

THE CAMBRIDGE
HISTORY OF
JEWISH
PHILOSOPHY

THE MODERN ERA



EDITORS
MARTIN KAVKA
ZACHARY BRAITERMAN
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THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

Volume 2: The Modern Era

This second volume of *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy* provides a comprehensive overview of Jewish philosophy from the seventeenth century to the present day. Written by a distinguished group of experts in the field, its chapters examine how Jewish thinking was modified in its encounter with modern Europe and America and challenge long-standing assumptions about the nature and purpose of modern Jewish philosophy. The volume also treats modern Jewish philosophy's continuities with premodern texts and thinkers, the relationship between philosophy and theology, the ritual and political life of the people of Israel, and the ways in which classic modern philosophical categories help or hinder Jewish self-articulation. These chapters offer readers a multifaceted understanding of the Jewish philosophical enterprise in the modern period.

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The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy, Volume 1: From Antiquity through the Seventeenth Century edited by Steven Nadler and T. M. Rudavsky

The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy, Volume 2: The Modern Era edited by Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman, and David Novak

The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy

Volume 2: The Modern Era

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Note: On occasion in quotations, transliterations from the Hebrew have been silently altered for the sake of uniformity.

INTRODUCTION

MARTIN KAVKA

The contributors in this volume have set out to present the current state of affairs in an intellectual discipline, that of modern Jewish philosophy, and to offer programmatic lines for future inquiry on the part of its practitioners. Like its companion *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy, Volume 1: From Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century*,¹ this volume is organized thematically. The guiding thread that connects the chapters in this volume is the recognition that the field of modern Jewish philosophy is a dynamic territory built up around concepts, not around a history of “great thinkers” arranged chronologically. To navigate a philosophical territory is not to master a history, in the sense of knowing what a chain of figures have stated about these or those philosophical/theological topoi. Rather, it is about tracing, critically assessing, and justifying theoretical and practical instances of concept-use across diverse bodies of thought in the modern period and in our contemporary age. The authoritative role played by primary figures is secondary to this other kind of mastery, premised on the consciousness of the field’s analytical dynamism.

It is perhaps easier to describe modern Jewish philosophy along these lines than premodern Jewish philosophy because the field, both as an active practice and as a scholarly discipline, of modern Jewish philosophy is a young and emergent one; it is also because, frankly, its nature and purpose have been unclear and contested. As an object of study in the American university, the emergence of Jewish philosophy (both modern and medieval) is somewhat murky. It appears at first only gradually. The issue of whether Jewish philosophy is truly philosophical, the relations between its universal and particularistic aspects, and even its ideological character have remained vexed ever since. When Emil Hirsch, rabbi of Chicago Sinai Congregation, was appointed to a chair in “rabbinic literature and philosophy” at the University of Chicago in 1892, there was no salary, he taught little philosophy, and he saw his own courses as examples of “Semitic studies.” Even though Hirsch’s writings included assertions related to the *philosophical* superiority of Judaism, his final title at the University of Chicago was as professor of “*rabbinical* literature”; the reference to philosophy had disappeared.² As Jewish philosophy entered philosophy

departments in American universities and seminaries in the early twentieth century, it was no longer as some set of philosophical ideas to be discovered through the application of the techniques of historical biblical criticism, or other forms of interpretation of rabbinic literature or even of biblical literature. Henry Malter, best known for his work on the tenth-century Jewish philosopher Saadia Gaon,³ was appointed to the faculty of Hebrew Union College in 1900. Isaac Husik was appointed to the position of lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania in 1911 and was promoted to assistant professor after the appearance of his introduction to medieval Jewish philosophy in 1916.⁴ In other words, the study of Jewish philosophy first emerged as the study of *medieval* Jewish philosophy.

The academic study of modern Jewish philosophy in the United States came a bit later, although just when is up for debate. Perhaps, given the place of Spinoza on the border of the medieval and modern worldviews, one should date it to 1934 with the publication of Harry A. Wolfson's book on Spinoza, much of which was devoted to identifying Spinoza's medieval sources. Or perhaps one should date it to 1959, to the arrival in the United States of Alexander Altmann to Brandeis University, where he trained many of today's senior scholars in the field. Or perhaps one should center on the key juncture in the emergence of modern Jewish philosophy as an object of study, the increase in positions in this field, as in all areas of Jewish studies, that occurs in the late 1960s and early 1970s following the Six-Day War, a development that dovetails with the proliferation of ethnic and religious studies on American university campuses, the emergence of multiculturalism, and new expressions of Jewish self-assertion. At this point, a canon quickly formed around the now mighty German-Jewish dead; Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig enter into a past (the *early* twentieth century) that is now recognizably historical. Within twenty years, this canon will have expanded to include other figures including Emmanuel Levinas, Leo Strauss, and Emil Fackenheim.

The lived practice of modern Jewish philosophy and thought in early twentieth-century Germany took inspiration from a wide variety of Jewish genres: philosophical, scriptural, and mystical. But before modern Jewish philosophy could come into view as an academic discipline in the United States, it first had to stand on the shoulders of scholarship in medieval Jewish philosophy. Wolfson wrote primarily on medieval Jewish philosophy. Altmann published on Maimonides and the tenth-century Neoplatonist Isaac Israeli in addition to his landmark biography of Moses Mendelssohn, which retains its monumental status today, and his dissertation on the philosophy of Max Scheler. Norbert M. Samuelson, whose first full-time academic appointment was in the Department of Religion at the University of Virginia in 1973, published his first chapters and articles on the medieval Jewish philosophers

Gersonides and ibn Daud before turning to modern figures.⁵ One could tell similar stories about other senior scholars in the field today, including Lenn Goodman, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, and Elliot Wolfson, all of whom first published on medieval philosophy and mysticism.⁶ One might try a different approach to historicizing the discipline, and settle on the year 1950, when Nahum N. Glatzer, who was instrumental in introducing the work of Franz Rosenzweig to the English-speaking world of letters, was hired to a chair at Brandeis. Yet the sheer range of Glatzer's scholarship – from his courses at the Frankfurt Lehrhaus on biblical and midrashic texts, to his dissertation on history in tannaitic writings, to Franz Kafka – makes it difficult to use Glatzer to say anything about the field of modern Jewish philosophy.⁷ Furthermore, Glatzer's classic reader in modern Jewish intellectual life is titled *Modern Jewish Thought*; the word "thought," as opposed to "philosophy," signals that volume's inclusion of many authors and figures such as Judah Magnes and Yehuda Amichai who would at first blush seem to fall outside of the category of Jewish philosophy.

If modern Jewish philosophy and its study in North America once stood and even continue to stand upon the shoulders of medieval philosophy, it is also true that the academic study of medieval Jewish philosophy, if not medieval Jewish philosophy itself, rests upon the universal values that come into their own in the modern period. For Wolfson, even before his appointment in 1925 to the Nathan Littauer Chair in Jewish Literature and Philosophy, a chair that had a home in both Harvard's Semitics and philosophy departments,⁸ scholarship in medieval Jewish philosophy was a pragmatic tool by which modern Jews could show the universal aspects of Jewish culture and thereby make a home in America. As he wrote in his 1921 essay "The Needs of Jewish Scholarship in America,"

I do not mean to imply that I consider medieval Jewish philosophy to be the most important field of Jewish study. Hardly that. For I believe, just as our pious ancestors believed, through for different reasons, that the Talmud with its literature is the most promising field of study, the most fertile field of original research and investigation. But I believe that medieval Jewish philosophy is the only branch of Jewish literature, next to the Bible, which binds us to the literary world. In it we meet on common ground with civilized Europe and with part of civilized Asia and civilized Africa.⁹

As argued by Ismar Schorsch, Wolfson would seem here to imply that for Judaism to articulate itself most successfully, it is necessary to turn to the rabbis, a turn that the status of the Jews as a religious and ethnic minority in America at the beginning of the twentieth century would have precluded. Jews are constrained by the culture in which they live, and so they must show that they are not different – or at least not *too* different – from the non-Jews who have social and political power.

Because of that cultural constraint, the study of medieval Jewish philosophy would be one that portrays Judaism to non-Jews *in a form that does not accurately portray Judaism*. If “the study of Judaism had to start off center, on a body of literature that was tangential to its essential character,”¹⁰ to quote Schorsch, then how common is the ground between Judaism and “civilization” in the first place? The essence of Judaism, on Schorsch’s reading of Wolfson, is unconstrained by universalist canons of reason; the essence of Judaism is the essence of Judaism alone, and universalism is a sham. But to leave the analysis of Wolfson’s text at this point is to miss something integral to Wolfson’s claim. For Wolfson, civilized Europe was still civilized *Europe*, and civilized Asia still civilized *Asia*. The bonds between Judaism and the “literary” world are bonds that, because they are *between* two poles, do not and cannot erase the particularity of Judaism. It very well may be the case that Wolfson was unable to defend *why* this particularity would not be erased as the study of medieval Jewish philosophy advanced. But it does not follow from this passage that Jewish philosophy is tangential to Judaism simply because it proclaims itself to have universal significance.

Indeed, avowals of Jewish particularism inside Jewish philosophy and its reception are themselves not without their own universal, philosophical significance. The following is a case in point. When Henry Slonimsky, who had completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Pennsylvania and earned his doctorate under the esteemed neo-Kantian Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen at the University of Marburg in 1912, taught in the philosophy department at Johns Hopkins from 1914 through 1919, he taught courses in what we would now call “general” philosophy of religion, ethics, and logic.¹¹ (He would later become dean of the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City in 1926.) To the extent that he produced work while at Johns Hopkins that might be called “modern Jewish philosophy,” it was outside of any university-sanctioned context. The Baltimore chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women reported a series of lectures given by Slonimsky in 1919 entitled “The Philosophy of the Jewish Religion.” The head of the chapter, Jennie Friedenwald Hecht, described the force of Slonimsky’s lectures as follows: “The interest in his brilliant presentation reached a high pitch, and all felt how great to be a Jew, what a noble heritage we possess, how great a debt the world owes the Jews, and awakened a Jewish consciousness (whether dead, asleep, or half-awake) that will never go back to its original state.”¹²

Hecht’s description of Slonimsky’s lectures suggests a way to articulate Jewish philosophy, or at least a “philosophy of Judaism,” in such a manner that the category did not heave under the weight of the distinction between the universal and the particular. On the surface, her description endorses an understanding of Jewish

philosophy as being unaffected by claims about the universal; Jewish philosophy is not a practice that leads to the association of Judaism with universality (as Schorsch understood Wolfson's program for Jewish philosophy), but rather to the intensity of a particularist Jewish feeling. Yet there are reasons to doubt such a characterization. Although the lectures themselves appear to have been lost, there is every reason to suppose that there is more in them than just an expression of Jewish pride. In Friedenwald Hecht's report, a direct link is made between the particular "heritage" of the Jews and a "debt" owed for it by the "world." As a student of Cohen, the character of that debt or "gift" identified by Slonimsky in his telling of Jewish philosophy, and recognized as such by his listeners, was no doubt cosmopolitan and messianic in character.¹³ Embedded in the particularities of Judaism, Jewish philosophy is itself already universal.

The tension between universalism and particularism, if not altogether false, certainly has been overstated as a binary opposition. The opposition is usually presented as follows. Insofar as the study of modern Jewish philosophy describes how Jews and Jewish philosophy are part of the story of Western philosophy and a larger world culture, Jewish philosophy both as a living, constructive practice and as an object of study endorses the universal claims of philosophical discourse. At the same time, insofar as Jewish philosophy and its study are said to include nonphilosophy ("Jewish thought") as an essential part of its topography, then in its particularism it stands apart from philosophy as a universal discourse. This contestation over Jewish philosophy – whether it is universal or particular, whether it can be both, whether the term "Jewish philosophy" is anything other than an oxymoron – hangs over the study of both modern and medieval Jewish philosophy like a heavy weight.¹⁴

The universal/particularist dichotomy in the study of Jewish philosophy is unproductive because each side of the dichotomy always stands ready to reverse itself dialectically. In her recent book on exemplarity and chosenness, Dana Hollander persuasively insists that claims about the universal are always made by individuals who are particularly located. In other words, universality is always universality *for someone, from some historical context*. On the other side of the coin, "particularity" is itself already a concept, covering the "universal" class of those objects that can be described as particular "things."¹⁵ This, then, is the first conclusion of the introduction to this volume: *modern Jewish philosophy is neither a universalist nor a particularist discourse*. Its territory is constituted by the vexing torsion of its name "Jewish philosophy," a dynamism that gets elided by the will to label a scholar or a field as either particular or universalist, as if the relation between the two terms were not already implicit in each individual term. If particularism cannot be extirpated from any universalist discourse, then nonphilosophical works such as the Bible or Talmud

become sources for Jewish philosophical practice. So let us start again, leaving the universal/particular distinction for another taxonomy.

As part of a heuristic, second-order exercise, one might profitably recognize four genres in which scholars engage in modern Jewish philosophy. These are theocentric, ethical, ethnic, and ordinary. Although these are not pure types, and although it is doubtlessly possible to develop a fuller and better typology, in these four types one can gather a better view of “Jewish philosophy” as a territory of concepts, in terms of both the norms of inquiry that they set forth and the boundaries and rifts that these configurations and contestations establish between Jewish philosophy and other forms of research in the humanities.

First, there is what one might call *theocentric Jewish philosophy*. The validity of a philosophy of religion that is embedded in a particular tradition is premised on rejecting the notion that the universal constitutes the aim of thinking. As presented by Franz Rosenzweig, philosophy, in its quest to uncover an eternally and universally valid metaphysics, fails to take into account our individuated and anxious fear of death – our reflexive desire to perdure in existence and not to ascend up to the allegedly consoling realm of “a beyond of which [the creature] wants to know absolutely nothing.”¹⁶ The only thing that can make the human person feel at home in the world of temporal flux and keep the threat of nihilism at bay is the event of revelation steeped in the erotic dialogue of the Song of Songs. Rosenzweig infers from the dynamism of the world – the change of things’ relationships to their surroundings and their own organic development – that the essence of a thing does not inhere in it of its own accord, but rather is renewed from moment to moment by a creator.¹⁷

Given the central place of theology in Rosenzweig’s discourse, it would make sense that what currently passes by the name “Jewish philosophy” should really be renamed “Jewish theology.” As David Novak has recently claimed, “there is no discipline of ‘Jewish philosophy,’ that is, one that can be cogently defined, even though it is used now more than ever.”¹⁸ What Novak articulates is a “Jewish philosophical theology,” which “attempts to learn from philosophy how there is an opening for revelation in the created world.”¹⁹ In other words, Jewish philosophy is here understood as culminating in the claim that only a theological worldview can explain how phenomena come to appear in the way that they do; it is a *method* that can and should affirm theological content about the covenantal relationship between God and particular peoples. As such, “philosophy” is no longer about a search for the universal, but is the activity of articulating, justifying, and fine tuning a culture’s worldview and/or ethos.

Second, there is what one might call *ethical Jewish philosophy*. The opening sentences of the first overview of modern Jewish philosophy written in English – Nathan Rotenstreich’s *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times* (1968) – read as follows: “Jewish thought in recent times has been characterized by the prominence given to the ethical values of Judaism. This interpretation is not altogether novel ... [but] what strikes us as new is the insistence on the primacy of ethics in the sphere of faith; traditional religion is divested of its beliefs in transcendence, and pressed into the service of morality.”²⁰ Here too, Judaism is not swallowed into the universal language of philosophy. To discuss the feasibility by which an ethical community or commonwealth is created requires Judaism; philosophy on its own is unable to construct a way to link the singular individual (frequently described in the canon of modern Jewish philosophy as the one who suffers) to the universal without ignoring the singularity of the sufferer. As with theocentric Jewish philosophy, ethical Jewish philosophy envisions itself as a branch of thinking that turns to Judaism to delimit philosophy. Unlike theocentric Jewish philosophy, ethical Jewish philosophy also seeks to transform philosophy, to see Jewish philosophy as the repository of content, and not merely a description of a method.

The persistence of this model in contemporary scholarship is in large part due to the influence of the work of the French Jewish phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas, who argued in numerous writings that the egoism underlying the century of man-made mass death could only be countered by a philosophy that saw the self as grounded in (and constrained by) the other person. Such a philosophical turn might be grounded purely phenomenologically, but Levinas also described this move as a Jewish one. Writing a philosophy of the plural, in which the other is not seen as a mirror of myself, is to translate the plurality of rabbinic readings of the Bible “into Greek expression of the universal civilization – for joining or judging ... according to the mode of our Western university language.”²¹ Without departing from philosophy itself, the Bible serves to ensure that the idea of justice does not collapse upon itself by assuming that the universal order is ready-made. The Bible critiques traditional accounts of the universal in the name of another, better, philosophy yet to come. Nevertheless, even if ethical Jewish philosophy imagines Judaism as that which contemporary culture needs, whether it can articulate an account of God with the robustness seen in earlier periods of the Jewish tradition is a debatable question.

In both of these models, Jewish philosophy stands outside the world as it is; it discusses states of affairs that ought to be acknowledged, and its subject matter is something that is not material. As Jewish philosophical theology, it justifies a specific picture of the personal God. As Jewish ethics, it justifies a certain kind of image of the good life and/or its obligations.

However, twentieth-century Jewish philosophy has also transgressed this boundary, marking it as purely idealist. There is what one might call *ethnic Jewish philosophy*. Jewish philosophy on this account would not be a “philosophy of Judaism” (to invoke the phrasing of Julius Guttmann in his 1933 introduction to Jewish philosophy),²² but rather a philosophy of the Jewish people and its fate and/or destiny in the world. This approach inheres in the narrative arc of Rotenstreich’s book. As stated earlier, Rotenstreich opens his survey of modern Jewish philosophy by noticing the frequent emphasis on ethics in the canon of modern Jewish philosophy. Yet this emphasis is not one that Rotenstreich himself endorses. By the closing page of the book, the meaning of Judaism and Jewishness are up for grabs; it is up to the present generation to decide what these categories should mean, and there can be no guarantee that its interpretation will be correct.

For Rotenstreich, the story of Jewish philosophy, in its twists and turns, is a story that explains the difficulty of Jewish life in the late 1960s, for the needs of the Jewish ethnos after the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel are in uneasy tension, if not outright contradiction, with the story of the essence of Judaism that had been passed down to that generation from the thinkers of the nineteenth century. Rotenstreich’s words still have sufficient power to justify citing them at length.

For good or ill, we have consciously entered the stream of history. This fact was clearly seen by the leaders of the Jewish Reform movement in the last century, who were convinced that this entrance into history necessarily entailed a loss of national identity. Those of us who strove for national revival, however, entered into history in order to establish the Jewish people within it; to live, move, and have our being within it. The trust in the eternity of man and in the eternal principles of Judaism had been shaken by fate and Jews were resolved to enter history to preserve the people and sustain their faith ... The basic question that confronts Jews in the present era contains the relation between these two historical views of Jewish existence. Has a revealed, preordained Judaism any meaning for a generation at a time when it is caught up in the stream of events and swept along on its strong current? On the other hand, is there any meaning to a historical continuity that is devoid of Jewish content, however it may be interpreted? It is no longer a question as to which interpretation of Judaism enlists the sympathy and allegiance [of contemporary Jews]; the validity of the very concept of interpretation has been rendered doubtful.²³

If Jewish philosophy is to be honest about its inability to trust in either theological or secular-ethical ideals, then it must start with sociology, although it cannot remain there.

Outside of surveys of the field, the ethnic approach is most clearly visible in the various writings of Emil Fackenheim, whose formulation of the 614th commandment (“Do not give posthumous victories to Hitler”) was grounded in his response of wonder to the efflorescence of Jewish life in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in

relation to Zionism and the act of “resistance” that he saw in the creation of the State of Israel. “Even a merely collective commitment to Jewish group-survival for its own sake is a momentous response ... [it is] a profound, albeit as yet fragmentary, act of faith, in an age of crisis to which the response might well have been either flight in total disarray or complete despair.”²⁴ Accounts of the meaning of divine command, and the nature of that which commands, cannot ignore the Holocaust by assuming that post-Holocaust Jewish philosophy could possibly be similar to the Jewish philosophy that preceded it. Nor can they simply be ignored on the assumption that faith is completely meaningless after the Holocaust; for Fackenheim, even the secularist Jew *qua* secularist responds to the 614th commandment and wrestles just as much the religious Jew does. For Fackenheim, the contours of Jewish existence – secular and religious – are radically disrupted, even as tradition reconstitutes itself after the Holocaust in unprecedented ways. Authentic Jewish self-understanding does not begin in theology or in ethics; it begins in the realities of Jewish existence.

In all three of these accounts, Judaism is something singular. Like all singularities, it is extraordinary, set apart from and irreducible to the universal. Nevertheless, the force of its critiques – of immanently available truth, of universal ethics, of the very possibility of Jewish ideas detached from Jewish history – is a force that tempers this singularity. Jewish philosophical theology is a worldview that takes up the question of truth from within a particular standpoint, like all other theologies (e.g., Greek). Ethical Jewish philosophy seeks to translate the worldview of the Bible into philosophical language. Yet this act of translation from one world of concepts to another morphs both Judaism and philosophy to create an ethics (centered on tolerance, neighbor-love, or the Other) that is common to those who value the Bible and those who do not. Once the claim of translatability is made, the issue of the nature of Judaism’s uniqueness, if it has any, comes to the fore. Finally, ethnic Jewish philosophy, in opening itself up to the possibility that history conditions all possibilities of problem-solving, moves from an ethnic particularism to a fragmentary post-Holocaust existence that is held in common by Jews and non-Jews. The project of mending the world for Fackenheim is not just a Jewish one, but is exhibited by the philosopher (and lapsed Catholic) Kurt Huber, the Catholic priest Bernard Lichtenberg, and the Polish Catholic Pelagia Lewinska, who is arguably the most exemplary figure for Fackenheim in *To Mend the World*.²⁵

In all of these ways, Jewish philosophy affirms both the presence and the absence of the distinctiveness of the adjective “Jewish” and the indistinctiveness of the word “philosophy.” Non-Jewish philosophy – whether political theory, ethical reasoning, phenomenology, or existentialism – may open up a covenantal world. The Bible

may steer us toward the other person. The Holocaust may show that there is no thinking that is not situational. Yet insofar as the conclusions that Jewish philosophers make are temporary (until redemption,²⁶ until another person summons me to responsibility, or until a historical moment buffets the Jewish people in a new direction), what Jewish philosophy attests to is no more and no less than the persistence of these topoi of Jewish philosophical questioning.

Once Jewish philosophy becomes self-aware of this fact, it might take yet another approach to the field, which perhaps might be called *ordinary Jewish philosophy*. Leaving behind the problematics exercising nineteenth-century German philosophy and culture, it picks up its questions from the mid- and late twentieth century, from thinkers who are more comfortable with the hiddenness of that after which humanity questions. The contours of such a posture might be seen in the concept of dwelling in Heidegger's later work (nonrepresentational and aware of the eclipse of the divinity),²⁷ in what Hannah Arendt characterized as the "space of appearance" marked by potentiality,²⁸ and in the skepticism of Leo Strauss, whose thought is marked by its "insistence that there are real human problems that perhaps cannot be answered definitively."²⁹ As Strauss wrote near the end of the opening chapter of his 1953 book *Natural Right and History*,

The "experience of history" does not make doubtful the view that fundamental problems persist or retain their identity in all historical change ... In grasping all these problems as problems, the human mind liberates itself from its historical limitations. No more is needed to legitimize philosophy in its original, Socratic sense: philosophy is knowledge that one does not know; that it is to say, it is knowledge of what one does not know, or awareness of the fundamental problems and, therewith, of the fundamental alternatives regarding their solution that are coeval with human thought.³⁰

Applied to Jewish philosophy, this simply means that ordinary Jewish philosophy takes up three tasks. First, it articulates the questions that address Jewish existence (among them, the ones powerfully posed by Rotenstreich at the close of *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times*). Second, it shows how past answers to these questions might have closed off or repressed other options of inquiry; in this skeptical angle, ordinary Jewish philosophy would follow Stanley Cavell's notion of the ordinary as "not what may be but what must be set aside if philosophy's aspirations to knowledge are to be satisfied."³¹ Third, remaining close to the ground, ordinary Jewish philosophy remains alert to continually changing perspectival shifts in the angle of view. These conceptual turns are directed toward immanence and materiality in a canon that has sought to emphasize eternity and transcendence, toward aesthetics and politics in a canon that privileged ethics and redemption; toward sensation, affect, and imagination in an intellectualist tradition; toward philosophy of science

in a technological age; and toward gender in a canon that has been all too rarely read for gender.

As suggested earlier, this typology is halting and perhaps imprecise. Certainly ethical Jewish philosophy is not free of either ethnic-situational or covenantal concerns. Likewise, Jewish philosophical theology is not unethical. Yet what the turn to “ordinary philosophy” suggests is that the history of Jewish philosophy is the history of a set of enduring problems. Aaron Hughes has recently suggested that only a “problem-oriented” approach to Jewish philosophy can avoid the risk of “calcifying the dynamics” of other approaches to the subfield.³² For him, this means that one must reject introductions to the field that take the form of what Richard Rorty dismissed almost three decades ago as “doxography” – “ticking off what various figures traditionally called ‘philosophers’ had to say about problems traditionally called ‘philosophical.’ It is this genre that inspires boredom and despair.”³³ Part of Hughes’s frustration with the field of Jewish philosophy seems to be that “the focus is rarely on the questions asked or why those questions remain worthy ones for us.”³⁴ If this is the problem, then one might imagine a better kind of doxography, one that adds a central question – say, perhaps the distinction between the universal and the particular – and develops a stirring narrative as a result. But the problem with doxography on Rorty’s view is precisely that it assumes that philosophy is a “natural kind”; in other words, it thinks “of the fundamental questions of philosophy as the ones which everybody really ought to have asked, or as the ones which everybody would have asked if they could.”³⁵ To leave doxography behind, it is necessary either to develop new questions, or to be self-aware about the fact that we are making the thinkers of the past speak a foreign language – ours, and not theirs.

The problems of doxography, and the promise of moving away from it, are well represented in the closing paragraphs of the expanded edition of Julius Guttman’s *Philosophies of Judaism*. The original German edition, published in 1933, ended with a treatment of Hermann Cohen; the Hebrew edition (which served as the basis for the English translation), published eleven years later, was expanded to include Franz Rosenzweig, who became the single exemplar of how Jewish philosophy should proceed. On the one hand, Guttman suggested that Rosenzweig “offered a new way to look at Judaism” because his account of Judaism “grasped the spirit of Judaism as exemplified in the entire range of Jewish life in a single whole.”³⁶ What should have been the story of Jewish philosophy after Rosenzweig’s death, in Guttman’s view, was the wholesale “systematic clarification” of his ideas, a doxography in which Rosenzweig would have become the *doxa* for scholars to *graphein*. The Holocaust got in the way of this; “no new generation remained to work out the philosophy,” and therefore “Jewish philosophy has now reached its nadir.” For

this reason, Guttman's attempts to give a happy ending to his story of Jewish philosophy – “the results of this great effort of thought [will not] be wasted for the Jewish philosophy of the future” – fall flat.³⁷ Given that “Jewish existence today places before Jewish philosophy a completely new set of problems ... one cannot discern in what direction it [Jewish philosophy] will turn,”³⁸ but neither could one discern whether there would be anyone to push the field out of its post-Holocaust nadir. To take the field in the way that Guttman imagined that it should have gone – to transform Jewish philosophy into a thoroughgoing Rosenzweigianism – would have been to make Jewish philosophy powerless in a post-Holocaust age. On the other hand, Guttman's terms made it impossible to discern how Jewish philosophy could respond to the moment – to any moment that seems to relativize not only the answers of past philosophers, but also the questions that they asked. At such a point, all that Jewish philosophy could do was simply repeat the past, write a history of itself, whether the figure intended to serve as the exemplar for the reader was Rosenzweig or someone else (Levinas, or Cohen, or Strauss). This in and of itself was not shameful. As Rorty admitted in the essay that Hughes cites,

I am all for getting rid of canons that have become merely quaint, but I do not think that we can get along without canons. This is because we cannot get along without heroes. We need mountain peaks to look up toward. We need to tell ourselves detailed stories about the mighty dead in order to make our hopes of surpassing them concrete.³⁹

Without the ability to write a self-justifying history of Jewish philosophy, Jewish philosophy could only write doxographies, tales of the mighty dead that were exemplars, and not figures to be surpassed by their readers.

Rorty was correct. The practice and study of philosophy requires the “heroes” that canons establish. However, what scholarship does with heroes is more than simply proclaim their greatness. Whether a scholar of Jewish philosophy is engaging in second-order discourse or seeks to establish her own work as a constructive practice, she does not turn to a great thinker to articulate his problems, but to articulate her own. A philosophical canon represents a mental space in which to “form a community, a community of which it is good to be a member”⁴⁰ – and yet the content of such a community is powered by the *concepts* its members invoke when they speak to one another, or are made to speak with one another by a scholar in a later generation.⁴¹ Because concepts are communicated, they are common property. They are contestable; the rules for their application change over time.⁴² As per Wittgenstein, the meaning of an utterance is the use to which it is put.

The claims here are consonant with – although not identical to – the reminder of the neopragmatist philosopher Robert Brandom that concepts are inherently

normative: to apply a concept is to be responsible for it when others question the judgments we have made or the actions we have performed.

The norms or rules that determine what we have committed ourselves to, what we have made ourselves responsible for, by making a judgment or performing an action, Kant calls “concepts.” Judging and acting involve undertaking commitments whose credentials are always potentially at issue. That is, the commitments embodied in judgments and actions are ones we may or may not be *entitled* to, so that the question of whether they are *correct*, whether they are commitments we *ought* to acknowledge and embrace, can always be raised.⁴³

No matter what approach taken into the field of Jewish philosophy – whether theocentric, ethical, ethnic, ordinary, or some other approach – scholars enter that field’s conceptual territory in order to have their arguments endorsed by other persons. This is not to say that truth falls out of the picture entirely; as Brandom states in the quotation above, the question of correctness is raised when one communicates to someone else.⁴⁴ But it is to say that the pursuit of truth is not a solitary practice; it is a social one. The authority of a norm is meaningless without others’ consent to that authority. Concepts are for the sake of their communication.⁴⁵ Because the pursuit of truth is a social practice, the conceptual territory of that practice will change, depending on the cultural and political currents of a particular time and place. At any moment, authority is gained not through invoking a name, but through discerning how past moves through a conceptual territory might be applicable to the current moment.

For this reason, this volume limits the reach of the cult of the person in the canon of modern Jewish philosophy. Having some thinkers appear in some chapters but not in others, and having some chapters treat only one or two thinkers while others treat several more, brings this thematic focus to the fore. This approach has two corollary benefits. First, it allows a field of inquiry to expand and rebuild its canon, either in some of the chapters in this volume that associate thinkers who might not be associated otherwise, or in future scholarly work that engages in further recombinations and comparisons. Second, and more importantly, it allows modern Jewish philosophy to develop lines of questioning that ensure the persistence of its generative power.

The chapters in this volume are divided into five sections. The first section, entitled “Judaism’s Encounter with Modernity,” serves as a narrative of intellectual movements that have affected Jewish philosophy from the beginning of the Enlightenment through contemporary feminism. Yet each chapter also serves to upend certain sedimented distinctions that have been passed down in the field,

particularly as based in university culture. We begin with the Enlightenment. A typical introduction to modern Jewish philosophy might start with Mendelssohn in order to establish a master-narrative in which the only choice is the one between Judaism and radical Enlightenment, as if Voltaire were the only Enlightenment thinker. Against this grain, Willi Goetschel begins with Spinoza in order to show how the “Enlightenment” can be productively envisioned as a contestation over how (and not whether) tradition is to be maintained. Spinoza’s thought shows that there is no unmediated grasp of the universal. Religion becomes a necessary site for thinking through how an individual develops over time, and how institutions and communities serve as necessary contexts in which individuals exercise their potential. The exercise of that potential requires the maintenance of tradition through the reinterpretation of it. In this manner, Goetschel shows how Spinoza, by making religion into something historical and dynamic (yet integral for self-making), cuts off the possibility of a dogmatic theopolitics at the pass without reducing political philosophy to a search for secular principles. From such a starting position, Goetschel is able to elucidate the key force of the “and” between church and state in Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem*, how religion “should come to the aid of the state, and the church should become a pillar of civil felicity.”⁴⁶ Similarly, the dynamism of Spinoza reappears in what Goetschel sees as Solomon Maimon’s view of conflict and tension as the grounds of the “liberating force” of modern thought.

This tension remains even when thinkers in the modern Jewish philosophical canon deny it. In Samuel Moyn’s cannily titled “The Spirit of Jewish History,” we see that scholarly claims regarding the putative ahistorical or apolitical nature of modern Jewish philosophy neglect the substantive commitments to history and politics made by central figures in the canon. Moyn reminds us that Hermann Cohen’s ethics of the neighbor is politically imbricated in an irenopoietic image of community that incorporates outcasts, and around which the nations and nationalities of Europe might seek to organize themselves into a federation of states. Franz Rosenzweig placed the Jewish people outside history, at home in eternity, *for the sake of* Christians, who stake revelation within world history. Jews are at the telos at which Christians aim. Finally, Levinas assembled the story of Judaism as eternally about other-centered ethics upon a narrative of historical progress achieved by the tannaim and amoraim, for Levinas finds this narrative in the Bible only as mediated through the *derashot* of the Talmud (and not on the surface of the biblical text). In Moyn’s immanent critique of these thinkers, spirit and history become equiprimordial, as they already are in the work of Nachman Krochmal.

The commitment to a God outside of history found in significant strands of twentieth-century Jewish philosophy may be philosophically unstable in and of

itself. As Martin Kavka details in his chapter “Phenomenology,” major Jewish philosophers in the early twentieth century failed to distinguish between a phenomenological method that would ground the *right to postulate God solely as a ground of everyday worldly experience* and another method, well known from the phenomenologists of religion such as Rudolf Otto and Max Scheler, that would ground the *right to make claims that God could be experienced in the everyday world*. Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Emmanuel Levinas, and Abraham Joshua Heschel presume the reality of transcendent meaning. Transcendental phenomenology could defend the possibility of valid statements about a God beyond the limits of possible experience. But these four figures want more than this; they want classical Jewish accounts of God acting in history repeated in a philosophical key. And although one may prefer to tame such a desire, it may be the case that once this desire is tamed, philosophy loses its power to sustain hope. For example, Emmanuel Levinas’s first magnum opus, *Totality and Infinity*, maintains ethical interaction as the condition of the possibility of a “messianic triumph” that will take place at an indefinitely later moment in history; in this way, Jews can have confidence that their moral acts are not for nought. On the other hand, the closing sections of his second magnum opus, *Otherwise Than Being*, are free of any such historical sweep. In the description of history cycling between the skepticism of dominant ideologies from below and the refutation of that skepticism (by its successful incorporation into structures of power), there is no longer any at which humans will know that morality has been worthwhile. Jewish philosophy in this case – and in the cases of Buber, Rosenzweig, and Heschel – cannot satiate the desire to provide meaning to history that motivated these thinkers’ turn to phenomenology in the first place.

If Goetschel’s, Moyn’s, and Kavka’s chapters seek to show how static claims found in the canon of modern Jewish philosophy stem from historiographical and phenomenological considerations, Ken Koltun-Fromm’s piece on “America” shows that such stabilizing conceptions may have cultural roots as well. In his patient examination of American Jewish philosophy in the mid-twentieth century, Koltun-Fromm finds the messiness of the immigrant city lying underneath American Jewish philosophers’ search for orientation and order. The reconstruction of Judaism as culture in Mordecai Kaplan’s 1934 *Judaism as a Civilization* counters and conquers the hustle and bustle of city life, law and its study render Joseph Soloveitchik’s *Halakhic Man* immune to the seductions of urban capitalism, and Shabbat in Abraham Joshua Heschel’s *The Sabbath* is not only an island in time but also a safe haven from the objects of consumer culture described as “Frankensteins.” And yet such safe spaces could not last. The dangers of bourgeois civil religion, analyzed by Will Herberg in his *Protestant – Catholic – Jew*, Koltun-Fromm hypothesizes, also lie behind the

fragmentary commands found in Emil Fackenheim's post-Holocaust theology not to go mad in the face of overwhelming evidence that, if reason were our only guide, we should. And while the Reform theologian Eugene Borowitz may have sought to anchor Judaism as a site of resistance to the alleged emptiness of secularism, given the vagueness of his description of the ground of ethical decision making ("insight"), his theology is no less messy than the immigrant city of his parents' generation. Rachel Adler's pluralism fits our contemporary multicultural age, and yet Koltun-Fromm observes that one culture – the Orthodox – must remain excluded from her Jewish mosaic. In all of these cases, American Jewish philosophers and theologians have sought to draw boundaries that keep Judaism safe from varying infectious agents, an activity that he suggests may be as necessary as it is fated to constantly violate itself (by transgressing those boundaries) and repeat itself (by drawing new ones).

Koltun-Fromm cites Rachel Adler's religious pluralism as aiming to reveal "how to differ without breaking apart." This desire for difference, but not too much difference, is also visible in Hava Tirosh-Samuelson's "Feminism and Gender." Near the end of her chapter, she writes, "What do feminist Jewish women want? We want to be equal and different at the same time." This desire is not unique to feminist Jewish women in the story of Jewish philosophy, but perhaps it was Jewish feminists who were the first to express it clearly and loudly. As she shows in her thorough excavation of how gender studies and feminist discourse have influenced the study of Jewish philosophy, the rise of a dynamic portrait of Jewish philosophy (in which the value of various thinkers in the Jewish philosophical canon might be relativized once scholars attend to gendered discourse in their writing) is correlate with the increased attention to gender in the field. In turn, increased attention to gender in the field is correlate with feminist scholars' turn to intellectual subfields not typically associated with Jewish philosophy to bolster their arguments. Whether with reference to Robert Cover's narrative legal theory, to Kabbalah studies, to Spinoza's account of the body, to process philosophy, or to ecofeminism, it is in Jewish philosophy's productive encounters with feminist desires that Jewish philosophy becomes the site of scholars interpreting the past for the sake of the future. As she suggests, it is in the bringing together of only apparently disparate fields of inquiry, such as ecology and existentialist Jewish philosophy, that Jewish philosophy both is othered from its past forms and (thereby) makes itself relevant for future discourse.

If attending to the history of Jewish philosophy uncovers the dynamism both of Jewish philosophy and of Judaism itself, then one might well worry that the field is nothing but a record of the decisions of various scholars as to what Judaism and Jewish philosophy should be. Nevertheless, this worry ignores that the discourse

of Jewish philosophy, like any other discourse, has an audience. In order to be persuasive, a Jewish philosophical argument must *cite* figures who are acknowledged by others in a community as authorities. And so the next section of the volume, "Retrieving Tradition," deals with various examples of such citation. The first of these chapters, Peter Ochs's "Scripture and Text," offers a statement of the philosophy lying behind one of the foremost movements in modern Jewish philosophy in the last twenty years, namely that of "Textual Reasoning" (or, when it refers to text study in a broader Abrahamic context, "Scriptural Reasoning").⁴⁷ As a philosophical pragmatist in the mold of C. S. Peirce, Ochs builds on the insight that Jewish philosophy is grounded in the interpretation of traditional texts. In opposition to readings of scripture that view the meaning of a text as solely lying at its surface, Ochs develops an account that moves through three steps. First, Ochs argues that scripture is vague (in the Peircean sense – it could mean X, Y, Z, etc.⁴⁸) until the moment it is interpreted; this is what it means for the post-Mishnaic rabbis to link up rabbinic dicta in the Mishnah with the text of the written Torah, to say that the oral Torah is also the law of Moses. Second, Ochs claims that to think in a manner that places the act of interpretation front and center also places a reader in an order that diverges from the ordinary accounts of natural causality. Divine causality is made apparent through the divine word, *by virtue of the vagueness of that Word itself*. This is what is at stake in Ochs's assertion that "the created world should not be called 'nature' because it, and each creature in it, 'is' more than one possibility." Third, interpretation seeks to repair the failings of the world that are correlate with the failures of previous interpretations (whether within the Jewish community or outside of it), by reading for suffering, reading to minimize the deleterious effects of a fracture within a community (whether this be a schism within a Jewish community, or oppressions of one people by another). As a result, the divine word is made real not on its own, but by humans in response to both the possibilities inherent within the word and the possibilities inherent within the world to be something other than the world as it plainly appears, that is, to be repaired. It should be stressed that while Ochs's chapter is deeply constructive, Ochs also presents his account as a description not only of a new movement in Jewish philosophy, that of "textual reasoning," but also a description of an old movement of Mendelssohn's account of the conversational ethos between teacher and student, of Hermann Cohen's account of prophecy as that which leads a community to attend to those who suffer, and of Franz Rosenzweig's account of the redemptive power of love.

The next two chapters attend not to the citation of biblical or Talmudic texts in the major works of modern Jewish philosophers, but to the citation of medieval Jewish philosophers. Aaron W. Hughes's "Medieval Jewish Philosophers in Modern

Jewish Philosophy” clearly shows how modern Jewish philosophy stands in dialogue with thinkers of a more recent past than that of the Talmud and gains authority on the basis of the medieval Jewish philosophical canon. So, for instance, Cohen’s argument for creation is deeply indebted to the discussion of divine attributes in Moses Maimonides’ *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Rosenzweig’s critique of German idealism is indebted to Yehuda Halevi’s exposure of the limits of philosophy in the *Kuzari*, and Buber’s critique of modernity was indebted to the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov. Yet while these dialogues with the Jewish philosophical past maintain the force of tradition, interpreted in some manner, Hughes suggests that the *method* by which the past was revived also appears in terms of the *content* of their philosophy. Through dialogue with the past, modern Jewish philosophers become thinkers of dialogism. In this manner, the grounding of the I in the You – a hallmark not only of Buber’s dialogic thinking, but also of Cohen’s account of neighbor-love and Levinas’s other-centered ethics – becomes interpretable not as a philosophical point applied to Judaism, but a point about the construction of continuity with the past, essential for a religious tradition to call itself “tradition,” rendered in philosophical language.

Adam Shear’s chapter on “Jewish Enlightenment Beyond Western Europe,” covering a panoply of figures in the Haskalah of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, fills a lacuna in the contemporary agendas of scholars working on modern Jewish philosophy, who return again and again to German and French thinkers. Yet historians of the Haskalah, in attending to writers of the Galician and Russian Haskalah, have long known that the rise of the Haskalah was attached to a rise in the status of medieval Jewish philosophy for the maskilim. As Shear writes, “the Haskalah cannot be characterized as a philosophical movement *per se*” – it is not a departure from tradition, as the European Enlightenment was – but is rather better described as a “movement deeply concerned with philosophy.” The reprinting of classic works in medieval Jewish rationalism was for the sake of reforming the Ashkenazic intellectual curriculum, and new philosophical ideas were cloaked under the authority of medieval works. Thus, instead of the Haskalah being the beginning of a departure from tradition (as the historiography of Jewish philosophy often views it to be), the maskilim of the eighteenth century turned to Maimonides to defend the primacy of revelation. Thus claims that ground authority were perhaps different from the arguments of the maskilim themselves; this allowed maskilim to present themselves (or to be presented by their opponents) as either rationalist or fideist, or as a successful (or failed) harmony of both of those poles, as Maimonideans or as kabbalists, as being at the forefront of cultural advance or as being medieval in the pejorative sense of the word. If to cite is to interpret, and thus to portray the past as always

re-determinable, as Ochs suggests in his chapter, then Shear's chapter shows how the various thinkers of the Haskalah embodied this flux in their various publishing and educational endeavors.

To tie back present ideas to past authorities is not only a technique for giving those ideas authority; in other contexts, it may be a technique for deepening scholars' notions of what those ideas actually embody. In this spirit, Shaul Magid's "Hasidism, Mitnagdism, and Contemporary American Judaism" makes the hypothesis that old structures of Jewish history are currently recurring, or at least that viewing the contemporary Jewish landscape as if these structures were recurring helps us analyze the landscape more productively. Halakhically committed Jews in America today can be divided between those who are committed to halakhah not out of pure legalism but from a meta-halakhic worldview (including most strands of the contemporary modern Orthodox world), and those who are "post-halakhic" (primarily associated with Reconstructionism, Jewish Renewal, and other post-denominational forms of Jewish practice), living halakhic lives out of a commitment not to obligatory law but to ritual performance as a key mode of self-making. For Magid, this mirrors the split between the mitnagdim and the Hasidim in the early modern period. Tracing the lines from the mitnagdim to Joseph Soloveitchik to David Hartman's Soloveitchik-inspired vision of a unified Israeli society on the one hand, and from the kabbalists of Safed to Hasidism to Mordecai Kaplan to Zalman Schachter-Shalomi on the other, Magid shows how debates over the nature of the law endure. Magid's own allegiance is clear: for American Jews, a meta-halakhic standpoint cannot be persuasive since the American context does not bind Jews together (as the Israeli context might in Hartman's view), yet the post-halakhic standpoint – which, at least in the thinking of Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, seeks to develop harmony between the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds in the diaspora – meshes with the globalist orientation that Magid believes to be characteristic of contemporary American society. The debate that Magid establishes and traces can serve as the beginning of viewing various aspects of contemporary Jewish life, and their historical antecedents, through the lens of a philosophy of law.

If moving through to the territory of Jewish philosophy in part requires citing past authorities, it also requires invoking concepts from the traditional past. The third section of this volume, "Modern Jewish Philosophical Theology," speaks to the notion of God in modern Jewish philosophy, as well as on the ways in which God relates to the world, humans, and the order of history. The section begins with two chapters on God. "God: Divine Transcendence," by Aryeh Botwinick, takes up the common portrait of God's radical transcendence as reflected in the thought of an understudied author in the modern Jewish philosophical canon, Moshe Chaim

Luzzatto, an eighteenth-century philosopher and kabbalist from Italy. By focusing on Luzzatto's account of the acquisition of virtues in *Mesillat Yesharim* (*The Path of the Upright*), Botwinick shows how one can continue the Maimonidean emphasis on the *theoretical* otherness of God while at the same time making God intelligible through a set of *practical* habits that the believer imitates. Botwinick links Luzzatto's negative theology with the privileging of method in early modern political thinkers such as Machiavelli, Descartes, and Hobbes, for whom the goal of theory is to defer its completion. Machiavelli defers the exercise of power (so that it is not used up), and Descartes defers the completion of science (in order to retain the primacy of the subject), while Hobbes is a nominalist when it comes to language, meaning that science never hits its mark. The purpose of God's radical transcendence, for Botwinick, is not in the final analysis the cultivation of a certain determinate ethics, but the creation of a democratic polity. Negative theology justifies a skepticism that undoes the robust accounts of sovereign will in early modern political philosophy, in order to support the multitude's claim to power.

If, however, the God-idea of modern Jewish philosophy is commonly understood as wholly other, it is also the case that this canon, like the classical Jewish tradition, also foregrounds the intimate and proximate nature of the relationship between God and the human person. In his chapter on "God: Divine Immanence," Gregory Kaplan undoes what might seem to be a purely transcendent concept of God by rendering God open to material horizons. In this way, the tradition of divine immanence in modern Jewish philosophy might be closer to the classical canon than stories of this canon as a school of secularizing or acculturating thinkers might at first suggest. Certainly, this is not how one might think of immanence in the canon at first blush; in Spinoza, for whom there is only one substance (divine substance), divine immanence indeed departs from normative accounts of the Jewish tradition. Yet Kaplan will have us see that almost all the key figures in the twentieth-century Jewish philosophical-theological canon – Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Joseph Soloveitchik, Rachel Adler, Arthur Green, and Emmanuel Levinas – either generate explicitly panentheistic accounts of God, or temper their emphases on divine transcendence with accounts of immanence. If Kaplan's chapter appears to gainsay Botwinick's, it is also the case that his very contestation of Botwinick's points maintains the deferral of knowledge that Botwinick associates with negative theology and radical transcendence.

Since the publication of Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* in 1921, Jewish philosophical theology has been organized around the categories of creation, revelation, and redemption. As creator, God relates to the world; as revealer, God relates to the human; as redeemer, God completes/ends history (either directly,

or indirectly through humans' acts of neighbor-love). After the two chapters about God, the third section of the volume passes to three chapters making strong arguments about how to hierarchize thinkers in the modern Jewish philosophical canon in terms of these categories.

In "Creation," David Novak privileges those Jewish thinkers who resist both (1) what he finds in Kabbalah to be a world-denying acosmism that reduces the world to dimensions of God's inner life and which therefore cannot account for the relation between God and the world (*qua* relation, as opposed to identity), as well as (2) a scientific naturalism that cannot see God as ground of the world. Novak's discussion starts with Hermann Cohen's picture of God as the world's originaive principle (*Ursprung*), distinct from the world, unique, changeless, sufficient for the generation of things other than God's self, other than the spatiotemporal things that we encounter in our everyday world. For Novak, this account is theologically incoherent; God becomes so radically transcendent that it becomes impossible to distinguish between the God of "natural religion" and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His discussion then tracks to the work of Franz Rosenzweig as a solution to this problem, and finally to accounts of creation that seek to balance contemporary understandings of cosmology with Jewish tradition. As made clear in his conclusion, the primary challenge for theology as understood by Novak is to maintain an understanding of the world as purposive, an element that in his view no Jewish philosophical theology can afford to sacrifice. If the world is to be purposive, then Jewish philosophical theology's understanding of creation must be guided by its account of revelation.

Randi Rashkover takes up the complexities of this latter figure in modern Jewish philosophy. While recent Jewish philosophical theology has acknowledged that God cannot be reduced to a rational postulate and still remain the God of the classical tradition, the most influential modern Jewish account of a God who is a commanding personal presence of a personalist God – found in Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* – proves to be politically limited. Rosenzweig is a thinker of dual-covenant theology. On the one hand, there is the community of Israel, which exists outside of history, with God. On the other, there is the Christian community, whose members evangelize the nations of the world. Yet it remains the case that he is unable to count a number higher than two. The goal of Rashkover's work is to develop a Jewish position in which a community that sees itself as the recipient of divine revelation can also see itself as nonparochialist, as justly limited by all other religious communities, not just the single one that happens to have enjoyed political hegemony during the twentieth century. Rashkover argues that this requires a retrieval of an account of revelation as *law* that she finds most clearly delineated in

the work of Spinoza. It is Spinoza who portrays Jewish law as correlate with the desires of a Jewish community at a particular moment in history; in her words, this is the “materialism of the law.” Yet Spinoza’s account of law, in Rashkover’s view, is one that is structurally incapable of satisfying a community’s desires; to have one’s *conatus* be fulfilled is no longer to be human. If revelation is not to be Sisyphean, then a turn to supernaturalism is necessary. Yet while Rosenzweig offers an example of such supernaturalism, Rashkover reads Rosenzweig more minimally than is often the case in the secondary literature. The Rosenzweigian believer who claims to have experienced revelation (to have been loved by God in the past) lives both in a state of lack (the desire for that moment to return), as well as in the despair-conquering confidence that it will return. Since revelation takes shape as a drama of unconsummated revelation, claims of revelation are necessarily nonfanatical, and thus portable beyond the limited context of Jewish–Christian relations.

In the following chapter, Norbert Samuelson offers the germ-cell of a constructive Jewish theology of redemption.⁴⁹ With an attentiveness to the classical sources and to the rhythms of Jewish liturgical life, Samuelson posits the telos of the world as both a return to origin, and a gathering of all oppositions into a unified whole. The modern philosophical canon continues this position, whether in Mordecai Kaplan’s attempt to resuscitate the *kehillah*, Martin Buber’s romanticization of the kibbutz, or Rosenzweig’s messianic monism in which the distinction between light and night is sublated (see Ps. 139:11). Despite the variety of interpretations of redemption in the classical tradition and its modern interpreters, Samuelson maintains that this variety nonetheless scripts this fundamental point. What makes these positions more than useful, but also true, is their coherence with the current state of knowledge in astrophysics: the universe will either return to its beginning, or end in a monist blast in which light suffuses all darkness. Here, it is the open-endedness of the tradition, and the diversity of philosophical approaches to it, that makes it possible to integrate competing visions of redemption in the modern Jewish philosophical canon with the equally contested visions in “secular” knowledge.

Perhaps because of the sway that science holds in contemporary culture, Jewish philosophy has been reluctant to take up the issues of providence and prophecy as the medievals did. Certainly, the challenge to theodicy and the prevalence of “antitheodicy” in post-Holocaust Jewish theology⁵⁰ is never connected back to arguments about the existence or nonexistence of a providential order that would serve as a necessary ground of justice. Michael Morgan’s “Providence: Agencies of Redemption” follows the image of the prophet in medieval Jewish philosophy and links it to the accounts of ethical action that we find in Hermann Cohen and Emmanuel Levinas. In effect, Morgan argues that a world of providential order can

be produced by messianic expectation; providence is in part, but only in part, naturalized. Following the late Cohenian philosopher Steven S. Schwarzschild, Morgan reads the Jewish messianic tradition as producing justice and peace in the world. Yet he also recognizes that this kind of rhetoric can easily sound like a bromide unless it is linked to determinate political programs. Therefore, the majority of Morgan's chapter looks to current research in the field of international relations in order to claim that while there may be some justification for moving past a Jewish philosophy that puts too much trust in state sovereignty, there is little evidence to assume that religious associations alone can be agents of redemption. Jewish action must be political as well as ethical. In its political key, it must both support nongovernmental (or civil) associations, as well as acknowledge the power of sovereign nation-states to relieve suffering, if it is truly to maintain or generate confidence in providence.

Concepts and figures like "God," "creation," "revelation," "redemption," and "providence" do not exhaust the Jewish religion of philosophical canons. The cliché that Judaism and Jewish philosophy are focused on practice remains true to this day. More so than the first sections of this volume, the last two sections navigate areas that may be more specific to what were described previously as ethnic and ordinary approaches to Jewish philosophy. The fourth section of this volume contains five chapters that take as their focus Jewish "peoplehood" and its shape in law, ritual, and politics.

"Law," or halakhah, has been a primary datum in modern Jewish philosophy since its inception. In his programmatic chapter on the philosophy of halakhah, Avi Sagi seeks to supersede that approach to the study of halakhah known as *mishpat ivri*. Pioneered by the eminent Israeli jurist Menachem Elon in 1973, it was based on the broadly neo-Kantian orientation of Hans Kelsen.⁵¹ As argued by Sagi, Elon ignored the differing types of law included in halakhah, but more importantly, he notes the deep circularity endemic to the analysis, by which the philosopher creates the very object that he or she sets out to study. Halakhah does not give itself to the scholar in the singular as a reified "thing"; the only givens prior to philosophical analysis are the plural halakhot themselves. As a result, Sagi drops the dream of a unitary "philosophy of halakhah" in favor of a "philosophy of halakhot." His argument suggests that the context-sensitive philosopher who attends to halakhah would best generate a second-order discourse about halakhah by taking up the voluminous literature that has emerged in the wake of Ludwig Wittgenstein's analysis of rule-following in *Philosophical Investigations*.⁵²

Steven Kepnes's chapter on liturgy shows that liturgical practice has been the rhetorical site where the distinctiveness of Judaism and Jewish philosophy comes to the fore. In other words, what makes Jewish philosophy Jewish is not its theology

or its focus on ethics, but rather is in a more elemental set of data: the liturgical expressions of the Jewish people. Mendelssohn's privilege of the "ceremonial law" in *Jerusalem* shows that liturgical action contributes politically to the project of human cultivation (*Bildung*), fusing "enlightenment" and "culture," better than the dogmatics of Mendelssohn's Christian interlocutors and the chafing Enlightenment culture of "dead letter." In *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, Hermann Cohen's portrait of Shabbat as a "festival of social ethics" is not an illustration of a philosophical point; instead, Kepnes carefully shows that without liturgical practice, there is no way that Cohen can explain the dissemination of social ethics and virtues. A religion of reason only appears as such to the synoptic gaze of the scholar; like Mendelssohn, Cohen realized that he must explain not only the ideal *meaning* of Jewish practices, but also the real *forms* by which Jews (whether or not they are philosophers) come to associate meanings and practices. For its part, Rosenzweig's thick description of the relationship between God and the people of Israel requires not only scriptural analysis, but also liturgical analysis. It is in the analysis of the calendar year and its unique bending of ordinary clock time that Kepnes finds the core of Rosenzweig's portrait of the eternity of the Jewish people, not completely outside of history but "between the temporal and the holy." What Kepnes takes from the German-Jewish philosophical canon is that liturgy is prereflective; it generates meaning, as opposed to applying meanings that already exist or may have newly emerged within a Jewish community. As a result, Kepnes sees the process of imposing meaning upon liturgy, or changing liturgy so that it tallies with a community's understanding – which he finds in some recent feminist revisions of classical liturgy – as one that runs the risk of falling into anthropocentrism.

If Jewish peoplehood is in part constituted organically by characteristic types of practice, it is also in part constituted dialectically, in relation to how the Jewish people are perceived and conceptualized by non-Jews. Shmuel Trigano's wide-ranging chapter on Jewish–gentile relations makes the key point that the entire canon of Jewish philosophy cannot be understood if one does not acknowledge that the audience for this canon is not only members of Jewish communities, but also non-Jews. Theology is not anthropology, as Ludwig Feuerbach claimed in *The Essence of Christianity*; rather, philosophical theology is sociology. What Trigano sees as the draining of truth from the particularity of Jewish culture already in Maimonides serves to construct a notion of the universal that ends up privatizing Judaism and detaching it from tradition (Mendelssohn), or confusing the boundary between Jews and gentiles (Cohen, Rosenzweig, Levinas), or reducing Jews to mere figures (Kafka, Derrida). Even political Zionism, for Trigano, ends up confusing its particularity with its universality (being "like the nations"). In other words, the

sociological reality of postemancipation life produced bad philosophy all around. If there is a light at the end of the tunnel, Trigano suggests that we retrieve the thought of the nineteenth-century Italian kabbalist Elijah Benamozegh, who did not seek to collapse the universal and the particular into each other. Instead, he realized that particular communities view their others through a constructed category of the universal; in the Jewish case, this category is that of the Noahide laws. Here, the particular is not an instance of the universal; it is the ground of the category.

As one sees from Trigano's chapter, Jewish peoplehood is a necessarily political category. In her chapter on Jewish political theory, Leora Batnitzky argues that the project of constructing a Jewish political theory requires resisting two centuries of modern Jewish philosophy's spiritualization of Judaism. With the dissolution of Jewish political autonomy after emancipation, political authority is subsumed by the sovereign authority of the nation-state. European Jewish philosophers, whether liberal or Orthodox, subsequently began to deny the political nature of Judaism, which reached its culmination in Hermann Cohen's romanticization of Jewish suffering (echoed later in Levinas). At the same time, attempts to reconstruct robust political identities for Jews in the diaspora in twentieth-century America fail, on Batnitzky's account. Mordecai Kaplan's attempt to displace the role of religion in Jewish identity sacrifices Jewish distinctiveness. Leo Strauss's lionization of America as the place where the "Jewish question" needed no answer provided a negative type of liberty for Jews that Europe did not, yet Strauss could not articulate how America could possibly serve as a soil for the development of Jewish positive liberty. More recent work seems to her to promise only further culture wars: Alan Mittleman's retrieval of covenantal federalism (traditionally associated with the Puritan strand of early American political life³³) can only clash with contemporary pluralism, while David Novak's argument in his 2005 book *The Jewish Social Contract* that traditional Jews make the best democratic citizens also constricts individual autonomy.

As a cost-benefit analysis of Jewish approaches to the political leaves the reader with more questions than answers, so does Zachary Braiterman's chapter on Zionism leave the reader with a portrait of its subject as an "open question." The power of Braiterman's critique is rooted in his approach of discourse analysis. Recognizing Zionism as "an imaginary, invented construct," Braiterman shows how the history of Zionisms is a history of competing images and myths reaching their conceptual, political, and moral limits, thereby requiring new ones to take their place. His narrative has no normative arc; it is neither a story of progress nor one of decline. Like Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Braiterman's account speaks to the need for a picture to be self-conscious of itself as a picture (*Vorstellung*). This is not simply to say that Zionism must acknowledge that it has always been dynamic. It is also to

say that, as part of this acknowledgment, Zionism must dialectically recognize itself in and realign with those categories that it has too often seen as wholly other: the diaspora, and the Arab. In letting itself be energized by American liberal democratic culture and Arab culture, the particularity of Zionism might morph in directions that do not lead to ideological collapse in the ways that Braiterman's survey of the history of Zionism shows.

The fifth and final section of the volume is a return of sorts to a Kantian philosophical architectonic, organized along a division among pure reason, practical reason, and aesthetics. Given the importance of Kant to the modern Jewish philosophical canon, there is reason to argue that scholarship in the field should continue along these lines. Yet as these chapters show, when applied to modern Jewish philosophy, this architectonic begins to crack. The faculty of the imagination shows itself to be just as powerful as, and perhaps even more powerful than, the faculty of understanding. What appears to be a duty-based tradition also has much to say about the inculcation of the virtues. And a powerful strand in the Jewish philosophical tradition has long been uncomfortable with aesthetics, assuming that to talk of beauty is to begin a slippery slope to pantheism,⁵⁴ and ignoring the aesthetic theory even of its most aniconic thinkers. In its scope, the chapters in this section are intended to hearken to the past generation of scholarship, and by contesting it, to deepen and extend the canon of modern Jewish philosophy into new directions before veering back again to the Jewish textual tradition.

The first pair of articles in this section plumb the limits of (or lack of limits to) theoretical speculation. In his chapter "Reason as a Paradigm for Jewish Philosophy," Kenneth Seeskin claims that the intellectualist Maimonidean paradigm in modern Jewish philosophy makes it possible to create a productive interface between the religious and the secular worlds. Siding with elite culture rather than against it, Seeskin argues that the existentialist critique of rationalism in modern Jewish philosophy (which Seeskin views as akin to Hegel's critiques of Kantian thinking) is to set the stage for a dogmatic fideism that cannot but have violent political consequences. Claims of an immediate encounter with transcendence, whether in Rosenzweig or Levinas, abase the self before the face of power. When philosophers endorse these kinds of claims, Seeskin implies, they end up endorsing the very forces that maintain and/or augment unjust political and economic authority in society. Modern Jewish philosophy's demythologizing impulse and negative-theological stance therefore constitute a social good, in and of themselves. They ground a critique of the idolatrous act of attaching conceptual details to the bare God-idea dictated by reason and in this process ground a political critique of how these idolators act in culture.

On the other hand, as Elliot Wolfson argues in his chapter on the role of imagination in the modern Jewish philosophical canon, a rigorous negative-theological stance requires for its elucidation the very textured and poetic accounts of God that we find throughout the Jewish textual tradition. If Seeskin points to Kant as a thinker who places God beyond human concept-mongering, Wolfson reminds us that for Kant, there is no knowledge without the imaginative faculty. For the infinite to have some kind of motivating force for a community, it must be imaged. Wolfson thus observes how the radical transcendence of Jewish rationalism's God-idea exists alongside the immanence of the theolatrized God; anthropomorphic imagery does not cease to be imaged *as* God. While Hermann Cohen is frequently criticized for reducing God to a rational postulate, Cohen nevertheless tries not to be read in this manner; Cohen explicitly states that God is not a neuter (as in pantheism), but a person. At this point the theological imagination, as risky as it might be, must return; otherwise, Wolfson implies, there is no distinction between Judaism and deism. Wolfson's position should not be understood as endorsing pantheism, much less endorsing the necessity of a divine mediating logos as in Christianity. Rather, it is only to say "that the spiritual reality can be apprehended only through an image configured in the imagination of the visionary, an image that in its most sublime manifestation is anthropomorphic in nature." In addition, no one single image of God is ever fixed. One goes to an entire storehouse of images in a tradition's past, which in Judaism means to re-member the spiritual linguistically.⁵⁵ This, Wolfson suggests in expanding on the work of his teacher Edith Wyschogrod, is what Emmanuel Levinas did in his writings – for Levinas, it is in language that one can show how the "dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face." Yet if Jewish philosophy is to render God as persona, it cannot simply point to transcendence and do nothing else, since the act of pointing is an act of imaging.

The next two articles in the section take up issues of practical reasoning. In his constructive article on justice, Michael Zank argues against principlist and ethnocentric readings of justice in the Jewish philosophical tradition. His argument begins with the Bible, where justice (*tzedakah*) is associated with the consequences of good governance, not a fixed set of norms. On the basis of this distinction of the Bible's notion of justice from various sapiential conceptions of it, Zank finds justice to be accomplished formally, in the rule of law that is applied to all members of a community (whether the ancient Israelite polity or the modern nation-state). As a result, a Jewish approach to justice has nothing to do with theocentrism or anthropocentrism. In turning to Hermann Cohen, Hans Kelsen, Karl Marx, and Agnes Heller, Zank argues that a Jewish state is no more and no less than a polity whose members seek justice as an ideal, by basing law on a non-narrow notion of the

community and by promoting virtues of righteous action. Given Zank's connection of justice with what in the final analysis resembles virtue ethics, it seems key to recall figures in the Jewish philosophical tradition who bolster a view of ethics that is not purely deontological, an activity that scholars in the field typically do not do (perhaps because of the association of contemporary virtue ethics with a critique of the modern liberal state).

This is the task of Dov Nelkin's chapter on virtue, which turns to three figures for whom the purpose of the mitzvot is the inculcation of ethical dispositions. They do so without taking the antimodern stance of Christian virtue ethicists such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas. If the Vilna Gaon is the thinker who most clearly in the modern period stresses the intertwining of commandment and habituation, Nelkin's next two examples show two different ways of applying this intertwining to Jews in the modern world. On the one hand, the nineteenth-century Italian Jewish philosopher Samuel David Luzzatto sees in virtue and narrative the way to resist assimilation into Enlightenment universalism. On the other hand, Hermann Cohen was able to present the habituation of virtues, especially compassion (the very same virtue embraced by Luzzatto), as a necessary condition for the realization of universal moral aims. As Cohen claimed repeatedly throughout his Jewish writings, but most clearly in the *Religion of Reason*, philosophical ethics on its own (without religion) can only generate a formal sense of interhuman relations. It is religion – not the God-idea, but religion's force of inculcating compassion as a virtue – that can truly integrate the suffering individual into the community and thereby in the long run produce the humanitarian "totality" that Cohen describes as the messianic era.

Aesthetics takes the penultimate word in the volume. As argued by Asher Biemann, what many now see to be the once powerful myth of Jewish aniconicism, the idea of what Kalman Bland has called "the artless Jew," has finally begun to fray in recent years.⁵⁶ While Jewish aesthetics is frequently associated with the Zionist project of creating representations of Jewish life, Biemann shows traces of a modern Jewish religious aesthetics, dating back to Samson Raphael Hirsch. In the history of modern Jewish philosophy, Hermann Cohen was the most systematic in his endorsement of what he thought to be the second commandment's comprehensive prohibition against images. But in a 1914 essay on religious Jewish aesthetics, Cohen also presented the notion of a prophetic artwork as a deep source of ethical motivation. In the case of the Psalms, aesthetics becomes ethicized, and ethics becomes aestheticized in their representing the human longing for redemption. Biemann goes on to show how this focus on the materiality of Jewish life, its lack of clean form, is continued in Franz Rosenzweig's works on art and presages the writings

on fragment, ruin, and destruction found in major authors of the Frankfurt School such as Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin.

To be sure, there is no need to organize modern Jewish philosophy in complete accordance with the architectonic of human faculties found in the Kantian system. If scholars can and should continue following those historical strands in the modern Jewish philosophical canon, it is also the case that scholars of modern Jewish philosophy can and should find resources for Jewish philosophical thinking in the broadly “analytic” types of philosophizing that emerge in the wake of the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. In Jonathan Malino’s programmatic essay on what such a philosophy of Judaism might look like – thinking out of the various data of Jewish life and addressing the questions that are evoked by that form of life (as opposed to applying philosophical categories *to* Jewish life) – he takes up the religious claim of textual canonicity. One might assume that if Jewish philosophy is to be scholarly, it must obey the results of historical biblical criticism that understand classical Jewish texts such as the Bible and the Talmud as not distinctively different from secular texts. Nevertheless, there are scholars in the field – not only in Jewish philosophy, but also in other branches of Jewish studies and other scholarly fields – who do their scholarship from a perspective that affirms the intertwining of a text’s canonicity for Jews with its sacredness. Malino – expanding upon the work of Harry Frankfurt on desire, love, and care – argues that canonicity can be understood in a way that does not conflict with “secular” critical approaches to classical Jewish texts if we understand canonicity as correlate with a scholar’s valuing those texts as objects of his or her love. Following Frankfurt’s account of love in which “the importance of the beloved stems largely from our love of it, rather than from any value we discover in it,” Malino’s understanding of Jewish canonicity navigates the narrow territory between the Scylla of fanaticism and the Charybdis of relativism in a fashion that is markedly distinct from the Jewish philosophical tradition.

The dynamism of concepts in the field of modern Jewish philosophy is, in one way or another, the subject matter of this volume, from the opening essays’ pointing out of the instability lying behind various assertions about Judaism to Malino’s call for expanding modern Jewish philosophy to include styles of thinking that depart from its German history. The question remains as to whether articulating the field as “dynamic” will be enough for its practitioners, either in the present or in the future. Certainly the practitioner or student of the theocentric, and also the ethical, strands of modern Jewish philosophy will think that this energy can only find rest, elegance, and meaning in theological discourse. This volume as a whole does not and cannot solve this tension in the field. It cannot answer whether the increase in scholarship in modern Jewish philosophy has served to clarify the need

for stable theological grounds or warrants, or if it has only clarified its own dynamic nature across history. It cannot adjudicate the varying positions among the authors in this volume on what the ultimate telos of concept-use in modern Jewish philosophy might be. As Strauss wrote in the passage from *Natural Right and History* cited earlier in this introduction, the fundamental problems of philosophy have “fundamental alternatives regarding their solution” but no fundamental solution. To give an account of the history of Jewish philosophy in the modern era, and even of possibilities for using this history in future scholarship, is to portray only the alternatives for a solution. It is not to offer that solution itself. If a fundamental solution does exist, a later volume will undoubtedly uncover it. But its discovery will have been predicated on a selection from the varieties of concept-use detailed in the chapters that follow.⁵⁷

NOTES

- 1 S. Nadler and Rudavsky 2008.
- 2 Ritterband and Wechsler 1994, pp. 63–66; E. Hirsch 1920, p. 19.
- 3 Malter 1921.
- 4 See Husik 1916 and n.a. 1916, p. 1165.
- 5 See H. Wolfson 1983 (originally published in 1934) and the essays collected in H. Wolfson 1973 and H. Wolfson 1977b; Altmann 1962; Altmann 1973; and the list of publications in Altman 1998; Samuelson 1977; Ibn Daud 1986; and Samuelson 1999.
- 6 See Goodman 1977; Tirosh-Rothschild 1991; E. Wolfson 1988.
- 7 See Fishbane and Flohr 1975; Glatzer 1977.
- 8 Ritterband and Wechsler 1994, p. 120.
- 9 H. Wolfson 1921, p. 32.
- 10 Schorsch 1994, p. 373.
- 11 See, for example, Lovejoy 1918; Borowitz 1970–71.
- 12 Hecht 1920, p. 289f.
- 13 See H. Cohen 1972, p. 113 and 249ff. See also Kavka 2004, pp. 94–124.
- 14 It is customary in introductions to volumes such as this to point to the last sentence of Isaac Husik’s introduction to medieval Jewish philosophy as evidence for this point: “there are Jews now, and there are philosophers, but there are no Jewish philosophers and no Jewish philosophy.” (Husik 1916, p. 432; see also Frank and Leaman 1997, p. 5, and S. Nadler and Rudavsky 2008, p. 3.) For Husik, either Jewish philosophy uncovers a universal truth (and is thereby truly philosophical), or it articulates a particular stance (and is thereby the articulation of one culture’s opinions about matters).
- 15 See Hollander 2008.
- 16 Rosenzweig 1988, p. 3; Rosenzweig 1985, p. 3. See P. Gordon 2003, pp. 143–50.
- 17 Rosenzweig 1988, p. 147f.; Rosenzweig 1970, pp. 132–34. See Kavka 2004, pp. 141–47.
- 18 Novak 2005c, p. 231. See also Novak 1990.
- 19 Novak 2005c, p. 240.
- 20 Rotenstreich 1968, p. 6.
- 21 Levinas 1994b, p. 52; Levinas 1988, p. 62; Gibbs 2000, pp. 299–304. See also Gibbs 1992, pp. 155–75; Ajzenstat 2005; C. Katz 2004a.

- 22 See Guttman 1933; Guttman 1964.
- 23 Rotenstreich 1968, p. 254.
- 24 Fackenheim 1978, p. 21f. See also Braiterman 1998, pp. 134–60; Morgan 2001a, p. 83.
- 25 Fackenheim 1982, pp. 217ff., 267–77, 289–93, 302. See also Braiterman 1998, pp. 148ff.
- 26 See Novak 1995, p. 155, on “the Torah of the redeemed future.”
- 27 Heidegger 1993, pp. 347–63, esp. 360f.
- 28 Arendt 1958, p. 199ff.
- 29 Batnitzky 2006, p. 208.
- 30 L. Strauss 1953, p. 32.
- 31 Cavell 2005, p. 12.
- 32 A. Hughes 2010b, p. 54.
- 33 Rorty 1998, p. 260f.
- 34 A. Hughes 2010b, p. 54.
- 35 Rorty 1998, p. 262.
- 36 Guttman 1964, p. 397.
- 37 Ibid., p. 397f.
- 38 Ibid., p. 397.
- 39 Rorty 1998, p. 272.
- 40 Ibid., p. 273.
- 41 This is a Mendelssohnian claim. See Mendelssohn 1983a, p. 107.
- 42 Ibid., p. 102.
- 43 Brandom 2009, p. 115. For the reading of Kant suffusing these sentences, see pp. 32–42.
- 44 See Stout 2007, esp. 20ff.
- 45 Moses Mendelssohn intimated this in *Jerusalem*. See Mendelssohn 1983b, p. 105.
- 46 Ibid., p. 43.
- 47 See Ochs and Levene 2002; Ford and Pecknold 2006.
- 48 See Peirce 1998, p. 351.
- 49 This chapter should be seen as a sequel to his previous constructive work on creation and revelation. See Samuelson 1994; Samuelson 2002.
- 50 See Braiterman 1998.
- 51 For an argument that Kelsen’s theory of the basic norm is an application of the concept of hypothesis developed in Hermann Cohen’s systematic writings, see Edel 1999.
- 52 See Wittgenstein 2001, pp. 48–52, 61–69; Kripke 1982; Soames 2003, pp. 33–44.
- 53 See P. Miller 1956, pp. 48–98.
- 54 See Schwarzschild 1987.
- 55 For more on cryptic and graphematic models of memory, see E. Wyschogrod 1998, pp. 174–217, esp. pp. 176ff.
- 56 See Braiterman 2007b; Biemann 2006; Biemann 2009, pp. 274–305; Bland 2000; V. Mann 2000; Olin 2001.
- 57 My thanks to David Novak, and especially to Zachary Braiterman, for their feedback on previous drafts of this introduction.

PART I

JUDAISM'S ENCOUNTER WITH MODERNITY

ENLIGHTENMENT

WILLI GOETSCHER

With the Enlightenment begins what is considered the period of modern philosophy, a period that starts with a *tabula rasa*, returning to reason as the pure source of understanding – or so it is often argued. Ironically, by addressing the contributions of Jewish philosophers in terms of their “universal” significance, the conventional accounts, however, fail to attend to the specificity of modern Jewish thought, whose particular positioning challenges these very claims and universalist assumptions themselves. The critical significance of the trajectory of Jewish philosophers in the Enlightenment lies precisely in the way they use their particular perspective to examine reason’s universalist claim. In so doing, Jewish philosophers have rethought, through reason, the very project of modern philosophy – a critical challenge that seems often lost in conventional accounts of philosophy in modernity. For while secularization is often seen as the condition of the new science and philosophy that emerge from the cultural rebirth in the Renaissance, this move to secularization reveals a selective blindness with regard to the contributions of Jewish philosophers curiously at odds with the period’s claim to a universal scope.¹ Though the middle ages had relegated Jews to a distinct if subaltern place of negative significance, modern universalism was no longer interested in a distinct Jewish difference when secularized post-Reformation Christianity had become the undisputed and single paradigm for spiritual and intellectual life.

Unlike other modern philosophers, Jewish philosophers remained self-consciously aware of their connection to medieval and ancient sources. Far from a standard of unquestioned authority, these predecessors became the sources “out of which” Jewish thinkers drew their inspiration, to use Hermann Cohen’s paradigmatic expression.² During the Enlightenment, Jewish philosophers thus did not break with the tradition in the way other modern thinkers did. As a result, they can be considered more or less dependent on tradition as they examine and rethink their preceding Jewish and philosophical sources with a radically critical eye. Through their relation to the past, Jewish philosophers recognized the problematic implications of the modern attempt to ground the claims of reason on a shaky Cartesian raft, whose captains are ultimately forced to borrow their rescue

gear from a tradition on which they still depend. Unlike such attempts to constitute modern philosophy as a radical break, Jewish philosophers understand tradition as an enabling medium or force that has the power not only to bind but also to release creative energy. If Descartes and Hobbes can be considered paradigmatic for Enlightenment thought, then early modern Jewish philosophers appear to share with the Enlightenment only the temporal period itself. If, however, the scope of that period is expanded and thinkers such as Montaigne and Spinoza are no longer marginalized but recognized for their pioneering role, then the Enlightenment comes to include the innovative features that Jewish philosophers brought to it: contributions which – from a conventional point of view – seemed not just marginal, but oblivious to contemporary concerns.

Montaigne gives voice to a new, critical sensibility that breaks ground for a new direction in Enlightenment thought. Articulating views that resist rationalist reductionism, his early modern version of skeptical examination announces a newly accentuated emphasis on the I. Unlike the Augustinian and Cartesian versions that make the ego the incontrovertible foundation of modern subjectivity, Montaigne's I – literally his "je" that serves as the author's critical agency – resists reduction to a mere procedure of conceptual rigor. Instead, Montaigne's "I" enjoys a decidedly preconceptual fluidity and is portrayed as a self-producing agency whose processual nature and circular progression defy any notion of systematic and methodical closure. In this way, Montaigne's essays pave the way for Kant's self-reflective epistemological subject and its critical limitations.³ For both Montaigne and the philosophers of the Jewish Enlightenment, the I is less a solid and reliable point of reference than a sign of the need to negotiate between tradition and innovation themselves.

In a remarkable way, Montaigne articulates with his philosophical project a position that speaks to the situation that early modern Jewish philosophers face: they recognize that their religious and cultural identity is at the same time both an agent and a subject, a given and a project. Their family resemblance to Montaigne is hardly accidental. A son of a Marrano mother, Montaigne grew up in a philosophical culture defined by the profound spiritual restlessness and skepticism of Marrano refugees who had, among other places of refuge, fled to the southwest of France and made it their new home.⁴ Early on, Montaigne was thus exposed to the challenge – but also given the encouragement – to articulate a position of his own amid a set of radical and unsettling philosophical and religious uncertainties. The idea that tradition and innovation could go hand in hand, constituting each other in creative ways, had allowed Jewish culture to adapt and develop over the centuries an attitude that kept Judaism alive in the face of Christianity's claim to supersession.

With the dissolution of the medieval framework and the emergence of a new science and philosophy in the Renaissance, the old order began to dissolve, and Judaism's place had to be renegotiated once again. If Christian philosophy in late antiquity and the Middle Ages had shunted Judaism to the margins, it had acknowledged its existence. Judaism may have been seen as a regrettable but nevertheless instructive version of philosophy, in all its aberrance and falsity. Yet the Jewish tradition, along with Muslim thought, was at the same time recognized as a vital transmitter of Greek philosophy, via Alexandria and the translation schools of Toledo. With the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modernity, European philosophy departed from its scholastic approach, liberating itself from the hold of a tradition it considered obsolete. But the move to a new science and philosophy, as liberating as it seemed, rested on a claim to a universalism Enlightenment thought was ill prepared to realize. Tossing, as it were, the baby out with the bath water, the Jewish-Christian difference was replaced by a paradigm that, in the guise of the new secularism, had made its peace with the church by transposing the old theological predicaments into a new and more modern key. For Jewish thinkers, then, the situation represented by the beginnings of modernity offered little more reassurance than before. While they had been stamped as abject subjects before, the legitimacy of their particular identity had nevertheless remained undisputed, albeit in negatively charged theological terms. Under the new view, however, Jews were theoretically no longer to be subjected to discrimination. But in order to qualify to practice the new philosophical discourse, they were expected to cast off the particularity of their Jewish tradition. In a peculiar manner, then, secularization allowed the Christian tradition to conceal its claims without forsaking its hold. The exclusion of non-Christian traditions was therefore no longer carried out explicitly, but tacitly enforced: and compliance with this secular coding became a difficult task for non-Christians in this still Christian culture.

As radically liberating as the Enlightenment claimed to be, the demise of the medieval cosmos and the beginning of the Enlightenment led also to an increase of the pressures of assimilation unknown to premodern society. This was reinforced by the new role of vernacular languages in philosophy and political discourse, as well as in society as a whole. Whereas the generation of Descartes, Hobbes, and Leibniz straddled this linguistic divide between vernacular language and the language of philosophy, the Enlightenment and its universalist aspirations – as they reached their climax – became a national affair. While constantly stressing its universal scope and application, the languages in which the champions of the Enlightenment thought communicated their ideas revealed another problem: the kind of naturalization process that philosophical thought undertook in

this move to the national vernaculars had consequences of its own. The sheer organicism if not biologism of the metaphor of naturalization, used in the description of the European vernacular languages, imagined the fundamental outlook of Enlightenment thought in terms of striking roots, fixing meaning, and a radical stripping away of metaphysical content, or so it seemed. With the transition to European vernaculars as languages of philosophy, a change in direction toward local, secularized metaphysics began that was both pointedly particular yet remained subliminally linked to the universalizing claims of the philosopher's linguistic culture. Both Montaigne's move to "essay" in French and Spinoza's decision to write in Latin were telling responses to the dilemmas that linguistic naturalization held in store. Montaigne, for instance – raised from early childhood on in Latin and Greek – created a style that sought to preserve a critical awareness of classic traditions. His writing conveys an awareness of and critically reflects classic erudition in a modern French that carefully navigates the tensions between the emerging national vernacular and its Latin tradition. Spinoza's choice of language similarly resists naturalization, a naturalization that, in his view, could only mean a false form of particularity. In his hands, Latin was not "universal," but a language that defended against any erasure of the tension with the particular that universal thought must preserve in order to produce critical meaning. Following Leibniz's idea of universal language, Christian Wolff becomes the unacknowledged parody. Publishing side by side in Latin and German, his works assume the role of a translation factory whose assembly-line style of manufacturing pretends a complete identity of thought and expression only his style can betray.⁵ For Mendelssohn, reputed of loyal affiliation to the Leibniz-Wolffian school of thought – a "school" that in this form never existed – the thought of Leibniz and Wolff provided the terminology for the lingua franca of postscholastic philosophy.⁶ But loyalty to the framework did not mean for Mendelssohn the unexamined underwriting of its metaphysical scheme and outlook. On the contrary, his German, praised for its clarity in style and thought, is defined by skillfully navigating the problem of naturalization. His style's lucidity is not so much based on simplicity but rather on fluid agility as it persistently reflects the movement of thought in language while resisting assimilation to any norm – linguistic, cultural, national – that the movement of his philosophical thought does not call for on its own. At the same time, Mendelssohn's multilingual background made him one of the preeminent comparatists of the Enlightenment. The force of his German – one could say – stems precisely from the multilingual perspective he brings to his writing in a language that, in his view, is less a fixed vernacular than a language in formation.⁷

The questions of what constitutes Jewish philosophy or in what way a philosopher's thought can also be Jewish are thus questions that from the beginning have been tied to the question of language. But for Jewish philosophers as well as for someone like Montaigne, whose sensitivity to the same issues and concerns reveals a remarkable affinity in response – and whether his Jewish heritage may play an explicit or silent role in this context remains an open question – the linguistic dimension has from the start been an issue that poses questions rather than provides answers. Jewish philosophy is, among other things, a correlative concept in dialogue with “universal” philosophy. Its trajectory is strategic and corrective in a sense, and as a result critical of methodological and epistemic normativity. While “philosophy” presents itself as freestanding discourse, Jewish philosophy is often cast as philosophy's running commentary, expansion, and critical test on the particulars. The trajectory of Jewish philosophy in the Enlightenment can therefore not be severed from the trajectory of philosophy in general but is deeply entwined with it. To wish to extract a distinct Jewish strand in philosophy is therefore a methodologically problematic endeavor, since Jewish thought articulates its concerns at the interface between the universal claim and its historically changing, particular forms of expression. To do so would mean to essentialize thinking that is precisely bent on questioning the very notion of essence in thought. But this does not mean that historicist relativism would dissolve the Jewish philosophical impulse into sheer contingency. On the contrary, a distinctly Jewish voice in philosophy can be traced in the post-Reformation secular philosophy, but it emerges through dialogue with the general project of philosophy that seeks to assimilate or marginalize it. The distinction between what is Jewish or non-Jewish is therefore from the very outset a dynamic one, in process and transformation. Yet Jewish thought has been criticized for precisely this reflective fluidity that has allowed it to develop through constant and creative forms of exchange. But the compliment must be returned. Jewish philosophy's stubborn resistance to assimilation is not merely a negative feature – which it unambiguously remains from a hegemonic point of view – but a creative contradiction from a counterposition that reflects the hegemonic stand on philosophy critically. This “minority” position not only reclaims the voices threatened with silence but also keeps the necessary checks and balances on a universal trajectory that otherwise would be derailed. This dialogic role Jewish philosophy has come to play since the Enlightenment is not simply corrective but has become a fundamental part that co-constitutes philosophy as a critical project able to think its own limits productively. This feature is crucial for understanding the particular role Jewish thought plays in philosophy in modernity.⁸

SPINOZA'S CONTROVERSIAL PLACE IN THE HISTORY
OF JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

Spinoza has traditionally presented a problem for historians of philosophy – Jewish and non-Jewish alike. His place in the history of philosophy has been controversial if not contested. From his earliest reception, Spinoza served as pawn for different philosophical agendas. While for some Spinoza became a cautionary example of a theologically and morally abject position, others saw in him a formidable provocation, which in this view could be understood only as an unfortunate short-circuiting of theology and moral thought. Pierre Bayle's notorious discussion of Spinoza in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, which gained prominence as the most widely circulated Enlightenment treatment of Spinoza, posed the question in terms of a skeptical challenge. Spinoza, the tenor of his commentary went, posed a provocative problem to theology's traditional forms of legitimation, not so much because of his notorious views but because the impeccable conduct of Spinoza's life made him morally unassailable. An atheist position, in this account, did not have to imply immorality, as Spinoza's exemplary life demonstrated in indisputable terms. Such was the challenge several generations of scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were thus obliged to confront. The chorus of Spinoza's critics, however, reverting to the very theological polemics Spinoza had argued to be null and void, depicted him as a dangerous, treacherous intimate of those evil forces whose destruction was most urgently required. The history of the Spinoza reception thus became the conflicted story of a philosopher's reduction to stereotype or moral exemplarity. Showcasing him either as an object lesson in moral and philosophical virtue or as latter-day incarnation of evil, however, quarantined Spinoza in a lasting manner, relegating him to a place and status that transfixed his image in conventional narratives of philosophy. Labeled an exotic among modern philosophers, his claim to a place in the history of philosophy became a contested affair. Hegel's approach assumed exemplary significance as he cast Spinoza as the "oriental" who, precisely by virtue of his distinct difference, would have a momentous impact on the development of modern European thought. Such a concession also meant Spinoza's systematic exclusion from modern European philosophy itself by way of this peculiar inclusion as occidental philosophy's other.⁹

Jewish philosophers and historians responded differently to this predicament that continued to raise the issue of their own status. The way in which they responded remained inseparably linked to the way in which they positioned themselves in relation to both philosophy and their own Jewish identity. Mendelssohn, the first self-conscious Jewish philosopher to engage with Spinoza, took a stand on this

question that would be seminal for future generations. If during Mendelssohn's period acknowledging Spinoza openly in public remained a risky affair – the example of Christian Wolff's 1723 eviction from Halle under the threat of impending execution should he resist the order was still a recent memory¹⁰ – Mendelssohn developed a strategy similar to, and informed by, the crypto-Spinozist tradition: that of disseminating the philosopher's ideas under the guise of criticism. Mendelssohn's early redemptive reading of Spinoza, following the project of redemptive critique Lessing had introduced to “rescue” controversial figures and their heretical views, set the record straight by highlighting Spinoza's role in breaking new ground for modern philosophy. Spinoza, Mendelssohn's anonymous *Philosophical Conversations* (1755) argued, represented a decisive stage that made it possible to formulate the idea of a preestablished harmony, a notion that rested on Spinoza's metaphysics.¹¹ This diplomatic but at the same time unexpected and courageous demonstration of loyalty – the first public acknowledgment of Spinoza's significance as a philosopher instrumental for the emergence of modern thought – announced the beginning of an important turn. On the one hand, Mendelssohn addressed the challenge to respond to the marginalization of Spinoza *pro domo*, that is, for himself and for Jewish philosophers to come. Whether he agreed or not with the proposition, as a Jew who wanted to be a philosopher, Mendelssohn was expected to explain his view on Spinoza. Would he be a second Spinoza – minus the errors, as Lessing was so excited to declare him – or a philosopher in his own right?¹² For Mendelssohn there was no other choice than to take a stand on these tacit questions that defined the hermeneutic horizon of his period. But more important than his explicit position on this issue was the way in which Mendelssohn related to Spinoza's thought in his own philosophical works. Whether we can speak of influence or, more precisely, correspondence is of less significance here than the fact that Mendelssohn's thought reflects a remarkable family resemblance to Spinoza when it comes to key philosophical issues. In surprisingly innocuous fashion, Mendelssohn assumes a central role as conduit of Spinoza's thought at the end of the eighteenth century. Through Mendelssohn, Spinoza – otherwise considered a secular thinker par excellence – comes to play a central role in Jewish philosophy.

But this development has long been ignored. While the general historiography of philosophy has therefore turned a blind eye to the steady undercurrent of Spinoza reception, twentieth-century scholarship on Jewish philosophy has remained curiously unaware of this problem. For the traditional German-Jewish historian of Jewish philosophy, Julius Guttman, Spinoza simply was not a Jewish philosopher.¹³ Following the anti-Spinozist animus of Hermann Cohen, whose unforgiving stand against Spinoza Franz Rosenzweig reported,¹⁴ Harry A. Wolfson

made Spinoza single-handedly responsible for terminating Jewish philosophy, a project that according to his views had begun with Philo.¹⁵

These reactions evolved in the context of an enthusiastic reception of Spinoza among liberal Jews who, following Mendelssohn's cue, identified Spinoza as the pioneer of their emancipatory claims. In his lead article for the journal of the *Verein der Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden*, Immanuel Wolf saluted Spinoza as the philosopher to whom Judaism owes its modern reconstruction according to the pure science of philosophy.¹⁶ For liberal Jews of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from Heine to Moses Hess, Ludwig Stein, Leo Baeck, and to Georg Simmel's students Martin Buber and Margarete Susman, Spinoza became the paradigmatic thinker to demonstrate the seminal role modern Jews could play in philosophy and culture.¹⁷ Yet Spinoza also became a symbolic figure for a Jewish opposition that saw the Spinoza cult as the outgrowth of a naive over-identification with a liberal tradition that required its own critical examination. Critics in this latter camp – from Hermann Cohen to Franz Rosenzweig, Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem – faced the problem of appearing to keep company with reactionary critics opposed to emancipation, from Johann Georg Hamann to Carl Schmitt.¹⁸ The question of Jewish philosophy in the Enlightenment in this way remained a controversial issue at the beginning of the twentieth century. But not much has changed since. In the wake of the Shoah and the cultural developments that followed, through the Cold War and the postcolonial era up to the present, the relationship of the Enlightenment to Jewish philosophy has remained vexed. This problem still defines the way narratives of the Enlightenment are developed. If this issue of where to place Spinoza raises more questions than answers, the philosophically crucial point remains: by directly addressing the question of Jewish philosophy in the Enlightenment and the complex of its implications as itself calling for critical attention, we can understand these narratives as foregrounding a problem, rather than mistake them for history itself.

Thus while this reception history bears its political significance on its face, the specifically political dimension of Jewish philosophy and its relationship to the Enlightenment have remained curiously underappreciated. Focusing on the reception of metaphysics in Jewish philosophy, scholarship has – if it considered the social and political relevance of Jewish philosophy at all – treated this trajectory in isolation from the larger philosophical concerns that drive the project of modern Jewish philosophy. For both Spinoza and Mendelssohn, the way in which they chose to theorize social and political concerns connected their ethical and metaphysical framework. This connection set their philosophical projects apart from scholarship that has sought to understand it by focusing exclusively on their metaphysics

alone: thus following the conventional practice of the general historiography of philosophy. But this neat separation of philosophy from social and political concerns was precisely the view that both thinkers had challenged. It is only if we include the pointedly alternative direction social and political theory takes in Spinoza and Mendelssohn that we comprehend the way in which Jewish philosophy developed in the Enlightenment.

Articulating a project of self-assertion and of critical examination of the claims of philosophy, Jewish philosophers understood the fundamental significance of the constitutive link between practical and theoretical philosophy. Metaphysics and epistemology, they recognized, were not just theoretical but profoundly practical in nature. To understand practice, they knew, experience was not enough, or, rather, experience was not simply the accumulation of different forms of practice or the sum total of the status quo. But if theory was needed, they suggested, it was a practice, too. There was no ontologically privileged vantage point to which thought could withdraw. Philosophical thinking could not simply claim an ontologically secure observer status detached from the historical particulars that defined it as it made it possible. But the departure from the traditional view on philosophy and the tacit but signal move to a redefinition of its tasks made Jewish Enlightenment philosophy the subject of a misconception. While Jewish Enlightenment philosophers sought to envision a new approach to philosophy that would transform philosophy from an exclusionist universalism whose particularism systematically reiterated the invidious separations that traditional metaphysics entailed, contemporary philosophers as well as scholarship would relate to their challenge as ill-understood efforts to emulate “philosophy” proper. Seen in their own terms, however, Jewish Enlightenment philosophers did not simply seek to emulate a paradigm whose very implications were problematic. They rather redefine its terms and project. Taking this concern seriously, we now can trace the trajectory of a Jewish philosophy that, rather than being a diluted “minor” branch of thought, offers an enlivening enrichment of modern philosophy.

SPINOZA

In Spinoza, these concerns assume programmatic expression. Long reduced to an ontological and pointedly antireligious project, recent work has directed attention to Spinoza’s critical concern with rethinking the concept and task of philosophy as a whole. The new interest Spinoza has received in current critical theory highlights the signal impact of his thought in a way that suggests more than just anecdotal relevance.¹⁹ Spinoza’s critical response to the tradition of philosophy takes

on Aristotelian, Scholastic, and Cartesian approaches, as well as the materialism of naturalists like Hobbes. What these philosophies have in common, Spinoza argues, is that they fail to comprehend the particular in epistemologically and ontologically satisfactory terms. They approach the particular in terms of an ontological taxonomy that subjects the particular to an order that no longer corresponds to the philosophical sensibilities operative in modernity. If individuality still therefore remains a scandal for philosophy at the beginning of modernity, Spinoza proposes a philosophy that no longer conceives contingency in terms of a lack or problem. According to his view, contingency is not an ontological problem but indicates the epistemological failure to comprehend the necessity of what exists. Normative ideas on particularity are from this perspective void, as the universal and the particular stand in a different relationship than conventional thought had claimed. Whereas the latter assumed the epistemological primacy of concepts, Spinoza's ontological proviso proposes a different approach. If, for Spinoza, everything that exists is an expression of God (defined as nature, or substance), then the distinction between the universal and the particular reflects different modes of thought rather than a claim of primacy of one over the other. Ontologically indistinguishable in status, the universal and particular express different perspectives on what exists but prohibit any unmediated epistemological grasp.²⁰

This idea informs Spinoza's philosophy in a critical fashion and defines his stand on anthropological, political, and social issues. Taking its cue from Spinoza, Jewish philosophers in the Enlightenment redefine its scope beyond the purview traditionally assigned to philosophy. They now include larger social and political aspects that conventionally had remained reserved to "practical" or, in modernity, "political" philosophy whose claim to universal validity seemed unquestioned. With Spinoza, in other words, philosophy as an exclusively theoretical endeavor had become an inadequate exercise. Notions such as "the nature of man," "man," and "human nature" had become problematic as their normative implications were exposed as teleologically suspect. Spinoza's pointedly nonnormative angle *sub specie aeternitatis* countermands any form of abstraction, deploying a theoretical approach to historical specificity that resists the subjection of particulars to any presupposed scheme of universals. As a result, Jewish tradition was no longer relegated to the camp of particularity but could now come into view as an alternative approach to the question of the relationship between the universal and the particular.

As a consequence, Spinoza's geometric approach offered a nonhierarchical framework to theorize individuality: not as a differential between the universal and particular, but as crystallization points where the dynamics of universal forces converge to generate unique instances of constellations. Infinite in possibilities, such

formations would be ontologically of equal status but distinctive in their individual features. The normative hold of the traditional logic of the supremacy of the universal over the particular was thus replaced by a logic of phenomenological description. Husserl's comment that Spinoza developed the "first universal ontology"²¹ highlights a critical move whose consequences would only become fully understood as the history of philosophy took its course. But Spinoza's explicit stand on ontological equality accounts also for the aggressively militant front Spinoza's thought faced right from the beginning. For many of his contemporaries and critics of the Enlightenment, Spinoza presented an uncanny menace as his approach questioned the very structure and logic of the ontological assumptions on which philosophy used to rest. The virulent anxiety Spinoza's thought caused explains the vile and vitriolic attacks launched against him. For Spinoza did, indeed, pose the very questions that would bring old time-honored tacit assumptions to a collapse.²²

But besides this general impact whose signal effect had direct significance for the project of Jewish philosophy, Spinoza's works articulated a series of concerns that addressed problems Jewish tradition confronted with increasing urgency during the Enlightenment. In programmatic fashion, Spinoza formulated the agenda of Jewish philosophy as his questions and problems would come to define the projects of modern Jewish philosophers. *Prima facie*, this agenda was most obviously laid out in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, his explicit discussion of the meaning of religion, tradition, spirituality, and their significance for politics. But the *Ethics* and *Tractatus Politicus* are of equal importance for the agenda of Jewish philosophy as they provide not only the philosophical framework for Spinoza's approach to religion, tradition, and hermeneutics but also an approach to the larger philosophical issues in ontology and epistemology as well as in practical philosophy, particularly its anthropological, social, and political aspects that are fundamental to the project of developing alternative approaches to philosophy. Most importantly, Spinoza's recasting of the relationship of the universal and the particular proposes an approach that addresses "Jewish" and general philosophical concerns in nonexclusionary terms.²³

THE THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL COMPLEX

The *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670) examines the difficult relationship between theology and the politics, a relationship, Spinoza suggests, that cannot simply be severed once and for all. The hyphen accentuates a nexus that is hard to ignore. Spinoza's critical analysis of theological reasoning not only scrutinized the legitimation of theology itself, but also produced a general inquiry into theology's role

in politics. While the *Treatise* launched a powerful plea for the freedom of thought and expression that pointed beyond any conventional form of tolerance philosophers had hitherto demanded, it remained critically wary of the hermeneutic grip theology continued to exercise in modernity. But most significantly, Spinoza does not propose a secular society devoid of any traces of tradition. His approach instead stresses the importance of reflecting on tradition critically. Theology could, in Spinoza's view, not simply be left behind and replaced by secular ideology. The stress on his argument was rather to remind his readers of the profound theological implications inherent in "secular" thought. For Spinoza, to be "secular" did not call for the negation of theology but its critical examination. Instead of discarding theological traditions as cultural refuse, Spinoza understood them to pose a social problem that transcends the reach of political decree. Unlike Hobbes, Locke, and the German Enlightenment rationalists, Spinoza chose a third way that neither accepted nor rejected theological argumentation but engaged it on its own political terms. As a political factor, then, theology called for the examination of its political ramifications. This way, Spinoza complicated the project of the Enlightenment in a critical manner. Religious traditions were no longer simply obsolete and meaningless. Their study yielded instead a historically dynamic and creative force that led to a critical appreciation of the constitutive nexus between tradition and innovation. In this way he not only secured a more differentiated approach to, but also challenged the conventional view on, tradition as mere repetition and imitation, suggesting a more dynamic and creative relationship between religious tradition and modernity. Spinoza's resolute push to emancipate political theory and practice from theology's grip did therefore acknowledge the problem of religious difference as one that could not simply be declared to be resolved with the grand gesture of Enlightenment. Recognizing the profound if not constitutive political significance of religious power, Spinoza understood the fundamental importance of the economy of affects in any political system. To mistake the majority claims of dominant groups – religious, cultural, or social – for universalism, Spinoza suggests, jeopardizes the actual universal validity of natural rights. Political freedom emerges in the *Theological-Political Treatise* not from a division of religion from politics, theology from philosophy, but through a reexamination of religious tradition that reveals behind theology's grip a politics that enlists theology for its own purposes. Between the theology and politics, the *Treatise* establishes thus less of a separating divide than what emerges as a communicating linkage. The hyphen between "theological" and "political" in the title highlights that the problem is not simply one of a backwardness or irrationality of theology; it rather represents the complicated node of entanglement that the relationship between theology and politics

produces. With the accent on the hyphen, Spinoza opposes the desire to reduce the problem of modernity to an exclusively political matter. Whereas such a view would declare politics as the universal, the *Theological-Political Treatise* suggests that the terms of politics remain problematic as long as its claims about universal right remain unexamined. The *Treatise* provides precisely that, a history and examination of the terms that define the framework of modern political philosophy.

Besides this correctional shift that aligns both religious and political discourse with an alternative vision of emancipation, Spinoza remains wary of the liberal scheme of progress that pays for the freedom it purchases by mortgaging itself to a coercive universalism that turns a blind eye on the fine print. Spinoza in this way sets the agenda for Jewish philosophy and modern Judaism in general. Spinoza's approach to the Bible and to Jewish tradition in general spells out the terms for modern biblical criticism. This challenge assumes formative importance whose modern Jewish response is intimately linked to Spinoza. Consequently, even the most conservative positions in modern Judaism remain overtly or covertly linked to Spinoza. In examining prophecy, miracles, the nature of scripture, language, and translation, Spinoza demonstrates how the question of hermeneutics represents an issue that cannot be contained by theology. Modernity confronts hermeneutics precisely because interpretive questions are not limited to issues raised in biblical exegesis alone. In laying bare the theoretical implications of reading tradition, Spinoza shows how local textual exegesis cannot be contained strictly within the boundaries of philology and theology. Reading the Bible means instead to engage in the recovery of a tradition whose continuity links up and thus informs the present that implicates the observer. Reading, the *Theological-Political Treatise* suggests, is a process of translation for which prophecy provides a telling metaphorical account. For Spinoza, the prophet is the one who already translates, rendering his or her visions in human language. The prophet interprets the vision.²⁴ Prophecy, in this view, represents thus already a mediated form of knowledge. There is no direct access to the divine but only different reflections of it. Spinoza's discussion of the miracle illustrates this point in even starker terms. If the miracle calls for a hermeneutics of the singular, such a hermeneutics lacks the normative force it claims to possess. For, while hermeneutics seeks to propose a universally valid protocol for how to read the singular – the miracle – the meaning, sense, or message of any miracle or other singular event as such does not carry normative force. Miracles, in other words, are “mute.” Even if they contain “speech,” the interpretation of what they say remains just that: an interpretation. There are false prophets, Spinoza points out, and miracles performed by false prophets or false messengers of the divine. Their miracles and prophecies may be false, but the truth content cannot be

arbitrated on the basis of their knowledge alone. Understanding them requires a hermeneutic that reads them as signs whose meaning is only produced through the process of interpretation, that is, translation, and that means representation in the terms provided by human understanding.

Spinoza, however, does not see this as a limiting restriction but comprehends the distinctly mediated nature of all efforts to access the divine as the evidence of human autonomy and the limits of theology. This view provides the vantage point for a modern concept of religion and spirituality that, in critical accordance with Jewish tradition, rests on the performance of ethical commandments, and therefore on practice rather than the confession of articles of faith. Taking religion consistently, Spinoza argued, is tantamount to rejecting the claims and arrogations of organized religion that make the theological-political entanglement both religiously vacuous and politically pernicious. To preserve their spirituality, religious traditions had to reconfigure the relationship to the political; to preserve its political core, politics could no longer enlist religion in its forces. While Spinoza's push to secularism appeared unforgivingly antireligious in dogmatic accounts, a closer look at its implications displays a striking compatibility with the concerns that Jewish tradition had entertained all along. But Spinoza's significance goes beyond the positions he takes on particular issues in Jewish tradition and comprises the signal importance his philosophical thought has in general for the development of modern Judaism.

RETHINKING PHILOSOPHY

While discussion traditionally focused on Spinoza's metaphysics and its implications for theology, key aspects of his anthropological and political thought central to the framework of his philosophy have received little attention. But they play a crucial role in defining the agenda of modern Jewish philosophy as they provide the grounds for an alternative approach to modernity that will allow Jewish philosophers to make the case not only for complete compatibility with the claims of modernity but also to assert themselves as coequal participants in the project of modernity.

Markedly different from the approach of contemporaries like Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and Leibniz, Spinoza's rethinking of the role of power, state, and society as well as his view of human nature break new ground. Philosophy is no longer forced to exclude Jewish tradition but, on the contrary, makes it an illuminating subject for a critical understanding of the problem of the theological-political node. As Spinoza theorizes power, state, and society *more geometrico*, he breaks down

the very boundaries that constitute conventional accounts of the political. For Spinoza, power is no longer equated with force or control. Power not only resides in political forms and structures but also comes into view as a form of expressive self-affirmation, thereby making it possible to conceive the state and political institutions as just some of the infinite possibilities where power can reside. With Spinoza, the *conatus* or impulse for self-assertion and self-affirmation of individuals – persons and groups – that political thought had traditionally considered outside the purview of political power as it followed conventional notions of rule and domination could now come into focus as the underlying factor that defined specific forms of power. Spinoza's reconfiguration of the conception of power presented nothing less than a radical challenge to the notions of sovereignty current in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His equation of natural right (*ius naturalis*) and power (*potentia*) has remained a controversial issue, often mistaken for an authorization of a power politics that Spinoza intended to expose as devoid of any philosophical legitimation. If we recognize Spinoza's equation of power and right as exposing the hidden assumption that power transfers are conventionally theorized on the stipulation of a preexisting social contract, as Matheron has suggested, then the equation's critical thrust comes into focus as an exacting exploration of the way we conceive both power and right.²⁵ As the reception of Spinoza was quick to register, the impulse of this equation was pointedly antinormative, radically challenging – along with traditional forms of power – the normative claims of legal theory. Historically, Spinoza has never been made to serve any claims for power but solely to critique any such claims. The reason is that Spinoza thinks in consistently immanent terms, theorizing power as function rather than substance. For Spinoza, power is not a substance – an impossibility given his ontology – but an effect produced by a functional nexus. For Spinoza, power is a strictly descriptive term accounting for what he calls *conatus*, the relationship of a part to its system, which as such does not produce any teleological or otherwise normative value or entitlement. Constructing the individual “geometrically” in an ontological framework that does away with the notion of the subject as an entity exclusively residing in consciousness isolated and detached from the body and its affects, Spinoza's concept of power no longer hinges on notions of subjectivity, action, and autonomy, which in his view are but anthropomorphic projections. Grounding power in his alternative ontology of God (nature or substance), Spinoza proposes a change in the way we theorize the concept. Categorically opposed to conceding ontological standing to power, Spinoza gives the concept of power its critical moment as a functional term that refuses reification, by rooting *potestas* (power as *pouvoir* or *Gewalt*) in *potentia* (power as *puissance* or *Macht*).²⁶ If *potentia* resides in God, it eludes direct access by

discursive reason. Ontologically speaking, the very nature of power or its structural place makes it impossible to use it in metaphorically naive form in political contexts. The way Spinoza thinks the relationship between God (nature or substance) and particulars articulates an alternative to the way the relationship between the universal and particular is conventionally framed, namely in static terms that one-directionally arbitrate the particular as determined by a universal conceived of as completely and discursively accessible. Spinoza instead formulates an approach that figures the particular and universal in a way that theorizes the universal as only recognizable in terms of knowledge we reach by way of knowledge of particulars.²⁷ Just as God resides in all that exists but cannot be reduced to it, so does *potentia*. As a consequence, power cannot be theorized adequately outside the ontological nexus. The desire to locate power in particulars is thus misguided because it ignores that particulars cannot be adequately recognized outside their functional relationship to the whole. Traditional schemes of metaphysics cast the particular in a taxonomic order that privileged ontological hierarchy over the functional context in which power resides. Spinoza's geometric approach replaces this ontological regime with an approach that sets the particular free while recognizing its functional embeddedness in the whole. This makes it possible to theorize the functional, and this means also the nonlocalizable, quality of power. *Potentia* becomes a constitutive moment that cannot be assimilated to political thinking that takes the state or political forces and crowds – organized or not – as models for theorizing political power. Nor can the individual itself serve as the point of reference in which political reasoning could be grounded.

Spinoza identifies the basic point of departure for a consistent political philosophy in the affects. Taking the affects as the basis for an adequate comprehension of power means for Spinoza to advance a new frame of reference. “*Affectus quibus conflictamur*,” as the *Political Treatise* begins (“affects by which we are tormented”),²⁸ are considered by both philosophers and politicians as self-incurred flaws. Against such blindness Spinoza objects that such an attitude rests on a notion of the self that is inadequate given the way in which the affects determine the self rather than vice versa. Spinoza's psychodynamic theory of the affects does not posit the self as a free agent but understands it as the site where the affects stage not only their conflict but also their possible resolution. As a consequence, politics – in direct reversal of not only Plato's but also Hobbes's political theory – requires an entirely different approach. Agency and autonomy understood as self-determination are not revoked but, strikingly enough, become now possible in their modern form as Spinoza figures the individual as a self-generating process that is grounded in an origin whose immanence transcends pre- and post-Cartesian distinctions of mind and body as

separate ontological regimes. As Spinoza figures the individual in the context of his theory of affects and its attendant psychodynamic economy, political theory turns out to be contingent on the recognition of the profoundly dynamic and therefore unstable potential that determines the individual. In other words, while not only Descartes but also Hobbes, following Machiavelli, assigned their modern conceptions of the subject a distinct notion of agency, this was purchased at the cost of firmly entrenching the self in a concept of the subject that had become increasingly problematic in the eyes of Spinoza. Freedom as they were able to conceive remained grounded in a mechanistic structure of subjectivity that left no room for recognition of the intricacies of the dynamic economy of the affects.

Spinoza's move to a dynamic understanding of individuality, which he comprehends, in geometric fashion, as a complex interface of the play of affects, provides the framework for understanding power as a functional nexus conceived in terms of an economy of affects that is fluid, in flux, potentially volatile, and contingent. Power, in other words, Spinoza suggests, must be theorized in a multidimensional context that cannot be reduced to the conventional catalogue of abstractions. Eluding conventional schemes of control and domination, power ceases for Spinoza to be the concept of choice to define the nature of the political. Recognized as derivative of a displacement that screens if not eclipses crucial aspects of the phenomenon in question, Spinoza responds to the traditional construction of the concept of power as one oblivious to the constitutive functional nexus from which it arises. This way, Spinoza's critique of power resists the temptation of reification. Instead of reconstructing an alternative concept of power, Spinoza – unlike Foucault and others – deconstructs the desire for a concept of power altogether.²⁹ For Spinoza, the desire for power expresses a fatal misconception, since power *qua* potential is not a thing that can be claimed, appropriated, possessed, transferred, or otherwise owned as an external entity. As a moment of relations among individuals, groups, and political formations, institutionalized or not, power has descriptive value only. Resolutely nonnormative, it has no legitimating force. Or in other words, Spinoza's approach is consistently critical.

This explains why Spinoza's political theory does not provide a prescriptive answer to the question of how political institutions and political power are supposed to be organized. But there is no complete abstention from normative claims, and normativity remains local. This means in Spinoza's terms that questions of right and might cannot be abstractly negotiated but only in the context of their specific application. What is true for one species cannot serve as a criterion for another, and what is true for one political situation does not necessarily hold for another. Criteria for norms are in each case to be taken from the particular nature of the

species or individual – natural or artificial – in question.³⁰ Spinoza derives his criteria thus neither from the status quo nor from the concept of a thing determined teleologically. We can know the properties of a particular “nature” only by attending to its potential being. But contrary to the Aristotelian view that in his view still lingers in the thought of resolute anti-Aristotelians, Spinoza declares any teleological notion of determination to be illegitimate. This difference assumes particular importance when it comes to the question of defining social and political institutions. While Aristotle’s political thought gives unacknowledged but tacit validity to idealist thought, Spinoza opposes the notion that the status quo provides any insights as to what the norms for political institutions and rights could possibly be. The contingency of their existence is historical, and history’s telos is transcendent, while nature’s is immanent. So the criterion for political institutions is for Spinoza human nature in its dynamic potential. As a result, recourse to political institutions and their social arrangements does not account for a philosophical explanation of human nature and its needs. But this is how traditional thought has always been curtailed by previous commitments. Spinoza’s thought proposes thus to rethink philosophy, and consequently political philosophy, on its principal terms.

RETHINKING TRADITION

In addition to redefining philosophy and its key concepts and concerns, Spinoza plays a seminal role with his new approach to the understanding of history and tradition. The program of modern Bible criticism he formulates in the *Theological-Political Treatise* not only becomes the primer for the modern approach to biblical scholarship but also provides the framework for a more general rethinking of tradition. Spinoza’s approach to tradition critically reflects the constitutive interdependence of tradition and innovation. On Spinoza’s analysis, it becomes clear that transmission of tradition is more than mere repetition. The very act of transmission marks tradition as a process that exceeds repetition. Reception is more than just reproduction. Even the details of mechanical copying, Spinoza suggests, cannot be accurately comprehended in terms of transmission of identical meaning; otherwise one cannot account for either the work of the Masoretic scribes in transmitting scripture or the creative power of Jewish oral tradition. Whereas word and text might be fixed in writing, meaning defies the attempt at being arrested by fixation. The process of repetition and copying rests on temporal difference, a spatiotemporal shift that constitutes tradition in the first place.

Tradition requires both change and innovation as its condition. But this only highlights that tradition is intrinsically differential, and not just in its mechanical

reproduction. Spinoza thus inaugurates a discussion on tradition that makes it possible to address the continuity of tradition as always also predicated on the inherent discontinuity that informs traditional continuity. Continuity can be comprehended as itself hinging on discontinuity, and discontinuity can come into view as a form of continuity as both presuppose each other. In philosophical shorthand, Spinoza's discussion of the Masoretic scriptural tradition prefigures the debates among and within contemporary Jewish denominations on the nature and extent of traditional authority. But beyond that, his argument about tradition assumes general philosophical importance. Unpopular with theologians and politicians alike, the radical edge of Spinoza's point is not that tradition should be banned as evil and nefarious, but (in some ways more closely cutting to the bone of the political-theological complex) that tradition from the beginning represents the performance of its own reinvention. Negotiation of imagined continuity is, on Spinoza's analysis, only possible by way of discontinuity, and this defines the very moment on which tradition grounds its institution.

These new ideas enabled Jewish Enlightenment philosophers to turn the tables and embrace philosophy wholeheartedly as one they now could call their own. This new approach allowed them to claim the terms of modern Enlightenment for their project of redefining philosophy as a free, experimental, and critical project that would emancipate reason from the fetters of the status quo dogmatism of a tradition of philosophy that excluded them. Spinoza's critique of the kabbalists illustrates the particular situation of Jewish thought at the moment of transition from medieval to modern thought. During the Middle Ages, the kabbalists had developed a formidable tradition of speculative thought that became the most widespread, attractive, and important alternative to the philosophical rationalism Maimonides and others had formulated and that appeared to be increasingly out of step with historical development. Rather than rational analysis, kabbalistic speculations seemed to offer a viable alternative to provide the answers to the urgent questions of meaning and legitimacy of the Jewish tradition at a time rife with religious and political strife. To reassert the autonomy of philosophy, Spinoza thus rejected kabbalistic thought in no uncertain terms as his adversaries sought to link him with that very tradition. What later was to be addressed by historians like Gershom Scholem as a critical countertradition had to be rejected by Spinoza, since it represented, in his view, a fatal submission to the powers of imagination.

While Spinoza had little praise for Maimonides, he followed him tacitly on significant points.³¹ For Spinoza, raised in the Amsterdam community, where the spiritual life of the Marrano community was defined by theological dogmatism, Maimonides seemed an unlikely ally against a conservative traditionalism that

claimed ownership of the quintessential exponent of Jewish medieval thought. It is not until later that Maimonides became – besides Spinoza – the central most important figure for the Jewish Enlightenment. From Moses Mendelssohn to Salomon Maimon (who adopted the great philosopher's patronym) and to Hermann Cohen, Maimonides became a central source of inspiration. Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed* had been last printed in 1553; its republication after almost two centuries in 1742 in Jessnitz (near Dessau) was "a literary event of the first order."³² Already beginning in 1739, Mendelssohn's teacher and mentor, whom he was to follow to Berlin, published at the same press a new edition of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*.³³ With this new presence in print, it became possible for Maimonides to assume a new role in Jewish thought. Celebrated as great codifier and systematizer of Jewish tradition, his specifically philosophical significance comes now into new focus as Jewish Enlightenment philosophers discovered him as their precursor. Humorously, Mendelssohn ascribed his hunchback to his long hours of the study of the *Guide*.³⁴ For him, as for many contemporaries, Maimonides stood out as the authoritative figure inspiring Jewish philosophers to participate in and contribute to the Enlightenment without having to forsake their own tradition. If Spinoza played a central role in the development of Jewish philosophers in the Enlightenment, appeal to Maimonides as a source of inspiration carried the weight of authority and legitimacy Spinoza still lacked in public.

MOSES MENDELSSOHN

Mendelssohn's first publication, his anonymous *Philosophical Conversations* (1755), advances a redemptive reading of Spinoza as the necessary stepping stone that made Leibniz's philosophy possible and thus represents a crucial stage in the development of modern philosophy. Mendelssohn is careful in framing his argument, but the shift in nuance marks a striking turn in the reception of Spinoza. While Pierre Bayle had launched his challenge by highlighting Spinoza's exemplary significance in ethical terms – suggesting that his irreproachable life demonstrated that moral practice remained untainted by and independent from the heretical views of his philosophy – Mendelssohn was unafraid of moving the argument onto the battleground of theoretical philosophy itself. Spinoza, he argued, presented a challenge not just on ethical grounds but also on metaphysical grounds, as he paved the way for Leibniz. With his first publication, Mendelssohn announced the importance of rethinking European metaphysics in a manner that would no longer exclude Jewish thought but recognize it as a fully legitimate participant of Enlightenment philosophy. But making a public case for Spinoza would not be an easy task. The

fact that Spinoza remained for a long time and well past the Enlightenment the “Jew from Amsterdam,” as Leibniz and others had called Spinoza, and Mendelssohn the “Jew from Berlin,” as his contemporaries used to call him, shows how little prepared contemporaries were to heed the imperatives of the Enlightenment they so proudly advanced.

Sensitive to the marginalization of Jewish culture and tradition even by the republic of letters’ province of philosophy whose declaration of independent universalism seemed so promising, Mendelssohn reflected the question of marginality as itself a philosophical opportunity rather than a problem. Raised and educated “*extra muros*,” his Enlightenment ethos is informed by a rigorous, self-consciously poised opposition to any majority claim to truth. But while Mendelssohn was busy formulating ideas in literary and aesthetic theory that would become central to the formation of the canon of modern German culture, embraced by poets and critics from Lessing to Goethe, the Humboldt brothers, and Schiller, contemporaries like Michaelis and Lavater maintained that, in their view, Jews were still foreigners to Western culture. Mendelssohn’s celebrated contributions to what was to emerge thanks to his initiative as modern German literature, culture, and philosophy were thus cruelly questioned. Theology still had a strong and firm hold on the Enlightenment it was not prepared to judge except on confessional terms. As the road to emancipation and modernity through a literary and aesthetic discourse seemed blocked by theology, Mendelssohn had no other choice than to address the issue of secularism and its theological consequences more directly. Against his own wish to simply participate in what had appeared as a universal and free public exchange of ideas in the republic of letters, Mendelssohn found himself challenged to produce the credentials for membership in what had first seemed to be an all-inclusive project. Lavater’s painful provocation that Mendelssohn either defend Judaism or else draw the consequences and convert underscores the asymmetrical status of free speech and highlights the blind spots of the Enlightenment.

MENDELSSOHN’S CONCEPT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

As a result of the Lavater controversy and its lasting impact, Mendelssohn began in the 1770s to address the situation in more explicit terms. His 1784 essay “On the Question: What Does ‘To Enlighten’ Mean?” – when read in hindsight – shows how the literary critical and aesthetic ideas of the young Mendelssohn had already captured in pointed fashion the central tenets of his later social and political thought. In theoretical shorthand, the essay maps Mendelssohn’s systematic vision of how issues, customarily broken up into theoretical (enlightenment, knowledge, critique) and

practical components (culture, ethics, politics), ultimately represent complementary aspects of human experience that only in conjunction provide the grounds for the forward-looking emancipatory project of Enlightenment and self-determination. Mendelssohn's appreciation of the diversity of literary traditions, genres, and expressions reflects a nonsectarian vision of universal freedom of thought and expression that grounds in a firmly committed but critical concept of Enlightenment. The early Mendelssohn's numerous book reviews and his essays on aesthetics voice a new sense and sensibility of an Enlightenment aesthetic that breaks free from normative and formal extra-aesthetic strictures. With Mendelssohn the appreciation of literature and art becomes a hermeneutic practice that recognizes the aesthetic autonomy of artwork as a critical condition for its enjoyment. The ethic, in other words, that Mendelssohn brings to the question of hermeneutics reflects his concern to attend to the individuality of each work of art as an expression of an individual's creative voice or art. Mendelssohn's notion of *Bildung* (education, formation, development) will become seminal for German classicism. With the Humboldt brothers – Mendelssohn's students early on – and Goethe, *Bildung* would assume a key role in German culture. But it is the generation of Jews who, looking forward to emancipation, followed Mendelssohn's vision to advance *Bildung* as an enabling rather than standardizing norm, in which enacting the critical potential of cultural capital served as a gateway for attaining full membership in German society. In this context, Mendelssohn's 1784 essay gains signal importance for understanding his view on philosophy and the function of enlightenment. Published three months before Kant's "Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" Mendelssohn's essay takes a different approach from Kant's. Couched by Kant in terms of the question of the separation of the private and the public spheres, enlightenment becomes for Kant an issue of freedom of speech and emancipation. On the other hand, Mendelssohn's essay urges the reader to consider enlightenment in relation to its other, which Mendelssohn calls culture. Enlightenment, the essay argues, is not to be isolated from its context, but constitutes part of a larger whole. *Bildung* is a dynamic endeavor. It holds culture and enlightenment together, or literally what "informs," "shapes," and "builds" them both in conjunction; one requires the other. Enlightenment represents the theoretical side, knowledge and critique, while culture stands for the practical, ethics and virtuosity.³⁵ The challenge is thus how to keep the balance of culture and enlightenment in a productive and "building" relationship. *Bildung*, as a consequence, comes into focus as the potentially conflictual relationship between individual and cultural, personal and political conditions that require negotiation. Enlightenment can only be universal when it connects to the particular, that is, the practical, social, and political side that it itself lacks but requires

in order to become fully realized *Bildung*. The same is the case for culture, which requires enlightenment – the universal force of the mind – in order to contribute to *Bildung*. Culture and enlightenment can thus only gain significance through each other as they together constitute *Bildung*. It is only through their particular constellation that the universals “culture” and “enlightenment” gain specificity.

The enlightenment of man, Mendelssohn notes, can therefore come into conflict with the enlightenment of man as a citizen – a conflict produced by the disharmony of culture and enlightenment, or, more precisely, between the arrangements of a given civil society and human nature. Such collisions (*Kollisionsfälle*) cannot be resolved by the dictate of enlightenment or culture; neither one stands as arbiter for the other. Enlightenment’s limits are thus not those of censorship, Mendelssohn suggests, but the result of a lack of equilibrium that undercuts not just the enlightenment but ultimately also produces a culture out of balance that thus falls short of *Bildung*.

But, as Mendelssohn stresses in another short intervention published a few months later in February 1785, “the only true means to promote enlightenment however is enlightenment.”³⁶ Neither then is culture to control enlightenment nor enlightenment culture. This essay – entitled “*Soll man der einreißenden Schwärmerey durch Satyre oder durch äußere Verbindung entgegenarbeiten?*” – responds to the increasing pressures the Enlightenment faced. But while Mendelssohn remains unwavering in his support for enlightenment, he resists the temptation to enshrine the Enlightenment as master discourse. The essay’s concluding remark highlights that the issue is not to contain and control prejudice – enlightenment’s nemesis – but to provide the light that will empower the fanatic (*Schwärmer*) to see for himself or herself: “The destiny of man is in general: not to *suppress* the prejudices but to *shine light onto* them.”³⁷ With the metaphor of light, Mendelssohn returns to the idea expressed with the meteorological metaphor of the early Enlightenment that the rays of the sun will break through once the clouds dispel and will shed the mild light of reason on everything.³⁸ Mendelssohn therefore does not call for an approach to prejudices that seeks to simply discard them by suppression, but instead argues that the only enlightened response to prejudice can be shining the light of reason. Enlightenment is then not simply reason’s militia to eradicate prejudice but culture’s other, necessary for establishing *Bildung* as the product of interaction between enlightenment and culture as they together make *Bildung* possible as dynamic equilibrium. Mendelssohn’s concept of enlightenment thus illuminates the systematic manner in which he addresses the difficult relationship between literature and philosophy, aesthetics and politics, reason and religion. For Mendelssohn the constellation that gives rise to *Bildung* is one in which the philosophical and the

Jewish cannot be pitched against each other, but combine to a mutually affirming emancipatory project of *Bildung*.

MENDELSSOHN'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

In *Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism*, Mendelssohn does not simply present a discussion of the role of religion and more specifically of Judaism in modernity, but grounds it in a critical revision of political philosophy. The two parts of *Jerusalem* deserve critical attention not only for the arguments they separately advance, but also for the overarching argument that emerges when read as companion sections. Read this way, the two parts correspond to the distinction Mendelssohn introduces a year later in his Enlightenment essay; they reflect the continuing need for negotiation of the two sides, the critical and performative, knowledge and ethics, “enlightenment” and “culture,” and theory and practice.³⁹ Together the two parts advance a third argument as they present enlightenment and culture, politics and religion as the two constituents of a vision that rests on the recognition of their mutual interdependence. Independent but also complementary, they together carry the grounds for Mendelssohn's conceptions of state and religion. **Part One** of *Jerusalem* examines the terms of traditional political thought and formulates an alternative approach to rethinking political theory along the lines of Spinoza's recommendation to reimagine political theory by recapturing the specifics of the practice that informs and determines it. Mendelssohn suggests, in critical agreement with Spinoza, that not only political and legal institutions like the state and contract, but also concepts like the individual, civil society, and power, must be rethought because traditional theory lacks recognition of the particular practical dimension that constitutes its theory in the first place. Similarly, **Part Two** not only presents Mendelssohn's modern concept of Judaism but also proceeds by emphasizing its cultural and practical dimensions. Its approach to religion focuses on religion as culture in practical rather than speculative terms. But it is the correlation of the two parts that make the book's most original point: enlightenment and theory (here, also political philosophy) contribute to the project of humanity and *Bildung* only if culture and practice (i.e., religion) come into view as its other, and vice versa. Not only through their connection and harmony, but also through their tension – announced in the book's title *Jerusalem* – can humanity (i.e., *Bildung*) be achieved.

With the pointed reference to the prophetic vision of Jerusalem, Mendelssohn signals his alternative notion of universalism that recognizes difference as the promise of true liberation, rather than a handicap to it. *Jerusalem*, as title and vision of Mendelssohn's book indicates, suggestively resonates with the biblical city of

Yerushalayim, whose ancient grammatical form of the dual speaks to Mendelssohn's approach to address alterity in terms of complementary rather than merely conflicted relationship. Concluding with the citation of Zechariah 8:19, *Jerusalem* signals the intertextual reference of the book's title as it spells out its particular vision of universalism. Imagining Jerusalem as the tangible particular that represents the hope for a universal that would not cancel particularity, the passage in Zechariah 8:20–23, to which the citation of the book's concluding line from Zechariah – “Love truth! Love peace!”⁴⁰ – points, gives articulate expression of Mendelssohn's conception of *Bildung*. The continuation of the passage from Zechariah describes Jerusalem as the city where many and powerful nations will seek and worship God.⁴¹ Zechariah envisions Jerusalem and Judaism as tangible particulars that represent the universal in its nonrepresentability. Mendelssohn's conclusion thus alludes in a cryptic but clearly legible manner to the prophetic tradition of Judaism's mission to mediate between the particularity of all the nations on earth, their states and cultures, and the project of a universality of worldwide liberation that includes all of humanity without any exception. Jerusalem signifies the symbol of the universal in the form of a particular locality of space and time, with its own history, and its own religious tradition. Reclaiming Jerusalem as a city metonymically standing in for the Jewish prophetic tradition, Mendelssohn confronts Christian hermeneutics with a different vision of Jerusalem whose particularity challenges the limits of a universalism that comes at the expense of the exclusion of Judaism, the very source and origin of the spiritual notion of Jerusalem as universal symbol – a fact to which Mendelssohn's contemporaries turned a blind eye.⁴²

But Mendelssohn's critical merits consist not simply of negotiating a new position for religion in the modern conception of civil society and the state. *Jerusalem* also suggests an alternative approach to reimagine the foundations of civil society and the state from the standpoint of a political philosophy in critical dialogue with modern political thought from Hobbes to Montesquieu, Rousseau, the Scottish enlightenment philosophers, and the German rationalists. While [Part Two](#) of *Jerusalem* presents a modern conception of Judaism, [Part One](#) examines the theoretical foundations of social and political theory. In remarkable affinity to Spinoza's emancipatory alternative to modern political philosophy, [Part One](#) offers a vision of the modern state and its institutions that challenged and inspired political thought from Kant to Hegel and beyond. Ironically, Mendelssohn has gone virtually unnoticed as a political thinker, besides the occasional though rather viciously deprecatory appreciation by critics like Carl Schmitt, whose denunciatory verdicts, however, highlight the undeniable theoretical significance if only by rejection.⁴³ As a political theorist, Mendelssohn may not have provided the ultimate

solution to the conceptual conundrums that confront modern political thought, but he addressed its constitutive problems with a lucidity that allowed him to critically engage with the underlying, tacit, and often hidden presuppositions of political reasoning. In this context, his merits may be more critical than constructive. Mendelssohn's theoretical move is less concerned with proposing final answers for the purpose of political legitimation than with reimagining political philosophy as a theory that articulates the terms on which the human rights of the individual and the legitimate claims of state and church are negotiated.

At the center of Mendelssohn's rethinking of the nature and task of the individual, civil society, and political and religious institutions stands his conception of the contract.⁴⁴ Whereas the usual varieties of contract theory define contract as the formal terms of reference for negotiating claims, rights, and duties, Mendelssohn's definition is distinctly different.⁴⁵ He defines contract as a legal instrument that entrusts arbitration to a third party in the case of conflicting claims that are transferable, that is, that are not derived from natural right. What can be contracted, in other words, is the authority and competence to decide in those cases which affect the regulation of the *modus vivendi* in all of its sociopolitical ramifications, provided that the natural right remains intact. This unusual approach to contract has some profound implications. First, Mendelssohn's definition means that a contract is limited to the terms under which there exist justified claims and conflicts between parties. Where there are no justified claims, there are no grounds for joining a contract. Mendelssohn formalizes the distinction between imperfect and perfect rights and obligations: the former are enforceable and contractable, while the latter are not. Second, contracts do not set agendas – parties do. As a result, sovereignty is not simply transferred or entrusted to one institution or single holder of this title. Rather, the very notion of sovereignty is redefined if not, to be more precise, replaced by a different paradigm that resists the collapsing of different kinds of power into one undifferentiated, amorphous whole. This approach to sovereignty explains why Carl Schmitt considered Mendelssohn's political thought anathema. It runs completely counter to the axiomatic and apodictic mode of Schmitt's whole philosophy. But this also explains the attraction that Mendelssohn's contemporaries and many of the next generation (such as Hegel) felt for Mendelssohn's approach, as well as the sheer incomprehension that informs conventional political thought with regard to his work. His contract theory deserves then closer examination.

Mendelssohn defines contracts as “nothing but the *cession*, by the one party, and the *acceptance*, by the other party, of the right to decide cases of collision involving certain goods which the promising party can spare.”⁴⁶ While conventional contract theories define contracts as formalized accounts of an exchange of claims, titles, or

rights in legal terms, Mendelssohn frames them as transfer or surrender of claims for the purpose of arbitration. Designing the contract as an asymmetrical transaction of cession and acceptance rather than a symmetrical exchange, Mendelssohn's contract does not entail the surplus of the creation of a third institution that resides above the two contracting parties, but strictly limits the contract to a bilateral transaction. This definition precludes the kind of alternative most contract theories deploy: whether by glossing over the second step they have already tacitly presupposed, or by stipulating it *expressis verbis*. Lacking sufficient grounds, they go on to present the concept of the sovereign as a necessary and logical conclusion.⁴⁷

Hobbes represents the first version: the view that the state, if constituted by a contract between the people, inevitably requires the institution of a sovereign who alone can govern the contractual interaction between two parties. Hobbes does not provide any justification for this position other than to claim that the enforcement of a contract requires a power external and superior to that of the contracting parties – a sovereign body. The second step is therefore implied by or folded into the first one. Rousseau, on the other hand, posits the sovereign as the will of all into which everyone contracts his or her voice. Steps one and two are therefore addressed as two separate but necessary parts of the original contract. As a result, Hobbes comes down on a more individualistic side and Rousseau on a collectivist one. Both stipulate sovereignty, however, as the grounds, and the contract turns out to carry hidden ramifications that are spelled out only a posteriori. Both Hobbes and Rousseau grant axiomatic validity to the idea that a contract requires or implies a third party to validate and uphold it. Furthermore, this third party is imagined as sovereign without any particular accountability to the contracting parties but only a general accountability to the state as a whole. If Mendelssohn's contract theory seems more complicated at first, its actual design is simpler and more transparent, as it protects against the kind of systemic ramifications inherent in classical contract theory.

Mendelssohn's point seems at first glance a technical intervention whose niceties may be more academic than practical. But closer examination shows that it carries momentous consequences for the conception of the state, the church, and civil society. Redesigning the contract as a legal instrument for arbitrating rather than for transferring or transacting claims or rights themselves, Mendelssohn defines the state as the interface, rather than the foundation, for the interplay of political forces. The result is a concept of the state that no longer relies on monolithic or hegemonic presumptions, but imagines the state instead as an institution that thrives on, rather than excludes, difference and alterity. Mendelssohn's recognition of contract as an instrument embracing and enabling rather than excluding difference was

indeed an innovation, running counter to the harmonizing, or rather universalizing, drive of Enlightenment political philosophy. Up to Mendelssohn, classical political theory had been unable, if not unwilling, to imagine the state as anything other than an apparatus to enforce compliance with the privileged form of identity. But Mendelssohn does more than simply steer clear of a concept of the state predicated on the pressures of identity and assimilation. He also challenges the conventional view of the sovereign as a figure of circuitous self-referentiality, a paradox at the heart of the state posited by traditional theory and political practice. Although one might argue that Mendelssohn's own concept of the state eventually may fall short of providing a feasible alternative, it nevertheless provides an incisive critique of the hidden assumptions that inform the way in which the state continues to be theorized, even occasionally in the name of critical alternatives.

Mendelssohn highlights the critical significance of his contract theory in a long footnote that stands out not just in length and substance. Running over three pages, this note accompanies the main body of the text literally and visually as subtext. In addition, it carries its own footnote – that is, a footnote to a footnote – pointing the reader to the text that led to the publication of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* in the first place: an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Ueber das Forschen nach Licht und Recht* that had engaged Mendelssohn publicly in a direct challenge he could not ignore. If at the end of the long note Mendelssohn cites the proximate cause for *Jerusalem*, the pamphlet and its agreement with an Austrian court's ruling of a Jewish divorce case, Mendelssohn attaches his rejoinder to the divorce case in such a manner that it confronts and opens up the main body of the text and argument in the style of the Jewish tradition of Talmudic legal and theoretical discussion. Capturing the argument of his political thought here in a nutshell, Mendelssohn's note introduces the halakhic principle *dina de-malkhuta dina* in anything but name as the fundamental doctrine to uphold the very right of religious practice and belief. *Dina de-malkhuta dina* – “the law of the state decides” (literally, “the law of the state is the law”) – holds that in civil law matters, state law rules. But Mendelssohn gives this principle traditionally used to maintain the legitimate claims of religious law a critical, modern twist. In the Austrian divorce case, the husband converts and expects his wife and children to follow his life change. But while the Austrian authorities come down on the side of the husband in what seems a ruling according to civil law, Mendelssohn shows that, in fact, this ruling violates the very basis of the contractual agreement on which civil society rests. This marriage, Mendelssohn argues, was like any other one contracted in terms of an agreement between husband and wife to raise their family according to particular values and ideas, in this case the principles of Jewish tradition. If the husband breaks the contract and converts to

Christianity, no court, civil or religious, can have the authority to force wife and children to follow suit. On the contrary, given the nature of this contract, any civil court is bound to recognize the marital contract as the heart and fundament on which civil society rests. A court that decides, like the Austrian one, in favor of the husband acts against the principle *dina de-malkhuta dina* – or, in other words, undercuts the authority of civil law. But, worse, the argument suggests, such a ruling is itself informed by a religious claim it imposes on civil matters. Mendelssohn's opinion on this case encapsulates his political thought and his stance on human rights, as it were, standing on one foot. Mendelssohn's contract theory seals the categorical inalienability of natural rights in a firm and uncompromising manner and provides the framework for a modern conception of human rights. His insistence on individual rights, not despite but because and for the sake of state and civil society, grounds his conception of human rights in a vision that theorizes state and civil society not as abstract constructions that exist in and for themselves but as political forms that hinge on individuality as what makes them possible in the first place. This way, the individual is understood to "owe" the state and civil society as much as they owe the individual. Human rights, then, are established on the grounds of the correlation between the individual and civil society that constitutes the state's legal and political framework.

Historically, Mendelssohn formulated his political theory at a moment when the concept of the state was still in flux, at least in the German-speaking countries. While the historical developments in the south and west of Europe and in England led to the rise of premodern notions of the state as the seat of sovereignty at an early point, this conception arrived in the territories of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation only with delay. This is due to the historically complex and rather opaque system of interdependencies, feudal rules, and obligations that regulated the empire. There was, in other words, simply no "state" to turn to as an example of what the concept of the state might mean in the eighteenth century. In the German lands, modern theories of the state did not begin to emerge until the end of the eighteenth century, when the debates surrounding the Prussian legal reforms introduced in 1793 were in full swing, and the after-effects of the French Revolution began to make themselves felt. Mendelssohn's intervention thus came at a time when German political thought found itself struggling to articulate a theory of the state that could make the historical transition to a new sense of political order and organization. With the modern secular nation-state emerging as the new key organizing principle, structuring modern social and political life over and against the traditional authorities of the church and the royal or imperial throne, Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* entered the scene at a crucial junction in the history of

the modern concept of the state. Writing on the eve of what Reinhart Koselleck describes as the moment of transition when the word “state” was rising to semantic independence and was no longer used only in combinations like *Fürstenstaat*, *Hofstaat*, *Civil-Staat*, and *Kirchen-Staat* or relied on the context to derive precise semantic meaning, Mendelssohn used this semantic space as an opportunity to articulate his political vision in a situation where the notion of the state itself was open to revision.⁴⁸ The auspicious coincidence of this historical moment allowed him to broach the question of the state creatively. While concurring with the emergent tendency to construct the state as an independent and autonomous institution, Mendelssohn carefully describes it as part of a division of labor, placing the state over and against the church. Consequently, Mendelssohn describes the relationship between the political sphere and religion – or as he writes, “the civil and ecclesiastical constitution”⁴⁹ – from the start as the constitutive moment for the state. Pointedly, this is already asserted in the way Mendelssohn notes his idea in the draft for *Jerusalem*: “*Kirche u. [und] Staat*.”⁵⁰ “Church and state” means neither the church, nor the state, nor a dynamic of their opposition. The precision of the German “u.” for “and” is of crucial significance here. Once the state is no longer granted exclusive sovereignty but instead understood as a part of civil society, which provides the framework for the individual’s civil and political rights and obligations, “religious power” comes into focus as another form of power that resists assimilation to “political power.” Instead of seeing religion as a threat to secularism, Mendelssohn recognizes it as an equal but challenging power that helps determine the constitutional limits of sovereignty in the modern state. The claim to sovereignty presented a problem, not a solution, and the recognition of this fact, Mendelssohn suggests, could be a liberating moment. The move away from identifying the state with the sovereign opened the way to rethinking the state as a constitutive but not exclusive source of legitimacy. Disentangling religious from political power without eclipsing the former would give the state, in Mendelssohn’s view, all the legitimacy and power it needed. And no more.

MENDELSSOHN’S CONCEPTION OF JUDAISM

Part One thus presents a political theory that accounts for religion not just as a need or right but as a constitutive feature of the individual’s identity and therefore an inalienable aspect of civil society. If **Part Two** of *Jerusalem* introduces Mendelssohn’s modern conception of Judaism, the framework of **Part One** lays the groundwork for situating Mendelssohn’s argument on Judaism within the larger scope of the theory of modernity *Jerusalem* advances. Building on the groundwork of the political

theory outlined in [Part One](#), the discussion of Judaism in [Part Two](#) suggests that Jewish tradition is not only compatible with Enlightenment and modernity but also one of its sustaining resources. Religion, [Part One](#) had argued, is an anthropological feature that cannot be contracted out, transferred, or suspended as it presents an inalienable feature of humanity. A conception of civil society that is therefore unable to accommodate for the religious needs of its members is fundamentally flawed. This has been the case with the secularist variants of modern political theories from Hobbes, to Locke, and even Rousseau, whose civil religion exemplifies the problem of the logic of secularist thought all the more poignantly. With religion's legitimate place however demonstrated in nonnormative terms, civil society assumes a different and more significant political role as it does not require exclusion of religious particularity but, on Mendelssohn's view, pleads emphatically for its inclusion. In purely political terms then, Mendelssohn argues, religion is not the opposite but itself a particular form of politics, which, in turn, is always already informed by religion. Critically understood, this means that rather than reiterating a politics of exclusion, Mendelssohn comprehends one of the decisive challenges for civil society to be the recognition that it realizes itself to be part of and informed by its religious traditions. As a consequence, neither religion nor any other political institution like the state can dictate the terms of coexistence. Instead, this authority lies exclusively with a civil society that no longer excludes any constitutive aspect of human nature from its purview.

The seat of religious authority is, according to Mendelssohn, thus less to be found in institutional or doctrinal claims and concerns but rather in the individual's spirituality and communal practice. For Mendelssohn, the individual is sovereign when it comes to spiritual matters. Mendelssohn not only presents Judaism as a religion particularly attractive for modernity but also argues an originally alternative approach to understanding religion as both fundamental and dynamically open. Judaism, his *Jerusalem* proposes, is a religion whose tradition is based on a concept of revelation that solicits ethical action rather than belief. The transmission of Judaism through "living" rather than "dead" scripture, through religious law – that is, commandments (*mitzvot*) rather than dogma, or norms for the spiritual life – makes for a religious culture that reconstitutes itself through the ongoing process of realization. For Mendelssohn, Jewish tradition relies on a notion of scripture that is at the same time more traditionalist and more open to innovation than traditions that identify their essence exclusively with the "dead signs." Considering *mitzvot* as divine law, Mendelssohn refuses the idea of any need for editorial emendation of scripture's text. While modern Bible criticism engaged in an approach that sought to sort out an authentic version of the text of scripture, Mendelssohn opposed

the confusion of advanced scholarship to claim higher authenticity for its claims than tradition could provide. For him, textual emendation presented a misguided attempt at authenticating the divine word, a paradoxical if not absurd proposition. Instead, scripture was the law legislated by divine power, and while critical scholarship may contribute to its better knowledge and understanding, tampering with, or reinventing, the text of scripture remained unacceptable. For Mendelssohn, the law did not call for textual emendation but for its realization.

The practice of law is thus to be constituted by a tradition relying on continual innovation, as the law's realization produces not truth but action. For Mendelssohn, the ceremonial law is a textual body that presents "a kind of living script rousing the mind and heart."⁵¹ While conventional scripture based on a semiotic system of arbitrary signs remains ultimately defined by its "dead letter" and cannot accommodate for historical changes and cultural transformations, the hermeneutic force field produced by ceremonial law creates a scripture whose dynamics reflect and transmit the infinite and interminable meaning of divine revelation, which the human mind realizes through the performance of the practical imperatives of the mitzvot. Mendelssohn theorizes ceremonial law thus as an organon that creatively recasts tradition through a continuous process of regeneration. As a consequence, Mendelssohn's theory of scripture and transmission articulates the theoretical framework to conceive tradition as a creative process. Tradition and innovation, *Jerusalem* argues, constitute each other in a continuously reciprocal relationship. The preservation of the religious law hinges on its continual renewal through practice.⁵²

Mendelssohn's conception of Judaism is thus both traditional and innovative as it suggests that to preserve tradition is only possible by actualizing it, which, in turn, requires an interpretative hermeneutic process itself constitutive to the production of meaning. This allows Mendelssohn to be at the same time conservative and more progressive than the problematic secularism of liberals who dictate the terms of religion and spirituality in the name of politics. That means, for Mendelssohn, simply begging the question that was at stake. Political theorist and Jewish philosopher, Mendelssohn presents with his inquisitively self-reflective mode of Enlightenment a unique juncture in modern critical thought, a position that continues to inspire as philosophical vision and challenge.

As we begin to attend to the critical substance behind the splendid façade that has blinded generations of both those sympathetic to and those opposed to the Enlightenment as ideology, Mendelssohn gains significance as a philosopher who stands out as one of Enlightenment's most loyal but also most independent thinkers. Taking both his philosophical and genuinely Jewish concerns seriously, he liberates both from conventional attempts at subordination and – one of the first truly

uncompromising philosophers of modernity – refuses to settle for any arrangement that would threaten to subject one to the other. This may have been the reason why Mendelssohn, lionized as the hero of Jewish modernity, was catapulted to the Olympus of intellectual divinities, allowing both proponents of progressive liberal Judaism and traditionalists of the newly emerging orthodoxy to feel safe from the more profound challenges his thought would pose. As Mendelssohn's thought was saluted as the outstanding intellectual achievement of Judaism in modernity, a thought that declared Judaism's philosophical legitimacy, less attention was given to the practical implications of his thought that went beyond the purpose of the kind of legitimation the nineteenth and twentieth centuries envisioned.⁵³ But, remarkably, acknowledged or not, his contributions continue to inform the agenda of contemporary Jewish thought.

SALOMON MAIMON

Spinoza's critical impulse informs Mendelssohn's thought and that of Salomon Maimon (1753–1800) as well, despite the typecasting of the latter as Mendelssohn's "other." Shelomo ben Yehoshua was born and raised in what was then Polish Lithuania. He did not take the name Maimon until he was close to 30 years old, in an act of bold and programmatic self-assertion that highlights the peculiar place his work and thought was to occupy. Marked as East European Jew who lacked the cultural savvy and sophistication that the German maskilim claimed to have achieved, Solomon's choice of his surname evoked anything but the identity of a modest and epigonal follower.⁵⁴ Adopting the name Maimon meant not simply to claim the mantle of the quintessential Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages but the assertion of coequal standing. By choosing the version "Maimon" rather than "Maimonides," Shelomo ben Yehoshua claimed less a filial succession than a fraternal relation of equal standing, since Moses Maimonides' name is equivalent to the Hebrew Moshe ben Maimon – the son of Maimon. A subtly voiced assertion of paternity can be heard in the adoption of this patronym as well. With his new name, Salomon Maimon signaled a new and critically assertive position, openly staking out both his philosophical affiliation and independence at the same time. In this act of self-naming, Maimon identified himself as a Jewish philosopher self-consciously moving between Judaism and philosophy, whose correlation sustains the universality that both legitimately claim.

Maimon's career as philosopher effectively began with Kant's important recognition of him as the critic who understood him best. Kant's comment is a response to the manuscript of Maimon's *Versuch über die Transcendentalphilosophie*, which Kant's

former student and friend Markus Herz had sent him, requesting Kant's evaluation. Maimon came only late to Kant and his *Versuch* is a critical commentary on *Critique of Pure Reason*, which Maimon read at the time Kant was working on the *Critique of Judgment*. Published in 1790, the *Versuch* raises the very same concerns with which Kant was at that time grappling in the *Critique of Judgment* that appeared the same year. Maimon's *Versuch* pointed out the unsatisfactory way in which Kant attempts to bridge the gap between concepts and intuition and suggested that Kant's critical thought needs to be grounded on a more consistent foundation than the dualism it presupposed, just as Kant was moving toward a solution. Kant's solution was to introduce the teleological argument as a regulative idea, thus aiming at a theoretically consistent framework that would secure the grounds for the systematic coherence his critical philosophy required.

In the history of philosophy, Maimon stands therefore at a particular junction. Pointedly post-Kantian, and arguably a pioneer in his approach, Maimon reads Maimonides with Kant. At the same time, he reads Kant with Maimonides, creating an interpretative force field whose bifocal mode of philosophical reflection is unique. It reflects not only Maimon's particular philosophical concerns but also imparts a challenging, modern impulse onto his project. For Maimon, such an approach becomes necessary because the critical weight of Kant's transcendental philosophy rests on the conditions that ground the system's assumptions. Its theoretical stringency is thus purchased at the costs of system-generated limitations that could foreclose options that pre-Kantian philosophy still could claim as options. To supplement for this limitation Maimon takes recourse to precritical metaphysics. But given the resolute post-Kantian stance of his position, metaphysics is, as it were, accessed through a critical approach at the same time that critical philosophy, brought in dialogue with metaphysics, undergoes a peculiar transformation emerging as a new hybrid constellation that assumes prototypical importance for German idealism.

Hence the irony of the fact that Maimon has come to be considered a Kantian, even a derivative one, distinguished only by his epigonal efforts to fix flaws in a Kantian system that had run its course. Reducing Maimon's thought to a variety of Kantianism has thus had the unfortunate effect of slighting the critical core of his philosophical project. Maimon's thought, in fact, hardly maintains an exclusive focus on Kant's project, which in Maimon's hands undergoes a crucial transformation into an emergent form of German idealism, breaking the grounds for Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Instead, Maimon's point of departure is his reflection on the blind spot of the post-Kantian philosophy to come. Maimon's philosophical significance consists therefore not just in his status as the key transitional figure between

Kant and German idealism, but as insistent reminder of the systemic incompleteness of critical thought. If Maimon sought to close the gap in Kant's system – a proposition whose interpretive claim begs the question – his project would nonetheless become a monumental exposure of the gap at its center, and a persistent reminder of the impossibility of closure in Kant's system. His thought demonstrated the need to reconsider precisely those metaphysical options Kant had rendered obsolete. Maimon's critical significance for Jewish philosophy, philosophy in general, and for rethinking modernity is in this sense consistent with his decision to abstain from siding exclusively with critical philosophy or simply to revert to "dogmatic" metaphysics. Instead, Maimon reclaims metaphysics as a necessary critical supplement to Kantian thought. In the same letter to Markus Herz in which Kant had complimented Maimon on his impressive demonstration of critique, he also identified the metaphysics on which Maimon, in Kant's view, relied on to supplement Kant by name: Spinozism.⁵⁵

If Kant's approach was based on a dualism that rigorously distinguished the phenomenal from the noumenal world, Spinoza offered a different approach consistently monist in scope. But it was not just a reason of epistemological necessity that led Maimon to discover an affinity with Spinoza. With Spinoza, Maimon could connect with his Jewish tradition in a different way than with Maimonides. Spinoza was not just the philosopher who argued a systematically monist position but did so from a consistently immanent perspective. Unlike Maimonides who, in the tradition of the medieval reception of Aristotle, was seen as a moderate idealist, Spinoza's philosophy of immanence fearlessly reclaimed God as material cause in a way that would present a formidable challenge to any dualist approach. Heretically provocative, Spinoza represented for Maimon the liberating confirmation that not all was lost to critical philosophy's aporia in Kantian form. Like Spinoza, Maimon was forced to articulate his critique in the framework of a philosophical discourse that seemed to silence his very approach. Disciplinary conventions made it difficult to voice dissent in any way other than compliance with the expectations of "critical philosophy," which rendered any "precritical" thought "dogmatic." Maimon's independent stance between Kantian and pre-Kantian thought – his reflection of critical philosophy through its other – distinguishes his thought as uniquely modern. Thus while Maimon on the one hand seeks to resolve this conflict in systematic manner, his own thought remains intrepidly constant in its resistance to any compromising resolution. In his eyes, neither critical philosophy nor a revamped form of metaphysics could provide a philosophically satisfactory solution. Maimon instead resists the urge for an ultimately uncritical resolution, inscribing the emancipatory modernity of philosophy with a different notion of perpetual peace than

Kant's. For Maimon, conflict and tension do not present a disability or confusion, but the very liberating force that defines modern critical thought.

If Kant is often considered the culmination of the Enlightenment and his late work the transition to German idealism, Maimon can be seen as culmination of Jewish philosophy in the Enlightenment and the point of departure toward post-Enlightenment thought. A unique attempt at mediating premodern and modern Jewish thought, his project is Janus-faced: rigorously enlisting in the project of Kantian critique, Maimon heeds the necessity to return to premodern philosophers like Maimonides and Spinoza in order to secure the metaphysical ground and framework critical philosophy cannot provide on its own. But Maimon's trajectory is not one of simple return. Its progressive, forward-moving direction becomes possible as it combines the critical with the metaphysical concerns in a perpetually progressive reflection on its own conditions. While this move might suggest identification of thinking and being, it does so in a different manner than German idealism, and it remains critically distinguished from the varieties of neo-Kantian constructivism. Never stipulating its own grounds as proven and secure, Maimon's desire for identity remains resolutely in the balance. Maimon's epistemic-ethical concerns guard him against the reduction to a categorical imperative of ethics or epistemology. Instead, the reality of this identity is located exclusively in the process of thought: in other words, his thought insists on addressing the need for identity, but resists any gesture of positing or assuming it. This mode of thought rests on a futurity whose teleological security can only be relied on in a self-reflexive move, a thought that assumes fundamental importance for recontextualizing "premodern" metaphysics in modernity; a modernity that recognizes the critical significance of metaphysics precisely for the purpose of emancipating itself from the hold of dogmatism.

With Maimon, Spinoza is thus critically transposed into a modernity attuned to appreciating his critical significance. For Maimon, Spinoza is not diminished by the Kantian revolution but on the contrary gains new importance as his approach supplements post-Kantian thought, with a philosophical impetus absent both in Humean skepticism and post-Kantian critique. In the wake of Maimon, Jewish philosophers typically seize one of the two paths that he had opened: Spinozism and critical philosophy. As for Maimon, these alternatives were not to be understood as mutually exclusive, but as a creative tension that could issue in new philosophical projects. Thus from Salomon Maimon to Heinrich Heine, Karl Marx, and Moses Hess, progressive Jewish social and political philosophers appreciated Spinoza for the critical counterbalance his thought provided to a Kantianism and then a German idealism that seemed to have run their course.⁵⁶ Spinoza also played a central role in

the development of progressive liberal Jewish philosophers for whom neo-Kantian schooling had been formative. Hence for Edmund Husserl, Georg Simmel and his students Martin Buber and Margarete Susman as well as Leo Baeck, and for liberal German Jews in general, Spinoza became the exemplary modern Jewish philosopher.⁵⁷ At the same time, Maimon – the most rigorous Jewish Kantian of his era – stands at the beginning of the development of Kantianism that became formative for Jewish philosophers in the 19th and 20th century. Maimon provided the philosophical rationale for the following generations of Jewish philosophers to take mathematics as privileged conduit to philosophy. Maimon's view of mathematics as of paradigmatic significance for philosophy provided neo-Kantianism with its epistemological signal foundation. Together with the Kantian stand on ethics, Kant's thought thus was cherished for its intimate affinity with the concerns of Jewish philosophers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century for which he assumed formative importance. After Maimon, Jewish philosophers were confronted with the challenge to qualify as Kantians. The group of Kantian legitimists made Kantian thought a school no Jewish philosopher could afford to bypass. Only with Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig was that view challenged, which still forms the central tenet of Hermann Cohen's thought. With Buber and Rosenzweig, but also with Benjamin and Scholem, mysticism and a new sense of religion began to break the grip of an increasingly petrified neo-Kantian school of thought. The result was a return to the emancipatory but fragile equilibrium of Maimon's approach: a return that was a sign that Spinozism had been fully assimilated and no longer played the liberating role it had played for Maimon. It was not until later in the century that the tradition of Spinoza's critical thought would again resurface in the context of Althusser and his students.

CONCLUSION

Jewish philosophers in the Enlightenment develop projects that embrace Jewish tradition as an emancipatory and progressive force but their thought also contributes to the challenge of critically rethinking the problem of the universal claim of philosophy in the face of the particularity that defines the universal terms of the project of modernity. Besides the lasting role of Maimonides since the Middle Ages and the continuing undercurrent of Kabbalah from the late Middle Ages through the Renaissance and into modernity, they represent, in specifically modern terms, a line of philosophers whose critical thought helps set the agenda for modern philosophy. Rather than confining themselves to serve as philosophers of Judaism or formulating particular Jewish philosophies they see themselves – since Spinoza unafraid

and sometimes proud and since Mendelssohn and Maimon self-consciously so – as modern philosophers whose Jewish tradition does not confine but, on the contrary, enhances their critical scope and compass. Jewish tradition and identity, they hold, is for them the very opposite of a fixed boundary. Instead, it provides, creatively used, a platform to address, reflect, and rethink the claims of modernity in philosophical terms that otherwise might lack the necessary specificity crucial for philosophy. Rather than merely of historical interest, Spinoza, Mendelssohn, and Maimon articulate philosophical challenges that go to the core of issues and concerns still current. To attend to their particular philosophical projects means therefore not just doing historical justice to philosophers who still await adequate recognition but to begin to understand the current conjunction in a historically but also at the same time theoretically more adequate way.

NOTES

- 1 See the pioneering work of Zisels 1976. If the seminal study of Löwith 1949 is still of significance, despite criticism (e.g., Blumenberg 1983), then the role of Jewish thought and tradition with regard to the process of secularization has remained curiously marginalized if not completely ignored.
- 2 See the title of H. Cohen 1972. For a discussion of the philosophical vision that informs this expression, see “Philosophy Out of the Sources of Judaism” in Goldschmidt 2007, pp. 133–40.
- 3 Goetschel 1994a, pp. 25f.
- 4 Whether Montaigne is to be considered himself as a “Jewish philosopher” is less of a concern than the fact that his thought poses the same concerns that Jewish philosophers address. For a discussion of Montaigne’s Jewish background (his mother was a Protestant Marrano), see Friedenwald 1940. It is noteworthy that Montaigne’s friend Etienne de La Boétie – whose essay *De la servitude volontaire* Montaigne had planned to place at the center of the publication of his own *Essais* – was, as we know from a letter by Montaigne to his father, a Marrano with a firm insistence to his affiliation. See Friedenwald 1940, pp. 144f. For a discussion of the role of Marranos in the French sixteenth-century Pyrrhonist movement, see Popkin 1979.
- 5 See Beck 1969, pp. 256–75.
- 6 See Blackall 1978, pp. 19–48.
- 7 What Heinrich Heine writes about Luther and his innovative use of the vernacular German is true in a more profound way for Moses Mendelssohn. See Heine 2007, pp. 35–39. For modern Jewish languages in general, see Suchoff 2011.
- 8 For a discussion of the discourse of “Jewish philosophy,” see Goetschel 2012. For a discussion of the case of Swiss Jewish philosophers who pose the problem with pointed directness, see Goetschel 2004b.
- 9 Hegel 1986b, pp. 157–97; Hegel 1995, pp. 252–90.
- 10 Accusations arose in the context of Wolff’s 1721 *Speech on the Practical Philosophy of the Chinese*, which embraced natural religion in a fashion dangerously close to Spinozism. See Wolff 1985, esp. pp. xlvi–liii of Michael Albrecht’s introduction. Wolff was evicted, to return only in 1740.
- 11 For a discussion of Mendelssohn’s early “rescue” of Spinoza, see Goetschel 2004a, pp. 92ff.
- 12 Letter from Lessing to Michaelis 1754. See *ibid.*, pp. 187f.

- 13 Guttman (1933, p. 278, and Guttman 1964, p. 265) seems to return Hegel's compliment in the opening line of his section "The Influence of Jewish Philosophy on the System of Spinoza": "Spinoza's system belongs more properly to the development of European thought than to a history of Jewish philosophy."
- 14 Franz Rosenzweig, "Einleitung in die Akademieausgabe der Jüdischen Schriften Hermann Cohens," in Rosenzweig 1984, pp. 215f.
- 15 H. Wolfson 1977a.
- 16 Wolf 1823, p. 14.
- 17 For Moses Hess, see Avineri 1985, pp. 21–46. For Ludwig Stein, see Stein 1890. For Leo Baeck, see his dissertation (Bäck 1895). Martin Buber signed some of his earliest essays with "Baruch." An interesting moment of disappointment is palpable in the late "Eclipse of God," in which Buber nevertheless concedes Spinoza to have achieved the highest stage of anti-anthropomorphism: see Buber 1962–64, vol. 1, pp. 512ff., and Buber 1952, pp. 14ff. For Simmel, see his methodological approach in *The Philosophy of Money*, which was promptly taken to task by a critic for its "hold[ing] fast unperturbed to the Spinozan or, as the author states in his foreword, to the pantheistic standpoint" (Simmel 2004, p. 1; also see p. 526). In his second key work, programmatically simply entitled *Soziologie*, the method of Spinoza's geometric presentation seems to inform Simmel's discussion of his method of formal sociology. See Simmel 1968, pp. 4–6. See also the two important passages that describe Simmel's approach in "Soziologische Ästhetik" in Simmel 1992, p. 199, and in "Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben" in Simmel 1993, p. 120. For Margarete Susman, see her essay "Spinoza und das jüdische Weltgefühl" in Susman 1913.
- 18 In an illuminating way, Derrida engages Scholem with Spinoza in "The Eyes of Language: The Abyss and the Volcano" in Derrida 2002, pp. 189–227, esp. pp. 215f.
- 19 For a good survey, see Montag and Stolze 1997.
- 20 See Goetschel 2004a, pp. 23–32, for a more detailed discussion and further references.
- 21 Husserl 1977, p. 71; Husserl 1970a, p. 65.
- 22 For a comprehensive discussion of Spinoza's role for modern thought, see Israel 2001 and 2006.
- 23 For a brief discussion of the body of literature on Spinoza and Jewish philosophy, see Goetschel 2004a, pp. 3–7 and 270f., as well as Ravven and Goodman 2002, and Nadler et al. 2003. For Spinoza and the Jewish Enlightenment, see Sutcliffe 2003.
- 24 For this point and the following discussion, cf. Goetschel 2004a, pp. 53–65.
- 25 Matheron 1997.
- 26 Spinoza 2002, p. 696; see Goetschel 2004a, p. 76.
- 27 See Spinoza 2002, p. 375 (*Ethics*, part 5, proposition 25). The general framework of Spinoza's theory of knowledge is developed in the second part of the *Ethics* and in his *Treatise on the Improvement of Understanding*.
- 28 Spinoza 2002, p. 680.
- 29 See Chomsky and Foucault 2006, pp. 1–67, esp. 51, and Schröder forthcoming.
- 30 See Gatens and Lloyd 1999, pp. 99, 110–13, and Gatens 2009.
- 31 On the complicated role Maimonides plays in Spinoza, see Chalier 2006; Pines 1997; and Polka 2007, vol. 1, pp. 80–88 and 97f.
- 32 Altmann 1973, pp. 10f.
- 33 Ibid., p. 12f.
- 34 Ibid., p. 12. For another explanation, see the anecdote about Mendelssohn's courtship to win the hand of Fromet Guggenheim. Mendelssohn told her that he had at birth volunteered to take the disfiguration originally assigned to her in her stead. This allegedly clinched the case of Mendelssohn's courtship. Cf. Auerbach 1879.

- 35 Mendelssohn 1981, p. 116.
- 36 Ibid., p. 139.
- 37 Ibid., p. 141, with Mendelssohn's typographic emphasis: "Die Bestimmung des Menschen überhaupt ist: die Vorurtheile nicht zu *unterdrücken*, sondern sie zu *beleuchten*."
- 38 For a discussion of the early German Enlightenment's use of the meteorological metaphor, see Schneiders 1990, pp. 83–93.
- 39 Mendelssohn 1981, p. 116.
- 40 Mendelssohn 1983b, p. 204; Mendelssohn 1983a, p. 139. The passage is from Zech. 8:19.
- 41 Zech. 8:20–23.
- 42 For a more detailed discussion of the title of *Jerusalem*, see Goetschel 2004a, pp. 147–69, and Goetschel 2007.
- 43 See Schmitt 1982, pp. 92–93, 106–10; Schmitt 2008, pp. 60–61, 69–70. For a critical commentary on and exposure of Schmitt's occasionally opportunist attitude with regard to Mendelssohn, see Gross 2000, pp. 268–69; Gross 2007, pp. 164–65.
- 44 For further discussion of Mendelssohn's political thought, see Goetschel 2007.
- 45 Mendelssohn still follows the conventional definition of contract in "Über vollkommene und unvollkommene Pflichten" (1770), in Mendelssohn 1932a, pp. 280–82. Michael Albrecht ignores the change in Mendelssohn's thought between 1770 and 1782 (when Mendelssohn wrote *Jerusalem*) and does not discuss the different contract theory of the later phase. See Albrecht 1982; also unsatisfactory on this count is Rotenstreich 1966.
- 46 Mendelssohn 1983a, pp. 54f.; Mendelssohn 1983b, p. 123: "*nichts anders, als von der einen Seite die Ueberlassung und von der andern Seite, die Annahme des Rechts, in Absicht auf gewisse, dem Versprecher entbehrliche Güter, die Collisionsfälle zu entscheiden.*"
- 47 I am indebted to David Suchoff for pointing out that Mendelssohn's conception of the contract shares key aspects with the Talmudic tradition.
- 48 Koselleck et al. 1990; see also Werner Conze's contribution to the same article. Koselleck and Conze flesh out the historical development of the problematic brilliantly exposed in Derrida 2005.
- 49 Mendelssohn 1983b, p. 103; Mendelssohn 1983a, p. 33.
- 50 Mendelssohn 1983b, p. 95; Mendelssohn 1983a, p. 247.
- 51 Mendelssohn 1983b, p. 168; Mendelssohn 1983a, p. 102.
- 52 For the details of Mendelssohn's theory of signs, see Goetschel 2004a, pp. 160–65.
- 53 Goldschmidt (2007, p. 30) suggestively calls Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* and his Bible translation, both published in 1783 in the wake of America's Declaration of Independence, "declaration[s] of independence in [their] own right."
- 54 Socher 2006.
- 55 Salomon Maimon discusses the significance of Spinoza at great length in his autobiography, where he also describes Spinoza's philosophy as "acosmic" rather than "atheistic," a description that became seminal for Schelling, Hegel, and German idealism. See Maimon 1984, p. 217; Maimon 2001, p. 114. For an elucidating discussion of the significance of Spinoza for Maimon, see Y. Melamed 2004 and Atlas 1959. Atlas's essay complements his book on Maimon (Atlas 1964) that has no individual chapter or section on Spinoza. For a larger historical contextualization of Maimon's Spinozism, see also Socher 2006.
- 56 For the critical role of Heine in the reception of Spinoza, see Goetschel 2004a, pp. 253–76, and Goetschel 2003.
- 57 For Husserl, see n. 21 in this chapter. For the others, cf. n. 17.