

## The Philosophy of Emil Fackenheim

Emil Fackenheim was one of the most philosophically serious, knowledgeable, and provocative contemporary Jewish thinkers. His original focus as a philosophical theologian was mainly on revelation, but in his later work he concerned himself primarily with the wide-ranging implications of the Holocaust. In this book, Kenneth Hart Green examines Fackenheim's intellectual trajectory and traces how and why he focused so intently on the Holocaust. He explores the deeper thought that Fackenheim developed about the Holocaust, which he construed as a cataclysmic event that ruptured history and one that also brought about a change in the very structure of Being. As Green demonstrates, the Holocaust, according to Fackenheim's interpretation, changes how we view all things, from God to man to history. It also radically affects Judaism, Christianity, and philosophy, the major traditions that have shaped the Western world.

Kenneth Hart Green is Professor in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. A scholar of Jewish thought, he is the author of numerous journal articles and books, most recently *Leo Strauss and the Rediscovery of Maimonides*.

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*From Revelation to the Holocaust*

KENNETH HART GREEN

*University of Toronto*



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*Dedicated to the memory of those who resisted during the  
Holocaust, and to those who resist Hitler's shadow today.*

Revelation is close to the core of *To Mend the World*. At the core itself is the question of whether all Truth, Goodness, Beauty ever humanly perceived or created, ever divinely revealed, are not ruptured by the Holocaust; and if, in case this is so, a mending is possible.

Emil L. Fackenheim

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## Acknowledgments

I often wonder whether this book would have been written if I had not studied with Emil L. Fackenheim at the University of Toronto from 1973 to 1977, and carried on numerous lively conversations with him for many years thereafter. In some sense, therefore, this book is an act of filial piety.

But in another sense, it is much more than a tribute to Fackenheim. It is my effort to plumb the depths of Fackenheim's writings. In fact, I cannot be certain that Fackenheim would have concurred with what I have written about his thought. So rather than present the book's contents vis-à-vis my relation to Fackenheim, I will simply express my gratitude to him for his intellectual vigor, spiritual generosity, moral passion, and dedication to both the life of Judaism and the philosophic life.

I owe a debt to all the friends and colleagues with whom I have been discussing Fackenheim and his thought through several decades. I would especially like to thank: Arthur Fish, Martin D. Yaffe, David Novak, Clifford Orwin, the late Laurence Berns, James A. Diamond, Norman Doidge, Victor Shepherd, Waller Newell, Sharon Portnoff, Michael L. Morgan, Benjamin Pollock, Jeffrey A. Bernstein, Steven Frankel, Alan Udoff, and Fred Krantz. I likewise owe a debt to my students at the University of Toronto with whom I have studied Fackenheim's thought, and who have taught me much in the process. It is also my distinct pleasure to thank Jacqueline Newell for taking on the daunting task of editing a very long manuscript, and doing it with such style and skill. Whatever virtues of concision and focus the book may now possess would not have been possible without her.

I am immeasurably grateful to my wife and fellow Fackenheim student, Sharon Green. She has read the manuscript on numerous occasions, and she still enjoys discussing Fackenheim's ideas almost as much as I do.



## Abbreviations

### WORKS BY FACKENHEIM: BOOKS

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| EGJ   | <i>An Epitaph for German Judaism</i>                    |
| EJMP  | <i>Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy</i> |
| FGPJT | <i>Fackenheim: German Philosophy and Jewish Thought</i> |
| FPTJ  | <i>Emil L. Fackenheim: Philosopher, Theologian, Jew</i> |
| GPH   | <i>God's Presence in History</i>                        |
| JBAH  | <i>The Jewish Bible after the Holocaust</i>             |
| JPJP  | <i>Jewish Philosophy and Jewish Philosophers</i>        |
| JRH   | <i>The Jewish Return into History</i>                   |
| JTEF  | <i>The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim</i>            |
| MH    | <i>Metaphysics and Historicity</i>                      |
| QPF   | <i>Quest for Past and Future</i>                        |
| PJB   | <i>Paths to Jewish Belief</i>                           |
| RDHT  | <i>The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought</i>       |
| TGW   | <i>The God Within</i>                                   |
| TMW   | <i>To Mend the World</i>                                |
| WIJ?  | <i>What Is Judaism?</i>                                 |

### WORKS ON FACKENHEIM: BOOKS

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| ELFPTJ | Portnoff, Diamond, and Yaffe, <i>Emil L. Fackenheim: Philosopher, Theologian, Jew</i>            |
| FGPTJ  | Louis I. Greenspan and Graeme Nicholson, <i>Fackenheim: German Philosophy and Jewish Thought</i> |

*List of Abbreviations*

- EFQ* Laurie McRobert, *Emil Fackenheim's Quest: From Philosophy to Prophetic Theology*
- FJPI* Michael L. Morgan, *Fackenheim's Jewish Philosophy: An Introduction*
- EFJP* David Patterson, *Emil L. Fackenheim: A Jewish Philosopher's Response to the Holocaust*
- PWFRH* Michael L. Morgan and Benjamin Pollock, *The Philosopher as Witness: Fackenheim and Responses to the Holocaust*