

A History of Modern Jewish  
Religious Philosophy

# Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy

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# A History of Modern Jewish Religious Philosophy

Volume II: The Birth of Jewish Historical Studies  
and the Modern Jewish Religious Movements

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Leonard Levin  
South Orange, New Jersey  
October, 2014



## ABBREVIATIONS

AJS	Association for Jewish Studies
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
JJTP	Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy
LBI	Leo Baeck Institute
UAHC	Union of American Hebrew Congregations

## INTRODUCTION

The philosophies created in the first generation of the Jewish Enlightenment in Germany and Galicia expressed several tendencies in modern Jewish thought that were as yet barely identifiable as movements. They were the achievement of exceptional individuals who served as pioneers and prepared the ideological foundations of real movements that arose in the second generation through the establishment of educational, communal, and cultural-literary institutions.

The process of factional delineation was facilitated by the social development that raised expectations and generated the will to create the organizational means to fight for their achievement. In the first generation, the Enlightenment heralded emancipation as an immediate aspiration. This hope found instant expression in cultural and literary creativity, in personal lifestyle, and to a limited extent in the professional careers of isolated individuals who dared to break through the traditional barriers, which were already being breached from both sides.

These individuals stood out in talent and daring, arousing wonder and criticism. They gathered around them bands of disciples, interested and supportive, but they had no media of communication and transmission at their disposal, whether in the form of periodicals or publishing houses, schools or academies. A broader, vibrant social ferment became visible in the second generation. Many youths educated in traditional homes and communities sensed the changes and the new prospects. The cracks and breaches that were exposed in the walls of the ghetto were already seen as gates turning laboriously on their rusty hinges, provoking a concerted effort to hasten the process and to bring it to culmination in the present, not only as a dim hope for the future. This was now a social process that defined an entire generation. Youths started to rebel against the traditional education they received from their parents. Especially the more gifted among them experienced their education not as supportive but as compulsory and stifling. They strove to break free and to build on the exceptional personal career-paths of the first pioneers, broadening them into regular avenues into the general enlightened society.

The awakening to enlightenment and emancipation remained an individual affair. We are talking still of the most gifted youths, highly motivated and able to stand out and free themselves of their limitations of

birth and upbringing. This striving was a personal one to acquire general culture, to engage in distinguished and high-status professions, to excel and gain a position in the general enlightened society.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, it was Mendelssohn's celebrity as a famous German writer that appeared more significant to the youths of the next generation than his achievement in the Jewish realm. It was precisely in his career as a philosopher and German author that he showed by personal example that it was possible to leave the ghetto and become accomplished in the general society, even though this was fraught with difficulties and demanded that one pay a high price in terms of one's identity. It seems that the youths of the second generation were riper for such a step than their predecessors, and in this respect they were no mere followers but critics who sought to derive lessons, correct the errors of their predecessors, and carve out a path on which many others could pursue their personal happiness.

But for this purpose it was necessary to act in concert and to project a communal objective that transcended their private objectives. To satisfy this need, organization on various levels was required, and this by its very nature transformed their individual paths, especially in the realm of thought and cultural creativity whose task was to provide representation and leadership, which, in turn, depended on communal feedback.

Philosophers are generally individuals who assume personal authority. They speak in their own name or in the name of the truth at which they arrived on their own, and they relate to the generality of the culture known to them in order to arrive at the discovery of certain and compelling truth. Their personal experience on the one hand and their general education on the other determine the direction and horizon of their thought. But the personal experiences of the members of the second generation already occurred in the context of the appearance of the organized spiritual movements that were creating a public audience. It was these experiences, much more than the traditional education from which they wished to break free, that guided them on their way to their goal, reeducating them and thus determining the quality and extent of their education and the contours of their cultural orientation. These philosophers consolidated their position on the basis of the new movements already taking the shape of a new tradition in order to take a stand on the questions of the current public agenda; and the new movements set the

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<sup>1</sup> See David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 107–23: “The New Bourgeoisie.”

agenda. Moreover, the movements that attracted and defined the reading public were the ones that took an interest in the new philosophical message. Their mission as philosophers was thus to respond to the expectations of the public from which they themselves originated and whom they represented; they became spiritual leaders out of the consciousness of mission that their movement implanted in them, for in fact no one chose them or appointed them.

The role they had to play during the formative stage of the movements was dialectical: On the one hand, they had to shape the spiritual process that enabled the creation of a new tradition underlying the movements' organization, while liberating their adherents from the compulsory boundaries of the older tradition without cutting free of it entirely, for it was the sole source from which came the value-contents that identified their community with respect to its origin. On the other hand, they had to develop an orientation within the space of the general culture, and to confirm their audience in the certainty of the correctness and rightness of the way they had chosen, toward a vision whose contours of realization were still unknown and that was still more hidden than evident.

Of course, precisely because one sought a correct and right way affording practical and moral certainty to its adherents, controversy was immediately in evidence. The sought-for vision was open to different definitions from different points of origin of individuals and groups, and there was also the need to choose among several alternative ways of achieving each vision. Every modernizing movement outlined the certain path, allowing no exceptions, that in its view led along the straightest and shortest way from the reality it defined in the present to the vision it set forth. The vital and thankless task of the philosophers aspiring to a generalized outlook was thus to choose decisively, while nevertheless preserving unity in the circle of discourse among all the audiences and factions moving in diverse ways toward the new frontier whose nature no one really knew.

A description of the history of Jewish religious philosophy after the first generation of the Haskalah movement thus requires an examination of the emergence of the movements that set the agenda and defined the social-cultural points of origin of these individuals.

We will begin with the first lines of division that appeared among the founding fathers of the Jewish Enlightenment movement at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. It took shape in the rift between two leadership groups in the traditional Jewish community: the rabbinic leadership based on its official position and attached to the old ways, and the new critical leadership of the Maskilim, with no

official standing, yearning after the new and finding official support only outside the Jewish community. The rift did not yet appear as a cleavage between the generations, despite the resort to slogans about the “old” versus the “new.” It was a rift that divided members of the same generation, equally rooted in their ancestral heritage.

In this process, there already appeared a watershed between the movements that developed on a platform of fundamentalist “ultra-Orthodoxy,” opposed in principle to any innovation as such and aspiring to sanctify the patterns of religious life as they had been established in central and eastern Europe up to the mid-eighteenth century, as against those movements that affirmed and welcomed political, social, and cultural emancipation and sought a reconciliation of “Torah” with “life.”

We may conclude that the established rabbinic leadership’s sharp reaction in the form of an attempt to impose a religious ban—restrained only by the fear of the ruling authorities—first on Wessely’s *Words of Peace and Truth* and afterward on the propagation of the German translation of the Torah together with the modern *Be’ur* (Hebrew commentary) of Mendelssohn and his colleagues was in effect the first organized appearance of the ultra-Orthodox movement in Germany, crystallizing its ideology on the basis of the tradition in the course of the struggles that continued through the next generation against the historical “Science of Judaism” and the religious and national movements that proceeded from the Enlightenment.<sup>2</sup>

In the course of the emerging division between the Maskilim and their opponents in the Jewish community, there emerged also the first division within the Haskalah movement itself. The activities of Mendelssohn and Wessely, as comparatively evaluated, embodied the focuses of division, especially on the linguistic plane: Mendelssohn’s German translation, together with the Hebrew *Be’ur*, was intended to create a balance between cultural openness to the environment and the aspiration for an original Hebrew cultural renaissance; but it was clear that in his overall literary oeuvre, written almost entirely in German and addressed to a general reading audience, Mendelssohn gravitated unequivocally in the direction of the general culture and the tendency toward national assimilation in it. Wessely, on the other hand, leaned in his poetic and scholarly

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<sup>2</sup> See Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto* (New York: Schocken, 1978), 142–60: “Conservatives in a Quandary.”

writing, written entirely in Hebrew and addressed to a Jewish audience ranging from traditional to enlightened, in the direction of Hebrew and the development of its literature as the basis of an independent national culture.

This division was thus foreshadowed in the first generation but became crystallized and institutionalized only in the second generation. A fierce ideological battle eventually broke out between these two tendencies—Hebrew-based Jewish nationalism versus assimilation—but this ideological element was absent at the start of the bifurcation.<sup>3</sup> It was rather an expression of two parallel tendencies, which all of the Maskilim saw as legitimate in terms of the values and objectives of the Haskalah. The choice between them was a personal and social-cultural matter, not one of principle. The practical considerations were transparently clear. The Hebrew direction, which crystallized the Jewish identity around the axis of the national values of the general Haskalah, developed naturally in the mass Jewish centers of eastern Europe, whereas the German direction, which crystallized the Jewish identity around the axis of the universal values of the Enlightenment movement, developed naturally in Germany. The centers of institutionalized propagation of modern Hebrew literature (starting with the *Me'asfim*) were established in Germany. Also, the modern cultural development of the new Hebrew writers was in Germany's famous universities, to which they made pilgrimage. But the matrix of their Jewish heritage and the majority of their reading public were in eastern Europe, and this situation continued until World War I.

The result of this development was asymmetrical: The Hebrew Haskalah movement preserved connections with the German language and culture and within that rubric also with the school systems and movements of German Jewry. The modern religious movements, however, which developed from the Haskalah movement in Germany, lost within a single generation the knowledge of Hebrew and interest in the Hebrew Haskalah and its literature, all the more so with Yiddish literature, just as they quickly lost their spiritual interest in the ultra-Orthodox movements, even in Germany, for these movements also conducted their polemics in Hebrew and addressed only their own loyalist community in order to reinforce them. It is important to emphasize in this context that the Hebrew

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<sup>3</sup> See Eliezer Schweid, *The Idea of Modern Jewish Culture* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008), 37–42: “The Dialectic between National Hebrew Culture and Jewish Idealistic Humanism.”

Haskalah was the only movement that maintained reciprocal relations, if only by way of polarized polemics, with the general modern culture on the one hand and with traditional Jewry in full possession of its culture on the other hand—not only with the ancient sources but also with the movements that continued in the present to mold the pattern of Jewish culture in Hebrew and Yiddish. By contrast, the modern religious movements that developed in Germany fashioned for themselves a separate Jewish literature that conducted a one-sided dialogue with the German environment, and its relation to the other movements within the Jewish people was reduced in effect to the ideological-political plane.

With this we have arrived at the third stage in which were established the various movements that developed from the Haskalah both in the German cultural milieu and in the Hebrew and Yiddish cultural milieu in eastern Europe. We mention first the establishment of Jewish historical studies in Germany and in the German language, which was accomplished by the founding of the *Verein*,<sup>4</sup> by the founding of journals for Jewish studies, and some time later by the establishment of seminaries for training rabbis. Within two to three generations they produced a scholarly literature that was impressive in its breadth and depth in many areas, especially in bibliography, historiography, and the research of Talmudic, rabbinic, and liturgical (*Siddur* and *piyyut*) literature.

Without the development of Jewish historical scholarship through modern philological methods published in the German language, the proper foundation of organized source materials necessary for the functioning of the modern Jewish religious movements conducting open dialogue with the general cultural environment would have been absent. They thus provided fertile soil for the development of the religious movements

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<sup>4</sup> *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden*—"Association for the Culture and Scientific Study of Jewry" (short name: *Culturverein*—"Culture Association") This association inaugurated the movement which Immanuel Wolf named in his 1822 address (discussed here in chapter 1) *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (or *jüdische Wissenschaft* for short). This is commonly translated as "Jewish Science," "scientific study of Judaism," "scholarly study of Judaism," or "Jewish historical scholarship."

The German word *Wissenschaft* has no exact English equivalent. It embraces both natural and humanistic studies, with the emphasis on scientific methodology. Thus the simplest translation is "science" but "scientific study" is more appropriate to this context. Similarly, the German *Judentum* (nineteenth-century spelling "*Judenthum*") can mean either "Judaism" or "Jewry" depending on context. Thus *Wissenschaft des Judentums* can mean either "the study of Jewry" or "the study of Judaism" and in practice comprised both, with a wide variety of emphases.

from the seeds sown in the first generation.<sup>5</sup> The first to be established was the Reform movement, which developed from the communal, liturgical, and educational activity of Mendelssohn's disciples in the second generation of the Jewish Enlightenment. Some years later, the Conservative (or Positive-Historical) movement appeared, which, in the effort to find a middle way, anchored in tradition, that could unite all parties and streams of the Jewish community, split off from the Reform movement because of its extremism. Neo-Orthodoxy appeared around the same time, reacting against the Reform movement from the standpoint of true believers in the religious tradition (hence the designation "Orthodoxy"), yet also critical of the exclusionary approach of ultra-Orthodoxy (hence the designation "*Neo-Orthodoxy*"). According to the neo-Orthodox approach, the Jewish character of the Torah as given from Sinai could be more effectively defended precisely through carefully selective openness—without violating halakhic standards—to the positive values of the humanistic Enlightenment and the opportunities of emancipation.

On the other hand, in the east-European cultural milieu, different ideological expressions of Enlightenment developed. First of all, there was the continuation of the outlook of Mendelssohn, Wessely, Krochmal, and Isaac Baer Levinsohn, which can be defined as moderate religious enlightenment. Second, an extremist secular-nationalist enlightenment developed in parallel to the German Reform movement. It drew inspiration from the heretical philosophy of Spinoza and aspired to radical changes in the communal structure, replacing the rabbinic leadership with secular leadership, and to a revolutionary shuffling of values in methods of education, economic livelihood, and communal life, but all in Hebrew within autonomous Jewish political frameworks. In the middle appeared a moderate secular enlightenment that sought a mediating cultural path by bringing religion closer to life. Out of all these paths of enlightenment, the middle years of the nineteenth century already saw the development of the *Hibbat Zion* movement, at first religious but afterward secular in its political and cultural branches. All three forms of enlightenment that we have enumerated laid the foundation for the post-Herzlian Zionism that was to come. In the twentieth century this would split apart into political,

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<sup>5</sup> See Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); David Rudavsky, *Modern Jewish Religious Movements* (New York: Behrman House, 1979).



social, spiritual, and religious Zionism; we should emphasize that all these movements had deep roots in the Haskalah.

The literature, thought, research, and philosophy that were created by the second and succeeding generations in Hebrew and in German all came into being within the framework of these movements.

Not all members of the second generation followed the path of modernization. The vast majority continued to walk, whether by choice or through circumstance, in the ways of their ancestors. It is proper to stipulate that the fragmentation was governed not only by ideological value-choice but even more so by social processes that situated individuals in different points of origin facing different possibilities and prospects. In any case, the majority of the second generation still preferred the opportunities that presented themselves within the traditional frameworks, which were challenged yet continued to function, over the audacious yet uncertain prospects, bound up with threatening change, that were opened up by the Enlightenment. In the course of time, the traditionally religious core majority gradually contracted, first in Germany and afterward in eastern Europe as well. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the traditionalist majority had become the minority and the modernizing minority the majority. One nevertheless always found a core of youths who continued the path of the besieged ultra-Orthodoxy, and at least from their point of view this appeared to be a rift among different factions of the Jewish people, not between the generations.

Nevertheless, already in the second generation the struggle between the old-style traditionalist Judaism, guarding the shape of Judaism as it conceived it to have been from time immemorial, and the modernizing movements, aspiring to a different future, was depicted as a separation of the generations, or a struggle of fathers and children, and we may note that it was so depicted by both sides. We should stress this form of construing the consciousness of the rift because it informed the central personal experience from which followed the deeper reactions to changing cultural-historical reality.

This was first of all an emotional choice, and afterward an intellectual-rational one, between fidelity to a sacred ancestral heritage and a vision of spiritual-worldly happiness. This choice, when framed as a struggle between parental authority to determine their children's way of life according to Torah versus the children's authority to determine their own path from the considerations of their reason, expressed a profound emotional dichotomy and reinforced it in a form that at first sight did not

permit of compromise. From the viewpoint of the youths who sincerely opted for the sacred ancestral heritage and acceptance of its authority, the alternative choice was seen as a grievous sin: the destruction of the whole world of Judaism for which their immediate forebears and distant ancestors had laid down their lives. The culture that was the destination of the alternative choice appeared in this light not only negative and damned, behind the exalted ethical veil that it wore, but also brazen and corrupt from an ethical standpoint, for it struck at the most basic foundation of the religious ethic: fear of God and honoring parents and teachers. Therefore, having any positive contact or transactions with it was forbidden, for "those who enter it never return."<sup>6</sup> One must disqualify it at the outset so that one would not be endangered or seduced but would rather continue on the way that the elders taught. The same applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to those who made the alternative decision in favor of the vision of worldly happiness. From their viewpoint, too, the opposite choice of ultra-Orthodoxy represented not just rigid clinging to a frozen past but cowardly submission to the compulsory, arrogant tyranny of an ecclesiastical institution that used the claims of piety and parental respect to defend its power.

In order to judge the depth of negative baggage that each harbored against the spiritual-ethical ideal of the other, and especially on the part of the youth who struggled for the authority to chart their own course, we should attend to two social-psychological aspects that were bound up with the circumstances of the choice. First, from the aspect of the cultural ideal toward which the rebellious youth aspired: as members of the second generation, they recognized the external obstacles that stood in their path. They were aware also of the price of identity that was required in order to realize their happiness. Indeed, once they had chosen their way, the obstacles in their path became challenges that sharpened their will to prove their strength, and the price of identity that was demanded for their happiness made it more precious in their eyes. This generated in them the firm spiritual readiness to set out in battle and to pay the required price of identity, which the majority of them were not able to forgo, to the limit needed to pass the test of the value of self-respect defined by the ethic and culture of the free, enlightened general culture in which they wished to find their happiness.

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<sup>6</sup> Allusion to Proverbs 2:19.

Second, from the aspect of the Jewish legacy on which they had been reared from childhood: one could clearly sense in the second generation the defensive lineup of the rabbinic leadership and its loyal following, which was expressed in zealous strictness and the determination to stamp out any spark of heresy at the outset. Such an educational approach was perhaps apt to reinforce the tendency of the obedient youths who were conditioned to opt for loyalty to their parents and community, but for those who were lured by the siren song of outside freedom and knew something of the new educational ways of the Enlightenment, the defensive posture of their educational institutions confirmed them in the decision to adopt a negative attitude to all the lessons it was trying to teach them. The legacy that was conveyed to them by parents and teachers through methods of forcible indoctrination, severe discipline, and cruel methods of punishment came across as narrow, zealous, dogmatic, tyrannical, obscurantist, and mean. There was nothing attractive about it, and it only strengthened the motivation of those who yearned for freedom and personal independence to break free of it and forget all its lessons.

Thus the traditional Jewish education of the formative childhood years fostered in members of the second generation, which was tending toward freedom, a stance of alienation that interfered with any positive identification. It seems that only in this way can we explain the readiness of so many young Jews to change their religion for the sake of receiving the "entrance card into German society" (in the oft-repeated phrase of Heinrich Heine)<sup>7</sup> and the fact that most of the youths who in the end succeeded in realizing the dream of general enlightenment did not absorb or retain in their mature years any but a limited and superficial measure of the Jewish education and experience that had shaped their personal identity in a positive, conscious way. (What was preserved unconsciously and was perceived by the surrounding society who kept their distance from Jews as such is a matter for separate analysis.)

It is clear in any case that the feelings of alienation that the community, the parental house, and the traditional Jewish *heder* communicated to the youths who were inclined to rebel against them reinforced their

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<sup>7</sup> Heine coined this term in characteristic, ironic self-deprecation. He felt guilty about his conversion after the fact, frankly acknowledging the careerist motives (exacerbated by official anti-Jewish discrimination) that led him to it. In his frequent and varied reflections both on the intrinsic values of the Jewish legacy and on the anomalous status of Jewry in Western civilization, we can detect much satirical mockery of all the actors in the drama (including himself), but the positive considerably outweighs the negative in his evaluation of the traditional Jewish legacy.

inclination and strengthened their motivation to act on them. The readiness to pay the price of identity for the sake of re-education in the gymnasias and German universities hardened their bold resolve. The attraction of the other, enlightened culture also prevailed. Above all, a profound spiritual urge took shape, experienced not as a rational desire but as a temptation, to flee from one's Jewish identity to the point of denying one's ancestral identity, not only by altering the external characteristics of the home environment, garb, behavioral style, manners, and way of speaking but by changing one's world outlook, ethos, and sense of belonging that are the inner determinants of the sense of self. At the maximum this was not just a positive urge to adapt to an attractive environment but a longing for assimilation: surrendering a hated negative identity for an ideal identity without leaving any trace of an inner continuity between the two of them—like being reborn.

So much for the development that took place within and was addressed outwardly. The members of the second generation recognized from the outset the obstacles that could be expected for them from German society, especially the enlightened stratum that they wished to join. They knew the price of identity that this society emphatically required of them as a condition for acceptance, and their negative attitude to their Jewish education justified these requirements in their eyes, leading them to idealize the enlightened German society. It is thus natural that they tended to interpret the opposition and suspicion on the part of enlightened German society in terms of the price that they were required to pay in order to join it. It was their expectation that, if they were willing to pay the price and absorb the values of this enlightened German society, they would overcome the rejection and be accepted willingly.<sup>8</sup>

On this point they had to discover their tragic innocence, as Mendelssohn had discovered it a generation earlier: the opposition of enlightened German society to full social emancipation of the Jews was profound and more extreme than they had originally anticipated. It did not stem merely from the Jews' differences or from the negative image that they projected. It is likely that in addition to all these there were internal factors proceeding from German society itself, which is to say that their negative image

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<sup>8</sup> See George L. Mosse, *German Jews beyond Judaism* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1985), for a sympathetic and sophisticated analysis of the many aspects of this complex phenomenon. See also Solomon Liptzin, *Germany's Stepchildren* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1944).

of the Jews proceeded not only from the shortcomings of Jewish culture and character but from certain shortcomings of German society itself. It is likely that the German image of the Jews reflected also prejudices whose source was in the mythological and dogmatic attitude of Christianity toward the Jewish people and its religion. It was likely that even the enlightened secular culture, which had distanced itself from religion and its myths, had not shaken entirely free of their implications in relation to the Jews.

It followed that the youths of the second generation were not able to recognize and properly evaluate the historical depths of German culture and its dark side before they came into direct social and cultural contact with it, paid the price of acceptance demanded of them, internalized what they perceived to be the ideal values of the coveted culture, and imagined that they had become model enlightened Germans. Only then did they discover to their confusion that the opposition to them had not ceased. On the contrary—it sometimes even intensified and became more suspicious and hostile.

In retrospect it became clear that enlightened German society had a more tolerant and relaxed attitude toward the ultra-Orthodox Jews who forwent emancipation and preferred to remain what and how they had been, while the eagerness of those who came to be accepted and assimilated into German society with its values were perceived as a threat to its identity, as if these talented and ambitious youths wished to ravish the queen in her chambers and teach her, as it were, what her culture really was. Clearly, this process reinforced the anti-Jewish stereotypes whose source was in Christianity. On the contrary—the Jews who attempted to penetrate into German society in the guise of being better Germans than the Germans themselves appeared infinitely more dangerous than the Jews who walked before them undisguised and remained on the margins.

Most of those of the second generation who attained impressive achievements in their education and their creative contribution to German society and culture quickly experienced the tragic disappointment that was in store for them. Precisely the impressive achievements, which German society could not deny them, gave substance to the fact that they failed in achieving social emancipation though they succeeded beyond expectation in achieving cultural and psychological emancipation. Their humanity was rejected by their environment, in whose eyes they remained as Jewish as they had been in their childhood and youth, and moreover they were not perceived as individuals to be measured by their ideal success but as the disguised individuals of the whole Jewish people.

One of two things obtained: either the youths eager for emancipation did not understand the depths of their Jewish identity although these were obvious to their more objective neighbors, or else the surrounding German culture, even the enlightened culture, was not what they imagined it to be from their Jewish perspective, which all in all was not as negative as they had imagined it originally...

These were in effect the two possible ways to respond to the disappointment: that of the young Jews whose desire for immediate assimilation prevailed over their bitter disappointment and over the obstacles whose source was in the sense of self-respect of a person expecting that a society he perceives as ideal will appreciate his positive qualities and accept him honorably by virtue of his noble humanity; or that of the youths who internalized the negative attitude of enlightened German society toward the Jews to the point that they accepted their verdict as just and responded by intensifying their efforts to arrive at complete assimilation and by uprooting from themselves any remnant of Jewishness, even at the price of conversion, although they could not believe in the Christian religion, which was foreign to them, any more than they had believed in their abandoned ancestral religion. However, this disappointment led those young Jews who could not cross this barrier, precisely because they had internalized the ideal values of enlightened German society—and it stands to reason that they were the majority—to second thoughts and a different evaluation both personally and communally.

At a much later stage, in a generation that experienced disappointment after the Emancipation had already become a settled fact and a done deal, at least legally and politically, and a broad stratum of Jews had been formed who were educated from childhood on by assimilated parents and in good German schools and for whom German language and culture had been their first cultural awareness, the encounter with German social rejection of Jews led them to return to the Jewish sources, which they had to discover and interpret anew.<sup>9</sup> In the second and third generation of the Jewish Enlightenment, conditions were not yet ripe for that. The negative baggage against the Jewish educational legacy and the lure of an idealized enlightened German culture were still too powerful to permit a movement of returning to original Judaism as it had been depicted in their eyes

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<sup>9</sup> Nathan Rotenstreich, *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston), 149–218: “The Road Back”; Liptzin, *Germany’s Stepchildren*, 229–86: “The Renaissance of a People.”

from their childhood and youth. What was possible was an awakening to a second thought, directed both outward and inward.

Outwardly, the first to awaken was the basic insight of individuals that they could not make their way to complete emancipation as individuals, as they had imagined at first. It became clear that they were judged by general German society not as individuals in their own right but as representatives of their people and their religion. The unwillingness to accept all the Jews as they were prevented their acceptance despite the changes they had undergone. It followed that their personal problem could not be solved without a general solution of their people's plight. This meant that making themselves fit for emancipation was not enough; they must prepare the people and make them all worthy of it. Moreover, there would thus be created an assimilated German Jewish society in whose midst they could find their place as German Jews.

This insight was the motivation for the movements described above, but it had additional consequences. It was clear that the organization of certain persons for the sake of common interests and their living together defined them and preserved their special identity, even if their ultimate goal was social integration, and it was further clear that it was impossible to rely on a united identity as the basis of organization and living unless one also associated it with positive values that justified their common enterprise.

On the basis of this insight, a critique of the sources of the decidedly negative attitude of enlightened German society toward Jews and Judaism was thus required—first of all the stipulation that these are prejudices, and if prejudices express an unenlightened attitude, their source must be in the blemishes and deficiencies of German culture from its historical sources.<sup>10</sup> In this way one comes to define the need to counter the German demand for Jewish change with a counter-demand by Jews addressed to enlightened German society. Change by Jews is indeed a condition for emancipation, but reciprocity is required. German society must also adapt itself to its image of the ideal. This is a test not only for Jews but for German society.

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<sup>10</sup> Thus Zunz saw as one of the purposes of an informed, balanced presentation of the teachings of rabbinic literature the correction of prejudiced accounts such as Eisenmenger's *Entdecktes Judenthum* (Zunz, "On Rabbinic Literature" [1818], in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz [New York: Oxford University Press, 1995], 224; see also Zunz's Introduction to *The Liturgical Addresses of the Jews*, in *The Jewish Philosophy Reader*, ed. Frank, Leaman, and Manekin [London: Routledge, 2000], 374–76).



Even more, the emancipation of the Jews is defined from the perspective of Jews who identify with German-ness as a moral need of German society, and Jews who already see themselves in effect as Germans see themselves as entitled to ask forthrightly that German society take the necessary step on its part and correct itself. This means that the emancipation of the Jews had become for them the internal yardstick by which German society must measure its conformity to its own ideals, and just a single step more would lead to the realization that the Jews have a special mission for the improvement and perfection of German culture, and even for Western culture generally, and that they fulfill it by their struggle for full acceptance.

These ideas had the effect of increasing the opposition and suspicion of German society, and in order to cope with this opposition, the need arose to counterpoise to the mistaken and perverse prejudice an accurate description of Jews and Judaism as they truly were—without whitewashing them, but without distortion either. One needed an objective scientific view that conformed to the criteria of enlightened society, and who better than modern, educated Jews, who had internalized those values but also had the tools necessary to understand Judaism from within, were qualified to present it objectively? Indeed, this was the major task that the *Culturverein* (“The Association for the Culture and Scientific Study of Jewry”), formed in Germany in the 1820s, set for itself, and it was for this reason that the language of research was German and the disciplines were those of the German academy.

However, it was clear that such a deployment directed outward was bound up with a change addressed inward. Young Jews who were forced to criticize the image of enlightened German society before them had also to reevaluate their first criticism of Judaism, which in fact had been influenced by the prejudice of German society imbibed by them. A scientific, objective, balanced perspective was needed, not an apologetic one. One did not have to take back the criticism of those negative phenomena that drove enlightened Jewish youths outside in the first place, but one needed to delve deeper to uncover the positive elements that had preserved the Jewish people in exile for many generations despite their suffering, and one needed also to reexamine the source of the negative manifestations: perhaps they were the result not simply of Judaism but of their exilic fate, and maybe even of negative influences they had absorbed from the hostile Christian culture out of force of circumstances to defend themselves from persecution?



These questions finally led the young, disappointed Jews to a critical reexamination of their attitude to their early Jewish education. Were they right to generalize and to conclude that Judaism, as presented to them by their parents and unenlightened teachers, was original Judaism in its completeness and full depth? Were they sufficiently aware that the circumstances of the struggle for emancipation had spawned the manifestations from which they had suffered? Perhaps the misguided defensiveness had concealed from them the positive, authentic Judaism that had preserved the suffering people in exile for many generations? Perhaps it contained the element that enlightened German culture lacked for its completion? Such thoughts led to the realization that there was no need, indeed it might be forbidden, to neglect one's Jewish identity as a prerequisite for emancipation. On the contrary—one must rediscover the sources of Jewish identity and reform that identity so that it will live up to its own enlightened standards. Precisely in this way could Jews realize their mission in German society.<sup>11</sup>

We described above the development that led to founding the modern movements in German Judaism. The social-cultural development of the Haskalah movement in Eastern Europe was different in principle because of the most basic historical circumstances: demographic, economic, and political. There were major centralized communities there where the Jews comprised a majority. Thus a Jewish populace existed there that lived continually in its own milieu, even if its communal structures were in a state of disintegration: they could not function properly in representing the communal interests to the government, in affording physical protection or economic or legal security, or in providing the basic needs—especially educational—necessary for economic survival under conditions that changed gradually and sapped the time-honored sources of existence for the majority of the people. The ghetto, in the form of the east-European

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<sup>11</sup> "The neglect of Jewish scholarship goes hand in hand with civil discrimination against the Jews. . . . Furthermore, much bad legislation, many a prejudice against Jewish antiquity, much condemnation of new endeavors are a direct consequence of the state of neglect in which Jewish literature and Jewish scholarship have been for about seventy years, particularly in Germany. . . . I hope that in addition to their main purpose, the recognition of the right and the scholarship of the Jews, my investigations will stimulate interest in related studies and win for the nobler endeavors of our time the favor of the mighty, the benevolence of the prudent, and the zeal of the pious. Such a reward will be sweeter to me than any literary acclamation." Zunz, Introduction to *The Liturgical Addresses of the Jews*, in *The Jewish Philosophy Reader*, ed. Frank et al., 374–76.

shtetl, revealed all its deficiencies and lost most of its advantages. The pressure to leave it, at least from the economic aspect, was widespread and very strong, especially on the part of youths, whose impoverished houses could not offer them economic protection or a proper education.

But for the masses of people, there was nowhere else to go. There was as yet no modern economic, social, political, and cultural infrastructure, such as those in Germany and the progressive countries of western Europe, that might enable the formation of a sufficiently broad and well-educated middle class to absorb the masses of Jewish youths who were under pressure to join it. In eastern Europe the equivalent was only in its infancy and was encountering major obstacles, which we will not enumerate here. This was the cause of an increase of anti-Jewish sentiment, for reasons similar to those that sparked the beginning of modern anti-Semitism in Germany and the West, even before the Jews had managed to actually leave the ghetto: the Jews constituted a competitive factor that was threatening to other strata of the population who were seeking their own emancipation, for in fact the Jews' potential for adapting to the demands of the modern economy and culture was greater than that of many groups of the general population, despite their current oppressed state and antiquated education.

This meant that the path to assimilation through integration into the enlightened "general" society was open in eastern Europe only to a minuscule extent and only for a very thin stratum of rich Jews and outstanding members of the liberal professions on whom the Polish and Russian governments and aristocracy were dependent for their services: the exceptional Jews with "privileges." Most of the people remained imprisoned in the Pale of Settlement, in the impoverished shtetl, and in the unreliable frameworks of the Kehillah, whose leadership turned out, for very natural reasons, to be exploitative toward the Jewish communities, plagued with corruption, and immersed principally in defense of its prerogatives against its internal competitors by taking a soft approach with the government. In this situation it was necessary to find a way out for many within the framework of Jewish life through internal reform. This was the same path followed by Hasidism—the principal Jewish force that competed with the Haskalah in eastern Europe and fought it with zealous fervor.

The first objective was to increase Jewish productivity by training Jews to work in industry, agriculture, the crafts, or liberal professions that contribute to the general society. It was the hope of the Maskilim that in this way they would bring about not only economic rehabilitation but a change in the attitude of the government toward the Jews: they would

stop treating them as a burden that it was better to be rid of and would gradually upgrade their civic status, as had happened in the West. In order to achieve this goal, it was necessary to form a broad infrastructure of educated Jewish society within the communities, to become free of the domination of traditional rabbinic leadership with the help of the ambivalent support that the Jewish enlighteners received from the governments, and to campaign for a long list of changes that would bring the structure of the community in line with the needs of the time.

The general aspiration was to replace the old religious leadership and to effect changes in the whole pattern of life. We may emphasize in this connection that this was no narrow-minded campaign against religion but an all-inclusive campaign to reform the entire way of life. Religion was asked not to stop these changes but to adapt to them, especially to ease up on whatever stringent halakhic norms were impossible to live with given the circumstances of the time. The way to broaden the enlightened base and empower them was through the diffusion of education, but for this purpose there was a need to control the curriculum and effect reform in the topics of study and methods of instruction. This necessitated establishing modern schools in place of the antiquated *heder*, and either convincing the parents to send their children to them or compelling them with the help of the government. But first of all, books had to be written that a modern school could use to educate children whose study language was Hebrew, whose spoken language was Yiddish, and whose first education was faith in the religious sources.

This turned out in effect to be a broad, encompassing task to create a new national culture in the spirit of the time. It drew its educational contents from the sources of modern general culture, especially from German culture; but the process of pouring it from one vessel to another, while adapting it to the needs of the Jewish student being socialized into his people, was calculated to achieve not assimilation and effacement of the national identity but the opposite: to enrich its unique identity by creating a “national culture.”

The Maskilim of eastern Europe emphasized the importance of learning the vernacular language of their country of residence and alongside it German as the language of Western high culture. An east-European Jewish educated person was thus required to be at least trilingual.<sup>12</sup> But again,

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<sup>12</sup> Or quadrilingual, if one includes the Jewish vernacular spoken language: Russian, German, Hebrew, and Yiddish.

learning languages was intended not to assimilate Jews into the general society but to strengthen their standing as a distinctive group that had the will and the ability to integrate as an entire cultural entity on the basis of equality with other national minorities. It is important to emphasize that this conception was consistent with the multinational character of the two empires, the Russian and the Austrian, under whose rule east-European Jews lived.

With respect to the relation to Jewish texts, substantive differences emerged here in comparison with the second-generation German enlighteners. The national connection of east European Maskilim with the sources, especially the Bible, Mishnah, rabbinic lore, and medieval philosophical and liturgical literature, was not severed. On the contrary—it was deepened and strengthened and was perceived as the basis of a positive relation toward general enlightenment. Of course, this was done through a revolutionary twist in the definition of the religious sources and the methods of interpreting them. Instead of a religious definition, one employed a secular national-cultural definition. The methods of interpretation also changed in the spirit of the historical criticism that was drawn especially from Spinoza and Krochmal. To this was added a broadening of the network of ancient sources. Modern Jewish scholarship rediscovered Jewish literature that had not made its way into the traditional canon but was regarded as apocryphal or heretical. In retrospect, this literature gave evidence of a stratum of Jewish creativity that was not religious in the Talmudic-rabbinic sense but revealed the fruitful influences of world cultures. The great importance of such sources lay in the legitimation that they could offer to the creation of a modern Hebrew literature that might also be regarded as non-conforming to the accepted rabbinic canon and its mode of discourse. It might be a literature that was influenced by modern secular Western culture and that would bring “the beauty of Japheth into the tents of Shem,” which is to say it would further the historical trajectory of the national culture.<sup>13</sup>

We should therefore add that the Hebrew Haskalah in eastern Europe was not severed from the living popular Jewish culture that was teeming around it but rather discovered it as a source for modernizing literary and religious creativity. Moreover, the struggle that continued to grow

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<sup>13</sup> For the specific influence of the Western classical sources on this process, see Yaacov Shavit, *Athens in Jerusalem: Classical Antiquity and Hellenism in the Making of the Modern Secular Jew* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1999).

sharper between the second- and third-generation Maskilim and the official religious leadership, both rabbinic and Hasidic, did not bring about a total separation, at least on the part of the Maskilim. For the struggle did not turn outward but inward. It was the eager desire of the Maskilim to win over the youths who grew up and were educated in the religious framework. Thus they had to speak to them in a culture language that they would understand. Therefore, the deeper and sharper the polemical struggle grew, the more intimate and more conscious of the reactions and intentions of the other side it grew. In other words, even as the Haskalah movement became more extreme in its criticism of religion, it operated in parallel fashion to its most zealous religious opponent—Hasidism. The polemic against it was conducted with penetrating mockery that produced a visceral reaction, but precisely for that reason one should not be surprised that at a certain stage the enlightened authors, who knew how to imitate the style of Hasidic literature with impressive empathy, began to reveal in addition to their opposition also parallels and rapprochement. Indeed, Hasidism had rebelled against rabbinic Judaism and its unreliable communal leadership in order to find an alternative to it not outside of Judaism but within it. In any case, the Haskalah literature of eastern Europe, even at the height of its criticism of Jewish religion, remained faithful to its sources and gave them expression in its polemical, revolutionary way. It drew from it the richness and inspiration that distinguished it as Jewish literature.

In eastern Europe, an effective barrier against mass assimilation was thus created. The barrier was breached only in the 1880s and 1890s and then through two openings: mass emigration, especially to America, and affiliation of many Jewish youths to the revolutionary socialist movements. At that stage it became clear beyond all doubt that Jews had no chance of gaining release from their distress under the old regime. Education alone would not solve the problem because it would not change the attitude of the governments eager to be rid of their large Jewish concentration, which they saw as an insupportable burden. This was the background for the transformation from an extremist, adversary Haskalah to a moderate Haskalah that sought a common language with traditional Judaism, and this in turn was the background for the transition from Haskalah to *Hibbat Zion* and Zionism, out of the realization that only in the land of Israel was it possible to realize their national, economic, social, and cultural goals.

In all these respects, the differences between the development of the Jewish movements of Germany and western Europe and those of eastern

Europe are striking. Still, we cannot ignore the connection and the parallels. As we said, the Haskalah of eastern Europe was based in Germany and continued to maintain close connections to the German language and literature, to the academic centers of German culture, to the scholarly study of Judaism that developed in Germany, and through them also to the modern religious movements in Germany. These movements themselves did not, however, show much interest in the ultra-Orthodox movements or in the eastern European Haskalah, whereas the eastern European Haskalah movements maintained interest in the modern movements of Germany and continued to wrestle with them, criticizing their assimilationist tendencies while accepting their intellectual, ideological, and philosophical influence. In the context of our discussion we should emphasize that the work of the great Judaic scholars and the great Jewish philosophers in Germany had major influence on the Haskalah literature and thought in eastern Europe, even though that literature did not deal very much directly with philosophy.

The parallel was expressed especially in the conception of the struggle between the Haskalah and ultra-Orthodox rabbinic Judaism as a struggle of the generations between parents and children, with all the emotional baggage implicit in this conception. Precisely because in eastern Europe the conditions had not been created to make possible a clean and final separation between the ultra-Orthodox and the modern movements and they were forced to rub up against each other in the same communal arena for several generations, the struggle between them became more zealous, laden with more manifestations of verbal and physical violence. The defense mechanisms of the traditional exclusive religious society became ever more severe. Because the campaign was wide-ranging and affected not only education but also communal leadership, organization, and lifestyle, the defensiveness took on more extreme forms, and naturally the reactions of the younger generation were sharper and more zealous. The youths who were found possessing modern books, evidence of their heresy, were punished forcibly by a leadership that still held the upper hand. They were forced in numbers to be ostracized from their parental homes, sometimes even to separate from their wives, leave their communities, and seek refuge in distant lands.

The rift grew ever more painful and bitter. As we have said, there was not a wide opening for assimilation in eastern Europe, but the desire to flee one's previous identity and exchange it for another—with which they were acquainted more from literature than from real life—was no less strong than the desire of the second-generation Jewish assimilators

in Germany. A few were able to realize this urge through emigration or conversion. But the majority felt themselves torn and adrift, wandering between two identities, the one from which they wanted to separate but could not, and the second that they desired but could not attain. The only salvation from this profound spiritual division was found in the aspiration to create the alternative of a “different” secular Jewish culture, and young people possessed of creative talents devoted themselves to it.

One of the most striking manifestations of this tendency was the extent of influence of Spinoza's philosophy on the radical Maskilim of eastern Europe. Precisely because he had been excommunicated, they recognized him as their master and even their tzaddik.<sup>14</sup> Spinoza was identified in their eyes with the ancient image of the second-century rabbinic heretic Elisha ben Avuyah, and they attributed to both of them the aspiration to create, in opposition to the tyrannical rabbinical-Jewish community that persecuted and excommunicated them for their “freethinking,” an “other” secular-national Judaism that could be integrated as a national unit within the framework of modernity. They thus discovered an alternative tradition of secular Judaism that was not less authentic than the rabbinic tradition. One may say that this was the east European alternative to the first venture of second-generation enlighteners in the direction of assimilation and absorption through changing the collective identity of the people, except that this alternative was to be found within the creative trajectory of Judaism, not outside it.

This parallel can be seen also from the standpoint of their attitude to the response of non-Jewish society to the Jewish enlighteners' efforts for idealistic cultural rapprochement. We recall that also in eastern Europe the process of radical enlightenment in the second and third generations was dependent on the assistance of the governments and the hope that they, and the non-Jewish social elite with them, would support the efforts of the Maskilim to effect change in Jewish patterns of education and industry and would guarantee that the status of Jews in the country was ameliorated, and they would achieve—if not full equal rights—at least security, relief, and dignity.<sup>15</sup> The states and governments, especially in Russia, proved that there was no basis for these hopes. It became clear that assis-

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<sup>14</sup> *Tzaddik*—“Saint”; in Hasidic parlance, the charismatic, reputedly saintly rabbinic leader of a community; here used ironically.

<sup>15</sup> See Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 1:392–440: “The Reign of Alexander II, 1855–1881,” and 2:3–39: “The Position of the Jews in the Tsarist Empire, 1881–1905.”



tance would be intermittent and dependent on whim. The Russian rulers truly preferred a policy that would force the Jews to emigrate en masse. The social-economic reality and the pressure of persecutions and pogroms brought the majority of the young Maskilim to the point of despair, but it became clear even to those who sought to change the regime in Russia by turning in the direction of the revolutionary movements that, despite their enlightened ideologies, they also harbored prejudices against the Jews and Judaism and were ready to resort to popular anti-Jewish sentiment to reinforce their propaganda.

These disappointments necessitated soul-searching also on the part of the extreme Maskilim with respect to their idealization of the ideas of progress and enlightenment, as well as their relation to their people and their religion. In their hearts, too, was awakened the need to examine if they had not gone too far in their criticism of their fellow Jews and their religion, and if they had not ignored the fact that the circumstances of life in Exile and the needs of self-defense had been the cause of a certain part of the distortions in rabbinic and Hasidic Jewish existence and that one needed to discover behind them deeper positive elements that could be the source for regeneration and reform. The moderate secular Haskalah and the various branches of eastern European Zionism, especially "spiritual Zionism," developed toward the end of the nineteenth century from this juncture.

In Germany, the existential struggle, both individual and collective, achieved a comprehensive programmatic expression in philosophy. This was the most appropriate methodological tool, first, because philosophy played a central role in forming the cultural consciousness of the leadership elite in Germany; as a result, the discourse that took place between Jewish supporters of emancipation and the leading German elite had recourse to it; and second, because the process of assimilation and cultural absorption raised the question of the difference between Judaism and Christianity in the center of the discussion concerning the integration or segregation of Jews in German society. Dealing with it on the intellectual plane was thus given a central, guiding, and leading role.

In Eastern Europe, philosophy did not play a similar role. Its lessons were needed, but they were derived principally from German philosophy, and they were absorbed into a literature that tended more toward poetry and narrative expressive of the struggles of life, on the one hand, and toward ideological propaganda close to practical life, on the other hand. For these reasons, no extensive philosophical literature was



created in eastern Europe after Krochmal. There were several interesting experiments, though these were far from original, and in order to complete the picture we must resort to expressions in the areas of research into sources and history, as well as artistic literature, that expressed in parallel ways the deep existential grappling with the problems of “religion and life.”

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES

In his work, Krochmal developed a philosophical-historical theory for scientific research and dealt with the question of the relation between uncritical traditional learning, which ignored historical difficulties, and the new methods of research. On this basis he proposed a comparison between Jewish cultural development and that of other peoples. His starting point, however, was the inner continuity of Jewish culture as it appeared from the vantage point of the modern age. The connections with general culture were viewed from within by way of its points of intersection with other cultures and in terms of its own mission: to receive their influences, to influence them, and especially to combine the fruits of their legacies within itself.

In this way, Krochmal showed how philosophical historical research developed in parallel with the development of modern Jewish philosophy, within Jewish culture, from generation to generation. In this respect, too, he pointed to the reception of outside influences but showed that they were compatible with Jewish culture's self-appointed destiny. Thus he found the beginnings of a scientific approach in the plain-sense grammatically based scriptural interpretations of the Middle Ages. In particular, he researched the commentaries of Abraham Ibn Ezra, which voiced daringly critical ideas on the shape of authorship and transmission of various biblical books, including even the Pentateuch, in order to reconcile improbabilities and contradictions. A more advanced stage of explicit philological-historical criticism was found in the writings of Azariah di Rossi of the sixteenth century, who was influenced by the example of the Italian Renaissance. Finally, there was an impressive advance of critical methodology in the traditional rabbinic scholarship contemporaneous with the Haskalah, especially in R. Jacob Emden's campaign against the Zohar, and the amazing, wide-ranging critical studies of R. Elijah Gaon of Vilna. Krochmal found in these examples concrete evidence that the traditional models of learning were generally professional and rational by the standards of their time and were appropriate to the contemporary expectations of general culture.<sup>1</sup> Modern philological-historical research

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<sup>1</sup> Krochmal devoted an extensive chapter to analyzing the critical method of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, followed by an anthology of extracts of Ibn Ezra's major writings (Krochmal,

was thus presented as continuous with the older Jewish intellectual legacy. There was indeed a dialectical tension between it and the previous stage of the tradition. But when we measure the qualitative expressions of each generation, it turns out that the present innovations grew out of grappling with difficulties that were felt but not resolved in a previous stage. They advanced beyond the insights of the previous stage without contradicting it and without denying the eternal truth of the Holy Scriptures—for each generation should understand the divine revelation in Scripture to the best of its ability, with the tools of understanding at its disposal.

Krochmal himself was a rabbi. He trained a number of students as rabbis like himself who followed his research approach. If he had succeeded in convincing the majority of the rabbinic establishment, as he had wished to do in his moderate pedagogic way following Maimonides' example, it is likely that the absolute rift between the traditional learning practiced in the "ultra" and modern Orthodox yeshivot and Jewish studies as practiced in the academy could have been prevented. But Jewish studies found institutional form in Germany, in the German language, and in an isolated academic framework that did not seek dialogue or approval from the rabbinic establishment. On the contrary—it came to reject it openly and to offer itself as a replacement for it.

#### *A. The Association (Verein) for the Culture and Scientific Study of Jewry*

The "Association (*Verein*) for the Culture and Scientific Study of Jewry"<sup>2</sup> was organized at the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century by outstanding graduates of the German universities of the second generation of the Haskalah. This was done many years before the *Guide for the Perplexed of the Time* was entrusted to their greatest scholar, Leopold Zunz, for editing and publication. Thus this work could not have had an influence on the founders of the *Verein*, and it apparently had no influence even on Zunz. The time for its influence on the development of Jewish studies came only a generation later, when there was a recognized need for national reorientation. The point of origin of the founders of the

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More Nevukhei Ha-Zeman, in *The Writings of Nachman Krochmal*, ed. Simon Rawidowicz [Waltham: Ararat Publishing Society, 1961], 284–334; 335–94). He also through cursory references in the same work demonstrated his familiarity with the works of Azariah di Rossi (*ibid.*, 109, 127, 166, 241, 246–47, 449), Emden (*ibid.*, 306), and R. Elijah Gaon of Vilna (*ibid.*, 160–61).

<sup>2</sup> See Introduction, note 4 for explanation of the name.

*Verein* was the opposite. The young university graduates, who first identified with modern German culture and the methods of historical research that they imbibed from the German academy, encountered the barrier of anti-Semitism. It motivated them to return to the sources of Judaism with the new research methods that they had acquired in order to "liberate" the spirit of Judaism from its prison and to combine it with German culture. Their point of view was external, the viewpoint of individuals who had knocked on the doors of an enlightened German society that had difficulty accepting them as they were. They wished to examine how they could include their Jewish legacy in the general culture in such a way that it would be accepted as a part of the whole and not as a deviant exception.

Krochmal asked, "What makes Judaism unique, and how does it comprise in itself the best achievements of general culture throughout the ages?" By contrast, the founders of the *Verein* asked: "How was Judaism integrated into general human culture as one of its sources, and as one of its essential constituents? How did the separation, so glaring in the current age, arise between particular-collective rabbinic culture and individualistic-universal-aspiring humanism? How could one overcome the separatist traits that traditional Jewish learning emphasized at that time in order to put up a barrier against assimilation?" Thus a substantive opposition was formed between Krochmal's aspiration to discover the ecumenical uniqueness of Judaism and the *Verein* founders' aspiration to assimilate into that totality, or between Krochmal's objective to effect a transformation of general culture into a Jewish culture guarding its uniqueness, and the *Verein*-founders' objective to effect a transformation of Jewish culture into the general culture as one of its constituents. In short: a substantive opposition was formed between Krochmal's way, which sought to conduct a cautious dialogue with the rabbinic establishment in order to bring them to progress on the basis of a rational faith in the divine origin of the Torah, and the *Verein*, which declared war on the traditional learning of the yeshivot and all its ways and sought to present an alternative way on the basis of the assumption that all the scriptures are a human creation.

The *Verein's* conception of the task led to a problematic relation between the new research and its traditional topics. The new research was intended to investigate the literature of the Oral Torah and the rabbinic literature from Mishnaic times to the Enlightenment. But the traditional literature was written adopting the midrashic method, based on faith in the superhuman revelation and the authority of the sacred literature, comprising both the written and oral Torah. Sooner or later the question had to arise whether research undertaken on the basis of denying the

basic assumptions of its subjects, using methods that disqualified the very discipline that generated them, would allow a sympathetic understanding of the subject matter under investigation without misrepresenting it. But this problem did not worry the founders of the *Verein*. It was raised only at a later stage, out of confrontation with modern Orthodox positions, and then it indeed resorted to the mediating outlook of Krochmal.

The philosophical problem of the founders of the *Verein* was formulated against this backdrop. They had to adapt the philosophical basis of Western humanism in its German version to the special task that was laid on them as Jews. They had to contend with the fact that German idealistic philosophy expressed the negative view of Jews and Judaism that was current in German society on the "level of reason." The prejudices expressed by Kant, and even more caustically by Hegel, added a stringent spiritual dimension to the bitterness of the wave of popular anti-Semitism and the governments' retreat from the liberal legislation that had begun to grant civil rights to the Jews. It was especially hard to swallow Kant's and Hegel's denial of the fact that Judaism had been, via Christianity, one of the foundational sources of Western culture. Thus the Jews and their religion were depicted as a collective-particular spiritual entity, even more foreign in its values to universal humanism than Christianity. To add insult to injury, isolationist rabbinic Judaism gave full support to this indictment.

Idealist philosophy defined the national state as the supreme collective embodiment of universal reason. In this capacity, the state should unite all its citizens, who share a common territory, language, and laws, as individuals equal before the law. This provided a rational basis for the demand for emancipation. But to their great disappointment, the idealism of Kant and Hegel locked the gate to the Jews until they ceased being what they were. An intolerable contradiction was thus created between the identification of the *Verein* founders as human beings and German citizens with German idealism and as being Jews with respect to origin and religion. This was an intolerable absurdity to them, a kind of split in their identity and in the identity of the culture in which they wished to find their home. This forced them to reexamine the substance of their Judaism, whether it was indeed what Kantianism and Hegelianism declared it to be. But they had first of all to reexamine the philosophy of Kant and Hegel in its attitude to Jews and Judaism. Was there perhaps a philosophical error at the root of their glaring historical error? Did Kant and Hegel correctly interpret the relation between the universal individualism of the *Rechtsstaat* and the particular collective entities organized within the state, of which Judaism was one? Did they understand the universal value

of particular collectivities of peoples and religions included in the historical development of the supercultures that embraced them? Did they correctly understand the status of particularist identities within the state and the culture even after they had been organized into the superculture of the *Rechtsstaat*?

The founders of the *Verein* were the first who defined the problem of Jewish philosophy in relation to general philosophy in the modern period in this way. They were not outstanding as original philosophers. Their attempts at expression in the philosophical plane were scanty and their level was amateurish, but their statement of the problem and the direction that they sought for its solution had foundational importance. Until the middle of the twentieth century, the problem as they defined it stood at the center of Jewish religious philosophy's encounter with general philosophy.

As we have said, the founders of the *Verein* accepted Hegel's method of dialectical reasoning and his developmental view of human history.<sup>3</sup> At its basis was the outlook that human culture is a higher-level totality that embraces within itself partial national totalities. They defined their area of research in Jewish studies on the basis of this outlook. For them, Judaism was also a whole national culture that developed among other national cultures, became integrated among them, and made its unique contribution to them. Thus far, no difficulty was raised. Like all national cultures, Judaism originally had its own homeland, cultural language, legal constitution, and religion. One should study it as such and examine its unique contribution to human culture, proceeding from the assumption that the Jewish particularity was not and is not different in its essence from the particularity of other national cultures and that, like all other peoples, it needed to become integrated into the totality of human cultures. Its collective particularity followed the same rules as did all other collective particularities.

What was the source of the particularity of national cultures? According to Hegel, particularism is dominant at the sensory level of national culture. Here, the nation's spirit is incarnate in its geography, institutions, and language, all of which are expressive of its particularity. Religion, however, expresses through its symbols the supreme universal values

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed elaboration of Hegel's general historical outlook and his specific pronouncements on Judaism, see the chapter on Hegel in volume 1 of the present work, 135–51.

that every culture contributes to the whole of humanity, and thus comprises the dialectical transition from the particular-collective physical stage to the stage of pure spirituality that would come to supreme unified expression in philosophy and would be embodied institutionally in the *Rechtsstaat*. It followed that, according to Hegel, the particularity of each people and the particular symbolic expressions of all the religions comprise the different aspects of a single spiritual essence. The differences between them would disappear when culture arrived at its highest spiritual stage, institutionalized in individual homogeneous constitutional states. Each of these would represent human culture in its totality, just as each human individual represents in his being the essence of humanity.

This conception of the relation between the particularities of the peoples and religions to the universality of human culture presented an obstacle to the inclusion of Judaism in the rational constitutional state. If particularity is only a stage in the progression toward the unification of humanity in the individual national states, which would not differ from each other in their moral or cultural essence but only in the fact that each one had a different national formation, then it was clear that Judaism defined its collective particularity in a different way, one that was not susceptible of disappearing through sublimation into the totality. Judaism presented its particularity as an independent value, unique from all other particularities. It sanctified the particularity of its destiny in its religion and in its halakhic-legal frameworks that it conceived as eternal as they were given in the past by the absolute external authority of an absolute particular divinity. For this reason Judaism must persist obstinately in the preservation of its separate identity even in the rational constitutional state. On the other hand, it was not capable of surviving entirely on its own because of its exclusive particularity but had rather to be “hosted” by other national cultures from which it must nevertheless remain separate.

In Hegel’s view, this was a parasitic existence, which came about as the result of a historical aberration.<sup>4</sup> Judaism was created by a slave nation that did not succeed in liberating itself from a servile mentality, while its servile religion was fixed forever at the sensory stage of spiritual-religious development, and it sanctified its separateness through a religion based on imagination through an absolute suprahuman, suprarational authority to which its adherents considered themselves bound in obedience. If so, it was clear that the Jews could not join the rest of humanity in the free constitutional states until they liberated themselves as individuals from

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 146–51.

the collective particularity to which they were enthralled. Until then they would continue their parasitical existence, and the constitutional state for its part would not be able to accept them into its midst because their particular collective existence contradicted its principle and would thus halt its development.

Judaism thus constitutes, according to Hegel, a fossilized collective particular entity, essentially different from the relative particularity, which was open to development, of the other peoples comprising humanity. It was clear that Judaism made and makes no positive contribution to the totality. On the contrary—it halts its proper development, and its contribution is negative. This in his view was a structurally rooted historical defect and was therefore not amenable to correction by way of normal development and sublimation. The Jewish particularity had no remedy except through being dismantled into individuals who might change their previous identity and join the *Rechtsstaat* without any connection to their origin. Hegel did not ignore the fact that this was an extremely hard, almost impossible, requirement.

We saw that Krochmal grappled with Hegel's view of Judaism by ignoring it. Without any open discussion, he applied Hegel's view concerning the proper relation between individualistic universalism and collective particularity to the Jewish nation as well, despite its uniqueness. Like all the nations with their religions, Judaism comprised a complete national totality. Its obvious uniqueness was expressed on the universal plane, not the particular plane: Judaism first revealed the ideal of rational unity of humanity and gave it individual-constitutional expression at the very start of its history, not only at the time of the exodus from Egyptian slavery, but much earlier, in the patriarchal period. Judaism thus developed as an individual totality while maintaining direct and profound reciprocal connections with all the surrounding national cultures, and it embodied all human history in its own national history. There was no doubt that in Krochmal's view the Jewish people could be integrated as a nation among the nations. But it was also clear that his intention was not for assimilation into the other nations but rather for reestablishing Jewish nationalism in accord with the traditional vision of Messianic redemption to which the people had held steadfast in exile. The vision of Jewish nationalism would be realized, probably in a Jewish constitutional state, at the culmination of history as a unique individual symbol of the unity of humanity.

The founders of the *Verein*, who identified as citizens with German nationalism and its cultural language and law, could not wholeheartedly adopt such a solution. They were German nationalists and could not see themselves as Jewish nationalists in the same way. On the other hand, they



could not ignore the reasons that justified Hegel's conclusion that Jews needed to give up their distinctive identity as a condition for entering the liberal national state as citizens with equal rights. Indeed, rabbinic Judaism clung to its religious, legal, and linguistic particularity, and it remained faithful to the vision of a return to Zion. The conclusion that the founders of the *Verein* accepted from the outset was that this legal-religious separatism to which rabbinic Judaism clung was in need of reform, and the universal dimension in rabbinic Judaism needed to be reinforced as a condition of emancipation. But they, who as free-spirited individuals had already "reformed" their personal lives in the spirit of German idealism, also remained Jews in their own eyes and in the eyes of others, just as enlightened Christians who identified with philosophical idealism and the constitutional state remained Christians. Therefore they could not accept the argument that their collective-particular identity was substantially different from the collective-particular identities of members of other minorities, or of Protestant and Catholic Christians, whom the constitutional state was willing to include without asking them to forgo them.

The fact that they remained Jews in the eyes of their neighbors and in their own eyes even after reforming what was in need of reform for their citizenship in the German *Rechtsstaat* thus proved, in their view, that the Jewish collectivity was no different at bottom than those of the various Christians or other ethnic minorities. It was clear that this argument contained a criticism of the definition of the essence of ethnic or religious peculiarity, as well as the status that it was accorded in the framework of the state, not to mention the definition of the unity of humanity in Hegel's philosophy. All this needed to be corrected according to the yardstick of Judaism.

The three central individuals who suggested a program for Jewish studies within the framework of the *Verein* grappled with the problem on the philosophical plane: Eduard Gans, Immanuel Wolf, and Leopold Zunz. We should examine each individual's contribution separately, for despite their points of agreement, one could see them taking different approaches, revealing a practical problem that affected their methods of historical research.

### *B. Eduard Gans*

Eduard Gans (1798–1837) served as head of the *Verein* and its general director from its founding until its dissolution. His contribution to Jewish

studies was small, but the addresses in which he offered an annual report of the *Verein's* activity and development contributed to the philosophical basis that directed the research.<sup>5</sup>

As a disciple of Hegel, Gans defined Judaism as a national-cultural totality. It was such from its inception until the people's exile. It continued to remain such even in exile, but only within the religious rubric. In the manner of Hegel, Gans drew from this the proper starting point for Jewish studies: one should see in it one of the constituents of the totality of human culture that is manifest in its full scope in our time. The objective truth of Judaism will not be revealed if we study it only in its own terms. One must study it first of all in the context of the totality that embraces it, and it is clear that studying it with intellectual tools from this standpoint will reveal a different picture of its essence than that which rabbinic Judaism depicts through the methods of midrash.<sup>6</sup> This would be the principal difference between a subjective isolationist outlook, deriving from the particular, and an objective ecumenical outlook, deriving from the universal.

Traditional Jewish learning was in Gans's view the fruit of Judaism's subjective contemplation of itself. On what did it base its claim of objective self-knowledge and self-evaluation? Obviously on its reliance on the authority of suprarational divine revelation: God's knowledge of its creation was the truth, and there was no other. But he interpreted the objective significance of this claim dialectically. It was clear that objectivity on a suprarational basis was nothing but naïve subjectivity prior to critical reflection.

It follows that in this matter, too, Gans accepted Hegel's view but applied it differently. Hegel was misled into judging Judaism from a German viewpoint, entrenched in its looking upon Judaism in terms of its relation to Christianity. This was a subjective bias that misled him into interpreting rabbinic Judaism's separatist outlook in his time as if that were the whole story of Judaism's relation to humanity. But had he

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<sup>5</sup> These addresses were published in 1919 in the journal *Die jüdische Wille* (S. Rubaschhoff, "Erstlinge der Entjudung. Drei Reden von Eduard Gans im Kulturverein," *Die jüdische Wille* 2:109–15). An excerpt in English, "A Society to Further Jewish Integration," trans. J. Hessing, is available in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, 215–18.

<sup>6</sup> "The studies of ignorant, prejudiced rabbis, who conceived of Judaism not as a part of the whole, but as exclusive and isolated from other branches of knowledge, did not produce any faithful or credible results." Gans, excerpt in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, 218.

examined latter-day rabbinic Judaism with a view to understanding it in the broader historical context of its development, he would have discovered that the whole picture of Judaism's relation to humanity and to reason was different: rabbinic Judaism was not always what it later became. The historical potential latent in it, and the dynamic of its development, contained other dialectical possibilities. It had been different and it had the potential of changing, and the positions that Gans and his colleagues represented indeed embodied in his view the anticipated change that would follow from a comprehensive, objective knowledge of Judaism.

There thus arose the question of the source of the shortcomings of rabbinic Judaism with respect to its self-consciousness and, in Hegel's philosophy, with respect to its consciousness of the other. Gans did not delve deeply into the question of the shortcomings of rabbinic Judaism. He accepted Hegel's provisional explanation: rabbinic Judaism did not dare to loosen its grasp on fixed authoritative revelation that ruled out change. But it was clear that he differed with Hegel's historical description and his understanding of the idea of revelation in rabbinic Judaism. In Gans' view, based on Jewish historical study, rabbinic Judaism itself exhibited dynamic development from prophetic Judaism and from its encounter with other cultures. It followed that, if it now appeared frozen, this was not an ancient but a recent phenomenon.

The same applied to the reason for the ossification. Indeed, a history of enslavement was likely to blame, not the ancient Egyptian enslavement, but rather the oppression that intensified steadily throughout the history of exile. It continued in the present and in recent generations reached intolerable proportions. Thus the rabbinic response of isolation and inflexibility was the result of external oppression that brought about physical and spiritual ghettoization—but this was no evidence of the original essence of Judaism. Thus it was not Judaism that blocked the development of culture in Europe and Germany to the stage of reason but the dogmatic subjectivity in Christianity's hostile and oppressive attitude to Judaism, an attitude whose source was in Christianity's ambition to exclusive supremacy over all humanity. Philosophical idealism had not freed itself of these dogmatic stances, first and foremost in its disqualifying attitude to Judaism. But also its definition of the idea of the unity of humanity by way of a dogmatic uniformity that tolerates no variety stemmed from the same ambition to uniform exclusivity. Very likely from a philosophical-historical standpoint, this was Gans's most important critique of Hegel, for he thus advanced to an alternative model of unity, a rich pluralistic model, within which Judaism could contribute the full

measure of its individuality while at the same time achieving full integration in the general culture as one of its primary constituents.

Gans's detailed argument was tied to the historical events that occurred in his age. We will gather the deeper meaning of his words if we reconstruct the contemporary analysis that underlay them: the outbreak of the first wave of racial anti-Jewish sentiment in the second decade of the nineteenth century forced him into a critical examination of the views that he received from Hegel on the idea of progress in Germany.<sup>7</sup> The question was awakened in his heart: How was it possible that even the enlightened elite, represented by humanistic philosophers such as Kant and Hegel, could give rational support to the masses' prejudices concerning Jews and Judaism? Furthermore, how could it happen that the governments of the German *Rechtsstaat* adopted these prejudices and abolished the rights that had already been given? How was it possible to reconcile such a retreat with Kant's and Hegel's idealistic conception of history, according to which humanity moved forward according to an immanent regularity in its history and was striving to rise in the current age to the stage of reason?

Gans held fast to the idea of progress even after the backsliding that he saw before his abashed eyes. On it he pinned his hope that the defeat that had occurred was only a temporary retreat in preparation for the next leap forward. In order to maintain his faith in the face of the present failure, however, he had to resort to a dialectical explanation of what had occurred in Germany in his day. For this purpose it was necessary to apply to Hegel's philosophy the same criticism that Hegel had leveled at his predecessors. It was likely that his positions, too, were in need of dialectical development to a further stage.

What was the all-embracing historical process that could include the state's retreat from emancipation as one of its constituents? The answer was evident from the obvious connection between the German nation's attitude toward the Jews and the struggle of the national movements in Europe, especially in Germany, for the unity of each nation within its state. Europe was now in a critical stage of formation of nation-states. In the background was the period of wars of the European peoples for their respective territorial space and among various subgroups within each nation for supremacy. Germany was fragmented into small principalities

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<sup>7</sup> The background of Gans's remarks, delivered in 1822, was the "hep-hep" anti-Jewish riots in Germany in August 1819.

that fought among themselves and were unable to defend the German homeland against the French conquest. It now strove to achieve political unity, with Prussia at the center, on the basis of a crystallized national identity.

Gans discerned a direct connection between the current anti-Semitism and the aspiration of all strata of the German people for national unity.<sup>8</sup> The Germans viewed particularistic collectivities such as the obtrusive Jews in their midst as a factor that interfered with realizing the collective consciousness of the German nation aspiring to unity. Was Germany's aspiration for national unity opposed to progress and reason? Certainly not. Gans also saw himself as a German national patriot. Thus the error was not in the aspiration for unity itself but in the way that one defined it at that moment in terms of its immediate political objective—political unity—which despite all its importance was not an ultimate end but a means to the development of a rich national culture that would be fulfilling in all aspects of life and creativity.

Focusing the struggle on the achievement of political unity for the sake of national supremacy thus amounted in Gans's view to mistaking the means for the ultimate goal and supreme value. Thus the idea of unity was conceived in a superficial and abstract way, devoted to capturing a single rubric and ignoring the values that one needed to realize it. To mobilize, one needed to overcome division. To overcome division, one needed to abolish plural views and tendencies and preserve only a broad consensus that could unite the people. The practical upshot was that all parties and subgroups in Germany should surrender the interests and values that identified them with respect to one another and should also suppress expression of their identity in a uniform platform, "pure" of all admixture of opposing elements.

If this was the shape of national unity, then clearly every particular collective entity that could not surrender its uniqueness and be satisfied with the broad common denominator with all the other collective entities in the country deserved to be decisively thrown out, for it posed an obstacle to unity. The minorities with divergent particular-collective

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<sup>8</sup> "In recent times...the Jews' particularity has become problematic...The fewer the remaining number of unintegrated details, the more disturbing these details will seem...What to many observers, who do not go beyond the surface of daily phenomena, may look like an age of recurrent, incomprehensible hatred and reawakened barbarism, is nothing but the symptom of the struggle which must precede unification." Gans excerpt in *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, 216.

identities were forced to an extreme decision. They either had to abolish themselves outright or opt out of the national compact. The Jews were the most blatant instance of this kind. Therefore they were dealt with first and attacked with special ferocity. It was argued that they constituted a foreign factor even though they had dwelt in Germany for many years and had proved their loyalty and desire for integration.

We emphasize again that through his historical analysis Gans discerned a general tendency that united the anti-Semitic mob, the governments, and the enlightened elites. It was not only the anti-Semitic mob that isolated the Jews as foreign. The enlightened elites represented by German idealism tended toward the same stance on the political and spiritual plane. The question should then be raised: How could one explain singling out the Jews from all the other minorities? Was the peculiarity of the Jews indeed beyond the ability of any common denominator to commingle them with Western culture in general and German culture in particular? Gans, of course, rejected this argument with all his soul.<sup>9</sup> He tried to understand it to the best of his ability on the basis of the aspiration for pure unity and acknowledgement of the fact that the Jewish collectivity indeed surpassed in its particularity the common lot of minorities in Europe and in Germany. But when it came to confronting the outlooks of the enlightened philosophers through which the history of Western culture was being studied, a deeper explanation was called for.

The confrontation arrived on this point at the question of the essence of Western culture as a whole, first of all the question of its roots and sources. From the viewpoint of philosophers such as Kant and Hegel, who aspired to a systematic, inclusive, and unified knowledge of all reality and who saw their philosophy as the all-inclusive, unifying self-consciousness of their culture, it was natural that they would locate the roots of Western culture in the same source from which developed the philosophy, the legal and constitutional tradition, and the political tradition of the West: the culture of Greece and Rome. The status of Judaism as a central source for the development of European culture was negated decisively by them on this basis. In their view, Judaism represented a religious, not a

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<sup>9</sup> "The way in which the Jewish world will merge into the European follows from the above-mentioned principle. To merge does not mean to perish [*aufgehen ist nicht untergehen*]. Only the obstinate, self-centered independence of the Jews will be destroyed, not that element which becomes a part of the whole; serving the totality, this element shall lose nothing of its independence or substance. The larger entity shall be the richer for the new ingredient, not the poorer for the lost contrast." Ibid., 216–17.

philosophical idea—even an anti-philosophical idea: a personal transcendent God, suprapersonal and suprarational, a different conception of law rooted in divine revelation not in autonomy, and a “theocratic” political theory. How, then, did they explain the fact that Judaism was the source of the Christian religion that united the culture of the West? By denying its positive contribution. The idealistic philosophers emphasized the pagan Greco-Roman elements in Christianity and concluded that whatever Christianity took over from Judaism was negative. In order to raise it to the level of reason, it was necessary to liberate it from the foreign influence. Naturally such a consideration sharpened their rejection of Judaism. They saw it not only as a foreign factor but as a factor whose involvement was negative. Its continued presence would interfere with Christianity’s purification and elevation to the level of reason in order to be a purely Western religion.

Gans had to examine this assertion from the ground up, and the historical and philosophical criticism to which he subjected it fed the conception of unity that he came to offer in its place. First, this assertion did not withstand the test of objective scientific scholarship, which examined reality from the standpoint of the whole. If we proceed from an inclusive examination of all its constituents and interrelated processes, we should become convinced first of all that Western culture did not develop from one primal source but from a dialectical, tension-laden encounter between two primal sources. In comparison with other cultures, we will discover that this is also the secret of its superiority, its richness, its many-sidedness, and the inexhaustible creativity that characterizes it. The sciences, philosophy, and jurisprudence came from pagan Greco-Roman sources. The religion and morality came from the sources of Judaism, and, if we follow the development of Christian religion and later philosophy in the West, we will discover the unceasing creative efforts to blend the inputs of the two sources in a complex unity replete with inner tensions.<sup>10</sup>

With these thoughts, Gans raised for discussion the question of the general relation between Judaism and Hellenism as two complete cultural legacies, beyond the question of the relation between biblically based

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<sup>10</sup> “... Today’s Europe ... is not the work or the outcome of chance ... but the inevitable result of the effort made, through many millennia, by that Spirit of Reason which manifests itself in world history.... To this totality, the Orient has contributed monotheism; Hellas the ideal of beauty and freedom; the Roman world the import of the state vis-à-vis the individual; Christianity the concept of the preciousness of human existence as a whole; the Middle Ages contributed the sharp delineation of the states and other groups; and the modern world has added its philosophical efforts.” *Ibid.*, 215.



monotheism and philosophy. He presented this as a central topic for historical research and philosophical reflection with numerous contemporary implications, and indeed Jewish studies and Jewish religious philosophy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries accepted Gans's challenge and devoted much study to this topic. But Gans himself remained on the level of factual assertion. He was interested in explaining the source of the difference of Jewish identity within Western culture as one of its fruitful constituents, not as a foreign, intruding factor from which one needed to be liberated.

If so, Judaism is unique and original; it was rooted and crystallized in the ancient world. It truly cannot reduce its legacy to fit within a superficial common denominator of homogeneous nationalism that would emphasize only the Greco-Roman elements of the legacy or the pagan legacy of the peoples of Europe, and it was therefore understandable why it would irritate those who aspired to homogeneity as the foundation of unity. However in that respect Judaism was not an external, foreign factor in Western culture but one of its primary sources, and one of its essential constituents. If Western culture were to reject its Jewish legacy, it would lose an essential part of its identity and would give up its fecundity and its wholeness.

In any case it follows that anti-Jewish hatred is an indication of a failure to understand the essence of true national unity, as well as a failure to understand the specific essence of Western culture. The aspiration for unity is positive and an expression of progress, but in order to realize it, the first step toward unity must be to uncover the error embodied in it and to arrive at an understanding of the notion of unity with respect to its true content: not the negation of pluralism and complexity within a formal, abstract common denominator, but a discovering of the elements of inner compatibility within the depths of contrarities among the essential sources from which living creativity proceeds in order to fashion a harmony in which plurality does not disappear but, on the contrary, is maintained, takes on more nuances, and is deepened by coming to peace with its polarities.

In his lectures, Gans counterpoised the ideal of unity-amid-plurality to the ideal of pure uniformity. He challenged the ruling elites of German culture to recognize that Judaism was one of the essential sources that established European culture. One should not demand that it abolish itself in order to become integrated. One should expect of it only what it should expect of itself: adapting the level of its creative contribution to the level of rationality and the composite unity of the culture of the



modern age. Judaism should continue to perpetuate itself within all the national entities of Western culture as a constituent contributing to its richness. It would be the task of Jewish studies to advance this historical process by bringing Jews to an understanding of themselves in their connection to the totality of Western culture and by bringing the cultures of the West to an understanding of the place of Judaism in their totality.

### *C. Immanuel Wolf*

Immanuel Wolf (1799–1847) accepted Gans's view that one should research Judaism from its sources as a complete national culture and examine its place as one of the essential constituents of Western culture. His special contribution was expressed in the historical survey of the development of Judaism and of its place and fate in Western culture up to the beginning of the modern age and in his proposal of a general program for Jewish studies.<sup>11</sup>

With respect to the Jewish national culture's internal development, Wolf saw in its history a continuous process of focused selection by the criterion of the religious monotheistic ideal. In his view, this proceeded from the essence of the monotheistic faith. Judaism discovered the sublime idea of all-embracing unity, and in accord with this idea its institutional expression was called on to embrace and unite all areas of the people's cultural creativity within its ideological dogmatic and halakhic framework.<sup>12</sup> The realization of this idea, however, necessarily brought about selection and rejection of worldly areas of creativity of which religion had no knowledge or in which it was not able to embrace and apply its mantle of sanctity. The result was thus that the scope of Judaism as the culture of the Jewish people was always broader than the scope of the religion that strove to unite and represent it.

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<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Wolf, "Über den Begriff einer Wissenschaft des Judentums," *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, no. 1 (1822): 1–23; trans. Lionel E. Kochan, "On the Concept of a Science of Judaism (1822)," published in *LBI Yearbook* 2 (1957): 194–204, and in *Ideas of Jewish History*, ed. Michael Meyer (New York: Behrman House, 1974), 141–55. The citation references here are to the 1974 version in Meyer's *Ideas of Jewish History*.

<sup>12</sup> "It is the idea of unlimited unity in the all.... The body surrounding the divine idea... was Mosaic theocracy.... As the spiritual principle continued to grow in the Jewish State, of which it provided the foundation, the Jewish people were led to an ever more living knowledge of it." Wolf, "On the Conception of a Science of Judaism," in *Ideas of Jewish History*, ed. Meyer, 144.

Wolf laid down this distinction as a historical fact that ought to guide Jewish studies in the direction of broader research, departing from the traditional rabbinic scholarship that restricted the notion of Judaism to the religion, and this departure was another aspect of the substantive difference between the disciplines: Jewish studies were objective and inclusive, whereas traditional learning was subjective and restricted.<sup>13</sup> It was clear that this assertion implied a criticism. It sought to argue first that, despite the aspiration for all-inclusiveness, the monotheistic religion as an idea and institution did not exhaust the notion of Judaism and was not identical with it. It constituted only one of the spiritual forces that created the people's culture and was sustained by it. Second, if religion defined Judaism in terms of its tendency to segregate itself from the surrounding popular cultures, still the culture of the Jewish people in its broader scope participated in their cultures and made a substantial contribution to it, playing important roles in addition to creating the religions that they themselves practiced.

As an outstanding example, Wolf pointed to the medieval Jews' contribution to transmitting the Greco-Arabic scientific and philosophical legacy to European culture.<sup>14</sup> This meant that, despite the religious separatism that intensified because of the conflict with Christianity and Islam, the secular scientific, philosophical, ethical, and political culture of the West was still that of the Jews as well, and in that respect they did not stand separate but mixed in, were influenced by it, and made a unique contribution to it. Such assertions had great importance from the standpoint of the aspiration for emancipation and of defining the place of the Jews in modern Western culture not as an entity apart but as one that would be immersed and contribute its part to the whole.

One may discover a parallel critical intention in Wolf's survey of the fate of the Jewish people with respect to the gentiles' attitudes toward them. The entry of the Jews into the cultures of the nations always began with great openness and readiness to accept their special contribution. But the religious development that ensued from accepting the influence

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<sup>13</sup> "Judaism, as a whole, as here presented, based on its own inner principle and embodied, on the one hand, in a comprehensive literature, and, on the other, in the life of a large number of human beings, both can be—and needs to be—treated scientifically.... What Jewish scholars have achieved, especially in earlier times, is mostly theological in character. In particular, they have almost completely neglected the study of history." *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>14</sup> "Thus we see the Jews, even in the Middle Ages, together with the Arabs, energetically tilling the fields of scholarship, particularly in Spain.... The Jews became the interpreters of Arab learning to the European world." *Ibid.*, 149.

of the monotheistic idea—the formation of rival religions—eventually led to a negative turn in the attitude of non-Jews to the Jews and their culture. The result was isolation. The Jews were forced to prefer the ghetto as a framework that insured their survival in a hostile environment, and the physical ghetto gradually generated a spiritual ghetto as well: isolation within the precincts of the sacred religious idea.<sup>15</sup> This process eventually led to shutting down the development of Judaism as an inclusive culture.

In this connection, Wolf pointed out the worsening of the situation in recent generations. Western culture was developing apace in all aspects of secular creativity—scientific, technological, political, jurisprudential, religious, and philosophical. But only a scant few Jews took part in this development. The communities were not influenced by it. Judaism, isolated in the ghetto, thus remained in its fixed cultural state, without keeping up with the times, for the winds of modernity came to it only after great delay. This was Wolf's historical explanation for the fact that Judaism, which had always sought to stay abreast of the times and to emulate in its own achievements the cultural level of its surroundings, failed in this task in the modern age. It thus now appeared servile, depressed, constricted, and rigid. But that was not its fault.

The implication was clear: if the gentiles' attitude to Jews and Judaism were improved, cultural openness would again be manifested, transcending the domain of religion, and religion itself would redefine its ideological and institutional content. Jews would leave the ghetto, become modernized, commingle, and offer their cultural contribution as in previous ages. Their special identity would not disappear. On the contrary—its cultural content would be replenished from reciprocal contact with the environment. Of course, the Jewish religion would need to redefine its place in the totality of the Jewish and the general culture.<sup>16</sup>

On the basis of this historical analysis, Wolf assigned Jewish studies two complementary tasks. First, it would have to provide for Jews and members of their host nations, in whose cultures they participated, a complete objective picture of the culture of the Jewish people in all its areas, including but not limited to religion, in relation and parallel to the national

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<sup>15</sup> "Excluded from public life, restricted to certain fields of activity, the Jews were more and more pushed back into their own unique world. . . . Since then, and until the present day, the rabbis confined themselves to their scholastic preoccupations." *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>16</sup> "The influence of the irresistible progress of spirit already begins to make a powerful impact on Judaism. Where external pressure has ceased, the spirit can begin to develop more freely. The idea strives to free itself from the unyielding walls in which it has been imprisoned, and must once again reveal itself in its own inner, spiritual essence." *Ibid.*, 151.

cultures surrounding it, out of the assumption that all domains of creativity that were manifested in those national cultures were manifested as well in Jewish national culture. Second, they had to provide Jews and non-Jews with a statistical description of the Jewish people in the present, again based on an objective examination of all domains of cultural activity in which Jews were immersed.<sup>17</sup>

Critical (objective) observation on the basis of empirical research of source material was the preferred method of scholarly study that would aspire to describe the culture as it had been with objective precision. In these assertions, Wolf followed in the footsteps of the greatest German historian of his age, Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886). He proposed three “critiques,” each built on the previous: (a) a philological critique, whose focus would be exact identification of the literary sources and exhaustive specification of all that was known about them; (b) a historical critique, whose focus was an objective description, as detailed, inclusive, and continuous as possible, of the national culture’s development in all its domains on the basis of the literary documentation that had been examined by the first critique; and (c) a philosophical critique, whose task was to uncover and define the ideas that came to expression in the developing culture.<sup>18</sup> It would thus be possible to arrive at an understanding of the essence of Judaism, the significance of its history and destiny, and a definition of its place in the general culture.

The statistical research into the life of the Jewish people was intended to complement the description of the past with respect to its current achievements, to discern the challenges of the present, and to propose the directions for the future. Jewish historical study was required to describe, analyze, and document the activity and creativity of Jews in all areas of cultural life, to bring them to the awareness of people of the present age, and to enable them to cope in an enlightened way with the challenges of progress.<sup>19</sup> It would stand to reason that Wolf’s intention was to guide the continuing struggle for emancipation while preserving the cultural and

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<sup>17</sup> “This . . . will fall initially into two main divisions: (1) Study of Judaism in its historical and literary writings. (2) Statistical study of Judaism in relation to the present-day Jews scattered through all the countries of the world.” *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>18</sup> “The textual study of Judaism . . . The history of Judaism . . . The philosophy of Judaism.” *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>19</sup> “The scientific attitude is the characteristic of our time . . . The Jews must . . . raise themselves and their principle to the level of science, for this is the attitude of the European world.” *Ibid.*, 155.

religious identity of Jews within the general culture, in agreement with Gans's vision.

*D. Leopold Zunz*

Though Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) was a participant in the struggle for emancipation, his programmatic lecture on the task of Jewish studies expresses a very different way of thinking than that of his colleagues in the *Verein*. He was the only one of them who devoted himself to research as his life task. It was he who laid the solid foundations of the philological-historical discipline of Jewish studies in actual practice. However, he did this almost without relating to a general philosophical outlook, nor did he look to philosophy to guide his research. It appears that behind his argument—that if one wanted to arrive at objective truth, philosophical reflection ought to come only after sufficient historical knowledge had accrued through philological and historical methods—his stance was actually determined by a pessimistic assessment based on direct personal experience of contemporary reality. For him, the future continuation of Judaism was itself in doubt.

Zunz's pessimism about the future of Judaism—generally, but especially in Germany—had a philosophical premise. His sole reliance on Hegel's philosophy of history was his acceptance of the conclusion that philosophy as a unifying principle of the whole could come only after the whole was complete and after its spiritual processes had used up its creative potential and ceased. Hegel compared philosophy to Minerva's owl, which set out to explore the world at twilight, just before nightfall. Zunz sensed that the Jewish people of his time had exhausted its creative potential. The people was disintegrating and its culture was in a process of decline from which there was no escape. His Orthodox contemporaries had become frozen in their ways, while his assimilationist contemporaries broke away and left the scene. Neither of them adopted the ancient culture in order to continue it creatively. They were interested only in remembering it as what it had been, embalmed in memory. In any case, that is how Zunz saw the task of Jewish studies: to tell succeeding generations, Jewish and non-Jewish, what Judaism had been in its prime.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Precisely because Jews in our times . . . are seizing upon German language and German learning with such earnestness and are thus, perhaps unwittingly, carrying the neo-Hebraic literature [i.e., rabbinic literature] to its grave, science steps in demanding an

To what need? Zunz's typical answer, as a man of science, was: in order to know the truth. Knowing the truth for its own sake and in its own realm was the absolute value of cultured humanity. Once complete, historical truth was eternal. The divine thinking was expressed in it. As cultured people whose humanity is the internalization of cultural memory, we live as human beings before God through knowing historical truth as it was. Zunz could call his way of life as testimony to this: Jewish research was the substance of his life. Not only as a Jew. On the contrary—as a scholar of Judaism on the basis of his heritage and personal abilities, he achieved self-realization as a European and a German. This was the corner of culture to which he had been assigned.

On this point the same realism was decisive to Zunz's approach that had guided his pessimistic attitude toward the future of Judaism—to wit, his recognition that reality is external to human consciousness and that it is the responsibility of a man of science to know it as it can be learned from the critical objectivity of sensory experience. He thus showed preference for the way of the already-mentioned historian Leopold von Ranke rather than for Hegel's *a priori* method.

The controversy was rooted in the key question: What is historical truth? According to Hegel's idealistic method, it is the reality of reason unfolding gradually, step by step, until it culminates in the all-embracing vision from the end point of the historical process to its beginning. It was Hegel's claim that only from the final vantage point could one properly define the beginning; only from there could one uncover the developmental potential that was latent in it; and only from there could one perceive the necessity and meaning of the stages that proceeded one after the other to the denouement. Ranke, who was a believer, also believed that God guided the course of history and that it was possible to discern the divine thought through it. But since he rejected Hegel's developmental pantheism and held that God created the world and guided the history of the nations as a transcendent entity, Ranke defined the truth of writing history in the same way that a scientist defines the truth of natural science.

According to Ranke, history had to reflect the occurrence of events "as they really were." This meant that the historian must reconstruct in the recall of his contemporaries the events as the original participants lived

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account of what has already been sealed away." Leopold Zunz, "On Rabbinic Literature," trans. A. Schwartz, in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, 222.

them and experienced them in the original time. Only from the recall of the developing actuality can we discern the thinking of God that guides history and understand its meaning also with respect to the present vantage point from which we view it when we research it, recall it, and describe it.

This definition of historical truth determined Ranke's research methodology. It was the task of philology to verify that the literary sources document the historical occurrences at the time that they occurred, or at least on the basis of earlier sources that attested to it at the time that it occurred. It had also to verify, through a comparison of the different sources that came down to us, that the testimony was reliable and transmitted what happened as it happened, that it was not inventing or falsifying anything. It had to verify, as well, that we understand the literary evidence exactly as its authors intended when they wrote it, with respect to the language and with respect to the form of literary expression; the task of critical historical description was to put together a picture of the whole from the parts, and not to fill in the details on the basis of guesswork or a previous supposition. Indeed, the test of historical truth in Ranke's view was the exactitude of the details and their combination on the basis of factual support found in them, regardless of prior expectations or suppositions. This methodology lay behind his famous motto that "God dwells in the details"; finally, philosophical evaluation must come last, and it too must be based on the history of philosophy, namely, on the thinking of the people who underwent the events we describe and were influenced by them in the formation of their world outlook.

In his programmatic article, Zunz applied these principles to the research of Jewish culture. He started with a brief survey of the history of how scholarly research dealt with the broad literary documentation of the history of Jewish culture, and he showed that so far this had not been treated in a proper systematic manner. People with various interests, whether Jews or non-Jews, picked and chose in accordance with their subjective motives. Only in modern times was there sufficient background for objective scientific investigation of the rich and complex literary material of Jewish history, if only because subjectively motivated investigation was waning. Its place was taken by objective investigation whose source was in the desire for knowledge for its own sake. This was an aspiration of universal scope, not specific to Jews. One now faced a distinctive, broad collection of detailed information, and there was a scientific need to extract from it everything that could be gleaned concerning culture as such.



Zunz's primary acquaintance with these literary materials enabled him to determine as fact what Gans and Wolf had assumed as an a priori determination of reason: that one was speaking of the documentation of all areas of cultural creativity in which Jews engaged. He proposed on this basis to enumerate the materials first according to the various cultural disciplines and in chronological order. One had to start with a bibliographical inventory and philological research of each discipline by itself, to describe each discipline separately, then to progress from partial descriptions to more comprehensive descriptions until one could combine the descriptions that one had gathered into an inclusive history of Jewish culture in the context of general culture, and finally to build on its foundation a philosophical outlook. All would follow the method of Ranke as described above.

After writing his programmatic article, Zunz cut off all contact with general philosophical inquiries and devoted himself to implementing his program, assiduously compiling bibliographical entries, philological research, and description of well-defined topics. His first comprehensive work was the book *Homiletical Literature of the Jews in Its Historical Development* (1832). It was accepted immediately as an exemplary model of Jewish research according to Ranke's method.

The obvious tension between the philosophical outlook of Gans, which was based on Hegel's historical theory, and Zunz's empirical scientific approach, based on Ranke's concept of history, could be seen in the continued development of Jewish historical studies on the one hand and Jewish philosophy of religion on the other hand. Two schools were formed that were in need of each other and strove to reach accommodation with each other but conflicted with each other in fact without arriving at agreement. The one turned primarily in a philosophical direction and proposed inclusive historiosophic outlooks whose purpose was to shape the worldview of the modern religious movements that were grappling with the challenges of the present, in the spirit of Hegel. The second turned primarily in the direction of scientific research for its own sake, following the example of Ranke.

Of course, a philosophical outlook had need of scholarly knowledge and could not do without it, whereas scholars such as Zunz or Steinschneider could free themselves of philosophical inquiry or postpone it to the distant future. However, inasmuch as scientific research was also called on to play a role in religious education and in the religious and cultural life of



Jews who identified with modernity, the debate over the proper role and method of Jewish studies continues to the present day. There is no broad historical or literary research that is not required to examine its objectives and methods, and there is no substantive work in modern Jewish religious philosophy that did not first have to take positions regarding the status of the sources of Judaism and their legitimate methods of interpretation. We shall again encounter the continued debate on these topics in all the following chapters.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SCIENCE OF HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY, AND REESTABLISHING JUDAISM AS THE RELIGION OF REASON (VIS-À-VIS SECULAR HUMANISM AND CHRISTIANITY)

#### *A. Historical Development*

About twenty years passed between the appearance of the theoretical articles that laid the first academic foundation of Jewish studies and the appearance of systematic philosophical works that expressed the modern German-Jewish identity of the second and third generations of the Enlightenment and Emancipation. The latter appeared about simultaneously, between the middle of the 1830s and the 1840s.

This timing was surely not accidental, and it points to a personal and historical development that requires paying attention as the background for understanding the tendency and role of the works that were written out of direct and open involvement in the protracted internal struggles, among Jews and Germans, respectively, on their own self-definition and on the place of Jews in society, in the state, and in the surrounding culture.

First of all, one must take into account the gestation period needed for spiritual maturation, whether for the personalities of the authors or their audience. Philosophical creativity that shows inventive originality as well as grappling with major cultural changes requires prolonged gestation: basic learning, digesting outside influence, and system building. This requires tools and preparatory work in the areas both of cultural-historical research and of communal deliberation, in which the conflicting positions in daily life on the journalistic and literary level are crystallized, and one especially needs a sufficiently long perspective to enable one to encompass a certain sweep of time within a given period, which cannot be achieved until after the image of that period is no longer a matter of suppositions and dreams for the future but can be pictured as a reality in which one discerns an overall structure and essential tendency.

Hegel was right: philosophy proposes a vision for the future and prepares for its realization, but the wisdom out of which it operates is accumulated and distilled in observation that analyzes what was already produced in order to uncover the elements that were not visible when

the processes of change began. The philosopher discovers toward the end of a period what was in it at its beginning so that it may be possible to anticipate from it to the completion of its activity and perhaps its continuation into the following period. In this respect the program of those who laid the foundations for Jewish studies persisted into the 1820s, for according to it the philological and historical critique would advance and comprise a necessary preparation for philosophical critique.

In the view of the founders of the *Verein*, it was doubtful whether at the end of the 1830s, the time when those works that appeared at the start of the 1840s were written, Jewish studies had yet attained the necessary achievements, in extent or depth, to build on them a proper philosophical critique. We shall show later that the philosophical creations of the 1840s relied on world-embracing generalizations that were not always supported by sufficiently detailed and inclusive critical knowledge. We shall also show that, among some of the leaders of the new movements in German Judaism, literary and historical knowledge, which had already arrived at the stage of inclusive works that presented a general picture, took the place of critical philosophy for a guiding and directing role, largely out of a distancing from generalizing philosophical abstractions that scholars regarded as unreliable. Nevertheless, Jewish studies already had the status of a discipline that had demonstrated its reliability through its indisputable achievements, and philosophers who lacked patience but were endowed with inspiration and empathy could find a foothold in them and compensate for their deficiencies of knowledge by relying on their analytical observation of the modern period, which they knew from personal experience, and the general structural vision that modern philosophy of history had provided them, as we shall see.

However, the most important development that created the need and provided support for its satisfaction was in the social domain. During the twenty years that passed from the founding of the *Verein*, the face of German-Jewish society was transformed beyond recognition. Despite the political obstacles, social barriers, and growing anti-Semitism in the German people, the cultural emancipation of Jews had become a reality. There was now a Jewish society that spoke German as its mother tongue, with a modern scientific and humanistic education. This society succeeded in supporting itself economically in advanced and prestigious occupations. Its connection to the leading elite in most areas of spiritual creativity was pronounced. It was already impossible to ignore the growing influence of Jews who distinguished themselves in the sciences, literature, art, and philosophy.

From the standpoint of the internal structure of German Jewry, this development was expressed in the profound change in the composition of the Jewish population and in the relations of the forces that developed in it. The majority that at the start of the century had been in the hands of the old rabbinic leadership quickly dwindled and lost power. In several communities, the proponents of emancipation already constituted the majority or were sufficiently strong economically to take over the rabbinic role. A new stratum of rabbis emerged, proponents of emancipation and accommodation, with the will to lead in that direction.

We should emphasize in this connection that for those persons who chose to devote themselves as their life task to Jewish studies or to other Jewish creative cultural endeavors and who were not independently wealthy, communal rabbinic leadership provided the only official way to support themselves in this capacity. We should not be surprised, therefore, that the new German-Jewish society became in its own eyes, and gradually in the eyes of the German governments and elites, the official representative of Judaism. It became the accepted criterion for defining the essence of Judaism. One could learn what Judaism was from its outlook, faith, behavioral code, and way of life and not only from the old rabbinic society that stubbornly insisted that only it embodied authentic Judaism.

The prominence of modern German-Jewish society, ensconced in the German culture, contributed to the growth of popular anti-Semitism and to the sharpening of the critique of Judaism among the leading German elites, who saw in the penetration of Jewry into their domain a threat to their identity. This characteristic reaction of German society continued to be expressed in its general cultural life, including philosophy. But now it had to confront a Jewish society that was much surer of its own identity, both with respect to its having a place in Germany and in German culture and with respect to its characteristics as a Jewish society striving for integration. All this contributed to the pressing need to ordain, with formal authorization, a suitable rabbinical leadership to educate the community in the new spirit. This in turn required confirmation and justification from the two principal sources that nurtured the identity of modern Jewish society, and especially its spiritual leaders: the classic sources of Judaism, and the philosophy that expressed the consciousness of contemporary German culture.

The need to bring these two sources of identity face-to-face in order to reconcile them systematically grew in strength and urgency. The fundamental insight was that objective Judaic studies, together with rational

German philosophy (despite its critical attitude toward the older Judaism), could provide the necessary tools for understanding the essence of Judaism. Modern Jewish society accepted the critique of the old Judaism and internalized the values of enlightened German culture. Only a philosophy that proffered a justified critique of the old Judaism in the name of universal values, therefore, could successfully refute the continued criticism, which did not distinguish between old and new and which argued that the new Judaism was “the old lady in a new dress.” This new Jewish philosophy should moreover demonstrate that Judaism, correctly understood, is an authentic continuation of biblical prophecy and the classic rabbinic tradition before it was corrupted by Orthodoxy; it therefore has advantages over Christianity with respect to the humanistic values on which progressive culture prides itself. There is therefore good reason why Judaism should continue to exist as a separate religion.

The meaning of the turning expressed in this insight was far-reaching: it raised to social awareness an aspiration that was latent in the Enlightenment from its inception—to rebuild Judaism from its declined state by returning to the sources, by interpreting them afresh and introducing them into German culture, into Western culture, and into human culture generally. In other words, Judaism should be reformulated as a universal religious movement whose destiny transcended the particular identity of the Jewish people, in parallel to Christianity or secular humanism.

This way of thinking came to expression in organizing the religious movement that defined itself by the idea of “Reform.” Its full significance will become clarified by comparing it to its original model in Christianity, while emphasizing that we have here a characteristic phenomenon that is pertinent to all the religious movements that arose in German Jewry in the wake of the Enlightenment, including “Orthodoxy” and “Neo-Orthodoxy,” as well as Conservative Judaism that described itself as “Catholic Israel.” All these terms were borrowed from Christianity in the effort to construct an appropriate Jewish analogue in order to justify the survival of Judaism as a form of identity, religiously separate but belonging to Germany and to the West socially, culturally, and politically.

Christianity anticipated Judaism by grappling with the phenomenon of secularization in Western culture, and the concepts “Reform,” “Orthodox,” and “Catholic” expressed the variety of strategies of adaptation to the new era, starting with the appearance of Lutheran Protestantism, which sought to bring about reform in the Catholic Church. The modern religious movements in German Judaism, which were forced to defend a separate Jewish identity by drawing distinctions between themselves

and Christianity, thus availed themselves of parallel strategies, and they self-consciously emulated Christianity: Reform Judaism intended to bring about in Judaism the same comprehensive transformation that Lutheran Protestantism had sought to bring about in Christianity.

The word “reform” translates into Hebrew as *tikkun* (“repair,” “corrective enactment”). This alluded to the major corrective enactments that would be required in Jewish law to adapt it to different aspects of current reality. Still, the change implied by the notion of “reform” went much further than legal enactments. One was not speaking of piece-meal changes but rather of a directed effort to redefine everything in accordance with the needs of the times: the fundamental principles of faith, methods of institutional organization and functioning, ritual, norms of religious behavior, methods of instruction, and transmission of the legacy through educational activity.

In order to give a true picture, we must emphasize that Reform Judaism did not aspire to cutting oneself off from the formative sources, nor did it have any desire to found a new religion. It aspired to be the heir of the prior religion, not to break away from it. For this purpose it was basing itself on the primary sources of the religion and returning directly to them, while bypassing all the intermediate links that were created by the older tradition according to its logic. From these sources it derived its authority, by the argument that its methods of interpretation were the most authentic application of the sense of those primary sources to the present age. Indeed, the founders of the Reform movement saw themselves as Ezra and his “scribal” disciples, who in their view effected a similar religious revolution in the beginning of the period of the return from the Babylonian Exile. Thus the Reformers had an ambivalent attitude to the rabbinic sources. They rejected the institutionalized rabbinate and its methods of interpretation in the present, but they relied on the Mishnaic, Talmudic, and even medieval-rabbinic sources (especially Maimonides) in order to find legitimation for their project.

In any case, it was this development that created the motivation to proceed from the stage of Jewish scholarly research to the stage of creative philosophical thought. This is attested to by the circumstance that the majority of philosophical system builders who appeared in the 1840s were Reform rabbis who served as leaders in their congregations, while during the same period, the topics that they discussed philosophically in their works were subjected to vehement discussion in the founding rabbinic synods that gave shape to Reform Judaism. When the “catholic” Conservative movement subsequently broke away from Reform, these comprised

two international religious movements, each of which possessed institutional organization, a theological platform, its own suitable style of ritual, communal way of life, and schools.

*B. Judaism as "Religion of Spirit": The Teaching of Solomon Formstecher*

The first philosophical work that appeared in this period was published in 1835. This was the book *Revelation According to the Doctrine of Judaism* by Salomon Ludwig Steinheim, a well-known physician of broad humanistic and philosophical education, who may be considered an outstanding representative of the second generation after the Emancipation, in his being separated from the old rabbinic Judaism in his education, in his free way of life, and in his separation from the Jewish community, as well as in his determination to return and reexamine the foundations of his Jewish identity.<sup>1</sup> He was philosophically quite original, for although he never considered renouncing his free way of life or his separation from the Jewish community, whether old or new, he sought to ground a fundamental understanding of prophetic revelation on the foundation of the Mosaic Torah as divinely revealed.

Indeed, this step appeared so exceptional at the time as to be incomprehensible. Its time to attract attention, to generate positive echoes and influence, would come later, after all parts of his broad-ranging work would appear, and especially after the organization and crystallization of modern Orthodoxy, to whose intellectual grounding this kind of thinking contributed. As the work in its entirety appeared only in the ensuing decades and as its influence was felt later, we shall postpone consideration of it. Instead, we shall begin the present discussion with a book that was the first to respond to the philosophical-religious agenda of the time, namely, the work of the Reform rabbi Solomon Formstecher (1808–1889), *Religion of Spirit*, which appeared in 1841.<sup>2</sup>

Was this a philosophical system in the proper sense, with respect to methodological fundamentals and depth of thought? Formstecher's colleague, the Reform rabbi Samuel Hirsch, who two years later would

<sup>1</sup> Steinheim's work and thought will be discussed below, in chapter 4.

<sup>2</sup> Salomon Formstecher, *Die Religion des Geistes: Eine Wissenschaftliche Darstellung des Judenthums nach seinem Charakter, Entwicklungsgänge und Berufe in der Menschheit* (Frankfurt am Mein: Johann Christian Hermann'sche Buchhandlung, 1841); electronic reprint, Lexington, KY: ULAN Press, 2012.

publish the most fundamental and profound work on the same philosophical issues and for the same purpose, published at the appearance of *Religion of Spirit* a sharp and belittling critique. This doubtless smacked of professional rivalry, but there was some justice in his attack. *Religion of Spirit* is a decidedly apologetic work, which makes no pretense of concealing its argumentative purposes, both inward and outward directed. In his introduction he sought to provide grounds for his argument that only Jews who were critical of the old Judaism and who had imbibed the methods of research and general thought were capable of true objectivity regarding Judaism, as opposed to German scholars and philosophers with a pronounced Christian bias. This was because precisely those Jews had a subjective interest to arrive at the objective truth concerning their religion, and this was the task that he took upon himself in his work in order to prove the advantage of Judaism over Christianity by the criteria of universal humanism.

In that case, it was clear that the discovery of philosophical truth for its own sake was not his objective. Formstecher had recourse to the philosophical tools of Schelling that appeared to him most appropriate for the needs of this tendentious argument, and his use of them was skillful but not profound and steered clear of problematic issues. As is common in this kind of apologetic writing, it was graced with elegance that was achieved by rounding out the sharp corners of the difficulties and providing solutions achieved with marvelous ease, perhaps sufficient to persuade an educated lay audience but bound to disappoint anyone who regarded philosophy as a quest for truth.

It nevertheless seems that he made a lasting contribution, not only as a pioneering effort, but primarily for formulating the problems in the light of the historical challenge, setting the general objectives for the project of Jewish religious philosophy in that time, and offering a preliminary outline of theoretical methodology that would be appropriate to achieving these objectives. In these respects the simplicity and elegance of his presentation had the advantage of structural clarity by which he introduced the reader to the heart of the topics on the agenda.

Formstecher's apologetic strategy reminds us of the *Kuzari* of R. Judah Halevi. Like that work, it was arranged to deal on several fronts that came together at the same time. First, he had to deal with secular rationalism, which denied religion altogether or denied what religion asserted beyond the limits of reason. Second, he had to deal with Christianity and with the Romantic philosophy that defended it together with its negative stances



against Judaism. Third, he had to deal with idealistic humanism in Hegel's pantheistic formulation, which defined truth from the viewpoint of the thinking "subject" on the basis of the assumption that truth is not arrived at from an objective "reality" outside human reason but rather from human interiority. The claim of objective divine "revelation," on which religion relied, must be grasped from this perspective as fallible self-negating subjectivity or, in other words, man's rational freedom. To this was added the developmental outlook that was based on rational subjectivity: the attainment of truth is a historical process. At each stage a relative, partial truth is attained, relative to the truth that will be attained at the next stage, and only at the last stage does humanity arrive at the full vision of "subjective" reason that was concealed beyond the "objective" external truth of the sensory stage. This meant that the foundational truths of revealed religions had only an instrumental value, and philosophy "sublates" them.

A Judaism that was identified with its prophetic sources and the later postbiblical tradition was represented by such views as an anachronism, and on this point the philosopher who sought to defend the Reform position found himself in a very difficult dilemma, thrown as he was between two contradictory fronts: on the one hand, he had to defend religion in general and Judaism in particular against rationalistic philosophy, which denied the source of religion in supernatural divine revelation; on the other hand, he had to defend the autonomy of reason, rooted in its own rule-governedness and in the idea of historical progress, against the rabbinic theology that took refuge in the belief of "divinely revealed Torah" and forcibly rejected any "reform" that was required for religion to adapt to the progressive historical circumstances of the modern age.

Standing before these opposing fronts, Formstecher sought, like Halevi, a middle way that would unite the contradictory aspects that were revealed in crossfire through balance and mutual accommodation, and, like Halevi, he resorted for this purpose to locating the meeting point where all the arguments that undermined the religion of rational revelation met in order to discover under them a certain truth common to both religion and reason on the basis of which it would be possible to decide among them and to prove the historical and present superiority of progressive Judaism over secular humanism, Christianity, and ultra-Orthodox Judaism.

He chose to focus the discussion on what appeared to him as the current historical motivation for grappling with the problem of religion: the process of secularization, defined as the process of freeing Western culture from the yoke of religion and its return to natural life and the worldly

objectives of the free person. The basic question asked in this context was: What was the status of the spirit in a culture in which the objectives of worldly happiness and freedom determined the processes of its creativity? Was there any room left in this culture for the life of the spirit, striving for independent spiritual goals beyond the satisfaction of natural bodily needs? All the questions mentioned above revolve around this question, and it should be no surprise that Formstecher preferred to deal with it on the basis of Schelling's religious philosophy, which was anchored in reason striving for human freedom and progress but which maintained the religious truth beyond it.

Of course, Formstecher did not recapitulate Schelling's systematic train of thought. He took over the ready-made distinction between "nature" and "spirit" and adopted it as the point of origin of his own teaching.<sup>3</sup> According to Schelling, God is the eternal, mysterious source who brings forth Nature and Spirit from himself in a perpetual creative act. Nature is identified with the material world. Spirit is revealed in man, who is nevertheless a part of nature.<sup>4</sup> God is thus revealed beyond himself through creation and emanation in both Nature and Spirit. Each of these revelations has its own way and contents. They exhibit a dialectical tension, but it is clear that Spirit is the guiding principle and determines both the worldly and the supraworldly objectives of humanity.<sup>5</sup>

On the basis of this general distinction, Formstecher concluded that Judaism is the one and only "religion of Spirit," and he differentiated between it and all other human religions, which were "religions of Nature." These two types of religion were distinguished from each other and even opposed to each other, but it was clear that through each of them was revealed the spirit of God that was emanated over humanity, for it was the human being who created all religions through his spirit. It followed that they were joined at the root and destined to complement each other.<sup>6</sup> The "religion of Spirit" had need of the "religions of Nature" for the divine truth

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<sup>3</sup> Formstecher initially defines "nature" as man's conception of external reality as conforming to the pattern of causal necessity, and "spirit" as the manifestation of human activity in freedom, transcending this necessity (*Religion des Geistes*, 25, 39).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 39–40.

<sup>5</sup> "Das Gottesideal der Welterschöpfung wird von der Natur mit Bewußtlosigkeit, mit Nothwendigkeit realisiert, von dem Geist aber mit Bewußtsein, mit Freiheit" [The divine ideal of creation is realized unconsciously and necessarily by Nature, but consciously and freely by Spirit]. Ibid., 47.

<sup>6</sup> "Heidenthum und Judenthum, obgleich bei einer näheren Charakterisirung in ihre Objectivität strenge Gegensätze, bieten doch als Manifestationen eines und desselben Geistes ähnliche Züge dar" [Although on a first impression paganism and Judaism

at their core and the esthetic creativity that gave it expression, whereas the “religions of Nature” had need of the “religion of Spirit” for its eternal unifying truth and its morality. This was the dialectical tension that nourished the development of the religions in their relation to each other throughout all the history of humanity to our day. This sentence contains Formstecher’s whole philosophy of religion in a nutshell.<sup>7</sup>

We start with the assertion that there was only one “religion of Spirit” but many “religions of Nature.” According to Formstecher, this was an a priori ontological axiom prior to the historical research that would confirm it and identify Judaism as that religion. Nature according to Schelling was the creative embodiment of God’s striving to manifest the multiplicity in it by realizing the “potencies” that arose in His creative spirit, and matter was itself multiplicity. Nature was “full of gods,” and every “religion of Nature” was identified by the gods that symbolized the nature of its people and land, whereas Spirit embodied God’s striving for absolute unity, and so the “religion of Spirit,” expressing the relation of human spirit to itself and its divine source, must be one and must strive for universality.<sup>8</sup> An additional distinction was needed here: the religions of Nature required a certain length of time to develop their culture, but since their purpose was the finite happiness of man in nature, they had no perspective of infinite absolute good. (Only a transcendent spiritual ideal had that perspective.) Their developmental horizon was therefore finite, and they reached it when man discovered that the spirit that created the religion and its culture was his own spirit, without discovering that it was a divine creation. Idolatry thus reached its climax with the apotheosis of man. With that began the moral degeneration of pagan culture, which

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objectively present strict opposites, nevertheless they are manifestations of one and the same spirit with similar traits]. Ibid., 64.

<sup>7</sup> “Erinnert *καλοκαγαθία* an das Aesthetisch-Gute, probitas und virtus an die stoische Kraftäußerung, die sich mehr physisch als rein sittlich darstellt, so zeigt uns קֶדֶשׁ eine rein sittliche Eigenschaft, welche im Gebiete der Natur nicht gefunden werden kann, und welche nur als Eigenthum des Geistes betrachtet werden muß. Ist Heidenthum Naturdienst und Judenthum Geistesdienst, so muß—nach der historischen Erscheinung—ersteres als der Natur, und letzteres als dem Geiste angehörend sich darstellen” [If (the Greek ideal of) *kalos k’agathos* suggests the esthetically good, while *probitas* and *virtus* express the Stoic expression of inner strength (which is more physical than strictly ethical), then the Hebrew *kodesh* indicates a purely moral quality that cannot be found in the realm of nature, and that must only be considered a property of the spirit. If paganism is worship of nature and Judaism is worship of the spirit, then in their historical appearance the former must be represented as belonging to nature and the latter to spirit]. Ibid., 66–67.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 70–71.

knew no transcendental ethic of obligation but only a utilitarian ethic, whereas the “religion of Spirit,” which strove for the ideal of transcendental unity, recognized an ethic of obligation imposed on humankind from above, introducing it to the course of infinite progress in discovery of the ideal essence of human obligation and the measures for its realization in the life of human society. The “religions of Nature” thus create cyclical cultures that have no history in the full developmental sense of this concept, whereas the “religion of Spirit” creates the developmental history of humanity striving to unify itself through progress in realization of the infinite ethical ideal.

On the basis of these assertions, Formstecher carved out a scheme of historic development anchored in the constitution of the creation of man in nature: divine revelation, in its primal absolute sense, identified, as we shall see later, with the creation of man with his full spiritual uniqueness in the center of the world, that is to say, with the creation or emanation of Spirit in the world through the mediation of man. But human beings, like all creatures, are first of all creatures of nature, and their nature united them into peoples separated from each other by the religions of nature. It is possible to say that God revealed Himself to people first through the nature that surrounds them, so that the religions of nature came first to be revealed to the human spirit and to be institutionalized by it. Only at a later stage did historical revelation occur, which founded the religion of spirit. It was intended from the start for all humanity, for it was anchored in the primal revelation that founded humanity in nature; the necessary process of development, however, required its appearance within a single people that was destined to propagate it among the peoples. Thus began the universal history of humanity, as we learn from the biblical narrative.<sup>9</sup>

Divine revelation thus stands at the foundation of mankind’s religious history, and in order to understand its essence, destiny, and path, one needs to develop its concept. If we give our attention to what follows from the distinction between religions of nature and the religion of spirit and from the historical schema based on it, we will discover two distinctions: (1) between the revelation that is the basis for the religions of nature and the revelation that is the basis for the religion of spirit, and (2) between the absolute, primal revelation that grounds humanity and its religions in the human spirit and the historical revelations that give rise to the religion of spirit and further its development and propagation among the nations.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 53–63.

According to Schelling, the creatures of nature represent potentials that God created with His spirit and externalized from Himself by embodying them in matter. The human being is the embodiment of a special potential. In addition to his nature as an animal, he is endowed, as we have said, with a spirit that distinguishes him from other natural creatures, and that spirit is knowing reason, which is possessed of vision and creative will that realizes it. The human being also conceives potentials in his spirit and externalizes them in various artifacts, which in the aggregate comprise culture. The religions of nature are the first creations conceived by the spirit of man in response to the world that conditions his existence. How so? The divine potentials that were realized in the world are revealed to man through the creatures of nature and his own sensory visions. The human spirit discovers the connection between itself and the spirit that animates natural creatures, and it creates the symbols that concretize the revelation of the divine potentials in nature through art. The creative inspiration that expresses itself in this way is the revelation that founds the natural religions. The spirit of God is indeed revealed through them, both through the potentials that undergird creation and through the creative spirit in man, though the human who created them is oblivious to this.

By contrast, the religion of spirit is founded on the human spirit's recognition of the singularity that distinguishes it from the other creatures of nature and that joins it to God, its Creator. It is possible to infer from this definition that the revelation that undergirds the religion of spirit is the self-recognition of the human spirit to itself insofar as it is the World Spirit, and so we have again human self-apotheosis. However, following Schelling, Formstecher shied away from this Hegelian pantheistic understanding of the revelation of the spirit. In his view, the self-recognition of the human spirit as a supernatural entity involved an awakening from the primal subjugation of the human spirit to its bodily nature and to the nature of the world on which its life was dependent. This was a supernatural event. It did not come from nature but from the transcendental creative divine will that founded the human spirit. It follows that the human spirit's self-recognition as a supernatural entity was in and of itself the recognition of the transcendent source from which it had emanated, and the source was revealed as beyond it. In this sense one should see in the event of the self-recognition of the human spirit to itself also the revelation of God to humanity.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 53–63, 87–92.

The following question arises on this point: What is the content of the founding revelation of the religion of spirit, beyond the human spirit's awareness of itself and of its transcendental source? Formstecher answered this in a way that brought him closer to Kant than to the late Schelling but distanced him decisively from Hegel's pantheism: the content of revelation is the metaphysical truth and the moral obligation in reason itself—no more than this. Nevertheless, out of the certain knowledge that God is the source of the truth and the source of human reason that knows it, it follows that God is also the source of the authority that validates the truth that human reason discovers on its own, as well as the source of the authority that requires the realization of the moral imperative that man recognizes by his rational will. In other words, the contents of rational knowledge and will as Kant defined them are conceived by Formstecher as prophetic revelation in its original sense: the word of God to humanity.<sup>11</sup>

According to this understanding, which is close to Maimonides's philosophy of revelation, human reason does not grasp God's rational essence, but neither does its reliance on supernal divine reason violate its own autonomy. Knowledge of metaphysical truth and doing the good are expressions of man's rational freedom. When man's rational will agrees with the will of the Creator that he conceives beyond himself, he realizes his freedom, exactly as the will of God, though decided from pre-eternity, realizes the divine freedom. The content of divine revelation to humanity is thus the rational capacity for knowledge of truth and knowledge of the good, obligating the will to act. If so, it is proper to emphasize that, according to this conception, the religion of rational spirit is not directed to knowledge of God as a transcendental entity or to union with God but rather the opposite: it is directed to knowledge of the truth that unites the world and to realizing the good that should unite the society of human beings in its supernatural spiritual culture.

We learned above that the primal revelation, identified with the creation of man as a rational creature, undergirds the two types of religion. The religion of spirit was established through a second revelation, different in its substance, after the revelation of the divine potencies in the religions of nature. As we said, the revelations that founded the religions of nature were not historical; they were directed at the activities of man in nature, not to his activity in the supernatural spiritual sphere specific to him, even though in the process they began to create the sphere of culture specific to humanity in nature. From the standpoint of the religion

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 92–96, 153–60.

of spirit, however, the religions of nature are the beginning of history, or its necessary point of origin.

History always begins after an event that already occurred. This is an ontological axiom without which we cannot properly understand the kind of reality of historical becoming that is created by man. Without the consciousness of a past distinguished from the present, a past that defines the present as a transition to a future that will push it also into the past, there is no historical becoming. This assertion of Formstecher's—following Schelling here as well—puts in our hand the key to understanding historical revelation, as distinguished from revelation in nature: the awareness of historical time is essential to it, both with respect to the way that it is grasped by human spirit and with respect to the way that it is perpetuated and passed down.

Essential to the conception of the original historical revelation is the fact that historical revelation is represented from the outset as an event that already occurred, an event that sets the boundary and the origin-point of historical memory, which, as we have said, can only begin after an occurrence that is not a part of itself, an occurrence beyond which is glimpsed yet another event, earlier, truly primal, on the boundary of the historical and the metaphysical. When the human spirit is aroused to decipher the riddle of its origin, it is reminded on the threshold of the darkness beyond its first memory of an event that it cannot remember, which constitutes a foundation for its memory.

The revelation of God to Adam, to Noah, to the patriarchs, and to Moses and the revelation on Mount Sinai—all these historical revelations, representing stages in the formation of the religion of spirit, were conceived by Formstecher as divine revelations as occurring not in the present but in memory, which shaped them and interpreted them. One may thus say that historical revelations occurred in the substance of the historical memory, just as the religions of nature occurred on the plane of the human spirit's awareness of nature. Their definition as historical revelations thus takes on the ontological meaning of a reality of the spirit.<sup>12</sup>

Memory, as an ontological foundational dimension of the life of the spirit, shapes them and interprets them. On what basis? What guarantees the metaphysical truth of memory? We should say, it is guaranteed by primal memory, by memory of the event of revelation that preceded them all and laid their foundation in the absolute past, a past that adjoins

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 195–202.



trans-temporal eternity and that is the event of primal revelation to be identified, as we have said, with the creation of the human being as a rational creature.<sup>13</sup>

This conception of the substance of historical revelation and the source of its metaphysical certainty requires an additional determination that complements the understanding of the historical substance of the history of the religion of spirit: just as historical revelation relies on a memory of previous revelation and does not stand on its own, so it relies on a revelation that must necessarily come after it: no historical revelation can be the first, nor can any historical revelation be the last. Within history, there is no beginning or end. Every revelation relies on what precedes it and also constitutes a source for revelations that will come after it, and only in this way can it be transmitted and perpetuated from generation to generation, always with an expectation beyond the present, to the ideal historical future that it foresees. To be precise, this is the prophetic substance of every historical revelation whose concern is to project a vision of the future that follows from the in-depth memory of the past.

The sequential continuity of historical revelations is required by the developmental essence of historical becoming. Nature is cyclical, whereas history is an open-ended progression toward the realization of an eternal moral ideal in human society. Each generation redefines the horizon of realization toward which humanity strives in the totality of its cultural creation. Together with the horizon determined by a given social-political vision, the ways and means for its realization also become clarified. They determine the moral evaluation and social and political legislation. This is thus the vital role of renewed historical revelation. It relies on the memory of the past, not in order to be confined to it, but to extend what was achieved in it by relating to the change that was created by its achievers.

Of course, in Formstecher's view this is the proper way to relate to the ideational and normative lessons of the Oral and Written Torah: we are not speaking of eternal norms. On the contrary—we must reexamine them in every age and generation in order to realize the values that underlie them.

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<sup>13</sup> Compare Schelling's theory of the myth of creation, as we described it in volume 1: "What does this creation express? The conception of reality at the beginning of creation of human culture in nature, as it was conceived in the thought of its original creator. Its transmission through prophetic inspiration to the person creating his culture thus turns it, in human hands, into a testimony of the way in which humankind viewed itself, at the dawn of antiquity, in relationship to God and to Nature." Eliezer Schweid, *A History of Modern Jewish Religious Philosophy*, 1:166.



This conclusion requires that we pay attention to an additional dimension in the sequence of historical revelations. Just as their intellectual and normative content requires updating in every generation, so the methods of historical revelation require updating in order to adapt them to the progress in the intellectual toolkit for knowing scientific and metaphysical truth and valuing the good. If we compare the revelational events that were preserved in the memory of the past, we can verify this empirically. The qualitative difference between these successive revelations can be discerned by the respective role that feeling, imagination, and reason play in them. If we define these differences precisely, we can also discern the methods of revelation that will be appropriate to the historical reality with which the religion of spirit must cope in modern times in order to depict the vision for the future of humanity and find ways to its realization.

It was thus Formstecher's view that the revelation necessary for his time must rely on previous revelations, but it must not copy them in the fashion suggested by Mendelssohn when he argued that only a revelation equal to the Sinaitic revelation could release Jews from the obligation to obey the laws of the Torah as given at Sinai. A revelation that was adequate to the novelty of the present age must be appropriate to the level of spiritual existence of today, and then it would have the authority to instruct and legislate for people of the present age.

We thus arrive at Formstecher's immediate objective: to defend historical Judaism against the modern philosophical argument that it was inferior in its rationality and ethics because it was heteronomic and servile, and to defend the path of Reform against the fundamentalist, heteronomic position of rabbinic orthodoxy of his day. For this purpose he came to suggest research in the history of revelations of the religion of spirit with respect to their historical characteristics. In this way he distinguished three stages of progress in the grappling of Jewish religious thought with the development of human culture up to his age, and on the basis of his conclusions he came to suggest ways of religious thought that would fit the level of rational subjectivity of the modern age.

According to Formstecher's historical research, in the history of revelations of the religion of the spirit, one could discern continuous progress through three stages, which exhibited a dialectical tension.<sup>14</sup> The first stage started with the covenant of Noah and came to its climax in the covenant of Sinai. This concept of revelation had the characteristic of an

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 77–100, 202–4, 257–69.

event that occurred in the past but was eternally obligatory because a supernatural objective truth was revealed in it. The second stage started with the written prophets who relied on the Mosaic Torah as their mission's source of authority. These prophets spoke in the name of direct divine revelation. They themselves documented it from the present viewpoint of their social and political activity. It was their role to bring to the people the word of God that related to present historical reality in order to guide them through those events.

The authority that the people attributed to the words of the prophets was indeed based on the historical memory of their activity, that is to say, on the past. This is because the truth that was in their words in its time became clear only by viewing the past from the viewpoint of the present in which their warnings have come to pass. But the prophets themselves did not see in the variable lessons of their prophecy norms that would be eternally obligatory in the same way as those that were transmitted in the revelations to Noah, the patriarchs, and Moses. On the contrary—the contemporary lessons of the prophets were only intended to guide the application of the eternal obligations of the Mosaic Torah for their own time. It follows that, according to the view of the prophets in their time, their words could obligate those who followed them only through reapplying them to the present time of the later generation.<sup>15</sup>

We thus pass to the third stage of historical revelation, which started with the activity of the scribes and sages after the canonization of the written prophetic record during the return from the Babylonian exile. This stage was defined by Formstecher as subjective revelation, based on the rabbis' well-known dictum: "A sage is more authoritative than a prophet." The sages were required to interpret the eternally obligatory objective word of God that was transmitted to Moses and the prophets. But their "revelation" of interpretation and application was not a prophecy relevant to the events of its day but was rather a wisdom that they had internalized, and they were authorized to act independently on the basis of it. It follows that they instructed the people on the basis of the reason that was implanted in them as a divine inspiration and was developed through study.<sup>16</sup>

These characteristics of the history of religious revelation demonstrate in Formstecher's view that the Jewish Torah was found in a continual

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 202–57.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 257–69.

process of development from heteronomy to autonomy and from objectivity to subjectivity. It showed no sign of servile petrification until the modern period. They also demonstrated that the outlook of ultra-Orthodoxy, which ascribed sanctity to the teaching of the Oral Torah as it had been given in the past, was self-refuting: if we examine it from a historical perspective, we shall uncover that it, too, was a historical phenomenon. It was a mistaken, forced response that perverted the intrinsic dynamic quality of the Oral Torah, and its determining causes were rooted in the present. Yet these characteristics could also validate one's understanding of the next stage of revelation.

One could describe Formstecher's view of the revelation proper for his time as a dialectical synthesis between the objective stance of the prophets, relating directly to every historical present from the viewpoint of objective authoritative truth beyond human understanding, and the stance of the rabbinic sages, which related to that same authoritative truth that was revealed in the past from a subjective, rational viewpoint in the present. When human culture arrives at the stage of reason, it raises religious thought to the realization that autonomous human reason is to be identified with revelation. It gives the human being the independent authority to define its universal ethical values, to determine its vision for the future, and to legislate the ways of realization of that vision, whose fulfillment can be glimpsed on the horizon. The revelation of our time thus needs to be purely rational, in the spirit of Kant's thought. It will be identified with the religious philosophical truth that grants validity to the renewal of the religion of the spirit in the way of Reform: the norms of realization will henceforth be determined directly by universal ethical deliberation, and they will be applied in accordance with considerations of present reality.

So far we have examined the dimension of historical progress from the standpoint of the self-development of the religion of spirit, but its realization requires that we examine also the second dimension, which determines the parameters of values and the way of their application especially in the modern period: the propagation of the religion of spirit among all the nations in order to unite humanity. If we examine the history of the religion of spirit from this aspect, it will become clear that at every stage of development of revelation there is progress also in the universal extent of propagation of the Torah and its realization among the nations. The first stage of revelation established the people of Israel as the people of the covenant and focused on it alone. The literary prophets expanded their

horizon of vision. They established the vision of the unity of humanity as a peak that history strives to attain. They even discerned that the idolatrous natural religions provided a preparation for and intimation of the religion of spirit. During the third stage of rabbinic thought, the Jewish teaching gave rise to another religion of spirit that set itself the task of propagating the truth of monotheism and of spreading it among the peoples—Christianity. At a later stage came the revelation that established Islam as a religion of spirit laying the preparation for the same objective in another sector of humanity.

In this context, Formstecher thus came to fulfill his apologetic agenda by clarifying the relation between Judaism and its monotheistic religious rivals, especially Christianity. His fundamental assumption was, as we have noted, that there is but one religion of spirit. The appearance of Christianity and Islam as alternative religions of spirit did not contradict this assertion in his view: he saw them as branches that developed out of Judaism and were appointed to realize the universal dimension of its vision. The novelty in Formstecher's position on Christianity and Islam, as compared with the position of rabbinic Orthodoxy in his age, was expressed in his acknowledgement of the evolutionary advantage of Christianity and Islam over Judaism with respect to the aspiration to realize the unity of humanity on the basis of universal truth and morality. But he found support for this evaluation from earlier Jewish thinkers, and furthermore he maintained the advantage of Judaism with respect to its maintaining the religion of spirit in its pristine purity, pointing out the price that Christianity was forced to pay in order to fulfill its mission among the nations.<sup>17</sup>

Christianity turned to the nations that were sunken in the ancient natural religions, which had arrived at their stage of decadence and were in need of a redeeming truth. In order to win the hearts of the idolaters and open them to the metaphysical and moral truth of the religion of the spirit, Christianity (and to a lesser extent also Islam) was thus forced to compromise with the natural religions and to speak in their languages. Formstecher discerned in the teaching of Christianity two serious retreats from the purity of the original religion of the spirit, which were the result of this forced compromise, necessarily creating a major internal contradiction and preventing Jews from accepting the gospel of Christianity as a truth addressed to them. In the first step, Christianity compromised on the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 368–95.

issue of human self-apotheosis, toward which the pantheistic natural religions tended. This was expressed in portraying the image of the Messiah as a mediator between the transcendent God and humanity. The "Messiah" was depicted in Christianity as both human and divine, thus forming an unbroken continuous progression between God and humanity. The pristine religion of spirit could never accept this. From its point of view, this was a substantive contradiction that no dialectic could ever reconcile.

Christianity thus approached the religions of nature and the divine truth that they embodied in a mistaken way that needed correction. The second step that violated the pristine purity of the religion of spirit followed from this: Christianity had to defend the principle of the transcendental unity of the religion of spirit by taking an extremely negative attitude toward that same nature into which idolatrous humanity had been immersed to their moral undoing. Thus developed the doctrine of original sin, from which humanity could not free itself by its own powers, and with it the idealization of asceticism for the purpose of breaking the hold of the bodily instincts on humans.

Clearly, in Formstecher's view, this was a misguided understanding of nature and of the proper relation of the religion of spirit to nature. According to Jewish teaching, a human being is able to cope with the temptations of instinct by the power of his free moral will, and that is his task. It is up to man to free himself from the sin that lies in wait for him in his instincts. But it is clear from this that Judaism did not have a fundamentally negative attitude toward nature but saw in it the positive creation of God. Even bodily instincts were not seen as impure or sinful in themselves. They were necessary for the perpetuation of natural and social existence, and it was up to us to sanctify them. The erroneous Christian view was an inversion of the idolatrous view and was in need of correction.

Nevertheless, Formstecher did not ignore the fact that the rabbinic view of nature and natural life was also in need of examination and correction. The need to differentiate from natural-religious cultures in ancient times and afterward the need to differentiate from Christian culture that was still suffused with pagan elements led Judaism to develop in a limited and one-sided way. The emphasis was laid on the cultural expression of the distinctive aspects of the religion of spirit, whereas insufficient attention was paid in education and Jewish culture to scientific and esthetic concerns, which embodied the positive values of natural religion, especially in recent generations.

In these ways Formstecher accepted the Enlightenment critique of rabbinic religious culture and its demands for reform, the source for which lay in the positive, vital aspiration to integrate into the secular culture of the modern age and to operate within it.

The summary conclusion that followed from this analysis seemed simple and self-evident: Judaism and Christianity needed to reshape their relations while reformulating their role in a human culture that was on the way to progressive unification. Judaism must be renewed by raising it to the stage of rational revelation and by filling out and reforming its relation to secular culture in the full positive sense—scientific, philosophical, esthetic, and political—whereas Christianity needed to renew itself by purifying itself of the idolatrous elements that differentiated it from the religion of spirit in its pristine Jewish form. Thus the two religions could combine with each other as the two faces of the one religion and could aid each other in the completion of their role in realizing the vision of humanity.

*C. Judaism as Ethical-Religious Commitment: The Teaching of  
Samuel Hirsch*

The apologetic teaching of the “religion of spirit” expressed a celebratory optimism with regard to the situation of the Jewish people and of humanity. Out of this elevated transport of spirit, it presented the Reform movement as an ascent to a higher level of religiosity, laden with a consciousness of mission and responsibility to accept the yoke of the commandments—of course, those that were properly intended for the current moment. Not the ritual commandments on which Orthodoxy focused, but rather the ethical commandments that would contribute to the elevation and unification of human society.

But did this teaching express with fidelity the spiritual motives and religious mood of the Jewish society that identified with Reform, or the spiritual motives and mood of enlightened Christian society that was supposed to join forces in realizing that same mission? Or were those Orthodox critics of Reform perhaps correct in claiming that this was merely a pious fraud, and that in truth Reform was nothing but the opportunism of a small class of affluent bourgeois who desired a less demanding religious regimen and were seeking a lofty excuse for cutting themselves off from normative Judaism, for their waning faith, and for casting off the yoke of the commandments?

Samuel Hirsch (1815–1889), who as we have seen was the first to respond to Formstecher's book, thought that there was more than a grain of truth in ultra-Orthodoxy's harsh critique of the Jewish enthusiasts of Emancipation and the motives of Reform, even though, or maybe just because, he was himself at that point in time the Reform rabbi of the community of Dessau. He grew up and was educated in a traditional Jewish house that did not withhold general education from him. He internalized the simple piety that he experienced in that house, and he did not forsake it when he became convinced of the rightness of the way and ideas of Reform. The truth that he discovered in modern religious philosophy only sharpened his criticism of the society that pretended to hold by it, and he therefore suspected that the apologetic advocacy of the religion of spirit, uncritical of itself, concealed in effect the hypocrisy of a society seeking modifications for the sake of an easy Judaism.

In his view, this fact was obscured by the form of presentation of the idea of progress as a historical process embodying a teleological pattern. It appeared as if the march of time arranged matters on its own, and a person could only adapt to those winds of change in thought and life-style that were regarded as enlightened and progressive in his age and that would allow him to discharge his moral-religious obligation and fulfill his mission. In fact, he argued, Formstecher's book did not present at all the specific moral-religious requirements that would bring about the fulfillment of his lofty vision, much less the task of a rabbi as religious leader to criticize, demand, and obligate himself and his congregation rather than to justify them.

Samuel Hirsch's original and expansive philosophical work, *The Religious Philosophy of the Jews*, was published a year later (1842).<sup>18</sup> This was the first volume in an even more expansive literary project, which Hirsch titled "The System of the Religious Outlooks of Jews." The intention was to present not only religious philosophy but religion itself in a form that would be adequate to provide guidance to a well-rounded religious existence. But this ambitious literary project was not completed. Only the first volume, devoted to philosophy of religion, was written. But the difference in approach between Formstecher and Hirsch in their understanding of Reform came to expression even on the philosophical level.

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<sup>18</sup> Samuel Hirsch, *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Hunger, 1842); electronic reprint, Kessinger, 2012.



The book's unusual title was an indication of its purpose—not "Philosophy of Judaism" or "Philosophy of the Jewish Religion," not even simply "Jewish Philosophy." What did Samuel Hirsch wish to emphasize by calling the reader's attention in his book to persons who identify themselves as Jews instead of following the procedure of proper philosophers and pointing out to his readers the universal ideals and abstract principles by which people define their worldview?

The title raises the question. The introduction responds that this was done intentionally, expressing Hirsch's personal originality in understanding the substance of Judaism and the task of philosophy. As for Judaism, his intention was to say that what makes a person a Jew is a moral-religious decision that includes acceptance of a definite responsibility that is tested later in his whole way of life. It is thus religion's role to lay out the path for the realization of that responsibility, and in that respect religion is primary. Not philosophy, as those philosophers tend to think who see life's purpose in the knowledge of scientific and metaphysical truth. On the contrary—it is the task of philosophy to assist those individuals who choose to be Jews to arrive at the right decision. It must therefore relate to life, and in Hirsch's view religion—not philosophy—is identified with the highest level of living.<sup>19</sup> Writing a book with that title on the basis of such an assumption tells us that the author saw that hour in the history of his people and the history of humanity as one that required decisions of direct personal significance. It tells us that he made that decision himself and accepted responsibility, and that responsibility included having to persuade and assist all those who understood the meaning of the age as he did to decide as he had. Religious philosophy was needed only for this purpose.

All this testifies to Hirsch's originality as a Jewish philosopher and explains his original way in philosophy. He did not pretend to invent the methodology that he utilized, and he pointed to his sources, especially Kant, Hegel, and Schelling.<sup>20</sup> From Kant he learned that philosophy is a rational methodology whose task is not fashioning the truth but critiquing a cultural reality: the sciences; moral, social, and political action; artistic creativity; and religious life regimen. It was they who created truth; philosophy only served them, no more. Hirsch derived from this Kantian judgment systematic conclusions, especially with regard to the philosophy of

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<sup>19</sup> *The Religious Philosophy of the Jews*, introduction and chapter 2, §35.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, introduction and §§1–9.



religion. If philosophy's special interest was critique, then one could speak of philosophy as a universal discipline only with respect to the critical methodologies that are adapted to the various topical areas of knowledge, evaluation, action, and creativity, but it is impossible for philosophy to be included among the life domains that it criticizes in order to arrive at pure cognitions and evaluations. Every object of life, every domain of cultural creativity, and every culture or religion with its own unique individuality has a philosophy that criticizes them and helps them to establish their own truth.

Here, then, is the full meaning of the title *The Religious Philosophy of the Jews*. The name establishes that Jews have their own philosophy that defines the religious values that form their identity. This is a philosophy that is distinguished by its object of inquiry: the life of the Jews. One may of course ask the question: How shall we recognize, or on the basis of what shall we recognize, the life of the Jews? Hirsch's answer again defines the basic difference between him and Formstecher with respect to the philosophical methodology that he chose. We saw that Formstecher dressed up the history of the Jewish people and his source research with a priori images and did not arrive at a fundamental philosophical analysis of the sources. Hirsch criticized him sharply for this and returned to the fundamental assumptions of Jewish historical studies as they had been defined by the founders of the *Verein*—the “Association for the Culture and Scientific Study of Jewry.”

We note with interest the parallel—one that cries out for interpretation—between the title of Hirsch's book and the full name of the *Verein*. Yet there is also an important methodological difference between them, for the founders of the *Verein* distinguished between a prior historical-philological stage of research and a critical-philosophical stage, assuming that empirical research would present a comprehensive picture of the history of the Jewish people and its culture on which a philosophical critique could then be based. For that reason they never arrived, nor could they ever arrive, at the stage of philosophical critique. Samuel Hirsch rejected the distinction between the two critiques, arguing that one can only arrive at a comprehensive historical overview through a direct, detailed philosophical critique of the succession of religious sources of the culture of the Jewish people throughout its history. This was thus the task that he took on himself in the broad sweep of his book. Through the philosophical inquiry into the selection of sources representing the sweep of Jewish history, he was able in his book to offer a picture of the spiritual history of the Jewish people and illuminate its tendencies. He hoped on its basis

to create a continuous source that would document the religious life of the Jews of the modern age in the same way that Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah* documented the life of Jews in the Middle Ages.

In its direct connection with the sources, Hirsch's philosophical work was thus similar to the works of the great medieval Jewish philosophers, especially Maimonides. In the modern period it paralleled the work of Krochmal and anticipated Hermann Cohen's great project, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, which is similar to it in many respects. This similarity was expressed not only in his citing a wealth of sources, then analyzing them and interpreting them philosophically, but also in that he accompanied each chapter in his work with an anthology of sources from the Bible, the rabbinic literature, and the philosophical and kabbalistic literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Through these sources he sought to support the broad generalizations that he arrived at through his characterization of the shifting periods in the career of the Jewish people toward the fulfillment of its mission among the nations.

The philosophical methodology that Hirsch selected as the point of origin for his deliberation on the problem of religion was, as we have said, Kant's critical idealism. Thus he accepted two assumptions, one pertaining to the knowledge of objective truth, and one pertaining to the decision of the will to act on objective reality and to shape it in accord with a transcendent ethical ideal. As for knowledge of objective truth that is external to thought: no one has a source of knowledge other than the senses, imagination, understanding, and an autonomous reason that activates the other faculties in accordance with their nature and through them grasps external objects in its own categories. In other words, no one has objective knowledge except through the cognitive tools of the knowing subject.

Hirsch applied this judgment to the domain of religion as well. The way to man's knowledge of the Creator-God—and through Him to knowledge of the world—is rooted in human reason's contemplation of itself, while at the same time contemplating reality external to itself, and not in an "objective" divine revelation that somehow forces itself on human consciousness. As for the will, it is directed by the recognition of ethical obligation rooted in a transcendent ideal of good that a person apprehends through his autonomous reason. The basis of ethics is thus the autonomy of legislating reason and the freedom of choice between obedience and disobedience to this self-legislation. But the realization of the ethical ideal in reality is conditional also on the regularity of nature, and this is not

subject to man's volitional control. A person can only utilize the regularity of nature insofar as it is known to him. On this point, in Hirsch's view, the teaching of Judaism and of Kant's rational philosophy came together. The problem of the relation between nature and freedom was central to both of them.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, defining the place of religion in human life according to Samuel Hirsch's thought, which differed from Kant's, brought him to discover the areas of relevance of the two opposing philosophical methodologies of Schelling and Hegel, which developed on its basis. The area of relevance of Schelling's philosophy was defined by the role of religion in knowledge of reality and its formation from the standpoint of the destiny of man in the world, a kind of creative discipline that is not identified with philosophy though it is subject to criticism by it. Hirsch thus accepted Schelling's view that there is a more profound contemplation of reason on its independent functioning, and it reveals to man its source in the creative reason of God, just as man has a way of experiencing the uniqueness of the created world by means of his creativity. On the basis of this special contemplation, he accepted the doctrine of myth that Schelling developed in the philosophy of his middle period, before he arrived at his mystical stage. On it he established religion as a domain of experience in which all the domains of human experience meet, and on it he developed the distinction between religions of nature and the religion of spirit as two kinds of myth: the idolatrous-pantheistic, embodying human experience in the deterministic cyclicity of the life of nature and taking its materials from the contemplation of nature; and the Jewish-rational, embodying the experience of the human being in the freedom that was given him to fashion his social-cultural world beyond nature—that is to say, taking his materials from historical memory.<sup>22</sup>

Hirsch carved out the sphere of relevance of Hegel's philosophy within the special scope of Schelling's philosophy of myth. But in doing so, he laid a basis for the relevance of Hegel's philosophy. The cultural-historical reality that was fashioned by the religions of nature is what validated Hegel's dialectical outlook. But we should remember that this was an outlook that surveyed the history of human error. It expressed not the consciousness of human freedom and responsibility but the consciousness of his enslave-

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, §5.

<sup>22</sup> Hirsch discusses his conception of biblical prehistory as myth in chapter 1, §8. His exposition of the forms of idolatrous-pantheistic religion is found in chapter 2, §§19–35, and his exposition of Jewish religion is found in chapters 3–4, §§36–61.

ment to his natural lusts. Hirsch thus turned around the critical argument that Kant and Hegel used against Judaism, following Spinoza: the Jewish people kept faith through its religion with man's ethical-rational freedom, whereas Christianity, which had not yet become purified from idolatry, represented enslavement to the determinism of nature.

We shall show later that the complex interplay of the three idealistic philosophical methodologies, one within the other, was the basis of Hirsch's rational interpretation of the principal categories of Jewish theology: creation, revelation, divine providence, and miracle, especially the miracle of the survival and mission of the Jewish people, revealing divine governance in human history.

In order to judge his path as a philosopher, however, we should emphasize the prophetic motivation that motivated him to crystallize his complex method. His thought was fashioned out of a sense of urgency to restore religion to the center of life of both the Jewish people and the peoples of Europe, out of the realization that the processes of secularization rooted in philosophical rationalism, especially the philosophy of Hegel, which appeared so complete and self-contained, were threatening to destroy religion and to divert humanity again from its true destiny, which repeatedly revealed itself in the dawn of the new period in its history. Since the source of the idolatrous error in this philosophy was in his view the hermetic self-enclosure of human reason in itself, Hirsch had to open his critical philosophical deliberation with the same subjective point of origin in which philosophical consciousness was submerged in his time and to prove from it the centrality of religious consciousness to human self-understanding.

What is the question of religion from the viewpoint of rational subjectivity? At first sight, we are speaking of the question of the existence of God as an objective, suprarational reality to which religion attributes creation, revelation, and divine providence over nature and history. Hirsch attacked the presentation of the question in this manner, while also attacking the conception of religion that stood at its base. Defining religion as the realm of connection between humanity and God, he argued, removes it from the realm of scientific speculation and of philosophy based only on science, which would focus the issue on nature and on man as a natural creature.

It is clear that from the viewpoint of the scientific study of nature, including human nature, the notion of God is superfluous and bereft of meaning. It is apt to become meaningful only when the person, examining himself and asking about the meaning of his life, discovers that God is affecting him in the course of his life experience. Only then will he

be aroused to ask the question of God's existence in a form that will bring him to an answer arising out of the depths of real life experience. It follows that the prior question should be to frame the perspective of the person's consideration from within himself, living his own life: What is the purpose of his life? How should he bring the human element in it to realization? When we frame the question in this manner, argues Hirsch, then whatever answer we give to it will be a kind of religion, and in this sense there is no person without religion, whether it is a true or a false one, and when we confront the question how to verify the truth of the answer, the person will recognize that the hidden God is affecting him directly.

The horizon of Hirsch's philosophical deliberation is determined by this religious insight. That is what pointed him to Kant's ethical idealism and that is what led him to confront Hegel's philosophy, which in his view represented the threat of rationalistic secularization against religion in general, as well as the threat of disqualification in store for Judaism from the secular or pagan viewpoint and from the point of view of Christianity, which had absorbed pagan elements and had not yet been cleansed of them.

It is generally accepted in religious-intellectual scholarship that Hirsch was influenced by Hegel, and that this influence was significant, especially in the historiosophic part of his work, which follows the developmental logic of national cultures and their religions. As we shall see later, this judgment is not without basis, but it nevertheless misses the mark. In Hirsch's view, Hegel's philosophy of history posed the most serious challenge to religion in general and to Judaism in particular in the present age. He had to contend with it in its own field and of necessity by its own logic. After all, it was he who had shaped the consciousness of the age and the consciousness of history in his time. However, his open intention was to show that Hegel's philosophy of history and the understanding of religion that was at the base of it expressed humanity's erring from their ordained path, and the time had come to return to the true path that Judaism represented throughout its career and to which Kant's philosophy had given a rational basis.

The focus of Hirsch's opposition to Hegel's philosophy of history was the historical determinism that underlay it. According to Hegel, the history of humanity had to be the way it was. It had to follow all the stages of enslavement, tyranny, and cruelty that it underwent in order to arrive in our age, out of the same dialectical necessity, to the threshold of fulfillment of rational culture. Hegel's pagan and Christian viewpoint was visible, in Hirsch's view, through all his rationalist trappings in his determination

that sin—expressed at its philosophical root in the “false consciousness” of humanity’s essence and its role in nature—was the first and necessary stage in the positive development of the human spirit.<sup>23</sup>

The opposite assumption, on which Hirsch based his interpretation of Judaism, which in his view was more congenial to Kant’s philosophical idealism, was that the spirit of mankind was free from its inception. At the outset, the human being had no need of science or philosophy in order to know the divine command implanted in him from birth. From the first flickering of spirit in him, he knew the choice that stood before him and which choice was correct, for he was created in the image of his Creator. In this respect he stood face-to-face with the necessity rooted in his human existence: inasmuch as choice was given to him, he must choose, and the choice was not easy because of its foreseeable consequences. In the primal existential aspect, he must choose between two things: he may give in to the enticement to become enslaved to his natural urges and the gratification consequent on their satisfaction, which he may excuse by saying that he was forced into it by his nature; or else he may choose to comply with his moral obligation toward himself and toward his fellow person, with the full gravity of responsibility bound up with it. It is correct that, with respect to their bodily nature, it is natural that most human beings should exercise their freedom by choosing servitude, which appears easy and convenient at first but eventually turns into oppressive suffering. But the fact that this is not necessity but choice is proved by the appearance of individuals who choose the opposite, and especially from the history of the one people that made the contrary choice the foundation of its culture and its religion. This is the root of the confrontation between Judaism and the idolatrous religions, including among the latter the secular-philosophical religion of Hegel and the Christianity in which he was raised, which had not yet been purified of idolatrous determinism and the doctrine of original sin, which would seem to foreclose human destiny.

We thus come to the body of the philosophical deliberation of the essence of the respective faiths by way of critical analysis of their myths. Their common point of origin—according to Hirsch, following Schelling—was the story of Genesis, of the beginning of human history, or in other words

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<sup>23</sup> See the dialectical emergence of paganism out of sin in §§11–18 and the culmination of paganism in philosophy in §35.

the myth of temptation and sin. Hirsch interprets it not as a story of a particular sin but as a philosophical narrative depicting the primal choice at the basis of every sin and every specific act of goodness: the choice between freedom and the responsibility bound up with it on the one hand, versus the flight from responsibility toward libidinal satisfaction that entices through denial of free choice and positing enslavement to nature as one's fate.<sup>24</sup>

The Genesis narrative assumes, in Hirsch's view, that man knew what choice he was commanded to make by his Creator even before he was commanded, for he had been created in the image of his Creator, and his humanity was his reason legislating to itself. Nothing prevented him from making the correct choice, but he preferred to escape from freedom and from the ethical responsibility bound up with it. This is the meaning of Adam's hiding from God, whose voice he heard from the depths of his conscience, and this is the meaning of the feeling of the sense of guilt that he immediately experienced (his knowledge that he was naked). From that point on he would flee from himself, he would flee from the consciousness of his guilt and the perversion of his humanity. He would try to hide from his responsibility by pinning the blame on the other and by instinctual exploitation (the relation of Adam after sinning to his wife and to the other creatures of nature). Because of the fear that pursues him from within, he will increase his lust for tyrannical power over the other against whom he sins. But the more that he flees from one sin to another sin, greater than the first, the more his enslavement to his lusts increases and the greater the guilt that is his undoing becomes.

Thus in Hirsch's view was idolatry constituted as a "false consciousness." But for the understanding of the theory of historical development of religion, another assertion was important, one that Hirsch derived from the story of man's sin and fate after the expulsion from the utopian Garden of Eden: if at the outset sin was not his fate but a free choice for which he bore responsibility, it indeed becomes a compulsory fate once he has chosen it. He can no longer free himself from it by his own power, but he flees from his conscience until he arrives at the point of personal and social brokenness. Only then is there manifested in him the readiness to open himself to the truth from which he had fled and return to himself, but now he cannot discover it without the help of another who

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., §§11–17.



has learned the way, for we are speaking of a transformation of all the patterns of culture.

The philosophical-historical assumption embodied in this interpretation of the biblical myth of the beginning of the history of humanity is that the freedom of ethical choice is identified with man's rational-spiritual essence. Since he has the power, he must choose his way and bear full responsibility for his choice, whatever it may be.

However, the society and culture in which a person was raised, if it is a culture of subordination to the instincts, will be fateful for most human beings, for it has not developed the models and norms necessary for a lifestyle of freedom and acceptance of personal responsibility. An idolatrous society is tyrannical. It forces itself on individuals through their imbibing its values and through social and political enforcement. The result is ever-intensifying suffering, with which most people can deal only negatively, through ever-increasing identification with their culture's models of evil, even if in the process their feelings of guilt and fear increase.

This, in Hirsch's view, is the dialectic expressed in the historical development of idolatrous cultures. He tracked it down through a narrative analysis of their myths, their social ethics, and their political forms of government. He sought to show how idolatrous tyranny grew to the point of its spiritual and ethical collapse. The disintegrating culture gave up the ghost morally, socially, and politically. It had no future. Indeed, this was the period in which Christianity appeared beside it in order to redeem it from its chains of sin, for pagan society was not able to redeem itself. It is easy to see that the Christian "gospel" began with this definitive judgment. Paganism was in its eyes the "original sin" from which only the epiphany of God as a human being of flesh and blood, coupled with faith, could provide atonement and salvation.

We shall not give a detailed account of the description of idolatry that Hirsch presented in the manner of Hegel but with a reverse significance.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The following is a condensed outline of Hirsch's stages of idolatrous religion, presented at greater length in Schweid, *History of Jewish Thought in Modern Times: The Nineteenth Century* (Hebrew, Jerusalem: Keter, 1977), 243–246: (1) Fetishism, divinizing the objects of one's experience (§§20–21); (2) Ancient Chinese religion, bowing before the mechanical order of the world (§§23–24); (3) Hinduism, escaping from the natural world into supernatural oblivion (§§25–28); (4) Ancient Persian religion, caught in the struggle between supernatural principles of good and evil (§29); (5) Sabianism, positing a plurality of deities with good and bad qualities (§30); (6) Egyptian religion (paralleling Hinduism), focusing on preparation for death (§31); (7–9) Greco-Roman religion, developing from mythology to philosophy, self-consciously worshipping human nature as knowingly projected through the personalities of the gods (§§32–35). The 3 × 3 schema is blatantly



The center of his philosophical-critical analysis was of course the positive dialectic of the history of the Jewish people and its religion. This history paralleled the negative dialectic of the development of pagan cultures, and it arose out of a mighty struggle that in the end turned into a dialogue. For indeed the Jewish Torah was revealed—according to the testimony of its historical myth—amid the darkness of servitude to the idolatrous culture, in cultures in which idolatrous tyranny had arrived at the height of enslavement and evil.

The key to a philosophical understanding of the foundational concepts in the history of Israel—revelation, prophecy, providence, trial, and miracle—is found in this marvelous historical fact. These concepts express the subjective religious consciousness of the lonely spiritual giants who succeeded in contending with the tyrannical culture that oppressed their free spirit through their idolatrous upbringing and their tyrannical regime and in arriving nonetheless at the inner truth, which appeared to those persons living under pagan oppression as coming from the outside, as a truth piercing from the beyond.

How is it possible to explain the phenomenon of such individuals? How could they understand themselves? Hirsch responded that we may never be able to offer a scientific explanation (every scientific explanation is deterministic) to these facts whose source is in the freedom of the spirit. Surely we shall not be able to explain why precisely these individuals—Abraham, Moses, and later the prophets—succeeded in breaking free of the servitude and the covering-up of the awareness of freedom and ethical responsibility.<sup>26</sup> We shall never be able to offer a scientific explanation to the second question: how did they break free of this servitude? But since freedom of the moral will is man's original spiritual essence, we must assume that the "theoretical" possibility that the free spirit should return and become manifest remains standing.

Furthermore, if humanity is created in the image of God, who appointed them to bear ethical responsibility for created nature, then the appear-

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Hegelian in form but is used to serve Hirsch's thesis, which arrives at conclusions diametrically opposed to Hegel's. The common feature to all of idolatry's forms is that they seek to escape the responsibility of moral choice by bowing to an external necessity that is in various ways a projection of man's baser drives, presented as inescapable fate. They are thus all opposed to Judaism, which teaches the radical reality of moral choice and bids human beings embrace freedom to turn to the good. At bottom, Hirsch regards Jewish monotheism as more compatible with Kant's transcendent conception of the ethical ideal than it is with Hegel's immanentism, which is more akin to paganism.

<sup>26</sup> On Abraham, see chapter 3, §§41–48; on Moses, chapter 4, §§49–55; on the prophets, §§56–59; on the Sinaitic revelation, §§60–61.

ance of such individuals amidst the human race is not only possible but obligatory for the divine reason. The Creator-God thus guaranteed that the divine image in mankind should not perish entirely, despite the prevalence of idolatry. The rational order remains in effect despite man's misguided choice. This conclusion is the meaning of the idea of providence. And if we examine the experience of coming-to-awareness of moral freedom in the eyes of those who attained it amid the idolatrous darkness that obscured the connection between them and their Creator-God, we shall understand why they experienced the voice of their rational conscience as a divine revelation that came from outside and forced them to insurrection against the idolatry surrounding them, although they (like all their contemporaries) feared it.

They were prophets. What was their prophecy? According to Hirsch's system, prophecy is the ability to foresee the proper future, the ethical future for which humanity is appointed, as opposed to the deterministic future whose seers are practitioners of pagan magic (the primeval equivalent of modern science). The prophets are visionaries of redemption who instruct us of the way to its realization. Thus it is not enough that they discovered the truth and direct their lives by its light. The discovery of the truth is for them assuming the mission to propagate it and to bring about its realization by all humanity.

The prophets thus went out to struggle uncompromisingly against the idolatrous falsity that surrounded them. This was the trial that they had to undergo. Did they have a chance of success? It would appear not; but the prophets relied on their faith, and if despite their weakness and the greater power of the idolatrous regime they withstood the trial, survived, and also succeeded in leading many others on their path, one will not find a scientific (deterministic) explanation for this, though one may see in it a revelation of the divine reason that is at the heart of creation (providence). The spiritual strength of the prophets stood by them in the face of the spiritual weakness of those rulers possessed of physical power. They enlisted against them the reverence for truth, for the feelings of unacknowledged guilt crumbled their inner determination, as had happened to Pharaoh when he stood before Moses. As for these heroes of the spirit, who had no physical force supporting them, their victory was an event that transcended nature and in this sense may be defined as a miracle.

These philosophical insights came to expression in the myth of Israelite history in the books of Genesis and Exodus, especially in the narrative of Abraham. Following Nahmanides ("the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children") and Maimonides, Hirsch interpreted this story as a prophetic

paradigm. He discerned in it elements of historical memory, though he accepted the view of biblical scholars that they were reworked later. Nevertheless, or perhaps precisely for this reason, the story expressed in his view a truth more important than the detailed recounting of events: this was the quintessence of the fateful significance of Israel's appearance in the history of humanity and an exemplification of the positive dialectic of realizing the ideal of ethical freedom in human society.

What was the basis of the positive dialectic of fulfillment, as opposed to the negative dialectic of paganism? It was born of the tension between two requirements that were complementary in their essence but were not apt to be fulfilled together, because the devotion to the fulfillment of each must be at the expense of the other. It is possible to define this tension in terms of its outward expression by the terms "universalism" and "particularism." The conflict between them persisted throughout Jewish history, and it raised a crucial problem during the struggle for emancipation. Hirsch, however, preferred to define it in terms of the inner expression in which he found the solution: as a tension between the breadth of the extent of fulfillment versus its depth.

The realization of the vision of ethical freedom demands the universal scope of all humanity, but it also demands fundamental commitment and fully detailed specification in the full range of the society's life activities as such and in the full range of the individual life activities of each individual within that society. Hirsch resorted in this connection to the terms "extensive" and "intensive," or in other words, breadth over a wide extent versus depth within a narrow focus.<sup>27</sup>

The key to resolving the tension between these two objectives is a progressive rhythm of the process of individual and historical life: the first revelation of the vision is an "intensive" event: an individual is called on to devote his life, and afterward a people is called on to do the same, but the first step toward fulfillment of the mission in the arena of social life must be "extensive": the creation of a community prepared to accept the mission. But when the community arises and one needs to strengthen it and ground it, an "intensive" stage is required. Indeed, a community or a people that has not itself fulfilled the vision cannot persuade others of the truth that it propagates through mere words. In any case, the result of achievement through "intensive" realization will be the progressive

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<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, §42: "Abraham's extensive works"; §43 "Abraham's intensive religiosity"; chapter 5: "Extensive Religiosity, or Christianity."

integration of the “extensive” and “intensive” parameters, and this according to Hirsch is the third stage that lays the ground for the next leap forward of wider-ranging “extensive” propagation, until the “intensive” parameter may be realized throughout the whole universal realm. In Hirsch’s view, this is the key to understanding the history of Israel among the nations, both with respect to the conflicts that were generated and resolved among various parties of the Jewish people and with respect to the conflicts that were generated and resolved—or will be resolved in the future—between Jewry and the nations, in whose midst the Jews must fulfill their universal mission as a particular people.

The prophetic paradigm of Abraham’s life narrative exemplifies this clearly. From the opening imperative “Get you out” to the “covenant between the pieces,” Abraham devoted himself to propagating his truth through preaching. He did not settle in a fixed location but wandered through the land to gain converts. Once he had established a band of followers, he settled in one place and strove for the realization of his idea through a way of life. But toward the end of his days he returned to the propagation of his idea through “intensive” means—not through preaching but by undergoing “trials.” These were demonstrations of “intensive” realization undertaken in public, and they made the truth available without preaching. Through this integration Abraham created the kernel of the people who should spread his truth among the nations and realize it in the fullness of its life as a public demonstration.

On the basis of the exemplary life of Abraham, Hirsch thus interpreted the course of Jewish history among the nations up to his own time, and he defined the status of the mission in his day in the light of this interpretation. In the first period, from the Exodus and Sinaitic revelation until the end of the Second Temple, Hirsch saw the national stage in Jewish history. The activity of Moses and the prophets did not strive for universal acceptance. The objective was to establish a people that would take on the mission. In this respect, the activity was “intensive” in the general sense, but within it he distinguished between the stage at which the essential task was to propagate the word of the prophets among the people and persuade them through preaching, and the stage at which the intensive effort of the Sages<sup>28</sup> began, through the halakha, to turn the word of the

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<sup>28</sup> “The Sages” (capitalized) denotes the rabbis of the Tannaitic period (30 BCE–200 CE), and is equivalent to the Hebrew acronym *Hazal* (= *Chazal*). Uncapitalized, “sages” refers generically to the wise or learned class in all periods of Jewish history.

prophets into a way of life that would shape the personality of every individual throughout his life course. This in his view was the original objective of rabbinic “particularism,” to which Orthodox Judaism still adhered: translating the exalted ideal into a national and personal way of life. But toward the end of the period one could see signs of the third period in the readiness to propagate the word of the prophets among the nations, not through preaching, but rather through exemplar realization—undergoing martyrdom for the sanctification of God’s Name.

Two foundational events signified in Hirsch’s view the missionary significance of the next period in the history of Israel among the nations: the exodus into Diaspora, which Hirsch saw as a positive development with respect to Israel’s devotion to its destiny despite the destruction and suffering that it entailed (and in a certain sense, on account of them), and the initial appearance of Christianity as an “extensive” religious movement that went forth from Israel to the nations.

Hirsch’s dialectical outlook on the complex relation between Judaism and Christianity expresses a transition fraught with significance that started to characterize the relations between the two religions from the start of the Emancipation period: the absolute rejection of Christianity and of its founder, Jesus of Nazareth, by the Jews gradually turned to a dialectical affirmation that recognized in the emergence of Christianity from Judaism a continuation of their mission among the nations. Thence the historiosophic basis that Hirsch proposed for this turn and its present significances.

We start with the revised evaluation of the figure of Jesus of Nazareth as a personality representative of Judaism at its best. Hirsch insisted on affirming Jesus’s profound and complete Jewishness. Jesus did not address the gentiles but only the Jews. His exalted morality was the morality of the prophets in its purity and perfection, and in Hirsch’s view he was brought up in the Pharisaic halakha according to the School of Hillel, which (he argued) gave priority to the Torah’s ethical values over its ritual values. In this respect, Jesus represented the “intensive” realization of a Jewish individual, a living model toward which all the activity of the prophets and the Sages pointed. If he had influence on the gentiles, he did so not intentionally or by preaching but by the model of his life, including the martyrdom that he suffered at the hands of the Romans. It was they who crucified him and afterward elevated him, after their pagan fashion, to the status of “Son of God.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Chapter 5, §§63–67.

However, he himself died as a Jew, and thus he started to spread the prophetic truth among the nations, like Abraham toward the end of his life. A tragic irony was manifest here, which Hirsch highlighted and sought to explain and interpret: the Christians blamed the Jews for Jesus's crucifixion and by so doing did to the Jews what they had first done to the man who represented them. In retrospect, it was Israel among the nations who filled the role among the Christian nations that they attributed to the individual whom they turned, after their pagan fashion, into a "Son of God."

It was clear in any case that, in his study of Jewish-Christian relations, Hirsch sought to interpret and unravel the web of hatred and mutual rejection between the two religions that were in effect competing for the realization of the same universal mission but in opposite ways: the one in an "intensive" and the other in an "extensive" fashion.

Hirsch's historiosophic analysis suggested that it was not Jesus who founded Christianity as a religion separate from Judaism. Such a thing did not occur to him. His disciples did this, especially Peter and Paul, who came from the Hellenizing diaspora, with the purpose of propagating the true gospel among idolators who were despairing of their collapsing faith. These disciples had no other choice. They had to act, in contrast to Jesus and in contrast to the Jews, in an "extensive" manner through preaching and persuasion and without requiring fulfillment of the commandments, for these would only frighten those discouraged pagans who could not save themselves. They therefore had to compromise in their preaching with the habits of thought, feeling, and ritual of the pagans.<sup>30</sup>

Hirsch's analysis on this issue is parallel to that of Formstecher, and we shall not go into it at length. In any case it is clear that their concessions on halakhic observance and their compromise with paganism explain the forthright and justified response of the Jews: they had to reject Christianity as an alien religion in every respect and raise a fortified wall between it and Judaism. In response to Christianity's universalist "extensive" preaching, the Jews reinforced the particularist "intensive" approach of separatist realization, emphasizing subordination to the law's strict demands that came as commanded from on high.

As we have said, in Hirsch's view this reaction was necessary and justified from the Jewish point of view, even though in retrospect it was unfair toward Christianity. If we therefore examine it from the point of view of the Christians, we shall understand that they, too, could not respond otherwise than they did out of deep feelings of guilt for the sin of idolatry

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., §§68–70.

that clung to them and their deep feelings of frustration because of their inability to achieve salvation except through the truth that came to them from the separatist people who denied their new faith, as if it were absolute idolatry. However, behind the feelings of mutual hatred that intensified and justified each other, Hirsch was sensitive to the ambivalence or “dialectic” in the relation of the two sides to each other. Behind the Christians’ hatred of Jews, one could discern admiration and amazement at their perseverance under trial. Martyrdom, whether that of Jesus in the crucifixion or that of the other Christian martyrs, was their highest religious value. Behind the rejection of Christianity as idolatrous on the part of the Jews, one could discern the knowledge that it was based on the prophets of Israel and propagated their word among the nations. It was their debate of these issues that underlay their interpretation of the Old Testament, and the vision that the teaching of the prophets should in the Messianic future become the teaching of all humanity was also the vision of the Jews.

Hirsch sensed this dialectical relation from both sides in his age as well. The Christians, even those whose Christianity had been sublimated into a universal rational humanism, criticized the Jews and Judaism, especially the separatist particularism, the supposedly lower ethical teaching, and the heteronomic servitude. But amid the contempt it was discernible that the enlightened Christians were judging the Jews by a stringent, idealistic criterion that they did not apply to themselves. They were expecting from the Jews, on account of their religion, to be better than others, and when the Jews disappointed them and behaved with their Christian neighbors in effect the same way that they behaved with them, they blamed them for it—because they expected them to be an example.<sup>31</sup>

In any case, Hirsch saw in this dialectic the explanation for the miracle of the survival of the Jews in exile, which in his view was the decisive proof for rational divine providence in human history (as enlightened Christian thinkers acknowledged also), as well as the explanation for the realization of Israel’s mission among the nations: despite the hatred and persecution, and even from them, the light of “intensive” realization shone before Christianity, which up until the beginning of the modern period had rested content with “extensive” preaching, that is to say, with a religion of church ritual that did not require the realization of the exalted ethical values of Jesus’s teaching in society and state as a practical legal matter.

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<sup>31</sup> Chapter 6, §§77–78.



The influence of Israel's example was indeed discernible, in Hirsch's view, in the transition in the direction of "intensive" realization that started to occur in his time in the Christian society and state. Thus, in his view, Christianity was coming closer to Judaism—without acknowledging it, of course.

We have arrived at the chapter about the contemporary examination of the period of the Emancipation. In Hirsch's view, the transformation that occurred in Christianity was expressed on the one hand by the appearance of Lutheran Protestantism, which approached closer to Judaism by returning to the early sources of Christianity, including the Old Testament, and by its purification from irrational elements in Christian dogma, and on the other hand by the appearance of secular humanism, whose critique of Christianity amounted to redirecting it toward man's earthly objectives.<sup>32</sup> Christianity had to become a part of the liberal *Rechtsstaat* and to realize its ethics in the public square, not in the church. The door was thus opened to a change of the attitude to Jews and Judaism, even though there still remained a deep gap between formal recognition of the equality of citizens as human beings and its application in action in actual social life, especially as pertaining to Jews but not them alone.

In Hirsch's view, the gap was expressed on the part of Christian society in its demand that Jews give up their "intensive" identity as a condition of acceptance as citizens with equal rights in the state, and on the part of the Jews who desired emancipation in their readiness to qualify for it by accepting this condition. The meaning of the request and its ready acceptance was surrendering the principal thing, on the part of both Judaism and Christianity: the implementation of human rights, recognized formally by the state, in the patterns of social life and the interpersonal realm.

Implementation must be expressed in realizing the demands of the prophets for social justice, for the freedom of every individual to express his full spiritual identity, and for love of mankind—in other words, for relating to every unique individual self as an end and not only as a means, in Kant's formula, which agreed with prophetic ethics and Jesus's teaching. If we examine the liberal *Rechtsstaat* by these yardsticks, it is not only far from the ideals that it pretends to espouse, but it bears within it the danger of tyranny and oppression. The secular *Rechtsstaat* indeed strives

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<sup>32</sup> Chapter 5, §§72–73.



to abolish the authority of the church and its intervention in civil life, but it is liable to take its place and conduct itself similarly with far more effective means.

This, then, was the contemporary problem that concerned Hirsch on the philosophical-religious plane and on the practical plane. Here was manifest the focus of confrontation that he had to conduct against Hegel's philosophy, which had held up the formal, uniform *Rechtsstaat* on a banner as the ideal realization of the idea of humanity. From his standpoint this was primarily a debate over the place and role of religion in the state, not as a church, but as a faith and social way of life based on values. One may define the nub of the confrontation from Hirsch's viewpoint in the following way: Hegel sought a state that was in essence a secular church, whereas Hirsch sought a free secular state that was religious in its social and personal values, a "Christian state" that would fully recognize the right of Jews to live by their religion.

Hirsch based his critique of Hegel on an analysis of the social and political process of the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern period. The European peoples revolted against the old regime (in the French Revolution) in the hope of achieving more national and personal freedom for members of the nation. But the immediate result was exchanging the previous ruling class for a different social class, and the people remained in a state of oppression. The Jews also joined the popular uprising in the hope that their devotion to the general national cause would earn them equal rights. At the outset they were given promises in this spirit, in order to enlist them in the national revolution. The promises were forgotten, of course, and the Jews remained in their prior state; but it was impossible to undo the results of the uprising with respect to the winds of change and expectations aroused in all sectors of the people, including the Jews. The masses had gained experience in organized activity for attaining their rights and had tasted the feeling of freedom. The Jews, pent up in their ghettos, had also tasted it and had shaken themselves loose of the prudent long-suffering patience that had characterized them in the Middle Ages.

There was thus generated a contradiction between the new regime and the aspirations and hopes that it had aroused in the people, and the inevitable result was a second wave of popular uprisings, in which the Jews again participated. The government, which remained in place, was presented with demands for legal guarantees of civil equality and general political liberty, and these were indeed granted but essentially to shore up the position of the government and appease the people with mere

promises. The political philosophy of Hegel was, in Hirsch's view, the rationalization of this process from the standpoint of the government. But it was clear that this was a step that promised formal liberty that was not intended to be implemented through social justice and full self-determination of all sectors of the people.

This critique of Hegel was similar to that advanced by Karl Marx. But Marx based his critique on the viewpoint of the general society vis-à-vis those social-economic processes that determined class relations. His dialectical assumption, which he took from Hegel, was that the deterministic regularity that operated in history was what generated the confrontations and brought about the revolutions and that it would in the end force a solution through a new regime that would bring the working class itself to power. But Hirsch based it on the Jewish viewpoint vis-à-vis the spiritual processes that were expressed in the educational activity of religion within the state. His assumption was one that he took from Kant: man's free ethical will was what drove the wheels of history, and it alone could bring a solution.

Thus with these concepts Hirsch uncovered behind Hegel's philosophy the conflict between the "extensive" conception of realizing the ideal of freedom and morality and the "intensive" conception. A general march of history toward realizing the ethical ideals common to Judaism and Christianity within Western culture started with the French Revolution. Hegel's formal, abstract philosophy represented the "extensive" stage in this progression, whereas Hirsch sought to set beside it the demand to undergo the "intensive" stage and to implement it for all members of the nation, including the Jews—as Jews—among them. But the Jews needed to be the pioneers at the head of the camp. This was their mission.

In Hirsch's view, this was the right yardstick of the Emancipation that the Jews must demand for themselves, in the name of realizing the prophetic ideal on the universal plane of the state. Of course this was also the yardstick he used to criticize the Jews who were ready to give up their full "intensive" identity for the sake of being granted formal equality by the state. This was a sharp criticism first of all of his own movement, a criticism in which he identified with some of the Orthodox arguments against it. The Orthodox indeed clung to old-fashioned ways and refused to recognize the positive aspects of historical change and the conclusions to be derived from them, but they kept faith with an "intensive" Jewish identity and were ready to make sacrifices on its behalf, whereas most of the champions of Reform understood it in "extensive" terms: adapting their religion to the homogenizing pattern of citizenship in the liberal

*Rechtsstaat* in order to live an easier life. In Hirsch's eyes this was an utter bowdlerization and travesty of true humanism, as well as of true Christianity and true Judaism.

Hirsch thus demanded a true reform, consistent and uncompromising.<sup>33</sup> Not a reform of adaptation to the superficial, homogenizing criteria of citizenship in the liberal *Rechtsstaat*, but a reform of adapting the liberal *Rechtsstaat* to the intensive realization of those ethical values held in common by Judaism and Christianity. Not a reform whose agenda was submission to external dictates for the sake of assimilation in a secular society devoid of religious values, but a reform whose agenda was realization of the spiritual identity of Jews within the universal framework of a state that was religious in its social and cultural values. Not a reform whose agenda was lightening the yoke of commandments for the sake of petty-bourgeois convenience, but the contrary: a reform that would express the readiness for a more intensive realization of the values of the Jewish religion in the general arena of the "Christian state," a realization that would demand a hard struggle and readiness to make sacrifices.

It was obvious that such a reform would demand the removal of unnecessary barriers between Jewish and Christian society. In order to realize the values of Judaism in the general society, it would be necessary to integrate (without giving up their unique identity), and it was obvious that it would require harmonizing the religious life patterns and the ways of divine worship with the religious-rational outlook and becoming liberated from halakhic formalism. However, harmonization and integration were not the ends but the means. The main thing was not the changing or abolition of specific commandments but precisely the addition of new commandments that would become obligatory from the intensive realization of the values of Judaism in the new arenas of the life of society, the culture, and the state that were being opened before the Jews.

Hirsch's call to the German people, and to all European peoples, to establish the "Christian state" that would put the emphasis on society and spiritual-intellectual culture rather than on the state and his call to Jews to become integrated in it and act within it were calls for the realization of Jewish identity in its full unique character rather than for its abolition. Instructive in this respect is the vision at the end of his book of an

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<sup>33</sup> Samuel Hirsch, *Die Reform im Judenthum und dessen Beruf in der gegenwärtigen Welt* (Reform in Judaism and Its Mission in the Present-Day World, Leipzig: Heinrich Hunger, 1844).

“end of days” that he knew was very distant: when all peoples succeeded in realizing a just and free society and culture, then the Second Isaiah’s prophecy of consolation would be fulfilled to the letter, that is, the gentile nations on their own initiative would bring the Jews back to Zion in order for them both to realize there an exemplary ethical-religious society—a symbol of the unity of humanity.<sup>34</sup>

*D. Reform in the Mode of “Religious Feeling”: The Influence of Friedrich Schleiermacher on Abraham Geiger*

Abraham Geiger (1810–1874) was the most important and influential leader—in thought, in scholarship, and in deed—of the development of Reform as a Jewish religious movement throughout all the Germanic lands. He was the spiritual leader of several of the major congregations, he convoked and chaired the rabbinical synods that established Reform as an organized movement,<sup>35</sup> he established the Reform rabbinical seminary in Berlin,<sup>36</sup> he founded periodical journals for Jewish studies,<sup>37</sup> and he made an important contribution to Jewish scholarship through his many articles and two books that elicited positive acclaim even in general academic circles: *Mohammed and Judaism* and *The Bible and Its Translations*.

Geiger’s influence on the formation of Reform Judaism’s outlook and practical religious approach was decisive. It was expressed first of all in the changes that he put into practice in his congregations and whose exigency he explained in the rabbinic synods he organized. In his historical researches he proved the dynamic character of Judaism from its inception, its confrontations with the cultures of surrounding peoples,

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<sup>34</sup> *Religious Philosophy of the Jews*, chap. 6: “Absolute Religiosity”; §74: “The Messianic Age”; §§79–80: “The Reconciliation of the World with Israel.” Hirsch is lavish with biblical quotations in these closing chapters. One citation stands out, confirming the universal Zionist end-of-days scenario: “The peoples will then take Israel and bring them to their homeland, . . . [the gentiles] shall bring your sons in their bosoms, and carry your daughters on their shoulders” (Isaiah 14:1–2, 49:22).” *Ibid.*, 882.

<sup>35</sup> The major synods of Reform rabbis in nineteenth-century Germany took place in 1844 in Brunswick, in 1845 in Frankfurt, in 1869 in Leipzig, and in 1871 in Augsburg. See W. Gunther Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism* (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1963), 74–94.

<sup>36</sup> The *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Berlin (founded 1871), which later counted among its alumni Solomon Schechter, Leo Baeck, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Emil Fackenheim.

<sup>37</sup> Notably, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie* (1835–39) and *Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben* (1862–75).

its adaptation to these cultures, and its contribution to them, and he deduced from all this the crucial elements that preserved the continuity of Jewish identity and its uniqueness as a religion in comparison with Christianity and Islam.

As a scholar of the philological-historical empirical persuasion and as a practical political and spiritual leader, Geiger shied away from philosophy on account of its abstract and generalizing character, which too often lost touch with factual reality or treated facts in an *a priori* arbitrary fashion. Even when he expressed philosophical ideas about the substance of religion, he did not resort to its theoretical methodology but rather relied on personal experience. In this respect he felt closer to R. Judah Halevi than to Maimonides, and among the philosophers who were influential in his time on understanding the phenomenon of religion he gave preference to the cultural-historical inquiries of Herder, and it appears that he was also influenced by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who proposed alongside the philosophies of religion of Kant and Hegel a Romantic version of religious philosophy that was parallel to the religious philosophy of Schelling but was tied to Kant's epistemology.

In *Judaism and Its History*, the wide-ranging work in which Geiger summarized his views about Judaism and its development, he defined the phenomenon of revelation in religion in a philosophical manner close to that of Schleiermacher in several respects, though he did not draw attention to the similarity, apparently because of this thinker's pantheistic and Christian tendencies from which he sharply distanced himself.

We should first present Schleiermacher's path in religious philosophy.<sup>38</sup> Like most German philosophers in the generation after Kant, he based himself on his critical epistemology. Schleiermacher did not disagree with Kant in the domains of sciences and metaphysics, of ethics or esthetics, but he disagreed with him in the domain of religion. He accepted Kant's view that it was impossible to base faith in God on science or metaphysics, but in contradistinction to him he thought that faith is an independent domain, independent of scientific reason, ethics, and esthetics. Like each of these three domains, which Kant defined for purposes of philosophical analysis, religion is also an autonomous sphere, and like them it is rooted

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<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1800), especially Second Speech, "The Nature of Religion" (New York: Harper, 1958, 36–59).

in its own special kind of experience and its own faculty of thought. One should therefore examine it as a discipline in its own right.<sup>39</sup>

It was thus Schleiermacher's intention to extend Kant's epistemology, but it is proper to emphasize that this extension was not an escape beyond the limits of rational subjectivity, as if to argue that a person had a suprarational organ through whose means he was able to be privileged with divine revelation or mystical presence. The psychological faculty that Schleiermacher located in the human mind as an organ of religious experience was existent and active continually in every human being. Kant was also aware of it and did not ignore it, but he defined it as an intermediate product of reason, sense, and imagination and dealt with it under the rubrics of ethics and esthetics, whereas Schleiermacher insisted that it was a unique faculty.

We are speaking of feelings or emotions. Feelings, argued Schleiermacher against Kant, are a special form of activity, distinct from the sensory impressions that flow through human consciousness, as well as from imaginings and thoughts. One should distinguish between this activity and the activity that proceeds outward from intellectual-rational awareness, striving for conceptual formulation, and from the activity proceeding outward from the will and striving to shape reality in accord with rational ideas. The emotional activity is passive in relation to the external reality that surrounds it. It creates in human awareness an internalized sense of being placed in the world and flowing from it.<sup>40</sup> If science and

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<sup>39</sup> The three categorically distinct domains of reason for Kant were (1) theoretical reason (addressing the question: "What is true?" and comprising science and metaphysics); (2) practical reason (addressing the question: "What should I do?" and comprising ethics or morality); and (3) esthetic reason (addressing the question: "What is beautiful or sublime?" and comprising esthetics). Though Kant devoted a book to religion (*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*), he did not consider it within the province of reason. Schleiermacher disputed this negative verdict.

<sup>40</sup> Geiger echoes these Schleiermachian ideas in Lecture 1 of *Judaism and Its History*: "[Man] is endowed with a double nature, with the consciousness of his greatness and eminence, on one hand, and on the other, with the humiliating feeling of his dependence;—on one hand, with the native impulse to raise himself to that source whence his own spiritual faculty, which is not self-creative even because it is dependent, has proceeded; and on the other, his inability to completely occupy that highest degree. Is this not, indeed, *Religion*?" Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Its History*, trans. Maurice Mayer (New York: M. Thalmessinger & Co., 1865), 16. "Religion is not a system of truths, it is the jubilation of the soul, conscious of its eminence, and, at the same time, the humble confession of its finiteness and limitedness. Religion is the aspiration of the spirit after the Ideal; the pursuit after the highest ideas . . . and, on the other hand, the feeling, the unavoidable experience that, after all, we are bound up with the Finite and Evanescent." *Ibid.*, 17.

philosophy are a kind of pure intellect and reason, if ethics is a kind of pure will, and if esthetics is an intermediate product of intellect and will, as Kant taught, then faith is a pure feeling awakened in a person in the encounter with the world.

A person's world of feelings is varied. It has different characteristics and relates to different experiences of a person in nature and in human society. What, then, distinguishes religious feeling, the sense of faith? Schleiermacher's answer is that this is the feeling aroused in a person when he is situated in a world that embraces him and when he grasps his creative uniqueness in the world as an infinite totality.

Such a disposition, when it occurs, neutralizes the yearning to know and the desire to judge, evaluate, or shape, for these require actively focusing on definite objects that are separated out from the totality. Relating to the totality requires an opposite disposition of consciousness: to open up and receive the message that comes from outside, and the result is a passive ingathering and profound sense of serenity, enveloping the entire personality, of absolute dependence. This is faith.

This does not, of course, generate the notion of a deity as an object of contemplation distinct from the world in which the person is situated. The word "God" expresses the sense of indefinite presence mediated by the world. Its infinity, spreading beyond any boundary, touches the eternal and absolute, and the word "God" expresses this in contrast to the person's finitude. We are thus speaking of a subjective feeling, but it is felt directly and with absolute certainty and requires no scientific or rational proof.

It is clear from this that faith is, according to Schleiermacher, an individual experience. On the other hand, the religion that is constructed around it is an instituted cultural creation: a world outlook and emotional-practical expression common to many individuals. Together they bring to expression, through art, thought, and life patterns, a spectrum of feelings, ideas, images, outlooks, and values, of ethical virtues and norms. Schleiermacher explained the need for a social institutionalization of religion inasmuch as the individual faith-emotion expresses a relation to the world as a tangible totality, a specific, unique totality that a specific, unique person experienced directly. The relation of an individual to the totality is expressed through identification. A person expresses himself through his whole individual identity and through his whole identification with his specific human society. In order to achieve this goal, creative activity is required from all areas of the personality's functioning in the various domains of life.



It is self-evident that religious creativity is not in competition with, nor does it replace, the pure and independent functions of the senses, intellect, and reason in the domains of science, ethics, politics, and art, but the senses, imagination, intellect, and reason relate to the religious emotion and the religious emotion relates to them. It expresses itself in their domain and adds its special contribution to man's orientation in the world. In this way religion is formed as a separate domain, and it is nevertheless immersed in the specific historical contexts of the whole culture.

This explanation of the phenomenon of the social-cultural institutionalization of faith as religion is at the same time an explanation of the differences that grew up between religions. Schleiermacher's fundamental assumption in this area—and it is one of the outstanding advantages of his teaching from a theoretical standpoint—was that the faith-emotion is individual, and in this sense it is at the same time universal but unique for each specific person within his specific cultural circle. Therefore, the differences between the religions in all relevant aspects—the articles of belief, symbols, rituals, ethical norms and virtues, and the like—follow from the qualitative differences among the various cultures.

The same explanation will also underlie the assumption that institutional religions change and develop. The faith-emotion is passive and tends to conservative stability, but the need to express it in all domains of life requires adaptations whenever significant development occurs in the culture. How does religion preserve the passive stability characteristic of it? How does it keep faith with its sources? Through the continuity of the interpretative process. The religion develops for its needs a special kind of subjective interpretation, different from scientific interpretation in its self-conscious creativity and nourished by ongoing inspiration guided by the sources.

This recognition brought Schleiermacher to develop the discipline of religious hermeneutics, and this was one of the most important contributions that he made to modern religious philosophy and the development of the contemporary field of hermeneutics. He coined the notion of "hermeneutic circle" that constitutes the basis for the fidelity and authenticity of a self-consciously creative and subjective interpretation of the sources—an interpretation that broadens the inventory of meanings of sacred religious texts by introducing them into new cultural contexts. The "hermeneutic circle" is created between the interpreter relying, on the one hand, on his experiences as a believer in the culture of his time and, on the other hand, on the sources that, through his being brought up on them, shaped his contemporary experiences. This reciprocal relation is



the warrant for him and his readers that the meanings he knowingly innovates exist potentially in them and are true from their perspective.

Abraham Geiger did not resort to Schleiermacher's theory of the "hermeneutic circle," which actually could have offered support to the traditional methods of the Midrash. His campaign against the petrification that he attributed to the Orthodox rabbinic establishment, and the need to provide a basis for necessary reform led him to prefer unequivocally the philological-historical methodology of the German academy of his day. This situation continued throughout the nineteenth century, and so the influence of the hermeneutic theory of Schleiermacher and his disciples on the research and philosophy of Judaism was deferred until the twentieth century.

However, the understanding of faith as an individual feeling and an analysis of the connection between religion and culture were the bases of his way in Reform. He saw his task as applying the understanding of faith as an individual feeling and the institutionalization of religion as a historical-cultural process to the domain of Judaism. A field of dialectical tension that raised his thought to the philosophical level was created against this backdrop: on the one hand, the need to defend the separate identity of Judaism vis-à-vis Christianity and, on the other hand, the need to import the notion of "reform" from Protestant Christianity into the Jewish domain. Geiger danced on the edge of this paradox both in his relation to Christianity and in his relation to the Jewish paradox. It is no surprise that he seemed throughout his career to be vacillating between the demands of fidelity to Jewish historical continuity and his view that its adaptation to modern culture was bound up with radical changes that might rupture that continuity. He strove for pragmatic balance between these contradictory obligations and sought legitimation in his scholarly studies of the Bible and rabbinic thought.

Geiger did not tend toward Romanticism and even recoiled from it, like the majority of Jewish thinkers of his time. Schleiermacher's religious philosophy contributed to it only in its individualistic cast, its basis in immediate feeling, and its spontaneous character. It thus revealed the emotional motive that in his view made reform a necessary and highly urgent matter for the Jewish youth of his generation.

The Orthodox pattern of religious expression, which was tied to the established, antiquated liturgy and to the minute details of the *Shulhan Arukh*, signified petrification. It represented the ghetto in the spiritual-religious arena. Geiger strove with all his might to participate in the

cultural ferment that was manifested on all levels outside the ghetto. This ferment was also manifested in the religious sphere. From the standpoint of Orthodoxy, it represented the rebellion of the young against the extinguishing of their faith and its suppression by materialistic worldliness, whereas in Geiger's eyes it was an authentic spiritual religious renewal: a breakout of natural, spontaneous personal religiosity that had been repressed by the artificial burden of the strata of tradition heaped upon it by rabbinic education, burying it underneath these strata. The arena of general creativity that was manifest outside awakened in him the personal independence that demanded spontaneous expression of authentic religiosity bursting up from the depths.

From this point of view it is clear that the Orthodox claim that their religiosity was authentic Judaism turned in his eyes into the embodiment of religious inauthenticity. The antiquated, compulsory patterns were authentic at the time they were created, when they were a direct expression of their creators' feelings and thoughts, but their very sanctification as a set formula and their being forced on the succeeding generations turned them into something that was inauthentic. The rebellion was thus not only against certain laws and mitzvot that no longer fit the spirit and conditions of the time but principally against the habit of thought that sanctified patterns of expression of religious feeling and thought beyond the time that they were apt to express the religious spontaneity of the living individuals who resorted to them.

But even as he was attracted to the conception of religious faith as spontaneous individual feeling, he distanced himself from the Romantic emotional typology that Schleiermacher presented as a devoutly Christian thinker. Two formative elements of Romantic religiosity seemed to Geiger to contradict his Jewish religious spontaneity: passive submission, and directing religious emotion in the direction of esthetic commingling with the infinity represented by nature. In these two elements he sensed the substantive difference between Christian religiosity, which was pagan at its source and tended toward pantheism, and Jewish monotheistic religiosity. Jewish religiosity was rooted in the experience of personal "illumination," which drove one to obligatory activity, not to submissive repose. It was not drawn to esthetic commingling with the divine symbolized in nature but rather awakened the will to shape the worldly life of man in society in the spirit of morality.

In Judaism, God was experienced as a transcendent will that created nature and unified it. For the Jew, God was an ethical ideal whom he imitated in his deeds, whereby he felt God's closeness. In place of the esthetic

feelings that Schleiermacher put at the center, Geiger thus put the personal revelatory illumination that operated on the will and the ethical feelings directed at it: justice, compassion, love. All these needed to be expressed in deeds between one person and another. In these the Jew felt his God's closeness, and when he turned to God in prayer he accepted this obligation and dedicated himself to its realization.

If the desire for individual expression distanced Geiger from the religiosity that he inherited from his forebears, awareness of its moral quality returned him to it with the recognition that it could not have always been as it was in his day. To know it truly, one must return to its sources and research its historical development. This recognition, too, burst forth for him as a transformative "illumination" requiring reform of the reality in his day. Petrified rabbinic Judaism was entirely ignorant of its own history. It was immersed in an imaginary consciousness of an eternal present in which no change was possible. The first stage of correction must therefore be an awakening from the petrifying illusion. Discovery of the past as a dynamic process would shatter the deceiving illusion and would lead to continuing the journey toward the future. It would also discover the values necessary for the rejuvenating religious creativity that was needed in the living present. The scholar's task was therefore to discover the elements of spontaneous moral intuition and the dynamic ways for its realization in ever-changing historical reality.

Geiger turned to researching the transformations that had occurred in his ancestral religion in its process of becoming and to studying the dialectical relation between spontaneity, which brought about innovation in response to changing reality, and religious institutionalization, which was also a prerequisite of realization. He did not ignore the fact that he was looking not for a utopia but for a guide to a way of life. He had a sense that the problem with which he was grappling in his day was the same problem with which his people had been grappling throughout their entire history. In his research he sought the historical roots for the double confrontation: between Reform and Orthodoxy and between Judaism and Christianity. It was between these two focuses of tension that he sought to express his identity as a modern Jew.

Identifying Judaism as spontaneous religiosity, expressed in the feelings of justice, compassion, and philanthropy and realized in the ways of ethics, led to prophecy as its source and as its primal authentic expression. Judaism in its purity was expressed in the idealistic moral pathos of the prophets, first and foremost in the prophecy of Moses and in the words of the literary prophets. Geiger defined Judaism as "Mosaism" and saw

in the literary prophets the great implementers who brought it to fulfillment. What was prophecy? Using Schleiermacher's conceptual toolkit, he explained it as the genius-revelation of the moral sense. Its spontaneous character was clear to see: identifying with the oppressed and expressing a grievance against the oppressors, immediate awakening and long-term devotion to a course of action that would bring about not only a cessation of the injustice but a restoration of the oppressed to their proper status and enjoyment of their full rights.

Prophetic Mosaism always came as a counterresponse protesting against insufferable injustice. It appeared as a declaration of untiring war against idolatry, which Geiger understood to be a religious ritual institution designed to lend validation to tyrannical regimes.<sup>41</sup> Prophecy began with social protest. But protest was not its end goal. Its higher purpose was to realize worthy vision of a free society ruled by the law of justice.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to idolatrous religiosity, which restricts itself to ceremonial-magical worship whose objective is to ingratiate the tyrannical, arbitrary gods to their submissive worshippers, the Mosaic religion was not primarily directed toward ritual and sacrifices. Indeed, it also gave scope eventually to ritual and sacrifices in order to satisfy lower human needs that could not be ignored.<sup>43</sup> But the essential service to God according to Moses and the prophets was performing justice, righteousness, and loving-kindness toward one's fellow human beings. The Mosaic religion is therefore "ethical monotheism," and that is what distinguishes it from idolatry.

In this way the line of separation and confrontation between monotheism and polytheism was drawn in the moral arena, and ethical monotheism strove to take the form of a popular society with respect to its religious organization, whereas polytheism strove to organize itself as a church within a governing hierarchy—in other words, a priestly establishment based on a temple. Idolatry is polytheistic because it bows to the forces of nature that conflict with each other in blind, arbitrary fashion and toward which the human being indeed feels a sense of "absolute dependence." By contrast, the Mosaic religion is constituted by a human

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<sup>41</sup> In Geiger's depiction of pagan Greek religion, the moral imperfections of their gods failed to offer models for human emulation. See Geiger, *Judaism and Its History*, 24–32.

<sup>42</sup> "Judaism . . . did not enter into this world to present it with a new idea concerning God, but to purify all human relations as well as the knowledge and appreciation of man." *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 98–101.

being, possessed of will and ethical feeling, standing up to his nature in order to rule it and direct it toward the good, just as God directs the forces of nature that conflict in His world in order to unite them.

However, a religious institution has a structural logic that generates contradictions within it. As we have said, prophetic religion must also take account of man's other needs and emotional inclinations as a natural creature. It is forced to compromise with the Temple ritual and the priestly establishment that it requires. The Mosaic religion was instituted as a popular society, not as a priestly hierarchy. Its prophetic institution is social, between God and His people, and its content is social-ethical (the Ten Commandments). But afterward, Moses responded to the ritual demands of his compatriots, who were accustomed in Egypt to offer sacrifices to appease the god.<sup>44</sup>

Geiger here relied on Maimonides's historical explanation: Moses's intention was to educate the people and raise them up to the level of sublime religiosity, which would not have need of sacrifices but would be focused on ethical education and fulfillment of the ethical commandments in practice. He explained all the Torah's legislation that smacked of compromise with the natural inclinations that were not of the highest ethical purity in the same way. A hierarchy was established and became entrenched. From Geiger's standpoint, this was the focus of the struggle, conducted throughout the whole history of the people and its religion, between the spontaneous popular-ethical tendency of the prophets and the ritualistic tendencies of the temple priests. Each of the sides recognized the legitimacy and permanence of the other but tried to present the center of religious life within itself, and thus two paradigms of religiosity were formed in practice that were mutually connected and struggled with each other throughout the generations. This was the struggle of the prophets against the priests and the kings, who strove to use religion as an instrument of their rule.<sup>45</sup>

Prophecy, however, characterized the Mosaic religion only in the first period, and it survived to our time in the rabbinic form that was instituted after the historical transition of the destruction of the Temple and the monarchy, the Babylonian Exile, and the return to Zion. Were the Sages the true successors of the prophets? Did they internalize the spirit of prophecy? Geiger's positive answer pointed to the advantage of the Sages

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 98–99.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 98–101.

with respect to realizing prophetic ethics in the people's life patterns.<sup>46</sup> The popular affinity of the Sages was revealed in his view in their approach to ritual and particularly in the fact that they applied the commandments of priestly ritual purity to the entire people. Their purpose in doing so, he argued, was to appropriate the status of sanctity that had been the monopoly of the priests by applying the rules of dietary restrictions and purity to the entire people. This was a step toward democracy and at the same time a move toward neutralizing the magical significance of ritual and turning it into a symbolic expression of ethical purity. One should understand this in connection with the gradual transfer of emphasis from sacrificial worship in the Temple to an expression of religious-ethical feeling in popular prayer, which involves and unites the congregation as a religious community.

The Sages thus succeeded, according to Geiger, in achieving, through halakha and teaching, what the prophets desired but were not successful in achieving: relegating the Temple worship and the whole priestly establishment to the sidelines. They thus took a great step toward eliminating the Temple and sacrifices altogether and replacing them with the synagogue and study house, in other words, with prayer, sacred study, and especially performance of the interpersonal mitzvot.<sup>47</sup> To be sure, the final elimination of the Temple and sacrifices occurred only with the destruction of the Second Temple. In Geiger's view, however, had the Sages not acted in time by putting in place the alternatives of prayer, sacred study, and halakha that shaped the life patterns of a religious community, it would not have been in the power of the people to overcome the crisis and turn it into an opportunity for moral-religious purification.<sup>48</sup>

Geiger interpreted the conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees against the background of these assumptions. In his view, the Pharisees represented the popular-ethical tendency, while the Sadducees represented the priestly-aristocratic tendency. But once the Pharisees had set up a religious establishment, the same tension developed within them between a popular tendency and a tendency of aristocratic Pharisaism standing aloof from the people and drawing distinctions, whether by

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<sup>46</sup> In his last years, Geiger summarized the four periods of Jewish history: (1) Revelation, through the close of the Bible; (2) Tradition, through the close of the Talmud; (3) Legalism, through the middle ages until the eighteenth-century Enlightenment; (4) Liberation, from the Enlightenment through the present. See Max Wiener, *Abraham Geiger and Liberal Judaism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962), 156.

<sup>47</sup> Geiger, *Judaism and Its History*, 164–68, 182–97.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 269–76.

more stringent performance of the ritual commands or the more demanding style of learning that they cultivated. In Geiger's view, this was the background that fed the controversy between the more stringent School of Shammai, which emphasized the relations between a person and God, and the more popular and lenient School of Hillel, which emphasized interpersonal ethics.<sup>49</sup>

Geiger explained the appearance of Christianity toward the end of the Second Temple period in a manner similar to that of Formstecher and Hirsch. Jesus himself was a Jew who raised the approach of the School of Hillel to a sublime prophetic level.<sup>50</sup> It was Peter and Paul who founded Christianity as a religion apart from Judaism, and they established it as a church-based ritualistic religion that compromised with pagan idolatry.<sup>51</sup> True to his method, Geiger emphasized the moral aspect: Christianity sought, and soon achieved, the status of an imperial state religion. It set out to spread the prophetic teaching of love through force of arms, with the power of the secular orders subordinate to its rule, in order to impose its dogma and ritual (only those that could be enforced, but not the ways of the ethic of love) on all humankind.<sup>52</sup>

This, then, was the substantive difference between the prophetic, popular Mosaic religion and ecclesiastical state Christianity, and there is no room for doubting which Geiger preferred, by his ethical criteria. Nevertheless, he did not ignore the positive mission of Christianity in spreading the prophets' morality among the nations.<sup>53</sup> He also did not ignore the transformation that occurred in Christianity in modern times, through which it returned to Jesus's original ethical teaching and in essence to the ethic of the prophets. Furthermore, we saw that Geiger sought to effect in the Judaism of his time the same kind of reform that Protestantism had conducted in the Christian Church. Nevertheless, a study of his words will show that his reservations concerning Christianity, even in its Protestant form, outweighed the positive that he saw in it. It was still very far from the degree of ethical improvement that would allow Jews to accept it.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 182–97, 275–76.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 214–26.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 229–45.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 245–64.

<sup>53</sup> "We are, of course, agreed on the definition of the nature of *Wissenschaft*. It is the sum total of the entire intellectual development of mankind, constantly striving for liberation from the limiting one-sided effects of transitory and strictly national phenomena. Both Christianity and Judaism have been effective factors in this process." Letter to Professor Theodor Noeldecke, Dec. 1, 1865, in Wiener, *Abraham Geiger and Liberal Judaism*, 128.



He therefore demanded that one keep faith with original Judaism. Until Christianity returned completely to its prophetic roots, Jews were obligated to keep their separate religious identity, for their own sake and for the sake of humanity, for they are the “people of revelation,” and it is their mission to spread the truth of revelation among all peoples by setting a moral example.<sup>54</sup>

Like Hirsch and Formstecher, Geiger saw in the triple calamity of the destruction of the Temple, the destruction of the Jewish Commonwealth, and exile a positive opportunity.<sup>55</sup> Judaism was elevated by them and gave up forever its priestly–ritual, ecclesiastical, and political–statist elements. In the process, the Jews took on themselves the mission of being witnesses among the nations—not by church and not by political–military power, as was the case with Christianity and Islam. We saw that Judaism started its career as a national religion, and, in Geiger’s view, this was at the outset both a necessity and an advantage. From the destruction onward, however, it matured into a pure religion. From this point on, the Jews were required to be citizens in all the countries in which they settled and to regard them as their homeland. Only their religion continued to unite them, and only in a spiritual way. In a blaze of German national patriotism, Geiger rejected every form of national solidarity among Jews who were citizens of different countries.<sup>56</sup>

The hegemony of Christianity in the West, however, and afterward the hegemony of Islam in the East during the time that the Jews were in exile was in Geiger’s view a calamitous result in which (unlike Hirsch) he saw no redeeming feature. The two religions that were born of Judaism oppressed it under their rule. They stifled its spiritual development and forced it into a decline, for in Geiger’s view the phenomenon of rabbinic petrification was an inevitable result of the oppression of the people in exile. Their active participation in the arena of general cultural creativity was gradually restricted until it was choked off almost completely, and

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<sup>54</sup> “Ah, if only Christianity really were the religious force that it pretends to be, the source of all ennobling teachings.” Letter to Honigmann, June 25, 1866, in Wiener, *Abraham Geiger and Liberal Judaism*, 129; see also “On Renouncing Judaism: An Open Letter to Mr. M. Maass,” Breslau, 1858, *ibid.* 283–93.

<sup>55</sup> Geiger, *Judaism and Its History*, 269–94.

<sup>56</sup> In 1840, Geiger depreciated the expressions of those Jews who rallied to Jewry of the Levant in the wake of the Damascus blood libel (letter of August 3, 1840 in Wiener, *Abraham Geiger and Liberal Judaism*, 87–88). By contrast, in 1863 he delivered a stirring sermon commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the German victory at the Battle of Leipzig (*ibid.*, 253–57).



Judaism withdrew into its rigid halakhic fortress and shut itself therein, as if in a prison.

Geiger's historical research concluded that the Jews always sought to remain current in the cultures of the peoples that surrounded them and adapted their religion naturally to their greatest heights. They did the same in the early Middle Ages; however, just when the greatest development of Western culture began, during the Renaissance, the pressure of Christian oppression and the segregation of the Jews in the ghetto became almost hermetic. Thus was created a gap of several generations between the medieval cultural infrastructure, which sustained the cultural and spiritual life of the Jewish communities, and the modern culture of advanced Western countries. When the walls were finally breached, the Jews stood face to face with a new cultural world, much more advanced and enlightened than their own world, and it became clear that in order to attain it and adapt to it they had to undergo major and rapid changes—spiritual-intellectual, psychological, and institutional.

As we saw above, Geiger demonstrated in his historical researches the dynamic qualities embedded in the prophetic Mosaic religion. Rabbinic halakha was originally a profound product of the same dynamic, and Hillel the Elder was regarded by Geiger as a decided "reformer" of the Judaism of his time in the spirit of ethics. Geiger thus knew the qualities of adaptation and application of rabbinic halakha and had learned its ways. Because of the great gap that had been created between the development of the general culture and that of the Jewish culture, however, it appeared to him in the event that the halakhic apparatus was not able to overcome such a gap with the required urgency. For this reason, reform was called for, and this in his view was its exact definition: the formation of Judaism in accord with the spirit of the modern cultural age, using tools whose source was to be found in the intellectual and institutional repertoire of that age rather than those of the traditional halakha, for the old toolkit was antiquated and in need of fundamental revamping with respect to the methods of deliberation leading from general values to specific norms.

Thus the dilemma with which Geiger struggled during his whole career as religious leader arose and grew: In order to fulfill the urgent task of adaptation to the modern cultural environment, there was an urgent need to enact major and basic changes and to do them quickly before the younger generation, yearning for freedom, would despair and sever the ties completely with their ancestral religion. But changes such as these would necessarily divide the communities, and they were apt to bring about a situation in which the formerly one Judaism would break apart into two

religions: Reform Judaism would appear as a new religion, imitating Christianity and cutting itself off from its own historical foundation.

As we said, Geiger sought pragmatic solutions, and his decisions tended sometimes in the direction of radical Reform and sometimes in the direction of moderate Reform. He tended to the radical direction in his principled refusal of the way of the moderates, who sought to be satisfied with gradual changes that could be achieved with the existing halakhic tools. He tended toward the moderate direction in opposing suggested reforms that went too far, in his view, either in becoming too similar to Christianity or because of the danger that Reform would appear as a new religion in the eyes of the majority of Jews. It was clear that distinctions such as these were a matter of subjective judgment, and it was impossible to establish definite and clear criteria for them.

Out of such struggles Geiger paved a middle way and led the central stream of his movement down that path. His influence persisted in his movement even after his death and continued until the start of the twentieth century. But as a scholar and thinker, his influence was felt across the entire breadth of modern Jewish movements, including the east-European Haskalah.



### CHAPTER THREE

## THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE NATIONAL HASKALAH MOVEMENT IN EASTERN EUROPE

### *A. Introduction*

The modern religious movements that developed out of the Jewish Enlightenment movement in Germany grounded their views concerning Judaism's distinctive character on a body of scholarly and theoretical literature. They imparted these views to their congregations by fashioning appropriate prayer liturgies and services—and especially through the sermons that they delivered in the synagogue on Sabbaths and festivals. In the other domains of cultural creativity, including school education, their colleagues strove to integrate into the German culture. They studied in the German gymnasia, and insofar as they studied Judaism they did so through the scholarly literature in German. In other areas of creativity they participated in the German culture as individuals. Even if one can discern Jewish characteristics in their creative efforts, these were a part of their free personal expression within the rubric of German national culture.

By contrast, the task that the Hebrew Haskalah movement in eastern Europe took on itself was of a comprehensive cultural scope. Studies of Polish, Russian, or German were required, but these studies were for the sake of communication with the immediate environment and acquisition of higher education. Providing basic education and cultural values to a public that read in Hebrew and spoke in Yiddish, however, necessitated the creation of a Hebrew literature and a Yiddish literature in parallel to it that would supply the needs of basic intellectual life for youths who were attracted to general education but nevertheless yearned to develop a Jewish cultural identity that would not be inferior in any way to the traditional religious identity or national cultural identity of the educated classes of the peoples among whom they dwelt.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the general history of Russian Jewry during this period, see Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 1:355–440.

The primary need was to create a literature that would propagate the idea of enlightenment, attract the hearts of the youths, and perhaps persuade their parents as well of the necessity of their children's future and its legitimacy from the standpoint of the Jewish sources. Together with the propaganda and polemic against the old pedagogical methods, they needed to offer the necessary tools: basic textbooks in all subjects, including scientifically informed Jewish areas. On this primary basis, they conducted polemical propaganda against the reactionary forces opposed to enlightenment, especially Hasidism, and on behalf of changing the sources of livelihood, as well as a general reform of the organization of Jewish communal governance and social life patterns that followed the accepted custom of rabbinic halakha in order to adapt them to the conditions and needs of the modern age. Finally, there was the need for an original literature that would foster a circle of communication and feedback for the cadre of Maskilim that was developing its own national culture and desirous that it not be lacking in any creative genre of which Western peoples boasted. This was only achieved gradually, but the aspiration to achieve it pulsed in the literature of the Hebrew Haskalah from its inception.

Philosophy was regarded as one of the creative genres that was needed according to the paradigm of German culture; it could not, however, stand at the top rank of preferences. The graduates of the yeshiva generally had no prior philosophical preparation, least of all in modern philosophy. Clearly they were not able, nor did they feel any need, to deal with it in their first stages of application to general education. Belles lettres and journalism were more appropriate for the purpose of spreading the Haskalah ideals among the people and fighting for their realization. These two literary genres intermingled to the point that one could not distinguish in the Hebrew and Yiddish literature of the period between literature and poetry on the one hand and ideological preaching and polemic propaganda on the other.

Only a few individuals of special intellectual abilities arrived at the stage of engagement with the modern philosophy. They studied on their own and started with the tools that were available for them in the Beit Midrash. Their first philosophical awakening was still by way of the Hebrew speculative literature of the Middle Ages, particularly Saadia's *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed*, and R. Joseph Albo's *Book of Principles*, whose contribution they found of special interest, as we shall see later. Krochmal's *Guide for the Perplexed of the Time* served them as an introduction to modern philosophy. At the same time they would learn German and find their way to the modern

philosophical literature, both general and Jewish, that was written in that language. Through this course of development they would individually join the margins of the circle of philosophical and scholarly discourse of German Jewry, for there was not enough basis to form an independent circle of philosophical discourse of east-European Jews that could encourage independent creativity for its own sake.

The poverty of literary sources is testimony to this fact. In the nineteenth century in eastern Europe, only two noted philosophical textbooks were produced: the *Thesaurus of Philosophy* by Julius Barasch (Vienna, 1856) and the *History of Modern Philosophy* by Fabius Mieses (Leipzig, 1887). As for original philosophical writing, the nineteenth century saw the publication in Hebrew of only one attempt to present an original Jewish philosophical system, namely that of Abraham Krochmal, the son of Nachman Krochmal, who sought to follow his father's example and continue his project. Unlike his father, he did not succeed in generating any echoes.

It thus appears that the scholarly literature in Jewish studies and the ideological journalism that derived from it and from the belles lettres and that was prevalent in fact in both of them served the needs of intellectual expression among the masses. The emphasis was placed on the practical worldly direction: the political struggle against the rabbinic establishment, sharp criticism of the stringent applications of the law that suppressed personal happiness in the life of the family and community, the encouragement of professional training, and the acquisition of the other tools needed for worldly success. Such a climate certainly does not encourage immersion in the study of philosophy for its own sake.

But this did not mean that coping with the problems of the time on a philosophical level was entirely silenced. A movement that struggles for a comprehensive cultural vision is based on a general worldview and is guided by it. For the needs of its communal struggle, it must have recourse to ideology, and modern ideologies are the emanations of comprehensive philosophical teachings that constitute a methodological justification of their truth. As we have said, the Maskilim of eastern Europe received their ideologies from the Jewish thinkers and scholars of Germany, but they had to adapt them to the different reality of east-European Judaism, and the adaptation had a direct or indirect impact on the philosophical basis as well.

The transfer and substantiation were direct. The authors, scholars, and publicists of the Haskalah movement in eastern Europe mentioned, quoted, or paraphrased in popularized form ideas that they borrowed

from the leading German-Jewish philosophers and scholars in order to support and substantiate their proposals. One could say that they usually borrowed the general ideas but not the underlying systems. From the outset they were not associated with a single thinker but with them all, and thus they could choose for themselves whatever fitted their needs from one source or another. Their thinking was eclectic. It was not based on a unifying philosophical method but on educational, social, and political objectives that were determined by force of circumstances and by practical considerations. Afterward they collected the philosophical ideas that could legitimate and justify the new programs.

Thus the east-European Maskilim interpreted the ideas that they borrowed from the thinkers and scholars of Germany in their own way, for their practical needs. By combining them and introducing them in new contexts they imparted new meanings to these concepts and tweaked them to their desired ends. This applied especially in the principal arena that interested them as practical warriors, namely, the domain of political thought. It was this thought that from their point of view defined the collective identity in national terms and that dealt directly with the problem of the place of Jewish religion (and particularly halakha) in a Christian state and in Jewish society.

As in Germany, so too in eastern Europe the problem of adapting halakha to life was at the heart of the ideological conflict, but we emphasize again that in eastern Europe it was not discussed from the plane of philosophy of religion in clarification of meta-halakhic topics such as revelation, the authority of Torah, divine providence, and the like. On the contrary—for political reasons it was better not to deal at the outset with such topics in order not to arouse suspicion of denying of religion altogether but rather to restrict the discussion to a direct consideration of the lot of life of the people who bore the yoke of halakha in exile and to point to the suffering that stringent halakhic observance added to the sufferings of the exile and the obstacles that it erected on the road to happiness and worldly success. The advantage of attacking halakha and the rabbinic establishment from this angle continued even after the struggle intensified and the radical Haskalah moved on to an attack on religious faith itself, insofar as it led the people to be infatuated with halakha and the rabbinic leadership. Even in this context they emphasized the tragic or deplorable consequences of fanatical faith from the standpoint of morality, happiness, and worldly success.

It would thus seem that the substantive difference between the contribution of the east-European Maskilim and that of the spiritual leaders

of German Jewry to the formation of Jewish philosophy of the period was manifest principally in the political realm.

*B. Adapting the Doctrine of Interfaith Tolerance in the Secular State:  
The Teaching of R. Isaac Baer Levinsohn*

R. Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1781–1860) played the same founding role in the Russian-Jewish Enlightenment as had Moses Mendelssohn in Berlin and R. Nachman Krochmal in Galicia. He had a direct personal connection with Krochmal and his circle and was in correspondence with the important Jewish scholars of Germany. Like Mendelssohn, he succeeded in forming a positive contact with the government (especially with the Russian minister of the interior, who tended to a liberal policy toward the Jews in the spirit of the “Edict of Tolerance” of the Austrian Empire). The support that he received enabled him to emulate Mendelssohn in advocating a change in the attitude of Christian society toward the Jews, as well as the struggle for the spread of enlightenment among his fellow Jews.<sup>2</sup>

Toward the outside world, he fought against prejudices, the blood libel, and persecutions and preached for interfaith tolerance. We may emphasize in this connection that, although he wrote in Hebrew, the works that were directed at an external audience were translated into Russian, German, and English in order to perform their mission. Internally, he spread the ideas of enlightenment, especially in the area of education, and sought to persuade his readers that general education, acquisition of productive skills, and the study of local vernacular languages were necessary under the circumstances of the time and promised the reward of success and happiness. Furthermore, such studies were not opposed to the Jewish tradition but were commanded by it.

Levinsohn sought supports for these messages in the many generations of literature of the Oral Torah. Likewise, on the theoretical topics connected with the propagation of enlightenment among Jews, he preferred the classical rationalists of the Middle Ages, particularly Maimonides and R. Joseph Albo. However, in the external struggle with Christian society

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<sup>2</sup> For a general survey of Levinsohn's career and literary output, see Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1978), 11:21–94; and Joseph Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature* (Jerusalem: Ahiasaf, 1960), 3:33–115.



and in the internal struggle with the rabbinical establishment over the reform of halakhic ways in the public realm, he resorted to the basis of the modern doctrine of tolerance, according to which the place of religion in the state and society ought to be redefined. The basis that he required for the sake of criticizing the stance of Judaism on these topics was to be found in Mendelssohn's political treatise *Jerusalem*. He therefore preferred to rely on it, rather than on Krochmal, who purposely refrained from deliberation on this timely political topic.

Levinsohn was a prolific author. His principle works were *Proclamation in Israel* (1828), *House of Judah* (1839), *No Bloodguilt* (1837), *Ahijah the Shilonite* (1863), and *Zerubavel* (1864). In his first book he proposed practical programs for the Haskalah and supported its elements from the traditional religious literature. In his last book he summarized his proposals and based them again on religious sources. However, in his second book, *House of Judah*, which presented the theoretical foundation of the Haskalah movement, and in the next two books, which he devoted to disputation with the Christian religion concerning its attitude toward Jews and Judaism, it was necessary for him to adopt the rubric of modern political philosophy.

Mendelssohn's teaching of interfaith tolerance was based on the distinction between "natural religion" and "historical religions."<sup>3</sup> "Natural religion" is universal and rooted in common sense. Mendelssohn saw in it a divine revelation addressed in equal measure to all humanity through natural reason. Its task was to lay the foundation of social existence that is the condition for human happiness. On its foundation, therefore, all human beings are able to respect each other as equals, no matter what differences there may be in their views outside the realm of equity and moral conduct. The "historical religions" are specific to each people. Their source is in suprarational revelation in which God addressed each people as He so desired in accord with its cultural-historical uniqueness, and the proof of their facticity is based on historical tradition specific to each people. "Natural religion" reveals to all humanity the existence of God as cause of all being. It teaches that God governs His creatures for their good and rewards or punishes all individuals as is proper in accord with their

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<sup>3</sup> Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, trans. Allan Arkush (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 1983), 90–99. Strictly speaking, Mendelssohn addresses the question of "truths of reason" and "historical truths" and thus focuses intentionally on the question of the theoretical claims of religion and its universal ethical teachings, while shunting the behavioral demands ("revealed legislation") to the sidelines.

good and evil deeds. These beliefs are vital for human salvation, and the true test of such beliefs is their conducing to ethical conduct. It follows that the service to God according to natural religion is expressed in ethical conduct between men and women. The "historical religions" are also based on "natural religion," and on that basis they are required to treat each other with respect within the framework of the state.

The place of religion in the state is also governed (according to Mendelssohn) by the universal application of natural religion. Insofar as it is the task of the state to regulate relations among its citizens, it understandably has a legitimate interest in seeing that all should recognize and accept the truths of "natural religion" and obey its laws based on morality. Therefore the state is authorized to supervise its citizens, to see that they uphold these truths and behave accordingly. On the other hand, the state has no interest in the truths that differentiate "historical religions" from one another. It should treat them all with the same measure of tolerance without preference for any of them and to reserve for its citizens the freedom to choose whichever "historical religion" they believe in.

To understand this argument, one must emphasize that Mendelssohn did not regard "natural religion" as a religion separate from the "historical religions." Just the opposite—"natural religion" was for him the universal foundational layer of all positive religions from the standpoint of individual and social morality, a foundation on which they all agreed. In his view, the prophets of Israel did not disqualify idolatry on account of the belief in many gods or its pantheistic tendency but only because of its customary forms of worship, which involved moral degeneracy and human sacrifices. As for the polytheistic religions that offered correct moral teachings, these were legitimate in the prophets' eyes for those peoples that upheld them.

In each nation, a "historical religion" thus developed appropriate to its special culture. In its framework were included all the elements of "natural religion," reinforced by worship rituals and symbols expressing the direct subjective relations between God and humanity. In summary, the positive "historical religions" are equal to each other in their rational elements and especially in their moral values and social laws, but they differ from each other in their elements of suprarational revelation.

Tolerance follows as a logical result of all this. One must refrain from a judgmental attitude against the suprarational experiential elements of another's religion. The believer in his religion must recognize that every "historical religion" appears persuasive to the people who were raised on its traditions and unpersuasive in the eyes of those who were not so brought up, for his own situation is no different in this regard from

his neighbor's: his faith is no more evident to his neighbor than his neighbor's faith is to him. It is therefore permitted to level criticism at the respective faiths only by the universal yardstick of "natural religion" in their attitudes toward one another, but in the area of dogma and ritual there is no justification either for debate or for trying to persuade another to change his religion. On the contrary—such attempts are disqualified by the criterion of natural morality. This is of course a basis for a scathing critique of the attitude that Christianity has taken against the Jewish religion and the Jewish people.

Levinsohn adopted this doctrine as a given. Like Mendelssohn, he argued that Judaism passes the test of tolerance in its attitude toward other religions, and he sought to chastise Christian society with his claim that it contradicted its own principles—the ethic of love on which it prides itself—in its attitude toward Jews and toward Judaism.

It is worth noting that Levinsohn's words on this topic were far sharper than Mendelssohn's, who contented himself with refuting prejudices and false accusations against Jews but refrained from expressing bitterness against the moral perversity that came to expression in such views. Levinsohn set out to wage an ethical attack against Christianity's attitude toward Judaism, against the hatred that the church incites, against the blood libel and pogroms, against degradation and discrimination.<sup>4</sup> He did not rest content with showing that these feelings and deeds had no just cause from the side of the persecuted Jews, but he argued vehemently that they stood in contradiction to elements of that "natural religion" that Christianity accepted and even exceeded in its pretension to replace the "ethic of justice" of Mosaic religion with an ethic of pure love.

But when the discussion proceeded from the topic of interfaith tolerance to that of the place of religion in the state, Levinsohn was convinced that Mendelssohn's distinction between "natural religion" and "historical religion" was insufficient to define the proper place of Judaism in the secular state. It might be adequate for church-based Christianity, but it was not adequate to describe a Judaism that shaped the lifestyle of a people through halakha.

To be precise, we should also note that Mendelssohn felt that his suggestion of a common denominator for defining the place of the two religions in the state was a stretch. In his book *Jerusalem* he commented that the word *religion*, used to denote Christianity, had no real Hebrew

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<sup>4</sup> See especially Levinsohn's books *No Blood Guilt* and *Ahijah the Shilonite*.

translation and that the word *dat* (the conventional Hebrew translation of “religion”) was not adequate to describe the Jewish Torah.<sup>5</sup> But it is likely that Mendelssohn preferred to ignore the theoretical problem that was reflected in the semantic difficulty, despite the stretch. It would seem that he understood in advance that, for the sake of emancipation in the enlightened national state, the Jewish community and the rabbinic leadership would be forced to adapt to the laws of the state that applied equally to all citizens and to observe the eternal halakha only in those clearly religious domains of worship, dietary laws, family purity, Sabbaths, festivals, and the like. This is because the national state in western Europe, which followed the pattern established by revolutionary France, could not tolerate in its midst a second national-social identity obedient to its own peculiar social and civil laws.

The difference between the reality in Germany and that in eastern Europe generally, and Russia in particular, stood out on this topic in a form that necessitated critique and a different development of this theological-political theory. First, emancipation in Russia—in the sense of equal rights and citizenship for all Jews as individuals in the general society—simply was not on the agenda. One was speaking only of liberalizing the relation of the governing powers to the Jewish people, which would continue to maintain itself as a people with the communal frameworks in which rabbinic halakha would remain in effect in its full scope of application. Second, in Russia it was impossible to consider that the rabbinic leadership, which still represented an absolute majority, should accept a decree minimizing the application of halakha in shaping the social lifestyle in the communities. The demand for tolerance was thus a demand to take Jews into consideration not only as individuals but also and mainly as a national minority group, privileged to maintain its special lifestyle within the universal framework of the state, side by side with the Russian majority and other national minorities.

Levinsohn drew the necessary conclusions from this reality. First of all, he illuminated the full significance of the semantic difficulty: Judaism was different from Christianity not only in its theological elements and modes of worship but in its very manner of relating to the social life of its members. Judaism was not a church-based “religion” but rather a Torah-based

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<sup>5</sup> “Judaism boasts of no *exclusive* revelation of eternal truths that are indispensable to salvation, of no revealed religion in the sense in which that term is usually understood.” *Jerusalem*, 97.

*dat* [law/rite], one in which its Torah sought to shape directly the comprehensive life pattern of the people to whom its commandments applied.<sup>6</sup>

What, then, does “Torahitic law [*dat toratit*]” add to those entities that were defined by Mendelssohn’s terms as “natural religion” and “historical religion”? Levinsohn replied to this question by returning to the original distinctions of R. Joseph Albo in his *Book of Principles*. We shall again be precise and note that Mendelssohn also relied on Albo when he sought to prove that his new distinctions had a basis in the tradition, but that in this topic also he preferred to ignore the difference between his distinction and Albo’s. In the *Book of Principles*, Albo made a distinction not between just two kinds of *dat* [religion or law] but three: “natural law,” which laid the foundations of social ethics, the basis for all legislation; “divine law” (religion rooted in revelation, defined by Mendelssohn as “historical religion”), which determined the ways of worshipping God; and between these two, “conventional law/religion,” which concerned itself with ordering the laws and jurisprudence necessary for governing the society and state.<sup>7</sup> In Albo’s eyes, political legislation, based on human authority, was rooted in divine commands, for he saw the legitimization of state law as rooted in religion, as was accepted in the Middle Ages.

It is clear why Mendelssohn ignored the category of “conventional law/religion”: legislation and civil jurisprudence in the modern secular state did not come from a divine command but from human beings themselves,

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<sup>6</sup> “With respect to its political status from its beginning to this day... I have already said that the Israelite nation was unlike any of today’s nations, for its religious and political law, as well as studies and sciences, customary ways and worldly occupations—all were interwoven, connected and lumped together without any distinctions between them, and all fell under the Torahitic law (*religion*) as the reader of this book will see.” Isaac Baer Levinsohn, *Beit Yehudah* (Warsaw: Y. Halter, 1901), *Ulam Ha-Bayit* §0; see also gate 1, §2 and §§15–21. Note: Levinsohn emulated Nachman Krochmal (who emulated certain medieval pietists) by using “gates” as a unit of division of his book. *Beit Yehudah* (House of Judah) is divided into ten “gates” corresponding to ten periods of Jewish and world history: (1) From Creation until Abraham; (2) to Moses; (3) to the canonization of the Bible; (4) the Mishnah; (5) the Jerusalem Talmud; (6) the Babylonian Talmud; (7) the early kabbalah (Nahmanides); (8) the later kabbalah (Luria); (9) the Enlightenment (Elijah of Vilna and Moses Mendelssohn); (10) the present (1827). To these ten gates are added an *Ulam Ha-Bayit* (Entrance Hall) at the beginning and *Ulam Ha-Mishpat* (Hall of Judgment) at the end.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Albo, *Sefer Ha-Ikkarim—Book of Principles*, ed. Isaac Husik, vol. 1, bk. 1, chaps. 7–8 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1929), 78–92. In Albo’s usage, the realm of social legislation was either “conventional” (*nimmusi*) or “divine” (*elohi*), depending on whether it was legislated by humans without divine guidance or followed the divinely revealed social laws of the Torah.

as a product of the sovereignty of the people. It followed that conventional law, for him, was not in the jurisdiction of religion; it was impossible to deny, however, that Albo's original system reflected the original conception of the Torah according to which the true "divine religion"—the Jewish law given at Sinai—included all the kinds of law, and in that rubric they relied on the absolute authority of divine revelation, with which reason concurred.

Levinsohn's concept of "Torahitic law" [*dat toratit*] received its concrete content by way of a correction to Mendelssohn's ignoring the role of "conventional law" in the Jewish Torah. Through this correction, he restored to the "Torahitic law" all its national character.<sup>8</sup> But the question that immediately arose was: How could one maintain the stratum of "conventional law" in the Jewish religion within the framework of a secular state? Spinoza had already raised the question and replied with an emphatic negative. It would seem that Mendelssohn agreed with Spinoza, whereas Levinsohn did not accept this judgment and sought to solve the problem within the framework of the pressures and adaptations of a multinational state by expanding the application of Mendelssohn's distinction between obligations of the Torah, whose source is in human reason and whose application is up to human deliberation, versus obligations whose source is in divine revelation and which therefore cannot be altered through mere human deliberation.

Influenced by scientific research in the history of halakha, especially Krochmal's *Guide for the Perplexed of the Time* and Geiger's works, Levinsohn concluded that the principle of the eternity of the divine Torah and immutability of its laws applied only to those commandments pertaining directly to divine worship, whereas the "conventional laws" of the Torah followed the same criterion as its "natural law." Even though it proceeded from the revelation to Moses at Sinai, it was nevertheless

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<sup>8</sup> "The conventional law is based on the improvement of deeds, and it stands on four pillars: (a) enterprise (*Gewerb*), such as agriculture, livestock, all field-work, and all manner of crafts necessary for man's life and sustenance, essential commerce, and the like; (b) the prevention of social evil, such as robbery, theft, murder, oppression, and the like; (c) the performance of justice, such as aiding the poor, lending, performing good works, and the like; (d) wisdom, such as languages, arithmetic, geometry, biology, medicine, seafaring, astronomy, morality, childrearing, pedagogy, jurisprudence, military tactics, and the like, and including also the arts necessary for crafting things of beauty. This fourth pillar was called by the ancients *Naturlehre* and *Hilfswissenschaften*—natural science and technology. The four taken together comprise *derekh erez*—worldly conduct." *Beit Yehudah*, gate 1, §18.

entrusted from the outset to the intellectual deliberations of the Jewish sages. It followed that in the whole domain of “conventional law” the Jewish sages and rabbis served as political leaders, and it was not only possible but incumbent on them to adapt them to the conditions and needs of the age through human deliberation. Of course, they should do so without violating the ethical-religious values of the Torah on which they are based.<sup>9</sup>

The claim that Levinsohn highlighted in the dispute that he conducted against the rabbinic leadership was that it was possible to adapt the halakha within the domain of “conventional law” to all the expectations and legitimate demands of good life in the secular state directed at realizing the worldly objectives of human beings. It was the obligation of the rabbinic leadership to exercise its full power and authority in order to reform what needed reforming in halakha in this respect, so that the entire community, not only those individuals who were able and desirous of leaving it, could adapt itself to the conditions of life and to those demands that were justified and necessary in themselves, which were also the conditions for a liberalization of the relation of the secular governing powers to the Jewish people as a collective entity.

The parallel between this approach and the approach of Reform in Germany toward the halakha is obvious, but there is also a substantive difference. German-Jewish Reform sought to abolish the national character of the Jewish Torah. It did away completely with the element of “conventional law” in halakha, and it sought revision precisely in the domain of the “divine law” in order to abolish social and cultural barriers between Jewish citizens and the majority of the citizens of the state, whereas Levinsohn sought a way to preserve the national character of the Jewish Torah by reforming the halakha in the civic arena, including its social, cultural, and educational aspects, in a way that its obligations would be brought into harmony with the obligations of the state without forcing Jews to throw off the yoke of halakha and abandon their national framework for the sake of acceptance.

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<sup>9</sup> “Only the major principles of the commands in the Torah that we discuss under the heading of ‘conventional laws’ are unchanging, as are those that fall under the category of natural laws, and all nations in the world share them; but their details, which are derived from the roots, are subject to change depending on time and place, addition and subtraction, and so they are not common to all nations.” *Beit Yehudah*, gate 3, § 51; see also §§41–50, where Levinsohn describes seven categories of laws of the Torah and classifies them all with respect to Albo’s schema.



*C. The Attack on the Rabbinic Establishment: Spinoza's Influence on the Radical Hebrew Haskalah*

Levinsohn, like Mendelssohn and Krochmal before him, refrained from any direct attack on the rabbinic establishment. In his works he hoped to persuade the rabbinic leadership through citing precedents that in his view were halakhically acceptable. He based himself on sources from the Oral Torah and presented himself as one who combined piety with enlightenment.

However, the response of the vast majority of the rabbinic leadership and the entire Hasidic leadership to the Berlin Haskalah was no different in eastern Europe than in Germany. On the contrary—their response was even more fanatical in their resorting to communal sanctions, for there was still real power vested in the communal leaders and rabbis. In Germany, it was already impossible to resort effectively to excommunication and ostracism, unlike the case in eastern Europe. Even the moderate Haskalah was regarded as dangerous heresy. The rabbinic leadership was convinced that it was only concealing its true nature behind an appearance of learning and piety, and its deployment of traditional precedents was regarded as the Devil citing Scripture. It was thus incumbent on them to nip the temptation in the bud, to close one's eyes and ears against letting their message in. One must ban the books of the Haskalah, punish those caught with heretical books in their possession, fight by all means against establishing "reformed" institutions of learning, and as much as possible prevent the formation of independent societies of Maskilim.

The ideological confrontation quickly turned into a violent struggle, and not only in words. The violence exceeded even that of the previous struggle between Hasidim and Mitnagdim, which still continued in a restrained fashion. The Hebrew Haskalah appeared as an enemy more dangerous to both Hasidim and Mitnagdim than these were to each other. The internal struggle that divided religious society was reined in, and all the force of fanaticism that had been harbored in both camps was directed against the Haskalah.

It is proper to add in this context that precisely because the Hebrew Haskalah paralleled Hasidism in its social goals and the Mitnagdic movement of the disciples of Rabbi Elijah Gaon with respect to its positive valuing of the sciences within a framework of Jewish learning, it threatened them with internal competition in the struggle for the souls of the young generation. There was something irreverent about the Haskalah that they perceived as Satanic in kabbalistic terms: on the one hand using scriptural



citations in an enticing discourse that claimed to speak in the name of the Torah, and on the other hand the “externality” of the demonic realm by receiving subsidies from the gentile government, carrying out its policy in the educational arena against the will of the community, and providing instruction in gentile disciplines and languages.

The moderate Haskalah did not die out in the second and third generations, but a radical secular Haskalah developed alongside it that mounted an attack on religion. Its prime target was Hasidic mysticism and the charismatic leadership of the “Tzaddikim,” who held the people spellbound, immersed them in illusions, filled their minds with superstition, ignorance, fairytales, and nonsense and exploited them through their promises to solve their pressing material problems through mystical incantations, amulets, prayers, and blessing—in other words, through delusions and false guidance. However, the regular rabbinic establishment also did not go scot-free from the attacks of the extreme Maskilim. It was depicted by them in the same light as the French writer Voltaire had described the Christian clergy: imperious, hypocritical, and crafty, using their halakhic authority in order to dominate the simple souls of the people and to extort their money in the service of the religion and of stringent observance of the dietary laws while shutting off the way to freedom and worldly success.

The most effective tool of the radical Haskalah movement, which developed mainly in Galicia, in the Hasidic heartland, was the satire. It skillfully mimicked the thought processes and expressive style of the learned rabbis and strove to undermine them from within through their erudite mocking. The two best-known authors of Maskilic satire, both of the second generation of the Galician Haskalah, were Joseph Perl (1773–1839) and Isaac Erter (1791–1851).<sup>10</sup> It was they who led the attack of the second Haskalah generation into the strongholds of religion, starting in the 1820s. In their rationalistic, antireligious worldview, as in their literary methods, these authors copied the anticlerical ideas of Voltaire (1694–1778) and applied them to the Jewish reality of eastern Europe. This was a holy war against obscurantism and a call for liberation on all fronts—spiritual, social, and institutional—from the yoke of religion, which was manifested on the one hand by the “delusions” of Hasidism and on the other hand by the

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<sup>10</sup> On Joseph Perl, see Zinberg, *History of Jewish Literature*, 10:87–92; Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, 2:278–314; and Raphael Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985), 121–68. On Isaac Erter, see Zinberg, 10:92–100 and 108–10, and Klausner, 2:315–44.

hair-splitting casuistry of the *Shulḥan Arukh*. The ideological and scholarly foundation was laid later by the circle of scholars and thinkers that gathered around the journal *He-Ḥalutz* (1857–1881) under the sponsorship and editing of the wealthy merchant and learned *Wissenschaft* scholar Joshua Heschel Schorr (1818–1895). The source of his philosophical and historical inspiration was the heretical philosopher of Jewish origin who had made a name in the gentile world and inspired even Voltaire—Baruch Spinoza.

Second thoughts concerning the significance of the ban of excommunication that the elders and rabbis of the Amsterdam community had decreed against Spinoza accompanied the Jewish Enlightenment movement from its inception. We have already described this phenomenon in the thought of Mendelssohn, Solomon Maimon, Saul Ascher, and Krochmal, who attended to the dialectical ambiguity in Spinoza's relation to faith in God, the ethical teaching of the prophets, and the national significance of the Mosaic Torah. The fact that he left, or was evicted from, the community but did not renounce his religious affiliation gave grounds for justifying the assumption that, were it not for the fanaticism of the Amsterdam Jewish community and its determination to suppress the freedom of scientific and philosophical thought that Spinoza required as one requires air for breathing, the teaching of Spinoza, like the teaching of Maimonides before him, could have been the subject of legitimate debate within the Jewish thought-world, as one of the philosophical currents within it.

This manner of appreciating the figure of Spinoza and the proper place of his teaching from the perspective of the development of Jewish philosophy would certainly grow stronger the more the Enlightenment critique of the rabbinic establishment intensified, taking it to task for suppressing freedom of thought and resorting to excommunication and ostracism against freedom of opinion and research and for the halakhic stringency that was oppressive to the spirit of the people. This affinity increased when the east-European Jewish enlightened thinkers came naturally to the view that Judaism at its source was not a religion but a political law and outlook whose purpose was to unify the people in a national rubric and thus guarantee its worldly prosperity, as Spinoza had taught.

It was the acceptance of this definition of Judaism as an alternative to the religious definitions, whether those of standard rabbinic Judaism and Hasidism in eastern Europe or those of the modern religious movements in Germany, that turned Spinoza from a heretic who had left the fold of Judaism to the teacher who had revealed the secular-national alternative for Judaism of the modern age—what from now on was to be called “free Judaism.”

In the eyes of the radical Maskilim who gathered around the journal *He-Ḥalutz* [The Pioneer], Spinoza was thus made into a prophet who had proclaimed their rebellion against the moderate Haskalah and taught the way of national Judaism. He was the first proponent of enlightenment who had paid the price of rebellion by suffering persecution at the hands of his community and the fate of isolation that was forced on him. His stature in the eyes of these Maskilim was comparable to Moses: the man who had given his people a political-terrestrial Torah of life in order to liberate them from political and spiritual servitude. The time had come, therefore, to spread his gospel and convert many followers to it.

Against the background of the requirement for scientific research into the history of the Jewish people and the sources of its religion—to which Spinoza himself had contributed by laying the philosophical foundation for critical analysis of the Bible and researching the political history of Israel in the biblical period—he appeared as a latter-day representative for the authentic biblical conception of the Israelite ethos, one that preceded rabbinic Judaism and continued to persist (if only underground, though it broke out into the open at several critical junctures) throughout all of Jewish history: during the Second Commonwealth (in the form of the Hasmoneans and the Sadducees) and even during the Exile.

This assumption was reinforced by the researches that examined the history of Israel during the First and Second Temple periods and traced the sources of Spinoza's thought in the kabbalistic literature that tended toward pantheism. The radical Maskilim turned to the literary sources that had been defined as "apocryphal" and to the deviant positions that were revealed in the many-sided Talmudic literature. Personalities such as Elisha ben Avuyah, who was labeled "Aḥer" (the Other), excited their imaginations. In their eyes, Spinoza was the Other of their age, the great rebel in the name of a free, natural religion striving for the ideals of earthly happiness.

Before we attempt to examine the adaptation of Spinoza's teaching to Judaism in the thought of the Maskilim of the *He-Ḥalutz* circle, it is fitting that we examine the activity of one pioneer who marched ahead of the camp in the theoretical area: the Maskil who was persecuted throughout his lifetime and saw himself as another Spinoza—Dr. Solomon Rubin (1823–1910).<sup>11</sup> He was a prolific author who dedicated himself to the service of his people's enlightenment. Working on his own, he established

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<sup>11</sup> On Solomon Rubin, see Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, 5:305–18.

a broad and variegated literary oeuvre whose objective was to spread enlightenment among the people and at its heart was the teaching of the man whom the rabbinic establishment had tried to exile from the midst of his people. In Rubin's eyes, Spinoza was the "guide" for the perplexed of his day, and he took on the role of his prophet.

He started by publishing several popular Hebrew expositions of his teaching. The first and most comprehensive bore the audacious title *The New Guide for the Perplexed* (1856), and we shall return to it later. He received his doctorate from the University of Göttingen for his dissertation (written in German), *Spinoza and Maimonides*. His literary activity found a wide response. The Orthodox biblical scholar and thinker Samuel David Luzzatto responded to his book in a sharply polemical article.<sup>12</sup> Rubin replied with *A Conclusive Answer* (1857).<sup>13</sup>

The Orthodox Luzzatto, who saw himself as a disciple of Judah Halevi, condemned Spinoza's pantheism as a form of idolatry. On this basis, he condemned Maimonides's way as that of one "who had consorted with pagan children." All the more, then, was it necessary for him to steer clear of Spinoza's heretical path. Not only was his pantheism disqualified as idolatrous, but his deterministic ethics was based on a rationalism devoid of emotion. Nevertheless, the debate that erupted between Luzzatto and Rubin had the effect of introducing Spinoza's teaching into the center of the scholarly and theoretical discourse of the Hebrew Enlightenment movement.

In what sense, then, did Rubin see in Spinoza's teaching a new *Guide for the Perplexed*? Despite the promising title, Rubin's book was not an original philosophical work but rather a popular lecture about Spinoza the man and his two principal works: the *Ethics* and the *Theological-Political Treatise*. Rubin's Spinoza was a brilliant student who knew the Jewish sources thoroughly, discovered their national-worldly essence, rebelled for its sake against fanatical, obscurantist rabbinic Judaism, and

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<sup>12</sup> See article by Luzzatto in *Hamaggid*, no. 41, reprinted as "Spinoza (Part 4)" in S. D. Luzzatto, *Mehkerei Hayahadut* (Studies in Judaism), vol. 1, pt. 1 (Jerusalem: Makor, 1970), 212–17.

<sup>13</sup> When Rubin eventually got around to publishing a full translation of Spinoza's *Ethics* in 1885, he reminisced about this exchange: "About thirty years ago I began to place Spinoza's books before Hebrew readers, and two booklets of mine saw the light in 1857. Hardly had the first booklet appeared, when the scholar Samuel David Luzzatto came out against me and poured out his anger and fury on Spinoza . . . he declared holy war on me in a dispute that was for the sake of Heaven, a wave of battles conducted in various journals and lasting for about ten years." Solomon Rubin, *Heker eloah 'im torat ha-adam* (translation of Spinoza's *Ethics*) (Vienna: Georg Breg, 1885), Introduction, v.

was persecuted for it. In his view, Spinoza's philosophy was the foundation for modern philosophy in general. As such, it was also the modern interpretation of Judaism.<sup>14</sup> In the continuation of his work, Rubin presented a popular survey of Spinoza's theology and ethical theory. Pantheism was presented as a modern interpretation of the idea of monotheism, and his ethics was presented as a philosophical interpretation of prophetic ethics. In his survey of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Rubin emphasized Spinoza's struggle for freedom of thought, his recognition of the importance and independence of the sciences as intellectual disciplines, their standing apart from religion, and the national-political character of Judaism.<sup>15</sup>

Two principal messages emerged in the course of this work, and Rubin offered them for the edification of the perplexed of his generation, the youths who aspired to enlightenment, fearful that it might lead them outside the Jewish fold: First, belief in God was a truth in the heart of every individual. Every individual understood it and expressed it in ways appropriate to him. Thus the prophets also felt that their teaching contained no obligation in matters of thought or ritual, and the halakha had no binding force in these areas. Jews were permitted to believe and worship God as they wished. Second, the connection to Jewry need not be maintained through religion but rather through belonging to the national framework and its culture. It was expressed principally in observance of the laws of the society and following its ethical traditions.

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<sup>14</sup> "Every religion and faith from the root of Jacob bears fruit. The shoot of modern philosophy also emanated from Israelite stock to the nations of the world. But Spinoza came into the world two centuries before his time [and was reviled for that reason] . . . Now that all the peoples of the earth have returned to show favor to Spinoza, we have the right of the first-born to bring him back from exile and accept him into our Hebrew literature, in which his exalted ideas gestated, and from whose fountains he drew his faithful waters." *Ibid.*, vi–vii.

<sup>15</sup> "The camps of Spinoza's enemies were two, for the progressions of his research separated out onto two paths. The first ascends to the House of God (Beth El) on the heights of his book on the Holy Scriptures, the *Theological-Political Treatise*, in which he demonstrates that all the prophecies were only imaginary visions, and all the miracles were only prodigies hanging by a slim thread based on the laws of nature. Also that Moses was none other than a great political sage in his time. This aroused the fire of the theologians, priests and rabbis, and they called him an atheist who did not fear God. The second path was in his book *Ethics*, in which he speaks of the nature of God (*Deus-natura*) one and unique in his manifold acts, who moves imperceptibly on the wings of the wind and in the still small voice of the roar of the sea, who dwells serenely amid the flora, who stirs and roams amidst the fauna, whose reason speaks in the innards of man, and whose movement fills all creation unceasingly." Solomon Rubin, *The New Guide for the Perplexed* (Vienna: Joseph Holzwarte, 5616/1856), 1:8–9.

Solomon Rubin continued in his activity to propagate Spinoza's ideas his whole life long. His last project in this vein was the first Hebrew translation of the *Ethics*, under the name *In Search of God* (Vienna, 1885). Afterward he translated the *Grammar of the Hebrew Language* (Cracow, 1905), as testimony to Spinoza's relation to his national culture.

As we have said, Dr. Rubin devoted himself to propagating the Enlightenment in general and Spinoza's ideas in particular, whereas the members of the *He-Ḥalutz* circle devoted themselves to scholarly and theoretical work. Joshua Heschel Schorr,<sup>16</sup> the publisher of the periodical, its editor and primary author, who lavished the greater part of his ink on his own articles and researches, conducted his campaign against rabbinic Judaism in detailed studies on the rabbinic literature and the history of the Jewish people. He thus was close to Geiger's path, except that he did not concern himself with the question of belief in God and the philosophical topics bound up with it. Nor did pantheism or Spinoza's intellectual love of God speak to his heart. The content of the prophets' monotheism, which he valued as Geiger had, was their idealistic social ethic, which burst forth from the depths of their personal conscience and was not subservient to the priestly ritual or petrified halakhic rules. The prophets invoked the rule of justice in every present moment by directly applying its values to the reality of their time.<sup>17</sup>

From Spinoza Schorr received the definition of Mosaic religion as a political teaching striving for democracy and directed at the people's worldly happiness. He also accepted from him the argument that rabbinic Judaism turned the democratic "kingdom of God" that Moses had established into rule by priests. As a historical scholar, however, he was alert to Spinoza's limitations as a researcher of Jewish history in its full extent, and the historical picture that he drew differed both from Spinoza's and from Geiger's. Unlike Spinoza, he did not blame the betrayal of

<sup>16</sup> On Joshua Heschel Schorr, see Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, 4:56–78, and Ezra Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr: Maskil and Eastern European Reformist," *HUCA* 31 (1960): 181–222, and "Joshua Heschel Schorr: The Mature Years," *HUCA* 40/41 (1969/1970): 503–28.

<sup>17</sup> The outlook summarized here is repeated throughout the thirteen volumes of *He-Ḥalutz* that comprise the core of Schorr's literary output (1852–1889). It is expressed succinctly in the series of articles titled *Davar Be-Itto* ("A Timely Word"; see *He-Ḥalutz* 1 [1852]: 47–65), in three sections: 1. introductory remarks, 2. "A Look at the Mishnah and Gemara," and 3. "Errors of the Talmud." A selection of Schorr's articles from *He-Ḥalutz* is available in the collection *Y. H. Schorr: Ma'amarim* (Jerusalem: Dorot Series 35, Mosad Bialik, 1972).

the Mosaic-Sinaitic prophetic theocracy on its own inherent deficiencies, in invidious comparison to the teaching of the New Testament. Rather, Schorr (agreeing with Geiger) saw prophetic ethics as superior to Christian ethics precisely in its practical, worldly aspect: the teaching of social justice, as opposed to an ethereal, abstract teaching of love. But on the other hand, unlike Geiger, he rejected the halakha in no uncertain terms. In his view it served no other purpose than to give the rabbis authority and ruling power over the people, and this tended to develop more and more in an arbitrary and “priestly” direction.<sup>18</sup>

Thus the negative turn that Spinoza discovered in the development of Mosaic law after the Golden Calf episode Schorr discovered in the transformation that was wrought by the scribes and Sages after the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth. In his view, it sought to fashion a religious substitute for the political framework that had disintegrated. The development was, of course, gradual, and it continued throughout the Second Temple period by way of the unceasing struggles with the priests, who held fast to the worldly political existence as in a previous age. Against this background, Schorr interpreted the struggle that erupted between the Pharisees on the one hand and the Hasmoneans and Sadducees on the other. With the destruction of the Second Temple, on the threshold of the Exile, the political powers were vanquished, and Pharisaic Judaism

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<sup>18</sup> Schorr's polemical article “Tefillin” is a choice example of his opposing punctilious observance to ethical living: “But what, you ask, is wrong with these mitzvot [of tefillin, tzitzit, and mezuzah]? Do they injure and harm the cause of enlightenment, if a maskil is accustomed to them? To this I answer: indeed they injure and harm to a great extent! Whoever is perceptive in this matter will respond that customs that do not have an intrinsic value are deleterious. Never mind that ordinary people will imagine that by doing these they have satisfied the demands of righteous living; they have earned paradise; and they need not bother themselves with behaving ethically. Never mind that it gives hypocrites and swindlers a means of deceiving the folk and winning their confidence. It causes even greater damage, for the common person, when he sees someone who is slack in performing these mitzvot, will consider him a heretic and consider it meritorious to hate him, persecute him, and cut off his livelihood. In addition to this, if a common person is occasionally forced by necessity to relax his performance with one of these customs that are sacred to him, he may conclude that since he can no longer keep to the whole regimen, he may as well chuck it all. Consider whether these closed-hearted and dumb-witted people—and I count the majority of the self-styled scholars and wiseacres among them—do not consider themselves as guaranteed long life if they are wearing tallit and tefillin and have a mezuzah on their doorposts, and as having a ticket to paradise if they say their prayers punctually every day. What need, then, do they have to purify their deeds in order to earn God's favor?” Joshua Heschel Schorr, “Tefillin,” *He-Ḥalutz* 5 (1860):11–26; reprinted in Joshua Heschel Schorr, *Ma'amarim* (Essays), ed. Ezra Spicehandler (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1972), 191–221.



emerged victorious. Religious halakha thus took over the leadership role from the worldly regime.

Schorr credited the completion of this development to Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, who committed the Oral Law to writing in the Mishnah, certified it as binding law, and assumed the prerogative of interpretation for himself and his duly ordained disciples.<sup>19</sup> In this spirit Schorr criticized the halakha enforced by the rabbis in his age and sought to show that it was arbitrary, rigid, and oppressive, posing an obstacle to the worldly happiness of the people. The objective for which he preached was replacement of the rabbinic leadership and its halakha with a democratic communal leadership that would set laws and judicial norms on the basis of values that were in accord with changing life conditions, subject to the consent of the people.

The same outlook that Schorr expressed in his historical researches was formulated in a more crystallized and principled philosophical way in the article of Fabius Mieses (1824–1898), whom we mentioned earlier as the author of the *History of Modern Philosophy*. In 1868 he published in installments in *Ha-Melitz* a comprehensive article titled “The War over Religion.”<sup>20</sup> This referred to the battles that had been waged by the religious movements around the issue of the reform of halakha. He gave an overview of the contending views, analyzed their arguments and showed that there was a measure of justification and a measure of one-sidedness in each of them, while they could all find support for their positions in the sources.<sup>21</sup> His conclusion was that Judaism could not be contained

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<sup>19</sup> “Maybe the words of Rabbi Joshua, who protested rightly against the heavenly voice and said, ‘It is not in Heaven!’ were addressed also against the heavenly voice that rendered Hillel’s view sacrosanct . . . The power of the Patriarch increased for several reasons, of which the political situation of the nation was primary, generation by generation, until Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, who was the first who was so bold as to lay down the decree, ‘A court may not override the decision of its fellow-court unless it is greater than the former in wisdom and in number,’ and codified it in his Mishnah [*m. Eduyot* 1:5]. . . . My hair stands on end when I bring to mind how great is the evil that could have ensued from this decree, that a court may not override, etc., if it had been possible for him to achieve his objective and to establish it firmly for succeeding generations, for by means of it the later sages’ hands would have been bound, so that they would be unable to change or annul anything, even if it were quite necessary for their time and place.” Schorr, “A Timely Word,” *He-Ḥalutz* 2 (1853):37–58, reprinted in Schorr, *Ma’amarim*, 73–76.

<sup>20</sup> Fabius Mieses, “Milhemet Ha-Dat” (The War over Religion), *Ha-Melitz*, October 3, 1868 thru February 13, 1869 (intermittent installments).

<sup>21</sup> In the course of his installments, Mieses defines three parties in contemporary Judaism: the rationalists of the Enlightenment (who have their medieval prototype in Maimonides), the ultrareligious (who take after the kabbalists), and the modern rabbis (of whom he singles out for special approbation Rapoport, Frankel, and Sachs). He subjects



in a single worldview, a single set of faith-principles, or a single philosophical system. Judaism enabled all these views to exist within itself, and what united them was to be found beyond them in “Torahitic national and political laws . . . which have the power to foster prosperity and happiness in the practical life of the people and its polity,” just as Spinoza had taught.<sup>22</sup> But unlike Spinoza, he strove to show that one could implement the principles of the Mosaic Law in the reality of his time. These principles, he argued, are the very principles of the French Revolution: national unity, political freedom, and equality of civil rights.

Alongside Fabius Mieses, we should also mention the Maskil Salomon Zebi Hirsch (1834–1879), who was the author of the strikingly unique book *History of Israel and Its Faith*. He wrote three volumes, but only the first was published and has come down to us: *The Causes of Jewish History to the Beginning of the Second Temple* (Vienna, 1873), namely, the same period on which Spinoza based his arguments; indeed, his objective was to demonstrate that the Israelite nation developed in its initial period as a nation in the same form as all nations that answered to the definition of nationhood accepted in Europe in his time. He argued consistently that, just like all other nations, so Israel was constituted in the land of Israel as a people on its land, and that was its historical birthplace, not in Egypt or at the foot of Mount Sinai, as narrated in Exodus.<sup>23</sup>

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all three parties in turn to a positive exposition of their principles, criticism, and finally balanced appreciation (*ibid.*).

<sup>22</sup> “The prophets strongly exhorted the people and the priests concerning performance of such action as was necessary for the good and happiness of the nation in actuality, and concerning virtuous traits and laws of justice and equity, kindness, and compassion.” *Ibid.*, November 7, 1868, 322. “We will repeat and say that the reasons for such political Torahitic laws was ‘for you were a slave in the land of Egypt,’ which is an example of freedom for the nation in its entirety.” *Ibid.*, December 26, 1868.

<sup>23</sup> The modern historical method of Hirsch’s work is evident from such passages as: “... Even those who say that the spirit of youth hovers over all the events written in the book of Genesis, whose style can be recognized in the whole book, and who will argue that the time of this book is very ancient—indeed, prior to Moses—this can be demonstrated or surmised only if it is known that the source of the reports and narratives (the mythic origin of these legends) . . . on which the scribes drew is very ancient.” Salomon Zebi Hirsch, *Korot Yisrael ve-Emunato* (The Events of Jewish History to the Beginning of the Second Temple) (Vienna, 1873), 76. “Moses who learned two widely different faiths, the sophisticated faith of the Egyptians and the faith of the Midianites, the primitive natural people of the wilderness, when he experienced the solitude of the wilderness of Arabia under the heavens are as pure as sapphire and crystal . . . there his heart’s eyes were opened, and he saw that the professors of both faiths were only dreamers, and neither knew the truth, for the dream of the primitives and the dream of the enlightened were one dream, and the one complemented the other. Out of these two opposed faiths, the Egyptian

Hirsch demonstrated his claim through detailed critical analysis of all the biblical references to the conquest of the land. He showed through these citations that the majority of the people did not go down to Egypt but became consolidated into a nation through a natural process. On the basis of this demonstration, he later depicted the internal and external struggles of the Israelite commonwealth. From a contemporary viewpoint, one may view this argument as a first attempt to base the historical national right of the Jewish people to return to its homeland and to reestablish on it its worldly polity, as would be argued later by the *Hibbat Zion* and political Zionist movements.

The only member of this group who dealt with the whole range of topics of modern philosophy of religion and proposed his own religious-philosophical method was, as we have said, the son of Nachman Krochmal and colleague of Schorr in *He-Ḥalutz*, namely, Abraham Krochmal (1817–1888).<sup>24</sup>

The younger Krochmal saw himself as continuing his father's philosophical and scholarly project. It was up to him to complete what his father had not managed to research or develop philosophically in his *Guide for the Perplexed of the Time*. He perceived the deficiency in three central areas:

- a. Research of the development of Jewish philosophical thought in the literature of the Oral Law from Mishnaic times to the beginning of the modern period in conjunction with the development of general philosophy;
- b. Research of the development of modern philosophy and providing the proper philosophical tools for developing a theory of Judaism in modernity;
- c. Coping with the historical task of the Jewish people and its religious teaching in the modern period, especially in the political-halakhic realm, the social-ethical realm, and the foundations of faith.

One should, of course, not view the younger Krochmal's contribution in these broad areas as merely filling in the gaps in his father's thought. It provided a necessary updating in response to present problems and developments in the field of Jewish historical and literary-source research and in the field of Jewish philosophy, and it was clear that such updating

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faith in the power of general providence and the desert dwellers' faith in individual providence, from the two of them together would emerge the pure faith." Ibid., 87–88.

<sup>24</sup> On the life and career of Abraham Krochmal, see Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, 4:88–118.

would require a comprehensive rethinking of the system in a manner apt to cause substantive changes.

His first attempt to research the development of Jewish philosophy of religion from the Bible through rabbinic literature to the literature of the Middle Ages was his book *Knowledge of God in the Land* (Lemberg, 1863). Afterward came several articles that were published at the time in journals, particularly *He-Ḥalutz*, on the topics of halakhic reform, developing the foundations of Israelite belief, and the destiny of the Jewish people in exile up to the modern age, and these were eventually published together in his *Collected Essays* (Lemberg, 1885). In 1871 in Vienna, he published a short work titled *Head-Stone*, containing a discussion of Spinoza's philosophy of religion and its place in general and Jewish philosophy. This was presented as a dialogue between his father and the Talmudic-halakhic scholar Rabbi Zvi Chajes. It would appear that this book was written as preparation for the publication of his major systematic work, for at its conclusion he announced its imminent appearance.

His culminating work appeared in German in Lemberg in 1872 under the title *Theology of the Future*. It would thus appear that Abraham Krochmal did not believe that such a systematic philosophical work would attract a sufficiently wide reading public in Hebrew. Over a decade later, there appeared his Hebrew book *Iyyun Tefillah (Concentration in Prayer)*, written in a midrashic style on the basis of traditional sources, especially rabbinic apothegms. It would thus seem that the younger Krochmal sought to adapt his writing to two reading publics—to the philosophically educated public he wrote in German in a systematic, disciplined manner, whereas to the public with traditional rabbinic education he wrote in a sermonic manner in Hebrew.

In *Knowledge of God in the Land*, and also in *Concentration in Prayer*, Krochmal dealt with the development of Jewish philosophy of religion from its sources in the Bible to the beginning of the modern period. The title of the first work emphasized the primary tendency of his thought, which goes far toward explaining the importance he attributed to the appearance of Spinoza's philosophy at the beginning of the modern period. He concluded that already in its prephilosophical beginnings Jewish thought was directed toward recognizing the activity of God in His terrestrial activity and toward realizing the divine ideal in worldly life. Unlike ancient paganism, the patriarchs of Israel recognized God as a transcendent ideal, not through any mystical approach, which would later produce Christianity, with its yearning to rise to the supraterritorial spiritual plane and find redemption from this worldly life by cleaving to

an objective, supraterrrestrial divine spirit, but rather for the sake of elevating the immanent divine forces in humanity and in nature.<sup>25</sup>

According to this outlook, the perspective out of which Moses and the prophets strove for knowledge of God was one of the divine spirit's being implanted in mankind and expressed in his ethical values and deeds. They did not arrive at the level of knowledge of modern philosophy, which grasped the divine through human subjective consciousness. The divine that was revealed to them was not a separate essence that remained beyond any human comprehension but rather the "attributes" that embody the immanence of the divine in terrestrial reality, in the regularity of nature and human ethical awareness. In this way Abraham Krochmal interpreted the revelation to Moses in the cleft of the rock as a prephilosophical approximation to Spinoza's teaching: identification of knowledge of God with knowledge of the laws of creation and the laws of ethical conduct.<sup>26</sup>

Krochmal's interpretative inquiries into the biblical sources and rabbinic midrashim caused him to show how they led to a gradual approximation of the ideas that came to systematic philosophical formulation among the modern philosophers. He discovered in Moses's words a prephilosophical awareness of Spinoza's position, and he found in the rabbis' sayings, which in his view represented a rational rather than a mystical approach, a prephilosophical awareness of the ideas of Kant and Hegel, who rediscovered the independence of spirit.

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25 "Abraham kept the ways of God and chose to walk in His paths, that is to say, that he endeavored to know the rule of everything as it was—this is scientific reason; and to act as reason prescribes—this is ethical reason. However, he saw and understood that, although he desired to enact absolute good, he was finite, and it would generally surpass his ability. . . . He understood that one who could enact justice absolutely, only such a one was truly free, for nothing was beyond his power. . . . But in another respect he was only believing, that is to say, trusting, as the verse says, 'And [Abraham] *believed* in God,' inasmuch as he was deficient in scientific reason and did not find the absolute in his scientific reason. . . . And his ethical reason was compelled to take faith for his assistance. . . . For all these reasons I say, the absolute was revealed to the patriarchs, but in the ethical sense, not the theoretical sense. Though scientific knowledge of the absolute exists, they had only faith, for until Moses they had no knowledge of it through the material and formal causes, that is to say, its essence and life." Abraham Krochmal, *Da'at Elohim Ba'aretz* (Knowledge of God in the Land) (Lemberg: Michael Wolf, 1863), 5–6.

26 "And indeed the rank of [Moses'] knowledge of the divine was close to the rank of the system of our master Baruch [Spinoza], except that Baruch, in whose time they already distinguished between substance and its idea, was forced to associate with the existent God two attributes of extension and thought." Ibid., 7.

What caused these developments in rabbinic thought? Krochmal attributed them to grappling with the developments in the cultures of the surrounding nations. Prophetic monotheism developed out of grappling with ancient paganism, and rabbinic thought developed at the beginning of the Second Temple period out of grappling with Persian Zoroastrianism, which had raised for the focus of inquiry the problem of the struggle between good and evil in the world. In order to advance from this position toward unity, they discovered the tendency of purposive development in history toward the ideal of worldly redemption. Afterward came the grappling with the challenges of Greek philosophy, which recognized monotheism but did not recognize the dimension of progress toward a vision of the future and remained attached to an ideal of metaphysical transcendence. Maimonides was the Jewish philosopher who raised the thought of the Torah to the philosophical level and envisioned a future of historical redemption on earth but still without full awareness of the idea of immanent development in history and without surrendering the dimension of supraworldly spiritual redemption.

All this is background for understanding the objective of the younger Krochmal's work *Head-Stone*, dealing with Spinoza's philosophy of religion from the standpoint of the development of general and Jewish philosophy in the modern age. Krochmal summarized the dialogue between his philosophical father and the unphilosophical halakhic scholar Rabbi Zvi Chajes as an effort to vindicate the excommunicated "Rabbi Baruch" and to show that he was far from the threatening image that the pious had of him.<sup>27</sup> First of all, he was as holy in his ethical conduct as one of the prophets, and it becomes clear when one delves into the depths of his thought that he was not cut off from the substantive framework of his ancestral heritage, he only brought it to a turning point in what was previously incomplete, and so there were grounds for misunderstanding.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "Know, my friend, I am not of Spinoza's followers; I do not agree with his opinions, and his thoughts are not my thoughts. Nevertheless, when I hear how today people who perversely persecute with hate and vengeance the thinker who was serene in his life and who has gone to his peaceful rest, I am heartsick." Abraham Krochmal, *Even Ha-Rosha* (Headstone) (Vienna: Joseph Holzworth, 1871), 11. "One can see the mettle of his spirit in all his life's journeyings, that he had the courage to inquire the truth to its conclusion unflinchingly and feared nothing. He chose to seek the wisdom of Torah and kabbalah and forsook them to study logic." Ibid., 11–12.

<sup>28</sup> "I see that he did not deny the existence of God . . . but every utterance in his books affirms the idea of the divine, which is the beginning and end of all. Moreover, that is the single idea to which he ties and connects all his insights." Ibid., 18.

It is clear that the effort to “vindicate” the great heretic expressed the desire to show that what the philosophically ignorant pious had regarded as standard Maskilic heresy was nothing other than a necessary turning required for the development of the Jewish Torah so that it might arrive at full self-knowledge and realize its destiny in the modern age.

When we examine Spinoza’s arguments precisely and in depth (argues the philosopher in the dialogue), we are convinced that the attribute of extension, representing the material principle, was not given equal status with the attribute of thought, representing the divine essence. Thought has priority. It is the source. The intellectual love of God is pure spirituality transcending the attribute of extension.<sup>29</sup> The same applies to the topic of purposiveness in man’s free moral choice. Although Spinoza denied teleology on principle, it becomes clear from a precise reading of his words that all actions that express human reason embody an ideal purposive will that strives for the exalted purpose of knowing God as the ideal of the good, and it is this will that guides ethical conduct. Thus he turned even causal determinism into true freedom—for that is how it is conceived in practice as the willing enlightened realization of human destiny.<sup>30</sup>

As we have said, according to the view of the “Krochmal” figure in the dialogue, the source of contradiction between the surface meaning in Spinoza and what a close reading reveals in the content of his argumentation is a consideration that has not arrived at full clarity. In his view, this was brought about by Spinoza’s mistaken adherence to Descartes’s epistemology. If he had continued to develop the logic of his thought, he would have arrived first at Kant’s revolution in epistemology and ethics and next at Hegel’s dialectical epistemology, for Hegel reverted to Spinoza’s view that the truth is apprehended through the self-reflection of the universal divine spirit in man, but he recognized that this self-reflection is a historical process that proceeds in order from one step to the next toward infinite perfection. Hegel thus overcame the dichotomy between object and appearance that was Kant’s stumbling block. He thus overcame Kant’s correct conclusion that there is no proof for God’s existence from nature: when one arrives at the self-reflection of the certain awareness that every cognition is of God, there is no need of proofs.

The younger Krochmal thus thought that the development of modern philosophy culminated in Hegel’s system. However, this conclusion did

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 22–25.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 31–36.

not bring him to negate the independent value of Spinoza's and Kant's philosophies. On the contrary—in his view each was valid in its domain. It was Spinoza who raised “knowledge of God on earth” to the philosophical level through the necessary revolution in conceiving the relation between God and nature from the perspective of human spirit. Therefore his approach was valid for researching the cultural-historical and political development of humanity and of Jewry. Kant's teaching was valid in the domain of ethics, and Hegel's synthesis brought one to the knowledge of metaphysical truth that united nature and history.

As we shall see later, these conclusions determined the methodological structure of his *Theology of the Future*; in order to understand it, however, it would be proper to examine first another Hebrew essay of Krochmal's included in his *Collected Essays*: “I Am a Hebrew, and I Revere the Lord, God of Heaven.”<sup>31</sup>

The explicit purpose of this essay was “to refute the slander” against the Maskilim, that it was their objective, so to speak, to destroy the house of Israel. Just the opposite. The Maskilim are devoted to preservation of the people in the future, which they anticipate in an enlightened way. They are faithful to the eternal principles of Judaism, and the changes that they demand in understanding its principles and how to keep them are necessary for adaptation to historical development. There is nothing new in this either. For changes required for adapting to the anticipated future were performed throughout all of Jewish history, and they embody the developmental principle of the Torah.

The proof of this claim requires, however, a definition of the eternal principles by tracing their appearance and interpretation in all the sources from the Bible to the literature of modern times and a definition of the methodological principle that will insure the continuity of the process toward a realization of the historical goal. In Krochmal's view, Judaism is based on three eternal principles, each of which defines its domain: the domain of true beliefs, the domain of ethical conduct, and the domain of religion (service of God). The first eternal principle is the unity of God (“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One”); the eternal principle in the second domain is the love of neighbor (“you shall love your neighbor as yourself”); and the eternal principle in the third realm is sanctification (“you shall be holy to the Lord your God”).

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<sup>31</sup> Abraham Krochmal, “Ivri Anokhi” (I Am a Hebrew), *He-Ḥalutz* 4: 1–12; reprinted in Krochmal, *Agadat Ma'amarim* (Collected Essays) (Lemberg: Michael Wolf, 1885).



This positive general formulation appears in all Jewish sources without change; however, it has no definite, permanent content in either thought or deed but only general guidance. In order to define it, one must set against every positive general principle a limiting negative principle: against the unity of God stands the principle negating idolatry. By means of it, we approach the recognition of unity via an infinite but intrinsic route. Against the injunction to love our neighbor stands the principle "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow," and against the principle "Be holy" stands the principle of abstinence from selfish sensuality for the sake of devotion to the spiritual ideal that is Israel's destiny.

In the conclusion of the essay, Krochmal points out that the positive principles are eternal because they are a kind of universal ideal pointing always toward the future. We shall never attain them; we shall, however, progress toward them by negating the tangible negations that we discover in every historical present, and in order to progress we must anticipate, on the basis of the memory of the past and the circumstances of the present, the possibilities of the immediate future, and we must shape the regenerating vision. Thus is revealed the secret of the unity of the Jewish people and the secret of its perpetuity: the prophets of Israel and its sages and spiritual leaders in every generation anticipate the future and establish the norms of conduct in the present in order to realize the desired future.<sup>32</sup>

These words explain the meaning of the title of the book, articulating its central idea: it is the objective of the *Theology of the Future* to show that Judaism was always oriented to the future. It always had the prospect of an exalted eternal vision, and between it and the people's current condition there was always a vision of the desirable toward which it was possible to approach in a process of historical realization in this terrestrial life.

The first part of the book is devoted to the historical development of Judaism on the political plane.<sup>33</sup> It is based on Spinoza's teaching and

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<sup>32</sup> Abraham Krochmal, *Theologie der Zukunft* (Theology of the Future) (Lemberg: M. F. Poremba, 1872).

<sup>33</sup> Krochmal organized his book into three parts, corresponding to the first three benedictions of the Amidah prayer, and titled them "Cheker Aboth," "Cheker Geburoth," "Cheker Keduschoth." Only to the first did he assign a German subtitle: "Lehre aus der Geschichte" ("Lessons from History"). It is easy to extrapolate how the three parts of this book correspond to the three principles enunciated in the essay, "I Am a Hebrew, and I Revere the Lord, God of Heaven," though in a different order: (1) Cheker Aboth corresponds to "love your neighbor"; (2) Cheker Geburoth (which focuses mainly on "Die Allmacht in der Natur" and arriving at knowledge of God from contemplating nature) corresponds to "God is One"; and (3) Cheker Keduschoth seeks, by analogy with the threefold



presents a description of the democratic character of the Mosaic constitution in comparison with pagan polities that exhibited tyranny. The book then describes the internal and external struggles of the prophets to oppose the tendencies of despotic idolatry and to uphold the command of the Torah in order to bring about regeneration.<sup>34</sup>

Like his father, the younger Krochmal showed that the political history of the Israelite nation exhibits the gradual weakening of the political framework, until the people were cut off entirely from their land and were exiled among the nations. He also thought that despite this, the process fostered ethical and spiritual elevation. Going into exile was not a punishment but rather a prerequisite to fulfilling Israel's universal destiny. But unlike his father, he defined this task not as needing to unite all the national cultures in its Torah teaching but rather as propagating the ethics of the unity of the ideals among the nations. Thus he drew closer to the outlooks of the leaders of the Reform movement and forsook the vision of the return to Zion. The people of Israel must remain scattered among the nations. But unlike the outlook of the Reform thinkers in Germany, it did not occur to him at all to forgo preserving the comprehensive national political framework even in Diaspora. The future that he anticipated from the perspective of his time was based on the communal democracy that developed in the Jewish people in exile, and the political redemption would be its perfection within a framework of an all-Jewish parliament that would determine the patterns of social life that distinguish and unify the people.<sup>35</sup>

It was clear that religion had to be a central task in defining the national identity and its preservation in life patterns. Nevertheless, the parliamentary framework was that of representative democracy, in other words, secular. Would it be possible to implement in this fashion the liberal principle of separation of church and state? The negative answer is clear. The separation would not leave the Jewish parliament with any authority of legislation and practical governance.

Abraham Krochmal's answer thus turned out to be inseparable from the way that Spinoza described the place of religion in the Mosaic Law: here was an entity in which the political and religious authority were identical. The difference from ancient times to the present had to be expressed only

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proclamation of God's holiness ("Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts") to arrive at the idea of God from the Kantian trinity of truth, freedom, and beauty.

<sup>34</sup> *Theologie der Zukunft*, "Cheker Aboth," vol. 1, §§6–7 (31–44) and §§10–12 (50–74).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, §13 (75–87).

in the full democratization of the process. That is to say, the authority for halakhic decision making would have to be transferred to the chosen representatives of the people. In order to ground this claim, Krochmal concluded that the substantive difference between Judaism and Christianity required separating religion from the state in Christian countries but leaving them inseparable in the Jewish political framework. According to Christianity, which strove for man's redemption on the plane of supraterritorial, spiritual life through the mediation of the church, man's love was wholly contained within his devotion to the love of God, and therefore the secular state had to arrange, outside the domain of religion, all matters of law and social-worldly ethics. This was not the case in Judaism, in whose Torah the love of God is expressed entirely in neighborly love. Religious legislation is directed at worldly ethical life, and nothing remains except to take the step that is called for by an understanding of modern democratic principles and to transfer the authority of halakhic decision making to the representative political jurisdiction of the people.

After the discussion of this theological-political agenda on the basis of Spinoza, the younger Krochmal dealt in the second part of his work with the theological-ethical issue on the basis of Kant. In this connection he dealt with the problem of the relation between nature, which operates on the basis of its deterministic regularity, and ethics, which expresses the purposive will of the human spirit. The theological question that is raised on the basis of the yearning for "knowledge of God on earth" is whether it is possible to approach toward the realization of the ethical ideal within the social life of human beings, who are embedded within deterministic nature.<sup>36</sup> Krochmal's positive answer is based first of all on Kant: man's moral will is autonomous and is self-determined. However, in order to overcome the Kantian dichotomy between spirit and nature, he returned to Spinoza via Hegel and opted in favor of the unity of nature and spirit as a vision for whose realization in history humanity is striving, in other words, through culture, which unites spirit with nature.<sup>37</sup> The "theology of the future" shapes the present through anticipating the absolute future toward which humanity is striving, and this is the destiny of Israel as the chosen people.

On the basis of the discussion in part 2, Krochmal thus comes to part 3 to discuss the sanctification of the Jewish people to its destiny within

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<sup>36</sup> *Theologie der Zukunft*, "Cheker Geburoth," vol. 2, §§1–5 (1–5).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, §11 (11–18).

humanity. The question that occupies him in this section is how the Jewish people will be distinguished for the sake of their destiny among humanity. Following Kant, and distancing himself from Hegel, he defined the true, the good, and the beautiful as ideals that are realized through deeds and not through thought alone.<sup>38</sup> In order for the destiny of humanity defined by these ideals to come to fulfillment, there must be one people sanctified entirely to this task, and it will shape its entire life toward the anticipated future while abstaining from the worldly present, and this is the destiny of sanctification that distinguishes Israel from the other nations that are devoted to living in the present. This refers of course to the religious commandments, the commandments of service of God through sanctity, by which Israel is distinguished in its entire life pattern.<sup>39</sup>

If we compare this conception of the destiny of Israel among humanity to that of the elder Krochmal on the one hand and the conception of the Reform thinkers (especially Geiger) on the other, we can conclude that Abraham Krochmal drew considerably closer to the missionary worldview of Reform, yet despite this he maintained in every area—the political, the ethical, and the ritual—the religious differentiating characteristics that distinguished Jews as a nation. He found justification for this—both theological-political and theological-ethical—in Spinoza's philosophy.

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<sup>38</sup> *Theologie der Zukunft*, "Cheker Keduschoth," vol. 2, §§3–5 (34–39).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, §§10–12 (48–60).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### REVEALED TORAH AND KANT'S CRITICAL IDEALISM

#### *A. Introductory Remarks*

The path of Reform was laid by individuals who rebelled against the rabbinic establishment in their traditional congregations and encountered the obstacle of German society. The defensiveness of the rabbinic establishment against the free, creative secular culture oppressed their personal selves, yet the defensiveness of the German society against their Jewish identity forced them to create an alternative religious institution that could enable them to conduct their struggle on two fronts. By contrast, the opposite path of Orthodoxy was laid down by leaders of the rabbinical establishment and by individuals who identified with it and developed their identities as Jews within its framework.

The task of the Orthodox ideology—we have said earlier that it, too, constituted an innovation relative to the tradition—was to confirm anew the religious authority that had been called into question and to reestablish it on its proper foundation: the given Torah (written and oral), which the believers saw as a totality of doctrines and beliefs, commandments, laws, and norms that comprised God's word to His people through the prophets who heard it and the sages who interpreted it with methods that were also given through revelation. The belief in the factuality of the divine revelation found in this Torah given from Sinai gave legitimation not only to the religious establishment but to all the doctrines, values, and life patterns that it imparts and through which its purpose finds fulfillment. The Orthodox ideology therefore needed to confirm this fundamental belief against those who would challenge it. Thence arises the centrality of the problem of revelation—in the sense of the transmission of the word of God to human beings—in Orthodox thought.

We should, however, attend to the fact that even this ideology, which sought to protect the religious establishment, was the creation of individuals who stood at a crossroads. Like those individuals who turned to Reform, so those individuals who turned to Orthodoxy also stood at a crossroads and had to choose, and it is self-evident that it is impossible for such decisions, proceeding from a deeply personal level, to be uniform

or to arrive at the same place. There will necessarily be many paths to Orthodoxy and different kinds of Orthodoxy, differing in their relation to the tradition and in their relation to the outside culture that challenged its authority.

Moreover, while the religious establishment required a clear, unequivocal ideology, the positions of the individuals who contributed to it were rooted from the outset in the ambivalence that lies behind every personal decision between alternatives. This ambiguity was indeed expressed, first of all in the division between fanatical and moderate responses, and afterward in the inner tension characterizing the moderate responses that favored mediation and reconciliation. It was also expressed, however, in the hidden inner struggle that characterized even the more extreme position, which was only apparently unequivocal but also expressed an inner attraction to the dangers of seduction, dangers it repressed through withdrawal and hostile rejection.

On the other hand, we should note that depending on the personal nature of the choice it was possible for an Orthodox position to take the form of a reforming idea or a journey of return in the hearts of those individuals who decided to rebel and were caught up in the definitions of the German society. The challenge to their original sense of certainty in the path that they had chosen, the confusion and gnawing doubts, roused them to thirst for the simple religious certainty that had been lost and to try to reconstruct—using the intellectual tools of modern culture that they had by now mastered and that had become a part of their own identity—the belief in the absolute truth of the Torah, whose source was in divine revelation.

On the level of organized movements, all these personal struggles were expressed in the division between the two kinds of Jewish Orthodoxy that arose side by side and clashed with each other: ultra-Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy. Ultra-Orthodoxy opted for a sweeping refusal of the Emancipation and absolute rejection of external modern culture, whereas Modern Orthodoxy considered how to fortify belief in revealed Torah in order to fashion openings to the positive messages of modern culture. These two paths were already visible in the first generation of the Jewish Enlightenment and its opponents, whereas in the second and third generations they became institutionalized during the battle against Reform.

The ideological response of ultra-Orthodoxy to Reform was based, of course, on the traditional Torah sources, and even among them there were choices to be made. The rationalist philosophy of the Middle Ages,

especially the legacy of the Maimonidean school, which had become an anchor point in the tradition for the modern Enlightenment party, was always suspect for its “Greek” tendencies. But even on general considerations there was a clear preference for the kabbalistic mysticism, which was revelatory in its essence, over the rationalist philosophy among the community that subscribed to the absolute authority of divine revelation embodied in the Torah.

Among the ultra-Orthodox, it was thus impossible even to consider relating to modern philosophy in a spirit of critical openness. It laid a sweeping ban against the students of Enlightenment, and clearly modern philosophy was the yeast in this dough, suspect of heresy. Only in later stages, when the active ideological struggle against the modern movements necessitated a deeper understanding of their positions, can one discover in the thought of the ultra-Orthodox ideologues influences—and they were well veiled—of ideas whose source was in modern philosophy, whereas in the stage that we are now discussing, ultra-Orthodoxy had nothing philosophical of its own to contribute.

The opposite held true of Modern Orthodoxy. From its standpoint, modern philosophy of religion was a vital instrument. It had to legitimate its chosen path both from the internal viewpoint of traditional Judaism and from the external viewpoint of the culture with which it wanted to achieve partial integration, and for this purpose a dialogue between traditional Jewish philosophy and modern philosophy was required. We recall that this need was already very much in evidence in the first generation of the Enlightenment.

We should nevertheless first emphasize that the consideration that led to institutionalizing Modern Orthodoxy as a distinct religious movement in the second and third generations of the Enlightenment was rooted in a prior foundation, characterizing Orthodoxy as such. From its standpoint, a principled difference between ultra-Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy did not seem possible. This was expressed outwardly by the agreement of all shades of Orthodoxy on the reasons for their sweeping rejection of Reform: a fundamental understanding of the principle of “revealed Torah” as the foundation of the entire edifice of Judaism.

No matter what explanation, whether philosophical or mystical, may be given to the phenomenon of divine revelation and prophecy, the principle that this Orthodoxy accepted in its literal sense was that the present Torah, as transmitted through the generations word for word, is the authentic word of God to His people. It is obligatory in all its details. Whoever denies even a single one of them is as if he denied the entire Torah,

and one may interpret and apply its commands only with the tools that were given with the same authority of Torahitic revelation.

To ultra-Orthodoxy, the meaning of this fundamental position was, as we have said, that one should forbid the study of any body of thought outside the Torah. To Modern Orthodoxy, it meant that the traditional meaning of the Torah, as interpreted by its own native methods of interpretation, is the criterion that determines authoritatively what it is permitted to accept of modern culture and modern philosophy and what is forbidden to accept.

Philosophically, this is a problematic position. In retrospect we can assess that this problem was the central focus of philosophical deliberation in Modern Orthodox thought, both methodologically and in terms of content. It was the struggle over it that drove the philosophical discussion in Modern Orthodoxy toward the Kantian philosophy, which had already conceded and made its peace with the notion that there are limits to human knowledge—more particularly the critical part, rather than the constructive part, of that philosophy.

*B. The Dialogue between R. Judah Halevi's Teaching and the Critical Philosophy of Locke and Kant in the Thought of Samuel David Luzzatto*

Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865) entered into the scholarly and philosophical circle of discourse of the east-European Hebrew Enlightenment and the German *Wissenschaft* movement from the special cultural background of Italian Jewry. He represented a tradition of general enlightenment immersed in Italian literature and in humanistic research of Jewish sources that was the product of the involvement of traditionally learned Jews in the culture of the Renaissance in Italy from the thirteenth century onward.<sup>1</sup>

S. D. Luzzatto had received a general education and read Italian literature. In addition to his deep Jewish education, he wrote poetry that was influenced by the Hebrew and Italian literature of his day, and he was an avid student of philologically oriented studies of the Hebrew language,

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<sup>1</sup> The most significant available researches on Samuel David Luzzatto, on which this analysis is based, are by Joseph Klausner (in *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, 2:40–121) and the Italian-Israeli scholar Menachem Emanuele Artom (in the introduction to the 2-volume collection *Shmuel David Luzzatto: Ketavim* [Bialik Institute, 1976] and *Perakim be-Mishnato shel ShaDaL* [Jerusalem, 1968]). See also Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, 10:125–150.

the Bible, the Jewish liturgy, and the poetry of the Spanish-Jewish Golden Age. The primary framework in which he served as a teacher and scholar was the rabbinical seminary of Padua, which had been established as a result of the Edict of Tolerance of Emperor Joseph II. The edict required, among other things, that rabbinical training should include general education. Though it had aroused a fierce storm of opposition in Germany and Galicia, this edict met with acceptance in Italy.

In the traditions of Italian Jewry, this intellectual and scholarly openness to general humanistic culture and its ways did not arouse any suspicion of heresy or threat to an observant lifestyle. The boundary of free scholarship that had been set by time-honored tradition was observed and taken for granted. One may say that the reliability of the historical testimony of the sacred sources and the tradition of the circumstances of their creation, their status and sanctity, was regarded as one of the assumptions on which philological research relied. This involved no departure from the scholarly norms that had been established in Italian humanism, which did not seek to challenge Christian belief but to broaden and deepen the secular cultural infrastructure that both served as its foundation and went beyond it.

Against this background, Jews who remained true to their faith and their religious observance could conduct an easy dialogue with Christian humanism without threat to their identity. The social-political background facilitated this as well: despite the social and cultural involvement toward which educated Italian society generally had a positive attitude, full civil emancipation was not on the horizon of Italian Catholic society. The leadership authority of the communal institutions had not yet been challenged, and the religious boundary between Jewish and Christian societies was strictly observed without overtones of hostility or prejudice from either side.

For S. D. Luzzatto, enlightenment was thus not a new ideology but an accepted state of affairs. He did not encounter in his education the fierce conflict that this movement had aroused in Germany and eastern Europe. Its echoes reached him when he entered into the central circle of discourse of Jewish studies, which had developed in Germany and Galicia, in order to publish his studies in the new journals. It was the extremism on all sides that he found there that aroused him to a theoretical response from which he might have preferred to abstain.

From the side of the free-thinking Maskilim, the disciples of Spinoza in eastern Europe, this extremism was expressed in questioning the reliability of the biblical sources and the rabbinic traditions concerning



them. Even a cautious scholar such as Nachman Krochmal questioned it when he alluded in one of his studies to the division of the book of Isaiah between two prophets of different periods.<sup>2</sup> This was all the more the case of Joshua Heschel Schorr, who took a dim view of rabbinic halakha, or Dr. Solomon Rubin, who advocated Spinoza's blatant heresy as a guide for the perplexed of his time. As for scholars such as Zunz and Geiger, whose scholarly achievements greatly impressed him, he was appalled by their open assimilation, their turn toward Reform, and their campaign against the established rabbinate,<sup>3</sup> whereas he found no comfort in the isolationism of the ultra-Orthodox or their hostility to all humanistic research. In the face of all these extreme positions, he had to defend the moderate traditional position in which he had been raised: freedom of research, balanced by simple faith in the Torah given at Sinai and transmitted through the generations. From his standpoint, this was neither "orthodoxy" nor "modernism"; it was merely the continuation of traditional Italian-Jewish religiosity, which was able to integrate with the surrounding culture and accept its new insights without having to sacrifice its faith in the sanctity of the Torah and the binding character of its commandments as transmitted from Sinai to the present. But in the circle of discourse in which he came to participate, his position was perceived as Orthodox; and when he endeavored to provide philosophical support to his critical arguments

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<sup>2</sup> Luzzatto himself adhered to the traditional view of the literary unity of the book of Isaiah and defended it passionately against Krochmal and other historical critics. But he accepted the modern critical late dating of Ecclesiastes, a book with whose outlook he had little sympathy. See Luzzatto, "*Sefer Yeshayahu*" (The Book of Isaiah), in *Mehkerei Hayahadut* (Studies in Judaism) (Warsaw: Hatzevira, 1913; repr. Jerusalem: Makor, 1970), vol. 1, pt. 2, 30–48; "*Divrei Kohelet*" (The Words of Kohelet/Ecclesiastes), *ibid.*, vol. 1, pt. 1, 60–123; and Samuel David Luzzatto, *Il profeta Isaia: volgarizzato e commentato ad uso degli Israeliti* (Jerusalem: Akadmon, 1966; originally pub. Padua: Antonio Bianchi, 1855).

<sup>3</sup> Luzzatto wrote: "Nor do we have to agree with many of the sages of this generation who say that the essence of their faith is monotheism, and in this matter they sin against Heaven and mankind. They sin against Heaven when they say (or hint) that the Jew has already performed his obligation when he proclaims the unity of God and that keeping the mitzvot is superfluous; and they sin against mankind when they boast that only the Jew is a monotheist, as if the other nations around us do not also affirm God's unity. . . . These same sages of the generation who have cast off from themselves and their brethren the yoke of Torah but nevertheless do not want the Jews to stop being called Jews magnify and exalt in their books the virtue of our monotheism to the skies, while they denigrate the virtue of other faiths. This is a great injustice and is a pronounced sign that they do not possess free inquiry or deep knowledge." Letter, 1858, published in *Hamaggid*, §50, reprinted in *Mehkerei Hayahadut*, vol. 1, pt. 2, 19–20; see also Zinberg's generous citations from Luzzatto's letters, *A History of Jewish Literature*, 10:130–38, which clearly illustrate his critique of his Reform and *Wissenschaft* colleagues.

against the blatant deviations of other scholars and thinkers from the norm of the tradition's sanctity, he confirmed that impression.

S. D. Luzzatto was a poet and a scholar. As a well-rounded man of culture, he took an interest in philosophical literature also, but he was not attracted to it and developed a critical attitude toward it. He was a man of feeling rather than of "cold" intellectual inquiry. As for the problem of the Torah and Enlightenment, he viewed it not as a result of confrontation between the Torah and modern philosophy but as a result of an internal confrontation over the question of the relation to the general culture. Such a confrontation had occurred repeatedly throughout Jewish history and had generated a whole theoretical tradition that had dealt with it successfully. For his part, Luzzatto preferred a traditional solution, and only later on was he convinced that, in order to persuade those who relied on the new philosophy, one had to show that the traditional solution passed the test. For this purpose he turned first to the philosophy of Locke and afterward to Kant's critical idealism.

He did this on the side, next to his primary work as a scholar. On the occasions that the theoretical topics became the subject of public deliberation, he wrote and published his essays in journals in Italian and in Hebrew. The only extended work that he wrote in Hebrew was *The Book of the Foundations of the Torah*, some chapters of which were published in journals, while it was published in its entirety only after his death (first printing: Lemberg, 1880).<sup>4</sup>

We have seen that the Maskilim of Germany, and later of eastern Europe, sought support for their openness to general culture in the philosophy of Maimonides. This did not settle the dispute but only deepened it. They set it in the perspective of the controversy that was conducted over the *Guide for the Perplexed* between the philosophical and kabbalistic parties. The kabbalists had imbibed some philosophical concepts, but they regarded philosophy—as a method based on independent human reason and pretending to interpret the truths of religion by means of it—as idolatry and Hellenization. The ultra-Orthodox opponents of the Haskalah responded

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<sup>4</sup> Also of primary importance for understanding his general philosophical orientation are the first ten chapters of his never-completed extended essay *Torah Nidreshet* (Torah Expounded), in *Mehkerei Hayahadut*, vol. 1, pt. 2, 49–109, and his *Lezioni de Teologia Dogmatica Israelitica* (Trieste: C. Cohen, 1863), abridged translation in *Shmuel David Luzzatto: Ketavim*, ed. Artom, 1:69–103. See also S. D. Luzzatto, "Neged Spinoza" (Contra Spinoza), in *Mehkerei Hayahadut*, vol. 1, pt. 1, 198–222.

with the same argument against the Maskilim, who relied on Maimonides. As we have noted, they based themselves on the kabbalah and rejected all philosophical argument, whether traditional or modern.

Though he strove for harmony between the Torah and humanistic research, Luzzatto was wary of relying on Maimonides.<sup>5</sup> In his view, too, the tilt toward Aristotelian philosophy and presenting knowledge of metaphysical truth as prophetic divine knowledge that was the summit of service to God was indeed in the category of Hellenization. His traditional argument was strengthened by the humanistic research of his day, which uncovered the sources of Western culture in the Biblical and Greek legacies and compared them. Here were two cultures based on contradictory and irreconcilable values. Greek culture was based on esthetic and intellectual values and was directed toward the joy of contemplation, whereas Israelite culture was based on religious and moral feelings and was directed at ethical perfection expressed in deeds of righteousness and kindness toward one's fellow human beings. Maimonides's work created an irreparable cleavage between his Jewish-halakhic side and his Greek philosophical side, and his critics were right.

But Luzzatto saw the mystical path as also dubious and fraught with foreign pagan influences. He rejected it and joined the campaign that Rabbi Jacob Emden had conducted against the Zohar.<sup>6</sup> His favored Jewish approach did not exalt reason to divine rank as philosophy had done, but it did not repudiate it either. Reason was God's gift to mankind so that he might recognize the nature of the world, human nature, society, and culture and find his proper way in the life of this world. When reason respected its limits and its proper task, it could be the foundation for a lifestyle of Torah and mitzvot, whereas mysticism ignored it and generated confused fantasies and ignorance.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "In subordinating the social-ethical objective to the metaphysical objective, Maimonides was not following the teachings of biblical and rabbinic Judaism, but the teachings of the Aristotelian-Arabic philosophy of his time, according to which it is only through acquiring metaphysical truths that a human being can attain immortality." *Lectures in Dogmatic Theology*, §6, in *Ketavim*, 1:71; see also Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, 10:142–43.

<sup>6</sup> See "Al Hakabbalah" (On the Kabbalah), in *Mehkerei Hayahadut*, vol. 1, pt. 1, 228–36.

<sup>7</sup> "And if you say, 'My faith is better in my eyes than the faiths of other nations,' then you have need of inquiry, and without it your faith cannot be well founded. In that case, the argument of those who spurn inquiry, saying there is no need for it, stands refuted. You see demonstrated that there is great need for [inquiry], not only in worldly matters and not only in the sciences, but also in matters of Torah." "*Hatorah Hanidreshet*," chap. 2 (*Mehkerei Hayahadut*, 1.2.57). Indeed, Luzzatto's commentaries on the Torah and the prophetic books can be seen as his application of the methods of critical scholarship in

Between these extremes, Luzzatto sought a balanced stance that would limit philosophy to being a foundation of the sciences and worldly culture and would reserve for suprarational prophetic revelation the realm of values that governed lifestyle, interpersonal morality, and exalted religious feeling. In this way religion would not spill over into the realm of science and would not contradict what reason knew in its domain, nor would science spill over into the domain of religion because it would know its limits. He found such a teaching in Halevi's book of the *Kuzari*, which had enjoyed considerable influence in Italian Jewry since the Spanish expulsion.

Halevi grounded his philosophy of religion on the foundation of Aristotelian epistemology, though he sought to limit its scope. His theory was rooted in the distinction between the experimental scientific viewpoint of the sciences, which he accepted, and the speculative viewpoint of metaphysics, which he rejected. He accepted Aristotle's fundamental epistemological premise: "There is nothing in the intellect that is not in the senses." Whatever people know comes from intellectual contemplation of sensory impressions of material objects. The intellect grasps its objects by means of sensory images that represent them, and it creates its concepts through a process of abstraction. It is thus possible after the fact to classify the constituents of nature, to determine the causal regularity manifest in them, and to appreciate their utility for man's worldly happiness.

Unlike Aristotle, however, Halevi argued that philosophy's task ends at this point. At the next juncture he denied the power of logical deductions that sought, starting from the findings of scientific examination, to arrive at conjectures of the metaphysical causes of reality. What man knows from logical deduction is not spiritual reality but only empty abstraction lacking certainty. Thus whoever has not been privileged to know supernatural spiritual reality from direct experience must be content with speculative conjectures. Perhaps he should be praised for his efforts, but he should know that his conjectures and abstractions pale beside the fruit of prophetic experience.

The prophets testify to the experience of direct divine revelation. What is the nature of this experience? What is the source of its validity?

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an apologetic mode to defend the traditional view of the Torah's revealed status within the arena of modern academic biblical studies, an enterprise that was later continued by Umberto Cassuto and Moshe Tzvi Segal, and had influence on Yehezkel Kaufmann's more nuanced critique of the Wellhausen documentary hypothesis.

True to the axiom that there is nothing in the intellect that is not first in the senses, Halevi argued that prophetic revelation is a special kind of experience whose source is in the system of “inner senses” that absorb the presence of metaphysical objects with immediate clarity in parallel fashion to the normal external senses’ perception of material objects. From the prophets’ testimony of their visions he learned that the prophets were able through their spiritual senses to have immediate spiritual contact with spiritual substances connected to God (the angels), and their human imagination formed these impressions into images from which it is possible to abstract a conceptual knowledge of God and especially of His word to human beings.

But the purpose of prophecy is not knowledge of God Himself, exalted beyond humanity, but the experience of His presence, which prepares man for his worldly and supraworldly destiny. The prophets know from their experience the ways by which it is possible for everyone gifted with prophetic ability to enjoy a certain level of divine presence, and this in Halevi’s view is the reason for all the mitzvot, the services and prayers that Jews are commanded to perform. For the people of Israel—and only they—all have this suprahuman psychic gift that is the basis of prophecy.

In order to merit divine presence, one must fulfill the commands of the Torah as God’s word to His people through His prophets. What, then, is the source of the certainty in the truth of the Torah in comparison with the sacred scriptures of Christianity or Islam that lay claim to the same divine source and authority? Halevi’s answer is rooted again in experience. At Mount Sinai, 600,000 Israelites experienced the same divine revelation and were agreed in their testimony of it. A faithful and well-examined tradition transmitted the testimony from parent to child and from teacher to student. In this way—argued Halevi—we attain a certainty that does not brook comparison with the testimonies that vouch for the founding revelations of other religions, which were not given in public and have no comparable supporting testimony.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary—Christianity and

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<sup>8</sup> Luzzatto’s extended argument for the validity of the biblical narrative is presented in his *Lectures in Dogmatic Theology*, §§61–77, and also in the letters collected as “*Ha-emunah Betorat Moshe*” (in *Mehkerei Hayahadut*, 1.2.5–29). He adopted the core of Halevi’s argument for the reliability of collective eyewitness testimony as transmitted through the Torah’s account (combined with a similar argument from Saadia Gaon), but with some changes. Whereas Halevi focused on the Sinaitic revelation, Luzzatto focuses on the miracle of the manna as most impermeable to skeptical objection because it was a phenomenon that was witnessed not just once but every day for forty years and so would be less susceptible to misperception under the emotional stress of the moment. Luzzatto

Islam are based on the Mosaic Torah. Moreover, every Jew can verify the truth of the Torah for himself if he makes an effort to observe the mitzvot and be privileged to experience God's closeness directly. Halevi argued that even amid the tribulations of exile Jews remain connected to God through the Torah, and this is the secret of their perseverance in faith despite their suffering.

Luzzatto adopted most of these ideas, but he had to adapt them to the epistemology and humanistic ethics of his generation. Halevi's argument that the prophets had a special inner sense with which only Jews were endowed and that they therefore transcended ordinary human nature did not pass the test of his antimystical stance, his reliance on common sense and immediate experience. He also found strange Halevi's distinction between Jews and non-Jews, as if they were possessed of supernatural qualities. This assumption contradicted his humanistic universalism. Even the idea that the Jews were appointed to teach monotheism to humanity—as the Reform thinkers argued and as was suggested in the *Kuzari*—was a false conceit to him.<sup>9</sup> The choice of Israel was an expression of God's love for the people who had dedicated themselves to His service. Dedication, closeness, and its own intrinsic value are the purpose expressed in giving the Torah to Israel. The Torah was meant only for Israel, and other peoples serve God in their own way.

How can one explain the supernatural aspect of prophetic revelation? How does God speak with human beings? A simple believer has nothing but the historical facts established by reliable testimony. He does not need to seek explanations for phenomena that are in principle beyond the power of human reason to conceive. Divine omnipotence is the only explanation that can be given, and that is sufficient. Prophecy is an occurrence that does not fit our familiar natural order. This is direct divine intervention,

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reproduces the argument of Saadia and Halevi that miracles were used to authenticate the prophet and his message (*Lectures*, §§58–59). He also argues from the obviously noble character of the transmitter of the narrative that he would not have been dishonest in his relating the facts (*Ha-emunah*, 1.2.10). He echoes Halevi's argument that the authenticity of the Hebrew Bible is vouched for by the universal opinion of Christianity and Islam and adds to this the authorization of its translation by Ptolemy in the Hellenistic age (*ibid.*, 1.2.11). Overall, he adopts the stance that the Bible is to be presumed reliable unless it can be proved unreliable, so if he can prove it contains nothing contradictory to the senses or self-contradictory, he has successfully defended it (see *Hatorah Hanidreshet*, chaps. 8, 10, 12, and 24). As a modern traditional exegete, he saw it as his task to present a consistent reading of the Bible that squared with the indisputable findings of modern historical scholarship while remaining loyal to the traditional assumptions about its revealed origin.

<sup>9</sup> See note 3 above.

whose ways are unknown to us. This is no contradiction of nature or of human reason that respects its limits. Philosophers think that the laws of nature are necessary and not susceptible of change; they thus conclude that events of a sort that are not occurring in the present age are impossible altogether. In Luzzatto's opinion, this view is baseless.<sup>10</sup> God rules over the nature that He created, and if His wisdom and goodness require, He intervenes as He wishes. Therefore the fact that miracles and prophecies, such as those to which the Bible attests, do not occur today does not imply that they are impossible. On the contrary—they occurred in the past and may occur again in the future.

All this has implications for the content of religious experience. What is this nearness of God that one attains in prayer and observance of the other mitzvot of the Torah? Like Geiger, Luzzatto also placed religious emotion at the center of the divine–human relationship. He did not develop philosophical descriptions of the essence of emotion for this purpose. As a poet, he preferred to express these emotions in the natural way, and in this respect Halevi was closer to him in his poems than in his philosophical speculations.

Like Geiger, Luzzatto perceived the centrality of ethical feeling in the Torah. He surely must have found an inner qualitative affinity between its religious feeling and its ethical feeling and seen the ethical norms that the Torah commands as fraught with religious value. In ethics, too, we fulfill God's command and express our faith in Him, but unlike Geiger Luzzatto did not identify these two kinds of feeling and refrained from combining them. In his view, these were two separate domains of connection and different kinds of feeling. One should not blur the difference between the commands observed as service to God—expressing the sense of sanctity, exaltation, love, reverence, yearning, and thankfulness that a person feels when standing before his God in prayer and during other acts of worship—and the ethical feelings of brotherhood and identification with one's fellow human being, especially compassion and participation, in which Luzzatto saw the primal foundation of Jewish morality.

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<sup>10</sup> "And the second matter that the philosophers do not understand is that every inquiry leaves a residue of doubt—what if the rules of heaven and earth were to change? This is as clear as day that we know that the world operates in these ways, but we have no evidence to say that it could not operate in other ways, because whatever is not the case at this time is not available to our sense, and we have no knowledge of it." *Hatorah Hanidreshet, Mehkerei Hayahadut*, 1.2.75–76. This seems a clear allusion to Hume's argument against categorical knowledge of causality in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.



All this expressed the substantive difference between Geiger's path of Reform and Luzzatto's Orthodoxy: to articulate the domain of the divine–human relationship was for Luzzatto to articulate the special value of religion based on God's revelation to man. As we have said, as he continued to be involved in the debate between Reform and Orthodoxy, which was conducted within the circle of discourse of modern German philosophy, he had to examine whether his positions withstood the test of the new epistemologies, which provided the rubric for modern science.

German idealism was foreign to his spirit for the same reason that Maimonides's outlook was foreign to him: it ascribed independent value to abstract truth and in his view cut itself off from the living reality of the world of the senses, the world of imagination and emotion. But he felt close to the empiricist philosophy of John Locke (1632–1704).<sup>11</sup> From the standpoint of Halevi's teaching, basing revelation on the clarity of historical experience, Locke's consistent empiricist epistemology seemed much more compatible than the Aristotelian epistemology that Halevi accepted, for according to Locke the path to metaphysics was closed off and philosophy was conceived as a tool of the sciences rather than as an end in itself.<sup>12</sup>

Locke's starting point was the same as Aristotle's: "There is nothing in the intellect that is not first in the senses." But Locke developed it more consistently and determined that the activity of the intellect was completed once it had contemplated external objects as represented by the senses, but it had no further agenda of its own. The activity of the intellect was reflexive and reflective, representational and critical. Locke denied the notion that there were ideas implanted in the intellect from birth.<sup>13</sup> The human intellect started out as a "tabula rasa" (blank slate). The world,

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<sup>11</sup> Luzzatto wrote in his autobiography that he read Locke (in Italian translation) and Condillac as a youth and built up his primary philosophical outlook from them. In chapters 3–7 of *Hatorah Hanidreshet*, Luzzatto presents the essentials of an empiricist epistemology, mentioning Condillac by name (see chap. 6).

<sup>12</sup> See *Hatorah Hanidreshet*, chap. 7: "Inquiry cannot grasp that which does not fall under the senses."

<sup>13</sup> Luzzatto echoes Locke on this point: "Perhaps you will say, 'But in addition to the impressions of the senses there are additional ideas implanted in our soul, found in it from the day it was created, which are called first principles, and we may rely on these in inquiring on matters that do not fall under our senses.' You should know that these first principles never were and were never created; they are only a fantasy of the sages, who invented them from their hearts, and the latest thinkers have come and expunged them from the world through clear demonstrations and shown that in truth all our ideas are founded on the senses. And the truth is with them." *Ibid.*, 1.2.73–74).



its qualities and objects, and the relations among them—all these were the source of the content that the intellect must represent, research, and validate, and these are at bottom the tasks of criticism.

If so, the intellect does not dictate its findings but accepts them as given. In the process of critical validation, it must examine the reliability and clarity of experience and determine as well if the concepts reflecting its objects did not contain any internal contradictions. It is impossible that something should exist in reality whose concept would contain an internal contradiction or whose concept would contradict the other concepts of known reality. It follows that the intellect that created such concepts was mistaken, and it must reexamine them until it arrives at concepts that are coherent in their grasp of reality. This is not the case with objects or concepts of events that are abnormal or singular in their occurrence. If there is no contradiction within the concepts (or between them and other concepts of objects), they are not impossible and one should accept them as constituents of one's picture of reality and find a place for them.<sup>14</sup>

Luzzatto had no interest in developing a Lockean epistemology apart from this one element, just as Halevi had no intrinsic interest in developing an Aristotelian epistemology. From his point of view, there was one conclusion that was important in conjunction with the doctrine of prophetic experience that he accepted from Halevi: rejection of metaphysics as a method of knowing religious truth,<sup>15</sup> confirmation of what was apprehended as the content of immediate experience, and the exercise of rational critique from the viewpoint of conceptual consistency but without assuming a priori truth implanted in human reason.

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<sup>14</sup> Luzzatto places great store by this criterion for judging whether the books of the Bible are authentic prophecy; see *Hatorah Hanidreshet*, chaps. 8, 10, 12, and 24.

<sup>15</sup> "Because the philosophers did not understand that all inquiry rests on the impressions of the senses, they came to inquire also concerning those things that do not fall under the senses, such as the soul and the angels and the One Lord, may His Name be blessed, and they believed everything that arises in the web of inquiry in perfect faith, even of these exalted matters and even contrary to what is written in Moses's Torah." *Ibid.*, chap. 7, 1.2.71–72. Though Luzzatto does not mention Kant by name in this passage, he seems to rely heavily on Kant's arguments setting the boundaries against metaphysical speculation in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. On the other hand—citing Kant with approval—Luzzatto elsewhere, unlike Halevi, goes into great depth presenting a teleological argument for a Creator from the marvelous intricacies of nature, citing current findings in biology, organic chemistry, and astronomy (*Lectures in Dogmatic Theology*, §§31–45; see mention of Kant in §34).

As we have said, Locke's epistemology appeared sufficiently established to Luzzatto and sufficient from his corner of inquiry, but since Jewish philosophical discourse was conducted on the basis of German idealism, he eventually reexamined whether he could ground his religious world conception just as well on the idealistic theory of knowledge that was accepted by his interlocutors. The only possibility open to him—all German Orthodox thinkers were convinced of this fact—was Kant's critical idealism. Luzzatto could treat him as Halevi had treated Aristotle. He distinguished between the critical aspect, which he accepted,<sup>16</sup> and his idealistic assertions, which he rejected. He accepted from Kant the determination of the limits of the knowing capacity of human reason, the centrality of the consciousness of ethical obligation, the critical task of reason as a tool of the experimental sciences, and the conclusion that metaphysics and knowledge of God were from reason's standpoint in the domain of faith rather than certain knowledge. He rejected the idea of the legislative autonomy of reason, with all its implications, and Kant's obliviousness to the centrality of emotion as a religious and interpersonal experience, whether in the area of religion or that of ethics.<sup>17</sup>

Like Halevi, he thought that in these areas the superiority of a religion based on revelation was obvious and unequivocal.

*C. Revelation and the Critique of Reason: The Philosophy of  
Salomon Ludwig Steinheim*

Salomon Ludwig Steinheim (1800–1865) was the first Jewish religious philosopher after Mendelssohn's generation and that of his direct disciples in Germany to raise the discussion of the question of revelation and the status of the Torah in the modern age to a philosophical level. The first part of his book *Revelation According to the Doctrine of Judaism* was published in 1835, before the books of Formstecher and Samuel Hirsch. Three more thick volumes eventually followed.<sup>18</sup> However, they did not contain new

<sup>16</sup> See previous note.

<sup>17</sup> Luzzatto was critical of Spinoza, too, for emphasizing reason to the exclusion of emotion as a positive attribute of being human. See the first part of "*Neged Spinoza*" (*Mehkerei Hayahadut*, 1.1.198–202).

<sup>18</sup> S. L. Steinheim, *Die Offenbarung nach dem Lehrbegriffe der Synagoge, ein Schiboleth* (The Revelation According to the Doctrine of Judaism, A Criterion), vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Siegmund Schmerber, 1835); vol. 2 (Leipzig: Leopold Schnauss, 1856); vol. 3 (Leipzig: Oskar Leiner, 1863); vol. 4 (Altona: Gebrüder Bonn, 1865). Reprinted in 1986 by Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, West Germany.

insights or philosophical developments of the ideas that had already come to clear and full expression in the first volume.<sup>19</sup>

Convinced as he was that the truth concerning revelation—as it was revealed to him—was so clear and simple that anyone possessed of common sense would have to acknowledge it as if to facts confirmed by scientific experiment, Steinheim never made peace with the fact that he remained alone in his arguments. He repeated his first arguments again and again, with verbal expansion and many wearying repetitions, while taking issue vociferously with every book on the philosophy of religion published in Germany.

The paucity of responses that he received and the fierce rejection that they contained sprung from the fact that he set himself against the official ideologies of all religious movements of his time, whether Jewish or Christian, including Orthodoxy. Furthermore, he set forth against all the accepted schools of philosophy of religion of his time and developed his own original philosophical method on the basis of the revelation that occurred at Sinai and was documented in the Bible. His eyes were opened to seeing the light streaming continually from the plane of eternity, and he saw himself amid his unappreciative compatriots as Israel saw itself among the gentiles. This was in effect the religious movement of a single man, a prophet sent to open the eyes of those lost in their blindness.

He himself described the background of how revelation was revealed to him. This for him was a part of the message that he wished to convey in order to persuade his contemporaries that he was their authentic representative. In his early youth, he was privileged to study the Torah in Mendelssohn's annotated translation. He had fonder memories of this study than of everything else that he later learned in *heder* and in a regular Jewish school. The latter made Judaism hateful to him through their compulsory stringency and their pettiness, and he left them far behind, devoting himself to general studies and finally to medicine, in which he developed a reputation as a healer and researcher. He even considered conversion at a certain stage but was dissuaded in the end by considerations of integrity, like his colleague Gabriel Riesser, with whom he worked together in the struggle for emancipation. The opposition that he encountered from the side of German nationalism, and especially the

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<sup>19</sup> See Joshua O. Haberman, *Philosopher of Revelation: The Life and Thought of S. L. Steinheim* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), consisting of a brief biographical introduction, a complete annotated translation of vol. 1 of Steinheim's *Revelation according to the Doctrine of Judaism*, and excerpts from vols. 2, 3 and 4.

opposition of its philosophical spokesmen who represented themselves as enlightened, is what led him to reconsider.<sup>20</sup> He discovered the enlightened tyranny of the rational nationalist state, which rejected anyone who was different and abolished the freedom of minorities in the name of rational unity.

The tyranny of reason was immeasurably worse in Steinheim's eyes than the compulsion of the rabbis, which he now knew to be nothing else than the self-protection of those whose faith was being attacked in the name of a false enlightenment. For him, this was a moment of disillusionment and disorientation. In his confusion, he sought another truth that should light his way and plant in his heart the certainty that it was the right way. Then there shone on him again the light of truth that he had known in his youth, when he learned the Torah in its simplicity. This was the truth of innocent childhood, deeply felt, that burst forth from the ancient origins of his people and laid the foundation for the development of his personality. He went back to read the Bible and discovered that its words still stood as valid. They were persuasive even to the mature, learned man. He could still discover in their plain sense a depth addressed to him. It was not a philosophical truth but a truth of life and of struggle in the real world. Thus he discovered that the truth he had known and experienced in his youth was not confined to the child of yesteryear, like that of the rabbinic learning that had displaced it, but it was a primal truth, a foundational truth, an eternal truth revealed in every generation and every period of one's life as true in the present.

Let us look at two basic insights that are interwoven in this narrative, one negative and the second positive. The negative insight was the realization of the tyranny of the national *Rechtsstaat*, which the enlightened idealistic philosophers had represented as the embodiment of reason. Because of this tyranny, Jews could not become citizens. In that case, this was the same idolatrous tyranny from which Abraham the Hebrew escaped to Canaan; it was the same from which the Israelites, under Moses, were redeemed to go from Egyptian slavery to the Promised Land, to establish a social order under the Kingdom of God; on its account, Israel was exiled twice from its land.

Steinheim did not hesitate to define the *Rechtsstaat* of reason and its founding philosophies—especially those of Spinoza and Hegel—as the

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<sup>20</sup> Haberman, *Philosopher of Revelation*, biographical introduction 8, with reference to Steinheim, *Die Offenbarung*, 2:201–2.

idolatry of his age.<sup>21</sup> Israel as the people of the Torah was its absolute negation, and it is no surprise that they were oppressed and rejected by it. The positive insight was that the truth that had been revealed in the Torah was the correct ethical and political way to the redemption of Israel and of humanity.

We might say that Steinheim's spiritual biography was parallel to that of Spinoza, but in reverse. Indeed, Spinoza's pantheism and theological-political doctrines had laid the soil for the enlightened idealism that took pride in the *Rechtsstaat* and had also fed the negative attitude toward Jews and Judaism. Spinoza escaped from the servitude that revealed religion had imposed on him to the freedom that he found in the rational-causal determinism of the secular state, which spoke in the name of the supremacy of law. Steinheim escaped from the tyranny of the "state of law," which had deprived him of the freedom to be a Jew, in order to find true freedom in the Torah's "Kingdom of God."

As we shall see later, Steinheim proposed a philosophical basis for his two insights; however, the revealed truth of the Torah does not speak in the language of philosophy and has no need of it. It is therefore fitting to explain first how he understood the substance of revelation as it was grasped in the Torah and understood by its believers as a foundational guiding truth in their lives.

The assertion that sums up Steinheim's conception of revelation derives from his personal story: he identified revelation with the giving of the

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<sup>21</sup> Steinheim's fierce polemic against Spinoza and Hegel is subsumed throughout much of his work into a general adversary argument against Western philosophy, but the wraps come off in pt. 2, Fourth Prologue: "It is difficult to understand how it could be, if the terrifying name of Spinoza is not the culprit, that one considered this doctrine [of the necessary will in Spinoza's *Ethics* I.32 and IV] as less compatible with the doctrine of the enslaved will [*servum arbitrium*] of the holy fathers of the church than with the entirely identical philosophic teachings of a later time. Also, one cannot say that Spinoza himself or his publishers and defenders, from Dr. Meier until Herder (in his *God*) and Schleiermacher, were more remiss in sincere efforts to demonstrate the agreement of their teachings of freedom with those of the church than were the philosophers Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel" (217). See also: "This philosophic evangel of freedom and immortality [Schleiermacher] has meanwhile been replaced by another [Hegel], in which freedom appears still more miserable. Night and night all around! In the course of the deduction of the middle links toward the absolute synthesis of the object-subject, a so-called absolute freedom, identical with absolute necessity, arises from the datum: The consciousness of self is the unmediated act by which all is set up for the *I*. This is the highest principle" (219). And he sums up by grouping philosophy with paganism as such: "It should not come as a surprise to anyone to find the results of natural religion, speculative philosophy, and the myths of paganism together on the same level and in the same direction" (224).

Torah. In the broader sense, this refers to the historical revelation at Sinai through which the testimonies of the particular ancient revelations to the patriarchs were canonized and became part of the people's legacy. Once the divine revelation entered the collective consciousness of humanity, however, it becomes renewed to each individual when the Torah is given to him and he accepts it—in other words, when he learns the Torah and its truth opens his eyes.

We emphasize that according to this understanding, revelation contains no element of mystery or mysticism. Like Samuel David Luzzatto, Steinheim rejected Halevi's doctrine of "inner sense." He saw himself as a man of natural science, and for this purpose he adopted Kant's epistemology based on experience. All knowledge is sensory, inferential, or rational. Through revelation one learns truths that one cannot arrive at on one's own, even from knowledge of nature. But one learns them, as one learns the natural sciences, from an external source. One learns about nature from experience; one learns about revelation from the Torah and is convinced of its truth when it becomes clear that it resolves one's perplexities, defines one's place in nature and society, sets one's goals and obligations as a human being, and answers the question of how one should realize one's life goals in all areas of one's personal and social life.<sup>22</sup>

This, then, is the explanation that Steinheim proposed to the question of why the foundational event of revelation occurred only once in the history of humanity. Why does it not recur in every generation? There is no need of it! Revelation, once it has occurred, is revealed. Just as one need not go back and re-create the world once it is created, but its creation is nevertheless renewed all the time, so there is no need to reveal again the truth of the Torah, but one must renew it through learning.

Given these assumptions, one should pay attention to the significance of the "giving of the Torah" as an event of revelation: this is first of all a direct personal acquaintance with God, Creator of the world, Creator of humanity, and Creator of every individual person out of a specific intention. We note precisely: we are not speaking of theoretical proofs for God's existence. Steinheim agreed with Kant that there are no such proofs, but

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<sup>22</sup> "We are gaining space and time, matter and spirit, from the hand of a freely acting Creator, and out of our view grows the fruitful doctrine of purposefulness, a true and genuine teleology. It develops along with the method of natural science, which one may call induction, the art of asking and understanding the answers, which has always been the right basis for all knowledge and will remain so as long as human beings remain human." *Revelation*, pt. 2, conclusion to Third Prologue: "Philosophy and Physics," 208.

he thought that they are not necessary. What is necessary is the immediate awareness of a commanding presence. God is not known to man, but He is present and certifies His reality by the fact that His word is a fitting answer to the questions of human beings living in the world.

Steinheim thus pointed out that awareness of God's reality as speaking to man through His word brings him to awareness of himself. It thus leads to awareness of his place in his natural and social environment. Face-to-face with God addressing him, man discovers himself as a creature. He discovers that he lives in the created world and that there is a reason and purpose to his being created.<sup>23</sup> It is self-evident that a person cannot arrive at this truth on his own. He must know his Creator in order to know that he was created; he must know the command that God has commanded him in order to know that he is commanded. As long as God does not reveal Himself to man and command him, how will he know that he is commanded? How will he know that he is given the freedom to choose between fulfillment of the divine command and enslavement to his nature?

We must draw another distinction: in Steinheim's view man has no free choice as long as he regards himself as a natural creature. In this respect, Spinoza was right: causal determinism rules within nature, and it applies to human nature. For this reason, there was no escape from identifying freedom with the necessity manifested in human nature, including human reason.<sup>24</sup> Yet despite this, the identification of freedom with necessity is refuted by its inner contradiction. Freedom is choice in accord with purpose. Only when man discovers that he was created, that he is commanded, and that he bears responsibility before his Creator for himself and his environment is he convinced that he must choose and that choosing correctly will liberate him from his enslavement to his compulsory nature.

In the end, the revelation that informs man of his freedom enables him to realize it through fulfilling the commands of the Torah. Nor can man know the commandments as such on his own. He is able, of course, to arrive through his reason at the categories of recommended and forbidden

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<sup>23</sup> "Revelation, I should say, answers our concern and the careful question: Are we free or machines (*l'homme machine*)? You were created in the image of God!" *Revelation*, 255.

<sup>24</sup> "Therefore, the free and creative will, like any fact of the visible world, contradicts the knowledge of reason and cannot be admitted by it without having to give up its truth and surrender itself. Accordingly, the objection of all paganism to the revelation says: *Everything that happens, happens necessarily.*" *Revelation*, 252.



action that are forced on him by the circumstances of his life or necessary for the satisfaction of his natural needs. But only when he knows that he is commanded by his Creator do these rational categories become transformed into imperatives through which a person expresses independent choice between good and evil.

Of course, this conclusion is also an antithesis to the doctrine of Spinoza and his followers. Spinoza argued that freedom is constituted by the necessary self-legislation that proceeds from human reason. According to Steinheim, the "autonomy of reason" that characterizes idealistic philosophy from Spinoza to Hegel is nothing but man's subjugation to his nature. Only the Torah's "heteronomy" endows man with the freedom to choose and realize his freedom as one created in the image and likeness of God.

The philosophical question on this point is raised as a question of epistemology: If revelation is the giving of Torah, how can one explain the discovery of God's word? How do we know that this is God's word and not human thought? In Steinheim's view, this is a question that cannot be avoided. Since he rejected decisively the ways of the mystics and of Halevi, he had to take his stand on Kant's scientific epistemology and to show that the truth of revelation stood up to its examination.

Steinheim's answer was that we stand before the same question throughout the whole process of learning, including our learning about nature and even human nature. Every learned truth does not come from reason itself, through deduction, as Spinoza taught, but through induction. We can make a first guess, but only that which is confirmed through experience is to be accepted as truth, and what is verified through experience will always be found to be a determination that cannot be derived from prior views. It is, however, reviewed after the fact for compatibility with the totality of previous experiential knowledge of nature. It follows that the facts of nature do not need to conform to human reason. They must conform only to the laws of nature itself, and we ascertain this by correlating all the facts of nature that we have discovered with each other.<sup>25</sup>

The natural sciences are based on sensory impressions. Kant, however, taught that there is no way to know how the phenomena perceived by our senses agree with their objects' essences. Scientists, unlike philosophers, do not concern themselves with this, and rightly. They give full faith in the correspondence of the phenomena to their objects. The fact that their findings are confirmed by further experience, the fact that nature behaves

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<sup>25</sup> See above, note 22, and below, note 26.



in an orderly fashion, and finally the fact that we can always accept these results when we act in reliance on the laws of nature that we have discovered—these facts justify our faith. It follows that all certain knowledge is the discovery of external truth, which was unknown until it came to us but which relies on a rational faith.

If we claim on the basis of this conclusion that the coming of the word of God to human consciousness cannot be explained by reason itself, or if we claim that the explanation is in God's will, whose ways of realization cannot be known by us, we are not claiming anything mysterious. There is no mystery in saying that something is known to be beyond the boundaries of knowledge. What we can know with certainty is that the revelational event occurred. People knew what they knew, placed absolute faith in what they knew, and did not accept the truth of their discovery without critical examination. If we wish to ascertain this belief afresh—and in the view of Steinheim, a man of science, it was perfectly proper that we do so—we must follow the example of scientists.

How? Though there may be a parallel between the methods of scientific knowledge and divine revelation, they are not identical. We are not talking of a sensory experience that can be repeated and examined. Revelation is a one-time event in the spiritual life of humanity. Through it were made known facts pertaining to human spiritual life: of spirit touching spirit, of values determining a way of life. All of these are to be judged not by sensory knowledge but by considerations of reason. If we grant that the knowledge that flows from the senses is apprehended by the intellect and verified by reason, then the knowledge gathered by reason is not found in it to begin with. It arrives at the mind from the outside, and the mind must examine this knowledge in order to verify it.<sup>26</sup>

In the critique of scientific knowledge based on sense impressions, Steinheim agreed with Kant's epistemology. But when it came to examining reason's role vis-à-vis the contents of its own knowledge and will, he brought his own critique to bear against Kant's critique of reason. On this

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<sup>26</sup> "We know that the data of revelation, if they are to be acknowledged as authentic, must be such that they contradict in form and content the rational dogma and yet compel reason to acknowledge them as true. It is comparable to the objects of the sensory world, which, despite disagreement with their representations in purely rational thinking nevertheless compel their acknowledgement as really existing by that same reason." *Revelation*, pt. 2 ("The Criterion"), Fifth Prologue, 229. This paradoxical criterion—that the contents of revelation must contradict what reason posits a priori yet are seen in retrospect to be true—is the crux of the "criterion" of revelation referred to in the title of Steinheim's major work.

topic he adopted and adapted a critique that had previously been voiced against Kant by the German philosopher Friedrich Jacobi (1743–1819), a younger contemporary of Mendelssohn's and Kant's and one of the heralds of Romantic religious philosophy in Germany.<sup>27</sup>

Jacobi started out with a direct attack on Enlightenment rationalism. He regarded Spinoza as the quintessential Enlightenment philosopher and attacked him in the name of the divine revelation that was the basis of Christianity, but along the way he also attacked Mendelssohn, who sought to uphold religious truth through rational methods. Jacobi argued that Spinoza's philosophy was most consistent in its adherence to rational principles recognizing no source of truth but reason. This clearly showed that any consistent rationalism must eventually renounce religion, for rationalism disqualified any claims to suprarational truth such as religion assumed. In that case, philosophers such as Leibnitz or Mendelssohn, who ventured to verify revelation through reason, were heretics. They uprooted religion from its natural source. Thus what they offered as religion was only their own imaginary invention.

In our view, Jacobi's argument against philosophy was itself philosophical. He examined philosophy by its own method, even if from an external perspective. This is what enabled him to take a stance of partial agreement toward Kant's philosophy, as opposed to Spinoza's or Hegel's. Its critical side, relating to natural science, was compatible with his approach. But he thought that one should exercise its coherent, logical criticism also against those *a priori* truths that reason discovered within itself. These were the very truths on whose basis Kant based his "religion within the limits of reason alone" in order to divorce it from its source in revelation.

It was Jacobi's contention that Kant's deliberation revealed despite itself that reason was necessarily caught in the contradiction between two conclusions that followed *a priori* from its own logic. This refers to the antinomies that Kant discovered and sought to resolve by the distinction between reason and nature but without knowing how reason could apply its judgments on external reality after that distinction:

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<sup>27</sup> Jacobi's motto "consistent philosophy is Spinozist, hence pantheist, fatalist, and atheist" could be predicated equally of Steinheim's thought. His report that Lessing had declared himself a Spinozist in conversation shortly before his death precipitated the "pantheism controversy" in Germany in the 1780s, which agitated Mendelssohn in his last years. See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/friedrich-jacobi/> for a succinct exposition of Jacobi's interactions with Lessing, Mendelssohn, and Kant.

1. The antinomy between positing the infinitely primordial nature of time or its having an absolute beginning;
2. The antinomy between the infinite extent of space or its finitude;
3. The antinomy between the causal determinism of scientific knowledge or the substantive freedom of choice of ethical volition;
4. The antinomy between the postulate of reason that there should be a transcendental divine guarantee of the identity between concepts and their objects and between the ethical will and the deeds that realize it, versus the inability of reason to find this guarantee in itself.

Kant could provide no convincing solution to these antinomies. All his solutions left reason disconnected from the tangible reality of mankind in nature. It followed that the pretension of reason to find the truth in all the domains in which it laid down the law was in vain. Only revelation that came from a suprarational divine source could provide the solution.

Steinheim adopted this argument for his system,<sup>28</sup> but he refrained from saying anything about the nature of the revelatory event that was leading him to the mystical realm. The path that he chose was parallel to that of Kant in natural science: in his view reason was not required to examine how God taught humanity the truth that resolved its intellectual dilemmas. God knew the way. It was reason's task first of all to examine whether it was qualified to find the truth of revelation by itself. When it became clear that the truth of revelation contradicted the two conflicting theses that created the antinomies within it, it should examine the solution presented by revelation: Was it coherent and free from internal contradiction? Could it be reconciled with all that man knew concerning reality from scientific experience?

The next step in Steinheim's philosophical argument was clear. He showed that revealing the truth that God created the world and humanity by His will and not out of the necessity of His nature solved the question of the finitude of time and space, while it contradicted reason's a priori assumption that it alone determined the contours of time and space. The objective reality of time and space are the creation of God. It followed

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<sup>28</sup> Haberman notes, "Steinheim proceeds [to demonstrate the inadequacy of reason] by adding to Kant's four antinomies a fifth, the antinomy of reason and experience [citing Steinheim, *Die Offenbarung*, 2:43ff]. A priori reasoning not only cannot comprehend *das Ding an sich*, *das Wesen der Dinge* (the thing in itself, the essence of things) but actually misrepresents reality [and cites examples from physical science]." Haberman, *Revelation*, 11.

from this that the beginning of time was not itself in time, and the starting point of space was not in space. The world does not constitute itself, just as reason does not constitute itself, even though it is forced by its nature to assume so. God created the world and human reason; He is their eternal origin, transcending space and time. This assertion explains their origin and finitude with respect to their starting point in eternity without contradicting their infinite duration from that starting point forward.<sup>29</sup>

The same applied to the antinomy of human free will versus natural determinism. The knowledge that God created the world out of His free will confirms human free will and the reality of choice without negating the causal determinism of nature created by the divine will. The solution lies in the knowledge that nature is not based on its own principle of lawful regularity but on a higher will that established it in accordance with a moral purpose. God is not to be identified with the ideal of reason, uniting within itself the multiplicity of all intellectual notions. God is rather the supreme reality, creating the multiplicity of entities in the world. This knowledge, which reason cannot come to on its own, is the guarantee of certainty, insuring that our volitional actions will have an influence on reality through the natural causes (including those of human nature) over which we can exert control when we act in accord with the divine will.<sup>30</sup>

From these realizations follows the conclusion that a social life pattern and political regime can endure only when people acknowledge the sovereignty of God expressed in His Torah, whereas a social life pattern and political regime based on the supremacy of human reason end up identifying freedom with causal determinism, which takes the form of a compulsory order.

Spinoza's political doctrine proved this clearly. Spinoza based the social contract that established the sovereignty of the state on every individual's desire for happiness. In the natural state, this desire leads to the war of all against all, where the powerful prevail. The failure of the vast majority to realize their happiness under these conditions is the rational consideration that leads them to surrender a part of their freedom in order that the state may impose laws that restrain conflict, promote cooperation, and enable all individuals to exercise the remainder of their freedom. Such a regime endures, in Spinoza's view, whenever the majority of its citizens

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<sup>29</sup> *Revelation*, pt. 2, chap. 2: "Creation" (240–49).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 3: "Freedom" (250–60).

feel that the happiness they succeed in realizing through this arrangement outweighs the sacrifices it demands.

Like Mendelssohn, Steinheim maintained that Spinoza's rational calculation ignored the transnatural sociality that underlay human existence within nature. In fact, the state was not based on the primordial war of all against all—just the opposite. Before entering into a rational political framework and before accepting compulsory laws, people develop and discover their humanity in a society based on feelings of kinship and love, whether in the family, the tribe, or the nation, and the authority that guides them is the authority of their God, which they accept willingly.

The price of ignoring this primal religious sociality of human beings is the establishment of a rational regime based from the outset on the willing surrender of freedom. But what makes this regime into a tyranny despite itself is the institutionalized agreement to grant it the power of compulsory enforcement in order to restrain the natural tendency of its citizens to realize the entirety of their freedom in order to achieve happiness. These means, rooted in law and precedent, become over time the primary factor that directs the citizens to obey the law, even when they are not actively utilized. At this point, we must raise the question: Is it the laws themselves that govern in the *Rechtsstaat* representing human sovereignty? Was it the collective will of the citizens that ruled through them? Or perhaps has the institution itself become sovereign, not answerable to any authority above itself, and holding in its hands the actual power to dictate the laws as it wishes, thus directly embodying the necessity of its compulsory nature?

To the loss of freedom of ethical choice of the person living under the rule of rational mortals is added the loss of man's freedom of spiritual expression. Spinoza argued that the rule by the religious church infringes on freedom of thought, whereas the sovereign state has no interest in the thoughts of its citizens, only in their future. Therefore he trusted that the freedom of scientific and philosophical thought would be ensured in the state governed by rational humans. Steinheim did not disagree with Spinoza's critique of the church's suppression of freedom of thought, but he pointed out that the rational state has a great deal of interest in those opinions that directly influence its citizens' behavior, such as their religious faith. He therefore gave the state authority over religion and turned it in effect into a tool in its hands. But did not the state thus suppress the freedom of thought of the majority of its citizens, who in the last analysis are not interested in science and philosophy but precisely in their religious faith? Would this not bring about the preference of one religion and the suppression of others, such as Judaism?

The simple conclusion, confirmed by observation of developments in several European countries including Germany, is that true freedom prevailed precisely in Moses's "Kingdom of God." He founded it on the basis of a familial-tribal society, bound together by love of nation, rooted in the positive feelings of love of neighbor and voluntary acceptance of the divine governance expressed in the Torah. Not the "autonomy" of human reason that ended up in compulsory determinism but precisely heteronomy, addressed to man's ethical will, is what made for a free ordering of life, and that is what Moses presented as an alternative to the regime of perfect slavery of Pharaonic Egypt.<sup>31</sup>

But was the constitution of the Mosaic Torah intended to be realized in history? Was Spinoza not right when he showed how the unreasoning people rebelled and provoked a response of repression and establishment of a "theocracy," the compulsory enthronement of priests? Did not the Israelites, once settled in the Land of Canaan, establish a kingdom that was a copy of the idolatrous national kingdoms surrounding them? Was it indeed possible to dispense with a compulsory regime as a means of preserving a stable social order within and security from enemies without?

Steinheim wrestled with these questions from a historical perspective. As was accepted in his time, he proposed a law of development operating within general history and more specifically within Jewish history. The difference between him and Formstecher and Samuel Hirsch, the theorists of Reform, was that they preferred Kant's and Hegel's model of rational development through the immanent regularity of reason, whereas Steinheim preferred a romantic Torahitic model of pedagogic divine providence.

The Orthodox character of his doctrine was expressed in that he posited the Torah as a paradigm whose validity did not derive from the authority of the past or tradition but from the eternal authority of absolute divine revelation.<sup>32</sup> Unlike Reform, which saw in the Torah the beginning of a protracted development toward an ideal paradigm that would be revealed in the future, Steinheim saw in the Torah an ideal paradigm toward whose realization history was moving, though it was indeed

<sup>31</sup> See pt. 1, Fourth Prologue: "Religion as an Ethnic Element," 74–86.

<sup>32</sup> "The religion in question has been declared a revealed religion, that is, it has been newly communicated to man at a moment in time that is historically dated or datable. Furthermore, it has been conveyed by a person who, possessing it as a secret, communicated it to another who, until the moment of this communication, knew nothing or could not possibly know anything about it. If that is so, then the term *revealed religion*—by virtue of this acknowledgement and through its historical facticity—excludes any kind of organic historical development. A revelation as such rules out any internal evolution and growth." *Revelation*, pt. 1, Second Prologue, 61.

always uncovering new depths in its understanding of its significances in the effort to realize it in the reality of the people's life.

He accepted the framework of dividing Jewish and general history into four periods: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and maturity.<sup>33</sup> The period of the people's wandering in the wilderness and their first settlement in the land, through the period of the judges, was in his view the ideal period of innocent childhood. The people maintained themselves in a familial-tribal organization without a political regime operating through compulsory apparatus and without a regular army. The undeveloped economy and absence of a tangible threat from neighboring countries facilitated this. Afterward social conflicts from within began, as well as the need to defend themselves from strong, organized foes in the form of aggressive, despotic neighboring states. These forced Israel to adopt the political paradigm of its idolatrous surroundings. The description of the struggle between the prophets, faithful to the vision of the Kingdom of God, and the priesthood and monarchy fills the place of the description of the period of adolescence in Israelite history. The departure into exile was the beginning of the period of young adulthood. The people lost their sovereignty. In Steinheim's eyes this was a positive development, not for the reason of the Reform philosophers, who saw the fulfillment of Israel's mission in its entry to the lands of enlightened nations, but because of the special genius of Israel, which was expressed again in its original popular nature, not as a nation defined by kingdom or church, but as a familial-tribal fellowship. Only the frail rubric of a communal framework was a proper expression of its political side, which of course could not be eliminated completely.

In exile, the Jews preserved their existence as a people, manifested in a social life pattern conducted by God's Torah and commandments, while the peoples around them established their states and churches. This was the enduring infrastructure on whose basis Steinheim intended to establish the patterns of living by Torah during the period of "maturity" that was breaking forth as a result of the struggle with the idolatrous state. The struggle for emancipation during the transition to the period of maturity brought about the desertion of many Jews from their national and religious existence into the "rational" state. That is what had prompted the rabbinic leadership to tighten their grip on the remnant of commu-

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<sup>33</sup> *Revelation*, Third Prologue: "The Characteristic of Periods of Development in Historical Religion," 68–73.



nal leadership that they retained, a gesture that appeared despotic and hostile. But in Steinheim's view this was merely the misstep of a passing phase. The desertion to the idolatrous state and its false freedom would stop when the youths discover its true essence, and the Jews would come back in order to represent among the nations the suprapolitical paradigm of the Torah, a Kingdom of God over a people responding to the laws of His Torah through responsible choice, without any element of compulsion, as in the days of the judges.

This conception is implicitly critical of Orthodoxy and close to Reform in its approach to the obligatory status of the Oral Torah. Steinheim held sacred the relation to the Written Torah, which should be reinterpreted directly, not by way of previous interpretation that is not eternal but only temporary.<sup>34</sup> He was sharply critical of Orthodoxy for preserving the entire halakha without distinguishing between what is still binding in the new reality and what is no longer binding but bears the stamp of relativity or historical accident and so is an impediment to free choice. Clearly, one who arrived at Orthodoxy from the internal development of the Jewish Torah could not accept such a critique of the halakha; from such a perspective, Steinheim would seem an out-and-out Reformer.

However, Steinheim's conception was all the more critical of Reform on account of its viewing the Torah as a developing entity and its desertion from the Jewish people to the bosom of the idolatrous state of "reason." There is no doubt that Steinheim established a profoundly Orthodox paradigm in his devotion to the Torah as an eternal divine revelation—undeveloping, but with history developing toward it—and in his affirmation of the familial–communal being of the Jewish people.<sup>35</sup> However, he appeared this way only from the perspective of a Jew who first deserted his people and Torah and then rediscovered their light. From this perspective, Steinheim's religious philosophy was very close to that of Franz Rosenzweig, a child of the twentieth century.

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<sup>34</sup> See the section "Revelation and Halakhah" (excerpts from *Die Offenbarung*, vol. 2) in Haberman, *Philosopher of Revelation*, 285–99.

<sup>35</sup> *Revelation*, pt. 1, Second Prologue: "In what sense may one argue for an evolution of revelation?" See above, note 32.



*D. Discovering the Inner Light of Torah: The Teaching of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch*

A year after the appearance of the first volume of *Revelation according to the Doctrine of Judaism* by Salomon Ludwig Steinheim, the first book of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888) was published.<sup>36</sup> He was then rabbi in the province of Oldenburg. The book was *The Nineteen Letters of Ben Uzziel on Judaism* (1836).<sup>37</sup> It was a short book, but its publication was an attempt by the author to assess his influence, to determine whether the time was ripe to publish his more massive halakhic-theoretical work *Horeb*, which encompassed all areas of Jewish life in the present day.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the larger work was published a year later, when it was clear that the *Letters* had hit the mark and made a great impression.

This was the beginning of a broadly ranging literary output that would eventually include a German translation with commentary on the Torah, the Psalms, and the Jewish prayer book; sermons for the Sabbath and Jewish holidays; and many articles, especially on Jewish education, occasioned by his new educational method, which Hirsch inaugurated and named “Torah with *derekh eretz*.” Other articles addressed issues concerning the German-Jewish community in view of the split between the Reform community and the Orthodox community that Hirsch led. These articles were published in the monthly journal *Jeschurun* (1854–1870), which Hirsch founded in order to disseminate his teaching.

*The Nineteen Letters on Judaism* contained the kernel of the teaching of the young rabbi, who had become the founder and teacher of the “Neo-Orthodox” movement in Germany. This was an attempt to teach the Orthodox community a new way that some individuals had already

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<sup>36</sup> For the collected works of Samson Raphael Hirsch, see Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 6 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kaufmann, 1902–12; repr. Nabu Press, 2014); English ed., *Samson Raphael Hirsch: The Collected Writings*, 7 vols. (New York: P. Feldheim, 1984). For a standard biography of Hirsch, see Noah H. Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform: The Religious Philosophy of Samson Raphael Hirsch* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1976).

<sup>37</sup> Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe über Judenthum* (Altona: J. F. Hammerich, 1836; repr. Nabu Press, 2010). References here are to the English edition, Hirsch, *The Nineteen Letters on Judaism*, ed. Jacob Breuer, trans. Bernard Drachman (New York: Feldheim, 1969).

<sup>38</sup> Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb: Versuche ueber Jissroels Pflichten in der Zerstreuung, zunaechst fuer Jissroels denkende Juenglinge und Jungfrauen* (Altona: J. F. Hammerich, 1837; repr. as *Horev Be-Tsion Uber Briefe Eines Judischen Gelehrten Und Rabbinen Uber Das Wert . . .* (Nabu Press, 2010). English ed., *Horeb: A Philosophy of Jewish Laws and Observances*, trans. Dayan Dr I. Grunfeld, 2 vols. (London: Soncino Press, 1962).

discovered but had not become public knowledge. Hirsch himself had been raised on it in the house of his enlightened Orthodox father and in the yeshiva of his teacher, Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger: not to close oneself off from emancipation, general education, and involvement in German society and culture but the opposite. One should demonstrate that God's eternal Torah, as given in written and oral form, not only stands up to all the highest ethical and spiritual criteria of humanistic ideas of progress, but brings them to fulfillment in the lifestyle of the Jewish people throughout its history.

Faithful to Torah and its commandments, the Jewish people contributed throughout its career to the spread of these ideas among humanity. The Jews still have a great deal to contribute to their realization in the future. But this is only if they remain faithful to their Torah and its commandments and if they will be accepted without prejudice, without being required to sacrifice their unique Torahitic lifestyle. This lifestyle indeed sets the Jews apart in their communities, but it does not close them off. On the contrary—it encourages their full involvement, with equal rights and responsibilities, in all the occupations of modern civilization, in all the domains of spiritual and cultural creativity of modernity, and in all areas of modern humanistic learning. If so, there is no need to reform the halakha but the opposite: one must uncover the hidden light in it, to realize it in the life of the Jewish community, and to disseminate it through involvement in the life of the general culture. This would be a fulfillment of the ideal of *derekh eretz* ("the way of the world") in its broad sense: the way to fulfill the destiny of humankind in their worldly life.<sup>39</sup>

As we have said, R. Samson Raphael Hirsch learned the way to a modern Orthodox Judaism from his father's house and his teacher's yeshiva. He received ideological influence in this direction also from Rabbi Isaac Bernays (1792–1847), who was a friend of his father's. However, the start of his path is to be found in effect in the prior positions of the two founders of the Haskalah in Germany, Moses Mendelssohn and Naphtali Herz Wessely, even though Mendelssohn's immediate disciples turned in the direction of assimilation and Reform.

Wessely's *Words of Peace and Truth* provides the first model of the "Torah and *derekh eretz*" method in Jewish education. Mendelssohn's translations of the Torah and the Psalms, and the *Be'ur* on which

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<sup>39</sup> Hirsch, *Nineteen Letters*, Sixteenth Letter: "Emancipation," 106–11.

Mendelssohn and Wessely collaborated, provide the first model of translation and commentary as a basis for teaching the Hebrew Bible in the German language in the light of modern literary methods. And Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* was the first attempt to demonstrate that Judaism is tolerant and that the message of the prophets was the first proclamation of the universalism at which European humanism arrived only very recently. *Jerusalem* also contains the central idea that Hirsch developed systematically and in detail, first in *Horeb* and later in his commentaries: one should understand the halakha as a system of symbols that embody universal ideas not only through intellectual study or dogmas that compel the thought but through impressing them on deeds and existential experiences, through life patterns that realize them and exemplify their truth in action.

Mendelssohn concluded that Judaism has no dogmatic "principles of faith" such as those of Christianity. The Torah brings about the internalization of its ethical values and its views concerning human destiny and obligations to God and humanity through study and personal reflection, as well as by putting them into practice experientially. It puts the emphasis on the realization of these values, not on exalting them through lofty speech that is too often a substitute for acting on them. Hirsch adopted these two key ideas.<sup>40</sup> He also accepted Mendelssohn's argument that because of the special path it has taken the Torah's light is not appreciated on the outside but is directed inward and concealed. Those who observe the Jewish way of life from the outside without participating in it imagine that a lifestyle guided by halakha exhibits no independent thought, living feeling, or elevated intentions but is a species of forced servitude—mechanical action through "heteronomic" compulsory obedience, as Spinoza and Kant claimed. Only those who know it from the inside experience its radiance and see its light.

The difference between Hirsch versus Mendelssohn and Wessely is rooted in his recognition that it is not only Christian society that views the halakhic lifestyle from the outside in a spirit of alienation; an increasing stratum of young Jews of the second generation on the road to assimilation does so as well. This was the key to the increasing attractiveness of Reform. He acknowledged, however, that because of the continuing

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<sup>40</sup> "You speak of 'dogmas,' 'articles of faith.' In answer, I would briefly say that Judaism enjoins six hundred and thirteen *duties*, but it knows of no *dogmas*. . . . It accepts no speculation which does not lead to active, productive life as its ultimate goal" (Fifteenth Letter, 98).

shadow cast by the Jewish exile and the consequent inner and outer threat to the authority of Jewish communal institutions, the inner light of Torah has started to become dim.<sup>41</sup> In any case, much more than apologetics is now called for—one must develop the ideas of Judaism in a systematic and detailed way so that they may be the basis of a complete educational method. The time has arrived to reinterpret the Torah and all its pathways in order to reveal the hidden light of Judaism to all the Jewish younger generation. One must rejuvenate the tradition's inner values, to reveal their outer beauty, express the joy implicit in them, and let the moral elevation of the Torah's ways be seen by all.

A Jew of the younger generation confronting the attractive forces of general culture must be convinced that everything positive attracting him from the outside is to be found in the Torah and is realized within his family, home, and community. In that case, he can have full access to the general society and culture without worrying that he will neglect the Torah and his religious observance. Just the opposite—he will see himself as an emissary contributing the Torah's light to the general culture.

A new conception of Jewish education is thus called for, along with the creation of ideological and bibliographic tools for implementing it. The attempt to put forward such a conception is the new element that one can discover in Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters*, for the ideas themselves were not new. The book was presented as a direct personal confrontation with the spirit of modern humanistic education and in a modern German poetic style. The work adopts the narrative frame of an encounter between a rabbi who combines in his person Orthodox learning and piety as well as a broad general education and a humanistic outlook and a youth who was educated in an assimilationist environment. His outside perception of Judaism, shaped by German humanistic views, sees it as cold, boring, disparaging the individual's freedom and happiness, remote from nature and esthetic values, destructive of the joy of living, and repressing worldly creativity. It is the rabbi's purpose to reveal to the innocent youth the hidden light of Judaism. To achieve this he opens the Jewish sources and reads them with him. Does Judaism, seen from within, appear the same as from the outside?

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<sup>41</sup> In the *Nineteen Letters*, Benjamin voices the complaint of this disaffected generation: "The Law itself prohibits all enjoyment. . . . It enforces our isolation and thereby arouses suspicion and hostility on the part of others. It invites contempt by its stress on humble submissiveness. It discourages the pursuit of the formative arts. Its dogmas bar the way to free thought." First Letter, 24.

The first pedagogical question is: What should one read first? Hirsch's natural decision is similar to Mendelssohn's: one should start the way back by means of the work that is already common knowledge to an assimilating youth (such as Salomon Ludwig Steinheim, who could have represented Hirsch's ideal reader)—the Bible.<sup>42</sup> This pedagogical consideration is sufficiently transparent. The Oral Torah, especially the halakha, would seem alien to the assimilating youth. He would not be able to achieve empathy if he started with its study. The Bible is universal; it is studied by Christians and researched by humanists motivated by its literary qualities (such as the German humanist Herder, whose approach to the Bible influenced Hirsch). It would be closer to his heart—it is a good place to start.

But the second methodological question is calculated to introduce the assimilating youth to an Orthodox orientation. One must make him aware at the outset of the substantive difference amongst different readings of the Hebrew Bible. There is a Jewish reading, which sees it as the singular, eternal document of the covenant between God, His people, and humanity. This is not the same as a Christian reading, which views it as the "Old Testament," a precursor of the "New Testament." There is yet a third reading preferred by Biblical scholars, who see it as a literary source depicting the innocent childhood of humanity; despite all its beauty and inspired poetry, one cannot view it as a guiding truth for an age when humanity has arrived at cultural, social, and political maturity.

Hirsch especially wished to focus the reader's awareness on two major distinctions. The first was between two religious readings of the Hebrew Bible in its own terms: the Jewish version (as the eternal word of God addressed to all times) versus the Christian version (a temporary prelude to a successor text). The second was between the reading of religious believers—whether Jewish or Christian—and that of scientific scholars, who claimed to have the inside track on what the Bible really meant in its original context but who did so based on their own fundamental secular-humanistic outlook, thus undermining the Bible's claim to be the authentic word of God.<sup>43</sup> The scientific scholars saw it as rather a human creation, through which its creators actually expressed their own beliefs

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Second Letter.

<sup>43</sup> "But, before we open it, let us consider how we shall read it. Let us not read it for the purpose of conducting philological and antiquarian investigations, or to find support and corroboration for the antediluvian or geological hypotheses, or in the expectation of unveiling supermundane mysteries. It is as *Jews* that we must study the Torah, looking upon it as a Book given us by God that we may learn from it to know what we are and what we should be in this our earthly existence." Ibid., 28.

and opinions and those of their contemporaries, in the belief—unsupported by any scientific evidence—that their word was eternal and divine.

The enlightened rabbi who represented Hirsch in his book had to present a methodological premise of study—which would inevitably be of a religious-philosophical character—to establish a hermeneutic circle that would include the rabbi himself, the student, and the sources they were studying. He could not, of course, require that his student agree at the outset that the Bible was the eternal, divine word of God. The student would have to be convinced of this later in the course of reading the Bible. But in order that he begin to read the Bible in a way that would open him to its light, he must first read about its substance and method of composition, in a way that would be unbiased and open to the words themselves. He should not take a prior position undermining the claim that the prophets spoke on behalf of God, not on their own behalf. Later he could examine and weigh whether the words' own claim that they were spoken in God's name was persuasive.

We have here the basic assumption of a religious philosophy that relies on a plain-sense reading of the sources in an attitude of primary trust. It was Hirsch's claim that if one broke with this trust from the outset and read the holy Scriptures as literary creations composed by naïve human authors out of inspired poetic talent or an active imagination, this would change their content and significance. The question of whether the commandments of the Torah were deserving of obedience as divine is one prime example. One who put his will at the disposal of an imaginary other because he feared him or wished to merit his grace, without sufficient basis to think that those acts he was commanded to perform were worthy in and of themselves, would indeed be the slave of his fears and passions and be acting irrationally. But was the same true of one who was obedient to the will of God who was no creature of the imagination but the Creator of the world—out of the intimate knowledge that the loving Will commanding him was commanding him out of supreme knowledge, concerning that which could be for the good of the entire world, on behalf of His creatures?<sup>44</sup> All depended, therefore, on the question of how one understood the will of the Legislator, as well as the internal relations of the commandments themselves. Those scholars who read the Bible on

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<sup>44</sup> "After all the foregoing, I ask you, what do you expect of the Torah? Obviously, you expect the revelation of a rule of conduct, of how, using the powers and faculties that are yours, you may fulfill the will of God toward the beings by whom you are surrounded; in other words, how you may practice love and justice with and toward all living things." Tenth Letter, 74.

critical assumptions that denied its divine origin and the existence of the God revealed in it read into it their own heresy rather than what it really said.

Hirsch entertained Kant's argument concerning Judaism's heteronomic character, and his answer did not evade the philosophical requirement that religion should be subject to rational criticism. On the contrary—he responded by criticizing Kant's ethic of duty as based in the last analysis on a criterion of selfish utility, for finite human reason had no other criterion of the good.<sup>45</sup> Thus the duty that one fulfilled was in effect enlightened self-interest, not a duty deriving from recognition of the totality. In the end he had to satisfy his duty through benevolent intention alone, for he had no criterion for determining whether the outcome was good in fact and whether the good intention had been actualized.

Only a divine command coming through revelation confronted a person with a moral obligation imposed on him from knowledge of the totality and for the sake of the good itself, and only it led to realization in reality, examining the moral deed in accordance with it. The Torah thus did not negate human reason, whose source was in God. On the contrary—it required it in its true sense and related it to its source.<sup>46</sup>

But what was this faith itself based on? It is instructive that Hirsch seems to have ignored Kant's conclusion that there can be no proof of God's existence on the basis of scientific knowledge of nature. It is likely that he did not require such proofs in order to arrive at certainty. He relied on revelation, which awakened in his heart religious feelings that he continually reexperienced throughout all his reflections guided by the Jewish sources, as well as a lifestyle that brought him continually into encounter with God's will through observance of the mitzvot.<sup>47</sup> There

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<sup>45</sup> "These baser tendencies in the materialistic view of the world are somewhat refined and spiritualized by the higher intellects of that philosophy, but these thinkers have made no attempt to renounce them in their entirety. The essential notion of this system is either that of a world without an active God, or of a God without a world at His service. Judaism takes a different, and higher view, and views even the highest and the best as means only to that higher end." Fifteenth Letter, 93.

<sup>46</sup> "As for the Law, is it really a brake on all the joys of life, a hindrance denying the gratification of the natural human craving for pleasure? Do examine the precepts and ordinances of the Law from beginning to end and tell me what legitimate desire it forbids to gratify, what natural impulse it would destroy or extirpate. . . . Yet, as means for attaining ends that are proper and necessary, the Law recognizes these desires as perfectly moral, pure and human, and their gratification as just and as legitimate as the fulfillment of any other human task or mission." *Ibid.*, 94–95.

<sup>47</sup> "And now, my dear Benjamin, consider this: Here we have a law which bids us recognize God in the world and in mankind, which teaches that the fulfillment of His will is our



is an instructive similarity in this regard between Hirsch's approach and Geiger's. (Hirsch and Geiger were fellow students at the university and held each other in mutual respect.) Both relied on the same post-Kantian religious emotion.

Hirsch's exposition of the elements of a Biblically based religious world-view in his *Letters* was a kind of emotion-suffused post-Kantian version of Saadia Gaon's *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*: reflecting on the Torah, and then reflecting on one's own life in order to confirm what it said. Indeed, this was not by way of formal observation but through heart-felt living reason. Hirsch directs the reader to examine his life in the world and to experience through self-observation what the Torah teaches.

The Torah attests that the world was created, and the prophets depict God's presence revealing itself through the splendor of creation. If we examine ourselves as we experience nature as one of God's creatures, we discover in ourselves and in our surroundings an inner emotional truth. The power and splendor of nature amaze us when we plumb their secrets through scientific tools. They amaze us no less when we discover within ourselves the emotional-symbolic meanings of the language of images implanted within us. These are the two languages in which God reveals to humankind that He is present in creation.<sup>48</sup>

The Torah teaches that the world was created to be a habitat for humanity. It teaches us that human beings have a destiny in creation, and for its sake they are granted the gift of reason and freedom. Through them they are like their creator. When they examine themselves they can verify this. The Torah teaches us to know ourselves vis-à-vis our creator, and in this context there is raised the question of our destiny in the world and the question of the connection between our destiny and our happiness.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, the question of worldly happiness and the connection between it and human destiny is found at the heart of Hirsch's teaching: it is the question that was raised out of the confrontation between the way of Torah and the way of humanism that establishes humanity and human

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mission, which shows Him to us as the Father of all living things, and every living thing as our brother-creature. It is a law which makes all our life a means of serving God through the practice of righteousness and love toward all living things, and a proclamation of these truths for both ourselves and others." Fourteenth Letter, 90.

<sup>48</sup> Third Letter, 30–36.

<sup>49</sup> Fourth Letter, 37–41.



happiness as criteria for a theory of values and a proper lifestyle. The youth of Israel stand before humanism's invitation to worldly happiness and compare it to what seems in store for them in the tents of Torah. They flee from the prospect of meaningless suffering, toward the prospect of secure and palpable happiness. An educator who wishes to persuade his young readers that the Torah offers the right way must answer their question: Why must they give up on promised happiness?<sup>50</sup>

If so, was the human being created for happiness? Is worldly happiness the way to it? Hirsch did not mean to deny worldly happiness or to argue that it was imaginary. An ultra-Orthodox answer such as this would not be acceptable to the young, just as it was not acceptable to him. The Torah also teaches that God intended the created world to be a habitat for humanity, in which they could find their happiness. It also promised Israel happiness in their land. But it promised true happiness as a reward or as a result that flowed from fulfillment of humanity's destiny to serve their creator, and service of the Creator is performance of His command, not for selfish utility but for the good of human society and of all creation and for the perfection that God intended for it in His benevolent will.

On the contrary—the Torah teaches, and reality confirms, that when a person pursues happiness as the goal of his life, without consideration of the happiness of others and without striving to do good for others, he perverts the orders of society and of nature through his sins, and happiness slips out of his grasp. Only when a person emulates his Creator, acting for the purpose of the happiness of all human society and thus fulfilling his Creator's command, does he arrive at happiness as a reward.<sup>51</sup> This is the way of Torah. If we reexamine in its light the lives of Jews when they experience it from within, we discover that even amid the sufferings of exile they are suffused with the spiritual-yet-worldly happiness that comes from familial and communal solidarity.

With the question of worldly happiness arises also the question of individuality in relation to the Jewish community. The youths stand on their right to personal fulfillment, and the request to bear responsibility for the Jewish collective seems to them to infringe on their elementary human rights. Just as Hirsch did not seek to disqualify the natural striving for happiness, so too did he not impugn the natural yearning for individual

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<sup>50</sup> Fifth Letter, 42–45.

<sup>51</sup> "Hence, happiness and perfection are nothing but the greatest plenitude of material and spiritual possessions, employed in accordance with the will of God. These, if so employed, alone constitute the greatness of man." Fourth Letter, 38.

self-fulfillment. Still, the question stands: How does one arrive at personal fulfillment? What is the nature of the individual's connection to the community? The Torah teaches the value of every individual as a world unto himself. But in doing so, it conceives the individual as a representative of humanity, a representative of the people, a representative of the community and family in which he grew up, from which he built his personality; it is among them and for their sake that he is obligated to realize his destiny. Considering life in the light of Torah confirms the simple truth that the young who rush so eagerly toward happiness miss the boat. If they do not bear responsibility toward the familial, communal, national, and all-human community in which they grew up, they will betray not only the community but most of all themselves. They will be cut off from their source and misconceive their true life destiny.

Given all this, what is the meaning of the Israelite people's exceptional historical fate? Why have they been consigned to the suffering of exile? Why are they isolated from all humanity, giving an appearance of superiority from one aspect, defensive seclusion from another, but in either case not taking their proper part in the richness of general culture that is attracting the heart of the youths?

This question raised for discussion the issue of Jewry's chosenness among humanity. Hirsch sought to address it by citing the evidence of the Torah and the prophets, as well as observations on Jewish and general history. The choice of Israel was not meant to imply either superiority or seclusion. On the contrary—the choice was for the sake of a universal destiny. The Jews assumed a task that was realized through their performance of the mitzvot of the Torah, as an exemplary demonstration of its truth. History teaches us that this mission was required for the advancement of humanity; without the Torah's performance by this particular people, it would never be realized. Even the worldly humanism of the modern age embodies Israel's contribution to gentile culture and religion.<sup>52</sup>

Israel's differentiation from the nations is only for the sake of fulfilling the mitzvot of the Torah. The Jews never disparaged the unique value of other national cultures; they not only studied and appreciated them but participated in them and contributed to them. Still, they preserved their own unique destiny and adapted whatever they learned from the outside to the requirements of their eternal Torah. They suffered for their destiny, to be sure; but Jewish history includes not only suffering and

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<sup>52</sup> Seventh Letter, 54–56.

persecution but also major spiritual achievements and happiness that permeated the familial and communal life patterns. Only in recent times did circumstances bring about a split in the people between the Torah-faithful and those who forsook it for forbidden pleasures, thus reinforcing the seclusive tendencies of the loyalists.

In Hirsch's view, this was an inevitable transition. It would pass when the Jewish youth took stock and stuck to their principles. The progress of modern times is a sign that the fulfillment of the Jewish destiny in the world is approaching. The development of humanism is evidence of this, foreshadowing an improvement of the Jews' fate. But humanism must reform its attitude to the divine source that has set the destiny of humankind in the world, as Hirsch sought to demonstrate in his critical dialogue with Kant.

Hirsch thus did not call the youths of his generation to return penitently to the ghetto. Fidelity to the Torah in this age required in his view that one go out into the world, not as escapees but as the bearers of a Torahitic destiny. The Torah mandated participation in general culture—but without neglecting its teachings and performance of its mitzvot. On the contrary—one must fashion a common discourse between the values of Torah and humanism in order to realize them in a way of life as an example to the nations.<sup>53</sup>

In all these respects, the pedagogical goal of the *Letters* was thus to bring about, in the hearts of the youths pondering before the existential crossroads of their age, a revolution in their view of both themselves and their Judaism. Hirsch sought to present in his book a mirror in which the image of Judaism that his readers had obtained from the outside would be transformed into its true essence; at the same time, their image of themselves as Jews, which they had internalized from outside observers, would also be transformed into their true essence. Their way of conceiving their destiny in the culture of the age was mistaken and could make them fail in their objective. Only when they had come to recognize their people and their religion would they recognize themselves and find their way. Only then would they come to realize their destiny as free individuals and reap their reward of happiness.

However, it was clear that transforming young Jews' awareness of Judaism and of themselves was only a start. In order to have a full knowledge of Judaism and of themselves and in order to reveal it as a complete way

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<sup>53</sup> Sixteenth Letter ("Emancipation") and Seventeenth Letter ("Reform"), 106–16.

of life, it was necessary to add the Oral Torah to the biblical foundation. Halakha was the royal road to realizing the eternal truth of revelation in historical reality. This assertion set Hirsch's teaching apart from Steinheim's, which was based solely on Scripture, and qualified it to become the ideological rubric and primary pedagogical instrument of Modern Orthodoxy.

The defining "Orthodox" ingredient in Hirsch's doctrine was the fundamental belief in the revealed status of Torah, as well as the application of this principle to the Written Torah and Oral Torah as one continuous entity. In his halakhic treatise *Horeb*, Hirsch made this continuity concrete by prefacing each chapter of laws incumbent on the individual, family, and community in the present with the verses of the written Torah that constitute its source. In this way he sought to show that the specific norms of the halakha derive directly, through interpretation, from the deeper sense of the words spoken at Sinai. The defining "modern" ingredient was in the modern method of presentation, with respect both to the idea governing the order of the chapters and to the manner in which they were derived as applications from the chain of halakhic deliberation.

One may regard *Horeb* as a modern, updated version of Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*. It relied on Maimonides's systematic formulation, but the difference between them was revolutionary. Maimonides wrote for the benefit of rabbis, to aid them in deciding the halakha. He intentionally refrained from citing the formal pro-and-con deliberation of the Talmudic sources and provided only the final legal result. He emphasized that the wisdom of the formal halakhic derivation was its basis and disallowed any other way of deciding. The systematic method of presentation did not express ideological continuity but rather a classification of domains calculated to make it easier to locate a given law. In fact, the *Mishneh Torah* comprised an orderly panorama of halakhic conduct in all areas of life—home, synagogue, study house, market, community, and nation.

By contrast, Hirsch composed his work for the purpose of pedagogical instruction of young Jews who were alienated from Jewish observance to introduce them to the world of Judaism and to convince them that it was the way to their self-fulfillment. There is evidence of this in its style, which was one of personal address, explanation, and persuasion.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> "The knowledge with which you have enriched your mind must be applied to *yourself*. . . . You may have beheld God directly in Nature or perceived Him in History. . . . So long as you do not receive God into your heart as *your* God, and embrace Him with your

He thus had to arrange the categories of rules as milestones of an educational progression leading to a religious goal: devotion to the service of God. In the process, he had to explain the necessity of each of the rules in terms of the significance that they embodied or the spiritual objective toward which they tended. We recall that the image of Jewish observance prevalent in the outside world was one of compulsory, arbitrary obligations that had the objective of inculcating blind obedience to a heteronomic divine will. Hirsch sought to reveal their light and to prove that there was no need to change the halakha itself through reform but only to update its contemporary understanding.

The revolution that marks *Horeb* as a modern halakhic work was thus expressed in bringing the philosophical meta-halakhic principles into the very core of the halakhic deliberation. It would thus create the impression among those coming to the study of halakha from the outside that the law was not based on formal legalistic considerations expressive of the legislator's imposition of authority. Rather, it derived directly from the ethical-religious values and hidden meanings that needed to be implemented in symbolism-laden actions, all of which combined into an inclusive worldview.

Hirsch's pedagogical-halakhic conception was expressed first and foremost in his understanding of the halakha's cognitive aspect. He presented it as instruction directly influencing the correctness of the deed, instruction that translated exalted ideas such as divinity, eternity, temporality, creation, revelation, sanctity, love, freedom, and redemption into the language of feeling, awakening the will to do and to experience the deed. The expression for understanding the halakha did not remain on the intellectual plane. It was observance that expressed the understanding. Thus the main thing was not theoretical acuity and depth but the complete bodily spiritual experience of symbolic action. "All my bones shall say..."

On the basis of this understanding, Hirsch had already in the *Nineteen Letters* proposed a classification of the rules of the Written and Oral Torah into six instructional types, comprising a continuous educational process: *Toroth* (Teachings), *Edoth* (Testimonies), *Mishpatim* (Equity Rules), *Chukim* (Statutes), *Mitzvoth* (Commandments), and *Avodah* (Worship).<sup>55</sup>

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whole being as your God, so long as this concept is a mere denizen of your brain, so long will this sovereign idea be without influence on your actual life." *Horeb* (London: Soncino, 1962), 1:3.

<sup>55</sup> Tenth Letter through Fourteenth Letter. We follow here the spelling and capitalization of these terms adopted in the standard English translation of Hirsch's *Horeb*. Note

The *Toroth* (Teachings) were meta-halakhic ideas that the Torah taught. But we should note that Hirsch, unlike Maimonides, did not present them as dogmatic “articles of faith” nor as “laws of the foundations of Torah” intended for intellectual study but as meditations, feelings, values, and virtues whose purpose was to shape the personality that would express itself primarily in its deeds and experiences. Thus he included the idea of God among the teachings, not for the purpose of Maimonidean “intellectual love of God” but rather for the sake of awakening the person “to accept the yoke of Heaven,” to know that God addressed the individual through His commandment while His essence was hidden from human understanding.<sup>56</sup> The philosophical effort to draw near to conceiving God, to which Maimonides ascribed supreme importance, was in Hirsch’s view superfluous and even misguided, for it diverted the person from his practical purpose. To take another example: the idea of revelation was to be learned by remembering the convocation at Mount Sinai as it was described in the Torah, in other words, through the effort to experience it as a personal memory. This orientation explains why he included among the “teachings” the emotions of reverence and love, the virtues of pride and humility, and the emotion of neighborly love.<sup>57</sup>

The “testimonies” included the commandments of remembrance in the Torah: the Sabbath and festivals, circumcision, tefillin and the garment fringes, the mezuzah, and the like.<sup>58</sup> The emphasis was on the individual’s bringing himself to reconstitute the national memory as his own individual memory and to give personal testimony of it among his family and community, especially through observance of the Sabbath and holidays. According to Hirsch, every Jew must testify to his faith through symbolic deeds so that his life will be a kind of Torah.<sup>59</sup>

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that in the exposition of Hirsch’s sixfold classification of the Jewish precepts below, the special spelling and capitalization of these six terms is used to denote the technical use of them that Hirsch employs, whereas the common transliteration spelling (*torot, edot, mishpatim, hukkim, mitzvot, avoda*) is used to denote the ordinary meaning of these terms in the rabbinic Jewish tradition.

<sup>56</sup> “But above all, the most vital lesson to lay to heart is that this One God is *your* God, and that you have acknowledged Him in order to live rightly.” *Horeb*, 1:6.

<sup>57</sup> *Horeb*, sec. 1 (*Toroth*), §§7, 8, 9, 12, 16. (The two-volume work *Horeb* is divided into six broad sections: 1. *Toroth*, 2. *Edoth*, 3. *Mishpatim*, 4. *Chukim*, 5. *Mitzvot*, and 6. *Avodah*. Each section is further divided into an average of 20 subsections [118 in the entire work], indicated by consecutive numerals in the standard 1962 Soncino English edition and here indicated by the symbol §.)

<sup>58</sup> *Horeb*, sec. 2 (*Edoth*), §§21–35, 36, 38–40.

<sup>59</sup> “There is need . . . of symbolic words and acts which shall stamp [the basic principles of the *Toroth*] indelibly upon your soul. . . . This is the essential concept at the basis of the

The “equity rules,” “statutes,” and “commandments” lead a person from ideological and emotional identification, through internalization and symbolic expression, to deeds that shape one’s relating to one’s human and natural environment. Human behavior must conform to, preserve, and advance the order that God established in nature for man’s sake so that he should have a home and field of productive activity.<sup>60</sup> On the basis of this divine ordering of nature, it is incumbent on him to establish the order that God set forth in His Torah on behalf of all human society and on behalf of the people of Israel so that they should realize their unique destiny. The “teaching” that underlies the norms defined by the “equity rules,” “statutes,” and “commandments” teaches that God legislated an ideal order for nature and for humanity but that it was not fully realized in the act of creation alone. It is man’s destiny to complete creation in accordance with the principles implanted in it and to establish society in accord with the Torah so that he should be a partner with his Creator and walk in His ways.<sup>61</sup>

This task, which Hirsch defined according to the phrase in Genesis “to work [the garden] and preserve it,” has two parts: a negative injunction, to take care not to violate the original order of existence; and a positive injunction, to improve and advance the world by creating that culture which humanity adds to nature. Through his cultural activity, the human being becomes a “partner in the work of creation.” In our view, Hirsch was thus adapting the humanistic conception of culture to the Torah.

In keeping with this classification, the “equity rules” and “statutes” show how the principles of the order established by God for nature and society are to be protected against violation. The rules of equity are based on

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*Edoth*... Thus the doctrine that God is the creator and possessor of all... is symbolized in the commandments concerning... the sanctity of the first-born... [other agricultural rules and]... the Sabbath... The doctrine that God is the Redeemer and Savior of Israel, is symbolized by *Pessach*—the Passover festival, *Shevuoth*—the Feast of Weeks, *Succoth*—the Feast of Tabernacles... To dedicate all the powers of our mind, heart and body to the service of the All-One is the lesson of *Tefillin*—the phylacteries.” Thirteenth Letter, 84–85. Hirsch also famously observed, “The catechism of the Jew consists of his calendar” (“Reflections on the Jewish Calendar Year,” in *Judaism Eternal: Selected Essays from the Writings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch*, trans. and ed. Dayan R. I. Grunfeld [London: Soncino Press, 1959], 1:3).

<sup>60</sup> *Horeb*, sec. 3 (Mishpatim).

<sup>61</sup> “The same hand which measured the earth and the sun and meted out matter to them in proportion to their pre-ordained courses, that same hand meted out mental power to man according to his spiritual destiny, prescribed the number of each being’s members and size, allotted to all matter its ingredients, which make it what it is. In the same manner, the continued existence, development and activity of the universe is but justice.” *Horeb*, sec. 3 (Mishpatim), §44 (1:218).



the concept of justice that the Torah has defined broadly, embracing the social, political, and cosmic levels. Its basic principle is that every creature has the right to preserve and advance his own nature as God created him. The Mishpatim (equity rules) deal with justice among human beings. Hirsch included in them norms regulating human property, purchase and exchange, the conduct of the state in conformity with values of dignity and peace, and judicial procedures including testimony.<sup>62</sup> It also includes ethical topics such as not shaming another in public, for the principle of human dignity embodied in such a rule is basic to justice and the proper functioning of society.<sup>63</sup>

The intent of the Chukim (statutes), in Hirsch's view, was to establish just relations toward nature's creatures and even its resources. Nature was created for the sake of humanity, but man was also created for the sake of nature. The task of "preserving" incumbent on man included the obligation to respect all nature's creatures and to refrain from violating their essence as God created them.<sup>64</sup> Hirsch understood the principle of *bal tashhit* ("do not destroy") as an element of justice toward the created realm, but he also included within the same rubric of halakhic norms laws such as the prohibitions of mixed species, as well as those of purity and impurity, which seem to have an irrational aspect.<sup>65</sup> Using the term Chukim instead of Mishpatim highlighted this difference. Traditional Judaism had long used the term *mishpatim*<sup>66</sup> to refer to the laws governing human society, which were "rational" in the sense that human reason was able—and also obligated—to understand their reasons and participate in legislating them. On the other hand, the *hukkim* pertaining to sub-human nature were not susceptible of being discovered by human reason,

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., §§46–48, 54.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., §§50–52.

<sup>64</sup> "Respect the Divine order in God's creation," is the second call to man. You should not interfere with the natural order which you find fixed by God in His world for its ultimate good. You must, by respecting the boundaries of that order, guard yourself against allowing the free use and transformation of this world, which He has granted to you, to degenerate into a God-forgotten, world-destructive presumption." Ibid., sec. 4 (Chukim), §57 (2:282).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., §56: "Do not destroy anything"; §57: "Regarding the species as divine order."

<sup>66</sup> The term "Mishpatim" derives from the root ShPT (judge) and indicates the norms that should be invoked when a civil case came before a judge to be decided by equity. By contrast, the term "Chukim" (= *hukkim*, from *hakak*, to carve in stone) denotes those fixed laws, often of a seemingly arbitrary character, that are famously resistant to rational explanation. Hirsch's explanation of the Chukim fits with the interpretations of contemporary biblical scholars about the coherence of the laws of Leviticus with the creation outlook of Genesis 1. See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1966), and Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22* (New York: Anchor Bible, 2000).



yet it was incumbent on the human being to observe them as a Torahitic command in the faith that they have a reason in the mind of God who created nature and that He knows its hidden secrets. It follows that through this division Hirsch sought to demonstrate that even the Torah's legislation, which seems at first sight to be outside the limits of human reason, is not outside the limits of reason of the divine legislator.

As compared with the "equity rules" (*Mishpatim*) and "statutes" (*Chukim*), the "commandments" (*Mitzvot*) embrace the obligatory actions of a person on behalf of himself, a fellow person, society, or nature in order to repair the world and bring it nearer to its ideal order. If "fear" is the attribute expressed in the fulfillment of the routine laws and rules, then "love" is the attribute that comes to expression in the *Mitzvot*. Through them one arrives at the level of "walking in God's ways" with all God's creatures, not only in the spirit of obedience from knowledge, but as one who has internalized the divine attributes that are revealed in creation and in Torah.<sup>67</sup>

We thus have a hierarchy of progress from one stage to the next, from "teachings" to "testimonies"; from "testimonies" to "equity rules," whose obligatory character is evident to human reason; from these to "statutes," which express faith in the rationality of the divine commandments even when they are beyond human understanding; from "statutes" to "commandments" which partake of identification with the attributes of love and kindness. The highest experience that a person arrives at on his path is expressed in "worship," that is to say, in prayer according to normative practice.<sup>68</sup>

Prayer, according to Hirsch, is man's standing in judgment before his God. It includes assessing one's deeds and feelings, confession and repentance for one's sins, and giving thanks for God's kindnesses and for

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<sup>67</sup> "*Mitzvah* shows you how through love translated into action you can raise yourself above the level of creation to God. For love is the activity which seeks unasked the welfare and benefit of others." *Ibid.*, sec. 5 (*Mitzvot*), §72 (2:359). A few of the precepts that Hirsch includes in this category are marriage (§§81–83), respect for age (§74), study of Torah (§75), and acts of benevolence (§§85–88).

<sup>68</sup> "Such a life of Divine service [as comprised in fulfilling the first five categories] can be completely fulfilled only with a clear, enlightened spirit, with a soft warm heart and with the dedicated power of our whole being. The attainment of such clarity and warmth, power and dedication; the equipping of oneself as a servant of God; the temporary withdrawal from the whirl of life in order to replenish, in the presence of God, one's spiritual power and dedication for further service to Him even in the continuing hustle and bustle of living—this is specifically called *Avodah*—Divine Service." *Ibid.*, sec. 6 (*Avodah*), §98 (2:471).

the purifying forgiveness that the one who prays sincerely earns. But one should emphasize that for Hirsch prayer is conceived as an experiential performance of self-education intended to renew a person's spiritual energies and direct him to the continued fulfillment of his tasks. The objective of "worship" is dedicating oneself to realizing one's earthly life destiny, but it has no mystical element. Performance of commanded actions is the sole method of forming a direct personal connection between the person and God. Hirsch was thus careful to give an interpretation of Torah and Jewish religious practice that would be "within the limits of reason," as Kant had prescribed, yet he expanded these limits to include a revelation of divine reason that surpassed the bounds of comprehension of human reason and required recourse to a divine command.

A full description would show how Hirsch's theory of the reasons for the mitzvot built upon his basic principles as a foundation for the detailed specifications. Every specific norm of the later categories (equity rule, statute, commandment, worship) was explained in terms of the "teachings" and "testimonies." The specification of the mitzvot was conceived as a means for deepening the deliberation of the various aspects of realization of the "teachings" and for harmonizing the objective world order and social order with the conduct and spiritual experiences of a person who served God through the Jewish way of traditional observance. The Jewish halakha was thus conceived as a normative language that was necessarily a symbolic language. It shaped reality. It thus established an equivalence between spiritual meaning and formative practice.

From the standpoint of the philosophy of religion, hermeneutics thus played a prominent role in Hirsch's teaching. Hirsch did not mention Schleiermacher as a source of his inspiration, yet the influence of his method is evident when one examines how Hirsch's interpretations are directed at updating the meaning of the Holy Scriptures from the changing standpoints of the philosophical *Zeitgeist* in succeeding generations. The selfsame truth took on different shadings and depths, revealing different facets in accordance with the needs and level of understanding of each generation.

The methodological question was: How was one to interpret the divine Word, which carried the potential of a multilayered spectrum of understandings by human reason, and how could one insure nonetheless that the ever-changing interpretations would derive from the Source and not be the free invention of the interpreter? In his first two works, Hirsch presented his interpretations as the literal sense of the text, putting his trust in the divine source of the scriptures. In his later commentaries, he also

offered his interpretations as novel understandings rooted in the original sense of the texts, but he greatly elaborated on the ways of identifying the original meaning, presenting a native Jewish alternative for the philological method of identifying word roots, structural components, and their semantic and symbolic nuances.<sup>69</sup> The hermeneutic approach to Torah that he developed in this way was in his opinion a continuation of the rabbinic midrashic enterprise, providing it with the means to stand up to the scientific criticism that challenged its method.

Hirsch's hermeneutic of Torah was rooted in the theory of the Hebrew language developed by R. Judah Halevi in the *Kuzari*.<sup>70</sup> One must nevertheless emphasize that it derived modern support from the theory of religious language and myth of Schelling, which in turn was influenced by the kabbalah. According to Halevi, the Hebrew language was different in kind from the national languages that ensued from the general confusion after the failure to build the Tower of Babel. All those other languages were formed on the basis of linguistic convention, whereas Hebrew was the first original language and was thus the necessary prerequisite for establishing the conventions of the other languages. What, then, was the origin of this primordial language? The only possible explanation, according to Halevi, was that Hebrew was fashioned for the sake of creation. It had its source in the inner divine utterance through which the world was created, and it was implanted in humanity to enable it to relate to the creation, as one can learn from the account in Genesis.

The special characteristic of this original language that describes the creation is the ontological conformity of the word representing an object and the inner essence of the object. It follows that the more we delve into the understanding of the roots of language, the more deeply we under-

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<sup>69</sup> A sampling of Hirsch's creative etymologies will illustrate this approach to language as disclosing deeper essences: that the Hebrew root *'dm*/*'dmh* (Adam / earth) was related to *hadom* (footstool), for the human being is God's footstool (Gen. 1.26); that the term *'olot* designating Noah's sacrifices indicated their purpose was to achieve spiritual elevation; that the names of Noah's three sons represented three dispositions—Shem (= name) spirituality, Ham (= hot) sensuality, and Japheth (= beauty), both the positive (esthetic) and negative (seductive) aspects of beauty (Gen. 9.18); that the names "Melchizedek king of Salem" embodied the virtues of righteousness and peace that Abraham was to embody and that the term *kohen* (priest) used in that context connotes "one who prepares" (*mekhin*) the way for humanity (Gen. 14.20); that *emunah* (faith) is related to *omen* (educate) and indicates a surrender to God to be educated to God's service (Gen. 15.6). Source: Joseph Breuer, *Introduction to Samson Raphael Hirsch's Commentary on the Torah: From the Creation to the Death of Abraham* (New York: Feldheim, 1948); <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/4105>.

<sup>70</sup> See Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, sec. 2, §§67–81.

stand the hidden essence of the divine ideas by which the objects were created. Hirsch adopted this idea and drew both ontological and hermeneutic conclusions from it.

The principal ontological conclusion was that the original language that depicted creation bridged the gap that Kant discerned between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself. The words of creation represent the ideal essence reflected through the phenomenon that is subject to scientific examination. We come to the ideal essence of things, to their meaning in the language of creation, by means of the word roots and the nuances and permutations of their meanings. One should relate to every word in the Hebrew language not as a conventional semantic representation but as a symbol that directly embodies in itself the essence and spectrum of appearances that reveal it from different points of view and different contexts. In this way we can find in every word, in every verse and chapter, an infinite spectrum of meanings that cycle and congeal on the very roots of the words of Scripture.

This theory opened up for Hirsch a way to derive from the scriptures answers for the questions of life and faith of his contemporaries, without severing their essential rootedness in the basic literal sense that was given in revelation. There was no need to deny the fact that the new interpretations were generated out of observation of the present and the intention to respond to the questions of the present. The scriptures were conceived as sources of inspiration for creative interpretation, and holding on to the interpreted text was the guarantee that this interpretation would flow from the source of revelation and have the truth of revelation.

In this way, Hirsch's enterprise of interpretation fulfilled the basic requirement of Orthodox thought: the Torah must be an infinite fountain of infinite truth, continually renewed in every generation but without itself undergoing any change. Its light is revealed continually, but it itself is fixed and stands forever as the same body of texts and laws. In this way, Hirsch's hermeneutic method symbolized the fundamental essence of this movement of thought, which revealed the light of Torah to the children of the modern age as "Orthodox" on the one hand and "modern" on the other.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### ADAPTATION AND GROWTH OF THE INNER SPACE OF TORAH IN RESPONSE TO HUMANISM

#### *A. Introduction*

The counterresponse of ultra-Orthodoxy was expressed, as we have said, through its fixity and isolation from the inroads of modern cultural influence within the space of communal life and in the inner personal space of its members. The rule that “everything new is forbidden by the Torah” applied first and foremost to innovations in religious law and custom, to the style of outer appearance and conduct, and to everything pertaining to lifestyle, whether covered by religious law or not. Everything old was sanctified as an ancestral legacy. Yet it was clear that it was impossible to forbid innovations in modes of conduct without fending off the ideas that caused them: modern education, and especially the scientific and philosophical ways of thinking, which gave rise to heretical ideas and even worse—the secular humanistic outlook, which undermined the traditional modes of Torah interpretation, shattered the traditional historical myth, and introduced a new, foreign content to all the traditional religious concepts.

In order to fend off the threatening influence, there was an immediate need first of all to stop up the channels of transmission by prohibiting their study. From now on, only the curriculum of Torah was allowed to shape the education and thinking of the Torah-true Jew. From this standpoint, any systematic study of external learning was regarded as a sin and liable to lead to heresy, all the more so systematic acquisition of the tools of modern thought

It is nevertheless clear that forbidding the new as such and isolating themselves from the influence of the surrounding secular culture were conscious steps of adaptation to the new conditions. There was no escaping the need of adaptation, which was a need of survival, and this fact had an ambiguous significance.

Isolation was adaptation through externalization. As opposed to the tendency of the advocates of Emancipation to integrate into general society and culture, the ultra-Orthodox community decided that it preferred to

remain outside the modern social and political process. It preferred to remain "in the ghetto" and to remain content with the traditional status that the Jews had as a "tolerated" community within the gentile state, without civil rights, without participation in the general political process, and without cultural ties with gentile society. It was sufficient that they be allowed to earn an honorable living and to maintain their separate lifestyle, while of course separating themselves from the community of Jews who chose emancipation. But the need immediately arose to fashion new external ties with the environment, which had undergone transformation in its relation to the Jews and in its economic life, in order for Jews to find a niche to maintain themselves. If only to survive alongside the changing general society, they had to develop new occupational skills that required a certain education. If so, what were the boundaries of what was permissible through unavoidable necessity? How could one acquire the permissible without endangering one's faith and old folkways?

Moreover, the ferment in the new generation necessitated internal justification of the defensive steps that required great sacrifices. One needed an ideology that would give reasons for the changes in the relation of the ultra-Orthodox community to the outside general and Jewish environment expressed in the decision to refuse every kind of change. What was the pervasive flaw of modern culture that would rule out the kind of adaptation that traditional Jewish communities had exercised toward surrounding cultures in the past? Thus they had to contend with the critical arguments that the modern movements had directed at the ultra-Orthodox community and to respond with counterattacks that would identify what was inferior and wrong in them to justify steering clear of them, thus proving the unequivocal superiority of traditional Torah Judaism in spite of the false seductiveness of the new.

One should emphasize again that the ultra-Orthodox polemic against the Enlightenment and the movements it engendered did not take the form of a confrontation within a common forum shared by the ultra-Orthodox and the modern Jewish movements, especially in Germany. Ultra-Orthodoxy excluded itself from the common forum by its choice of language. From the start, and throughout this period, its polemic was conducted in rabbinic Hebrew and in Yiddish, whereas all the modern movements in Germany resorted to German. Even in eastern Europe, a wall of separation developed between the Haskalah literature written in modern Hebrew and the ultra-Orthodox literature written in traditional rabbinic Hebrew. Thus we are speaking here of internal propaganda whose purpose was to convince the ultra-Orthodox rabbis and especially its

youths. (It goes without saying that the ultra-Orthodox knew well that they could not convince those who had already left the traditional community to reverse their decision.) But even for this purpose, they had to be familiar with the basic argument of the modern movements and thus to some extent with their way of thinking.

Paradoxically, the antimodern polemic thus became the means by which modern cultural knowledge, ideas, and ways of thinking succeeded in penetrating into the ultra-Orthodox elite who devoted themselves to the educational struggle. In this way there could develop a kind of cultural buffer, which in its most prominent manifestations appeared as a kind of internal ultra-Orthodox Enlightenment.

Indeed, the Hebrew literature written in the first generation of the Haskalah played a typical role in this paradoxical development. Mendelssohn's project of translation and commentary and Wessely's *Words of Peace and Truth* provoked the first defensive reaction of the ultra-Orthodox leadership in Germany and eastern Europe. But when the line of confrontation moved to the left, from the first generation of Enlightenment to nineteenth-century Reform, it became evident in retrospect how much was orthodox and "kosher" in the early Enlightenment doctrines. Mendelssohn and Wessely had indeed used the principle of divine revelation as a point of departure to fortify their argument for general education and cultural integration. But the arguments they deployed to defend this principle against Enlightenment rationalism could serve the agenda of ultra-Orthodoxy in its battle against Reform. Furthermore, they could enlist their arguments in legitimation of general education and occupational training, not to place them in the category of learning for its own sake but as a means, a concession to unavoidable necessity, without undermining the foundations of religion.

Indeed, we shall find that several of the ultra-Orthodox thinkers who took a stand in the battleground against Reform in the second and third generations of the formation of ultra-Orthodox thought resorted to arguments that had their source in the orthodox aspects of Mendelssohn's and Wessely's thought, as well as the Modern Orthodoxy established by Samson Raphael Hirsch. From these sources, which were regarded to some extent as authentic Jewish legacy, the more daring ultra-Orthodox thinkers were able to permit themselves to accept what they could not accept directly from the sources of the general Enlightenment. And having established a foothold of what they had permitted themselves in the framework of ultra-Orthodox ideology, they could then dare to carve out an ultra-Orthodox path parallel to that of Samson Raphael Hirsch.



This was not, of course, for the sake of participation in the general society and culture but in order to strengthen traditional Judaism and to demonstrate to true-believing Jews that the Torah, resting on its own sources, was not missing anything that needed to be supplied from the outside. Everything good and true that seemed to come from outside the Torah could be derived from it. And furthermore, every argument that the modernizers advanced against the Torah could be refuted with the critics' own intellectual tools.

Though the outlooks developed in this way could hardly be called "modern philosophy of religion," their traditional character displayed nuances, expansions, and depths whose source was in their selective adaptation to modern ways of thought, and they showed originality in doing so.

*B. Ultra-Orthodox Nationalism in Response to Reform:  
Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer*

The religious *Hibbat Zion* movement, whose founders are considered heralds of Zionism, had its dawn in Germany against the background of the ultra-Orthodox struggle against Reform. The polemical context is obvious. One of the principal changes that Reform required in the name of responding to the demands of citizenship in the modern nation-state was to surrender all signs of separate Jewish nationality. What were the signs of Jewish nationality in exile? The connection to the land of Israel and Jerusalem as the ancient homeland that the exiled people had not renounced and the hope of redemption in the "end of days" that would be expressed in the rebirth of the Jewish commonwealth, the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the restoration of the sacrificial worship in it. All these hopes were prominently expressed in the traditional prayer book.

The Reformers excised these references. Thus they hoped to proclaim their unequivocal loyalty to the national states in which they would receive citizenship. It was natural that the ultra-Orthodox, who refused emancipation and persisted in regarding the Jews' dwelling outside of Israel as exile, should respond by reasserting the emotional-religious attachment to Zion and by reinforcing the Messianic faith in the return to Zion—the only land in which a Jewish polity could arise and in which Jews could see themselves as citizens in their own national homeland.

The ultra-Orthodox polemic against the Reform proposal to abolish the prayer references to the return to Zion and the rebuilding of Jerusalem

thus required a zealous expression of the connection to Zion, and it is the way of zealotry to seek a practical expression, sometimes symbolic, that partakes of fulfillment of the mitzvah. Furthermore, the great religious crisis that was fragmenting the people and the change in relations between Jewry and "the nations" could be interpreted as blatant signs of the imminent redemption. If so, deeds that helped to bring it about could be seen by those ultra-Orthodox who were not content with passive defensive measures as an alternative activist policy to that of the pro-Emancipation party. The one sought redemption through civic enfranchisement, liberating Jews from the burdens of the exile within the gentile lands; the other, true-believing Jews would act to advance the true redemption of the people on its land.

It is instructive in any case that the central rabbinic personality to raise the idea and be dedicated to its achievement came from the inner circle of the Ḥatam Sofer and Rabbi Akiva Eger, who coined the slogan "everything new is forbidden by the Torah" and labored to implement it in their teachings as the leading halakhic authorities of their age. Precisely from that circle went out the novel call to seize the opportunity presented by the changing attitude of Western countries toward the Jews to take assertive action to advance the national redemption of Israel in its land.

Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874), who served for most of his career as rabbi of the ultra-Orthodox community of Thuringia, on the border of central and eastern Europe, was educated in the yeshiva of Rabbi Jacob of Lissa and Rabbi Akiva Eger.<sup>1</sup> He was nevertheless different from the other ultra-Orthodox rabbis of his time in his tendency to broaden his halakhic and kabbalistic learning to include philosophy. He also took an autodidactic interest in the literature of the general Enlightenment. The philosophical sources that he used were mainly the medieval Jewish philosophers, and his preferred method was close to the apologetic method of Saadia and Halevi. He of course had to update the positions of these earlier thinkers, who had set out to defend their faith in terms of the debates of their times. For this purpose he broadened his philosophical education first of all through the works of the first-generation Maskilim, especially Mendelssohn and Wessely, whom he saw as continuing the

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<sup>1</sup> On Kalischer's life and thought, see Israel Klausner, "Introduction," in Kalischer, *Derishat Tziyon* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kuk, 1964), and Jacob Katz, "Demuto Ha-historit shel harav Zvi Hirsch Kalischer," in Jacob Katz, *Leumiyut Yehudit* (Jerusalem: Zionist Library, 1979), 285–318.

proper tradition of Jewish philosophy in defense of the religious truth of the Torah.<sup>2</sup> In the realm of general learning, he also studied those modern philosophers whose critique of religion he had to refute with the help of Reform thought, namely Spinoza and Kant.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, Kalischer utilized the philosophical methods that he had to acquire in order to conduct his ideological polemic against Reform. To this effort he devoted his major work, *Emunah Yesharah* (Right Faith—an exact Hebrew translation of “ortho-doxy,” a corrective to the perversions of revealed truth that were transmitted from generation to generation by the caprice of human reason). The first volume of this work was published in 1843, in the same decade that saw the appearance of the foundational works of all the modern Jewish religious movements.<sup>4</sup>

Philosophically, Kalischer followed the path of Saadia and Halevi. He did not base the “right faith” on human reason but on the prophetic revelation of the Torah, whose word was transmitted through the generations of exoteric Torah (halakha) and esoteric Torah (kabbalah). He did not base his religious world outlook, or the obligation of the mitzvot, on the attainments and evidences of human reason. He nevertheless appreciated philosophy for realizing the independent ability of human reason and regarded it as a commandment from the Torah. Rational inquiry was also important, in his view, to achieve a deeper understanding of the Torah and to defend against heretical views.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, *Emunah Yesharah* (Right Faith), vol. 1 (Krotoszyn, 1843); vol. 2 (Thorn, 1856); vol. 3 (Lyck, 1862). Kalischer makes passing reference to Mendelssohn in vol. 1, 21 and 101.

<sup>3</sup> Kalischer devotes an extended footnote to Descartes’ method of doubt as a salutary lesson in the imperfection of human reason employed in isolation (*ibid.*, vol. 1, 14). He makes passing reference to Kant (vol. 1, 59 and 62) and Copernicus (vol. 1, 59) and makes free use of examples from modern scientific discovery. But the main thread of his discourse is homiletic, weaving together verses from the Bible and rabbinic midrashim to argue rhetorically for his preconceived outlook. He also cites medieval philosophers in support of his views—Maimonides, of course, but most frequently Albo’s *Ikkarim* (*ibid.*, 1:60, 84–85, 89, and 2:61, 118, 120, 124).

<sup>4</sup> The contents of the first two volumes include: Faith and Reason; God’s Existence; Creation; Providence; Soul and Immortality; Purpose of Creation; Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will; and Reasons for the Commandments. All these topics as well as their methodology of argument are based on the classical medieval Jewish thinkers.

<sup>5</sup> “The Torah and commandment opposite intellectual inquiry, tradition and faith opposite investigation and reason, when they are separated they pursue each other, like the four elements. . . . Inquiry pursues tradition and religion pursues reason . . . they stand together like the foundations of the earth so as not to be separated . . . tradition will guide one to choose a way to dwell in; reason will aid him to understand tradition and to join it to intellect; intellectual inquiry will help him to understand how to fear the Lord with a perfect heart and to perform all of the Torah and commandments in deed with knowledge and understanding, to hold fast to the demonstrations of faith.” *Emunah Yesharah*, 1:12–13.

The fundamental assumption that Kalischer accepted from Saadia and Halevi, as well as from other traditional philosophers including Wessely and Mendelssohn, was that human reason, like revealed Torah, was God's gift to humanity. God gave man reason to fulfill his earthly mission and to understand the revealed word that should guide him on that mission. Thus, the Torah should not contain things that contradict truths or facts known by reason from deduction or experience. It contains teachings and commandments that an individual cannot arrive at on his own or that are beyond the power of finite, conditioned human reason to demonstrate, so we can learn them only from revelation. But a third test applies to them: it is not possible that they should contradict something that a person can know with certainty through his experience or rational demonstration.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, what a person achieves through his reason directs him toward recognizing the limitations of his power of independent insight and the dependence of reason on what transcends it.

Thus Saadia and Halevi taught. Wessely and Mendelssohn agreed. Kalischer adapted this outlook to the needs of his time. Reform denied the truths of religion that are above reason. Following Kant, it sought to press religion into the frame defined by "the limits of reason alone." Kalischer came to show the true believers that "straight faith," based on halakha and kabbalah, withstands philosophy's negative test: it does not contradict anything proved by empirical science or pure rational inquiry. On the contrary—when reason recognizes its limits, it points to the truth beyond it, relies on it, and derives nourishment from it, thus fitting itself to interpret the revealed words relating to earthly life.

The philosophic originality in Kalischer's arguments is evident from his departure from the hard-and-fast boundaries common to most of the ultra-Orthodox community. We see it in the combination of reliance on kabbalah and recourse to modern philosophy. He did not shrink from directly confronting the arguments of modern philosophers of religion such as Spinoza and Kant or from relying on the teachings of Maskilim such as Wessely and Mendelssohn. Kalischer thus expressed a willingness, unlike most ultra-Orthodox thinkers, to understand the denials of Reform in terms of its own logic and to refute it through dealing critically with the philosophy that it relied on. To be sure, the substance of

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<sup>6</sup> In a typical passage, Kalischer notes that the Bible's declaration that "a mist shall rise from the earth" (Gen. 2:6) is in agreement with modern meteorology, which teaches that the moisture in the atmosphere has its source from the evaporation of the oceans (*Emunah Yesharah*, 1:87).

his philosophical arguments did not generally go beyond what he learned from Wessely and Mendelssohn. His one major new idea appeared in part three of his work, published under its own separate title in 1862: *Seeking Zion*.

From the standpoint of the polemic against Reform, the purpose of "*Straight Faith: Part Three*" was to defend the traditional religious outlook that the Jews were a people distinguished by their religious teachings, by their connection with Zion—the Holy Land—and by their Messianic destiny: the establishment of a Jewish government, the rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem, and the renewal of the sacrifices in the Temple as in ancient times (to the extent that this is halakhically possible in modern times). All these are the "straight faith" that Reform rejected vehemently in disgust. But the uniqueness of *Seeking Zion* was its political agenda. Kalischer sought to give support to an immediate initiative to act for the renewal of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel as a preparatory step to realizing the vision of the "return to Zion" and establishing the Jewish commonwealth.<sup>7</sup>

The idea to act for strengthening the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel did not come from Kalischer himself. He joined forces with the initiative of a practical man and added the ideological dimension that he had developed through his confrontation with Reform: as they had turned their back on the land of Israel, Jerusalem, the Temple, the holy service, the sacrifices, and the era of Messianic redemption, the time had come to express fidelity to all of these through action. The people of Israel had sinned by not persisting in returning to their land, even when it had become a practical possibility, and this was the reason for the length of the exile. (This view was already found in Halevi's *Kuzari*.) The people must perform repentance in order to be worthy of supernatural assistance from on high. This is apparently a standard traditional idea, except that the "repentance" Kalischer called for was not of the kind expressed in the diligence of all Jews to perform all of the mitzvot faithfully so that they be

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<sup>7</sup> "The redemption of Israel, for which we long, is not to be imagined as a sudden miracle. The Almighty, blessed be His Name, will not suddenly descend from on high and command His people to go forth. He will not send the Messiah from heaven in a twinkling of an eye, to sound the great trumpet for the scattered of Israel and gather them into Jerusalem. . . . The Redemption of Israel will come by slow degrees and the ray of deliverance will shine forth gradually. . . . The Redemption will begin by awakening support among the philanthropists and by gaining the consent of the nations to the gathering of some of the scattered of Israel into the Holy Land." Kalisher, *Derishat Tziyon* (Warsaw: Baumritter, 1899), 19–20, translated in Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (New York: Meridian, 1960), 111.

worthy in God's judgment; rather, it was a repentance relating directly to the sin of neglecting the national connection with the Land of Israel. The intention, therefore, is for "seeking Zion" on the part of the nation as such. The Jews must learn from the example of other nations struggling for their political freedom in their homelands in Europe and must emulate them in whatever way possible. They, too, must appear as a people.

Two understandings—revolutionary in comparison with the rabbinic relation to the Land of Israel that had been in force since the defeat of Bar Kokhba—were bound up with this expectation. First, the repentance that Kalischer sought was not the action of individuals as such but of the nation as such. The nation sinned as a nation, and individuals are found to be sinning against their nationality inasmuch as they do not take care to articulate it through affiliation with a unifying national framework. Even before the redemption and as a precondition of it, there must be unification in a national framework for the sake of redemption, something that can be done only through the initiative of the nation itself. Second, repentance must consist of a correction of the national sin, not only a correction of the general religious observance of the commands between the individual and God. In other words, the united nation must act on its initiative for the sake of renewing the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel and for the sake of reestablishing the Temple worship in Jerusalem so that it will be in a situation to facilitate redemption.

*C. Systematic Grounding and Enrichment of Orthodoxy in Response to Humanism: The Teaching of the Malbim*

Rabbi Meir Loeb ben Jehiel Michael—the Malbim (1809–1879) was the most prominent Orthodox thinker in his sources, his general education, the scope of his literary achievement, his many-sidedness, and his systematic approach in the period of struggle against Reform.<sup>8</sup>

In all these aspects he presented an exceptional image in the Orthodox movement, which was otherwise moving in the direction of sectarian factionalism, fanaticism, and fundamentalist narrowing of the scope of spiritual creativity. It is surely impossible to present Malbim as a typical ultra-Orthodox leader. The open-mindedness and ambiguity that go far to

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<sup>8</sup> A capsule biography of Malbim and a bibliography of studies on his life and work can be found in the Encyclopedia Judaica article, posted at [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0013\\_0\\_13087.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0013_0_13087.html). Note especially Zvi (Herschel) Schachter, *Mishnato shel ha-Malbim* (dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1983).

justify these sweeping judgments shine forth from the wide range of his writings, especially his commentaries on the Torah, which enjoyed many reprintings and are still among the most beloved and accepted works in all branches of Orthodoxy.

Malbim did indeed suffer persecution toward the end of his life from some Polish Hasidim in his neighborhood, but most of his life he experienced no opposition within Orthodoxy, and his works enjoyed the approbation of the halakhic authorities of his time, including the Ḥatam Sofer. It would seem in fact that he satisfied the intellectual and cultural thirst of a broad stratum of the ultra-Orthodox in his generation and later, up to the present day. On the other hand, one should emphasize that Malbim's openness to broader culture (in many respects he was an east-European religious Maskil after the pattern of Wessely) did not diminish by a hair's breadth his zealousness on behalf of Orthodoxy's fundamental position, which was expressed in his general struggle against Reform. He was exceptional in daring to cross the lines to defend the Orthodox position and attack the Reform position not only from the internal positions of the attacked tradition but also from the humanistic "rearguard" of the Reform position.

Furthermore, he strove to demonstrate through the example of his work, which was varied both in thought and style, that a Jew who was loyal without qualification to the Torah could resort for his needs to the esthetic and accomplished tools of humanistic literature without thereby departing from the sacred, time-honored disciplinary frameworks of prophetic, midrashic, philosophical, and kabbalistic literature. What Samson Raphael Hirsch had sought to achieve by building a bridge between the text-bound traditional Jewish curriculum and the general curriculum that allowed direct involvement with the humanistic arena of creativity for its own sake, Malbim sought to achieve by borrowing form and content from humanistic culture. But it was clear that these were not for their own sake but to serve the Torah, to beautify it, to discover new depths in it, and to avoid the appearance that Torah culture was inferior to general culture.

Malbim's creation was thus representative in its exceptional character and so too was the course of his life. He was born in a small town in Volhynia, on the border of Austria. There he received the beginning of his religious education. He was attracted to general culture, which he saw as not contradictory in itself to the way of Torah but as serving and enhancing it. He was drawn westward; he stayed for several years to study with various teachers of halakha and kabbalah in Poland and later arrived in Germany. His long stay in Germany, first as a student in Breslau, then as



rabbi in the Orthodox community of Kempen in Prussia, helped to form his outlook and shape his consciousness of mission and creative path.

The year that Malbim spent in Breslau as a student under the supervision of Rabbi Solomon Tiktin, the Orthodox rabbi of the local community, was fateful in the struggle that broke out between his rabbi and the young Abraham Geiger, who was taking his first step as the leader of German Reform in his effort to take over the rabbinate of the Breslau community, an effort that eventually led to a rift between the Orthodox and Reform communities. The period of Malbim's service in Kempen saw the Reform rabbinic synods that established the Reform movement and that were the focus of the great polemics both within the Reform movement and against it.

Malbim thus found himself directly involved in the stormy controversy. He learned to know the essence and motivating forces of Reform from firsthand experience. He considered the great danger that it posed, and he thus arrived at the decision to devote himself to the struggle against it and to acquire the necessary tools for this. He learned German and studied the scholarly literature of the *Jüdische Wissenschaft*. He also studied general culture, especially the sciences and Kant's philosophy, some of whose aspects he found attractive and used in support of his arguments. He considered these studies a necessary resource for deflecting the attacks of Reform, as well as for increasing the power of Torah Judaism to withstand them.

An important lesson after those that Malbim derived from his personal involvement in the controversy, given his prior interest in general enlightenment, was the distinction that he saw clearly drawn between the early Hebrew Haskalah movement and Reform. He did not ignore the dangerous breach that the Enlightenment opened up within Jewish education. The Orthodox opposition to the new curriculum that the Haskalah proposed was justified in his view, but he saw this proposal not as expressing malicious intent against Torah Judaism but rather as seduction by the attractive power of the Emancipation. The early Maskilim failed the test and sinned, unlike the Reformers, who in his view were guilty of the malicious intent to uproot the belief in revealed Torah and the halakhic lifestyle and set up in their place a secular counterfeit that was nothing but a lying invention, the work of human hands.

The conclusion that followed from this was that one could extract positive elements from the Haskalah for the needs of Torah-based education, whereas Reform had no redeeming value. One must attack it root and branch, expose its deception, refute its critique of pristine Judaism,



and defend Torah-true Judaism so that Reform could claim no cultural, scientific, or theoretical advantage over Orthodoxy.

All this would require systematic consideration that would deal intrinsically with all aspects of Reform teaching. Well-reasoned opposition to its proposed changes was of course, in his view, an important part of the battle. But the primary piece lay not in these but in the moral and theoretical foundations, in the methods of research and interpretation of Jewish sources, as well as in halakhic argumentation on which the demands for change rested. Reform was based on the assumption that the Torah was not God's word to mankind but the creation of the prophets' human spirit. It similarly assumed that the Oral Torah was not a tradition originating at Sinai but was the creation of the rabbis, who expressed new insights in every generation to make the Torah compatible with life but who afterward ascribed their innovations to the Sinaitic tradition. On the basis of these assumptions, the Reform rabbis interpreted the Torah in accord with philological and historical research while deriding the traditional interpretation that was based on the unique linguistic qualities of the Torah as the eternal word of God. Only on the basis of their modern interpretative method did the Reformers claim the authority to revise the halakha according to their evil whims and adapt it to what they declared to be the needs of the time. As for their religious outlook, they based it on that same philosophy on whose basis they abolished the belief in prophetic revelation and the divine revelation of the Torah.

It was thus clear that in order to deal with such a fundamental challenge, one must first examine its assumptions and methods. One must demonstrate why these research methods were irrelevant to a proper study of the Written and Oral Torah. Above all, one must rehabilitate, in the face of the new scientific criticism, the validity of the traditional beliefs, the methods of textual study and interpretation, of legal decision, and of kabbalistic and philosophical teaching that had been accepted from time immemorial. Malbim took on himself the task of executing this major project by himself.

The first work that Malbim published was written at the same time as several unpublished youthful writings that he wrote before his arrival in Breslau. Even then, the struggle against Reform stood at the center of his interest. As he had not yet gauged the depth and scope of the attack, he focused narrowly on halakhic issues. The book was titled *Artzot ha-Ḥayyim* (*The Lands of the Living*—Breslau, 1837), and it provided a commentary on the *Orah Ḥayyim*, the first section of the *Shulḥan Arukh*.

The choice of this text, which comprised the major part of Jewish law applicable in current times, as well as calling his commentary *The Lands of the Living*, signaled his objective: to counter the objective of Enlightenment and Reform that there was a disconnect between the Torah and modern life, that halakha—ill-fitted to the circumstances of the time—had become an oppressive burden of compulsory obligations, meaningless and pointless or based on prejudice and superstition long refuted by enlightened science.

Malbim's commentary reminds one of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's *Horeb*, which was published later, except that Malbim addressed his work to the community of the pious. He wrote it so that the members of this community could stand proud in the knowledge that it was precisely the halakha that was directed toward life, was relevant to the present time just as it was, and would be relevant to all times. For this purpose, it was necessary not only to explain the reasons for the mitzvot but also to demonstrate that the moral and practical assumptions of the traditional laws were based on correct knowledge of the realities to which they applied, that they did not depend on erroneous science, superstition, or the like. In other words, he needed to show that the halakhic considerations on which the *Shulhan Arukh* was based withstood the test of modern criticism, whether scientific, philosophical, or social-ethical, even as it drew its inspiration and existential meaning from the highest spiritual sources of prophecy and kabbalah.

In Malbim's view, there was no contradiction among all these sources that fed the final legal decision. On the contrary—they were complementary insofar as they represented various domains and aspects of human life, bridging the terrestrial world and the higher spheres. *The Lands of the Living* was intended to demonstrate that halakha was an integrated discipline combining aspects of social ethics, psychology, natural science, philosophy, prophetic revelation, and mysticism in a single whole. Of course, the drive to integrate all these sources shaped his interpretative methodology. In his explication of the halakha, Malbim unveiled the relevant disciplinary aspects for the scope of its application in a fashion that created a whole mosaic of the Jewish world shaped by Orthodox halakha.

Malbim further developed his integrative approach to interpreting Jewish religious and legal sources in his succeeding works, which became more complex and alert to the underlying principles and methodology. In his next works, Malbim discussed the need to counter the philological-historical method of biblical criticism and the *Wissenschaft*-style study of rabbinic history and to propose an alternate methodology, one that in his

view was required by the unique character of the sources that needed to be interpreted in the spirit of the Oral Torah tradition. His great innovation was to present its principles and general rules as a discipline that would withstand rational tests—tests insuring the accordance of the interpretation with the original lessons embodied in the text as it would be interpreted by original authorial intention.

Malbim's striving to integrate the sources, domains of knowledge, methods, and writing-styles was expressed first of all in the multifaceted character of his work: sermons, novellae, poetry, ideology, and philosophy. It would seem that he resorted to all these genres, among others, in order to demonstrate that an Orthodox thinker such as he was free to express his spiritual world through all the creative genres on which the Maskilim prided themselves within an Orthodox framework without suffering any inferiority to the enlightened authors, scholars, and thinkers. But at the center of his creative effort stood the comprehensive interpretative project in which all these genres were united.

His first biblical commentary was on the book of Isaiah, and afterward he labored for many years on his principal work, *Ha-Torah ve-ha-Mitzvah*, which was a combined commentary on the biblical Pentateuch and on the Tannaitic midrashim associated with it. (The "Torah" and "Mitzvah" in his title referred to these two traditional texts, respectively.) At the same time, Malbim worked on his commentaries to Esther and the Song of Songs, which were literary works in their own right. In the methodological introductions to Isaiah and *Ha-Torah ve-ha-Mitzvah*, he presented his systematic hermeneutic theory, which he applied consistently in his commentaries, combining traditional ideas with original, inspired innovation.

His objective was to present a rational traditional alternative to the scientific interpretation of the Bible and Tannaitic midrashim. These needed to be based on a common foundation. A rational interpretation must strive to arrive at the plain sense of the text that could be learned from the language of the text, interpreted in its native literary context. Fidelity to these principles presented no problem in itself to an Orthodox interpreter. The plain-sense interpretation was considered a legitimate stratum in traditional biblical interpretation. Thus Malbim continued the tradition of Rashbam, Abraham Ibn Ezra, David Kimchi, and Isaac Abravanel. There was a continuity between their interpretations and modern scientific ones, as well as those of enlightened commentators such as Mendelssohn and S. D. Luzzatto. One area posed difficulty for consistent application of the plain-sense interpretation of the text: those biblical laws that served as the basis of rabbinic halakha. Mendelssohn and Luzzatto were also troubled by this problem. They took a simple,

clear approach. In passages affecting Jewish law, they were obedient to the rabbinic midrash, and Mendelssohn translated the texts in a manner that the sense of the Oral Law seemed to follow directly from the plain sense.

This approach, which would seem to be required by an Orthodox standpoint, could not, however, withstand the test of rational-scientific criticism. It forced a later viewpoint on the earlier text, and Malbim saw the justice of this argument. His original solution explains why he combined the Tannaitic midrashim with the Pentateuch in his work. First he interpreted the Torah according to the plain sense. Then he interpreted the Tannaitic midrash on the same passage, laying bare the characteristic logic of the Oral Law. He thus showed how the Sages derived the “mitzvah” from the “Torah” without forcing the sense of the one on the other.<sup>9</sup>

Malbim dealt similarly with the contradictions that could be found in the narratives and laws of the Torah. He did not seek a forced reconciliation that would circumvent the plain sense, but he related to the contradictory messages as different parts of a normative teaching, each of which had application in certain circumstances, or as different aspects of a narrative sequence, each of which occurred at a different time. By such clarification, it could be shown that different textual versions were not contradictory but each had its own domain or time of application.

The possibility to juxtapose the respective plain senses of the biblical text and the midrashic text was clearly based on a metahermeneutic assumption regarding the unique essence of the original text, which could be interpreted from two such different vantage points. The revealed text harbored such a rich, complex lode of meaning that no plain-sense

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<sup>9</sup> For example, see Malbim on Leviticus 19:3. The Torah says: “Every man should fear his mother and his father, and you shall observe My sabbaths; I am the Lord.” The Midrash Sifra deduces from this juxtaposition that if one’s parent should order one to violate the Sabbath, God’s command of the Sabbath takes priority. Malbim agrees with this derivation but first adds a creative original interpretation of the juxtaposition itself. What is the connection between the Sabbath and honoring one’s parents? Had God decided not to rest from His work (a fact that the Sabbath commemorates), there would be no such thing as parentage at all, for God would have continued to create all individuals directly. With the cessation of God’s work of creation, a new means had to be found to bring forth new individuals, and so parentage was invented for this purpose. Hence, one is obligated to honor both God, who is the ultimate source of all being, and one’s parents, who are the immediate source of one’s individual existence. Why, then, does the verse conclude “I am the Lord”? Since God stands on a higher ontological plane in this double causality, wherever a conflict arises between obedience to one’s parent or obedience to God, the obedience to God takes priority. Thus Malbim derives his own original interpretation from viewing the biblical text as an autonomous source of meaning, while at the same time connecting this *peshat* (plain-sense) interpretation with the rabbinic legal interpretation. See Meir Leibush Malbim, *Hatorah ve-hamitzvah* on Leviticus (Bucharest, 1860), 174a–b.

interpretation, however profound, could exhaust it. One could continue drawing from it as from an ever-gushing spring, through the ever-applicable logic of the Oral Torah, under the varying conditions of each age. This was the focus of Malbim's critique of the philological method of interpretation. In his view it did not take into consideration the revealed character of the text but ignored its unique qualities.

He raised the question: What metahermeneutic premises must one assume to account for the essential characteristics of the scriptures? Would the premises applicable to any literary text of human composition suffice? Or should one perhaps understand the essence of a prophetic text on the basis of special assumptions, rooted in its special status? Philological research was based on the assumption that there was no substantive difference between ordinary literary creations and holy scriptures. Each was the creation of the human spirit. Malbim argued that this answer failed to account for the rationality of the plain sense. It ignored the manner in which these texts came down to us, the way they were written by their Author, and the way they represented themselves.

How did Malbim define the "plain sense"? In his introduction to Isaiah, he proposed four criteria: (1) Plain-sense interpretation had to agree with what is known to the interpreter about the book's author and his historical circumstances. (2) It had to present the matter of the text in agreement with the rules of language, "without forced interpretation." (3) After the interpretation has broken down the work into its parts (sentences, paragraphs, chapters), each part must agree with the other parts, and they must combine into a coherent discourse. (4) The interpreter must articulate the ideational assumptions of the text on which his interpretation is based. These must be based on common sense, such that there will be a close and immediate connection between the assumptions and the sense of the text. If the interpreter proposes far-fetched assumptions requiring several intermediate links between assumption and text, this is not a "plain-sense" interpretation but a "homiletic" (midrashic) interpretation; this is a legitimate enterprise, but it is not the plain-sense interpretation.

This definition of plain-sense interpretation could have been accepted by a scientific interpreter, but on its basis Malbim based a controversial point. What assumptions must one assume for a plain-sense interpretation of the essence of the revealed text and the linguistic principles unique to it? The philologist sees the prophet as the sole author and sees no difference in this respect between him and any other human author writing from his heart and mind. But the traditional interpreter assumes, on the

basis of what he knows of the prophet and his history and on the basis of the testimony of the text itself, that the prophet is not the original author but only an intermediary between God and the people. Malbim does not deny on the basis of this that there is indeed a connection between the prophet's personality and the formulation of his words. The divine word is perceived by the prophet's intellect and is forged into words by him. The rabbis, too, affirmed that "the Torah speaks in human language" and that each prophet had a distinct personal style. Nevertheless, the prophet is not the source of the words that he utters, either by way of content or language, but God uses him and his linguistic talents in order to convey the divine word to the people.

If so, whose "premise" is closer to "common sense"—the philologist's, or the traditional commentator's? In Malbim's opinion, there is no question but that the "premise" of the traditional commentator is the more rational. It is directly deduced from the testimony of the text and seconded by the testimony of tradition: the true prophets proved through signs that it was God's word, not their own, in their mouths. The philologist's premise is the far-fetched one. First he explains the phenomenon of prophecy in a form opposite to the prophets' own account; then, on the basis of these theoretical premises, which have no connection with the texts under consideration, he interprets the prophets' testimony that it is God's word in their mouths as an invention of their human imagination.

What follows, then, from accepting the "premise" that the source of the prophets' words is divine with respect to the quality of the holy scriptures and their manner of composition? As we have said, Malbim did not ignore the rabbinic dictum that "the Torah speaks in human language." He also did not ignore the necessity of interpreting the prophets' words in agreement with what was known about their personalities and life circumstances. But when it came to understanding the words that were uttered in these circumstances, one should also pay attention to the absolutely unique characteristic of a divine utterance. This had bearing on the rank and complexity of the transmitted content, as well as on the necessary relation between the content and the words that expressed them, that is, the fit between the message and the medium of expression. This, too, was a premise required by "common sense". On its basis, Malbim derived the following three rules that must guide every interpreter of holy scriptures:

1. A revealed text contains no verbal superfluity—it does not repeat the same message in different words, nor does it employ synonyms or decorative words simply for style. Every word has its own meaning, and

the duplication of words does not constitute repetition but an addition without which one would not understand the utterance in its full depth or full precision.

2. In a revealed text, there is a necessary relation between the words and the meaning. No word was chosen accidentally. Nor are the linguistic contexts accidental. There is a precise intention behind the choice of one word over another or the choice of one word combination over another. The interpreter must therefore discover the reason why each word is preferable with respect to all its nuances of meaning.
3. In a revealed text, every utterance has an “exalted” meaning worthy of being the word of God to human beings. The divine word cannot be trivial, “empty,” or simply decorative. If it appears so, the commentator must probe deeper. He must get a precise sense of the words and the literary contexts in order to discover the higher meaning that was hidden in the shadow of utterances that at first sight seemed trivial or decorative.<sup>10</sup>

In accordance with these rules, Malbim adopted in his commentaries the philosophical method of interpretation of R. Isaac Abravanel. He divided the text into short units based on content. He then raised all questions that could be raised on the basis of the principles of interpretation enumerated above in regard to the key words and various difficulties posed by the text and answered them in order. Finally he offered a summary of the higher meaning. When he moved on to the next unit of text, he discerned the thematic connection between it and the preceding and showed the progression of thought between them. When he arrived at the end of the work, he summarized the higher meaning of the whole.

In his discursive commentaries, Malbim attended to the accumulated ideas of traditional Jewish interpretation, including philosophy and kabbalah. More than once he had recourse to modern philosophical ideas, especially those of Kant, when they seemed relevant as “premises” for understanding the scriptures. But all proposed ideas were examined by the interpretative criteria spelled out above, and the result was usually an original blend of ideas that he proposed as the “deeper plain sense” of the text.

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<sup>10</sup> Beginning of *Mevo Hamahberet* (Introduction), Malbim, *Hazon Yeshayahu* (Vision of Isaiah), in *Miqra'ot Gedolot* (Rabbinic Bible with Malbim's Commentary) (New York: M P Press, 1981), i.



Malbim attached considerable importance to a comprehensive grasp of the literary work on the basis of assuming its structural unity, both ideologically and esthetically. It is likely that he was influenced in this regard by Mendelssohn's commentary on Psalms and thus indirectly by the literary-esthetic researches of Herder on the Bible. But Mendelssohn paid attention in particular to the rules of biblical poetry, whereas Malbim laid down this requirement as a general hermeneutic principle. If we reexamine the problematic characteristics that he attributed to a revealed text, we will be convinced that they include a stringent requirement to discover in the revealed text a perfect correspondence of content and form, in its language as well as its general literary structure. Malbim employed this modern requirement of modern literary and esthetic criticism as a central hermeneutic tool. This was especially obvious in his commentary on the Song of Songs, which he called by the poetic name "Song of the Soul."

The decision to devote a special commentary to the Song of Songs was another result of the confrontation with Reform, which undermined the traditional methods of interpretation and especially attacked the allegorical interpretations of the rabbis, the kabbalah, and Maimonides. The artificiality and arbitrariness of this interpretation was especially blatant in the rabbinic midrashim to the Song of Songs, which were produced out of the evident pressure to show that this erotic song cycle had a sacred religious content worthy of inclusion in the "Holy Scriptures."

It should apparently have been clear to every sensible person that by the criteria of plain-sense interpretation, even as Malbim defined them, the Song of Songs was first of all an anthology of love songs, each of which stood on its own. Their combination was mechanical, and it was impossible to discover in it a unifying structure or continuous thematic development. On first inspection it is difficult even to find any principle governing the order of the songs. Moreover, it is clear that these are earthy love songs, bridal songs in the lap of nature that do not obviously have any dimension of human-divine connection. The fact that the book was included in the biblical canon only after lengthy debate on the basis of a radically midrashic interpretation would imply that even in antiquity the majority of the Sages read the Song of Songs as a book of earthy love songs. By their allegorical interpretation, which reads the book as an exalted expression of the mystical love of the Congregation of Israel for the divine Beloved, they raised it to the level of "holy of holies." The radicalness of this approach is worth the testimony of a hundred witnesses that



the Sages knowingly allowed themselves to force an appealing religious meaning onto this earthly text by force of arms and absolute arbitrariness.

Malbim was thus obligated to sit in judgment and defend the status of the Song of Songs in the scriptural canon. He therefore had to defend the reliability of the rabbinic and kabbalistic interpretations. The goal was thus to demonstrate with the tools of plain-sense interpretation that the Song of Songs is not a heterogeneous collection of earthly love songs but an exalted, unified literary creation expressing exalted ideas that were conceived and brought to light in divine sanctity. It is nevertheless instructive that Malbim's commentary on the Song of Songs was his most personal interpretative work and his most original and innovative. In all these respects it is also his most modern literary-poetic creation.

It is first of all obvious that without any explanation Malbim abandoned the rabbis' allegorical conception. It is likely that he, too, thought there was insufficient basis in the text for the premise that this was an allegorical representation of the love of the Congregation of Israel for their God in the guise of the love of Solomon and the Shulamite. It was especially hard to give a convincing interpretation of this kind to all the detailed expressions, the rich thematics, and the order of the songs. Instead of comprehensive allegory that cannot be derived from the fullness of the text, Malbim turned to a personal experiential reading of the poetic text itself in order to discover in its detailed verbal tapestry the thematic lines and symbolic clues that pervade its entirety and provide its unity. He thus arrived at the "premise" that these love songs are the soul confession of the poet Solomon, who yearned all his life to discover the meaning of his life on earth and solve the riddle of his mission in this course of existence out of a longing to return and cleave to his Source.

The modern character of this interpretation is expressed first of all in its literary qualities and in the esthetic tools that its author employed. This is no longer a commentary in the usual traditional sense but an original, captivating poetic creation that was written under the inspiration of the Song of Songs in the effort to discover through it the exaltation and sanctity that is in the emotion of love and that fills the human being and motivates him throughout his life course. Malbim's commentary was also modern in its focusing on individual experience in place of the Sages' focusing on the collective experience of the Jewish people, so that it was possible for him to activate a very intimate personal empathy in understanding the religious essence of the emotion of love. It is quite evident to the reader that Solomon's confession is a prism through which we intuit the poetic-revelational confession of the commentator.

The Song of Songs is thus depicted in Malbim's commentary as a psychodrama of a mystical poet who is grappling with the meaning of his earthly life. In his love he yearns to discover the secret of his Source, the meaning of his mission on earth, and the path by which he can finally return and reunite with his Source. In the transition from song to song, Malbim extracted the full measure of literal meaning and discovered the struggles of the soul striving for its life destiny from childhood and youth to adolescence and maturity and from maturity to senescence, until it views the end of its earthly journey and the fulfillment of its love in life after death.<sup>11</sup>

Is this interpretation worthy of being called "plain sense" by the criteria that Malbim defined? Did it succeed in showing that the work was composed originally as a mystical-symbolic creation that means these things? Whatever answer the reader may give, there is no doubt that the commentary itself comprises a literary work of this kind, based on the inspiration of the Song of Songs. It follows that if one accepts the rules

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<sup>11</sup> Malbim's commentary, titled "The Songs of the Soul," is presented throughout in two parallel columns, with subtitles *Mashal* (Parable) and *Melitzah* (Allegory), placing the literal and allegorical meanings side by side. The following sample will give a representative flavor of the whole:

Text: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is sweeter than wine."

*Mashal*: The shepherd, her lover, is standing behind the door and the doorpost, and she perceives his presence from the fine oils that exude a pleasing fragrance, and she says, "Would that he might approach me face to face and kiss me with kisses of love!" She turns her face toward him and says, "Your caresses and love are sweeter to me than the wine and pleasure that I have in the king's house!"

*Melitzah*: The Supreme Lover watches over His beloved, namely, the perfect soul, and stands behind her walls, for the wall, which is matter and the body, forms a partition between the divine beloved and her lover. She senses him from the fragrance of his oil and requests, "Let Him kiss me from the kisses of His mouth," that is to say, the attainment of the soul comes in two ways. The first is that it perceives God through intellect, understanding, and inquiry but through this channel does not perceive God's essence directly but only the signs of wisdom, power, and will that appear from God's direction of the world, which is symbolized by the literary figure of fragrance, for that which is perceived through smell is in a hidden place and not visible, yet one knows clearly that it is there because of the good odor that is perceived by the sense of smell . . . but there is an attainment greater than this, similar to a kiss, which is the approach of the lovers face to face in marvelous passion, and this occurs when the Lord pours out His spirit on the souls who have been prepared and sanctified for prophecy and the holy spirit, for then the soul departs from its earthly state and cleaves to the wondrous intellect in the Holy of Holies. . . .

Thus Malbim does justice both to the traditional allegorical reading and the modern plain-sense reading, keeping them clearly in mind and distinct from each other while relating the one to the other.

and personal “premises” of the author, the manner in which he read the biblical work seems authentic and convincing.

As we have said, the commentary on Song of Songs constitutes an especially impressive example of Malbim’s creative-poetic-philosophical-mystic hermeneutic. But in the rest of his work we can also find many examples of hermeneutic creativity, uncovering various original meanings—religious, personal, or national—in the scriptures. In his commentary to Isaiah he sought, through the same method of empathetic reading, to express the meaning of prophecy as transmitting God’s word to mankind in order to refute those Reform thinkers who depicted prophecy as ordinary poetic expression. He did the same in his commentary to the Pentateuch.

Malbim’s original philosophical contribution was thus in the area of hermeneutics. He sought to combine the contributions from various sources, including philosophy. It appears that he saw no reason to develop a comprehensive philosophical doctrine. He saw himself as a kabbalist, a poet, an educator, perhaps even a prophet. But when philosophical topics came to hand, he saw it as a legitimate discipline and had recourse to it on occasion, even at length. This was reasonable, on the assumption that there was no contradiction between philosophy in its place and mysticism in its place. That being the case, he did not hesitate to employ even Kant’s philosophical ideas when he saw value in them. Furthermore, there is found among his writings a philosophical work that was published after his death, *The Foundation of Logic*.

The name of this work testifies that it was written as a textbook for students, the kind of book that was common in Germany at that time. One might assume that it was written while Malbim was studying books like this in order to broaden his education. It is clear in any case that this was not meant as an original work but as an exposition of an accepted academic discipline. Still, the book contains no criticism or qualification; rather, it presents its subject matter as the common wisdom.

This description of Malbim’s relation to philosophy generally, and to Kant’s philosophy in particular, is confirmed in his relation to the natural sciences. He related to them all positively and confidently as sources of knowledge. He drew on them when he wished to show that the teachings of the Torah pass all the required tests of modern enlightenment.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Malbim’s aspiration to arrive at an integration of traditional interpretation with modern knowledge is strikingly evident in his commentary on the creation narrative:

Perhaps even more than this—just as he saw the need to orient himself in all these disciplines in order to prepare himself to confront Reform, so he thought that his pious readers need to know this, and it would be right for them to master them as he had. He understood nonetheless that, because of the limitations that they lived under, pious Jews were in need of special educational tools so as not to arouse their doubts through the infiltration of heretical ideas.

Among his other services to Orthodoxy, he thus saw a need to create tools to spread general enlightenment that would fit the special needs of Orthodox readers. In this respect, Malbim was not only a hermeneutic theoretician and modern philosopher but a unique and outstanding paradigm of an ultra-Orthodox maskil who played the vital role of cultural middleman.

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Nahmanides said that on the first day, starting with absolute nothingness, God created two kinds of matter without form, potentially capable of taking on any form, like the primal *hyle* of which the philosophers spoke. From the one he made all the supernal bodies and from the other all the terrestrial bodies. Rabbi Isaac Abravanel disagreed. In his view, “the heavens” referred to the outermost sphere [in the medieval Ptolemaic system] that enclosed all the heavenly bodies, all of which came into being on the first day, not merely hylc matter. As for what it says on the fourth day, “Let there be lights in the heavenly firmament,” implying that they had not been created on the first day, [Abravanel says] they were only made visible on the fourth day. But I am not satisfied with this view. This might seem correct to the ancients, who said that there really are spheres [surrounding the earth] in which all the heavenly bodies are fixed and rotate, in which case the “heavens” [mentioned in Genesis] refers to the spheres, created on the first day, while the sun, moon, and stars were created on the fourth day and suspended in those spheres, called “the firmament of the heavens.” But the moderns have made clear that there are no such spheres at all, but all the heavenly bodies move in their orbits through a clear air-like substance called “ether” that fills the entire created universe. If so, if God did not create the stars [on the first day], He did not create anything, for there is nothing else except them. Furthermore, it has been made clear by the most recent astronomers that the heavenly stars and their planets are not made of a fifth element as the ancients believed. The nonluminous bodies, such as the moon, are composed of the four elements, the same as our earth. If so, why was this earth created on the first day but in a state of chaos and darkness, whereas the stars, which are its companions, were not created until the fourth day? . . . The best view is that, when the text says God created the heavens, this refers to everything from the moon’s orbit and beyond, including many thousands of stars and suns in the realm of the heavenly spheres, including the supernal realms above which is the realm of the angels and the heavenly throne, higher and higher. All of these were created from nothingness in the first instant. Similarly, “the earth” is an inclusive expression implying everything within it. Afterward, when God called the dry land “earth” and called the gathering of the waters “seas,” the word “earth” comes to denote only the portion of the dry land. . . . Thus [the first verse] comprises all creation from beginning to end. (Malbim, commentary on Genesis 1:1)

*D. Developing the Halakhic Alternative to Hasidism and Haskalah:  
The Students of the Vilna Gaon*

The description of the tributes that were absorbed from the modern movements' thought into the thought of the ultra-Orthodox movements will not be complete unless we attend to the developments that followed from the raging controversy among the traditional religious movements in eastern Europe before the controversy over the Enlightenment and for some time in parallel to it. Orthodox movements are constituted by their unilateral positions, and they shy away from the dialectic that is implicit in any such controversies. The tension that prevailed despite the moderation of the controversy, however, eventually exposed the inescapable dialectic that was generated between them and their common enemy—the Enlightenment. Yet it is natural that this dialectic was manifested from the viewpoint of the Haskalah, which found itself in a certain stage not only in its confrontation with Hasidism and Mitnagdism but also in parallel with them and in a certain aspect between them.<sup>13</sup> Something of what distinguished the Orthodox movements from each other and something of what they rejected in each other appeared from the outside as if it was similar to certain aspects of the religious Enlightenment and modern Orthodoxy and may even have been taken from them without acknowledgement.

We should emphasize again that that is how things appear from an outside comparative perspective, though the ultra-Orthodox movements would naturally deny it. We reiterate: the outlooks that developed within Hasidism and Mitnagdism were, by their own declaration, rooted exclusively in the traditional religious sources. Moreover, despite the polar opposition between them, they had a common religious language that stemmed from their connection to the same authoritative sources: the *Shulḥan Arukh* for halakhic practice and the Zoharic and Lurianic kabbalah for their theological outlook. They did not have this much in common even with the religious Enlightenment and modern Orthodoxy.

Rabbi Elijah Gaon of Vilna and several of his prominent students adopted a positive relationship with the sciences and even with philological criticism of the text as an aid to studying certain halakhic topics

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<sup>13</sup> *Mitnagdim*, the Orthodox opponents to Hasidism, earned the historical reputation implied by being called the “Mitnagdim” as such (like the Dissenters in England).

and clarifying the halakhic truth.<sup>14</sup> This openness awakened hope in the hearts of the first Maskilim, but they were quickly dashed. The Gaon's and his students' interest in the sciences was rooted in tradition and delimited by it. It did not carry over beyond the point necessary for clarifying the halakha. No modern philosophical influence or openness to modern culture as such penetrated as a result.

For this reason, the ideas that developed from the ideological tension between Hasidism and Mitnagdism ought not be counted as part of modern religious philosophy. One can only present them as among the developments in latter-day kabbalistic thought, and they should be discussed for their own sake in the context of their own intellectual tradition. From the standpoint of the history of modern religious philosophy, it is sufficient to point to their parallel intellectual development and certain influences that were reflected in them, especially to lay the preparation for understanding obvious developments that followed from them in the twentieth century—in religious Zionism and modern American Orthodoxy.

We begin with an assertion that became evident from the perspective of the modern movements at the stage when they began to rediscover their roots in traditional sources: Hasidism, which appeared at the start of the Haskalah movement as its most determined and energetic opponent, was rediscovered later as a revolutionary movement that rebelled against the rabbinic establishment of its time and in that sense was parallel to the Haskalah in the context of that historical turning point.

Hasidism preceded the Haskalah by only a generation and stood parallel to it in the direct and open threat that it presented to halakha and the rabbinic establishment. Furthermore, like the Haskalah, Hasidism expressed the same sense of repression of the forces of life and creativity under the severe conditions of exile. It sought salvation from all of these through its kabbalistic-pantheistic vision, through developing a popular-social ethos and mystical-charismatic leaders, and through emotional expression that was manifested in folk-artistic creations (lyrics, melody, dance, and storytelling) that in time would enchant artists and writers

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<sup>14</sup> On Rabbi Elijah Gaon and the modernizing impact of his scholarship, see Eliyahu Stern, *The Genius: Elijah of Vilna and the Making of Modern Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). On the collective achievement of the next generation of Rabbi Elijah Gaon's disciples, including Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, see Allan Nadler, *The Faith of the Mithnagdim: Rabbinic Responses to Hasidic Rapture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

who represented romantic tendencies in the secular national and social-political movements.

The confrontation with the Haskalah, which turned toward integration with the external secular culture, intensified, therefore, precisely because of their common motive: Hasidism sought in the deeper layers of traditional Jewish culture a solution to the same troubles whose solution the Haskalah sought through integration into the surrounding secular culture. From the standpoint of Hasidism, this was total opposition. By its yardstick, the Maskilim excluded themselves from the Jewish people, and for this there was no remedy except returning in full repentance. But from the standpoint of those Maskilim who did not wish to cut themselves off from the flow of Jewish history and culture, kinship was apparent at the stage where they had to set the limits of their integration into the external culture and by the same token the ways they would be rooted in the Jewish legacy that they defined by notions of popular culture.

On the other hand, we may detect a subtle parallel between the Mitnagdim and the early Haskalah in their common opposition to Hasidism. This stemmed from the threat that Hasidism posed at its origins to the rabbinic leadership and to halakha at a time when the Haskalah was still religious and held onto halakha as its point of origin for the changes that it proposed in Jewish education. The Gaon Elijah of Vilna, Mendelssohn, and Wessely were contemporaries, and at that time the parallel in their critiques of ignorant popular religiosity was more evident than the critique of the dangers of openness to secular Western culture.

This fact, more than the limited interest of the Vilna Gaon and his students in the sciences, is what defined the parallel between their Orthodox-halakhic response to Hasidism and the Orthodox-halakhic position on which Mendelssohn and Wessely based their openness to humanism and sought to prove that it posed no contradiction to the Torah. Both sought to strengthen Judaism through fidelity to halakha and the idealization of learning that strove toward an enlightened understanding of the Torahitic truth, directed toward serving God in this world.

The parallel—and of course, the opposition—between these two kinds of halakhic Orthodoxy came to expression in the activity and thought of the Vilna Gaon's chief disciple, Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin (1749–1821).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> On Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, see Nadler, *The Faith of the Mithnagdim*, 5–9, 19–20, 24–26, 36–39, 67–68, 154–62, and Immanuel Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 30–56.



We are alluding to the new yeshiva that he founded, which was intended in effect to be a Jewish academy of the Oral Law that would fulfill in Jewry the task of the university in Western culture but in the area of religious sources that present Judaism as a complete world. The yeshiva of Volozhin was intended to establish the study of the Oral Torah as a certified discipline that would investigate the truth that had been transmitted through it from generation to generation in accord with the internal logic that shaped it in its connection to all the domains of life through which God is served here on earth. In this fashion, it was intended also to certify the authoritative and reliable halakhic-educational leadership that should present an example of spiritual-religious perfection. In this way, it was intended to crystallize the alternative to Hasidism and to cope with the crisis of division in the Jewish people. R. Ḥayyim of Volozhin's theoretical work, *Nefesh ha-Ḥayyim* ("The Living Soul," first published in Vilna and Grodno, 1824), laid the theological rubric of the yeshiva, which indeed succeeded in institutionalizing halakhic Orthodoxy in eastern Europe, first in response to Hasidism and later in response to the Haskalah.<sup>16</sup>

We emphasize again that R. Ḥayyim based his views solely on Torahitic sources and, in the speculative realm, on the Zoharic and Lurianic kabbalah. In this respect, it is highly significant that he shared a common religious language with Hasidism. Furthermore, although he continued to debate against Hasidism, he refrained from taking an extreme, uncompromising position against it as had the Vilna Gaon. R. Ḥayyim recognized that, once institutionalized in its stable frameworks, Hasidism was no longer rebelling against halakha. He also considered its superior achievement in reaching the people. His objective was positive: to define, in response to Hasidism, an alternative model based on learning that would reconstitute the authority of rabbinic leadership and would succeed in competing with the charismatic Hasidic leadership through *talmidei hakhamim*—paragons of Jewish learning. These would be exemplars of piety, expressed in their devotion to studying Torah for its own sake as a means of serving God before whom all walks of life are subservient.

The Haskalah was not mentioned at all in this book, either positively or negatively. One cannot identify any direct "enlightenment" influence on his ideas. If despite this a comparison of R. Ḥayyim's orthodoxy and that

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<sup>16</sup> Rabbi Ḥayyim of Volozhin, *Nefesh Ha-Ḥayyim* (Vilna and Grodno, 1824, repr. Bnai Brak: Va'ad le-hotza'at divrei torato shel rabbenu ha-Ga'on Shalita, 2009, and many other reprints). English translation: Rav Chayyim of Volozhin, *The Soul of Life: The Complete Neffesh Hachayyim*, trans. Eliezer Lipa Moskowitz (New Davar Publications, 2012).



of Mendelssohn and Wessely is justified, it would be rooted in its recognition that the Jewish people stand before a new period in their history. It was impossible to continue the style of rabbinic literature against which Hasidism protested. A reevaluation was required, one that would stand up to the harsh reality and measure it by realistic halakhic criteria. In short: *The Living Soul* was a call and rubric for returning to the primary Torah sources, in halakha and kabbalah, in order to correct the disastrous errors that had led to this deep crisis of division and delegitimation of national leadership and to perform a fresh evaluation. It was all the same, then, whether R. Ḥayyim learned from the arguments of the early Haskalah or carved out his own path parallel to it. The parallel was clear, and the Maskilim, for their part, noticed it at once.

And yet R. Ḥayyim based himself on the same kabbalistic sources on which Hasidism relied. The difference between them is to be found in the way he defined the task that the Torah imposes on the human being in his earthly life in order to fulfill his destiny in creation. As opposed to the mystical excitement of Hasidism, which led to emotional cleaving to the higher Sefirot and triggering the flow of supernal effluence upon earthly existence through mystical *kavvanot* and *yihudim*,<sup>17</sup> R. Ḥayyim of Volozhin proposed the study of Torah “for the sake of its truth” and the fulfillment of mitzvot with normative precision based on deep study.<sup>18</sup> According to this outlook, halakha was the divine thought defining the human task in worldly reality, which he was called on to repair through his deeds directed toward God’s service. In order to fulfill his role, it was

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<sup>17</sup> *Kavvanot*: “Intentions,” i.e., preparatory declarations of the intention of a religious act to put the worshipper in the frame of mind to perform it properly and achieve a certain spiritual purpose by doing so. “*Yihudim*”: “Unifications,” i.e., declarations that the religious act in question (or the prayer itself) should achieve the unification of Sefirot, or spiritual entities.

<sup>18</sup> Rabbi Ḥayyim insisted on focusing on intellectual understanding for its own sake, in the faith that once this was achieved, harmony with the divine purpose automatically resulted. Thus, he commented on *Avot* 5:1 “Whoever studies Torah for its own sake” as follows: “A person may think that *lishmah* means [for the sake of] cleaving [to God], and, therefore, according to this opinion it would be preferable for one to occupy oneself with songs and hymns... But such is not the case... The primary purpose of study is not to study simply for the sake of cleaving to God, but to comprehend, through the Torah, the commandments and laws, and to know each and every matter clearly, both in its general principles and its particulars... so that one will comprehend these matters and deepen one’s understanding and analytical skill... Even though at the time of study a person does not have the fear of God in mind, nevertheless the study itself is for the sake of the unification of the Holy One, blessed be He.” Ḥayyim of Volozhin, *Ruah Ḥayyim* on *Avot* 5:1, cited in Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), 88–89.

therefore incumbent on him to learn the commandment of his Creator, which is addressed to him and his world in accordance with its own normative logic. The Hasid's or mystic's question is: How can one's deeds arrive at the repair of the higher spheres of reality, and how can they increase the divine effluence on earthly existence, situated according to this view beyond the horizon of human apprehension? A person must learn the obligation incumbent on him and fulfill it exactly in certain knowledge that his learning and the practice informed by it will reach the goal that the commanding God intended in His wisdom. In this way, the halakhic learning directed to serving God in the worldly reality in which man is immersed in accord with its judicial, evaluative, and normative logic is made a means for fulfilling a mystical goal without the learner-practitioner of the mitzvah having to risk straying from his human limitations or from the stable norms that should shape his path according to the Torah that speaks to him in its language.<sup>19</sup>

One may define this process as deflecting mysticism from the direction of activating the higher, suprahuman spheres—through irrational powers from which the dangerous arrogance of the doctrine of the “tzaddik” in Hasidism is nourished—to the direction of activation on the human, rational level. Halakha was defined by R. Hayyim as an objective discipline addressed to earthly reality whose comprehension and mastery are within a person's independent intellectual capacity. In this sense, it was a human wisdom based on what was given to man in revelation, just as science is human wisdom based on what is given in creation. The Torah's wisdom provides its learner with autonomy of evaluative judgment, directing him toward realizing his religious mission in his worldly life without presuming authority beyond his human capacity. In that case, this is the same

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<sup>19</sup> An overview of the structure and argument of *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim* will illustrate both Rabbi Hayyim's partial agreement with Hasidism and his departure from it. The book is divided into four “gates,” each with a distinct agenda. Gate 1 discourses on man being created in the divine image with the power through observing God's commandments to have a direct impact on the supernal “worlds” of God's spiritual creation. Gate 2 focuses on prayer as a means of communion with God. Gate 3 focuses on the mystery of God's relation to the world, immanent in all creation yet transcendent (the view dubbed “panentheism” by Charles Hartshorne). Gate 4, comprising thirty-four chapters, is the longest section of the book and is devoted to the essential importance of Israel's study of Torah in maintaining the stability of the cosmos and the superiority of Torah study—understood in the intellectualist sense already described—over prayer and performance of the commandments as a means of attaining harmony of purpose with God. In Gates 1 through 3, Rabbi Hayyim espouses ideas that agree with Hasidism's basic tenets. In Gate 4, he asserts the unique superiority of Torah study (including Talmudic study) as the highest path to God.

“Law of Man” that Wessely and Mendelssohn defined as a preparatory stage to the “Law of God,” whereas R. Ḥayyim’s *Living Soul* presents it as a comprehensive “Law of God” addressed to man.

Placing the “Law of Man” at the center of the “Law of God” laid the basis for two ideological developments in the second half of the nineteenth century, which show parallel with and influence from Western modern Orthodoxy. One was the Musar movement, founded by Rabbi Israel Salanter (1810–1883).<sup>20</sup> The other was the Brisk school in the study of halakha as a purely theoretical science, presenting a conception of ideal man in his spiritual activity guided by Torahitic revelation.<sup>21</sup>

These two developments are logical extensions expressing the dynamic of an Orthodox worldview under obligation to prove itself through realization in the lifestyle of its adherents. The need to prove the superiority of the halakhic way, whether by setting up exemplary models of leadership or by shaping a religious communal lifestyle imbued with vitality and enthusiastic devotion as an alternative to Hasidism, was certainly an important factor in these developments. Yet parallel to this, one can see the influence of the intensifying struggle against the secular Haskalah, which had attacked the rabbinic leadership and the halakhic lifestyle on the basis of intimate knowledge and experience. Here, too, it was insufficient to refute the critique; one needed to offer a positive alternative for the scientific education and secular-humanistic/national idealism of the Haskalah, whose influence on the young generation in the ultra-Orthodox yeshivot kept increasing. Furthermore, it was impossible to ignore the moral, social, educational, and intellectual defects that the radical Haskalah pointed out. In order to deflect the criticism, a reform of the instruments of halakha was needed.

We may note here that halakhic Orthodoxy reacted with far more sensitivity to the radical Haskalah’s critique of the ethical standards of religious society (and of the halakha that guided it), its disconnection from real life, and the intellectual dishonesty of traditional hermeneutics (especially the

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<sup>20</sup> “Musar”: Morality, moralism, specifically: (1) the Jewish literary genre of moralistic and self-improvement writings, from medieval times to the present; (2) the movement founded by Rabbi Israel Salanter to cultivate ethical self-improvement through study of these writings and systematic self-monitoring.

<sup>21</sup> “Brisk school”: Brisk (the Jewish name for the city Brest-Litovsk) was the original home of the Soloveitchik family, who, starting with Rabbi Joseph Dov Ber Soloveitchik (1820–1892) and continuing to the present day, have played a leadership role in the intellectual movement of Talmudic studies that drew on the teachings of Rabbi Elijah Gaon and Rabbi Ḥayyim of Volozhin.

Talmudic “pilpul” that flourished in traditional yeshivot) than did mystical Hasidism with its charismatic leadership.<sup>22</sup> Hasidism could reject Maskilic criticism out of hand as a blatant expression of heresy and demonic evil. This was not the case with the halakhic Orthodox of the school of the Vilna Gaon and R. Ḥayyim of Volozhin, which was based on striving for the objective truth of the Torah, at whose center stood the realization of man’s destiny in his worldly life.

Thus the need increased to prove that the study of Torah and fulfillment of its mitzvot comprised a full and convincing alternative not only to the mystical path of Hasidism, with its cleaving to supernal worlds, but also to the scientific and ethical-idealistic path of the Haskalah, addressed to the improvement of worldly life.<sup>23</sup> The need grew to prove that halakha as a discipline passed the evaluative tests of morality and intellectual honesty, and that it was directed toward a worthy and meaningful life in this world. It was this need that drew the movements that developed from R. Ḥayyim of Volozhin’s teaching closer to the ethical values and theories of modern Orthodoxy, which stood for the same mission but again out of a decision to maintain the fundamental assumption of east-European ultra-Orthodoxy: the Torah is the whole truth that was given to humanity, and there is no other. The essential discipline of the Torah is the unified discipline that brings one to acquire the one truth that is in the Torah. Not a combination of Torah and general humanistic enlightenment that are supposed to complement one another, but Torah is the indivisible totality of truth that is necessary and proper for man.

R. Israel Salanter chose the path of ideal realization of the religious personality so that it might match the virtues established for it in the Torah and thus fulfill its destiny to repair the world. He drew the necessary conclusion from the anthropocentrism in *The Living Soul*: each person must perfect himself in order to arrive at the level of one “created in the image of his Creator.” This is his whole mission in the world (and would that he be capable of it!) for if every person fulfills his obligation in perfecting

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<sup>22</sup> “Pilpul” (literally: pepper): Intellectual pyrotechnics, the Talmudic counterpart to scholastic hair-splitting or casuistry.

<sup>23</sup> In the book *Halakhic Man* by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the twentieth-century heir of the Volozhin–Brisk tradition, his ideal of “halakhic man” still stands midway between “homo religiosus” (exemplified by Hasidism) and “cognitive man” (exemplified by the Enlightenment).

himself and in perfecting all his ways with his fellow humans, then the world itself will be perfected.<sup>24</sup>

The prescribed path to this is apparently greater fastidiousness in fulfilling the mitzvot of the Torah, especially those that pertain to interpersonal relations and virtues of character until they should become habit or second nature. But when one defines this goal with the readiness to realize it in its fullness, it becomes clear that achieving the ideal level of humanity according to the halakha is almost beyond human capability, inasmuch as man is a creature of nature. The problem arises of the person's voluntary control over his psychological functions, and not only his bodily urges. It turns out that even emotions and thoughts are unruly and resistant to full control of the will. The depths of the abyss open wider the more one probes further: the person is enticed to discover to what extent he remains unknown to himself. How shall he exert control over these inner forces and raise them to the level of the rational identity to which he aspires?

Salanter's teaching had a basis in the classic Jewish moral literature, especially R. Bahya ibn Pakuda's *Duties of the Heart* and Maimonides's *Eight Chapters*. The idea that intellect and rational will are the true original "self" of the person but that in his earthly life he is yoked to his body and his bodily forces are subservient to his lusts was drawn from these sources, as well as the idea that in order to arrive at rational control over these bodily forces one must arrive at self-knowledge and perpetual discipline until the bodily lusts should become subservient to his reason. It should be clear from the foregoing, however, that, in his efforts to arrive at consistent realization of his ideas, Salanter stumbled on the typical self-consciousness of modern man. The effort of realization required him to probe deeply in a different direction than that of the classic Jewish moral literature, which did not delve into the essence of human drives but precisely in revealing the higher roots of the soul from which the mind drew its power.

The psychology that led to the classic Jewish moral doctrine strove for discovery of the human superconsciousness, whereas Salanter encountered

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<sup>24</sup> "Rabbi Israel Salanter doubtless shared many of the basic assumptions of the Gaon [Elijah of Vilna], Rabbi Hayyim [of Volozhin], and Rabbi Zundel [of Salant].... Salanter shares his predecessors' assumption as to [the Evil Impulse's] power and deviousness. From this, there follows the common conclusion of the Gaon, Rabbi Hayyim, Rabbi Zundel, and Salanter that a person's life in the world consists of a series of difficult trials, requiring a constant struggle against the temptations of the *yetzer*." Immanuel Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Musar Movement* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993).

on his way the forces of the subconscious, which he had to overcome. By probing into the recesses of his soul, he encountered stumbling blocks to which the classic moral literature paid no attention. The conclusion that their source was in man's bodily drives, even if correct, was not enough, for these obstacles are identified not only as bodily appetites but as secret thoughts and feelings that a believing person is tempted to discover in himself, and they weaken his will in the struggle to control his lusts.

It would be easy to identify the source of these thoughts and feelings with the secular reality against which traditional Jewish society was defending itself in an effort to protect its spiritual-religious identity against its encroachments. The infiltration of the influence of the winds of modern secular culture that ultra-Orthodoxy tried to fend off with all its might was indeed the truth that Salanter discovered. But it was likely that at a certain stage the strategy of rejection and denial turned into a greater pitfall than the temptation against which they were trying to defend, and that is apparently the truth that became clear to Salanter in his journey: the winds of secular culture that deflect a person's thoughts and feelings from the goal of perfecting himself for the service of his Creator operate in fact not only outside traditional society but also within it, and not only outside the person of piety but also within him. In order to deal with them honestly, it was not enough to condemn them in others; one must identify them within oneself and overcome them.

That was the hard part. In order to deal with repressed pitfalls, one must know them as they are; and in order to know them as they are, one needs to master the terms of the culture from which they came. It was likely that only the modern psychology that developed against the background of such experiences was conscious of the subterranean layers of the soul and the place that they occupied in modern man's emotional and intellectual world. Thus the believer who wished to grapple with and overcome these temptations had need of the same intellectual tools that were shaped by them. At this point, however, Salanter went beyond the mental horizon of traditional Jewish learning and had to have recourse to the external world of ideas in order to take a stand against the powerful spiritual forces that underlay them.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A crucial source of these ideas for Salanter was Rabbi Menahem Mendel Lefin, whose book *Sefer heshbon ha-nefesh* (Taking Stock of the Soul) was highly regarded in the Musar movement. "Rabbi Menahem Mendel Lefin of Satanow (1749–1826) was one of the outstanding pioneers of the Haskalah movement in Eastern Europe.... Lefin was influenced by the ideals and dominant spiritual trends of the European Enlightenment."

Salanter's psychology and pedagogic doctrine are clear testimony that he delved deeply into modern psychological and pedagogic literature. He developed his own way to the realization of an Orthodox religious outlook on their basis, and in this sense one can define him as a modern Orthodox thinker. His kinship with modern Orthodoxy is also evident from his biography. He was drawn to the West as a place to live and carry out his activities. Like Malbim, he found his way to Germany and chose to publish his journal there. The name of the journal, *Tevunah* ("Understanding"), attests to his modern philosophical leaning. Yet it is instructive that he fought against these leanings as against temptations of the Evil Urge that needed to be overcome. He did not openly cross the boundary away from ultra-Orthodoxy, nor did he identify the outside sources that nourished his thought. His innovations were presented in his writings as deriving from the classical Jewish moralistic literature. If these were the unspoken rules of his own practice, they applied all the more to his followers in the Musar movement. It developed as an ultra-Orthodox movement in Lithuania and was transported from there to the Old Yishuv in the Land of Israel. As an institutionalized movement, it did not acknowledge the influences that it continued to absorb in fact from external scientific and psychological literature that was relevant to its focuses of interest.

The Brisk school in the study of halakha (R. Joseph Dov Ber Halevi Soloveitchik, 1820–1892; R. Hayyim Halevi Soloveitchik 1853–1918) sought to achieve the paragon of perfection in realizing the religious-halakhic ideal, which had its basis in the teaching of the Vilna Gaon and the *Living Soul* on the theoretical plane of the study of Torah for its own sake. The striving to arrive at "the truth of Torah" by plumbing the depths of evaluative and normative logic reflected in Talmudic deliberation led in their method of study to a consistent theoretical formulation that could be presented as a philosophical method. The goal of their halakhic deliberation

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Ibid., 123. "There are...three major characteristics of the Mussar system that may be ascribed to Lefin's influence: (1) the naturalistic understanding of the psyche; (2) the development of an educational system based upon an understanding of the causal relationship between disease and cure; and (3) the optimism implicit in the recognition that people are capable of improving their character traits and changing their nature through means of devices created by the intellect. . . . Such optimism was characteristic of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment, which believed it possible to correct the failings both of the individual and of society by means of reason. . . . What is surprising is that Salanter was fully prepared to accept such a line of thought—even if only within the limited area of Mussar education." Ibid., 133.



was not a practical ruling, nor was it novelty for novelty's sake (the shallow brilliance that went by the name of "pilpul"). It was rather the analytical understanding of each topic treated in the Talmud and in the centuries-long tradition of commentaries in order to arrive at a precise articulation of the core assumptions, values, and principles underlying the Talmudic description of the area of reality treated under that heading. The practical ruling offered a time-bound norm addressed to a subset of that reality and was technical in comparison, while the purely intellectual study strove to comprehend the eternal principles describing an ideal reality to which learning aspired.

It followed that the study of the truth of Torah was intended to shape a general worldview relating to man's task in creation, but even more so, it was conceived as a spiritual process by which a person served his God, perfected himself according to God's will, and raised himself to a reality that was a kind of summit of the life of the spirit. We emphasize: studying each topic by itself in depth until one had fully understood its principles and constituent parts was the process by which this was achieved.

One might define this approach as religious philosophy in the classic sense: the love of the divine wisdom that relates to the search for truth as a way of life. However, unlike classic and modern religious philosophy, it is not realized as a process of reconciliation between philosophical inquiry and Torahitic teaching; rather, it is traditionally Jewish in the sense that the Torah is its only medium and its only subject. It does not rely on the sciences, nor does it strive toward knowledge of a metaphysical God. It also does not strive to prove God's existence, to verify prophetic revelation, or to explain its ways. If it is indeed rooted in revelation, we are not speaking of an event that must be verified or explained; the contents of what was said and innovated as revelation in the Written Torah and Oral Torah are its subjects. It pursues its inquiry only through them, and from them it also receives the analytical tools for its interpretation. It follows that we have in effect a revelation that provides for its own interpretation and thus becomes a human wisdom.

Especially prominent in this ideological development is the striving to provide a halakhic-Orthodox alternative both for Hasidism's mystical path and for the scientific and philosophical paths of the modern movements. This conclusion in itself offers nothing new; it is a logical continuation of the paths of the Vilna Gaon and R. Ḥayyim of Volozhin, both with respect to the shape of the general curriculum of studies and the manner of learning, as well as defining the discipline that posits man's religious vocation as the center of study. The systematic development of these assumptions,



however, attests to the intensification of the confrontation to the point of presenting an ultra-Orthodox alternative to the modern Orthodox position: we have here a foundation for a new philosophy that cuts itself off decisively both from the mystical path and from the classic philosophical path by rejecting the presumption expressed in these two paths, that one can arrive at or approach the knowledge of God through creation. This is not the task of man in the first place, nor is it within his ability. The Torah itself instructs us thus. Man's task is defined by the Torah, and it is fully specified and realized through it.

It seems that this is the most consistent formulation through which halakhic Orthodoxy can express its logic on a philosophical level. One should note, however, that this notion, that one should base oneself absolutely on the authority of the halakha revealed at Sinai, was arrived at through a blatant revision in the understanding of the essence of halakha, both in the definition of its subject and in its discipline of study. In both respects, we have an expansion that turns the halakha from a religious-legal discipline concerned with worldly reality into a philosophical discipline striving for an ideal spiritual reality.

This provided a conclusive answer, especially to the challenges of the modern religious movements. They argued that the halakha had become outdated, that it no longer fit the requirements of life, that it dictates ignored the needs raised by modern historical reality. The answer one hears from this outlook does not ignore the possibility of improvising new legal rulings or even the necessity of doing so, but it sets this question aside as peripheral. The main question is the direction that necessarily follows from a correct understanding of the meaning of halakha as a discipline rooted in divine revelation: Does present-day life or any historical reality as such need to determine halakha? Or maybe it is the reverse: halakha is the goal of life and its highest level even in the present, and it ought to guide the course of history as well!

Posing the question in this manner constitutes an approach toward the position of modern Orthodoxy but without resorting at all to external scientific or philosophical categories.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE TORAH AND THE PEOPLE: "POSITIVE HISTORICAL" JUDAISM

#### *A. Introduction*

The Reform movement stimulated and attracted a varied audience of Jews thirsty for Emancipation, Jews who were not of a single mind about either the objective or the way to it. There were some among them who were far along the road to cutting themselves off from the lifestyle of Torah and mitzvot and rapprochement with the general culture, and they anticipated that Reform should remove the social obstacles from their path so that they could complete their assimilation as individuals and be totally absorbed. Many more saw Reform as a means to full individual civil emancipation while stopping short of total assimilation and preserving a meaningful communal religious Jewish identity, requiring faith allegiance and a certain lifestyle, within the limits of the general society's tolerance of difference. Still others did not want to distance themselves from the traditional halakhic lifestyle and faith and did not look to Reform for anything beyond modifying the halakha to the extent that such modifications were truly necessary for civic and cultural integration and could therefore be halakhically justified. For these, reforms were a means and not an end. On the contrary—their goal was to preserve the religious, communal, and ethnic distinctiveness of Jews as much as possible.

The common denominator was the general aspiration for full civil and cultural emancipation and the general recognition that certain revisions in halakha were necessary. However, polarized debate within the movement, which was still trying to hammer out its institutional shape through its rabbinic synods, was aroused by such questions as: How far should one go with these reforms? What are the criteria by which one should set the proper boundaries? Which takes priority, the preservation of Jewish identity, or full integration in the surrounding culture?

We mentioned earlier the dilemmas with which Geiger, the central leader of Reform, struggled. The scope of changes that he felt were necessary in order to respond to the just demands of German society as a condition for realizing emancipation, the pressures to decide quickly on these changes, and therefore also the form of deliberations that led to their

acceptance, not necessarily in accord with accepted principles of halakhic decision making but by decisions that followed directly from Reform's ideology and value ranking, were inversely proportionate to the conservatism that was necessary from all these aspects in order to maintain a Jewish identity that maintained contact with the past, fullness of expression in a Jewish lifestyle, and above all communal and national unity.

In the tensions it faced, Geiger's leadership expressed a search for practical solutions to the contradiction that lay between Reform's two primary commitments: national and cultural integration, and sincere, responsible fidelity to the unique values of the religion in which he believed. Since it was impossible to achieve reconciliation between the immediate necessary changes and the preservation of Jewish communal unity, he felt it was necessary to decide in favor of the higher priority. He did so from the viewpoint of a believing Jew who nevertheless identified as a German nationalist and a humanist who espoused the values of liberal progress and so sought to find all these ingredients in his Judaism. Geiger gave up on the unity of the Jewish people in Diaspora. Germany was his nation. He did not deny that at the outset Judaism was a national religion, not a church. Indeed, he saw in this the source of Judaism's superiority over Christianity. But all this belonged to the remote past. From the time of the Jews' exile, they belonged to the nations among whom they dwelt, and this was decisively confirmed by the Emancipation. Therefore, he determined that the Jews who were citizens of other nations had no "co-responsibility" across national boundaries, just as Christians who were citizens of various countries had no such responsibility. Furthermore, when it became clear to him how zealously opposed the ultra-Orthodox leadership was to Reform, he gave up on communal unity and preferred separation.

On the other hand, he did not want to give up on the responsibility of an honest believer to the unique elements of the Jewish religion and the historical continuity tying it to its canonical sources. In no way did he want Reform to be identified with a superficial, opportunistic religiosity devoid of a sense of responsibility, as its Orthodox opponents described it; and he surely did not want the Reform movement to change so much as to turn into a new religion, as had Christianity. On the contrary—the essential distinction between Judaism and Christianity seemed to him of the highest importance. Judaism's pure ethical monotheism was the source of its historic mission and its contribution to general culture.

Geiger's position seemed radical from the Orthodox standpoint, but from that of the Reform movement it was moderate. To the left of him stood out the zealous position of Samuel Holdheim (1806–1860), who

turned the goal of complete integration of Judaism into its social and cultural surroundings into the content of Judaism's mission. He wished to reform every shred of Jewish separatism, including circumcision. Thus he saw in Reform the necessary educational process to realize the historical path of Judaism toward total assimilation. And to the right of Geiger stood the position of Zechariah Frankel (1801–1875), for whom the central value was the preservation of Jewish identity together with the full historical continuity of the nation that bore it. In his eyes, Reform represented the people's need to adapt to the circumstances of the modern age, but it did not appear to him—as it did to Geiger—a goal to be desired for its own sake; rather, it was a means that would enable those Jews who wished to live by the precepts of their Torah under new historical circumstances to do so without paying a price that the majority could not tolerate.

This, then, was the debate that took place in the rabbinic synods that established Reform as an organized movement. It became clear that, with the crystallization of the platform of the movement in accord with Geiger's middle position, a split was unavoidable. The left party could make their peace with it. Not so those on the right, for whom their differences with Geiger were fundamental. In order to preserve the unity of a people based on Torah and the continuity of a full halakhic lifestyle, they had to split off and establish a movement that would bridge the gap between Reform and Orthodoxy. This dynamic was characteristic. The irony embodied it sheds light on the tragic controversy that splintered the Jewish people in modern times: again and again, we see splits whose proclaimed objective is—unity.

The split in the Reform movement occurred at the second rabbinic synod that took place in Frankfurt in 1845. Zechariah Frankel was opposed to the decision of the synod that prayer and preaching in the synagogue should be in German rather than in Hebrew.<sup>1</sup> This was the occasion of his departure to found his own movement, which defined itself as “conservative” in contrast to the Reform and Orthodox movements. Nine years afterward, he consolidated his movement by founding a rabbinical seminary in Breslau (1854). A crucial role in crystallizing and propagating his outlook on Judaism was played by the journal that he founded: the *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*. He edited it

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<sup>1</sup> See excerpts from the protocols of the 1845 conference and Frankel's letter of resignation in *The Rise of Reform Judaism: A Sourcebook of Its European Origins*, ed. Gunther W. Plaut (New York: UAHC Press, 1963), 85–90.

from 1851 to 1868. It was mainly devoted to scholarly articles in Jewish studies, but once a year he wrote a long article surveying current issues in Jewish life for the previous year, especially in Germany, and expressing his views on them. His outlook concerning Judaism and its future course, which he defined as “positive-historical,” came to expression in these articles and to some extent also in his researches in halakha, which provoked a stormy controversy.

*B. The General Social and Philosophical-Historical Background of the Conservative Movement: The Influence of Herder and Savigny*

Like the central thinkers of the Modern Orthodox and Reform movements, the two central thinkers of the Conservative Movement that was institutionalized in the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau, Zechariah Frankel and Heinrich Graetz, had need of a historical philosophy to guide them in their researches and in the positions they took addressing current Jewish issues while coping with crises with the surrounding culture. The Reform thinkers preferred the idealistic philosophy of Kant or Hegel. The idealism of these thinkers laid the basis for their conception of liberal nationalism in the framework of the rational *Rechtsstaat*.

We recall that each individual in the nation-state was included as a citizen with equal rights and obligations on the basis of being born into it or having willingly assumed citizenship, having a knowledge of the language, obeying the laws, and demonstrating patriotic loyalty to his nation and its community of citizens. It is easy to understand that the alternate national outlook of the German Romantic thinkers, according to which nationality is rooted in love of one's nation—that is to say, a common origin, the continuity of the generations, and the ancient legacy unifying them—was in the Reformers' eyes a dangerous reversion to the past. Attributing decisive importance to a common origin, to the ties of blood and ancient myths in determination of national identity, blocked the path of enlightened Jews who desired to identify as Germans in their nationality despite their different origin and historical legacy.

But it is instructive that the founder of Modern Orthodoxy (R. Samson Raphael Hirsch) also preferred Kantian idealism and the theory of the liberal nation-state, inasmuch as he saw himself—in this respect, like Geiger—as a German nationalist. He defined his nationality with the concepts of the liberal *Rechtsstaat*, and in keeping with this, he defined his Judaism in terms of Orthodox halakha, which is Jewish law, and ignored

as much as possible the dimension of national culture and the tradition in its broad cultural sense. He saw the Jews, of course, as members of a single nation, the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but he distinguished his people from other peoples as "the people of the Torah," the people who are preserved only on the basis of the covenant with their God within the confines of halakha for the sake of the universal mission of spreading the knowledge of God in the world. The Torah in its halakhic sense was therefore in his eyes the only content that preserved the peoplehood of Israel, a conclusion that enabled Orthodox Jews to participate fully in the cultures of their host nations until the Messiah should arrive.

There was thus a considerable measure of irony in the fact that the positions of Reform and Modern Orthodoxy, which strove enthusiastically to become integrated in their social and cultural environment, stood in contradiction to the political, social, cultural, and philosophical fashions that prevailed in that very environment. In the course of the nineteenth century, most of the elite of German society rejected the rationalist ideals of the Enlightenment and of the classic German idealistic thinkers. By contrast, the influence of the various currents of Romanticism grew ever stronger. It was natural that it also had its influence on Jewish society seeking emancipation.

As there were different currents, extreme and moderate, in German Romanticism, Reformers such as Geiger were able to combine Romantic motifs associated with popular German nationalism with their generally liberal-idealistic approach to Judaism and general politics. But the opposite approach of Frankel and Graetz was simpler and more natural: a Romantic reorientation in relation to the question of the self-identification of the Jewish people and the demands of the liberal state from its Jewish citizens.

It was self-evident that any rapprochement with the Romantic spirit of the German environment was bound to arouse in itself the same confrontation that was manifested between German society and the expectations of the Reform leaders, but from the opposite direction. The expectation that every national state should be exclusively the state of a single people seemed natural and to be expected against the background of the Romantic conception of the essence of the nation. That is how the Romantic movements in German society generally construed the issue. But was this a necessary conclusion? Was it not possible to take a liberal, rational construction of Romanticism, one that would foster the coexistence of different ethnic groups that respected each other's national identities in the framework of a single nation-state? Ought not one distinguish between

the nationality defined by the rational state, shaping the civil society and intellectual culture, versus the familial and communal identification with an ethnic group, based on religion and tradition, inclusive of folk customs and the intimate legacy of popular culture? It was obvious that the majority national group reserved the democratic right to determine exclusively the language of the state and the characteristics of civil society. But the members of minority peoples who were not able or interested in establishing their own state were entitled to preserve their distinctive national existence, their language and culture, and not only their religion. One must therefore struggle for these, in the name of the common Romantic principles.

One may view Frankel's withdrawal from the Reform rabbinic synod in the light of these issues. It expressed an assertive reorientation with respect to the strategy of coping with German society and its prevailing cultural trends. His rebellion against the surrender of Reform and Neo-Orthodoxy on the unity of the people as the basis of the religious identity of Jews received both positive and negative reinforcement from the prevailing trends of German society—positive with regard to the definition of Jews' identity as members of a single people, and not only as coreligionists; negative with regard to the critique of Romantic hostility to Jews, in other words, their refusal to recognize their natural right to preserve their full identity as members of a single people and to live as citizens with equal rights in the same state. They demanded for their own people what the German people demanded for themselves. From this followed the assertive audacity to demand for Jews the right to define for themselves, by the criteria of their Torah and their popular tradition, the characteristics of their identity and afterward to demand that the German state and society should not stipulate as conditions for emancipation any but the minimum reforms necessary for the objective need for adaptation to the conditions and circumstances of modern civil society.

Their reliance on the currents of thought of national Romanticism in Germany was rooted in its original source: the philosophy of history of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who in his day was both a Romantic and a liberal, a man with a profound personal relation to biblical poetry and a sympathetic interlocutor of Moses Mendelssohn's.

As opposed to the idealistic philosophers, who saw the state as the definitive, all-inclusive framework of the history of nations, Herder saw the nation itself, the nation that maintained its unity over the course of



generations on the basis of its origin, as the real subject of history.<sup>2</sup> To the same extent, he saw in all kinds of literary and artistic creativity the essential content of historical memory that identifies the nation's spirit. Herder rooted his outlook in Spinoza's pantheistic philosophy, while interpreting it in his fashion in the spirit of Romanticism, the spirit that yearned to return to Nature as the source of the unfolding of society and culture.

It was his assumption that even if social and cultural creativity revealed the superiority of human spirit and reason, it nevertheless developed from nature the same as living organisms. Human society was not formed by top-down organization. Nature formed it, and it developed from the primal cell of the family, broadening into the clan, the tribe, and the people. This was a continuous organic development. External social and political organization became necessary at a certain stage. However, Herder not only sensed the importance of the tapestry of popular creative life even in this period and saw the political framework as secondary to it, but he was conscious of the negative influences of the authoritarian state on popular creativity and saw in its appearance the inevitable but tragic natural process of senescence.

In any case, peoples developed in accord with their own natural characteristics and the nature of their environment, and this was noticeable especially in the canonical literary and artistic creations that were formative of their culture and religion and that nourished their creativity all the time that the people were wise enough to preserve their organic creative continuity. This outlook led indeed to the conclusion that the developmental pattern of a nation was like the developmental pattern of natural organisms. It was determined by the life cycle: childhood, adolescence, maturity, and old age. It was this rhythm that determined the general structure of the history of nations.

We note several conclusions that followed from this conception: the notion of organic development implicitly contains the idea of progress so dear to the rationalistic Enlightenment. However, the rootedness of the social-cultural organism of humanity in the natural life cycle qualifies progress in two respects: first, although the "mature" culture is more developed and accomplished than the "childlike" or "adolescent,"

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<sup>2</sup> Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

whatever it brings to actualization is found potentially in the earlier stages and follows from them. This conclusion not only attributes a fixed value to the creations of each period in the history of the culture that the people continue to utilize for their ongoing creativity, but, even more so, the earlier the creations are, the more original and distinctive they are.

Precisely the creations of the “childhood” period thus express the unique, distinctive spirit of the people in its clearest, purest, and most natural form. Afterward, in maturity and senescence, these qualities become effaced by the influences of other cultures. This conclusion accorded the first creations a canonical status. The unique identity of the culture of the nation would be preserved as long as the nation continued to have contact and draw on its primary sources and the other strata of original creativity. If one wished to consider the unique defining characteristics of each nation, one would have to do a comparative study of their primal canonic creations. That is the principal research project to which Herder devoted himself.

Second, after “maturity,” the organic development of the culture terminates in the stage of “senescence.” This stage undoubtedly exhibits many kinds of subtlety and sophistication, but, if we examine cultures by their level of vitality, cohesiveness, fidelity to their fundamental values, and the authenticity of their creations, we will be convinced that the old age of cultures is like the old age of all living organisms: a sad manifestation of weakness, falling apart, flickering, and decline. We may summarize all this in the conclusion that the authenticity and vitality of earlier cultural creations are superior to the later ones despite the sophistication of the latter. It follows that the progress that typifies the historical developmental course of cultures has its price, and one should see it not as a linear progression as the idealistic philosophers did but rather as a cycle ending in decline. Yet Herder evaluated his own age, with its many achievements, not as a period of progress but as the onset of old age for Western culture, and he discerned in it the manifestations of decline and deterioration. Hence the urgency that he attributed to his focusing on the research of ancient myths, including the Bible. He sought in them the sources of renewal for which he hoped.<sup>3</sup>

It was clear in any case that if human society and culture developed from nature and were connected to their roots in the same manner that a

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<sup>3</sup> See Johann Gottfried von Herder, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* (Burlington: Edward Smith, 1833; electronic reprint, BiblioLife, 2008, and Nabu Press, 2010).

tree is planted in the ground and develops from its roots, one should conclude that the secret of their continuity and vitality was not to be found in their organized institutions or in the political and military power that served them but in the continuity of the generations, the coherence of cultural memory transmitted to them as sources for renewed creativity, and fidelity to the values that are the basis of the people's spirit. Just as ancestral and familial ties generate and unify the social fabric of the people, so does the educational process that transmits the cultural memory, woven out of the classic canonical creations, generate and unify its cultural existence.

As we have said, Herder did not accept the idea that the nation-state could fill the place of the organic processes that preserve the people and perpetuate their culture. By the same token, he did not accept the suggestion of the idealistic philosophers that abstract rational ideas could unify nations and define their spiritual identity on the level of an established nationality. The spiritual identity of peoples was recognized in their linguistic distinctness and the whole of their creativity, not in abstract ideas. This was not a difference of intellectual outlook, but a difference of various qualities—religious, moral, judicial, and esthetic—that together comprised totalities that were too complex to be characterized by a single idea yet that were bound together by rich interconnections into the unique conglomeration of any natural organism.

As for the historical research, whose task it was to raise the characteristics of the national identity to the awareness of the ruling elites, Herder prescribed a comprehensive study of each culture from within. The scholar must be familiar enough with the creative canon of the nation under investigation to grasp its organic unity as it is experienced by its creators and followers. Only afterward can he engage in an objective comparison of several cultures in order to distinguish them. It followed that the talent required of the student of cultures was not the philosopher's talent of conceptual abstraction and analysis but the poet's talent of empathetic understanding.

One can easily see the importance that these ideas had for Jewish thinkers who yearned to preserve the distinctness of their scattered and fragmented people, a people without its own national state that had to obtain citizenship in the states of other nations. If the nation-state was the sole subject of history, then it followed that the Jews had no history of their own from the inception of the Exile onward. They were only a passive participant in the history of the nations in whose countries they settled. Only if we assume that the nation had its basis in the continuity

of the generations and the transmission of collective cultural memory that set it apart, which was the true subject of its history, could we discover the active, creative, and distinctive history of the Jewish people and pass judgment on their unique existence as a people.

The influence of the German legal philosopher Friedrich Karl Savigny (1779–1861) must be added to Herder's views.<sup>4</sup> His contribution applied Herder's historical outlook in the area of jurisprudence. It provided an ideological and methodological rubric for studying the development of halakha from the perspective of national culture.

Savigny was considered the founder of the “historical school” of legal theory. According to it, one should see in legislation and jurisprudence an organic developing creation of the spirit of each people. Thus he explained the differences between the laws and judicial practices of various nations. According to this conception, the basis of legislation is in the morals and customs whose ancient origin is to be found in the natural development of the family, clan, and tribe. The people preserve the ancient traditions in their folkways because they regard them as sacred. They are transmitted from generation to generation as children follow the life patterns of their parents while adapting them to changing circumstances. Legal and judicial institutions developed organically from these traditions, and they bore the obligation to remain true to them and to derive their own authority from them. It followed that creative judicial interpretation bore a debt of responsibility to the judicial legacy that had been amassed throughout the generations. Every new creation had to flow from the totality that preceded it, and one had to refrain from legislation or interpretation that contradicted the “spirit” of the tradition embodied in the accumulated and developing totality of national legislation and judicial precedents. Every legal development had to be continuous and gradual. It was forbidden to interrupt the continuity of the tradition by revolutionary enactments. On the other hand, the legislators and judges had to understand the needs of their people in the present, the current trends and their general expectations, so that their legislation and interpretation could be addressed to the people and win their voluntary acceptance without being forced on them.

According to this conception, a people itself exercises legislative and judicial power through its authentic representatives. We should be precise

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<sup>4</sup> For a recent study of the German historicist tradition comprising Herder, Ranke, and Savigny, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also Friedrich Karl von Savigny, *Of the Vocation of Our Age for Legislation and Jurisprudence* (The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2011).

here: Savigny did not mean that the people proposed the new legislation or ratified it by a formal vote. Legislation and judicial decision required deep knowledge of the whole judicial tradition, and in that respect it was an established professional role. Savigny was talking about the larger process of legislation and judicial decision, including the considerations guiding it. They had to reflect the recognition that the people were the source of authority of the legislation by which they were bound. According to this assumption, one must add to the legislator's responsibility to rely on the tradition—to internalize and represent it in its continuity and to pay attention to the needs of the people, their values and expectations—also the assertion that in the last analysis only if the people accept the legislation in actuality and conform to it does it acquire true validity, for it is impossible to force a law on the people if the majority of them are opposed to it and actively refuse to abide by it.

If one extrapolates this outlook to the field of halakha, then the tradition and the will of the people acquire a central role in its decision making. The way of Reform becomes invalidated at the outset as an arbitrary method without validity.

*C. Adapting Halakha to the Needs and Will of the People:  
Zechariah Frankel's Doctrine*

The assumptions on whose basis Frankel developed his movement's outlook came to expression on the occasion of his withdrawal from the Reform rabbinic synod.<sup>5</sup> The occasion was the decision that prayer and preaching in the Reform synagogue should be only in German. The ideological significance of Frankel's motives is clear from the fact that the Reform decision in this matter was not opposed to halakha in a technical or formal respect. According to halakha, the established liturgical prayer should preferably be done in Hebrew, but if the majority of the community does not know Hebrew enough to be able to pray with understanding, then prayer in the common vernacular is presumed legitimate. This was the practice in certain communities where the majority of the laity did not know Hebrew, and there was a need to translate the Torah and

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<sup>5</sup> For a general account of the development of Frankel's views, especially in this period, see Rivka Horwitz, *Zecharia Frankel ve-Reshit ha-Yahadut ha-Positivit-Historit* (Zacharias Frankel and the Beginnings of Positive-Historical Judaism) (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1984), Introduction, 9–30.

the prayers into the familiar language of the community, such as Greek or Arabic.

Why, then, did Frankel see in this reform an occasion to break away? It is clear that his reason was based not on the technical content of the decision but rather on the motives that determined its significance and consequences. He did not consider the decision as a temporary injunction that was required to overcome a difficult situation into which a Jewish public desirous of praying was unfortunately thrust but rather a permanent ruling, as a reform desirable in itself for a community that saw integration in German society and culture not as forced by the circumstances of life in exile but an ideal to be embraced. It followed for Frankel that the decision proceeded not from the positive desire to enable a Hebraically illiterate Jewish community to pray and derive edifying lessons that would strengthen its Jewish identity but the opposite: it proceeded from the positive evaluation and desire to encourage the objective of assimilation and abandonment of Hebrew as the sacred language that distinguished Jews from their immediate surroundings and connected them with Jewish communities in other lands.<sup>6</sup>

Reform thus expressed through its decision a longing to “Germanize” not only the general social and cultural life of German Jews (to this, Frankel—who would later establish a German-language journal for Jewish studies and publish some of his Jewish scholarly researches in the same language—was not opposed) but also their religious life. Moreover, it sought thereby to encourage estrangement from the spiritual and emotional ties that bound German Jews to their fellow Jews in other countries and times and thus to distance them from the cultural-popular milieu of their Torah and literature and to bring their religion into the cultural and literary milieu of Germany.

In short: the decision of the rabbinic synod concerning the language of prayer and preaching was not (in Frankel’s view) the result of a desire to enable the German-speaking Jewish laity to pray but the result of a desire to uproot the halakhic norm according to which Hebrew was the sacred language intended for prayer and the study of Torah. He therefore

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<sup>6</sup> “In vain was it stressed that, once Hebrew disappears from prayer, it will be lost altogether, for it will then be banished from the schools.... In vain—the majority of the Rabbinical Conference decided that Hebrew prayer was only *advisable* and that it would be the task of the rabbis to eliminate it gradually altogether.” Frankel, letter of July 18, 1845, in Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism*, 88.

saw it not as a legitimate communal enactment but as uprooting a central halakhic principle that was liable to undermine the very foundation: the connection between Israel's Torah and the people Israel. This seemed clear and straightforward: Hebrew, as the sacred language, the language of Torah and prayer, was also the language that united the Jewish people in all their dispersions and created the continuity over the generations. The normative abrogation of Hebrew was thus a decision in favor of simple and complete assimilation. Clearly, a religion that cut itself off from its language and thereby from its connection to its sources and the people pledged to it would quickly disappear.

The reciprocal, inseparable connection that Frankel assumed between the people Israel and the Torah of Israel is obvious from this argument. However, in order to delve into the deeper implications of his view of the substantive halakhic connection between people and Torah, we must note the principled critique that he directed, after his departure, to the idea of Reform itself as a way to adapt Torah to life.

The argument that Reform was not a legitimate way to adapt the halakha to the needs of changing life was not new in itself. We saw that it was raised in the ultra- and neo-Orthodox controversies, where it was based on the principle of the eternal validity of the divinely revealed Torah. The novelty of Frankel's argument is evident from the fact that he had originally participated in the Reform rabbinic synod. Implicitly, then, he accepted the assumption that the conditions of life in the modern world called for a strategy of adaptive application that required change of a different order of magnitude than traditional judicial rulings or the *takkanot* (enactments) that the rabbis would issue from time to time as temporary injunctions. He therefore assumed that there are historical moments that require the daring to introduce far-reaching changes in order to enable the people to live proper lives according to halakha. The question is: Who is allowed to decide on such changes? What is the source of their authority, and how does this come to pass?

The essential argument was thus one of legal philosophy rather than theology, even though it was clear that theological assumptions, which will be immediately clarified, stood at its foundation. No Reform rabbinic synod, nor any rabbinic synod—not even the Great Sanhedrin that met before the Temple in Jerusalem—had the authority to make any halakhic decision of its own volition, even judicial decisions on those matters that rabbis are authorized to decide on a case-by-case basis, much less decisions of broad, sweeping consequence, for all such decisions must be made only on the basis of the Torah and with the consent of the people.



We emphasize that this assertion was not based on the argument that the Reform synod did not include all the leading rabbinic authorities but only those of a certain faction, although it is clear that Frankel saw this as a definite drawback. It was based rather on the claim that the rabbinic synod deliberated and acted with a kind of authority such as no previous individual rabbi or rabbinic institution had ever assumed. The model that the Reform synod emulated—argued Frankel—was not that of the ancient Sanhedrin but rather that of the Christian Church. According to the Christian outlook, the absolute will of God was determined by the view of the Pope—God’s infallible surrogate—at the head of the College of Cardinals, who were the heads of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Its decisions, rendered with the consent of the Pope, were considered the will of God, binding on all believers, who expressed no view and exercised no authority in the matter. Thus, according to Frankel, did the Reform rabbis act, promulgating their reforms on the assumption that God’s will was to be identified with what they conceived as “progress” according to “the spirit of the times” and that the people must obey whatever appeared to them as truth, right, or progress.

But Judaism is not an ecclesiastical religion. It has no Pope or College of Cardinals whose views are authoritative. According to the Torah of Israel, God’s knowledge and will cannot be identified with the knowledge and will of mortals, not even the private knowledge and will of Moses, the “man of God.” God’s knowledge and commandments are known to mortals only as they are given by Him through the written and oral Torah. It follows that only the Torah’s wisdom is divine wisdom, and only the Torah’s commands are God’s commands. These were indeed given through Moses, not in the capacity of one who was declaring his own views and will, but as one who declared and interpreted the knowledge and will of God. In this respect it was thus clear that there is no person or institution with the authority to change the words of Torah or interpret them according to a private logic and considerations. Rather, the words of Torah are to be interpreted according to their own logic, according to the principles implicit in it. It is the task of a religious scholar to clarify to the best of his knowledge and understanding what is the view of the Torah on every halakhic question that arises in the real-life existence of the people.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “Judaism bases its Torah on divine revelation. The supreme will—God—stands first. This is the source from which derive its eternal truths about God, virtue and ethics, encompassing many other commandments which embody this spirit, in which come to full expression the exalted idea concerning the purification of man’s spirit and his drawing

So far, we have a radical interpretation of the principle of “revealed Torah” as a source of halakha, which does not deviate by even a trifle from the Orthodox position. But next to this principle, Frankel set the conclusions that follow from the Torah’s being—by its own testimony—the book of the covenant enacted between God and His people. According to this testimony, God did not force His commands on the people in the past, nor does He do so in the present.<sup>8</sup> God endows mankind, created in the divine image, with free choice, and God does not revoke this freedom once it is granted. It follows that one should define as obligatory on human beings only what they themselves subscribed to, knowingly and willingly—even if one is speaking of divine commandments. The people were first asked if they desired to receive God’s commandments. Only when they had accepted them wholeheartedly (“we shall do and obey”) were they obligated.

The simple conclusion from this is that the source of the Torah’s obligatory power is not God’s commanding will but the will of the people as determined in the covenant that was mutually enacted: God pledged to give the people a Torah that would guide them for their benefit throughout their history, and the Jewish people pledged at the same time—obligating future generations in such a way that the covenant would be renewed with the consent of the people in every generation—to carry out God’s commands. It follows that from this aspect no human individual or human institution has the authority to impose the Torah’s commands on the basis of his own knowledge or his own will.<sup>9</sup>

Just as only the Torah expresses God’s knowledge and will, so only the consent of the people to the teaching of the sages concerning the knowledge of the Torah gives that teaching binding force. It is now easy to see

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close to God. These revealed commandments serve as a protective wall for Judaism, faithful guardians of the inner sanctum that will never slumber nor sleep.” Zachariah Frankel, “On Reform in Judaism,” in *Zacharias Frankel and the Beginnings of Positive-Historical Judaism*, ed. Horwitz, 49.

<sup>8</sup> “The will of the people is determinative regarding what it wants to preserve and observe; the will of the people stands over halakha and authority.” *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>9</sup> “Let us emphasize that in Judaism there are no sanctioned officials vested with extraordinary powers. Even those who serve in some role do not therefore have the right to comprise a ‘synod’ without the participation of the people itself through its representatives. . . . Such a meeting is therefore not authorized to issue decrees, only to offer proposals, which can achieve their stated objective—‘to renew the religious life and awaken a deeper connection of piety to the faith’—only if they are accepted in the spirit of the religion and imbued with the spirit of the people.” Frankel, “On the Brunswick Conference,” in *Zacharias Frankel and the Beginnings of Positive-Historical Judaism*, ed. Horwitz, 84).

that by consistently presenting the principle of receiving the Torah out of free will, as opposed to the principle of giving the Torah as the eternal word of God, Frankel has opened the door to a halakhic deliberation that permits adapting the Torah to the changing circumstances and needs of the people. When historical transformations occur in a people's destiny, major reforms become possible in this way, provided that they be enacted on the basis of knowledge of the Torah in response to the will of the people who have taken it upon themselves to obey it and with their consent.

The Torah and the people are thus two sources of authority that stand facing each other through the reciprocal connection of the covenant. The Torah is the eternal legislation, which is renewed from its source as the Oral Torah, and the people require and seek halakhic guidance. This helps define the role of the rabbis and sages: they must bring the two sources of authority together, thus enabling the perpetuation of the covenant in the reality of daily life throughout the generations. Their authority is identified with their comprehensive knowledge of the Torah, their understanding of the methods of interpreting it, and their understanding of the reality in which their fellow Jews need to perform its mitzvot. The rabbis are thus scholars whose occupation is the Torah. They grow up in the ranks of the people that are pledged to Torah, without being specially appointed at the outset. Every Jew is required to learn Torah to the best of his ability. Those who arrive at the proper level are privileged, at the discretion of their teachers, to be called scholars and to be granted the title of "rabbi," thus qualified to teach others.<sup>10</sup>

Yet even this assertion needs qualification. The authorization to teach others is defined not as a privilege of the scholars but as their duty to the Torah and to the people. The privilege belongs to the people and to every individual among the people to learn the Torah that they accepted upon themselves in order to fulfill its mitzvot. Indeed, this is no mere

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<sup>10</sup> "Judaism is based on a divine foundation: the revealed commandments are fundamental. It progressed by virtue of the explanations and commentaries that endeared it to the people and made it a national legacy. These explanations and commentaries have historical sanction. They were commingled with the religious life and became incorporated in it through centuries of observance of the mitzvot, to the point that the Torah itself was perceived in the religious consciousness only through this approach, and interpretation was considered a vital part of it. What is the source of these explanations and commentaries, and how did they make their way? One generally answers that the rabbis knew how to gain honor and appreciation in the people's eyes. But we must first stop at the notion of 'rabbi' and learn how to recognize from it the development of this institution among Jews." Frankel, "On the Forthcoming Rabbinic Conference," in *Zacharias Frankel and the Beginnings of Positive-Historical Judaism*, ed. Horwitz, 71.

formal distinction. Through it, Frankel has come to define the mode of practical activity of the scholars on the one hand and the mode of exercising the authority of the people to express its consent and obligation on the other hand. Scholars and rabbis are not empowered to proclaim or force their decisions on the community of their own volition, even if they think their view represents that of the Torah; they are obligated to respond with the best of their knowledge and understanding of the Torah and the circumstances of the life of the people when they turn to them and request instruction.

The turning from the side of the individuals or the people is primary. It expresses from the outset the desire to know the Torah and to fulfill its mitzvot. When individuals, communities, or the entire people encounter difficulties and obstacles in the observance of certain mitzvot or when new questions are raised following from changes in life circumstances, they turn to their rabbis and seek Torah from them. They thus express their desire to live according to the mitzvot of the Torah and to obey its laws, and in that case the scholars are obligated to reply to the best of their ability so that Jews who wish to live according to the Torah will be able to do this without requiring sacrifices of them that the majority cannot withstand. The Torah itself commanded "and live by them," which the Sages interpreted as "and not die by them."

There is a final test, in Frankel's view, that attests to the people's authority in acceptance of the Torah and the way that this authority is expressed in practice. When individuals or communities turn to their rabbis with questions, they implicitly accept the answer in advance and are obligated to follow it. Yet this does not decide whether the ruling will be accepted as halakha binding on everyone. This decision is not determined in advance but only after the fact. If one is dealing with topics of central importance that affect not only isolated individuals or communities but the entire people, protracted debates will be generated among the scholars and the decision will be registered as the outcome of a historical process. The end result is that the people will adopt the view that seems most fitting and will reject whatever is not fitting. It sometimes reaches the point that a custom spreads among the people irrespective of the views of the scholars, and in the end the scholars accept it as halakha. This is thus the historical action of the spirit of the people, as Savigny taught.

All this holds the answer to the question of how one can legitimately adapt halakha to changing circumstances and even introduce far-reaching reforms that the age requires. First of all, one ought not to propose the reforms as an objective in itself, as if by introducing them the eternal

Torah should rise to an unprecedented moral or spiritual level. A conservative approach that regards the continuity of the tradition as sacred will take a cautious practical position vis-à-vis the idea of progress espoused by an idealistic philosophy of history. The dialectical method of the latter leads it to an almost automatic preference for the later over the earlier.<sup>11</sup>

Here, too, Frankel adopted the positions of Herder and Savigny. First, any true progress will not be achieved by revolutions that disrupt historical continuity. On the contrary—only fidelity to historical continuity anchored in the foundational sources can guarantee true progress, whether by the criterion of the foundational sources themselves, whose latent value potential is revealed through historical development, or by the criterion of the wisdom accumulated by experience, not only with respect to fixed truths, but also with respect to the manner of introducing necessary changes and reforms in a considered way that does not cause disastrous upheavals.<sup>12</sup>

Second, progress is only one of the aspects of change in history, and it comes along with other aspects that amount to regression or deterioration. One should approach them critically on the basis of fundamental values embodied in the original sources and in the tradition that flows from them. In short: if there is progress, it does not scrutinize the tradition in order to uproot it; rather, the tradition scrutinizes it in order to confirm it or reject it. Therefore, if reforms are required in halakha whose source is in the moral, spiritual, or scientific progress that was achieved by modern culture, they must be tested by the fundamental principles of the timeless halakha. They constitute not a reform or improvement of the Torah but a reform and improvement in the realization of its eternal fundamental values.

If one advances the reforms required for adapting halakhic norms to the reality of modern times as means for preserving the Torah, and if one proposed them as a response to the questions that the people are

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<sup>11</sup> "Regarding such proposals, they must first inspire the people to place their trust in their initiatives and those who propose them, that they are themselves imbued with a deep spirit of piety in the religion in which they seek to involve the people, that they take care to weigh all their pronouncements conscientiously and represent the conception of the religion as it lives in the people's heart, not as it is conceived by abstract theories and obscure reasonings." Frankel, "On the Brunswick Conference," 84.

<sup>12</sup> "Zacharias Frankel takes the floor... he stands on the ground of *positive, historical Judaism*. In order to understand what it means in the present, one must first look to the past and to the path which Judaism has traveled." Protocol of the 1845 Frankfort Conference, in *The Rise of Reform Judaism*, ed. Plaut, 85–86.

asking out of attention to their situation and the prevailing concerns of the entire people—not only the interests of certain groups—and if one assumes that the inquirers wish to live in accord with the Torah and are not searching for leniencies or exemptions to throw off its yoke as if with its prior consent, then (concludes Frankel) one may find in the halakha all the principles according to which rabbinic scholars familiar with the people's situation can derive from the Torah the solutions according to which the people may live.

In his essays and halakhic researches, Frankel specified those principles and showed how they were applied in the past and could be applied in the present. These belonged, however, to the legal deliberation itself, not to the “positive historical” philosophy that should guide it. We emphasize in summation the basic principle that Frankel defined on the basis of all these considerations in answer to both Reform and Orthodoxy as the platform for his movement: the principle of *kelal Yisrael* (“the community of Israel”):<sup>13</sup> one should not accept reforms that essentially or in effect involve the secession of a faction from the general community. Thus one ought not to accept reforms that will be accepted by some and rejected out of hand by others for they will cause a split in the people. The estimate that an overwhelming majority of the people are ready to agree to reforms is a basic halakhic prerequisite to accepting them. On the other hand, one must look for relevant, authorized solutions to the difficult problems encountered by different segments of the people who desire or essentially are forced to participate in the economic, social, political, and cultural life of their environment, for such participation is in itself positive and contains nothing in opposition to halakha.

The consideration of preserving the unity of the people—having in mind those who wish to live according to the Torah—was established by Frankel as the supreme halakhic principle, with whose help he hoped to bridge the factions of the people. The great question was whether, given the current factionalization, it was still possible to find in time-honored halakha the middle path that could preserve Jewish unity, and if the halakha itself could provide a criterion to distinguish who were the

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<sup>13</sup> Solomon Schechter called this the principle of “Catholic Israel” (see Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism* [Philadelphia: Meridian, 1958], Introduction). This was Schechter's idiosyncratic translation of the Hebrew term *kelal Yisrael*, which we have here translated “the community of Israel.” *Kelal* connotes commonality or universality, as does “catholic” in its common meaning. Schechter in no way meant to imply a similarity or correspondence between Judaism and the historical Catholic Church.

loyalists wishing to abide by Torah and who were the lawbreakers wishing to overthrow it.

Frankel believed it was possible to find the middle way, despite the major split between left and right factions in which he himself was involved. When he assumed the leadership of the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau, he did not intend to create a third movement in Judaism but to stand firmly within the mainstream of the Jewish community and to represent it. In retrospect, a third movement had just been established, which developed later primarily in the United States. But the principle of *kelal Yisrael* remained its guiding principle. The hope was that walking the middle road between Modern Orthodoxy and Reform would provide a bridge that would lead to the restoration of unity.

*D. Divine Providence and Ethical Mission in Jewish History:  
The Teaching of Heinrich Graetz*

The historian Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891) was a colleague of Zechariah Frankel's, teaching with him in the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau and helping to lay the ideological foundations of the "positive-historical" movement. They were agreed on the principle of maintaining the unity and continuity of the Jewish people, as well as the need for it to adapt to the changes that occurred in the circumstances of the people as a result of the Emancipation through moderate changes in halakha, which should be enacted in accord with Judaism's own intrinsic criteria. But there were substantive differences between them in the definition of those criteria, deriving from their different personal journeys and the different vantage points from which they arrived at the positive-historical outlook.<sup>14</sup>

Zechariah Frankel arrived at the middle way between Reform and Orthodoxy as a rabbi, devoted to halakha. As we recall, he first turned to Reform but withdrew from it on encountering its extreme approach. A return to Orthodoxy shaped his Jewish outlook by focusing on its rabbinic discipline—halakha. This was the area of research he chose, and he looked at all of Jewish history from that perspective. The notion of divine

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<sup>14</sup> On Heinrich Graetz's biography, outlook, and relationship to Zechariah Frankel, see Philip Bloch, "Memoir of Heinrich Graetz," in Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1898), 6:1–86; also Heinrich Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, trans., ed., and intro. Ismar Schorsch (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1975), Introduction; and *Zacharia Frankel and the Beginnings of Positive-Historical Judaism*, ed. Horwitz, 30–35.



revelation was for him the backbone of Oral Torah. It defined Judaism as the way of life of the Jewish people. He therefore rejected Reform's critique of Talmudic methods of thought and the methods of interpretation and legal decision in rabbinic literature. In all these respects he was close to Orthodoxy and distanced himself from Reform; he generally accepted the legal decisions of the *Shulḥan Arukh* as the basis of consensus that united the Jewish people in recent generations.

Heinrich Graetz arrived at the Breslau seminary from the opposite direction. In his youth he was repelled by Reform because of its self-abnegation before Gentile culture and its imitation of Christianity. He began to crystallize his modern Jewish outlook as a disciple of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the founder of Modern Orthodoxy. The book *Nineteen Letters on Judaism* was a spiritual awakening for him. The golden mean that he found in it encompassing enthusiastic fidelity to Judaism, broad cultural horizons, and spiritual depth resolved his doubts and rescued him from his struggles. But when he became Hirsch's personal student, he was repelled by his excessive halakhic stringency, his adherence to Talmudic learning as the basis of Jewish education, and his being wedded to the *Shulḥan Arukh* as the hard-and-fast bulwark of a Jewish way of life. These rendered Orthodoxy abhorrent to him even in its modern version; by distancing himself from it he arrived at the positive-historical outlook, actually tilting toward a more Reform position in his attitude to halakha. His sharp differentiation from Reform remained, not because of its relation to the Talmud and *Shulḥan Arukh*, but rather because of its suppression of Jewish nationalism, its self-abnegation before German nationalism, and its assimilationist imitation of Christianity. For these reasons, he was attracted to the national aspect of Frankel's teaching, but not necessarily to its halakhic aspect.<sup>15</sup>

We can demonstrate this by comparing Graetz's views to Geiger's on the history and literature of the halakha. Graetz was no less critical than Geiger of Talmudic argumentation. He found in it much that was vapid, overly formal, mechanical, emotionally arid, and intellectually convoluted.<sup>16</sup> As for the *Shulḥan Arukh*, the whole idea of forcing Judaism into a rigid

<sup>15</sup> Graetz's opposition to Reform and his critique of Geiger's historical work were expressed in his youthful articles in the German-Jewish journal *Der Orient*, 1844 (Schorch, in Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History*, Introduction, 34–35, nn. 78–79). They are also evident in the negative cast of his treatment of Reform Judaism in his *History* (Graetz, *History of the Jews*, 5:606, 674–87).

<sup>16</sup> On what Graetz regarded as the degeneration of Talmudic study into casuistical hairsplitting in early modern times, see *History of the Jews*, 4:640–41.

mold of stringent and pedantic rules that governed every detail of daily life seemed to him like a prison from which one needed to be liberated for the relief of the individual Jew's soul and the benefit of Judaism, whose original essence was embodied—here Graetz echoed Geiger and maybe Steinheim—in the works of the biblical prophets.<sup>17</sup>

Yet this agreement did not change Graetz's negative view of Reform for violating his national feelings. Even its criticism of the Talmud and *Shulḥan Arukh* was excessive insofar as it ignored the historical needs that were fulfilled by them in their proper time. Thus, Reform shut its eyes to the positive national aspects in these works, which in Graetz's view served as a tough outer shell to protect the tender spiritual core under conditions of exile. Graetz stood by his original judgment that Reform threw off the yoke of halakha in order to facilitate assimilation and accommodate to Christianity. Graetz's national identity recoiled from assimilation. As for Christianity, it repelled him, whether because of its irrational elements, or the church rituals that to him smacked of idolatry, but most of all because of the profound contradiction that he found in it between the ethic of love that it professed and the cruelty it displayed in its thirst for world domination, especially at the expense of the Jewish people. It comes as no surprise that he regarded Jewish converts to Christianity as traitors who defected to the camp of the enemy or that he saw the Christianizing tendencies of Reform as little better than outright apostasy. It was not Reform's rejection of halakha that was decisive in his judgment of it but the inferior alternative that it proposed in its place.

The positive-historical "middle course" that Graetz sought between Orthodoxy and Reform was thus different than Frankel's. He hoped that "the science of Judaism" in its broadest sense, including especially historical scholarship, would take the place of Talmudic studies in the curriculum of Jewish education, while the *Shulḥan Arukh* would be replaced by a method of halakhic decision making characterized not by legal formalism but rather by directly addressing the issues, giving pride of place to Jewish ethical values rather than ritual considerations.

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<sup>17</sup> "The Talmud was, to a certain extent, the winter coat for the organism of Judaism during the period of freezing cold. . . . Such a cloak certainly disfigures the man who needs protection rendering him nearly unrecognizable. . . . With the coming of spring the disfiguring cloak comes off by itself. How much of the Talmud has already crumbled since Moses Mendelssohn and the dawn of emancipation brought a fresh breeze to blow in Judaism!" Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, 250.

Graetz did not worry that such a radical rearrangement would lead to the erasure of boundaries and assimilation. On the contrary, he thought that this was necessary in order to restore the people's independent role and strengthen their power to stand up to the challenges of the age. The people will rediscover the advantages of their religion vis-à-vis Christianity and secular humanism. Through R. Samson Raphael Hirsch's influence, Graetz had become aware of the weaknesses following from humanism's dissociation from the idea of a divine imperative commanding realization through ethical living. Humanism had failed in his view to realize its exalted values, just as Christianity had failed because of the gap between its professed values and its actions. Judaism's superiority was to be seen in its ability to realize its moral values in the life patterns of the people. Unlike in Christianity, justice and neighborly love did not remain in the province of formal abstraction but were realized in the life of the community. One could thus say that Graetz saw the genius of Judaism in the spirit of halakha striving for realization. But just for this reason, he dissociated himself from the legal-authoritarian formalism of Orthodoxy.

The conclusion was that one needed to base Judaism not only on halakha but on the totality of its contents: values, ideas, ideals. Furthermore, one must examine these contents not only in terms of their formulation as an abstract worldview and formal laws but in their practical realization in the life of the people. We thus arrive at the key sentence in understanding Graetz's thought: Judaism, like any original culture, was expressed in the collective life of the people who created it. One would not find it in articles of faith, nor in formal laws, nor in philosophical doctrines or other ideologies, though it partakes of all of these, but only in the very substance of events and actions. Even when speaking of spiritual creations, the emphasis was on the pattern of emotional and intellectual life that was expressed in them. There was historical importance in those creations that were perpetually read and studied by the people, thus giving nourishment to the collective spiritual life of the people in each generation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "The Law itself does not enforce these observances as ends in themselves, but designates them as *means* for a higher end, 'so that thou mayest remember all the days of thy life.' In these words the connection between the spiritual essence of Judaism and a considerable part of its ritual observances is clearly designated: they are the means to an end, and that end is the memory of the past. National memories are dear to every nation. . . . But the people of Israel was to pride itself not on the great deeds of its ancestors, but on the Divine guidance, which had shaped its destiny; and its national memories were intended to keep alive and unforgetten its own exceptional position and significance." Ibid., 294.

Judaism, like any formation of unique cultural-national identity, is the unique history of the people who created it. By now it was clear that by “history” Graetz was referring to the objective life world that each people creates in fidelity to the unique spirit animating it while coping with the objective circumstances that it encounters in its path.

He got this outlook from Herder and Ranke. Their influence pointed him to his chosen vocation: researching the history of the Jewish people. He thus arrived at the monumental literary project to which he devoted his entire life: the multi-volume *History of the Jews*.<sup>19</sup> This work appeared in Germany between 1853 and 1876 and immediately enjoyed wide distribution and translation into several languages, including Hebrew. It filled a void that had been felt for over a generation. Graetz’s *History of the Jews* was the first complete and comprehensive scientific description of the history of the Jewish people from biblical times until the middle of the nineteenth century. He had been anticipated only by a few partial and truncated attempts, mostly by non-Jewish historians who had dealt with the ancient period from the viewpoint of the history of Christianity and Western culture. Graetz’s book put them in the shadow and enjoyed general recognition as the fundamental work in this area.

He achieved this status first of all because of his level of detail, his exhaustive use of the sources at his disposal, his exact analyses, and the broad scope of his description. The work was rightly regarded as the comprehensive summary of research findings in Jewish historical studies up to his time. No less important for his contemporaries was the independent Jewish viewpoint that Graetz announced programmatically at the outset of his work. One could only write “authentic history,” in the sense of Herder and Ranke, by empathetically entering into the sources and identifying with them. One should see the actions through the eyes of the actors and the creations from within the world of their creators. Only from an inside view could one grasp the historical phenomenon as a living process through which the people express their spirit. In other words: it was the Jewish national spirit that guided Graetz in writing his work.

The founders of modern Jewish studies thought that the summation of the detailed research project in all areas of Jewish culture would be a philosophical method that would incorporate the totality of ideas that set Judaism on the level of reason. It would establish clearly the contribution

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<sup>19</sup> Graetz’s *History of the Jews* was originally published in eleven volumes in German then translated into various languages. The standard English edition is six volumes.

of Judaism to general culture and thus constitute its immortality for the future. Graetz considered such a transformation of Judaism into rational abstraction to be its negation.<sup>20</sup> Reality was not in the idea but in its realization in the life of the people. When he proceeded to outline the general program of his work, he did indeed resort to several ideas borrowed from Hegel. However, a careful examination will reveal immediately that he was only paying lip service to the accepted mode of expression. The comprehensive summary of Jewish studies must be done through a historiographic work that would present history itself, which is to say, the tangible life process of the people. Writing it by entering empathetically into the life processes of the nation would express identity and continuity, and studying it out of that same sense of identification would be the educational process that would introduce the students to the history of their people in order that they might live it and continue it in their lives.

All this was stated in the beginning of Graetz's programmatic essay, "The Structure of Jewish History" (first published in four installments in Frankel's journal in 1846).<sup>21</sup> Graetz discussed the methods of Jewish philosophy that had been articulated in that period, such as those of Steinheim, Formstecher, and Samson Raphael Hirsch. In his view, these positions embodied partial aspects of the substance of Judaism as manifested in its history. But no philosophical method, nor any combination of such methods, could fully embody the complex, many-sided historical reality, which united so many different movements in itself. The reality that united all these opposing methods was to be found transcending them—in the concrete life of the people.

No systematic abstraction could exhaust the totality of Judaism. A real culture was formed by the interaction of various ideas that originated not from each other but from the various aspects and creative arenas of the spirit of peoples grappling with their surroundings. The ideas that guided the culture wrestled with each other and in the last analysis complemented each other, and the product was not a web of abstractions but history as a continuing drama whose hero was the nation.<sup>22</sup>

The influence of Herder's outlook could be discerned in these programmatic assumptions of Graetz's. To be sure, he went on to outline a framework

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<sup>20</sup> See Graetz's critical account of the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* in *History of the Jews*, 5:583–88.

<sup>21</sup> Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, 63–124.

<sup>22</sup> "The totality of Judaism is discernible only in its history. Its complete nature, the sum of its powers, becomes clear only in the light of history" (*ibid.*, 65).

of three periods of the past and a fourth period beginning with the age of Mendelssohn—a framework outwardly similar to Hegel's model of historical thought (or perhaps to that of R. Nachman Krochmal). But the concrete description that Graetz presented for each period suggests that one was not dealing here with the dialectical development of fundamental ideas toward a level of comprehensive rational consciousness but rather the opposite: the ideas themselves are manifested in full clarity already at the beginning, in ancient biblical literature. They do not develop or progress in the course of history. There is progress only in their realization in the life of the people and afterward in the effort to realize them in humanity. In the course of the struggle to realize them, controversies arose among various interpretations and outlooks. The source of these was not in the dialectical development of thought from one theoretical level to a higher one but in coping with the changing circumstances of objective reality into which the people were thrust in order to apply them. The structure of Jewish history thus reflects the stages dictated by the process of realization, in the manner that erecting a building must start with digging the foundations and end with erecting the roof.

The idea that Judaism is an eternal idea realized in the history of its people is found in Samson Raphael Hirsch, but Graetz relied on Mendelssohn, in whom he saw a thinker who envisioned the modern age and sought to prepare the people to meet it. Furthermore, he uncovered the common denominator between Mendelssohn's and Spinoza's views about the substance and history of Judaism. He found support in both of them and presented himself as a student of Spinoza, but he interpreted him à la Mendelssohn in a positive manner. Meanwhile, he added to them his original version of the biblical conception of history as divine providence manifested in Israelite-Jewish history.

Graetz's similarity to Spinoza in his outlook on Jewish history is expressed in the recognition that the Jewish Torah was from the outset a political-social compact providing guidance to the worldly life of a nation appointed to an exceptional historical destiny, not an ecclesiastical religion. Spinoza was right, in Graetz's view, in deciding that the Torah was not preparing the people for "spiritual salvation," neither in the religious sense of Christianity nor in the philosophical sense of Maimonides. It was the Torah's purpose for the people to succeed in their national life.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "The purpose is rather eudaemonistic... 'that you may fare well in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.' This is the constant refrain in the most dissimilar commandments... The unity and welfare of the Jewish state is dependent on the extent to which the commandments are observed... That actually means that Judaism, in the strict

Thus was expressed, in Graetz's language, the "national idea" that was the foundation of Israel's history from its inception. His distancing from Spinoza and his preference for Mendelssohn's outlook focused on two essential issues: (1) defining what constituted salvation in the national life according to the Torah, and (2) the assertion that hand in hand with the "national idea" there appeared in Israel's history a second central idea, opposite and complementary to the first, namely, the "divine idea," the recognition that the nation of Israel stands in a unique relation to a transcendent God and its salvation is conditional on dedication to God by performing God's commands.

Salvation in national life according to the Torah was not based first and foremost on military might and political power, though these were an important contributory factor, but on realizing justice and morality both in the collective life and in relations among individuals. In the prophets' view, only a government based on morality could guarantee enduring national salvation, for only morality could prevent the people from disintegrating and perishing. Indeed, in Graetz's view, this was the secret of the Jewish people's longevity, perseverance, and resilience despite the difficult conditions of exile. We have said that the circumstance and longevity of the Jewish people exhibit uniqueness of an exceptional order, which in comparison with the fate of other peoples may appear supernatural, even miraculous.

This conclusion leads us to the "divine idea," the second idea that in Graetz's view guided the people's history. We emphasize that, like Mendelssohn, Graetz considered himself a consistent rationalist and was opposed to mysticism in all its forms. Nevertheless, like Mendelssohn—and unlike Spinoza—he held to the traditional view that the Torah represented the covenant enacted between God and His people. The Torah was a revelation of God's will through the prophets and later through the Sages. For Graetz, this was a historical fact that must be accepted at face value. The profound seriousness with which he accepted this view is attested to not only by his reliance on Mendelssohn but even more by his enthusiastic identification with the teaching of Judah Halevi, which he preferred to that of Maimonides as an authentic expression of the spirit of Judaism.

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sense of the word, is not even a religion—if one understands thereby the relationship of man to his creator and his hopes for his earthly existence—but rather a constitution for a body politic." *Ibid.*, 70.



We thus see that Graetz did not interpret the phenomenon of the “divine idea” in Jewish history in the rational-idealistic sense as the creation of the national spirit; in his view, it was the intervention of the providence of a personal, transcendental God. From this followed the absolute purity of prophetic monotheism from its inception, which involved the absolute negation of every form of idolatry. We note: the “divine idea” in Judaism did not, in Graetz’s view, include any theological content. God Himself was not revealed; there was no mediation or emanation between God and humanity nor any kind of mystical unity or identification of God and man. The revelation was the Torah, and in it was embodied the divine providence, giving guidance and leadership to His people in order to realize the “divine idea” in the sense of ethical dedication to its earthly task, namely, realizing the “national idea.” The religious aspect in Judaism is fully contained in the unshakable knowledge that the Torah represents God’s providential command.

Was the revelation of the Torah a supernatural miracle? Indeed so, and yet Graetz did not consider this inconsistent with his rationalism.<sup>24</sup> His explanation was along the lines of Halevi’s understanding. As a historian, Graetz preferred experience based on documentation and reliable evidence while rejecting philosophical speculation. But the empirical method was not limited to events of the remote past, such as the convocation at Mount Sinai, whose testimony is shrouded in legend, but also to every chapter in the people’s history up to the present. Graetz had in mind the miracle of Israel’s survival, despite the fact that “in every generation they stand up against us to destroy us.” Halevi was right about this. Only a divine providence that assigned the Jewish people a historic mission to humanity could explain their survival under the conditions of exile. But since the providence expressed in the Torah was the foundation of the people’s way of life, one should see in the survival of the Jewish people empirical confirmation of the belief that the Torah was a supernatural divine revelation, renewed in the midst of its loyal followers in every generation.

Still, we must emphasize that, unlike Halevi, Graetz did not accept the religious outlook according to which there is a realm of commandments “between man and God” concerning the immediate union of the

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<sup>24</sup> In his historical account, Graetz seems to take the biblical account of the Sinai revelation at face value (*History of the Jews*, 1:20–21). This may be literary convention, but it is consistent with the liberal Protestant faith that prevailed in German religious scholarship in the late nineteenth century.

human being with the divine through philosophical apprehension or mystical identification, aided by ritual. On this topic Graetz adopted Maimonides's view but interpreted it in Steinheim's critical-philosophical way: the knowledge of God commanded by the Torah consists in avoiding any kind of idolatry in thought or deed. Every pretension of knowing God directly was in Graetz's view a form of idolatry to be absolutely opposed. Even Maimonides's "negative attributes" were rejected through this decisive conclusion, and nothing remained except the pure knowledge that the Torah was the revelation of the divine will, proved through historical experience in the dialectical connection between realization of the "national idea" and the "divine idea."

The key to understanding the structure of Jewish history is thus found in his conception of the relation between its two guiding ideas. They need each other for their realization: true, enduring national salvation is impossible without special moral dedication, and moral dedication is not possible in the collective life of a nation without a basis of a concrete "national idea." But when one seeks to realize both of them together, one must first determine priority. From a practical standpoint, it is clear that the material foundation is prior, for it is the platform for realization. In the course of laying the material foundation, it is proper to take care for the morality commanded by the "divine idea," but in the first step it is impossible that realization of this idea should be grasped by the people as the goal. The prophets demanded this, but the people treated it only as a means. Priority was given to national salvation expressed in worldly land acquisition and the creation of a monarchy. But it quickly became clear that this carried a heavy moral price that eventually caused the collapse of the national achievement.

This assertion constitutes the dialectical element in Graetz's historical theory. One can easily see that it is substantially different from Hegel's philosophical dialectic, centered on intellectual development. In the first period of Jewish history—the period of the First Temple—the people of Israel were focused on realizing the "national idea." Priority was given to material salvation. Spinoza described this correctly: the Torah guided the people to settle in their land, to reap the fruits of the land, to establish their nationality through a state, and to defend it from their enemies. The prophets also sought the realization of the "divine idea" as a goal, but the people related to it only to the extent that it served the purpose of their national unity in standing firm before their foes. Once the kingdom was established, the "divine idea" was neglected despite the outcry of the prophets, and the inevitable consequence was the destruction of the state ("national idea") and Temple ("divine idea") together.

But the people survived. This meant that the “divine idea” had been realized to a certain extent in the kingdom of Judah, and it saved the people from perishing in exile. Learning this lesson brought the people, now entering their second historical period, into an opposite balance of the two ideas: under the leadership of the scribes and the rabbis, the realization of the “divine idea” was preferable as a goal to the realization of the “national idea,” which was now considered only a means. The attitude of the Sages toward the Hasmonean dynasty testifies to this. The inevitable final result was again political and religious destruction—and exile.

But we must now note how the national defeats were necessary as stepping-stones to success in the realization of the “divine idea,” which in the last analysis would also be the realization of the “national idea.” We can see here the providential plan that directed the people toward the realization of their mission. First, it realized the “national idea” on a certain level of perfection, crystallizing the people’s self-awareness as a people for many generations. Afterward it started to concretize the “divine idea” in order to prepare the people for their mission among humanity. But for the sake of complete realization of the “divine idea” and its propagation among the nations, a third period was required—the period of exile. The national idea was transformed into a messianic vision that preserved the people’s national consciousness on the basis of the “divine idea” that cultivated a visionary-messianic nationalism with an eye to the future. Still, the people and their leadership could exempt themselves in exile from the actual responsibility for realizing the “national idea.” The political framework on which they relied was the sovereignty of the nations in whose midst they dwelt; thus they were able to dedicate themselves with all their heart and soul to realizing the “divine idea.” It was self-evident that a national price had to be paid for survival in exile. This necessitated limitations and defects affecting even the full realization of the “divine idea.” But despite this, the people began to fulfill their mission to humanity—propagation of the “divine idea” not as an abstract idea (as was the way of Christianity) but as an exemplary fulfillment in the communal life of the people.

Graetz saw in the Emancipation and the Enlightenment the end of the third period in Jewish history. He saw Mendelssohn as the great teacher whose teaching was destined to lead the people to the realization of their destiny in the fourth period. The structural logic of the providential plan unfolding before him required in the fourth period the realization of the visionary synthesis of the two ideas in balanced proportion as two equal

and complementary goals; this would lead to the vindication of Judaism as it led the Western cultural nations in the realization of its two ideas.

Graetz, who stood at the beginning of realization of the providential plan for the fourth period as a historian, not a prophet, did not see himself qualified to describe how the missionary synthesis would be realized. Thus he did not propose a prospectus for the future in his programmatic essay. He was content to assert the fact that the fourth period began with the great struggle over the Emancipation, but, as a thinker and spokesman of the positive-historical movement, he had to address the questions of the fourth period from a forward-looking perspective. He tried indeed to fulfill his task as teacher for his generation through several articles and essays that he wrote, especially in his old age, after he completed his historical work.

Two issues were interrelated in Graetz's late thoughts about his age, and it appears that in both of them he struggled with difficulty to arrive at unequivocal conclusions. The first was an evaluation of the direction of historical development of the Western cultural nations in which it was incumbent on the Jewish people to realize their destiny; the second was evaluating the way in which the Jewish people could reconstitute their nationality among the Western cultural nations in the modern age.

The substantive difference between Graetz and the Reform thinkers, and to some extent those of Modern Orthodoxy as well, came to striking and even emphatic expression in his answer to the first question. Like Herder, Graetz saw in his age some aspects of progress. This was evident in the rationalistic philosophy, in the sciences, and in the humanistic ideals that made the struggle for Emancipation and its initial realization possible. However, these aspects did not conceal the negative aspects he discerned with the empirical eye of a historian trained in sociology and psychology, searching for a view of the whole picture.

Indeed, the complete picture that was painted before his eyes was not one of development and progress but the opposite—of retreat, decline, deterioration, and fragmentation. He took note of the wars erupting between the new European nationalities and the class struggle within European society. He analyzed the political and social errors and failures of the nationalist movements in Europe, especially in Germany, which were leading necessarily in his view to shameful failures in the achievement of national objectives. Unlike idealistic historians, he did not see in these failures a dialectical sign auguring progress in the manner of the “cunning of reason” but the opposite. In his view, social ethics was the supreme

test, and according to it he diagnosed the principal factor in the manifestations of decline in Western culture: moral corruption, which was spreading through all the avenues of Western culture. He dwelt on the proliferating social injustice, but he especially emphasized the corruption of sexual morality that led to the disintegration of the family, the declining birthrate, and the spread of disease. We recall that in Herder's view the family was the kernel from which society organically grew. Family purity and fidelity were an inviolable condition for social welfare, as well as the basis for transmitting the cultural legacy that preserved the people from generation to generation. When it fell apart, the nation fell apart.

Graetz's pessimistic assessment of Western society in modern times was confirmed when he reexamined the social and political status of the Jewish people among European peoples in the second half of the nineteenth century. What had the struggle for Emancipation achieved? Waves of racist anti-Semitism grew and spread to the enlightened classes and the ruling elites, particularly in Germany. German nationalism degenerated into vulgar chauvinism with its petty narrow-mindedness. Liberalism and humanism were on the wane. Thus was undermined the foundation for the idea of progress on which Reform thinkers had built their rosy dreams of emancipation, which had fueled their urgent flight toward assimilation.

These views of Graetz's came to open and well-publicized expression in the controversy initiated by the German historian Treitschke, who among other things attacked Graetz's *History of the Jews* as an example of Judaism's negative influence—demanding emancipation while maintaining its separate identity—on Germany and on German social solidarity (1879).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke, "Ein Wort über unser Judentum (A Word about Our Jewry/Judaism) (Preußische Jahrbücher 44/45 [1880], Separatabdruck). The word *Judentum* (= *Judenthum*) in German conflates the meanings of the two English words "Jewry" and "Judaism" without distinguishing between them. This verbal ambiguity is in line with the idea prevalent in nineteenth-century European social thought that every national group embodied a distinctive idea or spiritual-cultural essence. From this assumption it followed that the influence of Jewry and the influence of Judaism were inseparable—if Jews as individuals or a group exercised influence on German life, it necessarily followed that the innermost ideas of Judaism were also penetrating into German culture. Such ideas were invoked throughout the nineteenth century to advocate exclusion of Jews from German national life and denying them civil rights, even before they were formulated in explicitly racial terms by Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau in 1853 and before Wilhelm Marr coined the racial term "anti-Semitism" in 1879. But the association of national group with an underlying idea could be given a positive connotation as well, as we see in the thought of Herder, Matthew Arnold, and most of the thinkers discussed in this volume, including Graetz himself. See also Michael Meyer, "Heinrich Graetz and Heinrich Von Treitschke:

Graetz, who did not conceal his Jewish national pride and his sharp criticism of German nationalism, especially when it was expressed in anti-Semitism, did not hold back his forceful reaction. Treitschke's views were for him yet another proof of the justice of his critique of German nationalism. Of course, from Treitschke's side, Graetz's reaction was further confirmation of his arguments against Judaism. It was clear in any case that the controversy was concrete evidence of the dangers that threatened on the road to emancipation, and it was clear that Graetz could not accept the Reform outlook that advocated the social and cultural blending of the Jews among the peoples of Europe and giving up their own national identity, while identifying the Jewish mission with the idea of progress and its realization.

It is thus instructive that Graetz proclaimed the coming vindication of Judaism precisely in the context of his verdict that the idea of progress had failed. If one compared the social situation of the Jews in Western lands to the social situation of the peoples in whose midst they dwelt from the correct standpoint, namely, from the social-ethical standpoint, one could demonstrate the profound superiority of the Jewish people. One could see the moral resilience whose source was in the "divine idea" that was realized throughout the generations of exile. This came to expression first of all in the unusual stability of the morality of the Jewish family, which promised the survival and unity of the people despite all the accidents of assimilation. But not only family morality, and the natural increase consequent on it, proved the superiority of the Jews over the deteriorating gentile society but also their unusual achievements, far disproportionate to their percentage in the population, in all areas: commerce, science, literature, journalism, art. Despite anti-Semitism and the social restrictions stemming from it, the Jews display vitality and creativity of an impressive order. This cannot be explained except on the basis of their moral fiber and their profoundly positive attitude to life.

That is not all. Graetz sensed in his later period a noticeable change in the attitude of the young Jews to their environment. Together with their achievements, they were made conscious of the advantage of their national origin, and they took pride in it. They no longer had that feeling of inferiority that characterized their parents in the face of the surrounding culture. They were able to permit themselves a critical attitude and a

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A Comparison of Their Historical Images of the Modern Jew (*Modern Judaism* 6, no. 1 [Feb., 1986]: 1–11).

desire to preserve their independent identity without closing themselves off from the outside world. In his estimate, the pressure toward assimilation that had brought about the struggle over emancipation would soon slacken and would be replaced with an opposite mood of returning to Jewish spiritual nationalism, one that would come to expression through his historical magnum opus.

It was thus likely that in his words about the approaching vindication of Judaism, Graetz had in mind that the Jewish national consciousness should be reconstituted in communal frameworks. Meanwhile, the European peoples would be forced to acknowledge the superiority of Judaism's ethical-religious way over the paths of humanism and Christianity as a refuge from social-cultural decline and disintegration. The Jews would succeed in basing their worldly status in the Diaspora not through assimilation but rather precisely through fidelity to their "national idea" and "divine idea." Thus they would set an example worthy of imitation and would outline the way of social-cultural reconstruction for the peoples in whose midst they dwelt. This would be the way of national and ethical realization,<sup>26</sup> balanced between the "national idea" and the "divine idea" in the fourth period of the people's history.

But there was another possibility that had been outlined by Spinoza in several cryptic sentences at the end of his *Theological-Political Treatise*: the Jews would return to their ancient homeland and reconstitute their nationality in it by way of a state that through its ethical qualities would be an example to all the nations. When Moses Hess's book *Rome and Jerusalem* appeared (1862), announcing this vision, Graetz seized on it enthusiastically and for a certain period teamed up with Hess for its fulfillment. Later he was convinced that the obstacles to it were too great. He gave up on it and seems to have returned to his first vision.

The enthusiasm did not lead to a decision. Nevertheless, we can summarize Graetz's teaching by pointing to the similarity between it and the path of the secular Hebrew Haskalah in eastern Europe influenced by Spinoza, as well as the moderate religious Haskalah of eastern Europe influenced by Krochmal, in their decided tendency to grapple with the issues

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<sup>26</sup> "National and ethical realization": Hebrew *hagshamah*. This key word in Schweid's thought is borrowed from early Zionism, which stressed that every idea is tested by whether it can be put into practice in living reality. It occurs frequently in this history in different contexts, as various thinkers had different visions of how the ideas of Jewish thought should be actualized in life.



of modern Jewish thought in the national direction. Like these thinkers, whose thought was discussed in chapter 3 of this volume, Graetz could not be classified as a Zionist thinker, but he stood at the threshold of spiritual Zionism. Indeed, the influence of the positive-historical current of thought in eastern Europe, whether of Frankel or of Graetz, helped bring about the transition—in both the secular Hebrew Haskalah and the moderate religious Haskalah—toward “spiritual Zionism” in both its secular and religious versions.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE DRIVE FOR UNITY IN THE EAST-EUROPEAN HASKALAH AND THE TURN TO ZIONISM

#### *A. Introduction*

The popular-national tendency that was expressed in Frankel's positive-historical halakhic philosophy and in Graetz's philosophy of history was in effect a continuation of the basic nationalist tendency of the Hebrew Haskalah movement in eastern Europe. Frankel and Graetz not only knew Hebrew and used it but insisted on the importance of continuing national creativity in the original national language. They were also appreciative of modern Hebrew literature and recognized the spiritual currents that motivated it. There is thus basis for the conjecture that their world outlook was formed by those currents, as well as for the assumption that their aversion to Reform as a characteristic manifestation of assimilating Jewish society in Germany expressed the east-European national trend of thought in which they had been educated since their youth. In any case, the similarity between their outlooks and the original religious Enlightenment outlook, influenced by Mendelssohn, in eastern Europe was profound, and it went far toward earning the approval of east-European Maskilim to affiliate with that tendency, to resort to its intellectual tools, and to apply it to the parallel yet different reality that was being formed there.

We recall the development of the historical background: a polarized controversy had broken out between Hasidim and Mitnagdim and between both of these versus the Maskilim, whose development we followed in the previous chapters. In the second half of the century, this controversy was to be depicted in the social landscape in terms of hatred and conflict, ostracism, persecution, denouncing to the authorities, or resorting to official censorship to silence one's opponents. Throughout all this, one sensed the threat that the people found themselves in a process of fragmentation, and no movement had a chance of victory either in the internal battle for education and reform of the Jewish society and culture or in the external economic-political battle to insure conditions of physical survival for the people in the face of anti-Semitic policies that became

ever more entrenched on the part of the governments who exploited division, encouraged it, and hoped that they would succeed eventually in forcing the Jews to emigrate.

We saw that the manifestations of communal division between Reform and Orthodoxy (old and new) and the manifestations of severance from the Jewish community through national assimilation stood at the basis of the appearance of the positive-historical movement in Germany. The factor that led to emphasizing the national motif as opposed to religious confrontation was the fear of collapse of the existential basis of Judaism: the historical existence of the people. In the eyes of individuals such as Frankel and Graetz, the manifestations of polar controversy appeared suicidal; to save the situation, they raised the idea of *kelal Yisrael* (the "community of Israel") to the level of the highest principle by which one should measure the legitimacy of different strategies of adaptation to modern reality. But if a movement on behalf of *kelal Yisrael* was necessary in Germany, how much more so in eastern Europe, where factionalization was an everyday collective and individual affliction that was becoming unbearable!

We recall again that in eastern Europe the communities functioned in their traditional form of organization within a total Jewish society, crowded and centralized, constituting a majority in its geographical region. The old communal structures, though declining, still constituted the only representative national body for the government. Only a few rich Jews could live outside it. The Hasidim, Mitnagdim, and Maskilim, in conflict with each other, formed separate cliques, different in their world outlooks and lifestyles, around the synagogues, educational institutions, and spiritual leaderships, but they could not break free of each other either geographically or with respect to their shared communal hierarchy. In these respects they continued to exist not just side-by-side but in each other's hair and faces and continued to carry on the fateful struggle over collective governance of the community, over rabbinic leadership, over methods of education, and above all over enlisting the young to their ways without bringing about the outright split such as occurred in Germany and western Europe at the hands of a non-Jewish society and gentile governmental authorities. This was a daily imbroglio, and it took the form of violent persecution, excommunications, fisticuffs, forced divorces, execrations, and denouncing to the authorities. That is how things were when the polarized controversy broke out between the Hasidim and the Mitnagdim, and that is how they continued in the controversy that erupted between these and the Maskilim.

Not only the webs of interpersonal relations in the community were destroyed in this fashion but also the fabric of family life. Party oppositions divided parents from children and often even young couples who married before it became clear that the groom had changed his worldview. Of course, the ones most affected were those who stood at the point of abandoning the view in which they had been raised from childhood in order to become Hasidim or, later, Maskilim. The powerful pressures exercised by traditional society, as well as the Maskilim's reliance on governmental support, rendered this whole chapter of "apostasy" from one outlook to another, from Torah study to enlightenment, and from one lifestyle to another into a traumatic crisis. Whoever underwent it would be affected by it for the rest of his life. Thus were fed the reservoirs of hatred that justified excesses of zealotry and violence on all sides. Were the conditions not ripe, therefore, for the emergence of spiritual leadership that would take responsibility for the "community of Israel" and try to stop the abysmal deterioration by taking a stand that would be a bridge between the camps?

The existential need was quite pressing, but in the context we have just described, a heroic measure of courage and daring would be required to stand between the contending camps and absorb the jealous reactions of both. Furthermore, the "middle" between the two warring camps, if it had ever existed, had long since been eroded. The centrist leadership would have to emerge from the fringes of the warring camps. We are speaking of individuals who stood on the edge, those who had obsessed but not arrived at a final decision even after affiliating with a given camp and were still capable of empathic understanding of the positions they had to all appearances abandoned. Yet it is clear that a decision was required in order to seek the middle way that amounted to a spiritual transformation involving self-criticism and change of stance—self-examination, even penitence and recantation.

Self-examination was rooted in the recognition that the way they had pursued to this point, even if it was right and convincing from the outset, had failed in the face of the opposition it had engendered. It would be fitting to reexamine the source of the opposition: Was it only the result of the blindness of the opponents, their ignorance and willfulness? Or was there perhaps a grain of truth in the opponents' views and a kernel of blindness, or at least one-sidedness, in their own? Out of such questions it was possible to arrive at the middle ground. It arose from the question of whether the oppositions between the warring camps were perhaps

not as extreme as they appeared from outside. In the last analysis, one was speaking of a quarrel between brothers who had been brought up on the same spiritual heritage, and the crisis they were coping with was the same crisis. They were turning to opposite solutions, but was this enough to destroy their common identity and belonging? The middle ground between the two warring camps could be found only through this process of self-examination and spiritual return. But to where could they return? The basis of the common crisis transcending contradictory ideologies was the feeling of belonging to the people, the feeling of national responsibility and rootedness in a common historical memory. The spiritual readiness to take on the necessary self-examination was most visible among certain exceptional individuals. But in retrospect, they represented the silent majority and became the pathfinders whose influence carried on to the next generation.

The individuals came from three groups: first of all, from the moderate religious Haskalah established by Mendelssohn, Krochmal, and Levinsohn. These sought from the outset a way to preserve the unity of the people by mediating between the ideals of the Enlightenment and the sacred authority of halakha. Second, there were some of the second, radical generation of the Hebrew Haskalah who were forced to reexamine their assumptions about the results of spreading enlightenment among the Jews of eastern Europe in light of the changes of overall governmental policy of the governments toward the Jews. Had their optimistic expectations been realized? Had a genuine chance to improve the condition of the Jews through enlightenment been realized? Or had it perhaps become clear that despite the efforts to educate the younger generation their social-economic and social-moral condition had continued to deteriorate? Had their zealous criticism of Hasidism and the rabbinic leadership improved matters, or had it merely divided the people while accomplishing nothing? Third, some members of the second generation of the rabbinic leadership were ready for self-examination from the opposite direction: Was their obstinate, total opposition to the Haskalah justified? Or did it ignore a vital need, positive in itself, of the younger generation, who had to struggle to maintain itself under new conditions of existence?

The coming together of the conclusions of isolated thinkers, coming from these three camps, helped to bring about the transition to the centrist national way of Zionism in the next generation. Naturally, these also harbored the seeds of controversies to come.

*B. Defense of Hasidism and Halakha from a Maskilic Point of View:  
The Peace Making of Eliezer Zweifel*

The creative activity of the religious Maskilim of the school of Mendelssohn, Krochmal, and Levinsohn continued in the east-European centers of the Haskalah (Galicia, Vienna, and Russia) throughout this entire period. Its outstanding representatives included scholars of Jewish history, halakha, and rabbinic literature, such as Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes, Rabbi Solomon Judah Rapoport, Rabbi Hirsch Mendel Pineles, Samuel Joseph Finn, Saul Phinehas Rabinowitz, and Rabbi Isaac Hirsch Weiss. It also included writers and poets such as Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg and Abraham Dov ("Adam" ha-Kohen) Lebensohn. Their positions on halakha ranged from the Modern Orthodox outlook of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch to the Conservative position of R. Zechariah Frankel, but only rarely did they feel it was incumbent on them to express their views on disputed topics. They also did not feel the need to formulate a detailed program of secular education within a religious framework beyond the founding ideas of Mendelssohn, Levinsohn, and Krochmal or to identify directly with any established movement. Their mediating activity was embodied in their scholarly and literary works, which combined profound traditional Jewish learning, general education, modern scholarly methodology, and unqualified fidelity to halakha.

The only one who deviated from this rule and addressed his research to the active movements within the Jewish people in his age, especially Hasidism, to grapple with the polarized split and bridge it by bringing to light what was common at bottom in the divided views was Eliezer Zevi Ha-Kohen Zweifel (1815–1898). His work *Peace upon Israel* (in four sections, 1868–73) did not in fact bring peace to the House of Israel but sparked a major controversy, especially from the radical Maskilim who saw it as apostasy from Enlightenment principles and even tried to prevent its appearance in print with the help of the Russian censorship. But for that very reason its fame spread, and the book made a major impression. In the end, it brought about a turning point in the attitude of the Maskilim to Hasidism in the next generation.

Zweifel did not present himself as an original theoretical thinker but as a scholar. On the contrary—it would seem that presenting himself as an original thinker would have contradicted his prime purpose: to reveal, through objective research, the common elements of the opposing doctrines and methods that had divided east-European Jewry—Hasidism in

its various branches, the Mitnagdim from the school of R. Elijah of Vilna and his disciple R. Ḥayyim of Volozhin, and the radical Hebrew Enlightenment that had freed itself from halakha. His own position, as a Maskil of the school of Mendelssohn and Krochmal, was embodied in his research, whose objective was to show to the parties of this controversy the true elements of the doctrines and methods against which they were fighting so that they would become convinced that the oppositions were not as vast as they imagined and the polarization was not a necessary fact of existence. Just the opposite—the common elements, found in their fundamental assumptions and their far-off goals, surpassed the differences that broke out in the surface manifestations of the present. It was therefore proper and possible to declare peace and to compromise on a common way.

It was clear in any case that Zweifel devoted himself to research not for its own sake, to increase pure knowledge, but rather with the intent to justify Hasidism in the eyes of its attackers and the halakha in the eyes of its critics, to bridge the extremes and inaugurate peace, as he said explicitly in the title of his book. That being the case, it was clear that he assumed at the outset the findings that he sought in his research, that they consisted mainly of extensive citations from Hasidic sources and some of the better “enlightened” scholars together with a comparative commentary of what was said in these citations, and that his goal was to uncover the common sources for the opposing views and to prove thereby his primary claim.

Zweifel was the son of a traditional scholar who belonged to the Ḥabad Hasidim. His father introduced him to Jewish learning, and he was a Hasid until he became a Maskil—but, it seems, without dimming his love and empathic understanding of Hasidism. He was not attracted to the radical Haskalah but to the moderate religious kind, he was observant of halakha, and he earned his living as a Talmud instructor in the rabbinic academy of Zhitomir. The synthesis that he wished to prove in his book was thus embodied first of all in his personality. Furthermore, his research was based on certain philosophical assumptions concerning the ways of development of religious thought and the essence and function of controversies in the history of thought generally and in Jewish history specifically. He presented them explicitly alongside his deliberation, and their source is clear: the theoretical teachings of Mendelssohn and R. Nachman Krochmal, which he combined and adapted to the case of controversy in his own age so that they would be acceptable to the parties of the controversy on all sides.



From Mendelssohn, Zweifel took the notion of "common sense," according to which all healthy rational beings whose virtue and honesty have not been corrupted by their passions are in basic agreement on basic values, on knowledge based on empirical experience of nature and human society, and on their positive aspirations to bodily, psychological, and spiritual well-being, to be achieved by adhering to truth and morality. From where, then, does controversy between honest thinkers and philosophers whose views aim at the truth, not their personal glory and power, originate? First of all, from differences in viewpoint, rooted in different personal or group experiences. Second, from differences in languages or from differences in the understanding of words in the same language. Differences such as these are liable to lead disputants to interpret each other's views in a distorted or falsifying way, especially if one is dealing with topics of absolute relevance, such as topics of faith and religion. For this reason, the longer the controversy proceeds, the deeper the impression of a contradiction. The disagreement progresses from the understanding of theoretical topics to mutual ethical denunciation of the disputants; rational discussion ceases, and quarrels ensue. It follows that if we cool the flames of rhetorical debate in time and explain to the disputants the manner in which each understands his own views and the other's, it will become clear that the differences are marginal, the disagreements are smaller than the agreements, and it will be possible to reconcile or compromise over them in order to preserve the vital unity of the group even if the differences remain.

Mendelssohn took this path in his book *Jerusalem*. There he sought to explain the essence of the confrontation between Judaism and Christianity and to develop a doctrine of interfaith tolerance. He continued this path in his book *Morning Lessons*. There he sought to portray Spinoza's teaching in a favorable light even though he disagreed with it on several essential issues. It was his intention to prove that Spinoza was far from guilty of the heresy attributed to him. Only human philosophical error that followed from the epistemology prevalent in his time formed this impression in the eyes of his opponents, who did not have a thorough understand of his views. It appears that Zweifel was greatly influenced by Mendelssohn's defense of Spinoza, which had direct relevance for his own agenda. In Spinoza's teaching he found a basis for understanding and peace between the outlooks of the radical Haskalah and Hasidism. But in this connection it is proper to add the influence of Solomon Maimon, who was the first to point out the similarity between Spinoza's pantheism and

the Hasidic teaching of the Baal Shem Tov, as well as the possibility that these two teachings shared a common kabbalistic origin.

From Krochmal, Zweifel adopted the outlook that explains theoretical controversy as a necessary process in the development of cultures, but, in order to avoid offending the ultra-Orthodox, he left out the Hegelian dialectic that was in Krochmal's original version. Following Krochmal, Zweifel distinguished four major periods in the history of Jewish religious thought. Each one saw the birth of new ideological movements that gave new interpretations to ancient sources. Like Krochmal, he determined that the fourth, last period began in the current age and that the disputing factions embodied the debate over the transition from the old to the new.

What caused the transitions from one period to the next? According to Krochmal, it was the dialectic of development: running into difficulties and limitations that require raising human thought gradually from the sensory to the rational level, as Hegel taught. By contrast, Zweifel described the process as a natural phenomenon of "aging." The teachings that were new and exciting at the time they were revealed, inspiring deep intellectual and emotional identification and religious enthusiasm, lose their sense of novelty over time and become routine. They cease to arouse feeling and independent thought. They are accepted in a dogmatic authoritarian manner and leave the heart empty. They need to be given fresh utterance that will arouse the hearts and point to the depths. It follows that the novelty in Zweifel's view is not in its content but in the mode of utterance, in the vitality and power of persuasion that it carries for the present-day community. The content is the same eternal truth that was revealed to our ancestors, transmitted in the self-same pure form from generation to generation.

We see that Zweifel acted in the same fashion toward the outlook that he learned from Krochmal's *Guide for the Perplexed of the Time*. He had no intention of improvising new content, only form. In effect, he adapted Krochmal's historical outlook—which had set Enlightenment thought on a higher theoretical level than Hasidism and Mitnagdism—to Hasidism's view of itself. Rabbinic Judaism had (in this view) declined into formal, rote learning; it had neglected the depths of feeling and the flight of religious thought and was therefore incapable of arousing enthusiasm or of attracting the people. In this way, Zweifel included both Hasidism and the Enlightenment as offering innovation in contrast to views that had flourished among the people in the Middle Ages; and he could include the Vilna Gaon and his disciples in the same category. All these three movements stood together, in his view, at the dawn of the fourth period. In this,

he differed from the radical Haskalah, which saw itself alone as occupying that position. Indeed, these three movements were born at practically the same historical moment, and each offered a fresh perspective to the tradition from which they had originated!

The same applied to the explanation that Zweifel offered to the phenomenon of controversy that characterized the transition from each period to the next. According to Krochmal, this was the necessary result of the dialectic of grappling with the dilemmas and perplexities that human thought encountered when it had exhausted the potential of the prerational stages. They could therefore be solved only through “sublation,” which must appear revolutionary from the perspective of the accepted outlook of the people—an upward jump from a previous level of thought to a higher level. The new outlook born of the synthesis appears continuous with the canonical sources only from the perspective of the innovators, whereas in the eyes of the pious traditionalists it must appear as uprooting the Torah. Zweifel, of course, who came to make peace, omitted this dialectical element. In his view, the controversy between the movements that arise at the end of each period is not the result of revolution and does not lead to revolution. It is required in order to reawaken thought from its dogmatic slumber by looking at old problems from the new standpoint of the coming period. Every one of these movements that arose at the same time is nourished by the same tradition but derives its interpretive stance from one of the new directions that have just been revealed. From this comes the strong controversy. But reason suggests—and historical experience teaches—that when each of these has fulfilled its mission from its own perspective, it will become clear that they do not contradict each other but together comprise the whole picture.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “[quoting R. Simcha Pinsker:] Man by his nature tends toward indolence and stasis as long as nothing happens to him from the outside that forces him to overcome this indolence. . . . Since the Holy Blessed One wanted to make Israel meritorious so that the strength of its religion would change from time to time and renew its youth like an eagle as the time required, and inasmuch as not much was happening from the old religions, which had lost their juices and dried up and drooped from senility, God arranged from time to time for contrary forces to oppose each other, forces that would awaken [Israel’s] inner character to be strong and stand up for its life, until strength should be added to its fighting capacity, and it should flourish again as in ancient times. See the evidence: At the start of the Second Temple, the Torah was tottering. When God saw this, He raised up within the people various sects that came up with new views, disputed the tradition, and availed themselves of Greek wisdom, until, through inner conflict and striving, the Pharisees were forced to become stronger and gather together the received legal traditions until they succeeded in putting all the laws together with the help of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch. They thus saved the Oral Torah from being forgotten. . . . You find a similar phenomenon in our

It was not hard to show on the basis of these assumptions that the quarrel between the Hasidim and the Vilna Gaon and his disciples was the product of misunderstanding born of the extreme, one-sided emphasis on different elements of the age-old Jewish tradition. On the one hand, it was clear to all that the teaching of Hasidism was nourished by the same kabbalistic sources that the Vilna Gaon also relied on. On the other hand, it is easy to demonstrate that, despite Hasidism's emphasis on emotionality and religious spontaneity, it was unreservedly faithful to halakha and there was no basis for the suspicions that the Mitnagdim cast on it in this respect. In the generation of R. Hayyim of Volozhin, who already acknowledged these two points, and from the perspective of Ḥabad Hasidism, which sought amicable relations with the Vilna Gaon and his disciples from the outset, it was very easy to persuade all sides of these areas of common agreement. The Maskilim would agree as well, for the quiescence in the Hasidic–Mitnagdic controversy had become an accomplished fact through the very eruption of their common front against the Enlightenment. It was only left to Zweifel, then, to exhort the Hasidim and Mitnagdim that if they continued their quarrel they would endanger the two elements dearest to their hearts: unity of the Torah, and unity of the people.

But was it possible to arrange peace between the Maskilim and the Hasidim and Mitnagdim in the same way? Zweifel saw rightly that this double-sided problem would be his primary mission and the hardest one: to negotiate peace between the rationalism of the radical Haskalah inspired by Spinoza's teaching, and the mysticism of Hasidism centered on the doctrine of the "tzaddik" who performed miracles—as well as the supremacy of the halakha in the thought of the disciples of the Vilna Gaon. Zweifel devoted the first three sections of his work to the first mission and the fourth section to the second.<sup>2</sup>

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own time, so that, when the Hasidim in Poland sprang up thanks to the Baal Shem Tov, there sprang up also the Maskilim in Germany thanks to Moses Mendelssohn, so that from this inner struggle the religion would be saved from decay and would grow stronger and add strength from both wings. These are the medicines that God creates in every generation to reinforce the health of religion when it is about to falter. If this is so, the creation of these sects is only troublesome in the short term during which they are necessary for the course of events and are beneficial for the ultimate goal of helping the people to achieve enlightenment and prosper." Eliezer Zweifel, *Shalom Al Yisrael* (Peace upon Israel) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1972), 1:55–56.

<sup>2</sup> "Many have complained to me, asking incessantly who twisted my arm that I should be engaged in justifying the ways of Hasidism and turning the tables in favor of it after its judgment—that all traces of it should be banished from our midst and from our memories—

Spinoza's philosophy was the point of origin for Zweifel's grappling with the first mission. As we have said, he drew inspiration from the short words of Solomon Maimon in his autobiography, which was written on the basis of personal experience as a student of the Maggid of Mezhirech in his youth: there was a surprising similarity between the Hasidic teaching of the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples and Spinoza's pantheism. Maimon distanced himself from pantheism. But he expressed appreciation, not only for Spinoza, but also for the teachings that he heard in his youth from the Maggid of Mezhirech, which excited him and contributed to his spiritual development.

As we have said, Zweifel refrained from taking an independent philosophical position. His task was to prove through copious citations from the sources that Maimon's opinion was correct and fully confirmed. Thus he showed in effect that Hasidism and the radical Haskalah were on the same level of spirituality, that they came to respond to the same spiritual crisis in the people, and that, even though they turned in opposite directions with respect to their relation to the sources of the modern Enlightenment, they have a broad common denominator and can make peace after they acknowledge their common origin and come to truly know each other.

The hard problem was to justify the doctrine of the "tzaddik" in Hasidism, his mystical leadership and wonders. The Maskilim saw in this the root of corruption in Jewry and the greatest obstacle on the path to enlightenment in eastern Europe. Zweifel, who was most familiar with the Habad Hasidism from which he came and whose doctrine of the tzaddik was free of miraculous deeds and mass populism, responded to this criticism by pointing to the positive elements of charismatic Hasidic leadership. He was the first of the scholars of Hasidism to see how the doctrine of the tzaddik answered to the crisis of leadership and the spiritual and social tribulations of the people. Indeed, the Haskalah had come to cope with these same tribulations, but it saw them from a different perspective and emphasized different needs.

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was signed and sealed? So it had been decided in the courts of the Mitnagdim and so also in the academies of the proponents of modern sciences. Whoever had second thoughts about these condemnations, all the more anyone who decreed the opposite, had separated himself from the community and was at odds with his teachers and friends. It was impossible for him to escape and defend himself against defamation and suspicion of hypocrisy, of taking a willful position and defying his teachers, of prostituting the truth for monetary gain or imaginary honor or hoped-for objective. It is to give a thoughtful and proper answer to these well-formulated and urgent questions that I now turn." *Ibid.*, 2:13.

Zweifel acknowledged that Hasidism ignored the need for general education that the Maskilim saw as primary. But the Maskilim, for their part, ignored certain social and spiritual aspects that Hasidism dealt with successfully. As the Hebrew Maskilim were nationalists, it was proper that they should recognize Hasidism's contribution to the social and spiritual life of the people instead of attacking it with mockery and enmity. Since the influence of Hasidism among the people was greater than that of the Maskilim, it was clear that the positive way to persuade the people through enlightened thinking would be more useful since enlightenment in itself posed no contradiction to Hasidic teaching. As for the negative phenomena that were manifest in the established leadership of Hasidism's "tzaddikim," Zweifel acknowledged that in the third generation after the Baal Shem Tov corruptions crept in that were not present in the first two generations. The Maskilic critique was right with respect to these corruptions. They surely could stand to be corrected. But this is no reason to disqualify the charismatic leadership of the "tzaddikim," which was basically positive and had proved its usefulness to the people.

As the disciples of the Vilna Gaon, who were opponents of Hasidism, based themselves on the kabbalistic sources and as one could find in the position of the Vilna Gaon an opening to halakhic legitimization for general education in natural science and the humanities, it would appear that the elements of peace that Zweifel proposed between the Maskilim and the Hasidim would be valid also for peace between the Maskilim and the Mitnagdim, perhaps even more so. But here Zweifel's mission of peace encountered its toughest obstacle, on the issue of halakha.

This was a problem not just for the Maskilim's relation to the Mitnagdim but also for their relation to the Hasidim, whose fidelity to halakha was not less than that of the Mitnagdim. Peace between the Maskilim and the Orthodox could take place only if the radical Hebrew Maskilim accepted the position of the moderate religious Haskalah toward halakha and rested content with adaptations and necessary reforms that one could arrive at through accepted halakhic procedures. Zweifel's mission was thus to persuade the radical Maskilim, disciples of Spinoza, of two things: (1) the halakha itself is enlightened and possesses the proper tools to reform what needs reforming in the way of communal governance, society, and education; and (2) their own outlook provides sufficient reason to make peace with halakha and with the rabbinic leadership and to accept its rule.

The discussion in the fourth part of *Peace upon Israel* was devoted to defending the halakha to the Maskilim in both these respects. One can easily see that Zechariah Frankel's positive-historical philosophy of halakha was as if made to order for this purpose. Zweifel recognized, of course, that one could not persuade the Hebrew Maskilim, disciples of Spinoza, to accept the assumption (which was accepted by Frankel and by the moderate religious Haskalah generally) that one should accept the Written and Oral Torah as the revelation of the Legislator-God's will. But he could argue, based on their national consciousness and thus on their ability to understand (even according to Spinoza), that accepting the halakha as "revealed Torah" was a politically necessary belief for the survival of the Jewish people, even in the modern period.

On the basis of Frankel's researches in halakha and on the basis of the positive-historical outlook on the relation between the Torah and the people, Zweifel thus offered a defense of the halakha from the national-democratic perspective of the Maskilim. On the same basis, he sought to persuade them that, as nationally minded individuals of a democratic disposition, they were obligated to accept the Written and Oral Torah, if not as God's will, then as the will of the Jewish people with whom they should compromise. Similarly, they were obligated to accept the authority of the existing rabbinic leadership as a condition of the unity of the people and its very existence. If only they could thus succeed in persuading this leadership, most of whom truly had the welfare of the people at heart, to find the necessary halakhic solutions to adapt to the modern times!

*C. Relation of Religion and Nation in Judaism and the Way to Spiritual Zionism: The Peregrinations of Peretz Smolenskin's Thought*

The Hebrew writer and thinker Peretz Smolenskin (1840/42–1885) did not offer a settled theory in his writings. In his great stories and his broad-ranging publicistic articles, he dealt with the arguments of philosophers and strove for solutions on their level of thought but never arrived at a coherent overall system. This was the result of the lack of an orderly, systematic education (like most east-European Maskilim who left the yeshiva, Smolenskin was an autodidact who drew his general education from wide but unsystematic reading) and perhaps also his tendency to express himself through narrative. But the primary factor was his writing, which was yoked to the events of the time and their permutations and



which, out of a sense of the mission of the Hebrew writer to be “a lookout for the House of Israel,” needed to warn of impending calamities and to instruct the way on the questions of unfolding life.<sup>3</sup>

The successive historical upheavals that followed from rapid and extreme changes in the frameworks of the collective organizations, the conditions of economic and political existence, the fabric of interpersonal life, and (as a matter of course) the assessment of chances for the future repeatedly uncovered different aspects of reality that demanded a coping response. Almost annually it was necessary to take a new stance out of one’s general reevaluation of reality. Prior assumptions proved mistaken; previous distinctions reappeared from another, surprising perspective and took on a different significance; and it was clear that new conclusions sought practical application. As a result of all this, Smolenskin’s path appears as a surprising journey of successively changing positions that caused contradictions in thought between his earlier and his later essays.

Nevertheless, one should not see this as evidence of inconsistency in his thought. Just the opposite—from the standpoint of national responsibility that he took on himself as a Hebrew writer, Smolenskin was faithful to his single consistent goal: preserving the unity of the people on the basis of its nationality or preserving the national unity of the people on the basis of the broad common denominator that unified it. The changes that occurred in his positions in response to changing questions that arose on the Jewish people’s general agenda stemmed from the necessity to derive practical conclusions from theoretical considerations. He needed to encompass the situation of the entire people—to examine closely what was happening in all the great centers of Judaism in central, western, and eastern Europe. He did this from the lookout station that he established in Vienna. From there he followed incessantly the developments that occurred in the intramural Jewish conversation and in the struggles for emancipation, and he would take a position that had the unity of Jewry as its basis. This was a continuing and profound self-examination whose objective was to discover the main lines that were apt to remain stable and provide unity through a time of transformations. This self-examination indeed brought him by gradual stages to recant his original position—that of a Hebrew Maskil who rebelled against religion in the

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of Smolenskin’s career and literary output, see Joseph Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1959), 5:15–268 and Charles Freundlich, *Peretz Smolenskin, His Life and Thought* (New York: Bloch, 1965).

name of his individual human freedom—and to return to Jewish religion, but from the national perspective, while substantially changing the definition both of nationality and of religion.

Smolenskin's national perspective was rooted from the outset in the legacy of the radical Hebrew Haskalah. He was not original in seeing the national essence of Judaism as a historical fact that was not in need of proof. Nor did he invent the problem that followed from this assertion, taking various forms depending on the current agenda: What was the relation between Jewish nationality and Jewish religion? But he discovered that the distinctions, definitions, and connections that he received at the outset from his fellow Maskilim, disciples of the school of Spinoza, seemed less than certain, or at any rate insufficient, for the reality of his age.

Faced with the rising tide of assimilation in western and central Europe and of division and alienation in eastern Europe, Smolenskin arrived at the same realization that Zweifel had arrived at earlier: the radical critique of Jewish religion, whether on the part of assimilationist Reformers or national Spinozists, had achieved only negative results without advancing the national objectives that had been promised by the Enlightenment. He was also convinced that, in order to advance the national interest of the people as a whole, one should desist from critique of religion and unite the people on a broad common national platform. But how was the national common denominator to be found if some portions of the people (Reform, and both Modern and ultra-Orthodoxy) rejected the national definition of Judaism and replaced it with a purely religious definition while another portion (the Spinozist Maskilim) rejected the religious definition and put a national definition in its place?

Was one to infer, then, that there was no common denominator? Smolenskin rejected such a conclusion out of hand. Historical reality testified that, despite the many divisions and despite their geographic dispersal, the Jews constituted and still constitute a single collective entity with prominent national characteristics. On the other hand, it was equally evident that the Judaism that unified them as a collective entity was something that could be intrinsically defined as having prominent religious characteristics. As one could not refute "history"—which Smolenskin viewed through the prism of Graetz's historiographic work—he arrived at the conclusion (following Graetz) that in the case of Judaism the definitions of nationality and religion, as well as determining the connections between them, were more complex than preceding thinkers, basing themselves on the accepted principles of the national philosophy of the peoples of Christian Europe, had supposed. This was a nationality of a

unique kind that withstood the test of dispersion and exile through its spiritual powers. In order to arrive at a decisive solution, one must reopen the discussion afresh and examine more closely the components of spiritual nationality.

The theoretical question was: Was it possible to draw a line between the national element and the religious element in order to preserve the Jewish identity of the national Jews on the one hand and the religious Jews on the other and yet still find a common denominator between nationality and religion that would reunite them as a single collective entity? The strange paradox was that for the sake of unity it was necessary both to separate out religion from nationality but also to combine the two. To solve it, one needed to reformulate the question in more complex fashion: To what extent was it possible and to what extent impossible to separate them in order to reveal the common denominator underlying the two elements, each of which was seized by this or that movement and represented as Judaism in its entirety? But one had to emphasize again that it was not a purely theoretical question that could be deliberated with philosophical calm. The winds raged, and the distinctions cut like knives in raw flesh. Smolenskin's essays were written in prophetic heat, fraught with strong emotions that weighed heavily on his consistent logical clarity, but they heightened the influence of his ideas on his reading public and energized the public debate.

Smolenskin began to seek his way as a Hebrew writer in his long narrative works, especially his first autobiographical novel, which made his mark as one of the chief spokesmen of the radical Haskalah: *The Wanderer in the Paths of Life*.<sup>4</sup> In it, he described how he struggled and wrestled—from his childhood in a Hasidic household and youth in a yeshiva, through his leaving the yeshiva and wandering in various walks of the Jewish world, until he acquired general education and achieved status as a Hebrew writer. The narrative documents the way of life of a typical east-European Hebrew Maskil whose traumatic conflict with his parents' household and yeshiva led to alienation from the religious way of life. Nevertheless, his education within the community, in his home and yeshiva, formed his identity and gave him a sense of belonging as a Jew rooted in his national culture, putting a stamp on his sense of self that he refused to give up.

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<sup>4</sup> Peretz Smolenskin, *Ha-to'eh be-darkhei ha-ḥayyim* (The Wanderer in the Paths of Life) (Vienna: G. Brag, 1881).

The descriptions of the east-European Jewish life world in *The Wanderer in the Paths of Life* are quite negative and critical of the despotic norms of rabbinic halakha and fanatical Hasidic belief, especially in their campaign against the “heretical” Maskilim. In this respect, there was no difference between Smolenskin’s descriptions and those of the poet Judah Leib Gordon, his great contemporary, with whom he would argue later on in his career. He did not show any positive points in the religious lifestyle that he knew from his life experience. In his last novel, *A Donkey’s Burial*, the negative picture was even more extreme. The rabbis and Talmudic scholars are depicted as tyrannical clerics in the style of Voltaire.

The “wanderer” was thus thrust out of the community in which he grew up and was educated. He sought another Jewish group, another focus for his sense of belonging, but he did not find it in the West. The novel ends when the hero is still wandering. But despite this, it never occurs to him to sever ties with his people and seek another identity. On the contrary—when he encounters the assimilation of Western Jews, he is repelled by it. It appears to him—as it appeared to Graetz—a betrayal. Smolenskin’s critique here anticipates Aḥad Ha-Am’s famous essay, “Slavery in Freedom.”

This explains the narrator’s obvious loyalty to the Hebrew language. This is the only language in which he can express himself authentically. When he told his story in it, he expressed his national identity and felt that its power, rooted in its ancient sources, stood the test of his negative relation to religion. It thus became for him the positive element of Judaism that he refused to give up, and it seemed that even if he was left “wandering” at the end of his story the hope was already strong in him that writing in Hebrew would be the way to the home that he would have to build for himself out of the materials of his culture, but different than it now stood. In other words: the solution to which Smolenskin alluded through the very writing of his story would be modern Hebrew literature. It would develop as a whole national literature, and it would be the basis for a modern Jewish national culture.

We should not be surprised, therefore, that he proposed, in the first article that Smolenskin published after *The Wanderer in the Paths of Life*, the revival of the Hebrew language and its literature as the only way to preserve the continuity of the national life, despite the rift between the generations and the parties.<sup>5</sup> The mission of the Hebrew Maskil, according

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<sup>5</sup> “The objective of *Ha-Shaḥar* will be to spread light on the paths of the children of Jacob, to open the blind eyes that have not seen the light of wisdom and do not understand

to this article, was to revive the language by reviving its secular national literature. For this purpose, he founded the journal *Ha-Shaḥar* ("The Dawn") in Vienna in 1869. From that time on, he published all his writings in it, together with the circle of important Hebrew writers to whom he accorded his literary hospitality. *Ha-Shaḥar* marked the dawning of the new Hebrew culture.

But the dialectical tension that he revealed in *The Wanderer in the Paths of Life* between the Hebrew Maskil's alienation from exilic Jewish religion and his resolute identification with Jewish national culture and language, whose roots in ancient sources were camouflaged by the exilic religion, was neither broken nor resolved. It led Smolenskin beyond the well-trod Maskilic path, which had determined his separation but now appeared simplistic and insufficient, to examining the inner relation between Jewish nationality and religion as two separate components but with the same spiritual root.

The first step was the discovery that nationality separates and alienates itself from religion when it not only divides the people in the present but with its own hands cuts the roots that nourish it from its sources in the past. This discovery came to expression in the first wide-ranging theoretical essay that Smolenskin published in *Ha-Shaḥar* in 1871 under the title "The Eternal People." Each of the three long essays that he published, one after the other, in *Ha-Shaḥar* had a polemical focus. The first was part of the continuing debate with Reform. It was addressed to a recent event: the development that took place on that front following the synod of Reform rabbis that met in Leipzig in 1869.

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its worth, to increase the glory of the Hebrew language and increase its supporters.... What good can the Hebrew language do for us? ... It will give us honor and power, it will provide the connecting link by which we can reclaim the name of Israel.... Let us not be ashamed of the source from which we were hewn. Let us hold precious our language and our people's honor! There is no shame or reproach to us in the faith that an end will come to our exile, that a day will come and sovereignty will return to the house of Israel, just as other nations who anticipate redeeming themselves from foreign rule feel no shame in doing so. Our faces will not blanch if we hold fast to the old language, which accompanied us from land to land, in which our poets and visionaries sang when they dwelt in tranquility and security on their land, and in which they spilled out their hearts like water to thousands of our ancestors while their blood was spilled like water in the light of the sun.... The language will stand fast in the strongholds of the nation, and if it falls into oblivion, then the memory of our nation will also perish entirely from the face of the earth." Peretz Smolenskin, "Opening Word," *Hashaḥar* (The Dawn) (1868), l:iii-vi).

The synod expressed a turning point and was widely acclaimed among Jews both because of its international scope (including rabbis from several countries in addition to Germany) and its ideological shift. In both respects, it seemed that the Reform movement had started to turn from its divisive extremism toward the center in order to preserve the unity of the Jewish community. The general tendency perceived at the Leipzig synod was thus a turn from the radical direction of Abraham Geiger toward that of the “positive-historical” movement. Indeed, the most dramatic change that was decided on was a temporizing resolution on the status of prayer and preaching in Hebrew as the holy language. It followed that the leadership of the Reform movement was forced to acknowledge the justice of its critics to some extent: the previous reforms had rendered the Jewish content that it imparted to its members, particularly to the younger generation, shallow and imitative. It had so severed the connection with its ancient sources that it was in danger of becoming like a new religion unless it reversed course and reformed its reforms.

In his essay “The Eternal People,” Smolenskin took his cue from Reform’s new direction and sought to pursue it to its logical conclusion—first of all, for the Reform movement itself, which had not in his view taken the decisive step of complete return to the Jewish national idea. But he also wanted to point to the moral for the extreme Haskalah of the Spinozists, who had followed Geiger in their attitude toward halakha though they remained loyal to Jewish nationalism. Smolenskin attacked the old “Geiger” brand of Reform in a Hebrew article in order to awaken his Maskilic reading public to the same kind of self-examination in relation to their national-cultural sources.

If the Reform leaders felt in the end that their alienation from halakha had gone too far, to the point of tearing up their roots in the spiritual sources of Judaism and effacing their religious identity, then the extreme Hebrew Maskilim ought to examine whether their critique of halakhic religion had severed their roots from the essential sources of Jewish spirituality so that the national identity to which they clung—just as Geiger’s disciples had clung to their religious identity—was schismatic, shallow, imitative of gentile culture, and without staying power.

Where had Geiger erred, according to Smolenskin? His great sin, according to the nationalist thinker, was of course the decision to assimilate into the gentile nationalities by denying the national character of Judaism itself. The result, apparent a generation later, shows that the sin against Jewish nationality was also a sin against the religiosity that Geiger apparently wanted to retain. The Western Reform leaders now perceived

the error, but they should pursue the self-examination to completion. Geiger's error was that he considered Jewish nationality in comparison with gentile nationality. Thus he arrived at the conclusion that the Emancipation required Jews to give up their national existence. He did not consider what Graetz understood: this was a different kind of nationality, a spiritual nationality, which could not be separated from Jewish religion without depriving it of its soul.

Reform thus ought to return to the original Jewish idea of nationality in order to fully correct its mistake.<sup>6</sup> We should emphasize here that Smolenskin was still far from Zionism, and his demand to return to the Jewish national idea did not in his view necessitate giving up emancipation in the gentile lands. Here, too, he followed Graetz. This line of reasoning had similar implications for the Hebrew Haskalah in its fight against religion, in the name of nationalism. The primal error was the same: not understanding that Jewish nationality was spiritual, so that uprooting it from its spiritual sources would empty it of its content. The conclusion to draw was clear: beyond nationalism in its political sense (on the analogy of gentile nationalism) and beyond "religion" in its halakhic or dogmatic and ritual sense (which is indeed distinct from political nationalism), there is a broader source from which both derive. If one uproots them from that source, they both become emptied of their content and effaced, like two dry shells separated from their fruit.

We thus arrive at the key new idea of the essay "Eternal People." Smolenskin sought to uncover the source in which Jewish spirituality was embodied, in which Jewish nationality and religion were blended in the root that transcended them: the Torah, both written and oral, which was renewed in every generation. Cutting oneself off from the Torah as a source that obligated and formed one's identity was cutting oneself off from the history of the Jewish people and from their national culture. But

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<sup>6</sup> "Since religion in Israel is the one bond that binds and unites the heart of Jews together in all their lands of residence, we must therefore consider it not only as an institution of faith but as [the equivalent of] land, state, language, and all the other bonds that draw together the hearts of other nations to make them a unified people. For this reason, in our desire to enact reforms, let us not lay a hand on any of its foundations, so that we do not undermine the entire building, in which case there will not remain any future or name for this people. We would then be betraying not only the faith but also the entire nation. We are under obligation to approach this task with the utmost love and affection." Peretz Smolenskin, *'Am 'Olam* (The Eternal People), in *Ma'amarim* (Essays) (Jerusalem: Keren Smolenskin, 1925), 1:33. "The Eternal People" comprises pages 1–162 of volume 1 of this 4-volume set of Smolenskin's essays, and is summarized in Freundlich, *Peretz Smolenskin, His Life and Thought*.



it was a mistake to restrict the Mosaic Torah to a worldly political constitution, as Spinoza and his disciples had done. By the same token, it was a mistake to restrict the Oral Torah to a "religion" in the sense of a legalistic *Shulḥan Arukh*, as the Orthodox had done, or to an ecclesiastical dogma and ritual, as Geiger and his disciples had done. The Torah as the source of the Jewish nationality and religion was forever more than nationality in the political sense, more than religion in the halakhic or the dogmatic-ritual sense. In this "more"—the creative essence of Torah, expressed in the people's creative historical life—nationality and religion are combined. Orthodoxy thus sinned by restricting the Torah to the authoritarian *Shulḥan Arukh*; Reform sinned by reducing the Torah to a religion in the ecclesiastical sense; and the Haskalah sinned by restricting the Torah to a political framework. It follows that all of the movements that held on, each to its own dried shell, could come back together if they returned to their common creative source in the Torah.<sup>7</sup>

Smolenskin did not specify his sources, but it seems clear that he followed Graetz in defining the spiritual character of Jewish nationality, its historical basis, and its ethical and religious content. But he developed Graetz's outlook and derived a content whose source was in the philosophically richer historiosophic doctrine of R. Nachman Krochmal. In this spirit, he coined the explicit distinction between "Torah" in the sense of a national culture whose unifying and evolving idea is the belief in the

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<sup>7</sup> "From all that I have said so far we have seen that the spirit of life that has sustained the people of Israel in every age has been the Torah. In time of trouble it encouraged them to bear and suffer; in good times it aided them to unite the heart of a people scattered to the ends of the earth. If they did not all understand it, they nevertheless trusted in it and relied on it. For the Torah is not like the religions of other nations, prescribing exclusive rule of priests and reducing the people to sheep without a voice. Rather it is a teaching that is taught to the entire people, in which everyone may express his opinion. . . . Whoever is well versed in it may contribute to adding and subtracting, changing and renewing it." *Ibid.*, 157–58. This idea is expressed even more vividly in "A Time to Plant": "[God] separated us originally from all peoples and gave us the life of the spirit in His Torah, which He put before us as the choice jewel of the entire nation. He chose a people who were inured to exile and wanderings, for only such a people could be God's messenger whom God would send to all the nations to convert them, to carry His message to all of them in clear speech in the name of the One God, the God of spirit. From the outset He said to them, for all the world to hear, that it shall be *your life and the length of your days—this Torah*, not the faith and not the laws, but the Torah itself would give this people length of life; it is the source of this nation's vitality. This source will not dry up and its waters will never cease, for it is not a material thing like the source of vitality of the other nations; it is not a material thing that could change its face and pass away and vanish from the earth, but it is a spirit, and the people is founded on spirit, and the spirit will never perish." Smolenskin, *Et Lata'at* (A Time to Plant), in *Ma'amarim*, 2:26.

“unity” requiring realization in the full life pattern of the people, versus “halakha” in the technical, institutionalized sense of “religion” or “law” on the one hand or dogma and ritual on the other hand. In this way he was released from the confusions of separation and unification between nationality and religion in order to propose the platform that would allow for unity.

The second essay, “A Time to Act,” was intended to apply the pedagogical and creative conclusions that followed from the first essay. The primary message was the expression of anxiety from the processes of breakup and disintegration that had taken hold of the people and the urgent need for corrective pedagogical action. It was especially crucial to focus energies on creating an original Hebrew literature that would grapple in a positive way with the requirements of the present in all areas of life, one that would prove itself a worthy continuation of the Torahitic corpus by adapting it to the needs and style of the modern age. The unifying thread would find embodiment, in Smolenskin’s view, through the positive renewal of the national creative power in its own language.<sup>8</sup> These ideas were simply filling out the argument of “The Eternal People” without revising it substantially.

But the third, concluding essay, “A Time to Plant” (1875), signified a more profound ideological transition in Smolenskin’s self-examination addressed to the radical Haskalah from which he had started his journey. The general historical background was the influence of Germany’s *Kulturkampf* on their relation to the extreme advocates of Emancipation in Germany as well as in eastern Europe.<sup>9</sup> In Germany, the Jewish

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<sup>8</sup> “We have no other way to turn except by first taking hold of the Hebrew language and seeking wholeheartedly to teach it to the whole people to the extent of their ability: (1) Because the precepts of our faith were written in that language, and since the entire people are the priests who are responsible for maintaining the faith, it is incumbent on them to know it. (2) If they do not know the Torah, then every glory seeker will see fit to add whatever occurs to him, and the people will be too ignorant to see through him because they will not have a proper understanding of the matter. (3) Only in this language will we be able to address all the Jewish people in the lands of their dispersion; otherwise, each will write and teach matters of Torah and faith in the language of his own country, and the people of Israel will be split apart by their lands of residence and never reunite, and the Torah itself will become a hundred Torahs. (4) Studying Torah is as important for Israel as keeping the laws, and it is even more important because keeping them is only an outward action of the body, whereas study is in thought and strengthens the spirit.” Smolenskin, *Et La’asot* (A Time to Act), in *Ma’amarim*, 1:175–76.

<sup>9</sup> In Germany, there was a political “center” party that by and large represented the interests of German Catholics. Bismarck led a campaign (the *Kulturkampf*—“cultural battle”) to reduce the power and autonomy of German Catholics in the name of national

diplomat Eduard Lasker offered a legal proposal according to which Jews who wished to do so might separate from the general community and establish a dissenting community (1873). In eastern Europe, the influential poet Judah Leib Gordon (1830–1892) wrote a sharp satirical attack not only against religion and halakha but against the Torah and its values generally.<sup>10</sup>

It would appear that Gordon was continuing the satirical attack on Hasidism that had been conducted by writers such as Perl and Erter, as well as the theoretical attack against rabbinic Judaism of scholars such as Schorr.<sup>11</sup> But although Gordon affirmed that Judaism was national in its essence, his attack on religion went beyond the standard nationalist version and preached for the normalization of Jewish life through complete secularization—identifying with the universal worldly ideals of Western culture and commingling completely with the “general” society that realized these ideals.

From Smolenskin’s viewpoint, two themes in Gordon’s polemical outlook stood out in particular. First, he attacked not only rabbinic halakha but also the apolitical religious morality of the prophets. He saw in them the dismantlers of the Jewish state, and he blamed them for the sin of going forth into exile. Why so? Because they deflected the people from the worldly ideals to which every natural nation was attached in favor of a spiritual, transcendent service of God that lured people away from the real world and cut them off from nature and from natural life. The prophets strove to subjugate the people under the “yoke of the heavenly kingdom.” In Gordon’s eyes, this was the root of the halakhic tyranny that was developed by the Sages and rabbis up to the present day. He thus

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unity. Naturally, there were parallels to be drawn between the situation of Catholics in Germany and the situation of Jews in Germany, Russia, or Austria—any of the multinational empires of central and eastern Europe.

<sup>10</sup> The controversy was sparked by the publication of Gordon’s satirical poem “*Barburim Avusim*” (Fatted Geese) in *Ha-Melitz* (March 21, 1870). In the poem, a woman buys a pair of geese in the winter and fattens them up so that by spring she can make them the centerpiece of her Passover feast. But they have a red mark on their necks, on account of which the examining rabbi speculates that they had suffered an internal injury for which in his view they must be declared not kosher. “The poor woman went out with her hands on her head / For her joy and happiness were banished. / Do not grieve, poor woman with many children / That the rabbis’ cruelty has deprived you / Of the food of your mouth on Pesach eve! / Many other sources are open to you / You and your children can beg at the doorways / Jews are merciful children of merciful parents!” Judah Leib Gordon, “*Barburim Avusim*” (Fatted Geese), in *Kol Kitvei Yehuda Leb Gordon: Shirim* (All the Writings of Judah Leib Gordon: Poems) (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1956), 246.

<sup>11</sup> On Perl and Erter, see above, chap. 3, p. 120, note 10. On Schorr, see above, pp. 125–27.

accepted in effect Hegel's view of Jewish emancipation: their redemption was conditional not only on their liberation from halakha but also from the corrupt spiritual essence at its root, namely, from the very faith and Torah with which Smolenskin sought to unite his people.

Second, the way to correct what was wrong in the people's life in exile was in Gordon's view complete immersion in secular Western culture, which he presented as the universal culture that realized the human ideal. Jewish identity in his view should remain an internalized feeling of national belonging that was to be expressed only in the private sphere, in the family. In his famous programmatic poem "Awake, My People!" (published in 1863), Gordon summarized his view in the slogan that was adopted by the radical Haskalah in Russia: "Be a man in your going out and a Jew in your tent!"<sup>12</sup>

Of course, to Smolenskin these views seemed even more extreme and dangerous than Reform. This was an attempt to undermine the Jewish fortress entirely, by total abandonment of even the last remaining shells of Judaism as "religion" or cultural-national framework. This led him in turn to a more extreme and comprehensive reaction. This time his reappraisal took on not only the Reform critique of halakha à la Geiger but even the founding philosophy of the Halakha movement, to which he attributed the root of the evil—the teaching of Moses Mendelssohn, father of the Jewish Enlightenment and in this respect also the founding father of all the modern movements in Judaism.

Smolenskin's comprehensive attack on Mendelssohn sparked a fierce and stormy debate. This time a Maskil had arisen and attacked the Haskalah from within, as its Orthodox detractors had attacked it from without, as if the betrayal of Judaism were to be blamed on it, from both the religious and the national standpoints. The furious reaction prompted Smolenskin to retreat somewhat and moderate his critique. Clearly he had not intended to condemn the Enlightenment as such. He remained a Maskil who valued openness to international culture and worldly values. His critique was substantially different from the Orthodox critique. But his self-distancing and his indictment of the first philosophy that

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<sup>12</sup> "Every person of understanding among you should learn wisdom / Workers and craftsman of every industrial skill / The courageous of heart should serve in the army / Farmers should purchase fields and ploughs. / Bring your wealth to the treasury of the state / And from its goods take your proper share / Be a man in your going out and a Jew in your tent / A brother to your fellow citizens and servant to your king." Judah Leib Gordon, "Hakitzza Ami" (Awake, My People), in *Kol Kitvei Yehuda Leb Gordon: Shirim*, 17.

determined the ways of applying the ideal of enlightenment within the Jewish people remained in place.

Smolenskin voiced three indictments of Mendelssohn's Jewish philosophy. First, it abandoned at the outset the national definition of Judaism and defined it as only a religion.<sup>13</sup> Second, it created the artificial distinction between the "man" as an individual who was required to integrate as such in the general national culture around him on the basis of universal human culture, and the "Jew" who must express his collective identity within the private sphere of his family and religious community (as expressed in Gordon's slogan, "Be a man in your going out and a Jew in your tent!").<sup>14</sup> Third, it was Mendelssohn who identified Jewish religiosity with religious law, depriving it of the content of belief by interpreting the latter in terms of universal reason.<sup>15</sup>

At a first critical glance, it would seem that, given Mendelssohn's actual words, the first two indictments were baseless. He had not even entertained the possibility of differentiating between religion and nationality in Judaism. In his writings, he used the word *Nation* in speaking of the Jews as a collective entity, without any qualification. The reason is clear. Mendelssohn did not suggest giving up the existing Jewish communities or propose a purely religious form of organization to replace them. Nor did he give up the principle of Jewish ethnic identity—their continuous existence as a people. Therefore, it did not occur to him to differentiate between the "Jew" and the "man." If indeed he based his doctrine of tolerance on the distinction between values held in common by all human beings and values based on a particular identity, he assumed at the same time that every individual and every human group unites these two sets of values—the general and the particular—in a single rubric; thus he did not deduce that Jews would have to hide their Jewish identity when appearing

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<sup>13</sup> " 'Israel is not a nation, it is only a religious confraternity. . . .' This view began to gain currency among Jews in the days of Mendelssohn, and it has now put the alternative view in the background." Smolenskin, "*Et Lata'at*" (A Time to Plant), *Ma'amarim*, 2:9–10.

<sup>14</sup> "He set his heart on only one thing, namely, to improve his private condition, as many before him had sought, and the only way that they could achieve this objective—they all agreed—was to become Germans in every respect. . . . But if someone will propose to destroy his ancestral home, the estate that he inherited, in order *perhaps* to build afterward a new house, this is a great folly and evil." *Ibid.*, 69–70.

<sup>15</sup> "If Judaism is defined as law, we are slaves not only to the *Shulḥan Arukh* but to every law laid down. It will increase hatred and division. . . . They are not to blame for this but rather the first teacher who set out to teach that Israel is dependent only on laws, whom we may rightly call by name. The first who enunciated this lofty view is Mendelssohn." *Ibid.*, 2:31–32.

as men-at-large in the public square. He only argued that the particular collective values that distinguish various groups within humanity are subjective and are not a matter for debate, as long as they do not contradict universal values.

Nevertheless, one may discover the basis for Smolenskin's indictment if one examines all three critical claims together from the perspective of his own spiritual Jewish nationalism. First, one can comment on the tension created in fact in Mendelssohn's personal example between his identification as a Jew and as a human being—and as a German. Indeed he did not conceal his Jewish identity when he appeared personally in the German public square. But the same cannot be said of most of his philosophical work, in which he strove to appear as a German writer, identifying with his German nationality and with the universal values of humanity. In this area, he gave no intentional expression to the Jewish aspect of his outlook.

Furthermore, he never developed a philosophical evaluation of Judaism. His book *Jerusalem* was written under duress. He acted on an intentional policy that differentiated between his universal arena of expression as a "man" and the particular arena of expression as a "Jew," which he kept hidden in the sanctum of his "tent." Moreover, when he expressed himself in the universal arena as a "man," he identified without reservation with the German nationality, not only by writing in German for a German public but also by displaying a proud German patriotism. (It was Mendelssohn who dared to criticize the Prussian King Frederick II for publishing his poems in French, not in German!)

More still. On the basis of his doctrine of tolerance, Mendelssohn hoped that the German nation-state would accept Judaism and Christianity as two legitimate religions within it, that is to say, within a national framework. It follows that in effect he was defining Judaism as a "religion" without distinct national characteristics, like Christianity. By doing so, he pointed the way to assimilation within the surrounding universal national culture in matters beyond the domain of religion (now defined as *halakha*); thus he can rightly be regarded as the father of the Reform advocacy of assimilation.

These assertions, which could be deduced in retrospect from Mendelssohn's conduct as a German writer "of the Mosaic persuasion," received explicit expression in his identifying Judaism's uniqueness as a religion based on "revealed legislation." As such, it was eternally obligatory. But at the same time, he asserted that the values that it put into applied form were the universal values of humanism. Thus he became the father of

Orthodoxy, as well as of the radical Haskalah that criticized it on the basis of humanism.

But from Smolenskin's perspective, the most serious sin that was concealed behind his conception of Judaism as a religion was this: by identifying the values of the Torah as humanism, he turned them from the source of Judaism's uniqueness into the source of universal humanistic culture, to which Judaism had contributed and into which it was destined to assimilate. Thus he turned the Torah into a way of identifying with humanity and with enlightened German nationalism. Only the halakhic aspect of religion continued to differentiate him as a Jew.

All this is attested clearly by the rationalistic interpretation that Mendelssohn gave to the affirmations of faith in the Torah. We thus come to explaining the third and most important indictment, from Smolenskin's perspective, which enabled him to develop more deeply the concept of Torah as the source of Judaism's national-spiritual uniqueness and to give it theoretical and practical content.

Smolenskin's critique of Mendelssohn in this regard recalls that of Friedrich Jacobi in Mendelssohn's lifetime: rationalism and faith do not sit well together. Whoever accepts human reason as the only criterion of truth has left no room for faith. Every rational validation of faith turns it into scientific knowledge, thus effacing its distinctive character.

Indeed, it is instructive that Smolenskin accepted Spinoza's definition of faith, which drew a sharp distinction between it and knowledge: Faith applies only to that which is beyond the boundaries of human sensory and intellectual knowledge, and as such it falls in the domain of creative imagination and emotional experience. But unlike Spinoza, who discounted faith's truth value because of its irrationality, Smolenskin saw it as an expression of inner truth. It was indeed subjective, but it strove toward the absolute that was above human reason, and this was both its truth value and its unique subjective value. On the other hand, it was proper that a human being should be conscious of the limits of his rational awareness and to attribute it to what was beyond his knowledge. Faith is based on such an awareness, not in opposition to reason but alongside it or above it, offering individuals and their cultures the supreme dimension of the life of the spirit.

Clearly these conclusions do not negate the value of the rationalist Enlightenment in the areas of science and philosophy. They seek to set its limitations while affording faith its own domain. In expounding his views at length, Smolenskin cited the prophets, the statements of the



rabbis, and the medieval Jewish philosophers, particularly Saadia Gaon and Judah Halevi. Like S. D. Luzzatto and Graetz, he dissociated himself somewhat from Maimonides and his disciples, who, like Mendelssohn, had "Hellenized" Judaism.<sup>16</sup>

In "A Time to Plant," Smolenskin thus came to offer a complete explanation of his idea of returning to the Torah as a source of the people's spiritual nationality and basis for its unity: the return to faith in the God of Israel and to the tradition that gave full expression to the life of the believer in his daily routines. Furthermore, since he had sought to restore the values of faith and tradition to their former dignity, he also had to reexamine his relation to halakha as a religious and national value. It was an instrument, and one should not attribute independent value to it, but its vital need was now clearly established. It helped preserve the continuing structure of the nation, especially in the Diaspora, and gave collective expression to the subjective aspects of faith. A holistic national culture had need of these two elements in order to survive, especially in the conditions of exile.<sup>17</sup>

Smolenskin now needed to expand not only Graetz's positive-historical teaching but also the halakhic doctrine of Zechariah Frankel on the democratic character of halakha and the ways to adapt it to the people's life needs. Going beyond the rationalism of Reform and the radical Haskalah, which did not take account of the Torah's suprarational authority, Smolenskin found in Frankel the view of the independent development of the halakha as a living Torah based on the traditional rabbinic leaders' responsiveness to the feelings, perceptions, and vital needs of the people. Like Frankel, he thought and accepted that the halakha was not given to reform by one-sided human decisions but rather changed and developed organically in response to the historical change and development of the people.

In "A Time to Plant," Smolenskin completed his journey of return from the radical, secular Haskalah to Torah, faith, and religion in order to give real content to the concept of spiritual nationalism. But later along the way, another turning point occurred. As we have seen, Smolenskin's concept of spiritual nationalism relied on the assumption of the positive-historical outlook that, insofar as Jewish nationality was spiritual, it was

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<sup>16</sup> "Maimonides, who went out from the school of Aristotle and Avicenna to the school of Abaye and Rava, sought to make everything in accord with Aristotle and the Greek and Arabic sages." *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. See above, note 7, second quotation.

not conditional on a sovereign territorial state and could be realized through emancipation in gentile lands under their rule.<sup>18</sup>

The condition was national organization, not just of separate communities in various regional frameworks, but also a comprehensive international framework. Smolenskin saw before him the example of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, which was established in France but took on responsibility for all Jewry and acted on behalf of oppressed and persecuted Jewish communities wherever they might be. He believed that the Alliance represented the national Jewish interest in the entire world and that it was qualified to intervene on behalf of its security, rights, and unity.<sup>19</sup> He therefore saw no need for a Jewish organization of a political-territorial nature. However, from the 1880s onward, the firmness of this assumption was undermined. Anti-Semitism was on the increase in western and eastern Europe alike; it penetrated the mobile classes and was established as governmental policy. In the context of anti-Jewish decrees and persecutions, the effectiveness of the Alliance had to be reexamined. It became clear that it was hemmed in by French national interests and was unable to defend Jews or even protest on their behalf when Jewish communities were persecuted, but defending them ran counter to the policies of the French government at that moment. When the wave of pogroms struck in 1882, and it was clear that they happened at the initiative of the Russian government as part of their general anti-Jewish policy, Smolenskin came to the Zionist conclusion: the Jews needed their own national state in their homeland. Only such a state could protect them and defend their national existence.

This turning point was expressed in dramatic fashion in his article "The Jewish Question: The Question of Life," the first part of which was written before the 1882 pogroms and the second part after them. Nevertheless, one should emphasize that Smolenskin did not change his conception of spiritual nationality. His concern was for the situation of the people in the present. He knew that even if the initiative to establish a Jewish state in the Land of Israel succeeded, it would be an extended process. The people

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<sup>18</sup> "We must therefore conclude that the source of the Jewish people's life comes from another source, not from the institutions of state, land, and language, and not even from [religious] laws, but *from the separate [national] spirit of Israel*." Ibid., 19.

<sup>19</sup> Smolenskin devoted section 6 of "The Eternal People" to describing the positive contribution that the Alliance made for the cohesion of the Jewish body politic across national and sectarian divisions (*Ma'amarim*, 1:38–45). However, he later deplored the Alliance's refusal to offer relief to Jews if they immigrated to the Land of Israel (Smolenskin, "The Jewish Question—The Question of Life," pt. 2, in *Ma'amarim*, 3:85).

would remain dispersed for a long time. Even after establishment of the state, the majority of the people would remain in Diaspora. The major question remained: Was it within the means of an international Jewish organization to cope with the "Jewish question," which had become a question of life and death in the present?

We should emphasize in this context that raising this practical question brought Smolenskin to the distinction, in which he anticipated Aḥad Ha-Am, between the "question of the Jews" as a matter of physical survival and the "question of Judaism" as a matter of spiritual survival. Like Aḥad Ha-Am after him, Smolenskin was convinced that Jews were able to cope by themselves only with the "question of Judaism," which depended on their will, their devotion, and their identification. By contrast, the fate of their physical survival among the nations depended primarily on the good will of the national states. From this, he deduced three conclusions (which also anticipated Aḥad Ha-Am): (1) Organization and activity in exilic lands, in preparation for the establishment of a Jewish state, could influence governments that wished to solve their Jewish problem to tend toward more positive policies in regards to them even in the present and to enable them to realize their political plans. (2) It was important to organize for the establishment of a Jewish state, especially in order to raise Jewish national morale. If they gained international support, the hope of redemption that sustained them in exile would be reawakened, and they would be shaken out of their depression and despair.<sup>20</sup> (3) In the Land of Israel, there was a chance to establish a center that would give political sanctuary to Jews from Diaspora and would secure them against persecutions and the deprivation of rights. But its principal task would be on the spiritual plane. It would develop the new Hebrew culture that would be nourished from the ancient tradition and would combine the best creations of the nations in organic unity. It would bring a halt both to assimilation and to Orthodox rigidity.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "A man will also be regarded as a dog if he chooses to spend all his days as a stranger passing through and does not focus his attention on preparing a permanent nest for his children. We must seek this with all our heart, spirit, and soul. We ought not stop to calculate if it is feasible, for no project is achieved without effort; and if we seek to attain the goal before lifting our feet, we will never achieve it. . . . If we seek to return and prepare our home, whether this be today or tomorrow or after a while, it is all the same, for the request itself will raise our spirits and give us honor in our own eyes. . . . We must revive the hope of redemption and reiterate it to our children with all the force of our emotions, for then our spirits will be raised and we will be considered human again." *Ibid.*, 52–53.

<sup>21</sup> "It is incumbent on us . . . to revive the Hebrew language and to put it in the mouth of all Jews who wish to remain members of the people of Israel. For not only is it the rope that binds us all together, not only is it a memorial and monument to our ancient ancestral

Thus Smolenskin maintained his outlook of Jewish spiritual nationalism even after he became a Zionist. At any rate, his final essays after "Time to Plant" laid the basis for Aḥad Ha-Am's spiritual Zionism.

*D. The Dawn of Religious Nationalism: Jehiel Michal Pines*

We saw earlier how the tendency to quasi-Zionistic religious nationalism arose within the ultra-Orthodox camp in its struggle against Reform. In the process, it accepted an unvarnished traditional religious basis for ideas that would veer in the direction of the modern, enlightened definition of nationalism. The first glimmering of an idea of religious nationalism—striving to achieve positive integration with modern existence by reconstituting the Jewish nationality as a complete religious culture in the Land of Israel—came to expression in the thought of Jehiel Michal Pines (1843–1913). Pines took an ideological path parallel to that of Smolenskin toward unifying the people on the basis of its spiritual nationality but from the direction of enlightened Orthodoxy, which he expanded in the direction of nationalism, yet remaining strictly true to it till the end of his career, in fierce polemics against Lilienblum and Aḥad Ha-Am.<sup>22</sup>

The theoretical essays in which Pines developed his doctrine were first published beginning from 1867 in the Hebrew journals *Ha-Melitz*, *Ha-Maggid*, and *Ha-Levanon*, in parallel with Smolenskin's essays. Before Smolenskin, Pines arrived at the conclusions of *Hibbat Zion* and became one of its leading spirits. In 1878 he migrated to Israel as emissary of the Moses Montefiore Testimonial Fund.

The parallel and agreement between Smolenskin's views and those of Pines stand out prominently. On several issues they are substantially identical. As they were expressed at practically the same time in parallel, one cannot explain them by direct influence of one on the other. Still, as representatives of two opposing parties who turned to seek a way of overcoming their divisions and of bringing about unity, they reinforced and confirmed each other.

Pines's step in the direction of unity was expressed in his adoption of the national viewpoint on Judaism from the perspective of its most

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glory, not only should we invest our hope in it that it may still unite us in the coming days if we succeed in building our house—aside from all these, it is very necessary to us in this time of trouble to communicate our hearts' wounds to our brethren." *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>22</sup> For a general survey of Pines's career and literary output, see Joseph Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature* (Jerusalem: Ahiasaf, 1958), 6:74–115.

radical exponents, the Spinozist disciples of the Hebrew Haskalah: the Torah of Israel was portrayed by him as the law of a heavenly monarch whose purpose was to unite the people and preserve them in their earthly reality. What was its distinction as a religious political constitution? Pines adopted the accepted distinction between Christianity as an ecclesiastical religion and Judaism as a religion that directly determines the lifestyle of a people, but he formulated it anew in more exact modern terms, distinguishing between the policing functions of the state (to prevent disorder and defend against adversaries) and the positive ethical, interpersonal functions of society. The unique religious character of the Torah's law was expressed in his view in the organic integration of the functions of both state and society, coming from the same authority.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, the emphasis was on the social function rather than the political function, for that is what shaped the organic social characteristics of the Torah's legislation and resulted in the prominence of its ethical characteristics. In this way, the Israelite nation developed in the spiritual direction. We should emphasize here that Pines, like Smolenskin, accepted the assumption that the spiritual character of the Jewish nationality was concretized and maintained in exile. The Jewish people would therefore be able to continue and survive until Messianic times as a spiritual nation even in Diaspora and under conditions of emancipation.

On this national-spiritual basis, Pines set out to battle against Reform. The parallel between him and Smolenskin is especially prominent on the issue of reforming halakha, on which they took a common stand against both Geiger and Gordon. Despite his Orthodox approach, Pines based his argument on the positive-historical halakhic approach of Zechariah Frankel, and that approach enabled him to deviate occasionally from his usual Orthodox approach without abandoning it and to agree on the need and the possibility of adapting halakha to the life needs of the people—not

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<sup>23</sup> "The objective of Israel's religion is the consolidation of the nation. Though it is an easy step for the member of another religion to exchange one national allegiance for another without changing his God (inasmuch as it is the purpose of his religion to improve the private individual and to insure the immortality of his soul apart from the body), [this step] is impossible for the Israelite individual who is faithful to his Law and religion, for the religion of Israel is like the law of a state: involved in its life and determining and regulating the relations of the members of the nation to each other. Its purpose is to constitute the members of a nation as belonging to a single organism—a covenanted people as a light to the nations." Jehiel Michael Pines, *Yaldei Ruḥi* (Children of My Spirit) (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1934), 1:2.

in the spirit of reform or development but by applying its eternal principles in keeping with its social-ethical purpose.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, Pines's Orthodox point of departure distinguished his views from Smolenskin's, and even though the difference was not prominent in his early essays because of the hope of arriving at agreement and unity, it later became the source of the uncompromising polemic that erupted between Pines and Aḥad Ha-Am, who continued Smolenskin's spiritual-national path in an atheistic, secular version. In comparison with Smolenskin's views, the difference was originally one of emphasis and priority. In Smolenskin's teaching, the spiritual-national element was prior to religion; his return to Torah, and from it to halakha and religion, served the need for the preservation of spiritual nationality and the unity of the people. In Pines's teaching, religion was the primary value defining the goal, whereas nationality was the instrument for its realization.<sup>25</sup>

This difference between Pines and Smolenskin can be clearly discerned by comparing their relation to the idea of Jewish chosenness and mission among the nations. Smolenskin's distancing from Reform because of its assimilation and denial of the national essence of Judaism, as if in order to realize the universal mission of the Israelite religion among humanity, deterred him from the idea that such a universal mission was the purpose of Jewry's survival. He indeed insisted on the unique spiritual-ethical values of the Torah and the significance of Jews' contribution to humanity, à la Graetz, but the survival of the nation was for him the chief objective of value in its own right, whereas the mission was a secondary benefit of it. Not so for Pines. His understanding of Jewish chosenness brought him close to Reform and to Modern Orthodoxy, and he cited Israel's mission among the nations as its purpose for existing. He agreed that the mission could be fulfilled only through its exemplary realization in the social life of the nation and that the Jewish people would realize their destiny by leading that exemplary social life not only in exile but in its own state, as the prophets of Israel taught in their messianic vision. Indeed, Pines held this to be one of Judaism's central principles, together with the principle

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<sup>24</sup> "We ought not to outrun natural development but be guided by it. . . . We may leave it to the Jewish people to find the proper channels for change in an orderly fashion when such change becomes necessary." Ibid., 2:41; cited in Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (New York: Meridian and Jewish Publication Society, 1960), 410.

<sup>25</sup> "I have no sympathy with the currently fashionable idea, with the movement to make the Jewish people a pure secular nationality in place of the combination of religion with nationality that has enabled us to survive to this day." Pines, "Jewish Nationalism Cannot Be Secular," in Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, 411.

of revealed Torah.<sup>26</sup> But it was now clear that these assertions highlight Pines's basic assumption that Jewish nationality is not the end but the means for realizing the ethical and religious values of the Jewish religion in order to disseminate them throughout humanity.

The priority of religion over nationality in Pines's conception thus brought about the split in the east-European *Hibbat Zion* movement between him and Lilienblum and more pointedly between him and Aḥad Ha-Am on account of their atheistic secularism. But precisely because Aḥad Ha-Am continued to hold to the idea of Jewish spiritual nationalism in its secular version and accordingly proposed a consistently nonreligious conception of this idea, the confrontation of Pines and Aḥad Ha-Am around the question of Jewish national education in the Land of Israel was extreme and uncompromising.

*E. From "Spiritual Nationality" to Secular "Natural Nationality":  
Exacerbating the Controversy in the Teaching of Moses Leib Lilienblum*

In discussing how Haskalah, nationalism, and religion converged in the developing thought of Smolenskin and Pines, we showed that their striving for unity took place within a controversy that continued to take new forms. The extremes, however, did not come any closer. On the contrary—the extreme positions on both sides became even more extreme, and their one-dimensional character was expressed even more consistently. The disputants wanted to prove their exclusive claim to truth, to deflect all criticism, and especially to overcome their frustration over lack of success in leading the people to their objectives. By the logic of their extremism they deduced that, if they would only make their positions more extreme, they would come closer to reality, which previously they had not assessed consistently enough. But one may also reflect that the sharpening of the violent struggle between the Orthodox, Reform, and national-Haskalah movements had repercussions in the tensions and struggles among the various factions within the religious camp on the one hand and the sec-

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<sup>26</sup> "‘Know God in all your ways’ (Pr. 3:6)—This is a maxim on which all the main principles of Torah are contingent, and it is a major premise on which our religion is developed, which is to sanctify the Jew in supreme sanctity until he is dedicated to heaven together with his thoughts and his inner emotions, and all his deeds at home and in society are done in holy purity. In keeping with this principle, the Torah radiated its light into all aspects of life and imposed its rule on all of a person's deeds and actions." Pines, *Yaldei Ruḥi*, 2:87.



ular camp on the other. These were the inevitable ironic results of the critiques that those who sought pan-Jewish unity addressed to their comrades within their own movements. The price of seeking general unity was thus division within the competing camps.

The influence of the general background strengthened these tendencies. They found support in the philosophies and ideologies of the revolutionary movements that brought about the crisis of liberal idealistic humanism in the West and spread from there into the circles of the revolutionary intelligentsia in eastern Europe, especially in Russia. Idealistic humanism looked to gradual and continuous progressive development that would not cut itself off from the legacy of the past but would sift it, add to it, and reinterpret it. Not so the revolutionary philosophies and ideologies, whether materialistic or existentialist, which attacked them. These sought to cut themselves off unequivocally from the legacy of the past through a revolution that would transform the material basis of their national life. The circumstances of life would be changed instantly, and another cultural growth process would begin whose roots would not derive from the past but from the expectations of the future.

The concretization of this ideological development would constitute a unique chapter in the history of Jewish religious philosophy, which will be dealt with in the next section of this work. However, the appearance of its heralds was still an inseparable part of the ideological process that has been described already. We have seen that Smolenskin's thought developed in the course of grappling with the countervailing tendencies toward extremism, especially with the polemical poetic thought of Judah Leib Gordon, which we described briefly. But the most important founding expression of this development in the secular-national vein is in the crystallization of the outlook of Moses Leib Lilienblum (1843–1910), the founder of the secular *Hibbat Zion* movement.<sup>27</sup>

Lilienblum began as an ambivalent religious thinker who made his way to Haskalah from the same spiritual-national position that Smolenskin arrived at in "A Time to Plant." His first essay, "The Pathways of the Talmud," published in *Ha-Melitz* in 1867, expressed his moderate position in the period that preceded his alienation from the Orthodox community. In this essay he suggested a halakhic method similar to Frankel's positive-

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<sup>27</sup> For a detailed account of Lilienblum's early career and writings, see Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1978), 12:210–25. For a brief biographical sketch and selections from his Zionist writings, see Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (New York: Meridian and Jewish Publication Society, 1960), 166–77.

historical method. Whether he was influenced by Frankel's writings or came to the outlook on his own, he dwelt on the fact that halakha always adapted itself to the life needs of the people, and he showed that there was a call for, and therefore in principle a possibility of, adapting halakha to the needs of the present age through its own tools. Lilienblum criticized those Orthodox who refused to recognize their obligation to the people who were living in distress and thus liable to break free of halakha if it were not adapted to the needs of life. But at the same time he directed piercing criticism against those outlooks that prided themselves on reforming religion, especially in the nationalist versions of Abraham Krochmal and Judah Leib Gordon.

The rabbinic leadership responded—and not in a theoretical manner. In Lilienblum's community, its word was law, and it exercised its authority to show the brash young man what it saw as the true logic of halakha. Lilienblum was forced to divorce his wife, to leave his home and community, and to seek his independent way in the major center that the Haskalah had established in Odessa. He learned his lesson and began his path toward an extreme nationalist position. He first accepted the outlook of Abraham Krochmal, with which he came into contact in Odessa, but he quickly became convinced that philosophical idealism did not lead to the kind of serious confrontation adequate to changing the face of reality in fact. Already burned by the rabbinic leadership's coals, he understood that there was no hope to change reality by propagating lofty ideas. One must pit power against power in order to change it. The mood of criticism of idle, ineffectual idealism endeared him to the literature of the revolutionary Russian intelligentsia, which also despised idealism and sought action that would change the face of reality, directly and immediately.

The great question was how one could effectuate a revolutionary strategy given the woeful circumstances of the Jewish people in exile. Would joining the Russian revolutionary movement, which was then turning mainly to the agrarian peasantry, be likely to save the Jews as well? While he was pondering this question, the pogroms of 1882 broke out at the initiative of the government and the eager cooperation of the oppressed Russian people. Like Smolenskin, these facts swayed Lilienblum, too, in the direction of *Hibbat Zion*. But of course he could not accept Smolenskin's spiritual approach. He sought a practical solution to the immediate physical distress of the Jews. The "question of Judaism" did not concern him. It was clear to him that physical survival came first, and in line with the revolutionary logic of the Russian intelligentsia, a conclusion was required that would be the opposite of Smolenskin's "spiritual nationality": One

should restore the Jewish nation to its natural condition. The Jews should live like other nations, close to nature. They should dwell on their own land, just like the Russian nation.<sup>28</sup>

The revolutionary philosophy that Lilienblum adopted for himself under the influence of the Russian radicals was thus a doctrine of action. Intellectual activity from this point on needed to be directed toward actions, not lofty ideas. It should focus on investigating the conditions of material reality, its natural laws and tendencies, the practical solutions appropriate to it, and the ways to their realization. This was a transition to social-economic and political investigation that would from henceforth become the central arena of ideological focus for secular Jewish thinkers for whom religion was irrelevant in principle. The result was a doctrine of “practical Zionism” with a strategy of settling the land. From then on, Lilienblum was devoted to spreading it and realizing it.

His influential autobiography and the programmatic essays that he wrote came to serve these goals.<sup>29</sup> He intentionally refrained from taking a position on problems of halakha and religion, or even on disputed issues of Jewish culture. He had come now to the political conclusion that it was fitting to circumvent all these problems, which divided the people to no purpose. On the contrary, it was truly proper to unite the people, not around “spiritual” agreement, as Smolenskin thought (and as he himself thought in his youth), but around practical agreement on social-economic and political issues on which it was possible to move beyond all divisions of opinion in matters of halakha, religion, and nationality and to leave the

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<sup>28</sup> “Work! Lay the foundations for a normal and healthy national life for the Jewish people, which has been persecuted in every time and place, but has never surrendered. Give it back its home, something which no people lacks, except the gypsies. . . . We have not been able to teach mankind, in more than three thousand years, not to beat poor wanderers who are bereft of a home and protection—shall we teach mankind love, brotherhood, peace? . . . There are three paths open to us: (1) To remain in our present state, to be oppressed forever. . . . (2) To assimilate. . . . (3) To initiate our efforts for the renaissance of Israel in the land of its forefathers, where the next few generations may attain, to the fullest extent, a normal national life. Make your choice!” Moses Leib Lilienblum, “The Regeneration of Israel on the Land of Its Forefathers,” originally published in 1881 in the Russian journal *Razsvyet*; Hebrew edition, Jerusalem: Zionist Organization, 1953; this excerpt from Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, 176–77.

<sup>29</sup> Moses Leib Lilienblum, *Ketavim Otobiografiyim* (Autobiographical Writings), 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1970); Moses Leib Lilienblum, *Kol Kitvei Moshe Leib Lilienblum* (Complete Works of M. L. Lilienblum) (Kraków: Josef Zeitlin, 1910–13).

spiritual problems to the future, on the assumption that they would disappear by changing the circumstances that had led to them.<sup>30</sup>

The doctrine of nationalism that Lilienblum adopted relied on the biologically based Darwinism that was accepted in the Russian revolutionary literature of his time. According to it, nations are “races” with different physical and mental characteristics that are transmitted by inheritance from generation to generation. Nations strive for unity in their midst because of the power of attraction of inheritance and because of the collective will to survive, which is according to this theory a manifestation of the biological will for survival. For the same reason, nations strive to differentiate among each other: their opposing characteristics repel each other. The Jews were not lacking in empirical evidence that proved the correctness of the theory of “natural nationalism.” They were clearly a “natural nation” rooted in their generational continuity, united on that basis despite their ideological variety, differentiated from the other nations among whom they dwelt, and rejected by them, as anti-Semitism demonstrated.

In Lilienblum’s view, it seemed clear that there was no chance that anti-Semitism would disappear or weaken in the future. On the contrary—it would continue to become more extreme. In the modern age, all Western nations were waking up to demand their rights and establish their own states, and along with this awakening, the enmity that they harbored against the foreign Jewish race dwelling among them was also naturally awakened. They would not be appeased until the Jews were uprooted from their midst. The only possible positive solution was thus that the Jews should leave the exile of their own free will and return to live as a natural people in their natural homeland—the Land of Israel.

This conception of natural nationalism nullified the importance of the question of spiritual identity unifying the people. Of course, every nation had its language, literature, and culture. But these are products of its natural character. Just as a palm seed can only sprout palm trees, so a collective of Jews who are given the chance to develop their culture independently on their land will only develop a Jewish culture, appropriate to the conditions of their environment and their age. There is no need to

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<sup>30</sup> “Let all special questions, whether religious or economic in nature, take second place to the general question, to the sole and simple aim that Israel be ‘saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation.’ Unite and join forces; let us gather our dispersed from eastern Europe and go up to our land with rejoicing.” Lilienblum, “Let Us Not Confuse the Issue,” in Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, 172.

think about it or program it in advance. One need only take the practical steps to settle Jews in their land. The rest of the problems will be solved on this basis, of their own accord.

Indeed, all the foci of the controversies that were raised in the context of dealing with the crisis of humanism and the revolutionary radicalism in Europe are found in Lilienblum's doctrine of natural nationalism, like a seedling in the bud.

## GLOSSARY

- Derekh Eretz** “The way of the world.” The secular realm. In Samson Raphael Hirsch’s slogan “Torah with *derekh eretz*” referred to an educational system where Jewish religious studies and secular studies were included within a single curriculum.
- Haredi** Ultra-Orthodox; that segment of Jewish society and thinkers that took an overall negative view of modern culture and resisted integration with it or adoption of its intellectual and evaluative outlook.
- Haskalah** The Jewish Enlightenment movement, especially in the form it took in central and eastern Europe in the late eighteenth and early to middle nineteenth centuries.
- Heder** In traditional Jewish society, a religious primary school for teaching Hebrew literacy and elementary Bible.
- Jüdische Wissenschaft** “Jewish Science,” short for *Wissenschaft des Judentums*: “the [scientific] study of Jewry/Judaism.” See *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.
- Kehillah** The organized governing body of any traditional Jewish community in European countries prior to Emancipation, with quasi-governmental authority over the Jews in its jurisdiction.
- Maskil** (*pl.* Maskilim) A proponent of the Jewish Enlightenment, especially a creative thinker, writer, or educator who contributed to the articulation of Jewish Enlightenment ideals and their dissemination to the traditional Jewish communities of central and eastern Europe.
- Mishnah** Traditional concise code of rabbinic Jewish law, compiled around 200 CE; the core of the Talmud.
- Musar**—Morality, specifically: (1) from medieval Judaism onward, a literary genre devoted to describing the moral virtues and fostering the quest for individual ethical self-improvement; and (2) from the 1840s onward, the movement for Jewish ethical self-improvement, founded by Rabbi Israel Salanter, based on the study of these writings and including disciplines of self-monitoring.
- Pardes** The “orchard of mysteries,” the mythic and symbolic destination of mystical or intellectual enlightenment.
- Pilpul** Intellectual pyrotechnics, the Talmudic counterpart to scholastic hair-splitting or casuistry. (From *pilpel*, “pepper.”)
- Rechtsstaat** In Hegel’s political philosophy, a state based on rational law.
- Shtetl** Town, especially a town in eastern Europe with a considerable Jewish population, the characteristic milieu of traditional Jewish social-religious culture.
- Sublation** In Hegelian philosophy, the supplanting of an earlier thought-form by a later thought-form, in which the true essence of the earlier is supposedly preserved in the later.
- Talmud** Encyclopedic compilation of Jewish legal discussions and folklore, compiled around 500 CE; the core of traditional Jewish learning from then until modern times.
- Tzaddik** “Saint, righteous person.” In Hasidism, the charismatic rabbinic leader of a Hasidic sect; by extension (and ironically), the intellectual leader of a modernizing Jewish faction—as Spinoza was for the radical Maskilim.
- Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden** “Association for the Culture and [Scientific] Study of Jewry.” (short name: *Culturverein*—Culture Association). The short-lived association (1819–1824) of German-Jewish scholars (Leopold Zunz, Eduard Gans, Immanuel Wolf, and others) that laid the basis and articulated the methodology of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement in Jewish scholarship that was to persist for the next century and beyond. See *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.
- Wissenschaft des Judentums** “[Scientific] Study of Jewry/Judaism.” The movement of disciplined scholarly study of Jewish history, literature, and thought that began in

Germany with the establishment of the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* by Leopold Zunz and others in 1819 and continued until the emigration of Jewish scholars to Israel and other countries in the 1930s. More broadly, the enterprise established by those scholars that continues in various forms to the present day. *Wissenschaft* in German means “science” in the broad sense, encompassing both natural sciences and humanistic studies, with an emphasis on scientific methodology. *Judentum* can mean either “Jewry” or “Judaism.”

**Yeshiva (pl. yeshivot)** Traditional advanced school of Jewish religious (especially talmudic) studies, especially for male adolescents and young adults.



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