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WISSENSCHAFT DES JUDENTUMS

Judaism and the Science of Judaism
200 Years of Academic Thought on Religion

Guest Editors:

George Y. Kohler, Andreas Brämer, Thomas Meyer

Dov Schwartz, Avi Elqayam, Hanoch Ben-Pazi

EDITORS



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Secretary: Ms. Varda Aviani
Tel. +972-3-5318368 • Fax +972-3-7384102
Address: Yackobovitz Building 1002, floor 4, room 403
Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan 5290002, Israel
Email address: daat.philosophy@biu.ac.il
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Wissenschaft des Judentums

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Introduction

Commencing in the late 1810s in Germany, an entire generation of young Jewish scholars initiated a dramatic development of historicizing and critically analyzing the rich intellectual heritage of Judaism, using for the first time the academic tools they had acquired at German universities. This ambitious project essentially followed two interconnected goals: On the one hand, the treatment, editing and annotating of Jewish religious literature of all ages was to be raised to a scientific level – but this was done, on the other hand, not only for the sake of pure science, but increasingly in order to give Judaism a philosophical-theological basis that was to guarantee, in the view of these scholars, its very survival in modernity. Historical research, and in particular, research into the history of Jewish ideas, was not only a means for clarifying the essential content of Judaism, it actually played a substantial role in the development of Judaism itself. After the more instinctive acceptance of rabbinic law as the way of traditional Jewish life had almost ceased to exist in Western Europe, a new justification for adhering to Judaism needed to be found, and many nineteenth century Jewish thinkers saw as the only alternative to legal authority a new form of theological conviction. Voluntarily cherishing the Jewish religion for them was only possible if Judaism were able to contribute to the progress of humanity, that is, if Judaism could find a philosophically secured place within the civilized world's general culture. It was this new concept of "Judaism's philosophical essence" that was then developed by German reformist theologians in the course of the 19th century based on scientific research: A system of ethical and philosophical ideas which were crystallized from the numerous literary sources of Jewish tradition – precisely all those ideas of Judaism which the reformers understood to be eternally valid: Strict monotheism, an earthly and social messianism, and the moral I-Thou relation of man and God. A new kind of Judaism emerged, a bourgeois Jewish creed: denationalized, personalized, spiritualized and at the same time, rationalized. It was still firmly grounded in Jewish sources but barely recognizable any longer for traditional Jews.

This new scientific movement, which called itself *Wissenschaft des Judentums*,¹ was in its beginnings deeply rooted in the revolutionary

1 Frequently used during the 19th century was also: 'Jüdische Wissenschaft'. Gershom Scholem turned this polemically into "Wissenschaft vom Judentum", in idem

paradigm shift that took place during the first half of the nineteenth century in general intellectual culture, when the new ideal of scientificity (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) replaced the Enlightenment ideal of universal *Bildung*. With the onset of modernity the rational requirements of Jewish theology became as universal and as academic as they are today. Not only had Jewish theology (now for the first time) to answer the need of unbiasedly comparing Judaism with other religions – in order to prove and justify its existence in the modern age both inwardly and outwardly, Jewish theology also had no choice but to incorporate the results of modern science into its system: historiography, philology, anthropology and natural sciences. This was and is increasingly painful for traditional views, especially under the influence of the scientific results in the understanding of the Biblical text. With the rise of modern science, even abstract theological thought has been forced to accept that Judaism is a historical religion that had developed and is still developing its own system of beliefs in time. But in the course of the nineteenth century, and even more so at the beginning of the 20th, *Wissenschaft des Judentums* also became increasingly self-reflective, critically discussing its contribution to the transformation of Judaism, its very subject, into a modern religion – as well as its role in formulating a scientific Jewish theology. The positions taken eventually varied from posing *Wissenschaft* as “a matter of life and death” (Max Wiener) for Judaism, to the opposite opinion of viewing *Wissenschaft* as the means of Judaism’s own “decent burial” (Gershom Scholem).

For the last few decades of research into the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, studies of the history of its ideas and theories have laid a new foundation for an academic treatment of the philosophical aspects of Judaism as a religion. Therefore we believe that the time has come to approach not only the research results, but rather revisit the systematic foundations and propositions of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. This is probably best done by reference to the movements’ two central concepts: ‘religion’ and ‘science’ (or ‘scholarship’ – *Wissenschaft*). Both categories, and even more so their co-relatedness, were often declared to be foreign to the Jewish tradition – usually in order to prove assimilationist tendencies, or at least the external, theoretically-detached view of the *Wissenschaft* movement on Judaism. But essentially – this is the working hypothesis of the current volume – ‘religion’ and *Wissenschaft* are indeed related

“Wissenschaft vom Judentum einst und jetzt”, in *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Institutes*, 1960, p. 10-20. See also *Judaica* VI, (ed. P. Schäfer) Frankfurt 1997.

concepts, if only in a very complex way. Both concepts have been frequently transformed, have been put into relation to other intellectual traditions, but have also been constantly tested, throughout the history of Jewish philosophy, for their potential of being analyzed. Why and in what way this happened, which intentions led the scholars who did so, and which results they achieved – those are the questions debated in this volume. Of special importance in this context is the discussion of the very possibility of describing the theological content of the Jewish religion, and thus also of religion in general, with scientific methods. The essays collected here therefore focus on issues of theology, deliberately avoiding a philological, anthropological or cultural approach to Judaism, which would not describe religious ideas but rather custom, daily life or liturgical developments as such.

Although there have been many influential attempts in Jewish thought, beginning from the 10th century, to resolve the dichotomy of orthodoxy and atheism and to formulate a rational philosophy of religion, only during the 19th and early 20th century Judaism succeeded for the first time to describe itself in an apparently systematic and critical way, using the methods of the newly discovered ideal of *Wissenschaftlichkeit* ('scientificity'). This, precisely, is the achievement of the philosophers and theologians of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*: Samuel Hirsch and Salomon Formstecher, Abraham Geiger and Ludwig Philippson, Kaufmann Kohler, Leo Baeck, Hermann Cohen, Julius Guttmann, Max Wiener, and Alexander Altmann. Their foundational work in this respect is widely neglected until this day – although it is, in our opinion, of crucial importance for a modern understanding of Judaism. This understanding in itself has far-reaching impact not only on a rational justification of contemporary Jewish identity but even on the academic training of rabbis, or on the Jewish contribution to the concept of spirituality, or on the current debate on the relation of monotheism and ethics. All those subjects are hidden in the general theme of the volume, and we are thus convinced to have offered a wide and multidisciplinary basis for further discussion.

The articles collected in this volume are for the most part based on papers delivered at the 11th international Carlebach-Conference at Bar Ilan University in March 2017, dedicated to the last chief rabbi of Hamburg during the Nazi era.² We believe that these essays can

2 Michah Gottlieb's paper was given at a conference devoted to a similar subject at the Leo Baeck Institute in Jerusalem in February 2018.

widen the horizon of our current understanding of the *Wissenschaft* movement and, as a consequence, constitute an important milestone on the way into the future, not only of research of the movement itself, but also of Jewish Studies at institutions of higher education in general. Too often contemporary scholars tend to believe that in this respect most of the work has been done, and hence call for papers directed at the scientific fringes of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, geographically or historically. Indeed, with focusing on the movement's inner philosophical substance, the complex relatedness of traditional religion and critical scholarship, we propose to rediscover what might arguably be called its greatest contribution to Judaism itself: The attempt at clarifying what is at the basis of the ur-dichotomy between knowledge and belief, philosophy and revelation.

George Y. Kohler
Andreas Brämer
Thomas Meyer

Alexandra Zirkle

Biblical Hermeneutics: Between *Wissenschaft* and Religion

Exegesis and the Shape of Nineteenth-Century German Theology

The queen of the sciences found her sovereignty in universities across the German lands severely challenged by the end of the eighteenth century. Thinkers including Lessing, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Schleiermacher proposed that the theological faculty should be excised from the university's medieval quadrivium of theology, law, medicine, and philosophy or subsumed within the "lower" philosophical faculty.¹ Critics argued that theological faculties remained myopically focused on confessional minutia, thereby dragging out the Wars of Religion, or were mired in intellectual torpor, unwilling or unable to engage new scholarship which posed vital challenges to the methods and canon of theological studies. When the Napoleonic wars wreaked havoc on Germany's universities, the subsequent era of rebuilding forced the question of whether and in what form the faculty of theology merited a place in the restored and newly established universities.

Early nineteenth-century theological faculties were commonly organized into four disciplines: exegetical theology, historical theology, practical theology, and dogmatic theology.² Schleiermacher's brief theological encyclopedia,³ the *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums*

1 Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Zachary Purvis, *Theology and the University in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

2 On the diverse ways that leading Protestant theological faculties were configured, see Johannes Wischmeyer, *Theologiae Facultas. Rahmenbedingungen, Akteure und Wissenschaftsorganisation protestantischer Universitätstheologie in Tübingen, Jena, Erlangen und Berlin 1850–1870* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008).

3 Unlike the genre of encyclopedia which catalogs aggregated information, the theological encyclopedia introduced students to how theology was (or should) be organized as an academic discipline. Theological encyclopedias detailed the scope and methods of theology's sub-fields and often included bibliographies which sketched a theological student's course of study. Thomas Albert Howard, "The Rise and Fall of the 'Theological Encyclopedia,'" *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University*, pp. 303-323 and Zachary Purvis, "Institutions and Reforms," *Theology and the University*, pp. 38-65.

(Brief Outline of the Study of Theology) (1811, 21830), posed one of the most prominent challenges to this four-fold organization. Schleiermacher proposed collapsing the faculty into three disciplines by folding exegetical theology and dogmatic theology into historical theology, retaining practical theology, and adding philosophical theology.⁴ Schleiermacher's reformulation of theology was rooted in his understanding of theology as a 'positive science' – a discipline which answered to the practical demands of the Church rather than emerging from the systematic ordering of human knowledge – and he argued that the theories and methods of theological scholarship should map onto the needs of the Protestant church.⁵ These commitments shaped his call for dramatic changes in the institutionalization of theological scholarship. Schleiermacher not only recast exegetical theology as a sub-discipline of historical theology concerned only with representations of “normal Christianity,” but he also excised the Hebrew Bible from the exegetical canon. The reconfiguration of nineteenth-century theological faculties is regularly described as a response to the demands of scientification (*Verwissenschaftlichung*), and yet Schleiermacher's *Kurze Darstellung* illustrates the extent to which confessional commitment, rather than the ravages of historicism or philosophy, sought to transform the university's disciplinary topography.

- 4 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums zum Behuf einleitender Vorlesungen entworfen* (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1811). Although historians regularly cite Schleiermacher's sketch as emblematic of shifting opinion on the nature and organization of theological scholarship, Schleiermacher's home institution, the newly-established University of Berlin, rebuffed his proposal and maintained the common four-fold organization which included exegetical theology as its own discipline; see Rudolf Köpke, *Die Gründung der Königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin* (Berlin: Gustav Schade, 1860), p. 162. Of the eight “principal disciplines” listed in the 1828 faculty statutes, two are immediately related to exegesis: “biblische Kritik und Hermeneutik” and “Auslegung des Pentateuch, des Hiob, der Psalmen, des Jesias, der wichtigsten historischen und didaktischen Schriften des Neues Testaments.” Paul Daude, *Die konigl. Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin: Systematische Zusammenstellung der für dieselbe bestehenden gesetzlichen, statutarischen und regelmentarischen Bestimmung* (Berlin: Müller 1887), pp. 56-57. Of the four theological disciplines, only systematic theology and exegetical theology have two professorships; historical theology and practical theology each only have one appointment. *Ibid.*, p. 58. On the disciplinary homes of biblical exegesis at Leipzig, Tübingen, and Göttingen, see H. George Anderson, “Challenge and Change within German Protestant Theological Education during the Nineteenth Century,” *Church History*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (March 1970), p. 40.
- 5 Johannes Zachhuber, *Theology as Science in Nineteenth-Century Germany: From F. C. Baur to Ernst Troeltsch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 12-17.

Dogma, even when cloaked as science, continued to shape critical biblical scholarship throughout the nineteenth century.

German Jews uniquely understood that the pursuit of *Wissenschaft* was always a function of reinscribing particular religious identities and their attendant political and cultural privileges. The German university purposively functioned to create certain types of statesmen and specific forms of middle class citizens, and theological faculties in German universities were the primary site at which the beliefs and practices of Protestantism and Catholicism were theorized and where the religious leaders who would guide the formation of local Christian communities were educated. The confessional projects of the academic study of theology are explicitly stated in founding documents, including those of the proudly modern and scientific Berlin theological faculty.⁶

There was no corollary space for theorizing Judaism and training Jewish religious leaders. Thus, in the late 1830s, a handful of German Jews called for the establishment of a Jewish faculty of theology in a German university. This article focuses on the two most comprehensive proposals: Abraham Geiger's "The Establishment of a Jewish Theological Faculty, A Pressing Necessity of Our Time" (1836) and *On the Establishment of a Jewish Theological Faculty* (1838) and Phoebus Philippon's "Ideas Toward an Encyclopedia and Methodology of Jewish Theology" (1837). Even as German Jewish communities established a number of new teacher training schools and considered erecting modernized rabbinical seminaries, proposals for a Jewish theological faculty introduced something distinct.⁷ A Jewish theological faculty laid claim to institutional power and resources by asserting that Jewish theology, composed of distinct texts and hermeneutic methods and taught by Jewish faculty, ought to

6 "The theological faculty has the vocation of proceeding according to the doctrine of the evangelical church so as not only to propagate the theological sciences in general, but also especially to make competent by means of lectures and other academic exercises the young men who dedicate themselves to the service of the church." "Die Statuten der theologischen Fakultät v. 29 Januar 1838," in Daude, *Die König. F.-W. Universität*, p. 46. Cited by John M. Stroup, "The Idea of Theological Education at the University of Berlin: From Schleiermacher to Harnack," in *Schools of the Thought in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Patrick Henry (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 155.

7 Thus this article does not address other educational institutions including teacher training schools and rabbinical seminaries. On the establishment of the Berlin teacher seminary led by Leopold Zunz, see Andreas Brämer, "Making Teachers ... Who do not Treat Their Profession as an Occasional Business': Leopold Zunz and the Modernization of the Jewish Teacher Training in Prussia," *European Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2013), pp. 151-170.

be incorporated into the structure of the German university.⁸ A Jewish theological faculty would also recognize and answer to the needs of the new generation of *Doktorrabbiner* whose training as rabbis was rooted in the worlds of Jewish learning and the German university.⁹ Proposals for a Jewish theological faculty traded on a double dynamic: desire to participate in the collective project of knowledge-building coupled with the desire to apply this knowledge to the specific needs of German Jewish religious communities. German Jews sought the institutional resources afforded German Protestants and Catholics and called for a theological faculty which would develop Jewish theology as a rigorous field of scholarship and which would provide the rich education necessary for this new class of rabbis to craft a vibrant modern German Judaism.

Of the four common disciplines comprising a theological faculty, the discipline of exegetical theology formed a particularly visible site at which these dynamics of collective endeavor and particular identity formation were worked out. To the extent that the disciplines of exegetical, historical, systematic, and practical theology are distinct, exegetical theology constituted the boundary discipline in which some nineteenth-century Protestant and Jewish scholars understood there to be overlap between Jewish and Protestant sources, methods, and interests. Phoebus Philippson grounded his proposal in this sense of shared scholarship and he outlined a Jewish exegetical theology that was different only in species to a Protestant exegetical theology. Philippson's proposal imagined how institutional parity would allow Jews to participate in pan-confessional scholarship and would prompt Protestant exegetes

- 8 Salo W. Baron, "Jewish Studies at Universities: An Early Project," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 46, Centennial Issue (1975), pp. 357-376. Despite offering a general overview of Geiger's, Ludwig Philippson's and Isler's proposals for a Jewish theological faculty, Baron's article does not evince familiarity with Phoebus Philippson's sketch of a theological encyclopedia and does not analyze the content of Geiger's proposed faculty.
- 9 Carsten L. Wilke, "Modern Rabbinical Training: Intercultural Invention and Political Reconfiguration," *Rabbi – Pastor – Priest: The Roles and Profiles Through the Ages*, eds. Heinz-Gunther Schottler and Walter Homolka (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 83-110; Andreas Gotzmann, *Eigenheit und Einheit: Modernisierungsdiskurse des deutschen Judentums der Emanzipationszeit* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Andreas Brämer, *Rabbiner und Vorstand: Zur Geschichte der jüdischen Gemeinde in Deutschland und Österreich 1808-1871* (Vienna: Bohlau, 1999); and Ismar Schorsch, "Emancipation and the Crisis of Religious Authority: The Emergence of the Modern Rabbinate," *Revolution and Evolution: 1848 in German-Jewish History*, eds. Werner E. Mosse, Arnold Paucker, and Reinhard Rürup (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981), pp. 205-253.

to update their curriculum to include rabbinic, medieval, and modern Jewish sources.

And yet exegetical theology, an intellectual realm which was shared in some ways by Jews and Protestants, was also a site which generated the irreducible differences shaping the other realms of theological scholarship. Distinctly Jewish or Protestant systematic, historical, and practical theologies were formed through the processes of exegetical theology, and exegetical theology was never wholly free of systematic, historical, or practical theological concerns. When historians conflate nineteenth-century exegetical theology with lower and higher criticism, they lend the field a degree of objectivity which it could never rightly claim. Studies about the rise of biblical criticism often highlight the threat critical methodologies posed to religious beliefs, such as the Mosaic authorship of the Torah/Pentateuch or the coherence of the biblical narrative. This perspective mutes the ways that the academic discipline of exegesis, even in concert with the rise of critical methodologies, regularly served to reproduce specifically Protestant people religious. Textual and historical criticism could never have actually generated “scientific,” presuppositionless modes of reading scripture, for exegetical theology, no matter its critical orientation, was always a confessional endeavor. The purported transformation of the Bible from Divine speech into a cultural artifact was never total and the “death of scripture” eulogizes a corpus whose vitality hardly wavered.¹⁰

In contrast to Philippon, Geiger argued that only a separate space dedicated to Jewish exegetical theology would give rise to non-Protestant exegetical scholarship and thus he proposed a Jewish theological faculty organized around a distinctly Jewish exegetical theology. This new field of exegetical theology would apply textual and historical criticism to neglected books of Jewish scripture, including the Talmud but also the Torah, and it would also birth an entirely new discipline of exegetical scholarship focused on talmudic hermeneutics. For Geiger, the fields of biblical and talmudic exegesis, developed free of Christian commitments, were central to the project of creating a modern Jewish theology *de novo*.

Focusing on how Abraham Geiger and Phoebus Philippon theorized the discipline of exegetical theology not only points to how the discipline of exegesis figured within the projects of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*,

10 Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

but also shows how these thinkers understood the establishment of a Jewish theological faculty to offer a route to Jewish emancipation. As developed below, Geiger framed Jewish political oppression as a function of Protestant anti-Judaism, whereas Philippson advanced the “rights through regeneration” rhetoric and deemed a Jewish theological faculty the primary institution through which to cultivate the reform of German Judaism.

Bible and Talmud: The Doubled Canon of Geiger’s Jewish Theological Faculty

Abraham Geiger’s 1836 “The Establishment of a Jewish Theological Faculty, A Pressing Necessity of Our Time” was the first public call for the establishment of a Jewish theological faculty in a German university. Geiger opens this love letter to *Wissenschaft* by lamenting how talmudic study unmoored from scholarly philological or exegetical method had long passed for Jewish theology. Geiger insists that Jewish theology, a heretofore “orphaned” discipline, could be adopted into the family of sciences only through two innovations: Jewish theology must be systematized and the field must be established within a Jewish theological faculty in a German university. Only a university setting – and a setting within a German university, in particular – would afford students and faculty the intellectual freedom, access to resources, and environment of exchange required for the development of Jewish theology as *Wissenschaft*.¹¹ A separate, though modernized, rabbinical seminary could not meet this demand.¹²

In his subsequent *On the Establishment of a Jewish Theological Faculty* (1838), Geiger underscored that if a Jewish theological faculty must be

- 11 Geiger writes that universities, “the beautiful blooms of spiritual German life where universal scholarly *Bildung* has its seat,” formed the vital “arteries of collective spiritual activity.” He also argued that universities formed unparalleled spaces where the study of theology could develop according to the dictates of free inquiry instead of devolving into bastions “where cloistered torpor nestles.” Given the conservative wave that swept through theological faculties beginning in the mid-1830s – replete with multiple dismissals from positions for having the wrong politics – Geiger’s reference to universities as sites of intellectual freedom was not quite accurate. Abraham Geiger, “Die Gründung einer jüdisch-theologischen Facultät, ein dringendes Bedürfnis unserer Zeit,” *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für Jüdische Theologie* (hereafter *WZJT*), Vol. 2, No. 1 (1836), p. 18.
- 12 This constitutes the greatest point of disagreement between Geiger’s and Ludwig Philippson’s (but not Phoebus Philippson’s) proposals.

located in a German university, it is equally important that it functions as a *Jewish* theological faculty. Like Protestant and Catholic theological faculties, the Jewish theological faculty in a German university must also serve the needs of Jewish religious life, in part by providing rigorous training for rabbis. Geiger registers that nineteenth-century rabbis find themselves in a particularly challenging position: they are expected to be conversant in the latest research on the Bible, to possess vast philological training, and to be versed in historical approaches to the Talmud, yet they are largely without guides in this endeavor.¹³ He notes that some rabbis prepared for their vocation by studying in universities with Christian professors, who could offer some basic, if insufficient, foundational instruction: Christian scholars were adequately acquainted with Hebrew, understood the Aramaic Targumim and rabbinic commentaries, and were often familiar with the Masorah. Not only are these basic competencies hardly adequate for the training of Jewish theologians, but Christian professors also practiced “an exegesis which flows from the perspective of their church and to which perspectives it always returns.”¹⁴ The confessional nature of academic biblical studies reveals itself, Geiger writes, in multiple ways: the selection of which books are lectured on – rarely the Pentateuch, the most important portion of the Bible to Jews yet often neglected by Christian academics; Christian scholars’ overwhelming ignorance of rabbinic Judaism; and the regular interpretation of the Bible as a repository of Christian beliefs. Geiger succinctly summarizes that for all the developments in the academic study of the bible in nineteenth-century German universities, “the confessional perspective never loses its influence on even the most impartial research” – and he queries: “thus how shall Jewish theology resist these encroachments of Christian perspectives?”¹⁵ There is only one way of cutting the Gordian knot: the establishment of a faculty of Jewish theology, within a German university.

Geiger’s proposal does not contain a detailed sketch of which subjects would be taught in a faculty of Jewish theology, but, in addition to historical and philosophical approaches to theology, he designates biblical exegesis and talmudic exegesis as two essential components

13 Abraham Geiger, *Ueber die Errichtung einer jüdisch-theologischen Facultät* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Riedel, 1838), p. 12.

14 Geiger, *Ueber die Errichtung einer jüdisch-theologischen Facultät*, p. 13.

15 Geiger, *Ueber die Errichtung einer jüdisch-theologischen Facultät*, p. 14.

of the curriculum. Geiger argues that biblical studies must form the foundation for any Jewish theology since the fact of revelation, central to the premise of a Jewish theology, emerges through systematic study of the Bible. Biblical studies so conceived would draw on philosophical, historical, and exegetical scholarship to evince and render comprehensible the Bible as a book of revelation. Knowledge of the Bible's content would come through understanding the philological textures of scripture and the perspectives of biblical authors, as confirmed by the methods of lower and higher criticism.¹⁶ Foreshadowing arguments in his 1857 *Urschrift und Uebersetzung der Bibel in ihrer Abhängigkeit von der innern Entwicklung des Judenthums* (The Original Text and Translations of the Bible in Its Dependence on the Inner Development of Judaism), Geiger suggests that biblical exegesis is hardly about accessing a single well-defined, retrievable biblical theology, but rather discerning how a seemingly coherent text is actually comprised of a variety of discrete theological traditions which developed through a variety of historical contexts.¹⁷ Critical biblical exegesis would offer a comprehensive survey of the theological beliefs (*Glaubenstoff*) scattered throughout the biblical books and allow scholars to consider how these individual theological traditions are related to each other and how they may comprise a coherent whole. Thus Geiger proposes that exegetical scholarship will reveal a contoured rather than a monolithic Bible, a newly “gapped and dialogical” scripture. At a time when biblical criticism was often understood to threaten religious belief, Geiger recasts critical method as productive for Jewish theology. Rendering visible the philological, historical, and exegetical evolution of the Bible allows scholars to recognize how Jewish theology was weighed, sifted, and developed in the past – and provides a model for the same processes in a nineteenth-century German Jewish context.

In order to craft the sort of substantial and comprehensive edifice

16 Geiger, “Die Gründung einer jüdisch-theologischen Facultät,” pp. 3-4. On Geiger’s approach to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scripture as part of his broader theological project, see Stefan Schorch, “Philology of the Jewish Spirit: *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and Jewish Scholarship on the Sacred Texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” *Wissenschaft des Judentums Beyond Tradition: Jewish Scholarship on the Sacred Texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. Dorothea M. Salzer, Chanan Gafni, and Hanan Harif (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 3-21.

17 Abraham Geiger, *Urschrift und Uebersetzung der Bibel in ihrer abhängigkeit von der innern entwicklung des Judenthums* (Breslau: J. Hainauer, 1857). On Geiger’s *Urschrift*, see Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

of Jewish theology appropriate to the standards of scholarship and the needs of contemporary Jewry, Geiger insists that Jewish scholars must develop not only critical study of the Bible, but also critical exegetical study of the Talmud. Geiger laments that there is hardly any critical scholarship on the Talmud (since it hardly interests non-Jews, he says) and points to the wealth of scholarship yet to be undertaken: knowledge of the Talmud's idioms and lexicography; understanding of the Talmud's methods, motivations, and meanings; accounting of the extent to which the Talmud reproduces established traditions or generates its own exegetical innovations; and study of how the Talmud evinces the development of new forms of authority and attests to Judaism's evolving theological consciousness.¹⁸ By insisting on the significance of systematic talmudic scholarship, Geiger proposes a Jewish theological faculty with double fields of exegetical theology – exegesis of the Bible and exegesis of the Talmud, each grounded in philological, historical, and exegetical methodologies.¹⁹ Geiger suggests that modern Jewish theology encompasses two textual hemispheres – analogous but not parallel to Protestant and Catholic theological faculties' focus on the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Modern Jewish theology, attuned to biblical and rabbinic exegesis, traverses its own doubled canonical topography.

Geiger's proposal reveals that his appreciation of talmudic hermeneutic creativity did not emerge with his *Urschrift und Uebersetzung der Bibel* but was already adumbrated in his proposals for a Jewish theological faculty published two decades earlier. Indeed, as Susannah Heschel notes, his recognition of this creativity already figured in his 1835-36 "Der Kampf christlicher Theologen gegen die bürgerlichen Gleichstellung der Juden, namentlich mit Bezug auf Anton Theodor Hartmann" (The Battle of Christian Theologians Against The Civil Equality of the Jews, With Particular Reference to Anton Theodor Hartmann).²⁰ Thus his 1844 "Das Verhältniss des natürlichen Schriftsinnes zur thalmudischen

18 "Die Gründung einer jüdisch-theologischen Facultät," p. 10; *Ueber die Errichtung einer jüdisch-theologischen Facultät*, p. 6.

19 Contra Carsten Wilke's interpretation of Geiger's proposal, Geiger's proposed faculty was not a radicalization of Schleiermacher's conception of theology, in which Schleiermacher dissolved the discipline of exegesis into a subdiscipline of historical theology. Carsten L. Wilke, "Abraham Geigers Bildungsutopie einer jüdisch-theologischen Fakultät," *Jüdische Existenz in der Moderne: Abraham Geiger und die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, eds. Christian Wiese, Walter Homolka, and Thomas Brechenmacher (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 370-378.

20 Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, pp. 70-71.

Schriftdeutung” (The Relationship of the Natural Sense of Scripture to Talmudic Scriptural Interpretation), in which he contrasted a “natural” plain sense with the “superficial” and “arbitrary” hermeneutic of the rabbis, marked a sort of detour which has yet to be explained.²¹ However one accounts for this, these tropes were certainly not invented by Geiger; negative representations of the Talmud and rabbinic exegesis were swirled into circulation by Protestant scholars, a point Geiger addresses in his “The Battle of Christian Theologians Against The Civil Equality of the Jews.”

By centering talmudic exegesis within his sketch of Jewish theology, Geiger bounds over the stereotypes regularly traded in Protestant depictions of rabbinic exegesis and endows talmudic hermeneutics with the scholarly dignity, theoretical independence, and institutional networks and resources worthy of a significant field of scholarship. Geiger’s proposal not only situates Jewish students and scholars within the structures of German education, but roots Jewish theology within the landscape of German *Wissenschaft*. Once talmudic exegetical theology was embedded within a Jewish theological faculty at a German university, anti-rabbinic tropes would no longer benefit from the aegis of scholarly credibility.

Geiger’s claim to Jewish structures of knowledge production was explicitly also a project of securing civic equality for German Jews. In his adumbration of a Jewish theological faculty, Geiger writes that “The highest spiritual progress lies in man becoming increasingly liberated from the lot which happens to be allocated to him in society... How could we have any doubt that prejudice and bias still have yet to lose their power?”²² He cites German Jews’ civil status as evidence of the extent to which German Jewish life by was constricted by theological bias,²³ and he narrated at length how specific theological prejudices bred

21 Abraham Geiger, “Das Verhältniss des natürlichen Schriftsinnes zur thalmudischen Schriftdeutung” *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie* Vol. 5, Nos. 1-2 (1844) pp. 53-81, 234-59. *Pace* Ken Koltun-Fromm, “The Practice of Hermeneutical Authority,” *Abraham Geiger’s Liberal Judaism: Personal Meaning and Religious Authority* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 40-63.

22 Geiger, *Ueber die Errichtung einer jüdisch-theologischen Facultät*, p. 7.

23 The antisemitism of Protestant biblical scholarship is treated at length in Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism Through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) and Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

political oppression in his four-part “The Battle of Christian Theologians Against The Civil Equality of the Jews.”²⁴ Geiger published his “The Establishment of a Jewish Theological Faculty” in the same issue of the *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für Jüdische Theologie* in which he published the third installment of critique of Christian prejudice, so readers could have connected his allusions to theological bias made in his proposal for a Jewish theological faculty to his specific arguments about the anti-Judaism of German Christian theologians including Michaelis, Eichhorn, Anton Theodor Hartmann, and others. In his proposal for a Jewish theological faculty, Geiger asserts that the path to civil emancipation passes through the emancipation of Jewish theology from the hegemonic control of Christian theologians.

Fully German, Fully Jewish: Philippson’s Theological Encyclopedia

Within a year of Geiger’s proposal, Phoebus Philippson, Ludwig Philippson’s brother and frequent collaborator, published a second call for a Jewish theological faculty in his brother’s widely read *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*. In his “Ideas toward an Encyclopedia and Methodology of Jewish Theology” (1837), Phoebus presents the only version of a Jewish theological encyclopedia I have found, in which he outlines the disciplinary organization and curriculum of a faculty of Jewish theology. As the title suggests, Philippson’s brief “Ideas toward an Encyclopedia and Methodology of Jewish Theology” indicates the influence of one of the most popular theological encyclopedias of the nineteenth century, Karl Rudolf Hagenbach’s *Encyklopädie und Methodologie der theologischen Wissenschaften* (Encyclopedia and Methodology of the Theological Sciences) (1833).²⁵ By basing his sketch on Hagenbach’s *Encyclopedia*, Philippson claims parity between the faculties of Jewish and Protestant theology, suggesting that they are of the same genus, if different species. Like Geiger, Philippson insists that the German university is the only

24 Abraham Geiger, “Der Kampf christlicher Theologen gegen die bürgerlichen Gleichstellung der Juden, namentlich mit Bezug auf Anton Theodor Hartmann,” *WZJT* Vol. 1, Nos. 1, 3 (1835), pp. 52-67; 340-357; Vol. 2, Nos. 1, 3 (1836), pp. 78-92, 446-473.

25 Karl Rudolf Hagenbach, *Encyklopädie und Methodologie der theologischen Wissenschaften* (Leipzig: Wiedmann’sche Buchhandlung, 1833). On Hagenbach, see Zachary Purvis, “Preceptor of Modern Theology: Hagenbach and the Mediating School,” *Theology and the University*, pp. 191-216.

suitable setting for a Jewish theological faculty since only a university setting offers the libraries and museums, the healthy exchange of ideas, interdisciplinary collaboration, and academic freedom necessary to nourish the growth of a new scholarly discipline like Jewish theology.²⁶

With Hagenbach and in contrast to Hagenbach's teacher, Schleiermacher, Philippson retains the four-part division of the theological faculty into a department comprised of exegetical theology, dogmatic theology, historical theology, and practical theology. Philippson explains that a Jewish theological faculty would be divided into the disciplines of exegetical theology, "embodying all knowledge leading to the understanding of scripture;" dogmatic theology, "embodying knowledge which leads to the systematic conception of religious instruction;" historical theology, "Jewish church history, which considers the fate of the Jewish church (synagogue);" and practical theology or "rabbinic studies" (*Rabbinalwissenschaft*), which "deals with the externality of Jewish religious knowledge and the particular capacities of the clergy."²⁷ As was typical of Protestant theological faculties, Philippson's encyclopedia highlights the interplay between scholarship and its practical application and proposes interdisciplinary structures of knowledge which would provide training for scholars and people religious in ways not previously available to German Jews.²⁸

Neither the education in German universities available to German Jews nor the training offered in the dwindling number of rabbinical seminaries in German lands offered German Jews the comprehensive instruction outlined in Philippson's brief theological encyclopedia. The

26 Dr. Uri [Phoebus Philippson], "Ideen zu einer Encyclopädie und Methodologie der jüdischen Theologie," *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (hereafter *AZJ*) No. 62 (2 September 1837), p. 246.

27 Philippson, "Ideen zu einer Encyclopädie," *AZJ*, No. 30 (8 July 1837), p. 119.

28 Phoebus Philippson introduced his "Ideas toward an Encyclopedia and Methodology of Jewish Theology" with another set of justifications for the need for a Jewish theological faculty: to reflect the diversity of religious roles within the Jewish community. Unlike Christian pastors whose primary function devolves upon preaching and ministering to his community, Jewish religious duties include not only the new role of the Jewish preacher, but also the sofer, the hazzan, the shochet, the instructor of the youth, and the shamash. Only a Jewish theological faculty which treated all of Jewish theology could offer the systematic resources necessary to inform the diverse needs of modern Jewish religious life. Philippson, *AZJ*, No. 20 (15 June 1837), pp. 77-78. Carsten L. Wilke echoes Geiger's and Philippson's point by highlighting the non-equivalence of nineteenth-century German rabbis and pastors, "Modern Rabbinical Training," pp. 85-88.

structures of German university theological faculties allowed Jewish students to be trained to some degree in only one of the four branches of the theological disciplines – exegetical theology – but, as Geiger noted, always through a Protestant or Catholic lens. Within German universities, there was no opportunity for Jews to be trained in a Jewish dogmatics, a Jewish historical theology, or a Jewish practical theology. This lack of institutional support immediately impacted how German Jews were able to develop Jewish theology as an academic discipline or nurture new developments within Judaism.²⁹

Philippson's proposed encyclopedia details the nature and method of studying exegetical theology, offering us one of the rare Jewish programmatic conceptions of the scholarly study of exegesis. Philippson outlined a Jewish exegetical theology rooted in the worlds of contemporary biblical criticism and rabbinic and medieval Jewish exegesis. Echoing Hagenbach's *Encyclopedia*, Philippson names five disciplines which should be mastered by the student of Jewish exegesis: isagogy, *critica sacra*, *philologia sacra*, *physica sacra*, and hermeneutics. Philippson's sketched course of study, like Hagenbach's, points to the comprehensive character of exegetical theology, which draws on grammar, philology, Oriental languages, the history of exegesis, and the newly ascendant disciplines of history, philosophy, and natural science.

Philippson's inclusion of isagogy and *critica sacra* foregrounds canon and redaction criticism as the portals through which scripture's meaning may be accessed. Isagogy introduces students to the Bible's redaction history and the analysis of the concept of canon; *critica sacra* includes analyzing the authenticity of biblical books as a whole, assessing the integrity of individual passages, and weighing the ordering of the books of scripture. This critical orientation holds as much deconstructive as constructive promise, as these methods also introduce students to the possibilities of multiple authorship and the existence of inauthentic elements of scripture. Philippson's brief overview of these subjects and

29 For example, the class of German Jewish rabbi preachers which emerged in the early nineteenth century crafted their mastery of rhetoric and edification literature without access to the systematic instruction available to their Protestant and Catholic colleagues; attending Christian services and studying exemplary Christian services stood in, poorly, for the university-led training in practical theology afforded their Protestant and Catholic peers. See Alexander Altmann, "The New Style of Preaching in Nineteenth-Century German Jewry" in *Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 65-116.

his decision to not include a suggested curriculum, as he does for the other exegetical disciplines, helps mask the critical orientation of his conception of biblical exegesis.

The third realm of study, *philologia sacra*, reveals the specifically Jewish canon and methods of Philippson's conception of Jewish exegetical theology. Philippson defines *philologia sacra* as fluency in Hebrew; Aramaic, including the dialects of the Targumim and the Talmud; and Oriental and specifically Semitic languages, namely Arabic, Syriac, Ethiopian, and perhaps Sanskrit.³⁰ Philippson's conception of *philologia sacra* establishes the primacy of fluency in Hebrew, seconded by fluency in Aramaic. By placing comparative Semitics third in the list, Philippson echoes fellow German Jewish exegetes in insisting that Hebrew and Aramaic form the primary linguistic context through which scripture is interpreted, suggesting that comparative Semitics should be utilized only as a tertiary resource.³¹ Philippson's curriculum for the study of *philologia sacra* includes the grammars of "Hartmann, Vater, Gesenius, Ewald, but also the Jewish grammarians Ibn Ezra, Kimchi, Ben Ze'ev, Heidenheim, and others" and the lexica of Kimchi, Simon, Gesenius, and Winer.³² Most of the German-language resources Philippson recommends are also listed in Hagenbach's *Encyclopedia*, but Philippson is the first to fold medieval and modern Hebrew-language scholarship into the curriculum of *philologia sacra*.³³ In these revisions, Philippson provides yet another example of how confessional orientation – namely the hegemony of Protestant sources – shaped even the highly technical and purportedly critical field of philology. Philippson's proposal refashions the field by

30 Philippson, "Ideen zu einer Encyclopädie," *AZJ*, No. 80 (5 October 1837), p. 318.

31 By emphasizing fluency in Hebrew and Aramaic, Philippson explains that he is privileging the study of grammar and lexicology (glossed as "*dikduk*," recalling the works of medieval Jewish grammarians), which he asserts is frequently overlooked in comparative Semitics. On the rise of comparative philology, see Holger Gzella, "Expansion of the Linguistic Context of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: Hebrew Among the Languages of the Ancient Near East." *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 3, *From Modernism to Post-Modernism*, pt. 1, *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. M. Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), pp. 134-167.

32 Philippson, "Ideen zu einer Encyclopädie," *AZJ*, No. 80 (5 October 1837), p. 318.

33 On Ben Ze'ev, see Hannes Bezzel, Louise Hecht, and Grit Schorch, "Die Anfänge moderner Bibelwissenschaft in der Wiener Haskala: Juda Jeitteles und Juda Leib ben Ze'ev als Exegeten im Verlagshaus von Anton Schmid," *Deutsch-jüdische Bibelwissenschaft – Historische, exegetische und theologische Perspektiven*, eds. Daniel Vorpahl, Shani Tzoref, and Sophia Kähler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 171-194.

diminishing the influence of comparative philology and asserting the primacy of Hebrew and rabbinic literature for the study of the Bible and by including the works of medieval and modern Jewish grammarians in the curriculum of biblical philology.

Like Hagenbach, Philippson includes within *philologia sacra* not only Oriental languages and Bible translations, but also a collection of Bible commentaries.³⁴ Unlike Hagenbach, the curriculum in Philippson's brief encyclopedia includes talmudic and later rabbinic exegesis, which he argues "have exercised great influence upon Judaism and its theological conditions" and thus their knowledge is "an indispensable requisite for every Bible scholar, especially the Jewish scholar of theology."³⁵ Philippson agrees with Geiger that Jewish hermeneutics encompasses both biblical and rabbinic exegesis and thus a Jewish theological faculty must include study of the history and methods of both biblical and rabbinic hermeneutics.³⁶ In this sketch, Philippson offered one of the earliest articulations of the demand that serious biblical scholarship cannot be carried out without intimate knowledge of rabbinic exegesis. This argument would be repeated by every prominent German Jewish exegete throughout the nineteenth century.

In his suggested bibliography, Philippson recommends "study of the Talmud and its commentators [unnamed], as they relate to exegesis" and the commentaries of Kimchi, Ibn Ezra, Rashi, Mendelssohn, and Wessely. Historians have rightly pointed to German Jewish scholars' predilection for the *pashtanim*, medieval exegetes including Ibn Ezra, Kimchi, and Rashi who were attuned to the plain sense of scripture, and indeed these exegetes are listed in Philippson's proposed curriculum.³⁷ But by including rabbinic exegesis and the commentaries of Mendelssohn and Wessely, Philippson maintains the continuing significance of *derashic* exegesis to modern Jewish exegetical scholarship.³⁸ The exegetical

34 That is, *philologia sacra* as conceived in both of these encyclopedias extends beyond philological training, even though both initially define *philologia sacra* as such – yet they both list commentaries in their proposed curricula. Compare Hagenbach, *Encyklopädie und Methodologie*, pp. 180–183.

35 Philippson, "Ideen zu einer Encyclopädie," *AZJ*, No. 80 (5 October 1837), p. 318.

36 Philippson, "Ideen zu einer Encyclopädie," *AZJ*, No. 30 (8 July 1837), p. 119.

37 Ismar Schorsch, "The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy," *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1994), pp. 71–92.

38 Mendelssohn wove rabbinic exegesis into his hermeneutic via his account of language's primary and secondary meanings; Wessely revised the notion of *'omek ha-peshat* and maintained that the deep plain sense of scripture often accords with rabbinic *derashic* interpretation. Jay Harris, *How Do We Know This? Midrash and the Fragmentation of*

theology Philippson proposes is not reducible to plain sense exegesis, but includes both rabbinic exegesis and modern Jewish exegetes whose exegetical method united plain sense and homiletical interpretation. This curriculum, which extends beyond plain sense philological, historical, or literary hermeneutics, is apace with the diversity of hermeneutic methods to which Protestant students of exegetical theology were introduced.

The fourth discipline to be learned by the budding Jewish exegete, *physica sacra*, encompasses knowledge of the antiquarian, geographical, historical, chronological, and natural scientific scholarship related to the biblical world. Philippson explained that the far-ranging disciplines included under the umbrella concept of *physica sacra* each contributed to the historical-philosophical project of elucidating the spirit and mode of thinking in which each book of scripture was composed. Biblical scholars who presupposed that ancient modes of thought were distinct from modern ways of thinking relied on *physica sacra* to navigate their way back to biblical life and its modes of expression. Wholly reflecting contemporary trends in biblical scholarship, Philippson's curriculum for the student of *physica sacra* spans scientific scholarship, travel journals, and historical-philosophical scholarship, all aimed at elucidating the *realia* informing the perspectives of biblical authors.³⁹

Modern Judaism (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 142-147; Edward Breuer, "Rabbinic Interpretation in an Age of Enlightenment," *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans, and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 177-222; and Elias Sacks, "'The Strict Obedience we Owe': Jewish Practice and the Study of History," *Moses Mendelssohn's Living Script: Philosophy, Practice, History, Judaism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017), pp. 132-139.

- 39 Philippson names the works of Hanzel, Winer, Bochart; Jahn, de Wette, Celsius, Rosenmüller and Herder's writings on poetry and philosophy. Philippson, "Ideen zu einer Encyclopädie," *AZJ*, No. 80 (5 October 1837), p. 319. Biblical scholars frequently traversed the chasm separating ancient and modern modes of expression by way of orientalist scholarship which read contemporary Arabs as essentially unchanged from biblical figures – hence the inclusion of contemporary travel journals within the curriculum of *physica sacra*. See Jonathan M. Hess, "Orientalism and the Colonial Imaginary: Johann David Michalis and the Specter of Racial Antisemitism," *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University, 2002), pp. 51-89 and Jonathan Sheehan, "History: The Archival Bible," *The Enlightenment Bible*, pp. 182-222. James Turner rightly identifies scholars' perception of the gap between biblical thought-worlds and modern perspectives, but overlooks the extent to which German biblical scholars relied on an unchanging – and not extinct – "oriental mind" to decipher the Bible. *Philology*:

Philipppson's proposed course of study for the Jewish exegete is completed with mastery of the art of hermeneutics. Like Hagenbach, Philipppson agrees with Schleiermacher that interpretation of the Bible follows the same interpretative rules applicable to any other text. As exegetical students develop their talents for the art of hermeneutics through exegetical exercises, Philipppson suggests that they practice a series of methodological precepts:

- (1) First, read cursorily through the text which is to be interpreted, in order to gain a general understanding of its spirit, content, and language;
- (2) Create an outline of the book by making a schema of the text's main ideas and their consequences;
- (3) Translate the passage literally, keeping conventional expressions comprehensible;
- (4) Given the plurivocality of so many words in the Bible, one cannot content themselves with finding the true and proper sense of a passage in itself, but must investigate whether it is also the demonstrable (erweisliche) sense of the passage;
- (5) One often tackles interpreting the difficult passages of scripture by taking refuge in dictionaries and lexica, but the best interpretations are often found through one's own thinking and research;
- (6) The most careful exegete searches for the influence of known philosophical and theological ideas and opinions (failure to consider these contexts forms a cliff against which many Jewish and Christian exegetical theologians flounder);
- (7) If the interpretation of the Bible is to be used for practical purposes, it is not as necessary as it may seem to hold so closely to the grammatical interpretation, but religious teachers should still strive to compose their texts according to correct hermeneutic rules.⁴⁰

Two aspects of Philipppson's section on Jewish hermeneutics are particularly striking. First, he prioritizes a plain sense hermeneutic over other hermeneutic methods, including homiletical and philosophical readings of scripture. If his inclusion of Mendelssohn and Wessely was notable given their theories of the deep resonance between the plain

The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 211.

40 Philipppson, "Ideen zu einer Encyclopädie," *AZJ*, No. 80 (5 October 1837), p. 319.

sense and rabbinic exegesis, Philippson's adumbration of hermeneutics seems to suggest that their method merits only historical interest for nineteenth-century students of Jewish theology. Like Graetz would argue half a century later, Philippson seems to shear homiletical, philosophical, and mystical exegesis from the realm of modern Jewish scriptural hermeneutics. Until, that is, one reaches the seventh principle, in which strict adherence to plain sense interpretation is rendered secondary to the needs of "practical purposes," namely, the crafting of sermons or the education of the youth. Jewish practical theology, with its affective and educational demands, holds open space for the on-going development of supra-peshat Jewish exegesis.

Second, these seven principles are woefully inadequate as a theory of hermeneutics. Indeed, this section is absurd in its brevity. Unlike his adumbration of philologia sacra and physical sacra, Philippson recommends no textbooks, only supplying these seven precepts. However, this oddity does not reflect Philippson's own idiosyncrasy, but a yawning chasm in exegetical scholarship. If Philippson did not reference any textbooks in his overview of isagogy and critica sacra in order to mask the critical thrust of his conception of exegetical theology, Philippson recommended no books on hermeneutics because there simply were not any to recommend. Of the sources on biblical hermeneutics Hagenbach lists, not one of them offers a theory of hermeneutics trained exclusively on the Hebrew Bible.⁴¹

Philippson never uses his theological encyclopedia to directly criticize Protestant theologians, but reading his proposal as a sort of commentary on Hagenbach's theological encyclopedia illustrates how thinking through the structure and curriculum of a Jewish theological faculty reveals distortions and lacunae in Protestant formulations of exegetical theology. The most striking interventions Philippson introduces are the inclusion of rabbinic, medieval, and modern Jewish grammars and commentaries and his cursory motion toward a hermeneutics of the Hebrew Bible on

41 In this list, there are several texts whose titles are not explicitly focused on biblical hermeneutics *qua* New Testament hermeneutics, but each of these still propose a hermeneutic of the "Old Testament" which is realized through New Testament doctrines. Hagenbach, *Encyklopädie und Methodologie*, pp. 166-167. For example, Hermann Olshausen opens his "Ein Wort über tiefer Schrittsinn" with "Gerade die Erklärung des alten Testaments im Neuen aber ist der Punkt, wo von einzig und allein alle der göttlichen Weisheit zugehörnde Auslegung ausgehen darf," p. 8. Even more starkly, he proclaims a page earlier: "Wer nicht bekennen wird, daß Jesu Christus ist in das Fleisch gekommen, der ist der Antichrist," p. 7.

its own terms. Philippson's proposed faculty prepares Jewish scholars to participate in Protestant exegetical scholarship but also reconfigures which languages, texts, and methods are constitutive of the academic discipline of biblical exegesis.

Philippson, too, tied the establishment of a Jewish theological faculty to Jewish emancipation, though he espouses a "rights through regeneration" approach. Philippson concludes his encyclopedia with the hope that establishing a Jewish theological faculty so conceived would not only redound to the dignity of the individual Jewish theologian, but would also afford German Jews the resources needed to proceed along the paths of *Bildung* and civilization, in order, he writes, to become ever worthier of emancipation. "Once we have first emancipated ourselves, once we have brought ourselves to a higher level of *Bildung* such that the Jewish populace stands at a higher level than the masses of other nations, truly Europe can no longer delay awarding us the boon of emancipation."⁴² With these words, Philippson reveals his internalization of the ubiquitous *quid pro quo* logic saturating late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates over Jewish emancipation: once German Jews sufficiently reformed themselves – spoke better German, practiced less strange versions of Judaism, attained higher levels of education – then they would be awarded emancipation.⁴³ According to this arrangement, disenfranchisement was hardly a matter of Christian prejudice, but simply a reflection of deficiencies in German Jews' educational, professional, or religious formation. In Philippson's eyes, a Jewish theological faculty could provide the theoretical foundations and systematic training required for German Judaism's thorough-going reform.

The Generational Ravages of Nothing

Two tropes have emerged in recent scholarship: the first insists that German Jewish scholars excluded the Bible from their purview, the second admits that German Jews were interested in biblical scholarship

42 Philippson, "Ideen zu einer Encyclopädie," *AZJ*, No. 85 (17 October 1837), p. 339.

43 David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 13-40. Jonathan M. Hess places this discourse in the context of Prussian colonialist ambitions in "Rome, Jerusalem and the Triumph of Modernity: Christian Wilhelm Dohm and the Regeneration of the Jews," *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity*, pp. 25-50.

but avidly avoided biblical criticism. The argument that German Jewish scholars were disinterested in the Bible is simply incorrect.⁴⁴ The second claim that German Jews avoided textual and historical criticism arises from a distorted perspective. Measuring German Jewish bible scholarship by their reception of biblical criticism ignores the plurality of hermeneutic methods comprising biblical scholarship and exaggerates the influence of biblical criticism, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century. Throughout the nineteenth-century, German Jewish scholars were attuned to the challenges and promise of critical exegetical scholarship and, like their Protestant peers, engaged it to the extent that it supported their broader projects.

The question sparked by these two tropes is: To what are we comparing nineteenth-century German Jewish scholarship? Usually German Protestant biblical scholarship is invoked as the standard against which to measure German Jewish biblical scholarship. But this is a flawed comparison which, in its asymmetry, reveals deeper truths about how unequal access to institutions of knowledge production have vast consequences which are often difficult to discern. Nineteenth-century German biblical scholarship was a highly technical affair. The biblical exegete must become proficient in the wide range of disciplines comprising isagogy, *critica sacra*, *philologia sacra*, *physica sacra*, and hermeneutics. But the faculty of Jewish theology proposed by Geiger and Philippson was never established.⁴⁵ There was no space in which German Jews could become trained in Jewish exegesis. Although the modern Jewish study of exegesis was institutionalized with the opening of the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau in 1854, the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in 1872, and the Rabbinerseminar in Berlin in 1873,⁴⁶ not one of these institutions satisfied the demand voiced by

44 Just in the last year, several studies of nineteenth-century German Jewish Bible scholarship have been published, including *Deutsch-jüdische Bibelwissenschaft – Historische, exegetische und theologische Perspektiven*, eds. Daniel Vorpahl, Shani Tzoref, and Sophia Kähler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019); *Wissenschaft des Judentums Beyond Tradition: Jewish Scholarship on the Sacred Texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. Dorothea M. Salzer, Chanan Gafni, and Hanan Harif (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019); Alexandra Zirkle, “Heinrich Graetz and the Exegetical Contours of Modern Jewish History,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 109.3 (2019), pp. 360-383; and Abigail Gillman, *A History of German Jewish Bible Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

45 On the cognate topic of German Jews’ overwhelming exclusion from faculty positions at Prussian universities, see Ismar Schorsch, “Jewish Academics at Prussian Universities,” *From Text to Context*, pp. 51-70.

46 Rabbinical candidates at the Breslau seminary studied exegesis as one of the eight

Geiger and Philippson for a Jewish theological faculty within a German university. Each of these institutions required concurrent enrollment in doctoral studies at a German university, but such an arrangement still failed to avail Jewish students access to high quality instruction in the fields related to Jewish exegesis.⁴⁷

As the case of German Jewry illustrates, the losses and distortions of civil disenfranchisement are multitude, generational, and challenging to trace. Without access to a systematic and comprehensive course of study, only the most exceptional and self-motivated German Jews were able to produce exegetical scholarship with the same breadth of expertise as their Protestant peers. Without a critical mass of Jewish theologians concentrated in a single place, German Jews were precluded from forming distinct schools of thought. Without being housed within a university system, German Jews were not embedded within scholarly networks with all the benefits of collegiality, mentorship, and exchange such networks afford. With no existing faculty positions in Jewish theology, German Jewish scholars had to balance their biblical scholarship with a non-academic career, save the very few individuals who secured posts in one of the rabbinical seminaries or the Hochschule. This is only

disciplines in the theological faculty, which included biblical exegesis; Hebrew grammar; Talmud studies; Jewish history; philosophy of religion and Hellenistika; homiletics; pedagogy; and calendrical matters. Following Talmud study, biblical exegesis was the second most intensive component of the seminary curriculum, requiring a total of twenty-four weekly hours of instruction over the seven-year rabbinical seminary program. Marcus Brann, *Geschichte des Jüdisch-theologischen Seminars (Fraenkel'sche Stiftung) in Breslau: Festschrift zum Fünfzigjährigen Jubiläum der Anstalt (Breslau: Th. Schatzky, [1904])*, p. 68.

When the Berlin rabbinical seminary opened in 1873, biblical exegesis constituted one of the four categories in the curriculum and was a required component of every semester of the six-year program, *Das Rabbiner-Seminar zu Berlin. Bericht über die ersten fünfundzwanzig Jahre seines Bestehens (1873-1898)* (Berlin: H. Itzkowski, 1898), pp. 32-33. Like the Breslau seminary, biblical exegesis was the second most substantial part of the curriculum, following Talmud study, with eighteen weekly hours of instruction. David Ellenson offers a very brief overview of the Breslau Seminary's course of study before turning to the curricula of the Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, in "The Curriculum of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Historical and Comparative Perspective: A Prism on the Emergence of American Jewish Religious Denominationalism," *After Emancipation: Jewish Religious Responses to Modernity* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2004), pp. 280-319.

47 Jewish university students at the University of Berlin complained that there were no competent professors of Bible exegesis, Jewish history and literature, philosophy of religion, or homiletics. *Rabbiner-Seminar zu Berlin*, 6.

a partial accounting of the losses incurred by the failure of German universities to create space for a Jewish theological faculty; the costs extend far beyond what has been enumerated here. German Jewish Bible scholarship cannot be assessed without registering that German Jews were systematically excluded from theological faculties in German universities. Although the absence of a Jewish theological faculty renders the biblical scholarship produced by German Jews all the more remarkable, we will never know what German Jewish exegetical theology would have looked like if Geiger's or Philippon's proposals for a Jewish theological faculty in a German university had been realized.

Andreas Brämer

Wissenschaft? des? Judenthums? – Defining the Boundaries of Modern Jewish Scholarship in Germany 1818-1876¹

Many historians seem to agree on 1818 as the year in which the modern academic study of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*) was born – a field of investigation thus constituted in an era when most disciplines within the humanities were in the process of developing a historical consciousness. In retrospect, the early beginnings of this scholarly endeavor seem rather modest: Leopold Zunz (1794-1886), a young Jewish student at the newly established Berlin University, wrote a small brochure, which was in fact far from creating a sensation following its publication. But Zunz's pamphlet entitled *Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur* (On Rabbinic Literature) was designed as a programmatic text.² Written in German that was far from elegant and clear, the 23 year old author endeavored to sketch the basic outlines of a research agenda which has ever since served scholars as both a point of reference and a source of inspiration for their own work. What seems to be common sense today marked a turning point in the early 19th century: If traditional exegetical literature had presented Judaism as a basically

- 1 This essay is based on research that I was able to conduct during my fellowship 2014/15 at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia. I am grateful to the staff for an exceptional year: Anne Oravetz Albert, Bonnie Blankenship, Sam Cardillo, Sol Cohen, Mark Davidson, Natalie B. Dohrmann, Joe Gulka, Arthur Kiron, Ety Lassman, Judith Leifer, Carrie Love, Bruce Nielsen, Karen Schnitker, Steven Weitzman and, last but not least, David Ruderman.
- 2 Leopold Zunz, *Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur, nebst Nachrichten über ein altes bis jetzt ungedrucktes hebräisches Werk*, Berlin 1818; cf. for example Leon Wieseltier, "Etwas über die jüdische Historik: Leopold Zunz and the Inception of Modern Jewish Historiography", in: *History and Theory* 20 (1981), p. 135-149; Richard S. Sarason, "Rabbinic Literature, Rabbinic History, and Scholarly Thinking: *Wissenschaft* and Beyond", in: Andreas Gotzmann and Christian Wiese (eds.), *Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness: Identities-Encounters-Perspectives*. Leiden 2007, p. 93; Nils Roemer, *Jewish Scholarship and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Germany. Between History and Faith*, Madison, Wis. 2005, p. 24; Christoph Schulte, "Kritik und Aufhebung der rabbinischen Literatur in der frühen Wissenschaft des Judentums", in: Dirk Hartwig et al. (eds.), *Im Vollen Licht der Geschichte. Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung*, Würzburg 2008, p. 102.

unchangeable system, although in details capable of adaptation, Zunz described Judaism as a culture formed by religion that had without exception evolved over time: in other words, it was a phenomenon that had invariably undergone change and was constantly developing and changing throughout its course of history. For that reason, it had to be approached utilizing the methodological arsenal of scientific critique and not via the traditional paths of textual commentary.

This essay aims at making observations on Jewish scholarship in Germany during the first period in the history of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, i.e. the decades following Zunz's revolutionary essay up until 1876, when his collected writings appeared in print.³ The text concentrates on two aspects. The first part deals with the reassessment of the popular notion that the field of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and its thematic and methodological boundaries are and always have been undisputed, that is to say that an early consensus was reached concerning a canon of authoritative texts and a nomenclature of associated scholars within the academic study of Judaism. However, a close reading of Jewish texts originating in German speaking Europe up until the 1870s suggests that our present understanding of the meaning of *Wissenschaft* in the context of Jewish scholarship could be too limited and rigid. *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, especially in its early stages, seems to have comprised a number of rather diverse definitions of critical scholarship. These different notions and concepts of *Wissenschaft* coexisted and competed at the same time.

Secondly, this paper will neither focus on Jewish scholarship with an emancipatory agenda nor on research designed as a counter-history in efforts to grapple with Christian scholarship or common beliefs among non-Jews.⁴ Instead, it examines the fact that *Jüdische Wissenschaft* often turned inwards and explicitly delivered a message to a Jewish audience, either real or imagined, "to introduce the Jewish world to itself".⁵ Contrary to Zunz's often cited maxim that "the entire literature of the Jews must, to the greatest possible extent, be regarded as an object of research, without our being concerned as to whether its total

3 L. Zunz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3 volumes, Berlin 1875/76; I am following Ismar Schorsch's periodization, cf. id., "The Emergence of Historical Consciousness in Modern Judaism", in: *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 28 (1983), p. 437.

4 Cf. Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, Berkeley/ Los Angeles/ Oxford 1993, p. 36.

5 Salman Rubaschoff, "Erstlinge der Entjüdung (Drei Reden von Eduard Gans im Kulturverein)", in: *Der jüdische Wille* 1 (1918), pp. 195f.

content should or can also be a norm for our own judgment”⁶ during the course of the 19th century, a modern branch of Jewish research emerged that did not always do justice to this claim and in actuality but rarely complied with it. Notwithstanding the considerable influence that Zunz exercised as a master thinker of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, this scholarship did not develop as a “secular discipline, to be pursued independently of Jewish commitments.”⁷ Rather, as the second part of this article will try to make clear, critical Jewish scholarship – which per se was not limited to the secular but necessarily expanded into the religious realm – positioned itself in a field full of tension between the open-ended quest for knowledge and systematic-normative claims of the religious community.⁸ Many, if not most, representatives of *WdJ* were far from separating their research from their religious belief system. Their vision of a *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as a religiously infused Jewish theology included, – implicitly or explicitly, – different readings of divine revelation. For these men (mostly rabbis), the history of the Jewish religion mattered not only as a history with cultural but also with religious meaning.

I Meanings of *Wissenschaft*

In order to draw conclusions on the conceptual ambiguities of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* it is enlightening first of all to analyze the Jewish use of the term *Wissenschaft*. The 19th century presented itself as

- 6 L. Zunz, *Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur*, I have used a reprint in: idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 1, Berlin 1875, p. 5; cf. for example, Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Wissensbilder im modernen jüdischen Denken”, in: Ulrich Raulff & Gary Smith (Eds.), *Wissensbilder. Strategien der Überlieferung*, Berlin 1999, p. 233.
- 7 See Christian Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany*, Leiden/Boston 2005, p. XVII.
- 8 Cf. also Andreas Gotzmann, *Eigenheit und Einheit. Modernisierungsdiskurse des deutschen Judentums der Emanzipationszeit*, Leiden/ Boston 2002, pp. 184–211; Kerstin von der Krone, *Wissenschaft in Öffentlichkeit. Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und ihre Zeitschriften*, Berlin/ Boston 2012, pp. 151–160; George Y. Kohler, “Judaism Buried or Revitalised? Wissenschaft des Judentums in Nineteenth Century Germany – Impact, Actuality, and Applicability Today”, in: Daniel J. Lasker (ed.), *Jewish Thought and Jewish Belief*, Beer Sheva 2012, pp. 27–65; Michael A. Meyer, “Two Persistent Tensions within Wissenschaft des Judentums”, in: *Modern Judaism* 24:2 (2004), pp. 105–119; also in: Andreas Gotzmann and Christian Wiese (eds.), *Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness. Identities, Encounters, Perspectives*, Leiden/ Boston 2007, pp. 73–89.

an era of *Verwissenschaftlichung* (scientification) in general and within German Jewish learning in particular.⁹ German Jews increasingly entered secondary schools and reformed universities, which they felt were not only places of knowledge passed on from earlier generations but which they also considered to be centers of knowledge production gained through research. Gradually, the findings gained in the different faculties – philosophy, theology, jurisprudence and medicine– began to make their presence generally felt in everyday life. Thus both in the secular and the religious spheres of Jewish life Jewish tradition and learning had to come to terms with this impact, e.g. as Jews started to apply modern scholarly approaches in dealing with their religious cultural heritage, the validity of which could no longer remain unquestioned. Thus the uses of *Wissenschaft* were both a cause and a symptom of crisis but at the same time also offered an instrument for its solution.

However, scientification was not uniform but could work in different directions. If we take Leopold Zunz as both a pioneer and a mentor of modern German Jewish scholarship, we can certainly list a considerable number of scholars who in the course of the century followed in his footsteps by applying both textual criticism and source criticism. As a student at the University of Berlin, Zunz had been greatly influenced, among others, by the classical scholars Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824) and August Boeckh (1785-1867), who had developed a methodology of classical philology to empirically investigate antiquity as a narrative of cultural and intellectual developments.¹⁰ However, we should bear in mind that a modern notion of *Wissenschaft* only prevailed during the second third of the 19th century. In the earlier epoch of idealism, however, numerous concepts of *Wissenschaft* still circulated which also enjoyed great popularity while philosophy presented itself as an integrative meta science, a superior comprehensive science of sciences. During these

9 Cf. David N. Myers' interesting observations: "Philosophy and Kabbalah in *Wissenschaft des Judentums*: Rethinking the Narrative of Neglect", in: *Studia Judaica* 16 (2008), S. 58f.

10 August Boeckh, *Encyclopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften*, Leipzig 1877; Friedrich August Wolf/ Philipp Buttmann, *Museum der Alterthums-Wissenschaft*. Erster Band, Berlin 1807; cf. Giuseppe Veltri, "Altertumswissenschaft und *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Leopold Zunz und seine Lehrer F.A. Wolf und A. Böckh", in: idem/ Reinhard Markner (eds.), *Friedrich August Wolf. Studien, Dokumente, Bibliographie*, Stuttgart 1999, pp. 32-47; Ismar Elbogen, "Neuorientierung unserer *Wissenschaft*", in: *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und *Wissenschaft des Judentums** 62 (1918), p. 85; Michael A. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew. Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany, 1749-1824*, Detroit 1967, pp. 144-182.

years, speculative approaches were still considered by many, of whom several also taught at the University of Berlin, as superior in relation to the empirical disciplines. Even Zunz, who was far from being a dedicated philosopher, could not ignore the central role of philosophy within scholarship in general and Jewish scholarship in particular. This acknowledgement was particularly obvious in his early years. In his seminal essay written in 1818, for example, he explicitly recognized the special role of philosophy as “the supreme guide when we ourselves take on the task to recognize the intellectual stature of the [Jewish] people”. At least in theory it was philosophy that reigned over all the “chambers of science”.¹¹

Many articles in the *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, edited by Zunz for the short-lived *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* in 1823, likewise exemplified the influence of philosophy, especially in its Hegelian guise. Interestingly, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, in his quest for cognition of the absolute spirit, emphatically dismissed the use of empirical evidence as a waiver of the use of a scientific approach!¹² Even in later decades when philosophy had already given up its former hierarchical claims within the sciences, its impact on German Jewish scholarship was still easily verifiable. Especially Salomon Ludwig Steinheim, Salomon Formstecher and Samuel Hirsch, in their efforts to systematically approach the Jewish belief system, are noteworthy representatives of philosophically inspired scholarship. Their works today are not generally considered truly genuine contributions to *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*. However, their oeuvre was at least in part acknowledged as such during their own time when the boundaries of the new discipline were still marked less rigidly and no institutions existed to mandate one authoritarian, modern methodology for the generation of Jewish knowledge.

Salomon Ludwig Steinheim (1789-1866), a physician from Altona, is a fascinating representative of an innovative Jewish scholarship designed to break new grounds both substantially and methodologically, while arguing specifically against philosophical speculation. While Steinheim is acknowledged today by many as one of the most important German

11 Zunz, *Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur*, pp. 42-44; cf. Myers, *Philosophy and Kabbalah in Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, S. 59f.

12 Wissenschaft (article), in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Vol. 12, Basel 2004, pp. 902-921; on Hegel's influence see Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew.*, p. 146 et passim; Sven-Erik Rose, *Jewish Philosophical Politics in Germany, 1789-1848*, Waltham MA, 2014, pp. 90-145.

Jewish philosophical thinkers of the 19th century, he vehemently objected to a philosophical approach to the Jewish religion, insisting that all efforts to describe the belief system from the vantage point of pure reason would necessarily lead astray. In his four volume opus magnum “Die Offenbarung nach dem Lehrbegriff der Synagoge” (The Revelation According to the Doctrine of Judaism) published between 1835 and 1865, he offered at least a theoretical remedy, suggesting a positivistic approach modeled on the methodology of the exact sciences. In order to “direct the beams of *Wissenschaftlichkeit* into the deep shafts of Jewish doctrine”, one should rather follow the example of such disciplines as astronomy, chemistry and physics, in other words, to produce knowledge on the basis of observation, experiment and experience. “It is our task”, he claimed, “to prove that there is no veritable source of knowledge of the real God, but revelation as described in the Old Testament (sic).” However, in his attempt to apply empiricism to metaphysical matters, Steinheim could not escape philosophical theory altogether.¹³

While it is true that Steinheim – not least because of his medical training background – was never a member of the inner circles of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, yet he was not a complete outsider, either. Steinheim did contribute, for example, to the periodicals published by Zacharias Frankel, the chief rabbi of Dresden, Saxony, (*Zeitschrift für die religiösen Interessen des Judenthums*) and by Abraham Geiger, liberal rabbi in Wiesbaden and Breslau, who had even invited Steinheim to join the editorial board of his journal, the *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für Jüdische Theologie*. Geiger’s *Zeitschrift* also welcomed the first volume of Steinheim’s *Offenbarungslehre* as a valuable contribution to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, even though Geiger personally objected to Steinheim’s conclusions.¹⁴

13 Salomon Ludwig Steinheim, *Die Offenbarung nach dem Lehrbegriff der Synagoge. Die Glaubenslehre der Synagoge als exacte Wissenschaft*, Leipzig 1856, pp. 1-9; cf. Heinz Mosche Graupe, “Die philosophischen Motive der Theologie S. L. Steinheims”, in: Hans-Joachim Schoeps (ed.), *Salomon Ludwig Steinheim zum Gedenken. Ein Sammelband*, Leiden 1966, pp. 40-48.

14 B.H., Rezension, in: *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für Jüdische Theologie* 2 (1836), p. 361; Salomon Ludwig Steinheim, “Der Gottesstaat”, in: *WZJT* 3 (1837), pp. 15-38, idem, “Die Messiasidee nach der Bestimmung der Offenbarungslehre”, in: *Zeitschrift für die religiösen Angelegenheiten des Judenthums* 2 (1845), pp. 21-23, 41-49; idem, “Die politische Legitimität und die Lehre der Offenbarung”, in: *ibid.*, pp. 130-139; cf. also Steinheim an Leopold Zunz, April 9, 1841, in: Schoeps (ed.), *Salomon Ludwig Steinheim zum Gedenken*, p. 271; Michael A. Meyer, “Ob Schrift? Ob Geist? Die Offenbarungsfrage im deutschen Judentum des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts”, in: Jakob J. Petuchowski/ Walter

A contemporary of Steinheim, reform rabbi Salomon Formstecher (1808-1889) of Offenbach, published his 400 page philosophical theological work *Religion des Geistes* (Religion of the Spirit) in 1841. Formstecher used the subtitle to raise the claim that his work presented no less than a scientific description of Judaism (“eine wissenschaftliche Darstellung des Judenthums”). Far from Steinheim’s marked preference for the natural sciences, Formstecher was partly indebted to Schelling when he invoked a strictly “*wissenschaftlich*”, i.e. nonpartisan and presuppositionless, approach that he claimed to be unique to Judaism. Free speculation, he suggested, could be used to scientifically combine knowledge of the past and the present in order to picture a probable future. Formstecher ultimately aimed at proving Judaism an absolutely necessary phenomenon in the history of humankind.¹⁵

It is interesting to note that Moritz Steinschneider (1816-1907), soon to be one of the preeminent representatives of critical Jewish Scholarship, was sufficiently impressed as to mention Formstecher in an essay published in 1843, in which he addressed the idea of a *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* encyclopedia.¹⁶ Yet in 1842 a far more critical response had already come from Samuel Hirsch (1815-1889) in Dessau, himself a religious reformer in his own right. Hirsch, who was to become chief rabbi of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg only one year later, criticized his colleague sharply, refusing to give him any credit for his scholarly achievements. On the contrary, he reproached Formstecher, whose conclusions he disputed altogether. What is more, according to Hirsch, Formstecher failed in his attempt to apply the strict method of academic research (“die strenge Methode der Wissenschaft”), thereby doing Judaism a dangerous disservice. Hirsch explained his position:

“So far, Judaism has been humiliated abundantly in scholarship; [...] however it was only Christian scholars who thus spoke. The Jews had to remain silent; because they first had to learn to understand the meaning of those terminologies and honorific titles, before they were able to independently give the right answer. [...] If these scientific enemies of Judaism are now being offered a work that is intended to reproduce the

Strolz (eds.), *Offenbarung im jüdischen und christlichen Glaubensverständnis*, Freiburg/Basel/ Vienna 1981, pp. 162-179.

15 Salomon Formstecher, *Die Religion des Geistes, eine wissenschaftliche Darstellung des Judenthums nach seinem Charakter, Entwicklungsgange und Berufe in der Menschheit*, Frankfurt a.M. 1841, pp. 3-16.

16 Moritz Steinschneider, “Briefe über eine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaft des Judenthums”, in: *Literaturblatt des Orients* 4 (1843), p. 469.

spirit and position of Judaism, but that suffers from numerous scientific deficiencies, it will not [...] be held against the subjectivity of the author but against the matter under discussion. It will be used as evidence that Judaism is not compatible with the results of absolute *Wissenschaftlichkeit*, but nobody will want to believe that only one single Jew has failed to scientifically rise to the rich thought content of Judaism. Critique must be strict, if it does not want to compromise Judaism; it has to lay bare the scientific deficiencies on the one hand, while on the other hand it must try to illustrate that true Judaism can only be comprehended in its totality, using absolute scientificity; it is absolutely as compatible with true scientificity as it is incompatible with the deficient (scientificity).¹⁷

It is interesting to read Hirsch's comments that seem to allow conclusions on an increasing Jewish enthusiasm for science in general, which in Hirsch's own case seems to have verged on obsession. In fact, Hirsch stipulated rigorous *Wissenschaftlichkeit* for himself on publishing his own systematic description of Judaism, a religious philosophy of the Jews. Dissociating himself emphatically from mathematics and its axiomatic presuppositions and following in the footsteps of Hegel's dialectic logical model, Hirsch also recommended speculation as the ideal procedure for gaining objective evidence. Hirsch thus hoped to firmly establish philosophy not as, but within, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.¹⁸

Other German Jewish authors, characteristically most of them rabbis, wrote and published essays and books dedicated to aspects of the Jewish religion that lacked the reference material and procedures to generate and validate knowledge typical to a scholarly work but which nonetheless asserted the claim to contribute to critical scholarship. Neither the radical reformer Samuel Holdheim (1806-1860) nor the progenitor of modern orthodoxy Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) hesitated to inscribe themselves in the history of *Jüdische Wissenschaft*. In 1843, Rabbi Holdheim in Schwerin without any reservation claimed to meet the requirements of scientificity in his religious political reform treatise on rabbinic autonomy and the abolition of Jewish marriage and divorce regulations.¹⁹ From a conservative position Hirsch operated in similar ways when he launched his all-out attacks on scholars from the historical

17 *Literaturblatt des Orients* 3 (1842), pp. 438f.

18 Samuel Hirsch, *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden*, Leipzig 1842, pp. XV, XXXII, 3f.

19 Samuel Holdheim, *Ueber die Autonomie der Rabbinen und das Princip der jüdischen Ehe*, 2. Aufl., Schwerin 1847, pp. IV, XIII; see also his expert opinion in: *Rabbinische Gutachten über die Verträglichkeit der freien Forschung mit dem Rabbineramte*, vol. 1, Breslau 1842, p. 64.

critical camp of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. His criticism was flanked by a counter-scholarship, designed to not only systematically produce new religious knowledge but also explicitly acknowledge, if not prove, the revelational character of both the written and the oral Torah. Tradition according to this view was the product of a supernatural historical event, but it did not evolve and develop over time.²⁰

Although more names could easily be added to the list, only one more prominent author shall be mentioned here. Surprisingly, Rabbi Ludwig Philippson (1811-1889), a political activist as well as a prominent publicist, also made claims to join the ranks of *Wissenschaft* in the German Jewish arena. Admittedly Philippson was a prolific writer in all fields of the Jewish past and present, but he would eventually only publish one single piece of empirical scholarship, in 1865, a critical assessment of Jewish involvement in the crucifixion of Jesus.²¹ In an essay dedicated to *Wissenschaft* and life in 1856, the religious leader of the Magdeburg Jewish community and editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* severely criticized Zunz and those Jewish scholars who followed his example, openly accusing them of a philological antiquarianism that fell

- 20 See for example Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Chovev, Versuch über Jissroëls Pflichten in der Zerstreung*, Altona 1837, pp. IX-XI; idem (Ben Usiel), *Mittheilungen aus Naphthali's Briefwechsel*, pp. 5f.; idem, "Geschichte der Juden vom Untergang des jüdischen Staates bis zum Abschluß des Talmuds von Dr. H. Graetz", in: idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*. vol 5, Frankfurt a. M. 1910, pp. 318-509; idem, "Ein Wort an Herrn Kirchheim", in: *ibid.*, pp. 510-531; idem, "Grundlinien einer jüdischen Symbolik", in: idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*. vol 3, Frankfurt a. M. 1906, pp. 213-227; idem, "Wie gewinnen wir das jüdische Leben für die Wissenschaft", in: *Jeschurun* 8 (1861-62), pp. 73-91; cf. Heimann Jolowicz, *Die fortschreitende Entwicklung der Cultur der Juden in Deutschland und die wissenschaftliche Ausbildung des Judenthums von Mendelssohn bis auf unsere Zeit*, Berlin 1841, p. 23; Ran HaCohen, "Gehörst Du zu uns oder zu unsern Feinden?" (Josua 5,13). Die jüdische Auseinandersetzung mit der "Höheren Bibelkritik", in: Görgo K. Hasselhoff (ed.), *Die Entdeckung des Christentums in der Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Berlin 2010, pp. 77f.; cf. also David Myers who points out that Hirsch's "opposition to the desiccative effects of historicism is couched in the language of historicism itself – a hint to us of historicism's poignant inescapability. Unlike critics of the late eighteenth-century Maskilim – the Measfim, for example – Hirsch operated in a world in which the contextualizing logic of historicism had become pervasive. And so, for all of his efforts to rein in the excesses of historicism, he could not, or chose not to, evade its basic terms of reference."; Myers, *Glaube und Geschichte: A Vexed Relationship in German-Jewish Culture*, in: Gotzmann/ Wiese (eds.), *Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness*, p. 58.
- 21 Ludwig Philippson, *Haben wirklich die Juden Jesum gekreuzigt?*, Berlin 1866, p. 3; pre-publication in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* AZJ 29 (1865), pp. 317f., 331-335, 357-359, 421-424, 440-443, 533-537, 581-584.

back behind Friedrich August Wolf and failed to reach beyond the text, merely producing *Wissen* instead of *Wissenschaft*. Commenting on a claim Zunz had allegedly made that thanks to *Wissenschaft des Judentums* the yoke of rabbinism had been shaken off, Philippson reproached Zunz for encumbering the Jews with the stifling yoke of petty-minded scholarship (“geisterdrückendes Joch einer kleinlichen Gelehrsamkeit”). Leaving aside formal criteria in favor of a meta perspective, Philippson felt justified to place himself above the first generation of modern Jewish scholars, who did not even “pursue *Wissenschaft*. Because *Wissenschaft* includes the investigation, understanding and comprehension of life, the essence of things, which are all the object of *Wissenschaft*. [...] We do not emulate their example, but rather do not shy away from articulating that we, even if we have only in single parts worked on the historical material of Judaism, have been able to contribute more to the knowledge of its entire history, its place, accomplishments and objectives in world life than all these men jointly, that we, from the very start of our career, have succeeded to create the bright comprehensive view of Jewish history.”²²

II Notions of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

While general *Verwissenschaftlichung* or scientification in the Jewish context is best understood as an element of acculturation, *Wissenschaft des Judentums* or – to use another term that was even more frequently used – *Jüdische Wissenschaft* – emerged against the backdrop of political disappointments, social exclusion, anti-Semitism, cultural self-consciousness and religious disorientation. As previously mentioned with reference to Leopold Zunz, the academic study of Judaism initially appeared on the scene as a discipline that admittedly focused on a culture with a religious center of gravity but at the same time claimed to investigate its object independent of subjective piety, credo and ritual observance. In this respect, the educator Immanuel Wolf (Wohlwill) (1799-1847) followed suit when he presented his conceptual remarks on *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in 1823, published in the periodical *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, which was edited by Zunz for the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden*. Wolf referred to Judaism mainly in Hegelian terms, speaking about its idea of ultimate unity in

22 Ludwig Philippson, *Wissenschaft und Leben*, in: *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 20 (1856), p. 620.

the universe while also describing the academic study of Judaism as an all-encompassing systematic approach. Thus it addressed its object for its own sake, from a non-religious standpoint, unbiased and unconcerned with its results. *Wissenschaft des Judentums* therefore was a modern concept diametrically opposed to theology, i.e. the traditional mode of producing Jewish knowledge. While speaking emphatically against a utilitarian approach, Wolf expected the new scholarship to yield a substantial benefit, both from a universal and an explicitly Jewish perspective.²³

Zunz's early seminal masterpiece "Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden" ("The Sermons of the Jews"), published in 1832, may serve as one example of this strategy, albeit without its philosophical implications. Following the path of his university teacher Boeckh, who had defined philology and positive religion as two different fields that should not be connected under any circumstances²⁴, Zunz asserted that he had chosen a non-partisan approach in dealing with the religious institution within Judaism. It is true, however, that his results did support his argument both in favor of Jewish legal emancipation in the state and religious progress in the synagogue.²⁵ But in spite of his early reform enthusiasm, Zunz refrained from making references to the belief system of Judaism. All in all, he conceived *Wissenschaft des Judentums* mainly as a *Literaturgeschichte*, a literary history. Within his research agenda, historical theology as a sub-discipline only had a place when it dealt with the exterior patterns of the Jewish religion, but hardly with dogmatic or doctrinaire issues.²⁶

It was Zunz's follower and close friend Moritz Steinschneider who then carried the secular approach in Jewish studies to extremes. On various occasions, Steinschneider expressed his disapproval of *Wissenschaft des Judentums'* preoccupation with theological issues. Instead he advocated

23 Immanuel Wolf, Ueber den Begriff einer Wissenschaft des Judenthums, in: *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums* 1 (1823), pp. 1-24, in English: On the Concept of a Science of Judaism (1822), in: Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook 2 (1957), pp. 194-204.

24 Cf. Boeckh, *Encyklopädie und Methodologie*, p. 29.

25 Leopold Zunz to S.M. Ehrenberg, March 27, 1832, in: Nahum N. Glatzer (ed.), *Leopold Zunz. Jude – Deutscher – Europäer. Ein jüdisches Gelehrschicksal des 19. Jahrhunderts in Briefen an Freunde*, Tübingen 1964, p. 160.

26 Leopold Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt. Ein Beitrag zur Alterthumskunde und biblischen Kritik, zur Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin 1832; cf. id. to Samuel Meyer Ehrenberg, in: Nahum N. Glatzer (ed.), *Leopold Zunz. Jude – Deutscher – Europäer. Ein jüdisches Gelehrschicksal des 19. Jahrhunderts in Briefen an Freunde*, Tübingen 1964, p. 160; cf. Boeckh, *Encyklopädie*, p. 29.

a rationalist positivistic approach as opposed to the “Denkgläubigkeit” (faith based on intellect) of Reform Judaism. According to Steinschneider, Jewish scholarship had to deal both with the religious and ethnic dimensions of Judaism, while the scholar had to refrain from any references to his own belief system or even contemporary notions of Jewish theology. In an essay published in 1902 and dealing with the Arabic literature of the Jews, Steinschneider made remarks which were strikingly reminiscent of Boeckh’s position mentioned earlier. He also referred to faith and scholarship as two certainly valid but clearly distinct entities. While religious authority pertained to feelings and actions, Steinschneider stated that it should not serve as a source for knowledge, as knowledge did not allow for any pious concerns or considerations. Religious matters in Judaism should be the object of historical research without ever revealing the author’s personal credo.²⁷ On the other hand, national elements had their place within the history of the Jews. From this perspective, even studies by Jewish doctors, scientists, mathematicians, poets and composers could provide valuable contributions to *Jüdische Wissenschaft*.

A close examination of Zunz’s and Steinschneider’s biographies and writings reveals that the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholarship –especially since the 1830s– did not always comply with the scientific standards of these seemingly most influential figures. On the contrary, both scholars were in complete agreement on their criticism of the general trends. But the feeling of estrangement was mutual. While numerous modern Jewish scholars of the second generation still held Zunz in veneration and admired Steinschneider’s encyclopedic knowledge of all things Jewish, they clearly conceived a significantly different vision of academic Jewish scholarship. Dealing with these tensions from a historical perspective, it could be helpful to begin with an appraisal written by the Hungarian neolog rabbi and scholar Leopold Löw (1811-1875). When Löw critically assessed Zunz’s book on the history of the sermon in his weekly *Ben*

27 Moritz Steinschneider actually seems to have been the first to introduce the term “*Jüdische Studien*”: idem, *Jüdische Literatur*, in: *Allgemeine Encyclopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste Sect. 2 Th. 27* (ed. by Johann Samuel Ersch and Johann Gottfried Gruber), Göttingen 1850, p. 468; cf. idem, *Die Zukunft der jüdischen Wissenschaft*, in: *Hebräische Bibliographie* 9 (1869), p. 78; idem, on Zunz and Steinschneider see Céline Trautmann-Waller, *Leopold Zunz and Moritz Steinschneider: Wissenschaft des Judentums as a Struggle against Ghettoization in Science*, in: Reimund Leicht/ Gad Freudenthal (eds.), *Studies on Steinschneider. Moritz Steinschneider and the Emergence of the Science of Judaism in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, Leiden/Boston 2012, pp. 81-107.

Chananja in 1858. he also granted insights into a meta level of inter-generational critique, revealing that Löw did not stand alone:

“Jewish literature from his [i.e. Zunz’s] vantage point is neither predominantly religious nor theological. Since Jews have contributed in all fields and mostly in Hebrew, according to his opinion Jewish literature is part of general literature. [...] Therefore he is not focusing on religious historical aspects but rather on cultural and literary history. When he is elaborating on the history of the Jewish sermons he is proving that the Jewish spirit never sank to shameful idleness and that the living, instructing and edifying word was at all times heard in the synagogue; he is demonstrating how people taught and who the teachers were; he is listing the works that owe their existence to the synagogue sermon; but what actually had been taught and preached, and how the contents of the teachings and sermon have changed in the course of the centuries, he either conceals completely or he contents himself with vague suggestions. [...] In spite of the fact that this approach may be justified, Jewish theology will never be able to be content with it. [...] Research in the fields of philology and literary history has already generated enough progress so that we can and must enter the inner sanctuary of genuine theological, especially religious historical research, if Jewish historical theology is willing to accomplish its task.”²⁸

But what exactly was Löw driving at? It is no coincidence that the Szeged rabbi was referring to his reform colleague Abraham Geiger (1810-1874) in Breslau in his short article, presenting him as a shining example of a new generation of progressive scholars, who did in fact plow the field of actual religious history (“eigentliche Religionsgeschichte”). Indeed, it is Geiger who must be given credit for not only having produced multiple examples of this advanced scholarship but also for having laid the theoretical foundations for Jewish theology within the boundaries of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, or to be more precise, for a *Wissenschaft des Judentums* within the boundaries of Jewish theology. It is not without reason that Geiger’s first periodical was entitled *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für Jüdische Theologie*. Geiger was a prolific writer who on numerous occasions provided insights into his vision of a discipline that drew on Friedrich Schleiermacher’s (1768-1834) triple division of Protestant theology – i.e. philosophical, historical and practical

28 Leopold Löw, *Literarische Anzeige zu Geigers Urschrift*, in: *Ben Chananja* 1 (1858), pp. 93f.

theology.²⁹ As a theology, *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was no longer pure and purposeless but decidedly served as a tool to be applied to shape both the present and future. Rather than producing a systematic description of Judaism as a belief system and religious worldview, Geiger chose to explore the religious developments of the past in order to draw conclusions for the present and future. In his public lectures held during the late 1840s, Geiger defined Jewish theology as the knowledge of religious truths and of a life complying with these truths according to the teachings of Judaism. Hence practical theology was all about using this knowledge prescriptively for religious progress:

“History and critique, especially of post-biblical theology, is the most eminent scholarly endeavour of the present, without which no thriving practice is conceivable. When dealing with a full-fledged theology, practical action may seem sufficient for some; but when dealing with an incomplete one, practice alone is not sufficient. (Isaak Marcus) Jost, (Leopold) Zunz and (Salomo Judah) Rappoport started productively, (Salomon) Munk, (Samuel David) Luzzatto and (Leopold) Dukes contributed splendidly, albeit paying attention to the exterior mostly, while I have always endeavored to digest the inner core and to obtain from it results for reform.”³⁰

When Sigismund Stern (1812-1867), an ardent religious reformer and renowned educator, published his post-Mendelssohnian history of Judaism in 1857, he praised Geiger as the creator or first representative of a scientific theology of Judaism, an opinion probably shared by many of his contemporaries.³¹ It is indeed imaginable that the *Hochschule für*

29 Cf. also Imke Stallmann, *Abraham Geigers Wissenschaftsverständnis. Eine Studie zur jüdischen Rezeption von Schleiermachers Theologiebegriff*, Frankfurt a.M. 2013.

30 Abraham Geiger, *Einleitung in das Studium der jüdischen Theologie*, in: *Abraham Geiger's Nachgelassene Schriften. Zweiter Band* (Herausgegeben von Ludwig Geiger), Berlin 1875, p. 27; cf. also A. Geiger, *Urschrift und Uebersetzungen der Bibel in ihrer Abhängigkeit von der innern Entwicklung des Judenthums*, Breslau 1857, pp. IVf.; Heimann Jolowicz, *Die fortschreitende Entwicklung der Cultur der Juden in Deutschland und die wissenschaftliche Ausbildung des Judenthums von Mendelssohn bis auf unsere Zeit*, Berlin 1841, p. 22.

Michael Brenner, *Propheten des Vergangenen. Jüdische Geschichtsschreibung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, München 2006, p. 61; Alexander Altmann, *Jewish Studies: Their Scope and Meaning Today*, in: Raphael Jospe/ Samuel Z. Fishman, *Go and Study. Essays and Studies in Honor of Alfred Jospe*, Washington D.C. 1980, p. 85; Andreas Brämer, *Abraham Geiger – skeptischer Pionier einer Glaubenslehre des Reformjudentums?*, in: *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies* 3 (2018), S. 207–230.

31 S. Stern, *Geschichte des Judenthums von Mendelssohn bis auf die Gegenwart*, nebst

die Wissenschaft des Judenthums – founded in 1872 – might just as well have borne the name *Hochschule für Jüdische Theologie*, if Geiger's ideas had prevailed over those co-founders who favored a less denominational and more knowledge-oriented stance.³² Furthermore, another institution, the Breslau *Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar* (Jewish Theological Seminary) founded in 1854, had already laid claim to the term. Zacharias Frankel (1801-1875), its first director, was closer to Geiger's vision of a Jewish theology than he himself probably would have cared to be. But as an advocate of a rather conservative version of liberal Judaism (positive-historical Judaism) Frankel set different religious standards for the practice of Jewish scholarship. Thus, far from advocating a scholarship free of basic metaphysical tenets, he explicitly supported a "science of faith," a *Glaubenswissenschaft*, which despite its reservations on the constraints of dogma, could not completely do without them. Piety, focusing both inwardly and outwardly, was for Frankel simultaneously the prerequisite, the signpost and the goal of scientific inquiry. As he wrote:

"In its content and substance, it [i.e. Judaism] cannot be averse to critical scholarship: it calls on us to engage in research, in reflection, it does not desire spiritual darkness, and does not need to avoid science. That is its pride. But let us be led by faith. It is the banner, the leader, and it treads forever in the light of the Eternal One!"³³

Active as head of the Breslau JTS, Frankel directed the very

einer einleitenden Ueberschau der älteren Religions- und Kulturgeschichte, Frankfurt am Main 1857, p. 232.

32 Cf. the preliminary curriculum (1870), in: Erster Bericht über die Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums in Berlin (die ersten zwei Jahre ihres Bestehens 1872 und 1873 umfassend), erstattet vom Curatorium, Berlin 1874, pp. 24f.; the brochure also contains Geiger's report on his introductory lectures on the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*; cf. also Heinz-Hermann Völker, *Die Gründung und Entwicklung der Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums 1869-1900*, in: *Trumah* 2 (1990), pp. 26-30; Imke Stallmann, *Abraham Geigers Wissenschaftsverständnis. Eine Studie zur jüdischen Rezeption von Friedrich Schleiermachers Theologiebegriff*, Frankfurt am Main 2013, p. 370; *Verhandlungen der ersten israelitischen Synode zu Leipzig vom 29. Juni bis 4. Juli 1869*, Berlin 1869, p. 110.

33 Zacharias Frankel, *Über palästinische und alexandrinische Schriftforschung*, in: *Programm zur Eröffnung des jüdisch-theologischen Seminars zu Breslau am 10. August 1854*, Breslau 1854, p. 42; concerning Frankel's ideas on *Wissenschaft* cf. A. Brämer, *Rabbiner Zacharias Frankel. Wissenschaft des Judenthums und konservative Reform im 19. Jahrhundert*, Hildesheim/ Zürich/ New York 2000, pp. 255-275; idem, *Jüdische ‚Glaubenswissenschaft‘ – Zacharias Frankels rechtshistorische Forschung als Herausforderung der Orthodoxie*, in: Thomas Meyer, Andreas Kilcher (Eds.), *Die »Wissenschaft des Judenthums«. Eine Bestandsaufnahme*, Paderborn 2015, S. 79-94.

first modern institution for rabbinical training founded on German soil. During their studies at the seminary, the candidates had ample opportunity to become acquainted with Frankel's ethos of scholarship, to which the other teachers also had to pledge their loyalty. When the term "Breslau school" was used in the contemporary Jewish press, the reference was not just to a current within religious Judaism, but also to the principles of a religiously infused scholarship valid at the Seminary.³⁴

Closing Remarks

The academic study of Judaism in Germany during its first half of the 19th century sometimes addressed or envisioned a non-Jewish audience trying to further the legal emancipation of the Jews, thus presenting a counter-history to Christian classical studies and theology.³⁵ In the majority of cases, however, it is justified to refer to early *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as a *jüdische Wissenschaft* from all perspectives, that is to say a *Wissenschaft* designed by Jews, dealing with Jewish subjects and addressing mainly or exclusively a Jewish readership. While many different notions of *Wissenschaft* did initially compete within the Jewish sphere, by the second half of the 19th century the historical critical method obviously gained the upper hand. Also, it is interesting to note that a large proportion of those scholars conducting research within the academic study of Judaism were either serving as rabbis or involved in the field of rabbinical training, teaching as lecturers in the modern Jewish seminaries that had come into being in Germany since the 1850s.³⁶ The *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as a field of scholarship bound by and linked to religion was distinguished by its relation to different readings of divine revelation, but it also saw itself as shaped in these rabbinical seminaries. If nothing else, these institutions were led by an interest in

34 Cf. A. Brämer, The Early Years of the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary: The Change in the Rabbinical Profession in Germany in the Nineteenth Century (in Hebrew), in: Guy Miron (ed.), From Breslau to Jerusalem. Rabbinical Seminaries Past, Present and Future, Jerusalem 2009, pp. 27-50.

35 On counter-history in the German Jewish context see Susannah Heschel, Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus, Chicago 1998; Wiese, Challenging Colonial Discourse.

36 Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar Fraenckelscher Stiftung (Jewish Theological Seminary), Breslau (1854); Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (Higher Institute for the Science of Judaism), Berlin (1872), Orthodoxes Rabbinerseminar (Orthodox Rabbinical Seminary), Berlin (1873).

educating a professional elite, who acquired and possessed these branches of knowledge in order to apply them to their office. For these Jewish theologians, the history of the Jewish religion mattered as a religious history, i.e. a history with religious content and meaning. Such scholars as Zunz and Steinschneider fiercely opposed this development but they were not able to prevent or reverse it.³⁷ Within Jewish theology as a positive Jewish scholarship, Jewish history and Jewish philology necessarily lost their independence and were downgraded to serve as auxiliary disciplines. For a majority of its practitioners, especially in the second half of the 19th century, Jewish *Wissenschaft* neither could nor should ever be a completely secular occupation. Obviously, it was meant to strengthen the religious identity of its followers vis-à-vis modernity and to serve as a tool for a (defensive) modernization of religious practice within and outside the synagogue, thus performing tasks predominantly in the public sphere. Furthermore, in so doing, Jüdische *Wissenschaft* often ended up playing an important role in the private sphere as well. It became a religious pursuit for many scholars and, not least of all, for its own sake.

37 Cf. for example M.A. Meyer, *Jewish Scholarship and Jewish Identity: Their Historical Relationship in Modern Germany*, in: idem, *Judaism within Modernity. Essays on Jewish History and Religion*, Detroit 2001, pp. 134f.

Michah Gottlieb

Samson Raphael Hirsch on Scientific Pluralism and Religious Schizophrenia

It is well-known that nineteenth century German Jewish Neo-Orthodoxy split over *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. In Berlin, Esriel Hildesheimer's *Rabbiner-Seminar* made *Wissenschaft des Judentums* an important component of the curriculum the main limit being biblical criticism of the Pentateuch, while in Frankfurt Samson Raphael Hirsch waged an unrelenting campaign against the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* strongly opposing Hildesheimer's embrace of it.¹

Scholars commonly portray Hirsch's opposition to *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as absolute calling it "categorical negation."² A memorable line from Hirsch's 1861 polemic against Zacharias Frankel is often cited as encapsulating Hirsch's approach: "Rather a Jew without *Wissenschaft*, than *Wissenschaft* without Judaism."³ But scholars less often quote Hirsch's next line "But thank God that is not the case." Indeed, in his first published work his 1836 *Neunzehn Briefe über Judentum* (*Nineteen Letters on Judaism*) Hirsch presented his work as a specimen of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* writing "I had to find the road to the reconstruction of Judaism as a science (*Wissenschaft*) almost entirely by myself."⁴

1 See David Ellenson, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy*, Tuscaloosa 1990, p. 143-165.

2 See Asaf Yedidya, "Orthodox Reactions to *Wissenschaft*," *Modern Judaism* 30, no. 1 (2010): 69-94, here: p. 71; Ran Hacoen, *Reclaiming the Hebrew Bible German-Jewish Reception of Biblical Criticism*, New York 2010, p. 157. In an early article Mordechai Breuer presents this view writing that Hirsch's "opposition to *Wissenschaft* was total." See Breuer, "Three Orthodox Approaches to *Wissenschaft*," in: *Jubilee Volume in Honor of Moreinu Ha-Gaon Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik*, ed. S. Israeli et al. Jerusalem 1984 (in Hebrew), p. 856-65, here 857. But in his later work Breuer refines his view noting that Hirsch sought to appropriate the term *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. See Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition: The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany*, New York 1992, p. 176-181.

3 Samson Raphael Hirsch *Gesammelte Schriften* (henceforth: *GS*), Frankfurt 1902, vol. 6, p. 393; idem, *Collected Writings* (henceforth: *CW*), New York 1984, vol. 5, p. 287. See for example David N. Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought. Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World*. Princeton 2003, p. 32.

4 Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe* (henceforth: *NB*), Frankfurt 1889, *Brief* 19, p. 106; *Nineteen*

I will argue that rather than seeing Hirsch as an inveterate opponent of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, he is better understood as contesting its meaning. “Scientific pluralism” has been a lively topic of discussion among recent scholars. Stephen Kellert, Helen Longino, and C. Kenneth Waters discuss a range of its meanings, but define scientific pluralism most broadly as the idea that “some natural phenomena cannot be fully explained by a single theory or fully investigated using a single approach...[hence] multiple approaches are required for the explanation and investigation of such phenomena.”⁵ I will argue that in appropriating the term *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Hirsch espouses a radical form of scientific pluralism. Hirsch’s debate with *Wissenschaft* scholars turns on the question how to define dogmatism versus science. The preeminent *Wissenschaft* scholar and chief ideologue of Reform Judaism Abraham Geiger charged that Hirsch’s method of analyzing Judaism relied on dogmatic religious belief and was therefore unscientific. Hirsch responded that it was *Wissenschaft* scholars like Geiger who were unscientific as they dogmatically denied that there could be multiple, equally valid scientific explanations of phenomena. After presenting Hirsch’s debate with *Wissenschaft* scholars, I will show how two of the most important twentieth-century scholars of Kabbalah Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel present variations of Hirsch’s arguments. I will argue that their scientific pluralism is, however, less radical than Hirsch’s which rests on a relativistic view of reality. Hirsch’s relativism might seem to imply that he compartmentalized his religious and scientific views. I will show that in fact this is not the case. Indeed, Hirsch attacks the founder of Positive-Historical Judaism Zacharias Frankel precisely for such a compartmentalization, which he deems a Christian approach contrary to Judaism that leads to untenable religious schizophrenia.

Hirsch’s Concept of *Wissenschaft*

Born to a family of moderate maskilim, Hirsch received a first-rate secular education. In his late teens he studied at the Hamburg *Akademische Gymnasium* which had a wide-ranging curriculum that included arithmetic and mathematics, history, geography, German rhetoric and

Letters (henceforth: *NL*), transl. Karin Paritzky, ed Joseph Elias, New York 1995, Letter 19, p. 333.

5 Stephen H. Kellert, et al., *Scientific Pluralism*, Minneapolis 2006, p. vii.

poetry, French, and English, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.⁶ After leaving the Gymnasium, he spent a year studying at Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger's yeshiva in Mannheim before enrolling at the University of Bonn in the fall of 1829. Majoring in philology and history, Hirsch was exposed to *wissenschaftlichen* approaches to history.

In his first semester, Hirsch took a course on Non-Roman Ancient History with the renowned historian Barthold Georg Niebuhr.⁷ Niebuhr's lectures from the course were later published and it is evident that when Hirsch presents his scientific understanding of Judaism in the *Neunzehn Briefe* he draws on methodological elements he learned from Niebuhr, though he gives them a distinctive twist.⁸

In the introductory lecture Niebuhr writes that every people has a distinct national character that can be known through its history.⁹ He explains that the best way to know this character is through a philological approach where texts are read in the original language.¹⁰ And Niebuhr stresses the need to understand the past on its own terms and not to anachronistically project contemporary ideas onto it.¹¹ Similarly, in the *Neunzehn Briefe* Hirsch calls Jews a "*Volk*" that must be understood historically¹², and writes that this history must be based on a philological

6 See Roland Tasch, *Samson Raphael Hirsch, Jüdische Erfahrungswelten im historischen Kontext*, Berlin: 2011, p. 37-39.

7 See "Hirsch Testimonial for British Chief Rabbinate," London 1844, #10. Abraham Geiger mentions that the course focused on non-Roman history. See Abraham Geiger, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, ed. L. Geiger, 5 vols., Berlin 1875, vol. 5, p. 23.

8 The lectures were published in an English translation in 1852 from transcriptions held by Niebuhr's son Marcus. In his preface the translator Leonhard Schmitz states that the translation is from a "literal transcript" of the lectures that Niebuhr delivered in the 1829-1830 winter session at the University of Bonn. See Barthold Georg Niebuhr, *Lectures on Ancient History*, transl. Leonhard Schmitz, 3 vols. Vol. 1, Philadelphia 1852, vol.1, p. vii, x.

9 Niebuhr, *Lectures on Ancient History*, pp. 33-35.

10 *ibid*, 37.

11 This principle is implicit throughout Niebuhr's book. See for example his discussion of the Ionic migration into Attica where he argues that while ancient historians claimed that it involved "a friendly reception of exiles," it actually occurred by force. Niebuhr then observes that "many things, even such as belong to a later period, are fabrications; national vanity has often been guilty of fabrications." Niebuhr, *Lectures on Ancient History*, p. 231.

12 Hirsch writes, "Israel is an historical phenomenon (*geschichtliche Erscheinung*) among all others." See Hirsch, *NB*, Brief 3, 9; *NL*, Letter 3, 27. For some places where Hirsch calls Jews a "*Volk*" in the *NB*, see Hirsch, *NB*, Brief 2, 7; Brief 7, 35-36; Briefe 8, 39; *NL*, Letter 2, 15; Letter 7, 105, 106, Letter 8, 114. Breuer correctly observes that "Hirsch

study of the Torah in the original Hebrew that seeks to uncover the meaning of the text as it was originally intended.¹³

In a famous footnote to the eighteenth letter of the *Briefe*, Hirsch presents his *wissenschaftlichen* method of interpreting the Torah, which he compares to the scientific study of nature. Hirsch uses physics to epitomize the scientific method, which makes sense as the only natural science he studied at university was Karl Dietrich von Münchow's course on experimental physics.¹⁴ Hirsch notes that the scientist seeks to discover laws that govern "facts" (*Facta*) of nature. Beginning with the facts, he hypothesizes laws "backwards from the phenomena" that explain how the facts of nature are governed. The scientist then tests the hypothetical law against the phenomena to see if they act in accordance with it. A single "contradicting phenomena" disproves the hypothesized law. But regardless of whether or not the scientist is able to discover a law that describes the interrelation among phenomena, "the phenomenon itself remains a fact."¹⁵

Hirsch takes this approach as a model for *Wissenschaft des Judentums* writing that "the method of research (*Forschung*) into the Torah is entirely the same." He provides a theological basis for comparing the study of nature to the study of Torah writing that nature and the Torah are both divine "revelations."¹⁶ Just as God is the ultimate "cause" (*Grund*) of nature so God is the "cause" of the Torah. For Hirsch, a *wissenschaftlichen* approach to Torah research involves seeking to understand the "determinations" (*Bestimmungen*) of the Torah, which he applies to study of the details of Jewish law. While in the science of nature one begins with facts and hypothesizes laws that explain their interrelation, in Torah research the laws of the Torah are the facts and one seeks to explain their interrelation by hypothesizing reasons for them that connect the laws to one another. Just as in the science

thoroughly loved the expression 'nation' as he perceived it with respect to Judaism, and he used it in innumerable instances in his writings, with all possible derivatives and lexical combinations." See Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, pp. 288-289, 294-296.

13 Hirsch, *NB*, Brief 2, 7-8; *NL*, Letter 2, pp. 15-17.

14 See "Hirsch Testimonial for British Chief Rabbinate," #6; Raphael Breuer, *Unter seinem Banner: ein Beitrag zur Würdigung Rabbiner Samson Raphael Hirschs*, Frankfurt 1908, p. 213-214.

15 Hirsch, *NB*, Brief 18, 96; *NL*, Letter 18, pp. 271-272.

16 The idea that one can compare study of nature to the study of Scripture has its roots in Psalm 19, but was first developed by the Church Fathers in the fourth century. See Peter Hess, "The Two Books," in: *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 9421-24. Detroit 2005.

of nature one must then test one's hypothesized laws by verifying that they accurately describe the facts, so in Torah research one must test one's hypotheses regarding the reasons for the laws against the laws themselves. Finally, just as in the science of nature facts have priority over hypothesized laws with a single fact being able to disprove the most elegant hypothesis, so the laws of the Torah have priority over the hypothesized reasons for them and if the explanation of the reason for a law contradicts the details of how to practice it, the hypothesized reason is always invalidated, never the law itself.¹⁷

In the *Neunzehn Briefe* Hirsch boldly criticizes *wissenschaftlichen* approaches to the study of the Torah as insufficiently scientific. We have seen that he accepts the *wissenschaftlichen* principle that texts should be understood as they were originally intended. But while *Wissenschaft* scholars deploy this principle to oppose how traditionalist Jews understand the Torah, Hirsch argues that naïve Jewish traditionalists are, in fact, closer to this scientific ideal than many self-described *Wissenschaft* scholars. He notes that the Hebrew word “Torah” literally means “instruction” (*Unterweisung*).¹⁸ According to Hirsch, the Torah presents itself as a revelation from God to the Israelites that explains their place and responsibilities in the world. As such, to understand the Torah as it was originally intended a Jew must read it in a spirit of engagement as a personal address from God teaching one how to live.¹⁹ By contrast, Hirsch contends that *Wissenschaft* approaches to the Torah are often marked by antiquarian interests that aim at disinterested investigation. The *Wissenschaft* scholar may read the Torah for information about the ancient Israelites, the geography of the Palestine, Semitic languages,

17 Hirsch, *NB*, Brief 18, 96; *NL*, Letter 18, 271–272. Hirsch notes that only the practice of *Edot* which he defines as rituals whose aim is to convey ideas that affect one's emotional being, remain “imperfect” without understanding the reasons for them. See *ibid.* Hirsch's approach explains why the subtitle of *Horev* his great work on the reasons for the commandments is “Versuche über Jissroël, und über Jissroëls Pflichten in der Zerstreung” namely “essays” or “attempts” to provide explanations for Jew's duties in the diaspora.

18 Hirsch, *NB*, Brief 2, 7; *NL*, Letter 2, 15.

19 Hirsch, *NB*, Brief 2, 7–8; *NL*, Letter 2, 15–16. Buber and Rosenzweig made a similar point as they gave their translation of the Pentateuch known in Hebrew as *Hamishbah Humsbei Torah* the German title *Die fünf Bücher der Weisung* where *Weisung* (instruction) translates *Torah*. Also see Buber's essay *Der Mensch von heute und die jüdische Bibel* (People Today and the Jewish Bible) in: Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung*, Berlin 1936, p. 20; engl. *Scripture and Translation*, Bloomington 1994, p. 8.

or aesthetically as a work of literature.²⁰ But in studying the Torah as an impartial, dispassionate scholar rather than as a Jew seeking divine instruction for life, Hirsch claims that the scholar necessarily will misunderstand the Torah's original intent. In this way, the naïve Jewish traditionalist better understands the Torah's original intent and so is a more *wissenschaftlichen* reader than the critical scholar.²¹

Geiger counters

At the University of Bonn Hirsch developed a deep friendship with Abraham Geiger. Bonding over a discussion of Goethe's autobiography *Wahrheit und Dichtung*, the two became *hevrotot* (study partners), learning the talmudic tractate *Zevahim* together.²² Geiger recalls that "mutual love and respect developed" and while they did not always agree, Geiger attests that he "admired [Hirsch's] outstanding mental gifts, rigorous virtue ...and good heart" while Hirsch "respected my glowing plans.. [and] loved my openness, and youthful cheerfulness."²³

Hirsch left university after a year to become the District Rabbi of Oldenburg. Geiger remained at the University of Bonn completing his doctoral thesis, which was awarded by the University of Marburg in 1832 after Geiger accepted the post of District Rabbi of Wiesbaden.²⁴ The two friends remained in touch, but when Hirsch published the *Neunzehn Briefe* Geiger took the unusual step of responding with a three-part review that was nearly half the length of Hirsch's original book.²⁵

The *Neunzehn Briefe* employs the literary device of an epistolary exchange between a disaffected Jewish youth named Benjamin who advances complaints about Judaism and a young rabbi named Naphtali who answers these complaints and ultimately wins Benjamin back to Judaism. Benjamin's doubts, many of which center on questioning the

20 Hirsch, *NB*, Brief 18, 97-98; *NL*, Letter 18, p. 273.

21 Hirsch extended his attack on *Wissenschaft* in later writings, most notably his 1861 essay "How can our *Wissenschaft* benefit life?" See Hirsch, *GS*, 2: 424-433; *CW*, 7: 36-45.

22 Geiger, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, 5: 19.

23 *ibid.*, 5: 18.

24 See Max Wiener, *Abraham Geiger and Liberal Judaism*, Philadelphia 1962, p. 8-10.

25 Geiger's three reviews were fifty-five pages while the *Neunzehn Briefe* was only one hundred and eleven pages. Geiger's reviews appeared in his journal *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie* in vol. 2.2 (1836), pp. 351-359; vol. 2.3, pp. 518-548; and vol. 3.1 (1837), pp. 74-91.

contemporary value of halakhah, are presented in the first letter while the next eighteen are Naphtali's responses with Benjamin's side of correspondence not included. Benjamin is meant to be a mouthpiece for alienated young German Jews.

Geiger begins his first review with considerable sympathy for Hirsch. He describes the anonymous author of the *Neunzehn Briefe* as a man of "clarity and sharpness, fiery zeal, tough love, and independent power" who seeks to "save this sick and wounded generation from the confusions and gnawing contradictions" that plague it.²⁶ Geiger notes that the author does this not through "cold, systematic instruction" but rather through "warmth and intimacy" using the attractive literary device of a correspondence between friends.²⁷ That Hirsch had crafted his work as a correspondence between two young men must have reminded Geiger of his own heartfelt conversations with Hirsch during their university days. But while Benjamin is Hirsch's spokesman for the skeptical youth, Geiger does not see him as an adequate representative. Geiger writes:

Would such a man [Benjamin] never have questioned the obligatory nature of Judaism? Would a man to whom was entrusted so much biblical and talmudic knowledge... never have had doubts about whether the Bible, Talmud, and later rabbinic writings were all written in a single spirit, whether they form parts of a single indivisible whole? Would it never have occurred to him that at times a spirit that speaks through the whole of Judaism stands in the most glaring contradiction with many of its particulars? Why does he [Benjamin] withhold these doubts from the friend to whom he opens his heart with complete confidence?²⁸

For Geiger, Benjamin cannot adequately represent the doubts and confusions of German Jewish youth as long as he does not raise fundamental questions concerning the divinity of the Bible and Talmud, whether they are each internally consistent, and whether they are consistent with one another. As long as Benjamin does not express these doubts, Naphtali's response, however eloquent, cannot satisfy skeptical, intelligent German Jewish youth. Furthermore, Geiger claims that Benjamin's concerns over the contemporary value of halakhic practice only makes sense on the assumption that he harbored doubts about the divinity of the Torah. For had Benjamin truly believed that all the laws of the Bible and Talmud were divinely revealed, he could not

26 See Geiger, "Recension der *Briefe über Judenthum* (1)," pp. 351-352.

27 Ibid, pp. 352-353.

28 Ibid, p. 354.

have doubted the importance of observing them as God's reward for obedience must surely outweigh any worldly inconveniences occasioned by this obedience. Why then does Hirsch not have Benjamin voice doubt about the Torah's divinity?²⁹

In the third review Geiger addresses Hirsch's portraying his method of studying the Torah as scientific. While Hirsch asserts that one must study the Torah's laws in the same way that a scientist studies nature namely by seeking hypotheses that explain the data while never questioning the validity of the data itself, Geiger contends that this is a complete misunderstanding of the scientific method. Geiger notes that when a scientist observes a flower he does not consider the flower in complete isolation from all other natural phenomena bracketing all assumptions about its place in the natural order. Rather, he begins with the assumption that nature operates according to causal laws and seeks to understand how the flower develops from prior phenomena. In the same way, the scholar who studies the Torah must not treat it in isolation from all other phenomena in history. Rather, he must assume that history operates according to natural causes and seek to discover the developmental mechanism by which the Torah came into being and was transmitted.³⁰

Hirsch was likely taken aback by his friend's forceful and often insulting review. But he recognized that Geiger had mounted substantive challenges to his vision of Judaism. One finds Hirsch's first response to Geiger in *Horeb* which he published in 1837 after Geiger's reviews had begun to appear. The main purpose of *Horeb* is to fulfill the vision of a true *Wissenschaft des Judentums* that Hirsch had sketched in the *Neunzehn Briefe* by providing a detailed account of the reasons for the commandments and how they relate to one another. As in the *Neunzehn Briefe*, Hirsch emphasizes that his *wissenschaftlichen* method seeks to understand the Torah as it was originally intended namely as a guide to living. Hence the first chapter of *Horeb* begins: "Let the flower of knowledge be life."³¹

Hirsch dedicated *Horeb* to the "thinking young men and women of Israel" and in the preface to the work makes his assumptions explicit. Obliquely addressing Geiger, Hirsch notes that *Horeb* is only addressed to

29 Ibid, p. 355.

30 Geiger, "Recension der *Briefe über Judentum* (3)," pp. 74-77.

31 Samson Raphael Hirsch *Chorev - Versuche über Jissroels Pflichten in der Zerstreuung*, Altona 1837, p. 3; engl.: *Horeb - A Philosophy of Jewish Laws and Observations*, transl. Isidore Grunfeld, London 1962, p. 3.

those who accept the divinity of the Torah both oral and written noting “it will be clear that not a single line of this work has been written with the object of trying to defend the divine commandments, since the very thought of such an attempt would appear to me as a denial of their divine origin and consequently as lying outside of Judaism.”³²

In 1839, Geiger published a lengthy review of *Horeb*. The review is filled with sarcasm alongside substantive points of criticism. But for our purposes, I would like to focus on the beginning of the review. Geiger is simply flabbergasted that Hirsch has the audacity to address *Horeb* to the “thinking” (*denkende*) Jewish youth and then dogmatically assert that a Jew must believe that the Torah is divinely revealed.³³ For Geiger, this epitomizes Hirsch’s unscientific dogmatism. As Geiger puts it, “all thinking and *wissenschaftlichen* readers” must “protest against this entirely unreasonable demand.”³⁴ Geiger concedes that questioning the divinity of the Torah places one outside of Judaism, but he nevertheless considers this necessary for himself writing: “I must first place myself outside of Judaism in order that I may then return to it with greater reverence.”³⁵

Hirsch responded to Geiger in an 1840 pamphlet titled “Postscripta.” Addressing Geiger’s claim that his approach excludes all “thinking and *Wissenschaft*” Hirsch retorts that this statement itself is “testimony to the greatest *wissenschaftlichen* poverty of... [Geiger’s] standpoint.”³⁶ For Hirsch, a hallmark of *Wissenschaft* is the ability to detach oneself from one’s own presuppositions and understand a different point of view dispassionately. But Hirsch notes that Geiger only deems an approach to the Torah *wissenschaftlichen* if it assumes that the Torah is *not* divinely revealed. For Hirsch a different, though equally *wissenschaftlichen* approach to Torah is possible, namely one that seeks to understand “the spirit of the laws themselves and their meaning by inquiring into the components of the law and their interconnection with each other and with life.”³⁷

For Hirsch, the Torah can be studied through two equally scientific methods. The method favored by Geiger seeks to understand the *development of the Torah within history*. But an equally valid method treats the Torah’s laws *phenomenologically as an unchangingly divinely*

32 Hirsch *Horev*, xiv; *Horeb*, clxi.

33 Geiger, “Recension der Hirsch’s *Versuche*,” pp. 355-381.

34 “Recension der Hirsch’s *Versuche*,” p. 356.

35 Ibid.

36 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Postscripta zu den unter dem Titel Horev Betzion erschienen Briefen*, Altona 1840, p. 34.

37 Ibid.

revealed unit that is practiced by a community of believers. This *wissenschaftlichen* method which seeks to understand the rationale behind individual laws, how they relate to one another, and how they inform life is the one Hirsch employs in the *Neunzehn Briefe* and in *Horeb*. While Geiger dismisses this approach as unscientific and dogmatic, Hirsch contends that Geiger's approach reflects his dogmatic failure to appreciate multiple *wissenschaftlichen* approaches.³⁸ According to Hirsch, what motivates Geiger's opposition Hirsch's method is not dispassionate rational considerations, but rather a practical interest namely the desire to adapt Judaism to the needs of the time. For if the Torah develops throughout history, this legitimates continuing its development now and in the future.³⁹

Hirsch and later Jewish scholarship

In an essay penned some twenty-one years after the *Postscripta* titled "Wie gewinnen wir das Leben für unsere Wissenschaft?" (How can our *Wissenschaft* benefit life?), Hirsch further develops the idea that *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as commonly practiced does not treat Judaism as a living entity, but as a remnant of the past.⁴⁰ But in this essay Hirsch uses stronger, more evocative language to express his point. Asserting that *Wissenschaft's* historicist philological approach treats Jewish texts as "obsolete" objects of "antiquarian research and vain scholarly curiosity," Hirsch uses macabre imagery to describe the effects of this approach: "The research conducted has not yielded a physiological study of a living Judaism but rather a pathological anatomy of a dying or dead

38 Ibid, pp. 34-35.

39 Ibid, 34-35. This criticism of *Wissenschaft* later received support for unexpected quarters. In a 1951 article, Isaac Heinemann contends that Hirsch's claim that study of Torah must serve life was more intellectually honest than the language of scholarly disinterest used by many Reform and Positive-Historical practitioners of *Wissenschaft* to explain their motives for studying Jewish texts. For, according to Heinemann, *Wissenschaft* scholars' objectives in studying Jewish texts were no less practical than Hirsch's. See Heinemann, "Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and his Teacher Rabbi Isaac Bernays," [Hebrew], in: *Zion* 16, no. 1/2 (1951): p. 44-90, here 85. Heinemann was no Orthodox opponent of *Wissenschaft*, but rather a premier *Wissenschaft* scholar who was a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau and the penultimate editor of the flagship journal of the Positive-Historical school, the *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

40 The 1861 essay is found in Hirsch, *GS*, 2: 424-433; *CW*, 7: 36-45.

Judaism.”⁴¹ Contrasting this conception of *Wissenschaft* with his own Hirsch concludes: “Jewish *Wissenschaft* should be the fertile ground of Jewish life. As long it served that end, it also took first place in life. *Their* science, however, is like the fine dust wafting from the sarcophagi of moldering corpses over the arid steppes of the present day.”⁴²

In his essay “Reflections on Modern Jewish Studies” Scholem uses imagery that is strongly reminiscent of Hirsch’s. Speaking of early *Wissenschaft* scholars Scholem memorably writes “you see before you giants who for reasons best known to themselves have turned themselves into gravediggers and embalmers and even eulogizers.”⁴³ To be sure, there are important differences between Scholem’s and Hirsch’s criticisms of *Wissenschaft*. Unlike Hirsch, part of the reason that Scholem describes *Wissenschaft* using morbid imagery is because he thinks that *Wissenschaft* scholars sought a spiritual idea as the essence of Judaism that turned Judaism into a “disembodied spirit” seeking rest “in an alien body or in a grave.”⁴⁴ And Scholem seeks the living vitality of Judaism not in treating the Torah as a revealed eternally valid system of laws but rather in uncovering dynamic forces many of which made Hirsch uncomfortable such as Kabbalah, Sabbateanism, and the history of Jewish crime. But Scholem agrees with Hirsch that *Wissenschaft* scholars’ historicist approach to halakhah obscured vital religious elements of it noting “The halakhah not as a history of its literature but as the study of its problems remained to a large extent completely outside of the ken [of early *Wissenschaft* scholars]. It did not appear at all as a religious problem. Try to learn something of its essence (*mabuta*) from the writings of Zacharias Frankel or Isaac Hirsch Weiss. As a religious problem, it is no less alien to them than is Kabbalah!”⁴⁵

A second echo of Hirsch’s ideas can be found in the work of the other major twentieth century scholar of Kabbalah, Moshe Idel. In his landmark book *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Idel criticizes Scholem’s tendency to interpret kabbalah as a set of theoretical concepts rather than as practical teaching meant to impact life writing:

“The evaluation of Kabbalah as predominately theoretical rather than

41 Hirsch, *GS*, 2: 427, 430; *CW*, 7, 38, 42.

42 Hirsch, *GS*, 2: 432; *CW*, 7: 45.

43 Gershom Scholem, *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time & Other Essays*, transl. Avraham Shapira, Philadelphia 1997, p. 59. See Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition*, p. 437, note 150.

44 *Ibid*, p. 57.

45 *Ibid*, p. 65.

practical is misleading. Although the large body of printed kabbalistical literature indeed deals with theoretical issues, an understanding of Kabbalah based primarily upon this material is highly problematic, as it cannot be aptly appreciated without taking into consideration what seems to me the ultimate goals of kabbalah. According to the perceptions of the kabbalists themselves, this lore is primarily practical and experiential and only secondarily theoretical.”⁴⁶

Like Hirsch, Idel criticizes scholars’ tendency to mine texts for their theoretical conceptual content rather than seeking to understand the practical ways in which these texts shaped the lives of their readers. To be sure, Scholem and Idel would object to what would they regard as Hirsch’s bourgeois idealizing of the purpose of halakhah and his contention that the Torah should be studied as an immutable, perfectly consistent divinely revealed text. But notwithstanding these differences, it is likely that they would regard elements of Hirsch’s critique of *Wissenschaft* as prescient.

Models of Scientific Pluralism

Hirsch, Scholem, and Idel all criticize *Wissenschaft* scholars for lacking an appreciation of scientific pluralism. But their notions of scientific pluralism differ. Among the many conceptions of scientific pluralism considered by Kellert and his colleagues, two are most relevant for our purposes. One view that Kellert and his colleagues call “modest pluralism” maintains that multiple scientific explanations of some phenomena are valuable because “some parts of the world are so complicated that they cannot be accounted for from the perspective of a single representational idiom.”⁴⁷ On this view, manifold scientific approaches are useful because of the complexity of phenomena. Scholem’s and Idel’s notion that one can study Jewish texts not just from a philological, historicist perspective that centers on the meaning of the texts alone but also by inquiring into the religious meaning of the texts and the way that this meaning manifests itself in the lives of those who read them seems to reflect this view. By contrast, John Dupré espouses a radical form of pluralism that he calls “promiscuous realism.” For Dupré, there are “an indefinite number of ways of individuating and classifying the objects in the world... no

46 Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven 1988, p. 28.

47 Kellert, *Scientific Pluralism*, p. xii.

one of which is more correct than the others.”⁴⁸ In other words, because the world can be classified in an indefinite number of ways, multiple equally valid scientific accounts can be offered which contradict and are utterly incommensurable with one another. This would be closer, though not identical to Hirsch’s view. For according to Dupré contradictory scientific accounts of the world must still be naturalistic. By contrast, Hirsch’s scientific pluralism includes both historicist *Wissenschaft*, which assumes naturalism and Torah *Wissenschaft*, which assumes the reality of miracles and divine revelation. In this way, Hirsch seems to point to a more radical, relativistic view of reality than Dupré.

Scientific pluralism and the problem of religious schizophrenia

One might think that the relativism implied in Hirsch’s notion of scientific pluralism would lead him to compartmentalize his religious beliefs from his scientific ones. The opposite is the case. This emerges clearly from Hirsch’s polemic against the founder of Positive-Historical Judaism, Zacharias Frankel. In 1859, Frankel published his landmark book *Darkhe ha-Mishnah/Hodegetik in der Mishna* (Methods of the Mishnah/Methodological Introduction to the Mishnah) in which he presented a *wissenschaftliche* account of the origin and methods of early rabbinic literature.⁴⁹ Five years earlier Frankel had been appointed director of the newly established *Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar* (Jewish Theological Seminary) in Breslau the first modern rabbinical seminary in German lands.⁵⁰ The seminary’s task was to produce rabbis who would serve all German Jewish communities including Orthodox ones. Worried about Frankel’s religious direction, on the eve of the seminary’s opening Hirsch had an open letter published asking how the seminary would teach

48 Ibid, p. xiii.

49 Zacharias Frankel, *Darkhe Hamishnah; Hodgetica in Mischnam*, Leipzig 1859. After the Hebrew title page, there is a Latin title page that gives the title as *Hodgetica in Mischnam*. Elsewhere Frankel renders the title in German as *Hodegetik in der Mishna*. “Hodegetic” literally means “indicator of the way” in Greek and in nineteenth century German connoted the idea that understanding the method of a work helps elucidate its content. See Gregory B. Moynahan, *Ernst Cassirer and the Critical Science of Germany*, London 2013, p. 18.

50 Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context*, Hanover 1994, p. 255. On Frankel’s tenure at the *Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar* see Andreas Brämer, *Rabbiner Zacharias Frankel - Wissenschaft des Judentums und konservative Reform im 19. Jahrhundert*, Hildesheim 2000, pp. 318-414.

four central theological questions.⁵¹ One of the questions concerned Jewish *tradition*. The open letter contended that Orthodox Judaism not only considered the Bible as directly revealed by God to Moses but also teachings the rabbis deemed *de'oraita* (of biblical authority), even where these teachings did not appear explicitly (or at all) in the Bible.⁵² Would the seminary teach that these traditions were revealed by God? Frankel left the questions posed in the open letter unanswered. But with appearance of *Darkhe Hamishnah*, Hirsch was able to confront Frankel directly.

Hirsch's polemic is long and complex and I have dealt with it in detail elsewhere.⁵³ For our purposes, I would like to focus on one criticism. In a short piece titled "Clarification of the *Methodological Introduction to the Mishnah*" Frankel wrote that in *Darkhe Hamishnah* he had sought to demonstrate the "scientific form" of the Mishnah and treated the Oral Torah with the greatest reverence. As to the question whether laws the rabbis deemed *deoraita* that did not appear explicitly in the Bible were of divine or human origin, Frankel asserted that this was a matter of theological "dogma" (*Dogmatisches*) that "academic research" (*wissenschaftlichen Forschung*) could not address. Academic research could prove the historical antiquity of many of these laws, but not whether or not they were revealed by God.⁵⁴

Hirsch responded with a sharp attack on Frankel's distinction between theological "dogma" (*Dogmatik*) and "scholarship" (*Wissenschaft*). For Hirsch, this distinction was "foreign" (*fremd*) to Judaism as it was simply a repackaged version of the division between "faith" (*Glaube*) and "reason" (*Vernunft*) that Christians used to defend their mysteries of faith.⁵⁵ Hirsch asserted that it was axiomatic to Judaism that "dogma" and "scholarship"

51 Hirsch's worry about Frankel seems to have been first aroused by the fact that after the Reform Rabbinical Assembly in Brunswick in 1844 Frankel had refused to join the many rabbis who condemned it including Hirsch. See Schorsch, *From Text to Context*, p. 262. Though the open letter was published anonymously Hirsch was clearly the driving force behind it.

52 Samson Raphael Hirsch, „Offene Anfrage an die Leiter der zu Folge des Programms vom Februar dieses Jahres in Breslau zu eröffnen den Seminars für Rabbiner und Lehrer,“ in: *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* 18, no. 20 (1854), pp. 244-46, here 245.

53 See Michah Gottlieb, *The Jewish Reformation: Bible Translation and Middle Class German Judaism as Spiritual Enterprise*, (in print), chapter 6.

54 Zacharias Frankel, „Erklärung, Die Schrift ‚Hodegetik in die Mishna‘ betreffend.“ In: *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 10, no. 4 (1861), pp. 159-60, here 159.

55 Hirsch, *GS*, 6: 416; *CW*, 5: 312.

cannot occupy independent non-overlapping spheres, but rather must refer to a single domain of truth. As he put it: “*There is only one truth. That which is true according to dogma must be true also according to science (Wissenschaft)*” (Hirsch’s emphasis). For Hirsch, Judaism had no need to separate faith and reason since it knew no “logically inconceivable mysteries.”⁵⁶

There was no contradiction between Hirsch’s rejection of the claim that religious dogma and historical scholarship occupy separate, non-overlapping spheres and his radical scientific pluralism. For Hirsch, multiple *wissenschaftliche* investigations of the Torah were possible depending on whether one began with the assumption that the Torah was a humanly composed document that developed through history or a divinely revealed timeless document revealed by God. Both of these positions relied on dogmatic assumptions that could not be proven, but on the basis of each assumption one could formulate an internally coherent *wissenschaftliche* account of the Torah. What Hirsch deemed unacceptable was Frankel’s approach that employed a historicist *wissenschaftliche* approach to the Oral Torah that tacitly assumed it was a human creation, while claiming that one could hold that the Oral Torah was divinely revealed as a matter religious dogma. For Hirsch, Frankel’s compartmentalizing of his scholarly and religious views not only was “unjewish”, it led him to a type of religious schizophrenia that Hirsch considered untenable.

Hirsch’s objections to Frankel formed the basis for his rejection of Hildesheimer’s introduction of *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* into his Neo-Orthodox *Rabbiner-Seminar*. In 1873, Hirsch warned the Neo-Orthodox scholar and newly appointed *Rabbiner-Seminar* faculty member David Zvi Hoffmann not to publish his doctoral dissertation *Mar Samuel: Rector der jüdischen Akademie zu Nehardea in Babylonien: Lebensbild eines talmudischen Weisen* (Mar Samuel: Head of the Jewish Academy of Nehardea in Babylonia: The Life of a Talmudic Sage). Hirsch objected that Hoffmann’s use of academic methods had led him to historicize and humanize the Mishnah and Talmud as reflected by

56 Hirsch, *GS*, 6: 415-416; *CW*, 5: 312. Hirsch also wrote Judaism could not make a distinction between religious “dogma” and historical “scholarship” because Judaism was founded on “historical facts grounded on the clear experience (*Erfahrung*) of the nation.” If historical scholarship proved that central events in Jewish history such as the exodus from Egypt never happened, then Judaism made no sense and must be abandoned. See *ibid.* Also see Hirsch’s critique of the idea that Judaism is a “religion” in the Christian sense. See Hirsch, *GS*, 6: 17-18; *CW*, 2: 143-144.

his claim that the Sages introduced new laws in response to changing historical circumstances and that certain halakhic decisions derived from Sages' unique personality traits. For Hirsch, such views put Hoffmann irreconcilably at odds with Orthodox belief in the eternal, revealed nature of the Oral Torah.⁵⁷

Conclusion

While Hirsch is often cast as an inveterate opponent of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, he is better understood not as seeking to “categorically negate it,” but rather as contesting its meaning. For Hirsch, multiple equally *wissenschaftlichen* approaches to the Torah are possible depending on whether one regards the Torah as revealed by God or as created by human beings, assumptions that cannot be decided on the basis of reason. While Hirsch accepts the possibility of multiple, contradictory ways of reading texts, he rejects as both incoherent and “unjewish” the idea that one can sunder one’s scholarly assumptions from one’s religious faith. Attempting to do so results in religious schizophrenia that Hirsch considers unacceptable.

I have also shown that Hirsch’s critique of *Wissenschaft* is resonant with later critiques mounted by the preeminent scholars of Kabbalah Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel both of whom also advocate forms of scientific pluralism. But Hirsch’s scientific pluralism is more radical and relativistic than either of theirs. The resonances between Hirsch’s critiques of *Wissenschaft* and those put forward by later Jewish studies scholars should alert us to ways in which critics of the scholarly enterprise can sometimes open new avenues for scholarship.

57 See Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition*, pp. 185-186. On the dispute between Hirsch and Hildesheimer more generally, see Ellenson, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer*, pp. 135-65; Breuer, “Three Orthodox Approaches to *Wissenschaft*,” pp. 856-65. Hirsch’s objections to Hoffmann were very similar to those he mounted against his former student Heinrich Graetz almost two decades earlier. Hirsch’s criticisms of Graetz are found in Hirsch, *GS*, 5: 318-509; *CW*, 5: 3-208. For discussion see Gottlieb, *The Jewish Reformation*, ch. 6. On Hirsch’s evolving account of the revealed nature of the Oral Torah and its relation to the Written Torah see Gottlieb, “Oral Letter and Written Trace”; *The Jewish Reformation*, chs. 5-8.

George Y. Kohler

Theology as a Discipline of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (1830-1910) – An Overview

It is one of the least known, and even less discussed achievements of the movement of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* to have introduced critical scientific theology to modern Jewish thought. Contrary to the eighteenth century understanding of the *Haskalah*, Jewish Enlightenment, the first authors writing on Jewish theology in the nineteenth century were convinced that Jewish identity was not only shaped by practical law observance, but also by the acceptance of a set of specifically Jewish dogmas. The German term generally used here was *Glaubenslehren*, meaning doctrines of faith.¹ For Moses Mendelssohn, writing in 1783, Judaism was still a combination of historically revealed divine commandments to act (or to refrain from acting) on the one hand, and rational, universal religious truths and beliefs that Jews shared with all of humanity – such as deism, the acceptance of divine providence and belief in the immortality of the soul – on the other.² The first *Wissenschaft* scholars of the nineteenth century rejected Mendelssohn's views and re-introduced the notion of an authentically 'Jewish dogma' to Jewish thought – religious ideas found, or at least originating, only within Judaism.

From the beginning, this Jewish theology was conceived as fundamentally different than its Christian counterpart. The difference, however, is difficult to describe. It is certainly true that during the nineteenth century, for many modern Jews, as it was for the Christians, a confession of belief defined their belonging to their respective community of faith, herewith replacing the practical observance of Jewish ritual laws as a religious identity marker.³ But the Jewish dogmas to be professed

1 See, for example one of the earliest studies on the subject of Jewish theology: Michael Creizenach, "Grundlehren des israelitischen Glaubens", in: *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie*, 1835, No. 1, p. 39-51. Creizenach (1789-1842) was an educator and radical Jewish reformer from Mainz, his main work was what he called an alternative *Shulchan Aruch*. On Creizenach, see Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, Detroit 1995, p. 119-121.

2 See especially the second part of his major work *Jerusalem*, dated 1783.

3 This gave room to repeated claims that reformed Judaism was merely a copy of

had both a different origin and a different function, compared to the Christian confession. No general religious authority had laid down Jewish articles of faith before Maimonides (1138-1204) made such an attempt in the twelfth century, an attempt that immediately met with heavy intra-Jewish criticism and throughout the following centuries was at best regarded as a basis of discussion.⁴ Doctrines of Jewish faith rather constantly arose from the beliefs of the community and were probably shaped much more by the influence of daily liturgy than by systematic theology. As for the function of those dogmas, the difference to Christianity was even more decisive and here modern Jewish theology concurred with Mendelsohn's view that except possibly for the divinity of the Pentateuch, all Jewish dogma was seen as rational, as not contradicting human reason. What is more, as Christian dogma determined membership in the church precisely because it demanded belief in the irrational, it became the necessary condition for salvation. Jewish articles of faith never required this kind of proof and Jewish theologians always took great pride in pointing out that there cannot be a contradiction between faith and reason for the believing Jew, let alone an intended, conditional one.⁵ In addition, Jewish dogma was much less defined than Christian beliefs in terms of fixed formulations, more often Jews just agreed on the general idea of a Jewish dogma (i.e. the coming of the Messiah), while the content of this idea remained fluid, a matter of dispute with little influence on the acceptance of the dogma in itself.

All this holds true of Talmudic times, throughout and beyond the Middle Ages, until it was revived in a systematic and scientific way during the nineteenth century in Germany. What had made this modern re-introduction of theology to Jewish thought possible, was the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, writing precisely in the period between Mendelsohn and the beginnings of the Jewish *Wissenschaft* movement.

Protestantism. Few scholars who still hold this view today, however, have taken into account the rather radical rejection of the first reform rabbis of all denominations of Christianity, expressed also in theological debates between Jewish and Christian thinkers from the 1830's on. I will devote a broader study on this subject in the coming years.

4 This discussion is ongoing until today, see for the latest round: Marc Shapiro, *The Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides' Thirteen Principles Reappraised*, Oxford 2004 and Menachem Marc Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?*, Oxford 2006.

5 This point was most impressively set out by Hermann Cohen in 1910. See his "Die Bedeutung des Judentums für den religiösen Fortschritt", in: Hermann Cohen *Werke*, vol 15 (ed. Hartwig Wiedebach), Hildesheim 2009, p. 429-454. (also in: Hermann Cohen *Jüdische Schriften*, vol. 1, Berlin 1924, p. 18-35).

Kant convincingly demonstrated that all rational proof of the ‘existence’ of God was beyond the abilities of human reason and furthermore, Kant had rather parenthetically mentioned that this demonstration of reason’s inability would make “room for belief”, an assertion that was given to misunderstandings from the moment of its first appearance in print.⁶ Nineteenth century Jewish theologians, however, felt liberated by Kant from the burden of rational proof for their faith. In 1857, the Kantian thinker Rabbi Manuel Joel of Breslau wrote that with Kant’s critique of reason, “religion has lost its only enemy, or at least its only dangerous enemy: metaphysical speculation.”⁷

Thus the overall assumption of this essay is that *the science of theology* was almost from the beginning an important discipline of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The concept of theology is understood here as the academic thought on the Divine – and is distinguished from the concept of ‘religious philosophy’ by two major criteria: a) theology assumes without further proof (if not the existence, so at least) the possibility of rational *thought* about God, and b) this thought on the nature of God and the implications of the Divine on the human world are analyzed in theology for one specific positive religion – in the case of this paper, for Judaism. Contrary to the opinion of Leopold Zunz, one of the founders of the *Wissenschaft* movement, who demanded a strict separation of theology from an academic approach to Judaism – many young German-Jewish thinkers of the *Wissenschaft* movement in the first half of the 19th century, firmly believed they were theologians.⁸ Abraham Geiger’s project of a “Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie” (1835-1847) is only one of many examples. Especially their employment as (reformed) community rabbis, which financed their scientific enterprises, was frequently a good occasion to realize the absolute imperative of a reasonable theological foundation for their practical reforms. With the old intuitive Jewish lifestyle according to

6 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction to the second edition, 1787, Bxxx.

7 Manuel Joel in *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 1857, No. 1, p. 37-40. See also the discussion of this text by Heinz Mosche Graupe in his *The Rise of Modern Judaism: An Intellectual History of German Jewry*, (transl. John Robinson), Huntington, N.Y., 1978, p. 158-60.

8 Zunz wrote famously that Jewish *Wissenschaft* should “emancipate itself from the theologians and rise to a historical understanding” (*Über jüdische Literatur*, 1845, in: Zunz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, p. 57), a demand obviously still based on a pre-academic notion of theology.

the Talmudic law now defunct, if not entirely lost, being Jewish had to be re-established with the help of new ideas: The actual “usefulness” of Judaism in the modern era had to be justified – and by no other way than theologically. If *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in nineteenth century Germany was indeed “a religious enterprise”, as Michael Meyer wrote, the science of theology would best be suited to combine theoretical research and practical life of religious persons, thus the young theologians around Geiger believed.

Now if this observation is correct, and scientific theology was indeed from early on a decisive part of the *Wissenschaft* movement, there are a number of important implications to consider: Historically, Zunz and his student Moritz Steinschneider might no longer be called the typical or most influential representatives of *Wissenschaft*.⁹ Their main fields of activity, philology and bibliography, were, if not replaced by theological thought, at least reduced to being handmaidens of theology, drawing for its own achievements on the results of these disciplines.¹⁰ If that is true, then in turn accusing the entire *Wissenschaft des Judentums* of having given living Judaism ‘a decent burial’ among dusty bookshelves, as some twentieth century Zionists did, first and foremost Gershom Scholem, is no longer sustainable – or will at most concern only the scholarship of Zunz and Steinschneider themselves.¹¹ Scholem’s reproach might make some sense in regard to philological filigree work, but it is much more difficult to sustain it for theology, the existence of which by definition, and even at the university, is rather the academic precondition

- 9 On Zunz and philology, see Celine Trautmann-Waller, *Philologie allemande et tradition juive, Le parcours intellectuel de Leopold Zunz*, Paris 1998. For an apology of Zunz as not being an antiquarian, see Ismar Schorsch’s new biography, *Leopold Zunz – Creativity in Adversity*, Philadelphia 2016, esp. p. 4.
- 10 A telling example of a fruitful combination of philology and theology is the 1863 essay “Horae Semiticae” by Saul Isaak Kaempf (1818-1892), in: *MGWJ* 1863, No 4 and No 10, discussing the dogmatic implications of the language of the *Mishnah*. Kaempf was a favorite student of the famous Hebraist Wilhelm Gesenius (1786-1842) and later succeeded Michael Sachs as the rabbi of Prague.
- 11 Scholem attributed the ‘decent burial’ quote to Steinschneider, thus even making it intentional, but Scholem actually meant to include all of his scholarly predecessors in the accusation. Charles Manekin has shown in the meantime that Steinschneider never said anything like this. (See Charles Manekin, ‘Steinschneider’s ‘Decent Burial’: A Reassessment’, in: *Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought* Vol. I., ed. Howard Kreisel, Jerusalem 2006, p. 239-251.) For Scholem’s lifelong disdainful view of 19th century Jewish *Wissenschaft* see for example his “Reflections on Modern Jewish Studies” (the infamous 1944 lecture), in: *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time & Other Essays*, ed. A Shapira, Philadelphia 1997.

to train qualified clergy in the hope of keeping practical religion alive. Consistently, both Zunz and Steinschneider refused to teach at the newly founded rabbinical seminaries in Breslau (1854), Berlin (1873) and Budapest (1877) for the very reason that those institutions taught theology to prospective rabbis.¹²

Mainstream *Wissenschaft* scholars, however, accepted theological thought within the ranks of an academic approach to Judaism and many of them authored theological works themselves, as will be shown in the present study. A century after the inception of the *Wissenschaft* movement, we are confronted in 1918 with the famous request by historian Ismar Elbogen to rename the entire project of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* into 'Jewish Theology'. True, the word theology would not meet with much sympathy in Jewish circles, writes Elbogen, but this perception is outdated today, as it is based on the identification of theology with blind dogmatics. In modern times, however, Elbogen continued, "theology is a science, based on a philological-historical foundation and a strictly critical method."¹³ Following Elbogen in search of a specifically *Jewish* theological approach that would fit the academic criteria of modernity, we can look back on a rich literary tradition within the *Wissenschaft* movement, at least from the end of the 1830s on. There is a hidden treasure of comprehensive theological works, written by several of the leading *Wissenschaft* scholars that only need to be unearthed. For a start, this study will at least give an overview of relevant literature – the vast majority of which so far remains still untouched by modern scholarship.

One of the earliest indications for the return to theology to modern Jewish thought was the appearance of a new genre, Jewish catechism. The publication of these often book-long lists of doctrines of Jewish belief, containing extended itemizations of theological assumptions that Jewish pupils were supposed to accept and learn by heart, is in itself striking proof of the transformation of Jewish identity-building processes during the nineteenth century – from observing ritual law to what might be called a internalization of Jewish articles of faith. That those beliefs were thought to be perfectly rational and/or historical by the authors of the catechisms and that the purpose of these books was

12 For Zunz, see Schorsch, *Leopold Zunz*, p. 224-225, for Steinschneider, *ibid*, p. 227-228.

13 Ismar Elbogen, "Neuorientierung unserer Wissenschaft," in: *MGWJ*, Vol. 62, (1918), pp. 81-96, here 90. On Elbogen, see: Michael A. Meyer, *Without Wissenschaft there is no Judaism: The Life and Thought of the Jewish Historian Ismar Elbogen*, Ramat Gan 2004, and "Elbogen, Ismar", in: *Lexikon deutsch-jüdischer Autoren*. vol. 6, München 1998, p. 255-273.

rather more educational than religious, did not change the fact that Judaism had now become a confession instead of an intuitive way of life.¹⁴ At the same time, still during the 1830s, the first debates on the very justification of dogma, and thus of theology, in a modernized Jewish religion were held. In 1837, for example, Moritz Freystadt (1810-1870) and Simon B. Scheyer (1804-1854), two university trained, young Jewish scholars, discussed in *Sulamith*, the first German-language journal published for Jewish readers, several reasons why Judaism was in need of a reintroduction of rational dogmatic thought.¹⁵ While they disagreed on the role modern Jewish theology should play in the nineteenth century, both thinkers, however, clearly encouraged the development of the idea to scientifically analyze what distinguished Jewish religious thought in comparison with other belief systems.¹⁶

The first scholar to call for the establishment of a faculty for Jewish Theology at a German university was young Abraham Geiger, at the age of 26.¹⁷ In an editorial to his above mentioned *Journal for Scientific Jewish Theology*, Geiger argued that modern theological thought has to eventually replace traditional, uncritical Talmud studies. But theology was not another form of secular ‘cultural studies’ for Geiger. The first question for a scientific theological approach to clarification, Geiger pointed out, was nothing less than the *nature of revelation* – only after this has been done, can literary Jewish tradition be examined critically.¹⁸ How much a scientific theology of Judaism is missing today is clearly reflected

14 According to Zunz in 1832, some fifty such works had been published throughout Europe, first and foremost for use in the newly founded Jewish schools. (Leopold Zunz, *Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*, Berlin 1832, p. 457.) Almost every better-known Reform rabbi published a catechism during the nineteenth century. See, Jakob J. Petuchowski, ‘Manuals and Catechisms of the Jewish Religion in the Early Period of Emancipation’, in: Alexander Altmann (ed.), *Studies in Nineteenth Century Jewish Intellectual History*, Cambridge 1964, p. 47-64.

15 Freystadt wrote among other works a defense in Latin of Kabbalah versus the accusation of Pantheism; see his *Philosophia cabbalistica*, Königsberg 1832. Scheyer soon became one of the leading Jewish scholars of Jewish medieval philosophy; on him see Gad Freudenthal, “Simon B. Scheyer (1804-1854): A Forgotten Pioneer of the Scientific Study of Medieval Jewish Philosophy”, in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 2016, No. 2, p. 363-91.

16 For this interesting debate, see in detail George Y. Kohler, “Is There Room for Belief in Judaism? – Two German Jewish Thinkers Debate Dogma in 1838”, in: *Jewish Thought – Journal of the Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought volume 1:1* (2019), p. 89-114.

17 For the historical background of the following paragraphs, see Alfred Jospe, “The Study of Judaism in German Universities Before 1933”, in: *LBIYB* 27, 1982, p. 295-319.

18 Abraham Geiger, ‘Die Gründung einer jüdisch-theologischen Fakultät, ein dringendes

by the undetermined status of Jewish belief in his time, young Geiger lamented, all modern progress of Jewish life and its ritual institutions lacks a secure intellectual hold and is therefore often only a 'reform for the moment,' and not the product of carefully developed convictions. As long as true science is not at its root, the fruits of modern enlightenment will remain unripe. While up until now rabbis were trained at *yeshivot* in the practice of talmudic law, this training was hardly appropriate for the modern age, Geiger claimed, for now theologians of Judaism had to be the teachers of religion "in the full sense of the word". They must be knowledgeable in the entire structure of Judaism and be able "to apply its doctrines to real life." The precondition for these new requirements of the rabbi was a thorough, independent Jewish theology. It is obvious that Geiger thought of more than the disinterested philological study of ancient texts in connection with his proposed faculty. Rather, the intellectual freedom of the university was for Geiger the ideal remedy for the "monastic torpidity", a common concomitant in the pursuit of all previous, non-scientific theology.¹⁹

The following year, in 1837, Ludwig Philippson (1811-1889) published in the weekly newspaper he edited, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, an urgent call to German Jewry to donate money to this enterprise. In this text, Philippson echoed Geiger's description that the teaching of Jewish theology at a German university should first and foremost solve the spiritual crisis of modernity by training rabbis and teachers of religion to give Judaism a new focus (*Mittelpunkt*). At Geiger's proposed faculty, the Jewish religion was not only to be taught, but also further developed and advocated, Philippson predicted.²⁰ Geiger responded another year later in a small brochure, supporting and justifying Philippson's donation call with an extended version of his earlier essay. Now Geiger emphasized as a new insight, compared to the article written in 1836, that Jewish theology must be engaged in first and foremost by Jews. True, scientific research must be carried out unbiasedly, true also, it must be done pre-supposition-less and honestly, Geiger argued, but up until now it had been very rare that a Christian described Judaism entirely without prejudice. Although Christian scholars frequently treated Judaism in a serious and learned way – necessarily

Bedürfnis unserer Zeit', in: *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie* (WZJT) II, Frankfurt a. Main 1836, p. 3-4.

19 Geiger, *Die Gründung*, p. 12-13

20 Ludwig Philippson in *AZJ* 1837, No. 88, p. 350.

there always remained something involuntarily Christian in the position they took.²¹ We Jews should not be silent when thus Judaism is to be eliminated from the books of science, Geiger proclaimed, suddenly changing his so far rather polite tone. Specifically, Jewish theology will have to focus on the critical study of the Pentateuch, a book that is rarely the subject of the lectures of Christian professors at today's universities, Geiger explained, but, of course, no Jewish theologian can neglect to study it in the most comprehensive way.²² But a Jewish theology created exclusively by Jews need not lose sight of its scientific aspirations, Geiger continued. True scholarship was necessarily dry and technical, and although it always yielded results applicable to real life [*lebensvolle Resultate*], it must conceal those results, Geiger stated. Jewish theology must not *aim* for those results, it should never directly focus on practical benefit, not for individuals, and not for the reformation of Jewish life and ritual in general. Most of all, scientific Jewish theology should not listen to the ever changing wishes and interests of the Jewish community – this alone would be a sufficient reason to transfer its practice from that of the pastime of the community rabbi to the commitment of a full time scholar at the university.²³

Geiger's proposal, however, was never realized. In 1841, Salomon Formstecher (1808-1889), who called his monumental work *Die Religion des Geistes* in the subtitle "A Scientific Representation of Judaism", still pursued his scholarship parallel to his duties as the community rabbi of Offenbach. Formstecher left no doubt that what he had written was a Jewish theology. The very beginning of the preface to this work reads thus: "As long as there are no Jewish professors who see their life's task in elaborating Jewish theology according to the latest scientific Weltanschauung, practical Jewish clergymen must use their leisure hours to work on this exclusively theoretical field." And while the first eight chapters of Formstecher's book deal more with general philosophical thought on God, nature, men, revelation, reason and ethics – as well as making an interesting distinction between Judaism and pagan thought – from chapter nine on, Formstecher presents four chapters of classical Jewish theology, entitled "Charakteristische Grundlinien des Judentums" (characteristic baselines of Judaism). Although the overall purpose of his

21 Abraham Geiger, *Über die Errichtung einer jüdisch-theologischen Fakultät*, Wiesbaden 1838, p. 7.

22 Geiger, *Über die Errichtung*, p. 13.

23 Geiger, *Über die Errichtung*, p. 9.

work is to prove that what Formstecher called “the absolute necessity of Judaism for mankind” is still a relevant claim, and that Judaism will “ultimately develop into the universal religion of civilized humanity”²⁴ – Formstecher prefers to call his proof of this ambitious theory “scientific theology” (*wissenschaftliche Theologie*) and not a philosophy of religion as “the term philosophy carries a pagan-metaphysical connotation (*Colorit*), thus instilling the highest mistrust and suspicion.”²⁵ Between the beginning and the end of “scientific theology” of Judaism, however, there is “much room for historical, linguistic, hermeneutic and archeological research” in Formstecher’s view. Interestingly, the “rigorously scientific method” (*streng wissenschaftlich*) that must be applied in Jewish theology to achieve logically-based results “unbiasedly, pre-suppositionlessly and with systematic consistency” – Formstecher considers this scientific method a “specific property of Jewish theology”, explicitly opposed to Christian theology.²⁶ The often-heard objection, Formstecher argued, that a believer in a particular religion is unable to judge this religion unbiasedly, is in fact wrong, as it confuses the notion of prejudice, that is, of judging without prior examination, and the religious interest that the believer might show in his judgment after unbiased examination. The Jew, Formstecher held, will naturally judge Judaism “with a corrupted heart, but not with using a corrupted form of reasoning.”²⁷ In the case of the Christian faith, however, in which theology ultimately needs to come to the support of such mystical beliefs as the Trinity, which by their very nature could never be the object of scientific knowledge, the scientific method cannot be fully applied, all attempts of modern Protestant scholarship to that end notwithstanding.²⁸ Jewish theology, as opposed to this, can unconditionally refer to the cognitive capacity of human reason and thus to the unlimited power of judgment, Formstecher summarized in the methodological introduction to his attempt to produce the first modern Jewish theological monograph.²⁹

Writing in 1845, the well-known Hamburg preacher and theologian Gotthold Salomon (1784-1862), also insisted on the strict *criteria of scientificity* for formulating a Jewish theology, arguing this point

24 Salomon Formstecher, *Die Religion des Geistes*, Frankfurt 1841, p. 4.

25 Formstecher, *Die Religion des Geistes*, p. 5.

26 Formstecher, *Religion des Geistes*, p. 8.

27 Formstecher, *Religion des Geistes*, p. 6, based on a German play on words: *Vorurteil und Interesse am Urteil*.

28 Formstecher, *Religion des Geistes*, p. 9.

29 Formstecher, *Religion des Geistes*, p.10.

with the above mentioned Rabbi Ludwig Philippson. Philippson had published in his *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* a sharp critique of the first assembly of German Reform rabbis, held 1844 in Braunschweig. In his editorial, Philippson complained that the assembly was not an academic conference and therefore the scientific-critical method, applied in Braunschweig by some theologians to the Jewish religion, had rather damaging (*zerstörend*) consequences on Judaism. “*Pectus facit theologum*”, Philippson postulated,³⁰ – in his view the rabbinical assembly’s task was to contribute to the edification of the religious mind, which was the only recipe for the survival of Judaism in modernity – while for the purpose of spiritual continuity cold, academic criticism was out of place, it should better be reserved for the sciences where the critical method actually belongs.³¹ Gotthold Salomon almost aggressively objected to Philippson’s view. In a booklet he wrote in defense of the Braunschweig assembly, he asked Philippson if he really believed that the vocation of the theologian was tailored to fit a person who only knew how to pour his heart out? (in German: *expectorieren*, a play on the word *pectus*). *Expectorieren* was probably the vocation of the preacher, according to Salomon, but theology was a *Wissenschaft*, a science, and furthermore “a very deep and comprehensive science”. As such, he argued, Jewish theology “cannot dispense with the critical method, that is with an in-depth examination and an all-round illumination of its objects.”³² Being a celebrated preacher himself, Salomon obviously knew what he was writing about. As a Jewish theologian of the nineteenth century, however, he saw this discipline not only as an equal member in the family of newly established critical sciences, he even seemed to suggest in his attack on Philippson that scientific theology was itself a recipe for the survival of Judaism in modernity.

During the next rabbinical assembly, held 1845 in Frankfurt, the thus criticized Ludwig Philippson himself became co-author, along with Abraham Geiger, of another “Proposal for the Establishment of a Faculty for Jewish Theology” at a German university. This institution was to

30 This is a famous dictum by the Christian theologian August Neander (1789-1850), one of the founders of *Erweckungstheologie* (revivalist theology), the Christian equivalent of the Jewish reform theology of religious *edification* as the ultimate purpose of the divine law.

31 Ludwig Philippson, *AZJ*, 1844, No. 28 (8.7. 1844), p. 386.

32 Gotthold Salomon, *Die Rabbiner-Versammlung und ihre Tendenz. Eine Beleuchtung für ihre Freunde und Feinde*, Hamburg 1845, p. 54f. On Salomon, see: Simone Lässig, *Jüdische Wege ins Bürgertum*, Göttingen 2004, p. 482-93 and 631.

train future teachers of Jewish religion; it was to become “in one word, a place where Jewish theologians would be taught Judaism scientifically and methodically,” as stated in the new proposal. While the modern Gymnasium (high school) would provide a good foundation in classical languages and philology for the rabbinical candidates, a truly scientific approach to Jewish theology and even thorough knowledge of its basic tenets, were still missing. The resulting confusion in the young rabbis needed no description, the two authors wrote, because “we ourselves have been through all this,”³³ – referring probably not only to themselves, but to almost every one of the rabbis assembled in Frankfurt. However, even before young theologians could be trained there, the university faculty in question had to be established and used in order to, first of all, *formulate* a modern Jewish theology. Theological questions of Judaism had been approached recently using scientific methods, Philippson and Geiger said in Frankfurt, but Jewish theology was still very far from being a science in itself. What needed to be done was to write a scientific, systematic elaboration of all Jewish doctrine, which could only be possible within an established academic framework.³⁴

Ironically, Abraham Geiger, with all his commitment to the establishment of theological study within Judaism, never wrote a Jewish theology himself. Geiger’s religious views must be tediously gathered from short passages taken from several of his published works and private letters, and even then the picture is not always consistent.³⁵ However, from early on, at age 21, Geiger called himself a theologian, four years before he initiated his above mentioned theology-journal.³⁶ In his 1849 lectures called “Introduction into the Study of Jewish Theology”, Geiger divided theology into a theoretical and a practical part. “Theoretically, Jewish theology is the knowledge of religious truths and the way of life corresponding to those truths – according to Jewish doctrine.” This

33 *Protokolle und Aktenstücke der zweiten Rabbiner-Versammlung*, abgehalten zu Frankfurt am Man, vom 15ten bis zum 28ten Juli 1845, Frankfurt a. M. 1845, p. 373.

34 *Protokolle*, p. 375.

35 See for attempts to describe Geiger’s own theological views: Karl E. Grözinger, “Abraham Geigers theologische Wende vor dem Hintergrund der neuzeitlichen Debatte um Religion und Vernunft”, in: *Jüdische Existenz in der Moderne – Abraham Geiger und die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, ed. Christian Wiese et al, Berlin 2013, p. 15-36, and Andreas Brämer “Abraham Geiger – skeptischer Pionier einer Glaubenslehre des Reformjudentums” in: *Yearbook of the Maimonides Center for Advanced Studies* 2018 (ed. Bill Rebinger), p. 207-230.

36 Geiger to Zunz on April 25th 1831, published by L. Geiger, ‘Aus L. Zunz’s Nachlass,’ *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* 2 (1892), pp. 243-247.

means that for Geiger Jewish theology is not identical with universal truth, it is not religious philosophy. To gain theological knowledge of Judaism entails for the theologian the acceptance of something given, to learn predetermined ideas. This is why, for Geiger, Jewish theology is not only “a task of thought, of philosophical contemplation”, as something given, but it is also “a task of history.”³⁷ But those given theological ideas of Jewish history are not arbitrary, Geiger claimed. “The Jewish view of the world, ruling the minds for millennia, achieving great victories without possessing external power – this view cannot be shaken by philosophy because it must contain an inner truth.” This inner truth, in Geiger’s interpretation, is the truth of prophetic revelation. But while his understanding of the nature of revelation stood somewhere in the middle between the spiritual intuition of the poet and the sudden idea of the genius, Geiger well knew that “the given content” of revelation itself was subject to historical change, so that even the theoretical part of Jewish theology was divided into philosophical and historical truths.³⁸ *Practical* theology, on the other hand, consequently meant for Geiger nothing more but the art of implementing the theoretical part within the life of the community.³⁹

Interestingly, a certain theological bias against systematic philosophy is quite traceable here: “While philosophy proceeds supposedly presuppositionless,” Geiger wrote, “the theologian will always be interested in actually discovering religion ... thus protecting himself from the aberrations of philosophy.” The theologian can, for example, happily accept a dualism of body and soul (*Geist*) because he is not searching for the highest, monistic principle – rather, eventually, the theologian is in search of God Himself, “the original source of all Geist” (*Urquell des Geistes*). Reading Geiger’s 1849 lectures, one gains the impression that ultimately, Geiger, like Formstecher before him, identified ‘religious philosophy’ with the Christian way of thought – which he bluntly rejected, as we know – while theology is seen by Geiger, contrary to Formstecher, as the authentically Jewish expression of an intellectual approach to religious questions.⁴⁰

37 Abraham Geiger, *Einleitung in das Studium der jüdischen Theologie*, in: Abraham Geiger, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Ludwig Geiger, Berlin 1875, p. 4.

38 Geiger, *Einleitung*, p. 6.

39 Geiger, *Einleitung*, p. 28.

40 For Geiger’s outright rejection of a Christian contribution to world culture, see Abraham Geiger, *Offenes Sendschreiben an Herrn Professor Heinrich Julius Holtzmann*, printed at the end of Geiger’s *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte*, vol. 2, Breslau 1865, p. 185–86. For

Two works were printed in the 1840's, authored by radical Jewish Reformers, which should receive attention within discussions on the beginnings of a modern Jewish theology. In 1845, Sigismund Stern published eight lectures on *The Task of Judaism and the Jews in Our Time*, describing, however, the entire theological development of Judaism from the Bible to Modernity.⁴¹ Stern (1812-1867) was a school teacher and lay theologian, but his Berlin lectures held during the 1840s laid the intellectual foundation of the Berlin Reformgenossenschaft, one of the most controversial Jewish Reform communities in nineteenth-century Germany.⁴² Stern's successor at the head of this community, Rabbi Samuel Holdheim (1806-1860) also published in 1845 one of his most important theological writings, a pamphlet called *Ceremonial Law in the Kingdom of the Messiah*.⁴³ Holdheim, a brilliant Talmudist, in this text actually founded modern, critical Talmud studies. With all its reform-justifying tendencies, Holdheim's work is still a well argued, deeply informed analysis of the sources of authority of Talmudic law within Judaism.

The first comprehensive work dealing almost exclusively with Jewish theology is arguably Rabbi David Einhorn's "Das Princip des Mosaismus", written in the early 1850's in Budapest, published in Leipzig in 1854, immediately before Einhorn's immigration to America in 1855.⁴⁴ In the preface Einhorn (1808-1879) complains that "the Jewish-theological

discussion see Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, Chicago 1998, p. 206-209, and Hans Liebeschütz, "Judentum und deutsche Umwelt im Zeitalter der Restauration," in: *Das Judentum in der deutschen Umwelt*, ed. H. Liebeschütz and A. Pauker, Tübingen 1977, p. 48-49.

41 Sigismund Stern, *Die Aufgabe des Judenthums und des Juden in der Gegenwart*, Berlin 1845. For Stern, see Meyer, *Response*, p. 125-129; and Ari Joskowicz, *The Modernity of Others: Jewish Anti-Catholicism in Germany and France*, Stanford 2014, p. 141-145. Stern was the grandfather of William Stern (1871-1938), who invented the IQ. He was the great-grandfather of Günther Anders (1902-1992), first husband of Hannah Arendt and later the philosopher of the post war anti-nuclear movement.

42 The people gathered for the lectures formed the core of the later community. See, for the *Reformgenossenschaft*, Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, Detroit 1995, p. 129-131.

43 Samuel Holdheim, *Das Ceremonialgesetz im Messiasreich*, Schwerin 1845. On Holdheim, see Michael A. Meyer, "Most of My Brethren Find Me Unacceptable: The Controversial Career of Rabbi Samuel Holdheim", in: *Jewish Social Studies* 9:3 (2003), p. 1-19.

44 For Einhorn, see: Christian Wiese, "Samuel Holdheim's Strongest Comrade in Conviction: David Einhorn and the Discussion of Jewish Universalism in the Radical Reform Movement", in: Wiese (ed et al.), *Re-Defining Judaism in an Age of Emancipation*, Leiden 2007, p. 306-377; and Gershon Greenberg, "Mendelssohn in America – David Einhorn's Radical Reform Judaism", in: *LBIYB* 27, 1982, p. 281-293.

science, despite all the progress it has made within the last decade, was still in the age of early childhood.” Thus, scientific Jewish theology was “still far from being fruitful” [*fruchtbar*], Einhorn claimed, that is, far from exerting a creative influence on the religious life of Judaism, as he would have preferred. Instead, Einhorn criticized, theology was still rather “towing behind” practically experienced Judaism. This phenomenon, that mid-nineteenth century Jewish theological thought was in practice affected by the life of the communities, as opposed to having an impact on Jewish life itself, was in Einhorn’s view the very reason for all the annoying religious chaos that characterized the situation of German Jewry at his time. As long as Jewish theology was unable to give comprehensive expositions and explanations of a specifically Jewish position on what Einhorn saw as the “basic elements of all religions: sin, atonement and holiness”, this theology can still not be called a science. All that the critical method had achieved so far in this new discipline, Einhorn argued, was to demonstrate which theological elements were foreign to Judaism. Jewish theology had yet to show what precisely were the *formative* elements of Judaism.⁴⁵ This passage from Einhorn’s preface might be read as a critique of Salomon Formstecher’s book, mentioned above, but was probably much more an attack on the gigantic, 900-page work “Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden” by Samuel Hirsch (1815-1889), published in 1842.⁴⁶ Indeed, the great achievement of Hirsch’s thought is to theologically demarcate Judaism from Christianity, while Hirsch himself promised in several places in the book that he would treat what he called Judaism’s “Historical Theology” in a second volume of the *Religionsphilosophie*, which was, however, never published.⁴⁷

Einhorn himself claimed in his book on Mosaism that while a scientific approach could probably be content for some while with the technique of demarcation of Judaism from other theologies, real Jewish religious life was in bitter need to heal the painful wounds inflicted by this academic treatment – namely by the abstract exclusion of all false and outdated elements in the Jewish religion. It was his intention, Einhorn wrote, to contribute with his book to the remedy of those scientific and practical defects by eventually providing a *positive* Jewish theology. Einhorn’s book is divided into six chapters, beginning with

45 David Einhorn, *Das Prinzip des Mosaismus and dessen Verhältnis zum Heidenthum und Rabbinischen Judenthum*, Leipzig 1854, preface.

46 Samuel Hirsch, *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden*, Leipzig 1842. Hirsch explicitly intended to write a “philosophy of religion”, not Jewish theology.

47 See for example Hirsch, *Religionsphilosophie*, p. XXXIII.

general considerations on 'God and Nature' and 'God and Man' from a Jewish perspective, but then moving on to a specifically Jewish view on moral evil, and finally to a very original discussion of sacrifice and atonement within Jewish theology.

Although Einhorn also repeatedly called himself publicly a Jewish theologian,⁴⁸ he was convinced, contrary to Geiger, that Jewish theology must not be built on Jewish history, not even on the intellectual history of Judaism. Einhorn declared that the very essence of Judaism is found exclusively in (what he called) "the nature of Mosaism". That essence should be penetrated by the painstaking study of the Mosaic Law and not of Jewish history.⁴⁹ All aspects and teachings of Jewish theology must be reduced to the one central principle, thus Einhorn, that of 'Mosaism'. Therefore, Moses Mendelssohn was fundamentally wrong, Einhorn explained, when he declared Judaism to be free of all theological dogma. On the contrary, the claim that Judaism had no belief system of its own meant to "undermine the very foundation of the Jewish religion, that is, to deprive Judaism of its spiritual center (*geistiger Mittelpunkt*)". Eventually, Mendelssohn's theory leads to a dangerous tension, if not outright opposition between religious conviction and deed, according to Einhorn.⁵⁰ Interestingly, what Einhorn takes up here is a complex argument about the authority of the prophecy of the Biblical Moses that can be traced back in Jewish thought until to the Middle Ages: for Einhorn, as well as earlier for Maimonides, not the historical truth of specific revelation-events lends authority to Jewish belief, but the theological truth of Judaism's religious doctrine itself.⁵¹

Only seven years after Einhorn's work appeared, the above mentioned rabbi and publicist Ludwig Philippson published the first of three volumes of his own attempt at formulating a comprehensive Jewish theology. Philippson had in the meantime translated and annotated the entire Hebrew Bible, and much of the then widely read Biblical commentary was considered in itself as being of a strictly theological

48 See, for example: David Einhorn, *Gutachtliche Äußerung eines jüdischen Theologen über den Reformverein*, in: *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, 1844, No. 7 (12.2.1844), p. 87ff.

49 Einhorn, *Princip*, p. 3.

50 Einhorn, *Princip*, p. 11 (*Gesinnung und Tat*).

51 The former position was held by Yehuda Halevi and his followers down to Mendelssohn. For more on this tension, see George Y. Kohler, "Wissenschaft des Judentums and the Rediscovery of Yehuda Halevi's Kuzari (1840-1865)", in: *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Volume 109, Number 3, Summer 2019, p. 335-359.

nature.⁵² Especially in his “Allgemeine Einleitung zur heiligen Schrift,” (General Introduction to the Holy Scripture), Philippson disclosed his theological thoughts on Judaism’s sources.⁵³ Nevertheless, during the 1860s Philippson wrote another comprehensive work on Jewish theology – this time more philosophically-theoretic, entitled *Die Israelitische Religionslehre*. The first volume, printed in 1861, is devoted entirely to a book-length introduction to the subject, dealing essentially with the singularity of the Jewish religion. In the preface to this volume, Philippson explains that his work in theology provided “stable ground” for Judaism, after the great confusion of the nineteenth century. In this century, thus in Philippson’s own lifetime, Reform efforts had ‘eliminated all living reality of Judaism’, Orthodoxy returned to a more traditional position than ever before, while the conservative middle way preached a dangerous compliancy for the sake of peace. In this situation, his *Religionslehre* was meant to re-introduce “a guiding principle, a theological focal point” for the Jewish religion.⁵⁴ Philippson’s intention was to write “a systematic representation of the Jewish religious doctrine” – a book to help the contemporary seeker (*dem Suchenden*) to find a way back to a stable view and firm religious convictions. A theology was useful for this purpose as many of the ritual questions, then so hotly debated, were in fact of a much more general nature. His Jewish theology had the task of protecting Judaism against the onslaught of modern confusion, Philippson explained, but even more than that, the purpose of his writing was ultimately to guarantee the very future of the Jewish religion.⁵⁵

The second volume, published in 1862, is devoted to the Jewish doctrine of God and the Jewish view of divine worship, while the third volume, published in 1865, deals entirely with what Philippson called the Jewish lifestyle (*Lebenswandel*), involving the moral conduct of man according to Judaism. As almost the entire 19th century school of thought, Philippson was in search of an overarching principle of Judaism, a central idea of the Jewish religion (Leo Baeck would later call this the *essence of Judaism*), from which all theological doctrine could be deduced. Philippson discovered this principle in the concept of ‘sanctification

52 The translation was republished Freiburg 2015, unfortunately without the commentary, see however the German introduction to this edition by Klaus Herrmann. For more background: Klaus Herrmann, “Translating Cultures and Texts in Reform Judaism: The Philippson Bible.” *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14 (2007): p. 164-197.

53 *Die Israelitische Bibel*. Vol. 4. Leipzig 1854, pp. xi-xliv.

54 Ludwig Philippson, *Israelitische Religionslehre*, vol. 1, Leipzig 1861, p. XI.

55 Philippson, *Religionslehre*, vol. 1, p. XIV.

of man' as demanded by the Hebrew Bible in the commandment of *imitation dei* – he writes in the preface to the third volume.⁵⁶ A fourth volume, announced in the same text, was to treat Jewish dogma itself – but to the best of my knowledge it was never published.

Another major theological work of the second half of the nineteenth century is Leopold Stein's "Die Schrift des Lebens", published, similar to Philippson's work, in three thick volumes. Stein (1810-1882) officiated for almost 20 years as the liberal rabbi of Frankfurt am Main, and was thus the local antagonist of the founder of the separatist German neo-Orthodoxy, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888).⁵⁷ In 1872 and 1877, after Stein had retired, he published the first two volumes of a work that was supposed to be nothing short of the "Epitome of Entire Judaism" [*Inbegriff des gesammten Judenthums*]; as stated in the subtitle – the third volume was edited after Stein's death (1882) by Cäsar Seligmann, and appeared only in 1910.⁵⁸ What is original about his work, Stein announced in the preface, is that it portrayed Jewish theological doctrine in relation to Christian theology – first and foremost to demonstrate the strict antagonisms between both religions, as he stated.⁵⁹ Taking the Biblical account as his guideline, Stein, too, devoted his first volume to a discussion of the notion of God and its relation to man, but contrary to Philippson, the second volume already deals with Jewish "Life under the Law", while only the third and last volume explored ethical aspects of the Jewish religion. The second volume seems thus to be of special interest to the modern history of Jewish theology, because Stein argues here emphatically that Judaism needs to remain a "religion of law", as opposed to a religion of theological confession, in the future as well. Over almost 500 pages he analyzed and evaluated in this volume the relation of Mosaic and Talmudic law during all different periods of Jewish intellectual history.

But neither Philippson's, nor Stein's work met the criteria of an academically critical, or even a systematic Jewish theology, as Formstecher and others had envisioned in the 1840s. Thus, their urgent appeal was still repeated by the philosopher Hermann Cohen in a public lecture held in Vienna in 1898. "For 50 years now, nobody has written a *dogmatic* theology of our religion", Cohen complained, apparently ignoring the

56 Philippson, *Religionslehre*, vol. 3, preface.

57 On Samson Raphael Hirsch see Micah Gottlieb's essay in this volume.

58 Leopold Stein *Die Schrift des Lebens – Inbegriff des gesammten Judenthums*, vol. 1 Mannheim 1872, vol. 2 Straßburg 1877, vol. 3 (ed. C. Seligmann), Frankfurt 1910.

59 *Schrift des Lebens*, vol. 1, p. IV-V.

just discussed rabbinical works of the 1860s. Referring explicitly rather to Formstecher and Samuel Hirsch, Cohen said in 1898 that the claim that Judaism had no articles of faith was a “nonscientific delusion”. To the contrary, he explained, “every systematic science has its own dogmatics, let alone religion”. It would only show a poor education to believe that dogmatics require blind belief. Neglecting Jewish theology, however, meant for Cohen nothing less than “to dry out the source of Jewish life”. Increasingly, religious Judaism was detached from philosophy (*Weltweisheit*) and especially during the nineteenth century, Jewish theology (*Glaubenslehre*) was often replaced by shallow moral doctrines. But these abstract moralisms “could never be the foundation of a living religion”, Cohen argued. Therefore Judaism must reach a new clarity concerning its “living system of beliefs”, he concluded and then began, still during the same lecture, to outline several major concepts of a modern Jewish theology.⁶⁰

In 1904, a few years later, Cohen once again called for the establishment of academic chairs for systematic Jewish theology, at least at the rabbinical seminaries – chairs that were supposed to change the common practice of teaching at the seminaries only medieval Jewish philosophical thought under historical aspects. Interestingly, Cohen avoided the term theology in both essays devoted to this subject, although there is no doubt that his use of “ethics and religious philosophy” means exactly what Geiger and Philippson had in mind with their similar project in the nineteenth century. In the course of the 1904 essay, Cohen called the chairs he demanded to establish “lecturing desks for the dogmatics and the ethics of Judaism”.⁶¹ These were necessary because during the nineteenth century the community rabbi had become increasingly unable to fulfill his traditional double role as the spiritual leader of the congregation and as the principal teacher of Jewish doctrine. While for thousands of years the study of the Torah was seen by Jews as the best service of God and vice versa, modernity brought the “ambiguous blessing” of a separation of both fields, Cohen wrote. The highly technical demands of scientific research and the specialization of modern science now

60 Hermann Cohen, “Das Judentum als Weltanschauung” (1898), reprinted in Dieter Adelman, “Reinige dein Denken” – Über den jüdischen Hintergrund der Philosophie von Hermann Cohen (ed. Görg K. Hasselhoff), Würzburg 2010, p. 322-23. (For some reason, this interesting text was not included in Cohen’s three volume *Jüdische Schriften*, published in 1924.)

61 Hermann Cohen, “Die Errichtung von Lehrstühlen in Ethik und Religionsphilosophie an den jüdisch-theologischen Lehranstalten”, in: *MGWJ*, 48 (1904), pp. 2-21, here p. 7.

necessitated the establishment of separate chairs for Jewish theology. Theology (*Dogmatik*) for Cohen, must reconnect “the old religion with the young life of culture”, without theology there is no living religion, he repeated here – ritual observance alone is unable to defend Judaism against torpidity. The intuitive unity of “Leben und Lehre” (reality of life and Torah and/or education) – that shaped the traditional life-form of the pre-modern Jew – was to be replaced in the age of science by the ‘science of Judaism’ – that is with Jewish theology as the ‘essence of Judaism’.⁶²

The appreciation for theology must first be re-awakened in modern Judaism, Cohen demanded. He strictly opposed Mendelssohn’s famous and influential claim that Judaism possessed no doctrines of belief and thus, in fact, no subject matter for an independent theology. Dogmas, Cohen argued, are nothing but theological concepts, and “if a system of thought has no constructive doctrinal concepts, it is lacking a methodical basis.” In fact, the opposite is true: A philosophy of Judaism, that is, a rational Jewish theology, is the precondition for understanding the essence of Judaism for Cohen – and without philosophical substantiation the further development of Judaism, actually the very existence of the Jewish religion in modern times, was in critical danger.⁶³

Probably even the major work of Cohen’s arch enemy Moritz Lazarus (1824-1903) could be referred to as a Jewish theology – and precisely for the same reason why Cohen has pulled the book to pieces: Jewish ethics, Lazarus claimed in his 1898 *Die Ethik des Judentums*, was originally a theological idea.⁶⁴ What Cohen had attacked from a philosophical point of view, that ethics was wrongly confessionalized by Lazarus, while it always had to remain universal and valid for all humanity, is alternatively also an attempt by Lazarus to identify the ‘essence’ of Judaism in its teaching of absolute morality, as he saw it.⁶⁵ More interesting for the

62 Cohen, *Die Errichtung*, p. 9.

63 Cohen, *Die Errichtung*, p. 8. Cohen’s own major work on religious philosophy *Religion of Reason from the Sources of Judaism* (1918), however, was less a Jewish theology (a collection of Jewish articles of faith) and much more an attempt to construct a universal ‘religion of reason’ from Jewish sources.

64 Moritz Lazarus, *Die Ethik des Judentums*, Frankfurt 1998, §77 p. 85. A second volume appeared posthumously Frankfurt 1911. For Cohen’s critique see: Hermann Cohen, “Das Problem der jüdischen Sittenlehre. Eine Kritik von Lazarus’ Ethik des Judentums”, in: *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 43 (1899), p. 385-400, 433-449. For background on this debate: Hans Liebeschütz “Hermann Cohen and His Historical Background”, in: *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 13 (1968) p. 3-33, here p. 25-27.

65 See the first volume § 187 (p. 202f.).

theoretical groundwork of Jewish theology, however, was a public lecture by Jacob Guttman from 1894, called “On the Origin of Dogma in Judaism”.⁶⁶ Guttman (1845-1919), at the time of the lecture chief rabbi of Breslau, was one of the most important scholars of medieval Jewish philosophy. Approaching his subject historically, Guttman nevertheless spoke of ‘Jewish theology’ that continuously discussed Maimonides’ thirteen articles of faith throughout the centuries. For Guttman, the dogmatics of a positive religion establish only the “fundamental pillars” of the religious edifice – after examining the foundational documents of this faith community. But discussing the “roots of this faith”, that is, the rational source of the religious authority (*Verbindlichkeit*) of dogma, belongs to philosophy, and is not part of the theological realm. The theologian, for Guttman, would always refer to revelation for religious authority. Revelation, however, presupposed the existence of God, which claim the theologian had just posed himself as a dogma – thus moving in circular logic.⁶⁷ Interestingly, Guttman, the historian of the conservative Breslau school of Jewish thought, was closest in his conclusions to Moses Mendelssohn, compared to all other thinkers during the nineteenth century. While also Guttman argued against Mendelssohn that Judaism was not exclusively a religion shaped by keeping practical law, what Guttman saw as the necessary addition to a more complete picture was not theology, but “the religious and moral ideals that Judaism announced to the whole of humanity.”⁶⁸

The first decade of the twentieth century saw several new attempts to formulate formal, abstract descriptions of the central, foundational tenets of Judaism in short monographs – and Leo Baeck’s *The Essence of Judaism* (1905) is only the best known among them.⁶⁹ Without directly mentioning him, Baeck (1873-1956) responded to the Protestant theologian Adolf von Harnack, whose famous sixteen lectures on the *Essence of Christianity* from 1899/1900 provoked irate reactions both from conservative Christian circles as well as from several Jewish theologians, who in particular protested Harnack’s description of the Jewish religion as a cult of outdated law.⁷⁰ At least Baeck refrained from calling his thought on the essence of Judaism ‘theological’ and returned to the

66 Jacob Guttman, *Über Dogmenbildung im Judentum*, Breslau 1894.

67 Guttman, *Über Dogmenbildung*, p. 10-11.

68 Guttman, *Über Dogmenbildung*, p. 17.

69 On Leo Baeck, see the essay by Michael A. Meyer in this volume.

70 See Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, Leipzig 1900; and Leo Baeck, *Das Wesen des Judentums* Berlin 1905.

language of religious philosophy in the wake of Samuel Hirsch. However, the broadside of Jewish responses to Harnack has also, and justifiably so, been read as yet another attempt to write modern Jewish theology, especially as in this case, the various authors were forced to clearly demarcate Jewish forms and content of belief from their Christian counterparts.⁷¹ Other monographs on Jewish theology included Joseph (Israel) Goldschmidt's *Judaism in the Religious History of Humanity*, a rather popular but systematic representation of the Jewish religion in search of a true, non-apologetic answer to Christian theological supersessionism.⁷²

The first Jewish theology with a scientific-systematic aspiration was only written in 1910 and interestingly, it was immediately and smoothly integrated into the influential series of academic studies on Judaism, published by the *Society for the Support of Wissenschaft des Judentums*.⁷³ This series was the most ambitious project of the *Society*. Never completed, it was called the "Grundriss der Gesamtwissenschaft des Judentums," and projected to be a systematic and comprehensive collection of Jewish scholarship to encompass 36 volumes. The first volume to be published was Leo Baeck's above mentioned *Das Wesen des Judentums* (1905).⁷⁴ In 1910, Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926), who had already lived in the US at this time for some 40 years, included in the series a German language volume, entitled "Grundriss einer systematischen Theologie des Judentums".⁷⁵ Kohler, who had studied under Samson Raphael Hirsch,

71 Cf. Uriel Tal, "Theologische Debatte um das Wesen des Judentums", in: *Juden im Wilhelminischen Deutschland*, ed. W.E. Mosse et al, Tübingen 1976, p. 599-632. Friedrich W. Marquardt, "Unabgeglichenes in der Kritik Leo Baecks an Adolf von Harnack", in: *Leo Baeck – Lehrer und Helfer in schwerer Zeit*, ed. Werner Licharz, Frankfurt 1983, p. 169-87.

72 Joseph Goldschmidt, *Das Judentum in der Religionsgeschichte der Menschheit*, Frankfurt 1907. Goldschmidt (1849-1924) was Formstecher's successor as the community rabbi of Offenbach, he studied at the Hildesheimer rabbinical seminary but later turned his back on orthodoxy.

73 *Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums* – for this society, see Henri Soussan, *The Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums in Its Historical Context*, Tübingen 2013.

74 Among the other important publications were Moritz Güdemann's *Jüdische Apologetik* (1906); Ismar Elbogen's, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst* (1913); Hermann Cohen's *Die Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (1919 and two volumes of essays on Maimonides (1908, 1914).

75 Kaufmann Kohler, *Grundriss einer systematischen Theologie des Judentums*, Leipzig 1910, an English translation appeared eight years later as *Jewish Theology – Systematically and Historically Considered*, New York 1918.

soon made his way to the Reform camp, with his dissertation in 1868 being one of the earliest studies in the field of the higher Biblical criticism authored by a Jew. From 1869 on in North America, Kohler succeeded in 1879 his father-in-law, David Einhorn (discussed above), as rabbi of Temple Beth-El, New York City, and became president of Hebrew Union College in 1903.⁷⁶ Kohler always saw himself first and foremost as a theologian, the best expression of which is his decisive contribution to the so-called “Pittsburgh Platform”, a text that laid the theological groundwork for American Reform Judaism.⁷⁷

Closer acquaintance with the religious and philosophical systems of modern times, Kohler wrote in the preface to his 1910 theology, “has created a new demand for Jewish theology by which the Jew can comprehend his own religious truths in the light of modern thought.”⁷⁸ Kohler is arguably the first Jewish scholar who systematically approached the question of an original and authentic *methodology* for a Jewish theology – distinguishing it *both* from general religious philosophy, and at the same time from Christian theology. While his mentor Abraham Geiger had described, several decades earlier, *which* fields should be included and studied by prospective Jewish theologians, Kohler was now interested in the question of *how* this discipline should be pursued. Contrary to Christian dogmatics, Jewish theology shall not deal in the establishment of an absolute religious truth as such, Kohler held categorically, but would strive to “lead up to the highest and perfect truth as the final goal of world history.” Jewish theology would not seek the salvation (*Heil*) of the soul, but the salvation of humanity, Kohler wrote. Because Judaism will always remain a dialectical unity of religion and ethnicity, dogma is not beatific for the Jew, and thus Judaism knows nothing of the dichotomy of reason and faith. Jewish theology is rather “tightly knit to the historical progress of human understanding”, it

76 On Kohler, see: Robert F. Southard, “The Theologian of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform: Kaufmann Kohler’s Vision of Progressive Judaism”, in: *Platforms and Prayer Books; Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism*, ed. by Dana Evan Kaplan, Lanham, MD, 2002, p. 61-79; and Yaakov S. Ariel, “Wissenschaft des Judentums Comes to America: Kaufmann Kohler’s Scholarly Projects and Jewish-Christian Relations”, in: *Die Entdeckung des Christentums in der Wissenschaft des Judentums*, ed. Görge K. Hasselhoff. Berlin 2010, p. 165-182.

77 On the Platform, see Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, p. 256-70.

78 Kohler, *Theology*, English edition p. 3, German p. 4. See also: Jacob Haberman, “Kaufmann Kohler and His Teacher Samson Raphael Hirsch”, in: *LBIYB* 1998, p. 73-102, here p. 96.

will always present Jewish doctrine not as the completion, but as the “unfolding of Judaism’s truths”.⁷⁹

In addition, Kohler declared at the very outset of his book “that Jewish theology cannot assume the character of apologetics.” This rejection meant for him nothing else than that it must assume the character of a pure science. For Kohler, Jewish theology can no longer afford “to ignore the established results of modern linguistic, ethnological, and historical research,” as he writes, but also the results “of Biblical criticism and of comparative religion...”. But eventually, even for Kohler, all this is not done for the sake of science alone, but for the sake of the continuance of Judaism itself. The object of a systematic theology of Judaism, he writes, “is to single out the essential forces of the faith. It then will become evident how these fundamental doctrines possess a vitality, a strength of conviction, as well as an adaptability to varying conditions, which make them potent factors amidst all changes of time and circumstance.”⁸⁰

In summary, this paper calls for the inclusion of Jewish theology as a discipline with the study of the movement on *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The sources speak a clear language: considering that many of the important protagonists of the *Wissenschaft* movement were at the same time community rabbis, theology might be seen as the connecting link between the two occupations – a scientific, critical approach to Jewish theology made it possible for those rabbis to transfer the modern ideal of scientificity (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) from their research on to their daily professional practice. But also for an all-embracing understanding and evaluation of today’s scholarship on the *Wissenschaft*-movement itself, the inclusion of theology seems to be reasonable: On the one hand it helps to clear up the persistent misunderstanding according to which during the nineteenth century *history* became “the religion of the fallen Jews”, meaning that turning to *Wissenschaft* was in itself a secularization process.⁸¹ The study of the pursuit of a historical-critical theology would

79 Kohler, *Theology*, English edition p. 6, German edition p. 6-7. Note here the interesting parallel to the theology of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), who was held in high esteem by many modern Jewish theologians.

80 Kohler, *Theology*, English edition p. 4, German p. 5.

81 Cf. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Seattle, 1996, p. 86. On this issue see George Y. Kohler, “Judaism Buried or Revitalised? ‘Wissenschaft des Judentums’ in Nineteenth Century Germany: Impact, Actuality and Applicability Today,” in: *Jewish Thought and Jewish Belief*, ed. Daniel J. Lasker (Beer Sheva, 2012), p. 27-63.

demonstrate that this view is based on the confusion of the theological notion of 'religion' with myth and supernaturalism. On the other hand, the inclusion of theology in the study of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* seems to prove convincingly that this movement was not taking living Judaism down to its grave – but was in fact very interested in providing Judaism with a stable intellectual basis for a glorious future for conquering the whole spiritual world.

Moritz Lazarus and the Ethics of Judaism

One of the most fascinating characters that emerged from among the scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and perhaps also a forgotten leader of that intellectual movement is Moritz Lazarus (1824-1903).¹ Lazarus was one of the outstanding Jewish writers of Central Europe, and among the most influential in the second half of the 19th century. His life and personality, academic career, and his involvement in public affairs still await the extensive exploration and treatment they deserve.² Here we will concentrate on the philosophical and ethical aspects of his work, and in particular on the unique manner in which he dealt with those subjects.

Among his projects in philosophy and the history of philosophy, two large and important undertakings are worthy of mention. The first is *Völkerpsychologie*, the psychology of peoples or nations.³ The second is

- 1 On Moritz Lazarus and his importance see *Moritz Lazarus' Lebenserinnerungen* (Bearbeitet von Nahida Lazarus und Alfred Leicht), Berlin: G. Reimer, 1906; *Aus meiner jugend: Autobiographie* (mit vorwort und anhang herausgegeben von Nahida Lazarus), Frankfurt a. M.: J. Kauffmann, 1913. Patrick B. Koch, 'Universalist Particularism' – (Jewish) Ethics in the Thought of Moritz Lazarus and Felix Adler," In *Zwischen Universalismus und partikularem Anspruch: Das Prinzip Aufklärung*, edited by Kristina-Monika Hinneburg and Grazyna Jurewicz, pp. 49-62. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2014. On the historical context of Lazarus and his thought see Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*. Wayne State 1995, pp. 203-206; Christian Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies And Protestant Theology In Wilhelmine Germany*, Brill 2005 pp. 112-113.
- 2 This is so despite his many public organizational and social activities, and despite the fact that his academic career in Switzerland and Germany is worthy of being recounted as well.
- 3 The study of the psychology of nations developed first out of the study of languages, mainly due to works of Wilhelms von Humboldt. Moritz Lazarus played an important role in this area as well. See Alfred Leicht, Lazarus, *Der Begründer der Völkerpsychologie*, Leipzig: Dürr'sche Buchhandlung 1904; see also Gerald Hartung, *Sprach-Kritik: Sprach und kulturtheoretische Reflexionen im deutsch-jüdischen Kontext*, *Velbruck Wissenschaft 2012*, the chapter on Lazarus on pages 61-86, primarily the analysis of his paper *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*. I would also like to direct the reader's attention not only to Lazarus' book, but to the important introduction to the description of Lazarus in this context. Moritz Lazarus, *Grundzüge der Völkerpsychologie und Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. by Klaus Christian Köhnke, Hamburg: Meiner 2003; ("introduction" IX-XLII).

the ethics of Judaism.⁴ The two projects are different in the manner in which they were conceived, in the way in which they were written and articulated, and in their philosophical significance as well – if there is any. One project focuses on the realm of psychology and national identity, while the other is concerned with the realm of ethics. Nevertheless, the two projects do have a great deal in common, since in both of them Lazarus strives to ascribe philosophical significance to processes that take place in the social realm and find expression in law, in official institutions, and in actual behavior. In both projects, Lazarus seeks the overarching meaning that lies behind and beyond the many and varied events in the life of the individual and of society.

The connection between these two projects creates a philosophical and spiritual perspective that might be called “meta-halakhic,” in that it tries to examine religion and Jewish law not from a bird’s eye view, as it were, not from a distance, but rather from within the textured reality that they create. Lazarus distances himself from the search for any “Geist” or “national spirit.” He is not prepared to be satisfied with an analysis of the law or official institutions. Instead, he tries to identify social and cultural creativity and actual accomplishment, while attributing

Other publications on this subject worth mentioning are Moritz Lazarus, *Einige synthetische Gedanken zur Völkerpsychologie*, Berlin 1863; some of the works were prepared in collaborations with Lazarus’ brother-in-law, Heymann Steinthal. Among the more interesting developments in this connection are the comprehensive and influential works of Wundt, Wilhelm Max, *Völkerpsychologie: eine Untersuchung der Entwicklungsgesetze von Sprache, Mythos und Sitte*, Leipzig: Engelmann 1900-1909; W. M. Wundt, *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie: Grundlinien einer psychologischen Entwicklungsgeschichte der Menschheit*, Leipzig: A. Kröner 1912. See also Carlo Sganzini, *Die fortschritte der völkerpsychologie / von Lazarus bis Wundt*, Bern: A. Francke 1913. A worthwhile comprehensive study, which includes a bibliography, is Burkart Holzner, *Völkerpsychologie – Leitfaden mit Bibliographie*, Würzburg: Holzner 1961.

- 4 Lazarus’ published works on both topics are numerous. We should make note of his books: Moritz Lazarus, *Ideale Fragen: in Reden und Vortragen*, Leipzig: C. F. Winter 1885; M. Lazarus, *Ueber die Reize des Spiels*, Berlin: Dümmler 1883; Lazarus, *An die deutschen Juden*, Berlin: Walther & Apolant 1887; Lazarus, *Ein psychologischer Blick in unsere Zeit*, Berlin: Harrwitz & Gossmann 1872; Lazarus, *Ueber den Ursprung der Sitten*. Berlin: F. Dümmler 1867; Lazarus, *Die Erneuerung des Judentums: Ein Anruf*. Berlin: Georg Reimer 1909; Lazarus, *Treu und frei: gesammelte Reden und Vorträge über Juden und Judentum*, Leipzig: C. F. Winter, 1887; Lazarus, *Der Prophet Jeremias*, Breslau: S. Schottlaender; New York: G. E. Stechert, 1894; Lazarus, *Was heisst und zu welchem Ende studirt man jüdische Geschichte u. Litteratur?: ein Vortrag*, Leipzig: M. W. Kaufmann, 1900; Lazarus, *Die Ethik des Judentums*, Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann, 1899.

significance to the self-conception of society's members.⁵ Lazarus' book and writings were subjected to a penetrating critique by Hermann Cohen, but despite the importance of describing it and exploring the polemics between the two of them; I will engage that topic only insofar as it assists us in clarifying Lazarus' position.⁶

Lazarus's philosophical position relates both to examining ethics as a general philosophical area of study, and finding the appropriate method to explore Jewish ethics in particular. Thus, we can describe two approaches upon which he bases his attitude toward Judaism as follows:

1. The general inference that can be derived from the meaning of ethics and religion is the collective product of all the manifestations of Jewish life and culture: in *halakha*, in custom, in the arts and in literature.
2. The significance Lazarus ascribes to the inner aspects of religion, which is preferable in certain matters to the external aspects.⁷

In sum, he attempts to ascribe new meaning to Judaism from an ethical perspective as he understands it.

Lazarus's philosophical research can best be understood if we try to define in the most precise possible manner just what the object of inquiry

- 5 It is unnecessary to expatiate here on the significance of the idea of "spirit" and of the concept of a "national spirit" (Volksgeist) in the Hegelian sense, or to its development in the philosophy of history. There are many of research studies concerning this aspect in Hegel's philosophy; see for example the important book of Kojève: Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel. Leçons sur la Phénoménologie de l'esprit professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'École des Hautes Études*, réunies et publiées par Raymond Queneau. Paris, Gallimard, 1947; and see Michael N. Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998; For the most important reference on this topic to the writings of Herder, see Johann Gottfried Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, transl.: Michael N. Forster, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002 (esp. part IV). Berlin analyzed Herder's thinking in a great work: Isaiah Belin. *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas*, New York: The Viking Press, 1976.
- 6 Hermann Cohen's critique can be found in Hermann Cohen, "Das Problem der jüdischen Sittenlehre – Eine Kritik von Lazarus' Ethik des Judenthums", *Jüdische Schriften*: Bd. Zur jüdischen Religionsphilosophie und ihrer Geschichte, C. A. Schwetschke, 1924.
- 7 The question of external or internal points of view is one of the most significant issues relating to methodological aspects in the study of religion. On the wide perspective of this methodological question see Scott S. Elliott (ed.), *Reinventing Religious Studies: Key Writings in the History of a Discipline*, Acumen, 2013; Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

is when we think about moral questions within and through a Jewish context. Lazarus does not want to examine Jewish or religious ethics as stemming from the concept of divinity. He does not want to lay out the essential foundation of Judaism in contrast to other religions, but he nevertheless endeavors to determine the significance of ethics that emerge from Judaism. He does so by examining the social and cultural space in which certain moral ideas develop.

For that purpose, we may employ the phrase he borrows from, or maybe contributes to Ernest Renan: an “eternal plebiscite.”⁸ That is, while there is indeed a national spirit, culture and spirit are the outcomes of a multiplicity of free choices by many individuals. In this sense, Lazarus calls this project *Völkerpsychologie* even though it is only the product of the choices and consciousness of individuals. In the context of moral deliberation, we can say that for Lazarus it is not the written *halakha* that is the subject of the ethical-philosophical discussion, but the way in which it is translated and develops as the Jewish way of life at its various levels. One needs to examine that way of life in order to understand the central concept of Jewish morality: sanctity (*kedusha*). Such an examination will reveal how the Jewish way of life, from the Bible through the classic rabbinic literature and later literature of Jewish law, establishes various concepts and levels of sanctity: ritual sanctity and social-moral sanctity. Ritual symbolism enables a person to think in terms of bringing sanctity to the society in which he lives as well, and turning it into a sanctified society. Sanctified morality is not the language of the law, which lays down limits, but is instead intended to create the internal motivation for those who observe *halakha* to strive toward the vision of a sanctified society.

Let us explore some examples of Lazarus’ position by examining a number of examples of law or custom that he deals with. One example: *ona’at devarim*, the talmudic concept of “verbal mistreatment,” meaning fraud or misrepresentation that leads not to monetary but emotional damages. We can trace in this a transition from Biblical law to the talmudic discussion and the realization of a spiritual idea as determining behavior in matters of language and speech.⁹ Another example: fasting – from the concept of afflicting and restricting oneself to the underlying

8 The famous lecture on the meaning of nation given by Renan: Ernest Renan, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’, *Conférence faite en Sorbonne*, le 11 mars 1882, Paris. See Egbert Klautke, *The Mind of the Nation: Völkerpsychologie in Germany 1851-1955*, Berghahn: Oxford and New York, 2013.

9 Lazarus, *Ethics*, 251-254.

impact of the fast, the *ta'anit*, in its social and moral sense.¹⁰ Another: the sanctification of material things – the transition from the Priestly code and the Temple, which sanctify matter for the worship of God, to the Talmud and the halakhic discourse, in which the idea of the sanctification of nature finds expression in practice.

Lazarus – Jewish Identity and Philosophy

In many senses, Lazarus is a loyal son of the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment, in Germany. He grew up within the Jewish world, inside the Jewish community, the *bet midrash*, and talmudic learning, and he found his way toward Enlightenment, first as an autodidact and finally as part of the Swiss and German academic community. From his descriptions of his childhood and youth, we can discern his ability to devote himself to study, including his copying out the biblical grammar of Wilhelm Gesenius for his own use. He relates how his friends tried to make him into one of Goethe's admirers, but he himself was repulsed by Goethe, preferring Schiller instead. We may add that Lazarus describes the inspiration of Lessing for his work. In his old age, he spoke warmly of that relationship. Reuven Brainin writes, "Of Ephraim Lessing' – Lazarus told me – 'I was particularly fond from the day I first began to read German literature. Back in my youth I read with great pleasure everything that flowed from the pen of that great man. And no wonder. With the sharpness of his intellect, his healthy logic and his clear thinking, Lessing is close to the Talmudic spirit. He is close to the Hebrew spirit in this as well: he always gave preference to content over external form.'"¹¹

Lazarus – *Finding a New Place for Jewish Thought within the National and Psychological Discourse of Nations*

In both 1869 and 1871, Lazarus served as president of the Liberal Jewish Synods of Leipzig and Augsburg. Therefore, his public intervention for Jewish rights and the defense of Jewish Identity in

10 Lazarus, *Ethics*, 54.

11 Reuben Brainin published an essay on Lazarus in the journal of *Ahiasaf* (in Hebrew), iv. 214: <https://benyehuda.org/brainin/lazarus.html>

Germany and Europe of in the second half of the nineteenth century should not be surprising.¹²

In order to achieve a proper understanding of the relationship between Lazarus' thought in the European tradition and his Jewish thought, it would be wise to have a close look at the collection of pamphlets that he published in 1887 under the title *Treu und Frei* – “Faithful and Free.” From an historical perspective, Lazarus is involved in the German social controversy regarding Jews and Judaism in the wake of the publication of the pamphlet by Tröschke, a debate in which the scholar Hermann Cohen participated, identifying publicly as a Jew for the first time.

Despite the fact that Lazarus built his conception of nationality into his discussion of the psychology of nations, his more focused description of it is to be found in a work he published in 1880, *Was heist national?* (“What Does ‘National’ Mean?”). Lazarus's approach was nationalistic, but his conceptional framework was humanistic in nature. Nationality and the nation's spirit exist – not as a product of race, however, but as a product of a cultural or historical-cultural process, that unites the individuals who participate in it. Lazarus describes a complex, although not dialectical, position: national identity influences the self-conception of individuals, but that self-conception is established by individuals who choose that identity as the circle of their national belonging.

In his article “*Ueber den Begriff und die Möglichkeit einer Völkerpsychologie als Wissenschaft*” (“On the Concept and Likelihood of a Psychology of Peoples as a Science”), which Lazarus published in 1851, he set out the ideational program. Just as in psychology, individual scholars and scientists try to find a good description of the emotional life and the spirit of the individual, relying on the totality of the individual's expressions and creations, so must science create a psychology of peoples by describing their emotional life, imagination, and the spirit of an entire organic

12 Due to the nature of the research methodology I use in this study, I do not devote much attention to the historical context of this discourse but rather will suffice with a number of references that will be helpful in situating Lazarus in the aforesaid context. Till van Rahden, *Jews and other Germans – Self Society. Religious Diversity and Urban Politics in Breslau 1860-1925*, trans. Marcus Braunard, University of Wisconsin Press 2008. There is herein a nice description of the broader picture of how the Jews fit into the German elites. In this regard see Lazarus 9, 167. *Language as Bridge and Border: Linguistic, Cultural and Political Constellations in 18th to 20th Century German – Jewish thought*, Hentrich and Hentrich Verlag Berlin 2015, mainly the introduction by Sabine Sander entitled *Language as Bridge and Border: Introductio*, pps, 11-26.

society. This psychology should be established on the basis of the totality of the people's self-expression in its literature, art, law, and institutions. The individuals who function within that society do so as individuals, but they also give expression to the people and the society in which they live and work. Lazarus' research led him to the conclusion that there is a unifying spiritual foundation which underpins every organic group, which constitutes the basis of individual creativity.

Lazarus' identification as a Jew is as part of German Jewish society and the German Reform community, and in identification with Abraham Geiger's approach. Beginning in the 1880's, he became a very active figure in German Jewish life, including his involvement as a founder of the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums. Lazarus viewed himself as a scholar and researcher, making an active contribution to German intellectual life. He served as professor of philosophy and psychology in Switzerland and then in Berlin. Basing himself on the philosophy of Johann Friedrich Herbart, he founded the field of "Völkerspsychologie." His line of reasoning involved Hegel and the search for an abstract culture of concepts that would take in the sum total of a people's cultural creations. However, according to Lazarus, the search for an all-inclusive culture led scholars to search for the highest observation point, one beyond cultural and creative life itself, and doing so caused them to ignore the palpable reality of culture and the capability for self-awareness of individuals who are members of a particular culture. The search is, then, for the empirical tools that will make it possible to closely examine the national spirit by using its own tools, and from within. Thus he arrived at the phrase "psychology of nations." Experience from within enables a person to encounter the culture's creativity in all its strata, including the most basic and important ones.

We will now delineate his position more precisely. Lazarus does indeed borrow the expression "the people's spirit" or "the *Geist* of a nation" from romanticism, but he gives it a totally different meaning. That "spirit" is a social and psychological factor that unifies individuals in the framework of a national and cultural group, to which it concomitantly lends constancy and continuity. As regards methodology, Lazarus's approach is intended to describe the existing moral system at its various levels, and not a system of theoretical ethics. Thus, for example, Lazarus attacks the Spanish philosophical moralist Bahya ibn Paquda. His thought, as reflected in his work *Hovot Ha-levavot* ("The Duties of the Heart"), does not bring the ethical to new depths of profundity. Instead, it transfers it into the realm of mysticism, which (to quote Heinz Moshe Grauper, in his book

The Rise of Modern Judaism) “of necessity led to an overly aristocratic morality.” For the same reason, Lazarus chose to ignore Maimonides’ ethical project, seeing it as an attempt to place the ethical sources of Judaism into an alien philosophical framework.. A proper description of ethical must be rooted into the actual cultural context.

It appears that this learned critique should be addressed to Lazarus himself as well, since he makes use of a tool of philosophical thought that is foreign to the sources of Judaism – Kantian thought.¹³ The Jewish formulation of the ethical is not a statement about the supreme good towards which a person should be directing his actions, but rather about the correct path, or as Rabbi Yehuda Ha-nasi puts it in Avot 2:1, “the good path that a person should choose for himself.” The rules of moral conduct are what should guide a person.

The Ethics of Judaism

Lazarus, as a loyal member of his community, tried to validate these ideas in regard to Judaism in his major work, *The Ethics of Judaism*, the first volume of which appeared during his lifetime, in 1898, while the second volume was issued posthumously in 1911. If one follows the book’s internal logic, one sees that Lazarus not only tried to give an example of the idea of the psychology of nations, and not only tried to accomplish it from within, in the context with which he was familiar, but tried to say something essential about Judaism as well. In his view, the search for the ethics of Judaism is a search for the inner essence of Judaism that forms the basis for any expanding Jewish identity in his time, for the whole span of Jewish life, and for any ritual symbolism. True devotion to Judaism, he thinks, is a result of dedication not to a way of life but to the inner essence that is expressed by that particular way of life.

His work is of great significance in the realm of German culture as well, since for Lazarus Jewish ethics is the universal mission of Judaism, which is capable of perfecting humanism in Kantian or Hegelian terms. Lazarus’s position has even been called the pluralist nationalist option that was one of German society’s possible self-identities, and was rejected

13 Heinz Mosche Graupe, *The Rise of Modern Judaism: An Intellectual History of German Jewry, 1650-1942*, Krieger Pub Co. 1978, p. 263.

as far back as the end of the 19th century in favor of nationalistic patriotism.

In many studies on Lazarus, one can find his ideas described as an attempt to internalize Kantian ethics and bring them into Jewish culture. I take issue with that position, which, I think, stems from a partial reading of the first volume alone. With the publication of the second volume, one can discern the full picture of the project and understand that while Lazarus may indeed have great admiration for the ethics that Kant proposed, he nevertheless takes a few important additional steps beyond Kant in order to validate the proposition that his is a book about “The Ethics of Judaism.” For any reader without the patience to read the whole book, I will summarize three critiques or learned observations regarding Kant offered by Lazarus, which are all linked together.

1. Lack of ethical motivation – The Kantian moral imperative is based on the judgment of human will, which allows ideas to be fulfilled. – from theory of justice to realization. Lazarus examines the motivation for ethical action instead.
2. Extending beyond ethics – The religious or Jewish context expresses an abundance of morality because of its being directed beyond the ethical imperative. We can put it this way: there are deeds that Kantian ethical judgment would find worthy, but the religious ethical imperative would deem necessary, placing them in the category of “matters of the heart” (דברים המסורים אל הלב). Lazarus’ fascinating example is the Talmudic inquiry into what is called in Hebrew *ona’at devarim*, making truthful statements that are nevertheless misleading. This form of fraud leaves its victim no worse off financially but causes him to suffer a psychologically loss.
3. The idea of holiness – There is a need for a unified picture of the world in order to grant meaning to the ethical endeavor as a spiritual project. That is, it is within the power of religion to give spiritual meaning to the moral deed itself. Thanks to Judaism, ethics earns the status of “holiness.”

Lazarus’s book intends to describe an ethical system – its sources, its assumptions, its arrangement and goals, and, no less important, the ways in which it is realized in the fulfillment of mitzvot (commandments) and in a way of life. The objective is to see Judaism’s ethical system as educational, directed toward shaping personality. In his formal programmatic declaration, Lazarus states that his goal is not just to

anchor high ethical norms in Jewish sources, but also to lead his readers to identify with those values and dedicate themselves to achieving them. The success of this project is important from two perspectives: the defense of Judaism against the humanistic critique and the defense of humanism from its own weaknesses.

Ethical Motivation

Part of the book is devoted to Lazarus' response to Kant's criticism of Judaism. He makes the point that Kant's methodology prevented him from seeing two things: on one hand, the closeness of Kantian ethics to ideas found in ethical writings throughout Jewish history, and on the other hand, seeing how Jewish thought provides a response to one of the failures of ethics. What does he mean by that? According to Lazarus, Kant's objective conceptualization of morality does not succeed in providing morality with a desire for its actualization as a way of life. Judaism, he says, sought first and foremost to direct us toward the actual realization of morality as a way of life. There is an educational failure built into Kantian thinking: it is a truth imprisoned in abstract concepts, and thus exerting no influence on the will. Motivating the will is accomplished by none other than the emotions and by actual closeness to life. This can be restated as a philosophical claim: Kant's theory of ethics requires positivist supplementation – that is, it needs to be supplemented by being tested out (empirically) in life, and not according to *a priori* assumptions. And then, if we go to the trouble of adding a positivist supplement to Kantian thought, we will discover that a theory of ethics formed in that way is close to the theory of ethics that emerges from the sources of Judaism.

The important distinction that Lazarus adds to the Kantian deliberation distinguishes between the objective validity of the imperative and the definition of the individual's subjective will. In other words, he accepts, Kant's formula of the categorical imperative without reformulating it, which lays claim to the ethical imperative as a general obligation. He also takes pains to show how that imperative appears as far back as the Torah and the prophets. However, in his view, what was clear to the Rabbis of classical Judaism was not clear to Kant: that it is necessary to coordinate between the individual will and the general obligation. The subjective personality, motivated by emotions and powered by free will, expresses itself fully in morality, and that is the meaning of the Torah's

phrase “with all your heart and with all your soul.” That is, empirical analysis reveals the full personality established by ethics, and not just an external and objective morality imposed a priori on the individual. One interesting point in the book is that, after the fact, Lazarus searches for many places and contexts in which Kant expresses himself psychologically and individually, in order to argue that empirically, Kant can be shown to be conscious of weaknesses in his ethical position.

One of the criticisms leveled against Lazarus was that he steered clear of the religious and theological dimension of morality, but according to his own testimony, he deliberately refrained from theological discussion. Doing theology using philosophical tools seemed to him to be an inappropriate form of inquiry. The man of science, of *Wissenschaft*, as distinct from a rabbi, does not make use of theological discourse itself but rather of the empirical tools at his disposal, and using them he reveals ethical meanings within religious discourse. As a man of scientific scholarship, that is, he does not get involved with the proof of God’s existence, but he can measure the human significance of belief in God’s presence and of belief in divine providence. Judaism’s naive depiction of the relationship between man and God as a relationship between persons with absolute commitment to one another expresses the human sense of destiny based on the existence of an objective requirement. The pure theological description directs human beings not to view reality as though they had created it, but rather as though they are called to account out of their own free will and choice. Love of God is identical, in the eyes of the believer, with the love of goodness and truth, even without any recompense or reward.

Extending Beyond Ethics

The complex argument herein relates to the added imperative of Judaism vis-à-vis ethics. The categorical imperative is based on the judgment of human deeds from a general and universal standpoint. The ethical is as obligatory as a law of nature, in the sense that it applies to all people as rational beings. The religious moral imperative also applies in cases in which it is impossible to apply an ethical imperative as law, but nevertheless Judaism makes ethical demands of a person in such instances as well. The fascinating example that Lazarus analyzes is *ona’at devarim*, “verbal misrepresentation,” that is, the prohibition against causing another person to believe something that is not true, even

without telling an outright lie. The talmudic examples of such incidents relate to matters both simple and serious, in which a person plants a false conception in the mind of another person. For example, if a person enters a shop without intending to buy anything, but gives the salesclerk the impression that such is his intention, this is *ona'at devarim*. To give a different example, if a person insults another person by speaking the truth – the “simple” truth, as it were – but knowing that the result will be injurious, this too is *ona'at devarim*. From the perspective of moral law, it is impossible to apply the ethical imperative to these instances; after all, no falsehoods were uttered, no untruths were committed, and so on. However, the religious imperative can include such instances. “About matters given over to the heart, the Torah says, ‘...you shall fear your God.’” The ethics of Judaism include the call to go beyond ethics – that is, beyond the imperative of ethics in philosophy.

The importance of Holiness (Sanctity)

In two passages in his book on ethics, Lazarus discusses the concept of *qedusha* – sanctity, or holiness. In the chapter on Holiness (*qedusha*) he clarifies the link between sanctity and morality. He also seeks to view the holy as an ideal. At one level of discussion, says Lazarus, Judaism’s proposes that the goal of morality is “the sanctification of life,” meaning that completely moral behavior endows the existence of all human society with sanctity.¹⁴ Holiness is designated as important: the things we consider most important are those that are sanctified. But language does something else as well. It marks off sanctified things as those that are not to be violated. And as such, the sanctified good is that which, when one impairs it, one has committed an immoral act, defined as a desecration or a violation of the sacred. At first glance, it appears that religious usage serves to create a separate realm of sanctity, like ritual sanctity – the Temple, the sacrifices, *et cetera*. Careful attention reveals, however, that in a Jewish context, ritual sanctity also relates to things in nature, to materials such as oil, water, blood, and the like. There is an important message that emerges from ritual sanctity, in its being part of the natural world, founded upon natural materials, and in its identifying special qualities with the natural world of human beings. In the Hebrew Bible, and even in the Book of Leviticus, which is devoted

14 Lazarus, Ethics II, 175.

to the Priests, there is an entire realm of ethical sanctity, a realm that seems to be distinct from the natural. It is not symbolic and is connected to what is beyond nature, to divinity and its attributes, and the like. But the message of the Bible, and the Rabbis who develop that message, is that one should not separate the religious from the ethical, in accordance with the verse, “And I will be sanctified in the midst of the Children of Israel” as explained in a classical *midrash* (Sifra, Kedoshim, I): “If you sanctify yourselves, I will consider it as though you had sanctified Me.” Ethics is described in the language of holiness, and the symbolic finds expression in the relations between human beings.¹⁵ What is the ethical good that holiness indicates? Lazarus’s answer is clear: moral wholeness in a community. The wholeness or fullness of morality demands, beyond harmony between moral ideas, the uniting of all the agents of morality, not only for the sake of individuals but primarily for the sake of the community.¹⁶

From this one can move easily to the second level of the discussion, which is also the last chapter of the book, entitled “Sanctification through Union”.¹⁷ If the idea of sanctity is the ethical idea of Judaism, that means that holiness in *The Ethics of Judaism* is expressed in the sanctification of life, which is the goal of humanity that confers meaning and form to all the other goals. Sanctity, therefore, is directed toward the totality of morality – toward the harmony of all ethical ideas. The result is not just the sanctification of the individual’s life, but of society and humanity as a whole. And thus, the goal of ethics is in the fulfillment of the verse, “and you shall be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

15 Idem, 189.

16 Idem, 194.

17 Ethics II, chapter VII, pp. 176-253.

Noa Sophie Kohler

Marcus Brann on Religious Identity and Wissenschaft:

Can non-Jews be WdJ Scholars?

In 2004, Michael Meyer published an essay called “Two Persistent Tensions within Wissenschaft des Judentums” in which he discussed a) the tension between the religious and the secular approach to the Study of Judaism and b) the question, whether Wissenschaft des Judentums is a Jewish project looking inwards or part of the general project of science.¹ Without the distance of time and a different approach that helps today’s historians to evaluate this question, Marcus Brann, himself a Wissenschaft des Judentums scholar, discussed in his private or semi-private correspondence with his colleagues whether non-Jews qualify at all for being Wissenschaft des Judentums researchers, which means the inverse: concerning Jewish studies, there can be no general project of science outside of a research that is a Jewish project looking inwards. As we will see, he was convinced that non-Jews are not capable of researching Judaism. But this was only indirectly connected to their religious affiliation. Non-Jews would never be able to acquire the same broad knowledge and reach the same level of understanding as Jews, who were trained from a very young age onwards. Brann’s letters constitute one of many facets of the pursuit of Jewish scholars to define and defend their scientific approach to Jewish studies, confronting the Protestant (in the cases discussed here) scholars who were in a position of strength as German university professors. For years, Jewish scholars had demanded the inclusion of Jewish studies at German universities, and Brann’s stance was not unique.² In 1907, the philosopher Hermann Cohen already wrote that “a person of different faith cannot lecture on the science of our living religion. A living religion can only be scientifically presented by someone who is part of it, with his inner religiosity. This is

1 Michael A Meyer, “Two Persistent Tensions within Wissenschaft des Judentums”, in: *Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness*, (ed. C. Wiese and A. Gotzmann), Leiden 2007, pp. 73-89.

2 See Wiese, Christian: *Challenging Colonial Discourse. Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany*, Leiden, Boston 2005, pp. 377-389.

distinguished from denominational bias by the scientific attitude and its public supervision.”³ Although the general question was what constituted good science, it was at the same time a controversy between Protestant and Jewish scholars on the prerogative of interpretation of Jewish sources, and Brann professed his position in a very frank manner to a Protestant colleague, of all people.

The letters cited here are part of an ongoing publication project of Marcus Brann’s expansive correspondence, “**Wissenschaft des Judentums in Europa. Die Korrespondenz des Breslauer Historikers Markus Brann (1849-1920)**” by Christian Wiese and Mirjam Thulin.⁴

Marcus Brann was born in Rawicz (then Rawitsch) in 1849 as son of a rabbi. He studied at the University in Breslau, earning his PhD in 1873, and in parallel at the Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar Breslau, where he was ordained a rabbi in 1875. After having taught in various places, he became the successor of Heinrich Graetz for History and Biblical Exegesis in 1891 at the seminary.⁵ He published several monographs and numerous articles on Jewish History, and he was the editor of the *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, a position which he first held along with David Kaufmann⁶ and then alone until his death in 1920. Along with Aron Freimann, he was the editor of the first volume of the topographical and historical handbook *Germania Judaica*⁷ and edited David Kaufmann’s collected writings.⁸ Apart from publishing, he also taught at the seminary. Commenting on his workload, which was heavier than usual during World War I, he wrote to a colleague in 1915 “...and in addition to all that, I have to give fifteen lectures a week and I have students who are able to scientifically check what I am saying”.⁹ At the same time, he ran the library of the seminary. His occupation with all the above-mentioned activities is reflected in his extensive correspondence with colleagues, both Jewish and Christian scholars.

3 Ibid., p. 355.

4 https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/41087479/10_editionsprojekt-brann

5 See Singer, and Isidore, Deutsch, Gotthard. “Brann, Marcus” Jewish Encyclopedia.com.

6 from 1892-1899, until Kaufmann’s death.

7 Heuberger, Rachel: Aron Freimann und die Wissenschaft des Judentums. Tübingen 2004, p. 294.

8 Brann, Marcus (ed): Gesammelte Schriften von David Kaufmann, 3 vol, Frankfurt a.M. 1908-1915.

9 Brann an Laible 28. Mai [191]5, Brann Archive, NLI, Archives Department, ARC Ms. Var. 308/751.

What is probably less known is his voluntary commitment in various positions, such as being a board member of a Jewish elementary school, a Jewish home economics school, association chairman of the Society for Jewish History and Literature, of the Society for the Colonization of Palestine, the Society of Israelite teachers in Silesia, a member of the support fund in Posen, and various others.¹⁰

A short excerpt from a letter exchange between Brann and his dear friend, the liberal Rabbi Dr. Philipp Bloch, Rabbi in Posen,¹¹ helps understand how Brann characterized the religious orientation of the Breslau Seminary, which was an important center of Wissenschaft des Judentums, and as such, influenced the way Jewish science was perceived. Bloch, like Brann himself a graduate of the Breslau Seminar, wrote to Brann in September 1916 that he was in search of someone to lead the religious school in Posen and could even substitute for him on occasion – evidently, the shortage of teaching personnel was a consequence of World War I. He wrote: “He has to be a man of the world, learnedness is pure luxury, he only has to impress the congregation [...] But he has to be liberal, this is a fundamental condition of my congregation [...] would you have someone like this in stock in Breslau?”¹² To which Brann responded rather sharply “I am not sure about the meaning of the word liberalism in Posen, but we do not have in stock students who openly desecrate Shabbat, break the dietary laws, are prepared to marry mixed couples or such prohibited by the Bible, and as you know, the statutes of our Alma Mater, that will also not be the case in the foreseeable future. But I am sure you will find such nasty fellows...”¹³ With Bloch

10 Brann to H. Laible, Breslau, 28. Mai 1915. “Von den sogen[annten] Ehrenämtern: der Ortsschulaufsicht über eine jüdische Volksschule, eine jüdische Koch- und Haushaltungsschule, der Vorsitz im Verein für jüd[ische] Geschichte und Literatur im Kolonisationsverein für Palästina, im Verein israel[itischer] Lehrer in Schlesien und Posen, in der Unterstützungskasse dieses Vereins und in mindestens 1½ D[u]tz[en]d Ausschüssen gemeinnütziger Anstalten.”

11 Von 1857-67 am JTS.

12 Aber nach den Feiertagen brauche ich eine Hilfe, die namentlich die Religionsschule übernimmt und sie selbständig leitet, auch mich eventuell vertreten könnte. Es muss ein Weltmensch sein, Gelehrsamkeit ist Luxus, er soll eben nur der Gemeinde imponieren. Können Sie mir einen solchen Mensch empfehlen? Aber er muss liberal sein, das ist für meine Gemeinde Grundbedingung. Haben Sie überhaupt in Breslau derartiges auf Lager? Ph. Bloch to Brann, Posen, 24. September 1916, Jerusalem, Arc. Ms. Var. 308/149. [in Hebrew letters]

13 Was man z. Z. in Posen unter entschiedenem Liberalismus versteht, weiß ich zwar nicht genau. Junge Kommilitonen aber, die öffentlich den Sabbat entweihen, die Speisegesetze

teasing Brann a little, Brann soon struck a conciliatory tone in the further course of their correspondence, but this short excerpt should serve as a background to understanding Brann's outlook on Judaism, which was strongly and consciously rooted in Jewish traditions.

One of Brann's Christian correspondents was Professor Heinrich Laible of Rothenburg, who taught there at the Latin School, who had published a monograph called *Jesus Christ in the Talmud* (1891)¹⁴ and occasionally published in the *Monatsschrift*. They corresponded for many years, and Brann's change from his usual form of address Highly Esteemed Professor (*Hochgeehrter Herr Professor*) or the formal Very Esteemed Professor to "good old friend" (*guter alter Freund*) in 1917¹⁵ bears witness to a certain fondness which was also found in the cordial tone between the two scholars. Laible often informed Brann on his research projects and questions, they discussed matters concerning publications, and to a great extent exchanged opinions on Christian and Jewish researchers in their field, especially in cases in which Christian scholars displayed an insufficient knowledge of Hebrew and Judaism. Both shared a strong dislike of Protestant bible criticism.¹⁶

In January 1913, Brann addressed Laible on the latter's scathing review of Oscar Holtzmann's *Der Tosephtatraktat Berakot*.¹⁷ Published in the *Theologisches Literaturblatt*, Laible's review *The New Testament and the Talmud*¹⁸ assiduously listed Holtzmann's inaccuracies, omissions, misunderstandings and outright mistakes. In his introductory words, he lamented the "untimely publications of those who had no thorough knowledge of Jewish writings and language, risking to damage Talmud science among Christians."¹⁹ Brann, who agreed "with almost every word", notified Laible of his intention to mention this "important essay"

verletzen und Mischehen oder biblisch verbotene Ehen einzusegnen – so was scheint ja gemeint zu sein – bereit sind, haben wir überhaupt nicht auf Lager und werden wir, wie Sie die Satzungen unserer alma mater kennen, in absehbarer Frist wohl auch nicht züchten. Zu haben werden solche Subjekte aber sein. Brann to Bloch, Posen, 26. September 1916, Jerusalem, Arc. Ms. Var. 308/149.

14 Laible, Heinrich: *Jesus Christus im Thalmud*, Berlin 1891.

15 See Markus Mordechai Brann Archiv, Arc Ms Var 308/751.

16 "Meine Stellung zur protestantischen Bibelkritik stimmt mit der Ihrigen, wie ich sehe, grundsätzlich überein" Brann to H. Laible, Breslau, 28. Mai 1915.

17 Holtzmann, Oscar: *Der Tosephtatraktat Berakot*. Text, Übersetzung und Erklärung nebst einem textkritischen Anhang von D. Oscar Holtzmann. Giessen 1912.

18 Laible, Heinrich: *Das Neue Testament und der Talmud*, in: *Theologisches Literaturblatt*, 34, Leipzig 1913, 1; pp. 1-6 and 2; pp. 25-28.

19 "...unzeitige Publikationen solcher, die von jüdischer Literatur und Sprache keine

in the *Monatsschrift*, and deridingly announced “a detailed appreciation of Holtzmann’s and Beer’s accomplishments” in the *Monatsschrift*, by which he meant a review by Viktor Aptowitz on the critical edition of the Mischna, the so-called Gießener Mischna, published by the Christian theologians and professors Georg Beer and Oscar Holtzmann.²⁰ Brann then proceeded to tell Laible a bit of gossip demonstrating that Georg Beer did not understand the Talmud even when lecturing on it. Referring to Beer’s publication, Brann continued: “When you have a look at his latest masterpiece, you will notice that he has not increased his knowledge. Anyhow, I consider him unteachable” and, by associating Beer’s overt anti-Jewish bias with his Jewish sounding surname, concluded that “indeed, I can comprehend his blind Jew-hatred only in the case that he is either an apostate himself or a direct ancestor of apostate Jews.”²¹ By this, Brann put Beer tacitly on a par with Joseph Pfefferkorn, the Jew turned Christian (Catholic) theologian, who advised that the Talmud should be taken away from the Jews. Laible, however, had his doubts as to Brann’s suggestion, arguing in his answer that Beer’s lack of knowledge of Hebrew – not so much concerning grammar but with regard to the Jewish world and mode of expression of the Hebrews – would speak against his having Jewish ancestry. For Laible, Franz Delitzsch serves as a counterargument, since Laible, like many others, took Delitzsch for a “born Jew.”²² He argued that Delitzsch was a sincere friend of Israel and

gründliche Kenntnis haben, wodurch die talmudische Wissenschaft unter den Christen direkt in Gefahr ist geschädigt zu werden.” Ibid, 1; 1.

- 20 For the review Brann refers to Aptowitz, Viktor: *Christliche Talmudforschung*, MGWJ, Vol. 57 (1913), Issue 1; 1-23 and Issue 2, 129-152. Aptowitz discusses the state of the field of Talmud research among Christian scholars and although his overall tone is serious and profound, his comments on Beer and Holtzmann’s expertise are biting and ironic, which make the essay very entertaining to read. For a detailed analysis of the Gießener Mischna and its reception among Jewish scholars see Wiese, *Christian: Challenging Colonial Discourse. Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany*, Leiden, Boston 2005, pp. 377-389.
- 21 Wenn Sie seine neuen Grosstaten ansehen, werden Sie bemerken, dass er bis heut nichts zugelernt hat. Wie ich ihn überhaupt für jede Belehrung unzugänglich halte. Sein blinder Judenhass ist mir in der Tat nur dann erklärlich, wenn er entweder selbst ein abtrünniger Jude ist, oder unmittelbar von abtrünnigen Juden herkommt. Brann to Laible 19. Januar [191]3, Brann Archive, NLI, Archives Department, ARC Ms. Var. 308/751.
- 22 Rumor had it that Delitzsch’s Jewish benefactor Levy Hirsch, with whom he had a close relationship, was actually his father. See Gerdmar, Anders: *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews*, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann, Leiden 2009, p. 214.

this would show that Jew-hatred was not a necessary consequence of baptism. Beer's Jew-hatred, Laible presumed, had its origin in his hatred of Orthodox Christianity, as Beer disliked "the essential of Christianity" just as much as the "essential of Judaism". Laible here purposely chose the wording *das Wesentliche* – *the essential* – as opposed to *das Wesen*, – *essence* – because, as he explained to Brann, Harnack, in his *Essence of Christianity*, notoriously eclipsed the *Essential*.²³ Further on in his letter, Laible jokingly and surprisingly suggested that Beer's "need for spitting his venom" might be explained by his being married to a particularly evil woman, who would not let him spit at home.²⁴ And although the speculations on the possible reason for Jew-hatred were usually only secondary topics in both their letters, Brann in his answer right away took up this thread – without, however, reacting to the putative evil wife. It might very well be possible, Brann conceded, that Beer's Jew-hatred was grounded in his hatred against every positive-historical viewpoint. But, Brann objected, Franz Delitzsch had no Jewish ancestors, as in an argument with Rohling, Delitzsch had vigorously denied this and he was a strictly truthful man.²⁵ At this point, Laible and Brann left it at that. The question in how far non-Jewish, knowledgeable scholars of Judaism differ from Jewish ones, was not answered.

In May 1915, Laible asked Brann to send him Moritz Güdemann's review of Rudolf Kittel's *Supreme Expert Opinion*, which had just been published in the *Monatsschrift*, for his information – Brann and Laible were closely following their Protestant and Jewish colleagues' work and kept each other in the know about what was being published. Brann had asked Moritz Güdemann to write a review on Kittel's *Supreme Expert Opinion* for the *Monatsschrift*. Güdemann was the conservative Chief Rabbi of Vienna, and was, like Brann, a graduate of the Breslau seminary and a WdJ scholar. The case that lay at the basis of the *Supreme Expert Opinion* had long concerned Jewish scholars and dated several years back to when the *Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith*²⁶ started legal proceedings for blasphemy against the anti-Semite Theodor Fritsch in 1910. The court required expert opinions, and two Jewish and two Christian scholars delivered theirs. But as their views differed widely,

23 H. Laible to M. Brann, Rothenburg ob der Tauber, 21. März 1913, NLI Jerusalem, Arc. Ms. Var. 308/751.

24 Ibid.

25 M. Brann to H. Laible, Breslau, 28. März 1913, NLI Jerusalem, Arc. Ms. Var. 308/751.

26 Central-Verein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens.

in addition Prof. Rudolf Kittel was asked to give his decisive expert opinion, (the *Obergutachten*²⁷) which was eventually published in 1914.²⁸

In his review, Güdemann did not concentrate on Kittel's scientific approach to the Bible as such. Instead, he focused on the arrogant attitude with which Protestant Bible critics handled the subject, which, to his mind, disregarded and hurt the religious feelings of Jews. Thus, Güdemann asserted for example: "A downright unbearable arrogance developed among the Protestant Bible critics, which has little to do with real science and only tries to masquerade the false for the real."²⁹ And a few pages further he explained that "Kittel should have known [...] that he is not dealing with a philological or historical question, but with a matter of worship, a matter of religious feelings, which lay at the basis of the *Centralverein's* decision to file action, a matter on which Kittel, as a Christian, had no judgment and might not even be able to form one."³⁰ After having received the latest edition of the *Monatsschrift*, Heinrich Laible wrote to Brann referring to Güdemann's review: "I agree with almost everything [Güdemann wrote], except for the sentence that Kittel "as a Christian, has no judgment and might not even be able to form one." In light of the fact that Laible himself was a Christian, a Protestant theologian, one of the very few of his kind who sided with the Jewish scholars over many years of friendly scholarly exchange, it is understandable that he argued: "Franz Delitzsch, [Herrmann] Strack³¹ and many other *אֲוֹהֲבֵי שְׂרָאֵל* (and me among them) must necessarily feel the blasphemy as the Old Testament is a holy book for us, too."³²

27 Kittel, Rudolf: *Judenfeindschaft oder Gotteslästerung? Ein gerichtliches Gutachten*, Leipzig 1914.

28 For detailed description and analysis of the *Obergutachten* and of Güdemann's review, see Christian Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse*, pp. 248-268.

29 Es entwickelt sich bei den protestantischen Bibelkritikern ein geradezu unerträglicher Hochmut, von dem wahre Wissenschaftlichkeit sich fernhält und mittels dessen sich nur die unechte für echt auszugeben sucht. p. 71.

30 My translation. For Wiese, see *ibid*, p. 277. "Musste Prof. Kittel dies sich nicht vor Augen halten, musste er sich nicht sagen, dass es sich hier nicht um eine philologische, nicht um eine geschichtliche Frage, sondern um eine gottesdienstliche, eine religiöse, eine Gefühlsangelegenheit handelt, von der allein der jüdische Centralverein bei seiner Klage ausgegangen ist, und über welche Kittel als Christ gar kein Urteil hat und vielleicht nicht einmal haben kann?" p. 74.

31 Protestant Theologian, Christian authority on rabbinic and Talmudic studies, studied under Steinschneider.

32 Unterstreichte fast alles, nur nicht den Satz S[eite]... "als Christ gar kein Urteil hat u[nd] vielleicht nicht einmal haben kann." Fr[an]z Delitzsch, Strack u[nd] viele andere

Von der Krone refers to this passage in a footnote as a testimony to the exceptional role Laible played among his Protestant colleagues, in that he did not only refrain from demanding conversion to Christianity, but also that he strove to resolve controversies on professional matters on a personal level.³³ But seen in the context of the ongoing, private dialogue between the two men revolving around the question if or how the religious identity of a scholar shapes his scientific viewpoint, this exchange of opinions gains in importance. So far, both had agreed that Protestant theologians Beer and Holtzmann were not only unsympathetic towards Judaism, to say the least, they were also incompetent scholars. But here, Laible invents a category which he calls *Lovers of Israel*,³⁴ to which he himself belonged, as well as Franz Delitzsch – who was no longer alive –, the Protestant theologian Hermann Strack, and “many more”. This group of Christian scholars, according to Laible, felt the blasphemy of Fritsch’s portrayal of “Yahveh” as a tribal God no less than the Jews, because the Old Testament was part of their religion likewise – and with this they completely rejected Kittel’s argument, which claimed the opposite in his *Obergutachten*, namely that “if Fritsch’s statements – or at least the legitimate ones – were reviling Judaism, they would do the same regarding Christianity or the Christian God, [...] but as Fritsch explicitly refers to the folkloric, early Israelite *Yahve*, this is not the case.”³⁵ For Laible, however, the Old Testament God belonged to Christians in the same way as to Jews.³⁶

In his response, Brann strove to explain to him the difference between

אוהבי ישראל (ich gehöre auch dazu) müssen, weil das A[lte] T[estament] für uns ein heil[iges] Buch ist, die betr[effende] Gottesläster[un]g empfinden.“

33 Von der Krone, Kerstin: *Wissenschaft in Öffentlichkeit: die Wissenschaft des Judentums und ihre Zeitschriften*, Berlin, Boston 2012, p. 277.

34 So far, I could not find any indications that אוהבי ישראל was used as a term, especially not for non-Jewish supporters of Jewish scholars of WdJ. There is a notion of אהבת ישראל but I doubt that this applies here as the group is made up of Christian scholars. For אהבת ישראל see Shira Kupfer, Asaf Turgeman, *The Secularization of the Idea of Ahavat Israel and Its Illumination of the Scholem–Arendt Correspondence on Eichmann in Jerusalem*, in: *Modern Judaism*, Volume 34, Number 2, May 2014, pp. 188-209.

35 “Wären Fritschs Äußerungen in ihrem berechtigten Kern... eine Beschimpfung des Judentums, so müssten sie auch als eine solche des Christentums bzw. des Christengottes angesehen werden. ...trifft aber bei einer Beschimpfung des von Fritsch betonten volkstümlichen, besonders frühisraelitischen, ...Jahwe nicht zu”, R. Kittel, *Obergutachten*, p. 71.

36 Here I differ from Von der Krone’s interpretation, that Laible felt his professional competence was criticized because he was Christian, see p. 277, fn. 32.

a Jew's and a Christian's relationship to what Laible called the Old Testament and what Brann, drawing a line, called *תורת משה*: "I am glad you consent with Güdemann and agree with him. But you get his harmless little sentence wrong "as a Christian has no idea and might even not be able to have one". He is, just like myself and all of us, with all his heart grateful to every Non-Jew who is an honest *אוהב ישראל*, like you are. This is self-evident. But he adds something that is just as self-evident, namely that ours is a totally different, a personal relationship to *תורת משה* compared to yours. You managed to achieve an honest *אהבת ישראל* in the midst of an entirety that is hostile towards us. But please do not forget that when we started to babble, the first word mother taught us was *שמע ישראל* and *תורה צוה לנו משה*. None of us can remember when and where he learned Hebrew. I might have been seven years old when my father made me write a little letter or at least a little greeting to my grandfather in Hebrew every Friday; and I was not much older when I learned the weekly Torah portion, the Prophets and soon also Targum and Rashi, repeating everything year after year to this very day. When I was in seventh or eighth grade, I was already used to the daily learning of my quota of *תנ"ך*, Mishnayot and Gemara, and this is what I have been doing all my life as a matter of course, even though I have to admit my inadequacy compared to my ancestors [*אבני*] *קטני עבה ממתני*.³⁷ You, dear professor, can surely sympathize with us when we pray every day *כי הם חיינו ואורך ימינו וכו'* and surely you honestly try to make sense of this strange circle of thought. But for us it is not a bit construed. Rather, it is real and veritable daily life, today just as it was centuries ago. And you want to be offended when Güdemann says something like that? Because this is what he meant and nothing else, that is for sure."³⁸

37 "kleiner als meines Vaters Hüften" 1 Könige 12, 10.

38 Es freut mich, daß Sie mit Güdemann einverstanden sind und ihm in allem zustimmen. Sie verkennen ihn aber doch mit seinem harmlosen Sätzchen: "als Christ gar kein Urteil hat und vielleicht nicht einmal haben kann." Gerade so wie ich und wie wir alle ist er jedem Nichtjuden, der ein ehrlicher *אוהב ישראל* ist, wie Sie einer sind, von ganzem Herzen dankbar. Das ist für unsereinen ganz selbstverständlich. Nur sagt er dabei das ebenfalls ganz Selbstverständliche, daß wir alle doch in einem ganz andern persönlichen Verhältnis zu *תורת משה* stehen, wie Sie, der Sie sich inmitten einer uns unfreundlich gesinnten Gesamtheit erst zu einer ehrlichen *אהבת ישראל* durchgerungen haben. Vergessen Sie doch gef[älligst] nicht, daß für uns, als wir zu lallen anfangen, das erste Wort, das uns die Mutter lehrte, *שמע ישראל* und *תורה צוה לנו משה* gewesen ist. Keiner von uns erinnert sich, wann und wie und bei wem er Hebräisch lesen gelernt hat. 7 Jahre war ich vielleicht alt, als der Vater mich anhielt, jeden Freitag an den

Brann's very personal and emotional response, which might reflect his own perception more than it does Güdemann's, could be summed up as saying that the difference between a Christian and a Jewish scholar does not lie in the Jewish or Christian belief in God (as understood by Laible) – because, just as Laible says, for him and other *Ohavey Israel*, the Old Testament is a holy book – but in a deepened understanding through learnedness in all the traditional sources, which makes all the difference between the holy book being “תורת משה” as opposed to the “Old Testament”. With all of his scientific approach, Kittel could never really understand Judaism, because he had not mastered the basics. Even such well-meaning Christian scholars as Laible would never be able to overcome the gap in learning, given the amount of knowledge acquired through a traditional Jewish upbringing. For Brann, Christians could not qualify as scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, simply because they would never have enough Jewish learnedness to understand their subject, and understanding the subject is the starting point of real scientific research.

As Laible did not react to this letter, Brann wrote to him again in December of the same year, inter alia asking whether he had received his letter. Brann had heard from a friend about a letter that Laible sent to Georg Beer, so he used this as a thematic pretext for writing. After telling two anecdotes on Beer (one of which he had already written in 1913), he concluded by repeating his opinion of two years earlier: “I don't think that Beer has by now learned anything new in the field of Mishna. Possibly in the field of Jew hatred. And concerning this [latter] point, I have told you before that I consider him to have Jewish ancestors.”³⁹

Großvater möglichst ein Briefchen, wenigstens ein Grüßchen in hebräischer Sprache zu schreiben. Nicht viel älter, als ich jede Woche den ganzen gerade fälligen Thora- und Prophetenabschnitt und bald auch Targum und Raschi dazu lernte und Jahr für Jahr bis zum heutigen Tage immer von neuem wiederhole. Als ich in Quarta oder in Tertia saß, war ich bereits gewöhnt, täglich mein Pensum תנ"ך, Mischnajoth und Gemara zu lernen, und so ist das selbstverständlich geblieben mein Leben lang, wenngleich ich meine Unzulänglichkeit bekenne, im Vergleich zu meinen Vorfahren, [אבי] אשר קטנם עבה ממתני [אבי] und denen gleichzukommen für mich eine bare Unmöglichkeit ist. Sie, sehr geehrter Herr Professor, können es gewiß lebhaft nachempfinden, wenn wir täglich beten כ"י הם חיינו ואורך ימינו וכ"י und geben sich zweifellos redliche Mühe, um sich in diesem wunderlichen Gedankenkreise zu orientieren. Für uns aber ist gar keine Spur von Konstruktion dabei. Es ist vielmehr wirkliches und wahrhaftiges tägliches Leben, heute wie vor Jahrhunderten. Und da wollen Sie empfindlich sein, wenn Güdemann so etwas sagt? Und nichts anderes als das, was ich hier auseinandergesetzt habe, hat er gemeint. Das steht fest.

39 It might be interesting to know that Georg Beer later became later an active member

Brann's strong sense of being confronted with irrational antagonism by Beer prevailed and Laible's rational reasoning was forgotten. How Laible would have reacted to Brann's explanation on what differentiates him from a Jewish scholar remains pure speculation, because Brann soon found out that he accidentally never posted that letter and so made do with informing Laible that he had not missed out on anything, letting the matter rest there.

As mentioned above, Hermann Cohen had in 1907 already voiced the opinion that non-Jews were not qualified for scientific research on Judaism. And while it is not clear if Kittel was aware of this specific statement or whether in general, the battle for sovereignty over the science of Judaism made him connect science with identity, this is echoed in Kittel's *Obergutachten*, in which he took issue with Hermann Cohen's essay "Der Nächste". This essay dealt with the biblical neighbor who must be loved like yourself and stressed the universal approach of the Old Testament, running counter to Protestant theologians' interpretation of biblical Judaism's tribal nature. The essay had just been published and provoked Kittel to comment: "...his [Cohen's] reputation, well known in other areas [of research], could here be misleading for lay people. A former professor of philosophy, even though born a Jew, is still no competent interpreter of the Hebrew Bible."⁴⁰ What made all the difference to Brann, namely the Jewish upbringing, characterized by learning the language and the traditional sources at an early age, remained concealed in Kittel's remark, which seemed to turn Jewishness solely into a matter of biology. For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that Kittel did take Jewish learning into account but dismissed its decisive character in science by claiming, in his *Obergutachten* as well that the non-Jewish scholar can substitute specialized knowledge of a topic with more thorough training and practice in the critical examination of questions on the history of religion.⁴¹

Although for Brann, scholarly expertise lay in Jewish education and

of the *Institute for the Study and Elimination of Jewish Influence on German Church Life*, see Susanna Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*, Princeton 2008, p. 100.

40 "Der Nächste" der allerdings schärfsten Widerstand heischt, da der auf andern Gebieten wohlbekannt Name des Verfassers den Laien leicht irreführen könnte. Aber ein gewesener Professor der Philosophie ist, auch wenn er geborener Jude ist, damit noch nicht ein sachkundiger Erklärer der hebräischen Bibel (Kittel Gutachten, p. 44. See also Wiese, p. 273.

41 Was dem nichtjüdischen Gelehrten an Spezialkenntnis des Gegenstandes abgeht, wird

the publications of his Christian colleagues did not convince him that it was otherwise, nevertheless belonging to the Jewish nation did play an important role for him. When a few years later, in 1917, Laible tried to find out who translated Kittel's work *Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* into Hebrew,⁴² he speculated vis à vis Brann that the translator could have been Paul-Philipp Levertoff. He pointed out that Levertoff was a scholar he held in high esteem, who, unlike Kittel, analyzed the history of the Israelites in a strictly positive and Bible-believing way.⁴³ Brann had never heard of Levertoff before, but, commenting on the fact of his being a Jew who had converted to Christianity and worked at the Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum in Leipzig, he exclaimed that he found apostates (using the Hebrew word *meschumadim*) detestable. Brann then quoted Güdemann with a German play on words: "Was abfällt, ist Abfall" (whatever falls down, is rubbish), asking, in light of the cooperation with Kittel: "And you are surprised that someone who broke faith with the God of his forefathers is not faithful to his friends?"⁴⁴

Close reading shows that it was Laible rather than Brann, who considered Jewish learning as the qualifying factor for the science of Judaism, while for Brann, the sense of an ideological confrontation with Christian theologians was too acute. For Brann, the implicit condition for being a *Wissenschafts*-scholar is the combination of being a Jew and, in addition, displaying a heartfelt identification with the Jewish cause.

Formulating a "standpoint" along these lines was not considered unscientific at that time – the above-mentioned Georg Beer wrote for example that *Mischna* editions, "mostly by Jews for Jews", could not satisfy the needs of modern Christians.⁴⁵ But today, Brann's ideal of a scholar is ironically the opposite of what would now be called an unbiased, critical scientist.

ihm ersetzt durch die zumeist gründlichere Schulung und Übung in der Behandlung kritischer religionsgeschichtlicher Fragen. Kittel, *Obergutachten*, p. 81.

42 החקירה בכתבי-הקודש על-פי מסקנותיה היותר חשובות.

43 Laible to Brann, 25 June 1917.

44 Ich gebe da Güdemann ganz recht, wenn er sagt: "Was abfällt, ist Abfall". Die wenigen, die ich von diesem Kaliber persönlich kenne, beweisen dieses Urteil auf das Schlagendste. Und Sie wundern sich, daß ein Mensch, der dem Gotte seiner Väter die Treue gebrochen hat, den Menschen keine Treue hält?

45 Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse*, p. 382.

Michael Moxter

Learning from Hermann Cohen: Karl Barth's Understanding of Theology as Science

Exactly one hundred years ago, in 1917 during the First World War, an article appeared in the prestigious theological journal *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* which was written by its co-editor Karl Bornhausen, who was commenting on Hermann Cohen's recently published book *On the Concept of Religion*.¹ This journal does not publish book reviews, thus the article entails a broad discussion of the similarities and differences between a Christian and a Jewish understanding of individuality, sin and salvation, by comparing Cohen's philosophy with Wilhelm Herrmann's theology. But it was obvious that the article was occasioned by Cohen's new book, which Bornhausen called "the most important publication of our times concerning the philosophy of religion." I am here now referring to the article owing to the metaphorical dimension it introduces. Describing affinities between these two thinkers and praising their joint venture as "truly providential," Bornhausen modifies the German adage of taking different paths to the same goal, saying that both thinkers are climbing the same mountain, though for reasons of terrain they can't stand side by side, each remaining on his own separate peak. They nonetheless shared a common world-view. In the concluding passage Bornhausen added to this twin-peaks metaphor the image of a bridge between both thinkers which consists of personal authenticity and veracity as well as a mutual recognition. Each thinker had developed his unique religious standpoint, quite distinct from that of the other, yet achieved in the same spirit. Bornhausen was optimistic about the field's prospects, telling us that as long as this bridge holds there will be an enrichment of both traditions leading to a better future.

Fifteen years later we find Bornhausen among those academics who were members of the "Deutsche Christen," aggressively attacking Judaism in his lectures at the University of Breslau, and pleading for a Nordic religion, a corrupted form of Christianity entirely deracinated from its Jewish origins.

1 M. Marquardt neglected to include this article in Bornhausens bibliography when he presented the author in: M. Marquardt, *Karl Bornhausen*, in: *Vergessene Theologen des 19. u. frühen 20. Jahrhunderts*, eds. E. Herms and J. Ringleben, Göttingen 1984, 116-126.

It is in looking for mutual influence between Christian theology and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* that we are confronted with just such forms of disruption and intellectual corruption among scholars. And we may learn, that neither historical knowledge nor comparative analysis can reliably generate mutual understanding let alone guarantee it. In concentrating on Karl Barth's adoption of Hermann Cohen's "concept of religion," I have no wish to present a counterexample of or as fig leaf for this development. But for a certain period of time Barth's systematic theology relied on insights from Jewish philosophy, in particular the way Cohen described the relationship between reason and religion. Partly an echo and partly an autonomous response, in Barth's case Protestant theology followed a path that was paved by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

I

The phrase "rationality of religion" is too broad a concept not to encompass a wide variety of aspects. Concerns about the relationship between intellect and emotion, knowledge and belief, and science and theology are as much involved as logical questions about the concept of God. Alternatively one might ask whether religious people behave rationally. However the issue is settled, sooner or later one is confronted with the problem how to relate universal and particular claims, rational standards and historical facts or so-called statutory statements. An early Enlightenment strategy was to privilege the former and reconstruct a *religio rationalis* without any dependence on historicity and practices. The perennial problem with this strategy is that it establishes stipulative approaches to the varieties of religions, rather inventing a new belief-system nobody ever has shared than taking religion seriously. Herder, Hegel and Schleiermacher therefore argued that an understanding of religion should begin with given religions, with their historical and particular forms, and that instead of putting the cart before the horse one should describe how religion evolves, how it interacts with science, philosophy, political order and the autonomous spheres that structure modernity. The issue is whether a particular religion is capable of a reflective self-understanding and critical attitude toward its own explicit forms or whether it is sealed off from any such development.

Whereas the Enlightenment project tends to reduce existing religions to a uniform standard of what true religion is supposed to be and thus

promotes a non-historical attitude toward history, as it were, this second approach refers to “positive religions”, yet goes beyond mere positivism, since it takes into account an ability to transform religion from within. I baptize this position ‘reflective positivism’.

The difference between both approaches can be highlighted by distinguishing deduction from justification. Enlightenment rationalism understood religions to be justified insofar as they were deducible from a basic and entirely rational form. Whereas Romanticism denies the entire idea of rational deduction, but reckons with rational potentialities within religion. Reason has not been the source of religion, yet a rational treatment of religious beliefs and practices can emerge within a given religion. Attempts to frame the issue in this way are non-deductive while at the same time not being *inductive* either; they are neither speculative nor merely empirical. Instead they operate in a sphere somewhere in-between – and here we find a similarity to Kant’s more restricted version of transcendental philosophy in his *Prolegomena*, which he called a regressive form, since it was starting with facts (not with speculative principles). The fact that we have scientific disciplines like mathematics or Newtonian physics, according to Kant, gives rise to a quest for rationality, namely an explicit articulation of what these facts imply and presuppose. [In Kantian ethics there is likewise no hesitation in bridging the gap between facts and reason through the philosopher’s famous “fact of reason.”]

II

Hermann Cohen’s Neo-Kantianism was a refined version of starting with facts. Analogous to the role that Newton’s physics play in Kant’s transcendental philosophy, Cohen insists on the fact of jurisprudence in the ethical realm and on the presence of fine arts and their history in the aesthetic sphere: “Philosophy relies on the fact of science. This dependence on the fact of science is what we understand as the Eternal in Kant’s system.”²

The question was: Does philosophy of religion fit into this general frame? Can religious studies somehow be regarded as a similar fact? Or do we need something more specific, for instance a concept of God or an encompassing treatment not only of belief, but of religious culture

2 H. Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens* (= *Werke*, ed. H. Holzhey Vol 7), 65, [my translation].

as intended in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*? Interesting as the debate might be, according to Cohen the whole idea of such an analogical treatment is misleading. Religion isn't a candidate for integration into the philosophical system.

Cohen's understanding of autonomy forbids such an undertaking. If religion was admitted into the system, it would raise claims that violate the independence and integrity of other spheres such as science or morals. Excluding the autonomy of religion is therefore a precondition of cultural autonomy. This argument is not an abandonment of religion since it is precisely religion's otherness which shows its cultural significance and brings its unique and indispensable achievement to the fore. According to Herrmann and Cohen, religion alone gives rise to individuality within a context of general laws and common rules which cover particular cases and examples but are logically incapable of reaching the individual. Moreover even an elaborated system of moral rules cannot generate the willingness to act in accordance with it. Devotion to the law cannot emerge through reason alone. Hence it is as much an effect of religion to save the individual from the cultural drive to universals as it is to empower actors to attach themselves to rules. Religion inspires moral consciousness without undermining its autonomy.

Cohen's theoretical description of the role of religion reflects a position somewhere between belonging and exteriority, perhaps a particular Jewish experience in nineteenth-century Germany. Interesting however is Cohen's assumption that even a well-established system of neatly distributed claims to validity (Habermas can serve as a recent example) is still in need of implementation and incorporation.

The gap between *verités de faits* and *verités de raison* (as Leibniz called it) is thus bridged by facts that enable rational claims on the one hand and by rational norms that require realization on the other. We must keep this in mind in order to interpret Cohen's general methodological rule, namely that of pure genesis (*reine Erzeugung*).

This rule was essential for *Neo-Kantianism* since in a post-Hegelian situation, it sought to reformulate Kantian philosophy without the duality of Kant's two independent sources (intuition and concept). Such a *chorismos* was accused of being a carry-over of metaphysical remnants like the thing-in-itself or a *Vermögenspsychologie*. What defines *Neo-Kantianism* is precisely the fact that it starts with the assumption that thinking has "no origin...beyond itself."³ This rule of purity can be

3 H. Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (= *Werke*, ed. H. Holzhey Vol 6), 12f., 310. This of

interpreted as one further step along a path that Kant had already taken when in the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* he replaced his analysis of categories with a merely transcendental argument. The new version was mainly concerned with conditions of validity and eliminated former references to constitutional acts and faculties such as imagination and other mental agencies. Issues of genesis and issues of validity are distinguished from one another to the point where the whole argument consists in a method of justifying categorial statements as such without further linkage to a particular list of categories. Continuing this line of argument, Cohen dismisses Kant's distinction between the given and the thought. Thinking liberates itself from "the prejudice of the given."⁴ But this rule of pure genesis does not revoke the reliance on 'facts of reason'.

As a result of this purification process principles become mainly formal, turning into methodological rules. In line with Natorp's interpretation of Plato, Cohen uses the term "hypothesis" to introduce a non-foundationalist understanding of principles. They are more of performative means than substantial insights or basic axioms: "All thinking consists in and rests on setting the task, of setting a problem. Forms of thinking are projects of thought, preconditions, problems which have to be treated in a specific way in order to be solved."⁵

The significance of these forms rests upon the results rather than in self-evident first principles. Hypotheses shouldn't be judged by their substantial claims but by their function, leading namely to consequences that can be checked and examined. Thus thinking refers to itself, not to any external item, and is therefore independent of any gift (*LdrE* 29). Nothing is given except that which is methodologically treated.⁶ To summarize: The request for foundations cannot be satisfied by ontological

course only holds for thought; it would be the end of visual arts were one to flee from sensuality (see H. Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, vol. 1 (= Werke, ed. H. Holzhey Vol 8), 180.

4 H. Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, 28.

5 My translation – the original reads: "Alles Denken besteht und beruht in diesem Setzen seiner Aufgabe, seiner Probleme. *Alle Gedanken sind Vorsätze des Denkens*, sind Voraussetzungen, Probleme, Vorwürfe, die es zu behandeln und zu lösen gilt. *So bedarf jede These ihrer Hypothese*, die wiederum ihre Hypothese *ins Unendliche* alles wissenschaftlichen Denkens hin fordert" (H. Cohen, *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie* [= Werke, ed. H. Holzhey, Vol 10], 29).

6 Cohen reminds us that the expression "given" comes from mathematics – the conditions of the construct are a given (with reference to Euclid's book *Data* [Δεδομένα]). See H. Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, 82; and H. Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, vol. 1, 78.

Grundlagen, whereas *Grundlegung* properly understood is the work of philosophy.⁷

III

As a student Karl Barth attended Cohen's lectures at Marburg University. In 1918 he wrote to his mother that he would have rejoiced had he earlier read Cohen's *The Concept of Religion*.⁸ Barth actually first read it while he was preparing his study of Paul's epistle to the Romans, but Cohen's book would have been even more helpful to Barth a few years earlier, around 1911, when he was developing his first theological *Ideas and Vagaries*, so titled when they were finally published decades after his death.

In these notes Barth briefly sketched a discipline that he called "philosophy of religion" and that should develop principles for religious studies and theology⁹ while still corresponding to standards conceived in transcendental philosophy. "Philosophy of religion" is legitimate since religion is a cultural factor and fact,¹⁰ not just an inner feeling of pious consciousness. Hence it is only in a particular *Gestalt* that religion exists. To clarify the relationship between the concept of religion and the determinate religions, Barth presupposes claims of validity that should be reflected and elaborated by philosophy. Religion cannot be reduced to other dimensions of cultural life and must therefore be treated in a particular way. It cannot be integrated into cultural consciousness at the same level as thinking, willing or feeling, nor is it possible to give *a priori* reasons for its necessity.¹¹ Even though Cohen's book had still not been published at this time, Barth was already following his path.

Learning as a student from his lecturer, young Karl Barth abandoned

7 See H. Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, 97.

8 See D. Korsch, *Dialektische Theologie nach Karl Barth*, Tübingen, 1996, 69, note 75; and H. Anzinger, *Glaube und kommunikative Praxis. Eine Studie zur 'vordialektischen' Theologie Karl Barths*, München, 1991, 128ff. Barth was largely influenced by Cohen's systematic phase, which encompassed (if leaving aside the additional instruction that Barth received from his brother Heinrich Barth) Cohen's lectures in psychology at Marburg University, his *Ethik des reinen Willens* and his religious writings.

9 K. Barth, *Ideen und Einfälle zur Religionsphilosophie* (= Gesamtausgabe III. Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten [1909-1914]), 129.

10 *Ibid.*, 129f.

11 *Ibid.*, 133.

any claims to deducing religion or proving its necessity.¹² He took religion as fact, as something shaped by history and tradition. And secondly, he looked upon this factual status as linked to differences between immanence and transcendence, between the given on the one side and its significance on the other.

The extent of Barth's reliance on Cohen can be measured by a quasi-dialectical move that prefigures the type of theology which Barth developed in the 1920s. In one of his earliest articles he interprets the notion of absoluteness in negative terms. The absolute is that which cannot be given – the absence of positivity.¹³ It is hard to translate Barth's phrase since even in German it is somewhat mysterious, so I now quote from the original: "Die 'Ungrundlegung' wird zum Grund der Grundlegung des Gedachten und Gewollten, die reine Abgezogenheit zum reinen Ursprung."¹⁴ I read this as a paraphrase of sentences that Cohen wrote in his *Ethics of Pure Will*: "We know from *Logic* [what is meant is the first volume of Cohen's *System of Philosophy*, published under the subtitle *Logic of Pure Knowledge*] how in Plato's writings the term 'the Absolute' emerged in close connection with his concept of hypothesis – as expression of a desperate humility of the human spirit at its most profound, as a self-ironic human reason. Since Being rests upon foundational acts of thinking, there arises a desire for foundations that are independent of the act of thinking, a longing for some kind of ungrounding as the basis of all ground-laying – *anhypotheton* – as one might translate Plato's word in order to make the paradox of his expression obvious."¹⁵ The emphasis laid on the term *anhypotheton* underscores the Neo-Kantian resistance to metaphysical interpretations of Plato's ideas, the will to neither hypothesize methodological presuppositions nor to reestablish a theory of two worlds. Overcoming metaphysics and

12 Ibid., 202, 211. This is an argument employed by Barth later in his career and primarily in his examination of Schleiermacher.

13 K. Barth, *Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott*, (= Gesamtausgabe III. Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten [1909-1914]), 523f.

14 Ibid., 524f.

15 Partly my translation – the original reads: "Wir wissen aus der Logik, wie der Begriff des Absoluten bei *Platon* in innerlichstem Zusammenhang mit der *Hypothese* entstanden ist; als Ausdruck verzweifelnder Demut des tiefsten Menschengenies, der Selbstironisierung der Vernunft. Da alles Sein auf der Grundlegung des Denkens beruht, so erhebt sich das tief sinnige Verlangen nach einem Grunde, der von dieser Grundlegung unabhängig sei. Die Ungrundlegung (ἀνυπόθετον = ἀνυπόθεσις), so möchte man das objektive Wort [...] durch das methodische Wort übersetzen [...] um sogleich die Paradoxie des Ausdrucks unverkennbar zu machen" (H. Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willen*, 429).

substantialism, Neo-Kantianism turns to a functional understanding of thinking that starts by setting up methodological tasks.

Barth uses the difference between unshakeable foundations and productive hypotheses (the latter having a dialectical relationship with *anhypostaseis*) to justify the status of theology as science by rejecting pleas for foundation in a cartesian sense of the term. Theology operates with hypothetical presuppositions, it cannot demonstrate its indispensability or satisfy claims of 'Letztbegründungen'. Nonetheless it methodologically echoes an advanced understanding of scientific logic while also applying it to religion. This enables a non-positivistic attitude toward positive religion which brings forth what Barth in one of his first publications had called "the truth of God's negativity"¹⁶ and leads to critical acknowledgement of human forms and traditions. Any adequate understanding – whether it be in terms of theological god-talk or simply hermeneutical-descriptive approaches to religion, whether in terms of Christian belief or Jewish tradition – must come to grips with the tension between the given and the non-given, or let us say, the paradoxical coincidence of withdrawal and gift.¹⁷

Later in Barth's *Church Dogmatics* this concurrency of hypothesis and *anhypostasis* is described in terms of God's grace and sovereignty. The latter stands for God's freedom and the inability of humans to fully grasp God, whereas the former represents the kataphatic dimension, the human reliance on meaning and significance as something given to us.¹⁸ One can understand these motifs, yet it is through the introduction of these concepts that Barth uses the relationship between facts and their condition of possibility in a completely new way. What counts as a fact has changed: it is mainly the event of God's revelation, and that which makes this event possible is God's free and eternal election of grace. To reframe the question in such a way is to overload the phrase "condition of possibility," which leads away from transcendental reflection. Perhaps one reason this approach miscarries is its failure to fully credit contingency. Even though Barth has much to say about the contingent event of God's revelation, he downplays the differences and the competition between

16 K. Barth, *Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott*, 526.

17 See K. Barth, *Der Römerbrief* [second edition], München, 1922, 56.

18 "Die Proklamierung völliger Voraussetzungslosigkeit im entscheidenden Punkte," according to Barth, is executed when we understand that "Gott ist frei. Die Heilsbotschaft ist gerade darum Heilsbotschaft, weil sie *allen* (auch den transzendentalst gedachten!) menschlichen Anknüpfungen, Vermittlungen und Voraussetzungen die absolute Souveränität Gottes gegenüberstellt" (K. Barth, *Römerbrief*, 370).

positive religions and he neglects the consequences religious pluralism may have on what count as facts.

The reliance of rational treatments of religion on a particular tradition and, as a consequence, the hypothetical status of theology assumes a different shape if the variety of religions is recognized. The use of hypotheses in a more tentative way can be learned in a pluralistic situation where respect for others includes a basic trust that they take seriously what they themselves presuppose. This may lead us back to Bornhausen's metaphor of the twin peaks.

IV

In the end Karl Barth's theology and even his so-called revelational positivism appear in a different light when his reliance on Cohen's philosophy of religion is acknowledged. Its impact can be grasped when Barth in the opening passages of his *Church Dogmatics* (as late as 1932) remarks that theology always remains problematic and without a definitively fixed position in the system of sciences.¹⁹

I now conclude with a brief outline of how Cohen treated the tension between positive religion and reason. In *Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism* he distinguishes between facts and factors, thus highlighting that the factual side of religion entails not only a *status quo* but simultaneously an internal power to transform this actual state. The literal sources of Judaism, according to Cohen, do not form a canonic identity-marker – on the contrary, transformation is intrinsic to what is called tradition. Continuous reception and re-interpretation have already shaped the texts, hence they call for further advancement and invite the reader to rethink them. It is through this process that reason emerges as the art of drawing distinctions. This art is achieved in interpretation as well as in scripture itself. Reading the sources thus gives rise to reason and fosters a scientific culture. Perhaps Cohen was too optimistic about this, underestimating the proclivity of religious people to fall prey to fundamentalism. That is why even a religion of reason, according to Cohen, has need of some kind of scaffolding, namely an autonomously arranged system of liberal rights and duties.

19 K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/1, 5.

Michael A. Meyer

Jewish Scholarship and Religious Commitment – Their Relative Roles in the Writings of Rabbi Leo Baeck

The advent of modern Jewish scholarship (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*) early in the nineteenth century created a crisis for traditional Judaism. Instead of a single divine source of truth underlying the origins of the Jewish religion, there were now two: the revelation of the Written and Oral Law at Sinai and the critical examination of these sources' origin within their historical context. The internally focused *Lernen* was under attack by externally focused *Wissenschaft*. Yet religious commitment demanded attributed divinity of some sort to the sources of faith while a full and exclusive commitment to the new criterion of secular investigation seemed to lead to the removal of divinity from all or parts of them.

This clash came to be fundamental for Judaism as its adherents moved increasingly into a secularizing world.¹ In Germany various religious positions soon appeared: segregating all, or almost all sources from critical analysis (Orthodoxy), separating the divinely revealed Written Law from the humanly constructed Oral Law (Positive-Historical Judaism), and limiting all revelation to a non-verbal inspiration expressed in fallible human language (Liberal Judaism). Entirely beyond religion lay the domain of scholars who rejected any influence of religious commitment as being destructive of objective analysis. Though not himself a secular Jew, Leopold Zunz, universally recognized as the father of modern Jewish scholarship, expressed this position most emphatically when he wrote: "Our *Wissenschaft* should first of all emancipate itself from the theologians."² Zunz's historical writing had a political purpose more than it did a religious one: to gain civil equality for the Jewish people in the German states and respect for Jewish tradition in the academy. His pupil Moritz Steinschneider held a similar view. Still, Zunz's scholarship, unlike

1 For general discussions of this confrontation see Julius Guttmann, *Religion und Wissenschaft im mittelalterlichen und im modernen Denken* (Berlin, 1922); Michael A. Meyer, "Two Persistent Tensions within *Wissenschaft des Judentums*," *Modern Judaism* 24 (2004): 105-119.

2 Leopold Zunz, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur* (Berlin, 1832), 20.

that of Steinschneider, was largely devoted to the history of the Jewish religion rather than to the accomplishments of the Jewish people. One could not secularize the content of the religious poetry to which Zunz paid so much attention. It was not until the historian Simon Dubnow, for whom the basic substance of Jewish identity was national rather than religious, that we obtain a fully secular comprehensive view of the Jewish experience.

There was yet another possibility of new relationship between the religious and the secular, and that was not to mediate between the two but rather to sacralize scholarship itself. With regard to a historian like Martin Schreiner, his scholarship could be seen as “a path to holiness” (einen Weg ins Heiligtum).³ Similarly, the earnest commitment of Gustav Bradt to the Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums could be seen as indicative of a solemn consecration that approached the sacred.⁴

Finally, there was the possibility of a reconciliation based neither on a complete acceptance of the authority of the sources, nor on a division of sources with regard to it, nor yet on a sacralization of the scholarly enterprise itself, but rather one that flowed from a stance that was mediated by being located within religious Judaism even as it reached out to the criteria of objective scholarship. That, I believe was the position of Rabbi Leo Baeck (1873-1956), the scholar, religious thinker, and leader of German Jewry during its darkest days, the Nazi years. In the preface to his *Wege im Judentum* (Paths in Judaism), he wrote that the essays contained in that volume were “not so much written about Judaism but rather emerged from within Judaism.”⁵ He saw himself – and all Jews – as placed within (*hereingestellt*) the Jewish religious experience. It was the task of the Jewish scholar to begin from this position, not from an artificial one looking in from the outside. Although he was not consistent in the matter, Baeck frequently preferred the expression *Wissenschaft vom Judentum* to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.⁶ The first formulation could mean that Jewish scholarship by its very designation indicated that it flowed outward from within.⁷ Certainly for Baeck, his own scholarship was of that sort. He noted that the purely academic study of religion

3 Leo Baeck, “Helfer und Lehrer,” in *Leo Baeck Werke*, 6 vols., ed. Albert H. Friedländer, Berthold Klappert, Werner Licharz, and Michael A. Meyer (Gütersloh, 1996-2003), 3: 309.

4 “Gustav Bradt,” in *Werke* 3: 312.

5 Preface to *Wege im Judentum* in *Werke* 3: 26.

6 For example, “Helfer und Lehrer,” in *Werke* 3: 297.

7 Similarly, it is probably not by chance that the title of Baeck’s second volume of essays

by its nature was incapable of producing faith; the sources of faith lay elsewhere.⁸ But the two could be combined in a *Glaubenswissenschaft*, an academic investigation imbued with faith.⁹ Indeed, in reference to the study of Judaism, the two components of the term, faith and scholarship, in Baeck's eyes, were ultimately inseparable.

Baeck's twofold commitment, to scholarship and to faith, manifested itself variously in the multiple areas of his intellectual activity. It will be the purpose of this essay to explore how they appear in each instance. I shall in sequence examine Baeck the scholar, the polemicist, the apologist, the Liberal exegete, and the theologian of Jewish history.

The Scholar

Jewish scholarship played a central and ongoing role in Leo Baeck's life. According to one of his students at the *Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the Liberal seminary where Baeck taught for close to thirty years, "of all his numerous interests and activities, scholarly research was really the main element of his life, which he pursued with a particularly affectionate zeal and devotion."¹⁰ Baeck's scholarly horizon was broad: he was able to write knowledgeably in philology, philosophy, history and theology.¹¹ His knowledge of Greek and Latin extended well beyond what was offered him in his formal humanistic education. His doctoral dissertation on Spinoza was a masterpiece of erudition; his contributions to the encyclopedic *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* covered a broad range of subjects. When Carl Clemen decided to publish his popular book on the religions of the world, he turned to Baeck to serve as a co-editor and to write a lengthy scholarly article on Judaism.¹² Over the years Baeck published seven articles in

should read *Aus drei Jahrtausenden*. The essays, I think Baeck was suggesting, flowed out from within their historical contexts; they were not constrained by them.

8 Werke 1: 127.

9 *Glaubenswissenschaft* should not be confused with *Religionswissenschaft*. The latter, which the biblical scholar, Hugo Greßmann, called "the most beloved *Wissenschaft* of our time," was strictly academic and comparative in nature. See Greßmann, *Albert Eichhorn und die Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (Göttingen, 1914), 27-28.

10 Richard Fuchs, "The 'Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums' in the period of Nazi Rule," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 12 (1967): 12.

11 H.I. Bach, "Leo Baeck," *The Synagogue Review*, January 1957, 138.

12 "Das Judentum, in Carl Clemen, *Die Religionen der Erde, ihr Wesen und ihre Geschichte*

the principal Jewish scholarly journal of the time, the *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

Among Baeck's articles in that journal are some, especially the earliest, that reveal no personal stamp of the author. Here Baeck's religious commitment is not evident. They could easily have been written by another scholar, Jew or Gentile. His first published essay, on a Maimonidean epigone, Levi ben Abraham, which appeared in 1900, was severely critical.¹³ After a careful reading of his subject's work, Baeck concluded that it contained nothing new of any value. His motivation here, we may assume, was simply to fill a small blank space in historical knowledge – or perhaps, through a demonstration of critical capacity to join the circle of Jewish scholars. No present purpose or religious motivation is noticeable. Two years later Baeck submitted a brief piece of biblical criticism to the *Monatsschrift*, which may be considered his most radical work. Here Baeck the philologist argued that the Hebrew word סנה, usually assumed to mean a bush, was in fact a variant of the word סיני. He went so far as to conclude that there never was a burning bush but only a burning mountain, the volcanic Mount Sinai. Baeck would continue to hold to this theory even late in his life.¹⁴ On the other hand, he criticized those scholars who used linguistic and similar arguments to declare that the tetragrammaton pointed only to the particular deity worshipped by the Israelites, instead of representing the one and unique God of the universe.¹⁵

As a scholar, Baeck was little interested in the external history of the Jews. Their tale of suffering, their *Leidensgeschichte*, which, along with their history of learning, their *Gelehrtengeschichte*, had made up an important element in Jewish history for Heinrich Graetz, is almost completely absent in Baeck's writing. His interest is not in the Jews as

(Munich, 1927), 261-298. The book was reissued in 1949 and appeared in English, Dutch, French, and Spanish translations.

13 Leo Bäck, "Zur Charakteristik des Levi ben Abraham ben Chajjim," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 44 (1900): 24 ff.

14 "Der im Dornbusch Wohnende," in *Werke* 4: 245-247; 5: 257. The theory was not novel with Baeck, but he supplied a fresh linguistic argument. The article ends incongruously with Baeck's suggestion that "nonetheless, since there is more that seems to speak against [this theory], it might well be more appropriate to remain with the traditional interpretation of Exodus 3:2." I suspect that this sentence was suggested to – or forced upon – Baeck since the *Monatsschrift's* editorial policy, from the journal's beginnings, rejected the inclusion of biblical criticism. Baeck likewise applies a linguistic analysis in his "Simon Kefa," in *Werke* 4: 204-207.

15 *Das Wesen des Judentums*, in *Werke* 1: 175-176.

objects, but only as subjects of their history, and he sees that history as dominantly religious. It is the history of “the people of Judaism” before it is the history of the Jewish people.¹⁶

Despite his continuing to write occasional highly detailed and narrowly focused articles, Baeck, like Franz Rosenzweig and Ismar Elbogen, deplored the excessive specialization that characterized much of Jewish research in recent years.¹⁷ Such studies might advance knowledge, but they did not advance Judaism. In order to understand the essence and the historical development of Judaism it was necessary for the scholar to employ a broader lens and to penetrate to its interior. Baeck had been a student of Wilhelm Dilthey at the University of Berlin and had absorbed his academic mentor’s approach to historical sources. Like Dilthey, he saw the task of the scholar to “understand” his subject from within, via a psychological approach that, according to Dilthey, particularly characterized the *Geisteswissenschaften*, the humanities, which he had sharply separated from the *Naturwissenschaften*, the natural sciences. Baeck’s criticism of Adolf von Harnack’s historiography – to which we will turn next – is a Diltheyan critique: Harnack was not able to understand (*verstehen*) the Jewish atmosphere in which Jesus lived because he lacked sympathy (*mitfühlen*) with it.¹⁸ What separates Baeck from Dilthey is that whereas Dilthey sought only to comprehend, Baeck, from his position of religious commitment, went beyond comprehension to evaluation and judgment even if the judgment was more implicit, by emphasis and omission, than explicit as praise or condemnation – a characteristic that becomes evident, as we shall see, in Baeck’s apologetics.¹⁹

Baeck’s principal contributions were, in fact, intended to reach beyond mere historical explanation. Religion in particular, he believed, could not be fully understood by cognitive research (*wissensmäßige Erforschung*).²⁰ A penetrating study of religion required writing from a religious standpoint,

16 “The Character of Judaism,” in *The Pharisees and other Essays* by Leo Baeck (New York, 1947), 150.

17 Alexander Altmann, “Theology in Twentieth-Century German Jewry,” in his *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History* (Waltham, MA, 1981), 276-277.

18 Leo Bäck, *Harnacks Vorlesungen über das Wesen des Christentums* (Breslau, 1902), 27-28.

19 Reinhold Mayer, *Christentum und Judentum in der Schau Leo Baecks* (Stuttgart, 1961), 23; Altmann, “Theology in Twentieth-Century German Jewry,” 273; Maurice-Ruben Hayoun, *Léo Baeck, Conscience du judaïsme moderne* (Paris, 2011), 104-109.

20 *Das Wesen des Judentums*, in *Werke* 1: 70.

shaping the material in one's own consciousness rather than allowing the history, separate from the scholar himself, to shape the account.

For Baeck the substance of religion was not fully accessible to scholarship. Researchers could deal with the sources that reflected divinity, but not with divinity itself. Baeck was a lifelong opponent of any form of gnosis, choosing to follow Maimonides in regarding God as beyond description. He did write scholarly articles on two early works of Jewish mysticism, *Sefer Yezira* and *Sefer Bahir*. But he did not himself adopt their descriptions of the divine realm. Instead he historicized Jewish mysticism by noting that it had arisen in times of persecution.²¹ In one essay he called mystical speculations often artificial and even sometimes no more than childish amusement (*Spielerei*).²² As a scholar one could explore the essence of Judaism but not the essence of God. Jewish mysticism, unlike Christian, was a *Gebotsmystik*, a mysticism of commandment.²³ The voice of God could be heard as commandment. But the essence of God remained an impenetrable mystery.

Scholarship for Baeck was not alone an intellectual occupation or even a mission to bring his religious understanding of Judaism to fellow Jews. For Baeck scholarship and personal virtue were intimately interrelated. *Wissenschaft*, he wrote in 1938, was more than a collection of techniques, it was the *Wissenschaft* of a particular person. It was a reflection of the scholar's character: "As a person is, so is his *Wissenschaft*,"²⁴ he wrote. In his last years in Germany, before his deportation to the Theresienstadt ghetto, in January of 1943, scholarship became for Baeck also a consolation, a way to restore his spirit in the most difficult of times. On three occasions, from 1933 to 1938, Baeck translated the Gospels from Greek into Hebrew in order to determine their oldest elements.²⁵ On a visit to London on behalf of Jewish emigration in 1938, he spent the extra hours unwinding in the Babylonian collection of the British Museum.²⁶ To Ismar Elbogen, then already in the United States, he wrote in 1940: "My work takes its accustomed course, and in my free hours *Wissenschaft*, with its path into the distance, provides its

21 Ibid., 77, 268.

22 "Die Mystik im Judentum," in *Werke* 3: 85.

23 Ibid., 89.

24 Leo Baeck, "Wissen und Glaube," *C.V.-Zeitung*, 2 June 1938, Beiblatt.

25 Bach, "Leo Baeck," 140.

26 Leonard Baker, *Days of Sorrow and Pain: Leo Baeck and the Berlin Jews* (New York, 1978), 246-247.

comfort.”²⁷ In 1941 he proudly reported to Elbogen that “the [current] volume of our *Monatsschrift* has been approved [for publication]” and that he hoped it would shortly appear.²⁸ We can only imagine Baeck’s disappointment when that volume, which he had edited and which, he believed, represented purity versus propaganda, was, upon publication, confiscated by the Nazi regime.

The Polemicist

Baeck first gained attention not by his own scholarship but by seeking to set aright the assertions of another scholar. In the winter semester of 1899-1900 the Lutheran theologian and scholar of religion, Adolf von Harnack, had presented a series of lectures at the University of Berlin, which in printed form quickly became very popular. He entitled the lectures “Das Wesen des Christentums” (The Essence of Christianity). As a critical scholar, Harnack did not rehearse old canards about the accusatory role of Jews portrayed in the New Testament. His “liberal” arguments, he said, were based strictly upon historical *Wissenschaft*, though along with what he called his own “life experience, the product of witnessed history,” in other words a basis at once objective and subjective. Thereby, he claimed, he was excluding both a defined philosophy of religion and apologetics.²⁹ But by their author’s own admission Harnack’s lectures eschewed the constraints of *Wissenschaft*, which, he argued, could not be stretched to satisfy the needs of the heart and spirit. Thus when Harnack came to a discussion of the Judaism contemporary with Jesus, he did not turn to an objective study of the Judaism of that age, but proceeded rapidly to its moral and comparative evaluation in relation to the teachings of Jesus. His conclusion was that while Jesus offered no radically new doctrine, his recorded statements rose to a level of purity and earnestness that stood in stark contrast to a Pharisaism polluted by excessive adherence to Jewish law.³⁰

Baeck’s attack on Harnack’s work carried multiple elements, all resting

27 “Leo Baeck: Letters from War-Time Berlin,” in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 5 (1960): 353.

28 *Ibid.*, 354.

29 Adolf Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums. Sechzehn Vorlesungen vor Studierenden aller Facultäten im Wintersemester 1899/1900 an der Universität Berlin (Leipzig, 1901)*, 4.

30 *Ibid.*, 30-33.

on the lecturer's having forsaken the canons of *Wissenschaft* as he proceeded to a biased, personally motivated moral evaluation.³¹ To Baeck's mind, Harnack, notwithstanding his protests to the contrary, had not presented history, but rather apologetics. Leaving out New Testament elements of his thought with which he could not identify, he had shaped Jesus in his own image, the essence of Christianity becoming the essence of Harnack's personal religious values. According to Baeck, his lectures should have been called "my religion" or "my Christianity." He had "mixed himself up with Jesus," projecting his values upon the past; he had acted the role of the defense lawyer rather than the scholar.

It is only after thus attacking Harnack's general approach as unscholarly (*unwissenschaftlich*) that Baeck proceeds to undermine his portrayal of Pharisaism, which, according to Baeck, served as a dark background against which Christianity could shine the more brightly. Instead of trying to understand the Judaism of that time and thus better understand the Gospels, Harnack had simply cast it aside. Baeck concludes that there is nothing wrong with a Christian writing a glorification of Christianity, but he should have recognized that what he is writing is not history, but rather apology. Ironically, apology is exactly what Baeck himself would write three years later, even borrowing the term *Wesen* (essence), and also, like Harnack, composing what was ultimately Baeck's own Judaism, a work that was as much a religiously determined apology as a work of *Wissenschaft*.

The Apologist

Even as Adolf von Harnack's work mirrored his spiritual attachment to Christianity, so did Baeck's first major work reflect his religious attachment to Judaism. His *Das Wesen des Judentums* (The Essence of Judaism) was no more a strictly scholarly work than was Harnack's.³² In his review of that book, Franz Rosenzweig stated bluntly that Baeck's theme was, in fact, not the essence of Judaism, but his own religious essence.³³ Baeck himself did not deny that he was engaging

31 Leo Bäck, *Harnacks Vorlesungen über das Wesen des Christentums* (Breslau, 1902). Baeck's critique first appeared in the *Monatsschrift* 45 (1901): 97-120.

32 I am drawing here on both of the two major editions of Baeck's *Das Wesen des Judentums*, that of 1905 and that of 1922, according to the pagination in the first volume of the *Werke*.

33 Franz Rosenzweig, "Apologetisches Denken. Bemerkungen zu Brod und Baeck" (1923), in Rosenzweig, *Kleinere Schriften* (Berlin, 1937), 41.

in apologetics. In the first edition of his work he admitted with regard to the Hebrew Prophets that one might perhaps see his treatment of them as apologetic. But it was simply not possible to speak of certain facts other than apologetically. "For some matters understanding them means *admiring* them."³⁴

As in Harnack's work and contrary to the criteria of impartial scholarship, Baeck's reading of history is selective rather than balanced and comprehensive. His intent is not to present Judaism in its full compass but to isolate its viable elements. As a result, he is able to provide Jewish readers with a usable past that they can claim completely and without ambivalence. Baeck does admit that from time to time in the history of Judaism base or inferior elements emerged.³⁵ But he argues that in due course they were vanquished. He passes over in silence any particulars that are discordant with his apologetics, or at least places them outside the category of essence. One example is Baeck's proud discussion of the humane manner in which ancient Judaism treated the slave, wherein he locates it morally above the cruel practices of Greeks and Romans. However, he fails to distinguish between the relatively well-treated Hebrew slave on the one hand and the considerably less desirable position of his Canaanite counterpart.³⁶ Like Harnack with regard to early Christianity, Baeck minimizes outside influences on Judaism, limiting them mostly to externals that fail to touch upon the essence of the faith as it is expressed especially in the originality of the Hebrew prophets. For the Prophets, according to Baeck, were the religious geniuses of Judaism, occupying a role within religion equivalent to the greatest painters or sculptors among the artists.³⁷ They embody the essence of Judaism, which Baeck believes to be moral in character. It is therefore the history of the Prophetic message, and not the history of Israelite monarchs, that constitutes the true history of Judaism both in biblical times and thereafter down to the present day.

Baeck was himself aware that in his *Das Wesen des Judentums* he had crossed the boundary between unprejudiced scholarship and an approach structured by his religious commitment. In his preface to the English edition, first published in 1936, he wrote that "the writer must possess a personal, spiritual relation to the details and to the whole;

34 Werke 1: 337.

35 Ibid., 330, 424.

36 Ibid., 226-227, 390-392.

37 Ibid., 331.

he must be filled with the conviction that there is contained in them a permanent and decisive value.”³⁸ Thus for Baeck *Wesen* is intimately related to *wesentlich*, in the sense of vital and significant.³⁹ The enduring essence of Judaism is not determined by what was objectively and consistently central in the Jewish tradition but by those doctrines (not dogmas!) which attracted Baeck, the religious Jew, and which he believed should no less possess attractive power for other Jews of his own time. It was indeed to contemporary Jewry that *Das Wesen des Judentums* was directed and, for all of its scholarship, not principally to a community of scholars. This is especially evident in the last pages of its first edition, whose language migrates from description to prescription, its author from scholar to rabbi.⁴⁰ Here Baeck speaks of what his fellow Jews should do to embody their Judaism and spread its message. “We should allow our way of life to announce the majesty of our faith,” he writes. His ultimate goal thus does not lie simply in laying bare the essence of Judaism but in inspiring Jews to express it in their lives.

The Liberal Exegete

Like Solomon Schechter, Leo Baeck was a believer in “catholic Israel” (כלל ישראל) who maintained good relations with the leadership of all streams in Judaism. In his major works he meticulously avoids distinguishing explicitly among Judaism’s currents. His writings address all Jews who live in the modern world regardless of where their views are located on the religious spectrum. But Baeck was also the adherent of a particular stream, Liberal Judaism, and one of its foremost exponents. Even as his broad religious commitment to Judaism as such affected his scholarship, so too did his adherence to certain specifics of its Liberal interpretation.

At the Lehranstalt in Berlin Baeck taught Midrash and homiletics, not Halakhah, and it is possible to view much of his writing as a sort of historical midrash in which Jewish ideas, but not Jewish law, receive paramount attention. Already in an early essay he had argued that “the thread of midrashic literature actually never tore” and that numerous writings of later times, both rationalistic and mystical, clearly give evidence of their midrashic character.⁴¹ Baeck was, of course, aware of

38 Ibid., 423-424.

39 Ibid., 36.

40 Ibid., 414-417.

41 “Mittelalterliche Popularphilosophie,” in *Werke* 4: 341.

the role of Halakhah in Judaism and was himself a religiously observant Jew. But he did not regard Jewish law as occupying a central position within the essence of Judaism. In Baeck's view the laws contained in the Torah, both civil and ritual, were self-given by the tribes of Israel in the desert; they were not dictated by God.⁴² Revelation, in Baeck's view, was limited to moral commandment. He does argue in favor of ritual observance, especially of laws regulating the Sabbath. But he regards their nature as flexible rather than fixed and as providing means to spiritual ends rather than being ends in themselves. Frequently, Baeck employs the rabbinic metaphor of "a fence around the Torah" (סייג לתורה), which traditionally refers to expansions of Jewish law, to encompass Jewish law as a whole.⁴³ Observances, Baeck writes, preserve the teaching (*Lehre*), allowing the community of the Torah to remain separate and devoted to its moral task in the world. He believed that Judaism had from early on undergone a beneficial process of spiritualization (*Vergeistigung*) within which customs and practices served not alone as a bulwark against assimilation but also as a form of poetic expression (*Poesie*) that raised Judaism above the dry prose of philistinism and lent beauty to the Jewish religion.⁴⁴

Baeck's explication of the Bible, central to much of his writing, in various ways reveals his commitment to principles characteristic of Liberal Judaism. One of these is the belief that the destruction of the Second Temple and the consequent Jewish diaspora were not punishments that required repentance, but rather beneficially opened the possibility of spreading the moral message of Israel to the nations of the world. The sacrificial service of the ancient Temple, he believed, could henceforth be fully replaced by the higher level of worship represented by prayer. That, according to Baeck, was the great contribution of the Pharisees: they set prayer, a distinctly different form of worship, not simply alongside the sacrificial cult but in opposition to it.⁴⁵ Not only does Baeck's historical writing neglect priests and sacrifices in favor of a Judaism in which the Prophetic message lies at the center of the Jewish essence, he is, at least in one instance, willing to commit what by the standards of *Wissenschaft* is quite inexcusable. He translates what he calls "the daring statement of Rabbi Eleazar" in Talmud Tractate Berachot 32b as "On the day that the

42 *Epochen in der jüdischen Geschichte*, in *Werke* 5: 274.

43 E.g. Baeck, "Judentum," in *Clemen*, *Die Religionen der Erde*, 295; Cf. *Werke* 1: 411-414.

44 *Dieses Volk. Jüdische Existenz*, in *Werke* 2: 167; Cf. 5: 199.

45 "Die Pharisäer," in *Werke* 5: 379-381, 390.

Temple was destroyed an iron wall fell that had arisen between Israel and the Father in Heaven.” The intended conclusion, Baeck suggests, is that the destruction of the Temple enabled a closer relationship between the Jews and their God through acts of verbal worship. However, the word that Baeck translates as “fell” (*gefallen*) is the Hebrew נפסקה, which in the context of Rabbi Eleazar’s supporting proof text clearly means not “fell,” but “intervened,” i.e. the destruction of the Temple did not bring the Jews closer to God, but rather distanced them from God. Baeck was here playing the midrashist, turning the Talmudic text on its head to obtain the message he wished to convey.⁴⁶

Evident also in Baeck’s writing is his hesitancy to affirm certain traditional concepts. Resurrection of the dead of necessity receives mention in Baeck’s essay on the Pharisees, but even for these adherents of the concept, Baeck suggests, it was secondary to their vision of the coming messianic days and of the world-to-come – that is to say, of ideas to which Baeck himself adhered.⁴⁷

Whereas he peripheralizes and ephermalizes the concept of bodily resurrection, Baeck holds that the “spiritual, imageless conception of immortality remains the possession of Judaism.”⁴⁸

The doctrine of “Return to Zion” does not play an essential role in Baeck’s Judaism. Like almost all of the German rabbis of his time, for most of his life Baeck was not a Zionist. Although he was also not an anti-Zionist and believed the subject should be freely discussed within German Jewry, he minimized Jewish national ideas in favor of universal ones. Yes, he admitted, “that in the image of the future also national conceptions and expectations would be depicted is obvious” and it was natural for a people to hope for recognition and good fortune in the course of time. But the Prophetic message was directed outward as moral task and did not intend any form of self-aggrandizement. Had not Abraham already been called to a mission of creating blessing among the nations?⁴⁹ In the dedication to his last major work, *This People Israel*, Baeck again acts the midrashist when he cites Isaiah 43:21: “The people I formed for Myself that they might declare my praise,” but leaves out the first part of the sentence in the preceding verse, which

46 This translation occurs in both the first and the later edition of *Das Wesen des Judentums*: Werke 1: 195, 381. The prooftext is Ezekiel 4: 3.

47 “Die Pharisäer, in Werke 5: 389.

48 *Das Wesen des Judentums*, in Werke 1: 212, 386.

49 *Ibid.*, 97, 106.

mentions Israel as God's "chosen people."⁵⁰ In Baeck's eyes Israel's special relationship to God lies in acceptance of God's commandment, not in any privileged status given to it by God.

Finally, Baeck's own Liberal concept of revelation is likewise projected into his historical narrative. In lectures that he delivered in the last months of his life Baeck explained biblical prophecy not in the traditional manner as verbal communication from a transcendent God but as "the human being speaking, as it were, with his highest self, with the revelation of God that is within him.... In the highest sense he is speaking with himself."⁵¹ This statement is the most radical theological expression in Baeck's published writings. It represents a humanization of prophecy that sets his religious thought at the edge of the Jewish theological spectrum.

The Theologian of Jewish History

It can be argued that Baeck was first and foremost a theologian and that in much of his writing he used *Wissenschaft*, especially historical *Wissenschaft*, primarily in support of his theological conceptions. In his work the relationship between the analysis of the historian and the testimony of the religious Jew are closely linked. The relation between the two is reciprocal: "One can grasp history only once one has penetrated into faith and one can understand faith only once one has also comprehended history."⁵² This connection sets the work of the Jewish historian apart from others in his field. Baeck, who was thoroughly familiar with Greek historiography, distinguished it sharply from its Jewish counterpart. The former, "historia," i.e. "investigation," produces *Historie*, defined as the field cultivated by the secular historian seeking secular explanations for the course of events. The latter is properly "Geschichte," an ongoing process, intimately related to religion, that can never become "mere matter for knowledge and research." Thus the task of the Jewish historian is not simply to investigate the past, not to engage in the self-contained historicism that edges out any sense of transcendence. "On account of all of the 'Historie'," wrote Baeck, "often little remained of religion.... History became history for its own sake."⁵³ In a lecture delivered in the Theresienstadt ghetto Baeck suggested a

50 Dedication to *Dieses Volk. Jüdische Existenz*, in *Werke* 2: 5.

51 *Epochen in der jüdischen Geschichte*, in *Werke* 5: 325.

52 *Dieses Volk. Jüdische Existenz*, in *Werke* 2: 332.

53 "Theologie und Geschichte," in *Werke* 4: 50.

much higher expectation: “The historian could be the conscience of his people and thereby take up that which the Prophets were and what they displayed.”⁵⁴ Whereas *Historie* understands the past as closed, *Geschichte* sees it as ever moving into the future.⁵⁵

For Baeck the work of the historian is not merely to determine a sequence of events. *Geschehen* (occurrence) is not yet *Geschichte* (history).⁵⁶ At least for Jewish history its composition is fundamentally spiritual and moral, the consequence of revelation. Where revelation has appeared, history emerges, not as the secular historian might see it, but rather as the encounter of the religious challenge with ever new personalities.⁵⁷ As positive or negative response to divine imperative, history progresses from generation to generation on the plane of morality, its flexibility made possible by the absence of stultifying dogma.⁵⁸ History becomes “the struggle for the good and the just.” Born in revelation, history itself becomes revelation of the eternal living God.⁵⁹ Baeck criticizes Spinoza for neglecting this truth.⁶⁰ He takes to heart Dilthey’s insistence on the primacy of lived history to formulated historiography. According to Dilthey, “we are, first of all, historical beings and, after that, contemplators of history; only because we are the one do we become the other....”⁶¹ Because living within history is for Baeck, whose life was so deeply immersed in history, a moral challenge that he refuses to escape, history becomes an ongoing task. It may have to be endured, but it can also be possessed, it can be “won” when its tasks are assumed.⁶² Acts of evil, by contrast, negate history.⁶³ The selfishness of a nation, Baeck holds, denies history; acts of positive moral response constitute genuine history.⁶⁴ Human beings may be the principal shapers of history, but the historian’s formulations can never provide complete explanations.

54 “Geschichtsschreibung,” in *Werke* 6: 357. The lecture illustrates Baeck’s close familiarity with Herodotus and Thucydides.

55 “Romantische Religion,” in *Werke* 4: 78.

56 *Das Wesen des Judentums*, in *Werke* 1: 270.

57 Baeck, “Judentum,” in Clemen, *Die Religionen der Erde*, 267.

58 *Dieses Volk. Jüdische Existenz*, in *Werke* 2: 86, 157.

59 Baeck, “Judentum,” in Clemen, *Die Religionen der Erde*, 289.

60 “Motive in Spinozas Lehre,” in *Werke* 3: 249.

61 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society*, ed. H. P. Rickman (New York, 1961), 66.

62 *Dieses Volk. Jüdische Existenz*, in *Werke* 2: 89.

63 Max Gruenewald, “Baeck’s View of History’s Role: Continuity, Courage, Conscience,” *LBI News*, 4: 1 (Spring 1963): 4.

64 Leo Baeck, “History,” *AJR Information* 5:9 (September 1950): 1.

The transcendent element is always present as history's driving force, though it be shrouded in mystery. It is God rather than human beings who moves history forward. Baeck states this explicitly: "It is not that which is limited, that which arises from the human world, but rather it is the divine (das Göttliche) that makes history."⁶⁵ It is this conception of history that explains the otherwise enigmatic prayer Leo Baeck spoke in front of the United States Congress in 1947 on an anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth. "We cannot escape history," Lincoln had said. To the president's words Baeck added: "So help us, O God, that we may not evade history, but may we be granted history."⁶⁶

As a scholar examining the full length of Jewish history, Leo Baeck, like Jewish historians before him, divided his subject into periods. Such divisions, as is evident from the work of Nahman Krochmal and Heinrich Graetz, can be highly revelatory of the historian's theology of history.⁶⁷ Baeck does not divide Jewish history by specific events and does not vary the length of its periods. Instead, quite remarkably, he posits four major periods, each a millennium in length, each with a particular character. The first runs from 1500 BCE to 500 BCE, the second from 500 BCE to 500 CE, the third from 500 CE to 1500 CE, and the last, beginning in the year 1500, stretches on into the future, to the year 2500.⁶⁸ He thus places the present directly in the middle of the fourth epoch, whose conclusion is still half a millenium away. Neither the Holocaust nor the establishment of the State of Israel, both of profound significance, inaugurates a new epoch. This symmetry, which recalls Abraham ibn Daud's *Sefer Ha-Kabbalah*,⁶⁹ is scarcely acceptable practice when seen from the perspective of secular historiography alone. It is indicative of Baeck's lack of concern for specificity and perhaps also his desire to impose a transcendent structure upon Jewish history. But I believe it is

65 Das Wesen des Judentums, in Werke 1: 258.

66 "Prayer in the House of Representatives, 12 February 1948," in Werke 6: 549.

67 See the selections from the works of Krochmal and Graetz in Michael A. Meyer, ed., *Ideas of Jewish History* (New York, 1974), 189-244.

68 See Baeck's *Epochen der jüdischen Geschichte*, in Werke 5: 221-363. This division does not match what Baeck wrote earlier in his article "Judentum: IIB. Neue Zeit und Gegenwart," *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3: 486. In the latter Baeck begins the contemporary period not with 1500, but, like Graetz, with Moses Mendelssohn in the eighteenth century.

69 See Gerson D. Cohen, "The Symmetry of History," in *Sefer Ha-Qabbalah: The Book of Tradition*, ed. Gerson D. Cohen (Philadelphia, 1967), 189-222, esp. 216. Although there are profound differences between ibn Daud and Baeck, both linked history to a form of messianism and both were homileticians.

more than that. By leaving the last period open, Baeck's scheme points to the future, to a futurity fundamental to Baeck's theology of Jewish history.

Like Krochmal and Graetz, Baeck held that Judaism has repeatedly undergone rebirth. Baeck puts it bluntly: "One cannot write Jewish history comprehensively if one fails to see it as a history of rebirths."⁷⁰ New shoots and new blossoms appear as each new epoch invigorates the tree of Judaism that had appeared to be dying. In this power of spiritual rebirth, this power of inner development, writes Baeck, "the religion of Israel possesses its true history."⁷¹ Hope is ever renewed and in the last millenium that hope is fully universalized. With regard to the present, writes Baeck, it has now "become the principal task to hold fast to the single hope over and against the many hopes that ever and again seemed so close to fulfillment. It was and remains, from generation to generation in its origins and goal one and the same: the [hope in the] one God and therefore the one way, the one sovereignty, the one great expectation."⁷²

I believe one can conclude that Baeck's broader historical writings are determined as much, if not more, by his vision of that future than by his examination of the past. Here too Baeck is in accord with Dilthey, who wrote that what he found as significant in the present was that which was fruitful for the future.⁷³ Baeck understood history as possessing a clear teleological goal: the establishment of the righteous society or, in religious terms, of the messianic age, the sovereignty of God, the Hereafter on earth.⁷⁴ It is the messianic, writes Baeck, that represents the dynamic element in history.⁷⁵ In the last analysis, I would argue, Baeck's history of Judaism is a *Heilsgeschichte*, a history pointing to the ultimate salvation of the Jewish people and, through a universal ethics based on Jewish monotheism, also the salvation of humanity. His is a *Wissenschaft des Judentums* with an exalted purpose that reaches far beyond the immediate concerns of scholarship. Baeck believed that it was the particular task of the historian of the Jewish faith to be the living conscience of the Jewish people, taking up the task of the Hebrew prophets and, through studying the past pointing the way

70 *Epochen der jüdischen Geschichte*, in *Werke* 5: 352.

71 Baeck "Judentum," in Clemen, *Die Religionen der Erde*, 265.

72 *Dieses Volk. Jüdische Existenz*, in *Werke* 2: 277.

73 Dilthey, *Pattern and Meaning in History*, 166.

74 *Das Wesen des Judentums*, in *Werke* 1: 254.

75 *Dieses Volk. Jüdische Existenz*, in *Werke* 2: 163.

forward.⁷⁶ Seeking not to violate scholarly canons but standing within and not outside of his subject, Baeck's thought thus ventured beyond what scholarship by itself can determine, to the realm where response to divine commandment drives history forward.

76 "Geschichtsschreibung," in *Werke* 6: 357.

Meir Seidler

“Religion... Cannot Teach Us ‘Thou Shalt Not Lie’, and... Lie Itself” –
Rabbi Joseph Tzvi Carlebach’s Refutation of
Biblical Criticism

Introduction

One of the main characteristics of enlightenment and post-enlightenment Judaism – in all its facets – is the renewed interest in the Holy Scriptures. This trend that started in the Mendelssohn era has expanded since then to the entire Ashkenazi world. It encompassed not only the Maskilim, the proponents of Reform and Liberal Judaism, but extended also to West and Central European Orthodox Jewry (that embraced European culture and science in an unprecedented manner and is therefore sometimes called Neo-Orthodoxy).

The present article deals with the biblical scholarship of Rabbi Joseph Tzvi Carlebach (1883-1942), a Jewish-orthodox scholar and rabbi in Germany before the Shoah – more precisely with his attempt at a refutation of higher biblical criticism. Carlebach was the most outstanding scion of a rabbinic “dynasty” stemming from his father, Rabbi Salomon Carlebach (1845-1919).¹ Between 1920 and 1941, Joseph Carlebach subsequently served as rabbi and chief rabbi in Lübeck, Altona and Hamburg, and fatefully, he happened to be the last orthodox rabbi in Nazi Germany. Although he had, after the Nazi rise to power, several opportunities to leave Germany, he decided to stay with his community and thus finally shared the fate of its last members: after his deportation “to the east” in December 1941, he was murdered by the Germans in Riga in April 1942, along with his wife and three of his children as well as a great part of his community. His extraordinary personality, his moral stature as well as his charisma were acknowledged by many of his

1 Salomon Carlebach served for nearly fifty years as Rabbi of Lübeck in Northern Germany. Five of his eight sons followed in his footsteps and became rabbis as well (two of his four daughters married rabbis). Most of the Carlebachs served in the interwar period as communal rabbis in Northern Germany. See Shlomo Carlebach, *Isb Yehudi. The Life and Legacy of a Torah Great: Rav Joseph Tzvi Carlebach*, Monsey (NY), 2008, pp. 26-32.

pupils (among them the former Israeli Minister of Justice and Deputy Head of the Israeli Supreme Court, Chaim Cohen, the illustrious Rabbi B. S. Jacobson and others).² Carlebach was not only a rabbi, but also a leading Jewish-orthodox intellectual in his time and a prolific writer. He published extensively on communal, philosophical, historical and Halachic matters, as well as on biblical exegesis and biblical criticism. However, because of his public duties, and no less because of the Jewish catastrophe he had to face on the communal as well as on a personal level, during his most fertile literary period,³ he had neither time nor leisure to formulate his ideas in an appropriate magnum opus. Carlebach's books and articles which were published over more than two decades, can be found in diverse popular as well as semi-scholarly Jewish-orthodox journals printed in Germany in his time. However, their content deserves much more attention than the literary platforms then available to him would suggest. It is the undisputed merit of Carlebach's daughter, Miriam Gillis-Carlebach, to have assembled the most important of Carlebach's writings in four volumes of "Joseph Carlebach's Selected Writings" ("Joseph Carlebach – Ausgewählte Schriften").⁴ Carlebach's writings and ideas became thus more accessible and researchable.

Among Carlebach's publications, his biblical writings as well as his articles dedicated to biblical criticism deserve a special place. His understanding of the Holy Scriptures, their "Sitz im Leben", their focus and exegesis formed an important part of his Jewish theological work. Among the more than a dozen headings that served Gillis-Carlebach, the editor, in dividing "Carlebach's Selected Writings" into categories, the heading "Biblical Writings" comprises by far the greatest section. It was therefore rightly chosen as the introductory one. In 1915, Carlebach published two articles on the Psalms in the German Jewish orthodox weekly *Jeschurun*,⁵

2 See Miriam Gillis-Carlebach (ed.), *Joseph Carlebach. Ausgewählte Schriften I-IV*, Hildesheim, New York 1982-2007 (in the following cited as *JCAS I-IV*), at *JCAS I*, p. 8; B. S. Jacobson, "Joseph Carlebach", in L. Jung, *Guardians of our Heritage (1724-1953)*, New York 1958, p. 655; E. Lucas, *Jüdisches Leben auf dem Lande. Eine Familienchronik*, Frankfurt/Main 1994, pp. 113-114.

3 Nearly half of Carlebach's writings, among them some of his most important ones, were published in the Nazi era. Thus, in 1934, his most productive literary year, his publications amounted to 70. Even during the first ten months of 1938 – until all German-Jewish newspapers were dissolved after the Kristallnacht (November 9-10, 1938) – he still published 25 articles.

4 see note 2.

5 Joseph Carlebach, "Der Psalter Davids im Wechsel der Tage" ("The Psalter of David in the Course of Time", 1915), *JCAS I*, pp. 15-36.

and from then on he continued to write and publish different biblical books and texts, mostly from an exegetical point of view. In his last exegetical effort, Carlebach once again returns to the Psalms. In one of his last letters of June 1941, half a year before his and his family's deportation, he writes: "In order to find some comfort, I started writing a commentary on the Psalms", trying "to unveil the focal point of the Psalms".⁶ The fruit of this last work of his could, unsurprisingly, not be traced.

The following make up Carlebach's "Biblical Writings":

1. A book on "The Three Great Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel" (translated from German also into Hebrew, English and French) that was highly praised in a book review by Shmuel Hugo Bergmann immediately after its publication (1932).⁷

A number of scholarly as well as popular articles:

2. on the Bible as a whole (in vol. XI of the Jewish Library of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations in America), Carlebach's only publication in English,
3. on German and English Jewish Bible translations (Buber Rosenzweig, Hertz, Torczyner),
4. on several Biblical books (Psalms, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Book of Ruth),
5. on the reception of the Hebrew Bible in the arts (Michelangelo, Thomas Mann),
6. on the works of other Jewish and Christian theologians,
7. as well as several articles on biblical higher criticism.

Except for the above first mentioned original English article and the translations of his book on "The Three Great Prophets", all of these writings are only accessible in the German original.

Carlebach's attack on the central assumptions of higher biblical criticism is part and parcel of what can be termed the orthodox brand of "Wissenschaft des Judentums" as it had developed in Germany since

6 JCAS IV – Briefe aus fünf Jahrzehnten (Letters from Five Decades), p. 339. The translation from the original German citation is mine and so are all the following translations (from German and Hebrew) in this article unless indicated otherwise.

7 Shmuel Hugo Bergmann, "Joseph Carlebach, Die drei grossen Propheten Jesajas, Jirmija und Jecheskel: eine Studie", *Kiryat Sefer* 9 (1932), p. 443: "We are completely convinced that this book will be reckoned among the best ones in the vast literature on this topic".

David Tzvi Hoffmann (1843-1921).⁸ Carlebach's important contribution to the scholarly discussion on biblical criticism has already been addressed by Alfred Bodenheimer – who limits himself explicitly to “some examples”⁹ – and, in the specific context of Carlebach's answer to the Deutero-Isaiah theory, is also briefly mentioned by George Yaakov Kohler.¹⁰ However, a systematic analysis of his methodological approach has not yet been undertaken. The present article aims precisely at such an analysis as well as at providing an ensuing evaluation of Carlebach's contribution to the discussion on biblical criticism.

Biblical Criticism as a Formidable Foe

Not only in those of his articles dedicated specifically to biblical higher criticism, but virtually in all of his exegetical writings (starting with the above mentioned two articles on the Psalms in 1915 and ending with his book on Ecclesiastes in 1936¹¹), Carlebach takes up the challenge of biblical criticism. He does so extensively, and in some of his biblical writings the rejection of biblical criticism even seems to be the predominant issue. Why is this so? Why did Carlebach, even in his commentary on the Song of Songs, which he explicitly dedicates to “every Jewish bridegroom and bride” (1931)¹² – for whom biblical criticism is probably not the first thing they are supposed to be preoccupied with at their wedding – not miss the occasion to consciously and extensively counter biblical criticism? Elsewhere, Carlebach himself gives us the answer. For him, it is a question of life and death (for Judaism).¹³ The claim underlying all biblical criticism, namely that the Torah does not

8 See below, p. 148.

9 Alfred Bodenheimer, “Joseph Carlebach als Bibelleser” (“Joseph Carlebach as Bible Reader”), Miriam Gillis Carlebach, Barbara Vogel (eds.), *Die sechste Joseph Carlebach Konferenz – Joseph Carlebach und seine Zeit. Würdigung und Wirkung*, Hamburg 2005, pp. 75-85, at 76.

10 George Y. Kohler, “Eine Idee mit vielen Vätern: Rabbi Joseph Carlebach und der jüdische Messias”, Miriam Gillis-Carlebach et al., *Horchet, ihr Söhne, der Moral des Vaters, und höret zu, um Weisheit zu erkennen (Sprüche 4, 1)*. Die Zehnte Joseph Carlebach Konferenz, Hamburg 2016, pp. 71-83, at 78-79.

11 *Das Buch Koheleth – Ein Deutungsversuch*, JCAS I, pp. 348-423.

12 JCAS I, p. 69.

13 Joseph Carlebach, “Die Göttlichkeit der Tora und die Auferstehung der Toten: die Voraussetzung des Judentums” (“The Divine Nature of the Torah and the Resurrection: the Prerequisite of Judaism”, 1934), JCAS III, pp. 79-92, at 80; See also next note.

tell us the truth about itself, that it pretends to be what it is not, that it actually lies to us concerning its real origins, is a question of basic truthfulness. Let Carlebach speak for himself:

Religion must be true and be grounded on the truth, otherwise it will lose its moral justification. It cannot teach us “Thou shalt not lie”, and, at the same time – in order to make us accept this prohibition – lie itself and vest itself in foreign clothes. Every attempt to deny the integrity of the Tora is therefore a deathblow into the heart of Judaism... Indeed... the well-known Prof. Delitzsch called the Pentateuch Judaism’s “big deception”.

For us, the idea that some later authorities should have attributed their laws and religious revelations to Moses in order to vest them with higher authority is quite absurd... Why e.g. should Ezra, the alleged author of the priestly codex and the head of the Great Sanhedrin, be afraid to acknowledge his authorship... After all the book of Deuteronomy, which is (even according to biblical criticism) much older, gives him full authority to do so: “Act according to whatever they (the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem) teach you and the decisions they give you. Do not turn aside from what they teach you to the right or to the left”.¹⁴

The Torah attests countless times to its laws as originating in God’s revelation to Moses (“God spoke to Moses, saying...”). The denial of this claim which was, for instance, basically accepted by Reform Judaism,¹⁵

14 Joseph Carlebach, “Die wissenschaftliche Unhaltbarkeit der Bibelkritik” (“The Scientific Untenability of Biblical Criticism”), *Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt für das Gebiet der Hansestadt Hamburg* 13 (5), May 5, 1937, pp. 2-3, at 2. For Delitzsch’s antisemitism see Christian Wiese, *Wissenschaft des Judentums und protestantische Theologie im wilhelminischen Deutschland*, Tübingen 1999, pp. 191-196.

15 See Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Pentateuch as Scripture and the Challenge of Biblical Criticism – Responses among Modern Jewish Thinkers and Scholars”, Benjamin D. Sommer (ed.), *Jewish Concepts of Scripture – A Comparative Introduction*, New York 2012, pp. 203-229, at 208-210. Even Benno Jacob, perhaps the most conservative of Germany’s Reform Rabbis who denies most of the conclusions of higher biblical criticism, admits its basic premises, namely that “the Pentateuch is a work compiled of several sources and was, in its present form, not written by Moses” (Benno Jacob, *Die Thora Moses*, Frankfurt/Main 1912, p. 87); For Jacob, see also Wiese, *Wissenschaft des Judentums und protestantische Theologie im wilhelminischen Deutschland*, pp. 182-190). In spite of their different religious outlook, Carlebach highly esteemed Jacob and referred to his research frequently [see Carlebach, “Die wissenschaftliche Unhaltbarkeit

is for Carlebach religious suicide. This urgent need is the reason why Carlebach addresses the issue of biblical criticism in virtually all of his biblical writings and why he pursues his high alert line regarding biblical criticism even in the Nazi period when, as he himself admits, the Jews seem to have other, more urgent problems. However, Carlebach maintains that in times of distress the question of the truthfulness of the Torah and thus the fight against biblical criticism is even more urgent than ever. The Jew in distress needs a truthful Torah and not a deceitful patchwork of clumsily edited fragments.¹⁶

The fact that according to Carlebach Judaism *also* rejects every attempt to marginalize rationality and, quite to the contrary, makes rationality a non-renounceable part of the religious quest, renders a rational debate mandatory; in any case, a retraction to a “sola fide” stance is not an option for Carlebach.¹⁷ Hence the importance of the *intellectual* fight against biblical criticism – Carlebach aims, of course, at higher biblical criticism. Because of his rational approach, we do not find in Carlebach any claim to a specifically Jewish form of understanding, nor a denial of possible true insights by Christian scholars. Rather he states explicitly: “Christian scholars have certainly contributed a great deal to the understanding of the Bible. After all, every intelligent person who invests some time in reading the Bible, will find there valuable insights”.¹⁸ Carlebach regards Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffmann, who was the first rabbinic authority having extensively responded to Wellhausen (as early as 1903)¹⁹, as his spiritual mentor.²⁰ Thus it is not surprising that he adopts Hoffmann’s credo vis à vis his scientific opponents. Hoffmann wrote:

I willingly admit that on the basis of the articles of my faith I would be unable to conclude that the five books of the Torah were written after the time of Moses or by someone other than

der Bibelkritik”, p. 3; see also his article “Unbelehrbar” (“Unteachable”), supplement “Gola und Gëulla” 7 of *Der Israelit* 75 (25), June 21, 1934, p. 2, et al.].

16 Carlebach, “Die Göttlichkeit der Tora und die Auferstehung der Toten”, p. 80.

17 See Carlebach, “Die wissenschaftliche Unhaltbarkeit der Bibelkritik”, pp. 2-3.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

19 David Hoffmann, “Die wichtigsten Instanzen gegen die Graf-Wellhausensche Hypothese”, *Jahres-Bericht des Rabbiner-Seminars zu Berlin für 1902/1903* (5663), Berlin 1904, pp. 3-154. Carlebach cites Hoffmann in his article “Unbelehrbar”, p. 2, and also in “Die wissenschaftliche Unhaltbarkeit der Bibelkritik”, p. 3.

20 Carlebach, “Der Psalter Davids im Wechsel der Tage”, p. 34.

Moses, but in my desire to scientifically ground these fundamental assumptions, I have always tried to put forth only those arguments that persons holding other fundamental views would acknowledge as correct.²¹

Here we have somewhat of a proper disclosure. On the one hand the acknowledgement of an unshakable pre-scientific conviction that, from a scientific standpoint, is of course precarious, but on the other hand an acceptance of the scientific method. Actually this is a sort of reformulation of the ethos of Jewish philosophy of all ages, assuming rational premises, in order to prove – post factum – essentially unquestioned religious truths.

The urgency that motivates Carlebach to take up the challenge of higher biblical criticism as well as the rational premises dictating his scholarly work, are not the only characteristics of his approach to this topic. What is quite exceptional in all of Carlebach's publications relating to biblical criticism is the extremely polemical and sometimes even aggressive tone that characterizes most of these publications, from the earliest until the very last. Again, the arguments are, as we will see, rational, but the tone, or the style, is extremely polemical. This cannot merely be explained by the urgent nature attributed by Carlebach to the need to confront Biblical criticism. In general, even when engaged in polemics or attacking ideological adversaries, Carlebach was anxious to maintain a moderate tone which was nearly always characterized by giving his ideological adversaries the credit they deserved. Carlebach, a man of extraordinary rhetoric abilities who engaged ostensibly with "great pleasure in polemics",²² generally presents the reader with pros and cons, acknowledging this or that good observation in his adversary's thesis. Not so when confronting higher biblical criticism. The reason for Carlebach's vehemence in regard to biblical criticism is quite simple. He has no doubt that the main motivation of most biblical critics is antisemitic. "Is biblical criticism based on facts?" he asks rhetorically in one of his articles. "Undoubtedly", he answers, "on the fact of antisemitism".²³ As Alfred Bodenheimer puts it pointedly:

21 English translation by Yaakov Shavit, Mordechai Eran, *The Hebrew Bible Reborn: From Holy Scripture to the Book of Books – A History of Biblical Culture and the Battles over the Bible in Modern Judaism*, Berlin, New York 2007, p. 143.

22 See Bodenheimer, "Joseph Carlebach als Bibelleser", p. 84.

23 Carlebach, "Die Göttlichkeit der Tora und die Auferstehung der Toten", p. 91.

The decisive impetus (for Carlebach's extraordinary literary effort to fight biblical criticism, M.S.) was his insight that the struggle over the reception of the Bible was just another battle in a war (against the Jews, M.S.) that racialism alone could not win: a spiritual battle aimed at uprooting the foundations of Judaism.²⁴

In his accusation of the biblical critics' anti-Jewish bias, Carlebach was neither alone nor the first. Solomon Schechter, the renowned Cairo Genisa scholar and architect of Conservative Judaism, had already formulated it as early as 1905:

But this higher degree of antisemitism has now reached its climax when every discovery in recent years is called on to bear witness against us and to accuse us of spiritual larceny... it is... the reproach of Carlyle, who, in one of his antisemitic fits, exclaimed, "The Jews are always dealing in old clothes; spiritual or material." ... The Bible is our sole *raison d'être*, and it is just this which higher antisemitism is seeking to destroy, denying all our claims for the past, and leaving us without hope for the future... There is no room... for spiritual parvenus.²⁵

Especially regarding what he calls "the Jewish epigones" of biblical criticism, Carlebach does not conceal his abhorrence vis à vis what he regards as Jewish collaboration with antisemites.²⁶

So far the framework. Let us now proceed to Carlebach's critique of the *method* applied by biblical critics. His rejection of some specific *examples* of the main *findings* of biblical criticism – such as pointing to new archeological evidence or inconsistencies (or even contradictions) in the different theories etc. – will be cited only when adduced in support of his critique of the biblical critics' *methodology*.²⁷ This confinement to methodology has, besides the natural restrictions of an article aiming at concise description and analysis, an additional reason: Carlebach's mentor, Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffmann had already been criticized for his

24 Bodenheimer, "Joseph Carlebach als Bibelleser", p. 85.

25 Solomon Schechter, Seminary Address and Other Papers, Cincinnati 1915, pp. 35-39.

26 See Joseph Carlebach, "Das Selbstbegreifen des modernen Menschen – Jüdische Epigonen der Bibelkritik" ("The Self-Understanding of Modern Man – Jewish Epigones of Biblical Criticism", 1933), JCAS III, pp. 38-55, especially at 39-40.

27 For a representative sample of Carlebach's examples contradicting some of the conclusions of biblical criticism, see Bodenheimer, "Joseph Carlebach als Bibelleser".

claim that the demonstration of mistakes in some of the conclusions of biblical criticism justifies a total rejection of the latter. After all, a theory can still be valid in general even if it contains some mistakes in detail.²⁸ Methodological reservations, however, are much more fundamental and therefore deserve more attention.

Criticism of the method

The above mentioned accusation of antisemitism, which at first sight seems to be an *ad hominem* argument, quickly turns into an *argumentum ad rem*: Carlebach exposes a common line (a sort of tacit agreement) that characterizes all Christian biblical critics – biblical criticism in his day was largely a Christian enterprise – and that prefigures their thinking: the ubiquitous *de facto* adoption of the classical Christian narrative on the inferiority of Judaism as compared to Christianity, the latter being a higher developed religion than the former. The biblical critics adopted this narrative. True, biblical criticism dismantles Christianity no less than Judaism, but still: in the eyes of all major biblical critics in Carlebach's time, dismantled Christianity is still more valuable than dismantled primitive Judaism. According to biblical criticism, both Christianity and Judaism are, in their present form, a historical patchwork, actually a fake, but Christianity is still a fake that advanced humanity far beyond degenerated Judaism. In sum, Carlebach bases his accusation of antisemitism on the tacit agreement among the foremost biblical critics on the outdatedness of Judaism as compared to Christianity. He presents numerous examples for the adoption of the classical Christian anti-Judaic narrative by the most prominent biblical critics. Although both, Judaism and Christianity, are exposed by Bible-critical scholars as historical patchworks, Judaism fares much worse than Christianity, for which most of these scholars maintain sympathy. Carlebach is aware of the well-known fact that it is Spinoza's spiritual fatherhood that looms over the whole Bible-critical enterprise.²⁹ Before him, Hermann Cohen had already claimed that modern antisemitism owes very much to Spinoza, "the real accuser of Judaism in the eyes of the Christian world".³⁰ Spinoza, though depriving Christianity of its divine nimbus, still

28 See Schwartz, "The Pentateuch as Scripture and the Challenge of Biblical Criticism", pp. 216-217.

29 Carlebach, "Die Göttlichkeit der Tora und die Auferstehung der Toten", pp. 86-89.

30 Hermann Cohen, Spinoza on State and Religion, Judaism and Christianity (transl. Robert S. Schine), Jerusalem 2014, p. 58.

credits it with some qualities, whereas, according to him, Judaism is void of all qualities.³¹ One can argue with Carlebach if this is antisemitism or rather anti-Judaism, but in terms of the main thrust of his accusation – his pointing at an anti-Jewish bias based on a type of quasi Hegelian evolutionary theory which by definition assumes the historical superiority of Christianity – this is only semantics. According to Carlebach

Biblical criticism was from the outset a biased science with the explicit purpose to depict the Torah as an inferior religious level paving the way for Christianity, the crown of the religious evolution. It lacked the most basic prerequisite of all science, the quest for objectivity. It quickly degenerated into an antisemitic pseudo-science ... setting out to destroy “the nimbus of the chosen people...”³²

Carlebach’s criticism of 19th and early 20th century biblical criticism and its preconceived assumptions is today also accepted by many non-Jewish scholars Here is a statement by George Mendenhall, a modern biblical critic:

The generally accepted account of Israel’s history and religion produced by Wellhausen and popularized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries survives, to be sure, to this day. It is especially among non-specialists that it is accepted as indubitably valid... Yet [it] was largely based on a Hegelian philosophy of history, not on his literary analysis. It was an a priori evolutionary scheme that guided him...³³

According to Carlebach, the anti-Jewish bias has wide-spectrum collateral side effects that have a disastrous impact on scientific judgement. As *one* of these side effects, biblical critics tend to discard all that is exceptional in Judaism by overemphasizing foreign influences, thus often presenting

31 For a detailed discussion of this topic see Meir Seidler, “Benedictus de Spinoza – The Shaper of European Enlightenment’s Image of Judaism”, *Daat* 54 (Summer 2004), pp. 29-47, especially p. 40 (Hebrew).

32 Carlebach, “Die wissenschaftliche Unhaltbarkeit der Bibelkritik”, p. 2.

33 George E. Mendenhall, “Biblical History in Transition”, G. Ernest Wright (ed.), *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Winona Lake, Indiana 1979, p. 32; See also Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Antisemitism – German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews*, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann, Leiden 2009.

the Jewish religion as plagiarism. In Jewish circles, a similar critique of biblical criticism had earlier been voiced by historian Ze'ev Yaavetz.³⁴ Regarding these two points – actually the second point (disregarding the uniqueness of the Bible and its protagonists) is a consequence of the first (antisemitism) – Carlebach claims that the very starting point of biblical criticism lacks the most basic condition of every science, its presuppositionlessness.³⁵ As the fact that biblical critics used to go out of their way to paganize Judaism and thus to negate what seems to be Judaism's main contribution to humanity – namely monotheism – is hardly deniable, Carlebach seems to make a valuable point here. However, Carlebach himself is not free of presuppositionlessness, especially as he explicitly adopts the approach of his mentor David Hoffmann, who, as mentioned above, willingly admitted that on the basis of the articles of his faith he was “unable to conclude that the five books of the Torah were written after the time of Moses or by someone other than Moses”. Carlebach would presumably argue with Hoffmann that, notwithstanding his presuppositions, he always tries “to put forth only those arguments that persons holding other fundamental views would acknowledge as correct”.³⁶

Among the more detailed methodological reservations Carlebach puts forward as against biblical criticism, the following seems to me the most important one. Carlebach claims that when approaching a text, we should, in order to understand it, proceed from the clear and evident parts to the more obscure and less unequivocal ones. The clear and evident parts provide us with some basic and well-founded facts that can presumably shed light on the more obscure statements. However, biblical criticism generally chooses the other way around: it picks up a number of dubious statements, the intention of which is unclear, and invests them with a supposed meaning. Given the unclear nature of these statements, this supposed meaning can only be speculative. Its speculative nature, however, does not prevent its proponents from presenting it as the principal vantage point from which the rest of the scriptures has to be interpreted, and if necessary, emended, in order to fit a preconceived theory. The latter is mostly based on an interpretation that fits into mainstream anti-Jewish bias. Let Carlebach speak for himself:

34 Ze'ev Yaavetz, “Habikoret Shehi Mevakeret”, *Tachkemuni*, 1 (1910), pp. 14-15.

35 Joseph Carlebach, “Die wissenschaftliche Unhaltbarkeit der Bibelkritik”, p. 2.

36 see above, p. 149 and n. 21 there.

The final goal of all these theories is to paganize the Jewish conception of God. Everything which is unequivocal and evident and presented by the Jewish tradition clearly, is discarded. Instead, we find constant rummaging in peculiarities in form or content in which the difficulties leave enough room for all kinds of fantasies. Here we have... the complete reversal of sane science. Instead of explaining difficult and peculiar verses by taking recourse to the clear ones, we find fantastic interpretations of peculiarities that are used to obscure the meaning of the clear and unequivocal verses.³⁷

Here we need an example. Carlebach gives, among others, the following one: In the story of the creation, there is a mysterious plural form in the verse preceding the creation of man (Gen 1:26): "Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness...". All the other verses dealing with man's creation are in the singular. Instead of sticking to the majority of the verses and explaining the plural form e.g. as a majestic plural, many biblical critics claim that the real intention of the Scriptures is revealed precisely in the unique plural form, and the monotheistic creation story was originally a pagan myth. Carlebach refers specifically to one such opinion which suggests that the original story of the creation described some sort of competition among the gods, as to who of them would be able to create the best man, hence the plural form which attests to the pagan origins of the Torah. Carlebach reasons as follows: this verse is indeed strange, but instead of transforming it into the focal point of the creation story, rendering all the other singular forms pertaining to man's creation mysterious, let us rather leave one verse mysterious instead of multiplying the mystery only to achieve what he regards as a preconceived goal, i.e. the deconstruction of the text.³⁸ Here as well as in nearly all other instances, Carlebach points to the fact that all of the scriptural peculiarities brought to the fore by biblical criticism, like the above one, were abundantly treated by Jewish tradition itself. In the case of the above plural form, he adduces the Midrashic opinion that there is a moral teaching in the plural, namely: As even the Creator of the World

37 Carlebach, "Das Selbstbegreifen des modernen Menschen – Jüdische Epigonen der Bibelkritik", p. 51; See also his article "Aus der Arbeitswelt der Religionsphilosophen", *Der Israelit* 68 (46), November 17, 1927, p. 3.

38 Carlebach, "Das Selbstbegreifen des modernen Menschen – Jüdische Epigonen der Bibelkritik", p. 51; see there also, pp. 43, 45-46, 50. See also Joseph Carlebach, "Die liberale Theologie und ihr Echo" ("The Liberal Theology and Its Echo", 1932), *JCAS* III, pp. 28-35, at 31-32.

consulted, so to speak, the ministering angels how to create man – “let *us* create man” – no one should make important decisions before seeking advice and hearing other opinions. In one of his last articles, published in 1938, “Prophecy and Wisdom”, Carlebach resumes the discussion on the plural form in Gen. 1:26 and on the above moralizing Midrash and states that this moral advice for decision makers was so important for the Torah that in order to bring it home, it even took the risk of being misinterpreted as pointing to more than one god,³⁹ in other words: moral considerations overrode metaphysical clarity. This interpretation is in accord with a defense line that had been developed a few decades before by Rabbi Abraham Yitzchak Kook (1865-1935) – whom Carlebach knew and held in high esteem⁴⁰ – vis à vis the evolutionary theory. According to Rabbi Kook, the main focus of the creation story which seems to contradict evolution is moral. Thus, for instance, the story of the Garden of Eden serves the purpose to let man know about the pitfalls of his human existence, whereas “the question if there was in reality a Golden Age when man enjoyed material and spiritual plentitude, or that life started from below climbing constantly from a lower stage to a higher one... is irrelevant for us”.⁴¹ True, both solutions – Rabbi Kook’s and Rabbi Carlebach’s – are apologetic, but unlike Rabbi Kook in the just adduced case, Carlebach is in the lucky position that he can point to an ancient Midrash that cannot be suspected of apologetics in the face of biblical criticism. Moreover, Carlebach addresses this issue in the broader context of the literary method used by biblical criticism. He seems to challenge one of the principles of this method, the “lectio difficilior potior”-rule attributed to Erasmus of Rotterdam and then applied by the very first biblical critics as far back as the late 17th century.⁴² This rule states that if we encounter several manuscripts of an old text with different readings, the most difficult and hard to understand reading is the original one as it can be assumed that the later scribes emended problematic passages to make them harmonize with the accepted view and not the other way round. In line with this rule, a peculiarity in a text is regarded by biblical critics as hinting at something lying behind it, precisely because of its strangeness. Carlebach does not mention

39 “Prophetie und Weisheit”, JCAS I, p. 47.

40 See his eulogy on Rabbi Kook (1935), JCAS III, pp. 446-449.

41 Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, *Igrot Hareaya*, Jerusalem 1985, vol. 1, Letter 134 (1908), p. 163.

42 See James Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture. Evidence and Probability Before Pascal*, Baltimore and London, 2001, p. 191.

the “lectio difficilior potior” – rule explicitly, but, given his negation of “fantastic interpretations” in favor of “unequivocal and evident” ones, he evidently advocates a more restrictive approach as voiced by the later classical scholar Martin L. West:

When we choose the ‘more difficult reading’...we must be sure that it is in itself a plausible reading. The principle should not be used in support of dubious syntax, or phrasing that it would not have been natural for the author to use. There is an important difference between a more difficult reading and a more unlikely reading.⁴³

For Carlebach, then, a “more difficult reading” attributing pagan origins to the monotheistic Torah that defies paganism on each and every page of it, is obviously a more unlikely one. To sum all this up: instead of weaving a completely new story based on a speculative meaning of some peculiarities forced upon otherwise clear and unequivocal texts, let us remain with the old narrative based on the majority of the cases and settle the peculiarities as what they are, namely peculiarities. This is all the more true, the more abundantly these peculiarities were already treated in the framework of Jewish tradition, as Carlebach firmly maintains.

In this context, Carlebach points time and again to the fact that the leading biblical critics do not even mention their Jewish predecessors, who have been dealing for centuries with the peculiarities that the biblical critics claim to have discovered:

There is no question asked by these theologians that the sages of the Talmud had not asked before.

The questions raised by critical research are not wrong... However, it seems to us one of the dishonesties in Bible critical research to withhold from the public how an allegedly unresolvable contradiction had already been understood and interpreted by (Jewish, M.S.) religious authorities.⁴⁴

In no other field, be it the research of Hellenism or of old Indian cultures, would a scholar dare to approach his object without first

43 Martin L West, *Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique Applicable to Greek and Latin Texts*, Stuttgart 1973, p. 51.

44 Carlebach, “Die Göttlichkeit der Tora und die Auferstehung der Toten”, p. 84. See also Carlebach, “Die wissenschaftliche Unhaltbarkeit der Bibelkritik”, p. 2.

assembling the classical sources that are part of his research object. Only in regard to Judaism do researchers feel free of this obligation. “Their silence is our praise”, exclaims Carlebach paraphrasing a verse from the Psalms.⁴⁵

Another methodological reservation voiced by Carlebach concerns the quest for the original meaning of a word in order to unveil the real meaning of a scriptural statement. Carlebach argues that words are always subject to historical change. As an example, Carlebach adduces the Hebrew word for altar, *mizbeach*. True, the Hebrew root is *zevach* which refers to a ritually slaughtered animal. However, the very same Torah speaks about a *mizbeach ketoret*, an incense altar, regarding to which the meaning of *mizbeach* has already shifted:

We actually have no interest in finding out the original meaning of a biblical expression. The one and only question of interest is how it was understood by Moses, what meaning it assumed in biblical times. Everything else is philology for museum purposes and is completely irrelevant for understanding Bible and Judaism.⁴⁶

Here again, Carlebach finds support in modern biblical scholarship, in which the quest for the “original meaning” of a word is referred to as the “etymological fallacy” or the “root fallacy”:⁴⁷

Biblical writers and characters were no more aware of the history of the words and expressions they used than are modern writers and speakers. Very few of us are aware of the history of the words we use nor do we try to determine what the “original meaning” of a word was before using it. Unless we are historical philologists, such matters are seldom more than a curiosity. What matters is whether the words we are using communicate what we want to say. Students should not assume that “original meanings” exist for words, that ancient users were aware of such and that some “original meaning” must be discerned whenever a word appears.⁴⁸

45 Joseph Carlebach, “Aus der Arbeitswelt der Religionsphilosophen” (“From the Working World of Religious Philosophers”), *Der Israelit* 68 (41), October 10, 1927, pp. 22-23.

46 Carlebach, “Das Selbstbegreifen des modernen Menschen – Jüdische Epigonen der Bibelkritik”, p. 49.

47 John H. Hayes, Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis. A Beginner’s Handbook*, Atlanta 1987, pp. 79-80.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Epilogue

Many biblical scholars today share Carlebach's characterization of classical biblical criticism as being highly tendentious. The contemporary German theologian Marius Reiser points at the ethos of 19th and early 20th century's "historical-critical" research that was, according to him, "unmasking the fraud" rather than being an objective truth-seeking inquiry:

It was the "criticism" that dictated the direction of the "historical". For historical research that wanted to be enlightenedly critical had to unveil and unmask. Inconsistencies, errors, mistakes, lies, distortions, legends and inventions had to be revealed. Prejudices, "tendencies" and illusions had to be exposed...⁴⁹

Similarly, Carlebach's criticism of the "the omissions and emendations" made by biblical critics in order to "dissect the Pentateuch into different sources",⁵⁰ is largely echoed in modern biblical scholarship. Classical biblical criticism's reliance on literary analysis, even in the absence of historical evidence, is now being challenged. Helen Gardner writes on this:

In field after field theories of composite authorship, earlier versions, different strata have been discarded ... The assumption today is more and more in favor of single authorship, unless there is clear external evidence to the contrary, and of taking works as they stand and not postulating earlier versions to account for inconsistencies. ... Occam's razor has been applied to the critical postulates beloved by the nineteenth-century scholars.⁵¹

As demonstrated above, and for the reasons adduced there, Carlebach, who dealt with biblical criticism in more than a dozen books and articles did not form his arguments into one comprehensive theory. However, he invested considerable intellectual efforts to countering what he considered as a major threat to Judaism. His thoughts exhibit a deep understanding of the problems at stake and offer possible answers. Moreover, in some of his methodological reservations, Rabbi Joseph Tzvi Carlebach antedates later developments that occurred decades after his tragic death.

49 Marius Reiser, *Bibelkritik und Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift*, Tübingen 2007, p. 37.

50 Carlebach, "Die wissenschaftliche Unhaltbarkeit der Bibelkritik", p. 2.

51 Helen Gardner, *The Business of Criticism*, Oxford, 1959, pp. 97-98.

Cedric Cohen Skalli

Between Yitzhak Baer and Leo Strauss:
The Rediscovery of Isaac Abravanel's Political
Thought in the Late 1930s

**1937, the End of a Political Blindness in the Wissenschaft
des Judentums**

For it is not impossible that a nation should have many leaders who convene, unite, and reach a consensus; they can thus govern and administer justice ... Then also, why cannot they have terms of office...? When the turn of other magistrates comes to replace them, they will investigate the abuses of trust committed by earlier [magistrates]. Those found guilty will pay for their crimes ... Finally, why cannot their powers be limited and determined by laws or norms?¹

These lines of Don Isaac Abravanel's 1483-1484 commentary on 1 Samuel 8 earned him fame in 20th-century scholarship as the first early modern Jewish republican thinker.² In his 1937 article on the political conception of Abravanel, Herbert Finkelscherer (1903-1942) noted: "His fundamental position and refusal of monarchy were to remain unique and isolated in Jewish literature deep into the modern times."³

1 Abravanel, *Perush Abaranel al Neviim, Shmuel*, Jerusalem, 2010, p. 96. For the translations from Hebrew of 1 Samuel 8, I relied (with a few changes) on Menachem Lorberbaum's English translation in *The Jewish Political Tradition, Volume 1: Authority*, ed. Michael Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum, Noam J. Zohar, and Yair Lorberbaum (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 150-54.

2 For a first approach of the topic, see Aviezer Ravitzky, "Kings and Laws in Late Medieval Jewish Thought: Nissim of Gerona vs. Isaac Abrabanel," in *Scholars and Scholarship: The Interaction between Judaism and Other Cultures*, ed. Leo Landman (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1990), pp. 67-90; Avraham Melamed, *Abotan baketana shel habochmot* (Hebrew) (Raanana: Open University Press, 2011), pp. 242-81, - 281 and also Melamed, *Wisdom's Little Sister: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2012), pp. 272-304.

3 "Seine [Isaac Abravanel] grundsätzliche Stellungnahme, seine ablehnende Haltung zur Monarchie dürfte in der Tat bis weit in die Neuzeit hinein im jüdischen Schrifttum vereinzelt dastehen." (Herbert Finkelscherer, "Quellen und Motive der Staats – und

The uniqueness of Abravanel's anti-monarchical views lasted until the times of enlightenment, revolutions and emancipation in the 18th and 19th centuries. Yet, the age of *Aufklärung*, *Romantik*, and *Wissenschaft des Judentums* did not bring renewed attention to Abravanel's theological and political thought.⁴ On the contrary, the first book devoted to Abravanel, Jacob Guttman's 1916 *Die religionsphilosophischen Lehren des Isaak Abravanel* (The Philosophical-Religious Doctrines of Isaac Abravanel), "omitted" a study of Abravanel's political ideas, while declaring him the "last of the Jewish writers, who could still claim a place in the history of Jewish philosophy of religion" (*der letzte unter den jüdischen Schriftstellern, der einen Platz in jüdischen Religionsphilosophie beanspruchen darf*).⁵ For Guttman, Abravanel was defined as a figure of decline, as the end of Jewish medieval rationality; he could not be seen as the first modern Jewish political thinker, a title reserved for Spinoza or Mendelssohn: "Spinoza, who took another path [than the Maimonidean-Aristotelian one], owed to Jewish literature some seminal stimuli, yet he could no longer be counted among the Jewish thinkers."⁶ Abravanel was thus more than a negative historical figure: his life and work served as a marker for a new historical period in which Jewish philosophy disappeared. This generated much anxiety among many of the exponents of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, who partly considered it their mission to relegate this obscure period to the past.

Abravanel's political thought remained largely unexplored until its rediscovery in the 20th century. The history of the modern rediscovery of Abravanel's political thought, as well as its philosophical and political context after the fall of the Weimar Republic in 1933, is relatively unknown. The following paragraphs are devoted to a first elucidation of this important chapter of early 20th-century Jewish scholarship.

The rediscovery of Abravanel's political thought occurred during the first years of the German Nazi regime, and can be attributed to the 1937 commemoration of the 500-year anniversary of Abravanel's birth, which brought Jewish scholars from Europe, Palestine, and the United States to study and write academic articles on Abravanel's political thought. Many

Gesellschaftsauffassung des Don Isaak Abravanel," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 81 [1937], p. 496.)

4 See Jean-Christophe Attias, "Isaac Abravanel: Between Ethnic Memory and National Memory," *Jewish Social Studies* 2 (1996): 137-155.

5 Jacob Guttman, *Die Religionphilosophischen Lehren des Isaak Abravanel*, Breslau, 1916, p. 16.

6 *Ibid.*

of these commemorative publications dealt with the political aspect of Abravanel's life and work. In 1937, Ephraim Urbach published an article in *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* entitled *Die Staatsauffassung des Don Isaak Abravanel* (The Conception of State of Don Isaac Abravanel).⁷ In 1938, Urbach immigrated to Palestine; after WWII, he became a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.⁸ In the same 1937 issue of the *Monatsschrift*, Finkelscherer published an already mentioned article entitled *Quellen und Motive des Staats- und Gesellschaftsauffassung von Don Isaak Abravanel* (Motives and Sources in Don Isaac Abravanel's Conception of State and Society).⁹ Finkelscherer was most probably deported to Auschwitz and murdered there in 1942.¹⁰ In a 1938 issue of the *Monatsschrift*, the journal's penultimate issue, Isaak Heinemann (1876-1957), a prominent Jewish scholar and the journal's chief editor, published an article entitled *Abravanel's Lehre vom Niedergang der Menschheit* (Abravanel's Doctrine of the Decline of Humanity).¹¹ The following year, Heinemann immigrated to Palestine and joined the faculty of the Hebrew University. Yitzhak Baer's (1901-1993) Hebrew article, "Don Isaac Abravanel and his Attitude towards the Problems of History and State,"¹² published in the eighth issue of the young Hebrew Journal *Tarbiz*, and Leo Strauss' (1899-1973) English essay, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching,"¹³ published in the University of Cambridge's volume entitled *Isaac Abravanel: Six Lectures*, are the best-known contributions to early 20th-century writing on Abravanel and reflect opposing views on the subject. These two

7 Ephraim Urbach, "Die Staatsauffassung des Don Isaak Abravanel," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 81 (1937), pp. 257-270.

8 David Assaf (ed.), *Ephraim Elimelech Urbach*, Jerusalem: The World Association for Jewish Studies, 1993 (Hebrew).

9 Finkelscherer, "Quellen und Motive," pp. 496-508.

10 Michael Brocke and Julius Carlebach (eds.), *Die Rabbiner im Deutschen Reich 1871-1945*, vol. 2, pp. 2144-2145. See also the website of Yad Vashem: <http://yvng.yadvashem.org/name/Details.html?language=en&itemId=11496481&ind=0>

11 Isaak Heinemann, "Abravanel's Lehre vom Niedergang der Menschheit," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 82 (1938), pp. 381-400.

12 Yitzhaq Baer, "*Don Izhaq Abarbanel ve-yahso el bayot historiah ve-hamedinah*," *Tarbiz* 8 (1937), pp. 241-259.

13 Leo Strauss, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching," J. B. Trend and H. Loewe (eds.), *Isaac Abravanel: Six Lectures*, Cambridge, 1937, pp. 95-129. See also Leo Strauss' remarks on Finkelscherer's article, Heinrich Bleier (ed.), *Leo Strauss Gesammelte Schriften Band 2 Philosophie und Gesetz*, Stuttgart und Weimar: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 1997, pp. 233-234.

scholars also differed in their paths out of Germany. In the 1920s, Baer, a young and promising historian, and Strauss, a provocative philosopher, were colleagues at the Berlin *Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*. After publishing the first volume of his ground-breaking *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien* in 1929 by the *Akademie's* publishing house, Baer immigrated to Palestine in 1930 and joined the Hebrew University faculty.¹⁴ That same year, Strauss published his *Religionskritik Spinozas* by the same publishing house.¹⁵ He left Germany for France and England in 1932, and later immigrated to the United States in 1937, joining the New School's faculty the following year.¹⁶

This brief and partial survey of the historical and editorial context in which the scholarly rediscovery of the political aspects of Abravanel's work occurred reveals that this shift was linked to the traumatic political experiences faced by these writers during the Weimar Republic and early Nazi period. It also deals with the broader question of Jewish political destiny in Europe and outside of it, in Palestine, in the United States, and in other places. Furthermore, this political shift, best exemplified by Baer and Strauss' articles, occurred in a context of Jewish emigration out of Europe, and in a context of internal and external challenges of German and European models of Jewish civil emancipation. In the following comparative study, I will discuss Baer and Strauss' contradicting contributions to the rediscovery of Abravanel's theological and political thought, and will also emphasize their value for an understanding of

14 Fritz Baer, *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1929-1936, vol. 1-2. Thomas Meyer, "Yitzhak Fritz Baer und Leo Strauss Über Galut", *Exil – Literatur – Judentum*, Berlin 2016, pp. 64-85. Shmuel Ettinger, "Yitzhak Baer Z'L," S. Ettinger, H. Beinart, M. Stern (eds.), *Sefer Zikaron Le-Yitzhak Baer*, pp. 9-20; David Myers, *Re-inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History*, New York: Oxford University Press: 1995, pp. 109-128.

15 Leo Strauss, *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft*, Berlin: Akademie Verlage, 1930.

16 On the intellectual biography of Leo Strauss in the 1920's and 1930's, I first want to thank Dr. Thomas Meyer, Dr. Eugene Sheppard and Dr. Philipp von Wussow for their generous help and suggestions. I used the following literature: Meyer, "Yitzhak Fritz Baer und Leo Strauss"; Eugene Sheppard, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher*, Brandeis University Press, 2006, pp. 51-117; Joshua Parens, "Leo Strauss on Farabi, Maimonides et al. in 1930's," M. D. Yaffe and R. S. Ruderman (eds.), *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 157-169; Philipp von Wussow "Leo Strauss on returning: some methodological aspects", *Philosophical Reading IX* (2017), pp. 18-24.

the critical appreciation of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* between the two world wars.

Fritz Yitzhak Baer: the Cultural and Political Ambiguity of Isaac Abravanel

Baer opens his article with a programmatic statement:

Isaac Abravanel is one of the few Jewish political leaders of the Middle Ages to whom it is worthwhile and possible to devote an entire book. The course of his life is known to us in its broad lines; we possess his monumental books infused with political wisdom [science], which raise in us the desire to understand the relationship of their author to the essential problems of his times. If we could succeed in understanding at least one of these Jews whose continual work and employment were the service of kings, we could then remove the veil obscuring the real face of this typical Jewish figure [the Court Jew], a figure responsible for great disasters, but also a source of great consolation.¹⁷

Baer's call was heard: within twenty years of the publication of Baer's article, the Zionist academic elite became interested in Abravanel's political work, considered and checked Abravanel's positive or negative contribution to Jewish politics. One such work is Benzion Netanyahu's *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman and Philosopher*, published in Philadelphia in 1953.¹⁸ Needless to say, these two decades were also those of Nazism, world war, Shoah, and the conflictual foundation of the State of Israel. Yet Baer's opening statement was also a clear criticism of the past, of the only academic book on Abravanel existing at his time, Jacob Guttman's 1916 *Die religionsphilosophischen Lehren des Isaak Abravanel*, and of the methodological limitations of this work written in the spirit of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Indeed, Guttman did not devote even a single one of his 11 chapters to Abravanel's political thought. Although Guttman presents his book in the *Vorwort* as a reparation of a scholarly "*Unrecht*" (injustice) inflicted on Abravanel and his work,

17 Baer, "Don Izhaq Abarbanel," p. 241. (My translation.)

18 Benzion Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman and Philosopher*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998.

he declares on page six already that “Abravanel was not an original thinker, who could have enriched by his own intuitions the development of Jewish philosophy of religion in any new direction.”¹⁹ For Baer, Guttman failed to study the essential link between Abravanel’s political life and its elaboration and reflection within his exegetical, theological and philosophical writings. In his 1931 inaugural lecture at the Institute of Jewish History in Jerusalem, beautifully studied by David Myers, Baer insisted on the hermeneutical-political structure of historical inquiry.²⁰ “Historical knowledge is from beginning to end knowledge of oneself. This is its finality. At first, men begin to inquire into their past to clarify a political question, the origins of a given political situation....” Baer continues: “History is concerned with and loves details. But in every detail it sees the whole ... it sees in every [individual] ... the inner force.”²¹

From the very first lines of his article on Abravanel, Baer intended to point to the failure of the former Jewish *Wissenschaft*. Exemplary of the *Wissenschaft*’s failed contextualization of Abravanel’s work is the beginning of the third chapter of Guttman’s book, which, after the biography and bibliography of Abravanel, initiates the study of Abravanel’s work:

A special discussion of the doctrine of God and particularly of the doctrine of the divine attributes, developed with predilection by Arabic and Jewish philosophy of religion, is not to be found in Abravanel’s work.²²

Whereas the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* had imposed theological and philosophical standards on Abravanel’s work, which were not central to his work, Baer proposed a way to correct the *Wissenschaft*’s abstract contextualization; he developed a new historical and political contextualization of documents and literary sources linked to Abravanel. For Baer, Abravanel’s life and work offered a unique opportunity to understand a central figure of Jewish history: the Court Jew. Instead of looking for a new *Religionsphilosophie* in Abravanel’s work, Baer sought to make of Abravanel a case-study of the political tension between the Court elite and plain Sephardic Jews.

19 Guttman, *Die Religionphilosophischen Lehren*, pp. VII, 6.

20 Myers, *Re-inventing the Jewish Past*, pp. 116-118.

21 Yitzhaq Baer, *Mehkarim ve-masot be-toldotyisrael*, vol. 2, p. 9. [English translation partly taken from Myers, *Re-inventing the Jewish Past*, p. 116].

22 Guttman, *Die Religionphilosophischen Lehren*, p. 48.

Baer characterizes the Court Jew as an ambiguous political figure because of his dual political function at the Court and in the Jewish community. Baer explains Abravanel's ambiguity as a Court Jew through the latter's political, economic, and cultural association with the Christian elites of his times, an association which entailed deep tensions, if not contradiction, regarding Abravanel's role as a Jewish community leader. On the fourth page of his article, Baer formulates this contradiction as such: "In the year in which Abravanel arrived in the Kingdom of Castile, the expulsion of the Jews from Andalusia was proclaimed, and, later, other projects of local expulsion were advanced, until the decision of a general expulsion of the Jews from all the territories of the kingdom was reached." Although the politics of the Catholic kings was oriented against the Jews, "many Jews, among them Rabbi Isaac Abravanel, responded positively to their offer [to serve them as economic agents]."²³ As in Guttman's biographic introduction, Baer insisted on the social contradiction which brought Court Jews to be agents of the new anti-Jewish policy of Catholic monarchs. Yet whereas Guttman approached this policy and the subsequent expulsion of the Jews in terms of "destiny" (*Schicksal*) and *Katastrophe*, Baer searched, using his historiographical method, for the "particular ... the living force of the period and of a historical movement..."²⁴ The dynamic tension between Court Jews and the rest of the community, as well as its role in the implementation of the Jewish policy of the Catholic kings, are set at the heart of Baer's new historical investigation of the Sephardic Court Jews. In this respect, Abravanel appears to Baer to be different than his fellow Court Jews. Whereas Abraham Senior and Meir Melamed surrendered to the "moral and practical pressure of the [Catholic] kings" and converted in order to continue to serve as "perfect heralds of the [new] absolutist regime," "Isaac [Abravanel] was filled with a fierce hatred against this regime [...] and his heart was bounded to the suffering and hopes of the persecuted Jews and conversos in Spain."²⁵ Baer explains Abravanel's difference from the other Court Jews through the latter's new cultural profile, which was apparent in his anti-monarchical attitude, both "a consequence of his personal experience of political life" and "a conception deeply rooted in his heart and theoretically grounded."²⁶

23 Baer, "Don Izhaq Abarbanel," p. 244. (My translation.)

24 Baer, *Mehkarim ve-masot*, vol. 2, p. 10.

25 Baer, "Don Izhaq Abarbanel", p. 244. (My translation.)

26 Baer, "Don Izhaq Abarbanel", p. 242.

According to Baer, Abravanel's new cultural profile made him a complex and contradictory specimen of the Jewish Iberian Court Jew, an ambiguity which manifested itself in a crucial moment in Abravanel's life: his participation in the rebellion of some leading aristocratic families against the newly crowned Portuguese King João II and his new policies in the early 1480s. In the first years of his reign, João II decided to revise his father's alliances with the leading noble families of Portugal, and, more specifically, with Abravanel's patron, Dom Fernando II, Duke of Bragança. These families' active opposition to King João II's new policies led to a palace coup by the king, in which he succeeded in condemning the duke to capital punishment, and forced most of the latter's family and allies to leave Portugal.²⁷ Aware of the complexity of this moment, which could be labeled as both a rebellion and a provocative royal policy, Baer insists that Abravanel participated in the "rebellion" which led to the end of his career at the Portuguese Court and also to the execution of his Christian patron, the Duke of Bragança. Relying on the documents published by Carl Gebhardt in addendum to his 1929 edition of Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'Amore*,²⁸ which testify to Abravanel's economic and political association with the Bragança rebellion party, Baer added a cultural and literary dimension to Abravanel's collaboration with the Bragança clan. To this end, Baer used a Portuguese letter written earlier by Abravanel to a member of the Bragança clan²⁹ in order to establish that Abravanel shared with his Christian patron "a common language, free of any particular religious or national garment, the language of humanism."³⁰

The academic rediscovery of Abravanel's humanistic letter was the result of a joint effort between such Portuguese and Jewish German scholars as Carolina Michaelis de Vasconcelos (1851-1925), Joaquim de Carvalho (1892-1958), Carl Gebhardt (1881-1934), and Jakob Guttmann, in collaboration with a scion of the Abravanel family, Jeanette Schwerin-Abravanel (1852-1899), a leading female figure in

27 Luis Adão da Fonseca, *D. João II*, Rio de Mouro: Circulo de Leitores, 2005, pp. 59-65.

28 Carl Gebhardt, "Regesten," in C. Gebhardt. *Dialoghi d'amore: Hebraeische Gedichte*, Heidelberg, 1929, pp. 1-66.

29 Jeannette Schwerin, "Ein Brief Don Isaac Abravanel's in portugiesischer Sprache," *Magazin für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* 18 (1891), pp. 133-145. Three years earlier, she published a partial German translation of Yehuda Abravanel's *Dialoghi: Des Leone Hebreo (Jehuda Abarbanel) Dialogue über die Liebe aus dem Italienischen übertragen von Jeannette Schwerin-Abarbanel*, Berlin 1888.

30 Baer, "Don Izhaq Abarbanel," p. 241.

the beginning of German social work. Before Baer, scholars had already pointed to the cultural proximity between Abravanel and his patrons. For Jeanette Schwerin, “the letter shows a common character of the writer and the addressee, it reveals in the two men chevaliers of thought and a highly philosophical conception of life.” Noting the “*Intimität des Freundschaftsverhältnisses*” between Abravanel and his addressee, Jeanette Schwerin-Abravanel concludes her introduction to the letter by insisting on the letter’s “pure Portuguese language,” perfectly adapted to “philosophical reasoning,” and depicting Don Isaac Abravanel as a “*Mann von allgemeiner Bildung*.”³¹ Ten years after publishing his monography *Leão Hebreo Filósofo* (Coimbra, 1918), the great Portuguese historian of philosophy Joaquim Carvalho (1892-1958) republished Abravanel’s Portuguese letter in the new Portuguese Journal *Revista de Estudos Hebraicos*, concluding his introductory note on the cultural position of Abravanel:

No doubt that Abravanel was endowed with a deep feeling of the Eternal and with a resignation to His omnipotent will, thereby following the pure Israelite attitude toward life. Yet, he assimilated the contemporaneous ideological background in such a measure that a Christian could subscribe to his letter – all the more so since he wrote in the rhetorical and erudite taste of the prose-writers of his time.³²

For Carvalho, Abravanel, and even more so, his firstborn son, Yehuda Abravanel, incarnated the ambiguities of the birth of modern philosophy. Between submission to “philosophy as a closed and ordered system, in which, if not relying on revelation, the logical process of the spirit consisted uniquely in facilitating or acquiring its intellection” and “the dawn of modern thought”³³ (understood as the affirmation of subjectivity), Isaac Abravanel and Yehuda Abravanel constituted ambiguous social, cultural, and historical figures. Defined as “foreign to the narrow Israelite culture...,” Carvalho even sustained that Isaac Abravanel and Yehuda Abravanel “could have been Christian, Arab or Jew.” For Baer, this indetermination of Abravanel’s cultural background expressed itself on the one hand in

31 Schwerin, “Ein Brief,” p. 134.

32 Joaquim de Carvalho, “Uma Epistola de Isaac Abravanel,” *Revista de Estudos Hebraicos* 1 (1928), p. 235. (My translation.)

33 Joaquim de Carvalho, *Leão Hebreo Filósofo*, Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1918, p. 35.

the adoption of “the language of humanism,” “free from any religious or national garment” (“מופשטת מכל לבוש דתי ולאומי מיוחד”); on the other hand, Abravanel’s Jewish-Christian indetermination drove him also to reject the new monarchical “absolutism,” as expressed in João II’s new anti-aristocratic policies and in the Catholic monarch’s new anti-Jewish policies.

The great novelty of Baer’s article was not in his capacity to identify the complex background behind Abravanel’s political and cultural association with the Christian noble elite. This had already been done from a modern Portuguese perspective by Joaquim de Carvalho, who related Abravanel to new cultural and political developments of the first Portuguese Republic (1910-1926). Baer’s decisive contribution was to connect Abravanel’s complex cultural background with his attitude toward Scripture, expressed in his anti-monarchical commentary on 1 Samuel 8, quoted at the beginning of this paper. Abravanel wrote this commentary after the great political crisis between his clan (around the Duke Fernando de Bragança) and King João II, and just after his escape from Portugal to Castile in 1483. Although Abravanel claims in his autobiographical introduction to the commentary that he did not partake in the plot against the king, Baer considered very innovatively and creatively that the anti-monarchical views expressed by Abravanel were a major factor in his ideological inclination toward the aristocratic party which rejected the “absolutist” policies of King João II.

The solution of this contradiction [plot of the Bragança clan or political maneuver of the king] can be found in the hypothesis that the secret preparation for a rebellion could be interpreted from different perspectives. Yet one must take first into account ... that R. Isaac Abravanel displayed in all his books a fierce hatred of autocratic regimes and viewed constitutional frameworks which limit political power as much as possible as the medicine for the diseases of States. Apparently, this opinion did not only result from his personal experience of political life but was deeply rooted in his heart and theoretically grounded. Maybe this opinion was one of the reasons which brought him to participate in the aristocratic rebellion [against the king] in Portugal. Indeed, what he wrote afterwards in his books [especially in his commentary on 1 Samuel 8] was fixed in his thinking before [the political crisis of 1481-1483] and even partially written.³⁴

34 Baer, “Don Izhaq Abarbanel,” p. 242. (My translation.)

Through this political contextualization, Abravanel's most original political text, his anti-monarchical commentary on 1 Samuel 8, becomes the literary and philosophical expression of Abravanel's association with the Christian Renaissance elite and with its new humanistic ideology. Baer even went so far as explaining Abravanel's resistance to conversion at the time of the 1492 expulsion out of his "hatred" of absolutism. "Men like Abraham Senior and Alfonso dela Cavaleria," writes Baer, "were without doubt devoted defenders of the absolutist regime [of the Catholic kings]. Isaac Abravanel, however, deadly abhorred this regime...."³⁵

This statement seems to contradict Baer's famous social and political understanding of "Jewish Averroism" as a "theoretical justification" of the 12th, 13th and 14th-century social and religious detachment of Jewish elite from the common behavior of the community. The philosophical distinction between the heart and the envelope in religion led, according to Baer, to a treason of the clerks in the great 1391-1415 crisis. Baer seems to consider Abravanel's humanism differently than the "dangerous Jewish Averroism." Although this "historical-theological" argument is only fully developed in *History of the Jews in Christian Spain* published in 1945, Baer already sought to unearth the "class struggle" which informed the tension between mystical-conservative and philosophical Jewish sources in several articles written in the 1930's.³⁶ Yet in the struggle between the Court elite and the poor, which Baer transposed to the tension between rational philosophy and mystical-conservative trends, the stoic, anti-political, ascetic, and messianic motives are considered as having strengthened the social and religious cohesion of the community. In this regard, Abravanel's humanism, as far as it relied on stoicism and on social and political criticism, was not part of the dangerous philosophical elitism of Court Jews. It is this contradiction between Abravanel's social profile and the content of his thought that made Abravanel of historic interest to Baer:

Thus Abravanel, throughout his life, rejected what he saw in his environment. In his books ... he dreamt of being released from the courts of the kings, of sufficing himself with the necessary, and of living in purity and simplicity like Adam in *Gan Eden*. He waited

35 Baer, "Don Izhaq Abarbanel," p. 244. (My translation.)

36 See for example: Baer, *Galut*, Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1936; Baer, "Todros Ben Yehudah ve-zemano," *Zion* 2 (1937), 19-55; Baer, "Ha-megamah ha-datit-hevratit shel 'Sefer Hasidim'," *Zion* 3 (1938), pp. 1-50; Baer, "Ha-reka ha-histori shel 'Raya Mehemma'," *Zion* 5 (1940), pp. 1-44.

impatently for the return of humanity to its original state and to the messianic redemption. Yet he was always brought back to the dramas of political life by his lust for power and by his desire for political leadership – the right occupation for a philosopher trained in the political philosophy of Aristotle and for a man of the Renaissance aspiring for grandeur.³⁷

This lyrical paragraph is far from being a mere reflection on Abravanel's self-image as an *Anti-Courtier*; rather, it seems to embody much of Baer's own social, cultural and political stance as a member of the Jewish and Zionist establishment.

In later sections of his article, Baer further explains Abravanel's humanism, which, in addition to medieval Jewish, Islamic and Christian sources, draws upon new stoic sources, and develops a new historical and realistic interpretation of biblical narratives from this eclectic learning. According to Baer's vivid words of praise:

Abravanel moved from scholastics to reality and to the understanding of the nature of human affairs. And by understanding in a naturalistic manner the stories of the Torah and the Prophets, he strengthened the faith [of his readership] in the biblical text in its concrete meaning, which was until then covered by the fog spread by the "masters of the secret and figurative meaning" such as Maimonides and Ibn Ezra ..., since the words of the Bible are closer to nature than the medieval commentators thought.³⁸

For Baer, Abravanel's anti-monarchical interpretation of 1 Samuel 8 is rooted in a larger conception of human historical evolution as "a progressive decadence from man's natural and original condition." Abravanel's refusal to interpret the institution of monarchy in 1 Samuel 8 according to the medieval distinction between the limited power of the legitimate king and the absolute power of the tyrant relies, according to Baer, on Abravanel's rejection of human technology and civilization, the institution of kingship being just another example of man-made institutions replacing the natural and original human order. Following Baer's interpretation, Abravanel's strong support of a republican regime is the outcome of his neo-stoic humanism, learned from the

37 *Ibid.*, p. 245. (My translation.)

38 *Ibid.*, p. 246. (My translation.)

Christian elites. It delineates a new attitude toward political power, which Baer distinguishes from the “medieval philosophical apologetics” clearly associated, like the Jewish elite, with the justification of monarchy.³⁹

Nonetheless, Abravanel’s greatest contribution in the eyes of Baer did not lie in his rapprochement “of the Venetian Republic to the absolute [political] ideal,”⁴⁰ but in the fact that “he brought back the apology of Judaism to its political predicament, from which it departed in the Hellenistic Period.”⁴¹ Indeed, Abravanel rediscovered through neo-stoic humanism the theocratic regime in the times of the Judges, which for him was the closest to the natural and divine original order.

Government was in the hands of Judges elected by the people and by divine providence. Their role was to administrate justice to the people and to lead the wars of the Lord only according to temporary ordinances. The Israelites lived then according to the just laws and norms written in the Torah of Moses, which are different from the contractual laws of other people and even from the Noachide commandments.⁴²

The depicted ambiguity of Abravanel’s political position as a Court Jew and a community leader is reflected in this twofold model of the republic and the theocracy of the Judges. In 1932, five years before Baer’s article was published, Buber published his book *Königtum Gottes*, in which he developed the idea of a theocratic-anarchic moment that played a decisive formative role in biblical history. The ambiguity of the republican and theocratic models, rediscovered by Baer in Abravanel, seems to echo the “theopolitical paradox” of Buber’s *Königtum Gottes*: “Isn’t the sociologic utopia of a voluntary community only the immanent side of direct theocracy?”⁴³ The anarchical, free community transposed to the ancient “Beduin” society is the other side of God’s theocracy, of God’s dwelling in Israel’s history. Largely in line with Buber’s insistence on the “charismatic authority” of the Judges for “a limited mission” without the political finality of founding a dynasty, Baer concludes his exposition

39 See *Ibid.*, p. 254-256.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 256.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 248.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 256. (My translation.)

43 “Ist doch die soziologische Utopie einer Gemeinschaft aus Freiwilligkeit nichts anderes als die Immanenzseite der unmittelbaren Theokratie?” (Martin Buber, *Königtum Gottes*, Berlin, 1932, p. 144).

of Abravanel's theological-political views as being a clear understanding of the authentic Jewish regime (theocracy), of its superiority over other historical regimes, but also as presenting a correct view of its historical counterpart: the republican regime.

The humanist is a sworn republican. Among the political regimes of his time, the Republic of Venice appeared to Abravanel as coming closest to the absolute ideal. Yet the ideal and divine constitution was only given in the Torah of Moses and fully realized during the rule of the Judges over Israel.⁴⁴

Leo Strauss: Jewish-Islamic versus Jewish-Christian Model

Proximity?

Baer's historical reconstitution of Abravanel's ambiguous model of the republic and the theocracy ends with a footnote referring to the recent scholarly work of Leo Strauss, his former colleague at the *Akademie* in Berlin. Before sending his readers to Strauss' 1935 German book *Philosophie und Gesetz* and his 1936 French article "*Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Maïmonide et de Fârâbi*,"⁴⁵ Baer remarks the following:

The laws of the Torah among medieval philosophers and apologetists [אפולוגטים]! This is a topic almost completely neglected until today. And yet, it was a central principle in the history of [Jewish] apologetics. The Torah as an ideal constitution which was bound to accomplish itself in messianic times, was the first of all principles for Jewish believers until the *Haskalah*.⁴⁶

Following these enthusiastic words of praise for a theological-political approach of Jewish philosophical apologetics, Baer refers to a footnote in Strauss' French article, published just a few months before the publication of his own article. Strauss' footnote appears at the end of a paragraph in which Strauss defines the ideal city established by the Maimonidean

44 Baer, "Don Izhaq Abarbanel," p. 256. (My translation.)

45 Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 2 Philosophie und Gesetz – Frühe Schriften*, H. Meier (Herg.), 3-123; 125-158.

46 Baer, "Don Izhaq Abarbanel", p. 256. (My translation.)

Messiah. “The Messiah,” writes Strauss, “being a king-philosopher, will establish for all time ‘the perfect city’ whose inhabitants will apply themselves, according to their respective faculties, to the knowledge of God, and he will thereby bring to an end the evils which today trouble the cities.”⁴⁷ A few lines before the footnote referring to Strauss, Baer pointed in his article at Abravanel’s view of the government of the Judges as the ideal Jewish regime. The passage to which Baer referred in Strauss’ French article, however, insists on “the eternal peace achieved by the [king-philosopher] Messiah” through a re-centering of Jewish political society around a socially graduated contemplation of the divine.

The tension between Baer and Strauss’ understanding of the genuine Jewish political regime becomes even clearer when studying the footnote to which Baer refers in Strauss’ 1936 article:

We do not take up in the present article the important question concerning the relation between the explication of the Mosaic laws given by Maimonides, and political philosophy. We only note here the fact that Maimonides twice cites passages from the Nicomachean Ethics in order to explain Biblical commandments (Guide III, 43, p. 96a [p. 572] and III, 49 beg.).⁴⁸

As Baer understood and enthusiastically lauded, Strauss points here to the articulation of “Mosaic laws” and “political philosophy.” He does so by referring to two passages in chapters 43 and 49 of the third book of Maimonides’ *Guide*, both of which refer to the eighth book of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. In chapter 49, Maimonides echoes much of the beginning of the eighth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* on φιλία, friendship or civil affection between men.⁴⁹ Of special interest to Strauss and Baer was the connection between Aristotle’s statement that “friendship appears to be the bond of the state [τας πόλεις συνέχειν]”⁵⁰

47 Leo Strauss, “Some Remarks on the political science of Maimonides and Farabi”, *Interpretation* 18 (1990), p. 20. [translation by Robert Bartlett]. For the French original text, see Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 2, ibid.*, p. 151.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 29. For the French original text, see Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 2, ibid.*, p. 151.

49 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, London and Cambridge Mss.: Harvard University Press, 1952, pp. 450-515.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 452-453.

and Maimonides' view on "the great purpose of Law" [אכבר מקאצד אלשריעה] being to reinforce "love and mutual assistance" among Jews.⁵¹

It is well known that friends are something that is necessary for man throughout his whole life. Aristotle has already set this forth in the ninth [eighth] book of the "Ethics". For in a state of health and happiness, a man takes pleasure in their familiar relationship with him; in adversity, he has recourse to them ... The same things may be found to a much greater extent in the relationship with one's children and also in the relationship with one's relatives. For fraternal sentiments and mutual love and mutual help can be found in their perfect form only among those who are related by ancestry. Accordingly a single tribe that is united through a common ancestor – even if he is remote – because of this, love one another, help one another, and have pity on one another; and the attainment of these things is the greatest purpose of the Law. Hence harlots are prohibited, because through them lines of ancestry are destroyed.⁵²

In chapter 43, Maimonides references a later passage in the eighth book of *Nichomachean Ethics*, which Strauss saw as a further esoteric allusion to the political nature of Jewish law.

The Feast of Tabernacles, which aims at rejoicing and gladness, lasts for seven days, so that its meaning be generally known. The reason for its taking place in the season in question is explained in the *Torah*, "When thou gatherest in thy labors out of the field" (Exod. xxiii. 16); this refers to the season of leisure, when one rests from necessary labors. In the ninth [eighth] book of the "Ethics", Aristotle states that this was the general practice of religious communities in ancient times. He says literally: The ancient sacrifices and gatherings used to take place after the harvesting of the fruit. They were, as it were, offerings given because of leisure.⁵³

51 Moise Ben Maimoun, *Dalalat Al Hairin Le Guide des Egarés*, trans. S. Munk, Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1964, vol. 3, p. 113 [Arabic part].

52 Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, pp. 601-602. Maimoun, *Dalalat*, 113.

53 *Ibid*, pp. 571-572. Maimoun, *Dalalat*, p. 96.

Maimonides' quotation of Aristotle seems to first integrate the Feast of Tabernacles in the natural order of ancient societies, the succession of labor and leisure. Yet Maimonides' quotation of Aristotle is taken from a passage which opens in the following way:

But all associations [κοινωνίαι] are parts as it were of the association of the State [μορῖοις της πολιτικης]. Travelers, for instance, associate together for some advantage, namely to procure some of their necessary supplies. But the political association too, it is believed, was originally formed, and continues to be maintained, for the advantage of its members: the aim of the lawgivers is the good of the community [το κοινη συμφερον], and justice is sometimes defined as that which is the common advantage. Thus the other associations aim at some particular advantage; for example sailors combine to seek the profits of seafaring in the way of trade or the like [...] and similarly the members of a tribe or parish [and some associations appear to be formed for the sake of pleasure, for example religious guilds and dining-clubs, which are unions for sacrifice and social intercourse. But all these associations seem to be subordinate to the association of the State which aims not at a temporary advantage but at one covering the whole of life (εις άπαντα τον βίον).] combine to perform sacrifices and hold festivals in connection with them, thereby both paying honor to the gods and providing pleasant holidays for themselves. For it may be noticed that the sacrifices and festivals of ancient origin take place after harvest, being in fact harvest-festivals; this is because that was the season of the year at which people had most leisure [μάλιστα 'εσχόλαζον]. All these associations then appear to be parts of the association of the State [μορῖα της πολιτικης].⁵⁴

According to Strauss' reading, Maimonides' quotation of *Nicomachean Ethics* is not limited to the exoteric allusion of the natural and historical background of the Feast of Tabernacles, but is endowed with an esoteric allusion to the political finality of the seemingly limited norms of Jewish law. As stated earlier in Strauss' article, "this means that only Moses is the philosopher-legislator in Plato's sense or the 'first Chief' in Farabi's sense. But Maimonides does not say this explicitly: he limits himself to indicating the signs which suffice for one 'who will understand,'

54 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 486-489.

for an attentive and duly instructed reader.” Understood in its esoteric meaning, Strauss’ footnote referring to the two Maimonidean quotations of Aristotle proposes a new contextualization of Jewish law, defined not by its particularity, but by its finality: “the foundation of the perfect nation.”⁵⁵ The relationship between the peculiarity of Jewish law and its political finality is similar to the Aristotelian finalist understanding of particular communities as parts of the political [complete] community. In this sense, Baer was right to exalt Strauss for the new field opened by his former *Kollege’s* philosophical and political understanding of Jewish law.

The perfect law, the divine law, is distinguished from the human laws in that it aims not only at the well-being of the body, but also and above all at the well-being of the soul. This consists in man having sound opinions, above all concerning God and the Angels. The divine law has therefore indicated the most important of these opinions to guide man toward the well-being of the soul, but only in a manner which does not surpass the understanding of the vulgar. This is the reason it was necessary that the prophets have at their disposal the supreme perfection of the imaginative faculty: imagination makes possible the metaphorical exoteric representation of the truths whose proper, esoteric meaning must be concealed from the vulgar. For one neither can nor ought to speak of the principles except in an enigmatic manner; this is what not only “men of the law” but also philosophers say.⁵⁶

In the paragraph of Strauss’ article, to which Baer referred in his footnote, Strauss insisted on the expectation that the Torah as an ideal constitution should be realized in messianic times, according to Maimonides. Yet, in the quoted passage appearing just after the footnote, Strauss reveals that divine law already has political efficiency in exile, structuring the society hierarchically around the Law. Relying on Strauss, Baer understood that the political efficiency of the Law “was the first of all principles for Jewish believers up until the *Haskalah*.”⁵⁷

55 Strauss, “Some Remarks,” p. 15. For the original French text, see Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 2*, pp. 144-145.

56 *Ibid*, pp. 17-18. For the French original text, see Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 2*, *ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

57 Baer, “Don Izhaq Abarbanel”, p. 256. (My translation.)

Distance

Yet just after this mark of agreement between Baer and Strauss, the historian adds another remark, very different in its content:

In the critical study of the laws of the Torah, only Abner [of Burgos], the convert preceded Abravanel, with of course the intent to abolish the *Torah*. Unfortunately, the Jews answered him only in general and neutral terms. The Apologists of the Hellenistic Period came closer to the empirical truth.⁵⁸

Baer's footnote, which opened by praising Strauss' discovery of a genuine Jewish political philosophy, seems to end with a clear dissonance between the two former colleagues.

For Strauss, the centrality of Law and its socially graduated efficiency in Jewish society (through different epistemological and imaginative means) was at the heart of Maimonides' articulation of Judaism and political philosophy. For Baer, Abravanel was among the first Jewish thinkers to rediscover the Jewish Hellenistic understanding of the authentic Jewish regime – a discovery which made Abravanel a new thinker “who aspired to a political outlook, clear and well-founded, which was generally missing in the Medieval Period.” Baer even adds that “Abravanel was not satisfied... with the conceptions of the [Jewish] philosophers who had more or less lost contact with political realities.” For the historian of Jerusalem, the modernity of Abravanel lies in his return “to the political premises [of Jewish apologetics] from which Judaism had departed since the Hellenistic Period.”⁵⁹

Strauss and Baer's differing positions on the necessary redefinition of the Jewish political regime can be better understood from an earlier passage in Strauss' French article, which discusses the question of the medieval translation of the Greek concept of *πολις*.

The difference between the complete (*kamila*) communities regarding their size does not imply a difference regarding their internal structure: the city may be as perfect (*fadila*), i.e., directed by an ideal chief toward happiness, as the nation or the nations (*Musterstaat*, p. 54, 5-10. *Siyasat*, p. 50).

58 Baer, “Don Izhaq Abarbanel”, p. 256. (My translation.)

59 *Ibid.*, p. 248.

There is always at least a theoretical preference for the city: it is not by chance that Farabi entitled his most complete political treatise *The Perfect City* and not *The Perfect Nation* (cf. also *Musterstaat*, p. 69, 17-19; this passage could be the direct source of the respective passage of Maimonides). One might say that the perfect city is the ancient core, borrowed from Plato's Republic that Farabi tries to guard and leave intact, however he may be compelled by the theological-political presuppositions of his time to enlarge the Platonic framework, to acknowledge the political unities larger than the city: the nation or nations.⁶⁰

In a marginal note on this passage from the hand of Strauss himself, he refers to an interesting passage in his 1937 English article on Abravanel in which he discusses Baer's article:

This criticism of all political, "artificial", life does not mean that Abravanel intends to replace the conception of the city as something "artificial" by the conception of nations or as of something "natural"; for, according to Abravanel, the existence of nations, i.e. the disruption of the one human race into a plurality of nations, is no less "artificial," no less a result of sin, than is the existence of cities.⁶¹

If Maimonides had succeeded in conserving the original Platonic concept of the *πολις* in his views on the ideal regime of the Jewish nation (via the assimilation of Al-Farabi's political philosophy), for Strauss, Abravanel's "criticism of political organization is truly all-comprehensive"⁶² and leads him not only to an "un-political," but to an "anti-political" outlook.⁶³ Strauss then defines what is "un-political" and even "anti-political" in Abravanel's thought, referring to Baer's article:

As has been shown recently by Professor Baer, Abravanel takes over from Seneca's 90th letter the criticism of human civilization in general (of "artificial" and "superfluous" things) and of the city in particular.⁶⁴

Indeed, the great philological discovery by Baer – that Abravanel's works

60 *Ibid*, p. 10. For the French original text, see Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 2*, p.135.

61 Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 2*, p. 209.

62 *Ibid*.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

64 *Ibid*.

were imbued with humanistic Senequism – is interpreted by Strauss, not as a positive sign of Abravanel's association with Christian elites, nor as an interesting rediscovery of the Hellenistic understanding of a Jewish authentic regime, but as a corruption of the Platonic understanding of the *πολις*. A corruption of the Greek understanding of *πολις* to a Roman and stoic discourse on the intimate connection between city (*civitas*), crafts (*arifices*) and luxury (*luxuria*), is famously expressed in this passage of Seneca's 90th letter:

Nature suffices for what she demands. Luxury (*a natura luxuria descivit*) has turned her back upon nature; each day she expands herself, in all the ages she has been gathering strength, and by her wit (*ingenio*) promoting the vices. At first, luxury began to lust for what nature regarded as superfluous (*supervacua*), then for that which was contrary to nature; and finally she made the soul a bondsman to the body, and bade it be an utter slave to the body's lusts (*corpori libidini deservire*). All these crafts (*artes*) by which the city (*civitas*) is patrolled – or shall I say kept in uproar – are but engaged in the body's business (*corporis negotium*); time was when all things were offered to the body as to a slave (*servo*), but now they are made ready for it as for a master (*domino*).⁶⁵

Instead of being the locus of articulation between human life and ideal law, the city is transformed into a point of departure from the realm of the natural into the realm of artificiality. In this “artificial” transformation, the natural hierarchy between body and soul, as well as the natural order between men, degenerates into an indefinite process of submission to unlimited bodily desires and to human tyranny.

In the long footnote devoted to Baer's philological identification of the stoic sources of Abravanel's (anti-)political thought, Strauss first expresses his need to “make only some slight additions to the ample evidence adduced by Baer.” He refers more precisely than his former colleague to a passage in Seneca's 90th letter concerning “life in the field”: “Meadows beautiful without the use of art (*sine arte*), amid such scenes were their rude homes, adorned by rustic hand.” This “*agreste domicilium*” is defended by Seneca as being “*secundum naturam*.”⁶⁶ According to Strauss, this

65 Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, trans. R. M. Gummhere, London and Cambridge Mss.: Harvard University Press, 1970, vol. II, pp. 408-409.

66 *Ibid.*, pp. 426-427.

doctrine of Poseidonios (c. 135 BCE – c. 51 BCE), which concerned the Golden Age and “the government of the best and the wisest” at that time, was adopted by Abravanel with a theological modification, according to which “Divine Providence extended itself without any intermediary”⁶⁷ in the early age of humanity (and later in the time of Moses). In Abravanel’s commentary on the reason for the punishment of the generation of [human] dispersion [דור הפלגה] (Gen. 11), one finds, as pointed out by Strauss, the Senecian opposition between “the sons of the fields” [בני שדה] and the “city which comprehends all the crafts” [עיר... כוללת המלאכות כולם]:

Although they were given by the Lord and from the Heavens plenty of natural things necessary to their lives, although they were dispensed from work and labor and were prepared to occupy themselves with the perfection of their souls, their minds did not suffice themselves with what the Creator prepared for them in His natural and great gift. They directed their hands and thoughts to the invention of techniques for building a city which comprehends all crafts with a tower in the middle. [They did so] to associate themselves there [in the city] and to make themselves urban citizens, instead of being sons of the fields. They thought that their finality and perfection was the political union of the cities [or States]....⁶⁸

For Baer, this Senecian interpretation of human sins in Genesis 11 made him “discover the literal meaning of Scripture, which had been covered by the veil of *midrash* and later interpretations.” In Baer’s eyes, Abravanel “preceded the interpretation of modern biblical scholars” because he understood that the Jewish political regime was designed to maintain “the sons of Israel as close to the original natural condition [of humanity] as possible for men following the expulsion from Gan Eden.”⁶⁹

Abravanel’s Senecism, and even his rediscovery of Josephus’ criticism of the role of Cain as the “first to build a city” and “the first to put an end to that simplicity in which men lived before,”⁷⁰ are not valued by Strauss as an important historical contribution to the understanding of

67 Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 2*, p. 208.

68 Abarbanel, *Perush al ha-Torah*, Jerusalem, 1964, vol. 1, p. 176. (My translation.)

69 Baer, “Don Izhaq Abarbanel,” pp. 249, 256. (My translation.)

70 Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities Books I-IV*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, Cambridge Mss.: Harvard University Press, 1961, pp. 28-29.

the biblical criticism of the state, and also of biblical political thought in general. Baer, conversely, sees this as a contribution to which modern Jewish scholarship and modern Jewish politics would return in modern times. For Strauss, Abravanel's Senequism was proof that "he [Abravanel] had undermined Maimonides' political philosophy of the law by contesting its ultimate assumption that the city is 'natural' and by conceiving the city as a product of human sin."⁷¹

Strauss' "slight additions" to Baer's philological discovery end with a cryptic reference to Aristotle's opening distinction in *The Nicomachean Ethics* between the "life of enjoyment [τον βίον απολαυστικον], the life of politics [ὁ βίος πολιτικὸς] and the life of contemplation [ὁ βίος θεωρητικὸς]."⁷² Strauss mentions the Jewish reception of this Aristotelian distinction by quoting a passage in Maimonides' *Guide II, 30* which distinguishes between Cain and Abel "who both perished," and Seth, whose existence, in contrast, "perseverated." Strauss goes further and refers to Profiat Duran's explication of the same passage, which explains Maimonides' esoteric distinction between Cain, Abel and Seth by defining Cain as the one "whose endeavor is to gather money and to acquire properties," Abel as the one whose vocation is "to lead the people," and Seth as the one "who is the human theoretical intellect."⁷³ By adding these last philological additions to Baer's discovery, Strauss wanted to hint that Abravanel's criticism of civilization was in tension with an ancient and medieval tradition which considered political organization to be the right way to implement the necessary hierarchy between the intellect, the imagination and bodily desires. Abravanel's criticism of civilization destroys the ancient and medieval articulation *φύσις/πολις* in favor of a providential state of nature and a providential government, strongly disconnected from human political and technical civilization.

Strauss explains further the Abravanelian disjunction of Torah from the Maimonidean-Platonic understanding of Law by cryptically referring to Abravanel's interpretation of the gift of Torah, as derived not from the intellect agent, but from God "without intermediary." Therefore, the laws of the Torah drive the Sons of Israel towards a society which differs entirely from political laws whose natural finality is only "the preservation of the political order."⁷⁴

71 Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 2*, p. 208.

72 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 12-15.

73 Moshe Ben Maimon, *More Nevuchim im perush Shem Tov ve-perush Efodi*, Yasnitz, 1742, p. 76b.

74 Abarbanel, *Perush Abarbanel al ha-Torah*, Jerusalem: Horev Press, 2008, vol. 2, p. 340.

The confrontation of Baer's footnote referring to the work of Strauss with Strauss' critical footnote on Baer's article unearths a clear dissonance between the two. Whereas Baer seems to understand Abravanel's political thought to be a genuine understanding of what Strauss defines in his 1935 book *Philosophie und Gesetz* as the ideal regime implied by the Torah, Strauss points to the tension between the Platonic, Farabian and Maimonidean understandings of the political dimension of Torah, and the Hellenistic and stoic Abravanelian tendency to dissociate Torah and πολις.

A Critique of the Jewish-Christian Ambiguity of Abravanel

The further course of Strauss' article provides that he agrees with Baer on the Christian origins of Abravanel's deviance from Jewish medieval philosophy:

Of Christian origin is, above all, Abravanel's general conception of the government of the Jewish nation. According to him, that government consists of two kinds of government, of a government human and of a government spiritual or divine.⁷⁵

Yet Strauss interprets Abravanel's assimilation of Christian political dichotomy (earthly versus celestial city) not as a sign of a new political and humanistic approach expressing the Jewish-Christian ambiguity of the Court Jew, but as the destruction of Maimonides' genuine political project to articulate revelation and philosophy on the grounds of a "rapprochement with Plato" through the Islamic philosophical traditions of Alfarabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd. Baer read Strauss' harsh criticism of Guttman's *Philosophie des Judentums*, and thought that maybe his own interpretation of Abravanel's rediscovery of the original Jewish regime was in line with Strauss' warning: "...the adequate scientific knowledge of Judaism is bought at the cost of the belief in the authority of revelation, at the cost of a considerable loss to the Jewish 'substance of life.'⁷⁶ Yet whereas Baer took Abravanel's approach to human and biblical history for a new stoic naturalism, that is capable of retrieving

75 Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 2*, p. 222.

76 Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law: Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and His Predecessors*, trans. E. Adler, Albany: SUNY, 1995, p. 45.

the original Ancient Judaism, Strauss understood Abravanel's criticism as an expression of the anti-rational and anti-political dichotomy between nature and the techno-political realm. Indeed, in the eight pages prior to discussing Baer's article, Strauss had already established the real nature of Abravanel's anti-rationalistic and anti-political stance. According to Strauss, Abravanel accepted only the exoteric part of Maimonides' philosophy, in accordance with traditional Jewish beliefs, while rejecting his esoteric project of a rational articulation of the Torah with the ideal law (and hence with nature).⁷⁷

In his book *Philosophie und Gesetz*, Strauss suggested the articulation of a "recognition of the authority of revelation" with its philosophical elaboration into Plato's ideal State as being the alternative model to the failure of modern *Aufklärung*. For this reason, Abravanel's misunderstanding of the political or esoteric-Platonic essence of Jewish philosophy is understood by Strauss as a decisive step toward the decline of an authentic Jewish philosophy. A step which would eventually lead toward the constitution of modern criticism of orthodoxy and medieval theology, and in the later case of Spinoza to a complete disjunction of philosophy and revelation. Strauss concludes his 1937 article on Abravanel by relaying the link between Spinoza and Abravanel, a link already developed by Gebhardt and Carvalho, as mentioned earlier, but this time as proof of the problematic nature of Abravanel's political views. He writes: "To the same connection [the return to the original biblical meaning], belongs Abravanel's criticism of certain traditional opinions concerning the authorship of some biblical books, a criticism by which he paved the way for the much more thoroughgoing biblical criticism of Spinoza."⁷⁸

In Strauss' view, Maimonides' political and philosophical project of justifying Jewish law relied not on a Jewish-Christian alliance, but exclusively on a Jewish-Islamic alliance, defined in *Philosophie und Gesetz* in the following way: "Plato's rapprochement to the Revelation (*die Annäherung Platons an die Offenbarung*) furnishes medieval thinkers with the starting point (*Ansatz*) from which they could understand the Revelation philosophically."⁷⁹ The German term *Annäherung* refers to a central motif in Hermann Cohen's famous 1915 article, *Deutschtum und Judentum*: the affinity between Judaism and central

77 See also Parens, "Leo Strauss on Farabi, Maimonides et al."

78 Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 2*, p. 226.

79 Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, p. 76. (I slightly changed the translation.)

concepts of reformation (*die Verwandtschaft von Juden mit Grundbegriffe der Reformation*) or the rapprochement of Protestantism to prophetism (*Annäherung an den Prophetismus*).⁸⁰ This rapprochement is defined by Cohen as the overlapping of the German Protestant Reformation and earlier Maimonidean Jewish “*Protestantismus*,” relying on their common idealistic and ethical-rational orientation.⁸¹ Strauss’ replacement of the Jewish-Protestant alliance around the model of the *Aufklärung* with the medieval Jewish-Islamic alliance was, of course, an attack on the theological-political foundation of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Yet this attack should not only be attributed to the impact of the Nazi regime on Strauss’ life and thought while exiled in France, and later in England, but rather to his search for an alternative model to liberalism as well, as can be read in his 1933 letter to Karl Löwith:

I see no acceptable possibility to live under the swastika [*dem Hakenkreuz*], i.e., under a symbol that says nothing else to me except: “You and your kind, you are subhuman φουσαι and therefore true pariahs.” There exists here only *one* solution. We must repeatedly say to ourselves, we “men of science” – for so people like us called ourselves during the Arab Middle Ages – *non habemus locum manentem, sed quaerimus...* And, as to the substance of the matter: i.e., that Germany having turned to the right does not tolerate us, that proves absolutely nothing against right-wing principles. On the contrary: only on the basis of right-wing principles – on the basis of fascistic, authoritarian, *imperial* principles – is it possible with integrity, without the ridiculous and pitiful appeal to the *droits imprescriptibles de l’homme*, to protest against the money grubbing bedlam [*das meskine Unwesen*]. I am reading Caesar’s *Commentaries* with deeper understanding, and I think about Virgil: *Tu regere imperio... parcere subjectis et debellare superbos*. There exists no reason to crawl to the cross [*zu Kreuze zu kriechen*], to liberalism’s cross as well, as long as somewhere in the world there yet glimmers a spark of the *Roman* thought [*des römischen Gedankens*]. And even then: better than any cross, the ghetto.⁸²

80 Hermann Cohen, *Jüdische Schriften, Zweiter Band Zur Jüdischen Zeitgeschichte*, Berlin, p. 256.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 244.

82 William H. Altmann, *The German Stranger: Leo Strauss and National Socialism*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012, p. 227.

Far from forcing him back to liberalism, Strauss' 1933 exile from Germany led him to find a stable philosophical and historical axis in the attitude of Arab "men of science". This enabled him to face the catastrophe of the collapse of Germany from afar and to accept his Jewish fate. Perceiving Abravanel's thought from this perspective, Strauss was particularly prone to decipher in Abravanel's views the degeneration of the Jewish-Islamic political articulation of accepted religious norms and the philosophical drive toward perfection. Such degeneration could only lead, according to Strauss' historical vision, to a dangerous limitation of political philosophy, which would no longer rely on the virtuous circle of the "legal foundation of philosophy" and "the philosophical foundation of Law", leading from medieval Enlightenment to modern Enlightenment.

One can with a certain right call Maimonides's position "medieval religious Enlightenment." With a certain right: namely if one accepts the view that not only for the modern Enlightenment and thus for the Age of Enlightenment *proper*, from which the expression "Enlightenment" is customarily *transferred* to certain phenomena of the Middle Ages (and of antiquity) but also for Maimonides and his predecessors and successors in the Middle Ages, it is a matter of the freedom of human thought, the "freedom of philosophizing." But one must not for a moment leave any doubt that these medieval philosophers were precisely *not* Enlighteners in the proper sense; for them it was *not* a question of *spreading* light, of educating the *multitude* to rational knowledge, of *enlightening*; again and again they enjoin upon the philosophers the duty of *keeping secret* from the unqualified multitude the rationally known truth; for them in contrast to the Enlightenment proper, that is, modern Enlightenment, the *esoteric* character of philosophy was unconditionally established. To be sure, even in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were men who, to quote Voltaire, claimed: "Quand la populace se mêle à raisonner, tout est perdu;" and on the other hand, even men like Maimonides had in mind *a certain* enlightenment of all men. But if one considers that the modern Enlightenment, as opposed to the medieval, generally *publicizes* its teachings, one will not object to the assertion that the medieval Enlightenment was essentially esoteric, while the modern Enlightenment was essentially exoteric.⁸³

83 Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, p. 102.

Retrieving in the first years of his exile from Germany esoteric medieval Enlightenment from the collapse of modern *Aufklärung*, Strauss could not interpret Abravanel's redefinition of Jewish political philosophy as a historical fact, opening new relations between philosophy, politics, religion, technique and nature. He was bound to see only a negative Christian influence on Jewish thought, with the fateful result of replacing the esoteric insertion of philosophy within the pre-modern political environments with the exoteric confusion of philosophy and modern constant transformation of political organization. By rejecting Abravanel in 1937, Strauss was struggling against time and tracing back the origin of a historical peril.

Conclusion

Following Baer's discovery of the twofold political model of Abravanel (republicanism and the theocracy of the Judges) and the dual cultural background (Renaissance Christian Humanism and Jewish medieval literature), Strauss was also driven to deal with the political dimension of Abravanel's work. Yet he devoted much effort to prove that Abravanel had no authentic republican concept and that his republicanism was nothing more than "a tribute he paid to the fashion of his time."⁸⁴ One of the main philological contributions of Strauss' article was to prove, in opposition to Baer's positive attitude towards theocracy, that Abravanel's antimonarchic interpretation of 1 Samuel 8 relied on Nicholas of Lyra's concept of God as *rex immediatus illius populi*, as the direct King over Israel.⁸⁵ For Lyra, as for Abravanel, Buber, and his followers, God's direct kingship made the demand for a human king *contra ordinationem Domini* (against the order of the Lord). If for Baer, Abravanel's republican-theocratic commentary on 1 Samuel 8 was a positive expression of his political and cultural association with the Christians, and possibly a model for a new Jewish society in *Eretz Israel*, for Strauss, Abravanel's republican-theocratic model eventually relied on a superficial humanism and a dangerous assimilation of Christian theocratic models which were eventually responsible for the end of an authentic political understanding of Judaism, and for the advent of Christian and Jewish *Aufklärung's* lack of philosophical interest in Revelation. The Jewish-Christian ambiguity

84 Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 2*, p. 215.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 220.

of Abravanel is thus at the heart of the debate between Baer and Strauss on the interpretation of Abravanel's political contribution to Jewish history. For Baer, this Jewish-Christian ambiguity is the backdrop for the elaboration of new social, historical and political conceptions which expressed a genuine Jewish political model, but unfortunately proved unfruitful in a time of absolutism, expulsions and persecutions. For Strauss, Abravanel's Jewish-Christian ambiguity destroyed an authentic philosophical Platonic-Farabian understanding of Jewish law and accounted for future modern disastrous consequences. While both Baer and Strauss left the German-Jewish emancipation model behind them, no doubt their respective 1937 study of Abravanel's republican-theocratic model was also a reflection on its value for the new Jewish society in Palestine (in the case of Baer) or on its negative consequences for Jewish history (in the case of Strauss). The two former colleagues at the *Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* both displayed in their critical dialogue a multifaceted critique of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, pointing to its incapacity to understand Jewish political agency and Jewish political philosophy.

Yehuda Halper

God, Δαιμόνιον, and “The Absent Philosopher”:

Constructing a Socratic Dialogue between Halevi and his Readers according to Leo Strauss’ “The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*”

George Kohler has recently examined how Jewish thinkers of the 19th century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement turned to Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari* as a basis for their own philosophical and theological reflections.¹ Leo Strauss’ article, “The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*”, first published in 1943,² also provides an account of the contemporary relevance of *Kuzari*, one that emphasizes the importance of political philosophy. Although philosophy is explicitly under attack in the *Kuzari*, Strauss finds an implicit defense of philosophy by reading the work in comparison with Plato’s dialogues.

Leo Strauss’ “The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*” may be the most scholarly of Strauss’ works. The 142 footnotes are rife with detailed references to academic scholarship of the 19th and early 20th centuries, e.g., Moritz Steinschneider, Salo Baron, Julius Guttmann, H. A. Wolfson, Isaak Heinemann, Moïse Schwab, Paul Kraus, Alexander Marx, Shlomo Pines, and Moïse Ventura. Indeed, there is hardly a modern scholar of Jewish or Islamic thought who does not appear in Strauss’ footnotes. Moreover, Strauss also provides well-documented references to numerous medieval texts in the most recent critical editions, such as Ibn Ṭufayl’s *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzan* in Gauthier’s 1936 Beirut edition, Al-Razi’s *The Philosophical Life* in Paul Kraus’ 1935 edition, and Averroes’ *Incoherence of the Incoherence* in Maurice Bouyges’ 1930 Beirut edition – to name just a few. Strauss also gives philological interpretations of various Arabic

- 1 George Y. Kohler, “Yehuda Halevi’s *Kuzari* and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (1840-1865),” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 109 (2019): 335-359 and *ibid.*, “The Captivating Beauty of the Divine Spark – Breslau and the Reception of Yehuda Halevi’s *Kuzari* (1877-1911).” *Transversal* 14 (2016): 26-34.
- 2 Leo Strauss, “The Law of Reason in the ‘Kuzari,’” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 13 (1943): 47-96. This article was reprinted without significant changes as Chapter 4 of Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952. Reissued Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). References are to the 1943 text.

terms, such as *siyāsa*³ and *al-nawāmīs al-‘aqaliyyab*⁴. Similarly, references to Al-Farabi’s works preserved in obscure printer’s copies published in Hyderabad⁵ give the impression of vast erudition, particularly in the fields of Arabic and Islamic philosophy. This impression was carefully cultivated by Leo Strauss in this article, even though his Arabic was probably fairly rudimentary.⁶ Indeed, in his other writings Strauss usually cites Arabic philosophy in medieval or renaissance Latin or Hebrew translations.⁷ In order to present such mastery of Arabic thought in his *Kuzari* article, it is possible that Strauss consulted with his brother-in-law, the Arabist Paul Kraus, whose works appear throughout the footnotes.⁸

The carefully cultivated impression of erudition in Islamic and Jewish

- 3 P. 73, n. 72. Cf. pp. 92-93, n. 133. These philological arguments do not cite any secondary sources.
- 4 P. 50, n. 8. Strauss says that he is “not at all certain whether [the literal translation of this expression as ‘the intellectual *nomos*’] is not the most adequate one.” Again, he does not mention any secondary sources.
- 5 P. 71, n. 67 and p. 73, n. 72. Strauss’ citations refer to the Muslim, Hijri years of publication, 1345 and 1346, which correspond to 1926-1927 C.E. For a description of this volume, see Muhsin Mahdi, *Alfarabi’s Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), 151-152.
- 6 Dimitri Gutas noted, Strauss “did not know Arabic well enough to read Arabic philosophy.” See Dimitri Gutas, “The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (2002): 20. However, Steven Harvey notes that in a letter of Strauss to Cecil Adler from 1933, Strauss asserts that he has studied several Muslim philosophers in Arabic manuscript. Harvey cites a personal communication with Thomas Meyer to the effect that “Strauss was taught some Arabic by his sister Bettina already in the mid-1920s.” Nevertheless, Harvey does not think it likely that Strauss was ever proficient enough in Arabic “to read through an Arabic text with without the help of a translation.” See Steven Harvey, “The story of a twentieth-century Jewish scholar’s discovery of Plato’s political philosophy in tenth-century Islam: Leo Strauss’ early interest in the Islamic *Falāsifa*,” in *Modern Jewish Scholarship on Islam in Context: Rationality, European Borders, and the Search for Belonging*, ed. Ottfried Fraisse (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 219-241, esp. 224-225.
- 7 For example, in two letters to Gershom Scholem from 1960 and then 1973 he cites Averroes “in the beautiful Arabic Latin created by some of our ancestors.” See Joel Kraemer, “The Medieval Arabic Enlightenment”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, ed. Steven Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p. 170, n. 115.
- 8 Unfortunately, there can be no confirmation of this collaboration since Paul Kraus died under suspicious circumstances in Cairo a few months after the first publication of the article. Strauss also mentions his sister Bettina’s work on Ibn Wahshiyya, p. 78, n. 88. On Strauss’ relationship to his sister and brother-in-law and their tragic deaths, see Joel Kraemer, “The Death of an Orientalist: Paul Kraus from Prague to Cairo”, in *The Jewish*

thought that Strauss labored to display stands in stark contrast to his use of Greek philosophy in the article. Greek philosophical works, in fact, are cited throughout the article, yet these are cited by Stephanus and Bekker pages without reference to modern editions. Strauss is apparently less interested in Aristotle's thought, citing no text besides the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the pseudo-Aristotelian *Magna Moralia*,⁹ but he refers to numerous works of Plato: *Republic*, *Menexenus*, *Second Letter*, *Parmenides*, *Apology*, *Laws*, and *Phaedo*. Yet, other than an injunction on the readers to check certain terms in the index to Otto Apelt's 1916 German translation of Plato's *Laws*,¹⁰ Strauss cites none of the wealth of German scholarship on Plato.

He does refer to some scholarship on the transmission history of Plato into Arabic,¹¹ but here he is somewhat wily. Thus, in order to show that Plato's *Laws* was available to Halevi he cites discussions of the book's title in Steinschneider's *Die arabischen Übersetzungen aus dem Griechischen*, his *Die hebraeischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters* and Alexander Marx's "Texts by and about Maimonides."¹² The only problem is that Steinschneider is actually discussing how the *Laws* was frequently confused for another magical work that was disseminated under the same name¹³ and Marx presents a letter in which R. Sheshet Ha-Nasi mentions a work called ספר נימוסי השכל, but which from Sheshet's description resembles more the *Phaedo* than the *Laws*. Marx, in fact, suggests that what Sheshet has in mind is not the *Laws* at all, but the *Republic*!¹⁴ This is to say that Strauss' sources make no definitive claims

Discovery of Islam: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis, ed. Martin Kraemer (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center, 1999), 181-223.

- 9 Strauss does mention the *Rhetoric* in n. 2, but only to say he will discuss it elsewhere.
- 10 P. 78, n. 87, referring to *Platons Gesetze*. 2 vols. (Meiner, Leipzig 1916), now online: http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11171848_00007.html.
- 11 E.g., Strauss refers to Paul Kraus, "Plotin chez les Arabes," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* 23 (1940-41): 269 ff., but he uses the article only to argue that Al-Farabi's esotericism "has nothing in common with mysticism." See p. 64, n. 46.
- 12 See p. 70, n. 62, p. 77, n. 86, and p. 93, n. 136, referring to Moritz Steinschneider, *Die arabischen Übersetzungen aus dem Griechischen* (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1897); *ibid.*, *Die Hebraeischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin, Kommissionsverlag des Bibliographischen Bureaus, 1893); and Alexander Marx, "Texts by and about Maimonides," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 25.4 (1935): 371-428.
- 13 In *Die arabischen Übersetzungen aus dem Griechischen*, p. 116, Steinschneider suggests that Ibn Ezra may have distinguished the genuine book of the Laws from the magical one. This argument could perhaps be said to apply to what Strauss saw as Halevi's ability to distinguish the two works, however this is speculation.
- 14 Albeit, the *Republic* confused with the *Laws*. See Alexander Marx, "Texts by and about Maimonides," p. 410.

about what precisely was circulating under the name of Plato's *Laws* and certainly do not justify comparing the *Laws* to the *Kuzari* using Otto Apelt's index. The situation with the *Apology* is similar, with Strauss drawing on Steinschneider's note that an Arabic name for the *Apology* was mentioned in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's *Lives of the Physicians*¹⁵ in order to justify drawing "parallels, not necessarily borrowings" between the *Kuzari* and the *Apology*.¹⁶ In fact, as we shall see, Strauss uses these "parallels" to suggest that the *Kuzari* is in some crucial respects modeled after Plato's *Apology*. Thus, it seems that Strauss strives to give a veneer of scholarly references justifying his comparison of Plato and Halevi, but that these references are far from adequate. Indeed, for most of the Platonic works cited, e.g., the *Menexenus*, Strauss does not give any scholarly justification for such comparisons at all. That the *Kuzari* is itself "written in the form of a Platonic dialogue," Strauss passes off as a "fact" "noted" by Salo Baron. Yet in context Baron does not clearly take this expression to mean anything other than that the *Kuzari* is a dialogue which treats philosophy.¹⁷

15 See *Die arabischen Übersetzungen aus dem Griechischen*, p. 22.

16 P. 59, n. 31. In general, Strauss uses Steinschneider to support claims far more extensive than Steinschneider actually had in mind. E.g., Steinschneider's observation that the Hebrew *נימוסיית* is used by Judah Natan in ways similar to how the expression *נפאת ההסתכמה* was used by Samuel ibn Zarza becomes for Strauss proof that "the best translation of Averroes' interpretation of [Aristotle's expression] *δίκαιον φυσικόν* would be 'ius naturale conventionale'" (p. 49, n. 5). Now, this argument requires a host of assumptions across four languages and cultures that I cannot imagine Strauss could have accepted at face value.

17 See Strauss, "Law of Reason," pp. 56-57, n. 27, referring to Salo Baron, "Yehudah Halevi: An Answer to an Historic Challenge," *Jewish Social Studies* 3.3 (1941): 257. Baron states there that Halevi turned away from poetry toward "a systematic presentation of his ideas on Jews and Judaism which, though written in the form of a Platonic dialogue and often filled with poetic similes, nevertheless belonged to the scholarly-philosophic prose of the period." Indeed, Baron seems to imply that stylistically, the *Kuzari* is closer to other writings of his time than to Plato's dialogues. Another of Strauss' mentions of Baron's article is also not entirely straightforward. At "Law of Reason," p. 62, n. 38, Strauss cites Baron when arguing that "In the case of a man such as Halevi, however, the influence of philosophy on him consists in a conversion to philosophy: for some time, we prefer to think for a very short time, he was a philosopher." Yet Baron ("Yehudah Halevi," p. 259, n. 33) states, "Like most of his compatriots of the cultured classes [Halevi] was a student of Graeco-Arabian philosophy and ethics, but he increasingly realized the futility of some of its answers with respect to the hard and fast realities of his age. ... This does not mean that he wished to abandon the rational approach to life. As a matter of fact, notwithstanding his sharp critique of the prevalent rationalist trends in Arabian thought ... remained basically a rationalist to the end of his life." See below, n. 37 of this article.

We are faced, then, with the following facts about Strauss' article on the *Kuzari*: 1. Strauss meticulously cites numerous scholarly sources documenting medieval Islamic and Jewish thinkers and their works; 2. Strauss cites a number of Plato's dialogues, but without any classical scholarship on his works; and 3. Strauss cites a few sources on how Halevi might have encountered Plato, but examination of these sources makes it clear that they are somewhat inadequate for the use Strauss makes of them. Strauss, then, does not attempt to convince his readers of his expertise in classical scholarship as he does with regard to medieval scholarship. Moreover, the careful reader of Strauss' footnotes would not fail to notice that the connection between Plato and Halevi is not so well supported as Strauss implies in the rest of the article. Rather than assume that Strauss did not know what he was doing here, I think it more likely that he is actively departing from the scholarly path when it comes to interpreting Plato and that he is signaling that departure with his citations of Steinschneider, Marx, and Baron that misleadingly attribute to them the notion that Halevi was an avid reader of Plato. In other words, Plato is for Strauss in the *Kuzari* article a signal of Strauss' own creative reading of the *Kuzari*. If this is correct, then Strauss' Platonic reading of Halevi is not so much a scholarly attempt to understand Halevi on his own terms, but a molding of Halevi into a "Platonic thinker" a la Strauss' own view of what such a Platonic thinker is.¹⁸

II

Most of the references to Plato occur in a relatively short section of the *Kuzari* article which Strauss calls "The Literary Character of the *Kuzari*," where Strauss describes the *Kuzari* in general before he turns

However, Strauss "Law of Reason," p. 65, n. 49, also cites Baron when claiming that there were there were doubting Jews in Halevi's time, a position more or less echoed in Baron, "Yehudah Halevi," p. 252 ff.

- 18 An anonymous reviewer points out that there is a certain parallel here to Strauss' somewhat forced use of Avicenna's supposed reliance on Plato's *Laws* to argue that prophecy is part of political science. See Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law: Essays toward the Understanding of Maimonides and his Predecessors*, trans. Fred Baumann (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1987), 100-105. See also Georges Tamer, *Islamische Philosophie und die Krise der Moderne: Das Verhältnis von Leo Strauss zu Alfarabi, Avicenna und Averroes* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 55-86.

to an elucidation of those places where Halevi mentions “rational laws,” נואמים עקליה.¹⁹ The section has eleven paragraphs describing the dialogical character of the *Kuzari*. The careful reader will notice that Strauss actually describes two characters of the *Kuzari*, one in the first five paragraphs and another in the final five. The sixth and central paragraph of the section describes the turning point in the section, accounting for the difference between the explicit dialogue of the *Kuzari*, as described in the first five paragraphs, and the hidden or secret dialogue that emerges in the latter five paragraphs.

That a difference between the explicit text and an implicit argument exists is derived by Strauss from the fact Halevi does not speak in his own name in the *Kuzari* and accordingly leaves the statements of the various characters in the work to be understood according to the “conversational situation” of the text. That is, the “conversational situation” may be intended to lead the reader who has understood the dialogic character of the work to different views than those put forward by the characters themselves.²⁰ Strauss describes this kind of work as “imitative,’ not ‘narrative,’” using terms he takes from Plato’s *Republic* 394b9-c3.²¹ In that part of the *Republic*, Socrates gives Tragedy and Comedy as examples of “imitative” works. Years later, in his essay on Plato’s *Republic* in *The City and Man*, Strauss uses the same section of the *Republic* to note that Platonic dialogues also fall under the same category of “imitative” work. A consequence of this, according to Strauss, is that “Plato conceals himself completely” in his writings, or, as Strauss terms them, his “dramas.” Insofar as these dramas treat austere and serious subjects, they are tragedies, but insofar as Socrates has a propensity to laugh, but not to cry, they are also comedies. As with stage-plays, the readers must take into account not only the speeches of the characters, but also the dramatic setting and the intentions behind those speeches. That is, one must read not only Socrates’ words, but also “the silent action of Socrates.”²²

19 Strauss, “Law of Reason,” 50–65.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

21 See *Ibid.*, p. 52, n. 16.

22 See Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), pp. 59–61. Strauss may have a similar notion in mind in a series of notes written for the essay “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” which were typed up in 1939, but not published in Strauss’ lifetime. There Strauss says, “All Platonic writings are *dialogues*. Dialogues are a kind of *dramas* (*sic*) ... What is the characteristic feature of the drama according to *Plato*? Drama is that kind of poetry in which the author *hides* himself.” The notes are brought

The first five paragraphs of Strauss' "The Literary Character of the *Kuzari*" thus treat certain aspects of the dramatic setting of the *Kuzari* in some detail. Strauss clarifies that the *Kuzari* is not a philosophic book, but a defense of the Jewish religion, i.e., a work of *kalām*. Given Halevi's literary excellence, he must have considered a dialogue between the Khazar King, the philosopher and the Jewish scholar to be "the ideal setting for a defence of Judaism."²³ Strauss argues at some length that it would be easy to defend Judaism before Jews, or even Christians or Muslims who recognize the divine origins of Judaism, but much more challenging to defend Judaism before a pagan, particularly a pagan who is hostile to Judaism at the outset. The argument is even stronger, Strauss notes, if the drama is based on historical events and can make a claim to have actually occurred, as indeed we find in the opening of the *Kuzari*. The first half of the section on the *Kuzari*'s literary character then presents the dialogue as a work of literary persuasion, arguing for the superiority of Judaism over philosophy and other monotheistic religions. As far as I can tell, this view of the *Kuzari* is not incompatible with the views of Kaufmann²⁴ and Guttman.²⁵

Yet, Strauss throws a wrench in the works by comparing the efforts not to defend Judaism before Jews to Socrates' efforts not to praise the Athenians to the Athenians in a highly contrived, rhetorical speech in Plato's *Menexenus*.²⁶ In Plato's *Menexenus*, Socrates presents an elaborate

in full in *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s*, ed. Martin Yaffe and Richard Ruderman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 293-304, this passage is on p. 302. Strauss does not here refer to the action, silent or otherwise, of Socrates. Nevertheless, I think it reasonable to assume that his view of the importance of the dramatic action of Platonic dialogues was nascent in 1939, more developed in 1943 when "Law of Reason" first came out, and more explicitly developed later in, e.g., *City and Man* and such works as *The Argument and the Action of Plato's Laws* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

23 Strauss, "Law of Reason," p. 54.

24 See, e.g., David Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre in der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1982), 119 ff. Kaufmann opens his discussion of Halevi with a mention of Halevi's contribution to his paternal heritage by demonstrating the superiority of Judaism to philosophy (along with Christianity and Islam) before Halevi's "Judgement seat" (*Richterstuhl*).

25 See, e.g., Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, trans. David Silverman (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 136-151. Guttman repeatedly emphasizes his view that Halevi saw the point of the *Kuzari* as demonstrating the superiority of Judaism to other religions and especially to philosophy. Moreover, Guttman claims, "Halevi's religious idea of God advances a new theory ..." (pp. 150-1), i.e., that the religious ideas prepare him to form a superior theoretical understanding of the divine.

26 Strauss, "Law of Reason," p. 54.

funeral oration for fallen Athenian soldiers which he claims to have heard from Pericles' special-lady-friend, Aspasia. Many elements of the dialogue are parallel to Strauss' first account of the literary character of the *Kuzari*. Not only does the funeral oration argue for the racial, political, legal, moral, and military superiority of the Athenians, it also describes how the enemies of Athens, including the Spartans and the Persians, came to acknowledge that superiority and even to praise Athens. It does this through a historical argument based on well-known events. By having Socrates state these praises, Plato portrays the philosopher bending toward the city and acknowledging the importance of those whom the city chooses to honor – an attitude quite different from the *Apology*, where Socrates suggests that the city is honoring all the wrong people, particularly non-philosophers. Yet the *Menexenus* is a parody. In its preface Socrates makes clear his great derision for such speeches; the historical argument is laden with anachronism; and most significantly, it is not presented before Spartans or Persians, but before the Athenian people within the story – but actually before a young Menexenus in the dramatic setting of the dialogue itself.

Similarly, the *Kuzari* is not to be read by pagans, who as the king notes, do not speak Arabic,²⁷ but by Jews. Also, the historical veracity of aspects of the events in the dialogue were certainly subject to question. That is, it in no way meets the criteria for persuasion that Strauss lays out for it. Strauss notes further that far from being persuaded by the Jewish scholar simply, the events of the dialogue, *viz.* the king's rejection of his own paganism, philosophy, Christianity, and Islam before the Jewish scholar arrives on the scene, mean that the king has no choice but to embrace Judaism even before he knows anything about it.²⁸ As a work of *kalām*, then, it is remarkably unpersuasive.

Strauss, though, puts great stock in the philosopher, who is absent from over 95% of the book. For Strauss, what is most important about the philosopher is what he does not do. He does not have a conversation with the Jewish scholar and he does not succeed in persuading the king to become a philosopher, despite the king's tendency to be easily persuaded by philosophical arguments. The Jewish scholar is quite knowledgeable in philosophy and that there is no discussion of philosophy between him

27 *Kuzari* I 6, where the King cannot accept the argument for the divine beauty of the Quran because he does not speak Arabic. This is of course somewhat puzzling, since the entire discourse of the *Kuzari* is written in Arabic.

28 P. 55.

and the philosopher is said to be in agreement with “Platonic dialogues,” in which mature philosophers never discuss philosophy together.²⁹ The dialogue between the king and the philosopher is said by Strauss to resemble the kind of dialogues described in Plato’s *Second Letter*. Presumably, he is referring to the indirect, allusion-laden language with which Plato says he addresses the king of Sicily, seeking unsuccessfully to persuade him that both would benefit from the king’s praise of philosophy. Yet his specific citation (310e4-311b7) refers to Plato’s claim that wisdom (φρόνησις) and great power (δύναμις μεγάλη) come together by nature (πέφυκε συνιέναι) and always seek to consort together (ζητεῖ καὶ συγγίγνεται). Plato’s cites numerous examples, including Croesus and Solon and Agammemnon and Nestor, but the standard seems to be the speech of the common people (ἐν τε ἰδίαῖς συνοουσίαῖς). Like Dionysius of the *Second Letter*, the king of Khazaria is not convinced to follow or promote philosophy. Nor does the Khazar king seek to be known for his association with the Philosopher. Yet, the Khazar King, despite having “only a superficial knowledge of philosophy,”³⁰ continues to be “deeply impressed by” the arguments of the philosopher as late as Book V of the *Kuzari*.³¹ Dionysius, too, rejects the advice of Plato, but continues to pursue a kind of interest in philosophy, or at least in the appearance of being a philosopher.³² Plato, however, raises serious doubts about whether Dionysius is, in fact, a true philosopher.³³

In the second half of the section on the literary character, Strauss turns with more detail to the dialogue that did not occur in the *Kuzari* between the philosopher and the Jewish scholar, but with the caveat that “Halevi knew too well that a genuine philosopher can never become a genuine convert to Judaism.”³⁴ The genuine philosopher Strauss has in mind is like Socrates, whom the Jewish scholar cites twice as saying that he possesses “human wisdom” but not “divine wisdom.” Strauss goes further, comparing the *Kuzari* to Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*. According to the *Apology*, Socrates is “set in motion” by an oracle at Delphi and then subsequently by his own δαιμόνιον to examine “the representatives

29 Pp. 56-57, n. 27. It is here that the *Parmenides* is mentioned as an example of a dialogue in which Parmenides is a mature philosopher, but Socrates is young and “in the position of the inferior.”

30 P. 68.

31 P. 63.

32 See, e.g., the Seventh Letter, 338d-339b.

33 *Ibid.* 339b-346d.

34 P. 57.

of various types of knowledge.” These examinations then lead him to refute all claims to knowledge in Athens; his subsequent claim of ignorance includes knowledge not only of his own ignorance, but also of the ignorance of the religious citizens of Athens. This realization and then the consequent, or perhaps concurrent examination of that ignorance constitute philosophy and the philosophical way of life. Similarly, the Khazar king is “set in motion” by an angelic dream which leads him to examine “the representatives of various beliefs.” The refutation of these beliefs, one of which is philosophy, leads the king to accept those beliefs that he cannot refute and to convert to Judaism. Explicitly, then, the *Kuzari* is the anti-*Apology*, in Strauss’ view. The *Apology*, as Strauss notes, is ironic³⁵: divine revelation, in the form of the oracle and perhaps the δαίμόνιον, spurs Socrates to reject divine revelation in favor of “human wisdom” alone. The *Kuzari*, in contrast, is not ironic: the divine revelation spurs the Khazar king only to adopt another form of divine revelation.

Yet Strauss’ main concern in the later paragraphs, especially paragraphs 8 and 9,³⁶ is with what a dialogue between the philosopher and the Jewish scholar might look like. He is particularly concerned with the question of whether the philosopher would accept the Jewish scholar’s arguments against philosophy. This, of course, would be different if Halevi himself were a philosopher. Strauss argues at some length that since Halevi was a serious thinker and since he was seriously influenced by philosophy at some point in his life, he must himself have undergone “a conversion to philosophy” at least for some time.³⁷ If, as Strauss stated earlier, “Halevi knew too well that a genuine philosopher can never become a genuine convert to Judaism,” we must have serious reservations about whether Strauss thought that Halevi could ever genuinely return to Judaism after having converted to philosophy. Yet it is precisely “if Halevi were a philosopher” that, according to Strauss, the absence of a dialogue between the philosopher and the Jewish scholar would be

35 P. 60, n. 33. Strauss adds: “Those who do not think that Halevi noticed Socrates’ irony, are requested to disregard this paragraph which is based on the assumption, in itself as indemonstrable as theirs, that he did notice it.”

36 Pp. 59-63.

37 As mentioned in n. 17 of this article above, Strauss here once again somewhat disingenuously cites Salo Baron as evidence of this (Strauss, “Law of Reason,” p. 62, note 38), though Baron makes no such claim. Baron merely notes that Halevi says that man “is rarely strong enough not to be deceived by the views of philosophers, scientists, astrologers, adepts, magicians, materialists and others, and can adopt a belief without having first passed through many stages of heresy.”

so important. For in this case, “The purpose of that feature of the work [*viz.* the absence of such a dialogue] would be to compel the reader to think constantly of the absent philosopher, i.e., to find out, by independent reflection, what the absent philosopher might have to say.” That is to say, in such a case, the reader would have to construct the absent dialogue himself.

What would such a dialogue look like? The reader would be set in motion by the *Kuzari* to examine the representatives of various types of knowledge as they are presented in the *Kuzari*. The reader would then have to choose whether to adopt philosophy or religion. Halevi in this case would “have been compelled to state the case for philosophy with utmost clarity and vigor, and thus to present an extremely able and ruthless attack on revealed religion by the philosopher.”³⁸ As a result, some readers, Strauss goes on to state, would be tempted to become philosophers, or perhaps would even actually become philosophers. In that case, Halevi’s *Kuzari* would have set in motion an examination of the various types of knowledge, leading such readers to reject revealed religion, or “divine wisdom”, and instead to follow and seek after “human wisdom” alone.

This simplified schema of what would occur in the dialogue Halevi did not write is directly parallel to the simplified schema of the *Apology* Strauss gave in full in paragraph 7 of section I (“The Literary Character of the *Kuzari*”) of his article.³⁹ It is important, though, to highlight the differences. In this hypothetical dialogue, the reader plays the part of Socrates, who is ironically moved by divine revelation to reject divine revelation and turn to philosophy. What sets the reader in motion is not the oracle or the *δαμόνιον*, but Halevi’s *Kuzari*. The work itself manifests the ironic spur to philosophy in the absent dialogue in question.

Now, according to this reading, Halevi hides in the *Kuzari* precisely what Plato writes about openly in the *Apology*. One reason for this is that “the line of demarcation between timidity and responsibility is drawn differently in different ages.”⁴⁰ Another, is that Strauss’ Halevi has a genuine concern for those people who are “naturally pious,” even if they too encounter doubts. For Strauss, this natural piety refers to having had a genuine religious experience such as the Sinaitic revelation or an angelic dream. Halevi does not make his *Apology* explicit out of a

38 P. 62.

39 Pp. 57-59.

40 P. 63.

sense of civic responsibility to the laws and order of his age, even while he tries to instill a spur to potential philosophers to examine “human wisdom” through examining the law of reason insofar as it is available to human reason.

Strauss’ comparison of the absent dialogue to the *Apology* presents the *Kuzari* as an oracular speech or as the work of a δαιμόνιον. Now Strauss does not actually mention the δαιμόνιον in this context, but only the oracular source of motion for Socrates’ philosophical inquiries. This alone should be enough to assure us of the importance of the δαιμόνιον for the absent dialogue. One could also cite Strauss’ later article on “Plato’s *Apology* and *Crito*” where he makes it clear that the δαιμόνιον is Socrates’ true source of motion since it predated the oracular pronouncement, which only appeared after Socrates was already a philosopher.⁴¹ As Socrates makes clear in the *Symposium*, δαιμονία are neither gods nor men, but somehow in between. *Eros* is the most important example of a δαιμόνιον; it is a longing for the beautiful, but it can apply to human beauty or to inaccessible divine beauty. Similarly the *Kuzari* can spur its readers to look toward the human things and become philosophers, or else to look toward experiencing the divine and become religious believers.

Conclusion

In Strauss’s view, the *Kuzari* then contains two dialogues. Its explicit dialogue is like the *Menexenus*, a rhetorical exercise designed to promote the home team. Implicitly, it encourages the reader to construct a dialogue like the one described in the *Apology*,⁴² one which sets the potential philosopher in motion to become an actual philosopher. The actual philosopher is one who is not only ignorant of the divine things, but actively denies the kind of experiences that the naturally pious

41 Leo Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 46. This essay was originally printed in *Essays in Honor of Jacob Klein* (Annapolis: St. John’s College Press, 1976). In any case, this article was clearly written more than 30 years after “Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*” and so we cannot be certain that Strauss’ view of δαιμόνιον is the same in both essays.

42 Insofar as the *Menexenus* is a parody, it is a kind of comedy. The *Apology* could be seen as a tragedy. Since Halevi’s *Kuzari* resembles both dialogues it is both a comedy and a tragedy. If so, in Strauss’ system, the real tragedy of the *Kuzari* may be the prevalence of the religious viewpoint.

claim to have had. He has only human wisdom, which in the context of the *Kuzari* article is manifest in the reasoned study of law. Halevi's esoteric writing is designed to allow the naturally pious to persevere in their piety, while encouraging the naturally philosophical to turn to philosophy. That is, by making the *Kuzari* akin to both the *Menexenus* and the *Apology*, Strauss' Halevi can appeal to two distinct audiences. The *Menexenus-Kuzari*, which is primarily the explicit dialogue, appeals to the pious people, who are eager to find support for their piety. The *Apology-Kuzari*, which is primarily an implicit dialogue, appeals to philosophers and potential philosophers, who read the *Kuzari* as a kind of δαυμόνιον inspiring them to turn to philosophy. Strauss thus sees the *Kuzari* as a medieval update of two of Plato's dialogues for the religious people and potential philosophers of Halevi's day.

Could Strauss also be seeking to update Plato's dialogues and Halevi's *Kuzari* for his own times? To my mind, it is possible that Strauss' article is itself designed to preserve the piety of the religious, while encouraging the true philosophers and potential philosophers. Certainly philosophers and potential philosophers can read the article so as to find support for their turn to philosophy and, especially, political philosophy, the study of the laws of reason. But what about the religious? I want to suggest that Strauss may intend to include among the "religious" people who can be influenced by *Menexenus*-style arguments those scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, such as David Kaufmann and Julius Guttmann, who sought to use the *Kuzari* to argue not only for the intellectual superiority of Judaism to other religions,⁴³ but also for the transcendence of the Jewish God over human reason, i.e., over philosophical understanding.⁴⁴ Strauss' *Kuzari* article would appeal to followers of Kaufmann, Guttmann, and the like who would read it as

43 See notes 24 and 25 above.

44 Cf. Kohler, "The Captivating Beauty of the Divine Spark," 32: "At the outset of his work, Guttmann, like Kaufmann und Eisler, compares Halevi to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, whose famous statement that a demonstrated god is no longer God resembles the *Kuzari*'s theory that it would be a deficiency in God, should we be able to know Him." Moreover, according to Kohler, Kaufmann and Guttmann "attempted to replace legal fiction with true spirituality" and viewed religiosity in a neo-Kantian vein, "as a distinct function of the human consciousness in its relation to moral reason" (p. 33). That is, they saw in the *Kuzari* a fundamentally supra-rational approach to knowledge of God which they then associated with modern, neo-Kantian views. Such views are also present, in varying degrees, in the earlier generation of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* thinkers discussed in Kohler, "Yehuda Halevi's *Kuzari* and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (1840-1865)."

a defense of Halevi as a first rate philosopher and as an account of Judaism that was deeply engaged with philosophy, while accepting a God who was fundamentally transcendent to human reason. At the same time, Strauss shows that one can appropriate the same scholarship to arrive at a pro-philosophic view of the *Kuzari*, indeed a view that sees political philosophy as the high-point of human thought. Perhaps, then, Strauss' "Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*" is, indeed, intended to be an update of Plato's *Menexenus* and *Apology* along with Halevi's *Kuzari* for the modern day Jewish scholar, i.e., a kind of δαυμόνιον.

Thomas Meyer

Leo Strauss and Religious Rhetoric (1924-1938)

Prologue I

In his last letter to Julius Guttmann (1880-1950), based since 1933 at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Leo Strauss (1899-1973), who had a few months earlier become a professor at the University of Chicago, wrote on May 20, 1949:

“Scholem was here and spoke emphatically on his opinion of what my duty should be towards the Wissenschaft des Judentums. I must confess that I am impressed and confused – similar to the Maid of Orleans who was happy to herd her lambs out to pasture until the call of the nation reached her. I could now no longer state with the same determination as in my last letter that I would never return to the Jewish Middle Ages. I cannot say anything more at present.”¹

Prologue II

Before Gershom Scholem delivered the seventh Gilkey-Lecture entitled “The Messianic Idea in Jewish Mysticism” at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago on January 24, 1957, Leo Strauss the now eminent Professor of Political Philosophy at the Political Science Department, who now held the Robert Maynard Hutchins Distinguished Service Professorship and was an old friend of Scholem, held his “Introduction”. Strauss concluded his introductory lecture as follows:

“Critical, historical study of the Jewish tradition is of fairly recent date. It grew out of a victory of western thought over traditional Jewish thought. Let us remind ourselves of the fact that as late as 1815, a generation after Mendelssohn, there arose among the German Jews,

- 1 “Scholem war hier und hat mit Entschiedenheit seine Ansicht über das, was meine Pflicht gegenüber der Wissenschaft des Judentums wäre, zum Ausdruck gebracht. Ich gestehe, dass ich beeindruckt und verwirrt bin – gleich der Jungfrau von Orleans, die glücklich war, ihre Lämmer auf die Weide zu treiben, bis dann der Ruf der Nation zu ihr drang. Ich könnte jetzt nicht mehr mit derselben Bestimmtheit, wie in meinem vorigen Briefe, sagen, dass ich nie wieder zum jüdischen Mittelalter zurückkehren werde. Mehr kann ich im Augenblick nicht sagen”.

and Scholem is a German Jew, what was called science of Judaism, i.e., the historical-critical study of things Jewish. Generally speaking, the distinguished scholars who brought forth the science of Judaism looked at the Jewish past longingly, i.e., they despaired of the future of the Jewish people and of Judaism. Regardless of whether they were fully aware of it or not, they lived in the perspective of the Liberal dream. Hence as Scholem has put it, the study of the Jewish past meant for them to make the Jewish past ready for burial. The Liberal dream had become shattered by the end of the nineteenth century; thus Zionism arose, and that meant a rejuvenation of the belief of the future of the Jewish people and of Judaism. To study the Jewish people now came to mean to prepare, to the extent to which scholarship can prepare it, the rebirth of the Judaism – a rebirth as distinguished from a mere restoration. For the scholar who believes in a common rebirth of the experience of Judaism, the Jewish past is not merely an object of dispassionate or reverent study, it is a present challenge beckoning us in the still indiscernible way from the future.

Among the scholars who are animated, not to say possessed, by the belief in the Jewish future, i.e., in the future rebirth of the spirit of Judaism, Scholem is facile princeps. I regard it as a great privilege to be able to introduce this year's Gilkey lecturer, a scholar of the first place, a leader in his generation in the War of the Spirits."²

I.

Thanks to Julius Guttmann, Leo Strauss worked at the "Academy of the Science of Judaism" in Berlin from 1925 to 1932. From the beginning of his scholarly and political activities on, Strauss was a severe critic of the Science of Judaism.³ Nevertheless Strauss, born and raised in an observant, if not orthodox family of rural Jews (Landjuden) in Kirchhain, Hessa, had an ambivalent relationship to the terminology and results of the Science of Judaism, as we will see soon. An Ambivalence clearly expressed in the two Prologues, Leo Strauss was always aware of this ambivalence and because of this awareness, he tried to find a specific religious rhetoric that was beyond what he understood as the boundaries of the Science of Judaism. As in many other cases, Strauss also looked at the context of religious rhetoric for finding a way out of the predicament

2 Gershom Scholem Papers, Archive of the National Library Jerusalem.

3 See Thomas Meyer, *Zwischen Philosophie und Gesetz. Jüdische Philosophie und Theologie von 1933 bis 1938*, Boston Leiden 2009.

between tradition and the modern interpretation of tradition. Thus he emphasizes in his statement that a Manichean situation always exists, in which a scholar has to make decision: left or right, Jerusalem or Athens or Philosophy and Law. And just here Strauss is closer than ever to the philosophical and theological mainstream of his time as an analysis of his religious rhetoric will show.

II.

Although he had been considered shy and restrained ever since his student days in Marburg, Leo Strauss was a master of religious rhetoric in his letters and texts. For him, this rhetoric was neither a form of compensation for insufficient argument, nor a superficial adornment. On the contrary, he used religious rhetoric in same way as he analyzed its function in Plato and Aristotle, via Maimonides and Abravanel, in Spinoza and Hobbes, and up to Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, and Julius Guttmann: as an expression of the complex contest between philosophy and religion. After focusing on Hermann Cohen's critique of Spinoza in 1924, religious rhetoric was, for Strauss, no longer a feature of Zionist debates alone. Instead, it was a constitutive element of the problematic that Strauss strikingly and provocatively dubbed the "Querelle des anciens et des modernes"⁴ in a lecture held at the Hartford Theological Seminary, Connecticut, on January 8, 1948.⁵

In order to understand this change in the function of religious rhetoric in Strauss' work, I shall consider three stations of Strauss' intellectual development. First of all, I will present several articles in the "Jewish Weekly for Kassel, Hessen, and Waldeck".⁶ Strauss published these articles between February 1925 and January 1928. If we connect these texts with Strauss's conclusions on Spinoza, we can develop a stable account of his religious rhetoric up to about 1934. But Strauss's use of religious rhetoric in these texts can only be understood if we consider it in the light of Strauss' translation of a different religious rhetoric in terms of his own thought: namely, the way Strauss enriched his religious

4 Leo Strauss, Reason and Revelation, in: Heinrich Meier, Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem, Cambridge 2006, 141-179, 177.

5 Leo Strauss, Reason and Revelation, in: Heinrich Meier, Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem, Cambridge 2006, 141-179, 177.

6 Thomas Meyer/Michael Zank, More Early Writings by Leo Strauss from the "Jüdische Wochenzeitung für Cassel, Hessen und Waldeck" (1925-1928), in: Interpretation 39 (2012), 109-138. I discovered the articles by accident in the "Deutsche Nationalbibliothek" in Leipzig.

rhetoric through an understanding in one of, and in dialogue with, the most radical positions in Protestant thought – that of the dialectical theologian Friedrich Gogarten. This is the second point in Strauss' development that I wish to consider.

Strauss maintained his views on the role of religious rhetoric until mid-1937, including the piece on Abravanel that he wrote in August of that year.⁷ At that point, several years of study of the *More Nevuchim* lay behind him. In letters to Jacob Klein, Nahum Glatzer and Ernst Simon, Strauss announced surprisingly that he had broken the seal of Maimonides' book and now stood at the gates of a totally new and – for a Jew – dangerous world.⁸ Strauss thus placed himself in the middle of a rhetorical set-piece that he had not used before and would not use again. We get a clue of the reason for this in his essay on “The Literary Character of the Guide for the Perplexed”, published in late 1941 but which had already been completed in July 1938.⁹ In this work, Strauss offers a totally new view of the constellation of the Ancients-Medievales-Moderns – in other words, a total revision of his previous understanding of reason and revelation.

I. The Kassel Contributions

On several occasions – namely in Spring and Fall 1925, in Spring 1927 and Winter 1927-1928 – the Berlin Academy for the Science of Judaism appointed Strauss its course leader in Kassel. In consultation with Franz Rosenzweig, Strauss held Hebrew seminars for both beginners and advanced students, with exercise texts taken exclusively from the Bible. In addition, Strauss organized “workgroups”, whose members studied German-Jewish history, modern criticism of religion from Spinoza on as well as the works of Maimonides. Strauss gave introductory lectures

7 Leo Strauss, On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching, in: John Brande Trend/Heinrich Loewe (Ed.), *Abravanel. Six Lectures*, Cambridge 1937, 93-129, to be discussed below.

8 Letter to Ernst Simon of 1 June 1938 on board the “Normandie” en route from New York to Southampton. I published the letter with a commentary: Thomas Meyer, Leo Strauss and Ernst Simon, in: *Münchener Beiträge zur jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur* 6 (2013), 25-32

9 Leo Strauss, *The Literary Character of 'The Guide of the Perplexed'*, in: *Salon Baron* (Ed.), *Essays on Maimonides*, New York 1941, pp. 47-96. A revised version following the annotations in his personal copy was published in: *Leo Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Glencoe 1952, pp. 38-94

to these workgroups, of which only the titles or the summaries that appeared in the press are known. Furthermore, Strauss published an elaborate review of the “Jewish Writings” by Hermann Cohen and participated in Kassel in a debate on liberal Judaism.¹⁰

The writings I discovered are significant for Strauss’ biography as we know practically nothing of his activities during these years. They are nonetheless important in regard to his religious rhetoric. On the one hand, they give us a picture of Strauss as an educational practitioner long before he held seminars in New York and, later on, in Chicago. On the other hand, they allow us to observe how Strauss dealt in Kassel with themes and questions that he had developed during his earlier years in Marburg and Berlin. In order to bind these strands together, let us now review his intellectual development up to 1935, including his “Philosophy and Law”.¹¹

As a first step in his intellectual development, Strauss tried to understand the basis of the criteria on which Cohen condemned Spinoza as an atheist and interpreted Maimonides as a rationalist. In Kassel, Strauss wrote the following on this subject: “If one considers that according to Cohen, the system of philosophy is to effect the foundation or explanation of ‘culture,’ i.e. of European culture, and that the concept of God of Cohen’s ethics stand in an explicit relationship to the Jewish concept of God, as far as one can speak of this in view of the critique written during the most recent centuries. He already constitutes here a ‘return’ from Europe to Judaism. When Cohen asks, what necessity of the system of philosophy leads to the idea of God, he implicitly asks: what European necessity demands the preservation and development of Judaism?”¹² Strauss thus situates Cohen’s standpoint in terms of the more fundamental correlation Culture/God. For Strauss, this makes the reasons intelligible for which Cohen condemned Spinoza and regarded Maimonides as a rationalist: the former rejected revealed faith, whereas the latter sought reasons to attempt to understand God. Cohen, for his part, dignified Maimonides’ effort as an achievement of European culture rather than as a specifically Jewish project. While in Kassel, Strauss would go so far as to assert that Spinoza, on the other

10 See Meyer/Zank, *More Early Writings by Leo Strauss*, pp. 118-127.

11 Leo Strauss, *Philosophie und Gesetz. Beiträge zum Verständnis Maimonides und seiner Vorläufer*, Berlin 1935. English translated as ‘*Philosophy and Law. Essays Toward the Understanding of Maimonides and His Predecessors*’ by Fred Baumann, New York 1987.

12 Meyer/Zank, *More Early Writings by Leo Strauss*, 119f.

hand, was not a Jew at all – something that could easily be gleaned from his reception by Socialists and Communists.

As the second step of his progress, Strauss tried to develop a positive understanding of Spinoza so as to come to grips with his critique of religion and rejection of Maimonides. In 1924, he returned from Kassel to Berlin and published “On the Bible Science of Spinoza and Precursors” in the journal of the Academy there.¹³

Despite Strauss’ efforts towards objectivity, the article is permeated by the tone of the Kassel years. What follows are some relevant examples of Strauss’ religious rhetoric. This time, they mimic Spinoza, as they had Cohen in the text excerpted above. Note particularly the manipulative interlocking of description and evaluation in the following statement:

“Although it is not his habit to uncover the errors of others, Spinoza makes an exhaustive effort to refute religion, as its claims are prejudices that can obstruct the understanding of his arguments. The claims of religion are necessary errors, rooted in human nature, and are impossible to eradicate from the minds and hearts of most human beings.”¹⁴

After this, Spinoza is pitted against Maimonides – while Strauss takes them both on. What I mean is that when we read the relevant passages, we get the impression of a duel between Rambam and his critic, but it turns out that Strauss is pulling the strings. He drives the argument deeper into the recesses of the theories under consideration. He constantly and repeatedly writes that a certain question must be sounded out “more sharply”, “more radically”, or “intensively”. Strauss’ procedure presumes that a fog of illusory agreement obscures every conclusion and must be cleared away to lay bare the concrete antitheses of each thinker’s position. At the end, Strauss writes, verbally exhausted:

“On the basis of theory, Spinoza argues against the possibility of harmonizing theory and Scripture. His critique is aimed at the separation of ‘philosophy’ from ‘theology’ and of theory from the Scripture. What appears in this process reveals in part the inner difficulties of

13 Leo Strauss, “Cohens Analyse der Bibelwissenschaft Spinozas”, *Der Jude*, Vol. VIII (1924), 295-314, repr. in Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Heinrich Meier, Stuttgart, (henceforth: GS 1-3), Vol. 1, 32008, pp. 363-386; Engl. in Leo Strauss, *The Early Writings* (1921-1932), translated and edited by Michael Zank, Albany 2002, pp. 140-172.

14 Leo Strauss, “Über die Bibelwissenschaft Spinozas und seiner Vorläufer”, in: *Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins zur Gründung und Erhaltung einer Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* 7 (1926), 1-22, repr. in GS 1, 389-414. Engl.: *On the Bible Science of Spinoza and His Precursors*. Ed Zank, pp. 174-200, 175.

Maimonides' position and in part its historically conditioned character. The primary condition for the possibility of harmonizing theory and the Scripture proves to be the belief in the dependence of human reason on superhuman guidance for the achievement of the perfection of theory."¹⁵

The function of religious rhetoric as an expression of Strauss' systematic procedure is discernible here. Rather than translating their thought into a modern philosophical idiom, Strauss uses the protagonists' own terminology so as to restore them to the appropriate context. This is not done out of doxographical interest. Strauss reconstructs texts as if they were the apparatus of a scientific experiment, because he wants to know how the thinkers came to their results.

Strauss concludes from this procedure that even the "purest" theory cannot help avoid recourse to religious rhetoric. He applies his own strategy of rhetorical transformation to the very passages in which this recourse occurs. According to Strauss, the most authentic expressions of writers' thought occur where the genre of argument shifts from the language of theory to the language of religion. He believes, however, that this shift signifies the concealment of truth rather than its revelation.

If this is so, then the religious rhetoric of the past cannot simply be repeated, but must be amplified by the religious rhetoric of our own times, in order to restore the possibility of discovering the truth. This strategy can be said to have succeeded when a select few recognize that one and the same truth shines out of every religious rhetoric. That is the practice Strauss adopted in his puzzling books on Machiavelli, Aristophanes and Socrates.¹⁶ But we must first take a few steps before we get there.

In a third step, Strauss attempted to uncover the original position taken by Maimonides, which had hitherto been obscured by a superimposition of enlightenment and modern ideas leading to a false evaluation of the Middle Ages and their relationship to Antiquity. Strauss disclosed this aim in his dispute with Julius Guttman in 1933.¹⁷ Guttman, too, had tried to decode Maimonides' religious rhetoric – at least, Strauss depicted it that way. His result, however, was not the discovery of the one truth. It was a modern error, a kind of equivalence between reason and revelation. Whenever Strauss encountered this kind of balancing-act, he brought a third factor into play that would undermine the balance. In this case,

15 Strauss, Cohen. Ed. Zank, p. 199.

16 For these books, see below.

17 Thomas Meyer, *Zwischen Philosophie und Gesetz*, 19-106.

it was politics. For politics was a consideration that the thinkers who provided Guttman with his method, namely Kant and Schleiermacher, had not taken into account. As he followed their example, Guttman failed to understand Maimonides properly.

Strauss proceeded differently. For him, the “More Nevuchim” was a political text – but that is just what Maimonides had not been able to say. Rambam therefore chose a religious rhetoric familiar to the Jewish tradition. But that raised a question for Strauss: which counter-tradition should be appealed to in order to extricate Maimonides’ real thought from its rhetorical articulation? That could become clear to the interpreter – that is, to Strauss – if he developed for himself a religious rhetoric more powerful than Maimonides’ own way of speech, i.e. one that used rhetoric to disclose the intention that the author had himself enclosed in rhetoric. The risk of this procedure was that it would allow Strauss to expose the secret of the “More Nevuchim” – that this Guide for the Perplexed was a philosophical and political rather than simply a religious text – the light of day as well as the interpreter’s own understanding. And that is precisely what the rhetoric of the “More Nevuchim” was meant to prevent.

The means by which Strauss tries to simultaneously expose and conceal the secret of the “More Nevuchim” is, in a way, as simple as it is sophisticated. The “Law” of religion becomes the “Law” with which politics pursues its vision of order. This substitution had dramatic consequences as it allowed Strauss to place Maimonides among those thinkers who, in the midst of their interpretation of the Law, actually did nothing but *practice philosophy*. Again, religious rhetoric makes a process of interpretive transformation possible.

Strauss had already tried out this thesis in Kassel in a public lecture in which he asserted that Maimonides was, in a reality, a critic of “Law” in the religious sense.¹⁸ The weighty objection – that Maimonides was a defender of tradition! – was congenial to Strauss, because it showed him that neither Rambam’s religious rhetoric nor his own had been understood. It was a further confirmation that the truth is only accessible to a few.

It is obvious what we can learn by concentrating on religious rhetoric, which I have intentionally avoided defining more narrowly as well as from our inclusion of the Kassel contributions that reflect on this issue. Strauss developed his approach concretely, that is, from existing

18 Meyer/Zank, *More Early Writings* by Leo Strauss, 129f.

theoretical positions. For him, the pursuit of philosophers' true opinions involved the intense study of the way texts constitute themselves – especially by means of religious rhetoric. From his point of view, rhetoric was never used haphazardly. Instead, it always appeared at the point in the argument in which something fundamental was at stake, or in the closely related case of serious difficulties, where philosophy can no longer produce anything in its own “theoretical” register.

For Strauss, something extraordinary happens here: thinking finds itself, so to speak, in a condition of necessity. It is compelled to recognize that it is truly inaccessible. And it signals this recognition by choosing a language that traditionally claims to have exclusive access to the truth.

Although it might seem otherwise, medieval theology cannot stake such an exclusive claim because it had been entangled with philosophy since scholasticism. *Philosophy*, in fact, is the true language of religious emphasis, a language which does not claim any power of proof because it transcends logical proofs. When it speaks, philosophy, due to its distinctive characteristics, is closer to the numinous than any other mode of thought.

Strauss emphasizes the most important representatives of religious language, who mark for him the high- and crisis points of Jewish thought: Cohen, Spinoza, and Maimonides. Cohen represents the pinnacle of the philosophy of the enlightenment, which has to include the pendant “culture” in its return to God. With his critique of religion, Spinoza offers the possibility of conceiving this critique as a science, and thus of severing contact with tradition. Maimonides, finally, is able to preserve the secret of revelation, as he deploys the whole of religious rhetoric in an esoteric manner in the service of philosophy, and thus provides a defense for revelation.

Insofar as Strauss understands their religious rhetoric creatively, he does not just restore their contemporary logic of thought and argument to them. The much more important discovery is that religious rhetoric is the carrier of actual truth. This means: religious rhetoric is not just a supplement for the deficiency of theory, but philosophy's genuine mode of access to the truth of revelation. In this way, Strauss identifies religious rhetoric as the vehicle of a purposeful strategy that derives a constructive result from the tension between rational truth and revealed truth. According to his interpretation, religious rhetoric is nothing less than the philosophical appearance of revelation, without which philosophy betrays itself.

According to Strauss, this strategy is an old one, which originated in

Greece. It is based on the idea that every form of order is a political order. Order can only be stabilized by laws. Laws, however, have no final justification on earth but are of genuinely divine origin. Recognition of this situation can endanger order as there has to be criteria that enable the divine laws to become applicable in practice. And these criteria cannot be provided by argumentation, but only by means of rhetoric, namely by religious rhetoric. If religious rhetoric is not used sophistically, it must be placed entirely in the service of politics. All religious rhetoric, then, is political in the true sense of the word. Strauss' book on "Natural Right and History" is meant to confirm these proposals.¹⁹

It is therefore does not come as a surprise that Strauss found support for this theory in the Jewish-Arabic Middle Ages. But another factor is more important for the period that I have in view: dialectical theology. Here, too, we find in Leo Strauss a student of rhetoric developed on entirely differently conditions and assumptions. He learned from it how to use rhetoric as a means to think about the present without referring to it directly. I therefore invite you to consider another religious rhetoric in more detail: the religious rhetoric of dialectical theology.

II. Dialectical Theology and the Present

"It is our generation's fate to stand between the times. We never belonged to the time that is now coming to an end. But shall we really belong to the time which is coming? ...We stand between them. In an empty space."²⁰ When Pastor Friedrich Gogarten published these lines in June 1920, he very well knew that there would be a race to occupy this "empty space" – and that the race would be won by those who mastered the rhetoric of the extreme.

If we consider the years between 1924 and 1938, it is clear who the victors were: the dialectical theologians and their religious rhetoric. Like virtuosi, Gogarten, Karl Barth, and, with significant reservations, Rudolf Bultmann, to name only the most prominent figures, increased emotional tension and intellectual longing in the generation born between 1880 and 1900 nearly to the breaking point.²¹ No other form

19 Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, Chicago 1953.

20 Friedrich Gogarten, "Zwischen den Zeiten", in: *Christliche Welt* 34 (1920), col. 374-378, 374.

21 For a general introduction, see: David F. Ford, *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, Wiley 2005.

of rhetoric had the appeal of religious language to this generation. After the intoxication of the “principles of 1914” gave way to the defeat of 1918, historians, philosophers, and philologists suffered from a kind of permanent hangover. Only religious intellectuals – trained to elevate man to life under divine guidance and to depart that life when “full of days” for an eternity brilliant with happiness – had at their disposal a vocabulary promising sorrow, crisis, and hope. Sociologists were in a position to offer an alternative to religious rhetoric after the end of the 1920s, to the extent that they presented themselves as privileged analysts of religious rhetoric. The other disciplines, however, continued to draw on intellectual capital accumulated before 1914: they spoke of culture, spiritual existence, synthesis – and in doing so, tried to dull the excitement of the era by recalling earlier great times and famous names.

Consequently, it does not come as a surprise that the dialectical theologians needed only a few years to displace those who continued to speak on Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, or Thomas Aquinas. “Dialectical theology” comprised by far the largest and strongest faction in the battle for the strategic heights of religious rhetoric. Its representatives were not only exceptionally well educated. They also had a strong sense of party discipline and always knew where to find their collective opponents, but remained prepared to pursue individual engagements when the condition of the debate or career opportunities required them to do so. Finally, they possessed notable institutional and promotional skills: they founded hundreds of discussion circles and journals, which brought together followers from the broader academic community. These theologians even developed a remarkable talent for exchanging praise and criticism with thinkers outside their circle. It was not without reason that Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber took note of them; and Buber even became friends with Gogarten.²²

Strauss knew all this quite well. Strauss had been introduced into this intellectual milieu by a friend from his student days in Marburg, Gerhard Krüger. Even before he completed his dissertation in 1925, Krüger was a clear favorite of Paul Natorp and Rudolf Bultmann. In the winter semester 1922-3, he was sent to Freiburg on a type of special assignment to observe Heidegger, with whom he also conducted an impressive correspondence. Krüger was not only familiar with all the debates on Barth’s “Römerbrief”²³ and his first attempt at “dogmatics”,

22 According to the Buber Archive at the National Library in Jerusalem and the Gogarten Archive in Göttingen, they corresponded at least between 1922 and 1929.

23 Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*. Translated by Edwyn C. Hoskyns, Oxford 1933.

but also with Bultmann's complex interpretation of Paul, and even with the material that Gogarten, Tillich, and others were publishing. He was also in constant correspondence with these writers. Thus, Krüger knew better than any other member of Strauss' generation what was really at stake in the dialectical theologians' religious rhetoric: their interpretation of the present. Everything that could be applied to task – from God and antiquity to the most recent technological innovations – was placed in the service of the understanding and critique of the present. "Present", then, was not a concept to be understood in simply spatial or temporal terms. It was the widely-understood codeword by means of which one could stake a claim to jurisdictional authority over one's own time. And that always meant: with an eye toward the future.

In order to articulate this claim as clearly as possible, a rhetoric was used that represented the extreme in a plausible way. Such rhetoric could only be derived from the vocabulary of religion, which is uniquely and simultaneously affective, emotional, and objective. In religious rhetoric, as nowhere else, the lowly stand beside the mighty. In this idiom only can it possible to speak of apocalypse and salvation in one breath – without having to provide proof of the claim. In this context, "Kerygma" and "Didaché" were not merely "preaching" and "apostolic teaching", that is, instruction before and after baptism, as they are so beautifully called. Instead, these concepts were meant to indicate man's precise relationship to God. In the religious rhetoric of the period, the Holy Scriptures similarly became explicit instructions for conducting both individual life and the nation's social praxis. As Rudolf Bultmann thus formulated in 1930: the Holy Scriptures represent the unity of "faithful obedience and love" and in this way make "existential thinking possible."²⁴

"Existential thinking" was a typical expression of the form and structure of religious rhetoric in the period under consideration. From the very beginning, it combined a theological vocabulary with concepts drawn from other disciplines, as well as a trace of ordinary language. Although it is hardly recognized by the scholarly literature, Karl Barth's "Römerbrief" of 1919, which begins with an appeal to sound out the present, and also Paul Tillich's famous "Kairos" essay of 1922,²⁵ were only the tips of an enormous iceberg composed of thousands of books,

The first German edition appeared 1919, the second completely revised version 1922.

24 Rudolf Bultmann, *Paulus*, in: RGG: Bd. 4: Mi-R, Tübingen 1930, col. 1019-1045, 1026. Emphasis in the original!

25 Paul Tillich, *Kairos* (1922), in: Karl Heinz Ratschow (Ed.), *Paul Tillich. Main Works* Vol. 4, New York 1987, 53-72.

pamphlets, journals, and journal articles, in which Protestant, Catholic and Jewish authors engaged in a struggle to interpret the present with the help of religious rhetoric. The dialectical theologians were the most successful.

Naturally, the power of religious language did not remain hidden from other interpreters. Historians, philosophers, and sociologists eagerly threw themselves into the debate and remodeled their customary terminology accordingly. It was as if they understood as the *ordre du jour* Kant's advice that one should replace a traditional concept only when it has been proven to be completely unsuitable for novel content. The 1920s were such a time when it came to religious rhetoric.

Strauss followed the formation of this discourse very closely. Indeed, we cannot understand the critique of the liberal and conservative Jewish establishment that he published in Buber's "*Der Jude*" if we do not recognize the way he appropriates the radical dialectical theologians' speech patterns. Yet his position in the mid-1920s was not stable. As I have tried to reconstruct his development, Strauss applied himself only tentatively to the excavation of religious rhetoric as a medium of knowledge in Jewish thought. Strauss did not immediately succeed in building a bridge between a conception of religious rhetoric as philosophy's programmatic form of expression in the Jewish tradition and the tempting possibility of using religious rhetoric as a means of interpreting the present. Two pylons were lacking – and I shall now attempt to track them down.

The first precondition of the link that Strauss was trying to establish was a book discussed in hundreds of contemporary articles; their breathtaking religious rhetoric also impressed Strauss and Krüger. I mean Eberhard Grisebach's "The Present: A Critical Ethics", published in January 1928.²⁶ In this work, Grisebach, a close friend of Karl Barth and Friedrich Gogarten, attempted nothing less than a radical refutation of all contemporary currents of religious rhetoric. This refutation was articulated, however, in a thoroughly religious idiom. Grisebach was convinced that it could not be otherwise, as theology had, since Kierkegaard, been proven to be the science closest to life. Since the language of theology had become generally intelligible, the decisive currents of the present and the forces that shaped them had to be articulated by means of religious concepts. Present conditions could only be expressed in religious rhetoric, in other words, religious rhetoric

26 Eberhard Grisebach, *Gegenwart*, Halle/Saale 1928.

was the articulation of the moment. It was accordingly all that simple for Grisebach, who merely drew the logical conclusion from Gogarten's previously quoted account of his own placelessness.

This thesis had been long in preparation: Grisebach had already discussed it thoroughly in his correspondence with Gogarten in 1921-22. Gogarten drew his own conclusions from their exchange, first in the 1923 pamphlet "Faith and Revelation"²⁷, and then in the sequel "Faith and Reality"²⁸, published the same year as Grisebach's "The Present". Strauss found in the interplay between Gogarten and Grisebach what he had not yet been able to accomplish: the application of tradition to the interpretation of the present, and thus the imposition of a vocabulary of existential urgency upon his own time. In fact, Strauss learned how to understand the general problem of the present from Gogarten's radical politicization of the concept of revelation, and he viewed it as a model of the way by which theological doctrines could be thoroughly dissolved into instrumentalized religious rhetoric.

Yet a second consideration must be added to this account of Strauss' relationship to dialectical theology. In 1929, a year after the one-two punch of Grisebach and Gogarten, Karl Mannheim's book "Ideology and Utopia"²⁹ was published. Mannheim's analysis was understood as a blow against the intellectual consensus in both the dialectical theology movement and other camps that had taken up the cause of religious rhetoric. In the book, he traced a direct line from historicism to the corruption of modern principles of interpreting the present, which he exposed as ideology. And while he too believed that the interpretation of the present was the highest intellectual task, Mannheim was entirely uninterested in religious rhetoric. Strauss bought the book immediately and, over a period of nearly two years, wrote a long review that he further refined in successive drafts.

That was the stage Strauss had reached by the beginning of 1931. With whom could he discuss his treatment of Mannheim? He first met Krüger in Berlin, where Krüger and his wife came from. He also travelled frequently to Marburg to read his text to Krüger. It is clear from this behavior that the review essay developed a perspective that Krüger, an expert in dialectical theology, was uniquely in a position to understand.

27 Friedrich Gogarten, *Von Glauben und Offenbarung. Vier Vorträge*, Jena 1923.

28 Friedrich Gogarten, *Glaube und Wirklichkeit*, Jena 1928.

29 Karl Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie*, Bonn 1929. A serious English translation is still not available.

We know that Strauss also had Gogarten in mind as a member of his audience, because Strauss made unreserved efforts to ensure that Gogarten would get a copy of the essay and arrange its publication. I recently found a letter from Krüger to Gogarten in which the former asks the famous and long-since notorious theologian to help Strauss. On 8 March 1931, Gerhard Krüger wrote to Friedrich Gogarten, among others, the following lines:

“Now, concerning the impetus for this letter: read through the enclosed review of Mannheim. It comes from an old friend of mine, a man who takes the Bible very seriously as a Jew, and from this perspective has developed a critical view of the ‘synthesizing’ culture of the present. His name is Strauss and he has written a learned book on Spinoza’s critique of religion. (He calls himself a conscientious atheist.) I think his review is so successful as a general critique of the present ‘intellectual style’ that I hope it will be published in a journal or as a pamphlet. If that turns out to be possible, Strauss would further expand it.”³⁰

The thing is, it’s difficult to place such a satirical review: Frank won’t recommend it for publication, for example, because he knows Mannheim. What journal would be appropriate?

I turn to you because I know that I can expect you to have a proper appreciation for Strauss’ type of critique. Strauss recently read me a sample of the way he would expand the essay. For a title, he is considering: ‘The Sophistry of the Time.’³¹

These remarks are more than clear and provide this text – published by Heinrich Meier under the title “Conspicuousness” – with a clear place in Strauss’ intellectual development. Specifically, the proposal that the essay be entitled “The Sophistry of the Time” allows us to establish the connection between the two forms of religious rhetoric used by the early Strauss. On Strauss’ earlier conception of philosophico-religious rhetoric, “sophistry” designated all attempts to supersede the fundamental themes of ancient and medieval thought by means of an apparently enlightened modernity. “Sophistry”, then, stood for a model of thought opposed to Strauss’ decoding program. According to the modern “sophists”, religious rhetoric was nothing more than it appeared to be.

30 An asterix follows this sentence. The margin of the letter includes the note: “He wants to expand the second half of the critique, especially to show that Mannheim remains ‘helpless’ if he doesn’t pose the ethical question of what ‘the right’ really is.”

31 Unpublished letter by Gerhard Krüger to Friedrich Gogarten, quoted from the Gogarten papers in the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen, COD. MS. F. GOGARTEN 400:410.

For the “sophists”, secularization was an irreversible process and inseparable from the progress of freedom. Tendencies that aimed to make sense of the present with the help of religious emphases thus rendered themselves suspect *per se*. They were seen, quite simply, as a reactionary program. Strauss rejected this diagnosis. In his view, the sophists were superficial readers and thinkers uninterested in the shifting masks by means of which ancient constellations of thought/thinkers were still able to hold the present in their grip. Merely to understand the persistence of this holding, Strauss suggested, it was necessary to trace religious rhetoric back to its essentials.

The concept of “Time” in the planned title, on the other hand, shows that Strauss was now able to dignify “the present” as a genuine phenomenon of religious rhetoric. It had become clear to Strauss that “the present” designated the field on which a decision on the direction of his own rhetoric would be made. The “present”, in other words, was the arena of radicalism.

It was clear to every reader of the text that the religious rhetoric of dialectical theology moved from the individual to the whole nation and from the whole nation back to the individual. For Strauss, the decisive thing was that dialectical theology be accomplished by means of this reversal as an intellectual transition from personal to political concerns, and vice versa, thus remaining alien to contemporary Jewish thought.

Dialectical theology was therefore to be defended against Mannheim, at least on that point. Dialectical theology allowed Strauss to participate in the extreme, at times anti-democratic radicalization regarding criticism of the times, focusing on penetrating the fundamental features of the present. If Strauss aimed at discovering the inner features of the age in order to apply his critique of modernity more precisely, then he had to make common cause with rhetorical intensification that characterized the work of his Protestant comrades in arms.

So it was only logical that when Strauss criticized Gogarten’s 1932 “Political Ethics”³² in “Philosophy and Law” for its cooptation of the concept of revelation for an obviously Protestant-partisan purpose, he nevertheless accepted Gogarten’s basic program. Strauss could not articulate that program any more concisely than the publisher did in his blurb for the book. I quote:

“Gogarten rejects the liberal state with all possible severity and restores the state to its previous role as the absolute authority on all

32 Friedrich Gogarten, *Politische Ethik*, Jena 1932.

aspects of communal life. At the same time, he strictly distinguishes church from state, and restricts the former to its most essential task: the redemption of mankind from godless force. In this way, he provides Protestantism with the vocation that is necessary in our times.”

Let me summarize Strauss’ relation to religious rhetoric:

1. For Strauss, religious rhetoric in classic philosophical and theological texts is the expression of a distinctively restrained mode of expression. It shows that conventional concepts and forms of argument have reached their limit and are unable to adequately express certain contents – above all, the truth of revelation. For this reason, the authors of such texts switch into this register from their more usual “theoretical” mode.
2. We cannot simply eliminate religious rhetoric if we wish to gain access to the reflections that stand behind it. Instead, it is necessary make use of it, because religious rhetoric is the expression of an esoteric concentration of ideas, which are only intended for the initiated. In short, religious rhetoric refers to a secret.
3. Traditionally, it is understood that the careful reader will keep this secret, since he does not want to expose the entire tradition. The contrary also holds true. A writer who uses religious rhetoric knows about the secret. On the other hand, a scholar who uses religious rhetoric in an attempt to reconstruct religious rhetoric sees himself as a guardian of tradition – and of its secrets. Strauss’ famous formula “atheism from probity” means nothing else.
4. Religious rhetoric points toward something fundamental, namely the idea of order and its stabilization (“Law”) and ultimately to the question of the “order of order” (Harald Bluhm).³³ Insofar as the latter refers to something “divinatory”, it is itself a kind of religious rhetoric.
5. So far, we have only described one part of Strauss’ program. Strauss learned from the debates associated with dialectical theology that religious rhetoric plays a broader function: it reveals the contest of radicalisms that underlie the interpretation of the present. Religious rhetoric was not ideological in this respect, as Mannheim argued. Instead, it offered the possibility of placing tradition wholly in the

33 Harald Bluhm, *Die Ordnung der Ordnung. Das politische Philosophieren von Leo Strauss*, Berlin 2002.

service of actuality. This kind of religious rhetoric translates the “ancient” into the “contemporary”.

Strauss effectively links both forms of religious rhetoric in “Philosophy and Law”. While the treatment of Guttman provides the model of dialectical theology in Strauss’ work, the three other texts that I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks unmistakably pursue the secret of religious rhetoric – in order to protect it.

III. Revision, Renewed

Allow me to suggest briefly that a reversal of Strauss’ whole stance occurs in 1937. I will begin with a quote:

“His descent was, as he believed, royal. His soul was the soul of a priest - of a priest who had not forgotten that the Temple, built by King Solomon in the Holy City, was ‘infinitely inferior in sanctity’ to the tabernacle erected by Moses in the desert. Whatever he may have had to learn from the Cynics or the Bucolics of Antiquity in regard to the dubious merits of human arts and city life, his knowledge of the sinful origin of cities, and of towers, kingdoms, and the punishment that followed the eating of fruit from the tree of knowledge, was not borrowed from any foreign source: it was the inheritance of his own race which was commanded to be a kingdom of priests.”³⁴

These words conclude Leo Strauss’ essay on Abravanel, which he wrote in just a few weeks in August of 1937 and published that same year. In it, Strauss doubtlessly makes use of the classic devices of religious rhetoric, which articulate biblical theo-politics through quotations, plays on words, metaphors, and testimony. This procedure corresponds precisely to the manner in which Strauss previously analyzed Cohen, Spinoza, and Maimonides. At the same time, these lines offer a tendentious inventory of the major elements of Abravanel’s personal and philosophical position. Strauss’ article consolidates his previous thoughts: Maimonides finally becomes the decisive figure in the transformation of ancient Greek thought – the one who infused philosophy into religious rhetoric and thus reconstituted philosophy itself in an esoteric manner. Strauss shows how great this achievement was by suggesting that Abravanel remained

34 Leo Strauss, *On Abravanel’s Philosophical Tendency* p. 129. The quote in the quote is from Abravanel’s *Commentary to I Kings VI, 1* (f. 217, col. 3).

dependent on Thomist scholasticism, but nevertheless highlights his role in Spinoza's critique of religion. We are evidently dealing with a text that reveals its argumentative structure within the field of religious rhetoric.

We can shed light on the quoted excerpt if we supplement it with letters written shortly before and during the composition of the essay.³⁵ In a number of recently discovered notes to Nahum Glatzer and, above all, to Ernst Simon, Strauss identifies this article as the endpoint of his whole previous view of Judaism and philosophy.³⁶ His next move – which he described as a conversion – was a step into full blown heresy: he discovered that Maimonides was a philosopher. From the middle of the Atlantic, on the passage from New York to Southampton, Strauss reports to Simon on 1 June 1938: “Rambam was an actual philosopher – in the medieval sense of the word, which means radically unbelieving.”³⁷ Eleven years later, in 1949, he indicated to his teacher Julius Guttmann that he was so alarmed by this conclusion that he feared, and continued to fear, that he had placed himself outside Judaism. In consequence, Strauss turned away from Maimonides and toward Xenophon so as not to be guilty of betrayal.³⁸ If Strauss constantly returns to the famous sentence from the Talmudic tractate Hagiga, “Ben Soma is still outside”, which appears at the end of the “More Nevuchim” as well, we must surmise that his self-description in this period lies behind it.³⁹

The letters I have discussed, on the other hand, are characterized by a heightened religious rhetoric. They constantly proclaim a breakthrough that reveals Rambam's unique greatness: he made room within tradition for complete atheism. In the letters, Strauss reaches the limits of identification with the author of the “More Nevuchim” to describe his discovery more dramatically. He encourages Simon in particular to join him as he shows how the bottom drops out of an apparently religious text and how a specific medieval rationalism undermines alternative philosophy versus theology, which was apparently carved in stone for Judaism. According to Strauss, this all takes place as religious rhetoric is newly presented as philosophy.

35 Leo Strauss's “The Role of the Doctrine of Providence in Maimonides' View”, in: MGWJ 811937, 93-105 – had already been prepared in 1936, as correspondence with Guttmann and Isaak Heinemann shows.

36 A publication of the correspondences between Strauss, Glatzer, and Simon is in preparation by the author of the article along with Marco Kissling, Potsdam.

37 See letter of 1 June, 1938, quoted above.

38 See letter of May 20, 1949, quoted above.

39 BT Hagiga, 15a. See More Nevuchim, III, 51.

In the late 1930s, Strauss could no longer concern himself with the protection of the “secret” in Maimonides’ traditional manner. Instead, he realized that it had to be transformed as artfully as possible into philosophy in order to preserve its invisibility. Strauss later dubbed the vessel in which he concealed the secret of the “More Nevuchim” “political philosophy”. In this way, Strauss derived it from “the secret” to “the open secret” (Goethe).

In the Abravanel article and after returning to a radical conception of philosophy that Strauss pursues in the letters, religious rhetoric acquires a completely different function than it had had previously. For Strauss, it becomes a pure instrument of knowledge, and thus, although this had never been clearly expressed before, a figure of disruption. All thinking breaks down when confronted with the fact of revelation and the inexplicability of miracles, thus religious speech must acknowledge that it is accountable to reason in these matters. Strauss’ most complicated books – his study of Machiavelli⁴⁰ and his essay on the connection between Aristophanes and Socrates⁴¹ – are first and foremost accounts of the way that religious rhetoric appears in its highest concentration only in the form of philosophy. With this strategy, Strauss leaves dialectical theology and the associated program of permanent “intensification” behind him. In their place, he turns more often to the most serious enemy of pure philosophy: Historicism. From this time on, thus Strauss, it is historicism that threatens the secret that philosophers unceasingly pursue.

40 Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Glencoe 1958.

41 Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, Chicago 1966.

Alfred Bodenheimer

Jewish Studies as Successor of WdJ? What Can Be Achieved in the 21st Century?

“Is academic research on Judaism an end in itself or is it a means to fulfil a different purpose? Is it the final goal or is it an instrument?” In an essay published a few years ago, Joseph Dan raised these questions, observing “that the idea that it is possible to be both – fully dedicated to ‘pure science’ while simultaneously promoting specific political and cultural goals – is an unfulfillable dream that cannot be realized in the academic world.”¹

Taking this observation as a starting point, I would like to base my ideas on Jewish Studies as the successor to the “Science of Judaism” [“die Wissenschaft des Judentums”] as contained in two texts, one of them historical and the other contemporary, that make clear how difficult the problem of legitimation is. I will then try to create a perspective for the future.

The historical text was written by Ismar Elbogen, one of the most prominent and productive figures involved in the Science of Judaism, between 1900 and the end of German Judaism in the Holocaust. In 1922, Elbogen wrote a historical overview of “A Century of the Science of Judaism”, which also outlined his own times; for me, this study provides a useful compass to characterize problems of succession, similarity, and difference in the relationship between the Science of Judaism and our own contemporary Jewish Studies.²

In this study, Elbogen reaches the conclusion that Leopold Zunz – in Elbogen’s eyes the central founding figure of the Science of Judaism – did not attain his goal of establishing such a science beyond the narrow range of those Jews interested in such an approach. Yet Elbogen praises Zunz’s influence on the Jewish educational system and “not least, the enlightenment of public opinion on the nature and fate of Judaism.”³

1 Joseph Dan: “Jüdische Studien ohne Gewissheiten“, in: Michael Brenner, Stefan Rohrbacher (Hg.): *Wissenschaft vom Judentum. Annäherungen nach dem Holocaust*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000, 58-69; 58.

2 Ismar Elbogen: *Ein Jahrhundert Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Berlin: Philo Verlag, 1922.

3 *Ibid.*, 9.

As is well-known, the Science of Judaism ultimately remained a matter for Jews only, even though, as Elbogen conscientiously summarizes, it did manage to cover all periods of Jewish history and to reach a variety of philological and historical disciplines. As successes deserving credit, Elbogen identifies the founding of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau in 1854 as well as what amounts to a cultural export: the founding of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1875 and the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York in 1886 (which became a prominent institution especially after its expansion following the nomination of Salomon Schechter as its president in 1901). All of them were schools created by Jews for Jews, specifically for the training of scholars and rabbis. For Elbogen, a further achievement of the Science of Judaism in the United States was the founding of Dropsie College in 1907 in Philadelphia (now the Herbert Katz Center at the University of Pennsylvania). In contrast, the College for the Science of Judaism [Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums] founded in Berlin in 1872, was intended to have a widespread influence on both the Jewish and the non-Jewish population, but it failed to live up to expectations: “No institution of its kind began in such poverty – it was only rich in enemies.”⁴ And as Elbogen continues, it was never really successful, despite its excellent teachers.

Right from its beginnings in the 19th century, the Science of Judaism struggled with two problems of legitimation, one intrinsic and the other extrinsic. The intrinsic problem, its lack of a broad reach within Judaism, was a permanent one throughout its history, as Kerstin von der Krone noted in her work on the journals published in this field.⁵ The extrinsic problem lay in its unfortunate relationship to university sciences. According to Elbogen, the problem was that the Science of Judaism, which he once identified as Judaistik, was so broad that its separate parts could each be ultimately absorbed in university departments of theology, classics, history, or philology. Yet the goal envisioned was not actually a fragmented field split up into individual disciplines, but rather

4 Ibid., 36.

5 Cf. Kerstin von der Krone: *Wissenschaft in Öffentlichkeit. Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und ihre Zeitschriften*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011, 378: “Die Diagnose, die Wissenschaft des Judentums habe zunehmend die Verbindung zur jüdischen Alltagswelt verloren und würde mit ihrer historisierenden Perspektive das Judentum seiner Lebendigkeit berauben, wurde zum vorrangigen Motiv der Diskussion der kommenden Jahre und Jahrzehnte und kulminierte in der Forderung, die jüdische Wissenschaft müsse dem lebendigen Judentum dienen.”

“the science of a living Judaism, in the current of its development, as a sociological and historical unity”.⁶ Elbogen warned against broadening the field into the arbitrariness of dealing with everything Jewish, thus neglecting competence in the central fields, which he regarded as essential to research on both Jewish history and Jewish law. Here, Elbogen’s discussion reveals how much pressure arose in dealing with the academic location of the Science of Judaism and with its problem of legitimation:

Even problems of Judaism in the narrowest sense cannot always be the subject of an independent analysis. There can be no more burning issue than that of race. In multiple ways, taking a position on race also involves the judgment of Jews and Judaism. Yet the Science of Judaism cannot possibly burden itself with the entire complex of problems of scientific anthropology; rather, it must depend on research and the results gained by others, putting them to use for their own purposes, to whatever degree possible.⁷

Elbogen even turns to Islamic Studies as an analogous discipline. Because of the growth of political and economic connections “to the contemporary Mohammedan world, to the life and culture of contemporary believers of Islam”, the older field of Arabic Studies has seen the “limits of philology” broken and has been able to secure “as Islamic Studies, the dignity of a particular discipline”.⁸

One does not need to know Edward Said’s concept of “Orientalism” in order to understand that this comparison is troubling. After all, the study of Islam in the modern West has never been an emancipation project of Muslim scholars socialized in Europe and suffering from religious atrophy. Rather, it emerged from a majority Christian society (with quite prominent Jewish participation) not to create a “living” Islam, but to use an analytical western epistemology to understand the Islamic world and its culture – and, according to post-colonial reading, to dominate it.

But the troubling aspect of this analogy is precisely what is worth paying attention to, as it documents two things. First of all, an unresolved dialectic existed in the Science of Judaism. It aimed at rejuvenating

6 Elbogen, 43. Regarding opposing discourses concerning the WdJ as a science enlivening or burying Judaism see: Asher D. Biemann: *Wissenschaft als Wiederauferstehung: Zur Polemik der toten Geschichte in der Wissenschaft des Judentums*, in: Christian Wiese, Walter Homolka, Thomas Brechenmacher (ed.): *Jüdische Existenz in der Moderne. Abraham Geiger und die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Berlin 2013, p. 391-405.

7 Elbogen, 45.

8 *ibid.*, 44.

jointly owned Judaism as the authentic and thus the essential marker of identity for Jews themselves, while at the same time it also tried to find a home in the university and even to accept its integration in an ultimately utilitarian scholarly industry that had actually turned to Islamic Studies, not to further Islam but to make it accessible to Germans. Furthermore, although not separately, the reference to Islamic Studies contains an implicit confession: as a social realm, science is finally as much steered by hegemonial interests as are business and politics. The “dignity of a particular discipline” and the outcoming inclusion within the university canon were far from being granted to Judaism at all, not in Germany, and nowhere else either. Even in the United States, all the contemporary institutions in New York, Cincinnati and Philadelphia that Elbogen referred to, were privately financed by Jews for Jews.

It is worth noting that Elbogen was quite positive about the establishment of Hebrew as a second academic language for the field of the Science of Judaism and specifically about the founding of the then-planned Hebrew University⁹ – even though the most violent attacks on the Science of Judaism came from Zionists. This can be read as a sign that, even years before the dramatic rise of National Socialism, Elbogen realized that the future of his field lay less in Germany than rather at private universities in the United States and as well as at a possible Zionist institution in Jerusalem.

It is exactly this awareness concerning the future centers of the Science of Judaism, or Jewish Studies, that links Elbogen’s text to the second, contemporary text I wish to discuss here.

Written almost one hundred years later, the latter text is a take of Shmuel Feiner on the role of Jewish Studies today in those very same locations, the United States, Israel, and Germany, as he stated in his keynote speech at a conference in Hamburg in the summer of 2016 on fifty years of Jewish Studies in Germany after the Holocaust. Today, after the creation of a considerable number of academic positions and institutions in Germany since the 1990s, these three countries are, as Feiner points out, the “three largest, most dynamic, and most influential centers of Jewish Studies”.¹⁰

Feiner first discusses the social perspective of Jewish Studies in the

9 cf. *ibid.*, 8; 45.

10 Shmuel Feiner: *Jüdische Studien heute – eine Perspektive aus Israel 2015*, in: Andreas Lehnardt (Hg): *Judaistik im Wandel. Ein halbes Jahrhundert Forschung und Lehre über das Judentum in Deutschland*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, pp. 7-16; 7

United States, where the field has made a commitment to pluralism. In this sense, the American field of Jewish Studies is the heir less of the intra-Jewish institutions founded roughly a century ago in Germany and in the US, than of the American universities where, as a rule, the field emerged along with programs on other minorities and only marginally raised the issue of the social location of Judaism, as Steven Beller has demonstrated.¹¹ For Feiner, then, “the dominant narrative is of Jewish encounters with the non-Jewish environment and culture, encounters that create pluralism and are undoubtedly the consequences of living in a country that espouses such a perspective and sees itself as the bearer of such goals.”¹² As Feiner goes on to observe, Israel only plays a subordinate role in the discourse on Jewish Studies in the United States – which has only been enhanced by the connection between Jewish Studies and contemporary research on the diaspora.

In Israel (and here Elbogen has proven to be correct), despite harsh criticism of the Science of Judaism, the field’s ideas have been maintained by what Steven Beller has called Judaistik (as distinct from Jewish Studies),¹³ which is a mostly distinct field focused on objects understood as genuinely Jewish. But here, especially in recent years, Feiner identifies an even stronger and, as he sees it, quite problematic counter-current to developments in the United States – particularly a growing tendency for the field to be dominated by Orthodox scholars who reject the kind of critical, pluralistic questioning of their religious or national convictions that an academic field as such must be able to engage in.¹⁴ Yet even with this critical perspective, Feiner still focuses on the great achievements and even the great mission of Jewish Studies in Israel as it participates in the continuation of Jewish history.

For Germany, Feiner raises the provocative question of whether there is any identifiable motivation for the pursuit of Jewish Studies beyond its integration into the discourses of German universities. This goes to the heart of a discipline that has been supported by significant governmental protection. As a participant in the Hamburg conference

11 Steven Beller: *Knowing your Elephant: Why Jewish Studies is not the same as Judaistik, and why that is a good thing*, in Klaus Hödl (Hg.): *Jüdische Studien. Reflexionen zu Theorie und Praxis eines wissenschaftlichen Feldes*, Innsbruck u.a.: Studien Verlag 2003, pp. 13-23; 15f.

12 Feiner, 12.

13 Beller, 16.

14 Feiner, 14.

where Feiner gave this talk, I came to the conclusion that the reactions of the participants, although vehement, were also helpless.

Feiner's skepticism is confirmed by Johannes Heil, President of the College of Jewish Studies [Hochschule für Jüdische Studien] in Heidelberg, in the introduction to a book on the field of Jewish Studies and its disciplines, published by the Hochschule a few years ago on its thirtieth anniversary. With the subtitle "Considerations on the Profile and the Perspectives of the Discipline of Jewish Studies", Heil identifies what he sees as the overarching goal of the field: "Only with the participation of Judaistik and Jewish Studies, as well as the Europe-oriented sections of Islamic Studies [Islamwissenschaften], can the contemporary humanities do proper justice to their mission".¹⁵ It is interesting to note, of course, that Elbogen's vision in 1922 of Islamkunde as a model for the academic integration of the Science of Judaism reappears here in Heil's reference in 2010 to Islamwissenschaften as a complement to Jewish Studies in the broader context of the humanities.

Given Joseph Dan's contrast between what he implies are incompatible utilitarian and self-sufficient academic approaches to Judaism, Feiner could perhaps be seen as understanding Jewish Studies in the United States and Israel as utilitarian (although in contrasting ways), while in Germany the field is immanent, committed mainly to itself and at most a contribution to the humanities in general. In a historically completely changed perspective, this would be a kind of continuation of the critique by Zionist Judaistik of the immanent Science of Judaism in Germany, which Elbogen himself notably summarized as an applied science (to be precise, as a "Zweckwissenschaft" (science of convenience)).¹⁶

But Feiner's analysis can also be understood differently: in each of the three mentioned countries, Jewish Studies have largely conformed to the political demands made on it. In the process, programmatic approaches and adaptations to the social and political context have blended seamlessly into one other. This even holds true for Germany, where the niche of Judaism as such is positively fostered both in the everyday life of communities and in the universities. But the field is not really taken seriously enough to make it leave its small, well-endowed

15 Johannes Heil: Jüdische Studien als Disziplin. Zur Einleitung, in: Ders. und Daniel Krochmalnik (Hg.): Jüdische Studien als Disziplin – Die Disziplinen der Jüdischen Studien, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010, 1-22; 21.

16 Elbogen, 43.

garden, so that its social role is set – and on a broader level almost nonexistent. Making it into university and receiving government funding is achieved at the expense of the concession of staying inside the walls of the university – and even there, the field’s disciplinary boundaries are quite narrow.

As I see it, the peculiar construct of Jewish Studies in Germany was all but created to be an instrument of de-politicization, including the problematic hybrid constructions it has generated, such as that very Hochschule in Heidelberg, which was originally designed to train ritual personnel, but also runs a generously endowed program of scholarly teaching and research that is actually continually impeded by the institution’s original educational purposes. Another such hybrid is the peculiar form of a Jewish theological institute following the Christian model, as in Potsdam. It is quite striking that, unlike in the United States and of course in Israel, the discipline in Germany has probably more non-Jewish than Jewish professors – on the one hand, of course, that in itself is a sign of the field’s openness. But along with it comes a peculiar unwillingness to break out of the academic frame and leave behind this self-constructed, well-endowed idyll. In 2012, when circumcision was being debated all over Germany, the field of Jewish Studies only very reluctantly made itself heard – and when this was the case, it was primarily in the form of conferences at which experts in constitutional or criminal law could be heard arguing against a ban on circumcision whereas the Jewish Studies scholars mostly did not go farther than to utter highbrow reflections on the basic principles of an old Jewish custom. A professor of Jewish Studies at a German university told me then that while she was constantly taking part in panel discussions in order to defend circumcision, she would no longer have been able to do so as soon as it had been demonstrated that the damage to the health of boys was greater than its utility. To me, that is a characteristic form of the excessive academicization of a scholarly sense of self that makes it impossible to take political positions.

For the years to come, then, Jewish Studies will clearly be operating under quite difficult conditions (and in this respect, of course, it resembles almost all fields in the humanities these days). This is at least the case in Germany, where the field exists in the luxurious but precarious special situation I have already briefly described. What began as neo-liberal attacks on the humanities in the nineties and the early years of the new century, has now become a right-wing conservative attack on critical thinking as such. In the United States, one of the first,

if little noticed, acts of Donald Trump as President was the complete elimination of all humanities research programs in the United States for which the President was directly responsible. In Israel, as they try to steer education in particular and culture in general, government ministries censor schoolbooks and cultural events that run counter to their understanding of a national Jewish project. In Switzerland, with the support of a bunch of media sources, the largest political party in the country runs a campaign against a wide range of fields in the humanities and not only aggressively questions the achievements of professors in general but also carries out defamation campaigns against particular individuals. There, as elsewhere, where Jewish Studies largely have to exist under what amounts to market conditions (that is, neither through national interests as in Israel, nor through a pool of major private donors, as in the United States, nor for historical reasons, as in Germany), the step of Jewish Studies into the universities may have been successful, but the field is clearly seen as esoteric, even by the very government institutions that sponsor it. Whoever works in Jewish Studies, no matter how broadly supported or how impressive their list of publications and prizes may be, will generally find themselves kept out of individual-related excellency research programs, because their field of competence is “too narrow”. In addition, internationally, researchers in the Islamwissenschaften (the very discipline which both the Science of Judaism and Jewish Studies would so like to have taken as a model) have significant reservations about any cooperation with those studying Judaism. Here, too, research and politics are clearly closely connected.

What conclusions can be drawn from this? All in all, I think that Jewish Studies can and should orient themselves on the Science of Judaism, whenever things become uncertain, whenever things no longer go without saying. The recognition of its uncertainty always made representatives of the Science of Judaism nervous, but uncertainty also inspired them and above all led to reflections on the field’s own significance. The marginalization of deeper reflection on cultural and historical developments in our era, as well as of the results of such reflections, is unprecedented, at least for those of my generation, born after World War II. This is also true for Judaism, which is experiencing nerve-wracking interpretations of a mythmaking kind: the Cabbalistic mythmaking of Chassidic groups; the strictness and the withdrawal from the world of Haredi tendencies; the presumptuous claim to define everything of right-wing Zionist parties; the Biblification of national-religious and settler groups; and a universalist neutralization among

left-liberal intellectuals. Contrary to what the Science of Judaism still thought, Jewish Studies cannot create their own approaches, but it still has the tools to be able to question the absoluteness of each of these tendencies. At the same time, it can also uncover the stereotypes of those discourses in the countries of the diaspora that are no longer capable of accepting distinct religious perspectives, be this due to misguided discourses of integration as in Europe or because of newly resurgent racism or anti-Semitism as in the United States (and in fact in European countries as well).

In the face of difficulties fitting the transdisciplinary field of Jewish Studies into a department of the Faculty of Humanities at my university in Basel, I once said to the University's then President that Jewish Studies is the Jew among the disciplines. I think that the field has actually remained in that position in other places as well and we should not feel secure in any apparently well-established situation. If we can learn something, then it is this: wherever the field of Jewish Studies exists, it is an immediate indicator of the degree of democracy in a society. This is true of the diaspora, where the pluralistic position described by Feiner is now unexpectedly confronted with new challenges and dangers by the latest political developments; this holds true for Germany, where the field is dependent on support for the fostering of Jewish culture – it may currently still be high, but it could decrease some day. This is also the case in Israel, where Jewish Studies could face the danger of becoming an apparatus for the affirmation of politically expedient definitions and expressions of Jewishness.

When I want to come up with an exemplary case of how Jewish Studies confront the questions of present day Judaism, I am reminded of the beginning of Seth Schwartz's history of Jewish antiquity, in which he compares a contemporary liberal Jew in New York with those Jews in Palestine who, in the first century, started an uprising when their religious feelings were insulted by a Roman soldier's mishandling of a Torah scroll.¹⁷ If there seems to be an unbridgable gap between these two ways of Jewish self-definition, on the other hand, such scholars as Elias Bickermann or Fritz Jitzchak Bär have already famously tried to produce analogies between antiquity or the Middle Ages and their own era in the 20th century. In part because of the era in which they worked, which began before the Holocaust and lasted well beyond it, names like

17 Seth Schwartz: *The Ancient Jews from Alexander to Muhammad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014, 1-5.

theirs stand for transitions between eras of research. The production of a dialectic between the entirely foreign and the entirely familiar, no matter how apparently separate they may be, be it in their temporal distance or in their diametrically opposed concepts of contemporary Judaism, effectively introduced a basis for the continuation of the Science of Judaism to Jewish Studies. If the concepts have changed, if gender and post-colonial studies or transnationality, transmigration and transculturality are now more strongly the focus than before, this dialectic of continuity and breaks, of self-assurance and questioning all that is apparently obvious, remains both an essential quality as well as a mission for Jewish Studies as it moves into the future.

List of Contributors

Prof. Hanoch Ben Pazi	Bar Ilan University, Department for Jewish Thought
Prof. Alfred Bodenheimer	University of Basel, Department for Jewish Studies
Dr. Andreas Brämer	Institute for the History of the German Jews, Hamburg
Dr. Cedric Cohen Skalli	University of Haifa, Department for Jewish History and Thought
Prof. Michah Gottlieb	New York University, Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies
Dr. Yehuda Halper	Bar Ilan University, Department for Jewish Thought
Dr. Noa Sophie Kohler	Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Jaques Loeb Center for the History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences
Dr. George Y. Kohler	Bar Ilan University, Department for Jewish Thought
Prof. Michael A. Meyer	Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati
Dr. Thomas Meyer	Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich, Faculty of Philosophy
Prof. Michael Moxter	University of Hamburg, Institute for Systematic Theology
Dr. Meir Seidler	Ariel University, Department for Jewish Heritage
Dr. Alexandra Zirkle	Boston University, Elie Wiesel Center for Jewish Studies

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יוצא לאור מטעם המחלקה למחשבת ישראל,
אוניברסיטת בר-אילן, רמת-גן, 5290002

בתמיכת:

הקתדרה לחקר הקבלה ע"ש הרב ד"ר א' שפרן
University of Hamburg
Senat der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg
Joseph Carlebach Arbeitskreis

עורכת לשון: סוזאן מַבְס

מזכירת המערכת: ורדה אביאני
טל. 972-3-5318368 • פקס 972-3-7384102
כתובת: בניין יעקובוביץ 1002, קומה ד' חדר 403, אוניברסיטת בר-אילן, רמת-גן 5290002
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העורכים

דב שזורץ • אבי אלקיים • חנוך בן-פזי



הוצאת אוניברסיטת בר-אילן, רמת-גן תשע"ט