

JEWISH PHILOSOPHY
AND ⁶⁵³⁸₄₅
PHILOSOPHERS

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PREFACE

THIS LITTLE BOOK is mainly based on a series of lectures arranged by the Education Committee of the Hillel Foundation and delivered to the London Jewish Students' Association in the autumn and winter of 1959-60. Although in the first place given to Jewish students, the lectures were in no way specialist and the articles are, in the same way, directed to the general reader. I trust, therefore, that no one will be deterred from reading this volume by its title, for there is little or nothing in its contents that cannot be grasped by the non-specialist.

The reader who ponders on the great thinkers whose ideas are, however shortly, summarised or mentioned here will, I hope, gain a fresh appreciation of the variety and richness of Jewish thought. He may also, particularly by considering the ideas of Spinoza, whose conception of God and the Universe is incompatible with Judaism, and Maimonides' reconciliation of Judaism and Philosophy, obtain some understanding of the limits beyond which Judaism cannot be stretched to accommodate philosophical and scientific theory. Besides the philosophy that deals with the general causes of things, this book touches such themes as man's relationship with God, the character and destiny of the Jewish people, and the nature and development of Judaism itself.

It is my earnest hope that all who read this volume may be encouraged both to discuss its contents with others and, guided by the bibliography at the end of each article, to read further; I believe that in this way they will increase

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CHAPTER I

Is there a Jewish Philosophy?

By Leon Roth, F.B.A.*

The Problem

I TAKE MY text from the concluding words of Husik's standard work on the History of Jewish Medieval Philosophy: 'There are Jews now and there are philosophers; but there are no Jewish philosophers and there is no Jewish philosophy.'

Let me read that again: '*There are no Jewish philosophers and there is no Jewish philosophy.*' You will note that he is talking about the present ('There are Jews *now* and there are philosophers'), with the implication (presumably) that the matter was not always so: after all he had just concluded a big volume on Jewish Medieval Philosophy himself. But even among the philosophers whom he describes there would seem to be some who would not merit the title *Jewish* philosophers even though they lived long ago. You may recall, for example, the remarks prefaced by the editor to the first edition (1560) of Gersonides' *Wars of the Lord*: 'His words seem to contradict our Torah and the wise men of our people. . . . But he has explained in his Introduction and the last chapter of his First Part that the Torah is one thing and philosophy another, and each occupies itself with its own affairs. . . .' Since the sixteenth-century editor does not seem to be shocked by this avowal of Gersonides, it would

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seem that in Renaissance Italy too it could be said that there are Jews now and there are philosophers, but that it does not follow from the fact that a philosopher happens to be a Jew and even writes in Hebrew, that his philosophy is necessarily Jewish.

So the problem is fairly set. In what sense can we talk about Jewish philosophy, and what can we expect to find if we look for it?

The Meaning of Philosophy

And there is a further difficulty. I shall have to discuss with you not only the word Jewish but also the word Philosophy. As you all know, philosophy in our day and country has fallen into disrepute, and not so much in the mouth of the ordinary man as in the mouths of the philosophers themselves. Philosophers in England today seem to spend their time in pointing out how foolish previous philosophers were. They asked questions they should not have asked (we are told) and gave answers which are no answers; thus wasting their own and other people's time in the pursuit of a will-o'-the-wisp which does not exist. This is as may be; but as I am to talk about a traditional subject—or rather a small part of a traditional subject—I hope I shall be forgiven if I use traditional language. I shall explain first therefore what philosophy traditionally means.

If you take up, as I hope you will, Professor Salo Baron's monumental *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, you will find, as the title of the fifth chapter of his first volume, the phrase *Rethinking Fundamentals*. What Professor Baron meant by the phrase in its context is neither here nor there; but I propose adopting it in explanation of what I intend when I use the word philosophy. This is an old and respectable meaning of the word, and I choose Baron's

phrase because it is handy. It also contains a compliment to ourselves. By saying *re-thinking*, it flatters us with the suggestion that we have done some thinking already.

The phrase 'rethinking fundamentals' reminds us of two things which have always been characteristic of philosophy. The first is thinking, *thinking*, that is, as opposed to *feeling*. Whatever philosophy may be, it is at least a *reflective* activity. It is not the immediate sensation or feeling, or the recalling of an immediate sensation or feeling. It is a pondering on it, a considering of it, a weighing of it. If it were only a record or recall of an original experience, it would be history or possibly (you will remember Wordsworth) poetry. It would not be philosophy. To be philosophy it must be not only recalled but also reflected on, thought and rethought, until it is seen as part of a wider pattern fashioned by a host of other experiences as well as by itself.

But this too is not all. Philosophy is not just the activity of weighing experiences, *any* experiences. The experiences it weighs are of a certain dimension and importance. They may be, for example, those ubiquitous elements which seem to appear in all, or almost all, the things with which we come into contact—space, time, form, matter, or more abstractly and more difficultly, causation. These are *fundamentals*, pervasive factors the removal or alteration of which would change the nature of things altogether.

So philosophy as the 'rethinking of fundamentals' is a very serious and responsible activity. It means thinking and rethinking, pondering and repondering, those elements in our lives, in history, in Nature, which would appear to be not incidental, transitory, casual, trivial, but basic. Philosophy is the search, through thought, for the permanent; and it is with this conception in our minds that I am going to ask you to consider with me the question: Is there a *Jewish* philosophy?

The first and obvious answer is: 'Of course. Are there not books on it? Are we not now starting a course on it?' Indeed we are; and I am proud to be allowed to introduce it. But it is as well to start by knowing what it is that we expect; and as I listen to myself articulating the words 'Jewish Philosophy,' I cannot help remembering how the analogous phrases 'Jewish Physics,' 'Jewish Mathematics,' used to strike so harshly on the ear in the bad old times of racist theory and genocide practice. Is there such a thing as a Jewish physics? Surely the answer is decidedly, No. There is indeed a subject of rational inquiry known as physics, and valuable work in it has indeed been done by men of Jewish parentage. But equally valuable work in it has been done by men of *non-Jewish* parentage, and in either case the result has been not Jewish or non-Jewish but physics. Is there a Jewish mathematics? Surely the answer is equally, No! There is mathematics and there are mathematicians, some of them Jews and some of them—believe it or not!—non-Jews. But whatever the mathematicians may be, the subject itself remains neither Jewish nor non-Jewish but mathematics. Why then should there be a Jewish philosophy? In philosophy as in mathematics, as in physics, as in philology and classical scholarship, as in botany and geology and physiology, Jews are found on most sides of most controversies, each speaking his mind and each speaking differently. In the United States of today both Oppenheimer and Strauss are Jews, but they seem to hold different opinions on the legitimate use to be made of recent discoveries. The Salk vaccine is—in part—the contribution of a Jew to medicine. It is not Jewish medicine.

The Nature of the Subject

The year 1933 saw, among other things, the publication of the last product in the direct line of the authentic Judaeo-

German 'Science of Judaism.' I refer to Julius Guttman's *Philosophie des Judentums*. Julius Guttman was the distinguished son of a distinguished father. Guttman the elder, Jacob Guttman, Rabbi of the community of Breslau, had gone patiently through the classical Jewish philosophers from Israeli to Abrabanel and summarised clearly both their own teachings and the influence they exerted on others; Guttman the son, Julius, a student of economics as well as of philosophy, had started his career as a lecturer in general philosophy in the University of Breslau, and as Professor of Jewish Philosophy in the Jüdische Hochschule in Berlin he had by his comprehensive and independent studies of the whole field rounded off the results of his father's labours into one coherent and systematic whole. It was this which appeared in Munich in 1933, a Hebrew version with some additional chapters being published in Jerusalem after the author's death in 1951.

The significant thing about Julius Guttman's volume was its title, *Die Philosophie des Judentums*, the Philosophy of Judaism. Earlier books on the subject, e.g. that of Moritz Eisler in German and of Husik in English, had all borne as their title or part of their title the words Jewish Philosophy. Some of them, indeed, taking advantage of the German partiality for compound terms, had squeezed in the word 'religious' before philosophy. The pioneer work of David Kauffmann, for example, on the Attributes of God and that of S. Horovitz on the Psychology of Man, are named specifically contributions to 'Jüdische Religions-philosophie,' that is, the Jewish Philosophy of Religion. The great Munk, however, in his celebrated *Mélanges*, was content to speak of Jewish (and Arabic) Philosophy; and in this he was followed by most students of his own time and indeed is so followed today. Some scholars ventured even further. The brilliant and original, if unconventional,

David Neumark entitled his Hebrew edition of his German History the *History of Philosophy among the Jews*.

The only book on the subject written originally in Hebrew, that of S. Bernfeld, adopted a different name altogether. Its title is *Da'ath Elohim*, the Knowledge of God; and whether or no Bernfeld's use of this phrase coincides with that of Hosea, it made a title of great interest. For it suggested at least that the philosophers with whom it dealt had something to communicate rather about the nature of God than about the universe in general, and that that something was connected, in however distant a way, with the doctrine found in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Philosophical Interpretation of Judaism

So we have before us, reflected in these various titles, a variety of possibilities as to the nature of our subject. At the one extreme we may place Neumark with his *History of Philosophy among the Jews*, then Munk and the generality of students with their histories of Jewish Philosophy. The intermediate position is occupied by the histories of the Jewish Philosophy of Religion. The other extreme is held by Bernfeld with his Knowledge of God and, more explicitly, Julius Guttmann with his Philosophy of Judaism. You will remember that, broadly speaking, the matter of all these books is the same. Even Neumark's highly suggestive, and highly controversial, writings cannot do more than cover the usual list of thinkers—Philo, Saadyah, Maimonides and the rest; and one sees even with him a recognition of the fact that, even when we speak of the History of Philosophy among the Jews, we are not really considering a series of attempts to rethink fundamentals in general and to give freely the results arrived at. We have rather the restricted interests commonly covered by religion and in particular by historical Judaism, and a

series of attempts to work out, in the light of specific historical data, its basis and presuppositions. It is this fact which is recognised clearly by Guttmann and expressed in his title. The genuinely philosophical side of the so-called Jewish philosophers, he explains, is derived from without, that is, from the non-Jewish culture of their time. What they did was to select from that culture such ideas as would offer an account of Judaism which should be consonant with the spirit, or, if you like, the vocabulary, of the age.

We may perhaps put the matter thus. There is an old Talmudic saying, made much of by medieval writers, that the Torah spoke in the language of men. Since the men in whose language the Torah spoke passed away long ago, it would seem to rest with each successive generation to provide the Torah with a new vehicle of expression. This, historically, was the task and achievement of the philosophers (or at least of most of them), and their work is therefore quite fairly described as the, or a, Philosophy of Judaism; as indeed emerges clearly if they are considered soberly one by one, even Gersonides' *Wars of the Lord* which we noticed before being admissible, and admitted, under the rubric 'Wars against the Lord.'

It is this which is the subject of later lectures in this series, and I shall not attempt to anticipate them except in order to illustrate my present point. At the head of the long line of thinkers to be presented to you there is set generally the name of Philo, the Alexandrian Jew who lived in the early days of the Roman Empire and whose recorded public appearance was on the mission to Caligula in the years 39-40 of the Common Era. Philo was a great Jew and an original and interesting thinker, too; but he thought and breathed Plato and the Stoa, and it was his interpretation of Judaism in the light of these non-Jewish systems which constituted his 'philosophy.' True, he came to some surprising conclusions, and these conclusions led

to conclusions yet more surprising; but they were the result not of thinking out the nature of things in general but of a hellenised thinking on the nature of Judaism. The greatest figure we have is undoubtedly Maimonides, but he would be a rash man who would speak of a Maimonidean philosophy. For did not Maimonides himself state explicitly that so far as philosophy, that is, the wisdom of man, is concerned, we must all go back, as to a sole source, to Aristotle? True, as Philo used Plato, so Maimonides used Aristotle, in an original way with original results. But the originality consisted not in his philosophy, which was that of Aristotle (or rather, of the Arabised Aristotle), but in what resulted when he applied his Aristotelianism to Judaism. In the same way, the German Jewish philosopher Mendelssohn reflects the political thinkers of the seventeenth, and the theologians of the eighteenth, century; Lazarus and (in his own fashion) Hermann Cohen set out from the philosophical foundations laid down by Kant. The same holds true today. Students of contemporary Judaism in the United States know how influential a figure is Mordecai Kaplan. But Kaplan took his philosophical ideas from John Dewey; and he then proceeded, in the light of Dewey's ideas, to produce what can only be called, not a Jewish philosophy but a philosophy of Judaism. Similarly, the work of one of the all-too-few Jewish theologians of this country, Dr. Ignaz Maybaum, is based on the thinking of the Existentialists; but the result is an existentialist philosophy of Judaism, not a Jewish Existentialism.

The Philosophy Offered by Judaism

At the risk of tiring you I shall push this contrast home as it is important. I spoke earlier of the analogy to Jewish philosophy presented by a hypothetical Jewish physics and

Jewish mathematics, and I suggested to you that all such terms are nonsense. Let us consider now the further analogy offered by a phrase often heard recently, *Christian philosophy*. In the twenties or early thirties there was a grand debate on this phrase in the French *Société de philosophie*. (The minutes were published in their Bulletin and make interesting reading.)* Many different views were expressed from that of the extreme religionists that there is no genuine philosophy which is not Christian to that of the extreme secularists that philosophy and Christianity have no connection with one another whatsoever. The honours of the debate went to the secularists; but the religionists made the excellent point that religion poses certain fundamental problems which all philosophies must attempt to meet, and suggests certain answers. This was in essence Neumark's position in his *History*. There are, he said, specific problems like that of the origin of the world, of the constitution and destiny of man, of the nature of truth and right action; and on all of these, Neumark held, Judaism gave an intelligible and coherent answer which, implicitly or explicitly, in different stages of development, and in different degrees of conscious articulation, can be found in texts and documents throughout the course of Jewish literary history and more particularly in the writings of the philosophers and especially in those of Moses Maimonides. The world as such, Neumark would seem to be saying, poses its questions and Judaism, when properly understood, that is, as understood by Maimonides as understood by Neumark, gives the answers; just as the proponents of Christian philosophy would say that the world

* Since this lecture was delivered there has appeared the striking *Le philosophe et la théologie*, by the veteran historian of medieval thought, M. Etienne Gilson (Fayard, Paris, 1960). It is to be strongly recommended to any serious student of the issues involved in these topics, together with the same author's *L'Esprit de la philosophie médiévale* (Paris, 1932; available also in an English translation).

as such presents its questions and that the answers to them are given by Christianity as understood by, say, Thomas Aquinas.

Buddhists or Taoists could be forgiven if they were sceptical about these claims, although they might concede that any religious system might embody some truth or offer some persuasive account of some element in experience. And here, I think, we may leave the matter. We have seen enough to suggest that however much we may use the term Jewish Philosophy, the most we should intend by it is a philosophy of Judaism, that is, a discussion of the answers offered by Judaism to some of the general problems of life and thought; and we must recognise that this is not philosophy in the authentic historical sense of a *universal* curiosity and a *universal* questioning into the *widest* aspects of human experience. It is on the contrary a restricted study of certain historical ideas severely limited in relevance and space and time. Now it may possibly be that these historical ideas are of a universal interest, even of a universal importance. But this is a matter for inquiry and discussion. It is not a self-evident truth.

Jewish Philosophy—An Inquiry into Judaism

And we may have to go even further. The Neumarkian view is, as I have said, that the world poses its problems and Judaism offers the solutions, of course the right solutions. The philosophy of Judaism is therefore the philosophy *offered* by Judaism. 'Of' in this case is a possessive: the philosophy of Judaism is equivalent to Judaism's philosophy.

But are we sure we know what Judaism is? In our generation, a generation (I am afraid) of little learning and less understanding, it is just the nature of Judaism which we need to study and inquire into. So I suggest we take the

term a little differently, rather after the model of the 'philosophy of science' than of that of the 'philosophy of Kant.' The philosophy of Kant is the philosophy *held* by Kant. The philosophy of science is the philosophical inquiry *into* science. Science is not the inventor but the object of the philosophy. Philosophy, as we saw at the outset, is the thinking and rethinking of fundamentals, and when an object is attached to it, the sphere of its application is restricted. The philosophy of science is the thinking and rethinking of the fundamentals of science. The philosophy of Judaism is the thinking and rethinking of the fundamentals of Judaism.

And that, I think, is the historical fact of the matter. When Philo faced the Jewish Hellenists, when Saadyah argued against the Karaites, when Maimonists and anti-Maimonists excommunicated one another, when Jacob Sasportas fought his lonely battle against the followers of Shabbethai Zvi, when S. D. Luzzatto extolled Rashi and Yehudah Halevi as against Maimonides and Ibn Ezra—the object of discussion was not the nature of the world at large but the nature of Judaism.

So at long last we have found our proper subject. Jewish Philosophy, or rather the Philosophy of Judaism, is the thinking and rethinking of the fundamental ideas involved in Judaism and the attempt to see them fundamentally, that is, in coherent relation one with another so that they form one intelligible whole.

Why Jewish Philosophy?

Now that we know what it is that we are concerned with, we can ask why we should be concerned with it. Why should we worry ourselves with the inquiry into the fundamentals of Judaism and the attempt to see them together as one intelligible whole?

Why indeed? But once you look into the material offered you will, I am sure, fall under its fascination. Its variety and present relevance is astonishing. Begin with even the Jewish philosophers in the textbook and severely technical sense and you will find in them—true, disguised somewhat, but we are all detectives in these days and can see beneath the black spectacles—all our present hopes and fears, arguments and discussions, even our divisions and sectarian differences, writ small or large, and followed to their natural end, centuries and centuries ago. And this holds quite generally and outside the technical field as well. Are you interested in the phenomenon of what is called now assimilation? Read Philo on the Jews of Alexandria. You enjoy Hyde Park on a Sunday morning with its religious disputations? Study Nachmanides' accounts of his debate before the King of Castile in Barcelona. You are eloquent on the shortcomings of our learned men? You could not treat the subject with more acuteness than the Karaites. You follow the higher critics? So did Hivi of Balk, and he was less respectful to authority than you would care to be. If you don't—as I don't—love the Hasidim, read the sober first-hand accounts of them in the autobiography of Salomon Maimon or the satire (*Megalleh Temirin*) of Joseph Perl. If you admire simple piety, take up Abrahams's collection of Ethical Wills or the Memoirs of Glueckel or, best of all, the sayings of the Old Rabbis in the *Ethics of the Fathers*. These form an essential part of the background against which the philosophers need to be studied, and they amply repay attention.

When you turn to the philosophers themselves, those of us who care about serious thinking on serious subjects will still find matter to chew on in, say, Maimonides' theories of prophecy and immortality, his account of the good for man, his method of treating the Scriptures, his interest in anthropology, his approach to the difficulties

of time, creation, divine omniscience. Most interesting of all is his attitude towards science and his basing of morality. I am not saying that his treatment of these and other topics is final or even satisfactory; but it is there, and can be discussed, and discussed not only in itself but in its historical reverberations. Maimonides was taken up by the Rabad, by Gersonides, by Hasdai Crescas, by Isaac Abrabanel, as well as, later, by Spinoza, Salomon Maimon, Hermann Cohen; and each thinker raised new points or removed old ones so that the implications of the original thought become gradually clearer and its significance more closely defined. There is here a real historical process, a prolonged sifting and a progressive elucidation, which in terms of length of time it would be difficult to match.

This is a oneness of continuity; but we may observe too a oneness of diversity. Let us consider, for example, the three luminaries of the Islamic period, Ibn Gabirol, Halevi and Maimonides. They are all difficult authors, and I should hesitate to suggest to a general audience that you should go home and sit down at once to the *Fons Vitae*, the *Khuzari* and the *Guide for the Perplexed*. But however general the audience, I do suggest that when you go home you do sit down at once and read Gabirol's *Royal Crown* and Halevi's devotional poems and the first book of Maimonides' Code. These men were philosophers enough for the philosophy to overflow into their wider labours, and in these works we find not technical philosophy but something of even greater interest and importance, the quintessence of the thought of three master-minds all differing in outlook and yet all the same in the passion of their vision of what to them was truth. They were each members of diverse schools. The historians tell us that whereas Gabirol was a Platonist and went one way and Maimonides an Aristotelian and went another, Halevi cried a plague on both their houses and rejected Plato and

Aristotle and indeed all philosophers alike. Yet he too was in our sense of the word a Jewish philosopher, thinking and rethinking the fundamentals of Judaism; and although a far less powerful thinker than either of the others, he was yet the vehicle of views which appeal to many today.

Philosophy an Antidote to Intolerance

I sometimes think that it is this diversity in unity, rather than the unity in diversity, which constitutes at least one great element in the importance for us today of the study of Jewish philosophy. It focuses our attention on the *important* rather than on the *accepted*. The last half-century has seen in the Jewries of the world a double growth of sinister significance. The one side of the growth is parochialism; the other—its natural accompaniment—sectarianism, dogmatism, intolerance. It may be that as a people we are naturally quarrelsome; it may be that with the break-up of the larger communities the natural love of power, starved of its proper outlet, resulted in '*parnass*' politics and a vested interest in ideological fragmentation. In any case reason has been made a slave to passion and slogans are embraced as principles. A study of genuine principles reaching back to Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, and proceeding through the long line of distinguished theorists about whom you are to learn in this series of lectures, is not a complete antidote to this degeneration of our living cells but it is, I fancy, the only one that exists.

I would ask you though to see to it that the study should be a study, not a mere casual attendance at a lecture: lectures are no substitute for study, only an indication of what you should look out for while studying. And keep in mind throughout that you are dealing with a living thing,

however diverse its formulations and however distant in space and time. Gabirol, Halevi and Maimonides are not just faded words on a printed page. They are ideas, forceful and vivid today as they were eight and nine hundred years ago—but only if you make them so; and they are waiting so to be made.

I look forward then, as one result of your study of philosophy, to a certain ripening of the mind of Anglo-Jewry: a knocking off of corners; a mellowing, a sweetening, a more easy acceptance of other opinion; not, of course, indifferentism, the Hegelian night in which all cows are black, but a maturer outlook which appreciates the fact that although a man may go to another conventicle, or to none, he is yet a man, even a Jew, for all that. I look forward to a broadening of discussion. There are, I think, few theoretical opinions of any kind on religious or 'national' subjects precedent for which cannot be found in our classical literature, and it is salutary to learn that what we condemn now as heresy was maintained by men whom posterity holds in high honour. We are all too hide-bound; too cribbed and confined. We all have articles of faith and will not see beyond them. O for the masterpiece (but it will have to be published not only anonymously but also posthumously) which will demonstrate to our formula-bound souls that there is no single one of the Thirteen Articles even of Maimonides' alleged creed which was not rejected, explicitly or implicitly, by leading lights in the history of Judaism, including, I fancy (but I only whisper the suspicion), no less a person than Maimonides himself. We should know this and be humble.

The Study of Jewish Philosophy a Necessity

I have tried so far to show that a study of Jewish philosophy is desirable. I suggest now that it is more than

desirable. It is essential. We need a philosophy of Judaism today for the same reason as we need philosophy in general: in order to enable ourselves to escape the clutches of *bad* philosophy or *pseudo*-philosophy.

For it is a mistake to think of philosophy as a subject of study exactly like all other subjects, that is, as something you either learn or you do not. We either learn Chinese or we do not; but we are all philosophers. We all think about fundamentals. We all have views on the wider issues of life, that is, philosophies. The only difference between us on this score is that some of us philosophise a little better, some a little worse. The same is true in the sphere of the fine arts. We all pronounce judgment on pictures, on music, on poetry. We all know, as we say, what we like.

Yet it is surely true that in all these and kindred subjects some opinions are better than others. Skill is acquired and improved by practice. So is taste. So is any faculty of discrimination. Both the physical and the mental palate can be trained. Accustom the physical palate to good cooking and it will demand good cooking. Accustom the mental palate to good philosophy and it will demand good philosophy. And it will despise and reject the bad. To work through a first-class philosopher is like smoking first-class cigars or drinking first-class wine: we acquire a standard and cease to enjoy the inferior.

The value of a training in philosophy—the thinking and rethinking of fundamentals through the mind of a master—is thus not so much that it gives us a body of truth as that it helps to enable us to see through the sham and the false. If it gives us truth, too, so much the better; but what it gives is hardly likely to be Truth with a capital T, the final, the definitive, the incontrovertible. It will be a morsel, a fragment, a crumb; some small thing that one can cherish, and honour, and on occasion obey, but in no wise one massive, all-comprehensive, system. It will be an

idea, or possibly only a suggestion of an idea, perhaps only a faint gleam of a suggestion of an idea—you see I am not promising you much from your study of philosophy in general or of Jewish philosophy in particular. But something, however little, you will assuredly get, and, more importantly, there is much you will get rid of: the easy answer, the dogmatic affirmation, the private revelation, the crushing Juggernaut of triumphant self-assertiveness which overrides all opposition and all argument and all good manners.

I retain a vivid memory of an episode in my first visit to Switzerland. I was at Zurich, and from the bridge over the river caught my first sight of the Alps. It was just a glimpse of the line of distant snow-mountains which I had the good fortune to see lit up for a passing moment by the setting sun.

I have been pursuing that glimmer ever since, and I hope that in your study of Jewish philosophy you will do the same. You might catch it in the *Royal Crown*, an awe-inspiring creation which is a kind of cross between Lucretius and Traherne. You might get it from the reading of some chapters of the Guide. You might get it from a poem of Halevi or a casual phrase of Abraham Ibn Ezra or an essay of Samuel David Luzzatto or a sermon of Philo or a queer piece of speculation by Abraham bar Hiyya or a majestic paragraph of Hermann Cohen; but once you get it, it becomes, as both Jeremiah and Plato noted, not a gleam without but a fire within.

The Mystics

You will ask me why I have said nothing about the mystics, but in their regard I am incurably old-fashioned. Philosophy, whenever and wherever it appears and of whatsoever brand it might be, is a thinking and a re-

thinking of fundamentals; and whatever mysticism may be it is not *thinking*, and its way is not the philosophical way of *discussion*. I am not here talking in terms of values. It may be that the way of the mystics is the right one and the way of the philosophers the wrong. But let us not confuse our minds and the issue. If we are talking about philosophy, let us talk about philosophy; and if we remember that philosophy is a thinking and rethinking of fundamentals, we shall see that mysticism is irrelevant.

Now it is questionable—and I support myself in this on the great authority of Professor Zaehner—whether, in the accepted sense of the word, there is such a thing as Jewish mysticism at all. The notable characteristics of mysticism in the strict sense of the word seem to be lacking in our literature. As has been pointed out so often, there is hardly a trace in the Kabbalah of the ‘mystical union’; understandably, since the doctrine accords ill with Judaism’s teaching about God. The fact is that Kabbalistic theosophy, according to its latest and most sympathetic student (and in this judgment he only reaffirms the opinion of the first great pioneer students of the movement in the past century), is nothing but a resuscitation, through devious and so far untraced channels, of gnostic mythology.

The recognition of this fact adds point and justification to the judgment of Maimonides when in a famous Responsum he said of the mystical classic *Shiur Koma* that it is idolatrous and should be destroyed. It is a stern verdict, but it touches the quick of the modern predicament of Judaism. In the place of the second commandment we are offered alien myth and the worship of alien myth with the old cry: ‘These are thy gods, O Israel!’

The argument is a recurring one. Moses had it with Aaron over the golden calf, Elijah had it with the prophet of Baal; Jacob Sasportas, alone in his generation, had it with the enthusiasts for Shabbethai Zvi. I myself find

some comfort in recalling that masterpiece of *mis-interpretation* found in the Talmud of the verse in Isaiah (xlix, 15): *Eleh* (‘these are thy gods’) will be forgotten, but *Anochi* (‘I am the Lord thy God’) will not!

I am personally coming to the conclusion that if Judaism is to live—and it will live—it will have to be presented to us, and to the world at large, in the same way as it was, in the language of their time, by the classical Jewish philosophers. They joined Moses and the Prophets in declaring Judaism to be the *war against myth* in all its shapes and forms, and they strove in every way to rise above myth, however popular it may have been and however much it endeared itself to the masses. We must learn again to see Judaism as the classic expression of plain monotheism with definite implications both for morality and for science.

This will not be done by feeling, only by thinking, that is, by philosophy; and I commend it to you who are starting on this course today, both as *our* need and as *your* task.

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