INTRODUCTION

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This volume of *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy* covers the period from Jewish philosophy's beginnings in the Hellenistic era with the Greek writings of Philo of Alexandria to its culmination in the seventeenth century with the radical thought of Baruch Spinoza. Because of the noticeable gap in the philosophical literature between Philo in the first century C.E. and Saadia ben Joseph in the tenth century, most of the studies in this volume are devoted to Jewish philosophy in the medieval period; Philo and Spinoza serve as extraordinary (and very different) bookends to the unprecedented and unsurpassed flourishing of Jewish philosophy in this period.

Any history of Jewish philosophy must deal with two essential questions, often posed as challenges to the whole enterprise of identifying certain writings as instances of something called Jewish philosophy. The first question is: What is Jewish *philosophy*? That is, what distinguishes Jewish philosophy from the variety of other kinds of Jewish literature – Torah and Bible commentaries, *halakhic* (legal) and *aggadic* (homiletic) *midrashim* or exegeses, rabbinic *responsa*, and so on. Sometimes, the line between philosophy and some other genre is not particularly clear, and probably not worth insisting upon. The poetry of Judah Halevi, for example, is undeniably philosophical in content; and it would be a great mistake to disregard Maimonides' *halakhic* works when studying his philosophy. Moreover, the rabbis of the Talmud and the *midrashim* were, in many respects, profoundly good philosophers. Their recorded discussions range over a host of metaphysical, ethical, and epistemological issues, and they apparently excelled as logicians; nobody knew how to use a *reductio ad absurdum* or *a fortoriori* reasoning better than the ancient sages.

Yet despite the wealth of material of great philosophic interest to be found in many rabbinic works, the primary aim of these texts is not philosophical but religious. Their authors and the figures appearing in them were concerned not with addressing philosophical questions per se but with putting their admittedly considerable analytical skills to use in resolving the legal, social, theological, exegetical, and liturgical issues of Judaism. Their aim is not so much truth, but faith and obedience. Normativity is a matter not of what is reasonable, however that is to be

gauged, but of what is alleged to be God's command. By contrast, Jewish *philosophers*, for the most part, want to know what it is rational to believe – about God, the world, and human beings – and what reason can discover about what is right to do and good to pursue in our lives. Their interest, for the most part, is in metaphysical, epistemological, logical, moral, and political questions that we now regard as "philosophical"; in the case of ancient and medieval thinkers, attention was also given to questions of natural philosophy that now fall under the particular sciences.

It is also relevant to note that the interlocutors and intellectual colleagues (if not contemporaries) of the figures discussed in this volume constitute the larger philosophical community represented by ancient Greek and Latin thinkers – Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, Epicureans, and Neoplatonists – as well as medieval Arabic and scholastic philosophers. The Jewish philosophers are engaged by the same sorts of issues that consumed their non-Jewish philosophical peers and use the tools and forms of argumentation common to other traditions, sometimes even for the same purposes.

Of course, in the case of Jewish philosophy, all of these philosophical issues were pursued within the context of a certain religious (doxological and textual) tradition. This brings us to the second, perhaps more difficult, question: What is *Jewish* philosophy? One answer to this question can be quickly dismissed. Being Jewish is neither necessary nor sufficient for participating in the Jewish philosophical enterprise. Many philosophers who happen to be Jewish (for example, Karl Marx, Jacques Derrida, or Saul Kripke) could only very problematically count as engaged in Jewish philosophy, and why should not certain writings by non-Jewish thinkers be included in the canon of Jewish philosophy?

Being a Jewish philosopher cannot be simply a question of influences on one's thought. Spinoza, for example, was strongly influenced by much philosophical thinking that is unarguably Jewish: not just Maimonides and Gersonides, but other important figures as well, such as Ibn Ezra. Then again, Thomas Aquinas was also deeply influenced by what he read in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, and nobody, on that account, sees fit to argue that Saint Thomas was a Jewish philosopher.

A more plausible answer to the question might take into account a philosophy's *content*, perhaps the types of questions that are of most concern to a thinker or the substantive way in which those questions are answered. Thus, Steven Schwarzschild argued that there is a "Jewish way of doing philosophy . . . it is not so much a matter of doing Jewish philosophy as doing philosophy Jewishly," and insisted that the defining characteristic of Jewish philosophy is "the primacy of ethics over nature."[1] Alternatively, one might insist that Jewish philosophy is philosophy that

addresses specific questions pertaining to central claims of Judaism – for example, the meaning of the "election" of Israel or the validity of the Law of Moses in the contemporary world – or that attempts rationally to articulate and justify Jewish doctrine or practice.

To be sure, some skeptics have suggested that there is and can be no such thing as Jewish philosophy. They argue that philosophy is, by definition a nondenominational enterprise, the rational approach to universal questions, and it makes no more sense to speak of Jewish philosophy than it does to speak of, say, Jewish physics. Thus, Julius Guttmann argued that rather than Jewish philosophy we should speak of the philosophy of Judaism: philosophy in which Judaism – its beliefs, ceremonies, and history – is the object of philosophizing, perhaps making it a subfield of the philosophy of religion.[2] Similarly, Isaac Husik, in his *History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy*, famously insisted that "there are Jews now and there are philosophers, but there are no Jewish philosophers and no Jewish philosophy."[3]

There is a certain truth to these kinds of claim. Whatever Jewish philosophy may be, there is (*pace* Schwarzschild) no specifically Jewish way of doing philosophy, no more than there is a Jewish way of engaging in physics, mathematics, or history. Moreover, as one recent writer notes, the notion of "Jewish philosophy" is an academic label invented by nineteenth-century historians of philosophy; neither Maimonides nor any other thinker in the medieval Jewish tradition would have identified himself as a "Jewish philosopher."[4] Still, to reject wholly the utility of such a category is rather extreme and unnecessary. One of the assumptions behind this volume is that there is indeed a particular intellectual tradition that can meaningfully be called "Jewish philosophy." Although it may be difficult to give precise criteria for identifying the members of this tradition, a general, fairly practical approach can be taken. It is all a matter of the kinds of questions one is asking, the texts to which one is responding, and the thinkers with whom one is in dialogue (which, it should be stressed, is different from the issue as to the thinkers by whom one is influenced). Being a Jewish philosopher need mean only that an individual – perhaps necessarily of Jewish descent, perhaps not – is in his or her philosophical thinking engaged in an honest dialogue with a particular philosophical and religious tradition and wrestling with a certain set of questions and responding to a certain coterie of thinkers. Even if one's answers to those questions differ radically from those provided by other, perhaps more orthodox thinkers, still, one is addressing the same questions. He or she is also referencing (for the most part) the same religious and philosophical textual canon and engaged in an extensive conversation across time with the same figures (e.g., Saadia ben Joseph, Ibn Gabirol, and Maimonides).

Such a flexible, possibly circular, but nonetheless workable definition of what is Jewish about Jewish philosophy and what distinguishes it as philosophy from other genres of Jewish writing – what one recent writer has called a "hermeneutic" or "pragmatic" criterion – does not look for the presence of any single essential factor (or set of such factors). Rather, it looks for a type of practice that approaches questions that are of central importance to Judaism with the rational tools and methods of philosophy as these have been adopted from different philosophical traditions (Greek, Arabic, scholastic, and so on). Conversely, Jewish philosophy may approach traditional questions of philosophy on the background of, and with theological assumptions embedded in, Judaism. Jewish philosophy is, on this view, "whatever is the outcome of a multifaceted engagement between, on the one hand, thinking about issues relevant to understanding the Jewish condition or the meaning of Judaism and Jewish life, and, on the other hand . . . thinking that is indebted to and responds to the tradition of . . . philosophy."[5] It is philosophizing with and about the Jewish tradition, asking questions about Judaism as well as using Jewish texts and doctrines to engage in general philosophical speculation about classic problems (freedom of the will, happiness, the nature of time, epistemological problems about prophecy, and so on).

What distinguishes this volume from other "guides" or "companions" to Jewish philosophy is its thematic orientation. Rather than being organized chronologically or by individual thinkers – something that has been done well many times over – the essays in this volume have been conceived broadly along the lines of recognizable philosophical categories: metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of logic and language, moral philosophy, natural philosophy, and political philosophy. Some fields that, over time, split off from what we now think of as "philosophy" (e.g., physics or astronomy) were, in the period under consideration, still regarded as proper philosophical topics; it would be highly anachronistic not to include in a history of Jewish philosophy in the classical, medieval, and early modern worlds chapters on cosmology or meteorology because they now belong to "the natural sciences."

Because the thought of a Jewish philosopher in this extended period was often so strongly a product of the immediate intellectual, social, linguistic, religious, and political culture within which he lived, it was also essential to include in this volume some studies of the various contexts of Jewish philosophy in antiquity and the Middle Ages. Philo was essentially a Greek thinker, strongly influenced by Plato. Saadia and Maimonides flourished in the Arabic world, and their philosophy was, in many respects, a product of Muslim philosophical theology. It is hard to

read Gersonides and his later medieval colleagues without thinking of the European scholastic milieu by which they were surrounded.

We could not include everyone, and a number of Jewish philosophers between the first and seventeenth centuries do not get their proper due in this history; there are also some gaps in the topics covered (aesthetics, for example). Nonetheless, we hope to provide the reader with a good sense of the rich and important philosophical contributions made by ancient, medieval, and early modern Jewish thinkers in a number of central areas of philosophy.

The volume begins with a look at the various contexts within which Jewish philosophy flourished in this extended period of history. Kenneth Seeskin, in "The Greek Background," examines how three non-Jewish philosophers from antiquity conceived of God and how their philosophies influenced subsequent Jewish thought. The conceptions of God proposed by Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus are, respectively, as Demiurge, Prime Mover, and ineffable First Principle. As a result of their encounters with these thinkers, Jewish philosophers changed forever the way Judaism understood itself. No longer could one read sacred texts without inquiring about their metaphysical implications. No longer could one pretend that Judaism has nothing to learn from science and metaphysics. No longer could one ignore the intellectual contributions of gentiles. The relationship also worked the other way. Greek philosophy focused on the question of essence: How is the world ordered? By introducing the idea that everything has a single (divine) source, Judaism asked a new question: Why is there a world at all? There is little doubt that each tradition both influenced and was influenced by the other, and each tradition benefited as a result of this interaction.

In "The Muslim Context," Sarah Stroumsa examines the emergence of Jewish philosophy during the heyday of Islamic philosophy, between the ninth and the twelfth centuries, and looks at the implications of the appearance and development of Jewish thought in a Muslim cultural and intellectual milieu. While providing some observations on the unique character of this context, Stroumsa analyzes the impact of various Muslim schools of thought on Jewish thinkers, both Karaites and Rabbanites, and considers methodological questions pertaining to the study of Jewish philosophy, in particular, to the study of medieval Jewish philosophy in its Muslim context. The result is a clear view of the close interdependence between Jewish thought and the surrounding world of Islamic thought, one that highlights the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the interchange of philosophical ideas.

Mauro Zonta's chapter, "Textual Traditions," considers the transmission of Judeo–Arabic and Hebrew philosophical texts written in Iraq, Egypt, Spain, Provence, and Italy between 800 and 1500. His study incorporates a number of questions about the handwritten tradition of their originals, their translations into Hebrew and even into Latin, the presence of authors' variant readings in many manuscripts, and the identification of their Arabic and Latin philosophical sources. The chapter provides a number of case studies about the textual tradition of these texts, in particular those pertaining to the works of Daud al-Muqammaṣ (Iraq, ca. 850), Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī (Iraq, first half of the tenth century), Isaac Israeli (Egypt and Tunisia, ca. 900), Solomon ibn Gabirol and Baḥya ibn Paquda (Muslim Spain, ca. 1050 or after). Other Jewish scholars coming from Andalusia and working in the first half of the eleventh century include Judah Halevi, Joseph ibn Tzaddiq, Abraham bar Ḥiyya, Moses ibn Ezra, and Abraham ibn Ezra. Finally, Zonta examines the textual tradition of a number of Aristotelian Jewish philosophers, including Abraham ibn Daud (Christian Spain, second half of the twelfth century), Maimonides (Egypt, end of the twelfth century), Gersonides (Provence, first half of the fourteenth century), Ḥasdai Crescas (Aragon, second half of the fourteenth century), and some minor authors active in thirteenth-, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Spain, Provence, and Italy.

In "Philosophical Interpretations of the Bible," Howard Kreisel traces the fundamental changes that took place in Jewish biblical exegesis in the medieval period in comparison to the rabbinic period. The sages in the talmudic era treated the Bible as an open text, at least in regard to nonlegal matters. Already in the commentaries of Saadia we find a shift of focus toward understanding the literal or plain sense of the text. This shift was balanced by a commitment to reason, which rejected the truth of rationally impossible readings, most prominently the anthropomorphic descriptions of God, which it replaced with figurative interpretations. The exegetical approach focusing on the literal meaning of the text finds its fullest expression in the commentaries of Ibn Ezra, although he, too, on rare occasions, resorted to philosophical allegory to highlight the hidden wisdom of the biblical text. The philosophical allegorical approach dominates the way in which Maimonides and his followers treated passages of the Bible, especially those they regarded as having a secret meaning. This approach brought in its wake a strong reaction, as some came to view it as undermining Judaism. Kreisel's chapter culminates in Spinoza's account of biblical hermeneutic, in which the tradition seems to come full circle. Spinoza's approach combines a literal meaning of the text and a commitment to reason. In this case, however, reason is not used to bolster the truth of the divine text but to undermine its authority.

Concentrating on another intellectual context, Michah Gottlieb looks at two paradigms of the relationship between mysticism and philosophy in his chapter "Mysticism and Philosophy." The first paradigm, exemplified by Judah Halevi, considers mysticism an alternative to rationalist attempts to grasp the divine. For Halevi, the prophet is able to visualize divine forms through an "inner eye." Gottlieb calls this "revelatory" mysticism, whereby revelation provides crucial data akin to sense perception from which reason can then infer truths about the divine. The second paradigm, exemplified by Maimonides, knows of no direct perception of divine forms. Rather, reason plays the central role in metaphysical knowledge. Maimonides insists that, at its highest level, reason recognizes its inability to know very much about God. This, however, leads not to despair but to a profound sense of awe and love for God as the philosopher is overwhelmed by the immensity of God's perfection, which overflows human understanding. Gottlieb calls this "apophatic mysticism." In this case, mysticism is the culmination of rational attempts to grasp the divine. These two different views of the relationship between mysticism and philosophy result in two very different pictures of God. For Halevi, God is a personal being who cares deeply for humans and seeks relationships with them, whereas for Maimonides God is an ineffable, unknowable other with whom a reciprocal relationship is impossible, but whose perfection leads the true philosopher to a state of rapture.

The second section of the volume is devoted to an area of philosophy that flourished in medieval thought generally: logic and the philosophy of language. In "Propositions and Propositional Inference," Charles H. Manekin shows that the doctrines of the proposition familiar to medieval Jewish intellectuals were those of the Aristotelians (or the "Neoaristotelians," because the doctrines contained stoic and Neoplatonic elements), as transmitted and transformed during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, in the Greek, Arabic, and, later, Latin traditions. These doctrines were so fundamental to the study of philosophy that elements of them are contained in some of the earliest philosophical writing among the Jews, even among thinkers who themselves did not write works in logic or who are not considered by historians of philosophers as "Aristotelian." Manekin's chapter deals with Jewish discussions of the proposition, conceived within the Aristotelian tradition as a truth-bearing statement. Although much less space is devoted in Jewish logical manuals and commentaries on propositional semantics than in those of their scholastic counterparts, there are still disagreements: for example, whether propositions have an implicit temporal signification. The chapter also discusses Jewish treatments of the various forms of propositional inference: conversion, obversion, inferences underlying the square of opposition, and so forth. Because medieval logic in Hebrew is written under the influence of two Aristotelian traditions, first

the Arabic and then the Latin, Manekin also considers the impact of these traditions on Jewish theories of propositional inference. Although most of the Jewish treatments of the proposition are rather conventional, Manekin shows that Gersonides' treatment is notable for its originality and Judah Messer Leon's for its appropriation of scholastic logic.

In "Reasoning and Demonstration," Norbert M. Samuelson, after placing the subject of logic in medieval Jewish philosophy in its historical setting, examines the distinctive role of argumentation in the writings of the rabbis who lived after the codification of the Hebrew scriptures and before the political emancipation of the Jewish people in Europe. The subject of his chapter is not formal logic in rabbinic Judaism, but rather an examination of the way that logical thinking of a variety of types shaped the thought of sophisticated medieval rabbis about philosophical topics. Samuelson provides eight examples intended to highlight how in very different ways the logic of an argument in itself shapes the content discussed and how the forms of an argument used have their own special history within Jewish philosophy.

In his chapter "Meaning and Language," Josef Stern addresses three general topics concerning meaning and language. The first topic centers on the classic question of whether language, or meaning or signification, is natural or conventional; the different ways in which that distinction was understood by various thinkers; and the significance that the question held for them. He considers Saadia, Judah Halevi, Maimonides, and Efodi (Profiat Duran) in depth, although he takes some brief glances at some other figures. The second topic is the nature and mechanism of signification. By and large, the predominant model for medieval Jewish thinkers was the Aristotelian description-like conception of reference, although Halevi hints at a theory of names that is based on perceptual, causal, and contextual relations. The third topic concerns various theories of multiple meaning and polysemy (ambiguity, amphiboly, metaphor, equivocality, etc.) and the role that these notions play in theories of divine attributes and religious language. As might be expected, the central figure in all these discussions is Maimonides, although a major contribution of this chapter is its detailed analysis of Duran's *Maʿaseh Efod*, a remarkably original speculative grammar that was the first real departure from the dominant Maimonidean model of language.

With the third section, the volume turns to issues of natural philosophy. In "Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World," Sarah Pessin draws on a range of thinkers from the first through the seventeenth centuries to explore views on the corporeal world. She primarily analyzes three categories of representative attitudes toward matter: negative, neutral, and positive. In addition to serving as a useful organizing tool for a range of views within the Jewish philosophical tradition, this

tripartite structure actually complicates the correlation between corporeality and sin/evil, a theme that often stands out in the history of ideas. Although Jewish texts do sometimes see the materiality of bodies in a decidedly negative light, it is important to contrast and consider such texts side by side with discussions of matter in neutral scientific and cosmogonic contexts, and even with decidedly positive evaluations of materiality. Pessin highlights the negative role of matter in Platonic (and Neoplatonic) themes at play in Maimonides, Gersonides, and Philo; the neutral role of matter in the creation accounts and Aristotelian metaphysics in Nahmanides, Gersonides, Abraham ibn Ezra, Maimonides, and Crescas; and the positive role of matter in Ibn Gabirol's and Isaac Israeli's commitment to a supernal grade of matter, in Simha of Troyes' stoic-inspired divinization of matter, and in Spinoza's vision of God-as-nature.

Gad Freudenthal's chapter, "Cosmology: The Heavenly Bodies," looks at the paramount role that the heavenly bodies played in medieval thought. They were construed as God's instruments in exercising His providence over the sublunar world, so that the latter's order and stability were ascribed to their "influences." This was a generally accepted notion, held by even staunch opponents of astrology. Freudenthal studies the views of Jewish thinkers about the role of the heavenly bodies in the economy of the physical world. After sketching the disciplinary traditions on this topic in Greek philosophy (primarily Aristotle, Ptolemy, and Alexander of Aphrodisias) and Arabic thought (al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Averroes), Freudenthal discusses successively the heavenly bodies in the thought of Jewish thinkers who had access to writings in Arabic (Saadia, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, Abraham ibn Ezra, and Maimonides) and of those who depended exclusively on writings in Hebrew (Gersonides).

In "Miracles," Ari Ackerman focuses on four of the most extensive and influential treatments of the topic in medieval Jewish philosophy: those of Saadia, Judah Halevi, Maimonides, and Gersonides. Each of these philosophers forges a unique balance between the Jewish and philosophical traditions on miracles. Ackerman begins with a brief examination of the differing conceptions of miracles in the biblical–rabbinic and the Greek–Islamic philosophical traditions, which lays the groundwork for the medieval Jewish analyses of the issue. He then proceeds to extensive treatments of those Jewish philosophers' views of miracles, underscoring their attempts to integrate elements of the contrasting approaches of the Jewish and philosophical traditions.

Tamar Rudavsky, in her chapter "Time, Space, and Infinity," examines the interrelationship among time, place, and the continuum in medieval Jewish philosophy, particularly in light of existing theological constraints. Although the early biblical and rabbinic works did not contain an ontology of time or place, the theological

assumptions and constraints underlying these works reverberated throughout the medieval Jewish literature. Whereas in some cases these theological constraints were challenged, as reflected in the works of Maimonides and Gersonides, in other cases (such as Spinoza) these constraints were rejected altogether. Rudavsky notes that the development of the concepts of time, place, and the continuum involves three sets of issues. The first issue has to do with divine omniscience from the perspective of the apparent discontinuity between past and future. Clearly the past appears to be fixed in a way that the future is not. More bluntly, the past is actual whereas the future is possible. From the divine perspective there is no ontological difference between past and future: All events exist in an "eternal now" for God, and so what is possible from the human perspective is actual from God's eternal gaze. A second issue is related to the notion of creation. Traditionally, God the Creator is said to be eternal, or outside of time, whereas creatures are construed as being in time or subject to the flow of time. By understanding the notion of creation and how an eternal, timeless Creator created a temporal universe, we may begin to see how the notions of eternity and time function. A third issue, having to do with infinity and the continuum, leads to consideration of the notion of space (or place). Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the problem of creation continued to occupy both Jewish and scholastic philosophers and theologians. These issues are drawn to their logical culmination in Spinoza's discussions of time, eternity, and infinity.

In "Exhalations and Other Meteorological Themes," Resianne Fontaine considers how meteorological theories in medieval Jewish literature emerged in different contexts and in various genres. A key text is *'Otot ha-Shamayim* (The Signs of Heaven), Samuel ibn Tibbon's expanded Hebrew version of the Arabic adaptation of Aristotle's *Meteorology*, completed in 1210. The most important doctrine in the Aristotelian treatise is that of the dual exhalations, a cold and moist one and a hot and dry one, that explain the occurrence of diverse meteorological phenomena. Aristotle's treatise lies at the basis of surveys of meteorology in various Hebrew encyclopedias of science and philosophy within the framework of the orderly study of Aristotle's philosophy, of Hebrew translations of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle, and of supercommentaries on them. Moreover, Aristotle's views were studied in Jewish exegetical literature, especially with regard to the question of how they relate to the biblical account of creation and to certain miracles. Meteorological theories are also found in popular works, such as books of fables, sometimes in a moralistic context. A major problem for all medieval Jewish scholars interested in meteorology, however, was the fact that Ibn Tibbon's Arabic model presented great textual difficulties, which Fontaine examines.