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**THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY IN  
GERMAN-JEWISH THOUGHT:**  
Observations on a Neglected Tradition  
(Cohen, Rosenzweig and Breuer)



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When wandering down Los Angeles' own Pico Boulevard, a street worthy of mention among the leading Jewish thoroughfares of the world, I am often riveted by the steady stream of posters and signs competing for the pedestrian's attention. In addition to the frequent announcements of Torah study sessions, notices of the imminent arrival of the Messiah or the upcoming visit of a great Kabbalist from *Eretz Yisrael* intermingle with theological explications of a recent earthquake. Of course, sociologists like Menachem Friedman have long recognized that the ephemeral poster or newsletter is a wonderfully revealing measure of the social pulse, particularly at the level of popular religious expression.

And so it was with genuine curiosity that I noticed, several years ago, a new local publication deposited at every Jewish merchant's door, entitled *Beyond Time* (*Me-`al ha-zeman*). The journal was filled with astrological predictions, a sober mathematical meditation on the length of eternity, and extensive coverage of the renowned *dybbuk* from Dimona. Together, these varied articles bespoke the appetite for a kind of popular mysticism that has become commonplace in the City of Angels, with its blend of New Age spirituality, Hollywood image-making, hyper-materialism, and (mercifully) self-parody. But there was another intriguing element about this journal, one that both sheds light on our mystical-magical *Zeitgeist* and addresses a central intellectual interest of mine: namely, the desire to be propelled beyond time, beyond history, to a realm of blissful stasis.

It is not enough that we are said to inhabit a postmodern era, with its pronounced disdain for fixity and holism. Well before the advent of the new Christian millennium, Francis Fukuyama proclaimed that, with the demise of the Soviet Union, the "end of history" was upon us. Meanwhile, Lutz Niethammer traced a long chain of thinkers who intimated that we have entered the age of the "posthistoire."<sup>1</sup> And, of course, there are those who suggest that the Holocaust so thoroughly exploded our sense of proportion as to destroy all tools of historical

\* I would like to extend thanks to my friend, Professor Shmuel Feiner, for his gracious invitation to deliver the Samuel Braun Lecture at Bar-Ilan University on May 17, 2000. This lecture is part of a larger book project on anti-historicism in modern Jewish thought. Thanks are also due to Nomi Stolzenberg and David Ellenson for their insightful comments on a draft of this paper.

1 See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992), as well as Lutz Nietzhammer, *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?* (London, 1992).

measurement and, by consequence, our historical bearings.<sup>2</sup> In such a climate of uncertainty, it is no surprise that some seek a world unencumbered by historical contingency.

And yet, there is something poignantly paradoxical — not to mention cognitively dissonant — about this quest. For most of us, the way we narrate our pasts — our very sense of causality and mode of cognition — bears the unmistakable traces of historicism. We tend to understand a particular occurrence as the result of a complex juncture of mundane historical forces, which is to say quite differently from our premodern forebears — for whom the Divine Hand was the omnipresent and monocausal agent of history. It is not easy to escape the clutches of a modern historicist understanding. To do so is to engage in a difficult and ongoing battle, a conscious act of dispossession of a pervasive intellectual sensibility. Indeed, it is to reverse the process of "thinking with history" that, Carl Schorske argues, has come to dominate modern Western thought.<sup>3</sup>

But if we cannot disengage from history, do we surrender our bid for eternity? Can our assumptions of a transcendent being survive the grinding jaws of historicism? These are questions that have stood at or close to the center of modern Christianity, particularly Protestantism. Is Jesus to be understood as a man — and a Jewish man at that — born of a specific historical context, or as the mythic, transhistorical Christ of faith?<sup>4</sup> Not surprisingly,

2 In the memorable formulation of Jean-François Lyotard, "with Auschwitz, something new has happened in history ... which is that the facts, the testimonies which bore the traces of *here's* and *now's*, the documents which indicated the sense or senses of the facts, and the names, finally the possibility of various kinds of phrases whose conjunction makes reality, all this has been destroyed as much as possible." Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, translated by Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis, 1988). See also Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), pp. 5–6.

3 See Carl Schorske, *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism* (Princeton, 1998).

4 See the classic formulation of the problem of the historical Jesus in modern Christian theology in Albert Schweitzer's 1906 work, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*, translated as *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (New York, 1968). A recent work that traces the early 19th-century peregrinations of this tension is Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge, 2000); meanwhile, one can still derive much profit from Van Harvey's study of the tension between history and faith in 20th-century Protestant theology in *The Historian and the Believer* (New York, 1966). For an interesting collection of autobiographical accounts by contemporary French historians confronting this problem, see Jean Delumeau, ed., *Le historien et la foi*

other religious traditions have their own versions of the "historical Jesus" debate. Muslim scholars have sought to cloak their holy scripture, the Koran, as well as the prophet Muhammad, in a protective veil, immune from the contextualizing impulse of modern historicism.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, it has been suggested that Judaism knows little of such debates.<sup>6</sup> I would argue — and will seek to show here — that the tension between history and faith has been a recurrent and important feature in the history of modern Judaism.

It would not be farfetched to imagine that this tension might arise within the walls of the institution in which this lecture was first presented: Bar-Ilan University. To be sure, the ideal, as founding president Pinkhos Churgin (1894–1957) declared in the university's third year, was that "there would be no contradiction between science and research and faith in God or the sanctity emanating from this faith...."<sup>7</sup> And yet, has the relationship between Torah u-madà, or history and faith, always been tranquil at Bar-Ilan? One need only recall the attempt to appoint Cecil Roth, the distinguished English historian, to a visiting professorship at Bar-Ilan in 1964. Rabbinic figures outside of the university, most significantly Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook and Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Bromberg, fiercely objected to the appointment, claiming that Roth's historical method had undermined a principle of Jewish faith: belief in the historical existence

(Paris, 1996). Within the sphere of American religions, one of the most engaged groups of scholars contending with the problematic nature of its own received history is the cohort of Mormon researchers working on Mormon history. See, for instance, Richard L. Bushman's essay, "Faithful History", in George D. Smith, ed., *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City, 1992), pp. 1–17.

- 5 For a treatment of the tension between traditionalist and modernist approaches to Koranic interpretation, see J.M.S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation (1860–1960)*, especially pp. 88–120. Needless to say, the debate over Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, brought into sharp focus the price to be paid for deviating from a religiously sanctioned representation of Muhammad. See, for instance, Shabbir Akhtar, *Be Careful with Muhammad! The Salman Rushdie Affair* (London, 1989).
- 6 According to Salo W. Baron, the "entire problem of *Glaube und Geschichte*, so troublesome to many modern Protestant theologians, loses much of its acuteness in Judaism through the absence of the conflict between the historical and the eternal Christ." See Baron, "The Historical Outlook of Maimonides", reprinted in *idem, History and Jewish Historians* (Philadelphia, 1964), p. 109.
- 7 Churgin's charge to students in 1957 is quoted in Menachem Klein, *Bar-Ilan: Akademyah, dat ve-politika* (Jerusalem, 1998), p. 18. It is interesting to compare this statement with the more diluted formulation of Bar-Ilan's mission gleaned from the university's website. There it states that Bar-Ilan "seeks to blend Jewish tradition with modern technologies and scholarship" (<http://www.biu.ac.il/General/mission.html> from 26 March 2000).

of Abraham and Moses.<sup>8</sup> The result of their objection was quite consequential: Roth was denied the opportunity to teach at Bar-Ilan. While I make no claim to expertise about the history of Bar-Ilan University, I suspect that the kind of tension just described has arisen periodically — as an unavoidable consequence of the university's dual mission as a center of Torah and science.

In fact, one of the most articulate and anguished voices to probe the tension between modern history and Jewish faith was a Bar-Ilan professor. I am referring to Baruch Kurzweil, whose searing intellect and bitter passion reflected a deeply polemical personality. Interestingly, when Kurzweil thought about the problem of history and faith, he did not have Bar-Ilan in mind.<sup>9</sup> Rather, the institution that, to his mind, had created an irreparable breach between history and faith was the Hebrew University, with its sinister "Jerusalem school." In a series of essays published in *Ha'aretz*, beginning in 1945 and culminating in a spate of vituperative pieces in the 1960s, Kurzweil took aim against the historicist sensibility of modern Jewish scholars, who seek "to lower Judaism from its absolute validity to a state of relativism."<sup>10</sup> While the Jerusalem scholars were continuators of the 19th-century adepts of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, in this project of desacralization they, or more particularly their leader, added a new ingredient to the mix. Gershom Scholem, the spiritual guide of the "Jerusalem School," introduced mysticism as a — perhaps *the* — vital ingredient in an ever-evolving Judaism. As evidence, Kurzweil pointed to Scholem's study of the 17th-century false messiah, Shabtai Zevi. Not only did Scholem inflate the significance of this destructive historical figure; according to Kurzweil, he proposed a radically new historical understanding of Judaism in which:

we are all thrown in the caldron of relativization and transvaluation of values, of ceaseless dynamism, of a current that changes the face of Judaism and washes away all. There is no single and unique Judaism nor is it ever determined what Judaism is or will be.<sup>11</sup>

This anti-essentialist stance suited the study of mysticism perfectly, for

8 For a discussion of the Roth affair, see Klein, pp. 108–109.

9 He shared the harmonious ideal of Bar-Ilan as an institution that fuses "systematic, basic, Torah and scientific education together." Kurzweil, *Le-nokhah ha-mevukhah ha-ruhanit shel dorenu* (Ramat-Gan, 1976), p. 228 (quoted in Klein, p. 65).

10 See Kurzweil's review of Nathan Rotenstreich's *Ha-mahshavah ha-yehudit b'et ha-hadashah* from 11 January 1945 (*Ha'aretz*), reprinted in *Le-nokhah ha-mevukhah*, p. 43.

11 See Kurzweil's review of Scholem's Hebrew monograph, *Shabtai Zevi*, reprinted in

mysticism's role was to unsettle and subvert the normative rabbinic tradition. In Kurzweil's bifurcated world, Scholem was the chief villain, a diabolically brilliant scholar set upon harnessing the relativist practice of history to a "mystical nihilism."<sup>12</sup> By contrast, Kurzweil resisted any surrender to the irrational, individualist, and subjective forces of mysticism. Concomitantly, he struggled to build a protective wall against historicism, whose lapping waves continued to erode the once-mighty edifice of halakhic Judaism.

If the perverse fascination with mysticism went hand in hand with historicism, there was another partner in what Kurzweil considered the unholy trinity of secular modernity: nationalism. Where mysticism sought to subvert the normative tradition, nationalism aimed to "normalize" Judaism by removing its veil of uniqueness. In this regard, it was an ideal partner for historicism. Kurzweil was well aware that, in Europe, nationalism and historicism were close and mutually affirming allies from the early 19th century on. More often than not, historical scholarship had been called upon to tell the story of the nation. Nationalism, for its part, provided not only intellectual inspiration, but also an institutional home for historicism in the form of universities, learned societies, and large collaborative projects.

In diagnosing this relationship in the Jewish context, Kurzweil assumed a tone of desperation and crisis. "The Jerusalem School" led by Gershom Scholem was beholden to the "god of historicism, the same god of the science of normalization and historicization of Judaism." So as to leave no doubt, Kurzweil announced: "But the god of historicism and normalization is not the God of Israel."<sup>13</sup> The Zionist-historicist alliance marked a "transgression" against the sacred atemporality of the Jews. Not only did it insist that the Jews be treated like other nations; it also mandated that they be re-inserted back into the active current of history for which, Kurzweil warned, a high price would be exacted: nothing less than "surrendering eternal life."<sup>14</sup>

a section entitled "The Pseudo-Speakers of Judaism" of *Be-ma'avak 'al 'erkhe ha-Yahadut* (Tel Aviv, 1969), p. 106.

12 Kurzweil, "'Al ha-to'elet ve'al ha-nezek shel mada'e ha-Yahadut", reprinted in *Be-ma'avak 'al 'erkhe ha-Yahadut*, p. 211.

13 Kurzweil, "'Al ha-to'elet", p. 209.

14 *Be-ma'avak 'al 'erkhe ha-Yahadut*, viii. For a recent critique of the Zionist impulse to restore the Jews to history, see Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's "Ha-shivah 'el ha-historyah shel ha-ge'ulah", in S.N. Eisenstadt & Moshe Lissak, *Ha-Tsiyonut veka-hazarah le-historyah: Ha'arakha mi-hadash* (Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 259-76. Drawing on his 1996 dissertation,



Making sense of Baruch Kurzweil's contentious battle with Jewish historicism is a fascinating challenge. One can readily point to a number of intersecting explanatory layers: his iconoclastic personality; his personal animosity and inferiority complex toward the Hebrew University (where he sought and failed to gain a professorial appointment); his ambivalence toward Zionism, and particularly Zionist claims to intellectual or spiritual rejuvenation; his attention to the moral caesura occasioned by the Holocaust; and his uncommonly keen awareness, especially for a non-historian, that historicism was in the throes of crisis in postwar European intellectual culture.<sup>15</sup> And yet, for all of his intrigue, Kurzweil stands at the end of the story I would like to relate. That is, he is an exceptionally vocal, articulate, but late link in a chain of tradition of critics of Jewish historicism. The task before us is not to explore recent critics. It is to probe the roots of the largely unexplored tradition to which they belong, a tradition of dissent from one of the great orthodoxies of modern intellectual life: historicism.

## I

The "problem of history," as I have designated it, has a distinguished Jewish lineage. The yearnings of the 12th-century Judah Ha-Levi for a metahistorical Judaism served as a source of inspiration for a number of later figures, including Franz Rosenzweig and Isaac Breuer, who will be explored later.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Maimonides' dismissive reference to the study of history as "a waste of time"

Raz-Krakotzkin argues that "Zionist thought essentially adopts the Christian view" that Jews have stood outside of history and hence require a return to it. Raz-Krakotzkin, p. 254.

- 15 Kurzweil's awareness of the anti-historicist currents circulating in the West led to his incredulity regarding the Hebrew University: "The discontent with history is expanding throughout the entire world, but it has yet to arrive in Jerusalem". "I-ha-nahat she-be-historyah", p. 144. I have addressed Kurzweil's anti-historicism in "The Scholem-Kurzweil Debate and Modern Jewish Historiography", *Modern Judaism* (October 1986): pp. 261-85.
- 16 Rivka Horwitz has explored the parallels between the historical worldview of Ha-Levi and Franz Rosenzweig. She shows that, in addition to Rosenzweig's fascination with the *Kuzari* and Ha-Levi's poetry, both regard Judaism as an absolute historical truth and the Jews as the chosen people. See "Tefisat ha-historyah ha-yehudit be-mahshevet Franz Rosenzweig", *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 27 (1969): pp. 2-5. Like Horwitz, Amos Funkenstein notes the physiological-ethnic quality to Jewish chosenness in both thinkers. He also concurs with Horwitz's diagnosis of a primary difference between the two: whereas Ha-Levi seeks to overcome the state of Exile, Rosenzweig seems quite content with it. See Funkenstein's chapter "Franz

anticipated Moses Mendelssohn's fleeting remark that history was boring.<sup>17</sup> Between Moses (Maimonides) and Moses (Mendelssohn), we notice a pair of diverse attitudes toward history among Jews: first, that the recounting of mundane events was of little intrinsic interest; and second, that the momentous "historical" events in which the Jewish people participated were endowed with divine significance and subject to archetypal classification.<sup>18</sup> In his important *Haskalah ve-historyah*, Shmuel Feiner has carefully examined the Enlightenment era, in which these attitudes began to give way to new secular notions of history. In particular, Feiner and others have focused on the transition from "traditional" to "Enlightenment" notions of history in the late 18th century, a shift that anticipated the full-blown development of historicism in the succeeding century.<sup>19</sup>

But, at this point, we must ask: what is historicism? The term is surely one of the most elastic and confounding in the arsenal of the modern intellectual historian. By way of definition, I would suggest, following Calvin Rand, that modern historicism rests upon two conceptual layers.<sup>20</sup> At the foundational level is the shift from *historia sacra* (sacred history) to *historia profana* (secular history), reflected in the emergence of a new, decidedly worldly, norm of causality. This notion of causality penetrated deeply into European modes of thought, becoming an ordering principle, as Karl Mannheim put it in 1924, "on

Rosenzweig and the End of German-Jewish Philosophy", in his *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley, 1993), pp. 293–95.

17 See Maimonides' commentary on *Mishnah*, *Sanhedrin* 10:1, as well as Salo Baron's discussion in "The Historical Outlook of Maimonides", in *History and Jewish Historians*, 111ff. On Mendelssohn, see Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (Philadelphia, 1973), 108ff. Hans Liebeschütz offers a nuanced treatment of Mendelssohn's conflicted attitude to history in "Mendelssohn und Lessing in ihrer Stellung zur Geschichte", *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, edited by Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1979).

18 See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's now classic account in *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, 1982), pp. 33–36.

19 See Shmuel Feiner, *Haskalah ve-historyah: Toldoteha shel hakarat-'avar yehudit modernit* (Jerusalem, 1995). For a similar periodization in the general German (and European) context, see Friedrich Meinecke's classic work, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, translated as *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* (London, 1972).

20 See Rand's still insightful article, "Two Meanings of Historicism in the Writings of Dilthey, Troeltsch, and Meinecke", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25 (1965): pp. 503–18. See also Georg G. Iggers' excellent summary, "Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term", in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42 (1995): pp. 129–52.

which to construct our observations of the socio-cultural reality."<sup>21</sup> Among other effects, it stimulated the emergence and refinement of a new methodological regimen, which constitutes the second conceptual layer of historicism. This method was devoted to understanding the individual event or actor in its own discrete historical *context*. Causality and contextualization then represent the conceptual pillars of an historicism that became the primary point of reference for humanistic discourse by the 19th century.

It is against that backdrop of an ascendant historicism that I want to consider voices of dissent. My interest here is not in those whom we might call traditionalists — that is, Jews for whom the study of history (and usually, of other "secular" subjects) is deemed a waste of time better spent on Torah.<sup>22</sup> Rather, my interest is in Jewish figures who, regardless of their adherence to traditional ritual, were deeply and unapologetically immersed in a secular intellectual world, had absorbed the impact of historicism, and sought to protest against it — from within.<sup>23</sup>

A figure worth pondering in this context is Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–88), proponent of the *Torah im derekh erets* philosophy that countenanced study of, and even reverence for, secular literature within an overarching framework of Torah observance. While Hirsch could well qualify as a "traditionalist," he comes to mind because of his trenchant criticism of the leading Jewish historian of the 19th century, Heinrich Graetz (1817–91). In a series of critical reviews, Hirsch argued that Graetz's historical approach led to a desacralization of the rabbinic tradition — indeed, of the Oral Law itself.

21 See Mannheim's long essay "Historism," originally published in German, and reprinted in *idem, Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London, 1952), p. 85. For a classic view of the shift from sacred to profane history, see Karl Löwith's classic *Meaning in History* (Chicago, 1949).

22 See R. Joseph Caro's prohibition on reading history in *Shulkhan Arukh*, Orah Hayim 307, 16. But cf. Robert Bonfil, "Jewish Attitudes toward History and Historical Writing in Pre-Modern Times", *Jewish History* 11 (1997): pp. 12–16. By traditionalist, I have in mind a figure such as the near-contemporary Rabbi Shimon Schwab, for whom storytelling — i.e., tales that convey "the good memories of the good people, their unshakable faith, their staunch defense of tradition, their life of truth" — is vastly superior to critical history. See S. Schwab, *Selected Writings* (Lakewood, NJ, 1988), pp. 233–34.

23 Such an intellectual tradition is largely unexplored in historical and philosophical literature dealing with modern Jewish thought. For a recent study examining the interplay of traditionalist resistance to history and a modified traditionalist embrace of historicism, see Jacob J. Schacter, "Facing the Truths of History", *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 8 (1998/9): pp. 200–76.

Rather than treat the great rabbinic sages "objectively" — as bearers rather than creators of the Oral Law — Graetz "interprets them subjectively, in terms of what he perceives to be the temperament, the psychological makeup, the hierarchic positions and the political aims of these teachers."<sup>24</sup>

It is quite curious to see Hirsch, known for his contempt for the hubris of historians, attempting to refute Graetz on the very terms of the modern historian — by asserting the principle of objectivity and pointing out neglected sources or interpretations from the Second Temple period.<sup>25</sup> And yet, Hirsch's reliance on historical argumentation was hardly sustained. Indeed, notwithstanding his professed reverence for German culture, Hirsch had a truncated relationship with the German academic world — in which historicism's dominance was most pronounced. After a brief spell at the University of Bonn, he was largely removed from the intellectual circles from which the most interesting critics of historicism emerged. As such, he did not fully share in the fateful sense of intellectual crisis that commenced in Germany in the 1870s and extended through the rise of Nazism. It was in this period that historicism reached the pinnacle of its intellectual and institutional authority; and it was in this period that resistance to the hegemony of historicism reached its most vigorous expression.

Framed by the birth of the Second Reich in 1871 and the Third Reich in 1933, this period was marked by an unmistakable "crisis consciousness."<sup>26</sup> Iterations of fierce national pride competed with bouts of profound social anxiety, fear of degeneration with hopes of rejuvenation, flickering liberal sentiments with powerful reactionary currents. Not surprisingly, the experience of military conflict — the Franco-Prussian war and then the Great War itself — unsettled the cultural and intellectual foundations of German society. At the outset of this period, shortly after an intoxicating German military triumph, Friedrich

24 Hirsch's review of the fourth volume of Graetz's *Geschichte der Juden* was published in a number of issues of the Orthodox journal, *Jeschurun*, and reprinted in Hirsch's *Collected Writings* (New York, 1988), V: p. 6.

25 This reminds one of Ernst Troeltsch's scorn for those "who attacked the historical method as a manifestation of unbelief while employing something like it to vindicate the truth of their own views." See Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and Believer* (New York, 1966), p. 5.

26 The notion of a "crisis-consciousness" in turn-of-the-century European culture is borrowed from Charles Bambach's superb study, *Heidegger, Dilthey and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, NY, 1995). See also Robert J. Rubanowice, *Crisis in Consciousness: The Thought of Ernst Troeltsch* (Tallahassee, 1982). And also Fritz R. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: The Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, 1961).

Nietzsche unleashed a forceful attack upon historicism. Nietzsche did not deny to history all positive attributes. But he did express revulsion, in his 1874 essay, "On the Use and Abuse of History," for "the surfeit of history" so prevalent in his day. This excess burdened humanity with the heavy weight of historical data and prevented it from direct access to life experience. Drawing on a recent example, Nietzsche observed that "[t]he war is not yet over and already it has been transformed a hundred thousandfold into printed paper, already it is being served up as a new stimulant for the weary palates of those greedy for history."<sup>27</sup>

It was a similar effect — transforming multidimensional experience into one-dimensional history — that Baruch Kurzweil found so destructive nearly a century later. And, thus, it is understandable that Nietzsche was such a powerful presence in Kurzweil's anti-historicist writings. Not only did Kurzweil entitle one of his most important anti-historicist essays, "On the Use and Abuse of Jewish Studies," in evocation of Nietzsche; he also opened this essay with an epigraph from Nietzsche, lamenting the eviscerating effect of history on art and, significantly, on religion as well.<sup>28</sup>

## II

But Baruch Kurzweil, as promised, will not be the focus of this paper. Our interest is in an earlier period, one in which history came to be regarded as a sign of the atomization and alienation of modern society. Three years before Nietzsche's broadside, a young Jewish scholar threw himself into the midst of a vigorous battle between two representatives of a new philosophical movement (Adolf Trendelenburg and Kuno Fischer). All three rallied around the banner of a "return to Kant," which signaled a revival of the intellectual legacy of the great Enlightenment-era philosopher. The goal of the neo-Kantian movement was to move beyond the "great speculative constructions" of the once-regnant Hegelianism by providing a firmer, scientific foundation for philosophers' inquiries.<sup>29</sup>

And yet, division quickly surfaced within this new school of thought about how best to apply Kantian principles to contemporary humanistic discourse. It

27 Nietzsche's 1874 essay, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, has been translated as *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Indianapolis, 1980), p. 28.

28 Kurzweil, "'Al ha-to'elet vеха-nezek shel mada'e ha-Yahadut", p. 135.

29 Henri Dussort, *L'école de Marbourg* (Paris, 1963), p. 37.

was in this context that our young Jewish scholar, Hermann Cohen (1842–1918), entered the fray. Cohen was intent on assuring the primacy of philosophy — as the "queen of sciences" — within the *Geisteswissenschaften*.<sup>30</sup> This was hardly controversial among his fellow neo-Kantians. But Cohen also felt compelled to beat back the hegemonic impulses of history vis-à-vis philosophy. Whereas other neo-Kantians (especially of the Baden School) enthusiastically embraced history, Cohen warned in 1871 of an age that "allows itself to be dominated by the trend of history." The tighter the grip of historicism on intellectual life, the more difficult it would be for humanists to address the important questions of the day: "what will be and...the even more urgent question: what *must* be?"<sup>31</sup>

Left to its own design, history would remain focused on the individual datum from the past and ignore the moral challenge of the present or future. In this respect, history could have a paralyzing effect, as Nietzsche would argue a few years later. Cohen's solution was to subordinate history to philosophy, and thereby allow it to serve philosophy's mission of "fashion(ing) a whole out of its member parts."<sup>32</sup>

At various points in his career, Cohen manifested this same desire. Particularly in his later years, when his attention increasingly turned to the realm of Jewish thought, Cohen circled back to the problem of history. In a 1910 essay exploring the similarities between Kantianism and Judaism, Cohen declared that "it is neither the historian's task, nor does he have the competence to define essence."<sup>33</sup> To do so was the prerogative of the philosopher.

Noteworthy here is Cohen's concern with "essence," particularly, the essence of Judaism. The very language of "essence" stood at the heart of a raging intellectual battle in Germany over the role of history. In the decades since Cohen's youthful entry into the neo-Kantian fray, history had come under increasing attack not only from philosophers, but also from theologians who sought to reassert an autonomous, metahistorical domain for religious faith. In the Protestant world intense debate followed the re-issuance, in 1864, of

30 See Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism: German Social and Historical Thought, 1860–1914* (Detroit, 1978), p. 109.

31 Hermann Cohen, "Zur Kontroverse zwischen Trendelenburg und Kuno Fischer", in *idem, Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte* (Berlin, 1928), I: pp. 274–75.

32 Cohen, "Zur Kontroverse", p. 270.

33 Cohen's essay on the "Innere Beziehungen der Kantischen Philosophie zum Judentum" has been translated as "Affinities between the Philosophy of Kant and Judaism," in *Reason and Hope: Selections from the Jewish Writings of Hermann Cohen*, translated by Eva Jospe (New York, 1971), p. 88.

David Friedrich Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, originally published in 1835. To be sure, there were some who sought to reconcile their Christian faith and the growing dominance of an historicist mode of cognition. Typical in this regard was Albrecht Ritschl, the Göttingen scholar who believed in the value and necessity of history, but also believed that the history of Christianity is best understood by "one who...subordinates himself to His [i.e., Jesus'] person."<sup>34</sup> And yet, by century's end, the battle lines between history and theology were becoming increasingly contested. The Halle theologian Martin Kähler declared in an 1892 lecture, "Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus," that Jesus cannot be "the authentic object of the faith of all Christians if the questions what and who he really was can be established" only through critical historical scholarship.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, the Berlin scholar Adolf Harnack presented a celebrated series of lectures in 1899-1900, in which he argued for the indispensability of history. If, as he claimed, "Jesus Christ and his disciples were situated in their day just as we are situated in ours," then only an historical perspective could make sense of this generation in its formative context. But, more importantly, Harnack believed that only an historical perspective could grasp that essential part of Christianity "which, under differing historical forms, is of permanent validity."<sup>36</sup> On this view, it was the historian, not the theologian or philosopher, who was best equipped to gauge what was fleeting and what was enduring in a religion.<sup>37</sup>

34 See Ritschl, *Die positive Entwicklung der Lehre* (Bonn, 1874), pp. 1-3, quoted in Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, 1985), p. 14.

35 Kähler manifested a strong preference for "der geschichtliche Christus" over "der historische Jesus" in his lecture. See Carl E. Braaten's helpful introduction to Kähler, *The So-Called Jesus of History and the Historic Biblical Christ* (Philadelphia, 1964), pp. 20-21, 102. See also Claude Welch's discussion of Kähler in *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, 1985), II: pp. 152-53.

36 Adolf Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Leipzig, 1900), translated by Thomas Bailey Saunders as *What is Christianity?* (London and New York, 1901), pp. 12-14.

37 Harnack's lectures prompted a host of Jewish reactions, as Uriel Tal and others have discussed in detail. In general, the Jewish critics were less concerned with the primacy of historical method and more with Harnack's reading of the history of early Christianity. These critics, who included Leo Baeck, Moritz Lazarus, Moritz Güdemann, Joseph Eschelbacher, and Israel Goldschmidt, were intent on showing that Christianity did not supersede Judaism, but that it rested on the spiritual foundation of the latter. Hermann Cohen was not in the front line of Harnack's Jewish critics, but, ever vigilant in the defense of Judaism, he labored to assert its lasting value. In 1910 Cohen shared a platform with Harnack at the Fifth World Congress for Free Christianity and Religious Progress. In his address, "Judaism's Significance for the Religious Progress of Mankind," he announced to his Christian audience that the sublime ideal of One

Hermann Cohen diverged sharply from the view that the historian was the chief interpreter of religious tradition. He did so a number of years later in his response to another major figure in the Protestant debates over history and faith, Ernst Troeltsch. Like Harnack, Troeltsch was a leading practitioner of the *religionsgeschichtliche* method prevalent in early 20th-century Protestant circles. Advocates of this method, Troeltsch declared, were those "who have given up the last remnant of the idea of truth supernaturally revealed in the Bible, and who work exclusively with the universally valid instruments of psychology and history."<sup>38</sup> Scholars of this orientation labored to trace the decidedly *historical* origins of Christianity rather than accept dogmatic assertions of Christ's divinity. In Troeltsch's own work this impulse led, at various points, to the study of the Israelite prophets, in whom he saw the "highest development" of ancient Judaism before the advent of Christianity.<sup>39</sup> In a 1916 lecture Troeltsch applied historical sociological tools to "the ethics of the Hebrew prophets." There he concluded that the ethics of the prophets was not "the ethics of humanity, but rather of Israel [as reflected] in the undifferentiated unity of ethics, law, and morality that is particular to all ancient peoples." Moreover, Israelite prophecy, Troeltsch asserted, "was born and bred in the rural ambience of ancient Palestine," an environment rife with "oriental-religious messianic dream[s]."<sup>40</sup>

Both the content and method of Troeltsch's lecture unnerved Hermann Cohen. As Wendell Dietrich has noted, the kind of historical sociology that Troeltsch

- God — Judaism's gift to civilization — was "the principle of spirituality in which the moral universe...as well as all ethics are grounded." On Jewish reactions to Harnack, see Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics, and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870–1914*, translated by Noah J. Jacobs (Ithaca, NY, 1975), 202ff., as well as his "Theologische Debatte um das 'Wesen' des Judentums", in Werner E. Mosse, ed., *Juden in Wilhelminischen Deutschland, 1890–1914* (Tübingen, 1976), pp. 599–632. See also the recent discussion by Christian Wiese, *Wissenschaft des Judentums und protestantische Theologie im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Tübingen, 1999), pp. 131–40. The Bar-Ilan scholar, Aharon Shear-Yashuv, has written an incisive analysis of Leo Baeck's response to Harnack, "Ha-mahloket shel Leo Baeck 'im 'mahut ha-Natsrut' shel Adolf Harnack", *Da'at* 23 (1989): pp. 111–20. Hermann Cohen's address at the Fifth World Congress is excerpted in *Reason and Hope*, pp. 220–21. See also Gandolf Hübinger, *Kulturprotestantismus und Politik* (Tübingen, 1994), p. 274.
- 38 Ernst Troeltsch, "The Dogmatics of the 'religionsgeschichtliche Schule'," *The American Journal of Theology* 17 (January 1913): p. 4.
- 39 Ibid., p. 8.
- 40 As a corollary of this view, Troeltsch held, in good supersessionist form, that it was in early Christianity that "prophetism lives on again and is rejuvenated". Ernst Troeltsch, "Das Ethos der hebraischen Propheten," *Logos* 6 (1916–17): pp. 15–18, 24–28.



practiced deeply disturbed Cohen, because it "radically relativizes the truth claim of the prophetic ideas."<sup>41</sup> In Troeltsch's depiction, the Israelite prophets emerged as bearers of a rural peasant mentality (*Bauernmoral*). Cohen warned in his response to Troeltsch in 1917 that such a casting transformed the prophetic view of God from a universal force to "the particularism of a tribal god." And with that, "Judaism as a religion is destroyed."<sup>42</sup>

Cohen's passion here is not surprising, given his fervent belief in the universal message of prophetic ethics. No less unsurprising is his willingness to lock horns with a major Protestant intellectual like Troeltsch; for, on a number of occasions in his career, Cohen proved to be a vigorous and able defender of Judaism against hostile assault. But, even as Cohen sought to defend Judaism from Troeltsch's attack, it is intriguing to consider the extent to which his outlook in general — and his reticence toward historicism in particular — belonged to a Protestant intellectual universe.<sup>43</sup> In the first instance, his vision of an enlightened democratic state rooted in the universal morality of the prophets paralleled the commitment of German Protestant liberals — purveyors of *Kulturprotestantismus* — to an ethical state founded on Christian tenets of social justice.<sup>44</sup> From a different angle, Cohen's defense of the prophets recalled the efforts of another circle of Protestant intellectuals — opponents of *Kulturprotestantismus* — to ward off the advances of historians in rooting Jesus in a specific, local context. In this latter respect, Cohen's dismissal of the historian's capacity to grasp the essence of religion engages what has been called "the fateful question" of modern Christian thought: namely, the possibility of religious faith in the wake of historicism's assault.<sup>45</sup>

Caught in a sea of historicist dominance, Hermann Cohen tried to identify

41 See Dietrich's careful analysis of the Cohen-Troeltsch debate in *Cohen and Troeltsch: Ethical Monotheistic Religion and Theory of Culture* (Atlanta, 136), p. 36.

42 See Cohen's response from 1917, "Der Prophetismus und die Soziologie", reprinted in his *Jüdische Schriften* (Berlin, 1924), II: pp. 398–99.

43 I explore this question in a forthcoming essay "Hermann Cohen and the Quest for Protestant Judaism" in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 46 (2001).

44 Gangolf Hübinger notes that liberal German Protestants and Jews shared a notion of "eine bürgerlichen Moderne und den universellen Werten gleicher Staatsbürgerrechte und gleicher Lebensführungschancen". *Kulturprotestantismus und Politik*, p. 267. And yet, advocates of *Kulturprotestantismus* did not always find a place for Jews within their theory of a *Kulturstaat*. See Dietrich, *Cohen and Troeltsch*, pp. 73–75, as well as Kurt Nowak's monographic study of the complicated relationship of *Kulturprotestantismus* to German Jewry. Nowak, *Kulturprotestantismus und Judentum in der Weimarer Republik* (Wolfenbüttel, 1993).

45 See Emmanuel Hirsch, *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie im*

a distinct current, an ethical Judaism rooted in reason and unperturbed by the waves of historical contingency. If this Judaism of ethical perfection rather than ritual observance bore the traces of the surrounding Protestant culture, then so did his reservations about historicism. For, as various commentators have noted, Cohen was a kind of Protestant Jew — a thinker whose profound exposure to Protestant culture left an indelible imprint on his vision of Judaism.<sup>46</sup> One of the features of that vision — and indeed of Protestant Judaism more generally, according to Akiva Ernst Simon — was a decided resistance to Jewish nationalism.<sup>47</sup> Cohen was well known as a foe of Zionism, and I would propose that his critical attitudes toward Zionism and historicism be viewed in tandem.

In his great posthumous work, *Religion of Reason*, Cohen repeated the preference for philosophical holism over historicist fragmentation that we first noticed in his 1871 essay. The deficiencies of the latter were particularly evident in the case of nationalist historiography, whose narrow vantage point assured that "it cannot be the point of departure for a scientific orientation."<sup>48</sup> Apart from that abstract formulation, Cohen called attention to, and lamented, the union of nationalism and historicism in the work of Heinrich Graetz, his one-time teacher at the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary. Cohen expressed deep ambivalence toward Graetz both as a person and as a scholar, such that it is difficult at times to distinguish the intellectual from the psychological opposition. For instance, in the midst of the infamous *Antisemitismusstreit* that plagued German intellectual circles from 1879 to 1881 — a period in which most Jewish notables were rallying to defend Graetz against Heinrich von Treitschke — Cohen saw fit to describe Graetz's temperament as a "frightening perversity of emotional judgments."<sup>49</sup> This contemptuous verdict of Graetz's character blends into Cohen's critique of his methodological deficiencies. Unlike the

*Zusammenhang mit den allgemeinen Bewegungen des europäischen Denken* (Gütersloh, 1954), V: p. 492, quoted in Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, p. 8.

46 See Hans Liebeschütz, "Hermann Cohen and his Historical Background", *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 13 (1968): p. 13; see also Jacques Derrida, "Interpretation at War: Kant, the Jew, the German", *New Literary History* 22 (1991): p. 54.

47 See Simon's interesting comments on "Protestant", as well as the superseded "Catholic," Judaism in *Ha-im 'od anakhnu Yehudim?* (Tel Aviv, 1982), pp. 9–30.

48 Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, translated by Simon Kaplan (Atlanta, 1995), p. 262.

49 Cohen, "Ein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage", originally published in 1880, and reprinted in Cohen's *Jüdische Schriften*, II: p. 76.

steely rationalism and universalist aspirations of the philosopher, the historian, symbolized by Graetz, inclined to the emotional, sensual, material, and, alas, national. This may help explain why Cohen labeled Graetz already in 1874 with the pejorative term "Palestinian," signifying less a proto-Zionist stance than a base, materialist understanding of Judaism.<sup>50</sup> It may also explain why Cohen criticized Graetz in 1917, the centenary of the historian's birth, for privileging the "'succulent fruit' (*saftige Frucht*) of national-political Judaism" over a "sublimated idealized Judaism."<sup>51</sup> It is at such a point that we see the convergence of Cohen's personal antipathy, ideological opposition to Jewish nationalism, and intellectual dissatisfaction with historicism.

It would be overstating the case to argue that Cohen's concern with Graetz, and the problem of history, was the central feature of his intellectual project. He spent most of his intellectual labors attempting to provide an enduring scientific framework for a neo-Kantian epistemology.<sup>52</sup> But, as one who operated in the world of the German university, Cohen was periodically unsettled by the hegemonic impulses of historicism within that world. On such occasions, he sought to fend off what he perceived to be historicist attacks on the essence of Judaism, be they from Troeltsch, Graetz, or an earlier *bête noire*, Baruch Spinoza (to whom Cohen linked Graetz). Cohen's critical remarks against them remind us that anti-historicist gales blew powerfully across the intellectual map of Europe in the early 20th century, leaving little terrain untouched. While social scientific critics such as Karl Lamprecht and Emile Durkheim attacked the methodological flaccidity of history, philosophers and theologians pointed to the destructive features of historicism. Such critiques often coincided with a new rhetoric of degeneracy during and after World War I. Dire Spenglerian admonitions and a culture of fierce political violence rattled the pillars of the

50 Cohen made use of this epithet in a letter to his Marburg mentor, F.A. Lange, from 5 September 1874, and again in 1880 in "Ein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage", reprinted in Cohen's *Jüdische Schriften* (Berlin, 1924), II: 76ff. See also Liebeschütz, "Hermann Cohen and his Historical Background", pp. 3–4, n. 2.

51 Cohen, "Grätzens Philosophie der jüdischen Geschichte", reprinted in *Jüdische Schriften*, III: p. 205.

52 It is important to add that other neo-Kantians, mainly of the Baden tradition (H. Rickert and W. Windelband), were embarked on an explicit mission to provide a firm methodological grounding for historicism, primarily by highlighting its "idiographic" rather than "nomothetic" function. The Marburg school of neo-Kantianism, to which Cohen belonged, did not share this concentrated interest in the scientific underpinning of history.

*Geisteswissenschaften*.<sup>53</sup> It was in the throes of this upheaval that none other than Ernst Troeltsch, defender of history against religious dogmatism, declared a "crisis of historicism."<sup>54</sup> It was also in this milieu that Hermann Cohen, a steadfast believer in the clarificatory powers of science until his last days, undertook to re-orient the nature of Jewish scholarship away from historicism — together with his one-time student, Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929).<sup>55</sup> We might say that in this extraordinary intellectual partnership, the transition from the German-Jewish 19th century to the 20th century, from a harmonious neo-Kantianism to a discordant existentialism, reached completion.<sup>56</sup>

### III

By background, training, and outlook, Cohen and Rosenzweig were an unlikely couple. Born in an intimate and traditional Jewish home, Cohen moved from that world to the rarefied heights of the German academy. By contrast, Rosenzweig, the product of an assimilated Jewish upbringing, moved from an early career in the German academy to a free-floating existence as an innovative Jewish educator and thinker. Reflecting the generational and cultural gap between them, Rosenzweig reported that his first reading of Cohen left him "cold and gray."<sup>57</sup> But the vectors of their lives crossed in a fateful way, as both embarked on idiosyncratic paths of return (*teshuvah*) to Judaism. The two met in November 1913, when Cohen taught Rosenzweig at the *Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft*

53 See Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, CT, 1968), p. 174. For an illuminating discussion of the postwar "crisis of spirit," see George Steiner, "Heidegger, Again", in *Salmagundi* 82–83 (1989): pp. 31–55.

54 See Troeltsch, "Die Krisis des Historismus", *Die Neue Rundschau* 33 (1922): pp. 572–90.

55 See Troeltsch, "Die Krisis des Historismus", *Die Neue Rundschau* 33 (1922): pp. 572–90. Alexander Altmann writes of Cohen: "it is in small measure due to his influence that twentieth-century Jewish theology in Germany emancipated itself from a sterile Historicism and recovered the almost lost domain of the Absolute, of Truth and faith in the Truth". Altmann, "Theology in Twentieth-Century German Jewry", *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 1 (1956): p. 194.

56 For a nuanced study of Rosenzweig's dialectical relationship to Cohen and neo-Kantianism, see Peter Gordon's recent essay, "Science, Finitude, and Infinity: Neo-Kantianism and the Birth of Existentialism", *Jewish Social Studies* 6:1 (Fall 1999): pp. 30–53.

57 Rosenzweig, "Ein Gedenkblatt", originally published in 1918 in the wake of Cohen's birthday, and reprinted in *idem, Franz Rosenzweig. Der Mensch und sein Werk*, edited by Reinhold & Annemarie Mayer (Dordrecht, the Netherlands, 1984), III: p. 239.

des Judentums in Berlin. Rosenzweig was stunned by the "volcanic" passion of Cohen's teaching, by the force of a vibrant and profound thinker engaged not in sophistry, but in profound reflection upon "a world still plunged in the confusion of a reality threatened by chaos."<sup>58</sup> Cohen, for his part, encountered a powerful young intellect in the depths of theological and psychic unrest. Soon thereafter, Cohen and Rosenzweig joined forces in the project of reinvigorating Jewish life, and Jewish intellectual life in particular.

A key text in this shared project was the long letter Rosenzweig wrote to Cohen from the Balkan front in March 1917, in which he spelled out his ideas of how to infuse Jewish learning with new passion and depth. Later published as "Zeit ists," Rosenzweig's proposal called for the creation of an academy for Jewish science in which 150 teacher-scholars, fully engaged with the surrounding community, would be supported. Underlying this proposal was the view that "Judaism was more than a power in the past," not a mere historical relic, but a living organism with a promising future.<sup>59</sup>

Cohen enthusiastically endorsed the letter and spirit of Rosenzweig's proposal, and the two began efforts to create such an institution in Berlin. For a variety of reasons, including Cohen's death in 1918, the new institution was never established. Or, more accurately, it never took rise in the form that Rosenzweig had imagined. In fact, an Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums was established in Berlin, but, ironically, it became a bastion of pure historical scholarship.<sup>60</sup>

Dissatisfied with this course and bereft of Cohen's guidance, Rosenzweig relocated the locus of his plans for a new Jewish learning. In 1920 Rosenzweig, at the behest of Rabbi Nehemia Nobel, opened the Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus in Frankfurt am Main. In its brief seven-year history, the Lehrhaus hosted an extraordinary array of teachers and students, who were brought together with the aim of eliminating the distinction between all-knowing master and ignorant disciple. Like Rosenzweig himself, the Lehrhaus was thoroughly suffused with the impulse to break down such boundaries in the name of a genuine intellectual and spiritual *experience*.

58 Rosenzweig's recollection is quoted in Derrida, "Interpretation at War", p. 43.

59 Rosenzweig, "Zeit ists...", reprinted in Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk*, III: p. 463.

60 I have analyzed this development in "The Fall and Rise of Jewish Historicism: The Evolution of the Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums", *Hebrew Union College Annual* 63 (1992), pp. 107–144.

If Hermann Cohen symbolizes the neo-Kantian moment in 19th-century German philosophy, then Franz Rosenzweig symbolizes its replacement by another powerful philosophical expression following World War I. Unpersuaded by the once-dominant systems of Hegelianism and neo-Kantianism, Rosenzweig was on a mission to restore a sense of ontological urgency to philosophy. In this regard, he belonged to a cohort of impatient young German theologians and philosophers intent upon a *Kehre*, a turning away from the epistemological conceit of the previous century. Whereas Karl Barth instigated a new "crisis theology" that ached for "the primordially authentic religious experience," Martin Heidegger was calling for *Destruktion*, the leveling of prior philosophical and scientific modes of inquiry.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, Franz Rosenzweig was insisting that philosophy investigate not the way in which consciousness framed reality à la Kant, but rather the "pure existence, pure 'matter-of-factness': the factuality of the divine, the human, the worldly."<sup>62</sup> This philosophical imperative to grasp factuality — *Tatsächlichkeit* — owed much to the Enlightenment-era philosopher Schelling, as Else Freund noted in her doctoral dissertation some 70 years ago.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, this imperative clearly belonged to the ambience of crisis in early 20th-century Germany in which a new generation of intellectuals, preeminently Heidegger, arose in protest. The older systems against which they rebelled rested on sweeping claims of scientific certainty or assurances of human progress. With the passage of time, however, harsh experiences — war, economic and social unrest, and new illiberal ideologies — seriously undermined the validity of these systems.

Among those 19th-century methods that came under attack was historicism, which drew a remarkably wide band of critics.<sup>64</sup> And among these critics was Franz Rosenzweig, who was acutely aware of the debilitating features of

61 See Bambach's excellent treatment of the postwar crisis thinking in Barth and Heidegger in *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, pp. 192, 197.

62 Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, edited and translated by William W. Hallo (Notre Dame, 1970), p. 83.

63 Else Freund, *Die Existenzphilosophie Franz Rosenzweigs* (Leipzig, 1933). See also Stéphane Mosés's discussion of Rosenzweig's engagement with Schelling in *System and Revelation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, translated by Catherine Tihanyi (Detroit, 1992), 37ff., as well as Paul Mendes-Flohr's brief remarks in the introduction to *idem*, p. 8. *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (Hanover, NH, 1988), p. 8.

64 According to Bambach, historicism's relevance in the midst of this *Angst*-ridden era was "more as an index to the 'crisis' of culture than as a viable movement in its own right". Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, p. 188.

historicism — its tendency to atomize the past and stifle the present like a numbing sap. He himself had been a promising young practitioner of history under the tutelage of Friedrich Meinecke and Heinrich Rickert at the University of Freiburg (1908–12). Over the course of his studies, Rosenzweig developed serious doubts about historical study, especially its relativizing method. These doubts came in the midst of the churning intellectual ferment in Germany, and were an important factor in the profound personal crisis that pushed Rosenzweig, at the age of 27, to the brink of conversion. That episode, in 1913, has been amply described in the voluminous scholarly literature on Rosenzweig.<sup>65</sup> So too, for that matter, has Rosenzweig's critical attitude toward history.<sup>66</sup>

What merits more attention is Rosenzweig's proximate status to contemporaneous Protestant theologians, for whom history was the chief malady of the day — and faith its antidote. Rosenzweig personified the very struggle that they waged, namely, the challenge of stripping away the encrusted layers of historical interpretation and recapturing the primal experience of faith — not unlike the first Protestants whose rallying cry was *sola Scriptura*. For, as he began his earnest quest for faith, he turned away from the study of history. The catalyst for this change was not the classical sources of Judaism, but his encounter with Christian theology. Through his Protestant cousins, Hans and Rudolf Ehrenberg, descendants of a distinguished Jewish family, Rosenzweig was exposed to probing minds who well understood Rosenzweig's sense of emptiness as a Jew and offered an alternative path. Moreover, his long conversations in 1913 with Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy — another Protestant who, like Hans Ehrenberg, had chosen to convert from Judaism — introduced him to the latter's *Offenbarungsglaube*, a faith rooted in revelation that spoke to the alienation of the modern spiritual seeker. It was in the midst of these discussions that Rosenzweig felt that he had vanquished relativism, a chief symptom of the historicism that he had once embraced. In a letter written in

65 See, for example, Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York, 1953). An important recent contribution to the Rosenzweig literature is Ephraim Meier's lucid volume, *Kokhav mi-Ya'akov: Hayav vitsirato shel Franz Rosenzweig* (Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 15–50. For a discussion of Rosenzweig's "return" to Judaism (suggesting that Rosenzweig had recurrent doubts about his decision not to convert), see Rivka Horwitz's introduction to the Hebrew translation of Rosenzweig's letters and diary, *Mivhar igrot ve-kit'e yoman* (Jerusalem, 1987), pp. xxii–xxvi.

66 See Meier, *Kokhav mi-Ya'akov*, pp. 120–33, as well as the illuminating chapters by Alexander Altmann and Paul Mendes-Flohr in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, pp. 124–37, 138–61.

the most tumultuous period of his life (October 1913), Rosenzweig declared: "Rosenstock pushed me step by step out of the last relativistic position that I still occupied, and forced me to take an absolute standpoint.... Any form of relativism is now impossible to me."<sup>67</sup>

To reiterate then: Franz Rosenzweig's main dialogue partners at the time were Protestant intellectuals. Likewise, the chief topic of conversation was the possibility of faith as defined by Christian thinkers.<sup>68</sup> The obvious question was: why remain Jewish? It is this question that Rosenzweig struggled to address, particularly in 1913. The extended answer came in Rosenzweig's subsequent life, during which he recommitted himself — and sought to attract others — to a revitalized Judaism. This meant an explicit choice of faith over history, an act that was fully consonant with his Protestant intellectual companions — the brothers Ehrenberg and Rosenstock — as well as more prominent theological figures of the period, such as Karl Barth. All sought a religious faith rooted in factuality but liberated from the ponderous weight of historical facts. All anchored their faith in revelation, but refused to surrender that, or other inspired events, to the historian's scalpel.<sup>69</sup>

This shared, and seemingly Protestant, framing of the problem of history

67 This quotation comes from a letter Rosenzweig wrote to his cousin, Rudolf Ehrenberg, on 31 October 1919, and is quoted in Mendes-Flohr, "Franz Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism", *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, p. 143.

68 Rosenzweig was acutely aware of the very Christianness of the world he occupied. In an earlier letter to his parents (1909), he had observed with cold reflexivity: "We are in all matters Christian. We live in a Christian state, go to a Christian school, read Christian books. In short, our entire 'culture' is Christian through and through." See Rosenzweig's letter to his parents from 6 November 1909 in the first volume of the new edition of Rosenzweig's collected writings (*Der Mensch und sein Werk*), *Briefe und Tagebücher*, ed. R. Rosenzweig and E. Rosenzweig-Scheinmann (The Hague: The Netherlands, 1979), pp. 94–95.

69 The quest for a religious experience freed from philosophical or historicist inquiry animates Rudolf Otto's renowned study of the "numinous" in *Das Heilige* (Berlin, 1917). In recalling his own liberation from historical approaches to Christian faith, Karl Barth offered the following back-handed compliment to his teachers at the theological faculty of the University of Berne in the first decade of the 20th century: "They gave me such a thorough foundation in the earlier form of the 'historical-critical school' that the remarks of their later successors could no longer get under my skin or even touch my heart — they only got on my nerves". Quoted in Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, translated by John Bowden (Philadelphia, 1976), p. 34. See also Alexander Altmann, "Franz Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy: An Introduction to their *Letters on Judaism and Christianity*", in *idem, Essays in Jewish Intellectual History* (Hanover, NH, 1981), especially pp. 247–53.



is hardly a speculative fancy. Rosenzweig himself acknowledged to Hans Ehrenberg that his own conception of Judaism "may be more Christian than Jewish."<sup>70</sup> But does this mean that Rosenzweig — or Cohen before him — was entirely derivative, that he was forced to deny his own tradition in borrowing from the surrounding culture? To answer affirmatively is to ignore the complexity of the cultural negotiation in which modern German Jews repeatedly engaged. Similarly, to reduce that exchange to a matter of a minority culture helplessly submitting to a dominant majority is a clear case of what Simon Rawidowicz once called "hashpaitis" (influenceitis).<sup>71</sup> The term "influence" does not always capture the subtle and fluid boundaries of cultural exchange — the incremental concessions and retrenchments — that continually reshaped German Jewry. In the context of Rosenzweig's own formation, Amos Funkenstein understood that there was a good deal of *self-fashioning* involved in the creation of a German-Jewish identity, but that this self-fashioning did not occur in a social vacuum. With his customary insight, Funkenstein wrote: "Judaism, in short, is a form of existence that, in order to reflect upon itself, *would have to transgress beyond itself and see itself in Christian eyes.*"<sup>72</sup>

This act, of seeing with Christian eyes in order to see oneself, was an unavoidable aspect of the intellectual experience of a German-Jewish thinker like Franz Rosenzweig. It bespoke what we might call his cultural "bifocality" — connoting a pair of adjacent (and sometimes merging) optical perspectives. Hence, we notice that even after deciding to dedicate himself to Judaism Rosenzweig did not discard his Christian lens. In an essay he wrote in 1914 entitled "Atheistic Theology," Rosenzweig evinced clear understanding and some sympathy for a Protestant theological enterprise burdened by the methods of history. In particular, historical approaches to Jesus á la David Friedrich Strauss understood "the origin of Christianity purely in terms of the overpowering necessities and eternal truth of history."<sup>73</sup> The resulting contextual

70 See Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, p. 301.

71 Rawidowicz, "Two That Are One", *State of Israel, Diaspora, and Jewish Continuity*, p. 156. For a relevant discussion of the relations between colonizer and colonized in Africa, with attention to the hybrid culture that results, see K.A. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London, 1992).

72 Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, p. 301. See also Paul Mendes-Flohr's recent treatment of Rosenzweig's recognition of the complexity of the German-Jewish condition in *German Jews: A Dual Identity* (New Haven, 1999), especially pp. 66–88.

73 Rosenzweig's essay, "Atheistische Theologie," has been republished in *Der Mensch und sein Werk*, p. 688. The essay also appears in an abridged English translation as "Atheistic

reductionism reflected the "killing force of history" against which 19th-century theologians fought.<sup>74</sup>

Rosenzweig observed that despite Judaism's "lively relation to Christian scientific thought," there seemed to be no analogous conflict in 19th-century Jewry. But he did notice a later Jewish parallel to the "historical Jesus" school: namely, "the rationalistic deification of the people" that Zionism heralded in his own day.<sup>75</sup> The common thread of these two "atheistic theologies" was the attempt to render their respective subjects, Jesus and the Jewish nation, "determinately this-worldly." It was their shared insistence on contingency and temporality that Rosenzweig found so confining and, at the same time, so symptomatic of the human condition: "Man now finds himself under the curse of historicity, divided within himself between first receiver and last fulfiller of the Word, between the people standing at Sinai and the Messianic humanity."<sup>76</sup>

Trapped between the poles of historical time, one must seek liberation from them. But a movement such as Zionism, despite its apotheosis of Jewish peoplehood, pointed in the opposite direction, toward historical time and space. This view did not win Rosenzweig friends among Zionist intellectuals in Germany. In fact, Martin Buber rejected "Atheistic Theology" for a proposed publication of his. Undaunted, Rosenzweig forcefully returned to this topic on a variety of occasions, including a lecture delivered in his hometown of Kassel in 1919. In this lecture on "The Spirit and Epochs of Jewish History," Rosenzweig declared that the Jewish people refused to succumb to time, indeed, refused to be reduced to a scheme of periodization. On the contrary, the "Jewish spirit breaks the shackles of (historical) epochs" and "walks undisturbed through history."<sup>77</sup>

Theology: From the Old to the New Way of Thinking", *Canadian Journal of Theology* 14 (1968): p. 81. For an attempt to situate this essay in the midst of Rosenzweig's tumultuous intellectual and emotional world, see Bernhard Casper, *Das dialogische Denken. Eine Untersuchung der religionsphilosophischen Bedeutung Franz Rosenzweigs, Ferdinand Ebners und Martin Bubers* (Freiburg, 1967), pp. 78–80.

74 Rosenzweig, "Atheistische Theologie", p. 688 (English, p. 80).

75 Ibid., pp. 687, 692 (English pp. 82, 84).

76 Ibid., p. 697 (English, p. 88).

77 Rosenzweig's 1919 essay, "Geist und Epochen der jüdischen Geschichte", is reprinted in *Der Mensch und sein Werk*, p. 538. For a recent (and ahistorical) discussion of this essay, see Manfred H. Vogel, *Rosenzweig on Profane/Secular History* (Atlanta, 1996). See also in this context Rosenzweig's 1920 lecture from Kassel, "Jüdische Geschichte im Rahmen der Weltgeschichte", in *Der Mensch und sein Werk*, III: p. 539. There Rosenzweig declared: "Jüdische Geschichte — eigentlich gibt es keine....". Here Rosenzweig was denying that Jewish history could be understood in any usual prosaic

In general, Rosenzweig's critical gaze often shifted from the epistemological to the ontological realms, from history as method to history as causal scheme. In his Kassel lecture, it was not the former that interested him, but rather the wider domain of history in which the Jewish people operated. For the Jews alone, he argued, the portal of history was eternally open, to be entered and exited at will. Underlying this claim was a powerful spirit of dissent against the Zionist drive to return the Jewish people to the current of history, as well as against the very secular modes of historical thinking that framed such a desire.

This spirit of dissent is also evident in Rosenzweig's crowning achievement, the monumental *Star of Redemption*. Written in the trying circumstances of World War I, this book is an extended blueprint for Rosenzweig's vision of a Judaism beyond conventional time and space. As he notes in the third part of the *Star*, the Jews are the Eternal People for whom "home is never home in the sense of the land, as it is to the peoples of the world who plough the land and live and thrive on it...." Born in and conditioned by Exile, this people "never loses the untrammelled freedom of a wanderer."<sup>78</sup> Consequently, the burden of Exile becomes liberation. "Remote from the chronology of the rest of the world," the Jew can stand in immediate proximity to God. And, in this Exilic state, "eternity has already come — even in the midst of time!"<sup>79</sup>

Rosenzweig's mission of transcending history while remaining in time seems an impossible challenge. And yet, he was hardly alone in attempting it. As I have suggested, Rosenzweig belonged to a broader universe of German intellectuals for whom historicism was an unwanted and yet unavoidable intrusion on the more holistic disciplines of philosophy and sociology, or, most significantly, on the very experience of faith. Moreover, he belonged to a band of 20th-century German-Jewish thinkers often mentioned in the same breath, but rarely for their shared concern for history. This group included, at various points in their careers, Leo Baeck, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, and Leo Strauss among others. Notwithstanding their diverse perspectives and interests, all of these figures were intimately familiar with the historicist culture of the German academy. All were mindful of the "crisis consciousness" that had begun to permeate European society at the end of the 19th century,

sense. Rather, he insisted, Jewish history is essentially equivalent to a sweeping, eternally present "Weltgeschichte".

<sup>78</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, p. 300.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 331–32.

with its pointed critique of historicism. And all were deeply imprinted by the experience of the Great War, which further weakened the fragile foundation of 19th-century belief systems. The immediate aftermath of the war, particularly in Weimar Germany, was a remarkably dissonant period, as soaring utopian hopes clashed with cataclysmic despair. In that charged ambience, Jewish thinkers such as Rosenzweig and Benjamin tried to free themselves from the shackles of historicism, but not without constructing a new version of history, a messianic history profoundly "at variance with evolutionism and the philosophy of progress."<sup>80</sup> In this state of neo-messianic fervor, they were attempting to save History from historicism itself.

#### IV

Salvation, more often than not, did not lie in Zion. Throughout this paper I have intimated that a frequent companion of Jewish anti-historicism — and perhaps a tell-tale sign of the Protestantization of Judaism — was anti— or a-Zionism. It is in this context that I would like to mention briefly a final figure who affirms that link, while also providing a bridge from the German past to the Israeli present: Isaac Breuer (1883–1946). Father of a distinguished Bar-Ilan scholar, and teacher of Baruch Kurzweil, Isaac Breuer was heir to the intellectual legacy of his grandfather, Samson Raphael Hirsch. Of particular interest to us, he embraced, and even elaborated upon, Hirsch's vision of a Judaism that soared beyond historicist bounds.

Unfortunately, a full discussion of Breuer's thinking cannot be offered here. But it is incumbent upon us to highlight a few points relating to this most intriguing personality. Although he lived in the closely guarded confines of his grandfather's community in Frankfurt, Breuer came of age at a time of intense intellectual tumult. In the first instance, the attempts of the neo-Orthodox Breuer community to preserve its unique existence, at once segregated from the mainstream Jewish community and yet open to German *Kultur*, made for a daily struggle of boundary definition. As a prominent representative of that community, Breuer was called upon to meld wide secular learning, unstinting ritual commitment, and intense spiritual yearning.

80 See Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe* (Stanford, 1988), p. 3. See also Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley, 1997), pp. 5–6.

The broader cultural milieu in which the Breuer community existed — Frankfurt in the Weimar period — was home to a fascinating and eclectic range of Jewish thinkers, especially those associated with two distinctive institutions: the Institut für Sozialforschung and the Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus. Despite the stark differences between them, the Jewish thinkers who dominated these two institutions — figures such as Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer, Leo Lowenthal, Nehemia Nobel, Ernst Simon, and of course Franz Rosenzweig — struggled to create new paradigms of social and religious thought, joined by a shared commitment to move beyond the verities of a bourgeois liberal culture. Isaac Breuer belonged to neither of these institutions. But he did share the desire to transcend the comfortable bourgeois sensibility of German Jewry. In two early novels, *Ein Kampf um Gott* (1920) and *Falk Nefts Heimkehr* (1923), Breuer took aim at the "bourgeois-capitalistic atmosphere that prevailed in the Orthodox Judaism of Germany."<sup>81</sup> This theme also figured prominently in Breuer's most well-known work of fiction, *Der neue Kusari* (1934), whose protagonist, Alfred Roden, offered a stinging critique of the vacuity of the German-Jewish social existence as part of his quest for deeper spiritual meaning in life.

The attempt to overcome the emptiness of bourgeois life united Isaac Breuer and Franz Rosenzweig, notwithstanding the fact that the former came from a devoutly Orthodox home and the latter from a highly assimilated one. The two were also joined by their shared reverence for Judah Ha-Levi, whose views on Jewish chosenness and the subordination of philosophy to faith served as a model of resistance against the prevalent German-Jewish goal of assimilation.<sup>82</sup> Most significantly, Ha-Levi imparted to Rosenzweig and Breuer the sense that the Jewish people did not submit to history, at least not in the conventional prosaic sense.

The reliance on Ha-Levi provided the two with a foothold in the struggle against historicism. Like Rosenzweig, Breuer was dissatisfied with the regnant "historicist hermeneutic" of his day: historicism yielded a fragmented

81 See Jacob S. Levinger's superb introduction to Isaac Breuer, *Concepts of Judaism* (Jerusalem, 1974), p. 15. Breuer's son marvels at his father's "astonishingly radical standpoint" in criticizing the "capitalistic bourgeois atmosphere prevailing among Orthodox Jewry". See Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition: The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1992), p. 380.

82 David Sorkin traces this line of resistance at least as far back as the late 18th-century Moses Mendelssohn. See his *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* (Berkeley, 1996), p. xxii.

perspective that obstructed from vision the metahistorical path of the Jewish people.<sup>83</sup> But, unlike Rosenzweig, Breuer adopted a neo-Kantian stance to remove this obstruction. A Jew's *a priori* belief in the mythic *Keneset Israel* (community of Israel) should serve as "the epistemological presupposition for the comprehensibility of (the Jewish people's) unique history."<sup>84</sup> Only this ordering principle could allow one to recognize that the Jewish people followed a distinct and divinely guided path toward *Metageschichte* (Metahistory).

Breuer's premise led him to conclude that the Jews, unlike other peoples, were not subordinate to the normal forces of nature or human will. They possessed a "national history" that was "miraculous"; this national history was "actually the history of the Torah itself," and hence embodied the very guarantee of Divine providence.<sup>85</sup> Breuer's unapologetic reintroduction of divine causality into Jewish history cut against the grain of historicist logic. But, interestingly, it did not entail an abandonment of the category of history altogether. In fact, Breuer recalls in his memoirs how important the study of history was to his own intellectual development. He drew a larger lesson from this youthful experience: "history, when it is understood and taught properly, seems to me to be the most important element in any educational system, the most important means of connecting the individual to the general, the only path to understanding the present."<sup>86</sup>

But what was history "understood and taught properly" according to Breuer? Was it the same history written by professional historians or taught in university seminars? On the contrary, history *à la* Breuer was not concerned with the single detail wedded to its own context. Rather, it marked an unfolding pathway whose main protagonist — here the Jewish people — was constantly marching toward ultimate fulfillment. The utility of studying such a history lay not in satisfying curiosity about the past, but in inspiring for the future. It is in this unhistoricist sense that Breuer found value in history.

83 See Alan L. Mittleman, *Between Kant and Kabbalah: An Interpretation of Isaac Breuer's Philosophy of Judaism* (Albany, 1990), p. 163. See also Mittleman's discussion of Ha-Levi and Breuer, *ibid.*, 28ff.

84 This quotation from *Der neue Kusari* is taken from Breuer, *Concepts of Judaism* (Jerusalem, 1974), p. 261.

85 *Moriah: Yesodot ha-hinukh ha-leu'mi ha-torati* (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 94–95.

86 See the Hebrew version of Breuer's memoirs, *Darki* (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 32. Shortly thereafter, Breuer argues for the indispensability of an historical conception of Judaism, but suggests that history's task is to reveal that "Judaism is the living people of God". *Ibid.*, p. 33.

A related transvaluation can be noticed in Breuer's use of the term "Jewish nationalism." Breuer was a steadfast believer in the existence of a Jewish nation and a fierce opponent of the idea of a secular Jewish state. Throughout his life he waged battle against Zionism, whose impious disregard for Torah rendered it "the most terrible enemy that has ever risen against the Jewish nation."<sup>87</sup> That was not to say that Jews should eschew Palestine as a place of residence. For it was there, Breuer believed, that the ideal political and religious arrangement for the Jewish nation — a God-state based on the commandments of the Torah — could be realized.<sup>88</sup>

It was this very hope that led Breuer to visit *Eretz Yisrael* already in 1926 and 1934, and to choose it as his permanent home in 1936. Unrelenting in his opposition to Zionism, Breuer nonetheless expected to see the consummation of the Jews' metahistory in the Promised Land.<sup>89</sup> This seemingly paradoxical position distinguished Breuer from Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig, both of whom remained at a physical and ideological remove from *Eretz Yisrael*. And yet, all three manifested the link between the critique of nationalism and the critique of historicism that has concerned us throughout this essay. For them, both historicism and nationalism generated a base understanding that fell far short of the essence of Judaism.<sup>90</sup>

## V

The affinities between Cohen, Rosenzweig, and Breuer, as critics of Jewish historicism and Jewish nationalism, were forged in a period of intellectual, cultural, and spiritual upheaval. The "crisis consciousness" of European society that extended from the Franco-Prussian War to the unruly aftermath of World War I called into question many cherished axioms of the 19th century. It is in this context that we can trace the outlines of a tradition of Jewish

87 See Breuer's pamphlet *Judenproblem* (Halle, n.d.), p. 89, quoted in Levinger, p. 6. For another detailed brief against Zionism and for a Torah-true community in Palestine, see Breuer, *Das jüdische Nationalheim* (Frankfurt, 1925).

88 Breuer, "R. S. R. Hirsch ke-moreh-derekh la-historyah ha-yisre'elit", in *idem*, *Tsiyune derekh* (Jerusalem, 1982). An earlier German version of this appreciation was published in 1934 in the Breuer community's journal in Frankfurt, *Nahalat Zewi*.

89 For a nuanced re-reading of Breuer's antagonism toward Zionism, see Asher D. Biemann, "Isaac Breuer: Zionist Against His Will?", *Modern Judaism* 20 (May 2000), 129–146.

90 Emblematic of this view was Breuer's assertion that Zionism had a "strong link to a materialist historical view, which is to say, a distorted view". *Darki*, p. 33.

anti-historicism that closely paralleled and drew upon the surrounding, mainly German Protestant, world. A more exhaustive tracing of this tradition still awaits us. Such a study will yield, I suspect, a wider current of Jewish protest against the ineluctability of historical contingency that extends beyond early 20th-century Germany into post-Holocaust Europe, America, and Israel. It is this current that carried Baruch Kurzweil from his formative Central European milieu to his perch as an iconoclastic critic of historicism and Zionism in Israel.<sup>91</sup> And it is this current that prompted thinkers such as Emmanuel Lévinas, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and Joseph B. Soloveitchik to question the value of critical historical scholarship. Their skepticism, as well as that of earlier critics of historicism, reflects an intriguing intellectual stance that begs for further investigation — one that defies facile characterization as modern, anti-modern, or postmodern, but bears elements of all three.

There is something poignant about this stance. It seeks to resist the powerful pull of historicism, yet is repeatedly drawn to it. At the end of the day, it may simply be that the great majority of us who "think with history" — happily or not — are condemned to live in it. In that case, perhaps the best consolation is an eminently historicist one: to know not that we can escape, but that we have not been alone in our despair.<sup>92</sup>

91 The late Bar-Ilan professor, Moshe Swarcz, noted the links between Rosenzweig, Breuer, and Kurzweil, particularly regarding history and nationalism, in his introduction to Kurzweil's *Le-nokhah ha-mevukah ha-ruhanit*, p. 34.

92 In 1924 the theologian Friedrich Gogarten wrote: "The historicizing of all our thinking has been carried out today to the extent that it has become impossible for any of our ideas to escape it". Gogarten's remarks are quoted in Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, p. 187.



דוד מאירס

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