of a monocultural exclusive criterion. He considered the role played by the Jews in the cultural history of the world to be almost that of “mediators” who produce the “points of contact” (Berührungspunkte) and the “cultural relations” (Kulturverhältnisse) and who cause the circulation of intercultural “communication with the world” (Weltverkehr).¹⁹ The characteristic expression Weltverkehr, which is adopted not only by Karpeles,²⁰ but also by the German-Jewish Goethe expert Fritz Strich,²¹ stems directly from Goethe, who used it also in its technical meaning and did not only address the matter of intellectual communication by translation, but also its technological prerequisite that substantially accelerated traveling and correspondence. Interestingly enough, Zunz employed the expression “world literature” precisely for this transcultural mediation achieved by language, specifically referring to the Arabic-Jewish literature that had succeeded the epoch of Greek-Jewish literature:

The language became again the mediator between Jewish literature and world literature, and the nobler spirits of both nations used it to influence each other. The Jews wrote in Arabic for their brothers, as they had once done in Greek.²²

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¹⁸ Cited in Strich, Goethe und die Weltliteratur, 370.
¹⁹ Ibid., 47.
²⁰ Karpeles used the term Weltverkehr in a remarkably positive reinterpretation of the Babylonian exile after the fall of Solomon’s kingdom: “Now, a fresh cultural life started for Israel, an immensely important communication with the world that resulted in the blossoming of art and the sciences”; see Gustav Karpeles, Ein Blick in die jüdische Literatur (Prague: Brandeis, 1895), 16.
²² Zunz, “Die jüdische Literatur,” 45.
3. Diasporic Literature

Moritz Steinschneider followed this pattern of argumentation when rejecting the Haskalah’s narrow, Hebrew-centered concept of literature, replacing it by the wider, transcultural agenda of Jewish literature. As is well known, he devoted his own comprehensive work, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (1893), to the function of the Jews as cultural mediators or “interpreters.” Here he developed the third pattern of argumentation that I would like to analyze, an argument that radicalizes and transcends Goethe’s concept of world literature: the interpretation of Jewish literature as diaspora literature, of transcultural literature as exterritorial literature. The fact that Jewish literature is moving between cultures, a phenomenon characterized by Steinschneider by employing the contested term “aggregate” (*Aggregat*), is directly linked to its exterritorial character, which is beyond nationalization: it is a literature of transition, of “passage.” This fact, described in general terms in Steinschneider’s lectures on *Über Bildung und den Einfluß des Reisens auf die Bildung,* turns out to be the precondition of the specific transcultural constitution of Jewish literature:

The literature of the Jews in its widest sense actually includes everything Jews have written from the earliest times until the present, irrespective of content, language, and fatherland. It covers the Hebrew, Chaldaic, and Greek writings of the Bible and the Apocrypha, the literature composed in new Hebrew ... through two millennia, but also the writings of the Jews in the languages of the old world, which, in different periods, replaced or even displaced the Hebrew language. This passage through so many countries, languages, and materials causes a distinct character that makes it difficult to apprehend and acknowledge [this kind of literature].

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23 The term appears in the reform of philology suggested by Friedrich August Wolf, who since 1785 had lectured on the “Enzyklopädie der Altertumswissenschaften” in Halle, which became one of the foundations of *Wissenschaft des Judentums.* Wolf intended, inter alia, to defend philology against the charge of functioning as an “aggregate.” The term “encyclopedia” was designed to present it as an “organic whole.” See Friedrich August Wolf, “Darstellung der Altertumswissenschaft nach Begriff, Umfang, Zweck und Wert,” in idem, *Kleine Schriften in Lateinischer und Deutscher Sprache,* ed. Gottfried Bernhardy, vol. 2 (Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1869), 810–811.


Similar was the argument suggested by David Cassel, who also belonged to the contributors of the Brockhaus, in his first comprehensive, albeit unfinished history of Jewish literature (Geschichte der jüdischen Literatur, 1872). Even more explicitly than Steinschneider, Cassel traced the transcultural dimension of Jewish literature back to its extraterritorial character. Jewish literature, as defined by him, is, therefore, not only world literature in Goethe’s sense, but also in a specifically Jewish sense—namely, diaspora literature. Its character as world literature, he claimed, which had already shaped the Hebrew literature before the destruction of the second Temple, became even stronger with the diasporic conditions of Jewish literature. In the diaspora, literature became literally an intercultural archive that records and overwrites the traces of the Jews’ migrations:

The difficulty is that, here, in contrast to most other nations, nationality does not coincide with language. Already at a time when the Jews still formed a political body, during the last centuries before the dissolution of the Jewish state by the Romans, the Hebrew language had been displaced ..., even in the ancestral homeland of Palestine, by the Greek and Aramaic languages; this applies even more to the Jews living outside of Palestine and was more and more the case when the Jews were increasingly dispersed to almost all countries of the world.26

It was Gustav Karpeles who most strongly emphasized the diaspora argument. Although explicitly referring to his predecessors Zunz, Steinschneider, and Cassel (the introduction to his Geschichte der jüdischen Literatur is partly almost a collage of quotations), he certainly went beyond them, especially when he came to accentuate the diaspora as Jewish literature’s formative aspect:

[Jewish literature] includes writings in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Arabic, Spanish, Italian, French, German, and many other languages. This passage through so many languages as well as the contact with so many literatures holds one of the main problems of a systematic representation of Jewish literature. While, in the most cases, nationality and language coincide and thus constitute a national literature, the Jewish people adopted the languages of the nations among which it was dispersed and continued its own intellectual development in the medium of these languages. Greek wisdom, Persian religious concepts, Roman law, Arabic philosophy, Spanish poetry, and German collections of legends: everything is assimilated by this literature.27

27 Gustav Karpeles, Geschichte der jüdischen Literatur, 2.
In contrast to the European national literatures that are forced to achieve “world literary” competence by additional efforts, Jewish literature—as diasporic literature—possesses, from its very inception, a transcultural orientation. For Karpeles, the intercultural “spiral-movement” (Spiralgang) of diasporic literature has already become the specifically Jewish “distinctiveness in world literature,” a distinctiveness consisting in the fact that Jewish literature tends to “intellectually understand, permeate, and appropriate anything that it encounters anywhere in the wide world and during its migration that lasted nearly two millennia.”

This is perhaps the characteristic feature of this literature that ..., even in the hardest time of exile, vigorously developed. It relates any intellectual currents and developments to its original formations, poetry and philosophy, law, history and medicine.

The interpretation of Jewish literature as diasporic literature thus radicalizes the bourgeois-humanistic model of world literature. But Karpeles went a step further: if Jewish literature is literally permeated by the traces of exile, it becomes itself a portable place of exile. In other words, it is not so much the form or representation of an enlightened, humanistic, and cosmopolitan universalism, but the medium of diaspora. Literature itself becomes the exterritorial medium of the diaspora, since there is no secure political and social authority. Apart from being able to assume any potential linguistic and cultural identity, it becomes an imagined, spiritual “homeland.” By pointing to this aspect, Karpeles referred to the old oriental designation of the Jews as the ahl al-kitab, the am ha-sefer (“people of the book”), that, as is well-known, Heinrich Heine had discovered earlier (not coincidentally in dialogue with members of the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft des Judentums, i.e., with Zunz und Moses Moser). It was not a political institution, Karpeles claimed, but “its writings” that preserved the “Jewish tribe,”

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28 Ibid., 8.
29 Ibid., 6.
30 From the first day of his work on the Rabbi of Bacharach in 1824 until his “Börne-Denkschrift,” written in 1840 in his exile in Paris, Heine referred to precisely this idea of the Bible as the “portative fatherland” of the exiled Jewish people; that meant, for him, that the Jews’ homeland in the diaspora is not a country, but a book, or, in more general terms, writing and literature. “The Jews should easily console themselves [and overcome the sorrow caused by the fact] that they lost Jerusalem, the
and that is why the saying of the pious Jew who greets the Day of Atonement with the words, “and nothing else has been left to us than this lore!” sounds so heartfelt and moving. He is not praying for his people and the long-vanished city of Zion, … but he thinks only of the lore, the only gem that has been left to him and that protected him during his travels through exile. The great creation of Jewish literature … cannot be understood in its deeper core if we do not learn to perceive and apprehend it from this point of view.31

The motif of the book as the “portative fatherland” becomes, in Karpeles’s interpretation, the archetypical scene of Jewish literature in general: “And Judah starts his long travels through exile with a book, or, one could say, his entire literature!”32 Jewish literature, as understood by the Wissenschaft des Judentums, thus transcends the bourgeois-humanistic concept of world literature along the lines of Goethe: it is more than just a transcultural European organ of mediation, namely the quintessential exterritorial place of diaspora.

The diaspora thus changes the character of the book, transforming it from an exclusive Hebrew text into an open, multilingual, and intertextual book, from a code of law to a universal library, from national literature to world literature. This principle of transculturality corresponds to that of exterritoriality, since the text, universalized by this transformation, does not only become an archive, but, even more, the most appropriate, i.e., mobile medium of Jewish diaspora history.

Temple, the Ark of the Covenant, the golden vessels, and the jewels of King Solomon …, since such a loss is of minor importance compared to the Bible, the indestructible treasure they rescued. If I am right, it was Muhammad who called the Jews ‘the people of the book,’ a name they still bear in the Orient and that is profoundly significant. A book is their fatherland, their property, their fortune, and their distress. They live in the enclosed realm of this book; here, they enjoy their inalienable civil rights; here, nobody can expel or despise them; here, they are strong and admirable.” See Heinrich Heine, “Ludwig Börne: Eine Denkschrift,” in Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke, ed. Manfred Windfuhr, Düsseldorfer Ausgabe, vol. 11 (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1978), 38–39.

32 Ibid., 4.
4. The Reception of the Universalistic Model of Literature

The model of literature embraced by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* created an effective paradigm of scholarship as well as cultural politics that dominated Jewish literary studies in the nineteenth century and that continued to be strongly influential well into the first third of the twentieth century. It was, however, challenged and reinterpreted by the emerging Zionist movement with its nationalization of the Jewish concept of culture and literature, and later even attacked, rejected, and replaced by a model of dissimilation.

Examples for the affirmation and further development of this model can be found, first of all, within German-speaking literary history. One characteristic example is Jakob Winter and August Wünsche’s three-volume *Die jüdische Litteratur seit Abschluß des Canons* (1895–1896), which covered the period from antiquity to modern times. In the introduction to this work, both editors renewed the—in the meantime canonized—diasporic-universalistic interpretation of Jewish literature as a kind of global encyclopedia written in all the languages of the world:

> No area of knowledge is missing in Jewish literature, since the Jews most enthusiastically participate in all the interwoven realms of the intellectual life of those nations they come into contact with. Poetry and philosophy, history and law, grammar and exegesis, mathematics and the different branches of the sciences are incorporated into [the Jews’] work and research. … The Jews’ migration from people to people is, at the same time, a migration from one linguistic realm to the other. They were not able to participate in the nations’ intellectual life without appropriating their languages. And since they naturally also employed them for the creative work in their very own area, Jewish literature has many different works in the most different languages to offer. Already in antiquity, we find, alongside the new Hebrew, the related eastern and western Aramaic dialects as well as the Greek language, and, later on, Arabic and Latin, and recently the languages of all civilized nations.33

A second, later example of a scholar relating to the concept of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* is provided by the literary scholar Ismar Elbogen, who taught at the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*

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in Berlin since 1903 and left Germany for New York in 1938. Interesting, in this respect, is his article “Zum Problem der jüdischen Literaturgeschichte” in the Festgabe zum zehnjährigen Bestehen der Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums 1919–1929 (1929). Confronting the national Jewish critical approaches that, in the meantime, tended to accept only Hebrew literature as Jewish literature, thus making the language the decisive criterion, Elbogen defended Zunz’s, Stein- schnieder’s, and Karpeles’s concept and insisted on the synthetic link between “Jewish literature” and “general literature”:

It is neither justified to consider language to be the only criterion for [attributing a work to] Jewish literature, nor is it convincing to object, as some have done, that a literary work cannot belong to two or more groups of general literature. … Rather, it is true that the whole body of Jewish writings, from the earliest periods to the present, belongs organically together and that the history of Jewish literature has to include all of Judaism’s intellectual products, whatever the language they are composed in. … Such a point of view automatically refers to the dependence of the individual persons and their work on the influences exerted by their time and their surroundings. … Although literary work is strongly dependent on the material streaming from the ethnic community itself, there is no need to give special evidence for the fact that it receives and accepts numerous inspirations from outside.34

This model exerted a dominating influence outside of the German Wissenschaft des Judentums as well, namely in the Yiddish, English and, astonishingly enough, in the Hebrew literary history of the early twentieth century.

In the case of Yiddish historiography, the presence of this universalistic concept of literature is quite obvious. It mainly embraced the diaspora argument proposed by the Wissenschaft des Judentums, sometimes even idealizing the galut on the basis of diaspora nationalism. This can be illustrated by Israel Zinberg’s Geschichte fun der Literatur bei Yidn, undoubtedly the largest project of this kind. The Yiddish original (Vilnius, 1929–1937) included eight volumes, the English translation by Bernard Martin (1972) twelve volumes. Although very knowledgeable in this field, Zinberg, who can be

considered, alongside other scholars like Max Erik, Shmuel Niger, and Max Weinreich, to be the most important Yiddish literary historian, did not approach this ambitious project as a professional scholar of literature; as a chemist who had obtained his doctorate in Basle, he worked in the St. Petersburg chemical industry, pursuing Jewish studies as his second vocation. In his work, he was led by the idea of diasporic literature, declaring the topos of the “people of the book,” renewed by Karpeles, the fundamental disposition of Jewish literature, i.e., interpreting Jewish literature as a phenomenon that had always served as a compensation for or a sublimation of nationality:

Not without reason are Jews called the “people of the book.” The book occupies such an important place in its life that for many scholars the history of the Jewish people is transformed into the history of Jewish literature. Cultural life, the work of intellect—this was the only field in which the Jewish people could reveal its independent powers and the unique capacities of its spirits. This was the sole realm that remained to the eternally wandering people which, for many centuries, had no political life of its own but always lived in exile. … Among the Jews, those homeless wanderers, all this could be clearly reflected only in their literary creativity. And indeed, being closely connected with their life of exile, this creativity had to be originally interwoven with their intimate world.35

A similar concept of Jewish literature can be found in the five-volume English history of Jewish literature (1930–1941), written by a Russian-born American rabbi and professor of Hebrew literature and philosophy at Hebrew Theological College in Chicago, Meyer Waxman. Waxman, too, starts from the topos of the “portable fatherland,” then introducing his literary history by presenting the utopian view of postbiblical Jewish literature as a cosmopolitan, transcultural space in which Jews had, always and everywhere, united with humankind. This is a clear culmination of the most optimistic concept of literature of Wissenschaft des Judentums, elevating Jewish literature to an encyclopedic body of world culture that encompasses space and time:

Post-Biblical Jewish literature is a great, wide garden, a veritable “Garden of God.” In it are found the strangest and most exotic plants, culled

from all lands and all climes. There ... East meets West, Jew meets Greek and a host of his successors, Roman, Arab, and all Western nations. It is a point where the spirits of all nations, which left their mark on the history of human development, commingle, and is the scene of a great spiritual panorama which has the world for its background, where the echo of all centuries and all lands is heard. It is a literature without geographic boundaries, one which grew luxuriously on the shores of the rivers of Babylon, on the banks of the Jordan, bloomed most beautifully by the rivers Tagus and Gaudalquivir (Spain and Portugal), and flourished with equal vigor on the Rhine, the Vistula, and the Dnieper.\footnote{Meyer Waxman, \textit{A History of Jewish Literature}, vol. 1 (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1960), xvi.}

In the Hebrew \textit{Wissenschaft des Judentums}, however, this concept of literature can no longer be renewed that clearly and easily. At least, one has to differentiate between Hebrew literary studies in the context of the Haskalah, and modern Hebrew literary studies motivated by Zionism. This can be further illustrated by looking at Simon Bernfeld und Joseph Klausner; furthermore, a literary historian like Isaac Hirsch Weiss, who was torn between talmudic scholarship and modern philology, should at least be mentioned: a maskil and Talmud scholar acquainted with the methods of modern philological scholarship and an early critic of the \textit{Hibat Zion}-movement, Weiss composed a five-volume Hebrew history of the oral tradition from the beginnings to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain (\textit{Dor Dor ve-Dorshav}, 1871–1891) that was widely read in Eastern Europe.

The historian and scholar of literary studies, Simon Bernfeld, devoted himself to biblical literature and the literature of antiquity, using the methods of modern philology and based on the tradition of \textit{Wissenschaft des Judentums}. Especially his three-volume \textit{Mavo Sifruti-Histori le Kitvei ha-Kodesh} (1923–1925) followed this agenda. A few years earlier, the \textit{Jüdische Verlag} in Berlin published a short German version of this work under the title \textit{Die jüdische Literatur, Erster Teil: Bibel, Apokryphen und jüdisch-hellenistische Literatur} (1921). As Bernfeld explained in his preface, this book was a kind of preliminary version of the “larger Hebrew work \textit{Heker kitve ha-kodesh}.”\footnote{Simon Bernfeld, \textit{Die jüdische Literatur, Erster Teil: Bibel, Apokryphen und jüdisch-hellenistische Literatur}, (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1921), 6.} The crucial aspect is that Bernfeld adopted the concept of the \textit{Wissenschaft des Judentums}, including all its theorems with regard to a universal language and
the emphasis on world history and diaspora. Bernfeld laid special emphasis on the multilingual as well as transcultural and diasporic character of Jewish literature in this early stage of its development. With regard to its multilingualism he wrote:

A history of Jewish literature cannot limit its representation to the Hebrew writings; rather, any literary works created by the Jewish people in other languages have to be included. … In the millennia of its historical existence, the Jewish people has often changed its cultural language (Kultursprache)—we explicitly call this its cultural language since it has not always been the Jews’ colloquial language. Jewish literature, therefore, is multilingual. … As a consequence, the historical representation of Jewish literature, if it does not want to be incomplete, will have to deal in detail with the Jewish literary phenomena in Aramaic, Greek, and Arabic.38

It is, therefore, not surprising that Bernfeld referred to the idea of the diasporic universality and transculturality of Jewish literature:

Already at an earlier time, the Jewish diaspora gained a large extension. There were numerous Jewish settlements at different places of the inhabited world. … This led to a distinct fusion of different cultural elements that constituted the essence of diaspora Judaism. It enriched Jewish literature, contributing several interesting chapters to it. An example is the Jewish-Hellenistic body of literature.39

In the case of Weiss and Bernfeld, the transition to Hebrew as the language of scholarship was still completely independent from a nationalization or politicization of Judaism, i.e., it was still an expression of the ideas of the Haskalah. In terms of the contents of his literary history, therefore, Bernfeld largely followed the arguments of the generation of Zunz and Steinschneider. This situation changed with the increasing politicization of Jewish culture through Zionism. In the same year in which Bernfeld’s history of biblical and Hellenistic Jewish literature appeared, the Jüdische Verlag published a second work on Jewish literary history, originally written in Hebrew. Its subject was not the early history, but the most recent history of Jewish literature, more precisely, the Geschichte der neuhebräischen Literatur (1921). The author was Joseph Klausner, one of the most important Jewish scholars of literary studies in the twentieth century, who had

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38 Ibid., 5–11 passim.
39 Ibid., 9.
been born in Eastern Europe and immigrated to Palestine in 1919. Despite this Zionist profile, Klausner, in contrast to the radical Zionist, dissimilatory, anti-European models of literature, largely continued to be shaped by the universalistic concept of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. A first indication of this programmatic openness is the multilingual character of his relevant publications: his *Toledot ha Sifrut ha-Ivrith ha-Hadashah* first appeared in 1900 in Russian, only in 1920 in Hebrew, and, as already mentioned, in 1921 in a German translation by Hans Kohn. The elaborated six-volume version of this literary history, entitled *Historia shel ha-Sifrut ha Ivrith ha-Hadashah* (1930–1950), was, however, published only in Hebrew.

Accentuating modern Hebrew literature from the Haskalah to contemporary Palestine instead of traditional Hebrew literature, Klausner gained a new perspective that necessarily had to question the diasporic, transcultural concept of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. It is, for instance, not at all surprising that Klausner underscored the significance of the renaissance of Hebrew as the genuine language of Jewish history. However, on closer inspection, he was not so much interested in rejecting or negating the diaspora (*shliat ha-golah*) but intended to mediate between universalistic (multilingual, diasporic) and national Jewish (modern Hebrew, Zionist) *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Modern Hebrew literature, for him, was not an exclusive, but an inclusive medium of Judaism that appropriated the knowledge and the writings of the nations:

> [In this literature] we find translations of Shakespeare and Byron, Hugo and Musset, Schiller and Goethe, Turgenev and Tolstoy, Pushkin and Lermontov, Spencer and Nietzsche. There is no area of human creativity that is not, in some way, represented in modern Hebrew literature.\(^{40}\)

Klausner went even further, rejecting any linguistic purism and extending this universalizing concept of modern Hebrew literature to the language itself: “Thousands of neologisms and loanwords from the Arabic as well as the European languages” are enriching modern Hebrew.\(^{41}\) Above all, however, he substantiated this universalistic concept of literature by referring to the, at that time, already classic

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41. Ibid., 133.
argument of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* concerning the dialectics of universality and particularity:

> We are dealing with the relationship between Jewish and general human elements. In the last decade, there is an increasingly powerful voice in Jewish literature claiming that Judaism’s highest national ideas are merely a special form of elaborating general human ideas. And the task of Hebrew literature is to make use of and to cultivate these general human ideas in their national Jewish form, for the benefit of the Jewish people as well as for the benefit of humankind.\(^{42}\)

The phrase, “the general human ideas in their national Jewish form,” marks precisely the universalizing “synthesis” of nationalism and cosmopolitanism as supported by a Zionist “universalism,” and a modern Hebrew literature that includes any world literature.\(^{43}\) With this model, Klausner contributed to preserving the universalistic, transcultural agenda of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* for Zionist cultural politics.

### 5. Critique of the Universalistic Model of Literature

So far, we have illustrated that the model of literature embraced by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in the nineteenth century, including its reinterpretations during the first third of the twentieth century, was based on a high degree of optimism. In this concluding part, we will show how this optimism was increasingly challenged from different directions. Apart from the optimism concerning emancipation and acculturation, it was mainly the bourgeois model of historical progress that was affected by this challenge, since the increasing nationalization and ethnicization of the German culture at the beginning of the Second Reich as well as the emerging anti-Semitic movement more and more revealed the limits of this model. As is well known, German and European Jews reacted to this development by nationalizing their own identity; Zionism, based on this process, declared the failure of the project of integration supported by the

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\(^{42}\) Ibid., 132.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.: “Since 1785, modern Hebrew literature has come a long way. It [this way] has led Hebrew literature from the accusations of the Enlightenment to nationalism and, beyond this, to universalism (which distinguishes itself from cosmopolitanism the same way it does from chauvinism).”
Wissenschaft des Judentums and countered assimilation with dissimilation. On the other hand, the liberal Jews, from the “Kaiserreich” to the Weimar Republic, demanded an even stronger assimilation, to the extent of abandoning any Jewish perspective. In the wake of this polarization, the transcultural concept of world literature necessarily lost some of its relevance or had to be radically reinterpreted with regard to its relation to Jewish literature.

This increased assimilatory position of liberal Jews can be demonstrated by pointing to the case of the German-Jewish philologists, Fritz Strich and Erich Auerbach. Both turned to Goethe’s concept of a universalistic, cosmopolitan literature. In contrast to the founders of Jewish literary studies in the nineteenth century, however, they largely avoided any Jewish perspective. World literature remained the organ of a transcultural, European integration, but this was linked to the condition that Jewish particularity had to be entirely excluded. This is illustrated by Fritz Strich’s comprehensive work on Goethe (alongside Ludwig Geiger, Strich was perhaps the best known example of a German-Jewish Goethe-philology in the twentieth century), which culminated in his—still relevant—standard work, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur* (1946). When turning to Goethe’s concept of “world literature,” he did this not from a Jewish point of view, but from a European cosmopolitan perspective that rejected any kind of nationalization and ethnicization of politics and culture. Already in his lecture on “Goethe und die Weliltiteratur,” given in 1932 in Weimar (then already ruled by the Nazis) on the occasion of the centenary of Goethe’s death, Strich, who was then teaching in Switzerland, which he idealized as a cosmopolitan society, ascribed to that model of literature a more urgent task: it was to function as an esthetical corrective in historical and political terms. Thus Strich understood his “world literary work” as a philological counterpoint to the nationalization and ethnicization of German cultural and social life since World War I. “Everything that Goethe proclaimed, collapsed and lies in ruin,” Strich emphasized, thus giving an interpretation not only of that Goethe centenary of 1932 with its German national ideological implications, but also of the catastrophe that

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was to follow. Logically, after World War II, during which he had composed his book on world literature, he invoked Goethe all the more, calling him “the greatest European and cosmopolitan” and wishing he would “rise in his entire exemplary quality and fill the house of the nations that has to be rebuilt from scratch with his spirit of peace” and renew that “spiritual space in which the nations, by virtue of their literature, learn to perceive, tolerate, respect, and understand each other and attempt to rise to the higher levels of human culture.” In this context, in view of the wars and genocides of the first half of the twentieth century, the concept of diasporic literature gains an almost messianic function, since Strich considers it to be the sole ferment that is really capable of bringing the nations together. Already in his article “Goethe und die Weltliteratur” (1928), he called literature to assume the task of promoting transnational understanding: “Literature, a gift for the world and the nations, seems to be called to bring about reconciliation.” “Today, the nations talk to each other through their literatures,” he emphasized, expressing his universalistic optimism. As a consequence, he called it “the highest task” of philology to participate in this mission to strengthen the ties between the nations: “it [philology], too, has to turn to world literature.”

Having heard these remarks, it might be surprising to see that Strich did not completely exclude the Jewish perspective. Interestingly enough, the text in which he mentioned Judaism remained completely unnoticed, apparently because he did not publish it. His article “Die Sendung der jüdischen Dichter in der deutschen Literatur,” written around 1925, is to be found in a bundle of papers entitled “Goethe und die Juden” in the Strich papers in Bern.

45 Strich, Goethe und die Weltliteratur, 8.
46 Ibid., 7 and 9.
48 Ibid., 76.
49 Ibid., 77.
50 See Fritz Strich, “Die Sendung der jüdischen Dichter in der deutschen Literatur,” 2 and 18. The bundle of papers can be found in the Strich papers in the Bürgerbibliothek Bern, call number N Fritz Strich 40 (1–7). It includes seven folders with notes, pages of manuscripts, clippings, and separate material concerning topics of Jewish literature and Goethe and the Jews; folder 7 contains a typed manuscript entitled “Die Sendung der jüdischen Dichter in der deutschen Literatur.” In an addition to page 14 (on the back) we find the date 1928; in general, it is obvious that the
At least here, Strich adopts the integration-oriented Jewish-European concept of literature of the nineteenth century, referring not only to the idea of a “Jewish cosmopolitanism” as a “mission … to the nations,” but also emphasizing that, precisely in this respect, the “Jewish writers” agreed with Goethe’s universalistic humanism. This Jewish diasporic “mission” that has also been discussed by, among others, Anton Kuh and Lion Feuchtwanger, thus consists in the “Jewish cosmopolitanism” that transforms national literature into world literature and “the national God” into a “God of the world,” thus contributing to the “realization of an all-human community (allmenschliche Gemeinschaft).” Apart from that, it becomes clear that this “Jewish cosmopolitanism” defines the transcultural, extraterritorial “homeland of the spirit” as its true place, which means that it does not base itself on a national, political category, but forms a res publica litteraria, namely the “treasure chamber” of the entire European Bildung. In this newly found, unknown document, Strich thus renewed the model embraced by the Wissenschaft des Judentums, while his much-read works on Goethe and world literature completely ignored it.

The latter is also true for Erich Auerbach, who, in his contribution to the Festschrift for Fritz Strich (1954), referred to the agenda of “philology of world literature” (Philologie der Weltliteratur). Even more urgently, in view of the catastrophe of World War II, he countered the disastrous concept of a national homeland and ethnic identity with an imagined “philological homeland” shaped by transcultural identities. As in the case of Strich, who demanded that literature should embody a “messianic idea of the world” (messianische Welt-idee), Auerbach’s “philology of world literature” ultimately leads to diasporic messianism: he expected literature to create a universal standpoint from which no less than a new “world history could be pursued.” However, like Strich (in his publications), Auerbach

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52 Strich, Die Sendung der jüdischen Dichter, 11.
53 Ibid., 12.
54 Ibid., 18.
55 Erich Auerbach, “Philologie der Weltdliteratur,” in Weltliteratur: Festgabe für Fritz
did not want this world literature to be understood as a specifically Jewish one: he, too, transformed Jewish literature into a universalistic cosmopolitanism of literature, liberated from any kind of particularistic dialectics.

An opposite tendency can be observed in the case of Zionist reinterpretations of the nineteenth-century concept of world literature, especially those rejecting Klausner’s synthesis of particularism and universalism. On the first glance, it might be surprising to see that world literature was discussed at all in national Jewish circles. The term was, however, used in a quite specific, namely apologetic sense, e.g., in the book *Das jüdische Element in der Weltliteratur* (1924), written by the writer and artistic director Arthur Sakheim. In this text which, to a large extent, is parallel to his article on “Weltliteratur, Juden in der” in the *Jüdisches Lexikon*, Sakheim emphasized the significant Jewish contributions to world literature and attempted to show how “the Jewish people” transferred “its indelible genius to foreign countries”, instead of aiming at transcultural relations, this argument accentuated mainly the worldwide representations of Jewish identity.

The real aim of such a cultural Zionist literary agenda lies, therefore, in the “collection” and retranslation of the Jewish literature dispersed among the different languages and cultures. It is embodied by Hayyim Nahman Bialik’s ambitious anthological and editorial agenda outlined in his article “Das hebräische Buch” (Hebrew 1913, German 1919): “Let us extend a large net on the sea of world literature and collect all the pearls of the Jewish spirit.” The monumental project aims, more precisely, at transforming the Jewish literature dispersed among the “world literatures” into a genuinely Jewish literature, i.e., “Hebrew literature,” by retranslating it into Hebrew. With this agenda, Bialik explicitly rejected the tradition of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and demanded the creation of a new “Wissenschaft des Judentums in the language of Judaism.” As is well

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58 Ibid., 35.
known, this view corresponded to that of Gershom Scholem, whose criticism of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (as expressed in a comprehensive letter to Bialik), however, was even more radical: he harshly rejected its historical-philological method as a positivist archiving, or even, to cite the famous metaphors he used, as a learned “suicide” of Judaism, as its “funeral orations” (*Leichenreden*) and “textual graves” (*Text-Gräber*),\(^{59}\) and demanded a contrasting philological agenda oriented toward a renewal and rescue of Jewish literature that would redeem Judaism—in his case, the Kabbalah—from the “ruins of the past.”\(^{60}\)

Bialik (and Scholem) put the “world literature” model of Jewish literature as proposed by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* during the nineteenth century far more on the defensive than did Joseph Klausner, with whom Bialik had temporarily cooperated in Warsaw. While Bialik wanted to translate Jewish literature back from the diaspora into the Hebrew language, Klausner wanted to incorporate world literature into Hebrew literature. In his words:

> Only if national Judaism finds itself on the contemporary cultural level of the most progressive European nations will it have the right to present to Europe the intellectual achievements of the Jewish genius, produced over many centuries, purified and reborn through the general human striving for light, freedom, and higher intellectual and moral development.\(^{61}\)

In sum, it is obvious that, since the end of the nineteenth century, at least in comparison to the beginnings of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* embodied by Zunz and later voices like Karpeles, the debate about the term “Jewish literature” became increasingly many-voiced and controversial.\(^{62}\) The dialectical model of world literature was dissolved, either by the transformation of any particularistic-Jewish perspective into a radicalized cosmopolitanism, or by reducing it to a national Jewish perspective. History after the end of the Weimar Republic has, at first glance, justified this polarization. Recently,


\(^{60}\) Ibid., 19 and 23.


\(^{62}\) On the debate about the term “Jewish literature” around 1900, see Kilcher, “Was ist deutsch-jüdische Literatur?” (see note 44).
however, also on the basis of an increasing interest in postcolonial diaspora theories, scholars have demonstrated that any purist models of culture and literature are just constructs and that transcultural links and references, when analyzed more closely, are visible even where they are negated for ideological reasons. A critical assessment of the assumptions of the paradigm of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as attempted here is certainly necessary; on the other hand, it is obvious that this paradigm possesses a conceptual strength that is likely to regain the relevance denied to it by the radical Zionist critique.

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Part III
Ideology and Popularization in Jewish Historiography
CHAPTER TWELVE

HISTORICIZING EMANCIPATION: JEWISH HISTORICAL CULTURE AND WISSENSCHAFT IN GERMANY, 1912–1938

CHRISTHARD HOFFMANN

In the course of the nineteenth century, German Jewry developed a specific modern form of relationship to the past that can perhaps best be described as “historical culture” (Geschichtskultur). According to Wolfgang Hardtwig, the term means “the totality of forms in which knowledge about history is present in a given society.”¹ It includes not only academic historiography but also other forms of public presentations of the past, such as commemorations, monuments, museums, educational and popular literature, the press, and public debates. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the attitude of Jews—or at least that of a leading class of intellectuals—toward their own tradition was transformed under the influence of the contemporary rise of historicism to the position of leading cultural power, and the establishment of Wissenschaft des Judentums.²

The task of the modern historian was to represent the past in such a way that the unity of history, its “meaning,” would become clear, thereby enabling meaningful action in the present.³ Modern Jewish

¹ Wolfgang Hardtwig, Geschichtskultur und Wissenschaft (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1990), 8.
historical culture, which enlarged and in time replaced the traditional religious forms of Jewish collective memory, thus served as a medium for the self-definition and self-assertion of Jews in the age of acculturation. “History”—at least for those German Jews who wished to retain their Judaism in some form—became an important medium for the creation and preservation of a Jewish identity in the modern, secular world; it became, as Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi has formulated it, “the faith of fallen Jews.” While Jewish historical culture was initially dominated by liberal-reformist views, advocating political emancipation and personal acculturation (Bildung) and adhering to the optimistic belief in modern development as ever-increasing progress, it became more polyphonic and dissonant with the emergence of neo-Orthodoxy and Zionism, which challenged the liberal interpretation of history. All the same, no matter how disputed the Jewish past—and in particular the modern era—began in these debates over time, it remains a fact that all German-Jewish groups and ideological movements continued to refer to history in order to justify their ideological positions. Jewish historical culture offered a communicative space, comparable to a public marketplace, that allowed for controversy, negotiation, and competition and thus for a plurality of Jewish identities based on history.

This article deals with the relationship between Jewish historical culture (Geschichtskultur) and Jewish historical scholarship during the (extended) Weimar period (from the centenary of the Prussian emancipation edict in 1912 to the early Nazi years). Concentrating on the question of how the emancipation period was presented and interpreted in popular and academic concepts of history, it tries to draw some conclusions for the overall topic of this volume: the role and significance of Jewish Wissenschaft within a pluralistic and

Koselleck, 3d ed., vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), 647–691; for an example of how this approach was adapted to Jewish studies, see Ludwig Philippson, “Wissenschaft und Leben,” AZF 20 (1856), no. 46, 619–620.

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 86.

segmented historical culture that was characterized by ideological conflict and the dogmas of a controversial debate.

1. The Liberal Myth of Emancipation and Its Critics

In the liberal concept of history formed during the early nineteenth century, emancipation was not just another event in the course of Jewish history. It was viewed as a crucial turning point in world history, an event that had special meaning for the formation of a bourgeois Jewish identity in Germany. It thus became a central myth: it gave meaning and legitimacy to the radical transformations of Jewish life in the modern age, thereby accelerating the process of change and acculturation even further. In order to function in this manner, emancipation had to be presented in a specific way which David Sorkin has aptly named “the ideology of emancipation”: the granting of rights to Jews was seen as a consequence of Jewish self-improvement and Bildung. Jewish acculturation and emancipation were viewed as closely interconnected, and the emancipation of the Jews in Germany was thus presented as “self-emancipation.”

Making emancipation the paradigm and central narrative of the Jewish bourgeois conception of history meant, in many ways, taking it out of its actual historical context. The tendency toward dehistoricization within liberal Jewish historical culture can be observed in different forms:

(1) The presentation of emancipation as a universal and timeless “Mosaic principle” allowed for an interpretation (and idealization) of the modern age as the fulfilment of specific Jewish principles and promises. This can most clearly be seen in those liberal Jewish authors who, in the first half of the nineteenth century, interpreted modern developments as the fulfillment of ancient prophecies and described Jewish emancipation with biblical metaphors: as an exodus from Egypt or even as the beginning of the messianic age.

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Moreover, the idea of emancipation was seen as universal, not limited to Jewish history but extending over the whole world. In May 1865, faced with the victory of the northern states in the American Civil War, Ludwig Philippson, the editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, wrote an editorial under the headline “The Two Greatest Events of Our Century.”\(^8\) In this article, he considered the abolition of serfdom in Russia and the end of slavery in the United States as the two most important single events of the nineteenth century. They should not only be seen as the “victory of personal freedom and human dignity,” but also as the “victory of the Mosaic over the gentile principle.” Philippson went on:

Yes, it is the Mosaic principle that has come to final victory in both events. Drawn from a country where the whole people had become serfs, Mosaism did not tolerate serfdom on its own soil …. Mosaism is the only religion which has proclaimed and executed this principle as a religious one. More than three millennia have passed by since then, but it grew stronger and stronger over time and it guarantees by its successes that it will rule all over the world some day.\(^9\)

What Philippson expresses here became a popular topos in liberal Jewish conceptions of history in the nineteenth century. The characteristic mark of the modern age is the principle of emancipation, and this in its turn is based on the genuine biblical principle of liberation from bondage. In another example of the same argument, Philippson, in his retrospective assessment of the French Revolution, praised the French National Assembly for introducing, in 1789, the “Mosaic principle” of equality before the law, thus “laying the foundation stone of our present-day status in social and civic life.”\(^10\) He even quoted appreciatively a non-Jewish French author, who claimed that the Jews viewed the French Revolution as “predisposed in Hebraism,” as an “unconscious execution of Isaiah’s will,” and understood the belief in progress of humankind as a “Jewish idea.”\(^11\) By identifying the modern age as “Jewish,” i.e., as the fulfillment of ancient Jewish principles and promises, Philippson and other liberal authors made emancipation the key event in a secular history of salvation.


\(^9\) Ibid., 285.


(2) Another method of rendering emancipation a timeless principle was to present Jewish history as “modern,” i.e., as in conformity with the values of the educated middle class. By placing emphasis on those periods of Jewish history in which an active exchange between Jewish and non-Jewish culture had taken place, i.e., the Hellenistic period and the Jewish blossoming in Moorish Spain, emancipation and acculturation were presented as genuine parts of Jewish history, whereas the ghetto period appeared as an aberration, as the “dark age.”

(3) By presenting emancipation and acculturation as unfinished processes and as continuous tasks for the Jews, the dividing line between past, present, and future became blurred. Emancipation and acculturation were seen as normative demands and instruments for the direction of historical movement. The temporalization of political terminology was characteristic for liberalism in general, not just for Jewish liberalism. As Reinhart Koselleck has observed, concepts such as liberty, equality, fraternity, or, for that matter, emancipation, “call for objectives that assimilate more desires than previous history was able to fulfill.” That means they call for action to achieve the realization of their utopian promises. This conception of history became characteristic for the political ideologies of liberalism and, in a different form, also of socialism. In it, the present time is characterized by a struggle between the new and the old, between progress and reaction. The future is anticipated as a better world, as fulfillment of the utopian ideal. In precisely this way, the concept of emancipation functioned for Jewish liberalism in Germany.

This liberal view of emancipation did not remain uncontested. In the course of the nineteenth century, it met with growing criticism from neo-Orthodox and Zionist quarters. In the sixteenth of his Nineteen Letters on Judaism, the spiritual founder of neo-Orthodoxy in Germany, Samson Raphael Hirsch, discussed the significance of emancipation for the Jews. In the dualistic world view of

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14 On Hirsch and neo-Orthodoxy, see Mordechai Breuer, Modernity within
Orthodoxy sharply differentiating between “internal” and “external” spheres, between the unchangeable realm of the religious law on the one side and the vicissitudes of time and history on the other, emancipation was firmly placed into the latter, as part of the Jews’ “material state of affairs” (äußeres Geschick), thus being of minor interest for Judaism itself.15 Within the limits of this classification, however, Hirsch unreservedly welcomed emancipation as beneficial to the Jews: it lightened the pressure of everyday life and opened up new possibilities of living a pious life. As there was no valid objection against emancipation and as it was “opposed only by those passions which are degrading to humanity, namely, greed for gain and narrow selfishness,” overcoming these obstacles and establishing respect for the law and the rights of man, actually meant to him “the dawn of reviving humanity in mankind …, a preliminary step to the universal recognition of God as the sole Lord and Father ….”16 With his firm belief in progress and his optimistic view of the opportunities of emancipation, Hirsch’s position was actually not that different from that of the Liberals. The dividing line became apparent in the question of religious reform. For Hirsch and neo-Orthodoxy, Judaism was supertemporal, it stood outside history, and therefore could not be adjusted to the “spirit of the time” without losing its substance.17 Hirsch denied the liberal understanding according to which acculturation and religious reform were necessary preconditions for emancipation. His attitude toward emancipation—welcoming the granting of civil rights and the new opportunities it offered for Jews, while trying to keep the religious core of Judaism untouched by the impact of modernity—remained central within German neo-Orthodoxy.18 But Hirsch’ belief in progress and

16 Ibid., 81–82; English translation, ibid., 110.
his expectation of a new humanity emerging from the process of emancipation proved to be overly optimistic and, over time, were replaced by a more critical view of the modern age, emphasizing its “dark side” instead: the subordination of religion to the dictates of reason, and the concomitant loss of Jewish substance. As the Orthodox self-understanding was based on the demarcation between (eternal) “religion” and (transitory) “time,” a scrutinizing analysis, i.e., an “historicization” (and thereby qualification) of the current “spirit of the time” was essential to it. This allowed also for a rather detached view of the age of emancipation.

Jewish nationalism, as it emerged in the 1890s, developed its self-understanding in critical delimitation from the liberal concept of emancipation. Most outspoken in this respect was the Russian writer Ahad Ha’am (Asher Ginzberg) who, in 1891, described emancipated Western Jewry as living in “external freedom, but internal slavery.” Behind the glory and grandeur of Jewish life in the West, he recognized a “twofold slavery—moral slavery and intellectual slavery.” Asking himself whether he envied his fellow Jews their emancipation, he answered: “No! A thousand times no! … I may not be emancipated, but at least I have not sold my soul for emancipation.” In his famous speech at the First Zionist Congress in Basle in August 1897, Max Nordau sang the same tune, arguing that assimilated Western Jewry, having lost the “home of the ghetto,” had become insecure, an “inner cripple,” a “race of new Marranos … whose self-respect is destroyed through the ever-present consciousness of a fundamental lie.”

Tracing the causes of the “moral Jewish misery” of the present, Nordau turned to the origins of Jewish emancipation and diagnosed a severe birth defect:

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19 Ibid., 602.
The history of Jewish emancipation is one of the most remarkable pages in the history of European thought. The emancipation of the Jews ... was solely the result of the geometrical mode of thought of French rationalism of the eighteenth century. This rationalism was constructed by the aid of pure logic, without taking into account living sentiments. ... The men of 1792 emancipated us only for the sake of principle.24

Following just a fashion of time, the nations that emancipated the Jews mistook their own feelings. When the “honeymoon” was over and anti-Jewish hostility reappeared “from the innermost depths of the nations,” it left Western Jews, having based their self-understanding on the promises of emancipation and having sought “the closest association and assimilation” with these nations, in a quandary.25

For Nordau and the Zionists, history had proven the liberal view of emancipation a tragic self-delusion.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the issue of emancipation became a major point of dispute within German Jewry, bringing to light inherent ideological differences. While Liberals presented the contemporary breakthrough of emancipation as the fulfillment of ancient Jewish promises, thus identifying the modern age as “Jewish,” the Orthodox, defining Judaism as independent of time and history, were more critical of the “spirit of the times”; and to the Zionists, assessing the effects that social integration and assimilation had on Western Jewry, emancipation was identical with “de-Judaization” and “loss of identity.” It remains to be seen how these general patterns of interpretation took shape in Jewish historical culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. The celebrations of the centenary of the Prussian Emancipation Edict, in March 1912, are particularly instructive for this question.

2. Contested History: The Centenary of the Prussian Emancipation Edict (1912)

The initiative for organizing the centenary celebrations was taken by the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens, often in close cooperation with the local Vereine für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur.

24 Ibid., 45.
25 Ibid., 50.
In some cities, such as Essen, the local Jewish community officially joined the organizing board. Celebrations organized by the Centralverein were mostly held in neutral meeting halls; those organized by the Jewish community were held in the local synagogue, often in the form of a special service. Almost everywhere, the program of events included musical performances and ceremonial speeches, outlining the origins of the Emancipation Edict and its consequences for Prussian Jewry. Many speakers, such as the deputy of the Prussian Diet, Hermann Cohn (Dessau), who spoke in Königsberg, drew a line to the present situation. For him, the commemoration of the Emancipation Edict was not only concerned with the past, but with the present and the future. The centenary celebration was to give “a stimulus to a restless struggle for putting the granted rights completely into effect.”

The central celebration of the Jewish community of Berlin took place in the New Synagogue, the black, white and red flag of the German Empire flying on top of its golden dome. With members of the city government and political as well as academic dignitaries present, Rabbi Samson Weisse gave the main ceremonial speech, expressing the “sincere gratitude” of Prussian Jewry for the act of emancipation. Weisse did not fail to mention that the initial rejoicing over the granted freedom was followed by disappointments and setbacks, but he did not want to spoil the festive mood by elaborating on these, emphasizing instead the patriotism of Prussian Jewry in times of war and peace, and concluding that Prussian Jews, in the century since 1812, had always shown themselves “worthy of the high good of civil equality.”

Following a more general pattern of the emancipation celebrations, the address of the communal rabbi was complemented by the speech of a jurist, examining the historical background and legal significance of the act. As Justizrat Bernhard Breslauer emphasized in front of the convened notables of Berlin, the Prussian Jews entering city parliaments, public office, or administration turned out to be as competent and efficient as their Christian compatriots. Jews were in no way politically biased or “unreliable.” But they could not be expected to support those parties who worked to restrict their rights. Breslauer concluded with

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27 Der Gemeindebote (Beilage zur AZJ) 76, no. 11 (March 11, 1912), 1.
the credo of German-Jewish liberalism: “Judaism is nothing but a religious community that is definitely in harmony with our German-ness. We will not let us deprive of this belief—and we don’t need to—in order to be good Germans and good Prussians.”

The Berlin section of the Centralverein celebrated the centenary with a gala dinner (Festkommers) in one of the most imposing banquet halls of the German capital at Kroll’s Etablissement. Around one thousand participants, mainly members of the Centralverein, of the Grand Lodge and of different student fraternities, came together, listening to musical presentations and numerous speeches, and engaging in the recital of festive poems and songs.

The celebration of the centenary was not limited to special services or gala events. Virtually the entire Jewish press, including that of the Zionists who kept away from the celebrations themselves, published special features, relating the history of the Emancipation Edict and commenting on its meaning for the present. Moreover the Centralverein, joined by other German-Jewish associations and the major Jewish communities in Prussia, commissioned a two-volume history of Jewish emancipation in Prussia that was written by the legal historian Ismar Freund and published on the occasion of the centenary. It included an extensive collection of documents (volume two), and, based on it, a detailed historical presentation of

28 Ibid., 2.
29 See Der Gemeindebote (Beilage zur AZJ) 76 (1912), no. 12, 1; Der Israelit 53 (1912), no. 13, 4.
the prehistory of the Prussian Emancipation Edict. In the preface, Freund emphasized that he did not consider his work an occasional paper or a jubilee publication, but a piece of sound scholarship: “it has no other tendency than to explore the scientific truth and to present the events as they appeared to me in the sources.”32 The occasion of the centenary was also used to promote emancipation itself. One hundred years after Prussian Jews had officially gained equality, the board of the Jewish community of Berlin took the initiative for the establishment of an endowed chair in Jewish cultural and literary history at the University of Berlin.33 Faced with the disillusioning findings of an inquiry, presented by Bernhard Breslauer in 1911,34 that proved discrimination against Jewish applicants in higher education, the approach was meant to foster the emancipation of Judaism by incorporating Jewish studies into the most prestigious German university. The initiative failed already at an early stage as the University of Berlin could not accept the terms of the endowment, namely that the sponsored chair was to be filled by a Jewish applicant only.

How was the Prussian Emancipation Edict commemorated and interpreted in jubilee speeches and publications in 1912? Did the celebrations reflect the internal rifts and ideological differences regarding the meaning of emancipation for modern Jewry or did they bring about some common ground for historical understanding? Looking first at the contributions of some major representatives of the liberal camp, we can summarize the tenor of their arguments in four points:

1. The emancipation of Jews was founded in the development of the modern constitutional state and of citizenship rights, and supported by the will of the people. As Eugen Fuchs, the main speaker of the Centralverein, reminded his audience in Berlin, the characteristic mark of the

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32 Ibid., vol. 1, 1.
modern age lies in the principle of emancipation. Modernity as a distinct historical period only began with the legislation for Jewish emancipation:

For us it is sufficient to state ... that before March 11, 1812, the Middle Ages had not ended and the modern age not begun in Prussia. Modernity has not yet arrived as long as human rights have not been acknowledged for all people and as long as the idea has not yet prevailed that everybody who is created in the image of God has the same right to be appreciated as a human being.35

Several speakers took issues with the view of Max Nordau, who had claimed that Jewish emancipation was only based in the short-lived philosophical fashion of French rationalism and had no anchorage in the will of the people. In contrast to that, Fuchs emphasized the gradual and well-thought-out process leading to the French emancipation law.36 The Hamburg-based preacher and author of a Festschrift for the centenary, Paul Rieger, went even further and maintained that Prussia was “the first state in Europe where equality for Jews was not urged by the government, i.e., pushed through against the will of the people,” but rather followed an idea that had grown strong among the people themselves: “The people [of Prussia] do not feel the emancipation of Jews as restrictive but rather as just and well-deserved.”37

(2) The emancipation of the Prussian Jews was not an act of mercy or a gift, but a reward in return for the achievements accomplished by the Jews themselves. The topos of self-emancipation, i.e., that Prussian Jewry had earned emancipation by Mendelssohn’s reformation, its participation in modern Bildung and culture, and not least its patriotism, figured prominently in many jubilee contributions.38

(3) The unfulfilled promises of emancipation call for a continued struggle for its realization. The fact that, a hundred years after the Emancipation Edict, complete equality had not yet been achieved was stressed and

36 Ibid., 390–392.
criticized unanimously. As Felix Goldmann put it in his postscript to the centenary celebrations, “Looking back at the external development of Judaism in the century of emancipation did not really promote a festive mood.”39 Some speakers, such as Eugen Fuchs, took the opportunity to analyze the causes of the delay, confronting the academic proponents of modern anti-Semitism—Heinrich von Treitschke, Eduard Hartmann, or Werner Sombart;40 others, such as the philosopher Hermann Cohen, came out with concrete suggestions, reminding the state of its cultural task and demanding the establishment of Wissenschaft des Judentums at Prussian universities.41

(4) Emancipation has laid the foundation for the participation of Jews in public life and culture, but it has also brought about inner decline and the loss of Jewish substance. Even within the liberal camp, the celebrations were not imbued with a triumphalist attitude about the achievements of emancipation. Rather, the ambivalences of the present situation were emphasized, and a critical, self-reflective tone prevailed. Taking up the criticism from Zionist quarters, Rieger admitted that there always had been Prussian Jews who felt ashamed of their Jewishness and therefore followed a path of total assimilation, Jews who were politically free, but psychologically slaves: “the slavish mind is still alive within them; they cannot imagine that they are allowed to live without slave chains and lashes of the whip.”42 Rieger limited such criticism to those who left the Jewish community and thereby committed “treason and desertion”; he did not accept it for the majority of emancipated Prussian Jews who felt “that Judaism was identical with honor and conscience.”43 Whereas Rieger saw the “dark side of emancipation” caused by moral shortcomings of individuals but not as a structural defect, Felix Goldmann was more pessimistic about the long-term effects of emancipation on Judaism’s inner situation. Drawing a parallel between German Jewry’s economic and spiritual development in the age of emancipation, Goldmann diagnosed a decline in its spiritual power as the effect of rising prosperity, and predicted that this development would in turn hamper the economic

43 Ibid., 115.
situation of German Jewry as well. A solution could only be found by strengthening educational efforts among the Jewish youth.\textsuperscript{44}

As we have seen earlier, the German Zionists did not join the majority of Prussian Jewry in celebrating the centenary of the Emancipation Edict. For the editorialist of the \textit{Jüdische Rundschau}, the emancipation of the Jews in Prussia represented “a historical event that was bound to happen.”\textsuperscript{45} There was no point in expressing a feeling of gratitude for emancipation such as the \textit{Centralverein} had done in gala events and jubilee speeches, since the only achievement of men such as Stein and Hardenberg was that they had carried out by their own free will what sooner or later was to happen anyway. Moreover, the historical significance of the event was too critical for unqualified jubilation. The century of emancipation had taken a “heavy toll” of Jewry. On the other hand was Zionism, as a political and cultural factor, only made possible by the entrance of Jewry into the European cultural life, i.e., by the emancipation process. Following the necessity of the historical development, both emancipation and Zionism had to fulfill specific roles in their respective times:

Neither emancipation nor Zionism has “dropped in” on history by chance. As the beginning of the nineteenth century was “ripe” for the emancipation of the Jews, which had to happen exactly at that time, so can Judaism, at the beginning of the twentieth century, only fulfil its historical task by working for Zionism.\textsuperscript{46}

By viewing the course of history in a deterministic way as a definite sequence of different stages, the period of emancipation was no longer depreciated as an aberration (as it had been depicted in the early Zionist polemics), but seen as a “necessary,” but meanwhile “outdated” stage of historical development. This approach allowed for a more detached and differentiated assessment of the history of emancipation within German Zionism. Not all Zionist commentators of the emancipation centenary, to be sure, shared this view. In Heinrich Margulies’s article “The Century of German-Jewish Mixed Culture,” we still find the basic dialectical motion and pattern of interpretation that had shaped the Zionist concept of history since its beginnings: the ghetto Jew (thesis), deeply rooted in

\textsuperscript{44} Goldmann, “Reichtum und Geisteskraft im deutschen Judentum,” 325–333.
\textsuperscript{45} “Das Judenedikt,” \textit{JR} 17 (1912), no. 11, 89.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
cultural unity, representing wholeness, inner strength, and heroism; the emancipated Jew (antithesis), torn by cultural dualism, representing inner conflicts, nervousness, and the never-ending hunt for a purpose in life; the Zionist Jew (synthesis), striving for renewed rootedness, inner strength, and heroism by emancipating himself “from assimilation” and by following a path that leads “out of the chaos of cultural dualism” toward unity, cultural homogeneity, and a new wholeness: becoming a “complete Jew” (Volljude) and thereby a “complete human being” (Vollmensch).47

In the narrow scheme of his approach, Margulies could only paint a gloomy picture of the age of emancipation:

Verily, neither the Roman wars nor the stakes have played the same havoc among us as this century of German-Jewish mixed culture! Should we fully rejoice over the external liberties (that we perfectly do appreciate) in view of the green-sick flabby figures that nowadays fill the universities, in view of the type of the Jewish Schmock—this most genuine hybrid produced in great numbers—in view of the deepest despair and depression, [and] exotic craving for sensation and lascivious decadence? … Away with the ringing of the centenary bells! We are deserving of seriousness, not irresponsible carelessness.48

Forcefully argued as it was, Margulies’s position of cultural purism was not representative of German Zionists in 1912. On the contrary, his contribution invited dissent and provoked a debate on the “cultural question” within the pages of the *Jüdische Rundschau*.49 Other Zionist commentators warned against viewing the pre-emancipation period in the light of a false romanticism and against equating emancipation with loss and disaster only. As Moses Calvary put it in the editorial of the Zionist weekly, *Die Welt*, “It is true that the insecurity of our instincts was owed to that period [of emancipation]. … But we have also gained something, and not just some Bildung. Culture is not a problem of addition: a little piece of Jewishness less, a little piece of Germanness more.”50 By participating in the rich life of European culture, “the Jewish soul” gained expressiveness and was elevated

48 Ibid., 101.
to a new and more valuable level. Only under this prerequisite, Calvary argued, did modern Zionism, striving for the reconciliation of culture and nation, become possible.\footnote{Ibid.}

The celebrations of the Prussian Emancipation Edict in 1912 did bring to light the differentiation and segmentation of Jewish historical culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since the interpretation of emancipation had become a distinctive mark of opposing Jewish group identities, above all Liberal and Zionist, ideological arguments ruled the day. But beyond the black and white of ideological delimitation, the centenary also revealed that there was on both sides a good deal of ambivalence, uncertainty, and reflectiveness in assessing the emancipation period. Liberals were concerned about the “losses” of emancipation for the Jewish community, while Zionists emphasized the “gains” of acculturation for the development of Zionism. Above all, an understanding gained hold (to be sure, first on the Zionist side) that the origins of emancipation did belong to the past and had to be viewed historically.\footnote{When, in 1933, Nazi politicians rescinded Jewish emancipation within a few months and many Zionists felt vindicated by this event in their sense of the illusionary character of the liberal emancipation project, it was the Liberals who took refuge in the position of historicism, arguing that all historical periods have to be judged in terms of their own contexts and standards, and not with the hindsight of subsequent generations. See Guy Miron, “Emancipation and Assimilation in the German-Jewish Discourse of the 1930s,” \textit{LBIYB} 48 (2003), 165–189, here 172.} With so many questions unanswered, the historicization of emancipation became an urgent task. This was the hour of \textit{Wissenschaft}.

3. Beyond Ideology? Historical Research on the Period of Emancipation

In the German Empire, Jewish studies had no space at the universities. \textit{Wissenschaft des Judentums} was only represented in the rabbinical seminaries, belonging to the three major Jewish denominations: Conservative (\textit{Jüdisch-theologisches Seminar}, Breslau), Liberal (\textit{Hochschule/Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums}, Berlin) and Orthodox (\textit{Rabbinerseminar}, Berlin). Jewish historical scholarship was located at these seminars as well. In addition, German Jewry had established special institutions for the study of German-Jewish history, such as the
Gesamtarchiv der deutschen Juden (1905–1943), the Historische Commission für Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland (1885–1902) and the Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland (1886–1892). While some of these institutions were rather short-lived due to lack of support, the academic study of Jewish history received a fresh impetus after the First World War by the establishment of the Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (1919–1934) and the revived Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland (1929–1937). Moreover, the number of doctoral dissertations in the field of Jewish history, submitted to a faculty of philosophy at German universities, increased considerably during the Weimar years. Between 1919 and 1933, there were forty-eight doctoral dissertations in Jewish history, thirty-two of them alone in the field of German-Jewish history. Virtually all of them were written by Jewish graduate students who, apart from supervision by a German professor at the university, often had received additional training in Jewish subjects at one of the rabbinical seminaries. This development meant that research on Jewish history was increasingly done by academically trained historians who had specialized in Jewish history. The high degree of academicization is obvious among the authors of the (second) Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland (ZGJD): three out of four (or 75 percent) had obtained a Ph.D., and the majority of the contributors were professors at universities or seminaries and archivists, followed by rabbis, teachers, librarians, freelancers, and graduate students.

How did this tendency toward a more academic, professional, and “scientific” study of Jewish history, which was characteristic of the Weimar years, shape the research and presentation of the emancipation period? Did the Wissenschaft approach aiming at
impartiality and objectivity manage to obtain a position of authority within an historical culture that was deeply divided over the issue of emancipation? What were the major approaches and findings of studies on the history of Jewish emancipation?

Looking at the output of scholarly production in the years between 1918 and 1938 on Jewish history, it is quite obvious that topics of modern Jewish history were more frequently dealt with than previously. To be sure, the majority of studies continued to focus on the medieval and early modern periods, but the share of modern Jewish studies was rising. Of the 68 doctoral dissertations submitted at German universities between 1919 and 1935 in the extended field of Jewish history (including legal and religious history), one half (34) dealt with the late modern period (after 1750). Approximately one third of the 133 articles published in the ZGJD between 1929 and 1937 focused on the modern age. Even more telling than these numbers is the fact that the only research institute of the Wissenschaft des Judentums in Germany, the Berlin Akademie, developed a large-scale research project on the prehistory of Prussian emancipation that was carried out by Selma Stern. Planned as the third and final part of a more comprehensive project on the “Europeanization of Judaism”—ancient Hellenism and medieval Spain being the other two—the academy, under the leadership of Eugen Täubler, sought to clarify an urgent problem of the Jewish present by historical research. Moreover, the growing interest among younger and liberal-oriented German professors of history, such as Friedrich Meinecke, in the origins and different European paths of the modern development, made it easier to integrate the subject of Jewish emancipation into general historical scholarship. In her doctoral thesis of 1916 supervised by Meinecke, for example, Rosa Dukas compared the motivation behind the Prussian and French legislation of Jewish emancipation. The dissertation was part of a larger research project on the ideological

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origins of the Prussian reform movement, pursued by Meinecke. At the same time, its results were of immediate significance for Jewish historical culture in Germany.

But professional standards and a scholarly approach did not automatically guarantee a position of authority for Jewish historical 
Wissenschaft. How ideologically divided Jewish historical culture—and scholarship—was over the issue of emancipation can be seen in the polemical exchange between the historians Fritz Friedlaender and Ernst Simon in 1928. 60 Reviewing Friedlaender’s book on the life of Gabriel Riesser, published in 1926, 61 Simon acknowledged that the author had succeeded in writing a knowledgeable political biography of Riesser by placing his life into the context of Germany’s political development in the nineteenth century. When it came to the assessment of internal Jewish affairs such as the problem of Jewish emancipation, however, Simon saw Friedlaender losing “all historical prudence” and becoming “an anachronistic advocate of shallow anti-Zionism.” By presenting Riesser as forerunner and “patron saint” of the Centralverein, Friedlaender had failed to detect the inherent contradictions in Riesser’s concept of emancipation. His book, Simon concluded, was not more than an—admittedly fine—“contribution to C.V.-Wissenschaft.” 62 In his reply, Friedlaender repudiated the insinuation that scholarship inspired by the world view of the Centralverein could not be genuine scholarship because it was in conflict with Max Weber’s demand for impersonal and value-free scholarly research. It was a fact, Friedlaender argued, that every truly great conception of history was colored by unconscious objectives and that the claim to avoid any presupposition in scholarship (Voraussetzunglosigkeit der Wissenschaft) was just an empty phrase. 63 Friedlaender did not elaborate on the question of what minimum standards scholarship had to fulfill in order to qualify for genuine scholarship. Given the polemical fierceness of their exchange, it seems that neither Simon nor Friedlaender had much trust in the ability


63 Friedlaender, “Gibt es eine C.V.-Wissenschaft?” 458.
of *Wissenschaft* to bridge the ideological rifts within German Jewry.

In other quarters, Jewish emancipation and assimilation were even regarded as a subject too sensitive for scholarly investigation. When in the early 1920s at Heidelberg University the graduate student Ernst Simon told his professor of modern history, Hermann Oncken, that he would like to write a doctoral thesis on the emergence of German patriotism among the Jews in Germany during the eighteenth century, Oncken declined, saying, “Dear Mr. Simon, that book you can write independently. But no thesis will come out of my graduate seminar that the anti-Semites could quote in support.” Simon left the topic to his younger friend Benno Offenburg, who took his doctoral degree with it at Hamburg University in 1933, and chose for himself a different, less delicate dissertation topic with Oncken. When the Nazis came to power and established various institutes for research on the “Jewish question,” the space for academic research on Jewish topics narrowed considerably at the universities, although individual Jewish graduates were able to complete their studies, in some exceptional cases even as late as 1938. In the anti-Semitic concept of the Nazi research institutes, emancipation and assimilation of the Jews presented the true causes of misfortune and decline in German and world history. Attacking liberal professors for their support of Jewish historical scholarship, Wilhelm Grau, the research director of one of the Nazi institutes, managed in 1935 to obtain a position of ideological supervision of all dissertation projects at German universities dealing with Jewish topics. Even earlier, the climate of ideological pressure and intimidation had its effects. While many professors declined to supervise dissertations on Jewish subjects at all, others were anxious not to give offence to the new rulers. So when Jacob Katz finished his doctoral thesis on the origins of the ideology of assimilation in 1934 at the University of Frankfurt am Main, he was asked by his mentor to add a personal statement in the preface confirming that the historical reconstruction

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of the ideology of assimilation in the thesis did not imply support for the concept of assimilation. As a traditional Jew and a convinced Zionist, Katz had been critical of the concept of assimilation in any case, and he chose to act according to the request of his mentor.\footnote{Jacob Katz, \textit{Die Entstehung der Judenassimilation in Deutschland und deren Ideologie}. Diss. phil., Frankfurt am Main, 1935, in idem, \textit{Zur Assimilation und Emanzipation der Juden} (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982), 1–82, here 3.} But he always felt that this was an encroachment of politics upon scholarship: “Anyone who comes across my dissertation today will find the author’s disclaimer of any support for assimilation included for reasons that have nothing to do with scholarship.”\footnote{Jacob Katz, \textit{With My Own Eyes: The Autobiography of an Historian} (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1995), 93.}

In the midst of external pressures and the predominance of a bitter internal ideological controversy, Jewish historical scholarship during the Weimar and early Nazi years produced a few pioneering studies on the history of Jewish emancipation that have had a lasting effect on scholarship up to this day. Out of a greater number of relevant presentations I shall concentrate on four and briefly present the works of Selma Stern, Jacob Katz, Max Wiener, and Hannah Arendt.

Selma Stern’s large-scale research project on the Prussian state and the Jews that began in 1920 at the Akademie (and only ended in 1975 with the publication of the last index volume), aimed at reconstructing in great detail the process of legal, economic, and cultural integration of Jews into the Prussian state body from the beginnings to the Emancipation Edict of 1812.\footnote{Selma Stern, \textit{Der preussische Staat und die Juden}, 4 parts in 8 vols. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1962, 1971, and 1975). The first volume of the historical presentation (vol. 1, no. 1) was published in Berlin in 1925, the second (vol. 2, no. 1) was printed in Berlin in 1938, but then confiscated and destroyed. Quotes are from the postwar edition. On Stern, see Marina Sassenberg, \textit{Selma Stern (1890–1981): das Eigene in der Geschichte. Selbstentwürfe und Geschichtsentwürfe einer Historikerin} (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2004).} The historical presentation was to be complemented by the complete edition of relevant documents. In her study, Stern focused on the fundamental change of the “Jewish type”—its self-understanding and identity—in the process of acculturation and modernization. Following Täubler’s approach of integral history (\textit{Beziehungsgeschichte}), i.e., the assumption that the history of a minority has to be understood in
the context of the general history of its environment, she emphasized the influence of the Prussian state and its administration on internal Jewish development. In addition, she accentuated the impact of general historical changes, for example of the state, the bureaucracy, and the economy, on the formulation of Prussia’s Jewish policy. By applying the methodological standards of critical historical source analysis and by firmly placing Jewish history in the context of general history, Stern aimed at objectivity, trying to find a way out of the deadlocked Jewish debate over the gains and losses of emancipation. In view of the Zionist criticism of emancipation and the nostalgic idealization of the authentic Jewish life in premodern times that found its contemporary expression in the Zionist cult of the “Ostjuden,” Stern’s interpretation came down as a vindication of the process of modernization: emancipation and assimilation are necessary developments that cannot be revoked but have to be understood as a continuous task for Jewry. In her view, shaped as it was by the liberal ideal of Bildung, history aims at the liberation of humankind from the constraints of birth and religious tutelage, leading to the personal formation and self-improvement of the individual in freedom and moral responsibility. In this perspective, the dissolution of the ghetto could only be seen as progress: the Jews were torn away from the “narrowness” of their traditional way of life in which “the individual was absorbed by the community.”

The disadvantages of this development, such as the loss of Jewish autonomy, the tendencies of dissolution within the Jewish community, and the rise of anti-Jewish hostility, were, compared with that view of progress, underexposed in Stern’s historical narrative.

In his doctoral thesis, *The Origins of Jewish Assimilation and Its Ideology*, Jacob Katz followed a different approach. While Stern had extended the meaning of the concepts of emancipation and assimilation by applying them already to the seventeenth century and by understanding them as continuous tasks for Jewry in the modern world, it was important to Katz to narrow it down again and to explore as precisely as possible the specific historical situation in which assimilation originated. Inspired by the sociological approach

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of his academic teacher Karl Mannheim and basing his study on new research on the societal development of Germany in the eighteenth century, above all on Hans Weil’s study on the origins of the German concept of Bildung, Katz sharply discriminated between a pre-assimilatory and an assimilatory condition. The turn to the latter was only possible after a “neutralized form of society” had emerged in the educated elite of the Enlightenment. It was a society that, according to its self-understanding, was neither Christian nor Jewish: “it was possible to belong to it without having been confronted at all with the question: Christian or Jew.” The unifying centre of this society was defined by the terms of humanity, state, and civil society. With the emergence of this modern ideal, educated Jews could become members of non-Jewish society, which had been impossible before. This change marked precisely the beginning of assimilation. Katz explained the emergence of the ideology of assimilation by pointing to the societal conditions of its proponents: “It functions to legitimate the concurrent affiliation with both, Judaism and an extra-Jewish society, and seeks to conciliate the different doctrines and religious dogmas of the two communities.” Following this ideology, Mendelssohn redefined Judaism as the religion of reason and denied that it had any claims for universal recognition beyond that.

In its sociological approach and its precise line of argumentation, explaining cultural change by the structure and functional efficiency of societal transformation, Katz’s doctoral thesis has lost nothing of its appeal even today. By attributing the ideas of the first generation of assimilated German Jews to its social background, Katz does historicize the ideas of the proponents of assimilation, thereby qualifying their position.

A similar approach, albeit without the same methodological stringency, could already be found in Max Wiener’s monumental work Jewish Religion in the Age of Emancipation, published in 1933.

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72 Katz, Judenassimilation, 22–24.
73 Ibid., 40–41.
74 Ibid., 53.
75 For a re-evaluation of Katz’s work, see Jay M. Harris, ed., The Pride of Jacob: Essays on Jacob Katz and His Work (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), especially the essays by David N. Myers (9–27), Paula E. Hyman (85–95), and David Ellenson (97–123).
76 Max Wiener, Jüdische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation (Berlin: Philo-Verlag, 1933). On Wiener and his work, see Hans Liebeschütz, Von Georg Simmel zu Franz.
Concluding his study at a time when history had brought to an end the era of Jewish emancipation in Germany, Wiener presented a critical reassessment of the internal transformations of Jewish self-understanding and identity in the age of emancipation, from Mendelssohn to the 1870s. Focusing on the religious history of Judaism as a representative mirror of its general development in the modern period, Wiener aimed to explore whether there were “forces of vitality” within Judaism that had stood the test of modernity and had saved Judaism “from being totally crushed.” Comparing Christian and Jewish paths of secularization, Wiener emphasized the abruptness and suddenness of the transformation of Jewish life—from the wholeness of the pre-emancipation life-context shaped by the halakhah, to the fragmentation, individualization, and differentiation of Jewish life-contexts in the modern age in which a surrogate had to be found for the lost tradition. In analyzing the different attempts at forging a new principle of Judaism, Wiener took into account their social function of advancing the process of bourgeoisification and integration. But he insisted that Jewish religious or philosophical movements of the nineteenth century could not properly be understood by simply reducing them to pragmatic responses to changed social opportunities. Rather, they had to be viewed as a “serious effort to rejuvenate [Judaism’s] idea and vitality.” Concentrating his study on four typical forms of redefining Jewish religion in the modern era, namely religious movements, Jewish philosophy, the Wissenschaft des Judentums, and, in a kind of epilogue, the Jewishness of non-Jewish Jews (“Judaism as a mood”), Wiener gave, as Robert S. Schine has concluded, “a critical retrospective on the legacies of the nineteenth century from the threshold of the new era marked by the eruption of Zionism.” Despite his own Zionist inclinations, Wiener did not simply evaluate his topic by Zionist standards or present Zionism as the solution to the problem discussed in his book. He saw himself more as a “dispassionate describer” of the historical development, rather than a “metaphysician of history.”


77 Wiener, Jüdische Religion, 27.
78 Ibid., 3.
79 Schine, Jewish Thought Adrift, 161–162.
presenting ready-made answers. But one can nevertheless argue that Jewish nationalism served as a kind of foil for Wiener’s presentation that has been praised for both, the acumen of its analysis and its impartiality.

Hannah Arendt’s biography of Rahel Varnhagen that was written during the 1930s, but first published in 1957, was, by contrast, clearly shaped by a Zionist pattern of interpretation. Arendt was no historian of German Jewry; she came across Rahel when dealing with the philosophy of German romanticism. Writing Rahel’s life “from within,” her biography is an intense and personal book, blurring “the distinction between biographical and autobiographical writing.” Going time and again through the intellectual and emotional world of Rahel, documented in her letters, Arendt tried to analyze the typical dilemma of the Jew in the age of acculturation. The microhistory of a single life serves her as an example that proves the impossibility of complete assimilation. Viewing her Jewish birth as a defect, Rahel’s attempts to escape it by marriage, change of name, and baptism are bound to fail, Arendt argues, in the same way as her longing for acceptance in the world of Bildung and literature is unsatisfied. She remains a stranger and a pariah in the world of Gentiles and, in the end, returns to her Jewish roots. Arendt’s view of the process of assimilation is totally pessimistic. In her conclusion, she writes:

No assimilation could be achieved merely by surrendering one’s own past, but ignoring the alien past. In a society on the whole hostile to the Jews … it is possible to assimilate only by assimilating to anti-Semitism also. If one wishes to be a normal person precisely like everybody else, there is scarcely any alternative to exchanging old prejudices for new ones. If that is not done, one involuntarily becomes a rebel …—and remains a Jew. And if one really assimilates, taking all the consequences of denial of one’s own origin and cutting oneself off from those who have not or have not yet done it, one becomes a scoundrel.

80 Wiener, *Jüdische Religion*, 9; see also his conclusion, 274.
84 Ibid., 256.
This was written in 1937, when Arendt had left Nazi Germany and lived in French exile. But also the first part of the biography, finished before the Nazi takeover, was already shaped by a Zionist viewpoint, influenced by her friendship with Kurt Blumenfeld.85

4. Conclusion

In a fascinating study, David N. Myers has recently explored the development of antihistoricism in German-Jewish thought.86 Focusing on Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenweig, Leo Strauss, and Isaac Breuer, Myers shows how these thinkers tried to overturn the hegemony of historicism by finding alternative—theological or philosophical—ways of preserving tradition. And yet, as Myers concludes, “their best antihistoricist intentions were tempered by deeply ingrained—and ultimately inescapable—historicist impulses.”87

The inescapability of historicism has also been met in the discourse on emancipation within Jewish historical culture. As we have seen, all major Jewish camps defined their identities based on history, i.e., by forming a specific master-interpretation of the course of history. These “essentialized” interpretations were challenged by the historical discourse between the ideological camps and by the rise of historical scholarship striving for contextualization and “objectivity.” Trying to break the spell of the hegemonic liberal myth of emancipation, Zionists used the method of historicization, while at the same time, by idealizing the authenticity of premodern Jewish life-concepts, creating new myths. Liberals responded in the same way, demythologizing the Zionist construction of history. Participating in the debate on the historical significance of emancipation was probably mainly an act of ideological self-assertion, but it could also be a matter of orientation and critical self-reflection; in the final analysis, it may even have been another form of Jewish community

87 Ibid., 172.
building—a community no longer based on ideological unity but on historical discourse.

In a recent survey of the issue of emancipation in German-Jewish public memory of the 1930s, Guy Miron has found that there was “a gradual blurring of the traditional division between the major camps—Liberal, Zionist, and Orthodox.” This development towards moderation of one of the most painful internal Jewish ideological conflicts was essentially due to the external pressures on Jewish life in Nazi Germany. But it can be argued that this new unity was prepared for by the experience of a prolonged historical debate in which the major arguments had been exchanged time and again making the antagonisms in the end become less pronounced. Furthermore, the rise of Jewish historical scholarship during the Weimar years and the advances of historical contextualization and research had helped to de-emotionalize and de-ideologize the interpretation of this crucial era of Jewish history.

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88 Miron, “Emancipation and Assimilation in the German-Jewish Discourse of the 1930s,” 188; see also idem, “The Emancipation ‘Pantheon of Heroes’ in the German-Jewish Public Memory in the 1930s,” German History 21 (2003), 476–504, here 503.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

HISTORIOGRAPHY IN A CULTURAL GHETTO:
JEWISH HISTORIANS IN NAZI GERMANY

MICHAEL BRENNER

The Weimar Republic witnessed an enormous upsurge in Jewish historical research. The Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums under the leadership of Eugen Täubler initiated major research projects and employed scholars of Jewish history, such as Fritz (Yitshak) Baer and Selma Stern. At the same time, Ismar Elbogen, who taught at the Berlin Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, launched an international project for a multi-volume World Jewish History, which was cut short only because of the economic and political crisis in the early 1930s. In the late twenties, the Munich historian Raphael Straus re-established the Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland. Numerous dissertations were written on Jewish historical topics at German universities in the years after World War I, both by Jews and non-Jews, and for the first time also by women as well as men.¹

1933 was, as in many other respects, also a decisive turning point in German-Jewish scholarship, without, however, marking the end of the cultural creativity of German Jewry. The first scholars of Wissenschaft des Judentums had already left Germany well before 1933, either because they were Zionists or because they could not get positions at German universities; thus Baer and Gershon Scholem went to Jerusalem, while Eugen Täubler went to Switzerland for a few years before returning to Heidelberg. Ismar Elbogen rejected, in 1930, an attractive offer from Columbia University to hold the first chair of

Jewish historians in Nazi Germany

Jewish history at a Western university. After 1933, Jewish academic institutions like the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (and to a lesser extent the Orthodox Hildesheimer Rabbinerseminar) in Berlin, as well as the conservative Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar in Breslau not only lost but also gained faculty members. While some of their own faculty emigrated, new teachers were drawn into those institutions after they had to quit their university positions. Thus, teaching continued at both institutions until well into the Nazi period.2

Moreover, some of the first fruits of the recent research institutions were harvested in the years after 1933. Volume one of the Germania Judaica, which presented the earliest records of Jewish life in hundreds of German places in the Middle Ages, was completed at a time, in 1934, when attempts were underway to systematically eliminate Jews from German society. Just as Lessing’s Nathan the Wise could only be performed before a closed Jewish audience, and the only critical press were the remaining Jewish papers, unbiased research on Jewish topics in Germany after 1933 continued in the cultural ghetto of Jewish teaching and research institutions. In contrast to the absolute exclusion from most parts of German society, however, the university remained open to a few Jewish doctoral students, especially of non-German citizenship, until 1937/38.3 While the Jewish teaching institutions in this period have been covered by recent studies, less is known about those works of scholarship that were produced outside the “cultural ghetto,” be it at German universities or in publicly accessible journals.

One year after Hitler’s rise to power, three thick volumes were completed that served as unique epitaphs for the German-Jewish legacy. As already mentioned, one of them was the second and final part of the first volume of the Germania Judaica, one of the most ambitious projects in German-Jewish scholarship. It records in meticulous detail the presence of Jews in Germany from “the earliest beginnings until 1250.” Reflecting its untimely appearance, the preface concluded in a sober spirit: “It is, at the moment, too

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3 On the last case of a Jewish student submitting a doctoral dissertation in Cologne, see Frank Golczewski, Kölnier Universitätslehrer und die Nationalsozialisten (Cologne: Böhlau, 1988), 347–349.
early to speak of continuing this work. We hope, in more auspicious times, to be able to resume our task, a task that, at present, exceeds our society’s capacities.”

While the *Germania Judaica* showed the far-reaching roots of Jews in German lands, the second work concentrated on their contributions to German culture and society in the modern period. Edited by the publisher of the *Jüdischer Verlag*, Siegmund Kaznelson, it bore the title *Juden im deutschen Kulturbereich*. In fifty essays and stretching over more than one thousand pages, this study depicts Jewish involvements in almost all areas, from theater and film to geophysics and botany. There was even a separate essay on German Jews in chess. In 1934, however, the correct title for such an essay, as analogously for all other titles, would normally have been, “Jews in German Chess.”

The desire to show to the non-Jewish world the great contributions Jews made to civilization and thus to combat anti-Semitism was not restricted to Germany during this period. The most renowned British-Jewish historian, Cecil Roth of Oxford, published in 1938 a study entitled, *The Jewish Contribution to Western Civilization*, thus aiming to refute the myth “that the Jew is essentially a middleman, who has produced nothing: that he is an alien excrescence on European life …. A decade later, Louis Finkelstein, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, followed suit with his *The Jews: Their History, Culture, and Civilization*, in which he defined his task, four years after the Holocaust, as follows:

> More complete information about Judaism may perhaps avert, in some degree, the growth of Anti-Semitism. … Men who are ignorant are easily misled by those who are vicious; and it becomes the duty of any group which seeks to increase love in the world, to prevent misunderstanding of itself by offering correct information.

One may doubt if those works were indeed able to convince anti-Semites. To remind Germans of what the Jews contributed to German culture was certainly not in the interest of state and party officials in 1934. Thus, it is little surprising that the official institutions prevented the printing and circulation of Kaznelson’s volume, after the

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Staatspolizeiamt für den Landespolizeibezirk Berlin declared:

Upon reading the work, the unprejudiced reader will receive the impression that, until the National-Socialist revolution, the whole of German culture was carried by Jews alone.\(^7\)

Both volumes reached their readers only in postwar reprints, *Juden im deutschen Kulturbereich* in 1959, the *Germania Judaica* in 1963. The third book was Ismar Elbogen’s *Die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* (History of Jews in Germany), first published in 1935, and republished in different form after World War II by Eleonore Sterling. As Michael Meyer pointed out, the engaged tone of this book marked a clear departure from Elbogen’s more distanced works hitherto:

Unlike the earlier sketch of world Jewish history, this work is written with passion and a maximum of engagement. Here the tenor of Elbogen’s writing truly resembles that of Graetz. What he writes of Graetz’s work is true of his work in this volume as well: it is an attempt to enable the reader to relive the historical events. German-Jewish history assumes the form of a drama in which there are heroes and villains and in which dramatic effect is increased by the frequent use of language in the present tense. In contrast to his writing elsewhere, Elbogen here allows himself the liberty to imagine what his characters might have thought or felt. At times the writing resembles that of a Greek tragedy in which later outcomes are foreshadowed by earlier events. Yet, although the Jews are defined as a “community of fate,” Jewish survival is possible through collective acts of will.\(^8\)

The allusions to his own time were not hidden from the readers. Although Elbogen did not or could not openly analyze the present situation of German Jewry, he dropped enough hints to let his readers understand. Elbogen’s concentration on anti-Semitism in imperial Germany could hardly be understood out of the context of its time; yet one should realize that this tendency started much earlier, with Martin Philippson’s *Modern History of the Jews*, written two decades earlier, which also depicted the Jewish experience in imperial Germany largely as a history of anti-Semitism.\(^9\)

\(^7\) Quoted in Siegmund Kaznelson, ed., *Juden im deutschen Kulturbereich* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1959), xvi.
Elbogen ended his book with a remark clear to any contemporary reader:

The upwards-spiraling welfare budgets of the Jewish communities bear witness to the desperate material situation of those who have remained in their homeland—not to mention their spiritual suffering!10

Those important works were only three among quite a few publications on Jewish history and culture in the years after 1933. Dissertation topics ranged from biblical time through the Middle Ages to modern regional and local Jewish and Polish or Russian-Jewish economic and political history.11 In some works, the influence of the Zeitgeist was clearly visible. A few authors of dissertations and scholarly articles were occupied with the specific status and protections of Jewish minorities in twentieth-century Europe. Thus, Willy Weichselbaum’s 1935 dissertation dealt with “Der Rechtsschutz der Juden in Deutsch-Oberschlesien nach dem Genfer Abkommen von 1922,” and Kurt Stillschweig dedicated numerous articles in the Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland (ZGJD) and the Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums (MGWJ) to the question of Jewish minority status.

This was not a totally new question to Jews in Nazi Germany, although it gained new practical relevance. With the revolution of 1918 and the end of the old order, the question of whether Jews should gain national minority status was discussed in the Reichstag, where it found a prominent advocate in the Social Democratic deputy and Zionist Oskar Cohn. It was dismissed, however, by the vast majority of German Jews and was never considered seriously. Only in the last years of the Weimar Republic were ideas of national autonomy, which had been practiced in Eastern Europe, taken up again in the German context. In 1932, the Stuttgart lawyer and writer Karl Lieblich published a “Public Question to Adolf Hitler” under the title Was geschieht mit den Juden? (What Shall Be Done with the Jews?) in which he tried to convince the Nazis, still in opposition, to help establish Jewish autonomy in Germany. Before this public

10 Ismar Elbogen, Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland (Berlin: Jüdische Buch-Vereinigung, 1931), 314.
11 It would be worthwhile to compile a complete bibliography of these works. In the meantime, the best bibliography is still Guido Kisch, Schriften zur Geschichte der Juden: Eine Bibliographie der in Deutschland und der Schweiz 1922—1955 erschienenen Dissertationen (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1959).
appeal to Adolf Hitler, he had published three lectures between 1928 and 1930, *Wir jungen Juden* (We Young Jews), advocating the same idea—and he was not alone among German-Jewish intellectuals. The Social Democratic Heidelberg district attorney Hugo Marx released a similar book in the same year as Lieblich’s public question, *Was wird werden? Das Schicksal der deutschen Juden in der sozialen Krise* (What Will Be? The Fate of German Jews in the Social Crisis). Following Carl Schmitt’s thesis of the “total state,” Marx predicted an authoritarian state with a new social and economic order, in which the old Liberal principles of individual emancipation would lose their relevance. Instead, the Jews would only be able to survive as an autonomous group with corporate rights.

Thus, the idea of Jewish autonomy had already been discussed on the eve of the Nazi rise to power, and it continued to occupy some Jewish historians in the years after 1933. The intellectual journal *Der Morgen* was occupied with the discussion about cultural autonomy and the changing legal status of the Jews as a minority. Jewish intellectuals were thereby reacting to some Nazi ideologues like Ernst Krieck who suggested that German Jews build their own educational and cultural system within German society while at the same time retreating from its general institutions. Liberal commentators like Fritz Friedländer rejected this ghettoization, at the same time taking it as an occasion to write about historical developments of minority rights. In a series of articles in the *MGWJ*, Kurt Stillschweig dealt with this question, which now, from a variety of perspectives, indeed constituted a possible response to the changed situation. He analyzed emancipation in the context of the French definition of “nation,” the nonrecognition of nation-status for the Jews in the Habsburg

12 “Only from you can I imagine a serious, committed promotion of my thought, since you have endeavored to attempt something new and essentially renewing. That is why I am entrusting to you this book and the answer to the question it poses.” See Karl Lieblich, *Was geschieht mit den Juden? Öffentliche Frage an Adolf Hitler* (Stuttgart: Im Zonen Verlag, 1932), 88. For more details, see Michael Brenner, “Zurück ins Ghetto? Jüdische Autonomiekonzepte in der Weimarer Republik,” *Trumah: Jahrbuch der Hochschule für Jüdische Studien Heidelberg* 3 (1992), 101–127.


monarchy, and the development of autonomy in the new states founded after World War I. When Friedländer’s and Stillenschweig’s articles were published in 1937 and 1938 respectively, the retreat to a national autonomy was already a rather optimistic vision for the future of German Jewry. In his last article, “On the Modern History of the Jewish Autonomy,” Stillenschweig had to sign with “Israel” as his second name.

The 1939 volume of the *MGWJ* was the last endeavor of collective cultural creativity among the Jews in Nazi Germany; it reached only those who had failed to leave Germany in time when it was finally delivered in 1941, just before most of its recipients were sent on their last journey.\(^{15}\) One article prepared for this volume was Selma Stern-Täubler’s essay, “On The Literary Struggle for Emancipation in the Years 1816–1819”—an article with special relevance for German Jews in 1939. Selma Stern was mainly occupied with Jewish reactions to the resistance to emancipation; between the lines, German Jews could read arguments of a surprising and alarming actuality. She emphasized the dual world in which most German Jews lived: their rootedness both in Jewish and German culture and society, and the “unrequited love” (*enttäuschte Liebe*) of this “self-torturing and suffering” group that “endured the great Jewish grief” (*Judenschmerz*). In addition, she recalled the group of converts who had become accepted in Christian society, and who—like Friedrich Julius Stahl—even became spokesmen of the Christian state. She also mentioned those representatives of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* who tried to advance Jewish emancipation by means of scholarship. Stern concluded her contribution with a sentence that expressed both the hope of those early generations and the disappointment of her own, when she spoke of the “time when, together with the demise of the Romantic movement and the victory of the Liberal idea, even the anti-Jewish feeling dwindled and one could believe that the end of the suffering had finally come.”\(^{16}\) She also mentioned those representatives of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* who tried to advance Jewish emancipation by the means of scholarship. German-Jewish readers,

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however, were not able to share her thoughts. This article, signed by Selma “Sara” Stern-Täubler, fell victim to censorship.

Most historians did not deal with possible reactions to the new situation, but were interested rather in analyzing the roots of modern German-Jewish history and its dilemmas. The age of emancipation, once hailed as the beginning of a new glorious period in Jewish history, was now viewed rather critically. The two most important works published on this topic in Nazi Germany were Jacob Katz’s Frankfurt dissertation of 1934, “Die Entstehung der Judenassimilation in Deutschland und deren Ideologie” (The Origins of Jewish Assimilation in Germany and its Ideology) and Max Wiener’s Jüdische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation (Judaism in the Time of Emancipation) (1933).\footnote{Max Wiener, Jüdische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation (Berlin: Philo Verlag, 1933).}

Katz came to Frankfurt from his native Hungary as a student of the Orthodox Breuer Yeshiva. At the university he studied with the sociologist Karl Mannheim, who, as a Jew, was no longer in a position to examine him. Katz was left alone with professors not familiar with his topic, the origins of assimilation of German Jews. Georg Küntzel, a German nationalist who took over from Mannheim only insisted, as Katz recalls, “that I write a preface to the effect that my scholarly treatment of the subject did not imply that the author regarded assimilation as the solution of the Jewish question.” Küntzel did not have to fear that Katz’s work would advocate assimilation. Katz writes in his memoirs: “I grasped his point totally and immediately and merely remarked that anyone who read the work would see that my conclusions were scarcely a recommendation for assimilation.”\footnote{Jacob Katz, With My Own Eyes: The Autobiography of an Historian (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1995), 93.} Indeed the preface of Katz’s dissertation reads:

The study arose from the need to pursue the causes of a historical process whose effects clearly extended into the present, effects which the author condemned from a nonscholarly point of view. The historical shift of 1933 subsequently lent a larger significance to the scholarly inquiry of the study, not only because the subject gained an unforeseen degree of relevance for our time, but also because the shift brought about the visible conclusion of the epoch whose origins
the study sought to examine, thus allowing questions to be posed with much greater sharpness.\textsuperscript{19}

Katz concluded his dissertation, reflecting the spirit of his own time, in a rather pessimistic tone. He explicitly referred to the resistance against assimilation: “Thus a new age was born that no longer wished to see assimilation as a certain solution to the basic dilemma that had driven it.”\textsuperscript{20} As Katz was a Zionist, his skepticism toward assimilation is not surprising. He did not merely respond to German Jewry’s renewed ghettoization, but reflected a national Jewish spirit which had existed well before 1933.

More surprising perhaps was the growing distance of liberal Jewish thinkers from their traditional values of individualism and rational thinking. A clear dissociation from rationalism was visible already in the Weimar period, for example in the speeches delivered at the annual rabbinical associations by leading representatives such as rabbis Max Dienemann and Max Wiener. Wiener, who once served as assistant rabbi to Leo Baeck in Düsseldorf, and after a short stay in Stettin, became his colleague as rabbi in Berlin, published his magnum opus, \textit{Judaism in the Time of Emancipation}, in 1933. While Baeck was still wavering between the more traditional rationalism of liberal Judaism and the adoption of nonrational elements, Wiener’s break with nineteenth-century liberal traditions was complete. In his programmatic speech at the convention of liberal German rabbis in Berlin in January 1922, Wiener made Judaism’s transformation into a rational \textit{Weltanschauung} during the nineteenth century responsible for the poor condition of modern Jewish religiosity. He demanded a religious renewal based on the integration of nonrational elements into modern Judaism: the “feeling” of belonging to the Jewish people and the self-consciousness of the Jews’ particularity as a chosen people.\textsuperscript{21} As Wiener’s biographer, Robert S. Schine, has observed, Wiener’s “historical-metaphysical irrationalism” amounted to an assimilation of romantic \textit{völkisch} ideas into liberal Judaism.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{21} Max Wiener, “Was heißt religiöse Erneuerung?” \textit{Liberales Judentum} 14 (1922), 5–9.
For Wiener, religious acts based on revealed law instead of rational doctrines formed the basis of Judaism. His historical work also reflected his critical attitude toward German Judaism’s development in the nineteenth century.

The preoccupation with the emancipation period was also a favorite topic in the contributions to the *ZGJD* after 1933. Numerous articles discussed representatives and contemporaries of the Berlin Haskalah, from Moses Mendelssohn to David Friedländer and Saul Ascher. The Heidelberg rabbi Fritz Pinkuss, who wrote about Ascher, clearly expressed his skepticism regarding liberal ideas:

> Today especially the struggle for rights and the apologetics will again have to take new paths, if they are to be understood. With the end of the liberal vision of the state in Germany, and perhaps in the entire world, they will have to redefine the Jews’ proper sociological place in the new [German] state. They will have to portray the Jewish cultural heritage in a way that corresponds to its essential content, and do it better than Saul Ascher’s and his subsequent followers’ generation was able to.23

The *ZGJD* was also the forum for one of the dirtiest attacks on Jewish historiography after 1933. While Jewish historiography was mainly ignored by non-Jewish scholars in the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich now began to develop a new interest in “Research on the Jewish Question.” Several research institutions were founded to advance a clearly anti-Semitic perspective toward Jewish history. The main protagonist of such a view was a young historian at the Munich Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des Neuen Deutschland, Wilhelm Grau. In his dissertation, he dealt with the medieval Jewish community of Regensburg, building on—some say plagiarizing—the work of the Jewish historian Raphael Straus, former editor of the *ZGJD* and cousin of its new editor, Ludwig Feuchtwanger. Obviously, the Nazi Grau came to quite different results than his Jewish colleague Straus. This is not the place to describe in detail the conflict between the two.24 It may suffice to recall that, in 1935, it was still possible for

a Jewish historian who had emigrated to Palestine to publish quite a harsh criticism against the rising star of Nazi historiography on the “Jewish Question.” Thus, Straus wrote about Grau:

The reasons why Grau’s dissertation falls so completely on its face have already been suggested above. The young author, a doctoral student at the University of Munich, lamentably bit off more than he could chew.25

Grau, in his reply, denied that Jewish historians possessed the objectivity necessary to approach Jewish history. To quote from Grau’s response, which the ZGJD was forced to publish in 1935,

Jewish historical scholarship must come to terms with the fact that German scholars, too, will, in the future, systematically research and write on the Jewish problem, and will do so in the context of German national history. In Jewish circles, one will first and foremost have to face the fact that we Germans wish to write not the history of the Jews or of Judaism, but rather the history of the Jewish Question. Moreover, we will accomplish this task with the German scholarly spirit and with German thoroughness, motivated by our conscience.26

During the following years, German thoroughness was to characterize other tragic aspects of German-Jewish relations, namely discrimination, persecution, and finally extermination. However, the scholarship on the “Jewish Question” would not stop. Historians throughout Germany were busy publishing essays, dissertations, and source anthologies on the Jewish presence in Germany and other countries. Jews were no longer among them.

Let us, in conclusion, ask what this last breath of German Jewry means to the historian. First of all, we have to conclude that some of the most remarkable publications on German-Jewish history, from the Germania Judaica through Max Wiener’s Judaism in the Time of Emancipation to Ismar Elbogen’s History of Jews in Germany, albeit often conceived earlier, were published in the years following 1933, as were dissertations on Jewish topics, and journals of Jewish scholarship. Even more interesting is, second, the spirit of some of those

works, a spirit that was already perceptible in the last Weimar years in the context of an increasing climate of intolerance and exclusion. Criticism of the Enlightenment and individual emancipation as well as a new interest for autonomist ideas reflected an awareness of crisis expressed in scholarly terms. Thus, the above-mentioned publications, produced in Nazi Germany, are unique documents both of history and historiography. Their scholarship stood in the tradition of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, reflecting and expanding its new expression of the Weimar years, but it also began to ask the questions that were to occupy historians who wrote about Jewish topics after 1945: why and how did emancipation and assimilation fail in the context of German Jewry?
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

FROM TEXT TO EDITION: PROCESSES OF
SCHOLARLY THINKING IN GERMAN-JEWISH
LITERATURE IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

GABRIELE VON GLASENAPP

Benjamin von Tudela, der jetzt auf meinem Tisch herumreist, läßt Dich herzlich grüßen. Er wünscht, daß ihn Zunz mahl bearbeite und mit Übersetzung herausgbe, die Übersetzung und Bearbeitung ... die ich vor mir habe, ist unter aller Critik schlecht.¹


For several years now Jewish studies scholars have been displaying growing interest in the various influences modern historiography (modern historical consciousness) and other processes of scholarly thinking had on Jewish identity after the period of emancipation.

The fact seems to be quite unknown that the process of scholarly thinking, especially in traditional Jewish historiography, corresponded to similar processes in other cultural fields; this had already been demanded in the early 1820s by the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden, whose members, for the first time in Jewish history, brought together two completely different terms: Judaism and science.² In a

programmatic article, one of the founders of the Verein, Immanuel Wohlwill, explained which fields of Judaism he intended to connect with the new Wissenschaft:

When speaking about the Science of Judaism [Wissenschaft des Judenthums] it is completely clear that the term Judaism is understood in this context in its most comprehensive meaning, as the embodiment of all the circumstances, characteristics, and achievements of the Jews with respect to religion, philosophy, history, jurisdiction, literature in general, civic life, as well as all human affairs, and not in the restricted sense in which it merely signifies the Jews’ religion.3

In the following remarks I would like to focus on what Wohlwill called “Literatur überhaupt” (literature in general), i.e., on the beginnings and the development of the various processes of scholarly thinking in German-Jewish literature (specifically literature written by Jewish authors about Jewish subjects in the German language),4 and especially on literary texts published in the early nineteenth century.

Already in the beginning of the nineteenth century, a close relationship had emerged between modern historiography and literature. The most popular (and best-known) expression of this relationship was the modern historical novel, its most prominent representative at that time being the Scottish novelist Sir Walter Scott.5

Although, since the Enlightenment, historians in particular had pleaded for a strict separation between modern historiography and historical fiction, the great public interest in everything related to

5 Jewish authors at that time were strongly influenced by Scott’s historical novels as well. For them, the new genre provided a new possibility for approaching Jewish history; in the beginning it often did not make any difference for them whether they did research on historical facts in a literary or in a historical context. When working on his historical novel Der Rabbi von Bacharach, Heine wrote ironically to his friend Moses Moser: “Ende dieses Jahres denke ich den Rabbi fertig zu haben. Es wird ein Buch seyn, das von den Zunzen aller Jahrhunderte als Quelle genannt werden wird” (“By the end of this year, I plan to have finished the ‘Rabbi.’ It promises to be a book that will be referred to as a source by all the ‘Zunzes.’”); see Heine, Briefe, 204.
history was one of the main reasons for the fact that the field of historiography and the historical novel came into close mutual contact. Furthermore, the new manner of depicting the past that Scott had presented in his novels also exerted a strong influence at least on the historians’ literary style.

It is of great importance in this context that, at that time, the close relationship between modern historiography and literature corresponded to similar processes in modern Jewish historiography as well as the new Jewish literature in the German language. This broad interest in everything related to history (in the field of academic history as well as in historical novels written by Jewish authors like Berthold Auerbach, the brothers Phoebus and Ludwig Philippson, Salomon Kohn, and others) contributed decisively to the fact that, already in the 1830s, the historical novel became the most popular genre in the still young history of German-Jewish literature. The great importance of historical novels for Jewish readers in the early nineteenth century is, of course, strong evidence for a new historical consciousness, but it also expresses the process of popularization which historiography had already been exposed to at that time.

At the same time, there were also completely different developments in the context of the new German-Jewish literature that I would like to characterize by employing the term “processes of scholarly thinking.” This refers to the publication and the edition of quite different literary texts following scholarly principles, as they were introduced by the Wissenschaft des Judentums, including footnotes, historical remarks, scholarly comments, and intertextual references, i.e., in a critical, philological manner.

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6 Daniel Fulda and Silvia Serena Tschopp, eds., Literatur und Geschichte: Ein Kompendium zu ihrem Verhältnis von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002).
I would like to argue that this specific kind of relationship between literature and historiography is, at the same time, the expression of a new historical consciousness. It seems, therefore, appropriate to distinguish between three different aspects of these processes of scholarly thinking in literature: first and foremost, the edition of Jewish legends and fairytales; second, the role played in this context by the philological edition of Jewish chronicles and other historical works from earlier centuries; and third, the institutions established in order to publish this new kind of scholarly literature.

I would like to start by describing the different motives underlying the publication of Jewish legends and fairytales, a body of texts in which the principles of the new *Wissenschaft* were expressed more evidently than in any other literary genre. The beginning of this development can be found at the end of the eighteenth century, when the non-Jewish philosopher and theologian, Johann Gottfried Herder, began compiling and editing legends and folk-songs—not only from the German past, but also from other cultural traditions. For him, all these texts were literary testimonies which, from his perspective, belonged to the poetical history or heritage of each and every people; for that reason he created the term *Volkspoesie* as a designation for all these kinds of texts. Following Herder, it was the *Volkspoesie*—poetry from the people and for the people—by means of which the nations had expressed themselves. Later he applied this new understanding, especially of legends and folk-songs, to the poetry of all nations, even the minor ones, including the Jewish nation. Thus it was no coincidence that Herder took a particular interest in the preoccupation with Jewish religion and poetry. Already in his theological work *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts*, written between 1774 and 1776, Herder had suggested that the first book of Moses (*Bereshit*) should not be read as a religious text anymore,

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8 See Andreas Poltermann, “Johann Gottfried Herder,” in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens: Handwörterbuch zur historischen und vergleichenden Erzählforschung*, vol. 6 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 832–841.


but should be understood as a historical (and poetical) source reflecting upon the creation of the world and the Jewish nation, i.e., as a product of ancient Israelite history and culture in its historical and cultural peculiarity.

Herder attracted even more attention with his poetical adaptation of rabbinical legends, published in 1781 under the title *Jüdische Dichtungen und Fabeln*.\(^{11}\) For the first time, non-Jewish readers were confronted with poetical testimonies as an expression of a specific Jewish culture. At that time, understandably enough, not even Jewish readers were aware of the fact that the texts Herder had collected and published were, in fact, not really translations from the Talmud and the Midrashim, as he had claimed in the introduction of his anthology, but stemmed from older editions of Jewish legends that had already been translated and published in earlier times by Christian Hebraists and Orientalists, for example by the anti-Jewish author Johann Andreas Eisenmenger.\(^{12}\) It was, however, of great importance for Jewish scholars, especially the representatives of the Haskalah movement, that Herder, whom they deeply admired, on the one hand appreciated the rabbinical writings—especially the Talmud—while, on the other hand, he harshly criticized the representatives of rabbinical thinking during the pre-Emancipation era for insisting on considering the Talmud as a document of divine revelation instead of interpreting it as a historical or poetical document.\(^{13}\) Herder’s emphasis on the national, historical, and Jewish elements of the Torah and the Talmud\(^{14}\) as well as his contacts

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., vol. 26 (1882), 305–443 under the title “Nachdichtungen aus der morgenländischen Litteratur.”

\(^{12}\) Other legends were taken from the *Ma’assebuch* that had been translated into German for the first time already in 1612.

\(^{13}\) For the Haskalah movement’s attitude toward the Talmud, see Christoph Schulte, *Die jüdische Aufklärung: Philosophie, Religion, Geschichte* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002), 81ff. Schulte demonstrates that the *maskilim* did not consider themselves as enemies of the Talmud; this was just a polemical assertion that served their orthodox opponents who sought to discredit the Haskalah. In fact, the *maskilim* did not oppose the Talmud, but the Orthodox attitude, which still considered the Talmud a religious, holy document. They also criticized the fact that the education of young Orthodox men was based exclusively on learning the Talmud.

\(^{14}\) See Emil Adler, “Johann Gottfried Herder und das Judentum,” in *Herder Today: Contributions of the International Herder Conference November 5–8, 1987, Stanford, California*, ed. Karl Müller-Vollmer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 382–401, here 386; and see Martin Bollacher, “‘Feines, scharfsinniges Volk, ein Wunder der Zeiten!’—Herders Verhältnis...
with Moses Mendelssohn and other representatives of the Haskalah were the main reasons for the maskilim’s gradual rediscovery, especially of rabbinic literature. Referring to Herder, modern Jewish scholars were, from then on, able to claim that it was possible—or even desirable—for them to occupy themselves with the Talmud in a scholarly way without necessarily being considered as opponents or even enemies of the Haskalah.

Already at the end of the eighteenth century, under the influence of Herder, an increasing interest in Jewish poetry became apparent among non-Jewish scholars, mainly among Protestant theologians. One of the most important of them was Robert Lowth (1710–1787), bishop of the Church of England and professor of poetry at Oxford University. As early as in the 1750s he began his scholarly work on Hebrew poetry, and in 1787 he published his famous study *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*. This study received a good deal of attention from other scholars of that period, and already in 1793 several parts of the book were translated into German by Johann David Michaelis.

In the following generation, the interest of German non-Jewish scholars in Hebrew poetry was unbroken, as illustrated in the publications of the Orientalist Heinrich Ewald or the theologian Franz Delitzsch. Both Ewald and Delitzsch, who attempted to emulate Lowth and Herder, were trying, as they put it, to liberate Hebrew
poetry from its religious context and to understand it as a historical and literary source. But even though Delitzsch sharply criticized the “unhistorical exegesis” (*unhistorische Exegetik*)\(^\text{20}\) that had prevailed until then, there can be no doubt that these scholars did not treat these texts as historical sources for a specifically Jewish past; that was a task that was left to Jewish scholars.

Herder’s and the other non-Jewish scholars’ extensive interest in Jewish poetry as found in the Talmud and other sources was, however, not the only impulse challenging Jewish scholars to devote themselves to these texts. It should be pointed out that the beginning of the nineteenth century was the period when German literary (philological) studies were established as a new field of national relevance. Several reasons can be cited for this development: first, the increasing interest, inspired by Herder’s works, in everything that had to do with national history; second, the enthusiasm of the representatives of Romanticism for the period of medieval Germany; and third, the reflection upon national values during the period of the Napoleonic reign in Germany.\(^\text{21}\) Thus the emergence of the new *Wissenschaft* in Germany in the early nineteenth century coincided with a strong search for national identity—an important motivation for non-Jewish scholars as well as for the new generation of Jewish scholars.

In the field of literary discourse it was the edition of German legends and fairy tales compiled by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in the early nineteenth century that gave the impetus to further occupation with these texts. For the Grimm brothers, legends were first and foremost historical sources, from which the identity of the German people could be clearly deduced.\(^\text{22}\) Therefore, they published the famous *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* as well as the *Deutsche Sagen*\(^\text{23}\) in a form that was not intended for children, but for scholars—with introductions, footnotes, comments, and remarks. The philological,

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scholarly character of these editions was obviously no obstacle for the early process of popularization that very soon included all kinds of editions of legends and tales. After the Grimm’s edition, the scholarly publication of tales and legends began to play a central role in literary discourse in Germany, since these traditions were considered as most important parts of the national folk poetry. Already in the early 1840s, the number of editions published in one single year increased to almost thirty.

It was in the middle of the 1820s when the first scholarly editions of Jewish legends appeared in Germany, for the first time published by Jewish editors. In this context, a translation has to be mentioned first, published in London by the famous scholar Hyman Hurwitz (1770–1844), who had been appointed as the first professor of Hebrew at the University College London in 1828. The edition was named *Tales of the Hebrews* and subtitled *About the Spirit and the Value of the Talmud*. Only a few months after its publication in England it was translated into German by the non-Jewish author Gottfried Wilhelm Becker. Both Hurwitz and Becker, in their extensive forewords and epilogues, referred to Herder’s occupation with the legends of the Talmud, and following their revered example, they

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24 See Bluhm, *Die Brüder Grimm*, 50–53.
25 The national feelings found expression in the titles or subtitles of the anthologies, which used the term “German” as often as possible; see, e.g., Johann Karl August Musäus, *Volksmärchen der Deutschen* (Gotha: Ettinger, 1782–1786); Christiane Benedicte Naubert, *Neue Volksmärchen der Deutschen* (Leipzig: Weigandt, 1789–1793); Joseph von Görres, *Die teutschen Volksbücher: Nähere Würdigung der schönen Historien-, Wetter- und Arzneybüchlein, welche theils innerer Werth, theils Zufall, Jahrhunderte hindurch bis auf unsere Zeit erhalten hat* (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1807).
26 See the article “Zur Literatur der Märchen, Sagen und Volkslieder” (by an unknown author), published in the *Blätter für literische Unterhaltung*. In this article almost thirty different anthologies of German and foreign tales and legends were presented (1847, no. 229–233; 282–286; 351–358).
considered rabbinc literature an important source not only for Jewish legends and tales, but also for Jewish history. Interestingly enough, both Hurwitz and Becker sharply criticized the older generation of non-Jewish scholars whose representatives had quite often used the Talmud in order to promote anti-Jewish prejudices. Especially the Christian translator Becker felt it necessary to demand that, for this reason, legends and tales from the Talmud and the Midrashim should henceforth be compiled and edited exclusively by Jewish editors. And this was apparently one of the reasons why neither Hurwitz nor Becker even mentioned the names of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Obviously, they were not willing to accept the brothers’ inclination to embrace the anti-Jewish sentiments that characterized parts of Romanticism.

The first scholarly edition of legends from the Talmud was quite a success. It was reviewed in Jewish and non-Jewish periodicals, only two years later a new edition appeared, and in 1828 even a Dutch translation. The most important newly edited version was published the same year by Salomon Neubürger and Wolf Obermeier, both teachers at the Jewish school in the Bavarian village of Hainsfahrt. The two editors eliminated all the remarks made by Hurwitz and Becker about the Talmud and its meaning for modern Jewish Wissenschaft. Instead, they provided the sources of every single legend, that is, they showed exactly, in a philological manner, where these legends and tales could be found in the Talmud. Although the Grimm brothers remained unmentioned, the influence of their edition now became clearly perceptible. Hurwitz and Becker’s apologia was replaced by a strictly philological orientation obviously aimed at reclaiming the Talmud as an object for literary

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and historical studies, thus encouraging a process of secularization.

In many respects, Hurwitz and Becker’s as well as Neubürger and Obermeier’s editions marked a turning point in the young history of Jewish Wissenschaft, as far as it was concerned with literature. First of all, they manifested the claim for the equality of Jewish and non-Jewish Wissenschaft in the field of literature. They also clearly represented the Jewish minority’s ongoing willingness to foster the process of acculturation, because now the Jewish legends were no longer written in Hebrew or in Judaeo-German, but for the first time in German—simultaneously the language of the Christian majority and one of the languages of the new Wissenschaft. Another aspect of the change reflected by the above-mentioned editions is visible in the fact that, for the first time, the editors were not, as they had done in earlier times, simply compiling material. They were scholars who presented the legends primarily as historical source, as evidence of a Jewish past and history that was, for the first time, explicitly presented not from a Christian, but from a Jewish perspective.

This was all the more important, because all their predecessors—from Eisenmenger to Herder—and many of their contemporaries—e.g., Delitzsch, Ewald, Lowth, and others—had been Christian theologians. Their religious affiliation had always implied a perception of the Jewish tales from an external, Christian point of view, even if they strictly followed philological principles in editing them. Jewish scholars were painfully aware of this inclination: In 1847, for example, the scholar and poet Meir Letteris (1800–1871) published a critical edition of Talmudic legends he had translated and put into poetical form. In his notes he criticized the Orientalist and poet Friedrich Rückert, who had also translated some of these legends, but at the same time had obviously transferred them into a specific Christian context. Therefore, as soon as

33 M[eir] Letteris, Sagen aus dem Orient. Nach den Quellen bearbeitet (Karlsruhe: Macklot, 1847).
35 Letteris was especially concerned about the changes in the Talmudic legend “Der Zweig vom Lebensbaum” (13–18): “The material of this poetic piece was treated by Rückert, too, but he did not mention the source; instead, he gave the original
Jewish scholars started to edit and publish Jewish legends, they felt compelled to remove them from the Christian context, reclaiming their original meaning as an important part of their own Jewish history.

Furthermore, in the 1830s and 1840s, Jewish scholars finally began to demand a philological approach to this part of Jewish literature. Already Leopold Zunz, cofounder of the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden, and “heir of the Haskalah movement,” had claimed in his famous works, Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden, historisch entwickelt (1832) and Zur Geschichte und Literatur (1845), that the Talmud and the Midrashim were important sources of Jewish history. His urgent demand for a scholarly approach to these tales and narratives did not only aim at providing more editions of Jewish tales and legends, but also at promoting scholarly research on the Jewish past from a specifically Jewish point of view. Zunz’s ideas were supported by Moritz Steinschneider who, in an essay published in 1845 in Zacharias Frankel’s Monatsschrift, also called for an engagement with tales and legends, following the same scholarly principles that were used in modern historiography. Like the Jewish

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36 See Schulte, Die jüdische Aufklärung, 118.
37 Moritz Steinschneider, “Zur Sagen- und Legendenkunde,” Zeitschrift für die religiösen Interessen des Judenthums 2 (1845), 380–393; and 3 (1846), 281–290. With this demand, he referred to similar theories provided by non-Jewish historiography, as they had been formulated by, e.g., the historian Barthold Georg Niebuhr. In the preface to his three-volume work Römische Geschichte (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1811–1832), Niebuhr had provided detailed explanations about the correlation between modern historiography and research on tales and legends (see vol. 1, 136–137); see Gerrith Walther, Niebuhrs Forschung (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993), 358–363.
38 Steinschneider, “Zur Sagen- und Legendenkunde,” 391: “and thus we are allowed to point out that the wish to establish a specifically Jewish history of the legends has to be considered as a scholarly need” (emphasis by the author).
historians, Steinschneider established a link between this demand and the discourse on the Jewish reform movement. According to him, one of the main tasks of the new Wissenschaft was to point out the interdependence between the different cultural influences inherent in the Jewish legends; this, he emphasized, had to be done in sharp contrast to what he called the traditional national isolation prevailing in earlier centuries. Another important aspect for Steinschneider was the close affinity between research on legends and historical research.39 The results of both areas, he demanded, had to be related to the results of other modern academic disciplines.

The perspectives formulated by Leopold Zunz, Moritz Steinschneider, and other Jewish scholars prompted a positive response, especially among the Jewish audience. During the following years numerous scholarly editions and anthologies of Jewish legends and tales were published; the editors included such figures as Leopold Zunz, Raphael Jacob Fürstenthal, Meyer Kayserling, Julius Fürst, Meir Letteris, and Michael Sachs—just to mention the most important ones.40

The reviews of these works, especially those written by Jewish critics, among them Julius Fürst himself, but also the Orthodox historian and lawyer Wolfgang Wessely, again and again pointed

39 “The legend understands the material given in reality as the expression of thoughts, feelings, and opinions. … That is why the legend, as is well known, is a perfect reflection of intellectual life, and why, correspondingly, a nation’s inner history is a criterion with respect to the definition of the origin of its legends. … In the legends … we can see the spirit of their time” (ibid., 284).

to these editions’ lack of scholarly character and sharply criticized the fact that an appropriate philological apparatus was missing, e.g., in the case of the famous collection of the Sippurim, ed. the young Wolf Pascheles in Prague.

During the 1820s and 1830s, almost all the editors concentrated on compiling legends from the Bible, the Talmud and the Midrashim. It was the historian and folklorist Abraham Tendlau from Frankfurt who, for the first time, expanded the spectrum of edited legends. In his edition of Jewish legends and tales, first published in 1842, he included not only legends from the Talmud, but also those from editions of the Middle Ages and later centuries, for example from the famous Yiddish Ma’assebuch and the Sefer Ma’asseh Nissim, and from several Jewish chronicles like the Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah, the


\[42\] Julius Fürst, himself an editor of Jewish legends (see note 40 above), in his review of the Sippurim, wrote about the necessity of a critical apparatus: “This is not a learned demand, detected by criticism, but a natural consequence of the wish that the audience should understand them [the sippurim] as old legends instead of as inventions of an esthetic mind; since if they are new, i.e., they are retold according to the oral tradition, they have no justification without an exact reference to their source, and if they are taken from older sources, the whole enterprise is based on a lack of knowledge concerning the sources of the old legends and, for this reason alone, it is necessary to provide the references.” See Literaturblatt des Orients 9 (1848), 98–99.

\[43\] Abraham Tendlau, Das Buch der Sagen und Legenden Jüdischer Vorzeit. Nach den Quellen bearbeitet nebst Anmerkungen und Erläuterungen (Stuttgart: Cast, 1842). See the detailed review of Tendlau’s work by Raphael Kirchheim in Literaturblatt des Orients 3 (1842), 657–662.

\[44\] A collection of legends about the Jewish community of Worms, published for the first time at the end of the seventeenth century, it was designed on the model of the Ma’assebuch.

\[45\] Published in 1587 by the Italian scholar, Gedalja ben Joseph ibn Jachja. In this chronicle, he describes Jewish and non-Jewish history from Adam until the present time.
Sefer ha-Yashar,46 and the Shevet Yehuda.47 However, Tendlau also used sources from the mystical and ethical literature, e.g., the Sefer ha-Hassidim48 or the Kav ha-Yashar,49 and he even included those legends that were already part of modern historical works such as the famous Geschichte der Israeliten seit der Zeit der Makkabäer bis auf unsere Tage (9 vols., 1820–1828) by Isaak Markus Jost, or Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden (1832) by Leopold Zunz. According to Tendlau, all the Jewish legends, irrespective of their specific origins, were to be understood as part of Jewish tradition and, therefore, to be considered as belonging to the literary canon as well as to the new Jewish Wissenschaft.

Strictly following the method of scholarly editing as practiced by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, whose names remained, again, unmentioned, Tendlau recorded the origin of every single legend; even more, he also recorded every known version of the legends as they had come down in older collections. Thus, Tendlau’s edition echoes the scholarly principles as they were inaugurated by the new Wissenschaft as well as by the Grimm brothers and their successors. Every legend had to be put into a concrete historical context, which meant that each written source had to be named; in other cases, e.g., that of two legends about the Golem of Prague which Tendlau was reproducing in his edition, he frankly admitted that, at least as far as he knew, no written sources were available, so that he was dependent upon oral sources.50

46 A chronicle published in the twelfth century by an anonymous author, dealing with Jewish history from Adam until the period of the Judges. The stories, which were taken from the Bible, the Talmud, and the Midrash, but also from the Koran, made the Sefer ha-Yashar one of the most popular Jewish books in the Middle Ages.
47 The Shevet Yehuda was begun in the fifteenth century by the Spanish scholar Yehudah ibn Verga and dealt with the history of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. Later, the chronicle was expanded with several supplements by the descendants of the author.
48 Written in the twelfth century by Rabbi Jehudah ben Samuel ha-Hasid, it is one of medieval Jewry’s most important literary, social, and religious documents.
49 The Kav ha-Yashar, a very popular anthology of mystical and kabbalistic legends, was written in Hebrew by Aharon Shmuel Kaidanover and published for the first time in 1705 in Frankfurt. The first translation into Judaeo-German appeared already in 1724.
50 “Der Golem des Hoch-Rabbi Löb,” in Tendlau, Das Buch der Sagen und Legenden, 16ff.; and “Hoch-Rabbi-Löb,” in ibid., 115ff. See also Tendlau’s remarks about these legends (ibid., 242).
Tendlau’s edition and his remarks demonstrate the strong influence of Talmudic legends that had been told and retold already in collections of the Middle Ages and the early modern period, thus becoming an important part of the collective Jewish memory. Furthermore, the edition shows, at least implicitly, the unbroken continuity of Jewish narration, because even those legends which reflect the history of the Middle Ages, reveal the influence of Talmudic texts. Already in the first part of the nineteenth century it was, as the reviews emphasized again and again, utterly important that the new way of editing should not be considered a contradiction to the tradition of Jewish narrative, but rather its modern scholarly continuation and variation.

Not only Hyman Hurwitz’s work but also Abraham Tendlau’s edition was quite successful. By the 1870s, three enlarged editions were published, and like the collection of the Grimm brothers, it became the model for all further scholarly editions of Jewish legends—e.g., the famous multivolume editions of Jewish tales published by Louis Ginzberg (1873–1953) and by Micha bin Gorion (Micha Josef Berdyczewski, 1865–1921) at the beginning of the twentieth century.\(^5\)

The Jewish scholars justified their attempt to canonize main parts of traditional Jewish literature in various processes leading to the turn toward a scholarly approach (\textit{Verwissenschaftlichung}) by arguing that, from their point of view, as Steinschneider pointed out, Jewish legends and tales were not just literature, but historical sources; retelling these legends meant preserving Jewish history.

It is important to recognize that the old medieval Jewish chronicles as well as those from later centuries often contained numerous legends or at least elements of legends, too. Abraham Tendlau had already used several of these chronicles for his own edition, among them \textit{Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah}, \textit{Sefer ha-Yashar} and \textit{Shevet Jehuda}. In the

late 1850s, Jewish scholars, following the example of Hurwitz and his successors, eventually began to publish scholarly editions of these chronicles as well. Meir Wiener (1819–1880), a teacher and historian based in Hannover,\textsuperscript{52} published the chronicles *Emek habacha* by Joseph Hacohen,\textsuperscript{53} and *Sefer Shevet Jehuda* by Solomon ibn Verga;\textsuperscript{54} the scholar and well known travel writer, Joseph Israel Benjamin (1818–1864), edited the book *Yeven Mezulah* about the Chmielnicki massacres in Poland during the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{55} In their editions, these historians obviously followed the same principles as the editors of Jewish legends: they translated the chronicles from Hebrew or Judaeo-German into German and then added footnotes, remarks, and philological commentaries, thus transforming them from traditional chronicles into modern Jewish historical works.

The attempt to provide critical editions of these texts was, just as in the case of the legends, not restricted to Jewish scholarship in Germany, but has to be understood as a transnational phenomenon. This can be clearly seen in Joseph Israel Benjamin’s edition of the chronicle *Yeven Mezulah:*\textsuperscript{56} Benjamin, who was born in Romania, had published a French version of this chronicle (translated from Hebrew into French by Daniel Lévy) as early as 1855; this version had then been corrected by Joachim Lelewel (1786–1861), a Polish non-Jewish historian who is regarded as the founder of modern Polish historiography. Furthermore, there were connections between the French translation of the chronicle and Arab culture, since it

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{52} On Meir Wiener’s biography and his numerous publications on Jewish history, see Guido Kisch, “Zunz’ Briefwechsel mit Meir Wiener,” *HUC* 38 (1967), 240–242.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} In the preface of his edition of the chronicle *Emek habacha*, Meir Wiener pointed out that part of the chronicle had been translated into English and French only recently (see Wiener, *Emek habacha*, xi). Probably, these translations inspired Wiener to formulate his own project, which aimed at publishing, for the first time, a complete translation of this important historical source.
\end{itemize}
was published in the Algerian town of Tlemcen. There, Benjamin
was already well known as a Jewish historian, because this was the
place where he had published a philological edition of the *Ma’asse
Nissim* in 1854—in Arabic, written in Hebrew characters. The Ger-
man edition of the *Yesen Mezulah* was translated by Simon Kayserling
(1834–1898), Meyer Kayserling’s younger brother; it was a kind of
compilation, apparently based on both the already existing French
edition and Kayserling’s own translation from the original.

These historians constantly emphasized the continuity between
the traditional and the modern understanding of Jewish history.
For them, as for their predecessors, the authors of these chronicles,
Jewish history was above all a history of suffering, a fact that they
repeated again and again in their commentaries.57 And, since all
the above-mentioned chronicles did not only focus on Jewish history,
but tried to describe the general history of the time as well, the
modern scholars interpreted them as proof of the idea that Jewish
history had, at all times, been an important if not equal part of
general history—a conclusion that, again, could be understood as
an implicit sign of the Jewish process of acculturation.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the close relationship between
modern Jewish historiography and certain fields of German-Jewish
literature,58 which started in the early nineteenth century, did not
only shape scholarly editions of Jewish legends and chronicles. Rather
early, the new generation of Jewish scholars recognized the necessity
to create institutions that would enable them to publish their works.
One of the first and most important institutions was the Institut zur
Förderung der israelitischen Literatur, established in 1855 by the scholar,
Reform rabbi, and journalist Ludwig Philippson (1811–1889).

57 See the remarks of Meir Wiener in the preface of his edition of the *Emek habacha*:
“The work … describes, above all, the suffering and hardships Jews had to endure in
the different countries over the centuries” (ibid. ix).

58 See also the remarks Wiener made when he sent Zunz his book *Regesten zur
Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland während des Mittelalters* (Hannover: Hahn, 1862): “You
will find that it does not only provide some interesting aspects for the historian, but
also for those who are doing research on literary history” (see Kisch, “Zunz’ Brief-
wechsel mit Meir Wiener,” 253.)
By that time, Philippson was already one of the most prominent and remarkable Jewish figures of his era. As early as the end of the 1830s he had attracted the attention of a larger Jewish and non-Jewish public when he had begun, together with his brother Phoebus, to publish historical works which, for the first time in the history of German-Jewish literature, did not just present Jewish figures acting in a “non-Jewish” past, as was the case in historical novels by non-Jewish authors like Walter Scott and his successors, but treated Jewish history from a specifically Jewish point of view.

Philippson became even more influential when he created the first modern Jewish weekly, the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums. The primary goal of this journal was, as Philippson wrote in his first editorial, to spread knowledge about biblical, talmudic, rabbinical and modern Jewish literature on the one hand, and to promote the new German-Jewish Wissenschaft on the other hand, especially by forming “a bond between the scholars and the public.”

Two decades later, his wish to reach an even larger public prompted Philippson to realize a project he had had in mind for a long time and to found the Institut zur Förderung der israelitischen Literatur.

The Institute can best be described as a publication society, allowing members, for a nominal annual fee, to receive books published by the society. Philippson assured members that the publications would not be highbrow scholarly works, … but would rather strive to capture the interest of the masses and to entertain and educate them.

Although the very name of the Institut pretended to echo the program of the new society, Philippson wanted more than just to create another platform for the distribution of literary works. According to him, the term Israelitische Literatur included scholarly works as well. Already the choice of the two coeditors, Isaak Markus Jost, one of

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63 Ibid, 8–9; and see AZJ 19 (1855), 238.
the founders of modern Jewish historiography, and the reform rabbi Adolph Jellinek, one of the pioneers in Kabbalah studies, revealed Philippson’s intentions: During the eighteen years of the institute’s existence between 1855 and 1874, more than eighty books by more than four dozen authors were published. The most important publications were the first seven volumes of Heinrich Graetz’s famous historical work Geschichte der Juden and the first Jewish historical periodical in the German language, the Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Juden und des Judenthums (1860–1869). These books included literary works, mainly historical fiction, but above all a variety of scholarly works covering the whole range of Jewish scholarship. The scholarly publications of the Institut included works on Jewish history.

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65 In 1859, Adolph Jellinek was replaced by the scholar and rabbi in Leipzig, Abraham Meyer Goldschmidt (1812–1889). When Isaak Markus Jost died in 1860, the historian and “Landesrabbiner” from Brunswick, Levi Herzfeld (1810–1884)—like Philippson, Jellinek, and Jost a supporter of a moderate reform—was appointed coeditor (see Horch, Auf der Suche nach der jüdischen Erzählliteratur, 156). It is quite telling that Philippson appointed a distinguished scholar like Herzfeld and equally telling that Herzfeld accepted this appointment. Herzfeld had been a student of Leopold Zunz and was, until the beginning of the twentieth century, regarded as one of the most important Jewish historians of his time: “His historical works embody the results of painstaking research and show the analytical power of the author; they are, therefore, indispensable to the student of Jewish history and Jewish religion”; see G[utmann] R[ülf] in The Jewish Encyclopaedia, vol. 6 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904), 370.

66 Moses Rosenmann, Jellinek’s biographer, suggests that his scholarly essays, published in various magazines, had attracted Philippson’s attention; see M[oses] Rosenmann, Dr. Adolf Jellinek: Sein Leben und sein Schaffen. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien in der zweiten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts (Vienna: Schlesinger, 1931), 61.


68 On the complex process and the controversial discussions among the editors about the publication of Graetz’s works, see Horch, Auf der Suche nach der jüdischen Erzählliteratur, 156.

69 The great significance the editors ascribed to the new Jewish Wissenschaft also became apparent in the fact that the Institut also contributed financially to the publication of a number of scholarly works, among them the works of Zacharias Frankel, Michael Sachs, Salomon Ludwig Steinheim, Moritz Steinschneider, and Leopold Zunz (see S[igmund] M[annheimer] in The Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 6 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904), 609; and Hans Horch, Auf der Suche nach der jüdischen Erzählliteratur, 155.

70 See Julius Fürst, Geschichte des Karäerthums: Eine kurze Darstellung seiner Entwicklung, Lehre und Literatur mit den dazugehörigen Quellenachweisen (Leipzig: Nies, 1869); Levi Herzfeld, Geschichte des Volkes Israel von der Zerstörung des Ersten Tempels bis zur Einsetzung des Mackabäers Schimon zum hohen Priester und Fürsten, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Leiner, 1870); Isaac
the history of Jewish literature,\textsuperscript{71} important Jewish personalities of the past,\textsuperscript{72} Jewish religion, the Talmud and the halakhah,\textsuperscript{73} and Jewish geography, especially about Palestine.\textsuperscript{74} Finally, there were also editions of Jewish legends and chronicles, Meir Wiener’s above-mentioned edition of the chronicle \textit{Emek habacha} among them.\textsuperscript{75}

The efforts of Ludwig Philippson and his coeditors to promote knowledge about all forms of Jewish literature and thus to prove the close cooperation between literature and the new \textit{Wissenschaft} turned out to be extremely successful: The membership of the \textit{Institut} reached a total of about three thousand,\textsuperscript{76} and the estimated distribution of all its publications amounted to about 182,000 volumes.\textsuperscript{77}

It is worth mentioning that the founder of the \textit{Institut} also managed to permanently turn the attention of the Jewish as well as the non-Jewish public to the existence of the \textit{Institut} and its publications: all the works published by the \textit{Institut} were reviewed in the journals edited by Philippson, the \textit{Jüdisches Volksblatt} and the \textit{Allgemeine Zeitung}.

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\begin{footnotes}
\item[71] See David Cassel, \textit{Geschichte der jüdischen Literatur} (Berlin: Gerschel, 1872); and Abraham Geiger, \textit{Jüdische Dichtungen der spanischen und italienischen Schule} (Leipzig: Leiner, 1856).
\item[76] See Sigmund Mannheimer, in \textit{The Jewish Encyclopedia}, vol. 6, 609; and Horch, \textit{Auf der Suche nach der jüdischen Erzählliteratur}, 156–157.
\item[77] See ibid.; and Soussan, \textit{The Science of Judaism}, 9.
\end{footnotes}
On the basis of this kind of publicity, these works also attracted the attention of the non-Jewish public, since they were now also reviewed by non-Jewish papers and periodicals like the famous *Blätter für literarische Unterhaltung*.

In conclusion it may be said that Jewish scholars pursued quite different intentions with their editions and studies: first of all, they wished to participate in general scientific discourse about history, historiography, and national identity; furthermore, especially the scholarly editions of Jewish legends made it possible for scholars to canonize this traditional kind of Jewish literature in a modern version and enabled them, at the same time, to participate in the broader discourse about the emergence and the significance of a national literature that emerged in Germany, especially in the early nineteenth century; and third, the Jewish scholars sought, especially by using the German language, to prove the compatibility of Jewish tradition and modern *Wissenschaft* in the field of history and literature. A final, but no less important purpose was to look at Jewish history and literature from a specifically Jewish point of view, to refute anti-Jewish prejudices with scholarly methods, and, at the same time, to give a clear signal that the Jewish minority was willing to continue the process of acculturation.
Part IV

Wissenschaft and Jewish Identity
CHAPTER FIFTEEN
DIMENSIONS AND VARIETIES
OF ORTHODOX JUDAISM
AVIEZER RAVITZKY

1. “The Orthodox Faction”

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Rav Avraham Isaac Kook, the rabbi of Jaffa and later on the chief rabbi of the Land of Israel, adumbrated the three principal ideological movements which he perceived as struggling for leadership of the Jewish people, namely: “the Orthodox,” “the New Nationalists,” and “the Liberals.” In Kook’s view each of these movements or “factions” possessed a legitimate claim: each represented a distinct and positive spiritual force. The first faction—Orthodoxy—purported to represent the classical Jewish religious tradition. They “raise the flag of Holiness, courageously, zealously and bitterly invoking the Torah, Mitzvah, and all holiness in Judaism.” The second faction, the secular nationalists, battle for the people’s renewal in its land. They yearn for the realization of the nation’s innate aspirations “after these were long concealed, aggressively suppressed by the bitter exile.” The third faction, the Liberals, inculcate the Jewish people with universal ideals; “it cannot be subsumed within the national structure, and demands the humanistic content of the Enlightenment culture and morality.”

Coming from a prominent Orthodox rabbinical leader, Kook’s observations are particularly noteworthy, for they are surprisingly inconsistent with the accepted scholarly depiction of Orthodox self-perception. Rav Kook did not present “Orthodoxy” as the direct, unsullied, and self-evident continuance of a given, uninterrupted tradition—the penultimate manifestation of an inviolate life style. On the contrary, he presented it as being engaged in a dialogue

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with other, major modern ideologies. He did not ignore the dilemmas confronting the traditional Jew of his generation, compelled to choose between different worlds and to decide among the diverse cultural alternatives forced upon him by modernity. Orthodoxy has frequently been perceived as a movement that denied the influence of the external world upon its self-perception and ideological responses. But Rav Kook challenged us with a different perspective, adopting a reflective attitude to these questions, consciously acknowledging the connections (positive and negative) between Orthodoxy and historical or cultural changes.

Similarly, Orthodoxy is generally portrayed as presenting itself as the exclusive expression of the Jewish essence, being all-inclusive and unique. But here too, Kook assigned it a defined and delineated role in a more comprehensive scheme. “Three different forces are currently struggling in our Jewish camp,” writes Kook, “the Holy, Nationality and Humanity—these three basic dimensions sustain all life—our own and of all people, whoever they be.” In this context, the Orthodox “holy” expresses a particularistic limited truth only; without the input of the other two dimensions, it does not represent spiritual completion or total fulfillment. Admittedly, this conception is inseparable from Kook’s comprehensive historiosophic Weltanschaung, which was a consistent attempt to consolidate diverse ideas, recasting them as partial elements of a comprehensive dialectical synthesis. Nonetheless, for our purposes, it is significant that he did not view Orthodoxy as such as the synthesis, but rather as one distinct thesis, a critical, but single vector of a broad complex of beliefs and values. Only the latter can embody supreme completion, the “Supreme Holy” in the words of Rav Kook.2

Furthermore, Kook chose a surprising antithesis as the counterforce of the Orthodox thesis. The ideological rival, the “significant other” of the Orthodox Jew is not the Reform Jew, rather, it is the

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secular Zionist, waving the banner of modern nationalism, and the enlightened liberal, bearing the torch of universal humanism. These forces are the relevant contenders, since the authentic tension is not between good and evil, or between constructive values and destructive criticism; rather, it is between diverse and positive expressions of Jewish and human identity. And from the perspective of Rav Kook, the halakhic leader, both the “national” and “liberal” trends are such genuine expressions, whereas the phenomenon of Reform is an aberrant divergence, and as such undermines the entire system. Accordingly, Orthodoxy is indeed involved in a spiritual discourse, and is fraught with ideological tension, but its dialogue is not with antihalakhic religious movements, but rather with other ideological trends operating within modern Jewry.

These comments of Rav Kook provide an eloquent illustration of the problematic addressed by this article. Apparently, the academic research of Orthodoxy has reached a turning point, perhaps even a crisis point. On the one hand, the generally accepted characteristics of this trend, as evidenced by the ideational, historical, and sociological literature, no longer encompass all those who are intuitively referred to as Orthodox. On the other hand, these characteristics no longer provide effective tools for clearly distinguishing between those belonging to the camp and those existing alongside or external to it. Exclamation marks in past research have become the question marks of the present: Is Orthodoxy in all its divisions primarily a reaction to the modern Jewish reality? Or is it perhaps one of the constitutive forces that actually produced that reality? Is Orthodoxy the representative of the “old” world or a principal interlocutor in the dialogue of the “new” world? Is there really a clear divide between two cultural eras, embodied in traditional consciousness as opposed to modern consciousness? These questions are augmented by the questions raised above (in the context of Kook’s writings), regarding the substance of the Orthodox perception. Does it really present itself as the direct continuance of a traditional, inviolate religious experience, and as its exclusive expression in the present? Who are its relevant “others,” its rivals in the battle to preserve the Orthodox

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worldview? Finally, and beyond all of these: is there any substantive justification for including all of the groups commonly referred to as “Orthodox” (past and present) within one, all-inclusive title?

2. Orthodoxy as a Reaction?

In 1995, the Center for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University conducted an interdisciplinary seminar on the subject of Orthodox Judaism. The seminar illuminated the different manifestations of the phenomenon and provided an instructive demonstration of the compelling nature of a discussion conducted among philosophers, historians, and sociologists. Nonetheless, the participants were unsuccessful in their attempt to formulate a conceptual, historical, or sociological definition that would consolidate all of the sectors commonly referred to as Orthodox. The attempt further exacerbated an already thorny question. After all, what is the substantive spiritual affinity between the ideology of the Hatam Sofer and the National Religious Kibbutz? What do Samson Raphael Hirsch and his neo-Orthodox movement during the nineteenth century have in common with the contemporary Haredi-Nationalist camp? Can one discuss the Satmar Hassidic movement, American Modern Orthodoxy, and the Israeli Shas movement all in the same breath, as though they constituted a single integrated category? Obviously, these difficulties are not contingent upon the state of research. As in other fields of knowledge, they attest to the chasm between the empirical plurality of phenomena and the conceptual and linguistic effort to unite and generalize. Nonetheless, it would seem that the dominant approach in the study of Orthodoxy has significantly contributed to the difficulty, complicating it with additional dimensions.

According to the prevalent view, Orthodoxy is primarily a reaction to extrinsic changes and not the product of immanent development, of natural evolution from the traditional past. It is a modern phenomenon, which while valiantly endeavoring to fortify tradition against revolutionary times and trends, actually utilized radical reactive formats, and thus deeply transformed the very tradition it purported to protect. Even the foremost manifestations of Orthodox Judaism—halakhic stringency, the magnification of rabbinic authority, and the “Halakhization” of every religious custom (minhag)—are supposedly the mirrors of a new manner of response,
directed against the challenge of modernity. This means, so the claim goes, that Orthodoxy’s self perception is an illusory one and, in short, a myth. It may pride itself as being the direct continuance of the past, but in reality it has developed a new strategy for dealing with the challenges of modernity. Orthodox Jews have a need to justify their lifestyle and beliefs in accordance with an external criterion in order to vindicate them in the face of rival attitudes. The researchers contend that it is this need to justify which necessarily derails them from the tracks of the tradition. This is an apologetic mindset, separating the Orthodox from the integrated religious lives of their forefathers, who supposedly never engaged in this type of defense or confrontation with their environment.

This conception should be challenged from two directions. The first concerns the defining substance of Orthodoxy and the second deals with its constitutive self-perception. On a substantive level, if Orthodoxy is fundamentally a reaction to extrinsic developments, what then is the focal point of these developments? What is the antithesis against which they are reacting? For the fact is that Orthodoxy’s rivals have undergone repeated and often radical transformations since the nineteenth century. Accordingly, if the Orthodox identity is defined in terms of its reaction to perpetually changing rivals, is it conceivable today to speak of a distinct Orthodox identity?

When Orthodoxy emerged in Europe, its main battle was against the threatening specter of Reform Judaism. Today on the other hand, there are many traditional Jews (at least in the State of Israel) who have never laid eyes on a Reform Jew and at all events have never closely examined their spiritual world. The contemporary debate is no longer over what kind of faith but rather over whether faith at all. The question is no longer if the Torah is from Heaven but rather whether “Heaven” is a relevant category of reference. Orthodoxy no longer confronts the challenge of reforms in religion—it now contends with the attempt to replace religion by the national, scientific, humanistic, or materialistic realms of experience. By the same token, a few generations ago the threat appeared in the form of universalistic Jewish religiosity, whether transnational or antinational; but at a later stage, the threat appears in the form of national or

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even ultranational Jewish secularism. Orthodoxy originally defended itself against the Liberals’ demand for the “normalization” of the Jewish religion (a religion that would eschew its national symbols); later on it defended itself against the antithetical demand of the secular Zionists for the “normalization” of the Jewish people (a nation that would eschew its religious symbols).

The “rival” or the challenge to Orthodoxy was repeatedly transformed in many other ways too, unrelated to the question of Jews and Judaism. It rapidly evolved from modern culture to postmodernism, from all-inclusive, majestically structured ideologies to new trends of deconstruction and fragmentation, from essentialist theories (Hegel and Marx) to existential philosophies, and from European collectivism to American individualism. This is particularly true regarding the potential Orthodox response to contemporary phenomena such as “popular religion,” “new-age” thought, and “spirituality” from the sources of the Far East. Is it possible to ignore all the ideational upheavals that have molded and remolded the image of the “external” against which Orthodoxy is purportedly reacting—and to classify all the reactions as belonging to one and the same continuum? Can’t one identify an independent substantive quality, uniquely expressive of Orthodoxy, which is not determined by the external culture and is not the exclusive product of reaction?

Furthermore, as stated above, the prevailing assumption in contemporary research avoids the interpretation of Orthodoxy in accordance with the self-perception of its adherents. Orthodoxy may present itself as the direct and undisturbed continuation of the religious tradition, but in the historian’s opinion, this is no more than a subjective, romantic illusion. For it ignores the fact that the traditional contemporary Jew is required to react, justify, choose, and reject other alternatives. The point was lucidly expressed by Professor Jacob Katz:

The equation of the tradition-bound and traditionalist Judaism is a form of optical illusion. The claim of the Orthodox that they are no more than the guardians of pure Judaism of old is a fiction. Orthodoxy was a method of confronting deviant trends, and of response to the very same stimuli which produced those trends, albeit with a conscious effort to deny such extrinsic motivations.5

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This description evokes a paradoxical reflection: Perhaps it is precisely that “optical illusion” which makes Orthodoxy the authentic disciple of the tradition of old. Perhaps it was this “conscious effort” to stress continuity and downplay the power of change that made Orthodoxy the rightful scion of Jewish exegetical tradition. Couldn’t one claim that this tendency is really the embodiment of the tradition of Midrash, i.e., the continuous Jewish attempt to study the past through the looking glass of the present, the individual’s effort to bridge the gap separating one from the authoritative text, and thereby view oneself as the faithful heir to the legacy of his forefathers, despite the passage of time? On the face of it, if the Orthodox self-perception is regarded as an “optical illusion,” the same description should also be attributed to the monetary interpretation given by the Sages to the verse “an eye for an eye” as the product of a false conception; the letters supposedly sent by Joshua to the dwellers of Canaan are a myth, and how much more so the legend of Jewish philosophy having been appropriated by the Greeks. In this sense, figuratively speaking, almost the entire Jewish literature is an expression of an “Orthodox” heritage, eternally bestriding the gulf between the old and the new, engaged in a permanent exegetical adventure. An understanding of this kind does not require modern hermeneutic theories: we can content ourselves with exegetical and midrashic methods of reinterpretation adopted throughout the generations. 

The claim regarding the Orthodox fiction is based upon a series of controversial assumptions. It provokes a gamut of core questions: Did modernity wreak an upheaval greater and more profound that any of the other upheavals in Jewish history (and in the history of


7 See Leo Strauss, Spinoza’s Critique of Religion (New York: Schocken, 1965), 24: “Within a living tradition, the new is not the opposite of the old but its deepening; the new does not emerge through the rejection or annihilation of the old but through its metamorphosis or reshaping.”

culture), one which is substantively distinct from its predecessors? Is it really true that until the advent of the modern period, Israel (and the nations of the world) were not compelled to choose between competing spiritual options? Philo chose to compose a Platonic midrash (reinterpretation) of the Torah, Maimonides an Aristotelian one, and Italian Jewish sages attempted to harmonize Judaism and Renaissance culture. Were all of these given, natural, and self-evident choices, unanimously accepted and unchallenged in their time? In their sojourns throughout history, weren’t the Jews forced to confront countless relentless attempts at seduction and coercion at the hands of dominant religions, all compelling reflection followed by a conscious choice from among concrete spiritual options? Furthermore, conceivably there are but few chapters in the history of culture which can be correctly assessed without first inquiring into the context, i.e., the question of who was the external addressee—the significant other—toward or against whom a certain idea was proclaimed or a certain text was composed. So perhaps the religious Orthodox response is no more than a specific example of this rule.

We have dwelt upon two principal difficulties raised by the common assumptions of contemporary scholarship: the first reflected the profound changes that transformed the object of the Orthodox response, and the second consisted of new and critical reflections upon the nature of the Orthodox self-perception. These difficulties point the study of Orthodoxy in new directions. First one must attempt to understand Orthodoxy’s internal logic and thus expose the dynamic animating its different streams. Second, one must grant creditability to the reflective position of Orthodox thinkers and leaders, trace the themes of continuity that bind old and new, past and present, and perhaps also “tradition” and “modernity.” In essence, these two efforts share a common theme. They both attempt to define Orthodox Judaism in accordance with its own concepts, i.e., as an immanent development, not just as a reaction to external

9 Furthermore, what is the relationship between the modern historical development that rendered observing Jews a minority among their Jewish brethren, and previous historical developments that rendered the Jewish faithful a minority among their past-brethren who had become apostates?

rivals in the present, and not just as a deviation from its internal sources in the past.

3. Orthodox Prototype

In view of the above one must ask whether any justification still exists for speaking of “Orthodox” Jews and “Orthodox” Judaism.\(^\text{11}\) If the homogeneity of the camp is in doubt, if there is no longer a single, recognizable rival, and if the nature of the relation between the past and the present is a source of fundamental dispute, is it still possible to ascribe to Orthodoxy distinctive identifying attributes? We can take this one step further. A series of new studies have depicted the gradual blurring of the boundaries that traditionally distinguished Orthodoxy’s exterior “façade” (mainly with respect to Conservative scholars). At the same time they have shown that the divisions from within are growing progressively sharper (neo-Orthodoxy, ultra-Orthodoxy, modern Orthodoxy, nationalist Orthodoxy). Bearing all this in mind, can one still perceive Orthodoxy as a single defined “faction” (in the words of Rav Kook)?

Furthermore, several new studies have recently broadened the purview of research on Orthodoxy in terms of geography, sociology, and history.\(^\text{12}\) First, from the geographical perspective, contemporary scholars are no longer content to trace the emergence of Orthodoxy (during the nineteenth century) exclusively in Western and Central Europe, and is turning toward the expanses of Jewry in Eastern Europe. They also emphasize Orthodoxy’s vitality, evidenced by its surprising adaptation to the changed circumstances in the European countries, the State of Israel, and the United States. Some are also asking whether the phenomenon of Orthodoxy did not exist within Islamic countries as well: this is a research topic in great demand, and currently the source of a gripping dispute.\(^\text{13}\) Second, from a

\(^{11}\) See Gili Zivan, *Jewish Orthodox Thought Confronts the Post-Modern World* [Hebrew], (Ph.D. dissertation, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 2001).

\(^{12}\) A significant portion of the academic developments referred to here is included in a collection of Hebrew essays: *Jewish Orthodoxy: New Perspectives*, ed. Yosef Salmon, Adam S. Ferziger, and Aviezer Ravitzky [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, forthcoming.]

\(^{13}\) Zvi M. Zohar, *Masoret u-Temurah* [Tradition and Change] [Jerusalem: Machon Ben-Zevi, 1991]; idem, *Heiru penei ha-Mizrah* [The Face of the East has Gloomed]
sociological perspective, several scholars have progressed beyond examinations of the categories of sages and leaders, authors and books. They are now inquiring into the world of the regular Orthodox Jews, their familial and social ties, and their daily interaction with nonobservant relatives and neighbors. In other words, in addition to the study of ideas as such, they are also examining their absorption and dissemination. Finally, some traditional presumptions regarding the history of Orthodoxy have also recently been challenged. When did the Orthodox awakening begin? What were the paths of its penetration into Jewish communities? Did it react uniformly to any and all modern innovations, as well as any and all deviations from the traditional pattern? Some have taken another step and investigated the development of early “Orthodox” responses (during the nineteenth century) which were not necessarily directed toward a rival reform movement (for example, in Galitza), and which did not lead their adherents toward an internal division within the community (for example, in France).

Naturally, these studies have conferred on the phenomenon of Orthodoxy previously unexpected richness and variety, deepening and broadening the scope of research. As a result, most of the previous generalizations in the field must now be re-examined in the light of recent findings. All of this only reinforces the question: Is there any justification for continuing to speak of a continuous and discernable phenomenon of “Orthodox” Judaism?

In a past study, responding to a similar question, I proposed diverging from the constraints of the classical theory of definition and utilizing a “softer” theory, that of the “family resemblance” (per Ludwig Wittgenstein). Accordingly, distinct groups or personalities may be included within the same definition not only when they all

share a distinct common element, but also in accordance with partial similarities that connect them. Assume for example that Reuven and Shimon have one feature in common; Shimon and Dina have a second feature in common; and Dina shares a third feature with Levi, and so forth. The fictitious members of the family do not share one particular feature; nevertheless, a network of mutual relations interconnects them all, as a result of which each of them is more connected to their siblings than to their neighbors. Admittedly, the adoption of this strategy for our purposes renders us incapable of discerning the precise point at which Orthodoxy ends and heterodoxy begins. Of necessity a gray intermediate area exists, comprising individuals and communities whose identity is vague, fragmented, or disputed. However, in my opinion this is a faithful description of the social, ideational, existential, and behavioral experience of the contemporary halakhic community.

It was conceptual considerations that made this proposal useful in the past, but new empirical information compels an additional methodological step. First, we will depict a prototype or a paragon of “pure” Orthodoxy, an uncompromising, unalloyed image. It will represent the extremity of the relevant phenomena and will provide a vantage point from which we can survey the broad spectrum of more moderate samples. Admittedly, this prototype of Orthodoxy may be hypothetical, but it provides a conceptual standard against which each concrete phenomenon can be assessed, i.e., according to its relative position on the spectrum. Second, we will refer to “Orthodox” in the adjectival sense, as opposed to “Orthodoxy” as a proper noun. Hence, a person or a community can be regarded as being more Orthodox than others, or an opinion or behavioral mode can be described as less Orthodox than others, even if we no longer purport to be able to determine a dividing point between them. This framework accommodates gradations of Orthodoxy in accordance with varying criteria. Hence, in terms of doctrines and beliefs, Reuven may be regarded as being at the extreme of the Orthodox spectrum, whereas in terms of behavioral conservatism,

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Shimon is at the extreme, and from the perspective of communal identification, Yehuda takes their place, being identified with a segregated isolationist community.

Apparently, we have no choice but to reconcile ourselves to the fact that historical, social, and ideational reality is broader and more fluid than we normally realize. We are no longer concerned with a unique closed faction or a clearly delineated idea, but rather with a scale indicating “more” or “less,” or proximity to and remoteness from the pure prototype of Orthodoxy. This is indeed a significant methodological change; it means that from now on the term “Orthodox” can be used in a manner similar to terms like “left” or “right,” “socialist” or “capitalist,” all of them terms for grading and not branding, ascribing and not sentencing. None of these indicate a defined, distinct group, but they are still useful in accommodating illuminative and productive discourse. This softer, more flexible approach seems to provide a better conceptual matrix for assessing recent findings and insights concerning varieties of Orthodoxy.

4. Temporal and Eternal

The portrayal of the purist Orthodox may provide an axis, or an anchor, that prevents the semantic fragmentation of the discussion. But it is precisely the inherent vagueness regarding the borders of “Orthodoxy” that necessitates an illumination of its extreme, “ideal” form at the apex of the spectrum. I will focus on one critical theme: the tension between old and new, temporal and eternal, or between “history” and meta-history. The choice was not accidental; since the emergence of Orthodoxy as a distinct phenomenon, this tension has been an acid test for the overall Orthodox conception, and the cornerstone of disputes with rival religious streams in modern Jewry. I will begin with the conceptual aspect of the question, proceed to

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15 Several principal features of the Orthodox prototype are described by Eliezer Goldman, “Jewish Orthodox Thought Confronts Modernity” [Hebrew], in idem, Expositions and Inquiries: Jewish Thought in Past and Present, ed. Avraham Sagi and Daniel Statman (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 141–158. See also Charles S. Liebman, “Extremism as a Religious Norm,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 22 (1983), 75–86. I chose to focus the discussion on a different central feature of this prototype.
the halakhic aspect and conclude with the social-communal one.\textsuperscript{16}

First of all, the Orthodox per se is at the forefront of the battle against the modern norms of innovation and change. One of the foremost symbols of modernity is the inherent value it attributes to innovation qua innovation. The modern person desires change for its own sake—not only for its particular content but because it is the ultimate expression of dynamism, vitality, and freedom. In fact, the modern person (in the typological sense) has made movement and transformation a guiding principle of his culture.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, the Enlightenment did not only herald a new age of innovation but was also the harbinger of new experiences and values created thereby, and of the belief that all of these are humankind’s blessing. Change and movement inevitably surge forward and bring progress in their wake. The advancement of humanity is a deterministic process. Admittedly, there are human beings at the helm of this process, but in essence the process unfolds in accordance with its own immanent, innate law, advancing history toward its cognitive summit.\textsuperscript{18} Needless to say, this concept left a deep imprint upon modern culture. For even those philosophical trends that challenged the deterministic nature of the hope of progress still adopted the worldview implicit in the hope itself, granting inherent value to the actual phenomena of innovation.

The radical Orthodox Jews disapprove, protest, and reject. They are the stalwarts of stability in an ephemeral reality, perhaps even a bastion of solidity in a collapsing reality. From their perspective, the real conflict is not between old and new, the past and the present, but rather between transience and permanence, history and eternity—and they choose eternity. True, they protect the past, making

\textsuperscript{16} David Sorotzkin is currently writing a doctoral dissertation regarding these questions within the radical, anti-Zionist Haredi stream. See also his article, “Building the Earthly and Destroying the Heavenly: The Satmar Rabbi and the Radical Orthodox School of Thought,” in \textit{Erez Israel be-hagut ha-Yehudit ba-me’ah ha-esrim} [The Land of Israel in Twentieth-Century Jewish Thought], ed. Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Tzvi, 2004), 133–167.


it pre- eminent, but their deep aspiration is not to prefer one epoch (the past) over another (the present) but to unite the present with the past and, eventually, to eliminate time (all time) and history as categories of significance, in favor of eternity. This is perhaps the fundamental implication of the famous dictum of Hungarian Orthodoxy, “Hadash asur min ha-Torah bekhol maqom,” that is, the Law prohibits any change of any religious custom. This was an attempt to preserve the traditional status quo and endow it with normative value, but again, not necessarily by virtue of the substantive superiority of the given situation, but rather by reason of the stability and continuity it represents, and ultimately because it is perceived as an echo of eternity. That famous dictum flings the gauntlet at the very pulse of modernity, offering an alternative existential ethos ascending above the old and the new altogether.

An interesting anecdote illustrates the point. In 1980, Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Shach, a prominent ultra-Orthodox authority, wrote to one of his students: “When I am asked in the heavenly court why I didn’t identify with Zionism, I’ll directly blame the Hafetz Hayyim and all the other great rabbinical leaders before me, and they will have the answer.” Shach was anything but naïve, and this was his sophisticated way of intimating the permanence of religious ideas and values. Admittedly, the Hafetz Hayyim (Rabbi Israel Meir Ha-Kohen) lived in a different era (at the beginning of the twentieth century), before the Holocaust and before the creation of the Jewish state. Nor did he witness the military battles of the Jewish state. Prima facie, these developments could have been understood as necessitating a renewed ideological assessment. But this is precisely the point, for Rav Shach and his colleagues sagely nod their heads and say, Truths and halakhic regulations are beyond time; they exceed the boundaries of human history.

Unable to accept the modern norm of change, the radical Orthodox Jew a fortiori rejects the theory of progress. As noted above, he may perceive historical reality not only as ephemeral and fleeting, but even as terminally ill and collapsing. Truth has no history: it is

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19 This dictum became a slogan and flag of the Hatam Sofer school. Regarding its lingual and contextual import, see R. Moshe Sofer, Responsa, Yoreh Deah 2, sec. 19; ibid. Orach Chaim 1, sec. 28.
rooted in creation; Torah is above history, being divinely revealed at Sinai. History however is human’s fate, and in every successive generation it distances one further from creation and from Sinai.21 This theme of spiritual decline already appeared in early (Talmudic) sources: “Rabbi Yochanan said: The heart of the earlier ones was open like the entrance to the outer hall [of the Temple], while the heart of the later ones was open only like the [smaller] entrance to the inner hall, but as for us the opening is no bigger than the eye of a fine needle.” 22 In the words of R. Yeshayahu Horowitz (Shela) in the sixteenth century:

We observe the march of the generations. Earlier generations could plumb even the most profound matters without any commentary; they were followed by those who required a commentary, and then by those for whom the commentary itself requires a commentary, all in accordance with the darkness of intellect.23

These are expressions of the classic fear of the tides of time, distancing humanity from the ultimate source of life (creation) and the ultimate source of values (Sinai). In fact, for many of the later sages (Acharonim) the belief in historical regression was a cornerstone of their social and anthropological conception. Some of them further combined this belief with the traditional apocalyptic fear of the pre-messianic catastrophe, applying both to the modern period. In the words of the Hafetz Hayyim, at the beginning of the twentieth century: “there is no doubt that our time is that of the footsteps of the Messiah … for we have sunk to the most abysmal and appalling level possible.” 24 Needless to say, the amplification of the sense of

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22 See b. Shabbat 112b; b. Yoma 9a; Sanhedrin 106b; and parallels in Yerushalmi and Midrashim.


24 Moshe Prager, ed., *Le’or ha-emunah* [In the Light of Faith] (New York: Ha-Machon Le-Heker ha-Yahadut Ha-Haredit, 1958), 6, 12; for other examples, see Gershon C. Bacon, “Daat Torah and the Birth Pangs of the Messiah” [Hebrew], *Tarfiz*
regression reinforces the Orthodox rejection of the modern ethos. It culminates in an even more intense effort to abandon history in favor of eternity.

These two clear expressions of conservatism—the recoil from change and the fear of historical fall—dwell in a state of tense coexistence. The first is directed against the workings of men (innovation) and the second against the workings of history (decline). According to the first, tradition must be preserved because it represents stability and endurance, while according to the second, tradition should be preserved because it represents superior values. In my view, however, it is the emphasis of stability that distinguishes the radical Orthodox conception of time (since the emphasis on regression was a recurring theme in previous generations). Nevertheless, they combined forces in their battle against the normative status conferred upon change and the idea of progress. Thus, they both encapsulate the extremities of antimodern Orthodoxy.

According to a prevalent approach in the contemporary philosophy of history, the idea of progress was originally based upon a secular version of Christian eschatology, i.e., upon the belief in the immanent presence of the Redeemer within history. Adoption of this approach would lead us to view the Orthodox rejection of the belief in human progress as a Jewish rejection (direct or indirect) of a possible philosophical outgrowth of Christianity.

These features of the Orthodox prototype provide us with a starting point from which we can chart a rich spectrum of religious approaches toward the flow of time and the meaning of history. Some of them reflect the adjustment of the old to the new, others the attempt at compartmentalization; some of them invite the believing Jew to partake in a fruitful discourse, and still others daringly imbibe the spirit of modernity, imbuing it with redemptive,

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25 However, it may conduct an interesting dialogue with postmodern conceptions of frustration and deconstruction.
messianic power. This comports with our original observation: de-
signating the precise boundaries of “Orthodoxy” is indeed a dif-
ficult (perhaps impossible) exercise; nevertheless, one can point to
particular salient features that would designate one Jew as being
more “Orthodox” than his fellow Jew or a particular community
as being more “Orthodox” than its fellow community.

Examining our initial question in the light of the present sug-
gestion, the question must be raised: Haven’t we just affirmed the
common understanding among historians concerning the fictitious
nature of the Orthodox self-perception? Putting it somewhat less
cryptically, on the face of it, the salient features assigned to radical
Orthodoxy seem to present it first and foremost as a reaction to the
outside world, that is, as a direct result of the modern experience.

The question should be answered with opposing questions. Is there
anything more traditional than protecting tradition itself? Isn’t the
defense of the eternal and the absolute the most sublimely religious
act? In ancient and medieval times, the external threat was embodied
in a rival tradition, but the concept of tradition itself as a binding
category of reference was never challenged. In those times the op-
ponent spoke on behalf of an alternative vision of eternity (Greek,
Roman, Christian, or Muslim). He did not challenge it by raising
the banner of innovation and historical development. Consequently,
the traditional Jewish response at that time did not focus on the
danger of change,28 and the religious apologetic was not forced to

28 On the contrary, even when the premodern Jew tended to downplay the signifi-
cance of internal changes within the tradition, ascribing them to earlier authorities, he
was in tune with the dominant intellectual environment. In those times, even the great
authors tended to present their original works as works of exegesis, i.e., as the record-
ing and expounding of ideas that had long been preserved within the sacred texts and
sources of antiquity, and which had only now been re-exposed. This is not the case
with the Orthodox Jew in the modern period. In denying the process of change, the
latter does not orient oneself in the spirit of the times, but rather directly challenges it.
In other words, the Orthodox Jew follows in his forefather’s footsteps in his efforts to
downplay the power of change, but deviates from them in his comprehensive struggle
against the upheavals of the present. This existential situation demands a special effort,
a heroic adherence that was not required from his forefathers. In many cases, the stub-
born attempt to preserve the old requires more creative energy than is required from
the innovator. In my opinion, however, the actual need for a frontal confrontation
with the external world does not preclude internal Jewish continuity. Quite the oppo-
site: according to the (authentic) self-perception of the Orthodox prototype, it is his
uncompromising rejection of the norm of change and progress that actually reinforces
his claim regarding internal continuity. Stubborn intellectual energy should not be
equated with false perceptions.
prohibit Hadash—any change in any religious custom. Naturally, in those times too, religious leadership exercised its legislative power (Takanot) when confronting threats to the Torah; however, they focused upon different danger zones and attempted to protect different nerve centers. The nature of the battlefield has determined the nature of the response, and in this sense antiquity and modernity are inseparable.

A traditional formulation of this understanding might read as follows: in every generation Abraham the Hebrew (Ivry) stands on one side (ever) facing the whole world on the other side, even though the “world” he faces has donned a thousand masks. Now, if this perception is not considered to be “authentic,” than the entire Jewish historical memory should not be considered “authentic” as well. And, if one claims precisely this—that both in fact are “inventions of tradition”—then the inescapable conclusion is that “inventions of tradition” are the typical signs of the tradition, which returns us to our original claim.

Needless to say, traditional Judaism has developed a wide spectrum of alternative views of the Jewish encounter with the world. It produced fascinating dialogues between “Abraham” and the “World.” If Jewish Aristotelian philosophy and the neo-Platonic Jewish mysticism were viewed as developments “within the tradition,” the contemporary Jewish confrontation with the modern human adventure is equally worthy of being viewed as a development within the tradition, a development which remolds the relation between the old and the new in the light of a wide range of options, such as dichotomy, dialectic, or synthesis.

5. Halakhah and History

The analysis above is premised on two distinct claims: a historical claim regarding the nature of tradition, and a philosophical claim

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29 In many cases, classic interpretative creativity introduced remote worlds into the boundaries of the tradition, internalizing concepts and values that originated in other cultures in an attempt to locate the periphery within the epicenter. But as stated above, it also spared no effort in minimizing the significance of the process of incorporating new ideas originating in contemporary “Western” thought. See Ravitzky, Hadash min ha-Torah, 35–53.
regarding the meaning of Orthodoxy. On the historical level, an immanent nexus binds the confrontations of the external world by the later ("Orthodox") and the earlier ("traditional") generations, respectively. Philosophically speaking, the Orthodox rejection of the Hadash represents an attempt to protect the eternal from the temporal, more than an attempt to protect the past from the present. It articulates the preference of the permanent over the transient, the absolute over the contingent.

How are these traits reflected in the realm of Mitzvah and Halakhah, as principal components of Orthodox identity? Obviously, on the personal level, the degree to which a Jew expresses an unconditional commitment to the written and oral Law and the institution of rabbinical authority is an ultimate measure of one’s advancement toward “pure” Orthodoxy. This degree is primarily reflected in a formal voluntary decision, which may even eclipse the tests of practical fulfillment and cognitive perception. Regarding practice, commitment to Torah and devotion in principle to the commandments is of greater significance than concrete success in the test of daily observance. The decisive factor is personal fidelity to the transcendent will and submission to the absolute command, even if the frailty of the human will frequently impairs actual performance. Regarding cognition, Orthodox identity is not premised upon a level of theological comprehension or the internalization of principles of faith. It is rather embodied in a sense of obligation, fidelity, existential identification, mental disposition, and unconditional loyalty to this community, this Posek, this Torah, and this Absolute.

Putting a further gloss on this idea, I propose using the term orthonomy together with, or in place of the accepted terms orthodox or orthoprax. This new notion would express the principled aspect of compliance with the Halakhah and the believer’s consciousness of being a commanded being. In this defined sense, all commandments gather and unite under the wings of one fundamental imperative: “be commanded,” or, to quote an aphorism of Shalom Rosenberg: “Who is a halakhic Jew? One who commits transgressions—in other
words, a person for whom the notions of a religious commandment and transgression represent a living, meaningful concept. Our concern is therefore with the existential and ontological awareness of the halakhic person, an awareness that may precede both practical and theoretical life.

So far we have dealt with the personal dimension of adherence to the Halakhah. But the Halakhah is also an empirical, collective phenomenon, with particular characteristic features. According to a prevalent (though not exclusive) Orthodox conception, the Halakhah has no “history.” Its literature, its learning, its instruction, and its practical rulings must, by definition, be determined by an independent internal process, governed by its own logic, not subject to the exigencies of time. Even Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, the pioneer of neo-Orthodoxy, who adopted a relatively complex approach regarding this issue, fervently stressed: “God established Judaism in contradistinction to the [flow of] of time,” and therefore, “only when times comport with God’s commandments, will Judaism comport with times.”

Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the great teacher of Modern Orthodoxy in the United States, further refined the idea, repeatedly and relentlessly stressing the \textit{a priori}, conceptual nature of the Halakhah, removing it as far as possible from considerations of time, place, society, and history:

\begin{quote}
Once the Halakhah begins to move on its particular path, its movement is not a result of submission to any event, but is exclusively in accordance with the internal orbit of its own normative ideal. … The psychologization or the sociologization of the Halakhah are an attack on its soul.
\end{quote}

Apparently, when dealing with the “independence” of Halakhah, radicalism is not the exclusive legacy of the extreme streams of Orthodoxy; it similarly characterizes certain Modern Orthodox leaders, pioneers of synthesis and dialectic with external cultures, who further refined and sharpened the traditionalist conception of Halakhah. And, \textit{a fortiori}, it characterizes many of their colleagues in the Lithuanian Haredi camp.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{33} Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “\textit{Ma dodech mi-dod}” [What Is Thy Friend More Than Another friend], in idem, \textit{Be-Sod ha-yahid ve-ha-yahad} [In the Secret of Oneness and Togetherness] (Jerusalem: Orot, 1976), 224.
\item \textit{34} Goldman, \textit{Expositions and Inquiries}, 318.
\end{itemize}
Admittedly, contrary to the previous question regarding the authentic positioning of Orthodoxy on the continuum of tradition, it is difficult to avoid the “optical illusion” inherent in this meta-historical description of the halakhic world. No critical scholar can ignore the chasm between this idealistic conception and the way the halakhic system actually functions. In this sense researchers can find support in the halakhic camp itself. In the succinct words of the Orthodox philosopher, Eliezer Goldman: “The Halakah has its history … and has its geography. … It also develops; naturally its development obeys the internal logic of the Halakah itself.” Recently, these voices have been heard with greater frequency and increasing volume from spokesmen of modern Orthodoxy, and naturally, they function as catalysts for internal controversy. At the same time, they sharpen the question of the dividing line between Orthodoxy and contemporary halakhic trends within the Conservative movement.

In sum, a Jew adopting a historical view of the Halakah is required to renounce the claim to being the scion of the radical Orthodox prototype. The opposite, however, is not the case; not every Jew who denies the historic approach will merit that title, for in the modern Orthodox camp the question is open to a broad range of responses as well.

The tension between stability and change finds paramount expression in the sphere of religious customs practiced by Jewish communities. “One cannot understand the development of the Halakah, nor the status of the custom in the lives of the Jewish communities, unless one sees them in their reciprocal context” (Jacob Katz). Scholars have recently directed our attention to the halakhic debate over the generations regarding the normative status of custom.
chapter fifteen

and examined its recent developments within the Orthodox camp. Special importance, however, should be attached to the surprising social implications of this debate, and its dynamic potential for change even within the most traditional camp. I will give a brief illustration.

The debate focuses on the following question: Which source is decisive, the book or the living tradition? Who is the supreme authority—the experts on the sources (rabbis, scholars), or the members of the community? Does the Halakhah confer upon custom a constitutive, legal status in terms of Jewish practice? This dispute is fundamentally related to the issue of tradition and time. It directly touches the question: What are the components of continuity, permanence, and the eternally fixed tradition? Does an old custom, by virtue of its vintage, raise a community above time, beyond change and innovation—or perhaps only the written word (and its extrapolation) has that power, by abstracting truth from time, including the earlier time in which the custom was adopted? Is the invalidation of family or community custom—whether by text or argumentation—an opprobrious change and deviation from halakhic tradition, or perhaps it is the observance of that very custom, despite the text (or argumentation) that constitutes the perversions of the halakhic truth? Occasionally, the question may even be what prevails over change with greater power—the earlier memory or the primordial one, the old practice of the fathers or the (imagined) ancient practice of the forefathers?

This phenomenon clearly demonstrates the problematic nature of any generalization regarding “conservatism” or “modernization” in the religious sphere. What constitutes conservatism: adherence

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Reaction of Ashkenazic Jewry to the Influence of the Polish Center in the Beginning of the 17th Century” [Hebrew], Sinai 102 (1988), 226–240.

to tradition or adherence to texts? Who is the agent of change: the person holding onto the custom or his rival? Furthermore, in many cases the former may predicate the custom on an authentic, ancient tradition, whereas the latter sees the custom as a newcomer to the fold. At all events, both are an attempt to preserve the constant from the transient, and it is therefore no wonder that they both became deeply rooted in the Orthodox halakhic tradition.

6. Conservatism and Change

This discussion projected us directly from the ideational dimension into the social one (family, community, public)—in other words, the realm of customs and particular traditions. It goes without saying that a publicly accepted custom plays an important role in the crystallization of collective identity. Consequently, a scholar attempting to abolish it may rouse the ire of the members of the community, but at the same time he might also promote the development of new factions (either within or against the community) and new social circles. I will illustrate this with two well-known rulings of Rabbi Yeshayahu Karelitz, the Hazon Ish, the leader of the Lithuanian Haredi community in the Land of Israel. One concerns *shiurim* (standard measures), and the other treats *biur reshaim* (the purging of the wicked). Though the two rulings bear no substantive connection, they share exciting parallel social ramifications.

On the one hand, on the issue of *shiurim* the Hazon Ish unabashedly opposed religious practices anchored in many centuries of communal observance. The Talmudic sages established measures governing the fulfillment of various commandments in accordance with the dimensions of natural objects extant in their time. However, these natural objects (forearm, thumb, egg, olive) may no longer

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provide a reliable guide for the requisite fulfillment of commandments. For, according to the Hazon Ish, between Talmudic times and the contemporary period, “Nature has changed,” and in our time the same objects are physically smaller. As a result, they cannot be relied upon in the performance of particular, “measure-determined” commandments. In other words, not only is historical evidence unreliable; nature too is fickle and fails to provide a fixed anchor for halakhic determinations. Only the written text and halakhic logic are reliable sources for the determination of the timeless truth. Since these two last criteria are significantly more stringent and demanding than customary communal traditions, one must adopt them as decisive, even at the expense of prevailing custom. The result is indeed paradoxical: it was precisely that uncompromising quest for the objective law and the eternal, unchanging truth that recently engendered a significant change in the lifestyles of an important sector of the religious traditionalist camp in the Land of Israel.

On the other hand, regarding the question of *biur reshaim* (purging of the offenders, i.e., the halakhic approach to secular Jews), the Hazon Ish took a different approach. His position was similarly premised on transformations that had occurred (in his view) in the cosmic realm. But this time it was not the concrete Halakhah that provided him with a permanent anchor in a changing world, but rather the meta-halakhic purpose at its base. The Hazon Ish wanted to defuse the communally explosive potential of the rigid Talmudic rules concerning transgressors of the Law, public desecrators of the Sabbath, and so forth. In fact, he attempted to provide a halakhic basis for the deep changes that had occurred in recent generations concerning the attitude towards nonobservant Jews. His contention was that the heresy that was rampant in recent generations was not just the result of cultural and historical developments, but was in fact attributable to metaphysical and cosmic changes! The period is one of a divine eclipse; miracles are no longer revealed to the naked eye. This means that the modern nonbeliever, godless though he may be, can no longer be regarded as one “who recognizes his Creator but intentionally defies him,” but rather as one who has fallen into error and/or as one who is blind, meritng the benefit of the doubt.

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In other words, these stringent Talmudic rules were addressed exclusively to a specific time in the past, in which they could amend society. Our time however is a “time of concealment” and “hiding of the Face” (hester panim); therefore, the potential damage of these rules far exceeds their benefit, and “the law does not apply when it is ineffectual”! Surprisingly, therefore, the Hazon Ish characterized this halakhic regulation as a time-bound one, subject to change, a component of an eternal meta-halakhic teleology structured for the restoration of transgressors from their evil ways.

In the first example, we confronted a physical change in nature; in the second example, a metaphysical change above nature. Yet, interestingly enough, both of them catalyzed a profound transformation in society and in history. The first ruling was a key factor in the crystallization of an elitist group, a select sector comprised primarily of the Lithuanian Yeshiva circles. Its members unrelentingly and devotedly adhere to the “standard measures” of the Hazon Ish, setting themselves and their lifestyles apart from other observers of the commandments. Their stringency in the shiurim has sealed off an inner circle of guardians of the faith within the Haredi community. The second ruling, on the other hand, was directed at the periphery, and functioned in the opposite direction. It lowered the barriers between the Orthodox community and the majority of secular Jews. It broadened the borders of “the congregation of Israel,” creating an outer periphery of Jews who, though uncommitted to Halakhah, were no longer regarded as heretics or as people who intentionally rebel against their Creator. The emerging picture is one of a hierarchy, a series of expanding concentric circles, consisting of the selected elite, the Haredim, the Orthodox, and the rest of

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42 Yeshayahu Karelitz, Hazon Ish, Yoreh Deah, Hilkhot Shekhita, sections 16–17. See Aviezer Ravitzky, “The Loaded Wagon and the Empty Wagon: The Secular Zionist in Orthodox Thought,” in idem, Heirut al ha-luchot [Freedom Inscribed] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1999), 229–232. According to Brown, “The Hazon Ish: Halakhah, Faith and Society,” this is not a meta-halakhic expression, for the Hazon Ish considered the ruling concerning biur reshaim to be limited to a certain situation only. Still, I wonder whether, in other matters of less consequence, the Hazon Ish would neutralize laws and regulations enacted in the Talmud, the Shulhan Arukh, and Maimonides’ Code by making them contingent on the exigencies of the time. The tendency to leniency in this specific case was therefore based on meta-halakhic considerations, even if the argument sounds formal and technical. See the direct criticism leveled against it by members of the Hazon Ish school, cited in Ravitzky, “The Loaded Wagon and the Empty Wagon.”
the Congregation of Israel (*kelal Israel*), while heretics, infidels and apostates dwell outside the camp.\(^{43}\) I do not claim that the Hazon Ish formulated his rulings in order to consciously achieve these social results, but, in fact, this was their direct consequence and effect upon the contemporary Orthodox community.

In other words: revolutions can evolve from the core of traditionalism; absolute preference for permanence and stability can produce dynamic processes and results; historical changes in the Halakhah can also occur as a result of a categorical denial of the very concept of the history of Halakhah. Even if, formally speaking, the rule itself does not change, nature may change, Providence may change, the custom (in our perception) may be transformed, or the regulation may be modified; and each change can be a catalyst for radical outcomes regarding the halakhic flow and social dynamics.

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If the branches of Judaism can be characterized as to whether they welcomed scientific knowledge, ignored, or rejected it, Mordecai M. Kaplan’s Reconstructionism was, perhaps, the most science-minded of all. The theories and findings on which Kaplan relied, however, were not so much the meticulous historical researches of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* but the social sciences and the theological implications of the natural science of his youth.

The ideological roots of Reform and Positive-Historical Judaism can be traced to the first half of the nineteenth century when *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was taking shape: Abraham Geiger, Zacharias Frankel, and other figures important in the non-Orthodox sector of German Jewry were active participants; by the 1880s these scholars, trained in German universities but excluded from the German professorate, had produced an array of monographs on Jewish subjects using classical philology to critically analyze primary sources. Like *wissenschaftlich* German historiography of that period but from a Jewish perspective, they were influenced by the Enlightenment, philosophical idealism, and Romantic nationalism. In contrast, Kaplan’s Reconstructionism had its roots in the changed climate of opinion that emerged in the 1880s and 1890s, the onset of the so-called “war between science and religion,” a surge in collective social ideologies, the declining hegemony of philosophical idealism, the triumph of the nation-state in the West, and the emergence of minority nationalism in Eastern Europe. Kaplan’s worldview was
shaped by Pragmatism, structural-functional sociology, modernist Protestant theology, and Spiritual Zionism.

Complicating the picture is that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Reconstructionism no longer represents the religious stance of one man. Kaplan’s own ideology (for convenience let us call it “Kaplanism”) eventually led to a small but vigorous Reconstructionist denomination in America. Reconstructionism became one of a handful of Jewish movements in early modern and modern times instigated by a “founder.” Earlier there was eighteenth-century Beshtian Hasidism and its offshoots such as Habad and Satmar Hasidism, and the nineteenth-century Musar movement, founded by Israel Salanter. Subsequently perhaps, we might note the Jewish Renewal group around Zalman Schacter-Shlomi, which some label “New Age” Judaism. We might add to that list the Ethical Culture movement founded in 1876 by Felix Adler, son of the prominent Reform rabbi (Samuel Adler). All these founders seem to have propounded teachings refocusing key elements of Judaism in ways that turned out to be fecund even when their specific ideas were elaborated almost beyond recognition by epigones. Mel Scult, Kaplan’s devoted and expert biographer, avers that Kaplan said many times that Reconstructionism was “a school of thought,” not a separate denomination. But step-by-step that is what occurred. Most of his life a member of the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Kaplan had been rabbi of two prominent New York Orthodox synagogues when, in 1922, he and his supporters founded the Society for the Advancement of Judaism (SAJ). The SAJ served for the rest of his career as a congenial setting which enabled him to express his ideas, somewhat like the Free Synagogue that Stephen S. Wise founded in 1907, except that Kaplan did not receive a salary at the SAJ. The SAJ Bulletin gave way to a printed journal, the SAJ Review, which in 1935 became the Reconstructionist magazine, one of a

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2 This group, like Reconstructionism, has an intensely involved following but is the antithesis of Kaplanism with respect to taking modern science to heart.

3 Mordecai M. Kaplan, Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1956), 441: “As matters stand at present, none of the existing religious groups subscribes to the foregoing principles. That does not mean, however, that it is necessary to add a fourth denomination to be known as Reconstructionist. On the contrary, we hope that the foregoing principles will ultimately be adopted by the existing religious groups.” Also see Mel Scult, Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 257.
small number of modestly produced small periodicals of long-range, impact among the liberal American-Jewish religious elite. As his following among rabbinical graduates of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA) expanded, a federation of Reconstructionist congregations and fellowships was organized in 1954. Reconstructionism declared its independence, so to speak, from Conservative Judaism five years after Kaplan’s retirement from JTSA when, in 1968, the Reconstructionist Rabbinic College (the RRC) was established in a Philadelphia suburb. Reconstructionism has in the last half century become a thriving branch in the American-Jewish religious spectrum, much smaller than the other three but with an enthusiastic, committed membership. The hallmark of all American-Jewish (and other) religious denominations is not so much a sharply defined ideology as a set of institutions: seminaries, rabbinic and clergy associations, congregational unions. Inevitably, Reconstructionism has experienced certain inner tensions as to how far it should depart from strict Kaplanism in an era of different spiritual concerns and philosophical tendencies. This essay deals not with Reconstructionism as a whole but with Kaplanism tout court.

We will focus mainly on Kaplan’s appropriation of the social sciences and pragmatic and naturalistic philosophies of his time and place, which melded elements of functionalism and religious naturalism into a blueprint for Jewish survival. Kaplanism can also be viewed as a strategy for the reconfiguration of postemancipation structures in the diaspora, especially the fragmented and conflicted twentieth-century American diaspora; as a continuation of Haskalah values after the rise of Jewish nationalism; and as a defense of religion in response to the challenges of freethinking and philosophical naturalism.

Kaplan’s heyday as a controversial but influential figure of stature was in the 1930s and 1940s when the influence of his program transcended denominational divisions. Through his teaching, articles, books, and periodical, his viewpoint gradually attracted a devoted following among Conservative and Reform rabbis. Rabbi Bernhard

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4 Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century*, 260, 360.
5 According to its web page, the RRC by 2004 had more than two hundred graduates and the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation claimed over one hundred congregations serving sixteen thousand households.
Cohn of Congregation Habonim in New York (a graduate of Stephen Wise’s Jewish Institute of Religion) once remarked that despite their personal theologies, most liberal rabbis of his generation were de facto Kaplanians. The late Charles Liebman proposed that Kaplan’s Reconstructionism was the “folk Judaism” of a great many American Jews, even if they did not accept his theology (which Liebman called a version of “elite Judaism”). Kaplan can be said to have articulated the common Jewishness of a cohort of mid-twentieth-century American Jews, a generation imbued with respect for science and progress, patriotic Americanism of the New Deal era, committed to being Jewish but resistant to being told specifically which Jewish religious laws to observe. The emergence of Reconstructionism as a separate denomination may have been a symptom of the decline of this broad influence because of the rise of existentialist theologies of Judaism in the fifties. Nevertheless, a set of ideas that was a side path in the second half of the twentieth century may enjoy resurgence in the twenty-first. In the last analysis, what makes Kaplan significant is the scope of his addressing rationally so many areas of social and intellectual concern to lay out a coherent agenda for “meaningful Jewish survival.”

Kaplan’s literary style is explicit, orderly, lucid, commonsensical. Even though he taught homiletics and composed some striking poetic prayers, he did not engage in rhetoric and eschewed clichés. In his books and articles, he sought clarity; he argued, he explained. One reads him for elucidation, not soaring inspiration or mystical evocation.

Kaplan was the first major American-Jewish religious thinker to draw extensively on American sources: Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, John Dewey. He parallels liberal Protestant theologians like Henry Nelson Weiman and preachers like Harry Emerson Fosdick. The development of his thought is independent of European Jewish thinkers such as Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, and Martin Buber. The anguished tone of much neo-Reformation

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crisis theology and religious existentialism is absent in his writings. Despite Kaplan’s occasional moments of discouragement, there is a progressive optimism, a can-do spirit, a practical engagement in betterment that is distinctively American.

II

Born in 1881 in the town of Svencionys in the Lithuanian region of the Tsarist empire, Mordecai M. Kaplan and his family settled in America when he was eight years old. Raised in an enlightened Orthodox home (his father was a rabbi who, in America, supervised ritual slaughtering of animals), Motl/Maurice/Max/Mark/Mordecai was given both a traditional Jewish and a New York public-school secular education. (His name changed as he changed locale and schools.) In 1900 Kaplan graduated from the City College of New York and enrolled in a master’s degree program at Columbia University. From 1893, when he was twelve and one half, he studied at the nearby Jewish Theological Seminary until 1902 when he graduated and was ordained. In 1908 while on his honeymoon he received rabbinical semikhah from an eminent Lithuanian rabbi, Isaac Jacob Reines. Kaplan was asked by Solomon Schechter to join the faculty of the JTSA as principal, then dean of the Teacher’s Institute and professor of homiletics; later he became professor of philosophies of religion. Concurrently he served two prominent Orthodox synagogues until in 1922 he founded the Society for the Advancement of Judaism which, together with his JTSA classes, provided a forum for developing his ideas.

In 1934, when Kaplan was 53, he published his first and most original book, Judaism as a Civilization: Towards a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life. In his lifetime the opponents of Kaplanism reader to learn that, in my opinion, Hermann Cohen’s treatise [Religion der Vernunft, aus den Quellen des Judentums (Leipzig: Fock, 1919)] is based on a misunderstanding of Judaism … fatal to the spiritual readjustment which Judaism must undergo, if it is to survive.” Kaplan was not a philosophical idealist or a neo-Kantian.

8 Scult, Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century, 96.
9 Mordecai M. Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization: Towards a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1934). A plethora of other works followed, the titles of which convey Kaplan’s unfolding agenda: Judaism in Transition (New York: Covici, Friede, 1936); The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion (New York:
viewed him as outside the camp or, at least, outside the approved mainstream. In 1941 the Jewish textbook firm Behrman House issued Kaplan’s version of the Passover Haggadah (at a time when there were almost no alternative haggadahs). In 1945, on the occasion of the appearance of the Reconstructionist Prayer Book and around the Shabbat when parashat Korah is read, Kaplan was formally excommunicated by a group of Orthodox rabbis. There followed a sharp letter of criticism to Ha-Do’ar, a leading American Hebrew periodical, by eminent professors of Kaplan’s own institution (Saul Lieberman, Alexander Marx, and Louis Ginzberg), an indication of the vast religious distance between him and the intellectual leaders of Conservative Judaism, which grew overt in the postwar era. 

Although Kaplan flirted in the mid-1920s with an invitation to head Stephen Wise’s alternative, pro-Zionist Reform seminary, the Jewish Institute of Religion, he continued to hope that Reconstructionism would be acknowledged officially as the left-wing of the Conservative movement, which did not occur. Since Kaplan’s death in 1983 at the age of 102, despite the secession of the Reconstructionist movement, he has been considered a significant presence in the history of the Conservative movement.

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1. Post-Emancipation Judaism

Unlike his earlier European counterparts, Kaplan did not develop his position in a context where Jewish emancipation was hesitant, its outcome still uncertain. Writing in the midst of this long-drawn out process, the proponents of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* pointed to the centrality of the Jewish religious tradition in Western civilization, emphasizing the high qualities of Jewish religious literature and the exemplary rationality of Jewish monotheism. Apologetics was a conspicuous element of the most distinguished scholarship. Even Heinrich Graetz, who insisted against the Reformers that the Jews were a *Stamm*, a tribe-like group and not just a church or a theology, defended the Jews as a *spiritual* nation fully deserving political emancipation in Germany.¹¹

Unlike Central and East European Jewry, American Jewry never struggled to demolish a legacy of pre-emancipation legal barriers and to reshape an embedded semiautonomous Jewish communal-rabbinic structure. Instead, prospective leaders of American Jewry had to contend with a religious situation that was anarchic and frustratingly fluid. Various attempts to construct comprehensive national institutions did not work out as planned. Isaac Mayer Wise and his colleagues had sought to create a *Union* of American Hebrew congregations and a Hebrew *Union* College, but after the beginnings of mass Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe it became a delimited “Classical” Reform Judaism. What later became *Conservative* Judaism coalesced gradually around the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, which got new life with the appointment of Solomon Schechter as its head in 1902. In Kaplan’s early years, on the assumption that Orthodox Judaism would die on the vine, unable to cope with the American environment, JTSA saw itself as providing spiritual leaders for most of American Judaism. (‘Catholic Israel’ was a Schechter slogan.) By the time that the projected merger of

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¹¹ One version of Gershom Scholem’s famous criticism of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, “The Science of Judaism: Then and Now,” is found in his *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York, Schocken Books, 1971), 304–317. In his view, *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was in its origin an “attempt to reduce Judaism to a purely spiritual, ideal phenomenon,” disregarding that “the Jewish people as a whole was very much alive; it was more than some fixed structure, let alone something defined or definable by a theological formula.” (ibid., 305).
JTSA and Yeshiva University fell through in the mid-twenties (some blamed the presence of the notorious Kaplan on the faculty), it was evident that Conservative Judaism was to be one, albeit the most populous branch of non-Orthodox American Judaism.

When Kaplan was a young man, the Jews of the Tsarist empire were still not emancipated but were supposedly in a condition famously defined by Ahad Ha’am as “freedom in the midst of slavery”: inner, spiritual freedom and outer, political slavery. Their socio-legal condition was constricted but their Yiddishkeit was strong. (Ahad Ha’am contrasted this to the situation of Western Jews being “slavery in the midst of freedom.”) Reforming the Jewish religion was not a priority. Ahad Ha’am’s generation of Positivist intellectuals dismissed religion as anachronistic while they advocated collective forms of Jewish emancipation, rather than the emancipation of Jews as individuals that occurred in Western and Central Europe. The Russian Jewish ideologies of the turn of the century—Zionist, Bundist, Folkist, and so forth—defined the Jews as a nationality with its own cultural concerns, values, and heritage. Likewise, Jewish historiography was moving away from religious literature, philosophy, liturgy, and religious belief to the study of social, economic, and institutional history. This new interest fueled interest in the old kahal, the organized Jewish community structure of East European Jewry in medieval and early modern times, one of Simon Dubnow’s specialities. If one can speak of a decisive “ethnic turn” in late-nineteenth-century serious Jewish thought, Kaplan matured after this turn.12

A comparison of Kaplan’s early theological crisis with Felix Adler’s throws into prominence the effect of the “ethnic turn.”13

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12 To be sure, some Jewish thinkers before this period—Heinrich Graetz, for example—made peoplehood central in their ideologies, but I am suggesting that there was a historical “tipping point” when Jewish ethnicity was recognized almost across the board among modern Jewish intellectuals.

13 On Adler, see Benny Kraut, From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture: The Religious Evolution of Felix Adler (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1979), especially chapters 2 and 3. On Ethical Culture and Reconstructionism, see Michael A. Meyer, “Beyond Particularism: On Ethical Culture and the Reconstructionists,” Commentary (March 1971), 71–76. For Kaplan’s later views of Ethical Culture, see Questions Jews Ask, 169–170: “They … refrain from using the term God, apparently because of its historical associations. … We regard the maintenance of Jewish peoplehood as part of our religion, because, for us Jews, the Jewish People is essential to mediate the process of human self-fulfillment.”
Adler experienced his youthful theological crisis in the 1870s when the appeal of idealist philosophy was weakened by Darwinism and ideological materialism and when the undermining of critical biblical scholarship by a growing body of archeological discoveries cast doubt on the absolute uniqueness of Judaism and Christianity. Walking out of Temple Emanu-El where his father Samuel Adler was the rabbi, in 1876 young Adler founded the “Society for Ethical Culture,” abjuring ties to any particularistic tradition. A man of high moral principle and intense social concerns, Adler wanted to be a religious leader liberated from all historical religions. He rejected theism, revelation, and the divine election of Israel; there was no ideal basis for the continued mission of the Jewish people that provided a raison d’être for its survival as a separate group. Kaplan underwent his theological crisis around 1905, but for him leaving the Jewish fold was unthinkable and unnecessary. Like the East European Jewish nationalists, he thought that Jews did not need to be justified as the people chosen by God for the sake of a unique monotheistic mission. Every nation and culture had the right to perpetuate itself, albeit without harming others.

Kaplan’s attitude toward Felix Adler was ambivalent. He had studied philosophy with Adler at Columbia University and respected him as a teacher of philosophy and spokesman for moral causes (as did a number of prominent Reform rabbis). On the other hand, he considered Adler a traitor for rejecting the Jewish people as a living entity. In 1922 Kaplan even proposed calling the SAJ the “Jewish Ethical Culture Society.” In contrast to Adler, Kaplan was able to marshal intellectual resources to construct a nonsupernaturalist theology, which we will consider later.

Kaplan was a Jewish “survivalist,” convinced that the survival of the Jewish people along with its ongoing heritage was a fundamental and essential goal but that the Judaism of the future should not be so rigidly defined as to preclude further cultural and institutional creativity. Perhaps Kaplan’s most famous one-liner was that the past should have a voice but not a veto; maintaining continuity was necessary, but constructing a viable Jewish future was more urgent than reconstructing the whole of the Jewish past.

14 Scult, Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century, 87.
15 Ibid., 261.
Orthodoxy had sustained Judaism as a way of life, and he respected the substantial Jewish education provided to its progeny, but he rejected a Judaism that was static, infallible, and transcendent. While he acknowledged that Reform did consciously respond to novelty by introducing needed changes, to him Reform Judaism was like a philosophical society that “etherealized Israel, the nation, into Israel, the religious community,” sublimated Torah, the all-embracing system of concrete guidance, into the vague abstraction known as the moral law, in effect reducing Judaism to “a few anemic platitudes.”

A truly modern Judaism required an infrastructure that would reinvigorate the concrete reality of Jewish togetherness. Thus young Kaplan worked with several rabbis to delineate a new-type synagogue that would encompass a broad range of cultural and secular activities, as well as conventionally religious ones. Like the YMHAs that were established in some locales, the Jewish Center on West 86th Street in Manhattan, where Kaplan was the rabbi between 1918 and 1922, had a swimming pool and a gymnasium, even though religious services were Orthodox. Although the SAJ did not have a swimming pool, it developed a wide and expanding range of educational, cultural, and social activities in addition to formal worship services. Kaplan’s proposed new-model American synagogue, an embodiment of well-rounded Judaism as a “civilization,” required a high level of involvement by its members, just as its Sabbath morning services (traditional in overt structure but with some drastic changes in the wording of certain prayers) devoted considerable time to spontaneous group discussion of the sermon. On a broader level Kaplan from time to time proposed various arrangements for bringing Jewish groupings of all kinds under one umbrella and articulated various formulas to define diaspora Judaism’s relation to the Yishuv and later the State of Israel.

16 Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, 121; and Emanuel S. Goldsmith and Mel Scult, eds., Dynamic Judaism: The Essential Writings of Mordecai M. Kaplan (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 40.

Kaplan took for granted the methodology and findings of historical Wissenschaft des Judentums in his understanding of the development of Judaism. Sometimes his generalizations are debatable, for example, where in The Greater Judaism in the Making he remarked in passing that of the founders of scientific study of the Jewish past only Abraham Geiger was a leader in the Reform movement, whereas “most of the rest might well be claimed as having contributed to the version of Judaism which [Zacharias] Frankel fostered in the Old World and [Solomon] Schechter in the New World.”

To him it was no problem that Judaism developed through historical stages from primitive to modern. That the Pentateuch was an ancient work that evolved from earlier works over a long period posed no trial of faith to Kaplan. Unlike some faculty at the JTSA, Kaplan was not disturbed by espousal of critical theories that rejected the Mosaic authorship of the Torah. (Schechter famously called “higher” biblical criticism—the analysis of prior sources in contrast to the lower criticism that dealt with the transmission of the Hebrew text—the “higher anti-Semitism” because it was used to justify Christian supersessionism.)

Kaplan’s attitude toward academic scholarship was complicated. Mel Scult remarks that

on the one hand, he held in contempt the scholars around him whose arcane interests bore no relationship to contemporary issues. On the other hand, he was always the careful and informed thinker who observed the canons of critical inquiry, who very much desired the approval of his scholarly colleagues, and who himself engaged in scholarly pursuits.19

Kaplan eventually published a translation for the Jewish Publication Society of America of the Path of the Upright by Moses Hayyim Luzzatto. Assigned to him many years earlier by Solomon Schechter, the project took him two decades to complete because he was busy with so many other matters. In the introduction he remarked that “Very few readers find themselves thinking in terms of the spiritual

19 Scult, Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century, 216.
Aims formulated in the *Mesillat Yesharim*.”  

Even though Kaplan taught midrash, he had little interest in detailed textual scholarship of ancient texts. He disdained research interests that bore little or no relationship to contemporary issues. In his diary entry for October 10, 1914, Kaplan had the following to say about some exponents of *Wissenschaft* on the JTSA faculty:

> The men on the staff do not show the least desire to give themselves freely to the students if it is to be at the least sacrifice of time, and if it is liable to impair in the least the chances of writing some dry-as-dust article on some minute point in Jewish Science. I hold Jewish Science in proper respect, but I would not permit any but those who are crippled and maimed to pursue it, and I would compel men like [Louis] Ginzberg, [Israel] Davidson, and [Israel] Friedlander who are men of brains to help build up a living Judaism with content to it.  

Kaplan was a pragmatic activist, not a disinterested researcher or observer from the sidelines; he preferred to be *in medias res*, in the middle of things.

Perhaps symptomatic of his lack of interest in academic scholarship, Kaplan never bothered to earn a Ph.D. Despite his lifelong association with an institute of higher learning for which *Jüdische Wissenschaft* was a central value, he did not see himself as a detached academician. His professorial concerns were training preachers, educators, social workers, youth leaders, and so forth. Nor was he content to be a practicing congregational rabbi in the usual sense. Despite serving as spiritual leader of several synagogues, he was only reluctantly a pastor and officiant at life-cycle rituals. Until the Hitler era, he used the term *leader*, modeled on the head of the Ethical Culture Society, rather than the title *rabbi*, to describe his position at the SAJ.

Well-read in the social sciences, philosophy, and theology, Kaplan was not a social scientist, a philosopher, or a theologian. He was an activist thinker, an instance of Karl Marx’s *bon mot* that “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” Unlike the East European Jewish secularists...

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22 Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century*, 79.
and Marxists, his ideology fully acknowledged the positive functions of religion in human life in the present as well as in the past. Being a rabbi in an America that took religious belief seriously in a time of growing secularism and freethinking, Kaplan used classroom, podium, and pulpit to address ethical and spiritual issues to those Jews who accepted a modern, scientific outlook. Kaplan responded by showing that he took the sciences seriously not only as a challenge but as a resource. A telling if grandiose series of metaphors is found in one of the Reconstructionist Pamphlets he penned:

Reconstructionism does to Judaism what Copernicus did to astronomy; it shifts the center of gravity of Jewish life from Jewish religion to Jewish peoplehood. It does to Judaism what Darwin did to biology; it affirms that Judaism has undergone evolution in response to the changes it has encountered in the world about it. It does to Judaism what Whitehead did to philosophy: it gives Judaism “concreteness and adequacy.” In formulating a modern scientific ideology based on the assumption that Judaism is an evolving religious civilization, Reconstructionism is habituating Jewish life to the scientific climate of opinion of our day.23

3. Structural-Functional Sociology and Philosophical Pragmatism

Kaplan graduated from City College in 1900 and started immediately to work for an M.A. degree at Columbia. He took half his classes at Columbia with Franklin Giddings, who occupied the first chair of sociology in an American institution of higher learning. Giddings’s best-known concept was “consciousness of kind,” the sense of group belonging.24 Apparently Kaplan and Giddings felt an intellectual rapport, because Giddings recommended he enter a doctoral program (which Kaplan did not do).

The use of social-science generalizations to explain the Jewish bond had already made inroads among modern Jewish intellectuals. In line with the prevalent Darwinism of the time (and indirectly, Nietzsche), Ahad Ha’am, Simon Dubnow, and other Jewish nationalists explained Jewish history as demonstrating an intense

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24 Scult, ed., *Communings of the Spirit*, 47.
collective will-to-survive that enabled the Jewish people to adapt to many different environments. They were familiar with the ideas of Auguste Comte, the philosopher of Positivism and coiner of the term sociology, the writings of Herbert Spencer (some say, the inventor of Social Darwinism), and the Russian Narodnik (Populist) ideologists Peter Lavrov and Nicolai Mikhailovski, the last trend reinforcing indirectly the Russian-Jewish intellectuals’ proclivity to see group identity as decisive in shaping personal identity. (Dubnow’s political group was later called the Folkist Party.) Historian-ideologists such as Dubnow used sociology to argue that, whatever universalistic “non-Jewish Jews” claimed, rootless cosmopolitanism was not possible. For Dubnow—and for Kaplan—the universal was attained only through the national, and every individual acquired his or her identity through a specific culture. One could choose to take up residence in another national culture but not live outside all of them.25

After the “ethnic turn” it was no longer mandatory to defend the continued survival of Judaism by a mission to spread ethical monotheism as in Classical Reform Judaism. The new Jewish nationalism usually insisted that being Jewish did not require a legitimating principle besides the rationale that justified the existence of all cultures. The combination of a priori acceptance of being Jewish with opposition to a purely secularist view of Judaism can be seen in the following statement by Kaplan:

What the Jewish people should mean to the individual Jew may be illustrated by the famous answer given by George Malory, one of the greatest mountain climbers, when asked why he wanted to climb Everest. He simply replied, “Because it is there.” Likewise when we are asked, “Why remain Jews?” the only reason we should feel called upon to give is: “Because the Jewish people is here and we are part of it.” Unless we feel that to belong to the Jewish people is a high spiritual adventure which has intrinsic value regardless of consequences and practical ends, our Jewishness is tantamount to the interest of casual tourists in foreign countries.26

This passage from A New Zionism began with the statement that “the

25 Dubnow, who became the intellectual champion of “diaspora nationalism,” was at first opposed to Zionism but later acknowledged the value of the Yishuv as yet another branch of the worldwide network of Jewish communities. Kaplan was very supportive of Zionism, spent time in Palestine, and agreed that it was central but did not “negate” the diaspora.

26 Cited in Goldsmith and Scult, eds., Dynamic Judaism, 64.
self-identification of the individual Jew with his Jewish people is the source of the mystical [sic] element in the Jewish religion." Kaplan concluded that secularist thinkers and social scientists are only aware of the socio-psychological significance of self-identification with the Jewish people.

If they would stop to consider for one moment the entire regimen of Jewish religious practice and ritual and note the extraordinary fact that the individual Jew never takes part in them without associating himself with the whole House of Israel, they would begin to sense the extent to which this association with the Jewish people is not merely a socio-psychological, but a definitely mystical experience.27

The academic sociology available to Kaplan was much less schematic than the Darwinian version of Ahad Ha’am and Dubnow or the Marxist Jewish intellectuals of the next generation. American sociology was concerned to explain and interpret "social facts"—customs, mores, institutions, collective sentiments, established roles and expected patterns of human interaction—that dimension of human experience that lay between the realms of abstract universals and concrete individuals. Sociology served to bridge universal ethical ideals and the concrete social group by showing how ideals embody the aspirations of the group and maintain its solidarity.

Kaplan’s point of view has been compared to that of Émile Durkheim. (Kaplan read Durkheim and admired him but does not seem to have acquired any basic ideas from the great French sociologist.) In The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life Durkheim traced the primitive origins of religion to sentiments of group solidarity. We noted that one of Kaplan’s criticisms of Reform Judaism was that “the kind of social organism which Reformism has tried to make out of the Jews is without a parallel in human society. It is based on blood relationship plus consensus of belief. ... It is as though a family were to organize itself into a philosophical society. Sociologically, such an organism is absurd.”28 The Jewish religion is identification with an “organic community” rather than being a society of like-minded religious individuals on the one hand and a conception of God on the other.

Members of the structural-functional school of sociology explained

27 Ibid., 64–65.
28 Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, 120.
“social facts” by hypothesizing their functions in relation to the larger structures that sustained a group’s “social unity.” For Talcott Parsons, one of the leading figures of American structural-functionalist analysis, social actions were voluntaristic, interacting, and interrelated units forming structures that together constituted a social system. To Parsons it was not an adequate explanation to describe just the history of the units; one must view them in relation to the template of basic needs that maintained and integrated an ongoing system. Functionalism has been criticized in recent decades for de-emphasizing the extent to which social phenomena can be dysfunctional, i.e., conflict-ridden. For example, it is said that the functionalists tend to say that every society will have a religion, because religious institutions have certain functions which contribute to the survival of its social system, just as the organs of the body have functions which are necessary for the body’s survival. Translated into policy, an institution can be justified on the basis of what it purportedly contributes to social stability. Of the 1950s revival of religion in America, it was sometimes said that “what was revived was not so much religious belief as belief in the value of religion.”

In a diary entry in 1917 Kaplan wrote, “The question ‘What is Judaism?’ therefore resolves itself into the question ‘How do these beliefs and practices function?’ For the first time we try to get at the very essence of Judaism, for the function of a thing practically constitutes its essence.” In line with the functionalist mode of explanation, Judaism for Kaplan was an organic unity that cannot be distilled into a limited platform of religious doctrines or a list of dos and don’ts. In this regard Kaplan’s approach resembled the Columbia University sociologist Robert Merton’s distinction between the manifest (overt) and latent (hidden) functions of socio-cultural elements. Kaplan weaves a structural-functional explanation of a significantly Jewish practice with a prescription as to how it can be interpreted to further higher ends. Take the dietary laws:

In all likelihood, kashrut goes back to pre-Torah times. Originally, it may have been, like the dietary restrictions of other peoples, the

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outcome of primitive religious beliefs. But already in the Torah itself, the meaning assigned to kashrut is highly spiritual. … In the course of centuries, kashrut has taken on an important additional function: It has served as a means of Jewish identification and distinctiveness. Kashrut has contributed to the perpetuation of the Jewish People [Kaplan’s capital letters] and the retention of its way of life. The urgency for strengthening whatever factors in Jewish life make for survival is even greater now than in the past. The observance of kashrut commends itself as a means to this end, precisely because it can be practiced by any Jew, regardless of his cultural standing. … Kashrut is capable of becoming a means of generating spiritual values, in that it can habituate the Jew in the practice of viewing a commonplace physical need as a source of spiritual value.31

Theological principles as well as religious practices can be understood functionally, as will be pointed out below with respect to the concept of God. New ways must be devised to serve latent functions; for example, the arts should now be used to enrich Jewish life. On the functionality of art Kaplan wrote:

> It is … characteristic of human life that emotional experience leads to cultural expression, which in turn stimulates emotions akin to those which produce it. Thus, feelings of happiness are expressed in festivities, and festivities enhance happiness and give occasion for its expression. … The arts keep alive those experiences which we find most significant and stimulate new emotional responses. We should make use of this psychological principle in its application to Jewish life.32

The sociological-anthropological term Kaplan found best suited for historical Judaism was civilization, rather than culture. At present civilization may sound more high-brow than the generic term culture, but for Kaplan the reverse was the case. He had in mind culture as used by the British literary critic and poet Matthew Arnold, whose writings were dear to Kaplan; for Arnold, culture was the propagation of great and lofty ideas, “the finest the human mind has thought and felt.” (Compare the German Kultur.) We refer to a refined, sophisticated individual as “cultured,” and Felix Adler’s movement was “The Society for Ethical Culture.”33 For Kaplan civilization best conveyed the

31 Kaplan, Questions Jews Ask, 252.
32 Ibid., 373.
33 Culture, after all, has a quasi-agricultural origin. Incidentally, civilization had more positive connotations in English than in German discourse of the time where civilization was often used in negative contrast to the term völkisch, i.e., national culture.
complex continuum of Jewishness: literature, art, folklore, ceremonial practices, and so forth—all the dimensions of Jewishness, past and present. Also taken from anthropology is Kaplan’s use of the term sancta for folkways that inspire loyalty and ethical behavior, commemorate what the collective consciousness determines is most valuable to it, and provide continuity for a people through the flux of history. A sociological-anthropological term, sancta, like sanctify, sacred, sanctum, and so forth, comes from the Latin sanctus, holy, past participle of sanctire, to consecrate; perhaps the term sancta had the advantage of being temporal, time-bound, and of human origin in a way that mitzvah was not. Literally mitzvot aludes to a divine commandment and Commander, whereas sancta come and go in history. As defunct sancta fell by the wayside (the sacrificial system of Leviticus?), new ones emerge (the ceremony of becoming a bat mitzvah which Kaplan in effect initiated in America).  

Kaplan’s functionalism draws on (or echoes) the philosophy of Pragmatism, especially that of William James, the great Harvard psychologist and philosopher. James’s *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* was published in 1907. Like the pioneers of the seventeenth-century Scientific Revolution and subsequent new paradigms, Pragmatists such as James and John Dewey discarded venerable philosophical issues as insolvable, reconstructing the scope of rational inquiry to focus on how things, ideas, concepts functioned—what difference they made in human life. The relevance, value, and truth of an idea was its consequences, in William James’s notorious phrase, “its cash value.” For Kaplan the pragmatic value of historical research, for example, was to shine light on the function of various elements of Jewish civilization in the past, preliminary to its reconstruction in the scientific age in which Jews now lived. Like the Utilitarians, Pragmatists had no interest in metaphysics. However, unlike neo-Positivists who viewed good and bad only as evocative emotional terms, the Pragmatists were concerned with social ethics. For Kaplan, providing a guide to living a good and personally fulfilling life was at the heart of Judaism as the “evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people.”

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34 On the occasion of his daughter Judith’s coming of age in 1922.
Émile Durkheim had argued in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* that religion did not necessarily involve a supernatural deity; instead, its most elementary and basic form consisted of rites invoking the sacred as contrasted to the profane. Durkheim drew on accounts of Australian aboriginal cultures to trace religion to its prehistoric origins and elucidate its functionality:

> A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.37

Talcott Parsons posited that religion contributes to the integration and maintenance of the social system. Kaplan’s concept of the role of sancta seeks to convey the way religion provides collective identity. For example, the sancta of Judaism foster a sense of communal unity:

> A people does not offer itself to the individual as an instrument of salvation, in the same way as a system of philosophy usually does, by appealing to his reason to accept certain general principles or abstract truths. It always comes to him with a story about itself which he is made to feel is in a deeper and truer sense his story than the experiences that are confined to his person. In the course of that story there figure certain events, persons, places, objects, or, in brief, sancta, which come to possess a vital interest for him, since they belong to a history that he comes to look upon as his own. These sancta the people interpret, and these interpretations form the ideology and rationale of its existence and strivings.38

For Kaplan, the Jewish religion was the concretization of the collective self-consciousness of the Jewish people.39

Even though there are functional similarities between the earliest religions and contemporary faiths, the nature and makeup of religion in world history has a history too, a series of shifts in the center of gravity in relation to ritual practices, social and personal

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38 Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization*, 519.
39 On the early phases of Kaplan’s functionalism and the concept of collective consciousness, and his attraction to Pragmatism, see Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century*, 141ff.
values, and metaphysical assumptions. Enlightenment thinkers tended to view ethics as the core of religion, criticizing “obscurantism,” dogmatism, and intolerance in light of the worldview and methodology of modern science. In the Enlightenment tradition, Kaplan averred that true religiosity is ethical: “Religion without morals is magic, and morals without religion is expediency.”40 The boundary between the cultural and intellectual epoch in which he lived and the “pre-modern” constituted, in his estimation, a decisive watershed in the history of Judaism. Continuity with the past should be maintained but, as Dewey said in *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, “old truth has its chief value in assisting the detection of new truth,”41 or, in the Kaplanian *bon mot*, the past has a vote but not a veto.

In *The Greater Judaism in the Making* Kaplan described traditional Judaism as based on the doctrine of a twofold Torah, the “dogma” that the Written Torah was dictated by God, the belief in divine election of the Jewish people, the necessity of a semiautonomous legal status for the Jews, and a “salvational aspect” tied to the World-to-Come. Pragmatically, the transformation of the salvational aspect was the most crucial. In modern times “the keen yearning for individual salvation or fulfillment of his destiny as a person” was profoundly affected by “the change from other-worldliness to this-worldliness.”42 In one of his summary historical sketches, he remarked that “the denial of the traditional assumptions with regard to the nature and means of salvation paved the way for what is generally termed ‘the enlightenment,’ which identified man’s salvation with his self-realization in this world.”43 Even though the traditional premodern “universe of discourse” was no longer “habitable,”

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41 John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy: The Definitive Edition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), 34. There is an indirect connection between Dewey’s use of the term Reconstruction and Kaplan’s around the same time. “It is the objective of social philosophy to point the way to the development of those conditions that will foster the effective exercise of practical intelligence. The spirit that pervades Dewey’s entire philosophy and finds its perfect expression in his social philosophy is that of the reformer or reconstructor, not the revolutionary.” Richard J. Bernstein, “John Dewey,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan 1967), vol. 2, 285. Similarly, Kaplan was a reconstructer or reformer, not a revolutionary.
42 Kaplan, *The Greater Judaism in the Making*; see also idem, *Questions Jews Ask*, 210–211.
salvation remained a basic human need. In the Hebrew Bible salvation had denoted “human fulfillment through divine help and grace.” In the late Second Temple period, salvation came to include a belief in personal immortality. In modern times,

it is of the utmost urgency that we set about the task of reconstructing our traditional philosophy of salvation. That reconstruction is likely to be as revolutionary in our day as was the reconstruction effected by our ancestors during the era of the Second Commonwealth. The Torah way of life would have been completely routed by the all-conquering Hellenist civilization, if it had not been fortified by the belief in the resurrection and in the hereafter …. In our day, the reverse process has to be enacted, as a prerequisite to Jewish survival. … The only way to cope with the task of reinterpreting our Torah-tradition, in terms of this-worldly salvation, is to recognize how far men have moved away from pre-modern ideas about human nature and destiny, and how much has to be done to explore all available sources of knowledge, in order to arrive at some workable conception, or philosophy of salvation for our day.45

“Salvation,” according to Kaplan, means “the deliverance from those evils, external and internal, which prevent man from realizing his maximum potentialities.” Stated positively, it means “the maximum fulfillment of those human capacities which entitle man to be described as ‘made in the image of God.’”46 In other words, “God is the Power [capital P is Kaplan’s] that makes for salvation.”47

Kaplan may be seen here as pointing to the self-actualization psychology of the post–World War II era, but his concept of salvation was not limited to individual fulfillment. He insisted on a collective as well as an individual dimension of salvation: “Complete self-fulfillment in this world presupposes the maximum of individual self-realization through the maximum of social cooperation.”48

Kaplan re-constructed other venerable religious concepts—but not all of them. Even though a belief may be functional, if it is not in accord with universal ethical principles, it must be dropped. For example, although creation (i.e., creativity) and redemption (i.e., salvation), suitably reconceived, occupied an important place in

46 Ibid., 126.
47 Ibid., 128.
Kaplan’s theology, this was not the case for revelation, except in the loose sense of the poetical genius and moral fervor of the prophets and the ethical conscience of those who followed in their footsteps. The best-known negation mandated by Kaplanism was the idea of a “chosen people.” Because of his fervent antisupernaturalism and love of democracy, Kaplan insisted that no superiority can be ascribed to any group or tradition. Social science and history can explain how such a belief in chosenness was generated in the course of cultural evolution, but there was no rational basis for continuing to believe that God chooses a people to give only them the truth.49 (Kaplan’s position was similar to Felix Adler’s on this matter.) To be sure, the function of this idea in the Middle Ages was to help sustain the Jewish morale, but it could not adequately fulfill that function. Kaplan’s rejection of the concept of the Jews as the chosen people led to his expunging from the Reconstructionist prayer book the phrase asher bahar banu mi-kol ha-amin (who chose us from among the nations), even in berakhot. In its stead he preferred vocation, a freely chosen dedication of a group to the universal values that it has clarified in its history and that contributed to the enrichment of human life through “ethical nationhood” and the ideal of a peaceful humanity.50

Anything contrary to modern science’s understanding of how nature works was theologically untenable (a Kaplaniian position similar to Classical Reform Judaism). The most negative term in the Kaplanian vocabulary was supernatural in the meaning given it by late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century “free-thinkers.”51 Emmanuel Goldsmith writes:

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49 Kaplan, Questions Jews Ask, 421, 204–206.
50 Goldsmith and Scult, eds., Dynamic Judaism, 30, 212.
51 In the late sixties Kaplan published Judaism Without Supernaturalism: The Only Alternative to Orthodoxy and Secularism (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1967). In chapter 2 he argued that “the supernaturalist conception of salvation is based, in Jewish tradition, upon the following series of assumptions: … Divinity completely transcends humanity, of which it is the absolute antipode. … God’s intervention in the regular order of the world is not only a demonstration of His existence and power. It is also an evidence of His special love for the People of Israel. … That all of the great miracles and theophanies took place in the beginning of Israel’s career and were not repeated in later years is no mere accident” (21–23). In the preface he explained that “The purpose of this book is not to prove that the supernaturalist assumptions in the Jewish tradition are untenable. That would be a superfluous undertaking. It is rather to show that Judaism can be revitalized and enhanced by being freed from supernaturalism.”
Kaplan maintains that the Jewish religion can and should be divorced from supernaturalism and come to be associated with the natural processes of body and mind. … The idea that God’s power is manifest essentially in the suspension or abrogation of natural law makes supernaturalism untenable.52

Thus, unacceptable to scientific reason was the concept of an imperious deity who from time to time interfered with human or natural history, often serving, Kaplan held, as a prop for authoritarianism. In John Dewey’s phrase, it was the “suicide of reason.”53

Nevertheless, God remained a potent and necessary functional Jewish symbol—only if it were understood that God was not a substantive but an adjective, not an agent but a quality. “We learn more about God when we say that love is divine than when we say God is love.” God is that which “makes for salvation,” that which makes human fulfillment possible.54 For Kaplan the supernatural, anthropomorphic God of the old religion was anachronistic. Leaving the sinking ship of supernaturalism, however, did not mean human beings must give up the benefits of believing in God—moral benefits that affect people’s lives so deeply (Kaplan was emphatically not a Nietzschean in the sense that the death of the traditional concept of God meant that all was permitted to the elite.) John Dewey famously defined God as “the unity of all ideal ends arusing us to desire and action.”55 Like Dewey, Kaplan acknowledged the functionality of religious experience in leading a good life. To be sure, the idea of God was not credible as an Absolute Being apart from nature, but the Divine was a guide, sustaining the best that

54 Mel Scult holds that at times Kaplan moved beyond this idea in the direction of transcendence. See the note in the diary for March 30, 1913, where Kaplan says: “The God of Judaism is one who is above as well as in the world. But His being a God in the world was due to His being a God above the world. The moment God is merely identified with the world and conceived as being immanent but not transcendent, His divinity is denied and he is dissolved into the world. This is the atheism and pantheism which religion so vigorously contends against.” See Scult, ed., Communings of the Spirit, 62. Here is a point of contact between Kaplan and Hermann Cohen, but Kaplan does not develop this idea systematically.
55 Dewey, A Common Faith, 42.
the prophets and all other moral visionaries taught about justice, equity, and compassion.

To be sure, Kaplan’s conception of the divine was not identified only with man’s aspirations, as in some (simplistic) versions of humanism. Over time he offered various formulations of the interactive relationship between individual, group, ethics, nature, and God, such as the following from *The Future of the American Jew*:

To experience society as moral implies the dependence of society itself on a spiritual power operative not merely in man, but in the cosmos. What mankind has become, and all that it aspires to become, must be achieved in accordance with the conditions of nature. If, therefore, man must learn from nature itself how to subdue nature, not in the sense of using it for his individual survival but of learning from it how to insure the survival and abundant life of all men, that power cannot be limited to man but must interpenetrate nature itself and the whole cosmos.56

In such formulations Kaplan seems to have meant that, pragmatically, God is *that which* inspires, supports, and enables the urge to be good. The Divine is in our conscience when it dictates what we should do to act ethically and induces remorse for failure; conscience is the “semi-conscious intellectual effort to experience divinity, without recourse to anthropomorphic terms, rational propositions, or mystic ecstasy.”57 A basic function of religion is to respond to the question: “What shall man believe and do in order to experience that life, despite the evil and suffering that mar it, is extremely worthwhile?”58 Kaplan handled this issue, the perennial dilemma of theodicy, by asking, is there in the cosmos *that which* helps to actualize the best in human nature, just as, say, there is *that which* promotes physical healing? If so (and he fully believed there was), this *that which* provided the theological basis for moral responsibility and the ground for religious hope. Kaplan’s deity, imminent in nature in the form of constructive and healing potentialities, meant that we are part of a universe which includes more than just blind matter-and-energy.

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Later Kaplan called his a “transnaturalist” approach. In Goldsmith’s explanation,

Transnaturalism is an extension of naturalism that discovers God in the fulfillment of human nature rather than in the suspension of the natural order. It deals with phenomena such as mind, personality, purpose, ideas, values, and meanings, which materialistic or mechanistic science is incapable of dealing with. It utilizes symbols, myths, poetry, and drama to convey trust in life and in humanity’s ability to overcome the potentialities for evil inherent in heredity, environment, and social conditions.59

One may ask whether Kaplan’s God was monotheistic in the usual Judaic sense. As noted earlier, one of Kaplan’s definitions was that “God is the Power that makes for salvation.” Yet elsewhere he wrote: “God is the sum of the animating, organizing forces and relationships making a cosmos out of chaos.”60 Is a “sum” a singular God? William James famously admitted to being a pluralist against, the absolutism of his Harvard colleague, Josiah Royce. Probably Kaplan too was against the absolutism of traditional theology. The cosmos is composed of many kinds of things and processes, some of which can be labeled as having divine features. Milton Steinberg, one of Kaplan’s most eminent disciples, felt this was far too easy a way out of the problem of God’s relation to the world:

Refusing on pragmatist principle to venture any definition of the relations among the pluralistic universe, [William James] leaves that universe not only unexplained but even unthinkable. Here too, in my judgment, is the most serious deficiency in the Kaplanian theology: being a theology without a metaphysic it is really not a theology at all but an account of the psychological and ethical consequences of affirming one.61

Another of Kaplan’s theological affirmations is found in a section of The Greater Judaism in the Making entitled “Divinity in the Cosmos,” where he stated that “insofar as the cosmos is so constituted as to have man in the course of his evolution attain freedom, act responsibly, and strive for self-fulfillment or salvation, it is divine,

60 Kaplan, The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion, 76.
in the same way as man, by virtue of these same traits, is human.” The passage continues:

The metaphor of “dialogue” to identify the interaction between man and cosmos, or between the human and the divine, helps us realize to what extent God is God because of what he means to man, and man is man because of his relationship to God.62

Kaplan was toying with the idea of a philosophical correlation of the ideas of God and humankind, similar to that of Hermann Cohen’s conception of correlation. Without the divine, the universe (a term which presupposes an overarching unity) remains a chaos, a place of chance occurrences, contingencies, accidents.

Is positing this dimension of the universe a human projection? Meir Ben-Horin, another of Kaplan’s disciples, wrote that

Kaplan, perhaps, sees the world as “so constituted” because he was “so constituted” himself. He sees God as “the Power that makes for salvation” because he has generalized … from himself as a man whose own “constitution,” intellectual and psychological, was such as to seek with all his being to advance the cause of salvation for the individual person, for the Jewish people, and for humanity. … Having rejected the biblical “chosenness” idea, which singles out the Jewish people for God’s love and chastisement, Kaplan claims human salvation and Jewish salvation as the universe’s own “constitutional” chosen urge and destiny.63

In defense of Kaplan, one notes that he looked for the meaning of God by searching not with God in-and-of-itself but from God in human experience and aspiration, not from above and moving down to the human level, but from below and reaching out to the whole natural cosmos. The principle that “God is the Power that makes for salvation, the sum of the animating, organizing forces and relationships making a cosmos out of chaos” was as far as Kaplan could go without analyzing the ontological presuppositions of this assertion of faith or turning to some form of subjectivism.

To be sure, a cosmic potentiality for the higher unity of ideal ends is not exactly a personal God. Kaplan’s God was admittedly

impersonal, except as humans might relate to that power or those forces in worship. (This impersonality may account for a certain lack of interest in Kaplanism during the so-called religious revival in America after World War II, spurred by neo-Reformation theology and existentialism.) Nevertheless, Kaplan’s conception is one of a number of twentieth-century efforts to formulate a basis for religiosity compatible with a philosophy of nature. In *Space, Time, and Deity* the British philosopher Samuel Alexander presented a substantial argument for an emergent deity.\(^6^4\) Alfred North Whitehead’s philosophy of organism needed God prior to and during an open-ended cosmic process. (In *The Greater Judaism in the Making*, Kaplan indicates that he had perused Alfred North Whitehead’s *Process and Reality*.) Whitehead’s American disciple Charles Hartshorne conceived of a transnaturalistic divine potentiality that creatively transforms the elements of nature into organic wholes greater than the sum of their parts. A school of Process Theology has been at work explicating these ideas for the last few decades.\(^6^5\)

Considering all that he did—and the breadth of Kaplan’s interests was remarkable—Kaplan extended the limits of a naturalistic theology of Judaism more than anyone else in his day. One wishes he had pushed his idea of a transnatural God further. More recent science and philosophy of science offer resources that might make this possible.

5. *Who Needs Wissenschaft? Kaplan’s Audience—and Non-Audience*

During the productive years of his long life, who constituted Kaplan’s primary audience? It is said that he spoke most directly to the so-called second generation of American Jews, the Americanized children of East European Jewish immigrants who retained a strong ethnic identification and for whom a comprehensive Jewish social network

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was still in place, but who were committed to a scientific mentality, personal autonomy, social and economic progress, and liberal democracy. These were people with profound personal commitment to remaining Jewish, for whom belonging to the Jewish people was intensely meaningful, who were comfortable with the Jewish tradition and folkways but put off by the rhetoric of the traditional Jewish liturgy (especially when translated into English). The following that Kaplan attracted among Conservative and Reform rabbinical students, rabbis, and congregational leaders looked for an ideology that made sense of all of Judaism as they knew it and wished it to be. Possessing a general knowledge of Jewish history and a sense of Yiddishkeit, especially in its newer social and political renditions, this generation was involved in pressing social issues, Jewish and general, and wanted reassurance that there was coherent guidance and solace in Judaism. That is what Kaplan sought to provide out of the intellectual resources available to him: structural-functional sociology, cultural anthropology, self-actualization psychology, philosophical Pragmatism, religious naturalism.

To whom did Kaplan’s Reconstructionism not appeal? Those whose modern Judaism was not reoriented by the Enlightenment in any of its various metamorphoses but, contrariwise, who were more than touched by the counter-Enlightenment, Romanticism in its various metamorphoses. Those are they who acknowledged the legitimacy of the Wissenschaften in their proper domains, but felt the lack of something in Kaplanism: a sense of the numinous? a sense of tragedy? a sense of mystery and the sublime? a sense of transcendence? a ground of Being and of what should be? a conception of legitimate authority that qualified an autonomy that might become chaos and lead to spiritual relativism?

One can hardly fault Kaplanism and Reconstructionism for having not yet fused of all this into a coherent personal and cosmic, subjective and objective world view. No one has yet done so.
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

POSTZIONISM AND POSTMODERN THEORY: THE CHALLENGE TO JEWISH STUDIES

LAURENCE J. SILBERSTEIN

1. Postzionism through Zionist Eyes

In the spring of 1994, articles and letters in the Israeli press warned readers of a new and dangerous knowledge that was being produced within Israeli universities:

What has previously been known in limited academic circles should now be revealed to the community at large: There has arisen a scholarly school among Israeli social scientists that challenge the zionist world view, the zionist settlement of the land of Israel, and the right of the state of Israel to exist.¹

To the writer, Yisrael Landers, the knowledge being produced by these scholars posed a serious danger to the moral fiber and, ultimately, the very survival of the state. If the production and distribution of this knowledge was allowed to continue unchallenged, its detrimental effects on Israeli society and culture would soon be felt:

These critical scholars are presently only a minority among their colleagues in the various social sciences. But owing to their abilities as scholars and debaters, their views are receiving a wider hearing. They are directing generations of students in research, and their subversion of the zionist narrative will contribute, intentionally or unintentionally, to a delegitimation of the Jewish state at home and abroad.²

The basic danger posed by these scholars is “their subversion of the zionist narrative,” the narrative that had been dominant since the establishment of the state. By challenging the dominant zionist narratives of the settlement of the land, the events leading to the exodus of close to three quarters of a million Arabs from the

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¹ Yisrael Landers, “The Sin that We Committed in Establishing the State” [Hebrew], Davar HaShavua, March 18, 1994, 8–9, here 8.
² Ibid.
newly established Jewish state, these scholars, in Landers’ view, were subverting the prevailing zionist legitimations for the existence of the State of Israel.

According to Landers, this new wave of Israeli scholars has “depicted Zionism as a violent and oppressive movement.” Having allowed their ideology to intrude on their academic research, they cannot be considered zionists. The term chosen by Landers to designate these scholars was *Postzionism*, a term he applied to those who believe that “Israel should be a normal democratic society without a specifically Jewish mission.”

Landers’s criticisms were characteristic of subsequent attacks on Postzionism. Rather than engage the substantive issues raised by these scholars, he focused, instead, on the political implications of their writings. As he saw it, this postzionist writing undermined the very foundations of Israeli society, calling into question the dominant zionist legitimation for the state of Israel existence. Implicit in his criticisms, a position reinforced by Zionism, is the assumption that the zionist legitimation is the only valid legitimation, and the zionist narrative the only true one.

Several months later, Aharon Megged, a well-known Israeli writer, criticized those scholars who, in his words, demonized Zionism and “a kind of evil, colonialistic conspiracy to exploit the people (’am) living in Palestine, to subjugate them, to dispossess them.” In their view, claimed Megged, basic zionist values, such as “redemption of the land,” “conquest through labor,” “ingathering of the exiles,” and “defense,” are “no more than hypocrisy and ‘euphemisms’ for a depraved, base plot.” Speaking of the moral values and high ideals that motivated the zionist settlers, Megged, like most critics of Postzionism, ignored the effects of zionist practices on the indigenous Palestinian Arab population. This focus on intention to

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3 Ibid.

4 Aaron Megged, “The Israeli Instinct for Self-Destruction” [Hebrew], *Musaf Haaretz*, June 10, 1994, 27–29. While refraining from engaging the scholarly issues, Megged accused the postzionist scholars of abetting Israel’s anti-Semitic enemies who seek the destruction of the state. In his view, the interpretations promulgated by the postzionist scholars are not really new, but a replay of earlier attacks on Zionism and the state that had emanated from the Soviet Union and from other Marxist-Leninist circles.

5 Megged took specific aim at sociologist Baruch Kimmerling and his American colleague Joel Migdal, particularly their effort, the first by Israeli/Jewish scholars, to produce an unbiased history of the Palestinian people; see Baruch Kimmerling and
the detriment of effects was a characteristic of zionist criticisms of the postzionist position.

Informing the view of critics of Postzionism is a recognition of the relation of knowledge and power. Consciously or not, in the case of Postzionism, they seem to accept Foucault’s insight that:

Power and knowledge directly imply one another; … there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose or constitute at the same time power relations.

The term Postzionism, although applied to a relatively small number of scholars, many of whom reject it, continues to be widely used. Even though at the end of the 1990s, with the unraveling of the Oslo initiative, critics and advocates alike began to proclaim its demise, it has not gone away. In fact, in spite of the efforts of the ruling Likud party and in the face of the widespread frustration and demoralization pervading Israeli society in recent years, the production and dissemination of postzionist discourse continues to grow and the scope of its impact widens both in academic circles and in popular culture.

Nonetheless, the meaning of the term remains contested. To some, it refers to an era in which the hegemony of Zionism has passed and a new social and cultural reality has emerged within Israel. To others, it refers to the new sociocultural reality that now characterizes the state, a reality commonly associated with expanding globalization.

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And to many, it serves to identify a political position that asserts that rather than remain a Jewish state, Israel should become a state in which all of its citizens, including its Palestinian citizens, have equal access to the resources of power. This confusion is one of the factors that have led many, perhaps most of the scholars commonly identified as postzionist, to either reject the term, denounce it, or claim that it is meaningless. Many scholars focusing on the specific plight of Mizrahim, women, or Palestinian Arab citizens find the term to be of little use. For some critics, to suggest that Israelis live in a new era characterized by new postzionist conditions, is to obscure the current political and cultural realities. Others argue that the label only breeds confusion and has little relevance to what they see as their critical scholarly work.

In many ways, the ambiguity and multiple, often conflicting meanings ascribed to the term *Postzionism* mirrors the ambiguity and multiple, often conflicted meanings ascribed to the term *Zionism*. Of course, the same may be said of any other “ism” term. Accordingly, rather than engage in the futile task of seeking out any essential meaning of the term, I find it far more useful to ask how the term operates, what it does.

2. Postzionism: A Genealogical Perspective

As I have suggested elsewhere, the writings of Foucault are particularly useful for cutting through the confusion and clarifying what is being discussed when we speak of Postzionism. Rather than take Zionism or Postzionism as a given, Foucault suggests a genealogical analysis of the discursive processes, including language and practices, by means of which they have been produced. Thus, one does not begin by asking “What is Zionism?” or “What are the historical causes that brought Zionism or Postzionism into being?” Instead, a genealogical analysis entails an analysis of the power relations, practices, and apparatuses that produce what we have come to know as Zionism.

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and Postzionism. In this context, both Zionism and Postzionism are best understood as discourse, an assemblage of statements and practices that produces knowledge and positions people as subjects. Accordingly, discourse
governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Just as a discourse “rules in” certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it “rules out”—limits and restricts other ways of talking.\(^9\)

In Foucault’s view, discourse is interconnected with a set of codes, practices, and apparatuses that render the knowledge that it produces true or false. In an effort to represent the ways in which power permeates the capillaries of everyday life, Foucault introduced the term “dispositif,” commonly rendered in English as apparatus,
a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid.\(^{10}\)

One of Foucault’s important contributions has been to show how power, rather than distributed from the top down, is distributed throughout power relations as manifest in the capillaries of everyday life. Accordingly, a critique of power entails rendering visible the diverse and multiple forms of those relations. In such a critique, a focus on the state apparatus alone is insufficient.

Zionism, which like any hegemonic discourse defines the dominant ways in which Israeli reality is represented, talked about, and argued about, is intricately imbricated in power relations. It thus attempts to regulate what can and cannot be said about topics such as nation, people, identity, society, culture, and history, along with loyalty and patriotism. As Landers’s comments show, it seeks to impose limits on the ways in which Jewish history, the relationship of the Jewish homeland and exile, Jewish culture, and Jewish identity


are represented and discussed. In this way, it positions subjects so as to accept the knowledge produced by the discourse to be true, “natural,” and “common-sensical.”

One of the benefits in approaching Zionism or any nationalist movement as a discourse is that it makes us aware of the multiple and diverse forms of power relations it entails. The concept of discourse helps to make visible the multiple ways in which Zionism functions to produce, distribute, and perpetuate the knowledge that renders its existence possible. In contrast to a hegemonic discourse, Postzionism functions as a minority, counterhegemonic discourse. As a critique, it seeks to bring to light the neglected, “unseen,” or concealed and/or unseen power effects of the dominant zionist discourse that permeate the capillaries of everyday Israeli society and culture. Rather than serving as a temporal designation, the prefix post in Postzionism functions as a spatial metaphor indicating the opening of a cultural space in which an alternative discourse can be produced.

11 This is clearly reflected in the controversies surrounding the television series “Tekuma” and new secondary-school textbooks that the Likud government eventually removed from Israeli schools. In each case, the term Postzionism was widely applied. For a brief discussion of these controversies see the introduction to Laurence J. Silberstein, The Postzionism Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1–14.


15 As opposed to the common assumption that the term “post” in postcolonial
When viewing Postzionism as discourse, the important question is not whether or not a particular scholar or writer identifies as a “Postzionist,” which misleadingly suggests a coherent political position or organization. Instead, one is led to ask: How and to what extent do particular writings contribute to the production of a postzionist discourse? In what ways do a particular scholar’s intellectual activities help to produce or enhance the cultural space within Israeli society so as to enable the production and distribution of an alternative discourse? Viewed in this way, the question of intention is removed so that even those who refuse the label may nonetheless be said to contribute to the production of postzionist discourse.

From a postzionist perspective, the various definitions of the Jewish problem set forth by zionist discourse, a product of nineteenth-century nationalism, are simply inadequate. Zionist discourse’s framing of the problems confronting the Jewish people in general and specifically Israel fails to engage the complexities of contemporary life. From a postzionist perspective, the problems confronting Israel require a nuanced and complex discourse that opens the way to a far-reaching transformation of Israeli society and culture. While postzionist discourse does not necessarily prescribe specific formulas, it presupposes a society that accepts, even encourages difference, individual and communal. For a postzionist discourse to thrive, what is required is a society in which all individuals and groups, Jewish and non-Jewish, Israeli and Palestinian, male and female, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, heterosexual and homosexual, share access to the mechanisms of power.

(or postzionist) entails a denial that the effects of colonialism continue to be experienced, Shenhav and Hever emphasize that the term “does not refer to a period of ‘after colonialism,’ but is rather an expression of the effort to become liberated from the modes of colonialist discourse and speech” regardless of when they were manifested. Yehouda Shenhav and Hannan Hever, “Currents in Postcolonial Studies,” in Colonialism and the Postcolonial Situation [Hebrew], ed. Yehouda Shenhav (Jerusalem: Van Lear Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004), 189–200, here 194. See also Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of “third space” in idem, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994).


17 Several writers refer to a concept of a democratic society based upon the writings of Chantal Mouffe. See Chantal Mouffe, “Feminism, Citizenship, and Radical Democratic Politics,” in Feminists Theorize the Political, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 369–284.
The scholars who were first to be labeled postzionist were primarily historians and social scientists. The critiques they produced beginning in the early 1980s produced alternatives to the dominant representations of Israeli history and society. In the process, their writings served as early contributions to that discourse that, in the 1990s, produced a new cultural space that served as the site for a wide-ranging critique of Zionism. Although others had previously questioned the dominant zionist narratives prior to the 1980s, the lack of such a viable cultural space within which these critiques could be cultivated and shared helped to ensure that their interpretations would remain marginal.

3. Zionism, Knowledge & Power: A Postzionist Critique

A 1995 article by the sociologist Baruch Kimmerling may be taken as a useful entry point into a basic distinction between two basic types of postzionist discourse, historical and sociological revisionism and a theoretically informed form of discourse critique. Although Kimmerling identifies himself primarily as a sociologist in the tradition of Georg Simmel and Max Weber, in this article, he engages in a critique of the dominant Israeli academic discourse. From this perspective, the basic problem is not scholarly methodology in the conventional sense, but the scholarly discourse employed by Israeli academicians.

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18 The sociologist Uri Ram was one of the few to embrace the label. Ram spoke explicitly of the need for a postzionist sociology that would make visible the exclusionary effects of Zionism and the scholarship that took it for granted. See Uri Ram, ed., *Israeli Society: Critical Perspectives* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Breirot, 1993).

19 For a discussion of earlier critics of Zionism, zionist and non-zionist alike, see Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates*, 47–66 and 67–88. For a discussion of the factors that created the conditions for the emergence of a postzionist discourse, see ibid., 89–126.


21 Ilan Pappe, another scholar whose works were regarded as postzionist, had also referred to the narrow, exclusionary orientation of Israeli scholarly discourse. Insisting that any legitimate history of Israeli had to take into consideration Palestinian perspectives, he edited several books that represented both Jewish and Palestinian perspectives. See Ilan Pappe, ed., *Jewish-Arab Relations in Mandatory Palestine: A New Approach to the Historical Research* [Hebrew] (Givat Havivah: Institute for Peace Studies, 1995); and idem and Shlomo Swirski, eds., *The Intifada: An Inside View* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Mefaresh, 1992).
As an example, Kimmerling points to the dominant scholarly discourse that periodizes Israeli history in terms of successive waves of immigration. Employing zionist concepts such as *aliya* (ascent) for immigration, and *yerida* (descent) for emigration, Kimmerling objects to the uncritical acceptance of the zionist binary homeland/exile. Ignoring the significant discontinuities among different waves of Jewish immigration has led Israeli scholars to construct a homogeneous reality common to all the immigrants. Employing a discourse that derives its meaning from distinctly Jewish sources has the effect of limiting the scope and questions of historical research, while rendering invisible the specific experiences of Palestinians and Jews of Middle Eastern origin. By dividing Israeli history according to pre- and poststate periods, the prevailing academic discourse clearly implies that

> the process of state and society building had been concluded by the end of the first five waves of immigration. Subsequent changes were thus regarded as extensions or improvements (or even a worsening) of basic socio-political patterns established between 1882 and 1948.  

This, in turn, has the effect of minimizing the contribution of later, poststatehood immigrants, most of whom were from Middle Eastern countries.

Operating within what Kimmerling labels “a Jewish bubble” that treats Jewish and Israeli history as unique, Israeli scholars are led to ignore patterns and characteristics that zionist immigration and settlement practices shared in common with other immigrant-settler societies. Were they to adopt a comparative approach, he argues, they would find themselves compelled “to deal with Israel’s colonial legacy, the very allusion to which is taboo, in both Israeli society and Israeli historiography.”

Finally, representing Israel as exclusively Jewish confirms “the political and legal perception of Israel as the state of the Jewish people residing both within and outside its boundaries, rather than as the state of its citizens (which would also include Arabs).”

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22 Kimmerling, “Academic History Caught in the Cross-Fire,” 51.
24 Kimmerling, “Academic History Caught in the Cross-Fire,” 54. Criticizing
This, in turn, contributes to the marginalizing or exclusion of non-Jews, particularly Palestinian Arabs. Moreover, the recurring usage of such Zionist concepts as “ingathering of the exiles” conceals and silences the effects of settlement activities on the Palestinian “others,” who were already living in the land.25

In Kimmerling’s view, Israeli academic discourse is a conscripted discourse, “embedded in an active form of knowledge that shapes collective identity by bridging between different pasts (recovered, imagined, invented, and intentionally constructed) and creating meanings and boundaries for the collectivity.” Functioning as “an ultimate supreme court,” historians and sociologists decipher from all the accumulated ‘pieces of the past’ the ‘true’ collective memories deemed “appropriate for inclusion in the canonical national historical narrative.”26

Notwithstanding the modernist assumptions that inform Kimmerling’s own social-scientific perspective, his focus on discourse points the way toward a very different form of post-Zionist critique. Without intending to do so, Kimmerling makes a compelling case for Foucault’s claim that the discourse employed in the production of knowledge is imbricated in complex relations of power. To effectively reveal and confront the power effects of Zionist scholarly discourse requires a critique of that discourse and the knowledge it produces.27 Kimmerling thus calls upon his fellow scholars to

scholars who privilege the noble intentions of the settlers, Kimmerling argues that such a focus reinforces the prevailing Zionist view of Jewish settlement as “a benevolent enterprise that would bring progress and prosperity to all the inhabitants of the land” (ibid., 56). Completely occluding/silencing the Palestinian narrative, this approach erases the oppressive effects of this settlement on the indigenous Palestinian Arab population. Kimmerling also criticized the discourse used by scholars to label the land. Speaking of the “land of Israel” in the context of historical periods in which no Jews lived there has the effect of granting “the Jews an eternal title over the territory, regardless of who populated or governed it, even in a situation when the ‘legitimate ownership’ was under dispute” (ibid., 48).

25 Kimmerling focuses on the ideologically embedded character of historiography more clearly and incisively than most other Israeli social scientists. However, although acknowledging the importance of discourse, he refrains from analyzing the processes by means of which the discourse is produced and inscribed as a part of Israeli hegemonic culture. In contrast, as indicated above, a postmodernist critique would focus on the rhetorical processes by means of which the scholarly discourse is constructed and disseminated.

26 Kimmerling, “Academic History Caught in the Cross-Fire,” 57.

27 While providing an excellent example that supports Foucault’s claims regarding
recognize the ways in which the knowledge Israeli scholars produce contributes to the shaping of hegemonic power. “Only an awareness of those limitations can enable the historian to partially overcome their effects.” What is needed, he argued, is a new, non-zionist mode of scholarly discourse.

Kimmerling’s critique of academic discourse was by no means the first by Israeli academicians to place discourse at the center. Several years earlier, another group of scholars had argued that what was missing from Israeli academic and cultural life was a critical discourse that could effectively represent the power effects of Zionism in the everyday life of Israeli society and culture. Drawing upon poststructuralist, postcolonial, neo-Marxist, feminist, and cultural studies theory, the new form of critique presented a different kind of challenge to conventional Israeli scholarly discourse.

Growing increasingly concerned about the suffering being inflicted on Palestinians by the Israeli occupation, a group of young academicians including Adi Ophir, a Tel Aviv University philosopher, and Hannan Hever, a literary scholar then teaching at Tel Aviv, sought ways to integrate political activism with academic practice:

The current political and moral situation in Israel has sharpened the question of the role of the intellectual and the academician in Israeli culture. Many of us participate in different forms of political action and activities in opposition to the occupation. But there is no [adequate] intellectual response to the challenge presented to us by the current historical situation.

the relationship of power and knowledge, there is no indication that Kimmerling’s critique owed anything to Foucault. Nor is this kind of discourse critique representative of his scholarly work as a whole. While Kimmerling has gained a reputation as one of Israel’s most prolific intellectual critics, he continues to position himself primarily as a devotee of and practitioner of objective social science; see Baruch Kimmerling, The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society, and the Military (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), introduction.


It is important to mention that the writings of the so-called “New Historians” and “Critical Sociologists” had a significant impact on the thinking of those scholars identified with the postmodern critique of Zionism.

From an unpublished programmatic essay by Hever and Ophir (1989). I am grateful to Adi Ophir for providing me with a copy of this document.
Within the Israeli academy, efforts to integrate these two practices elicited “indifference, expressions of contempt, or explicit opposition.” To desist from critical reflection was, in their eyes, the equivalent of “participating in the culture of occupation and the apparatuses that legitimate and reproduce it.” Although convinced that the dominant scholarship in Israel was already deeply informed by political perspectives, they and their activist colleagues had yet to develop a critical discourse capable of effectively representing this. The challenge, therefore, was to create an environment, a cultural space that would enable and foster a genuinely critical study of Israeli society and culture. Such a space would also free them from the excessive constraints imposed by conventional disciplinary boundaries.

Using a language that clearly reflects the influence of Foucault, among others, Ophir and Hever spoke of the need to clarify the relationship between theoretical concerns and specific local realities. This, in turn, required “the historicization of the prevailing socio-cultural representations of Israeli culture,” the genealogical deconstruction of “the foundational categories and key concepts of Israeli discourse” such as Zionist, pioneering, nation, state, religion, and the “binary oppositions that informed that discourse, including key cultural and political concepts, [and] the identification of the culture’s fault lines, and the accepted binaries that operated in Israeli culture, such as Jew/gentile; secular/religious; Eastern/Western; National/leftist; and so on.”

In their effort to create a new cultural space, Hever, Ophir, and a small group of colleagues began to meet regularly at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem. In their view, they comprised “a kind of radical academy that would develop and examine analytic tools through critical reflection on the society in which it lives.” The establishment in 1991 of the journal *Theory and Criticism* provided a much-needed vehicle for producing and disseminating the results of their critical reflections and deliberations. The continuing conscious effort to integrate theory and scholarly research to reveal the

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31 As is evident from personal conversations and from their other writings, Ophir read widely in Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and French critical theory, while Hever was a serious student of neo-Marxist, postcolonial, and poststructuralist criticism.

32 From Hever and Ophir, unpublished document.

33 The group included Ophir, Azmi Bishara, Avigdor Feldman, Hannan Hever, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, Yoav Peled, and Yehouda Shenhav.
prevailing power relations in Israeli society continues to distinguish Theory and Criticism from other Israeli journals. Within a short time, it emerged as the primary site of a distinctive, theoretically informed critique of zionist discourse and practice.

In an attempt to distinguish this theoretically informed mode of postzionist critique from that of the historians and sociologists discussed above, I have previously referred to it as postmodern.\textsuperscript{34} While I am cognizant of the problems this term entails, it serves to differentiate the theoretically reflective form of postzionist critique represented in Theory and Criticism from the earlier form that emerged in the writings of the “new historians” and “critical sociologists.” At the same time, it calls attention to the extent to which forms of contemporary theory commonly designated as postmodern inform this particular kind of postzionist discourse.

The form of the postzionist critique in Theory and Criticism shares many characteristics commonly associated with postmodernism.\textsuperscript{35} There is, throughout, a recognition of all representations of human experience, including those by historians and social scientists, as produced through discourse embedded in power relations. Accordingly, the postzionist critique formulated in Theory and Criticism presumes an intricate connection between (zionist) discourse, the knowledge it produces, and power relations. Rejecting many historians’ and social scientists’ common claim to have privileged access to “objective” truth, the postmodern form of Postzionism regards these disciplines as alternative, competing ways of organizing, conceptualizing, producing and disseminating knowledge.\textsuperscript{36}

Rejecting modernist essentialistic conceptions of identity, Theory and Criticism engages in a comprehensive critique of the “complex social and cultural mechanisms” through which Israeli identity is constructed or negated.\textsuperscript{37} Culture, ethnicity, nationhood, and gender, 

\textsuperscript{34} Cf. Silberstein, \textit{The Postzionism Debates}, 165–206.

\textsuperscript{35} From the beginning, the journal provided for its readers Hebrew translations of excerpts from poststructuralist, postmodern, and postcolonial theorists such as Foucault, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Slavoj Zizek, and Jean François Lyotard. Other theoretical perspectives encountered include those of Pierre Bourdieu and Walter Benjamin.

\textsuperscript{36} The journal’s published statement of purpose is critical of the ways in which the prevailing disciplinary divisions of knowledge production in the academy contribute to obscuring or concealing fundamental social, political, and cultural problems.

\textsuperscript{37} Adi Ophir, “Introduction”, \textit{Theory and Criticism} [Hebrew], 5 (Fall 1994), 3.
together with the identities commonly associated with them, are “always framed in discourses and practices in multiple, sometimes contradictory ways.” Assuming the contingency of these mechanisms, many writers focus on the power relations through which academic disciplines are able “to represent the combination of events that gave rise to them as natural law, as essence or mission.” Sharing postmodern theories’ concern with marginalized and/or excluded “others,” *Theory and Criticism* is informed by a recurring concern with the ways in which knowledge grounded in Zionist discourse both enables and conceals practices that marginalize and exclude the “others” within Israeli society—Palestinians, women, and Jews of Middle Eastern origin or Mizrahim. To paraphrase Derrida, the postzionist critique within the pages of *Theory and Criticism* conveys an ongoing awareness of the ways in which Israeli culture is haunted by its others.

Consistent with the postmodern turn away from the temporal toward the spatial dimension of human life, this form of postzionist critique focuses on spatializing practices, by means of which spaces are demarcated and meanings assigned in ways that exclude non-Jews, particularly Palestinian Arab citizens. This, in turn, problematizes

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38 Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman, eds., *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 28. According to political philosopher Chantal Mouffe, whom they cite, “It is therefore impossible to speak of the social agent as if we were dealing with a unified, homogeneous entity. We have rather to approach it as a plurality, dependent on the various subject positions through which it is constituted within various discursive formations” (Mouffe, “Feminism, Citizenship, and Radical Democratic Politics,” 318). Similarly, Kwame Kenneth Appiah speaks of identities as “complex and multiple and grow[ing] out of a history of changing responses to economic, political, and cultural forces, almost always in opposition to other identities.” See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 110.


41 Several articles were devoted to the discourses and practices by means of which space was allocated to Palestinian Arab citizens. The shift in focus from historical time to space, a characteristic of Foucault’s writings, is also characteristic of
zionist essentialistic definitions of the land of Israel as the Jewish homeland as well as the power relations that reinforce it. Rejecting the idea that there is an essential core to Israeli nationhood, society, or culture, this form of postzionist critique seeks to reveal the power relations that enable such a premise.

While not all contributors to the journal draw directly from Foucault, the extraordinary impact of his genealogical critique, the ongoing concern for the intricate relation of knowledge and power, the role of power relations in the constitution of identities, and attention to the marginalizing effects of discursive practices that characterize his writings are evident throughout the journal. Thus, the mission statement of the journal speaks of the “the various modes by means of which cultural realities are represented” and the goal of revealing “the workings of the cultural mechanisms that operate in representational practices [and] interrogat[ing] the ways in which these mechanisms function to establish and reproduce the social order and the power relations that inform it.”

This is carried out in the pages of the journal through the recurring critique of the discursive and material practices—the rules, regulations, social arrangements, institutions, and cultural forms—that produce and disseminate power within [Israeli] society and culture.

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\footnote{42} Quoted from the mission statement of \textit{Theory and Criticism} as it appears on the web site of the Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem: http://www.vanleer.org.il/heb/publications.asp?id=4.

\footnote{43} The introduction to \textit{Theory and Criticism} 25 [Hebrew] (Fall 2004), 5–12, a special
4. After Oslo: Postzionism’s Premature Obituary

Since the breakdown of the Oslo accords, and particularly in the wake of the violence of the Al Aksa Intifada, one frequently encounters statements proclaiming the impending (or actual) death of Postzionism. Yet, as the continuing output of articles and books demonstrates, all such pronouncements are premature. As anticipated by the early critics, a widening circle of younger scholars are now utilizing theoretical approaches and embracing positions considered “radical” in the 1980s. As Landers anticipated in his above-mentioned 1994 article, historical and sociological arguments regarded as “radical” in the 1980s and 1990s are now taken for granted by a significant number of the younger generation of scholars. Moreover, the growth of cultural studies and postcolonial studies in Israeli universities assures the current generation access to these critical discourses denied to previous generations.

Elsewhere I have discussed at length the various manifestations of the postmodern critique of zionist discourse that emerged during the first decade of publication. Here I wish to expand on that analysis by briefly discussing several examples published since 1998 that contribute to an expanding postzionist critique. A significant contribution to this critique was the publication in book form of a special two-volume edition of *Theory and Criticism* which represented a cogent effort to subvert the dominant Israeli historical narratives. In this work, Ophir invited a wide array of scholars to write short

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45 For examples of the impact of postzionist thought on Israeli public culture and Israeli education, see Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates*, 1–14.

articles on events which were either ignored or marginalized in the
dominant Israeli historical narratives. In contrast to the conventional,
coherent, serial historical narrative, the book resists all efforts to
subsume these events within a controlling grand narrative. Instead, it
presents multiple narratives written from diverse ethnic, national, and
political perspectives. The result highlights the exclusionary effects of
the dominant Israeli accounts as well as the overall problematic of
Israeli historical narratives. In so doing, it offers the reader a wide
array of insights and perspectives on the first fifty years of the state
and the multiple narratives that were shaped during that period.

A wide-ranging representation of current directions in postzionist
critique is found in three recently published books, two of which are
comprised of articles culled primarily from recent issues of *Theory and
Criticism.* The books—*Mizrahim in Israel,* edited by Yehouda Shenhav,
Hannan Hever, and Penina Motzafi-Haller (2001), and two volumes
edited by Shenhav, *Space, Land, Home* (2003), and *Colonialism and the
Post Colonial Condition: Implications for Israeli Society* (2004)—
provide an excellent representation of the directions recently taken by
the theoretically informed postzionist critique. Although not sharing a
unified perspective, all of the contributors ground themselves in
postmodern theories. The books make a significant contribution to
the ongoing postmodern critique of Zionism described above.47

The first book, *Mizrahim in Israel,* is a multidiscipline analysis of
the processes by means of which Mizrahi identity was produced and
used as a tool to subsume diverse groups of Jews under a single
category. Building on the earlier work of Ella Shohat and others, the
contributors undertake “to undo the accepted dichotomies between
theory and practice, public discourse and academic discourse, politi-
cal activities and objectivistic, neutral practices, the production of

47 Yehouda Shenhav, Hannan Hever, and Penina Motzafi-Haller, eds., *Mizra-
him in Israel: A Critical Observation into Israel’s Ethnicity* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Van Leer
Institute/Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2001); Yehouda Shenhav, ed., *Space, Land,
Home* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute/Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2003);
and idem, *Colonialism and the Post Colonial Condition: Implications for Israeli Society* [Hebrew]
(Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute/Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2004). The three volumes
significantly expand the range of critical problems that were addressed in the early years of *Theory and
Criticism.* At the same
time, they provide access to *Theory and Criticism’s* distinctive form of critical discourse
and postzionist critique to a larger readership.
knowledge and the usage of knowledge.”

Drawing particularly on cultural studies and postcolonial theory, the contributors reject the conventional Ashkenazi/Mizrahi binary used to analyze the dynamics of Israeli social and cultural life. Instead, calling attention to the complex processes of inclusion/exclusion that inform conventional scholarly and political efforts to impose a unified model of Israeli identity, they speak in terms of multiple Mizrahi identities. Rejecting the dominant social-science discourse of the “absorption” of Jews from Middle Eastern countries, the book focuses on practices of marginalization and exclusion whereby Israeli society marks their “otherness,” thereby producing an ambivalent Mizrahi identity. Critically exploring the spatializing discourse and practices whereby Mizrahi Jews were marginalized in border settlements and so-called development towns, contributors continually weave together a cultural critique of identity discourse, a critique of spatializing processes drawn from Foucault and contemporary political geography, and postcolonial theory.

The articles in this book provide a clear example of the value of theory as a way to subvert the dominant discourse and create alternatives for a new type of critique:

The comparative exploration … enables us to identify the representational apparatus … that produces “mizrahiness.” … The postcolonial model enables us to examine mizrahiness not as the product of hegemonic definitions (as in the populist expression—oppressed) but as an autonomous voice that constructs its own reality.

The authors speak of the “subversive perspectives commonly marginalized or hidden. … Postcolonial discourse, asserting that every identity formed within the context of colonialist relations is hybrid and split, negates every attempt at essentializing.”

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Overall, these three books effectively reflect the ways in which problems of mizrahiness, space, and colonialism are interconnected. Thus, to take but one example, the analysis in the Mizrahim volume by Adrianna Kemp of the ways in which spatializing practices marginalize Mizrahi Jews in frontier communities and development towns directly connects to several essays in the volume *Space, Land, Home*, including one of her own.\(^{50}\) Criticizing the modernist representation of space as static, natural, and passive, contributors examine the specific discursive and material practices through which the meaning of space is produced.\(^{51}\) Thus, various chapters highlight the marginalizing and exclusionary effects of zionist spatializing discourse and practices on Mizrahi Jews and Palestinian citizens of the state. Grounded in recent theoretical discussions of space, the book also focuses on the role of spatializing practices in the shaping of Israeli cultural identity.\(^{52}\)

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\(^{50}\) Utilizing a theoretical framework based upon Foucault and other French theorists, Kemp’s doctoral dissertation (Adriana Kemp, “Talking Boundaries: The Making of Political Territory in Israel, 1949–1957,” Ph.D. dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 1997) was a pioneering study of the discourse of boundaries and borders in Israeli history. Criticizing the dominant Israeli discourse, she revealed its complex, contradictory, changing nature.

\(^{51}\) Implicit in the spatial turn is a critique of the serial and homogeneous diachronic approach to time that informs modern historical discourse. See Elisabeth Ermarth, “Invitation to Historians,” *Rethinking History* 5 (2001), 195–215, and the references in note 41 above.

A fine example of the ways in which attention to Israeli spatializing practices renders problematic the dominant representation of the state is found in the work of political geographer Oren Yiftachel. Yiftachel has argued that the ways in which Israel has drawn boundaries both within the state and between the state and its Palestinian neighbors has produced oppressive effects both on Palestinian Arabs and Mizrahi Jews. Based upon a zionist Judaizing discourse that defines the land as the possession of the Jewish people, such practices help to produce a society dominated by one ethnic group, Jews of European background. Defining Israel as “the state of the Jewish people,” Zionism generates practices that deny land ownership to Palestinian Arab citizens in all but a very small portion of the country. Moreover, affording Jewish settlers who live in the occupied territories beyond the conventional “green line” borders full participation in the Israeli political system while denying these rights to the Palestinian inhabitants of these territories has the effect of erasing any clear state borders, a prerequisite for a democratic society. The result is a state that, while incorporating a number of democratic characteristics, falls short of satisfying the criteria for a fully democratic nation. Accordingly, argues Yiftachel, a more appropriate term by which to characterize Israel is the term ethnocracy, a state that is dominated by a particular ethnic group.


When, in the 1980s and 1990s, Kimmerling and Shafir drew comparisons between zionist settlement practices and colonialism, their arguments were strongly resisted by all but a small minority of Israeli scholars. By the beginning of the present decade, however, a growing application of postcolonial theory has led to a greater awareness of the colonialist practices embedded in Israeli society. The growing integration of postcolonial theory into postzionist discourse is evident in the two volumes already discussed. In the third volume, *Colonialism and the Post Colonial Condition*, consisting almost entirely of material published in the pages of *Theory and Criticism*, the contribution of postcolonial theory to the postzionist critique emerges most clearly.

First, to highlight the relationship of theory and practice, the book is divided into two sections. In the first section, readers are provided with selected excerpts from the writings of major theorists of postcolonial studies, including Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The chapters in the second section demonstrate the various ways in which these theories have been applied to reveal multiple marginalizing and exclusionary practices in Israeli society. This structure also helps to accentuate the shift in postzionist discourse from conventional historical and social scientific analysis to theoretically informed critique.

Various chapters are devoted to Israeli historiography, the representation of space, the representation of the Arab minority, the positioning of Mizrahi Jews, the construction of Israeli identity, Israeli art, literature, and popular culture. Repeatedly the authors demonstrate the value of postcolonial theory as a tool for revealing the marginalizing and exclusionary effects of Israeli cultural discourse and practices on Mizrahi Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Imaginatively applying the teachings of Franz Fanon and Homi Bhabha, a number of the essays highlight the complex, hybrid character of Israeli national and cultural identity.

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55 For an early indication of what could be seen to be a growing receptivity to the concept of colonialism among Israeli scholars, see Anita Shapira, “No Subject is Taboo for a Historian” [interview with Rami Tal] [Hebrew], *Yediot Aharonot*, December 23, 1994, 30; and idem, “Politics and Collective Memory: The Debate over ‘New Historians’ in Israel,” *History and Memory* 7 (1995), 9–40.

In a programmatic overview, Shenhav and Hannan Hever discuss major shifts within postcolonial theory. In the process, they provide a useful framework in which to situate the diverse applications of postcolonial theory found in the second half of the book. Thus, beyond situations of conquest and occupation, these contributions make clear the applicability of postcolonial critique to multiple dimensions of current Israeli society and culture. They also reflect the ways in which postnational and feminist theories are interwoven with postcolonial theory to reveal the oppressive effects of Israeli nationalist discourse on women and gays. In light of the extent to which colonial discourse permeates Israeli historical discourse, Shenhav and Hever are led to ask whether it is “possible to write the history of Zionism from the perspective of a Fellah or an Arab intellectual?”

The writings represented in the three collections discussed above, reveal significant developments in postzionist discourse. Far from disappearing, postzionist critique is alive and flourishing. Building upon the fruits of previous writings from the 1990s, the new generation of Israeli academicians displays an increasing theoretical sophistication.

A second significant development is the widening range of scholarly fields to which this critical discourse is applied, including legal studies, cultural studies, critical feminist studies, and political geography. Concomitantly, and this marks a third significant development, the range of social and cultural spheres to which this critical discourse is being applied has significantly expanded to include law, popular culture, art, architecture, film, sexuality, and archaeology.

A fourth development is the increased attention given to the formation of Mizrahi identity in Israeli society. Once the concern of

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58 At the end of the 1980s, at the beginning of my search for Israel scholars who were applying poststructural, postcolonial, or critical feminist theory to the critique of Israeli society and culture, I was able to locate only a very small group, most of whose members subsequently became contributors to *Theory and Criticism*. That the situation did not change significantly during the 1990s was brought home to me in a conversation with Adi Ophir in the late 1990s in which he spoke of the ongoing difficulty of finding Israeli academicians who could contribute theoretically grounded articles to *Theory and Criticism*. 
a very small, marginalized group of scholars and, like gender, addressed primarily in nonacademic journals, this subject has now taken center stage in postzionist Israeli academic discourse. A fifth noteworthy development, referred to above, is the increasing application of frameworks derived from postcolonial, postnational, and multicultural theory.

Notwithstanding the central role played by Theory and Criticism in the shaping of postzionist discourse, it by no means constitutes the sole site for the production of a theoretically informed, reflective postzionist critique. A continual outpouring of books and articles in prominent international journals continually contributes to the postzionist critique. The research and writing of Oren Yiftachel, Dan Rabinowitz, Ronen Shamir, Ariella Azoulay, Adrianna Kemp, Hannan Hever, and Miki Gluzman, to name but a few, have rendered distinct contributions to postzionist critique.

5. The Challenge to Jewish Studies

While the scholarly and critical practices that inform postzionist discourse focus on Israeli society and culture, the implications of this critique for the wider field of Jewish studies has yet to be explored. Notwithstanding the specificity of the Israeli context, many, but by no means all of the issues raised by postzionist critics are relevant to non-Israeli contexts as well.

On one level, this should be self-evident. Although there are exceptions, prevailing interpretations of Jewish history rarely submit zionist discourse to critical reflection. General histories of the Jewish experience and specific studies of the modern Jewish condition afford a central position to Zionism and Israel. Moreover, these studies commonly, and appropriately, designate the establishment of Israel as one of the two or three most significant events of twentieth-century

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59 For further examples of recent postzionist scholarship see the section “Israel at the Crossroads,” ed. Uri Ram, in Constellations 6 (1999), no. 3. Ram, the first Israeli scholar to call for a specifically postzionist form of scholarship, was a major figure in the group known as “Critical Sociologists” which, along with the “New Historians,” is widely considered to be the first manifestation of postzionist scholarship. The fact that Benny Morris, who was the first to speak of the “New Historians,” is a professed Zionist is an indication of the loose way in which the term has been applied.
Jewish history. Accordingly, the dominant representation of Zionism and Israeli society and culture continues to have a powerful effect on dominant representations of the Jewish past and present.

On yet another level, Zionism and Israelism continue to function as a dominant identity-shaping discourse in contemporary Jewish culture. Consequently, attempts to call into question the prevailing representations of Zionism and Israel are vehemently resisted. Nor are the issues limited to Israeli scholarship. For, virtually all of the dominant representations of the history of the Jews represent Zionism and the establishment of the state of Israel as pivotal moments in Jewish history as a whole. Thus, in light of its central symbolic position and its place as the largest concentration of Jews in the world, the impact of a postzionist critique on Jewish identity and culture cannot be underestimated.60

Accordingly, by rendering problematic the prevailing interpretations of Zionism and Israel, postzionist critique contributes to the problematizing of dominant representations of Jewish culture and history as well as the prevailing academic practices that produce these representations. As postzionist scholars have shown, when one applies postcolonial, postmodern, poststructuralist, and feminist theory, it opens the way to a radically different way of conceptualizing Jewish Israeli culture, identity, and history in general.

Rather than accepting Zionism, a major Jewish discourse, as a given, a natural product of historical development, postzionist scholars analyze the discourses, practices, mechanisms, and techniques that produce it and represent it as truth. Similarly, rather than taking for granted such components of zionist discourse and practice as homeland, exile, return, the Sabra, Israeliness, borders, settlement, and redeeming the land, postzionist scholars seek to unravel the discourses, mechanisms, and techniques that produce these “objects” of knowledge and generate their power effects.

Postzionist discourse has, therefore, significant implications for

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60 Notwithstanding the readiness of some scholars to challenge the dominant historical narratives that inform and legitimate Jewish public life, the fact is that the knowledge produced by Jewish studies scholars outside of Israel is no less implicated in issues of power, albeit in a significantly different way, than the knowledge produced by Israeli scholars. Moreover, it is the rare scholar of Jewish studies who has not spent time studying in Israel and whose way of conceptualizing the study of Jewish history and culture has not been affected by Israeli scholarship.
Jewish studies. First of all, grounded in theory that questions many of the underlying premises and practices of modern scholarly discourse, it renders problematic the kinds of historical and social scientific discourse that characterize much of Jewish studies. In addition, in rendering visible the inherent relation of power and knowledge, it moves us to rethink the processes of knowledge production, the discourse and practices through which such objects of knowledge as “Jews,” “Judaism,” “the Jewish people” and “Jewish identity,” or forms of knowledge known as “Torah” or “commandment,” come to be constituted and situated within specific regimes of truth. For, like such concepts as Zionism, the concepts produced within the discourse of Judaism did not simply emerge out of a benign process of cultural development or evolution. Rather they were produced and rendered true through discursive practices and within specific regimes of truth.

In Foucault’s genealogical analysis, attention shifts from the exploration of objects of knowledge taken as “given” to a critique of “the ensemble of rules, according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true.” This entails a critical exploration of the “system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements.” Thus, in Jewish studies no less than in what is commonly referred to as “Israel studies,” one can, if one looks, see the workings of power-infused discursive processes through which those types of discourse are accepted as true, “the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned, the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth” and those who are “charged with saying what counts as truth.”

For understandable reasons, it is rare to encounter such an approach to power within Jewish studies. The field, comprised mainly of Jewish scholars, is viewed by many as contributing to the strengthening and preservation of Jewish culture and identity.

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62 Ibid., 73.
63 In 1999, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, then president of the Association of Jewish Studies, made an impassioned plea for Jewish studies scholars to assume a public role in promoting Jewish culture and identity. As reported in the *Jewish Forward* (February 12, 1999), her speech aroused much controversy and was roundly criticized by many.
Accordingly, approaches that render problematic prevailing interpretations are commonly viewed as undermining such efforts. When Jewish studies scholars write about power, it is usually in terms of the empowerment or disempowerment of Jews. Rarely does one encounter works that analyze in Jewish culture what Foucault called “the microscopic capillary political power [that is] established at the level of men’s very existence.” Like the general field of religious studies, Jewish studies commonly assumes the innocence of religious discourse. Rarely is attention paid to the power effects of that discourse on those who contribute to its production or are positioned by it.

Moreover, taking for granted the noble intentions of the producers of Jewish knowledge and discourse, scholars rarely analyze the ways scholars who sought to keep their academic practices separate from identity politics. It is interesting to note that implicit in Tirosh-Samuelson’s comments as reported in the *Forward* is the assumption that the appropriate role for Jewish studies scholars is to support and reinforce the dominant forms of Jewish culture and identity practices rather than, in the spirit of critical inquiry, to question them or render them problematic in order to open the way to other possible forms and practices.

64 For an exception see Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert Cohn, eds., *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).


in which that knowledge and discourse empowers or disempowers those whom it positions. With the exception of feminist research, the power effects of Jewish discourse are rarely addressed. Little, if anything, is said about the ways in which the boundaries of that discourse are produced and policed. While most works of Jewish scholarship do not accept transcendental claims regarding the origin of Jewish religious texts, little attention is paid to the power mechanisms and techniques that produce them.

The debates over what has come to be called Postzionism provide a cogent example of the inexorable relationship between knowledge and power. In this regard, they encourage us to recognize that scholarly and religious discourse, like any other discourse, is neither neutral nor innocent. Such recognition poses a significant challenge to the liberal Enlightenment conception of knowledge and self that informs the field of Jewish studies and might well encourage a rethinking of the ways that scholars in that field understand and enact their craft.
Part V
New Concepts and Perspectives
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

RESPONSIVE THINKING: CULTURAL STUDIES
AND JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

JONATHAN BOYARIN*

Although the distinction between names and things is one of the oldest in philosophy, historians have but recently taken it into account.1

We must always be conscious ... that we are attempting in our way to understand their understanding.2

Karl Morrison

I

To begin with a disclaimer may hardly seem bold, but in this case to do otherwise would simply be misleading—or perhaps embarrassing; as the limits of my scope will be readily apparent to the reader, I am best advised to make clear those limits at the outset. This first, very personal attempt3 to articulate some relations between the emerging field of Jewish cultural studies and the richly established discipline of Jewish historiography is not a comprehensive literature review. That more ambitious project would be both feasible and worthwhile. But it is far beyond my scope and capacities here and now, especially since I have only recently, after a hiatus of nearly ten years, begun once again to enjoy what we scholars call “time to read.”

Two more specific caveats before I begin this short story about

* My thanks to Elissa Sampsen for her usual perspicacious reading.
1 Karl Morrison, Understanding Conversion (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 3
2 Ibid., 7 (emphasis added).
3 I do not mean that I am the first person to attempt such an articulation; for example, the theme of the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania for the year 2003–2004 was “Prescriptive Traditions and Lived Experience in the Jewish Religion: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives.” A volume of essays from that seminar year, provisionally titled Tradition, Authority, Diaspora: Critical Terms in Jewish Studies, is currently being edited by Ra’anan S. Boustan, Marina Rustow, and Oren Kosansky (forthcoming).
the troubled romance between the master discipline of Jewish history (perhaps more subaltern than it has seemed from my particular perspective) and the wayward, unpredictable, “undisciplined” hybrid known as cultural studies. The first is that the works (mostly quite recent) of Jewish historiography cited, held up as models of reflexive awareness and interdisciplinary liveliness, and once or twice taken to task here have all come to my attention in the course of my own recent reading and research; nothing should be inferred about any texts not discussed when the criteria of inclusion are, as the statisticians say, necessarily haphazard. Second, while I understand fully that the rubric of “cultural studies” has historically been nurtured in and around departments of literature—and while my own thinking is certainly informed by literary theory—I find that I remain in sensibilities very much a cultural anthropologist, and will not attempt here to draw what would in any case be implausibly definite distinctions between anthropological perspectives on the one hand, and literary-cultural perspectives on the other. If forced, however, to make some more positive statement than that, I suppose I would stammer that cultural studies is the place where ethnography written beyond the confines of the oral, the primitive and the tribal meets literary studies (and its daughter disciplines such as film and media studies) listening and looking beyond the canon—both together, I suppose, turning willy-nilly to face the angel of history.

My story therefore begins with the moment when, still an undergraduate but already passionate about the Yiddish culture that still lay mysteriously on the other side of my competence, I was faced with the choice of which graduate department would serve as my ticket across. At that time, fortuitously, the great American social historian Herbert G. Gutman visited the Northwest U.S. college campus where, with a small coterie of friends, I was struggling to fashion an “authentically” Jewish New York personal idiom. I had

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4 This remains a confused question, partly because anthropologists sometimes remain defensively possessive about “their” culture concept, while scholars writing from training or housing in literature departments sometimes seem casually voyeuristic as they dip into analyses of daily culture outside the academy. In any case, it was within the Modern Language Association, sometime in the early 1990s, that I was able to help establish a Discussion Group on Jewish Cultural Studies.

the opportunity to tell Herb that I wanted to go to graduate school, learn the Yiddish language, and study modern East European Jewish life, and asked him whether I should apply to a department of history or of anthropology. Without hesitation, he answered: “You should get a Ph.D. in anthropology. We need historians trained in anthropology.” I followed Gutman’s advice and, perhaps because my choice was largely guided by it, I never suffered under the delusion that what I studied, in the anthropology department at the New School for Graduate Research and at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, was not history.

How could it have been otherwise, for someone who wanted more than anything else to break through the double barrier of the “shtetl myth” on the one hand, and the genocidal abyss of memory on the other, in order to attain something that might answer to the name “living connection” to the Jewish community world of Eastern Europe? Methodologically, I couldn’t do a year of participant observation in Boiberik in the 1930s. I had to turn to questions of memory, whether written or oral, and necessarily to the ways that the present shapes the past. This struggle with the complexities of interpreting both written and oral “texts” led me to engagement with literary theory. More to the point, I couldn’t fix Boiberik in the 1930s in anything like a timeless “ethnographic present,” nor analyze the “structure” of its Jewish community in a way separate from contingency, event, external determination. When studying and writing about Polish Jewish immigrants in Paris in the early 1980s, I had to serve, faute de mieux, as my own consulting historian, since no professional historian had, to my knowledge, tied the ethnic and political history of interwar Poland to the immigration of Jews to France before and after World War II.

But I was not then, and in the professional historian’s eyes have of course never been, a historian. And, tedious and difficult as it might be to document, it is clear that—certainly twenty-five years ago, when I was doing these graduate studies, and perhaps to a diminished extent today—there has “historically” been a hierarchy of disciplinary prestige in Jewish studies, with the historians standing very near the top, the literary critics expected to stick to literature

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and not to transgress the boundaries of popular culture, and the anthropologists only gradually coming in from nowhere at all.\(^7\) An echo of this may be heard in a complaint reported from an audience member at one of the earliest conferences on “The Culture of Sephardic and Oriental Jewry” in Jerusalem, sometime in the 1970s: “How come the Ashkenazim have history and we only have culture?”\(^8\)

Moreover, I was unwilling to limit myself to the theoretical menu available within cultural anthropology. Thus I had the frustrating impression that only professional historians were “authorized” to speak about the past (or, saying the same thing a different way, that it is only the “history” of the past that is really important). I was convinced that Jewish difference had as much to teach us about general processes of domination, resistance, and identification as gender, “racial,” or postcolonial difference each does. All this led me along with colleagues to promote the rubric of Jewish cultural studies. What I said that meant in the mid–1990s was this:

Cultural studies is the name of a creative turbulence in a moment of crisis for the “modern West” and the liberal academy within it. It represents a struggle to provide an answer (or at any rate a response) to this crisis through discovering ways to make history, literature, and other cultural practices “work” better for the enhancement of human lives. Jews and Jewish culture both are obviously in their own state of crisis. Thus there is room for a Jewish cultural studies, one that will function in two ways: first by seeking to discover ways to make Jewish literature, culture, and history work better to enhance Jewish possibilities for living richly; and second by uncovering the contributions that Jewish culture still has to make to tikkun olam, the “repair of the world.”\(^9\)

I would add now that I take the rubric of cultural studies to include (beyond the relatively hortatory connotations expressed in the quotation above), \textit{inter alia} and for the purposes of this essay, an attempt to bridge the disciplinary distinctions among history,\footnote{\textsuperscript{7} See Harvey Goldberg, “Coming of Age in Jewish Studies, Or Anthropology Is Counted in the Minyan,” \textit{JSS} 4 (1998), 29–64.} \textsuperscript{8} See Eric R. Wolf, \textit{Europe and the People Without History} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). \textsuperscript{9} Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, eds., \textit{Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), vii.
the social-scientific analysis of ritual, theology, and literature, themselves patently products of Western power/knowledge formations, and the particular ways they have configured the relation between authority and identity.

I confronted these confusing questions for the first time in many years upon “returning” to the academy in the fall of 2004, facing the double challenge of teaching formally for the first time in over a decade, and of teaching a course billed as “Histories of Jewish Diaspora” at that (for I, too, remain uncertainly under the spell of the historian’s unique discipline and authority). Middletown, Connecticut, a place I had not known before, was thus a site of professional homecoming for me, where I knew both delight and anxiety. The delight should not be merely incidental here, as much of my concern remains, as it was when I first began graduate school nearly thirty years ago, with the specific experience of particular places (“Boiberik in the 1930s”). Thus my scribbled notes for this essay begin at an orchard a few miles east of the Connecticut River, a few miles north of Middletown, in late September, with these words:

Pants and fingers stained with raspberries, picked at their peak purple not red (he typed “read”) […] a bit more and they’re rotten. Truly ripe raspberries cannot be bought at market (William Blake asks: “What is the price of experience?”) And he thinks, he articulates without voicing, a Yiddish phrase: toem gevezn gan eden.10

I had gone exploring, that late summer day, without a map, crossing eastward from Middletown over the broad Connecticut River that flows from north to south, then driving in fact northward parallel to the river but not seeing it, thinking myself still driving east and thus, having wended my way to the Connecticut River ferry, somehow (though it was logically impossible) thinking I was still facing west.

As I cross the river the first time, the bargeman, seeing my yarmulke, says, “Happy New Year” and the tug driver says, “It’s Rosh Hashanah tonight, right?” I ask about the road north, pointing left, and he corrects me: north is to the right, gently pointing out the sun behind me to indicate the morning east. Then, pointing across the river, “That’s our West Bank.”

Returning a week later to the same spot, I had trouble “reorienting” myself (more properly: “reoccidenting” myself, getting through my

10 “He has had a taste of Paradise.”
patterned skull the notion that I was facing west): once again I had
trouble shaking the impression that the bank I drove up on was the
western, that north was across the river to my left and south to my
right. So much for the specific pleasures of place, and so much for
an allegory of the difficulty of reorientation.

It was more the anxiety that led to these reflections on the chal-
lenge of teaching a Jewish history course at Wesleyan University,
to bright students with a reasonable expectation that their instruc-
tor should know what happened, while I myself was more concerned
with being able to convey a lively and “thick” description\(^\text{11}\) of
Jewish worlds that, in many cases, I was painfully aware I knew all
too thinly. Moreover, I faced the same dilemma as, I suppose, any
inexperienced director of a seminar in the humanities: I knew I
didn’t want to—couldn’t, I thought—“just lecture”; and yet, without
knowing the students in advance, how could I structure a discussion
with the unknown?

Hence my title, a play on the stiffly formalized “responsive rea-
dings” (commonly of Psalms translated into English, or of banal
modern homiletics) that are central to North American Conservative
and Reform Jewish prayer services (and somehow utterly different
from the “call and response” patterns of African and African Diaspora
public cultures).\(^\text{12}\) I associated responsive readings with the challenge
of creating a learning dialogue with my students—who I assumed
beforehand would for the most part come from upper-middle-class,
non-Orthodox and quite likely suburban Jewish backgrounds. This
required a reorientation to mainstream American styles of perform-
ing Jewishness, odd and slightly innerving for someone like me
who has spent the past quarter century fashioning and fancying

\(^{11}\) Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Cul-

\(^{12}\) “Call and response is an expression of both ritualized communal unity and
spontaneous individual freedom. It goes back to African communication by drums,
as messages were passed on from village to village. It also goes back to other African
conventions that expressed a strong sense of community and spontaneity—such as the
relation of each dancer to the drummers (the dancer would respond to the drummers’
call). And it became a means of unifying slaves who were not allowed to meet in
large groups, except in church, and who were continually exposed to deliberate mea-
sures by slave owners to break up families and people from the same village or tribe.
(http://acunix.wheatonma.edu/rpearce/MultiC_Web/Culture/Tactics/Conventions/Af-Am_Conventions/Call_and_Response/body_call_and_response.html).
himself a Jew in the quite extraordinary remnants of the Jewish Lower East Side.

The phrase also represented for me the challenge of discovering my students and finding a “responsive” discussion with them. For a seminar leader, being responsive where the script is not laid out beforehand requires both an openness to what is not known and the ability to share what my interlocutors may not have known beforehand. The work of permitting myself that openness was hampered in part by my lingering sense of trespass as a non-historian.

I wondered whether that sense of trespass would be finally laid or made more acute when, in the fall of 2005, I actually became a member of a history department. I will, in any case, have ample further opportunities to analyze it, as attested to by this fragment from an e-mail exchange with a new colleague over the future direction of the department:

Jonathan Boyarin: What do you mean by “the value of an education in our subject?”
J---- C----: It’s a matter of degree. We would doubtless all support all virtuous approaches to the subject, but not, I trust, to the point where undergraduates don’t grasp the special nature of historical method, and come to view history’s subject matter in a timeless presentism—always the default mode.

I did not dare to reply in a way that gave reason to suspect I had any doubts that there was a special nature to historical method, or that what it constituted was in any way unclear in my mind. Thus I am left to presume that my interlocutor was referring, perhaps in addition to the special kinds of documents and other evidence considered by historians in piecing together the past, some special stance that might still be called objectivity or a concern for what actually happened (though what historian today will dare to get up and confess that she still seeks to understand history wie es eigentlich gewesen ist?). Whatever the special method was in my interlocutor’s

13 I am, of course, extremely grateful to the members of the History Department (as of the Religious Studies Department) at the University of Kansas for welcoming me as the first Robert M. Beren Professor of Modern Jewish Studies there, as I am to Jeremy Zwelling at Wesleyan University for inviting me to teach a Jewish history course there, even if those generous acts may slightly undermine my argument in this essay.

14 Professor C---- did not add “no pun intended,” indicating, to my mind, that no pun was in fact intended.
mind—and though he also made clear his awareness that at best we only ever attend to a minute fragment of what actually happened, it was the bugbear of “timeless presentism” that frightened me. The power of imagination is so important in my teaching, and, no matter how hard we must work to imagine the ways that others (distant in geographical and social time and space) are both like and different from us, I remain convinced that we can only begin to imagine others from the starting point of who we understand and imagine ourselves to be. As Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias write: “Ask the Jews how they conceive of the other and you will soon learn how they conceive of themselves.”\textsuperscript{15} Perhaps: presentism if you will, but not “timeless presentism.”

Historians, too, sometimes thus insist on explicitly starting from and returning to the present; witness, for a recent example, Judith Lieu at the conclusion of her recent \textit{Christian Identity in the Jewish and Greco-Roman World}. She draws on all the resources of a philologist of Late Antiquity and on contemporary theories of the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of group identity to trace out the existential and doctrinal dilemmas of negotiating how Christians were to be kin and alien to, like and contrasted to, Jews and members of the broader Mediterranean world. Then she writes:

An obvious response, however, may still be that this has been \textit{our} reading of the texts, conditioned by a twenty-first-century agenda. It may not be how anyone in the first three centuries understood what they heard, read, or wrote. The distinction between the earliest readers of the texts and ourselves as their present readers has, it might be protested, become vicariously annulled. That is, of course, always the historiographical dilemma. But in showing how early Christian texts share the same dynamics and many of the same strategies with other Jewish and Graeco-Roman texts we have sought to neutralize this objection. It does not matter that we have supplied the agenda and the framework for our reading of the texts; what matters is that by so doing we can conceive a coherent social world that encompassed and enabled differentiation among the actual lives of those whom we cannot otherwise know.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias, \textit{The Jew and the Other} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), x.
This master thus contends, convincingly and with confidence, that our task is not to see others as they saw themselves but to articulate the inherited fragments of their world in a way that makes empathetic sense. It is perhaps not merely the same argument taken a step further to suggest that, beyond the need for better philology and more literacy, the ultimate payoff is the reformulation of our sense of ourselves in the present, as Maria Rosa Menocal writes: “The more difficult, and essential of the tasks is that of considering the validity of the views we hold, understanding their ideological bases, and readjusting them if they are found wanting.”

But here I pause, a bit stymied, almost a bit embarrassed, for two reasons: first, because the Menocal quote (from 1987) conveys the same vague and now somehow naïve-sounding hope or promise of liberation through criticism as does my 1996 definition of cultural studies, quoted above (this hope or promise is not so radical, really: it used to be called Enlightenment); second, more immediately and prosaically, because it is not clear that a meeting of undergraduates (my Wesleyan seminar) necessarily holds views sufficiently articulated (whether ultimately “wanting” or not) to serve as the primary basis for critical exploration of the past.

These, then, are the elements of the challenge that I faced, teaching for the first time, from the perspective of an anthropologist, a one-semester course covering the broad sweep of Jewish cultural history, trying to avoid the luxury of a Eurocentric limitation on the scope of that history, including (as happens more than we like to admit) some topics where the virtual sum total of my own information came from the assigned readings, and working with a group of students of uneven backgrounds (one or two of whom occasionally knew more than I).

Trying to find some kind of responsible balance in the face of this challenge, here are some techniques that I found myself repeatedly employing:

I. I found myself attending, and drawing my students’ attention to, contemporary historiography (and not just primary texts) as a literary

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cultural artifact, getting into the habit of looking for the analytic bind
an author has fallen into that is readily betrayed by the escape modifier
“ironically,” or watching for unsupported throwaway assertions that
present themselves as being by the by, given, as having nothing do
with assertions as to “history,” as mere restatements of what everyone
knows and agrees on.

II. I focused on, and attempted where possible to push further, the
“anthropological” insights and questions raised by the material provi-
ded us by the historians.

III. I never assumed that increasing distance in time affords greater
objectivity.

I will elaborate on these three points shortly, but let me make it
instantly clear that I do not want to be heard as making any kind
of claim, one way or the other, as to the existence vel non of some
putative hors-texte. On the contrary, I am trying to address the com-
mon situation of contemplating an immense sphere of human expe-
rience (e.g., several centuries of Jewish life in Alexandria) through the
precious but narrow and necessarily partial scope of a single fifty-
page essay. It makes sense, does it not, is it not properly scientific,
to examine closely the scope and not only the view it presents? More-
over, much like anyone ambivalently welcoming and shunning the
gaze of another, historians seem to invite and at the same time subtly
impede this kind of interrogation. And, of course, they increasingly
look to enrich their investigations with perspectives that may trespass
the “special nature of historical method.” Sometimes this takes place
in the context of debates within their own discipline. Thus Robert
Bonfil, acknowledging Benedetto Croce, writes in the introduction
to his Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy that “all history is contemporary
history, because history is an integral part of the conception of the
Self and its relation to the Other.” Moreover, Bonfil’s concern with
the dialectic of collective selfhood and the collective other informs
his understanding of the period about which he writes:

My purpose has been to present the history of the Jews of Italy in
the Renaissance and Baroque periods from the inside. … [This] is the

18 Of course, this situation is also that of the instructor in an ethnography
classroom; anthropologists have published more than their fair share of “full cul-
ture summaries.”
19 Robert Bonfil, Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy, trans. Anthony Oldcorn (Berkeley:
history of a coming to awareness of the Self in the act of specular reflection in the Other.\textsuperscript{20}

Is this not the theoretical armature of interdisciplinary cultural studies? Other historians of Jewish life appear likewise to be more ready to acknowledge the value of perspectives from non-“historical” cultural studies. Thus Robert Chazan, in his most recent book, \textit{Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom}, nods with his title to the influence of literary cultural studies (Stephen Jay Greenblatt’s \textit{Renaissance Self-Fashioning}),\textsuperscript{21} and explicitly acknowledges the growing influence of anthropology. Anthropological study has tended to focus on the functions that religious faiths play within societies. This has led away from the earlier judgmental posture and toward an appreciation of the diverse objectives of religious systems, with their relative successes and failures. The present study is very much a part of this newer anthropological thrust in religious studies.\textsuperscript{22}

Curiously, not a single work by an anthropologist is actually cited by Chazan here. By contrast, Judith Lieu’s book cited above includes a discussion titled “Boundaries,” containing an extremely rich and concise summary of recent discussions from Fredrik Barth onward on the processual nature of ethnic identities, drawing on work by anthropologists, historians, and “literary” cultural theorists (especially Paul Gilroy).\textsuperscript{23}

Perhaps not too much ought to be made of the fact that Chazan incorporates the “anthropological perspective” without explicit reference to anthropologists. It should of course not be an occasion for the display of bruised disciplinary egos. The risk, however, is that some readers may assume that the historian has in fact already assimilated (in the form of functionalism) all that they need to know or might stand to gain from anthropology, with the result that this new perspective is explicitly acknowledged only to be ultimately held at arm’s length.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., ix.
\textsuperscript{22} Robert Chazan, \textit{Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ix.
\textsuperscript{23} Lieu, \textit{Christian Identity}, 99ff.
Here, at any rate, are a number of examples of my points I (on the critical reading of history as text), II (on the search for the “anthropological” content sometimes semi-hidden in historians’ accounts), and III (on the difference between distance and “objectivity”) above.  

2. Examples of Point I

A. The resort to “irony” in historical narrative, which often seems to short-circuit an insight nearly articulated by the author, and thus to present a lost but retrievable opportunity for cultural analysis. In the midst of her *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam*, a book that is exemplary for its sensitivity to the contingencies and pressures attendant upon the invention of Sephardi Jewishness after the departure from Iberia, Miriam Bodian writes:

Ironically, Iberian society sometimes freely offered conversos information of which they might otherwise have been ignorant. The “Edicts of Faith,” for example—proclamations calling for judaizers to come forth and confess their crimes, and for the faithful to denounce judaizers—provided detailed lists of Jewish rituals in order to inform potential denouncers what to look for. Ironically, such lists also furnished valuable information to judaizers to whom the Inquisition had systematically denied access to such knowledge.

That information designed to facilitate control is often used to subvert domination, is, however, a commonplace of subaltern studies. Looking closely beyond the surface “irony,” therefore, enables us to do even more with Bodian’s text, linking the phenomena she lucidly presents and acutely analyzes to similar processes in postcolonial situations. Similarly, when Elliot Horowitz refers to the “painfully ironic” enforcement by the Mantua Jewish community of “Jewish attendance at compulsory Christian sermons,” what he is really

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24 These examples are drawn from works I have read and taught with great profit, and I hope that my *Randbemerkungen* will not be taken as carping.


pointing to is the fact that there is agency as well in a position of sustained subordination. That phenomenon, too, is hardly unique to the Jews, but may still seem puzzling to the extent that we continue to “oscillate between what Salo W. Baron defined as ‘the lachrymose conception of Jewish history’ and what, paraphrasing Baron, we might call ‘the antilachrymose conception of Jewish history.’”

B. “Hydraulic” explanations for cultural change. By this I mean any explanation of cultural change that attributes the rise in one phenomenon to a decline in another, as though cultures were containers that are “naturally” filled at a certain level with something. Thus, for example: “The converse of this increase of secular writing in Ladino was … a decline in the number of publications of religious import.” Why and how is one a “converse” of the other? Is the vessel (the Ladino language) not affected by this change in its content (religious versus secular literature)? Why, in a move toward secularism per se, is the separate language maintained at all? Similarly, Yosef Kaplan writes that among Sephardim in Amsterdam, “secular activity expanded into the space left vacant after the scope of Jewish law was narrowed.” What “space” was that? Was it still somehow “Jewish” space, and if so, why? Why did one public or communal realm give way to another, rather than leaving in its place only atomized nuclear families? I do not for a second suggest that the historians I cite here are oblivious to these questions, but that their reader’s sense of the contingency of Jewish (as of any other) identity in the chronotopes they describe is blunted to the extent they fall back on rhetorics of cultural wholes when doing cultural history.

3. Examples of Point II

A. The turn to “thick description.” The phrase refers to a renewed emphasis, in ethnography and elsewhere in cultural studies, on providing as rich a sense of the context in which cultural meanings are

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27 Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 1.
deployed and contended for as possible, and on holding theoretical structures in abeyance for a bit before that context is presented. In fact, the essay in which the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (sadly, not otherwise known as an ethnographer of Jews) introduced this phrase\textsuperscript{30} turned on an anecdote about a Jewish Moroccan trader named Cohen. Perhaps it was through Geertz that the trend in literary cultural studies called the “New Historicism”\textsuperscript{31} acquired another stylistic pattern now shared in Jewish cultural history, to wit:

B. The piquant opening anecdote. For an outstanding example, I will merely direct the reader to the beginning of Raymond P. Scheindlin’s article on Judeo-Arabic culture in the golden age of Islam, which offers an extended quote from the memoirs of Judah al-Harizi. The quote presents a dramatic episode about three Jewish youths who demand of a diviner that he guess both their question—“When will the Jews be redeemed from the exile, and when will the Jewish kingdom be restored?”—well as provide the answer. But the payoff, for Scheindlin, is the evidence the story provides about social boundaries:

The story’s depiction of the Jewish characters as externally indistinguishable from the Muslim masses … corresponds with the reality of Jewish life in the Muslim world … from the seventh through the thirteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{32}

Here we have a stylistic element that is fully assimilated from literary cultural studies into historiography, and to very rich effect.

4. Examples of Point III

My apologies for misleading you, gentle reader: while I did exhort my students not to fall into the trap of thinking that the distant past is somehow fixed and therefore better known than our own messy present, I do not in fact find recent writings in Jewish historiography falling into that naïve trap. Perhaps this shift toward

\textsuperscript{30} See note 11 above.


what Lieu identifies as the goal of an account that makes sense of the past, rather than an account of what really happened, is part and parcel of a greater tendency, shared now by Jewish historians, to see identity (including Jewishness) as contingent and as performed or enacted rather than as a matter of heroism and tolerance. Thus, to cite only two examples almost at random, Yosef Kaplan, in his essay in *Cultures of the Jews* cited (and criticized) above, offers an evocative description of the pomp surrounding the conduct of services at the new Portuguese *esnoga* in Amsterdam as a conscious performance for the community itself as well as its non-Jewish neighbors;\(^{33}\) while throughout Miriam Bodian’s book on the same community, she avoids falling into the trap of writing as though this community constituted itself through a simple recuperation of its true Jewishness, and leaves ever present before the reader’s eyes the task of communal reinvention, and the challenge of enforcing the bounds of that new community.

Along with this understanding of identity (personal and collective) as always contingent, always in need of maintenance, reinvention, repair, thus goes a new emphasis on its boundaries, its points of contact and repulsion vis-à-vis the other, as signaled by the quote from Robert Bonfil above and, indeed, by the preoccupations of nearly all the essays in Biale’s *Cultures of the Jews*. Within the works of a single Jewish scholar, I cite Daniel Boyarin’s own emphasis\(^ {34}\) on the shift in his thinking from his earlier *Carnal Israel*,\(^ {35}\) from an emphasis on “only the positions that seemed most antithetical to ‘Christian’ or ‘Hellenistic’ ones” to an emphasis on the presence “within the Talmud itself of positions much closer to those of contemporary Others in the Mediterranean world.” I will cite Boyarin’s own most recent book, *Border Lines*,\(^ {36}\) to suggest that this shift in emphasis—this new tone, we might call it, in the *pathos* of his scholarship—reflects a more general sea change, in Jewish cultural studies and elsewhere in history, anthropology, and related disciplines, from a focus on what James Scott famously called “domination and the

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\(^{34}\) In a lecture given at Wesleyan University on December 2, 2004.


arts of resistance” to a focus on the continuous construction, maintenance, and transgression of boundaries between ethnic and other collective identities.

Here as elsewhere, like his son Uriel Weinreich, the Yiddish cultural historian and sociolinguist Max Weinreich articulated approaches to cultural analysis decades before they became generally current: “It thus turns out that the very existence of a division [between cultural groupings] is much more important than the actual location of the division line.”37 That prescient quote aside, one early example of this new trend, perhaps early enough to be called a precursor, is Peter Sahlins’s 1989 Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees.38 In addition to the year it was published, that book is remarkable for two other reasons: first, that it focuses on the constructed nature of that which we have until recently tended to take as most natural: geographic boundaries between nations, and second, perhaps, that it was written by a historian who is the son of an anthropologist (Marshall Sahlins).

Certainly, the new focus on boundaries, the meetings, collaborations and clashes that take place at boundaries to recreate and challenge them, and the methodological urgency of questioning their given nature, can be detected in the most current scholarship on various periods and places in the history of Christianity. Thus, for example, Osvaldo Pardo, in his brand-new study of The Origins of Mexican Catholicism, criticizes Robert Ricard’s classic The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico39 in the following terms:

The perspective brought by Ricard rests on the notion that the Nahuas and Christian religion each possessed definite and identifiable boundaries or, rather, that such demarcation is in a certain sense methodologically necessary.40

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Daniel Boyarin’s new effort to inscribe the Talmudic narrative “within a larger [ancient] Mediterranean history of sexuality” 41 similarly recalls Ammiel Alcalay’s effort, in his 1993 book *After Jews and Arabs: The Remaking of Levantine Culture*, to reinscribe Jewish literatures in several languages within a shared cultural universe of the modern-day Levant. 42

If I’m right in detecting a trend here, we may dub it “boundary theory” 43 or “boundary discourse.” A few huge questions immediately arise: What is the relation of boundary theory to

a) theories of identity and difference that focus on the production of self through discourses of Othering; and

b) the theory, let’s call it a theory of abjection, in which Othering by the dominant group creates or at least sustains the subaltern collective self—I will identify this as the theory put forth in Marx’s “Essays on the Jewish Question,” brought to us by way of Jean-Paul Sartre.

And one preliminary answer to these questions may be that boundary theory permits and fosters a greater sensitivity to contiguities between collective identities, or names, without necessarily reinscribing notions either of cultural universals or of cultural diffusion.

Again, if there is some kind of shift toward a boundary discourse, toward the idea that the real action is at the margins and not at the center, what does that say about our own notions of or attachments to any collective identity now? Is our hold on some attachment to a positive projection of some *sui generis* core of group identity more tenuous than it was even a few short years ago? In the light of boundary theory, we might suggest, for example, that Boyarin’s effort to construct Jewish difference in *Carnal Israel*—an effort, if this needs to be said, that was very dear to my heart—as one of colonial domination and diasporic resistance was in fact a project in boundary construction and maintenance.

If cultural studies, with its emphasis on the constructed nature of all identities, personal and collective, might seem at first blush to pose a challenge to the maintenance of the Jewish and other

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41 Lecture at Wesleyan University, December 2, 2004.
collectives, the reverse question might be asked as well: Are there ways in which cultural studies, with its linkage both to literary scholarship and to ethnography, is especially congenial to approaches to Jewish cultural history? Here, for a starting point, I would point to the facility cultural studies has for seeing textuality as part of life, rather than merely the medium of a second-order representation of life. That lesson is now being absorbed, with profit, by seasoned master historians such as the medievalist Jeremy Cohen, yielding for example this shift from a frustrating attempt to sort out the “factual basis” in medieval Jewish martyrlogies, to a new emphasis on the meaning of the creation and reception of the martyrlogies themselves:

While tales of martyrdom, then, perhaps can teach us something about the martyrs themselves, their ideas, and their deaths, they communicate considerably more about the martyrlogists, those who remember the martyrs and tell their stories because they find them meaningful. Applying these principles to the extant Hebrew narratives of the 1096 persecutions, we shall see how the martyrs’ stories teach us above all else about the survivors who told them.44

More radically perhaps, a recent essay by David Nirenberg turns the very idea of a genre of “Jewish history” back onto itself, as he examines how Jewish historiography became part of the great effort—shared, from both sides of the divide, by “Christians” and “Jews”—to determine exactly to whom those two names properly belonged, after the great confusion inaugurated by the great persecution in Spain in 1391, and the mass conversions that followed. In this great sorting out process between 1391 and 1492, “genealogy [was elevated] to a primary form of communal memory,”45 and the efflorescence of history writing was a key prop of that genealogical memory. “Racial” notions that—again among both Christians and Jews—became prominent at that time, have by our day, albeit imperfectly, been discarded:

But it is fitting to end with the rise of history, because of all the products of the genealogical turn in Sepharad, it alone retains its power

to convince. We now, for example, treat as so much fiction the richly illuminated *ketubbot* (marriage contracts) that Sephardic families began to produce in the fifteenth century in order to celebrate their Davidic ancestry. Yet we rarely quarrel with a historiography, Christian and Jewish, that has in its quest for origins long adopted the genealogical methods of the fifteenth century polemicist. Like the “Antiquarian historian” of Nietzsche’s second “Untimely meditation,” the historian of Spain and its Jews too often “greets the soul of his nation across the long dark centuries of confusion as his own soul.” The preceding pages are about the history of lineage and the history of history in fifteenth-century Sepharad. But they are just as much about these shades of genealogy that have proved so difficult to exorcize from our own historical practices.46

Continued interrogation of our own pedagogy, our own research, our own writing remains in order, whether or not we still have any hopes or pretensions of “liberating” ourselves or others thereby. Cultural studies, among other things, is about the idea that just as text is never a second, more ideal order of reality, so too we are never “above” what we’re studying, teaching, discussing, writing. Rather than fixing on a supposedly delimited time and space as the guarantor of the purest approach to truth, let us be aware that we are constantly *tacking* between two formations of identity, the one (the notion of “ourselves”) inescapable for continued human life and being continually reshaped and nurtured by the other (the “past” in its relics), and attend to our work as not simply the *knowing*, but rather the active *making* or *performance* of history. Maybe in that we, rather than being ultimately tempted to conclude that the question of any profound commonalities among Jews through time and space is a trick of the present, we will allow ourselves to remain humbled—not hobbled—by Paul Gilroy’s reminder that “the fragile psychological, emotional, and cultural correspondences which connect diaspora populations in spite of their manifest differences are often apprehended only fleetingly and in ways that persistently confound the protocols of academic orthodoxy.”47

46 Ibid., 39–40.
For a historian, writing about the ways in which history is conceptualized undoubtedly means more than merely rethinking the roots of one’s own profession. From the perspective of cultural theory, this aspect has become an indispensable part of historiography itself. Reflection about the self-understanding of the discipline is taken far beyond the reassessment of different methodological approaches as well as beyond the differing concepts of what kind of history research is meant to produce. It aims at the very core of the processes underlying the intentions and methods of historical models, thereby reflecting its own position against the background of the given cultural frame and in contrast to the construct of other—e.g., “historical”—referential systems, in order to understand the structure and significance of the paradigms by which history is told.

This article does not attempt to trace all the different methods of telling Jewish history that have emerged since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Nor does it intend to provide a thorough description of how history became an essential, perhaps the most dominant cultural discourse of modern Judaism. Yet, it will discuss major characteristics of modern Jewish historiography that have become crucial for most of the scholarly approaches laid out during the last two hundred years. The aim is not a comprehensive history of Jewish historiography, but a conceptual critique of its predominant methodological perspectives. One of the central arguments will be that, after the cultural turn, still almost unrecognized within Jewish studies, all the attempts to discover new methods of writing Jewish history necessarily have to face the dominant heritage of one fundamental historical concept, namely national history. This concept

*I am most grateful to Christian Wiese for his thorough reading and revision of the English text.
toward a Jewish history beyond national history

495

clearly continues to define our perception of Jewish history even today, the reason being that its structures and bonds remain unrecognized, forcing us over and over again into similar ways of thinking, thereby considerably narrowing the possibility of developing fundamental new approaches. Here, only general characteristics can be outlined, while other interesting side-glances have to be omitted for the sake of focusing on the crucial paradigms and their dynamics. Although many examples will be taken from my field of expertise, i.e., from German-Jewish history, it seems to me that, on a conceptual level, the argument can also be applied, maybe not in every detail, but certainly in its general structure, to the field of Jewish history as it developed in other countries, mainly due to the close international contacts that emerged especially after the Holocaust.1

Modern critical history developed alongside with and in relation to other forms of history, such as personal memory, family traditions, and historical culture acted out by different parts of society. What set this specific new form of establishing normative ideas about the past apart from others? The historical perception of Judaism in modern times might provide a clearer and more complex answer to this question than research on other cultures. Premodern Jewish culture had also held normative models that prescribed how to tell its own history. They consisted in retelling the religious agenda and in integrating each time and event into a rather stable framework defined by religious interpretations of holy texts. Since the Middle Ages and even more since the Renaissance, the few Jewish historians, like other contemporaries, presented historical events as ethical tales, incorporating histories of rulers, wars, persecutions, and other events into a larger moral. In the late eighteenth century, the proponents of the German Haskalah, in conformity with European Enlightenment in general, found new ways to write Jewish history. Its characteristics were religious criticism and new philosophical ideas, subjugating the central texts still defining its own past to the newly forged critical approach.2 Only after this did modern Jewish life become linked to

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1 The term “Jewish history” is used here to indicate scholarly critical research.
2 Shmuel Feiner, *Haskalah and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002). In this article, the Eastern European Haskalah has to be neglected; it certainly developed a somewhat different approach that was linked to the general scholarly current of historical thinking but still remained rather “enlightened” in its character and, in contrast to the
a quite different approach, a specific way of historical perception developed in the German states and quite successfully exported from there to other centers of Jewish life.

Standing in the tradition of nineteenth-century historicism, we tend to ignore or at least underestimate the specific ways in which Jewish history has been and still is perceived. The new claim for objectivity that was made by historical research, i.e., the notion that the historian is able to sort out the true story from differing readings of the sources, resulted in what most historians, even today, consider the relevant background to all the other historical narratives that, since then, appeared as particularistic or as corrupted. Scientific history demanded quite successfully the authority to define the historical master narrative, but also claimed to produce the major normative cultural discourse for society at large. In European Judaism, as in other modern Western cultures, other historical tales certainly did not cease to exist. Although they lived in the shadow of the new master narrative, they were not at all detached from it. They interacted with the “true story,” paralleling but also overlapping it in a constant attempt to gain significance in the manifold aspects of social life and structures that were now legitimized by a critical and concise concept of the past. The new narrative’s authority was upheld by a rather small group of professionals, teaching predominantly at the newly founded Protestant universities. They succeeded in establishing themselves as cultural mandarins, or cultural mediators, who defined the normative model to which all the others were expected to submit. In Judaism, this process was certainly less consistent, but—as the results show—still very successful. Even today, we have only little knowledge about other forms of historical thinking; literary studies have provided some insight in this respect, and only lately have we learned about personal memories or historical culture.

former, almost non-bourgeois. After all, it did not prove to be decisive for the general outlook of the historical approach within Jewish studies today.

Such as private memories, family histories, local traditions, or ritual enactments of history—all combined with repercussions of older religious views on the past; see Christhard Hoffmann, “The German-Jewish Encounter and German Historical Culture,” *LBIYB* 41 (1996), 277–290.

The fact is that our perception is narrowed by the scholarly master narrative to the extent that “minor” forms continue to be eclipsed by its quest for authority.\(^5\)

It was the astonishing success historical research gained in general society that made it so attractive for Jews as well. Using it as a universally acknowledged means of redefining their own history and the relationship between Jews and Christians held the promise of enabling the Jewish minority to stand on the same ground as the Christian majority and even to encounter it at eye level. From the very beginning of the German Haskalah, history was, therefore, used as a medium to explain the special status and the problems of Jewish society, blaming the Christian side for its allegedly negative situation. Re-evaluating, but also defending one’s own culture in such a way was considered to be an integrative act that was supposed to include Jewish culture among the ranks of civilized nations because now it was history, and not religion, that would define the hierarchy of cultures.\(^6\) Furthermore, the idea of objective truth promised to establish a cultural discourse open to everyone, quite different from the restricted and closed theological concepts of the past. Finally, the growing prestige of university studies and historical science in society was expected to lend Jewish historians authority within the Jewish communities and to legitimize Jewish existence vis-à-vis the outside world.\(^7\)

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\(^{7}\) Gotzmann, *Eigenheit und Einheit*, 131–161; and Nils Roemer, “Paradoxes of Historical Consciousness: German-Jewish Transformations from Wissenschaft to Faith,” *Simon Dubnow Institute Year Book* 3 (2004), 31–47. Roemer is certainly right in stating that this was “a program of cultural revival that remained decisively religious in nature” (ibid., 32).
Until the last third of the nineteenth century, history rapidly displaced other forms of cultural reflection like halakhic interpretation or the religious readings of the formative texts and became the master discourse of modern Judaism. This did not, of course, happen all of a sudden; instead, this was, as critical editions of rabbinic texts even in the ranks of Orthodoxy show, very often a process in which other models were incorporated into modern historical thinking or permeated them. How powerful the idea of history was, is, however, illustrated by the very fact that, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, many histories of the Jews were written by Jewish authors. The scholarly works, such as those of Peter Beer and Isaak Markus Jost, never reached the larger part of the Jewish population. Only Heinrich Graetz’s comprehensive multi-volume History of the Jews gained an enormous popularity. While the perception of scholarship remained restricted to bourgeois circles, most of the historical works of these days were designed for school and adult education. Here, a large number of books appeared until the end of the Emancipation era, sometimes even in several reprints, accompanied by even larger numbers of religious text books as well as histories of the biblical period. It is most interesting to see how stereotypical these historical digests were in their depiction of the past, and how closely they remained tied to the scholarly books in their attempt to straighten these stories out for practical purposes. The ideological focus on religious reform was usually preserved, and the typical paradigms of how to depict and analyze specific historical incidents or periods like the destruction of the temple, the Spanish era, or early modern times, document a closed and, with only a few deviations on the Orthodox side, a rather unified vision of the past. Due to school training and the bourgeois ideal of Bildung, history not only became the major mode of cultural reflection but, as demonstrated by its

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8 See, e.g., Ludwig Philippson, “Die jüdische Geschichtsschreibung,” *Archiv für Geschichte des Judentums* 48 (1889), 749–752, especially 749: “History is the palladium of Judaism and its confessors. Not only that it has to justify it, to recognize its existence and martyrdom, and to acknowledge its world historical mission; the history of Judaism is also the essential basis of its religious lore.”

9 Jacques Ehrenfreund, “Erinnerungspolitik und historisches Gedächtnis. Zur Entstehung einer deutsch-jüdischen Wissenschaft im Kaiserreich (1870–1914),” in Wyrwa, ed., *Judentum und Historismus*, 39–62, here 49; even his differing point of view results in the same evaluation: “The historicization of Jewish culture in nineteenth-century Germany, however, did not go so far as to question the universality [of Jewish history], the core, as it were, of Jewish culture.”
almost stereotypical structures, also a unifying factor that allowed only a few fundamental deviations.\textsuperscript{10}

This brings us to the second trait of Judaism’s formative cultural discourse in modernity. The idea that critical research creates a world open to everyone did more than just promise integration by linking Judaism to the “other” world through a unified history. Although this was an indispensable aspect of writing history, the predominant purpose of historiography was to provide a means that allowed for a self-induced redefinition of one’s own culture as a normative way of self-reflection. Influenced by religious criticism, Jewish historiography soon was shaped by the idealist and liberal concept of “national history”.

The very term “national history” might produce some misunderstanding, since it is generally used to identify historical concepts tightly bound to state nationalism and to accentuate the territorial aspect.\textsuperscript{11} In Jewish history, this specific connotation was only adopted by the Autonomist and the Zionist movements (at the beginning of the twentieth century), with only the latter choosing territory as a central paradigm.\textsuperscript{12} What I would call “Jewish national history” refers to the much older liberal concept that continues to form the vital core of Jewish historiography even today. The persistence of the older model actually sets Jewish history apart from other fields of historiography like German history, which had the possibility of detaching itself from this common idealist background more easily and thoroughly. The character of this preterritorial national history was as deeply rooted in the bourgeois ideals of the 1840s aiming at national unity as it was shaped by the specific experience

\textsuperscript{10} Gotzmann, \textit{Eigenheit und Einheit}, 114–161.

\textsuperscript{11} For instance, Jacques Ehrenfreund consistently refers to a national concept linked to the Zionist model. The preterritorial concept, even in its specific territorial form of the manifold German-Jewish local histories, is not recognized as such because of its twofold nature that oscillates between ethnic identity and national integration into German history; see Ehrenfreund, “Erinnerungspolitik und historisches Gedächtnis,” 49: “History had undoubtedly become a central element of the minority’s identity; the historical discourse, however, did not result in a national Jewish orientation but served for the integration of the Jews into non-Jewish society.” And see Jacques Ehrenfreund, \textit{Mémoire juive et nationalité allemande: Les juifs berlinois a la belle époque} (Paris: Presses Université de France, 2000).

\textsuperscript{12} This observation sets even the later type of “proper” national history in Jewish historiography somewhat apart from other national histories, a point that is often neglected.
Jewish historians had with the German model of emancipation. All these historians internalized the idea that history was the key to the Eurocentric universe of civilized cultures. In order to gain access to this supposedly open universe, however, they had to accept its norms and structures as given. A differing historical logic or method would have excluded them once again from this general discourse of excellence and power. This discourse actually proved to be so strong (and for many historians it still is) that the idea of coexisting strands of historical thinking with differing, albeit equally valuable and true concepts and methodologies seemed unacceptable.

But the internalization of the dominant model also caused many problems. The narrow concept according to which history was to be conceived in patterns later named historicism, was based on assumptions that could hardly be applied to Jewish life and past. First of all, there was no national territory. Even the religious concept of Palestine as an abstract “center in absence” would have collided with the strong urge to integrate into the German nation—a situation well comparable to that of Roman Catholics. Furthermore, since there was no German national state at that time, history and literature became ideological and political agendas through which the nation was forged, for instance by invoking a united past that created an imagined unified territory. Such elements of a national culture as language, literature, arts, and a national character of the people itself were taken as tokens of a still unachieved political unity. Jewish authors were painfully aware of these fundamental obstacles to their historiographical project. Since, after the destruction of the Second Temple, there was no Jewish state, Jewish history could not be justified as an independent narrative. All the signifying aspects of national history—like rulers, statesmen, and state organizations—were supposedly missing, i.e., anything that was considered a pivotal prerequisite of society, namely centers of power and action.

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13 However, through all the conflicts the Roman Catholics had with the dominant Protestant national discourse, the fact that they belonged to the German nation was never really questioned; see Andreas Gotzmann, “Symbolische Rettungen. Jüdische Theologie und Staat in der Emanzipationszeit,” in Nation und Religion in der deutschen Geschichte, ed. Dieter Langewiesche and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag, 2001), 516–547. Gotzmann, “Zentrum in Abwesenheit. Jüdische Traditionen zu Jerusalem vor der Staatsgründung Israels,” in Jerusalem im Widerstreit politischer und religiöser Interessen: Die Heilige Stadt aus interdisziplinärer Sicht, ed. Tilmann Seidensticker and Helmut Hubel (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2004), 59–72.
These deficiencies were so serious that Jewish historians from Isaak Marcus Jost through Moritz Lazarus to Eugen Täubler felt compelled to provide an answer to the problem of the missing national qualities. In 1832, Jost attempted to find a definition that would overcome these tensions. In one of the very few conceptual and self-reflective texts from the pen of these historians he wrote:

> It seems difficult to testify to a common character of the Jews in all the mentioned regions, although, if one takes into account all the differences in manners, language, and family-habits by which they are characterized, often differing from each other as Frankonians, Swabians, Italians, Poles and so on, they reveal, compared to the other masses of the population, a distinct character by which they can be recognized.\(^\text{14}\)

This is reminiscent of what Moritz Lazarus, the first director of the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin and a leading figure in the Verein für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur, later wrote in a lecture on “What Is Jewish History and Literature and Why Should One Study It?” that, interestingly enough, alluded, by its very title, to Friedrich Schiller’s academic inaugural lecture at the University of Jena in 1789, which had called for an understanding of history as a German national endeavor:

> Jewish history, where does it begin? … It starts back then with the fathers of the Jews, the patriarchs. But, how far does it run? Not until today! There is no Jewish history. There has been no Jewish history for a long time. Jewish history does not go down further than the fall of Bethar.\(^\text{15}\)

Under the enormous pressure of the emancipation debates, Jewish thinkers tried to downplay this issue, ignoring its questions and avoiding the edges that were felt. At first, religious histories were written that defined the typical approach of Jewish history as a


\(^{15}\) Moritz Lazarus, Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man jüdische Geschichte und Literatur? (Leipzig: Kauffmann, 1900), 9; and see 12: “This, therefore, had been Jewish history so far, i.e., the history of a people that, simultaneously, constituted a state and led an independent life. This has disappeared. We all do not witness Jewish history any more. We are witnessing Prussian history, German history, or French history; we are members and parts of these nations.”
transterritorial “national” history in the guise of a history of ideas. But although the integration of the powerful general national approach to the own past created such serious problems, none of the Jewish historians gave in to them. All histories written before the second half of the nineteenth century were Jewish world histories that focused on the story of one people. Neither did they question that there were elements in Jewish history that made Jews a people or constituted a religious and—for the most part—even social autonomy; nor did they challenge the idea that, through all the differing developments and changes caused by contact with various other nations, the experiences of Jews from all over the world certainly formed one united past. In this fundamental sense, the aspect of integration—to reduce the Jews’ own history to the histories of other nations—had almost no impact.16

Since the stereotypical national character of this model was so obvious, it had to remain a hidden discourse, and, as it is often the case, practicing it was something quite different from labeling it. Jewish history as an account of literature, thinkers, and ideas created a unified and relevant history. These aspects had to stand in for the missing “proper” national structures, and, according to Graetz, they easily made up for them. The well-known outcry against Graetz’s History of the Jews and its, from a German nationalist point of view, inappropriate Jewish nationalist account that seemed to provide yet another proof of Jewish separatism, illustrates the enormous pressure Jewish historians experienced when thinking about how to write about the Jewish past.17 Nevertheless, as a crucial part of defining their own culture, they managed to do this in an independent way, despite the apologetic character of their attitude towards certain aspects of Jewish history and its quite obvious national implications. It is this complex interaction between both aspects, namely an identity discourse that still had to serve integration, which formed

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16 It has already been shown elsewhere, how this secularized self-perception was accommodated by different authors to the necessities of the integrated idealist concept of history; see Gotzmann, Eigenheit und Einheit, 114–184.

17 Heinrich Graetz’s defense of his specific approach against Heinrich Treitschke’s attacks shows how precarious such considerations were. See Jeffrey Andrew Barash, “German Historiography, 19th Century German National Identity and the Jews,” in L’antisémitisme éclairé: Inclusion et exclusion depuis l’Époque des Lumières jusqu’à l’affaire Dreyfus, ed. Ilana Y. Zinguer and Sam W. Bloom, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 351–367.
the specific discreet national concept of history, that defines the independent field of Jewish historiography.

On another level, this concept displayed two different, contrasting sides—one directed toward the inner Jewish realm, the other opening up to the world outside. It should be emphasized that most of the histories written at that time were above all composed for a Jewish readership. Almost none of the books and articles actually reached non-Jewish readers, even if they intended to. The predominant minor form of the historical tale, the textbook, was aimed almost exclusively at a Jewish audience. Christian readers were only taken into consideration with regard to governmental censorship, and perhaps the interest of a few learned non-Jews. But, of course, the scientific work of scholars nevertheless called, by its very nature, for a general audience, even if it did not address it and hardly met it. That history was the new concept by which identity was shaped, is already obvious from the astonishing amount of historical tales and novels printed during the nineteenth century in Jewish journals and newspapers, often to be reprinted as books. And for the rapidly growing part of Jewish society that identified itself with middle-class values, memoirs—the “small” form of historiography—became an important way of self-representation in the private sphere. Although unprofessional historians in the strict sense, men and women now channeled their experiences and the lives of their families into given idealist structures in order to become part of the accepted cultural model of history. This vast literary output, together with the growing historical culture in Jewish and general society, shows to what extent history—as the new mode of cultural legitimation—had permeated all aspects of life and self-perception.

While self-definition through the medium of Jewish history formed the core of this complex endeavor, the emerging discourse had to be opened toward the outside world. This methodological openness that allowed the integration of a Jewish reading of the Jews’ own past into what was seen as general objective historical truth actually led to a blossoming of scholarly research. It certainly

exposed Jewish historiography to criticism, but this was the price that had to be paid if the calls for social integration, expressed by Jews as well as by non-Jews, were to be taken seriously. By writing a history of Jewish achievements, inscribing brilliant Jewish thinkers as well as the religious tradition into the now dominant concept of an evolutionist history of human civilization, Jewish scholars emphasized Judaism’s important role for world history; this happened at a time when “irrelevant” traditions were once more shunned by this European master discourse. The attempt to compensate for Judaism’s missing national characteristics by presenting an erudite history of ideas that emphasized the outstanding ethical and scientific achievements of Judaism for all of humankind produced the typical form and logic that minority histories display until today. Nothing is more likely to illustrate this than the fact that, from the 1860s on, the enormous growth of local historical societies found its parallel in the foundation of numerous Jewish counterparts. The lectures that were given and the journals that were launched were mainly concerned with the history of Jewish luminaries and their achievements. The need to fight for social recognition as well as legal equality, however, tied the Jews’ own history strongly to the general narrative defined by others. It was not only necessary to follow the given structures; the very logic of national history had to be integrated. The inner tension between the wish for integration and the strong intention to define an independent Jewish narrative naturally forced the authors into constant apologetic arguments. But in contrast to the well-known reproaches expressed by later generations of Jewish historians, according to whom such strategies amounted to assimilation, a closer look shows that integration was

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20 As is well known, many histories have since then been written about other “classic” outsiders such as women, Blacks, Gypsies and gay people, which are comparable in structure.

21 See Jacob Borut, “Vereine für Jüdische Geschichte und Literatur at the End of the 19th Century,” *LBIJ* 41 (1996), 89–114; he identifies still another separate category, namely that of “consolidation of identity.”
only part of the deal: the true agenda had always been to shape Jewish identity.

Another aspect is likely to corroborate the observation that Jewish historians did not simply surrender to the above-mentioned dynamics and strictures. The Jewish character of the history they intended to represent was (and partially is, even today) also defined by the crucial necessity to develop a counterdiscourse against the usually negative judgments on Judaism in the works of Christian historians.\(^{22}\) From the perspective of postcolonial theory, Jews used history as a means to oppose the widespread “colonial” discourse that depicted Jewish tradition from the outside, denigrating it and excluding it from the ranks of valuable and leading cultures. By publicly rejecting this discourse and advancing a counterhistory, Jewish historians and theologians did more than just write their own, “true” history of the Jews that, from their point of view, would necessarily convince their non-Jewish opponents because it was legitimized by the same methods that they themselves used to secure objectivity;\(^{23}\) beyond such apologetic effects, their new strategy of legitimization served the aim of Jewish self-empowerment. Instead of just demanding a place for Judaism inside the universal history of civilized nations, they even re-established, albeit in a secular way, the religious claim according to which Judaism represented more than just an important part of human civilization: after the changes initiated by the Enlightenment that had delegitimized the biblical story of cultural heritage (i.e., that of creation, Israel’s election, and Israel’s divine mission), Jewish tradition once again became its center. Thinkers like Ludwig Philippson did not only refer to the notion that Judaism was the mother of all monotheistic religions and thereby all civilized nations;\(^{24}\) instead, this primarily religious concept was transcended by adding elements of the Jewish past (like the aspects of persecution and survival) that were considered to serve as a kind of yardstick for the cultural advancement of all nations, thus lending history a messianic aspect, with Judaism guaranteeing humankind’s future.


\(^{24}\) Andreas Gotzmann, “Brillianz des Mittelmasses” (forthcoming, see note 19).
A lot has been said about the apologetic and assimilationist character of modern Jewish historiography.\textsuperscript{25} During the heated political debates about the Jews’ integration into “other” nations or about the predominance of one’s religious tradition, not many of the apologetic undercurrents were noticeable. As long as the newly defined model of Jewish history had yet to be established, the national discourse remained hidden. But even then, Jewish authors sometimes were quite blunt when it came to unavoidable confrontations.\textsuperscript{26} Many pointed out that their Christian counterparts’ narrow nationalist approaches and the rejection of Jewish emancipation showed just how far they—and their cultural-religious tradition—still were behind Judaism’s historical achievements. Even the bourgeois concept of humanism, which paralleled the idea that scientific history would serve as a unifying element, was counteracted by emphasizing that Judaism was the only safeguard of this common ethical heritage for humankind. Considering the precarious social situation of German Jewry and the legal restrictions it was exposed to, this was quite an admirable thing to do.

\textsuperscript{25} See, e.g., Jonathan Frankel, “Assimilation and Ethnicity in 19th Century Europe: Towards a New Historiography,” in Assimilation and Community: The Jews in 19th Century Europe, ed. Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1–37; and see Maria Dold, “Eine Frage der nationalen und staatsbürgerlichen Ehre. Majer Balaban und die jüdische Wissenschaft in Warschau,” in Jüdische Kultur(en) im Neuen Europa—Wilna 1918–1939, ed. Marina Dmitrieva and Heidemarie Petersen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2004), 196–197, for an example from a Polish perspective that characterized the German approach as assimilationist because it reduced the historical task to archiving a dead culture, whereas the approach of the Warsaw “Institute for Judaic Studies” used history to create a Jewish future. In Dold’s words: “He [Majer Balaban] aimed at bringing scholarship and identity together.” The German-Jewish scholars, however, attempted quite the same thing. See, e.g., Ismar Elbogen’s judgment, according to which the Wissenschaft des Judentums was to lose its “raison d’être if it is not attached to living Judaism” (quoted from his essay, “100 Jahre Wissenschaft des Judentums,” as cited in Michael Brenner, “An Unknown Project of a World Jewish history in Weimar Republic. Reflections on Jewish Historiography in the 1920s,” Modern Judaism 13 (1993), 249–267, here 256; and see Myers, “Fall and Rise of Jewish Historicism,” 143, who states that the Akademie also aimed at a “holistic view of the Jewish past.”

\textsuperscript{26} See, e.g., Ludwig Philippson’s reaction to Bruno Bauer, Die Judenfrage (Brunswick: Otto, 1843); for an interpretation, see Gotzmann, “Brillanz des Mittelmaßes” (forthcoming); idem, Eigenheit und Einheit, 212–243; and see Samuel Hirsch, Das Judenthum, der christliche Staat und die moderne Kritik: Briefe zur Judenfrage von Bruno Bauer (Leipzig: Heinrich Hunger, 1843); and Samuel Holdheim, Stahl’s christliche Toleranz (Berlin: J. Abelsdorff, 1856).
Nevertheless, the conflicts and inner tensions this discreet national history created should not be underestimated. They forced Jewish historians to define their historical representations as Jewish ones, written by Jews for Jews. At the same time, it had to remain open for the outside world. And it was not territory that defined the national historiographical concept. For this liberal idea of nationality, activeness was equally important, i.e., the ability to shape one’s own fate by leading wars and by government action through royalty or outstanding statesmen. These factors were, of course, also considered to be missing in Jewish history, at least since the destruction of the Second Temple. The first two generations of Jewish historians had already replaced the concept of activeness by the idea of cultural autonomy and excellence, i.e., qualities representing quasi-national structures that constituted a smaller world within the “given” national patterns. Religion as the older signifier for Judaism rapidly lost its central importance. Jewish philosophy, for instance, which had, so far, been clearly less significant than the rabbinic legal tradition, was now particularly emphasized in order to accentuate the active encounter with the outside world.

Paradoxically, the history of the persecutions and hardships of the Jewish people also played an important role in the understanding of their own past. Remembering this historical experience was accompanied by very negative judgments on the rabbinic tradition and the Jews’ political and social status in Europe, especially during the immediate past, a time darkened by persecutions and social exclusion. While such critical estimations served to promote the political cause by illustrating the negative circumstances that promised to be overcome by internal reforms as well as external acknowledgement, there were also some aspects, like the Sephardic experience or the

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27 See, e.g., Heidemarie Petersen, “Mir zen far zikh die geshikhte nit fun a historisher mumie. Die historische Sektion des YIVO und die jüdische Geschichtsschreibung im Polen der Zwischenkriegszeit,” in Dmitrieva and Petersen, eds., Jüdische Kultur(en) im neuen Europa, 163–179, here 169; the differences between older models like Graetz’s and Dubnow’s concerning autonomy were rather the marking of it as at first social and cultural and only later also as political independence of the Jewish population.

Jewish family, that were suited to become paradigms of lasting national excellence and of Judaism’s positive potential to contribute to the idea of activeness. The description of a supposedly harmonious Jewish family life or the idea of a multi-cultural society corresponded to the middle-class values of the nineteenth century and projected a liberal, emancipating socio-political program into the past. The political agenda of Jewish historiography, i.e., the fight for legal and social acknowledgement, required such paradoxical deviations from the general concept and made it again a specific Jewish enterprise.

Telling the story as a sequence of persecutions, however, was seen as counterproductive even by the historians themselves, since such a historical image would hardly have met the ideal of an active national history; on the contrary, it would have depicted the Jews as a victimized, powerless, and marginal group that was subject to external rule instead of defining its own lot. In order to match the underlying historiographical concept, the predominant “negative” aspect of the Jewish past had, therefore, to be transformed into a “positive” one. One effective way to do this was to interpret the sufferings as a crucial part of an evolutionary cultural history of all humankind. Historians could even argue that, apart from the few accounts of harmonious interaction between Jews and non-Jews, e.g., in the “golden” Spanish era, the history of the persecutions actually presented the best opportunity for reflecting upon Jewish integration into the surrounding world: it constantly reminded the reader of the precarious situation of a minority in a hostile surrounding, thus pointing to the oppressor’s responsibility for what Christian authors continued to criticize with respect to contemporary Jewish life and culture. As Jacques Ehrenfreund has rightly pointed out, this became a central point of reference for Jewish historians toward the end of the nineteenth century. The deep influence of this kind


of national historical thinking can be seen in the fact that, even today, historians are concerned about this problematic approach: how would it be possible to establish a positive identity through history by referring to nothing else than ongoing suffering? This concern to avoid a “lachrymose” history can itself only be understood against the background of the general concept of national history.

From the late 1850s, the mentioned structures began to shift, giving way to a variety of new approaches. From now on, territory (at the beginning as a German, later as a Jewish or German-Jewish one) became more significant. A comparative look at the development of Jewish historiography in France demonstrates that there, this restriction of Jewish history to a national territory was much more advanced and apparently less problematic than in the German states.31 The reason for that might be the well-established national state in France and the less belligerent emancipation debate there. While in Germany Jews were incessantly urged to assimilate, French Judaism, despite the notorious restrictions on civil rights introduced by Napoleon, could feel more secure about their legal position. In England, this restriction of Jewish history to English national history came only late.32 But again, it was less debated than it had been in Germany.33

Here, the development first shows the phenomenon of a feeble Orthodox countermovement against the largely reform-oriented historical images, resulting in an explicit negation of the immediate German-Jewish past. The large amount of regional, very much community-centered historical accounts was designed to preserve the specific communal tradition and the rich religious life of the old

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33 For the situation in Poland see “‘Eine Frage der nationalen und staatsbürgerlichen Ehre,’” passim; Meir Balaban tried to establish his vision of a Jewish national history as a part of Poland’s national history, referring, like the older Polish history, to an imagined Jewish territory.
communities and rabbinites that had been so strongly devalued.\textsuperscript{34} The aspect of continuity was emphasized in order to prove that Orthodoxy was the only legitimate heir of the Jewish tradition. At the same time, in view of the growing interest in society at large in the history of the nation itself, Jewish historiography was also remodeled according to the primary category of territory. Now, Jewish historians were able to strengthen the integrative aspect of the Jewish model by showing that Jews had always been a part of the history of the “relevant” nations. However, the discreet discourse of a Jewish national history was still upheld. From the communal histories down to the overall project of the \textit{Gesamtarchiv der deutschen Juden}, led by Eugen Täubler, all the approaches worked on the basis of a common understanding of Jewish history that retained the structure defined by the liberal historical concept.\textsuperscript{35}

The new orientation toward Autonomist or territorial concepts as defined by Simon Dubnow, or by Zionist historians like Yitzhak Fritz Baer and their Anglo-American colleagues Salo W. Baron and Cecil Roth, was facilitated by a lessening of the pressure that the emancipation debate had exerted on Jewish authors; it was now much easier for them to express their self-understanding in another, much more immediate way.\textsuperscript{36} At the same time professionalization

\textsuperscript{34} A very good example might be the growing interest in the local history of old Jewish communities like Worms; see Nils Roemer, “Provincializing the Past: Worms and the Making of a German-Jewish Cultural Heritage,” \textit{JSQ} 12 (2005), 80–100. A good example for such Orthodox retelling of local history is provided by Leopold Donath, \textit{Geschichte der Juden in Mecklenburg: Von den ältesten Zeiten (1266) bis auf die Gegenwart (1874). Auch ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte Mecklenburgs} (Leipzig: Leiner, 1874; repr., Vaduz: Sändig, 1974); and Herz Bamberger, \textit{Geschichte der Rabbiner der Stadt und des Bezirkes Würzburg. Erweitert durch Simon Bamberger} (Wandsbek: n.p., 1905).

\textsuperscript{35} The contrasting aspects can be clearly seen in Täubler’s description of the archive’s work: “The Gesamtarchiv is, however, to the same extent designed to serve another purpose: to demonstrate the link that exists between the Jewish tribal element [\textit{Stammeselement}] within the German national body and the latter, and to point out the strong affinity between the German-Jewish and the general German development.”

\textsuperscript{36} Michael Brenner, “Secular Faith of Fallen Jews: Rewriting Jewish history Without Tears,” \textit{Simon-Dubnow-Institute Yearbook} 3 (2004), 315–324. See the contrasting nationalist approaches; Dubnow took a position somewhere in between the antinational Jewish history written by most of his German colleagues and the Zionist territorial approach focusing on the Jewish state; the latter represented, for Dubnow, “an unnecessary decline to earlier stages of nationhood” (ibid., 317). This last part of Dubnow’s assessment of the Jewish model is in line with the perception of German Christian-nationalist concepts, like those suggested by Friedrich Julius Stahl or Bruno Bauer, by nineteenth-century Jewish thinkers who had contrasted the narrow national
In Jewish history had grown enormously. Not that an academic career had become easier to achieve for Jewish historians: even in Germany, only a very few positions existed. The research continued to be excluded from the universities and restricted to specifically Jewish institutions sponsored by Jewish donors. Still, the academic training of the growing number of authors in this almost entirely nonprofessional league of scholars was, as Christhard Hoffmann has pointed out, amazingly high.37

In the Weimar Republic, where projects like the Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums and the Germania Judaica were trying to continue the earlier project of the Monumenta Germaniae Historica, demonstrating the Jews' participation in the history of the German nation, Jewish historians produced an unprecedented abundance of scholarly work.38 Usually, it focused on medieval times, which was considered the mythical founding period of European nations. The aspect of a unified Jewish national history was yet self-evident and still had to remain a kind of discreet agenda. In Eugen Täubler’s words, this attempt to inscribe the Jewish past into the history of the German nation was not perceived as negating the idea of a separate Jewish history that united all Jewish cultures, regardless of their affiliations to other nations. Those actually remained “secondary,” even if this could not be expressed in such terms:

There are just two spheres of action, which overlap in the history of the Jews in Germany: one is the overall Jewish history, the other the overall history of the German people.39

Jewish historiography was nevertheless profiting from the general shift toward an open, quite belligerent nationalism. Its representa-

approach with an open religious-ethnic Jewish “tribal community” [Stammsgemeinschaft].


39 Eugen Täubler, “Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Gesamtarchivs der deutschen Juden,” MGDJ 3 (1911/12), 55–84; here 63–75.
atives felt free now to counteract the restrictions resulting from the integration of the concept of national history as a model for Jewish historical identity. Henceforth, they discovered in the Jewish past the classical structures of national history, like social structures and Jewish communal and even state-wide governments, i.e., all the aspects that directly supported the idea of activeness, or the notion of Jewish cultural and social autonomy as a transnational nation.  

However, while the Zionist and partly even the Autonomist models were liberated from some of the restrictions necessitated by a discreet national discourse, the historians still had to cope with the lack of general acceptance their histories enjoyed in the outside world, both in political and scholarly respects. With regard to the second aspect, the Zionist School of Jerusalem as well as the historiography of scholars affiliated with the YIVO certainly remained oriented toward an integrative approach in their use of methodology and in their claim to write a Jewish history within the context of world history. By depicting themselves as a part of the imagined community of scholars, they were able to demand respect for themselves, their scholarly work, and the Jewish past they were describing. In this sense, they even wrote minority history as a history that had to be accepted by the wider academic community. The important aspect, however, is that Jewish history, while continuing to be an enterprise aimed primarily at a Jewish and only later at a non-Jewish readership, increasingly accentuated the “Jewish” features of its object.

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40 See Dold, “‘Eine Frage der nationalen und staatsbürgerlichen Ehre,’” 185–187 for Ludwik Gumplowicz’ and Majer Balaban’s discovery of the kahal as the central organ of a Jewish cultural autonomy, which influenced the work of the “Institute for Judaic Studies” in Warsaw.

41 For Zionist historiography see David Myers, Re-Inventing the Jewish Past. European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

42 Petersen, “Mir zen far zikh die geshikhte nit fun a historisher mumie,” 163–179.

43 Petersen, ibid., 167–168, argues that “from its very beginning, YIVO’s discursive frame of reference was not the non-Jewish academia, but (ideally) the Jewish society and (in reality) its intelligentsia. The impulse resulting in the foundation of YIVO was not primarily a scholarly one; instead, it aimed at a cultural East European-Jewish nation-building by means of popular education. It did explicitly distance itself from the intentions of the German Wissenschaft des Judentums that had, early on, taken great pains to become part of the general academic realm.” This certainly corresponds to the above-mentioned trend, e.g., in Germany, embodied by Franz Rosenzweig, to concentrate primarily on adult education; nevertheless, all these reorientations typical
The Eastern European historians of the YIVO wanted, above all, to teach the Jewish masses, a development very much reminiscent to Franz Rosenzweig’s concept of the Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus and the above-mentioned Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums.

Writing history in order to provide a basis for Jewish identity remained the prominent goal, even as Jewish life was shaped by the increasing experience of acculturation and integration, a process that should have promoted open historiographical concepts. However, this openness was actually limited to an interpretation insisting on a long historical interaction between Jews and Germans as well as on the Jews’ extraordinary contributions to non-Jewish society. This type of “integrated” historiography did not, in the end, transcend the described approach, since it basically remained essentialist in its core.

With the Nazi persecution and the Holocaust, this specific German-Jewish approach to a history that would also spell out integration became illegitimate. In view of their total exclusion from academia, as their publications were first restricted to a Jewish readership and later entirely forbidden, many Jewish historians felt that the purpose of their writings had been negated by the radical change of politics toward a violent anti-Semitism. At the same time, Nazi scholars like Wilhelm Grau took the initiative, telling their Jewish colleagues that their historical perspective of a self-defined Jewish past was now to be replaced by an anti-Semitic history of Judaism. While academia, at least on the upper level of university studies, actually never had accepted Jews and Jewish history as an equal or at least as a relevant part of its world, this renewed—and much more radical—rejection went beyond such discrimination, directly legitimating exile and murder.

for this time continued to aspire, by their scholarly and methodological approach, to be part of academia instead of simply producing another inner-Jewish way to reflect on the Jews’ own tradition; see Christhard Hoffmann, “Jüdische Geschichtswissenschaft,” 32–55; Michael Brenner, The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

44 See Michael Brenner’s article in this volume.

45 As Christhard Hoffmann has recently shown in reference to the example of Siegfried Kracauer; Christhard Hoffmann, “Von Heinrich Heine zu Isidor Kracauer. Das Frankfurter Ghetto in der deutsch-jüdischen Geschichtskultur und Historiographie des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts,” in Die Frankfurter Judengasse: Jüdisches Leben in der Frühen Neuzeit, ed. Fritz Backhaus et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Societäts-Verlag, 2005), 30–47.
With the delegitimization of integration-oriented narratives and the transfer of Jewish scholarship to the United States and to Israel, the concept of a national, albeit integrated Jewish history seemed to be completely obsolete. While in the State of Israel, writing Jewish history was based on a general Zionist interpretation of the past, there certainly were obvious splits between an overtly ideological historiography and less blunt approaches. At the same time, Cecil Roth and Salo W. Baron were defining what became known as the “integrative concept,” arguing that Jewish history cannot be written without considering the surrounding societies. But again, as could be best shown by reference to Baron’s masterpiece, his multi-volume history of the Jews, this approach was not at all likely to question the idea of a unified history of the Jews or to overcome the (reinterpreted) liberal concept. Cultural autonomy, including its specific social structures, became a major characteristic for these works too.\footnote{Roth, perhaps even more than Baron, argued in favor of the aspect of integration, interrelation, and sometimes even of a history that would be a reminder of a supposedly harmonious life in medieval Spain, an idea that had been rejected by Baer already in the first third of the twentieth century.}

All the Autonomist or Zionist approaches, with the integrationist models showing some specific developments, changed the discreet discourse into an overtly national history of the Jews.\footnote{How related both interpretations are can be seen in the fact that even the Zionist historians inherited first the task of “re-introducing” Judaism into history as well as the problem of the “bi-national” character of Jewish history, resulting from its twofold connection to the experience of the Jewish people and the national history of the host nations. See Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Geschichte, Nationalismus, Eingedenken,” in \textit{Jüdische Geschichtsschreibung heute: Themen, Positionen, Kontroversen}, ed. Michael Brenner and David N. Myers (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002), 181–206; and Dan Diner, “Historische Anthropologie nationaler Geschichtsschreibung,” in ibid., 207–216.} There was, however, one single important factor that set them apart from the basic conceptual structure already defined by the older model: while a discreet national discourse had, over and over again, forced the predecessors into contradictions that even weakened the structures determining the outlook and the intention of their work, the openly nationalist historians—and all the generations after them—did not have to play this game any more. Since they were openly “national” in their historical approach, describing a “closed,” and in its decisive parts culturally and socially independent, Jewish history, they were not forced any more to advance apologetic models of
interpretation. Liberated from the dilemma of how to integrate the liberal national concept without being able to openly embrace it, Jewish historians were now able to fulfil all the requirements of national history. Henceforth, the picture showed a clearly defined united people whose history was necessarily bound together by a common past and cultural heritage that consisted in much more than just religion, ideas, or persecutions.

While part of the Zionist school even made territory the central aspect, many Zionist historians continued to perceive the geographic center as a rather problematic aspect because it could not compensate for all the missing organizational structures required by the national approach. As already mentioned, a much more typical characteristic of these new approaches was the attention devoted to the aspect of an active historical role of a distinct community that was neither simply subservient to the dictate of others nor just a passive victim inside the history of the non-Jewish world. Here again, the topic was not at all new. However, while this aspect of activeness had been replaced by a history of ideas, the turn toward an open nationalist history took social life to be its paradigm, as did other national narratives. This was possible because opinions on the significance of historical sources changed toward the end of the nineteenth century: using legal decisions and communal archives, for instance, including the information they provided about organizational structures, historians were able to accentuate the notion of independence and activeness. This trend was strengthened by the turn toward Jewish nationalism, on the one hand, and by socialism on the other; this becomes especially clear in the research done by members of YIVO who were influenced by Bundism and Zionism. But again, this change referred primarily to the contents of historical writing, leaving the traditional structure unaffected, and the respective historians did hardly anything else than spell out

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48 This is one reason why those Zionist approaches that were most stringent in this respect would even shift well-established definitions of eras according to their perception of Palestine-oriented politics and immigration in the Jewish past, long before one could speak of Zionism in any proper sense.

49 E.g., Dubnow, and in his wake the approaches of members of the YIVO, according to whom the Jews were “active subjects of history rather than objects passively enduring it”; see Petersen, “Mir zen far zikh die geshikhute nit fun a historisher mumie,” 170.

50 Ibid., 172–176.
what had already been felt. The idea of producing an independent history from a Jewish point of view, written primarily for Jews as a model for cultural identification, had already been defined by the earlier approach. With the shift toward an open nationalist historical discourse, the older outlook characteristic for the emancipation era and its direct heir, the integrationist approach of scholars like Täubler and Elbogen—now called “assimilationist”—lost its relevance, making minor differences look like real conceptual changes.

Thinking about the ways in which Jewish history was written is a rather new topic within the field. In just the last few years quite an abundance of literature has been published, attempting to compensate for this obvious disregard. In comparison to other fields, Jewish studies is, once more, rather late in recognizing the important role of such self-reflection. In comparison to literature or cultural anthropology, history in general has shown a rather belated and reluctant interest in such an endeavor, mainly because it still defines itself in contrast to the past. After Yosef Haim Yerushalmi’s (even for its time astonishingly positivist, yet very influential) first approach to this topic in the late 1980s and Amos Funkenstein’s critique, hardly any further research on these questions followed. This changed with the rise of the so-called New Historians in Israel and their call for a post-Zionist historiography. This specifically Israeli debate seems to be based on a general mistrust of an overt, unhindered national ideology. After the rise of religious nationalism in Israel, the approach of the Jerusalem School had increasingly become questionable to liberal thinkers. But as meritorious as the discovery of the role that historians played in Israeli politics is, this critique of ideology neither created anything like a non-Zionist approach (as the term post-Zionist might evoke) nor was it strongly influenced by cultural studies, as its opponents have argued, in an attempt to disqualify its achievements. The debate strengthened the connexion

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between new approaches and the critique of political ideologies, constantly neglecting the basic fact that any writing of history is defined by political outlooks and intentions. Likewise, attempts to define new approaches remained almost exclusively restricted to the question of which areas and aspects should be accentuated or whether traditional periodizations should be reassessed.

After all that has been said, the field of Jewish history does not seem to be much different from any other historical school of national history. The only obvious discrepancy lies in its character as a discourse that is rather unacknowledged by academia and therefore powerless. From its very beginnings, rejection and disregard had, in many ways, limited Jewish history to a Jewish frame of reference. As said, this did not produce only negative effects; after all, it enabled modern historiography to become the outstanding cultural discourse of Judaism in the last two hundred years. But in contrast to “minority studies” like cultural anthropology, Islamic Studies, or Indian studies coming from a European colonialist tradition, Jewish studies have a very different history. The process of redefinition and criticism that shook other fields in the wake of the breakdown of colonialism left Jewish studies almost entirely untouched. Though all fought for proper representation and acknowledgement, the persistent need to defend the field and its inward perspective against other master narratives remained characteristic. Furthermore, the counterdiscourse could not be detached from the structures once integrated: since writing Jewish history found its legitimization in being part of the overall program and method of modern history, it was difficult to deliberately produce a distinct historical concept.52 While the authors unintentionally wrote a quite specific kind of history that served as a cultural discourse for a separate community, making the field of Jewish history a special one simply by its very structure, its outside appearance could not easily be altered. It was possible to redefine Jewish identity, turning religious into political agendas, and to do so even by neglecting its integrative openness. The means, however, to secure scholarly objectivity as well as the outward appearance had

52 As shown, e.g., by the constant efforts to reintroduce new methodology into Jewish history; see Myers, “The Fall and Rise of Jewish Historicism,” 132. This is certainly also true for Jacob Katz’s introduction of a social-historical approach, which created something quite specific—compared, for instance, to the social histories produced at the same time in Germany or in the United States.
to remain untouched, lest the project and the claim to represent a relevant part of human history be endangered.

This dilemma can be illustrated by the continuing struggle for academic positions and the proper acknowledgement of the field within German as well as British, French, and American universities. The constant conflicts are due to the idea of the existence of one central scientific truth, as can be seen in the old and still ongoing debate between Christian theology and Jewish studies. Especially outside of the state of Israel, factors like identity politics and the sponsoring system at American colleges and universities have allowed the field to grow immensely in the last decades. Unfortunately, they primarily required identity-oriented ethnic studies rather than independent research, thereby strengthening again the general characteristic of a minority discourse. This factor, together with the closed nationalist perception of history that mistrusts any theoretical approach questioning its basic convictions, further stabilized this situation.

As a consequence, Jewish history remains closely tied to Jewish identity, regardless of its quest for integration. The discreet and then open national historical discourse formed a closed cultural system of meaning that is constantly forced back into essentialist discourses by its specific heritage and politics. This dynamic is so strong that, through all the ideological shifts during the last two hundred years, most of the central topoi remained the same as long as they bore significance for the historical narrative, even when their evaluation sometimes changed substantially.33 Jewish history in Spain before 1492 had first served as a promise of harmonious coexistence with Christians and Muslims. Later, the Zionist historian Yitzhak Baer turned to an extremely contrasting interpretation, insisting that

Spanish Jewry had submitted itself too easily to the claims of the surrounding societies. The same discussion concerning the possibilities and limits of coexistence has recently been repeated with respect to the Italian Sephardic communities. And if we look at Northern Europe, the powerful discourse of Jewish history, the question of assimilation, can be found everywhere. It is repeated over and over again as an essentialist discourse that seems to hold our reading of the sources forever in a vicelike grip, allowing our judgment only to turn this or that way, always in conformity with what defines Judaism and Jewishness. The paradigm of social and intellectual exchange and integration as a “positive” or as a “negative” loss of Jewishness shows the very incompatibility of historical essentialism and a postmodern concept of culture.

In contrast to the convictions of historicism, there is no value-free history, “untinged” by contemporary judgments and interests; scholarly work actually is inspired and shaped by politicized interest. From a conceptual perspective, therefore, attempts like the meritorious work of Yitzhak Conforti, who tries to protect Zionist historiography against such criticism as voiced by David Myers, will not further our understanding. Conforti convincingly argues that there were different strands inherent in the artificial entity of the Jerusalem School, while even in the work of one single scholar, development and different perspectives can be found. But the concept of history behind his analyses remains a closed one; it could be called a positivist concept that denies self-reflection while reflectivity is its very agenda:

54 See, e.g., Michael Brenner, “Secular Faith of Fallen Jews: Rewriting Jewish history Without Tears,” 321–324, who draws a direct line from Baron and Roth to the discussions between David Ruderman and Robert Bonfil; see Myers, “Fall and Rise of Jewish Historicism,” 141.

55 See Steven Aschheim’s reconsideration of the question of pre-Holocaust assimilation: Steven E. Aschheim, “German History and German Jewry: Boundaries, Junc-

Indeed, the Zionist historians viewed themselves as committed to the national project and aspired to contribute to its success, while at the same time, they acted as scientists obligated to follow methodological rules accepted in their time. … Historians with a strong nationalist bent worked alongside those with a more scientific inclination. Among educators, some displayed activist tendencies; in other words, they aspired to integrate Zionist components into educational programs, with the goal of leading to the active creation of the “new Jew” on the soil of the homeland. Others demonstrated pedagogical and scientific goals, with the intention of leaving the education process outside the world of politics and ideology, as far as possible. They did so in order to enable the instilling of true knowledge into the students as individuals.57

The author differentiates between scholars who aimed at pedagogy and the popularization of their work, furthering the Zionist cause to create a new national identity, while other Zionist scholars are seen as “true” scientists because they had not turned their work primarily into a political tool. The author’s logic remains limited to the constitutive idea of historicism according to which the historian is detached from the sources and even “almost” from their interpretation. His analysis, too, criticizes the overt ideological interpretation without being able to solve the problem he identified.

The assimilation discourse, one of the most central historical paradigms, shows similar dynamics. Integration certainly has been an important aspect both of German-Jewish society and the research devoted to it. Embitterment about the void promises of acknowledgement had grown with the nationalist, racist, and anti-Semitic attempts to remove the fruits of equality before they had actually been tasted. The subsequent turn toward an open Jewish nationalism, especially by scholars coming from an Eastern European tradition, as well as a somewhat rebellious perspective, especially among the Jewish youth in the Weimar Republic who considered their Jewish heritage a defective and devalued one, renewed older discussions that had once dominated the religious realm and made “assimilation” their battle cry, designed to defy all representatives of the Jewish establishment. After the Holocaust, this perspective became so overwhelmingly strong that integration was not only understood

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as a tragic demand for acknowledgement, but as a delusion that prevented the Jewish population in Germany from recognizing the dangers their “loss of Jewishness” would hold. In the most extreme version of this interpretation, the victims and survivors of the Holocaust were almost held responsible for their own fate and the crimes of Nazi Germany’s industrialized mass murder.

While assimilation has long since been used as a central paradigm that helped in discussing the development especially of German-Jewish culture, the discourse began to shift in the late 1980s under the influence of an article by Shulamit Volkov that replaced it with the term acculturation. Since then, many attempts have been made to clarify the differences between these two concepts as they are used in Jewish history, without, however, too much success. The terms are often employed without deliberate reflection, as most authors tend to use acculturation just to avoid the negative and derogatory implications the word assimilation has acquired. If there was a change in perspective, assimilation came to signify the complete or partial loss of specifically Jewish aspects in the context of integration, while acculturation meant the internal reshaping of Judaism in order to facilitate integration into the larger society. Despite this distinction, both terms are telling a story of cultural loss, comparable to the way simplistic concepts of secularization had depicted the retreat of religion, ignoring the complexity of the developments they described. Even the specific differences between both concepts—dissolution versus a self-defined change—were, interestingly enough, hardly recognized. A processual perspective that is aware of the necessarily permanent redefinitions of cultural norms and outlooks is still largely unknown in the field of Jewish history.

The reason is quite obvious: to acknowledge such a perspective would mean introducing a concept of culture which is fundamentally opposed to Jewish history as an identity discourse designed to define stable normative patterns and a secure vision of what to understand as “Jewish” in the future when “looking at the past.” Yet, cultural systems are anything but fixed entities. From the point of view of a nonessentialist concept of culture focusing on the dynamics that

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form the foundation of cultural discourses, the question of assimilation or acculturation becomes irrelevant. Once the focus turns from structure to meaning, to use a popular slogan of early cultural studies, the question cannot be which structure should be kept and which one could be changed, since there is no fixed point outside of the analytical process or, as historians would say, apart from its historical place that would define Judaism as a fixed entity. To accept the perspective of cultural studies, i.e., defining culture as multilayered discourses of meaning that are constantly remodeled according to self-defined structures, would mean questioning the idea of “history as identity” itself in so far as it contradicts essentialism.

The essentialist approach also retained its power because the historical discourse itself is actually sustained by it. One of the reasons why history, in contrast to cultural anthropology or literature, has such immense difficulties accepting the principles of cultural studies, lies in the self-perception of historians already created by historicism. As a reaction to the demands of cultural theory, historians were either strengthening the older tradition in order to secure objectivity, referring again to methodology, or reducing the call for new approaches to the question of new topics or different sources. As long as the focus of the critics of methodology or of the fundamental change of theories of perception is still seen from the old perspective, according to which our knowledge remains damaged by imperfect analysis and missing information, history still appears to be, as it were, a vast distant picture, blurred by time, lacking many if not most of its original colors and details. The realization that history exists merely in the form of specific narratives is foreign to such an approach. But the historical tale remains closely bound to its author in a permanent act of outside projection; as a consequence, history also takes part in the processes by which cultural systems are constantly remodeled. The closer history remains tied to identity (and the aspects of minority and counterdiscourse undoubtedly create much stronger tensions in Jewish history than in national histories that have remained unchallenged), the more this change in the concept of science will question the role of the historian himself and certainly the outcome of his research.59

59 Michael A. Meyer, “Streitfragen in der zeitgenössischen jüdischen Historiographie,” in Brenner and Myers, eds., *Jüdische Geschichtsschreibung heute*, 36–43, might show this inherent closeness. While calling for the normative aspect of history as an
The results are well known: with very few exceptions, almost no one even tried to describe cultural change in modern Judaism (neither in terms of religion nor with respect to social or economic development) without referring to the concept of assimilation. There are, however, some outstanding examples. Recently a volume by Simone Lässig appeared that illustrates this aspect in a most interesting way. I cite this book because it certainly is an excellent piece of scholarship. For its thesis and its meticulous analysis, it has even won the renowned prize of the German Historical Society. Lässig, unlike most authors, demands a new approach, criticizing the concept of assimilation and questioning the use of the term acculturation.

But while the book makes a very convincing argument from the perspective of a social historian for analyzing the development of a bourgeois Jewish society without referring to the simplistic concept of assimilation, the following chapters prove this to be nearly impossible because the contrast between modern versus traditional society and culture forms the core of the argument. Its polarizing dynamics are too strong to define other ways of how to describe the changes. All transformations are constantly set against an “unblemished” Jewish culture of the pre-emancipation period which again introduces essentialist identity-discourse, he even reinforces the idea of history as an “adequate” representation of actual positions of power. See ibid., 42: “At the same time, the percentage of world Jewry living in Israel is constantly rising; as a consequence, already the demographic facts will force any scholar who wants to write on contemporary Jewish history in general, to turn his attention increasingly to the Israeli Jews and to disentangle their Israeli-ness from their Jewishness .... Is there any point at which Israeli literature becomes Jewish literature, Israeli music Jewish music, and Israeli wars Jewish wars?”

60 Simone Lässig, *Jüdische Wege ins Bürgertum: Kulturelles Kapital und sozialer Aufstieg im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 15–21, 73, 87, 516–518, and many other places. Her argument is that what is called assimilation actually is a conscious process of “embourgeoisement”—still, the loss of “something Jewish” remains the guiding principle.

61 There are only a very few books within Jewish studies that attempt to find new possibilities for analyzing cultural change apart from such problematic concepts as assimilation; I would like to cite two studies of my own: Andreas Gotzmann, *Jüdisches Recht im kulturellen Prozeß: Die Wahrnehmung der Halacha im Deutschland des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1997); and idem, *Eigenheit und Einheit*, passim. With respect to other concepts, the work of David Biale and Susannah Heschel certainly has to be counted among such attempts. Recently, a book appeared that demonstrates a convincing culturalist approach to the early modern period in the wake of Homi Bhabha; see Monika Preuß, “... aber die Krone des guten Namens überragt sie”; *Jüdische Ehrvorstellungen im 18. Jahrhundert im Kraichgau* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005).
the antimo
ern view that modernity has deprived Judaism of the
aspects that defined it as Jewish. The analysis unwillingly supports
an ahistorical essentialist concept of Judaism, integrating the debate
on assimilation—at least the historical one.

The essentialist approach becomes even more evident when we
move into early modern times, an epoch when Jewish culture sup-
posedly formed an almost closed entity. Until today, most discus-
sions about the history of the Jews in this period have advanced
the perception of closed cultural units, an idea that is strengthened
by the historical sources that speak—at least on the surface—of
similar, clearly defined and separate categories. The debates about
the small group of court Jews still re-enacts the question of whether
they are forerunners of later assimilation. Even in legal history, the
question concerning the relation between Christian Jewry law and
Jewish law, or between external social structures and those defined
by Jewish communities, is hardly heard because attempts to testify
to an interaction or even interrelation between the differing spheres
seem to question the Jewish experience itself. Certainly, the Jewish
historical perspective was undoubtedly one of difference and of
dangerous hostility from the outside. But if we do not want to
fall back into nineteenth-century scholarship, the analysis has to
account for the strong interrelation between almost all sources of
Jewish history; even a one-sided perspective will always have to be
established from a bifocal discourse.

From the perspective of a culturalist approach, only a few other
general attempts to redefine Jewish history can be found. They take
two different directions. Let me start with the outstanding and widely
discussed proposal by Dan Diner, who claims that Jewish history is
the paradigmatic transnational history. While Diner identifies
Jewish history with the strong claim to define a European history
and assigns Jewish history the task of serving as a role model, the
perception of history as such remains untouched. From the perspective
of the concept of a preterritorial discreet national Jewish history,

62 Stephan Wendehorst, “Rechtspraxis und jüdische Lebenswelten im Alten Reich
oder, Jacob Katz auf der Eisscholle,” Bulletin des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts 5 (2003), 89–95;
and Andreas Gotzmann, “At Home in Many Worlds? Thoughts about New Concepts
63 Dan Diner, Gedächtniszeiten: Über jüdische und andere Geschichten (Munich: C. H.
Beck, 2003), especially 246–262.
this new approach would not transcend national history, but only expand its borders. Reconsidering the restrictions and double binds characteristic of this concept, it seems questionable whether such a reorientation does, indeed, lead to a different Jewish history. Yet, it would certainly be furnished with special authority by strengthening its old characteristic ability of forming an “open” identity discourse. It would recover this specific aspect of the discreet concept, an approach that might be promising since it counters the inner dynamic driven by this discourse of self-reflection. Only the later, open national discourse had covered up this specific aspect in its attempt to write typical late-nineteenth-century style “closed” national histories. A project comparable to Diner’s, Susannah Heschel’s appraisal of the specific qualities of counterhistory that defined the field as a Jewish field, points to a similar direction and could also introduce positive changes.  

The second approach aims at a different concept of history itself. In an excellent essay, Klaus Hödl argues that not only new impulses but a fundamentally new understanding of Jewish culture could be achieved if one would focus, e.g., on the hybrid aspects of Judaism as well as the dynamic character of crosscultural interrelation, i.e., a third space, as it were. To give just one example: we know quite well that even the definition of who is Jewish is neither simply a normative act nor just related to the Jewish side alone. On the contrary, it is always the outcome of complex negotiations of different concepts and perspectives even with the Christian side. Our understanding of what it meant to be Jewish at a certain time in a certain place would grow enormously if we would concentrate on the dynamic processes instead of following normative one-sided models. At the same time, we would gain a new understanding of the structures and dynamics that characterize Jewish cultures.

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The tiresome discussions and the recurring demands for an integrative perspective—meaning nothing else than weaving Jewish and non-Jewish sources into each other—would become obsolete.\textsuperscript{67}

Such a transition from a traditional view toward a cultural approach referring to dynamic processes or—in sociological terms—to communication can easily be detected by analyzing the attitude toward the central aspects of perspectivity and relativity. While traditional approaches take them as deficiencies of research—a result of an insufficient or inadequate analysis, of limited sources, or of the fragmentary nature of historical “insight”—the culturalist approach understands perspectivity and, in its wake, relativity as the very source of the analysis. While all cultures certainly developed normative systems as resources for structural self-reflection (like the Halakhah in Judaism), modern scholarly research gained another quality. It defined itself as a detached logical entity that worked as an independent system of norms, based on the fictitious assumption that it was possible to create a perspective that allowed one to assess cultural processes from outside. Detaching the analytical procedure from its cultural frame and logic was the strategy by which objectivity and the claim for intercultural significance were secured. The cultural approach reconnects these two levels by integrating the dependence of any form of perception and analysis on its cultural environment. What semiotics calls a “third-grade observation” draws the line between the concepts that remain enclosed in its self-created systemic structures and dynamics—in our case, toward all the different national historical discourses in Judaism. They actually have to conceal such interrelations in order to be able to create identity and to achieve relevance, a fact that explains the obvious reluctance with regard to fundamental theoretical reflection in Jewish studies. As long as neither the history of the field nor the standpoint of the analysis becomes an integrated part of scholarly work, the essentialist discourses of Jewish history will continue to force us into the older model of “writing Jewish identity.”\textsuperscript{68}


\textsuperscript{68} Most interesting in this respect is David Myers and Michael Brenner’s recent edited volume on the status of Jewish history today, where the question of Jewish his-
of reflections on systemic dependencies into the analytical process will certainly put an end to the possibility of defining Jewish identity. While scientific work remains a part of the author’s identity and might even exert an influence on others, the need for constant reflection upon one’s own position will make it useless for normative cultural identification, which will not allow for any breaks of logic undermining its claims.\textsuperscript{69} But if reflectivity becomes the center

\textsuperscript{69} That produces a countercurrent to what was felt to induce a “break” from the close connection of identity and history that proved to be so relevant for all the older approaches. The supposed “danger” could come from what was called (e.g., by Eyvatar Friesel, among others) a “revisionist” perspective on German-Jewish history, telling German-Jewish history beyond a teleological logic pointing towards the Holocaust. See Eyvatar Friesel, “The German-Jewish Encounter as a Historical Problem: A Reconsideration,” \textit{LBIJH} \textbf{41} (1996), 263–275; idem, “Jewish and German-Jewish Historical Views: Problems of a New Synthesis,” \textit{LBIJH} \textbf{43} (1998), 323–336; especially 332–333, 335; and see Samuel Moyn, “German Jewry and the Question of Identity: Historiography and Theory,” \textit{LBIJH} \textbf{43} (1998), 291–320. It also explains reactions against what would have to be called the “normalization” of the field by including non-Jewish researchers—a sign pointing to the further integration of Jewish studies into general academia. See Oded Heilbronner, “Das (bürgerliche) deutsche Judentum im Spiegel der deutschen Fachwissenschaft. Ein Forschungsbereich zwischen In- und Exklusion,” \textit{Historische Zeitschrift} \textbf{278} (2004), 101–123, especially 105: “Nevertheless, it cannot deceive us about the fact that the engagement with German Jewry, including the establishment of institutions devoted to research on German Judaism, continues...
of models of writing history, we might gain some most interesting insights into the complex formations of cultural perceptions and processes. If we are not satisfied with being caught inside a rather stable essentialist discourse which allows merely some changes in content, without tolerating any substantial changes of structure, we have no choice but to proceed.  

70 A very interesting example for such dynamics is provided by the project at a Gesamtgeschichte at the International Leo Baeck Institute; see Christian Wiese, “A Master Narrative? The Gesamtgeschichte of German Jewry in Historical Context,” in Preserving the Legacy of German Jews, 315–348.
CHAPTER TWENTY

THE IMPACT OF FEMINIST THEORY
ON JEWISH STUDIES

SUSANNAH HESCHEL

Given that we possess no texts authored by Jewish women prior to
the early modern period, feminist scholarship evokes the specter of
writing history without a textual past and with an uncertain future.
While we know that Jewish women existed, we do not have texts that
they authored, and we can only surmise that their voices at times
may have been recorded by attribution to men. The absence of texts
known to have been written by women, preserving their points of
view, interpretations, and sense of identity, does not simply leave a
gap in women’s history, it also destabilizes the category of Jewish
history, rendering its claims uncertain as well as incomplete.

Attention to the position of women within Judaism seems to have
originated as part of Christian traditions of anti-Judaism. One of
the earliest statements appeared in the Juden Büchlein of Victor von
Karben (1519), in which he mocks the refusal of Jews to include
women in a prayer quorum.¹ The mockery continued in Johann
Eisenmenger’s Entdecktes Judenthum (1700), and became a major
topos among German (and some American) Protestant (and some
Catholic) theologians in the nineteenth and early twentieth cen-
tu-ries, including Franz Delitzsch, Joachim Jeremias, Johannes
Leipoldt, and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel.² The inferior status of
women within Judaism was discussed not only to denigrate Judaism,

¹ My thanks to Yisrael Yuval for calling my attention to this source.
² For a discussion of Christian theological anti-Judaism, especially within Christian
feminism, see Judith Plaskow, “Feminist Anti-Judaism and the Christian God,” Journal
in Feminist Religious Writings (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994); Susannah Heschel,
“Configurations of Patriarchy, Judaism and Nazism in German Feminist Thought,” in
Gender and Judaism: The Transformation of Tradition, ed. Tamar M. Rudavsky (New
Theologie und Antijudaismus in christlich-feministischer Theologie,” in Feministische
Theologie und die Verantwortung für die Geschichte, ed. Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz
but also to elevate Christianity with the claim that Jesus’ positive treatment of women stood in stark contrast to the Jewish men of his day. Jewish apologetic literature responding to such charges began to be generated in late-nineteenth-century Germany, starting with Meyer Kayserling in 1879, with a concentration on the treatment of women in rabbinic literature.³

Feminist historiography arose as an attempt to discover remnants of women’s experiences, even if their understanding of those experiences cannot be recovered. Among the best examples are Bernadette Brooten’s study, Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue, published in 1982, one of the earliest and most important pieces of feminist scholarship on Judaism.⁴ Brooten presented inscriptive and archaeological evidence demonstrating that women served as archisynagogos, leaders of their congregations in ancient Palestine, who were often seated at the front of the synagogue, and concluded that there is no archeological evidence of a separate seating section for women in Palestinian synagogues of antiquity. Her work opened the question of when, and under what circumstances, women’s subordination in the synagogue developed, and it also demonstrated the importance of examining evidence apart from rabbinic literature for reconstructing the history of women’s lives during the Roman era. Other examples include Renee Levine Melammed’s study of conversas, Jewish women who converted to Christianity and were then investigated and often tortured and killed by the Spanish Inquisition,⁵ and the recovery of medieval Jewish women’s domestic experience by Elisheva Baumgarten.⁶ Other studies confine themselves to examining female images in medieval texts, and the more sophisticated applications of feminist theory to the rhetoric of male texts reveal fascinating contours of gender ideology; as an example, I would mention Susan E. Shapiro’s examination of gender rhetoric in Maimonides’ philosophical writings.⁷

⁴ Bernadette Brooten, Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).
⁷ Susan E. Shapiro, “A Matter of Discipline: Reading for Gender in Jewish Phi-
Even as it has been an effort at recovery, feminist historiography has also been a revolt against Jewish history as a male canon, and against historicism as a male activity. Postulating the male canonicity of Jewish history carries ideological implications. As Jennifer Summit has argued in regard to the male canon of medieval English literature, we need to understand the ways in which women writers were historically produced as “lost,” as well as the imaginary relation that they bore to “tradition.”8 Similarly, the exclusion of women’s attribution from the written record cannot be taken as conclusive evidence of women’s exclusion from the Jewish creative process. It does, however, produce an alignment of canonicity and the “nature” of Judaism. As a male canon, Summit argues, English writing manifests a “masculine vigour” which is upheld by the writers of its past, such as the “father” Geoffrey Chaucer and the “manly” Shakespeare.9 In a similar fashion, assumptions of women’s absence from the written record reinforce a “masculine vigour” of Judaism. Thus the recovery of women’s history does not simply compensate the historical record, it challenges the nature of Jewish self-representation.

Within feminist scholarship, several models of historicism exist. Following the major tendency of Jewish historiography, which is positivist and empiricist, scholars of women’s history began by collecting data. In more recent years, however, postmodernist methods have led to analyses of the ideological representations of gender in Jewish historical data, and to more sophisticated understandings of the nature of patriarchal power.

Debate over theory has long been central to feminist scholarship, particularly in the United States, and it is through the application of theory that the most interesting interpretations about gender have been advanced. As women’s and gender studies first was taking shape as a field in the early 1980s, a significant dispute broke out concerning the kind of theory applicable to the analysis of gender. Much of the debate took shape over the work of Foucault, whose History of Sexuality first appeared in English translation in 1978.10

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9 Ibid., 204.
10 The relationship between Foucault and feminism remains tense at times. For
Foucault came as a challenge to the reigning models in women’s studies, which were based on British-influenced Marxism, particularly Edward P. Thompson, and transmitted through feminist theorists such as Linda Nicholson, Michele Barrett, Gayle Rubin, Heidi Hartmann, Nancy Fraser, and Iris Young, among others. By contrast, power, in Michel Foucault’s understanding, is both repressive and productive, and is concentrated not in one seat, whether text, person, or divinity, but is “capillary,” diffused throughout society. The manner in which power functions according to Foucault, as simultaneously repressive and productive, stood in sharp contrast to the prevailing feminist understanding of power as concentrated at a center or position above; for Foucault, power is understood as a constructed regime of discursive truth that convinces women, for example, that it is in their best interest to follow the injunctions of their husbands, and convinces Jews to heed their rabbis.

Feminist theorists, the philosopher Amy Allen argues, have generally followed one of three definitions of the nature of power: power as resource, power as domination, and power as empowerment. In turning to the historical study of Jewish women, models of power emerge in the work of the historian that shape the analysis of the data. For example, if power is understood as domination, questions of women’s subordination to men within a given era predominate; an example would be Tamar El-Or’s study of Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) women, which argues that their education is designed to keep them in a state of ignorance and subordination to men. By contrast, if power is understood as empowerment, a picture is drawn of women’s activities within the domestic sphere of her religiosity; an example would be Susan Sered’s studies of Haredi women which argue that women’s piety and rituals create a sense of personal self-worth and create female religious leadership.

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Allen has pointed out that more complex understandings of power have been postulated by theorists. She notes, for example, “[Michel] Foucault’s analysis of the interplay between constraint and enablement, [Judith] Butler’s introduction of citationality as that which mediates between the constraint and the enablement of the subject, and [Hannah] Arendt’s focus on the intersubjective emergence of power.” All three conceptualizations might be fruitfully applied not only to an understanding of women’s power within the Jewish realm, but to that of Jews within Gentile society as well.

The fruitful ways that feminist theory can complicate data about women and destabilize empiricist research can be illustrated by several examples. Shaye J. D. Cohen has presented the discussion among medieval rabbis of a new custom that arose during the tenth century among some Jewish women of refraining from synagogue attendance during periods of menstrual and parturient ritual “impurity.” Such periods of “impurity,” as defined in the Bible and subsequently expanded in rabbinic law, banned sexual intercourse and physical contact between a husband and wife, lest she convey impurity to him. Yet rabbinic law did not require the wife to leave her home nor was she freed of the usual housewifely obligations of cooking and cleaning nor of the obligation to say her prayers (public prayer was never required of women). The custom of staying away from the synagogue during women’s periods of impurity has no formal basis in Talmudic law, in other words, and yet some Jews came to endorse a prohibition against ritually impure women entering the synagogue. Jewish communities were divided: Sephardim rejected the prohibition, while Ashkenazim endorsed it, at least as custom. According to the rabbinic discussions, it was women who, motivated by piety, thought it proper not to come into the synagogue—or, if they did, not to look directly at a Torah scroll, not to pray or mention the name of God, not to touch a Hebrew book. While the rabbis did not codify that practice as law, they did acknowledge the custom and they praised the women for their piety.

16 Ibid., 109.
17 Ibid., 111.
The feminist historian, however, might ask whether that custom indeed reflects women’s piety or perhaps an utterly different motivation. How are women’s agency and women’s power to be defined, and how are their religious motivations to be taken into consideration? Since historians have no extant written documents by women describing their motivations, in reading male-authored texts about women’s actions we have to read between the lines to understand their motivations. Were all the women who refrained from entering a synagogue during periods of menstrual “impurity” motivated by a piety born of rabbinic Judaism that imagines menstruation as incompatible with the sanctity of synagogue? Or is it possible that at least some women engaged in a kind of “strike,” taking a vacation from synagogue attendance as long as male-authored laws forbidding marital intimacy during menstrual “impurity” were in force? In other words, if a woman’s husband can’t touch her, she might ask why she should go to the synagogue and watch his prayer service from behind the curtain of the women’s section, or gaze with adoration at the Torah scroll that defines her as “impure.” Applying Foucault’s “interplay between constraint and enablement,” as Allen defines it, we might conclude that identifying a pious motivation fails to capture the full range of women’s power in this situation. The constraints of the law are precisely what enable the exertion of power under the guise of piety.

The distinction between reading for empirical evidence and reading for ideological construct can be illustrated by two different feminist approaches to Jewish women in antiquity. The first is a book by Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine: An Inquiry into Image and Status*, the second a study by Miriam Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender and History*. Both are doctoral dissertations, the first written in the late 1980s at the Hebrew University under the supervision of Menachem Stern and Isaiah Gafni; the second was written in the 1990s at Duke University under the supervision of Eric Meyers, Ed Parish Sanders, and Kalman Bland, and was clearly influenced by Daniel Boyarin’s work in rabbinics.

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What distinguishes Ilan and Peskowitz is the role of Foucault’s methods, particularly as they have been given shape in the last ten years by the highly influential feminist theorist, Judith Butler. Like Foucault, Butler understands gender (and sex) as discursively constructed and performatively produced and reproduced. She moves beyond Foucault by asking what mediates between the oppressive sex and gender norms of a society and the individual subjects they attempt to control. Human agency, long a problem in Foucault’s work, is developed by Butler (influenced by Jacques Derrida’s concept of citationality) as subversion and resistance expressed through parody and other forms of performance. The work of Foucault and Butler has made attention to texts central, since they emphasize the power of discursivity; Butler calls for a “genealogy of women” and writes, “Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of ‘women,’ the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought.”

Ilan describes herself as learning about feminism during the process of writing her book, but her study is remarkably untouched by feminist theory. For her, texts are read not for their role in the genealogy of gender, but at face value, for information. She tells us she is concerned as a historian to determine “the exact social status of Jewish women in Palestine during the Hellenistic-Roman period.” Although aware that such a determination carries ideological significance for Christians and Jews, feminist and nonfeminist, she avoids any comparison of Jewish women’s status during this period with that of non-Jewish women, or with Jewish women during the biblical period. Methodologically, she recognizes the challenges posed by the sources—rabbinic texts, Greek literature, Dead Sea Scrolls, funerary inscriptions, and papyri and ostraca from the Judaean desert: they are male-authored, and they include both idealized images of women as well as reflections of the “actual” social status of women. Still, she concludes that the researcher can “try to sift out the crumbs of incidental information from the subjective or ideal picture of women these sources present, particularly by examining

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21 Ilan, Jewish Women, 41.
the contradictions between the description of an event or custom and the ideal picture.”

By contrast, Peskowitz, who examines almost the exact same sources as Ilan, begins with different assumptions and goals. For her, “texts” (literary or archeological) are “sites where social imagination and practice are articulated.” They are to be analyzed to unmask hidden agendas that are concealed not only in metaphors, but in the power strategies operative in rabbinic legal rulings as well. She makes no pretense to uncover the history of women’s actual experience, in contrast to Ilan, but attempts instead to understand the ideologies concerning gender that were created by rabbis in response to Roman culture. Peskowitz writes that she wants to destabilize knowledge practices concerning Jewish antiquity. She cites Joan Wallach Scott, who views gender as “the understanding produced by cultures and societies of human relationships …. Within large epistemic frames [that are] a way of ordering the world …, [g]ender is the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily differences.” Specifically, Peskowitz examines rabbinic ideas about textile production within the broader context of Greek and Roman literary, artistic, and architectural traditions, presenting evidence that the rabbis chose among a variety of gender ideologies current in Roman culture. In focusing on weaving, Peskowitz draws conclusions not only about rabbinic regulations of women’s domestic economic productions, but also about the rabbis’ idealizations regarding domesticity, virtue, femininity, and masculinity. The metaphors for women’s work also became the rabbis’ metaphors for heterosexuality and essential elements in the construction of gender. She concludes, for example, that the “rabbis employed notions of appropriate gender and sexuality to demonstrate that they belonged within Roman culture,” while at the same time avoiding the elements of eroticism present within Roman depictions of spinning and weaving. The rabbis, she suggests, eliminated sexual eroticism to avoid its social instability, and were concerned instead with placing women’s weaving under male control. Interestingly, her conclusions parallel those of David Balch in his study of the New Testament household codes, which were

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22 Ibid., 42.
23 Peskowitz, Spinning Fantasies, 11.
24 Ibid., 8.
25 Ibid., 66.
also written, he argues, to reassure Rome of Christian patriarchal commitments.\textsuperscript{26}

As an example of the contrasting approaches taken by Ilan and Peskowitz, let us examine their interpretations of \textit{Mishnah Ketubot}, chapter five. The question of the Mishnah is whether a woman who brings sufficient wealth to her marriage to support household slaves should still work in her home, weaving.

Rabbi Eliezer says: Even if she brought him in a hundred maidservants, he should compel her to work in wool, for idleness leads to lechery. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: If through a vow [her husband] forbids his wife to do work tasks, he must divorce [her] and give the \textit{ketubah} to her, because leisure brings lifelessness upon her. (5:5).

Ilan writes:

The idea that keeping busy with spinning and weaving protects a woman’s chastity and also demonstrates a woman’s diligence and high quality originates in classical Greece and can be found throughout Greek literature. R. Eliezer’s adoption of this idea may illustrate Hellenistic influence in Palestine.\textsuperscript{27}

Ilan then goes on to discuss women’s rights within rabbinic law to sell and keep the income earned by their domestic productions, and notes the various occupations open to married women that are mentioned in rabbinic literature, from selling dough and textiles and olives, to functioning as an innkeeper, hairdresser, professional mourner, or midwife. She concludes that “it was very common for women to work. They helped support their households and worked in professions in which they had special knowledge and training, even if informal.”\textsuperscript{28}

Peskowitz, by contrast, asks what is concealed by the text; for her, texts are sites of power to be unmasked. Weaving is part of the rabbinic creation of wifery, and the spindle and wool become reassurances to husbands “that the sexual temptations of their female relatives and wives are tightly under control…. Jewish wifery includes domestic labor to protect a husband from his wife’s sexual betrayal,” even though the stated rationale of the two rabbis’ rulings

\textsuperscript{27} Ilan, \textit{Jewish Women}, 186.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 190.
is to protect women. Drawing on Foucault and Butler, Peskowitz notes that the Mishnah
effectively hides from view the very men whom it privileges and whose advantages it will extend. This position hides both the husband who controls and owns the wife’s labors, and the rabbis who imagine themselves as legislators, but who were, simultaneously, husbands themselves. It makes an economy of discipline and control seem benevolent, and for a woman’s own good.

The contrast between the books by Ilan and Peskowitz, between looking for evidence for women’s social history and examining ideological constructions of gender, represents one of the major tensions within feminist scholarship today. Yet the two approaches taken by Peskowitz and Ilan are not necessarily exclusive; indeed, a combination of both approaches would be helpful in understanding not only the social conditions under which Jewish women lived in antiquity, but also the prejudices which limited their lives and shaped their self-understanding as women and as Jews. The hermeneutics of suspicion brought by Peskowitz to her examination of gender ideologies in rabbinic literature is familiar to those engaged in Jewish studies, who have long been trained to regard Gentile texts about Jews with a similar eye to the political interests at play.

A second example of how theory can reorient an interpretation of historical data can be found in studies of Jewish women in modern Europe. The example will also illustrate ways in which the study of Jewish women can highlight weak and distorting elements within feminist theory. Women often function within feminist theory as victims of patriarchy, which is sometimes presented as the primordial source of evil. In Jewish feminist scholarship, too, women are often idealized, presented as the most loyal of Jews, the last to assimilate, the most important transmitters of identity to their children. Because they are portrayed as rulers of their homes, while limited in their public role, women’s activities in the domestic realm are frequently equated with the private and apolitical, with the questionable result that women are sometimes absolved from political responsibility for the acts of their larger community, including male and female members, and of their government.

29 Peskowitz, Spinning Fantasies, 99.
30 Ibid., 101.
As Paula Hyman has made clear in her study, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, a feminist approach to modern Jewish experience looks not only at the differences between the impact of modernization on women and men, but also at the construction of gender that emerges in the creation of the modern Jew. Indeed, she argues that “gendered differences in the experience of assimilation and the growing representation of women as the primary transmitters of Jewish culture shaped modern Jewish identity on the battleground of sexual politics.”

In examining Jews of Western and Central Europe, Hyman notes that “the bourgeois ideal of female behavior restricted women’s access to the public arena and saw religiosity as a feminine attribute.” As a result, assimilation affected women differently. While men quickly abandoned the public displays that defined their Jewish identity, women “apparently retained more signs of Jewish identification” at home, maintaining holiday celebrations, special meals, kosher kitchens, and so forth. Within the United States, she claims,

> women appear to have been particularly attuned to the possibilities of renegotiating the norms that governed their access to education as well as their behavior in the public realms of work, leisure-time activities, and politics. America permitted the continual rethinking of the boundaries between the domestic and the public spheres.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Hyman argues that an ideology emerged within the Jewish community that “placed women at the heart of Jewish identity.” That ideology, Maria Baader has pointed out, was two-pronged, since it also meant that women could be—and were—blamed for a weakened Jewish identity, for “spreading materialism, empty synagogues, and declining domestic devotion.”

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32 Ibid., 48.
33 Ibid., 93.
35 Maria Baader, ” From ‘the Priestess of the Home’ to ‘the Rabbi’s Brilliant Daughter’: Concepts of Jewish Womanhood and Progressive Germanness in *Die Deborah* and the American Israelite, 1854–1900,” *LBTW* 43 (1998), 47–72, here 61. Hyman notes that though assimilatory processes were far different in Eastern Europe,
Hyman has long argued that gender challenges the basic paradigms of modern Jewish history, including its periodization and the topics of its concern. Consideration of women’s experience, she argues, calls attention to the domestic and the personal, especially in the realm of religious expression and spirituality. Marion Kaplan’s important study, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany*, is a model for the kinds of issues and methods Hyman places at the top of the agenda for gender and Jewish historiography. A study of the creation of bourgeois Jewish life and its impact on women, Kaplan emphasizes the centrality of women’s role in Jewish life through the culture of domesticity, and uses the household to examine issues of class and gender, as well as Jewish identity. Among her conclusions, she argues that women were not entirely confined to the domestic realm, but “used domestic ideology to exert considerable influence on their community from their private stations.” Like Hyman, Kaplan argues that Jewish observance continued in private homes long after it diminished in synagogues, but that assimilation has been measured without attention to the role of women and family life. She describes the family as created and mediated by women, and as serving as a force of cohesion and a source of Jewish ethnic culture, making women’s roles central in the transmission of Judaism. Yet Kaplan also calls attention to women’s dissatisfaction with the limitations of family life:

Confined by ideology and custom to the private sphere, they venerated domesticity and use it to enhance their own and their families’ status. However, their obvious dissatisfaction with total submersion in the cult of the home was evident in the eagerness with which they sought a variety of ways out. … Leisure-time activities … frequently fostered female networks and helped to expand women’s spatial and social boundaries. Women reached out into public space and maintained female ties, increasingly experiencing their own agency and autonomy. It was social work, in particular, which allowed Jewish women an arena in which to display their enterprising talents and assert their priorities…. In taking on communal responsibilities, women derived a

women were nonetheless blamed in Poland as well for high rates of Jewish assimilation. Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*, 90.


37 Ibid., 16–17.

38 Ibid., 233.
sense of gender consciousness and a personal sense of value and social usefulness. They developed considerable power in their own circles on their own behalf, ultimately emerging as public actors.39

Kaplan suggests that historians develop an alternative way to understand Jewish identity, focusing not only on public conduct and conscious identity, but on unconscious identity, emotions, and behavior in the private sphere, within family and friendships, and concludes that “women formed the core of this process, striving for integration on the one hand and the preservation of their cultural or religious identities on the other.”40 Ute Frevert emphasizes the social work of Jewish women by presenting a helpful comparison to non-Jews: “The duty to become involved in social welfare was much more firmly rooted in Judaism than in Protestantism, and welfare institutions in Jewish communities were exemplary in terms of both their number and the range of their provision.”41 Jewish middle-class women, Frevert notes, “were able to devote themselves to public affairs and the demands of the social world to a greater degree than Gentile women of the same social group.”42

Thanks to the pioneering work of Kaplan and Hyman, we now have a good outline of the rubrics of Jewish women’s history during the modern period. Their first step in clarifying the social processes leaves future historians with an agenda of refining some of the categories they employ, and of bringing women’s history into conversation with conclusions regarding men’s history. To what extent do their results require a modification of our understanding of the broader contours of Jewish history? In what ways might feminist theory provide useful tools for analyzing their results?

Domesticity, as it has been constructed by historians of gender and Jewish history, can play a role within historiography that carries serious moral and political implications, most easily illustrated by reference to feminist scholarship on Nazi Germany. A highly important debate over the moral and political responsibilities of

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39 Ibid., 229.
40 Ibid., 11.
42 Ibid.
bourgeois women first took shape in the late 1980s among feminist historians of Nazi Germany over whether German housewives should be viewed as aloof from the murder process, or as enabling their husbands’ killings by keeping the domestic front quiet and orderly. The debate emerged in response to the publication of Claudia Koonz’s important book, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics*, in 1988. In her broad study of both Nazi women leaders and the anonymous German Hausfrau under National Socialism, Koonz drew harsh and strong conclusions. She argued that German women were, by and large, active and ardent Nazis, and that the “Kinder, Küche, Kirche” slogan of the Nazis did not remove women from the political scene, but rather transformed the home into a site of collaboration that enabled the regime to carry out its work more effectively.

The most significant opposition to Koonz came from Gisela Bock, whose study of Nazi sterilization policies, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik*, was published in 1986. In her analysis of Nazi sterilization policies, Bock noted that women were more likely to die from the procedure than men, and that sterilization exerted a different impact on the lives of women than men. She argued that the death of approximately 4,500 German women who underwent forced sterilization was a form of “planned and deliberate mass murder” that differed only in degree, not in kind, from the genocide of the Jews. In Bock’s analysis, some women were perpetrators, but most were followers, bystanders, or victims. Indeed, Bock argued, had the Nazis succeeded in all of their goals, women, too, would have been their targets of murder.

Were women perpetrators or victims? Is the domestic realm a refuge for women from the nasty politics of men, or does it enable or even encourage the political activities carried out by men? Gitta Sereny’s pointed question in *Into That Darkness*, to Mrs. Franz Stangl regarding her responsibility for her husband’s deeds, highlights the

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choice that was available: If Mrs. Stangl could have threatened to leave her husband if he did not give up Treblinka, does her failure to pose that threat to him indict her for complicity? My point is certainly not to draw an analogy between the radically different social, political, and ideological conditions of Nazi Germany and the Jewish community of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but to call attention to the role of the private, domestic realm of bourgeois women within the public politics carried out by men. Is there, in fact, as sharp a distinction between private and public, women and men, as historians, anthropologists, and sociologists have long held?

When we are told that Jewish women assimilated at a slower rate than men, and that they domesticated Jewishness for their families by creating home-based celebrations, we might also ask if women might also have contributed thereby to the higher rate of assimilation achieved by male members of their families. In creating Jewishness within the home, did women unwittingly offer a stability that enabled exploration of alternative identities, via assimilation, intermarriage, and even conversion to Christianity? How, for example, should we understand the meaning of the cohabitation of Jewish holiday celebrations with a Christmas tree in some German-Jewish homes?

In other words, what role did the positive “domestic” Jewishness created by women play in the gradual abandonment of Jewishness by men? While separate in certain respects, the domestic and the public are also deeply intertwined. If assimilation is defined as the public abandonment of Judaism, perhaps dissimulation would be the appropriate term for its privatization.

Second, there is a more complex understanding of modern domesticity at work in contemporary historical studies of Germany that might prove useful to historians of Jewish women. Isabel Hull has recently argued in her book, Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815, that the dichotomies between male/public and female/private came into existence as fictions that were in fact rooted

in the legal structure of the modern state in precisely their opposites. Her analysis reveals, surprisingly, that “where absolutism did impose new sexual norms, these were more inclined toward gender equality than those of the liberal, civil society that succeeded it.”

Hull demonstrates that despite the decriminalization in the modern era of certain immoral behaviors (such as adultery), moral policing did not end but became even more strictly regulated through social control. Hull’s observations might be tested within the Jewish community as well; to what extent did emancipation from rabbinic authority transfer sex and gender regulation to the even stricter control of neighbors, community, and family? Did Jewish women experience a greater or lesser autonomy, as women and as Jews, in the transition from absolutism to the modern state?

Most important are Hull’s observations about the relationship between public and private that came to be configured in modern Germany. A modern society required a male free from the social fetters of the intense legal regulation imposed by the absolutist state, a male who was an independent, autonomous individual with energy to pursue economic gain and the self-determination required for active citizenship. Women, by contrast, were required to be wives and mothers, not independent and emancipated. The result was a schema of male/active versus female/passive that served not only as ideal, but was socially and legally regulated as such. Thus far, the traditional dichotomy, Hull goes an important step further, however, in examining the basis for the dichotomy:

The ideological expression of this dichotomy as male/public versus female/private reversed its actual intellectual foundation, however. Men’s autonomy (and therefore fitness for the new public of civil society) rested upon their presocial, private individuality, reckoned independently of society, whereas women’s dependence derived precisely from the social, “public” reckoning used to define their “nature.” From the standpoint of determination, men were private, women, public.

The ideology was rooted in the organization of the family, which was relegated to the private realm, independent of state law guaranteeing equality. Just as the modern state emancipated the man

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48 Ibid., 411.
If Hull is correct, it is through male domination within the family that the man achieves his independence and autonomy within the public domain. Without that domestic arrangement, his status would be diminished and the justification for his public role would be undermined. Women’s subordination to men within the family is what enables men to achieve power within society. The public domain is therefore not distinct from the private, but depends for its existence, after the fashion of a Hegelian dialectic, on the structure of the “private” family. As much as women might strive, therefore, to transgress the limitations of domesticity and engage in public acts of charity, join voluntary associations, or assume other communal responsibilities, it is not clear if they are, in Kaplan’s words, “emerging as public actors” and “experiencing their own agency and autonomy,” or simply extending the boundaries of the very housewifery that maintained their subordination to their husbands in order for the modern state to maintain its logic.

It is precisely the conflict between the analysis of institutional structures and private experience that leads us back to the problem of defining the nature of power. Amy Allen poses the question, If women are understood as being subjects of institutional regimes of sexism, how do they attain the capacity for agency and action? Yet if their agency is identified even under the most repressive conditions, in what sense are social forces operative? Power, Allen points out, involves both domination and resistance. For Foucault, power is strategic and coercive, a force from whose clutches it is not possible to emerge. Indeed, one of the major problems with Foucault is the location of agency and subjectivity, a problem addressed by Butler with her proposal of citationality as the means by which agency

49 Ibid.
is expressed to negotiate and resist the regimes of domination. In studying women’s lives, historians would have to account for both the institutional and discursive structures that create and impose gender regimes, and the particular cultural meanings of gender created by individual women in their negotiations of those structures. One without the other is only a partial picture (presenting women’s agency without examining prevailing gender ideologies), just as the study of anti-Semitism, for example, cannot be separated from the study of how Jews experienced it in a given era.

I want to conclude by briefly suggesting a few ways in which feminist theory can contribute to the study of Jewish history. First, Butler’s notions of performativity and citationality offer useful alternatives to the overused concept of assimilation. Both in relation to Judaism and to the Gentile world, modern Jewishness might be approached as a construct that is parallel, in certain structural ways, to gender. Second, feminist theory does not have to be limited to the examination of gender. In my own work on German-Jewish thought, I have found aspects of feminist literary theory, as well as postcolonial theory, to be helpful in illuminating the relationship between modern Jewish and Christian theologians. In certain ways, Jewish writings can be understood as efforts to cope with Christian hegemony, just as the writings of women have to cope with patriarchal hegemony. Finally, feminist scholarship has contributed to the shaping of a variety of new interests within the field of history, including, for example, the history of witchcraft,\textsuperscript{51} and the history of emotions\textsuperscript{52} and of the body,\textsuperscript{53} and the history of movements of religious reform\textsuperscript{54} and spirituality, both medieval and modern.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{51} The most recent study is by Dyan Elliott, \textit{Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).


\textsuperscript{53} Jane Long, Jan Gothard, and Helen Brash, eds., \textit{Forging Identities: Bodies, Gender and Feminist History} (Nedlands, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 1997).


\textsuperscript{55} On medieval spirituality, see the numerous studies by Caroline W. Bynum, Dyan Elliott, and Amy Hollywood, among others; on modern spirituality, see Ann Taves, \textit{Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Phyllis Mack, \textit{Visionary...
Just as Robin G. Collingwood stated, “I study history to learn what it is to be a man,” Abraham Geiger stated, “We became men and wanted manly fare, we wanted Wissenschaft.” The discipline of history, as it emerged in the nineteenth century, was simultaneously a disciplining of gender. Not only the person of the historian, but the subject matter, too, was made masculine. Hierarchies were established that ranked texts above matters dealing with home and family—but in that way, the household, sex, and marriage played a crucial role in providing standards for the important and the unimportant. Even the place of practice was significant, as Bonnie Smith points out in her study, *The Gender of History*: “Seminars and archives were spaces reserved mostly for professional men, and it is in this context that the professional work of historical science can be seen as enmeshed in the development of masculinity in the nineteenth century.” That situation has changed dramatically. The field of history, at least in the United States, is one of the leaders in women’s studies. Yet in some feminist scholarship, there is a suspicious extraordinariness of coincidence, a discovery in history of a female heroism that turns out to be precisely what contemporary feminism needs for its mission. Women are discovered to have been the most loyal of Jews, the last assimilators, the keepers of the Jewish flame. We can ask if this is historically accurate, but we must also ask why feminist theory demands the invention of a heroic female past; political change has to occur even if women were unenthusiastic Jews. Collingwood and Geiger realized what Bonnie Smith articulates: “part of the appeal of these new [historical] practices was the way in which they proposed a masculine identity worthy of and equal to the arduous quest for objectivity.” Yet that masculinity was not flaunted, but transcended as the historian was made invisible; in the words of Fustel de Coulanges, “It is not I who speak, Gentlemen,

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58 Ibid., 105.
but History who speaks through me." 59 It is no accident that women were absent from historical study, both as historians and as objects of historical investigation, yet the danger is that feminist historians, too, may adopt that model of pretending that history speaks through them, “revealing” the political necessities of the day. The problem for feminist historiography, as for all historians, is balancing political commitments with historical accuracy.

The medieval women who boycotted the synagogue might be seen as remnants of a medieval piety or as rebels against rabbinic law. Their actions—exaggerating the strictures placed on women during periods of impurity—might also be seen as parodic, in Judith Butler’s sense of the term, defining the absurdity of the male regulations imposed on women, and suggesting, through parody, modernity’s identity complexes that were yet to come. In the modern era, the feminist movement has encouraged women to take on the Talmudic-regulated religious male roles to assure equality, which simply reinforces the equation of Jewishness with men; women become men to be Jews. Were men to assume the traditional roles of religious Jewish women, they would abandon not simply their maleness, but the distinct commandments that characterize Judaism; men lose their Judaism in becoming women. Religious Jewishness seems to demand agency, the fulfillment of all legal imperatives incumbent upon men, and historians might ask whether a more complex understanding of agency could be developed that would permit a coexistence of a multiplicity of motivations as well as consequences. The theoretical questions posed by feminist theorists create new possibilities for scholarly inquiry, and for the shaping of Jewish identity.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

WHAT POWER FOR WHICH JEWS?

(POST)MODERN REFLECTIONS ON THE IDEA OF POWER IN JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

ANTHONY D. KAUDERS

1 Writing in the late nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche tried to revive a form of life that harked back to times less complex and less bewildering. Nietzsche’s source of inspiration was characterized by everything that encompassed “strong, free, and happy action.”1 The men who embodied this form of life were certain of their station. Unlike their plebian rivals, they defined themselves as “good” before designating others as “bad.” In doing so, Nietzsche’s noblemen fixed once and for all the distinction between a master and a slave morality.

The latter owed everything to impotence. This powerlessness gave rise to a hatred of inconceivable magnitude and found its main mouthpiece in priesthood. But not every priesthood was the same. The Jews especially succeeded in settling the score with their magnificent enemies by pushing through a revaluation of values—a spiritual revenge according to which the wretched, poor, lowly, and impotent alone were good, the suffering, deprived, sick, and ugly alone pious and blessed by God.2

The defining feature of this slave morality was ressentiment, which meant that the creed of the weak could “only exist by negating what it is not, what exists outside of it, and what is different to it,” being totally dependent as it was “on a hostile external world for its identity.”3 While it is true that ressentiment itself could be creative

2 Ibid., 267.
and could give birth to values—indeed, Jewish hatred was the “deepest and most sublime” hatred because it had brought forth ideals and standards—it is equally true that ressentiment was reactive rather than active, that its spirit opted for clandestinity (Schleichtwege), hiding-places (Schlüpfwinkel), and back doors, and that everything hidden comprised “its world, its security, its refreshment [Labsal].” The ultimate concealment, however, took place in the inner recesses of the mind, where an imaginary vengeance compensated for the absence of power “by redefining helpless passivity as a free exercise of will.”

Nietzsche’s position is not popular today, but his distinction between a master and a slave morality might serve as a starting point for a critique of Jewish appropriations of postmodern thought. This paper’s title—“What power for which Jews?”—echoes Nietzsche’s concern with the nature of might and influence. The first half of the question alludes to the recent preoccupation with “alternative” forms of power that informs the work of scholars in Jewish studies and elsewhere. I will try to challenge this redefinition of power with reference to Nietzsche’s discussion of slave morality. The second half relates to the purpose power might have for Jews and non-Jews alike. I will try to address the issue as to who should benefit from power and what this says about the underlying aims of those who espouse postmodern theory. In the course of our analysis we shall see that scholars have often put forward conclusions that either are inconsistent with the ideological premises (postmodernism), misrepresent the current situation of the Jews (postcolonialism), delineate an idea of resistance (power) that is questionable, or subscribe to a view of selfhood (identity) that other counterdiscourses have rejected long ago.

Since the definition of postmodernism is contested, I will initially spell out three elements that will figure prominently in the exposition below, as well as point out some of the problems already intrinsic to any attempt at utilizing these conceptions for cultural history. Here are three generally accepted postmodern positions:

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5 Ibid., 272.
(1) Numerous models of order exist, each of which makes sense only in terms of the practices that validate it. Systems of knowledge, language games, or communities of meaning may only be evaluated from within. No other tests of legitimacy, and especially not those reliant upon metanarratives, enjoy credibility.7

(2) Each culture is historically relative. This reflexivity of respective partialities occasions the “loss of the sense of an absoluteness of any Western account of History.”8 This reflexivity is also responsible for the liberation from the domination of Enlightenment thought with its emphasis on structure, rule-making, and universality.

(3) Difference replaces identity.9 Just as the founding center of thought in its Enlightenment guise has been superseded by different locales of thought, so logocentrism in the form of individual self-presence has been supplanted by an “endless process of substitution which attempts to put something where there is in fact nothing.”10 If a particular language game is being played, “it is always possible … that redescription (difference) will alter rules or place an utterance in a different language game.”11

If we look at these common features of postmodern thought, we note that the first element is at odds with both the second and the third.12 The first argues that master narratives no longer serve

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8 Robert Young, White Mythologies: Writing History and the West (London: Routledge, 1990), 19; and Jürgen Habermas, Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 295.

9 Stanley Rosen, Hermeneutics as Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 8; and Ben Agger, The Discourse of Domination: From the Frankfurt School to Postmodernism (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 296–297. Agger maintains that the death of the subject has been ontologized in postmodern theory.


11 Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (London: Routledge, 1983), 130–131. For Foucault, the search for origins leads to the dissolution of the self, leaving “thousands of lost events” in place of its “empty synthesis.” Michel Foucault, Von der Subversion des Wissens, ed. Walter Sitter (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1987), 73.

12 This inconsistency is not to be held against postmodern thought as such, for its practitioners usually repudiate systemic thinking. Yet in areas of study that seek to
as a standard to judge cultures. The second contends that cultures are historically relative. The difficulty is that most cultures would agree with the former view but not with the latter. I may criticize endeavors to assess my culture along the lines of rationality or liberty or modernity, yet still believe that it is worthy of protection from outside influences. I might add that my culture is simply not relative to other cultures, indeed that it is superior to them. The suspension of metanarratives, then, does not necessarily entail any protracted meditation on historical relativity.

A further problem arises if we compare the first with the third element, for the belief in self-determination conflicts with the belief that difference replaces identity. If the world is to be cleansed from self-presence on a personal or local level, whereby substitutions subvert supposed entities, then the same holds true for cultures or systems of belief. In this case, too, identity cannot be assumed, nor is it possible to sustain the notion that validation from within is preferable. Self-descriptions are therefore not perforce more authentic or more accurate than descriptions deriving from “outside” sources.13 Again, the suspension of metanarratives does not automatically imply reflection on the futility of achieving sameness.

I would now like to show how these contradictions also affect the way in which such notions as power, postcolonialism, and identity have been employed in the past.

Let us start with power. Recent scholarship has moved away from the concept of power as primarily an affair of those on top versus those on the bottom, of the state apparatus versus the populace, or of those who control the means of production versus those who do not. Owing to the considerable influence of Michel Foucault, power is increasingly seen as an ubiquitous feature of human interaction, so much so that it is available to anyone.14 The dialectics of power, according to this view, is based on the premise that every exercise of

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power invariably involves resistance and evasion, both of which bring about the refinement and modification of the techniques of power, which in turn provoke new forms of resistance and evasion.

Foucault’s relationship to Nietzsche’s idea of power can be interpreted in at least two ways. Since the French social thinker never committed himself to a specific emancipatory ideal, his version of resistance resembles the Nietzschean celebration of life: resistance in this sense is always individual and irreducible to wider allegiances or alliances. Power here means the personal ability to fight back. By contrast, Foucault’s construction of countermemories as derived from his study of schools, prisons, or the medical establishment “stands in stark opposition to Nietzsche’s recommendation that we actively forget for the enhancement of life.”

Most thinkers who have embraced Foucault’s discourse of power have opted for the second interpretation of his approach to Nietzsche. They prefer a Foucault “with most of the Nietzscheanism drained away.” They reject the Foucault who displays little interest in sharing his beliefs with fellow citizens. Their Foucault is not someone for whom power is intimately connected with the private search for autonomy, the “refusal to be exhaustively describable in words which apply to anyone other than” oneself. Although power is indeed available to anyone, most of these theoreticians endorse the search for lost narratives in order to combat current injustices, rather than the current search for new narratives regardless of past injustices.

Cultural studies as well as postcolonial studies figure prominently in this respect. Cultural studies welcomes the new stance on the subject of power, combining Michel Foucault with Jacques Derrida in an effort to champion the rights of “the people” against the “power bloc.” Robert Fiske says as much when he writes that the “dominant is found in the preferred reading, the oppositional in the semiotic

15 Ibid., 151.
excess that the preferred reading attempts to marginalize.” Power in this view is to be located in semiotic excess which is mobilized “in the interests of the subordinate.”  In a similar vein, postcolonial studies invokes countermemories precisely because the “intellectual and cultural traditions outside the west constitute a body of knowledge that can be deployed to great effect against the political and cultural hegemony of the west.” Postcolonial theorists also utilize deconstruction in virtue of its “potential to generate greater awareness of—and, possibly help in the liberation (or ‘coming of voice’) of excluded or marginalized social constituencies.”

Yet the contradictions outlined above with respect to postmodernism are also discernible in these postmodern readings of power. As will be remembered, one problem revolved around the question of relativity, according to which the end of metanarratives does not necessitate the end of particularistic micronarratives. Since most scholars choose Foucault the recoverer of lost memories, they also risk essentializing either the semiotic excess or the coming of voice of subordinate groups and peoples. A corresponding difficulty arises from the idea that difference replaces identity and the idea that validation should emanate from within. Again, if power is located in the semiotic excess or in the retrieval of suppressed voices, we still have to deal with the question as to how to define the excess and the voice. Is the semiotic excess, when put to use against the notion of a metanarrative, at that very moment self-identical? And if so, how long would it take for the semiotic excess to become part of a particularistic micronarrative that abhors spin-offs of itself?

It is with this dilemma in mind, namely how to reconcile Derridaian differance with resistance, that prominent postcolonialists and cultural theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Paul Gilroy, and Stuart Hall have introduced “hybridity,” “diaspora,” and “mimicry” as preferred means of reference. The emphasis on these concepts owes much to the assumption that the colonized subject comes to realize that he or she is not wholly apart of the colonizing

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regime, as “colonialization brings with it the inevitable inter-mingling of cultural discourses between colonizing and colonized groups,” so that neither one will “emerge ‘uncontaminated’ by the other.”21 Hall, for example, suggests that one discard the ideal of a multicultural society comprising discreet identities in favour of “new ethnicities” comprising “the ongoing admixture of cultural and racial identities.”22 For Bhabha, mimicry—that is, the process “by which the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and the ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence”23—is an effect of the “cracks within colonial discourse.” Resistance is thus engendered by the dominant discourse itself.24 Similarly, cultural hybridity comes about as a result of the clash of cultures and peoples, leading to ambivalent identities of specific individuals.25 Spivak adopts deconstruction’s conception of the de-centered subject in order to avoid essentialist approaches to belonging and identity. She rejects the notion of a “pure” or “original” form of postcolonial (or subaltern) consciousness unaffected by the impact and “epistemic violence” of (neo-)colonialism.26 Paul Gilroy looks to “diaspora multiplicity” as a “chaotic, living, disorganic formation” that is in ceaseless motion—“a changing same that strives continually towards a state of self-realisation that continually retreats beyond its grasp.”27 Gilroy is adamant that “hybridity” is particularly useful in that it gives “no ground to the suggestion that cultural fusion involves betrayal, loss, corruption, or dilution.”28

If we look at these manifestations of postcolonial thinking, it is noteworthy that their exponents face a very real dilemma. For in attempting to make difference compatible with resistance, difference faces various threats while resistance is never assured.

What are the threats to difference? Critics from the left have

22 Ibid., 5.
23 Homi Bhabha cited in Young, *White Mythologies*, 147.
28 Ibid., 144.
observed that the decentered subject is hardly the ideal starting point from which to wage a war against the forces of domination. Indeed, Spivak concedes as much when she suggests that it is permissible strategically to “take shelter in essentialism,” but only if it is always kept “under erasure” and not mistaken for a “universal truth.” “Under erasure” presumably means that essentialism is immediately disposed of when its strategic use-value has been consummated. This qualification, however, does not account for the beginning and end of the particularistic micronarrative. The questions—Who determines when essentialism can be employed? Who decides how long one is supposed to resort to it? And who specifies at what stage it is no longer required?—are never addressed in an adequate manner. What is more, difference is surely undermined when its advocates proffer rigid binary oppositions that do not allow for difference in the first place. Pronouncements along the lines that hybridity is better than purity, plurality better than singularity, and difference better than self-identity are reminiscent of the very universal moral prescriptions that many of the theorists thus far discussed renounce.

More seriously still, postcolonial critics seem to grant people the ability to “construct” or “invent” traditions as long as these are hybrid or disaporic, yet refuse them anything that smells of essentialism. As Arik Dirlik has argued, “the repudiation of essentialized identities and authentic pasts seems to culminate in a libertarianism that asserts the possibility of constructing identities and histories almost at will in those ‘in-between’ spaces that are immune to the burden of the past,” while at the same time postcolonial critics “are unwilling to recognize a similar liberty for those who seek to invoke the past in the assertion of cultural identities.”

In what way is resistance not assured? For a start, one might ask whether the mere proposition of a decentered self is in fact not self-contradictory. For if the disintegration of the subject is what matters, then the self which is supposed to be able to think différence cannot be unitary. In the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, one might conclude

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that “there is no way of posing questions about accountability or, correspondingly, about the identity, unity, and continuity of the self within a genealogical framework.” On a different front, postcolonial critics themselves have admitted that “poststructuralist theories of split and agonistic subjectivity came into vogue just at the moment when marginalised subjects were finding a more powerful voice.” They therefore conjecture, albeit carefully, that the notion of the decentred subject may be “the latest strategy of Western colonialism.” Marxist critics are much more forthright. David Harvey, for example, suggests that this postmodernist approach does not allow individuals to consider themselves to be alienated or to be conceived as such, since to be alienated presupposes a coherent sense of self from which to be estranged in the first place. Dirlik maintains that postcolonialist theory is driven by a “radical methodological individualism” that is “situationist in its historical explanations.” In like manner, Terry Eagleton contends that the emphasis on text and language, whereby colonized subjects come to replace a false conception of themselves with a correct one, smacks of philosophical idealism. The emphasis on text and language thus not only ignores everything that is pre-reflective, the “unconscious mastery of the social world which is acquired through permanent immersion in this world.” It also fails to distinguish between forms of social and material power behind different languages—for example, between the language game of international finance and its impact upon the world on the one hand, and the language game of inner-city blacks on the other. Finally, Jerrold Siegel has averred that the postmodern (and postcolonial) attempt at defining selfhood as purely relational

is made “in order to make room for a mode of self-existence that should be understood as heir to the kind of absolute, self-positing ego first brought into the world by Fichte’s revision of Kant.”

If differance is taken seriously, then it seems that it is best articulated on an individual level, where we might permanently create ourselves in our autonomy, as championed by Nietzsche. But even here one may wonder whether differance is really related to power or resistance, resembling as it does the likely attempt of redefining passivity as a free exercise of will. Utilized as a means of widespread defiance, however, it is difficult to fathom differance in terms of dozens or even thousands of decentered subjects united in an effort to challenge the powers that be. And in the unlikely event that they did manage to come together, we would probably be reminded that these decentered subjects would face a public that finds the humanities “boring, tiresome, and useless,” making it near-impossible to exert influence beyond the academy. As Bernard Williams has noted, real power is political, economic, social power, “and while it is crucially influenced by ideas, it will be so only if those ideas have some authority.”

If we turn to the Jewish fold, we shall see that the very concept of differance is hardly an attractive one for most minorities, whose more radical spokespeople take up postmodern or postcolonial positions without necessarily accepting the consequences of such an undertaking. What is more, the question as to what power is envisaged and for whom is especially germane in the case of the Jews, whose status within society ranges from that of comfortable New York to that of not-so-comfortable Bucharest.

The first scholar who addressed the subject of Jewish power in a systematic manner was David Biale. Power for the historian is far removed from any postmodern considerations. Rather, it is “the ability of a people to control its relations to other peoples as well

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as its own internal political, cultural, religious, economic, and social life."\(^41\) Power here is clearly communal in nature, and the concept of community is clearly based on homogeneity, as is evident from the way in which Biale compares the power of the American-Jewish community with that of Babylonian Jewry. For although the United States has permitted an unusually large number of Jews to be part of the elite, he maintains that an argument “could be made for the superior power of the Babylonian Jewish community, certainly in its governance of its own members and perhaps even in its relationship to the non-Jewish power structure.”\(^42\) Biale’s notion of power is in many ways traditional, even pre-emancipatory. If the group can retain its control over individual members, it is powerful. If the group can assure that the state or majority does not interfere in its affairs, it is powerful. This view resembles that of Salo W. Baron, who in 1928 tried to show that the medieval Jewish communities in fact possessed considerable power, the more popular “lachrymose” theory of Jewish history notwithstanding.\(^43\)

In the present-day context, it might be equated with multicultural aspirations, whereby each minority is able to practice its creed without being forced to conform to a majority culture. That being the case, the premise is always that a correlation exists between the “community” and its constituents, between the official and the simple member. In medieval times this correlation certainly existed, but in pluralist societies it is much more difficult to make such an assumption. Biale further deplores that the “American-Jewish community has not produced a major contribution to Jewish thought, let alone a modern equivalent of the Babylonian Talmud.”\(^44\) Again, if a modern Jewish community had a single purpose, if it were in large measure separated from the rest of society, and if it shared a common religious worldview, then perhaps something like a new Talmud could emerge. The concept of power inherent in such a vision is clear: it is collective and directed against a foe or enemy or threat in the shape of majority culture. Although not spelled out, the addressee is also known: it is the Jews as a people whose existence

\(^42\) Ibid., 204.
\(^44\) Biale, *Power*, 204.
is jeopardized by the forces of the many. In reifying group identity, however, this account sidelines the struggles within the group for the authority and power to represent it.45

Susannah Heschel, by contrast, is far less coherent in delineating her notion of power. Heschel’s foremost concern in her book on Abraham Geiger is to show how the Wissenschaft des Judentums rebelled against the “prevailing viewpoint established by the Christian eye.” According to this reading, Geiger’s corpus in particular represents a “revolt of the colonized” against “Christianity’s intellectual hegemony,” precipitating the end of that very hegemony.46 Being one of the “earliest examples of postcolonial writing,” Jewish historiography was also a form of counterhistory, a polemic in which the sources of the adversary were exploited and brushed against the grain.47 The rage with which Christian historians reacted to Geiger’s work is evidence, Heschel asserts, of “just how powerful his gaze really was,”48 reversing the “power relations of the viewer and the viewed” and thereby “transforming Christianity into a semiotic representation within the economy of Judaism.”49

In a piece written at about the same time, Heschel elaborates on some of these themes. Again, she argues that the Wissenschaft des Judentums portrayed Judaism as standing at the center of Western civilization, as the progenitor both of Christianity and Islam.50 As in her book, Jews are seen as having formed an “internal colony within Europe.”51 Yet in her article, Heschel moves beyond description, outlining a program that is geared towards contemporary Jewry, and specifically American-Jewish scholars in the field of Jewish studies.

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48 Heschel, Geiger, 22.
49 Ibid., 242.
51 Ibid., 101.
To her mind, the “original radical political thrust” of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* dissipated as the field was transferred to the United States, where the subject was pursued in order to incorporate “Jewish history into the larger framework of Western civilization.” Indeed, far from undermining Christianity, the study of Judaism aimed at contributing to its understanding and reinforcing its hegemony.\(^{52}\) Heschel’s critique also involves a plan of action. “The recovery of its radicalism,” she writes, “would enable Jewish studies to enter the multicultural academy, disrupt antagonistic claims about Jews and Judaism, and eventually develop a multiculturalism within the study of Judaism.” What is more, multiculturalism’s “tendency to view Jews as white European oppressors” could be shown to be false, if the study of Judaism were transformed “from the religion of white Western European Jewish males into a multivocal Jewish history that includes the geographic, gender, and class distribution of Jewish experience.”\(^{53}\)

Heschel’s work is daring and provocative. Some of her conclusions, however, are difficult to follow. Let us take a few examples. First, it is not clear at all whether Christian hegemony before the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was perceived as such.\(^{54}\) Indeed, for the longest time Jews did not see themselves as being part of a struggle in which they vied against the Christian interpretation both of Judaism and Christianity. They were concerned that Judaism remain uncontaminated from outside influences, rather than that Christians revise their belief in the superiority of the New Testament.

Second, one might add that an Orthodox as well as a Nietzschean reading would reject positions according to which the *Wissenschaft* embodied either a revolt of the colonized or an exercise of power. For the former, Christian readings of Judaism have no significance whatsoever, so that transforming Christianity into a semiotic

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 103.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 104.

\(^{54}\) This problem also pertains to David Myers’ description of the Jewish historian as a colonized subject who appropriated the scholarly methods of the colonizer. *Wissenschaft* was something new and disconcerting for Christians too, many of whom probably rejected *Bibelkritik* and felt alienated from both scholarly parlance and scientific method. Furthermore, Jewish and non-Jewish scholars may have also been convinced of the superiority of *Wissenschaft* without thereby feeling colonized; see David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 15, 21.
representation within the economy of Judaism is hardly entertained. For the latter, Geiger’s project is merely reactive, the *ressentiment* of the weak who despise the strong, the hope of the marginalized to stand at the center (of Western civilization). In fact, it is somewhat surprising that Heschel, upon advancing her thesis, concedes in both pieces that the counterhistory of Christianity “also poses a threat to Jewish identity.” For in making Judaism’s significance to Western civilization “so intimately linked to the figure of the Jewish Jesus,” a dependence is forged that “relies on the Christian theological realm rather than resting independently on Jewish identity.”

Third, this concession is troubling in at least two respects. For one, it sabotages her contention that the Jewish scholar, in narrating the Jesus story, becomes a hero of the Jewish cause. For another, if this cause comprises the strengthening of identity, Heschel’s postmodern or postcolonial stance strongly resembles Biale’s more conventional outlook, whereby a relatively autonomous community endeavours to retain its independence vis-à-vis the majority culture. One would be hard-put to call this counterhistory. It is also not evident how this attitude squares with the objective of bringing about a “multivocal Jewish history that includes the geographic, gender, and class distribution of Jewish experience.” In short, there seems to be a contradiction here between the claim of seeking legitimacy from within (identity) on the one hand, and the wish to join the postcolonial camp (difference replaces identity) on the other; between the implicit wish to remain Jewish—without specifying what that means—and the explicit call to challenge the established definitions of the Western canon—without showing how this would affect the very concept of Jewishness. More recent calls to embrace the idea of a decentered subject, to understand the postcolonial subject as shaped by colonial discourse, and to accept that identity always retreats beyond one’s grasp are nowhere acknowledged.

Finally, Heschel’s account of power is not very encouraging. Not only does she grant that it might compromise Jewish interests, she also proffers no evidence that the impact of Geiger’s gaze was truly formidable. Rather, in the wake of his work Christian theologians

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56 Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past*, 104.
continued to produce anti-Jewish tracts,57 of which many hundreds more appeared in subsequent decades. If a revaluation of values has ever occurred, it was certainly not as a result of the Wissenschaft des Judentums, its many favourable features notwithstanding.

Daniel Boyarin is the last prominent scholar I would like to discuss in connection with the subject of power. Particularly in his book on Paul and the politics of identity Boyarin puts forward a postmodern version of what Jewish power might entail, although elsewhere too he and his brother Jonathan have propagated new forms of so-called Jewish resistance.58 Daniel Boyarin is first and foremost concerned with the question of how he can “ethically construct a particular identity which is extremely precious to me without falling into ethnocentrism or racism of one kind or another.”59 He is aware that the “insistence on difference can produce an indifference (or worse) toward Others,” but he feels that “Christian universalism has been even more dangerous” than various attempts at holding fast to particularism. The “insistence on genealogical identity,” according to this reading, remains one of the “major forms of resistance” against “universalist violence” à la Pauline Christianity.60 Boyarin goes even further, however, when he suggests a means by which the abuse of particularistic essentialism can be avoided. In the case of a dominant group (such as the Israeli Jews vis-à-vis the Palestinians), “any assertions of essence are ipso facto products and reproducers of the system of domination.” Against this, essentialism is a legitimate form of resistance for subaltern groups.61 Boyarin thus suggests that in order to preserve the “positive ethical, political value of Jewish genealogy as a mode of identity,” Jews should uphold their subaltern status, which to all intents and purposes means to embrace a diaspora existence.62 The societies he chooses as examples that promote such

57 Heschel, Abraham Geiger, 231.
60 Ibid., 235.
61 Ibid., 241.
62 Ibid., 242.
a kind of life are not surprising: the millet system of the Ottoman Empire and the emerging multiculturalism of the United States.63

Boyarin offers another picture of power in an essay outlining the difference between Masada and Yavneh, taking the latter as emblematic of the appropriate form of resistance. As he puts it, the Talmud recommends for Jews the strategy of evasion rather than armed opposition. As other colonized peoples, the Jews should adopt the arts of dissimulation and dodging, “the very opposite of such ‘masculine’ pursuits as ‘standing one’s ground.’”64 Two examples seem especially relevant in this respect. The first, to which the title refers, juxtaposes the escape of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai from besieged Jerusalem in a coffin with the purportedly heroic struggle of the Zealots against the Roman enemy. Boyarin argues that the Zealots, like the Zionists at a later stage, appropriated the masculine self-understanding of the outside world against the more feminine approach of emerging rabbinic Judaism.65 The second example is taken from the scroll (book) of Esther. Through her strategy of slyness and evasion, the author suggests, Esther not only saves herself but also the entire Jewish people, figuring as a heroine with whom the Jews identified throughout the ages.66 Boyarin, then, comes down on the side of Yohanan ben Zakkai and Esther as exemplars of the right type of Jewish resistance in the Diaspora.

As elsewhere, so too in this case we are confronted with a scholar who seeks to combine postmodern notions with more “traditional” concerns—in his words, identity without ethnocentrism. The solution that is recommended is partly one that postcolonialists have also grudgingly tendered, namely the application of a “strategic essentialism” so as to combat the forces both of colonialism and universalism. Yet Boyarin’s version is not strategic in nature. On the contrary, he advocates a way out that is supposed to be final: Jews remain essentialists, but only in the Diaspora. Power here is good only if it is employed against the majority. And it is good only if it is practiced in a tricky, sneaky, cunning way, far removed from the supposedly straightforward displays of masculinity.

63 Ibid., 259–60.
64 Idem, “Masada,” 315.
65 Ibid., 325.
66 Ibid., 308.
Boyarin’s reassessment of Jewish history is also daring and provocative. Nonetheless, his conclusions give rise to a number of problems, three of which I would like to outline briefly.

The first concerns the idealization of diaspora existence. We do not have to refer to the Holocaust to be aware of the risks involved in such a mode of being. On a more general level, it is not clear why the Diaspora is necessarily beneficial, even if we accept Boyarin’s equation that combining essentialism with statehood is evil. As Michael Galchinsky has put it, idealizing diaspora existence not only minimizes the “suffering that is the frequent companion of diaspora,” it equally entails “making unconvincing claims for the privileged visionary potential of diaspora intellectuals.”

The second relates to Boyarin’s concept of power. If we take the example of various diasporas fighting each other (something that happens periodically throughout the world), the equation essentialism + diaspora = good no longer holds. Essentialism in its racist and xenophobic manifestations is prominent in these struggles and does not only surface when the hegemonic power is implicated. What is more, the other part of Boyarin’s equation, i.e., that essentialism + dominance = bad is hard to sustain in each and every case. As Arik Dirlik writes: “The values of the dominant (such as human rights) are not prima facie undesirable because of the fact of domination, just as the values of the dominated are not to be legitimated simply by recourse to arguments of cultural difference.”

Even a minority fighting for difference does not necessarily champion values that are benign for the members of that minority. Likewise, Boyarin—as Biale and Heschel before him—reifies Jewish group identity in that he completely ignores the power struggles taking place within different groups, minorities included. In doing so, he assumes that all conflicts in which Jews are involved center on the question of minority and majority. Taking his model of multicultural America,

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68 Dirlik, Postmodernity’s Histories, 73.
However, we discover that internal frictions are of equal if not greater significance to the Jewish community than possible conflicts with the supposed majority.

The third pertains to the larger question of “What power for which Jews?” The power Boyarin favors is always one of resistance, it seems. Yet such a view is rather naive in the context of Jewish existence today. Jews as individuals and as a group exert influence in the United States and elsewhere, but that influence (and power) does not invariably lead to misery or hardship. In the United States especially it is not at all plain who the majority is and whether the Jews do not in fact belong to it. To speak of Jews in the Western world as subaltern is therefore peculiar at best, if by subaltern we mean economic, cultural, and social powerlessness. Present-day Jews need not be sly or crafty or artful in order to reach their goals. By saying things openly they have not become paragons of masculinity either. Indeed, Boyarin’s attempt at pitting feminine evasiveness against masculine plainspeakingness sets up a most “un-postmodern” dualism that is rarely if ever found on earth. Finally, it appears that Boyarin, like Heschel, hopes to turn the lachrymose theory of Jewish history into a lachrymose theory of contemporary Jewish existence, wishing to join the postcolonial faction but not quite accepting its more radical conclusions, of which the most radical—the decentered subject—would make naught of the very idea that a self-contained particularist is lined up against an equally self-contained universalist.

Let us return to Nietzsche once more. If we take the philosopher’s distinction between a slave and a master morality as a heuristic device, then Boyarin’s call for powerlessness as something good is remarkably close to Nietzsche’s depiction of a “priestly morality.” Heschel’s call for postcolonial rebellion would then be close to Nietzsche’s depiction of a “reactive morality.” And Biale’s call for communal power might be compared to Nietzsche’s depiction of a morality that can only exist by negating what it is not. If we take the postmodern/postcolonial position, then Boyarin, Heschel, and Biale agree with its antiuniversalism but disagree with its preference for différence. If we take the question of power, then Boyarin embraces
the postmodern penchant for clandestinity and Heschel welcomes its “returning gaze,” yet in neither case is power acknowledged in its social, economic, and political ramifications. If we ask “What power for which Jews?” then it is always collective power against majority power for collective Jews against majority non-Jews. The premise here is not only identity—which in itself is not very endearing to the postmodern heart—it is the collective identity of a (postcolonial) minority whose apparent main concern is with a (colonial) majority. In Western Europe and the United States, however, one might wonder whether the question of power should not allude to power within Jewry itself, the power to control community institutions, the power to determine religious matters, the power to interpret the past in state and society. And one might wonder whether one postmodern concept in particular, namely *différance*, should not allude to the Nietzschean ideal of permanently creating and recreating oneself, rather than to power in general. And if there were power here at all, it would be the power to enervate the propagandists of communal solidarity, a very mighty group of people indeed. And in contemplating this challenge, we may have returned to a modern problem that requires no recourse to postmodern thought, namely the individual and his or her pursuit of happiness versus the group and its demands on that individual.
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Indices
INDEX OF SUBJECTS

Agudat Yisrael 68
Ahriman 119, 121f., 124, 136f.
Ahura Mazda 119–122, 124, 136f.
Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums 85, 345f., 349, 356, 511, 513
Al Aksa Intifada 460
Alsace 38ff.
America, see United States 29, 45, 47f., 50–53, 73, 79, 89, 208, 221, 227, 243, 280, 418, 421, 429, 434, 565
American-Jewish Historical Society 45, 50
Amsterdam 16, 487, 489
Cultural anthropology 478, 516f.
Antiquity 5, 7, 106, 316, 530, 534, 536
Anti-Judaism, Christian 529
Anti-Semitism, anti-Semitic 34, 40f., 46, 53, 80, 83f., 87, 145, 147f., 152, 156, 163, 166, 171, 173ff., 179–185, 187ff., 191f., 229f., 232, 238ff., 244f., 252, 260, 262f., 275, 319, 341, 353, 358f., 365, 427, 513, 520, 546
Racial anti-Semitism 151, 184
Apologetics, apologetic 80, 83f., 110, 163, 165ff., 169, 172, 175, 194, 199, 205, 407, 423, 502, 505f., 514, 530
Association for Jewish Studies 88
Athens 185
Auschwitz 276f., 279, 282, 289–293, 297f.
Austria 240, 265
Babylonian exile 39
Balfour Declaration 68
Baltimore 45, 111
Bar Ilan University 87
Basle 315, 335
Berlin 16, 34, 36f., 38, 54, 64, 66, 82, 106, 145, 148, 157, 161, 164, 174, 221, 253, 272, 314, 316, 337ff., 357, 364
Bern 321
Bhagavad Gita 114
Bonn 111
Brahman, Brahmanism 114–118, 132f., 135, 138
Breslau 36, 63, 272, 357
Brunswick 31, 386ff.
Bucharest 558
Budapest Jewish seminary 84
Buddhism, Buddhist 111, 113f., 117–120, 134–137, 139, 141, 143f.
Bund, Bundism 227, 424, 515
Cairo 96
Catholicism, Catholic Church 126, 209, 234
Chicago 46, 50, 69, 234, 245, 250, 261, 264, 315
Chicago School of Sociology 253, 261
China 117, 124
Chinese religion 113
Chmielnicky pogroms 383
Chosenness, chosen people 179, 188, 364, 425, 438, 442, 505
Aryanization of Christianity 191
Early Christianity 13, 152
Jewish critique of Christianity 164
Jewish origins of Christianity 149, 183, 189
Liberal Christianity 162
Orthodox Christianity 16
Cologne 245
Colonialism, colonial discourse 168, 463, 465, 562, 564
Columbia University 227f., 234, 238, 240, 259, 261f., 272, 356, 421, 425, 429, 432
Community, Jewish 16, 38, 42, 48, 50, 76, 80, 82, 84f., 88, 184, 262, 337, 339, 341, 344, 350, 354, 365, 424, 477, 486, 539, 543f., 559, 566

Conscience, freedom of 18, 24

Cosmopolitanism, Jewish 186ff., 319, 322f., 430

Counterhistory 164, 170ff., 192, 269f., 505, 525, 562

Cracow 192

Criticism, biblical 94ff., 148ff., 152ff., 156ff., 161, 163, 166, 170, 173, 175, 180ff., 427

Criticism, historical xiii, 12, 56, 75, 106, 151, 157

Criticism, literary 72

Criticism, religious xviii, 495

Culture, historical 329, 331, 336, 347, 354


Culture, Western 95, 168, 213, 258, 279, 282ff., 295, 496

Cultural studies xiv, xvii, xxi, 72, 166, 460, 462, 475f., 478, 485, 487ff., 491ff., 522, 553

Cultural theory 494, 522, 554

Darwinism 425, 429, 430ff.

Deutsch-Israelitischer Gemeindebund 36


Difference, religious 8

Dissimilation 269, 271, 313, 320, 543, 564

Dortmund 158, 242

Dresden 81

Dreyfuss affair 40, 261

Düsseldorf 364

Egypt 111, 113ff., 123ff., 138f., 144, 173, 331

Egyptian religion 123, 138f.


Enlightenment 6, 8ff., 69f., 226, 234, 238, 241, 253, 256, 267ff., 271, 351, 367, 369, 391, 403, 417, 436, 444, 471, 483, 495, 551

German Enlightenment 3f.

Ethnicity, Jewish 198, 233, 457, 540

Ethnocentrism 564

Ethnography 476, 492

Europe 56, 73, 96, 395, 507, 519, 538f., 560, 567

Eastern Europe 228, 251, 259, 265, 316ff., 360, 399, 417, 423, 477

Exile, see galut 48, 230, 315, 449, 452, 513

Existentialism 201, 421, 443

Faith, Jewish 74, 79

Feminism, feminist theory 535, 538, 546ff.

Fetishism 113, 130


Frankfurt am Main 31, 36, 66ff., 76, 86, 153, 348, 363, 380

Frankfurt National Assembly 31

Freiburg 66, 282ff.

Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus (Frankfurt) 66, 85, 513

French Revolution 40, 253, 255, 271, 332

Galicia 86, 257ff., 268, 400

Galut, see exile 70

Gender, Gender studies xvii, xxi, 457, 536, 544, 546

Genizah 96, 101f.

Nazi Germany 221, 265, 354, 360, 352, 521, 541ff.
Unification of Germany 33f., 38
Gesamtarchiv der deutschen Juden 36f., 345, 510
Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums 84
Göttingen 5, 11, 13
Greece 113

Haggadah 304ff.
Hagenau 40
Halakhah, halakhic xix, 96, 102, 172, 200, 305f., 352, 387, 394, 403f., 409–416, 526
Halle 14
Hamburg 16, 32, 36, 340, 348
Hannover 383
Haredim, see Ultraorthodoxy 394, 410, 413, 415, 532
Hasidism 195, 231, 418
Haskalah xiii, xvii, xix, 253, 300, 303f., 307f., 316ff., 365, 372f., 378, 419, 495, 497
Hebraists, Christian 10, 306, 372
Hebrew Bible, see Old Testament 5, 10, 12, 94f., 149–153, 155, 160, 163, 165, 173, 174f., 177, 179, 181, 183–186, 189ff., 250, 297, 437
Hebrew language 86f., 108, 254, 256, 307, 309f., 324
Hebrew Union College 423
Hebrew University 78, 86, 239–42, 394, 534
Heidelberg 127ff., 129, 131, 348, 356, 361, 365
Hermeneutic 94f., 104f., 158, 173, 397
Hibbat Zion 63, 316
Historical consciousness xvii, xxi, 370f.
Historical Society (England) 52
Historical thinking xvi, xvi–xix, xxii, 5f., 498, 500
Antihistoricism, Jewish 60, 62, 65, 71, 354

Jewish historicism 56, 58, 66
Historicity xx, 267
Historicization xx, 79, 335, 344, 354, 456
Historische Commission für Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland 345
Feminist historiography 530f.
Haredi historiography 60
Historiography of Judaism xvii, 269
Israel historiography 465
Protestant historiography 166
Zionist historiography xv, 519f.
History, American-Jewish 49, 53
History, Anglo-Jewish 43, 51, 53
History, cultural 487f., 492, 508
History, German-Jewish 34, 36, 359, 363, 495
History, religious 148, 174
History of religions 21, 97, 179, 199
Hochschule (Lehranstalt) für die Wissenschaft des Judentums 77f., 95, 313, 344, 356f., 501
Holland 48
Holocaust 55, 72, 87f., 193, 246, 275–280, 282f., 285, 290, 293–298, 495, 513, 520f., 565
Homeland, Jewish 449, 453, 459
Hungary 363
Hybridity 554ff.

Idealism xviii, 3, 281, 417, 557
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israeli identity</td>
<td>462f., 465, 468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideologization</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>49, 113, 117, 124, 138, 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian religion</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute for Jewish Studies (Hebrew University)</td>
<td>78, 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>28, 80, 146, 166, 168, 224, 319, 349, 504, 506, 508, 512f., 518, 541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interfaith dialogue</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intolerance, religious</td>
<td>242, 436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jena</td>
<td>37, 153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>7f., 18, 39, 188, 23932, 456, 564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem School</td>
<td>512, 516, 519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td>11, 14, 17, 19, 24ff., 57f., 126, 149, 164, 174, 185f., 190, 208, 212, 530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Jesus</td>
<td>12, 14f., 17, 19, 20f., 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus's divinity</td>
<td>12, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus’s Jewishness</td>
<td>13ff., 19, 23ff., 26, 152, 166, 191, 195f., 562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life of Jesus</td>
<td>13f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish-Christian dialogue</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish-Christian relations</td>
<td>165, 194, 213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Ethical Culture Society</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Historical Society of England</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Publication Society of America</td>
<td>49, 264, 427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Theological Seminary</td>
<td>418f., 421, 423f., 428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewishness</td>
<td>30, 233, 341, 343, 352, 430, 434, 480, 486, 489, 519, 521, 543, 548, 562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewry, American</td>
<td>51f., 238, 423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewry, British</td>
<td>41, 43f., 49, 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewry, European</td>
<td>193, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewry, French</td>
<td>40, 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewry, German</td>
<td>xiii, 33, 37, 50, 81, 147, 154, 164, 166, 168, 173, 192, 329, 341f., 348, 353, 356, 359, 366f., 417, 506, 527169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancient Judaism</td>
<td>10, 12, 15, 22, 165, 182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Judaism</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Judaism</td>
<td>422f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Judaism</td>
<td>59, 165, 178f., 184, 186, 198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense of Judaism</td>
<td>10, 17, 171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denigration of Judaism</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaspora Judaism</td>
<td>317, 426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Judaism</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essence of Judaism</td>
<td>6, 151, 165f., 432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Judaism</td>
<td>88, 433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission of Judaism</td>
<td>25f., 31, 33, 147, 164, 170, 505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Judaism</td>
<td>169, 172f., 199, 364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Judaism</td>
<td>xvii., xxff., 364, 426, 444, 498, 523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosaic Judaism</td>
<td>6, 10f., 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INDEX OF SUBJECTS

Pharisaic Judaism 149f., 161f.
Postbiblical Judaism 93, 148, 153, 159, 184
Posttextic Judaism 163
Rabbinic Judaism 150, 162, 198, 206f., 534, 564
Superiority of Judaism 164f., 170
Talmudic Judaism 96, 187
Traditional Judaism 144, 436

Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar (Breslau) 63, 74, 77, 250, 344, 357

Kabbalah 78, 87, 128, 255, 294, 324, 386
Karaism, Karaites 106
Kassel 67
Kiev 256, 263, 270, 272
Kirchhain 69
Königsberg 337
Kovno 259, 262, 272

Law 24, 201, 534
Biblical law 201
Divine law 200
Jewish law 18, 126, 198, 306, 324
Mosaic law 7, 11, 18f., 21f., 25f.
Oral law 59
Rabbinic law 533, 537, 548
Religious law 334
Ritual law 25, 161

Learning, Jewish 67, 81
Leipzig 180, 18392, 38665
Liberalism 70, 151, 269, 333
Jewish liberalism 333, 338
Likud Party 447

Literary history, Jewish 317
Literary studies, Jewish xvi, 300f., 305, 313, 320

Literature
Ancient literature 106
Biblical literature 316, 385
Diaspora literature 300, 309ff., 315, 321
German-Jewish literature 369f., 384f.
Halakhic literature 305
Hebrew literature 96, 300ff., 304, 310, 314f., 318f., 323
National literature 299, 311, 322
Postbiblical literature 95, 149, 315
Rabbinic literature xvii, xix, 93ff., 97, 98, 101, 104, 109, 152f., 157, 161, 188, 373, 376, 385, 530
Religious literature 75, 83, 423f.
Secular literature 487
Talmudic literature 97, 103, 106, 385
Tannaitic literature 97, 101
World literature 299f., 302f., 305ff., 309–312, 320–324

Lithuania 245, 255, 259, 260, 262, 268, 410, 413, 420
Liturgy, Jewish 97, 101, 107, 424
London 42, 50, 53, 87, 191, 243, 375

Lorraine 38f.
Lower East Side 226, 259, 265, 481
Lutheranism, Lutheran theology 148, 242
Luxembourg 111
Lvov 257

Manchester 244
Mantua 486
Marburg 62, 64, 147, 153
Marseille 225
Marxism 231, 236, 252, 532

Master narrative 8, 17, 27, 83, 167, 496f., 517, 551

Memory, collective 330
Memory, cultural 9, 27
Memory, historical 9
Memory, Jewish 82, 382
Mesopotamia 173

Messianism, messianic 7, 14, 163f., 199, 203, 207, 216, 228, 252, 331, 407, 505

Metahistory 68
Midrash, midrashim 97, 102, 10742, 157, 304, 372, 376, 378, 380, 397
Migration 29, 48, 53, 270, 310ff., 313
Minority discourse xv
Mishnah 96, 101, 104, 107, 157, 537f.

Mission to the Jews 189
Mixed marriages 238
 Mizrahim 448, 458, 461, 463ff.

Modernity xiii, xix, 7f., 11, 13, 17, 19, 22, 24, 27f., 58, 68, 81, 164, 192, 234,
INDEX OF SUBJECTS

269f., 332, 334f., 340, 346, 352, 392, 395, 397, 403f., 499, 524, 548, 552
Modernization xiii, xix, 240, 262, 349f., 412
Monotheism, monotheistic 131, 133, 170, 174, 176f., 179, 423, 425
Ethical monotheism 147, 162–166, 169
Mosaism 127, 137, 139ff., 332
Munich 30, 12728, 356
Multiculturalism, multicultural society 260, 263, 266, 268, 467, 555, 561, 565
Musar movement 418
Mysticism, Jewish xvi, 80, 199, 408
Nationalism 29, 31, 41, 63, 151, 202f., 237, 319, 393, 417, 419, 451, 511, 565
Diaspora nationalism 314
German Nationalism 29ff.
Jewish nationalism 335, 353, 391, 429, 502, 520
Naturalism 131, 140, 417, 419, 435, 441, 443
Nazi historians, Nazi historiography xx, 366f., 513
Nazism 84
New Testament 12, 16, 150ff., 176, 181, 184f., 191, 208, 536, 561
New York 47, 224, 226f., 259f., 264, 314, 418, 420f., 476, 558
Odessa 256, 272
Old Testament, see Hebrew Bible 15, 43, 149, 153f., 158, 161f., 174–178, 180, 182–190, 192, 208, 252
Oldenburg 58
Oriental studies 255
Orientalist(s) 11, 13, 19, 39, 372f., 377
Modern Orthodoxy 399, 410f.
Neo-Orthodoxy 193, 200, 204, 212, 214, 330, 333, 394, 399, 410
Ultra-Orthodoxy xix, 399, 403f.
Oslo initiative 447, 460
Ottoman Empire 564
Oxford 358, 373
Paganism, pagan religion 112f., 126, 129f., 135f., 140f.
Pale of Settlement 231
Palestinian Arabs 63, 446, 448, 451, 453ff., 458, 463ff., 563
Palestine 63, 65, 68, 317f., 366, 387, 446
Pan-Babylonism 174
Pantheism 130
Paris 39, 270, 477
Particularism, particularity 33, 35, 37, 48, 64, 120, 163, 165, 171, 179, 206, 227, 300f., 303f., 306, 319, 323f., 364, 392, 563, 566
Paul 126, 195, 202, 563
Pentateuch xix, 4, 148, 157, 159, 161, 427
Persia 113, 123f.
Persian religion 122
Pharisees, Pharisaism 193
Philadelphia 46, 111, 244, 419
Philology 106, 12728, 198, 254, 316, 417, 483
Philosophy xvif., xx, 72, 274f., 278, 280–283, 289, 294f., 298, 424
Jewish philosophy xvi, 42, 169, 275, 352, 507
Medieval Jewish philosophy 80
Philosophy of history 7, 15, 298
Philosophy of Judaism 143
Religious philosophy 163, 209
Pluralism 35
Poland 48, 52, 227, 230, 234, 259, 262f., 303, 477
Popularization xvii, xix, 370, 375
Portugal 47f., 52, 316
Posen (Poznán) 247, 258, 262
Positive Historical Judaism 417
Postcolonialism, postcolonial theory (studies) xviii, 166–169, 171, 460, 462, 465f., 550, 552, 554–558
Powerlessness 549
Pragmatism 418, 429, 434
Prague 75, 241, 380f.
Process theology 443
Prophecy 148, 150, 162, 163f., 171, 190
Protestantism, Protestant Church 126, 145ff., 154, 168, 170, 172, 179, 195, 223, 231, 541
Cultural Protestantism 145f., 151
Liberal Protestantism 164f., 165, 214
Orthodox Protestantism 77, 210
Protestant theology 145f., 149, 151ff., 167f., 173, 177, 179, 418
Prussia 30, 34, 338, 340, 342

Rabbinerseminar zu Berlin 344, 357
Radicalism, Jewish 227
Rationalism 206
Reconstructionism xvii, 261, 417–420, 444
Reconstructionist Prayer Book 422, 438
Reconstructionist Rabbinic College 419
Reform, religious 30f., 334, 546
Reform Congregation (Berlin) 161
Reform Judaism xix, xx, 110, 144, 162, 198, 200, 206, 379, 392f., 395, 417, 423, 426f., 430f., 438
Reformation 145ff., 208
Regensburg 365
Religion 76, 112
Ancient religion 114
Biblical religion 152, 199
Israelite religion 175
Jewish religion 42, 77, 80, 944, 151, 159, 164, 179, 192, 387, 396, 431, 435, 439
Rabbinic religion 97
Rational religion 14, 19, 21
Religion of Israel 113, 124, 139
Religion of reason 170
Universal religion 19
Religionswissenschaft 110, 124, 144, 193, 195f., 199f., 205, 208, 214, 222
Religious studies xvif., 470
Renaissance 398, 495
Revelation 13f., 20, 78, 80, 112, 128, 131, 140, 179, 200ff., 211f., 438
Revelation at Sinai 4f., 139, 405
Revolution of 1848 32
Riga 268
Romania 234, 383
Romanticism 281, 343, 353, 374, 376, 444
Rome 7f., 37, 185
Russia 219, 231, 234, 255, 268, 270, 332
Sabianism 123
Samaria 18
Sadducees 106
Satmar Hasidim 394
Schiller festivities 32
Scholarship 76, 81, 83, 347, 362, 423, 427, 498, 524, 552
Anglo-Jewish scholarship 44
Biblical scholarship 152, 156ff., 160, 174, 192, 425
Feminist scholarship 529ff., 538, 541, 546f.
German-Jewish scholarship 38f., 198, 356f.
Historical scholarship 3, 5f., 12, 26f., 330, 344, 346, 348ff., 355
Israel scholarship 103
Literary scholarship 492
Modern scholarship 99, 101ff., 192
Old Testament scholarship 152, 183
Protestant scholarship 157, 160, 181, 218
Orientalist scholarship 6, 10, 15, 26
Talmudic scholarship 316
Torah scholarship 79
Scripture 4, 13f., 944, 102, 113, 211
Secularism, secular xvii, 78, 88, 194, 196, 203, 319, 377, 396, 521
Secularization 352
Shamanism 113, 130
Shas party 394
Silesia 262
Six-Day-War 261
Socialism 255, 333
Society for Ethical Culture 425, 533
Society for the Advancement of Judaism 418, 421, 428
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index of Subjects</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Société des Études Juives</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociologists, Jewish</td>
<td>233ff., 244, 260f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology, social sciences</td>
<td>xvii, 231ff., 237, 253, 260ff., 265, 272, 431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology of the Jews</td>
<td>254, 257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>47f., 52, 316, 346, 492f., 518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Petersburg</td>
<td>254f., 315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalinism</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>34, 181, 448, 544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish state</td>
<td>404, 445, 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation state</td>
<td>29, 32, 34, 53, 252, 417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular state</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation of church and state</td>
<td>8, 22f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stettin</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strasbourg</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuttgart</td>
<td>32f., 360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernaturalism</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supersessionism, Christian</td>
<td>24, 427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surinam</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svencionys</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbiosis, German-Jewish</td>
<td>35, 269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babylonian Talmud</td>
<td>100f., 559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestinian Talmud</td>
<td>96, 102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodicy</td>
<td>283, 290, 296, 440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology, Christian</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology, dialectical</td>
<td>194f., 202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology, Jewish</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought, Jewish</td>
<td>274, 424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance</td>
<td>8, 13, 20, 179, 489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tosefta, Tosafot</td>
<td>104, 303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totalitarianism</td>
<td>284, 287f., 295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>6, 81, 395, 407f., 412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical tradition</td>
<td>94f., 147f., 155, 173, 176, 178, 190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical tradition</td>
<td>xxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postbiblical tradition</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharisaic tradition</td>
<td>148, 161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbinic tradition</td>
<td>xiii, 104ff., 155, 161, 200, 507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious tradition</td>
<td>xiv, 151, 391, 423, 506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transculturality, transcultural</td>
<td>306, 308–312, 315, 317ff., 325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transnational</td>
<td>28–31, 36, 48, 52ff., 321, 324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union of American Hebrew Congregations</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Universalism</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden</td>
<td>29f., 311, 368, 378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verein für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Versailles</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>239f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vilnius</td>
<td>256, 260, 272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>506f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weimar Republic</td>
<td>65–69, 70f., 78, 84, 150, 183ff., 189, 193, 221f., 320, 324, 330, 345, 349, 355f., 360, 364f., 367, 511, 520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfenstein</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women, Jewish</td>
<td>529, 532–535, 538, 540f., 543f., 548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s history (studies)</td>
<td>531f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War II</td>
<td>231, 268, 282, 321, 359, 437, 443, 447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Würzburg</td>
<td>127f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeshiva University</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiddish</td>
<td>226, 234, 257–261, 263ff., 265ff., 269, 314, 477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiddish culture</td>
<td>228, 255, 476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiddish historiography</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiddish Scientific Institute</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiddishkeit</td>
<td>234, 270, 424, 444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YIVO</td>
<td>260, 477, 511ff., 515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zend Avesta</td>
<td>111, 121, 124, 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Names</td>
<td>Page(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbt, Thomas</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abel-Rémyrat, Jean Pierre</td>
<td>11711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham</td>
<td>125, 133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham, Gary</td>
<td>25397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abrahams, Israel</td>
<td>4249, 43, 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abramsky, Chimen</td>
<td>256104, 271139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams, Herbert Baxter</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams, James Luther</td>
<td>65, 20943, 21056, 21675, 21778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adler, Cyrus</td>
<td>45, 49, 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adler, Emil</td>
<td>3724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adler, Eve</td>
<td>6912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adler, Felix</td>
<td>418, 424f., 433, 438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adler, Hermann</td>
<td>4146, 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adler, Samuel</td>
<td>418, 425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adorno, Theodor W.</td>
<td>277, 282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agamben, Giorgio</td>
<td>277, 282, 28417, 28517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agger, Ben</td>
<td>5519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnon, S. Y.</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albeck, Chanoch</td>
<td>9610, 103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert, Phyllis Cohen</td>
<td>3831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albertini, Francesca</td>
<td>1463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcalay, Ammiel</td>
<td>48317, 491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander, Samuel</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Harizi, Judah</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen, Amy</td>
<td>532f., 545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison, Henry E.</td>
<td>1222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almog, Oz</td>
<td>45012, 46312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almond, Gabriel</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altmann, Alexander</td>
<td>31, 42, 1628, 64, 742, 933, 263122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansky, S.</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Améry, Jean</td>
<td>27710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansell-Pearson, Keith</td>
<td>5491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appiah, Kwaame Anthony</td>
<td>45838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appleby, R. Scott</td>
<td>41239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apter, David</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquinas, Thomas</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arendt, Hannah</td>
<td>7134, 224, 236, 261, 265, 268f., 272, 27710, 27810, 282-289, 293, 296, 348, 533f., 533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristode</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkush, Allan</td>
<td>4, 1835, 30311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnold, Matthew</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aron, Raymond</td>
<td>224, 229, 232, 235, 266129, 268, 270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascher, Saul</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aschheim, Steven</td>
<td>51955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attias, Jean-Christophe</td>
<td>482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atsma, Hartmut</td>
<td>24880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auerbach, Berthold</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auerbach, Erich</td>
<td>320, 322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aver-Beck, Alan J.</td>
<td>10223, 10639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awerbuch, Marianne</td>
<td>3682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azoulay, Ariella</td>
<td>46352, 467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baader, Maria</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backhaus, Fritz</td>
<td>14912, 51345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon, Gershom</td>
<td>256104, 40522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baeck, Leo</td>
<td>164ff., 170ff., 192, 364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baentsch, Bruno</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baer, Fritz (Yitzhak)</td>
<td>8534, 86, 356, 510, 518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bähr, Karl Christian Wilhelm Felix</td>
<td>111, 1136, 114, 122, 12318, 124, 12626, 129f., 13138, 13341, 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baily, Bernard</td>
<td>24054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balaban, Majer</td>
<td>50625, 50933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balch, David</td>
<td>536, 53726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamberger, Fritz</td>
<td>31, 42, 77, 7813, 8812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamberger, Herz</td>
<td>51034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barash, Jeffrey Andrew</td>
<td>50217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnai, Jacob</td>
<td>8739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnavi, Elie</td>
<td>24982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barner, Wilfried</td>
<td>1424, 2992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar-On, Zvi</td>
<td>27710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baron, Salo W.</td>
<td>55ff., 71, 23335, 25297, 259, 261, 265126, 268, 272, 273145, 487, 510, 514, 559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrett, Michele</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartel, Adolf</td>
<td>30615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barth, Fredrik</td>
<td>485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barth, Karl</td>
<td>6727, 68, 194, 202f., 211–214, 28213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barzilay, Isaac</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basnag, Jacques</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basser, Herbert</td>
<td>10225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baszanger, Isabelle</td>
<td>23748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bauer, Bruno</td>
<td>50626, 51036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bauman, Zygmun</td>
<td>23645, 24676, 2768, 5517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baumgarten, Elisheva</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INDEX OF NAMES

Baumgarten, Jean 255
Baur, Ferdinand Christian 111, 114, 122, 124, 134, 137
Bechtel, Delphine 256
Becchold, Hans-Joachim 157
Becker, Gottfried Wilhelm 375ff.
Becker, Howard 235, 244f.
Beer, Bernhard 387
Beer, Georg 186
Beer, Peter 498
Bell, Daniel 224, 227f., 235, 237, 243, 261, 263, 264, 265, 267
Benbassa, Esther 482
Ben-David, Joseph 235, 266
Ben-Horin, Meir 442
Benjamin, Joseph Israel 383f.
Benjamin, Walter 71, 170, 251, 457
Benveniste, Émile 248
Benvenisti, Meron 450
Bergen, Doris L. 190
Berger, Bennett M. 247, 250
Berger, David 273
Berghahn, Klaus L. 299
Bergson, Henri 56
Berholtz, Amichai 409, 411
Berkhofer, Robert E. 460
Berkovitz, Jay 254
Berlin, Adele 94
Berlin, Alexander 227
Bloom,close Sam W. 502
Blutcher, Heinrich 283
Bluhm, Lothar 375
Blumenberg, Hans 406
Blumenfeld, Kurt 354
Blumenkranz, Bernard 254
Blumer, Herbert 235
Boas, Franz 235, 237f., 259f.
Bobbio, Norbert 251
Bock, Gisela 542
Bodean, Miriam 486
Boeckh, August 304
Boehlich, Walter 145
Bohlen, Peter von 114
Bokser, Baruch M. 97
Bollacher, Martin 303, 372
Bollnow, Otto Friedrich 127
Bond, Terry 541
Bonell, Victoria E. 553
Bonfil, Robert 484, 487, 489, 519
Bopp, Franz 114
Borut, Jacob 34
Bostock, Anna 282
Boswell, David 46
Bourdieu, Pierre 247, 456, 457
Bourez, Alain 248
Bouretz, Pierre 252
Boustan, Ra’anan S. 475
Boyarin, Daniel 109, 325, 397, 470, 478, 498, 534, 563
Boyarin, Jonathan 325, 478, 481
Brämer, Andreas 74
Brash, Helen 546
Bratuschek, Ernst 304
Braudel, Fernand 224
Braun, Willi 12728
Bréal, Michel 253
Brann, Markus 51138
Brenner, Michael 7711, 8636, 8842, 339111, 3561, 36112, 50625, 51036, 51343, 51417, 51631, 51934, 52667
Bretter, Marc Zvi 944
Breuer, Edward 6
Breslauer, Bernhard 337f.
Breuer, Isaac 6, 59, 67f., 70f., 354
Breuer, Jacob 33415
Breuer, Mordechai 587, 753, 33314
Breuer, Salomon 59
Brocke, Michael 2991
Bromley, John S. 438
Brooten, Bernadette 530
Brown, Benjamin 40013, 40521, 41239, 41340, 41542
Brown, Colin 25089, 25191
Brown, Peter 25089, 25191
Brunner, Emil 1967
Brunner, Otto 321, 3294
Bryce, James 449
Brydon, Diana 16631
Büsching, Anton Friedrich 7
Bunis, David M. 255103
Burguière, André 24880
Burke, Peter 250
Burkhardt, C. A. H. 50830
Bury, John B. 40318
Bushman, Claudia L. 4669
Butler, Judith 45117, 533, 535, 538, 545ff., 548
Bynum, Caroline W. 54655
Byron, George 318
Cahan, Samuel 254101
Cahen, Isidore 40, 4114
Cahnman, Werner 23024, 264123
Cahun, Leon 40
Cairns, David 1967
Calvary, Moses 343f.
Calvin, Jean 23439
Card, Claudia 276
Carrette, Jeremy R. 47066
Carlebach, Julius 10553, 3292, 34555, 51157
Carmel-Sorotzkin, David 40316
Caron, Vicky 4060, 270138
Castelli, Elizabeth 47066
Casper, Bernhard 20229
Cassell, David 300f., 311, 38771
Cassirer, Ernst 69, 40318
Cavell, Stanley 278
Cecil, Lamar 17574
Cesaranì, David 436
Chajes, Zevi Hirsch 8656
Chandler, Jeffrey 257108
Charbit, Dennis 257107, 271141
Chaucer, Geoffrey 531
Chazan, Robert 485
Cheah, Pheng 292
Chinski, Sarah 46332
Cicourel, Aaron 23544
Clifford, James 281, 292, 32563
Cohen, Arthur A. 4229, 44161
Cohen, Gerson D. 261
Cohen, Jeremy 492
Cohen, Josh 2768
Cohen, Mitchell 23541
Cohen, Richard 304, 259114
Cohen, J. Shaye D. 9714, 533
Cohn, Bernhard 419f.
Cohn, Hermann 337
Cohn, Oskar 360
Cohn, Robert 45840, 47064
Colli, Giorgio 5491
Collingwood, Robin G. 547
Columbus, Christopher 46
Comte, Auguste 430
Conant, James 24138
Confino, Alon 918
Conforti, Yitzhak 8657, 519, 52057
Conrad, Sebastian 292
Conze, Werner 3293
Cooley, Charles Horton 231
Cooner, Terry 22715
Cooper, Alan 944
Cornsill, Carl Heinrich 162
Coser, Lewis 235f., 23748, 24136, 24572, 263, 263122, 264123
Coulange, Fustel de 547
Cranz, August Wilhelm 17ff., 22, 24f.
Creizenach, Michael 86
INDEX OF NAMES

Crim, Keith R.  211
Crocce, Benedetto  484
Cromwell, Oliver  43ff., 52
Cuddihy, John Murray  234, 260
Culler, Jonathan  511
Daaldler, Hans  237
Damrosch, David  225
Dannhauser, Werner J.  79
Darmsteter, James  39
Darnell, Regna  260
Darwin, Charles  49
Davidson, Arnold I.  448
Davidson, Donald  281
Davidson, Israel  428
Davis, Israel  43
Davy, John  134, 135
Dehn, Günther  221
Deissmann, Adolf  178
Deleuze, Giles  450
Delitzsch, Franz  373f., 377, 529
Delitzsch, Friedrich  174–177
Denkler, Horst  376
Denton, John  62
Derenbourg, Joseph  38, 253
Derrida, Jacques  146, 277f., 458, 527, 535, 553
Descartes, René  280
Deshen, Shlomo A.  400
Desrochers, Stephan  491
Deussen, Paul  61
Deutsch, Karl  236, 240f.
Deutsche, Rosalyn  459
Deutscher, Isaac  226
Dever, William G.  101
Dewey, John  263, 420, 434, 436, 439
Diamond, Stanley  225
Dienemann, Max  155, 156, 364
Dietrich, Wendell S.  146, 163, 171
Dilthey, Wilhelm  85, 281
Diner, Dan  514, 524f.
Diner, Hasia  546
Dim, Ben Zion  86
Dirlik, Arik  556f., 565
Disraeli, Benjamin  41
Disselkamp, Annette  171
Dmitrieva, Marina  506, 507
Dohm, Christian Wilhelm  6–9, 17f., 27
Dold, Maria  506, 512
Dominguez, Virginia  240
Donath, Leopold  510
Donogh, Martin  133
Dorman, Joseph  227
Dow, Alexander  114
Dreyfus, Dina  225
Drunmont, Édouard  40
Duhm, Bernhard  162
Dukas, Rosa  346
Dukes, Leopold  379
Dunbabin, John P. D.  43
Duperrin, Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil  119
Durkheim, Émile  231, 236, 268, 270, 431, 435
Dworkin, Ronald  277
Eagleton, Terry  556, 557
Eberle, Joseph  306
Edmonds, David  242
Ehrenberg, Hans  66
Ehrenberg, Richard  66
Ehrenberg, Rudolf  66
Ehrenfreund, Jacques  499, 508, 518
Eichmann, Adolf  285
Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried  5, 10
Eidelinov, John  242
Einhorn, David  110f., 125–131, 133–144
Einstein, Albert  259
Eisen, Arnold  8
Eisenmenger, Johann Andreas  372, 377, 529
Eisenstadt, Shmuel  257, 266, 279
Eisner, Fritz H.  368
Elbogen, Ismar  77f., 95ff., 99, 100, 156, 313f., 356, 358, 359, 366, 506, 516
Elías, Norbert  236, 244, 246, 247
Eliassof, Hermann  50
Ellenson, David  75, 105, 107, 156, 351
Elliot, Dyan  546
Elon, Menachem  41

El-Or, Tamar 532
Emerson Ralph Waldo 420
Endelman, Todd M. 565
Eörsi, Istvan 231
Epstein, Catherine 249
Epstein, Jacob N. 103
Epstein, Joseph 251
Erb, Rainer 339
Eribon, Didier 225
Erickson, Robert 191
Erik, Max 315
Erikson, Erik 235
Ermareth, Elisabeth 463
Ersch, Johann Samuel 304
Ertel, Rachel 226
Etschelbacher, Josef 162
Espagne, Michel 238
Etizioni, Amitai 235
Evans, Jessica 46
Ewald, Heinrich 373
Ewen, Frederic 33
Ezrahi, Sidra Dekoven 325
Fabian, Johannes 477
Fackenheim, Emil 110
Fanon, Franz 465
Farias, Victor 277
Farin, Ingo 281
Faubion, James D. 470
Feiner, Shmuel 495
Felber, Stefan 190
Feldman, Avigdor 456
Feldman, Burton 127
Feldman, Ronald H. 286
Felsenthal, Bernhard 45
Ferziger, Adam S. 399
Festinger, Leon 235
Feuchtwang, David 181
Feuchtwanger, Lion 322
Fechtwanger, Ludwig 158
Feuer, Lewis 261
Fichte, Johann Gottlieb 282
Fine, Gary Alan 234
Fine, Steven 98
Finner, Samuel E. 236
Fink, Carole 248
Finkelstein, Louis 99
Fischoff, Ephraim 218
Fishman, Aryei 393
Fishman, Samuel Z. 74
Fiske, Robert 553
Fix, Karl-Heinz 146
Flashar, Hellmut 304
Fleischer, Ezra 97
Fleming, Donald 240
Flynn, Thomas 460
Fosdick, Harry Emerson 420
Foucault, Michel 224, 278, 447
Frank, Gelya 261
Frankel, Jonathan 425
Franck, Adolph 253
François, Etienne 518
Frank, Gelya 261
Franke, Zacharias 74
Friedländer, Albert H. 165
Friedländer, David 365
Friedländer, Fritz 77
Friedländer, Saul 248
Friedländer, Moritz Samuel 331
Friedländer, Maurice 194
Friedlander, Israel 428
Friedlander, Israel 428
Friedlander, Israel 428
Friedman, Menachem 405
Friedmann, Georges 235
Friesel, Eviatar 527
Fritsch, Theodor 180
Fritzsche, Peter 918
Fromm, Erich 235
Fruhwald, Wolfgang 376
Fuchs, Eugen 338
Fulda, Daniel 370
Funk, Rainer 252
Funkenstein, Amos 170
Fürst, Julius 31
Fürstenfeld, Raphael Jacob 379
Gabba, Emilio 251
Gafni, Isaiah 534
Galbraith, John Kenneth 224
Galchinsky, Michael 83, 167, 230, 269, 523, 560, 565
Gans, Eduard 30, 33
Gans, Herbert 245
Gaon, Sherira 105
Gardaz, Michel 39
Garfinkel, Abraham 235
Garrigou, Alain 246
Gatterer, Johann Christoph 133
Gay, Peter 249
Gebhard, Miriam 49
Geertz, Clifford 480
Gellner, Ernst 236, 266
Geiger, Abraham 266, 38, 75, 81, 94, 96, 106, 110, 163, 417, 427, 547, 560, 562
Geiger, Ludwig 38, 156, 299, 320, 338, 547
Geis, Robert R. 146
Gerhardt, Uta 231
Gerlach, Wolfgang 190
Giddings, Franklin 231, 262, 429
Gilbert, Felix 249
Gilman, Sander L. 325
Gilroy, Paul 485, 493, 554, 555
Ginsberg, Morris 235, 257, 268
Ginsburg, Vladimir 258
Ginzberg, Louis 101, 382, 422, 428
Ginzburg, Carlo 251
Glasenapp, Gabriele von 370, 380, 385
Glass, David 236
Glatzer, Nahum N. 93, 94, 200
Glazer, Nathan 226, 235, 261, 263, 264, 266, 267
Glick, Leonard 238
Gluckman, Max 235, 239
Gluzman, Miki 467
Goebl, Josef 286
Goering, Hermann 286
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 299, 303, 307, 312, 318, 320, 321
Goetschel, Willi 61, 323, 205
Goeze, Johann Melchior 16
Goffman, Erving 235, 244, 264
Gogarten, Friedrich 236
Golczewski, Frank 357
Gold, Martin 263
Goldberg, Harvey E. 412, 478
Goldberg, Sylvie-Anne 255, 260
Goldhammer, Herbert 195, 235
Goldhaw, Norman P. 195
Goldberg, Walter 238
Goldsmith, Abraham Meyer 386
Goldsmith, Lazarus 307
Goldsmith, Walter 238
Goldshmidt, Salomon, Karen Lisa 518
Goldsmith, Emanuel S. 426, 429, 430, 437, 438, 439, 440
Goldsmith, Walter 238
Goodman, Martin 94, 98
Goodman-Thau, Eveline 128
Gordon, Colin 449
Gordon, David 246, 256, 257
Gordon, Haim 202
Görrès, Joseph von 113, 114, 131, 133, 136, 375
Goshen-Gottstein, Moshe 94, 104, 156
Gothard, Jan 546
Goudsblom, Johan 247
Gouldner, Alvin 235, 237, 244
Gotzmann, Andreas 32, 74, 93, 497, 499, 500, 502, 503, 504, 505, 507, 523, 526
Greive, Hermann 304
Graetz, Michael 368
Grau, Wilhelm 348, 365, 513
Grazia, Louis de 211
Green, Abigail 34
Green, Kenneth Hart 274
Green, William Scott 106
Greenberg, Gershon 110
Greenblatt, Stephen Jay 485
Greenstein, Edward L. 97
Gregor, Neil 35
Greive, Hermann 129
Grimm, Jacob 374, 381
Grimm, Wilhelm 374, 381
Grossman, Susan 333
Gruber, Johann Gottfried 304
Gründer, Karlfried 304
Grundmann, Walter 191
Grüttner, Michael 543
Güdemann, Moritz 171
Gumplowicz, Ludwig 230, 512
Guattari, Felix 450
Gunkel, Hermann 153f., 177f., 208
Gurock, Jeffrey S. 422
Gurvitch, Georges 235
Gusfield, Joseph 235
Gutman, Herbert G. 476f.
Gutting, Gary 460
Guttmann, Alexander 96f.
Ha’am, Ahad (Asher Ginzberg) 256, 270, 270
Habermas, Jürgen 194, 232, 277
Hachtmann, Rüdiger 543
Hacohen, Joseph 383
Hacohen, Malachi 241, 242
Ha-Kohen, Israel Meir (Hafetz Hayyim) 404f.
Hall, Stuart 28, 449, 554f.
Hallo, William W. 202
Hamburger, Jacob 387
Hallacker, Anja 129
Hallie, Philip 277
Hallo, William W. 202
Hamburger, Jacob 387
Harnack, Adolf von 148, 149
Harris, Jay M. 102f., 351
Hart, Mitchell 186
Hartmann, Eduard 341
Hartmann, Heidi 532
Hass, Jonathan 57, 91
Heimann, Eduard 196, 221
Heimann-Jellinek, Felicitas 259
Heine, Heinrich 33, 311, 312, 368
Heinemann, Joseph 189
Heinemann, Joseph 100, 101
Heinrich, Nathalie 246
Hempel, Johannes 186
Hennen, John 112
Herbert, Ulrich 527
Herder, Johann Gottfried 10, 299, 303f., 374f., 377
Hermand, Jost 299
Herrmann, Wilhelm 145
Herskovits, Melville 235, 260
Hertz, Alice 239
Hertz, Robert 230, 239
Herz, Marcus 18
Herzfeld, Levi 386, 386
Herzog, Elisabeth 257
Heschel, Abraham Joshua 103, 192, 269
Hess, Jonathan 57, 91, 112, 152, 183, 269
Hess, Moses 86
Hessing, Jakob 527
Heuberger, Georg 149
Hever, Hannan 450, 451, 455, 461, 462, 466f.
Heyd, Michael 86
Hezser, Catherine 98, 106
Higham, John 44
Hildesheimer, Eshriel 58, 59, 75
Hillel the Elder 21f., 107
Hirsch, Emanuel 190, 191
Hirsch, Samson Raphael 32, 58f., 63, 67f., 71, 75, 333f., 394, 410, 417
Hirschfeld, A. 335
Hirschfeld, A. 335
Hobbes, Thomas 281
Hodgson, Peter 114, 115, 118, 120, 123
Hölder, Klaus 525
Hoffman, Lawrence A. 107
Hoffmann, Christhard 35, 77, 83, 96, 103, 156, 330, 333, 339
INDEX OF NAMES

34535, 34636, 34836, 35637, 36538, 49639, 4973, 50530, 511, 51331, 51832, 52133

Hoffmann, David Z. 75, 101f., 105, 107, 157f., 181

Holdheim, Samuel 50634

Hollinger, David 23235

Hollywood, Amy 34636

Holstein, Jay 25337

Holzhey, Helmut 14638

Hook, Sydney 23539, 263122

Horch, Hans Otto 36930, 37631, 38532, 38633, 38734

Horkheimer, Max 282

Horowitz, Elliot 486

Horowitz, Irving Louis 23540, 236, 264123

Horowitz, Sara 26735

Horowitz, Yeshayahu 405

Horwitz, Hyman/Heiman 375ff., 382

Hyman, Herbert 23541

Hyman, Paula 40, 270138, 351139, 539ff.

Hindess, Barry 55242

Ibn Jachja, Gedalja ben Joseph 38043

Ibn Verga, Yehudah 38144

Ibn Verga, Solomon 383

Iggers, George 52745

Ilan, Tal 534ff., 536ff.

Ish-Shalom, Benjamin 39246

Iser, M. 32147

Israel, Shaul 754

Jacob, Benno 158ff., 175f., 179, 191, 193122

Jacob, Walter 15848

Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich 69

Jabotinsky, Vladimir 27139

Jacobs, Joseph 42, 51

Jacobs, Louis 40540

Jacobs, Richard 7541, 10542, 15824

James, William 262, 420, 434, 441

Jamm, Christoph 12933

Jantzen, Grace 47034

Jaspers, Karl 265, 28913, 28315

Jaspert, Bernd 16546

Jefferson, Thomas 262

Jellinek, Adolph 305, 386

Jeremias, Joachim 529

Jersch-Wenzel, Stefi 3682

Jick, Leon 8813

Johanning, Klaus 17467, 17573

Jones, Hans 27710, 27810

Jones, William 1148

Jospe, Alfred 742

Jospe, Eva 20021

Jospe, Raphael 742

Jost, Isaak Markus 303, 76ff., 86, 381, 385, 38635, 38736, 498, 501

Jürgensen, Almuth 15830

Jütte, Robert 8534

Kadushin, Charles 2241

Kähler, Martin 208

Kämpf, Saul Isaac 37940

Kaes, Anton 2768

Kaesler, Dirk 22919, 23128

Kafka, Franz 258

Kaganoff, Nathan M. 4536

Kahana, Menahem 10327

Kahn, Zadok 4039

Kaidanover, Aharon Shmuel 38149

Kalischer, Zvi Hirsch 8636

Kallen, Horace M. 259–262, 263122, 27343

Kammen, Michael 50

Kampe, Norbert 15117, 33934

Kant, Immanuel 11, 65, 67, 147, 281, 293, 558

Kantorowicz, Ernst 247, 24879

Kaplan, Marion 540ff., 545

Kaplan, Mordecai 261ff., 268, 417–444

Kaplan, Josef 487, 489

Karben, Victor von 529

Kardiner, Abraham 235

Karelitz, Yeshayahu (Hazon Ish) 413–416

Karpeles, Gustav 300ff., 305ff., 308, 310ff., 314ff., 324

Katz, Bertram 213748

Katz, Jacob 919, 272143, 273145, 348–351, 363ff., 396, 411, 51752
Katz, Elihu 23544
Katz, Shaul 8637
Katz, Steven 27710
Katznelson, Ira 270137
Kaznelson, Siegmund 358, 359
Kaufmann, David 84
Kaufmann, Isidor 259
Kaufmann, Walter 20124
Kayserling, Meyer 379, 384, 38772, 330
Kayserling, Moritz 45ff.
Kayserling, Simon 384
Kearney, Richard 45840
Kedourie, Elie 236, 266129
Keith, Michael 45941
Kellenbach, Katharina von 5292
Kellermann, Benzon 161, 17160
Kellner, Douglas 45526
Kemp, Adrianna 463, 467
Kettler, David 25128
Kierkegaard, Sören 281, 289
Kilcher, Andreas B. 32044, 32251, 32462, 32563, 3694
Kimber, Rita 265127
Kimber, Robert 265127
Kimmelmann, Reuven 10119
Kimmerling, Baruch 4463, 452–455, 46349, 465
Kirk, David 236
Kirchheim, Raphael 38043
Kirchheimer, Otto 236
Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara 3935, 260115
Kisch, Guido 34554, 36011, 38352, 38438
Kittel, Rudolf 180ff., 18392
Klausen, Rudolf Heinrich 1136, 114
Klausner, Joseph 86, 316–319, 323f.
Kleuker, Friedrich 111, 119, 136
Klingenstein, Susanne 23230
Kluback, William 1463
Kistle, Richard Payne 132, 13341
Kochan, Lionel E. 271139
Kocka, Jürgen 316
Köbrich, Lotte 265127, 35483
Koelbl, Herlinde 24777
Kofman, Sarah 27710
Kohler, Kaufmann 12726
Kohler, Max J. 5294
Kohn, Hans 236, 261, 318
Kohn, Salomon 370
Kolb, David 13341
Kollatz, Thomas 2991
Koltun-Fromm, Kenneth 941, 10636, 1102
Kondylis, Panajotis 5517
König, René 22919
Kook, Avraham Isaac 391ff., 399
Koonz, Claudia 542
Korn, Bertram W. 271139
Kornberg, Jacques 271139
Kornhauser, William 235
Kort, Hermann 24673
Kosansky, Oren 4753
Koselleck, Reinhart 321, 3293, 333
Kossman, Ernst H. 4338
Kracauer, Siegfried 51345
Kraemer, David 53934
Kramer, Martin 1101
Krapf, Thomas 15726
Kraut, Benny 42413
Krell, Marc A. 1956, 20230, 20331
Krieck, Ernst 361
Krieger, Karsten 1452
Krieken, Robert van 24676
Kristol, Irving 226
Krobb, Florian 38041, 38560
Krochmal, Nachman 2741
Kuenen, Abraham 16342
Kuh, Anton 322
Kuhn, Thomas 236, 241
Kuntzel, Georg 363
Kurzweil, Baruch 60, 79f.
Kusche, Ulrich 14811, 190116
Kushner, Tony 4336, 5086
Lacan, Jacques 224, 278
LaCapra, Dominic 276
Laclau, Ernesto 4483
Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe 27710
Lacroix, Bernard 24676
Ladd jr., Everett Carl 23233
Lässig, Simone 523
Lamb, Martha J. 4877
Lamm, Norman 755
Lamprecht, Karl 56
Landau, Michel 259114
Landau, Wolf 81
Landau, Gustav 219
Landers, Yisrael 445f., 449, 460
Lang, Berel 275f., 2779, 282
Lang, Jean-Bernard 270438
Lange, Friedrich A. 6420
Langer, Ruth 10844
Langewiesche, Dieter 50013
INDEX OF NAMES 651

Laski, Harold 236, 244
Lassner, Jacob 110
Lau, Benjamin 411
Laube, Stefan 146
Lauterbach, Jacob Z. 102
Lautman, Jacques 240
Lavrov, Peter 430
Lazarsfeld, Paul 235, 240, 242
Lazarus, Moritz 33, 37, 84, 501
Lea, Charles 40
Le Beau, Bryan F. 47
Leben, Charles 259
Lécyuyer, Bernard-Pierre 240
Lederhendler, Elie 256
Lehmann, Marcus 334
Lehmann, Oskar 338
Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm 281
Leipoldt, Johannes 529
Leites, Nathan 236
Lelewel, Joachim 383
Lenin, Vladimir I. 228
Lermontov, Michael J. 318
Lerner, David 236
Leschnitzer, Adolf 350
Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim 3, 12–16, 27, 35, 357
Letteris, Meir 377, 379
Levenson, Jon D. 157
Levi, Abraham 334
Lévi, Israel 253
Lévi, Primo 287, 292
Lévi, Sylvain 253
Levin, Leonard 104
Levin, M. 340
Lévy, Emmanuel 225, 251, 268, 274, 277f., 281, 294–298
Levine, Lee I. 101
Levine, Peter 61
Lévy-Strauss, Claude 224f., 226, 228f., 232, 235, 237, 239
Levitt, Laura 531
Lévy, Alphonse 40
Lévy, Daniel 383
Levy, Isaac 38f.
Levy Jr., Marion 235
Levy, Moritz A. 387
Levy, Rudolf 361
Levy, S. 42
Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien 230
Lewin, Kurt 235, 262, 263
Lewinska, Pelagia 292, 293
Lewis, Earl 28
Lewis, Jan 546
Liberles, Robert 42
Libeskind, Daniel 54
Lichten, Joseph 256
Lichtheim, Georges 235
Lieberman, Saul 422
Liebeschütz, Hans 64, 148
Liebling, Karl 360
Liebman, Charles S. 402
Liedke, Rainer 321
Lie, Judith 546
Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien 230
Lewin, M. 340
Magnus, Katie 49
Mahon, Michael 553
Maier, Joseph 32, 230, 243
Mailer, Norman 224
Maimonides, Moses 72, 102, 141, 147, 226f., 244, 398, 530
Malino, Frances 40
Malory, George 430
Mandelbaum, David 260
Mandell, Charlotte 224
Mannheim, Karl 231, 236, 244, 351, 363
Mannheimer, Sigmund 346, 387
Marcion 11
Marcus, Judith 264, 265
Marcuse, Herbert 235, 237, 282
Marryle, Heinrich 342f.
Marheineke, Philipp 115
Marks, David Woolf 10
Marshall, Thomas H. 266
Martin, Bernard 314, 315
Martin, Kingsley 235, 237, 282
Margulies, Heinrich 342f.
Marx, Alexander 422
Marx, Gary 235, 236
Marx, Hugo 361
Marx, Karl 108, 219, 268, 396, 428, 491
Massil, Stephen 41, 42
Mattenklott, Gerd 128
Mauss, Marcel 230, 231, 239, 270
Maximilian I. 30
Maybaum, Sigmund 77
Mayer, Annemarie 202
Mayer, Reinhold 202
Mayer, Shlomo 192
McCalla, Arthur 127
McClintock, Ann 470
McCormack, Bruce L. 203
McCumber, John 278
McCutchecn, Russell T. 127, 470
McDowell, John 281
McIver, Robert 273
McKinnon-Evans, Stuart 541
McNay, Lois 532
McWhorter, Ladelle 532
Medding, Peter Y. 105
Megged, Aharon 446, 447
Megill, Allan 552
Meier, Heinrich 70
Meinecke, Friedrich 43, 66, 71, 346
Meisel Baron, Jeanette 233
Meja, Volker 231
Melammed, Renee Levine 530
Mendelsohn, Ezra 255
Mendelsohn, Moses 3-10, 12-27, 35f., 243, 303, 340, 351, 363, 373
Mendes-Flohr, Paul 317, 95, 194, 196, 197, 199, 200, 203, 218, 219, 220, 226, 229, 257, 258, 352
Menger, Carl 56
Mennell, Stephen 246, 247
Mennie, Karl 196, 221
Menocal, Maria Rosa 483
Merk, Otto 165
Merlin, Ethan M. 442
Merrit, Richard 241
Mertens, Bram 129
Merton, Robert 432
Messner, Ellen 238
Meyer, Isidore S. 45
Meyer, Michael A. 76, 93, 96, 104, 103, 106, 145, 329, 359, 424, 522
Meyer, Pierre-Andre 270
Meyers, Eric 534
Michaelis, Johann David 5f., 10ff., 15, 24, 26, 373
Migdal, Joel 446
Mikhailovski, Nicola 430
Milchman, Alan 276, 277, 278
Milikowsky, Chaim 97, 107
Mill, John Stuart 244
Miron, Guy 344, 355
Miskowicz, Jay 459
Mohammed, Abdul R. Jan 450
Mohr, Rudolf 165
Molitor, Franz Joseph 111, 126, 128, 129, 142
Moltmann-Wendel, Elisabeth 529
Momigliano, Arnaldo 127, 249, 251
Montinari, Mazzino 549
Montesquieu, Charles de 7
Montgomery, Robert 112
Montgomery, William 222
Moore, Deborah Dash 227
Moore-Gilbert, Bart 554
Mor, Menachem 477
Moravia, Alberto 251
Morgan, Michael L. 275, 287
Morgenstern, Matthias 68
Morgenhau, Hans 236
Morris, Benny 467
Morrison, David 240, 55
Morrison, Karl 475
Moscovití, Serge 235, 41
Moser, Moses 311, 368, 369
Moses 21, 24, 48, 133, 153, 158, 160
Moses, Julius 154, 21
Mosés, Stéphane 146
Mosse, Werner E. 149
Motzkina, Gabriel 146
Motzkina, Leo 257
Mouffle, Chantal 448, 451, 458
Moy, Samuel 507, 527
Moynihan, Daniel 263
Moyriac de Mailla, Joseph-Anne-Marie de 117
Müller-Vollmer, Karl 372
Mufti, Aamir 470
Munk, Salomon 253, 271
Nagel, Ernest 235
Nagel, Thomas 277, 280
Napoleon Bonaparte 509
Napoleon III 225
Naubert, Christiane Benedicte 375
Neiman, Susan 276, 277
Nelson, W. David 102
Neubauer, Jakob 157, 171
Neubücher, Salomon 376
Neumann, Franz 236
Neusner, Jacob 95, 97, 100, 102, 102, 106, 109
Nicholson, Linda 458, 532
Niebuhr, Barthold Georg 378
Niebuhr, Carsten 11
Niger, Shmuel 315
Nimni, Ephraim 447, 448
Nirenberg, David 492
Nitzsch, Karl Immanuel 111, 112, 124
Nordau, Max 271, 335f., 340
Norden, Barbara 541
Nossig, Alfred 257
Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) 57
Novick, Peter 249
Nowak, Kurt 171
Nuovo, Victor 216
Obermeier, Wolf 376
Oelsner, Ludwig 387
Offenburg, Benno 348
Ogletree, Thomas W. 67
Oldcorn, Anthony 484
Oncken, Hermann 348
Ophir, Adi 455f., 457, 458, 460, 466
Oppenheimer, Franz 231
Oren, Dan A. 232
Osterhammel, Jürgen 29, 552
Papen, Patricia von 365
Pappe, Ilan 452
Park, Robert 242
Parsons, Talcott 231, 234, 39, 432, 435
Pascheles, Wolf 380
Pauck, Marion 208, 209, 218
Pauck, Wilhelm 208, 209, 218
Paucker, Arnold 131
Pedaya, Haviva 405
Peled, Yoav 456
Pelger, Gregor 299
Peleg, Pinhas Ha-Cohen 206
Pelinka, Anton 240
Pelli, Moshe 373
Perles, Felix 156
Peskowitz, Miriam 470, 531, 534
Petain, Henri Philippe 251
Petersen, Heidemarie 506, 507, 512, 515
Petuchowski, Jakob J. 94, 97
Phillips, Reginald H. 180
Philip of Macedonia 250
Philippson, Ludwig 31, 34, 38, 332, 370, 384f., 387, 498, 504, 505
Philippson, Martin 37, 359
Philippson, Phoebus 370, 385, 387
Pile, Steve 459
Pinkus, Fritz 365
Pinsker, Leon 257
Pinson, Koppel S. 270
Plamenatz, John 236
Plaskow, Judith 529
Plato 147, 204, 280f.
Plotinus 281
Pöge-Alder, Kathrin 371
Pöggeler, Otto 129
Polan, Dana 450
Polanyi, Karl 235, 242, 270
Polanyi-Lewitt, Kari 242
Poliakov, Léon 254
Poltermann, Andreas 371
Poma, Andrea 62
Popper, Karl 235f., 241f.
Porat, Dan A. 519
Powell, Walter 257, 244f., 264f.
Prager, Moshe 404
Preuß, Peter 61
Procksch, Otto 184ff., 188f.
Putnam, Hilary 278
Putnam, Robert 263f.
Raab, Earl 263
Rabi, Wladimir 234
Rabinow, Paul 451
Rabinowitz, Dan 464
Rade, Martin 145, 153, 154, 164
Ragaz, Leonard 196
Rahden, Till van 32
Rambam, Maimonides 196
Ramsay, Rachel 382
Rand, Calvin 57
Raphael, Marc Lee 294
Raphael, Yizhak 75
Rapoport-Albert, Ada 329
Rashi 255
Raulet, Gerard 171
Ravitzky, Aviezer 392, 399, 401, 403, 406, 408, 415
Rawls, John 277
Ray, Sangeeta 166
Rayski, Adam 248
Raz, Joseph 277
Raz-Krakotzkin, Amnon 456
Rechter, David 36, 330, 518
Reggio, Samuel 86
Reif, Stefan C. 97, 103, 108
Reill, Peter 4
Reimarus, Hermann Samuel 4, 12–17, 24, 27, 57
Reinach, Hermann 39
Reinach, Salomon 40, 253, 254
Reinach, Théodore 39, 40, 271
Reines, Isaac Jacob 421
Reinhart, Jehuda 31, 38, 95, 196
Reissman, Leonard 235, 266
Rembrandt 43
Rendtorff, Rolf 190
Reventlow, Henning Graf 162
Rhode, Johann Gottlieb 111, 114, 115, 121, 122, 124
Ricard, Robert 490
Richardson, Robert 127
Richarz, Monika 317, 383
Richards, Ira 45
Robbins, Bruce 292
Robbins, Richard 234, 244
Roepeke, Kurt 345
Rohrbacher, Stefan 77, 88, 187
Rockmore, Tom 277
Rodrique, Aron 40, 254, 267
Roemer, Nils 33, 321, 36, 497
Rorty, Richard 277
Rosen, Mina 400
Rosen, Stanley 551
Rosenberg, Alan 276, 277, 278
Rosenberg, Bernard 264
Rosenberg, Curt 344
Rosenberg, Hans 235
Rosenberg, Shalom 409
Rosenbloom, Noah H. 58
Rosenfeld, Claude 270
Rosenmann, Moses 386
Rosenzweig, Franz 6, 62, 66ff., 70f., 84f., 172, 194, 200-205, 212ff., 251, 281, 289, 354, 420, 512
Rosenzweig, Rachel 66
Rosenzweig-Scheinmann, Edith 66
Rosenzweig, Rachel 66
Ross, Edward 231
Rossi, Ino 225
Rotenstreich, Nathan 277
Roth, Cecil 358, 510, 514
Roth, John 277
Roth, Norman 397
Rothschild, Fritz A. 165
Royce, Josiah 441
Rubashoff, Salman 30
Rubin, Gyle 532
Rudavsky, Tamar M. 529
Ruderman, David 258
Rückert, Friedrich 377
Rülf, Gutmann 386
Rustow, Alexander 221
Ruppin, Arthur 258, 261, 268
Russet, Bruce 241
Rustow, Marina 475
Rutherford, Jonathan 28
Rydel, Robert W. 46
Sachs, Michael 379, 386
Sáenz-Badillos, Angel 107
Sagi, Avraham 398, 402, 411
Sahlins, Marshall 490
Sahlins, Peter 490
Said, Edward 168, 465
Sane, Thomas P. 122
Sakheim, Arthur 323
Salanter, Israel 418
Salmón, José 399
Salomon, Albert 235
Salomon, Gotthold 331
Samet, Moshe 397
Sampsen, Elissa 475
Sanders, Ed Parish 534
Saner, Hans 265
Santner, Eric 276
Sapir, Edward 235, 259ff., 265, 268
Sarason, Richard S. 97
Sargent, Leisa 491
Sarna, Nahum M. 94
Sartre, Jean-Paul 274, 491
Sassenberg, Marina 349
Sauer, Hans 354
Schacter, Jacob J. 422
Schacter-Shlomi, Zalman 418
Schad, Margit 377
Schaeffer, Richard 329
Schäfer, Peter 97
Schapikow, Carsten 508
Schatzberg, Walter 265
Schechter, Solomon 421, 423, 427
Scheindlin, Raymond P. 100, 488
Schelling, Friedrich W. 110, 144, 209, 289
Schiller, Friedrich 37, 318, 501
Schilpp, Paul Arthur 201
Schine, Robert S. 156, 352, 353, 364
Schlegel, Friedrich 57
Schmidt, Friedrich August 117
Schmidt, Karl Benjamin 373
Schmidt, Michael 187, 339
Schmidt-Biggemann, Wilhelm 129
Schmitt, Carl 70, 284
Schon, Dominique 235
Schneemelcher, Wilhelm 111
Schonow, Werner 345, 362
Scholem, Gershom 70, 78f., 86f., 128, 166, 172, 199, 324, 356, 423
Schor, Grit 373
Schorr, Joshua Heschel 86
Schorsch, Ismar 33, 59, 105, 106, 329, 368, 386, 508
Schotoff, Willy 191
Schöffer, Dominique 235
Schulze, Hagen 515
Schütz, Alfred 235, 244
Schwab, Shimon 60
Schwartz, Arnold 95
Schwartz, Daniel R. 86, 357
Schwartz, Seth 98
Schwarz, Adolf 180, 181
Schwarz, Henry 166
Schweid, Eliezer 393
Schweitzer, Albert 122
Schweitzer, Friedrich 111
Scott, James 489
Scott, Joan Wallach 451, 536, 547
Scott, Walter 369, 385
Scult, Mel 262, 418, 419, 421, 422, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 435, 437, 438, 439
Seeberg, Reinhold 196
Seidensticker, Tilman 500
Seidman, Steven 455, 532
Selzer, Robert 270, 273, 422, 440
Selznick, Philip 227, 235, 244
Semler, Johann Salomon 14, 16
Sered, Susan 532
Sereny, Gitta 542, 543
Serrier, Thomas 248
Shach, Eliezer Menachem 404
Shaffer, Marguerite S. 508
Shafrir, Gershon 463, 465
Shalev, Thomas 225
Shakespeare, William 318, 531
Shamir, Ronen 467
Shammai 21, 107
Shammas, Anton 450
Shanks Alexander, Elizabeth 106
Shapira, Anita 87, 465
Shapiro, Marc B. 105
Shapiro, Susan E. 530
Shenhav, Yehouda 451, 456, 461, 462, 463, 466
Shehori, Dalia 447, 460
Sherman, Franklin 215
Shils, Edward 243, 250, 251, 264
Shohat, Ella 461, 470
Sherber, David 411
Silber, Michael 57, 58
Silberman, Lou H. 102
Silberstein, Laurence J. 199, 200, 206, 207, 216, 450, 457, 458, 460, 463, 479
Siegel, Jerrold 553, 557, 558
Siegel-Wunschewitz, Leonore 171, 529
Simmel, Georg 196, 230, 245, 281, 282, 452
Simon, Ernst 347
Simon, Howard 227
Simon, Uriel 94
Simon-Nahum, Perrine 415, 106, 254, 509
Singer, Claude 248
Sitter, Walter 551
Sivan, Emmanuel 416
Sklar, Marshall 235, 245, 266
Sluga, Hans 277, 282
Smend, Rudolf 148
Smid, Marikje 190
Smith, Bonnie G. 547, 548
Smith, Goldwin 41, 45
Sofer, Hatam 394, 404
Sofer, Moshe 403
Soja, Edward 459
Sokol, Moshe Z. 401
Soloveitchik, Haim 412
Soloveitchik, Joseph Baer 60, 410
Sombart, Werner 341
Sorkin, David 4f., 262, 331
Sorotzkin, David 403, 406
Sousan, Henri 385, 386, 387
Spencer, Herbert 318, 430
Sperling, David 94
Sperber, David 411
Spinoza, Baruch 13, 23, 69, 226, 281
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty 457, 465, 554
Sтаer, Willy 153
Stahl, Friedrich Julius 362, 510
Staiger, Emil 323
Stalin, Josef 228
Stange, Erich 184
Stanislawski, Michael 257, 271
Staten, Henry 550
Statman, Daniel 409
Stears, Peter N. 546
Stegemann, Ekkehard 190
Stein, Heinrich Friedrich Karl von 342
Steinberg, Michael P. 250
Steinberg, Milton 441
Steinecke, Hartmut 325
Steiner, George 226, 276
Steinheim, Salomon Ludwig 274, 386
Stemberger, Günter 95
Sterling, Eleonore 359
Stern, David 97
Stern, Menachem 534
Stern, Moritz 508
Stern-Taubler, Selma 346, 349, 356, 361, 363
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stevens, Wallace</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stiermotte, Alfred P.</td>
<td>443, 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stillschweig, Kurt</td>
<td>360ff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stocking jr., George</td>
<td>230, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoecker, Adolf</td>
<td>187, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolman, Avraham</td>
<td>411, 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone, Ronald H.</td>
<td>209, 11, 218, 80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stouffer, Samuel</td>
<td>235, 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straus, Oscar</td>
<td>45ff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straus, Raphael</td>
<td>354, 365f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strauß, Bruno</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strauss, Anselme</td>
<td>235, 44, 237, 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strauss, David Friedrich</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strauss, Herbert A.</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strauss, Isaac</td>
<td>39, 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strauss, Leo</td>
<td>6, 69ff., 236, 274, 277, 354, 397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streicher, Julius</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strich, Fritz</td>
<td>303, 10, 308, 320ff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong, Frank</td>
<td>52, 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroumsa, Guy</td>
<td>199, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuhler, Peter Feddersen</td>
<td>111, 114, 118, 119, 121, 134, 135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stumme, John R.</td>
<td>195, 1, 215, 69, 216, 73, 217, 76, 218, 81, 219, 84, 220, 89, 221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumner, William Graham</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summit, Jennifer</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudhan, Bernhard</td>
<td>371, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swetschinski, Daniel</td>
<td>38, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swirski, Shlomo</td>
<td>452, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synott, Marcia Graham</td>
<td>232, 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Szold, Henrietta</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabory, Joseph</td>
<td>108, 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tal, Uriel</td>
<td>149, 12, 173, 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talmage, Frank E.</td>
<td>213, 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targarona-Borrás, Judit</td>
<td>107, 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarr, Zoltan</td>
<td>230, 13, 264, 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta-Shma, Ysra</td>
<td>411, 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taubler, Eugen</td>
<td>36, 77, 85, 346, 349, 356, 501, 510, 510, 510f, 516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taves, Ann</td>
<td>546, 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor, Charles</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendler, Abraham</td>
<td>380ff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terdiman, Richard</td>
<td>450, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teweles, Heinrich</td>
<td>299, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theurich, Henning</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiele, Leslie, Paul</td>
<td>557, 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas, Lawrence</td>
<td>277, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson, Edward P.</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tillich, Paul</td>
<td>194ff., 208, 210–218, 220–223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timms, Edward</td>
<td>205, 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava</td>
<td>89, 44, 469, 63, 567, 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trachtenberg, Alan</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy, David</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trautmann-Waller, Céline</td>
<td>82, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treitschke, Heinrich von</td>
<td>63, 145ff., 341, 502, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd, Jane Marie</td>
<td>40, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolstoy, Leo</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tönnes, Ferdinand</td>
<td>273, 145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touraine, Alain</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trautner-Kromann, Hanne</td>
<td>518, 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traverso, Enzo</td>
<td>258, 113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treitschke, Heinrich von</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trigano, Shmuel</td>
<td>256, 104, 273, 145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troeltsch, Ernst</td>
<td>56ff., 65, 171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tschopp, Silvia Serena</td>
<td>370, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucker, Gordon</td>
<td>104, 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumin, Melvin</td>
<td>235, 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turgenyev, Ivan S.</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner, Samuel</td>
<td>117, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tykocinski, Haim</td>
<td>358, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulrich, L.</td>
<td>127, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umbach, Maiken</td>
<td>34, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upham, Edward</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbach, Ephraim</td>
<td>158, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vajda, Georges</td>
<td>254, 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valensi, Lucette</td>
<td>516, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varnhagen, Rahel</td>
<td>299, 353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veblen, Thorstein</td>
<td>228, 229, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veessen, Aram</td>
<td>483, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veit-Brause, Irmeline</td>
<td>32, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veltri, Giuseppe</td>
<td>110, 5, 504, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veyne, Paul</td>
<td>448, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vico, Giambattista</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidich, Arthur</td>
<td>235, 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villiers, Douglas</td>
<td>226, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vischer, Wilhelm</td>
<td>190, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vital, David</td>
<td>257, 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vogel, Manfred</td>
<td>110, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voigt, Bernhard Friedrich</td>
<td>117, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volkov, Shulamit</td>
<td>265, 126, 521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wacholder, Ben Zion</td>
<td>103, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wacquant, Lois J. D.</td>
<td>557, 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wagner, David</td>
<td>455, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wagner, Helmut</td>
<td>245, 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallach, Luitpold</td>
<td>304, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallerstein, Immanuel</td>
<td>235, 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Page Numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walther, Gerrith</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walzer, Michael</td>
<td>236, 264, 268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waters, Malcom</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wassermann, Henry</td>
<td>195, 356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasserstein, Bernard</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watzman, Haim</td>
<td>463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waubke, Hans G.</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waxman, Meyer</td>
<td>315, 316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weber, Cornelia</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weber, Max</td>
<td>107, 250, 252, 272, 347, 452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wechsler, Harold</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weichselbaum, Willy</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weil, Gilbert</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weil, Gotthold</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weil, Hans</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weiman, Henry Nelson</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weinberg, Joanna</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weinreich, Max</td>
<td>313, 490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weinreich, Uriel</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weiss, Isaac Hirsch</td>
<td>316f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weiss, Yfaat</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weissberg, Liliane</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weisse, Samson</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weizmann, Chaim</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellhausen, Julius</td>
<td>148f., 157f., 161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendehorst, Stephan</td>
<td>524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wertheimer, Jack</td>
<td>58, 413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wessely, Wolfgang</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Hayden</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitehead, Alfred</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiedebach, Hartwig</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiener, Max</td>
<td>75, 156, 157, 162, 163, 171, 349, 351, 352, 363–366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiener, Meir</td>
<td>383, 384, 387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiese, Christian</td>
<td>83, 93, 94, 110, 146, 149, 152, 153, 163, 171, 189, 193, 194, 224, 269, 299, 339, 494, 504, 505, 528, 560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildawsky, Aaron</td>
<td>236, 253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willford, John Noble</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilhelm II</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilhelm, Kurt</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilkins, Charles</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Jr., Robin</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams, Bernard</td>
<td>277, 558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willson, Amos Leslie</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson, Edmund</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windaus-Walser, Karin</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windelband, Wilhelm</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windfuhr, Manfred</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter, Jakob</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter, Rainer</td>
<td>554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wirth, Louis</td>
<td>235, 253, 260f., 264f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wise, Isaac Mayer</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wise, Stephen S.</td>
<td>418, 420, 422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wittgenstein, Ludwig</td>
<td>276, 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vogue, Lazare Eliezer</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolf, Eric R.</td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolf, Friedrich August</td>
<td>304, 309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolf (Wohllwill), Immanuel</td>
<td>82, 369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolf, Lucien</td>
<td>41f., 44, 51f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfers, Arnold</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolff, Kurt</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfson, Harry</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, Henry</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wozner, Akavia</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright, James E.</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wünsche, August</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyrwa, Ulrich</td>
<td>333, 370, 496, 497, 498, 509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yadin, Azzan</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeager, Patricia</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yerushalmi, Yosef Haim</td>
<td>54, 251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiftachel, Oren</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yochanan ben Zakkai</td>
<td>564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young, Iris</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young, Robert J. C.</td>
<td>166, 168, 465, 551, 554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young-Brühl, Elisabeth</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuval, Yisrael</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zawadzki, Paul</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zborowski, Mark</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zelcer, Maria</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimmer, Eric I.</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimmermann, Michael</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimmermann, Moshe</td>
<td>31, 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinberg, Israel</td>
<td>314, 315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinger, Illana Y.</td>
<td>502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zipperstein, Steven</td>
<td>89, 256, 257, 267, 273, 335, 506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zivan, Gili</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zizek, Slavoj</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zohar, Zvi M.</td>
<td>399, 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwelling, Jeremy</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>