



## THE SCHOLEM-KURZWEIL DEBATE AND MODERN JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the year 1965, nearly a century and a half after the first efforts were undertaken to establish a Science of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*), a bitter public debate broke out among scholars who pondered the ultimate degree of objectivity attainable in a "scientific" study of Judaism. Like their scholarly forebears of the early 19th century, the later group of researchers were primarily of German birth and/or upbringing, reared on many of the same literary and cultural traditions as their predecessors. And yet, outwardly at least, similarities between the two groups would seem to end with this basic socio-cultural component. For, over time, historical circumstance had dramatically altered the response of German Jews to the troubling questions of identity and collective perception.

Of course, the Holocaust, through its emergence as a major source of collective memory and historical consciousness, demanded a definitive rethinking of these questions, which had accompanied German Jews at least since the time of Moses Mendelssohn.<sup>1</sup> By 1945, the twin curatives of assimilation and emancipation were no longer the means and ends (respectively) to which Jews devoted their intellectual and personal energies, as they had a century earlier.<sup>2</sup> What remained of German Jewry—its population and its "culture"—were the tattered fragments, dispatched to the corners of the world. In America, and to a much lesser extent in Europe, these fragments, including those who escaped before the full reign of Nazi terror was unleashed, quickly assumed a vanguard position in many areas of the arts and sciences, although not always as an identifiable social unit.

In Israel, where the revived debate over the feasibility of a science of Judaism took place, Jews of German birth assumed perhaps an even more unified and significant role, particularly in the academic realm.<sup>3</sup> Beginning with the 1920's, such figures as Gershom Scholem, Yitzhak Baer, Akiva Ernst Simon, and Martin Buber exercised a profound influence upon the educational goals and directions of the emerging Jewish state.<sup>4</sup> Their efforts also contributed to a heightened awareness and over-

all reconsideration of the Jewish character of the Zionist enterprise as a necessary first step towards defining a new idiom for Jewish identity. In that vein, the German immigrants to Palestine, unlike their transplanted counterparts in America, bore a relatively coherent ideological agenda, Zionism,<sup>5</sup> which provided a conceptual framework for their study and research. This framework was not merely an abstract motivating force, an impressionistic backdrop to the scholarly endeavors of the new historical researchers of Judaism. It possessed a concrete institutional form in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which, on the view of Jacob Katz, allowed "the Science of Judaism (to) embark on the path to normalization"<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, for this scholar and others who shared his view, Zionism could not only serve to cure the physical and spiritual maladies which plagued the Jewish people throughout the millennia of Exile. It could also overturn the apologetic tendency which surfaced during the 19th century, and eventually dominated the nascent enterprise of a Science of Judaism. The importance of reversing this apologetic tendency was underscored by one of the most important Jewish scholars of the twentieth century, Gershom Scholem, in his classic attack of 1945 upon the earlier *Wissenschaft* researchers.<sup>7</sup> Scholem, who was a beacon of the emerging scholarly establishment in Jerusalem, blasted his 19th century scholarly predecessors for proposing, in the guise of enlightened and objective research, a one-dimensional and ultimately destructive view of Jewish history and identity.

One important contemporary critic of Scholem, Baruch Kurzweil, claimed that embedded in this attack was a certain circularity of argument which invalidated Scholem's conclusions regarding the objective potential of the Science of Judaism in Israel. Kurzweil, a sharp-tongued literary critic and professor of Hebrew and comparative literature at Bar-Ilan University, bitterly denounced Scholem's contention that, with a successful Zionist effort (in building a solid national foundation in Palestine), the study of Jewish history *could* arrive at a new standard of scientific objectivity. For him, Zionism was an overbearing ideological force which invariably influenced the work of scholars operating under its aegis. Kurzweil also doubted the correlated proposition that, through a "scientific" study of the Jewish past, hitherto suppressed forces active in Jewish history could be uncovered; such an expectation, to his mind, was misguided and dangerous.

Undoubtedly, the consequences of the claims and counter-claims contained in this debate<sup>8</sup> reach far beyond the personal and professional contempt which two academics held for one another. Indeed, they even reach beyond the exclusive concern of scholars over the degree of objectivity obtainable in their work. The issues of a Science of Judaism, as Scholem envisioned it, and the Zionist refiguration of that Science's

conclusions, of which Kurzweil warned, reflected the larger questions of Jewish identity and relationship to the past which have accompanied the Zionist movement since its inception. Whether a direct relationship between the universal scholarly dimension (i.e., the yearning for objectivity) and the narrower national/ideological plane exists—to put it simply, whether Jewish scholarship functions, perhaps uniquely, in the service of ideology—is a question which hovered over the Scholem-Kurzweil exchange and which will linger in the following discussion.

## II

Before entering into the heart of the Scholem-Kurzweil controversy, it is important to explore the highly-charged history of the movement known as "*Wissenschaft des Judentums*", or Science of Judaism. Long before Scholem and Kurzweil offered their conflicting views over the feasibility and ultimate potential of such a science, German Jews were infused with a spirit of liberation, both from traditional religious modes of observance and sources of authority, and from restrictive legal regulations governing their individual and communal lives. In the mid-18th century, Moses Mendelssohn pointed to the broader ethical-moral quality (as against the traditional rabbinic-pilpulistic) of the Jewish faith as its sustaining force and contribution to the development of civilization. While Mendelssohn himself did not reject the body of ceremonial law contained in the Talmud—he remained an observant Jew throughout his life—he did seek to expand the horizons of the rabbinic tradition by calling upon an expansive philosophic rationalism as its partner. To his mind, the rationalist sensibility which had seized hold in Europe in his time was not necessarily alien to the Jewish faith; it had existed, for example, in the time of Moses Maimonides, in whom Mendelssohn saw a kindred Jewish spirit.<sup>9</sup> The task thus remained for Mendelssohn and his disciples to rediscover this sensibility, long submerged under the dead weight of talmudic casuistry and irrational mystical explorations. For some of his followers, among them David Friedlander and Lazarus Ben David, this entailed a rejection of substantial portions of the Oral Law, a path far more radical than that proposed by their master.<sup>10</sup> In fact, in pushing for prayerbook and other ritual reform, the Mendelssohnian disciples encouraged the creation of Reform or Liberal Judaism in Germany in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Against the backdrop of reformist impulses in German Judaism arose a circle of Jewish intellectuals devoted to the advancement of the Jewish cause through a scientific study of the Jewish past. On the one hand, "advancement of the Jewish cause" entailed the full civic and religious emancipation of German Jews, as had been promised

French Jews in the wake of the Revolution of 1789, at the same time, it called for a reformulation of the frames of reference by which Jews identified themselves as Jews. No longer was traditional religious adherence considered a worthy path of Jewish self-identification; it was not likely to ameliorate the condition of Jews, even less to effect a positive reassessment of Judaism in the eyes of gentile hosts. What *could* effect such a reassessment, and what *could* establish a new frame of reference for Jews themselves, was science, or an objective study of historical phenomena. Inspired, in part, by the development of critical historical and philological research in German universities at the beginning of the century,<sup>11</sup> the circle of intellectuals officially formed the "Verein fuer Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden" in Berlin in 1821, convinced of the therapeutic impact which science could have on society in general and Jewish life in particular. One of the founding members, Immanuel Wolf, in a programmatic essay of 1822, gave voice to this sentiment when he urged the adoption of a scientific method which could rise "above the partisanship, passions and prejudices of daily life".<sup>12</sup>

And yet, between the lines of Wolf's statement can be apprehended an added expectation of this method. That is, it was supposed to reveal not only the "true" side of Judaism, but, more important for the larger goal of emancipation, the truly flattering side of Judaism. In short, science, the magical catch-phrase which spurred on Jewish and non-Jewish scholars throughout the nineteenth century,<sup>13</sup> was expected to revitalize a tradition worn down by rabbinic pedantry, strip it of its inglorious elements, and bestow upon it the noble character which it so desperately deserved and needed. Not only might such an enterprise convince state authorities of the worthiness of complete Jewish emancipation. It might also fulfill, according to Wolf, "an essential need for the Jews themselves".<sup>14</sup>

### III

The two-pronged charge which motivated the first generations of Jewish historical researchers and which is reflected in Wolf's programmatic essay—that is, the desire to achieve a maximal degree of objectivity in research, as well as to further the political aims of emancipation and assimilation—rendered impotent the social and sometimes even the scholarly utility of their work. This, at least, was the view of one of the most prominent twentieth century scholars, Gershom Scholem, who almost singlehandedly established and developed—not to mention, legitimized—the academic study of Jewish mysticism. Scholem regarded the ingraining tendencies of the nineteenth century German scholars—their attempt to use science as a means of hastening the process of

assimilation—as a vain effort doomed to failure. Cultural and intellectual assimilation, favored by some Wissenschaft scholars as a path to full emancipation, was an illusory remedy for Scholem. For many Jews, in Germany and elsewhere, it was the Nazi rise to power and policy of extermination which conclusively shattered this illusion; in Scholem's case, though, the realization came earlier, in 1911, when he first joined the Zionist movement in Germany. Zionism was, for him, a form of "post-assimilatory Judaism";<sup>15</sup> a reaction against his elders' willingness to surrender large portions of their Jewish identity in order to integrate into German society.

In relating his own rebellion against assimilation, Scholem noted that "the revolt, or the break—in instances like mine—was against self-deceit. A person living in a liberal-Jewish, German-assimilationist environment had the feeling that those people were devoting their entire lives to self-delusion."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, this "self-delusion" was part and parcel of the larger myth that a German-Jewish symbiosis ever existed or was even possible. Writing twenty years after the Holocaust, Scholem unequivocally denied that:

... there has ever been such a German-Jewish dialogue in any sense whatsoever, i.e., as a historical phenomenon. It takes two to have a dialogue, who listen to each other, who are prepared to perceive the other as what he is and represents, and to respond to him. Nothing can be more misleading than to apply such a concept to the discussions between Germans and Jews during the last 200 years. This dialogue died at its very start and never took place.<sup>17</sup>

Emblematic of the one-sided efforts towards dialogue which Jews attempted (and which, Scholem argues, ended in failure) was the apologetic scholarly impulse of Wissenschaft des Judentums. Scholem's bitter attack upon the Wissenschaft movement, which was referred to earlier,<sup>20</sup> portrayed it as the convergence of three contradictory tendencies: the yearning for an objective "pure science" vs. "the political function which this science (Wissenschaft) was intended to fill", i.e., emancipation and ultimately, assimilation; the Enlightenment-induced infatuation with reason and progress vs. the Romantically-inspired appreciation for the past and its study; and most important, the dialectical forces of preservation and destruction active in Jewish history as well as in academic research on it.<sup>21</sup>

Over the years, much of Scholem's intellectual travails as a scholar of Jewish history would be devoted to confronting these "deep contradictions" without travelling the same middle road<sup>22</sup> that Wissenschaft scholars used to resolve their conflicting scholarly and personal ambitions. His hope remained that Jewish scholarship might evolve beyond the limited boundaries set by them, that it need not suffer eternally from a slanted treatment aimed at exhibiting the best fact of Judaism to the Gentile world. Much like Immanuel Wolf more than a century earlier,

Scholem hoped that critical scholarship could rise above the plane of mundane political and ideological conflict and strive for an independent base.

In terms of Scholem's own interest and direction, such a status would allow the liberated Jewish scholar to focus upon the powerful currents of Jewish history embedded in mystical movements and figures. On Scholem's view, these currents had been repressed not only by the domineering rabbinic elite in medieval Jewish history, but by the rationalist-minded Wissenschaft scholars of the nineteenth century as well. What was considered life-threatening to the former and aesthetically distasteful to the latter was absolutely essential to Scholem. For this reason, David Biale entitles his important recent study of Scholem *Kabbalah and Counter-History*;<sup>25</sup> the title reflects the seminal counter-normative role that Scholem attributes not only to mysticism in Jewish history, but also to his own scholarly function in the shorter history of academic Jewish research.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, "counter-history" does seem an appropriate designation for Scholem's efforts and position, particularly when one takes note of the great importance which he accords to the notion of "dialectic" as a medium of change in history. History—and tradition for that matter—are not static phenomena, but rather the points at which often conflicting forces converge. As Biale notes, "for Scholem, historical change, which is necessary if a tradition is to remain alive, comes through the revolutionary struggle of contradictory principles."<sup>27</sup> As far as Jewish history was concerned, the normative rabbinic and the hidden mystical currents acted as dialectical foils between and within each other, producing a rich, varied, and dynamic stream of development. This conception clashed sharply with those formulated by Scholem's nineteenth-century predecessors, who, swept up by their euphoric first encounters with critical "scientific" methods,<sup>28</sup> hoped to uncover the progressive unfolding of a single idea or "essence" of Judaism.<sup>29</sup>

While pursuing a single essence of Judaism, the Wissenschaft scholars ignored the recurrent forces of mysticism and active messianism<sup>30</sup> and, thus, betrayed their own one-dimensional understanding of Jewish history. Unfortunately, Scholem argued, they failed to capture the multiple faces of Judaism, which resulted from frequent and explosive encounters between anarchic mystical forces and preservative rabbinic forces. In their ignorance, the Wissenschaft scholars revealed themselves as "giants in knowledge and midgets in understanding."<sup>31</sup>

To move beyond this ignorance, indeed, to break down the "walls of captivity,"<sup>32</sup> Scholem advocated nothing short of a "fundamental revision"<sup>33</sup> of 19th century Jewish historiography. In point of fact, the revision proposed by Scholem was a clear dialectical response to the overextended rationalist emphasis of the earlier generations of scholars.<sup>34</sup> While the critical disciplines of history and philology were by no means objec-

tionable to Scholem in and of themselves, the historical actors and movements to which Wissenschaft scholars applied them (and the political objective to which they were subordinated) were. Hence, activating the constructive and creative potential of the dialectical method essential for a healthy Jewish scholarship required an exploration of the hitherto unexplored or suppressed. Scholem observed:

Forces that were emphasized and considered positive from the standpoint of assimilation and false piety require a new and fundamental examination in order to determine what their actual role has been in the development of the nation. Forces whose value was once denigrated will appear in a different and affirmative light. Forces which were not considered important enough for serious scholars to research will now be raised from the depths of concealment. Perhaps what was once called degeneracy will now be regarded as a revelation and what seemed to them (i.e., Wissenschaft scholars) to be an impotent hallucination will be revealed as a great and vibrant myth.<sup>35</sup>

In this seminal passage are contained several of the key ingredients underlying Scholem's attack and response. Only through a full appreciation of mysticism and, particularly, Kabbalah—forces which were once denigrated—can a balanced view of Jewish history be attained. Moreover, the historico-philological method here becomes capable not merely of assembling facts and determining causal origins, but of uncovering a "great and vibrant myth" as well. Implicit in this capability was a creative potential for scholarly method which was not restrained by the guiding political objective of emancipation (or by the related apologetic motif) which marked the Wissenschaft period. Scholem believed that a solid national foundation for Jews, removed from an environment in which the dangerous illusion of assimilation festered, could establish the Science of Judaism as an integral partner in the task of reshaping contemporary Jewish identity; Biale even suggests that Scholem viewed "the historical science . . . as the modern form of Judaism."<sup>36</sup>

Hence, what distinguished the efforts of the Wissenschaft des Judentums from those of a twentieth-century Science of Judaism, as Scholem envisioned it, was not primarily the method used or even the language in which it was expressed;<sup>37</sup> nor was the difference evident so much in the degree of benefit which the historical sciences could be expected to bring. As we have just seen, Scholem seems to have shared the optimistic assessments of his 19th century predecessors regarding the remedial potential of science on a paralyzed Jewish tradition.

The distinction between the earlier and later "Sciences of Judaism" was rather the historical condition in which the two movements found themselves at the point of their inception. Whereas the drive for Jewish assimilation and emancipation was, in Scholem's view, morally bankrupt

and, consequently, condemned to decisive failure, the Zionist movement was capable of establishing a solid basis for an independent Jewish society, and thus of restoring the Jewish people to the mainstream of history. This process of "normalization" which Zionism undertook to effect could, if successful, also construct "a new center from which one can see completely new and different horizons"<sup>38</sup>—for example, the "real" forces, suppressed by earlier scholars, which had animated Jewish history hitherto. For Scholem, Zionism was not a diffuse ideological impulse along the lines of the Jewish Emancipation movement of the previous century. Rather, it embodied a genuine desire to reassert the national identity of the Jewish people. Moreover, Zionism's potential to "normalize" the Jewish condition could and should also re-vivify the Jewish scholarly enterprise. Scholem writes:

The new slogan is 'to see from within' . . . . To build anew the house of science in the wake of the historic effort of a Jew among his people who has no motives other than to see problems, events, and ideas as they actually were. . . .<sup>39</sup>

The ability "to see from within", to realize the objective potential of science,<sup>40</sup> was thus a by-product of the overall "return to history" which Scholem (and the Zionist movement overall) prescribed for the Jewish people.

At this point, though, it is important to make two vital distinctions. First, the "normalization" which we have used to describe Scholem's expectations of the potential of Zionism should not be confused with the common denotation suggested by Zionist activists in Palestine/Israel; that is, "normalization" for the Socialist Zionist often entailed the permeation of Jewish workers into all sectors of a new economic order in Palestine/Israel and, thus, the reversal of the aberrant material condition of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. Concomitantly, for the Revisionist Zionist, normalization meant the restoration of the Jewish people to the entire Land of Israel, extending beyond both sides of the Jordan River, as a prelude to the establishment of a Jewish state. Scholem's own view of the potential historical role of Zionism did not assume such a concrete material or territorial form, especially in the context of a discussion of Jewish scholarship. His was a broader, more abstract assessment of the unique opportunity which Zionism presented to the Jew in the wake of traditionally passive messianic hopes or the misguided illusion of assimilation. As Scholem recalls in his memoirs, there were those, including himself, who envisioned a Zionism which "promoted the rediscovery by the Jews of their own selves and their history as well as a possible spiritual, cultural and, above all, social rebirth."<sup>41</sup> Normalization then, if realized, could bring about an undistorted sense of Jewish historical consciousness, which in turn could stimulate the scientific study of Jewish sources.

Yet, it must be noted that, for Scholem, Zionist "normalization" did not assure the successful establishment of a new Science of Judaism. Indeed, the "normalization" of the Jewish people in and of itself was a rather ambitious goal whose outcome was far from a foregone conclusion. In the more specific case of Jewish scholarship in Palestine/Israel, Scholem expressed disappointment at the recurrence of sentimentality and "idyllization" in "the guise of orthodox science."<sup>42</sup> Moreover, while the backdrop to Jewish life and scholarship had changed from a religious to a national coloring, Scholem still observes that "the real forces active in our world, the real 'demon', remained outside of the picture we created."<sup>43</sup> The strong implication here was that, even under the Zionist aegis, mysticism as a topic of research remained, to a certain extent, unexplored. Consequently, critical scholarship had not yet succeeded in fulfilling its potential as an objective and creative force in Jewish life.

However, even the mere hypothetical potential for objective historical research which Scholem and some colleagues in Jerusalem<sup>44</sup> imputed to the course of Zionism was not accepted by all of the Jewish scholarly community in Israel. According to one of Scholem's most persistent critics, Barrich Kurzweil, "normalization", whether in the broader national context or on a more limited academic plane, was a convoluted aspiration which recalled the impetus towards assimilation that animated the first generations of Wissenschaft scholarship. Zionism was not, as Scholem implied, a "meta-ideological" force capable of restoring the Jewish people to its natural environment and the Jewish scholar to his value-free chamber. Rather, it was a partisan movement fighting for a restrictive secular-national definition of Jewish identity. The logical conclusion which Kurzweil drew from this was that the movement's influence permeated—and invariably poisoned—the works of scholars identified with its aims.

#### IV

As we have noted at the beginning of this essay, the year 1965 witnessed an acrimonious public exchange between two Israeli scholars concerning the objective potential of the Science of Judaism within the framework of a nascent Jewish national "society" in Israel. Representing the affirmative view advocated by Scholem was not the master himself, but rather a faithful defender, Jacob Katz, who shared Scholem's assessment that Zionism represented a critical turning point not only for the Jewish people as a whole, but for the Jewish scholarly enterprise in particular. In the opposite camp stood the main instigator of the debate,<sup>45</sup> Kurzweil, a religiously-observant Jew and professor at the religiously-oriented Bar-Ilan University near Tel-Aviv.

For some twenty years prior to the public outburst in the pages of the Hebrew daily, "Ha-aretz", Kurzweil had warned against the debilitating effect of the "historicization of Judaism", a process whose roots he traced to the dawn of the modern period of Jewish history.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, for Kurzweil, the very notion of modernity was a troubling proposition, since it emanated from the new relativist standards of measurement applied to history by the agnostic children of the Enlightenment.

At this point, one can already sense the thrust of Kurzweil's bitter attack upon the aims and intents of modern Jewish historiography; in his view, the attempt by modern academicians to repair the damaged faith through a "turn to history" was a profane intrusion into a sacred realm. The relativist credo of the historical discipline served only to dissect rather than to unify what was once an absolute spiritual and intellectual conviction. Moreover, the very effort to turn historiography into a constructive and creative medium of Jewish identity was an absurdly naive struggle which could never transcend the most superficial and ephemeral plane of discussion.

Kurzweil's criticism of the "historicization of Judaism" focused first on the Wissenschaft movement of 19th century Germany. The first generations of critical Jewish scholars did not merely try to change the terms of reference for contemporary Jewish identity;<sup>47</sup> they attempted to do so under the veil of objectivity and scientific virtuosity. Yet, Kurzweil wondered, what could be more *subjective* than their efforts to undercut the "absolute validity" of the divine force which hovers in and above history?<sup>48</sup> Moreover, how could these scholars possibly hope to recapture the monistic quality of Jewish faith through a relativist method?

As troubled by the methods and motives of Wissenschaft scholarship as Kurzweil was, he was even more distressed by their apparent recurrence in the Zionist-inspired movement to renew the Science of Judaism in the twentieth century.<sup>49</sup> No doubt, the stakes were higher for Kurzweil in the later instance, when his contemporaries were involved. Consequently, his critical tone turns bitter and often shrill when he reviews the purported scholarly advances of the academic establishment in Israel.

Kurzweil's vituperativeness is exemplified in an April 1965 article in "Ha-aretz" entitled "Dissatisfaction in History and the Science of Judaism"; in this article, Kurzweil challenged what he saw as one of the cardinal tenets of the Jewish scholarly enterprise—the belief in an objective historiographical undertaking. Relying upon the work of Karl Loewith, Karl Popper, and Leo Strauss,<sup>50</sup> Kurzweil suggested that the euphoric historicist sentiment of the 19th and even 20th centuries had long since given way to a more sober assessment of the course of historical development and of the historiographical process as well. To his mind, this malaise or displeasure with history as a scientific discipline "has expanded throughout the entire world, but it has yet to arrive in Jerusalem."<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, Kurzweil lamented the fact that a resilient historicism continued to inform the scholars of the Hebrew University. No more prominent symptom of this existed than the "futuristic" quality of their research,<sup>52</sup> which, in essence, embodied a secular manifestation of "Jewish prophecy and Christian eschatology".<sup>53</sup> In borrowing Karl Loewith's terminology, Kurzweil saw himself as joining forces with a vigilant intellectual movement set against grandiose (and secular) teleological schemes of history and against the predictive capabilities which necessarily followed from such linear conceptions. Modern scholars, he argued, were not prophets; they could not reveal the full causal roots of past acts or, even less so, predict the unfolding of man's destiny. Yet, Kurzweil argued, that is precisely the kind of capability to which the 19th century scholar laid claim. And it is the kind of capability to which the contemporary Jewish scholar continues to lay claim; as Kurzweil observed, "the same transfer of prophetic authority, which is the authority of spiritual leadership, has been carried out silently or openly by . . . the chiefs of the Science of Judaism of our time."<sup>54</sup>

In pinpointing even further the guilty party, Kurzweil contended that it was "G. Scholem (who) sees the function of historical research in its futuristic goal . . ." <sup>55</sup> Moreover, Scholem's interest and probing research into Jewish mysticism struck Kurzweil as evidence of a prominent anarchic strain in modern Jewish thought.<sup>56</sup> According to Kurzweil, Scholem has attempted, through his studies of the false messiah, Sabbatai Sevi<sup>57</sup> and Jewish messianism in general, to overturn normative Judaism and replace it with an unpredictable and wholly irrational force: mysticism. This transgression would perhaps have been more easily forgotten had Scholem not been so widely-known and respected. However, that was not the case; Scholem was known, respected, and influential. Indeed, for Kurzweil, "there is no more penetrating proof of the absurdity of our time than the fact that Scholem is today the spokesman of Judaism."<sup>58</sup>

This "absurdity" is not confined to the scholarly circle which Scholem represents. The desire to overturn the weight of traditional Judaism—and the myth of a "normalized" Jewish existence brought on by Zionism—are seen by Kurzweil as leitmotifs of modern Hebrew literature as a whole. Kurzweil's most renowned book, *Our New Literature: Continuity or Revolution?* emphasized the radical break which modern Hebrew writing made with the major literary sources of the Jewish religious tradition. In thus detaching itself from the unbroken line which bound together the scattered communities and customs into a single Jewish bond, modern Hebrew literature also attempted to sever itself from the meta-historical time-frame into which the Divine Hand had guided Jewish history.

Zionist-inspired normalization, then, in Kurzweil's lexicon, was at best a misnomer—and at worst, an ideological aberration which possessed traces of the nihilistic messianic force that had surfaced most visibly in

the Sabbatean movement of the 17th century. In the realm of historical scholarship, it spawned the fiction that a new standard of objectivity in research could be attained under Zionist auspices. If, as the argument went, historical research could document and legitimate the Zionist claim that a return to Eretz Yisrael might overturn the abnormal existence of the Jewish people in its historical exile, then perhaps the new frame of Jewish reference which Zionism sought—secular nationalism—could be set in place.

Of course, Kurzweil denied this positive role for Zionism and its scholarly supporters. To his mind, Zionism was quite simply a political solution destined to ameliorate little more than the physical condition of the Jewish people. It entailed no dramatic cultural or social transformation of Jews, and surely not a spiritual one.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Kurzweil doubted the sociological value of the academic study of Jewish history conducted in a Zionist framework.<sup>61</sup> Though only a symptom of the larger ideological force, historiography was, in his view, a highly visible and dangerous medium for the attempted Zionist transvaluation of traditional religious values.

Kurzweil exposed the degree of his despair when he attributed a devious, almost hypnotic power of persuasion to the most renowned practitioner of the new historiography. In pointing to his own intellectual arch-nemesis, Kurzweil poses, in rather desperate tones, the following set of rhetorical questions: "Who is it that, with great dexterity, has shifted the emphasis from the religious-theological . . . to the historical pole? Who is it that has hypnotized, through the enthusiastic force of his research, other scholars and sketched for them the way to this shift?"<sup>62</sup> Obviously, it is Gershom Scholem whom Kurzweil had in mind.

In recounting the charges and counter-charges levelled in this spirited debate<sup>63</sup>—and indeed, it is important to do so periodically as a sort of intellectual accounting—one is struck by the divergent perspectives from which the respective arguments are presented. One is also struck—momentarily at least—by the common motives which encouraged Scholem (and Katz) on one hand and Kurzweil on the other. That is, Scholem and Kurzweil advocated positions which both reflected *and* addressed the contemporary Jewish condition. Scholem portrayed his dialectical advance over the panegyrics of the 19th century, in large part, as the result of the superior historical force of Zionism over assimilation. Conversely, Kurzweil saw the Zionist impulse in modern Jewish historiography as a symptom of a radical break with traditional Jewish values, a break which began in the 18th century with the penetration of "(rationalist) philosophical systems from outside into the Jewish world".<sup>64</sup>

Clearly, then, the two men had radically different conceptions of

the role and importance of Zionism, and more specifically, of its relation to the renewed undertaking on behalf of the Science of Judaism. The passion, even ferocity, with which each man propagated his ideas indicated that the stakes in their exchange were quite high. At issue was not a genteel scholarly excursion into the ethereal world of the philosophy of history, but rather an existential dilemma of sizeable dimensions.<sup>65</sup> Both from Scholem, as a "post-assimilatory Jew", and from Kurzweil, as an observant Jew in Israel, Zionism evoked a response which reflected openly on their respective professional and Jewish self-images. In Scholem's case, Zionism shaped the course of his personal and professional life, particularly through "alayah" or immigration to Palestine. Not surprisingly, a frontal assault upon the presuppositions underlying Zionism, when carried upon the pages of Israel's most respected newspaper, raised the ire and consternation of Scholem and his colleagues.

Seen from the other side, Kurzweil's attacks were, to his own mind, a measure of last resort. Zionism, in its most expansive formulation, was a movement which threatened to detach the Jewish people from the roots of its tradition. Though ironically he himself had chosen to immigrate to Palestine, Kurzweil vigorously and bitterly objected to the image of Zionism as a trans-ideological force of normalization, capable of rejuvenating the Jewish soul and body. Indeed, such an expansive conception encroached upon his own religious faith and historical perception that the binding force of Jewish identity and historical consciousness was belief in the Divine Will.<sup>66</sup>

v

Over the course of this essay, we have granted space and even sympathy to the views of B. Kurzweil in his assault upon Gershom Scholem and the historiographical "establishment" at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Many would say that Kurzweil's frantic accusations are unworthy of such lengthy treatment either because of the petty jealousy which motivated them or simply because the substantive points raised by him were intellectually and/or chronologically passé. Thus, for instance, a critic could argue that, in general, the issue of the inherent subjectivity of human observation is not as problematic in today's philosophical discourse as it once was, or that new and more refined tools for understanding the process of association between observer and observed have emerged. In fact, it seems that the desire to construct a vast philosophic universe, one in which the grand issues of free will or an Archimidean point from which to base human perception are resolved, has given way in this century to more diverse and narrower angles of vision.<sup>67</sup> Artificial in-

telligence, linguistics, and literary criticism—each represents now a sliver of the larger pie which philosophers of the 17th through 19th centuries attempted to construct as a whole.

Similarly, one might argue that the “crisis of historicism” which afflicted historical thought in the late 19th and early 20th centuries has dissipated and a more realistic assessment of the capabilities of historical research has surfaced. Indeed, one indication of this development may be seen in the growing specialization and compartmentalization which has occurred in the field of historiography. Most historians today would probably admit that if ever the ideal picture of “what actually happened” in the past could be drawn, it would be through an integration of the myriad methodological strains which today constitute the historical discipline—social, anthropological, literary, economic/quantitative, and perhaps even psychoanalytical, to mention only a few—into a coherent whole. In the absence of such a complete and coherent picture, though, the historian must be content with accepting one or another approach or angle of observation as the best or most manageable means of historical explanation.

This trend towards specialization in history and philosophy would seem to diminish the impact of Kurzweil’s criticism of the historicist veneer to modern Jewish historiography. Indeed, had not the seeds of destruction for this sensibility in general historical thought been sown already in the last few decades of the 19th century, as the naive and exuberant faith in progress and science gave way to a growing reaction in France and Germany (i.e., post-1870)? Surely following the outbreak of the first World War, with the decisive failure of socialist visions, this naive faith could no longer inspire European intellectuals to bold utopian dreams. How then to account for the continued potency of historicism in Jewish historiography by 1945, when Scholem wrote his critique of the *Wissenschaft* movement? In light of these questions, it must also be asked whether Kurzweil’s critique is an anachronism, a diagnosis of an earlier malady which no longer afflicted Jewish historical writing of his day, perhaps even the product of an “hallucinatory reader”.<sup>68</sup>

One possible explanation for such a misdiagnosis is that Kurzweil’s views on the state of the historical discipline were, in fact, somewhat uninformed and outmoded. The term “malaise” which he gave to historical study as late as the 1960’s<sup>69</sup> reflected either ignorance or an unwillingness to recognize innovative trends in the field, such as psychohistory or the *Annales* school. But, even had he known of the *Annales* school, for instance, with its modified claim to scientific validation, this knowledge would not have changed the thrust of his criticism; on the contrary, it might well have lent support.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, twentieth-century historiography, for him, was heir to the dangerous 19th century confluence of Hegelian and Marxist teleological impulses on the one hand and

the illusory claim to objectivity implied by Leopold von Ranke on the other.

Paradoxically, what emerged from this confluence—tempered only by such sober voices as Karl Loewith and Karl Popper—was a relativist method weighted down by the fallible nature of human perception as well as the lofty ambition of uncovering the inner logic and overarching pattern of historical development. And yet, while Kurzweil ascribed this potent combination to historiography in general, he was no doubt concerned primarily with that limited area which he knew best and cared about most, Jewish historiography. Following Loewith, Kurzweil claimed that modern Jewish scholars had used the historiographical medium to search for a secular replacement for the vast metaphysical force which guided history, or was thought to, in the pre-Enlightenment Jewish world. This approach, Kurzweil thought, was doomed to failure: as a result of their declining faith, both 19th and 20th century scholars were destined to become “victims” of the same process of relativization, which constituted, in itself, a methodological barrier to the illumination of a monistic, universal force in history.

Given the nature of this vicious cycle, which virtually assured the agnosticism of the modern scholar, how could Kurzweil see any redeeming value in the academic study of history? After all, the relativist impulse so anathema to his intellectual and spiritual sensibility was a key ingredient of modern historical research; indeed, this impulse was a legacy of the very age in which he lived, a sign of irreligious times.

And yet, because of his principled resistance to it, Kurzweil was a partisan in the intellectual upheaval brought on by relativism. In fact, one scholar explained Kurzweil’s dispute with Scholem, at least in part, as the result of methodological differences: the latter’s desire for objectivity in the historical sciences clashed with Kurzweil’s interest in hermeneutics, whose “basic idea is that the subject of literary or historical texts is not separate or external to the object of his research, but rather an integral part of it.”<sup>71</sup> By positing this intrinsic relationship between the subject and object of human observation, the hermeneutician invariably dismisses the possibility of one’s capturing a hermetic point of observation, devoid of social, linguistic, or epistemological baggage. As Martin Jay notes in his summary of the hermeneutical system of Hans-Georg Gadamer, “(b)ecause humans are always in the midst of a pregiven linguistic context, they can never achieve a transcendental vantage point outside it.”<sup>72</sup> This intrinsic condition—or dilemma—when applied to the process of observation or perception, constitutes what is known as the “hermeneutic circle.”

Kurzweil certainly did not think Scholem and his colleagues capable of extricating themselves from this circle of intersubjectivity. In fact, the terms he used in criticizing Israeli historiography indicate a position far

more extreme than that of leading hermeneuticians; he implicitly rejected the view that the object of observation could arbitrate between two conflicting subjects. Following a radical line, Kurzwel argued that objectivity in historical observation was impossible. By nature, historiography was interpretive, influenced by social and linguistic habits which obstructed the desired path to objectivity. Especially in the contemporary Jewish context, the intellectual milieu of historical researchers was so highly-charged with ideological conviction that a value-free point of observation onto the past seemed, to Kurzwel, remote, if not unattainable. Indeed, Kurzwel would perhaps go so far as to concede that, for himself and surely for his academic nemesis, a very thin line separated scholarly persona from personal identification.

It is such a conclusion,<sup>75</sup> frequently implied by Kurzwel, which causes one to pause before dismissing out of hand his criticism of a towering figure in the modern study of Jewish history like Scholem. This conclusion also leads one to ask if and in what way Jewish (and/or Zionist) historiography is unique in terms of the degree of personal identification which it entails or demands from scholars. Does Jewish historiography follow the same rules of scholarship, as Jacob Katz claims, as any other branch of historiography?<sup>74</sup> Or is there something peculiar to the Jewish condition which calls for a heightened role for the written recollection of the past? Important critics like Harold Bloom<sup>75</sup> and George Steiner, themselves Diaspora partisans in the struggle for Jewish self-identification, regard Jewish tradition as a unique dialectical exchange between core text and interpretation, a process which has continually redefined identity in the absence of a common territory or even a monolithic linguistic culture. In fact, Steiner notes in a recent article entitled appropriately enough, "Our Homeland, the Text", that "the interpretative practices in Judaism are ontologically and historically at the heart of Jewish identity."<sup>76</sup>

This perspective is both illuminating and instructive when considering modern Jewish historiography, which does involve, after all, the interpretation of events and actors within an accepted literary medium. It, by no means, leads to the conclusion that a monolithic definition of Jewishness or Judaism has emerged from the academic study and writing of Jewish history. Rather, this perspective can focus attention upon a vaguer typological recognition—that modern historiography has attempted to play an important role in a textually-centered tradition like the Jewish tradition. Indeed, with the penetration of Enlightenment values into Jewish life by the 19th century, Jews began to seek validation *qua* Jews not through traditional religious observance, but rather through a critical evaluation of the Jewish people's role in history. With this development—and equally important, out of a tradition in which the oral or written text served as a repository of collective

identification—emerged the historiographical medium as a force in modern Jewish culture. Consequently, the critical exegesis of traditional literary sources which historiography entailed (from the time of the first *Wissenschaft* scholars) opened up new directions in Jewish identity—though apparently at the expense of a monolithic definition of it.

In this respect, the Jewish historian's quest to reconstruct the Jewish past constituted a personal exercise in group genealogy. The existential task of locating oneself in the vast expanse of Jewish history, of tying into the sense of shared past and common fate which lies at the core of Jewish historical consciousness, remains today a constant, though submerged agenda for the Jewish historian. More than the French historian writing on French history or the German historian writing on German history, the Jewish historian writing on Jewish history possesses a high degree of personal engagement and a spirit of collective belonging with respect to the subject of his/her research. These qualities assume an especially distinctive flavor in the absence of a singular term of definition or self-definition (e.g. nation, religious community, ethnic group, race) applicable to the Jewish people. In fact, the Jewish historian must take into account, even pay homage to, the more elusive standards of definition pertaining to modern Jewish identity—historical consciousness and memory—while struggling to find conventional frames of reference acceptable to fellow scholars and the historiographical idiom.

These brief reflections are in no way intended as a professional slur. They are not meant to invalidate the literary or scholarly value of Jewish historiography as a whole; nor do they endorse Kurzwel's rather unformed and naive views concerning the innate subjectivity of all historical observation. Rather, the impressionistic portrait sketched here of the Jewish historian reflects some of the unique characteristics and dilemmas of the modern Jewish condition, of which historiography has emerged as a central witness.

This, then, is the context in which Kurzwel's critique of Scholem and the entire "Zionist" historiographical establishment should be understood. His exaggerated attacks upon historiography in general are far less informed and prescient than his intimations regarding the conceptual influences at work in modern Jewish historiography. To be sure, these intimations allude to a matter of immense importance to the academic study of Jewish history—the link between scholarly persona and Jewish identification—which has yet to be explored in full. The historian, Yosef H. Yerushalmi, has made a significant foray into the subject with his learned *Zakhor*, opening up for investigation the vast territory linking myth, memory, and historiography.<sup>77</sup>

What still remained to be performed is a critical and comprehensive topography of that territory. We have indicated that the correlation

between scholarly persona and Jewish identity requires further reflection. An analysis of this correlation may lead to a more refined and illuminating understanding of historical consciousness and its centrality in the ongoing struggle over Jewish identity. Concomitantly, the link between scholarly and personal identity may also point to a certain functional continuum extending from the pre-modern Jewish chronicler to the contemporary Jewish historian.<sup>78</sup> If convincingly shown, this continuum might reveal an ongoing dialectic between vibrant, almost "living" conceptions of the past and contemporary concerns, suggesting a powerful "presentist" impulse in Jewish historiography.

Over against this impulse stands the avowed faith of Jewish historians, extant from the first days of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, in the "pure scientific" quality of their labors. In this regard, it is instructive to recall the recent affirmation by Professor Joseph Dan of the positivist sensibility in Jewish historical research. Of his teacher, Gershom Scholem (whose name adorns the chair in Jewish mysticism which Dan holds at the Hebrew University), Dan admiringly notes:

Scholem adamantly insisted on "pure" scientific research, on an impersonal academic method, on an objective handling of research results and the possibility of measuring them with precise scientific and philological tools. The historian, according to Scholem, is one who examines, page by page, every document and creative work which touches upon his field of specialization, who gives them historical explanations according to philological rules and knowledge of their general historical background, who addresses in utmost detail the bibliographic and biographic problems embedded in each page of every document, and who draws balanced, exacting, and complete conclusions. . . .<sup>79</sup>

Dan's endorsement of the "pure scientific" — that is, objective — quality in Scholem's research no doubt reflects a wider conviction that such a quality exists or is capable of existing in Jewish historical research today. It also reflects the second generation of denial (here implicitly conveyed) of the overarching conceptual influence of Zionism *qua* ideological force upon the reading and writing of Jewish history. Dan continues to propose both for himself and for the man who paved the road for the academic study of Jewish mysticism, Scholem, a scholarly function detached from such a conceptual influence and from the larger questions of Jewish identity. Though Scholem himself criticized the ideological motives of some contemporary researchers in Israel, he also envisioned, and perhaps believed he had assumed, an objective perspective in his own scholarly endeavors.

Interestingly (though not coincidentally), it is this claim to objectivity which twentieth century critics, including Scholem, considered so hypocritical in the efforts and sensibilities of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement: it is a similar claim which Baruch Kurzweil bitterly criticized when forwarded by his contemporaries of the "Jerusalem School", in-

cluding most saliently, Gershom Scholem. In both the case of *Wissenschaft* and the "Jerusalem School", powerful ideological currents were at work seeking to retrace or reconstruct the parameters of Jewish identity in the modern age. While this existential consideration, upon which Kurzweil's critique focuses our attention, brings into question the possibility of "pure scientific" objectivity obtainable in Jewish historical research, it does not invalidate the important scholarly merits of the research. It may, however, recommend Jewish historiography as a good case study for exploring the ideological influences at work in historiography in general.<sup>80</sup>

To be sure, the evidence presented here, in the form of the Scholem-Kurzweil debate, is not enough to assure the determinative influence of existential or ideological considerations in all works and writers of modern Jewish historiography. Nonetheless, the issues raised by Scholem's critique of the *Wissenschaft* movement and, subsequently, by Kurzweil's critique of Scholem and the "Jerusalem School", do point to a hypothesis which can be borne out only through a broader and more comprehensive analysis of the conceptual influences and limitations at work in the writing of Jewish history. That is, based upon a reading of the historian's work as a *primary* historical source, we offer, at least provisionally, that historiography, in the hands of the modern Jewish scholar — from the *Wissenschaft* generation until the present — has served as nothing less than a literary act of Jewish affirmation and self-identification.

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#### NOTES

I would like to thank Professors Daniel Bell, Menachem Brinker, Yosef H. Yerushalmi, and Michael Meyer for their valuable and pointed criticism of this essay. Their combined insights and erudition have greatly contributed to the essay, which began as a paper for a graduate seminar offered by Professor Bell and Professor Hilary Putnam at Harvard University during the 1984-85 academic year.

1. Of course, these questions were not limited to German Jews; as Irving Howe suggests in his intellectual autobiography, *American Jewish Intellectuals* faced similar issues in the immediate post-war years. See Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope* (New York, 1984), esp. chapter 9.

2. Several decades before the rise of Hitler to power, an important minority of German Jews refused to continue what they saw as the attempts of their fathers and mothers to ingratiate themselves with their German hosts. The emergence of an active Zionist movement, albeit numerically limited, in the early part of the 20th century attests to this. See Stephen M. Poppel, *Zionism in Germany: 1897-1933* (Philadelphia, 1976).

3. The immigrant German intellectuals created an enclave in Jerusalem which became known as "Little Berlin". See the brief reference in David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, 1982<sup>2</sup>), p. 98.

4. Their overall influence, though, upon the process of nation-building should not be overstated. By the time the Germans arrived in any large quantitative or qualitative way, most economic and political institutions of Jewish Palestine had been established and administered by Eastern European Jews. Indeed, the prominent political and labor leaders—Ben-Gurion, Berl Katznelson, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and others—were of Polish or Russian descent. One segment of the emerging national society which had not been developed was the academic/educational realm: it is to that realm that the German arrivals most saliently and successfully turned.

5. While Zionism is far from a coherent ideology, for our purposes here—that is, comparing the motivating force of emigres to Palestine with that of emigres to America—we have used the designation.

6. Jacob Katz, *Leumiyut Yehudit: Masot u-Mekharim* (Jerusalem, 1983), p. 204.

7. See G. Scholem, "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim al hokhmat Yisrael", reprinted in *Hokhmat Yisrael: Heybeim Historiyim u-Filosofiyim*, (ed.) Paul Mendes-Flohr, (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 153-168.

8. As we shall see, Scholem never addressed Kurzweil directly. A colleague, Jacob Katz, assumed responsibility for the defense of Scholem and of the historiographical establishment in Israel.

9. For a discussion of Mendelssohn's attitude to tradition and philology, see Michael A. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew* (Detroit, 1979), pp. 11-28.

10. Indeed, the Mendelssohnian disciples hardly considered the Talmud—or, even less so, the Shulhan Arukh—as a living guide to Jewish life. Rather, they believed that the Talmud's importance lay primarily in its historical value, as a document attesting to values and norms of an earlier age.

11. An important figure in this new scholarly activity was Franz Bopp, considered to be the founder of comparative philology. In the first three decades of the 19th century, Bopp undertook ground-breaking research into the origins of Indo-European language—thereby paving the way for philological investigations of the Semitic languages, including Hebrew. More specifically, Leon Wieseltier notes the direct influence of the German philologists, F. A. Wolf and August Wilhelm Boeckh, upon Leopold Zunz, the most prominent of first generation Wissenschaft scholars. See Wieseltier, "Etwas Ueber Die Juedische Historik: Leopold Zunz and the Inception of Modern Jewish Historiography", in *History and Theory*, Vol. 20 (1981), p. 137.

12. See I. Wolf, "Scientific Study of the Past" translated in *Ideas of Jewish History*, (ed.), Michael Meyer, (New York, 1974), p. 155.

13. The French philologist, Ernest Renan, captures the ebullient spirit which science instilled in 19th century European intellectuals:

It is not an exaggeration to say that science contains the future of humanity, that it alone can tell mankind . . . of its destiny and teach it the way to reach its end.

My translation of a passage from *L'Avenir de la science*, quoted in D. C. Charlton, *Secular Religions in France: 1815-1870* (London, 1963), p. 59.

14. I. Wolf, "Scientific Study of the Past", p. 155. Like his erstwhile colleagues

in the Verein, Leopold Zunz and Eduard Gans, Wolf hoped that critical historical research could heighten Jewish self-awareness of the past and present and could perhaps introduce a new vigor into a moribund religious tradition.

15. For a brief discussion of the influence of Hegel on nineteenth century Jewish scholars, particularly with regard to the notion of a guiding spirit of history, see N. Rotenstreich's *Tradition and Reality* (New York, 1972), especially chapter 2.

16. In fact, in summarizing Zunz's notion of the range of scholarly activity open to the Jewish researcher (a notion inherited by succeeding generations of researchers), Wieseltier perceptively observes that "the scope of the Jewish historian's activity (was) no less than the scope of Jewish life itself". Wieseltier, "Etwas Ueber Die Juedische Historik . . .", p. 139.

17. The term "post-assimilatory Judaism" was first used by the German Zionist leader, Kurt Blumenfeld; Scholem's endorsement of it can be seen in an interview which Israeli writer, Muki Tsur, conducted with him. For an English translation, see "With Gershom Scholem: An Interview" in G. Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (New York, 1978), pp. 1-48.

18. "With Gershom Scholem", p. 2.

19. "Against the Myth of the German-Jewish Dialogue", *ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

20. The essay was entitled "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim al Hokhmat Yisrael" or "From Reflections on the Science of Judaism".

21. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 155.

22. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 161.

23. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 161.

24. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 155.

25. See above note 3.

26. As Biale notes, this notion of counter-history bears resemblance to the aphoristic call by Scholem's great friend and intellectual partner, Walter Benjamin, to "brush history against the grain". See Biale, p. 7.

27. Biale, p. 77.

28. One scholar captures the euphoric infatuation of 19th century European intellectuals with progress by labelling Ernest Renan a "priest of science". See Robert F. Byrnes, *Antisemitism in Modern France*, (New Brunswick, 1950), Vol. 1, p. 48.

29. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", pp. 162-163.

30. This is opposed to "neutralized messianism", a term used by Scholem to characterize the 18th century Hasidic movement.

31. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 162.

32. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 165.

33. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 165.

34. See Biale's comments on this point. Biale, p. 136.

35. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 165.

36. Biale, p. 135. This point is not to be disputed. In fact, it seems, as Biale observes, that the expectation of a formative role for the historical sciences in the modern period is a legacy shared by Scholem and his predecessors. We will presently see how one critic of this "effort to find a secular substitute for religion" (Biale, pp. 135-136), Baruch Kurzweil, reacts to Scholem's envisioned role for historiography.

37. The Jewish poet, Haim Nahman Bialik, suggested in a 1925 letter to the

editors of the new Hebrew-language journal, *Devir*, that the failure of the Wissenschaft des Judentums could be attributed to the fact that its research was not conducted in Hebrew. Scholem counters that problems similar to those which Bialik mentions — i.e., overbearing ideological considerations — can and do exist in scholarship conducted in the Hebrew language. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 162.

38. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 164.

39. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 164.

40. Scholem's conception of such a potential is a vestige of the positivist/empiricist sensibility once broadly proclaimed in the days of Comte. Thus, not only does he insist that the new orientation "must penetrate to each and every detail"; he also chasises that form of "science which arrives at the conclusion before the analysis", as a result of some ideological prefiguration. See "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 168. Ironically, it is the latter tendency for which Scholem is attacked by Kurzweil.

41. See Scholem's autobiographical account *From Berlin to Jerusalem* (New York, 1980), p. 54.

42. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 167. Earlier in the essay, Scholem castigated Wissenschaft scholars for a similar tendency to "idyllize"; which he defined as "the forging of the past by obscuring the dissenting, rebellious, and explosive forces of history." See p. 163.

43. "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim . . .", p. 168.

44. Scholem shared J. Katz's view that the Hebrew University in Jerusalem was the independent and stable center required for the revival of the Science of Judaism. Scholem writes: "Within the framework of the rebuilding of Palestine, it (Zionism) led to the foundation of centers like the Hebrew University in Jerusalem where Judaic studies, although central, are pursued without any ideological coloring. Everyone is free to say and to teach whatever corresponds to his scholarly opinion without being bound to any religious (or anti-religious) tendency." See Scholem's milder attack on Wissenschaft in "The Science of Judaism — Then and Now" in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays in Jewish Spirituality*, (New York, 1971), p. 310.

45. Katz responded directly to Kurzweil's essay, "I-ha-Nahat she-be-Historiyah u-be-Mada'ei Ha-Yahadut", in "Ha-aretz" of 5.2.65. His article, "Historiyah Subyektivit u-Vikoret Obyektivit" (Subjective History and Objective Criticism), is reprinted in *Leumiyut Yehudit*, pp. 213-224.

46. The process of the "historicization of Judaism" has been discussed in depth by Max Wiener in *Die Juedische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation* (or the Hebrew translation *Ha-Dat Ha-Yehudit Be-Tekufat Ha-Emanzipatsiyah*, (Jerusalem, 1974), and more recently by Natan Rotenstreich in *Ha-Mahshavah Ha-Yehudit be-Et Ha-hadashah* and in his small English volume, *Tradition and Reality*. In a review essay of Rotenstreich's Hebrew work, Kurzweil lamented the "historicization of Judaism" for "lower(ing) Judaism from its absolute strength to a level of relativism". See B. Kurzweil, *Le-Nokhah Ha-Mevukhah Ha-Ruhani Shel Dorenu*, (Ramat-Gan, 1976), p. 43.

47. Kurzweil regarded the influence of Hegel as formative upon the Wissenschaft movement as a whole. To his mind, Hegel's transformation of the Christian eschatological spirit into a secular Absolute (whose fulfillment would come in the

form of the Prussian state) was imitated by the first generation of Jewish scholars in Germany. In this regard, Kurzweil followed the lead of Karl Loewith (*Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschichte*) to whom he frequently refers. For example, Kurzweil referred to the "almost religious quality attributed to Hegel's system" by the Wissenschaft circle. See his article "Al Ha-To'elet ve'al Ha-Nezek Shel Mada'ei Ha-Yahadut" in *Be-Ma'avak al Arbhei Ha-Yahadut*, (Tel-Aviv, 1969), p. 192.

48. Kurzweil agreed with Max Wiener that, of the 19th century German-Jewish scholars, only S. R. Hirsch, founder of Neo-Orthodoxy, "grasped the danger (of the subjectivization of religion) in all its dimensions". *Le-Nokhah Ha-Mevukhah* . . . , p. 46.

49. In an essay entitled "On the Use and Abuse of the Science of Judaism" (*Be-Ma'avak* . . . , pp. 187-188), Kurzweil noted the great similarity between the Wissenschaft circle and the Palestine-centered Science of Judaism, particularly as far as the failed effort to arrive at "pure objectivity" was concerned. The title and thrust of Kurzweil's article are derivative of Nietzsche's *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie* in which the principle of "objective and pure science" is dismissed as folly, especially when its advocates substitute it for the apparent unity of religious faith. Indeed, it is rather curious to see Kurzweil, a staunch defender of rabbinic Judaism among Jewish scholars, express affinity with the disaffected philosophy of Nietzsche. See "Al Ha-To'elet ve'al Ha-Nezek Shel Mada'ei Ha-Yahadut" in *Be-Ma'avak* . . . , pp. 184-240.

50. Kurzweil also based his assault on an article by Kurt Sontheimer, "Der Antihistoricismus des gegenwartigen Zeitalters" in *Neue Rundschau* 75 Jahrgang IV.

51. "I-ha-Nahat . . .", p. 144.

52. Kurzweil here borrows the terminology and central theme of Loewith's classic analysis of the teleological bent of modern philosophies of history in *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschichte* and the English, *Meaning in History*, (Chicago, 1949).

53. *Be-Ma'avak* . . . , p. 137. This is Kurzweil's rephrasing of Loewith's words. See "I-Ha-Nahat she-be-Historiyah u-be-Mada'ei Ha-Yahadut" (The Dissatisfaction in History and the Science of Judaism) from "Ha-aretz" of 4.16.65. The essay was reprinted in *Be-Ma'avak* . . . , pp. 135-150.

54. "I-ha-Nahat . . .", p. 137.

55. Kurzweil issues forth this claim in response to Scholem's call "to build anew the house of science." See above note 36.

56. Scholem's research is branded as a manifestation of "mystical nihilism". See "Al Ha-To'elet . . .", p. 211.

57. See *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1629-1676*, (Princeton, 1973) and Kurzweil's critical review of it reprinted in *Be-Ma'avak* . . . , pp. 99-134.

58. "Al Ha-To'elet . . .", p. 211.

59. *Sifnuenu Ha-Hadashah: Hemshekh o Mahpekhah?*, (Tel-Aviv, 1959).

60. In determining just how far the rehabilitative powers of Zionism extend, Kurzweil adopted a position parallel to that of a well-known "commentator" on Zionism in Israel, Yeshayahu Leibowitz. In a 1979 symposium, Leibowitz reflected on his own restrictive notion of Zionism, when he stated: "the significance of the Land (of Israel) to Judaism as the State of Israel is as a basis and framework for the political/national independence of the Jewish people (on whom was placed

the task of maintaining the Torah); however, the actual possession of the Land represents no achievement of religious value." See Y. Leibowitz, "Mashma'uta shel Erets Yisrael Le-Yahadut" in *Emunah, Historyah ve Arakham*, (Jerusalem, 1983-84), pp. 119-120

Kurzweil would have shared this assessment, though both men also directed their restrictive definitions of Zionism towards a pervasive tendency in the Israeli public: the infatuation with a new and secularized Israeli identity, by-product of the attempted Zionist transvaluation of Jewish self-expression. Kurzweil observed in 1964 that "the new Israelism has . . . allowed for the creation of a new Jewish type capable of fleeing from Judaism and all of its implications." See "Al Hnukh Ha-Dor u-Tarbuto" in *Le-Nokhah* . . . , p. 226.

61. Kurzweil observed with dismay: "The Science of Judaism is not a substitute for religion and surely religion will not be salvaged by it. The malaise with history must teach us that it is impossible to expect from the history of Judaism what Judaism itself can not give." "I-ha-Nahat . . .", p. 149.

62. "I-ha-Nahat . . .", pp. 149-150.

63. Indeed, the tone of both Katz and Kurzweil is sharp. Of Kurzweil's analysis, Katz writes: "His reading is not selective, but rather hallucinatory." Katz, p. 220. Kurzweil matches Katz, in a satirical counter-response, by belittling the latter as a pawn of Scholem. See "Hirhurim Shel Koreh Halutsinoti" from "Ha-aretz" of 5.28.65, reprinted in *Be-Ma'avak* . . . , pp. 151-165.

64. *Le-Nokhah* . . . , p. 49.

65. It is important to note that Scholem's and Kurzweil's views regarding Jewish identity under the Zionist aegis were not isolated within a hermetic group of academics. Just as issues of Jewish identity confronted by Wissenschaft scholars penetrated into the broader German-Jewish public, the positions staked out in the Scholem-Kurzweil debate also spoke to a larger arena of discussion in Palestine/Israel. In many respects, Zionism was an anti-intellectual movement whose leaders often rejected the cerebral existence associated with a scholarly life. Nonetheless, a small circle of intellectuals, including the writers Y. H. Brenner and H. N. Bialik, and scholars like Scholem, Martin Buber and Ernst Simon, analyzed the Jewish condition with a critical attitude towards traditional definitions and categories of discussion. In this way, they not only gave voice to reconsiderations of the essence of Jewish identity in the Zionist context; they set the tone for such reconsiderations.

66. Given Kurzweil's disdain for the Zionist claim to normalization, it is no surprise that he regarded as a truly inspirational figure, Samson Raphael Hirsch, the 19th century German rabbi and scholar. Hirsch emerged in mid-century as a forceful critic of reformist tendencies in German Judaism, which, to his mind, were brought on by a willful and unrestrained surrender of the modern Jew to the inviting domain of rationalist philosophy. Hirsch argued that his contemporaries had lost sight of the proper balance between "secular" studies, including history and philology, and Jewish learning—that "scientific" virtuosity had replaced the spiritual benefit which accrued to a learned student from the traditional study of sacred sources.

Kurzweil's great attraction to Hirsch lay in the latter's avowed openness to modern methodological innovations as a means of reinforcing his traditional stance. To Kurzweil's mind, Hirsch was neither overwhelmed by the novelty of critical methods nor afraid to use them in his own scholarship. Another positive

role model was Yitzhak Breuer, the Agudat Israel renegade, whose confirmed piety and intellectual openness inspired Kurzweil. Despite many differences between the two, Breuer's resistance to the hegemonic Zionist claims (vis-à-vis Jewish identity) prompted Kurzweil to write a number of articles on Breuer, including a eulogy, in "Ha-Aretz", which were later reprinted in *Le-Nokhah*, pp. 117-122, 122-130. See also Scholem's critical essay on Breuer in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, pp. 325-334.

67. In this regard, Hilary Putnam, an important contributor to contemporary philosophic discourse, eschews the effort to construct a vast philosophic universe: "I have not attempted . . . to put forward any grand view of the nature of philosophy; nor do I have any such grand view to put forth if I would." See Putnam, *Mind, Language, and Reality: Philosophic Papers*, Vol. II (Cambridge [England], 1975), p. xvii, quoted in Howard Gardner's *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution*, (New York, 1985), p. 88.

68. This is Katz's designation for Kurzweil. See note 63.

69. His article, "The Dissatisfaction in History and the Science of Judaism" was published in the 1960's and begins with this overarching assessment: "For several decades, especially since the forties of this century, we have witnessed an ongoing sobering process with regard to the historical researcher's claim to . . . 'scientific objectivity'." See "I-ha-Nahat . . .", p. 135.

70. See the comments of François Furet, who serves as president of the Ecole Des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales which is the center of the Annales school's influence and activity. In analyzing the renewed, albeit limited, claims to scientific validation in his field—as distinct from the grand claims of the nineteenth century—he notes: "A wedge has thus been driven into the old carefully enclosed empire of classical historiography, and this by means of two distinct but connected operations. First, by the analytical breakdown of reality into different levels of description, serial history has opened history in general to concepts and methods imported from the more specifically constituted social sciences such as political economy, which has probably been the operative factor in the recent historical revival. Second, by quantitatively analyzing the different evolutionary rhythms of the different levels of reality, it has at last turned into a scientifically measurable object the dimension of human activity which is history's raison d'être—time." Furet, "Quantitative History" in *Historical Studies Today*, (ed.), Felix Gilbert, (New York, 1972), p. 55.

71. See Moshe Swartz's Introduction to *Le-Nokhah* . . . , p. 29.

72. See Martin Jay, "Should Intellectual History Take a Linguistic Turn?" in Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan, (eds.), *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (Ithaca, 1982), p. 94.

73. Leon Wieseltier refers to "a link between scholarly procedure and personal conviction which is exemplary for modern Jewish historians" in his discussion of Zunz. See Wieseltier, p. 142.

74. He argues in the essay "Mada'ei Ha-Yahadut ve-Yahadut be-Hevratenu" that "the Science of Judaism does not deviate from other humanities in terms of the social function which it fills . . . Cultural and national history of other peoples fills a similar function. Katz, p. 200.

75. See Bloom's article, "Jewish Culture and Memory" in *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 8 (1983), pp. 7-19.

76. Published in *Salmagundi* No. 66 (Winter-Spring 1985), p. 7.

77. Yerushalmi arrives at the conclusion that the modern Jewish historian can not serve as a "restorer of Jewish memory". To his mind, the historiographical medium has failed to replace the "shared faith, cohesiveness, and will of the group itself" which once constituted Jewish collective memory and identity. See Yosef Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Philadelphia, 1982), pp. 93-94.

78. Against the notion of a functional continuum, Harold Bloom and Yosef Yerushalmi, in their respective spheres of interest, emphasize the radical ruptures that have occurred in Jewish memory in the modern period. Yerushalmi, for instance, argues that a radical discontinuity in historical consciousness and self-perception marks the emergence of the Wissenschaft movement with its critical historical perspective.

79. See Dan's long response to E. Schweid's "Mistikah ve-Yahadut Le-fi Gershom Scholem" in "Gershom Scholem: Beyn Historiyah Le-Historiyosofiyah" in *Mehkare Yerushalayim*, Vol. III (1983-84), esp. p. 431. In response to Schweid, Dan argues that Scholem's scholarly exploration of Jewish mysticism was not informed by a recognition that mysticism played a central role in Jewish history, or even by a wide-ranging philosophy of Jewish history. In another place, David Biale justifiably takes Dan to task, not directly for his view of Scholem's motives, but for other more basic notions underlying his historical endeavors, observing that "Dan wants to claim that historical research is equivalent to that of the natural sciences in that the object of research can be known independently of the researcher (a proposition that natural scientists, since the development of quantum physics, have come to realize is problematic for not only physics but perhaps for science as a whole). Such a positivist approach to historical work seems to me both dated and wrong." Biale, "Gershom Scholem's Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on Kabbalah" in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (February 1985), p. 91, n. 6.

As against this view, see the interesting remarks of Ada Rapoport-Albert in *The American Scholar* (Autumn 1985), pp. 541-548. In offering a positive assessment of Scholem's pursuit of the "plain objective truth" (p. 546), she contends that "Scholem banished from his work all traces of romantic mysticism (to which he was consciously averse), and his scholarly judgments were derived from evidence alone." (p. 548) Her brief discussion is a more enlightening defense of Scholem's motives and intents than Dan's, though it treats only perfunctorily the questions of objectivity and ideological impulses in scholarship.

80. Such interesting critics as Hayden White and Roland Barthes have challenged the claim that narrative historiography qualifies in some way as "scientific". They posit that linguistic conventions and personal predisposition prefigure the narrative historiographical text, just as in the case of a work of fiction. This perspective, with its emphasis on the interpretive quality of historiography, may be a bit overextended. Nonetheless, it can be useful in dispelling the persistent myth in Jewish (and other) historiography that one can arrive at a plateau of "pure scientific" objectivity. See, for example, White's article, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory" in *History and Theory*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1 (1984). Also, see Roland Barthes, "Le discours de l'histoire" in *Social Science Information*, Vol. VI, No. 4 (August 1967).