

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85243-2 - The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: Volume 2: The Modern Era

Edited by Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman and David Novak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

MARTIN KAVKA

The contributors in this volume have set out to present the current state of affairs in an intellectual discipline, that of modern Jewish philosophy, and to offer programmatic lines for future inquiry on the part of its practitioners. Like its companion *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy, Volume 1: From Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century*,¹ this volume is organized thematically. The guiding thread that connects the chapters in this volume is the recognition that the field of modern Jewish philosophy is a dynamic territory built up around concepts, not around a history of “great thinkers” arranged chronologically. To navigate a philosophical territory is not to master a history, in the sense of knowing what a chain of figures have stated about these or those philosophical/theological topoi. Rather, it is about tracing, critically assessing, and justifying theoretical and practical instances of concept-use across diverse bodies of thought in the modern period and in our contemporary age. The authoritative role played by primary figures is secondary to this other kind of mastery, premised on the consciousness of the field’s analytical dynamism.

It is perhaps easier to describe modern Jewish philosophy along these lines than premodern Jewish philosophy because the field, both as an active practice and as a scholarly discipline, of modern Jewish philosophy is a young and emergent one; it is also because, frankly, its nature and purpose have been unclear and contested. As an object of study in the American university, the emergence of Jewish philosophy (both modern and medieval) is somewhat murky. It appears at first only gradually. The issue of whether Jewish philosophy is truly philosophical, the relations between its universal and particularistic aspects, and even its ideological character have remained vexed ever since. When Emil Hirsch, rabbi of Chicago Sinai Congregation, was appointed to a chair in “rabbinic literature and philosophy” at the University of Chicago in 1892, there was no salary, he taught little philosophy, and he saw his own courses as examples of “Semitic studies.” Even though Hirsch’s writings included assertions related to the *philosophical* superiority of Judaism, his final title at the University of Chicago was as professor of “*rabbinal* literature”; the reference to philosophy had disappeared.² As Jewish philosophy entered philosophy

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85243-2 - The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: Volume 2: The Modern Era

Edited by Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman and David Novak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

departments in American universities and seminaries in the early twentieth century, it was no longer as some set of philosophical ideas to be discovered through the application of the techniques of historical biblical criticism, or other forms of interpretation of rabbinic literature or even of biblical literature. Henry Malter, best known for his work on the tenth-century Jewish philosopher Saadia Gaon,³ was appointed to the faculty of Hebrew Union College in 1900. Isaac Husik was appointed to the position of lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania in 1911 and was promoted to assistant professor after the appearance of his introduction to medieval Jewish philosophy in 1916.⁴ In other words, the study of Jewish philosophy first emerged as the study of *medieval* Jewish philosophy.

The academic study of modern Jewish philosophy in the United States came a bit later, although just when is up for debate. Perhaps, given the place of Spinoza on the border of the medieval and modern worldviews, one should date it to 1934 with the publication of Harry A. Wolfson's book on Spinoza, much of which was devoted to identifying Spinoza's medieval sources. Or perhaps one should date it to 1959, to the arrival in the United States of Alexander Altmann to Brandeis University, where he trained many of today's senior scholars in the field. Or perhaps one should center on the key juncture in the emergence of modern Jewish philosophy as an object of study, the increase in positions in this field, as in all areas of Jewish studies, that occurs in the late 1960s and early 1970s following the Six-Day War, a development that dovetails with the proliferation of ethnic and religious studies on American university campuses, the emergence of multiculturalism, and new expressions of Jewish self-assertion. At this point, a canon quickly formed around the now mighty German-Jewish dead; Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig enter into a past (the *early* twentieth century) that is now recognizably historical. Within twenty years, this canon will have expanded to include other figures including Emmanuel Levinas, Leo Strauss, and Emil Fackenheim.

The lived practice of modern Jewish philosophy and thought in early twentieth-century Germany took inspiration from a wide variety of Jewish genres: philosophical, scriptural, and mystical. But before modern Jewish philosophy could come into view as an academic discipline in the United States, it first had to stand on the shoulders of scholarship in medieval Jewish philosophy. Wolfson wrote primarily on medieval Jewish philosophy. Altmann published on Maimonides and the tenth-century Neoplatonist Isaac Israeli in addition to his landmark biography of Moses Mendelssohn, which retains its monumental status today, and his dissertation on the philosophy of Max Scheler. Norbert M. Samuelson, whose first full-time academic appointment was in the Department of Religion at the University of Virginia in 1973, published his first chapters and articles on the medieval Jewish philosophers

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85243-2 - The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: Volume 2: The Modern Era

Edited by Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman and David Novak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Gersonides and ibn Daud before turning to modern figures.⁵ One could tell similar stories about other senior scholars in the field today, including Lenn Goodman, Hava Tirosch-Samuelsan, and Elliot Wolfson, all of whom first published on medieval philosophy and mysticism.⁶ One might try a different approach to historicizing the discipline, and settle on the year 1950, when Nahum N. Glatzer, who was instrumental in introducing the work of Franz Rosenzweig to the English-speaking world of letters, was hired to a chair at Brandeis. Yet the sheer range of Glatzer's scholarship – from his courses at the Frankfurt Lehrhaus on biblical and midrashic texts, to his dissertation on history in tannaitic writings, to Franz Kafka – makes it difficult to use Glatzer to say anything about the field of modern Jewish philosophy.⁷ Furthermore, Glatzer's classic reader in modern Jewish intellectual life is titled *Modern Jewish Thought*; the word "thought," as opposed to "philosophy," signals that volume's inclusion of many authors and figures such as Judah Magnes and Yehuda Amichai who would at first blush seem to fall outside of the category of Jewish philosophy.

If modern Jewish philosophy and its study in North America once stood and even continue to stand upon the shoulders of medieval philosophy, it is also true that the academic study of medieval Jewish philosophy, if not medieval Jewish philosophy itself, rests upon the universal values that come into their own in the modern period. For Wolfson, even before his appointment in 1925 to the Nathan Littauer Chair in Jewish Literature and Philosophy, a chair that had a home in both Harvard's Semitics and philosophy departments,⁸ scholarship in medieval Jewish philosophy was a pragmatic tool by which modern Jews could show the universal aspects of Jewish culture and thereby make a home in America. As he wrote in his 1921 essay "The Needs of Jewish Scholarship in America,"

I do not mean to imply that I consider medieval Jewish philosophy to be the most important field of Jewish study. Hardly that. For I believe, just as our pious ancestors believed, through for different reasons, that the Talmud with its literature is the most promising field of study, the most fertile field of original research and investigation. But I believe that medieval Jewish philosophy is the only branch of Jewish literature, next to the Bible, which binds us to the literary world. In it we meet on common ground with civilized Europe and with part of civilized Asia and civilized Africa.⁹

As argued by Ismar Schorsch, Wolfson would seem here to imply that for Judaism to articulate itself most successfully, it is necessary to turn to the rabbis, a turn that the status of the Jews as a religious and ethnic minority in America at the beginning of the twentieth century would have precluded. Jews are constrained by the culture in which they live, and so they must show that they are not different – or at least not *too* different – from the non-Jews who have social and political power.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85243-2 - The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: Volume 2: The Modern Era

Edited by Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman and David Novak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Because of that cultural constraint, the study of medieval Jewish philosophy would be one that portrays Judaism to non-Jews *in a form that does not accurately portray Judaism*. If “the study of Judaism had to start off center, on a body of literature that was tangential to its essential character,”¹⁰ to quote Schorsch, then how common is the ground between Judaism and “civilization” in the first place? The essence of Judaism, on Schorsch’s reading of Wolfson, is unconstrained by universalist canons of reason; the essence of Judaism is the essence of Judaism alone, and universalism is a sham. But to leave the analysis of Wolfson’s text at this point is to miss something integral to Wolfson’s claim. For Wolfson, civilized Europe was still civilized *Europe*, and civilized Asia still civilized *Asia*. The bonds between Judaism and the “literary” world are bonds that, because they are *between* two poles, do not and cannot erase the particularity of Judaism. It very well may be the case that Wolfson was unable to defend *why* this particularity would not be erased as the study of medieval Jewish philosophy advanced. But it does not follow from this passage that Jewish philosophy is tangential to Judaism simply because it proclaims itself to have universal significance.

Indeed, avowals of Jewish particularism inside Jewish philosophy and its reception are themselves not without their own universal, philosophical significance. The following is a case in point. When Henry Slonimsky, who had completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Pennsylvania and earned his doctorate under the esteemed neo-Kantian Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen at the University of Marburg in 1912, taught in the philosophy department at Johns Hopkins from 1914 through 1919, he taught courses in what we would now call “general” philosophy of religion, ethics, and logic.¹¹ (He would later become dean of the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City in 1926.) To the extent that he produced work while at Johns Hopkins that might be called “modern Jewish philosophy,” it was outside of any university-sanctioned context. The Baltimore chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women reported a series of lectures given by Slonimsky in 1919 entitled “The Philosophy of the Jewish Religion.” The head of the chapter, Jennie Friedenwald Hecht, described the force of Slonimsky’s lectures as follows: “The interest in his brilliant presentation reached a high pitch, and all felt how great to be a Jew, what a noble heritage we possess, how great a debt the world owes the Jews, and awakened a Jewish consciousness (whether dead, asleep, or half-awake) that will never go back to its original state.”¹²

Hecht’s description of Slonimsky’s lectures suggests a way to articulate Jewish philosophy, or at least a “philosophy of Judaism,” in such a manner that the category did not heave under the weight of the distinction between the universal and the particular. On the surface, her description endorses an understanding of Jewish

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85243-2 - The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: Volume 2: The Modern Era

Edited by Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman and David Novak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

philosophy as being unaffected by claims about the universal; Jewish philosophy is not a practice that leads to the association of Judaism with universality (as Schorsch understood Wolfson's program for Jewish philosophy), but rather to the intensity of a particularist Jewish feeling. Yet there are reasons to doubt such a characterization. Although the lectures themselves appear to have been lost, there is every reason to suppose that there is more in them than just an expression of Jewish pride. In Friedenwald Hecht's report, a direct link is made between the particular "heritage" of the Jews and a "debt" owed for it by the "world." As a student of Cohen, the character of that debt or "gift" identified by Slonimsky in his telling of Jewish philosophy, and recognized as such by his listeners, was no doubt cosmopolitan and messianic in character.¹³ Embedded in the particularities of Judaism, Jewish philosophy is itself already universal.

The tension between universalism and particularism, if not altogether false, certainly has been overstated as a binary opposition. The opposition is usually presented as follows. Insofar as the study of modern Jewish philosophy describes how Jews and Jewish philosophy are part of the story of Western philosophy and a larger world culture, Jewish philosophy both as a living, constructive practice and as an object of study endorses the universal claims of philosophical discourse. At the same time, insofar as Jewish philosophy and its study are said to include nonphilosophy ("Jewish thought") as an essential part of its topography, then in its particularism it stands apart from philosophy as a universal discourse. This contestation over Jewish philosophy – whether it is universal or particular, whether it can be both, whether the term "Jewish philosophy" is anything other than an oxymoron – hangs over the study of both modern and medieval Jewish philosophy like a heavy weight.¹⁴

The universal/particularist dichotomy in the study of Jewish philosophy is unproductive because each side of the dichotomy always stands ready to reverse itself dialectically. In her recent book on exemplarity and chosenness, Dana Hollander persuasively insists that claims about the universal are always made by individuals who are particularly located. In other words, universality is always universality *for someone, from some historical context*. On the other side of the coin, "particularity" is itself already a concept, covering the "universal" class of those objects that can be described as particular "things."¹⁵ This, then, is the first conclusion of the introduction to this volume: *modern Jewish philosophy is neither a universalist nor a particularist discourse*. Its territory is constituted by the vexing torsion of its name "Jewish philosophy," a dynamism that gets elided by the will to label a scholar or a field as either particular or universalist, as if the relation between the two terms were not already implicit in each individual term. If particularism cannot be extirpated from any universalist discourse, then nonphilosophical works such as the Bible or Talmud

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85243-2 - The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: Volume 2: The Modern Era

Edited by Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman and David Novak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

become sources for Jewish philosophical practice. So let us start again, leaving the universal/particular distinction for another taxonomy.

As part of a heuristic, second-order exercise, one might profitably recognize four genres in which scholars engage in modern Jewish philosophy. These are theocentric, ethical, ethnic, and ordinary. Although these are not pure types, and although it is doubtlessly possible to develop a fuller and better typology, in these four types one can gather a better view of “Jewish philosophy” as a territory of concepts, in terms of both the norms of inquiry that they set forth and the boundaries and rifts that these configurations and contestations establish between Jewish philosophy and other forms of research in the humanities.

First, there is what one might call *theocentric Jewish philosophy*. The validity of a philosophy of religion that is embedded in a particular tradition is premised on rejecting the notion that the universal constitutes the aim of thinking. As presented by Franz Rosenzweig, philosophy, in its quest to uncover an eternally and universally valid metaphysics, fails to take into account our individuated and anxious fear of death – our reflexive desire to perdure in existence and not to ascend up to the allegedly consoling realm of “a beyond of which [the creature] wants to know absolutely nothing.”¹⁶ The only thing that can make the human person feel at home in the world of temporal flux and keep the threat of nihilism at bay is the event of revelation steeped in the erotic dialogue of the Song of Songs. Rosenzweig infers from the dynamism of the world – the change of things’ relationships to their surroundings and their own organic development – that the essence of a thing does not inhere in it of its own accord, but rather is renewed from moment to moment by a creator.¹⁷

Given the central place of theology in Rosenzweig’s discourse, it would make sense that what currently passes by the name “Jewish philosophy” should really be renamed “Jewish theology.” As David Novak has recently claimed, “there is no discipline of ‘Jewish philosophy,’ that is, one that can be cogently defined, even though it is used now more than ever.”¹⁸ What Novak articulates is a “Jewish philosophical theology,” which “attempts to learn from philosophy how there is an opening for revelation in the created world.”¹⁹ In other words, Jewish philosophy is here understood as culminating in the claim that only a theological worldview can explain how phenomena come to appear in the way that they do; it is a *method* that can and should affirm theological content about the covenantal relationship between God and particular peoples. As such, “philosophy” is no longer about a search for the universal, but is the activity of articulating, justifying, and fine tuning a culture’s worldview and/or ethos.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85243-2 - The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: Volume 2: The Modern Era

Edited by Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman and David Novak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Second, there is what one might call *ethical Jewish philosophy*. The opening sentences of the first overview of modern Jewish philosophy written in English – Nathan Rotenstreich’s *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times* (1968) – read as follows: “Jewish thought in recent times has been characterized by the prominence given to the ethical values of Judaism. This interpretation is not altogether novel ... [but] what strikes us as new is the insistence on the primacy of ethics in the sphere of faith; traditional religion is divested of its beliefs in transcendence, and pressed into the service of morality.”²⁰ Here too, Judaism is not swallowed into the universal language of philosophy. To discuss the feasibility by which an ethical community or commonwealth is created requires Judaism; philosophy on its own is unable to construct a way to link the singular individual (frequently described in the canon of modern Jewish philosophy as the one who suffers) to the universal without ignoring the singularity of the sufferer. As with theocentric Jewish philosophy, ethical Jewish philosophy envisions itself as a branch of thinking that turns to Judaism to delimit philosophy. Unlike theocentric Jewish philosophy, ethical Jewish philosophy also seeks to transform philosophy, to see Jewish philosophy as the repository of content, and not merely a description of a method.

The persistence of this model in contemporary scholarship is in large part due to the influence of the work of the French Jewish phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas, who argued in numerous writings that the egoism underlying the century of man-made mass death could only be countered by a philosophy that saw the self as grounded in (and constrained by) the other person. Such a philosophical turn might be grounded purely phenomenologically, but Levinas also described this move as a Jewish one. Writing a philosophy of the plural, in which the other is not seen as a mirror of myself, is to translate the plurality of rabbinic readings of the Bible “into Greek expression of the universal civilization – for joining or judging ... according to the mode of our Western university language.”²¹ Without departing from philosophy itself, the Bible serves to ensure that the idea of justice does not collapse upon itself by assuming that the universal order is ready-made. The Bible critiques traditional accounts of the universal in the name of another, better, philosophy yet to come. Nevertheless, even if ethical Jewish philosophy imagines Judaism as that which contemporary culture needs, whether it can articulate an account of God with the robustness seen in earlier periods of the Jewish tradition is a debatable question.

In both of these models, Jewish philosophy stands outside the world as it is; it discusses states of affairs that ought to be acknowledged, and its subject matter is something that is not material. As Jewish philosophical theology, it justifies a specific picture of the personal God. As Jewish ethics, it justifies a certain kind of image of the good life and/or its obligations.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85243-2 - The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: Volume 2: The Modern Era

Edited by Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman and David Novak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

However, twentieth-century Jewish philosophy has also transgressed this boundary, marking it as purely idealist. There is what one might call *ethnic Jewish philosophy*. Jewish philosophy on this account would not be a “philosophy of Judaism” (to invoke the phrasing of Julius Guttmann in his 1933 introduction to Jewish philosophy),²² but rather a philosophy of the Jewish people and its fate and/or destiny in the world. This approach inheres in the narrative arc of Rotenstreich’s book. As stated earlier, Rotenstreich opens his survey of modern Jewish philosophy by noticing the frequent emphasis on ethics in the canon of modern Jewish philosophy. Yet this emphasis is not one that Rotenstreich himself endorses. By the closing page of the book, the meaning of Judaism and Jewishness are up for grabs; it is up to the present generation to decide what these categories should mean, and there can be no guarantee that its interpretation will be correct.

For Rotenstreich, the story of Jewish philosophy, in its twists and turns, is a story that explains the difficulty of Jewish life in the late 1960s, for the needs of the Jewish ethnos after the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel are in uneasy tension, if not outright contradiction, with the story of the essence of Judaism that had been passed down to that generation from the thinkers of the nineteenth century. Rotenstreich’s words still have sufficient power to justify citing them at length.

For good or ill, we have consciously entered the stream of history. This fact was clearly seen by the leaders of the Jewish Reform movement in the last century, who were convinced that this entrance into history necessarily entailed a loss of national identity. Those of us who strove for national revival, however, entered into history in order to establish the Jewish people within it; to live, move, and have our being within it. The trust in the eternality of man and in the eternal principles of Judaism had been shaken by fate and Jews were resolved to enter history to preserve the people and sustain their faith ... The basic question that confronts Jews in the present era contains the relation between these two historical views of Jewish existence. Has a revealed, preordained Judaism any meaning for a generation at a time when it is caught up in the stream of events and swept along on its strong current? On the other hand, is there any meaning to a historical continuity that is devoid of Jewish content, however it may be interpreted? It is no longer a question as to which interpretation of Judaism enlists the sympathy and allegiance [of contemporary Jews]; the validity of the very concept of interpretation has been rendered doubtful.²³

If Jewish philosophy is to be honest about its inability to trust in either theological or secular-ethical ideals, then it must start with sociology, although it cannot remain there.

Outside of surveys of the field, the ethnic approach is most clearly visible in the various writings of Emil Fackenheim, whose formulation of the 614th commandment (“Do not give posthumous victories to Hitler”) was grounded in his response of wonder to the efflorescence of Jewish life in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85243-2 - The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: Volume 2: The Modern Era

Edited by Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman and David Novak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

relation to Zionism and the act of “resistance” that he saw in the creation of the State of Israel. “Even a merely collective commitment to Jewish group-survival for its own sake is a momentous response ... [it is] a profound, albeit as yet fragmentary, act of faith, in an age of crisis to which the response might well have been either flight in total disarray or complete despair.”²⁴ Accounts of the meaning of divine command, and the nature of that which commands, cannot ignore the Holocaust by assuming that post-Holocaust Jewish philosophy could possibly be similar to the Jewish philosophy that preceded it. Nor can they simply be ignored on the assumption that faith is completely meaningless after the Holocaust; for Fackenheim, even the secularist Jew *qua* secularist responds to the 614th commandment and wrestles just as much the religious Jew does. For Fackenheim, the contours of Jewish existence – secular and religious – are radically disrupted, even as tradition reconstitutes itself after the Holocaust in unprecedented ways. Authentic Jewish self-understanding does not begin in theology or in ethics; it begins in the realities of Jewish existence.

In all three of these accounts, Judaism is something singular. Like all singularities, it is extraordinary, set apart from and irreducible to the universal. Nevertheless, the force of its critiques – of immanently available truth, of universal ethics, of the very possibility of Jewish ideas detached from Jewish history – is a force that tempers this singularity. Jewish philosophical theology is a worldview that takes up the question of truth from within a particular standpoint, like all other theologies (e.g., Greek). Ethical Jewish philosophy seeks to translate the worldview of the Bible into philosophical language. Yet this act of translation from one world of concepts to another morphs both Judaism and philosophy to create an ethics (centered on tolerance, neighbor-love, or the Other) that is common to those who value the Bible and those who do not. Once the claim of translatability is made, the issue of the nature of Judaism’s uniqueness, if it has any, comes to the fore. Finally, ethnic Jewish philosophy, in opening itself up to the possibility that history conditions all possibilities of problem-solving, moves from an ethnic particularism to a fragmentary post-Holocaust existence that is held in common by Jews and non-Jews. The project of mending the world for Fackenheim is not just a Jewish one, but is exhibited by the philosopher (and lapsed Catholic) Kurt Huber, the Catholic priest Bernard Lichtenberg, and the Polish Catholic Pelagia Lewinska, who is arguably the most exemplary figure for Fackenheim in *To Mend the World*.²⁵

In all of these ways, Jewish philosophy affirms both the presence and the absence of the distinctiveness of the adjective “Jewish” and the indistinctiveness of the word “philosophy.” Non-Jewish philosophy – whether political theory, ethical reasoning, phenomenology, or existentialism – may open up a covenantal world. The Bible

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85243-2 - The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: Volume 2: The Modern Era

Edited by Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman and David Novak

Excerpt

[More information](#)

may steer us toward the other person. The Holocaust may show that there is no thinking that is not situational. Yet insofar as the conclusions that Jewish philosophers make are temporary (until redemption,²⁶ until another person summons me to responsibility, or until a historical moment buffets the Jewish people in a new direction), what Jewish philosophy attests to is no more and no less than the persistence of these topoi of Jewish philosophical questioning.

Once Jewish philosophy becomes self-aware of this fact, it might take yet another approach to the field, which perhaps might be called *ordinary Jewish philosophy*. Leaving behind the problematics exercising nineteenth-century German philosophy and culture, it picks up its questions from the mid- and late twentieth century, from thinkers who are more comfortable with the hiddenness of that after which humanity questions. The contours of such a posture might be seen in the concept of dwelling in Heidegger's later work (nonrepresentational and aware of the eclipse of the divinity),²⁷ in what Hannah Arendt characterized as the "space of appearance" marked by potentiality,²⁸ and in the skepticism of Leo Strauss, whose thought is marked by its "insistence that there are real human problems that perhaps cannot be answered definitively."²⁹ As Strauss wrote near the end of the opening chapter of his 1953 book *Natural Right and History*,

The "experience of history" does not make doubtful the view that fundamental problems persist or retain their identity in all historical change ... In grasping all these problems as problems, the human mind liberates itself from its historical limitations. No more is needed to legitimize philosophy in its original, Socratic sense: philosophy is knowledge that one does not know; that it is to say, it is knowledge of what one does not know, or awareness of the fundamental problems and, therewith, of the fundamental alternatives regarding their solution that are coeval with human thought.³⁰

Applied to Jewish philosophy, this simply means that ordinary Jewish philosophy takes up three tasks. First, it articulates the questions that address Jewish existence (among them, the ones powerfully posed by Rotenstreich at the close of *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times*). Second, it shows how past answers to these questions might have closed off or repressed other options of inquiry; in this skeptical angle, ordinary Jewish philosophy would follow Stanley Cavell's notion of the ordinary as "not what may be but what must be set aside if philosophy's aspirations to knowledge are to be satisfied."³¹ Third, remaining close to the ground, ordinary Jewish philosophy remains alert to continually changing perspectival shifts in the angle of view. These conceptual turns are directed toward immanence and materiality in a canon that has sought to emphasize eternity and transcendence, toward aesthetics and politics in a canon that privileged ethics and redemption; toward sensation, affect, and imagination in an intellectualist tradition; toward philosophy of science