specific community is also an others." I do not mean that instance of the universal, in int to suggest that a given be eradicated while at the herness. The ethical situa-

I do not mean that it becomes an indicating its identity in order to.

I am wrestling is whether a g exclusively to that people, this claim not lead to what to locking in a communal eople? Should the historian ing both outside and inside, e evidence of photographs, nality of fallen bodies? How ft, of stealing another's his-

alist Philip Gourevich's ac-

One of his Tutsi informants, , their bodies mutilated, in-

ones of the dead. "I did as he

I welcome Avi Bernstein-Nahar's invitation to comment on the interesting roundtable discussion devoted to "The Uses of History in Contemporary Jewish Historical Writing." This discussion marks the latest flowering of an important trend that has surfaced over the past two decades in the field of Jewish studies: namely, a reflexive turn characterized by an increased willingness both to study the history of our scholarly forebears and to contemplate the place of our voices in the narratives we construct. It is not my aim here to dig deeply into the causes of the turn. Suffice it to say that this trend gained momentum in the wake of a broader "linguistic turn" in humanistic discourse. In the field of history, the increased focus on semiotic and rhetorical formations in historiographical texts challenged the objectivity claims of their authors, at least in part, by challenging the distinction between fact and fiction. This challenge consequently impelled and emboldened authors to implace themselves rather self-consciously in the stories they tell—leading to the "confessional" impulse that attends much scholarly writing today.

Within the more limited and insular domain of Jewish historiography, Yosef Yerushalmi's 

Rwanda: After the Genocide," New
tention to the craft of the modern Jewish historian. In particular, Yerushalmi poignantly concluded that the modern Jewish scholar, beholden to the new scientific standards of the day, could not fulfill the role of custodian of Jewish collective memory. Ever since, from the first reviews of this book to Hava Tirosh-Samuelson’s recent cri de coeur regarding the impotence of academic Jewish studies, debate has raged over the role and relevance of Jewish scholarship in the construction of modern Jewish identities.

The complex status of the modern Jewish historical scholar stands at the heart of the roundtable discussion. All of the participants seem intent, at one point or another, on rescuing the modern historian from the abyss of antiquarianism. Avi Bernstein-Nahar, Elliot Wolfson, and Bob Gibbs all admire Chava Weissler’s attempt to recover the voices of early modern Ashkenazic Jewish woman, recognizing that this effort is deeply informed by contemporary commitments. Meanwhile, Jenna Joselit, who is less comfortable “introducing very contemporary concerns and injecting them back into the past,” nonetheless “admire[s] historians who put themselves into the service of the Jewish community.” Jenna herself manifests here an ambivalence that has accompanied the enterprise of modern Jewish scholarship from its inception; this ambivalence is born of the desire to remain steadfastly devoted to prevailing standards of scholarly method and probity, while at the same time putting one’s intellectual labors in the service of the Jewish community.

It is important to emphasize that neither the ambivalence nor the double-edged allegiances of the modern Jewish scholar are new. The founding scholars of the Wissenschaft des Judentums rallied around Immanuel Wolf’s belief in the eternal “bond of science, the bond of pure rationality, the bond of truth.” At the same time, these young Jewish intellectuals determined that one of their group’s primary tasks should be “to harmonize, by way of educational work, the Jews with the present age and with the states wherever they live” (Statutes of the Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden, 1810). The dual mission for the benefit of scholarship and the community, as Wissenschaftschuld, is an enduring distinction. Perhaps the most double-edged legacy was Heinrich von Treitschke, when the latter expressed his lifelong ambition to “another historian said,‘a Jewish historian is abashed.”

Countless other examples might be adduced that struggle between the modern scholar’s dual obligation has been the cost of research. While we might today recall à la Amos Funkenstein that “the task of writing” is a matter of concern not only for the modern, but also the nineteenth-century historian, we might note, as Weissler would seem to imply, that earlier predecessors who were “growing up Jewish, past in support of a profession”.

But is there not some historical parallel for the double-edged consideration of an intellectual obligation? I would like to return, first precisely to what Jenna Joselit addresses as the insertion of self into the historical text. The Ranke’s charge “to exclude oneself” and “to rise beyond the common-seen” in order to preserve the possibility of a “value-free” world? Does not our double-faced account of the myth of scholarship...
rish historian. In particular, at the modern Jewish scholar-standards of the day, could not h collective memory. Ever ok to Hava Tirosh-Samuel-mpotence of academic Jew-
ole and relevance of Jewish
Jewish historical scholar ischussion. All of the partic-
ther, on rescuing the mod-
arianism. Avi Bernstein-
all admire Chava
ices of early modern Ash-
at this effort is deeply in-
tents. Meanwhile, Jenna lucing very contemporary to the past,” nonetheless ves into the service of the ifests here an ambivalence f modern Jewish scholar-
ce is born of the desire to ng standards of scholarly time putting one’s intel-
sh community.
ther the ambivalence nor modern Jewish scholar are
schaft des Judentums ral-
the eternal “bond of sci-
bond of truth.” At the
als determined that one e “to harmonize, by way present age and with the
be Verein für Kultur und

Wissenschaft der Juden, t822). The clear mobilization of scholar-ship for the benefit of the group continued in the succeeding generation, as Wissenschaft now became a tool of denominational distinction. Perhaps the most compelling affirmation of this mobilization was Heinrich Graetz’s tart response to Leopold Zunz when the latter expressed surprise that the younger Graetz was writing yet “another history of the Jews.” “But this time,” Graetz retorted, “a Jewish history!”—that is, a narrative full of unabashed Jewish pathos.

Countless other examples could be adduced to demonstrate that struggle between the poles of pure scholarship and communal obligation has been a constant feature of modern Jewish historical research. While Yosef Yerushalmi makes clear the fealty of the modern scholar to scientific standards, it is important to recall à la Amos Funkenstein that collective Jewish memory was a matter of concern not only to the premodern chronicler, but to the nineteenth-century historian as well. In this respect, Chava Weissler would seem to belong to a noble lineage of scholarly predecessors who use scholarship to construct an image of the past in support of a present-day vision.

But is there not something new in the present moment beyond the double-edged commitment to scholarly norms and communal obligation? I would suggest that there is, and it is related precisely to what Jenna Joselit felt most uncomfortable with: the insertion of self into the account of the past. In stark contrast to Ranke’s charge “to extinguish the self,” this impulse reaches beyond the common-sense assumption of the scholar’s inescapable contingency to a bold upending of methodological conventions. In an earlier time, Max Weber allowed for extra-scholarly considerations to help shape a research question, but still ended up preserving the possibility of the wertfrei. Does Weber’s idea of “value-free” make any sense in our contemporary intellectual world? Does not our postmodern skepticism explode altogether the myth of scholarly dispassion and objectivity? For some, it
Myers | 48

clearly seems to. For instance, in a text such as Daniel Boyarin’s *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, the author not only declares unabashedly what his political goal is—“to reclaim the eroticized Jewish male sissy”—but readily confesses his own biographical affinities with that model. The resulting narrative fits neatly into the contours shaped by his declared goals and autobiography. But while eschewing the aim of value-free scholarship, Boyarin does not abandon time-honored methods of textual analysis and historical contextualization. In this sense, he continues to speak with two voices, as does Chava Weissler in consciously addressing her dual audience (scholars and feminists). In neither Boyarin’s nor Weissler’s case is the presence of two voices so noticeable or novel, for variations of the theme existed, as we have seen, in earlier generations of scholars. Rather, it is the current willingness to acknowledge and revel in this condition that is new.

Bob Gibbs’s own language in grasping this phenomenon is revealing. He referred to Chava’s commitment to “using ways of thinking that are not normally a part of scholarly style” as a form of writing “in Yiddish” (which closely parallels what Jonathan Boyarin has called “thinking in Jewish”). By “Yiddish,” Bob meant something other than Chava’s interest in Yiddish-language tekines. He meant, I imagine, Yiddish’s current status as a postcolonial, diasporist, anti-establishmentarian linguistic culture. The evident contrast is to the hegemonic Hebrew, transformed from the source of endless and ethereal rabbinic conversations to the brawny tongue of scholarly authority and popular culture. Apart from this remarkable shift in the status of Hebrew, it is striking to see how the roundtable participants comfortably embrace this bilingual world of Yiddish and Hebrew. Avi Bernstein-Nahar speaks of two approaches to history—the more conventional “descriptive” regime, and the second mode of “idealizing the past for purposes of contemporary critique.” Meanwhile, Elliot Wolfson acknowledges his allegiance to “the notion of contextualization” while also stating: “Skepticism is an anchor point from the past out of the present.”

Finding the balance in this tension, the other half is acknowledged in Boyarin’s latter effort that the book *Jewish Past Revisited*, mindful of our aims was to encourage the scholars who had inspired or influenced us. The payoff lay in capturing the present-day era seems to demand. But the most fitting example came closest to achieving this in the early-twentieth century German-Jewish intellectual, who suggests that Moshe Mendel Levenbaum in Gershom Scholem, facing the Kaisserreich and World War I, wasn’t hard emerged. But the other German-Jewish scholars in Grafton and Boyarin’s symposium two scholars contextualize their work, isn’t the story of how much we should pined on what they have. How do historians usually tell? One might even call it contextually sensitive, the capacity to provide a thick contextual awareness of the ways in which the scholarly forebearer of his/her times both usual and new would have been drawn to which the present-day scholar would have to the past. This, in essence, is what *The Jewish Past Revisited*’s volume’s essays, on
to “the notion of contextual reading and historical-philological scholarship” while also seeking (with caution) to “retrieve voices from the past out of the materials I study.”

Finding the balance between these impulses is half the battle; the other half is acknowledging them. It is particularly in this latter effort that the book which David Ruderman and I edited, The Jewish Past Revisited, may not have realized its promise. One of our aims was to encourage historians to reflect back on scholars who had inspired or intrigued them in their own labors. The payoff lay in capturing the spirit of self-reflection that our own era seems to demand. According to Bob Gibbs, Tony Grafton came closest to achieving this goal in his essay on the nineteenth-century German-Jewish classicist Jakob Bernays. By contrast, he suggests that Moshe Idel didn’t quite pull it off in his study of Gershom Scholem, failing to flesh out the cultural universe of the Kaiserreich and Weimar Germany from which young Gerhard emerged. But there is a certain confusion here. What Bob lauds in Grafton and laments in Idel is the degree to which the two scholars contextualized their scholarly forebears. And yet, isn’t the story of how Bernays’s and Scholem’s “actual lives impinged on what they wrote about Jewish history” the one historians usually tell? Or the story they are expected to tell as contextually sensitive scholars? I’m not sure how innovative it is to provide a thick contextual description or to demonstrate an awareness of the way in which a past scholar dealt with a scholarly forebear of his. To my mind, what would have been truly unusual and new would be a genuinely self-reflective enterprise in which the present-day scholar contemplates openly on what drew her/him to the scholar on whom s/he chose to write. That is what The Jewish Past Revisited might have offered, but didn’t fully succeed in achieving—in large measure, due to the ingrained inhibitions of scholars (myself included), to surrender the life-line of Wissenschaft. If one reads between the lines of the volume’s essays, one can obtain a glimpse at the spiritual kinships
and anxieties of influence that connect the current generation of scholars to their scholarly forebears. But the reader shouldn’t have to become a cryptographer to decipher the esoteric truths hidden within the essays.

Generously, Avi Bernstein-Nahar sought to squeeze out of my own contributions to this volume the glimmers of self-reflection. He did so because he noted an inhibition on my part “to move from historical critique to broader reflection on the purposes inscribed in writing history.” I share Avi’s recognition of my own failing in this regard, and will try now to render the latent more manifest. To a great extent, my own scholarly work is a series of debts, responses, and challenges to Yosef Yerushalmi, my teacher. Yerushalmi (and Nietzsche before him) set out for me the basic problem of history that pervades the modern sense of self: how is it possible to avoid the grinding jaws of historicism that reduce every event, text, or actor to a heap of contextual dust? How can historians make sense of the past in a coherent and meaningful way? The answers I have found to these questions are signaled in my various remarks here regarding the dual ambitions of the modern scholar. What I identify in the founding generations of Wissenschaft des Judentums or, for that matter, in the first generation of Jerusalem scholars is a “ceaseless mediation between critical history and collective memory,” between, we might say, Hebrew and Yiddish. It is no accident that this ceaseless mediation ceaselessly interests me. For it is my lot as much as it was my predecessors’. I too swing between the poles of history and memory, between the consensual (and ever-changing) standards of the historical profession and the ineradicable presence of my Jewishness. It seems too obvious to state that a major motivation for my study of previous generations of historians is to enhance my own self-understanding as both historian and Jew. But let it be said. Let it also be said that I can neither envisage nor wholeheartedly recommend the end of this balancing act of the Jewish historian. To live in two cultures, to speak with two voices—now and then—and, I might add, to indulge of it all.

But as I write this, I cannot help but see indulgence of it all. I am confident empiricism is not the only recent historical narrative whose abdication of responsibility between—two cultures, a moral stand? And an existentialism by using historians’ silence? These questions are Wyschogrod’s intentions. I find strong in this the historian’s mission is both to be a fixture of, and a historical discourse of the direction of the historian. It suggests that the present should also be covenanted to the historian be “driven by politics.” Lurking above this is the perspective of the historian who “speaks from the borders of voice and silence, definitively silenced. It is in such a zone the past, either in the ethical historian who fully grasps or returns to time and space, “a temporal act of voice. It is in such a zone the community.
the current generation of scholars, I believe, has to acknowledge the essential role of the historian in the preservation and interpretation of historical narratives. The historian's mission is to balance between descriptive and ethical responsibilities. This, after all, has been a fixture of historical method and is often accompanied by the historian's reflective impulses. Thus, Wyschogrod suggests that the past should not only serve the present. The present should also serve the past in the sense that “the historian is covenanted to the dead.” This covenant requires that the historian drive by the ethos for the dead and the urgency of ethics. Lurking above this ethical task is the shadow of catastrophe, e.g., the Holocaust, whose story has often been told from the perspective of the perpetrators. The ethically minded historian, who speaks from out of the cataclysm that she cannot name, labors to give voice to the mute—to the victims who were so definitively silenced. This act need not require a total surrender to the past, either in the name of morbidity or antiquarianism. The ethical historian willingly assumes a debt to the past, but never fully grasps or returns to it. S/he stands in a special interpretive space, “a temporal zone that is neither past, present, nor future.” It is in such a zone that the historian of Wyschogrod’s image can reassert his/her mandate to use historical method in support of the community.
Again, this message pushes us beyond the mere recognition of the “incommensurability of the predicative and ethical language” of the historian. It impels us to name or give voice to that which cannot be named. But how can any Jewish historian, especially one who is not a student of the Shoah, operationalize this principle? One way to do so is to redouble our commitment to understanding and representing the textured vitality of Jewish cultural existence between crises and before the “cataclysm.” By giving voice to the vibrant cultural cacophony that was stilled in the Shoah, we move closer to understanding its enormity.

Our understanding will, unavoidably, be imperfect. We have no perfect language to describe it. In fact, we Jewish historians, heirs to the legacy of our predecessors, speak two languages, Hebrew and Yiddish. The friction between them energizes us, but also prevents a full and clear understanding. But do we really speak Hebrew and Yiddish? Do we operate in an insular Jewish world? Or might we not speak, as Emmanuel Levinas suggested in a different context, Hebrew and Greek, linguistic reminders of our unceasing attempt to navigate between the particular and universal? Contemplating this question—namely, that the real struggle we face is between Hebrew and Greek—is no mere intellectual game. In forcing us to face the broader non-Jewish world, it exposes our passions and, at times, refines our moral instincts by demanding empathy, consolation, and forgiveness. Perhaps even more fundamentally, it makes us consider in which contextual and interpretive universe we choose to situate ourselves. What it does not, and cannot, do is transport us beyond our modern historicist moorings. This may seem to be nothing more than a Sisyphean retreat to our starting point, but the path to genuine self-reflection and ethical responsibility is a tortuous one indeed—one that must be joined, even if not completed.

Chava Weiss

from Jerusalem. In response...

Your work was referred to me (the Conservative woman's prayer, I would say, Scholar …”) [chapter 9] and with the permission of your writings on the nerve.

We wonder if you to know that...