Chapter 2

Judaism and General Culture in Medieval and Early Modern Times

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PREFATORY NOTE

The attempt to provide an analytical overview of Jewish attitudes toward the pursuit of general culture in the millennium from the Geonic Middle East to the eve of the European Jewish Enlightenment is more than a daunting task: it flirts with the sin of hubris. The limitations of both space and the author required a narrowing and sharpening of the focus; consequently, this essay will concentrate on high culture, on disciplines which many medieval and early modern Jews regarded as central to their

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This essay, as noted in the Acknowledgments, was essentially completed in 1990, though it underwent minor modifications, notably through the incorporation of references to new studies, until the publication date of 1997.

intellectual profile and which they often saw as crucial or problematic (and sometimes both) for the understanding of Judaism itself. Such disciplines usually included philosophy and the sciences, sometimes extended to poetry, and on at least one occasion embraced history as well. The net remains very widely cast, but it does not take all of culture as its province.

Not only does this approach limit the scope of the pursuits to be examined; it also excludes large segments of the medieval and early modern Jewish populace from consideration. Thus, I have not addressed the difficult and very important question of the cultural profile of women, who very rarely received the education needed for full participation in elite culture, nor have I dealt with the authors of popular literature or the bearers of folk beliefs.

Paradoxically, however, the narrower focus also has the effect of enlarging the scope of the analysis. The issue before us is not merely whether or not a particular individual or community affirmed the value of a broad curriculum. The profounder question is how the pursuit of philosophy and other disciplines affected the understanding of Judaism and its sacred texts. Few questions cut deeper in the intellectual history of medieval and early modern Jewry, and while our central focus must remain the affirmation or rejection of an inclusive cultural agenda, the critical implications of that choice will inevitably permeate every facet of the discussion.

THE DYNAMICS OF A DILEMMA

The medieval Jewish pursuit of philosophy and the sciences was marked by a creative tension strikingly illustrated in a revealing paradox. The justifications, even the genuine motivations, for this pursuit invoked considerations of piety that lie at the heart of Judaism, and yet Jews engaged in such study only in the presence of the external stimulus of a vibrant non-Jewish culture. Although major sectors of medieval Jewry believed that a divine imperative required the cultivation of learning in the broadest sense, an enterprise shared with humanity at large could not be perceived as quintessentially Jewish. Thus, even Jews profoundly committed to a comprehensive intellectual agenda confronted the unshakable instinct that it was the Torah that constituted Torah, while they simultaneously affirmed their conviction, often confidently, sometimes stridently, occasionally with acknowledged ambivalence, that Jewish learning can be enriched by wider

pursuits and that in the final analysis these pursuits are themselves Torah. On the other side of the divide stood those who saw "external wisdom" as a diversion from Torah study at best and a road to heresy at worst, and yet the religious arguments that such wisdom is not at all external often made their mark even among advocates of the insular approach. The dynamic interplay of these forces across a broad spectrum of Jewish communities makes the conflict over the issue of general culture a central and intriguing leitmotif of Jewish history in medieval and early modern times.

THE ISLAMIC MIDDLE EAST AND THE GEONIM

The first cultural centers of the Jewish Middle Ages were those of Middle Eastern Jewry under Islam, and the Islamic experience was crucial in molding the Jewish response to the challenge of philosophical study. In the seventh century, nascent Islam erupted out of the Arabian peninsula into a world of highly developed cultures. Had this been the typical conquest of an advanced society by a relatively backward people, we might have expected the usual result of *victi victoribus leges dederunt*: as in the case of the barbarian conquerors of the Roman Empire or the ninth- and tenth-century invaders of Christian Europe, the vanquished would have ultimately imposed their cultural patterns, in however attenuated a form, upon the victors. The Islamic invasion, however, was fundamentally different. The Muslim armies fought in the name of an idea, and a supine adoption of advanced cultures would have robbed the conquest of its very meaning. At the same time, a blithe disregard of those cultures bordered on the impossible. Consequently, Islam, which was still in an inchoate state in the early stages of its contact with the Persian, Byzantine, and Jewish worlds, and whose founder had already absorbed a variety of influences, embarked upon a creative confrontation that helped to mold its distinctive religious culture.

The legacy of classical antiquity was transmitted to the Muslims by a Christian society that had grappled for centuries with the tensions between the values and doctrines of biblical revelation and those of Greek philosophy and culture. For the Fathers of the Church, there was no avoiding this difficult and stimulating challenge. As intellectuals living in the heart of Greco-Roman civilization, they were by definition immersed in its culture. The very tools with which patristic thinkers approached the understanding of their faith were forged in the crucible of the classical tradition, so that the

men who molded and defined the central doctrines of Christianity were driven by that tradition even as they strove to transcend it. This was true even of those Fathers who maintained a theoretical attitude of unrelieved hostility toward the legacy of Athens, and it was surely the case for patristic figures who accepted and sometimes even encouraged the cultivation of philosophy and the literary arts provided that those pursuits knew their place.[1]

As Muslims began to struggle with this cultural challenge, a broad spectrum of opinion developed regarding the desirability of philosophical speculation. To suspicious conservatives, "reason" was a seductress; to traditionalist theologians, she was a dependable handmaiden, loyally demonstrating the validity of the faith; to the more radical philosophers, she was the mistress and queen whose critical scrutiny was the final determinant of all truth and falsehood.[2] Jews in

1. Despite—or precisely because of—its excessively enthusiastic description of patristic humanism, the rather old discussion in E. K. Rand, *Founders of the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1941), provides the most stimulating reminder of the importance of this issue to the Fathers of the Church.

2. For an account of the Muslim absorption of "the legacy of Greece, Alexandria, and the Orient," which began with the sciences and turned toward philosophy by the third quarter of the eighth century, see Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York and London, 1983), 1–36. Note especially p. xix, where Fakhry observes that "the most radical division caused by the introduction of Greek thought was between the progressive element, which sought earnestly to subject the data of revelation to the scrutiny of philosophical thought, and the conservative element, which disassociated itself altogether from philosophy on the ground that it was either impious or suspiciously foreign. This division continued to reappear throughout Islamic history as a kind of geological fault, sundering the whole of Islam."

In describing the manifestations of this rough division in a Jewish context, I have succumbed to the widespread convention of utilizing the admittedly imperfect term *rationalist* to describe one of these groups. As my good friend Professor Mark Steiner has pointed out, philosophers use this term in a far more precise, technical sense in an altogether different context. Intellectual historians, he argues, have not only misappropriated it but often use it in a way that casts implicit aspersions on traditionalists who are presumably resistant to reason. Let me indicate, then, that by rationalist I mean someone who values the philosophical works of non-Jews or of Jews influenced by them, who is relatively open to the prospect of modifying the straightforward understanding (and in rare cases rejecting the authority) of accepted Jewish texts and doctrines in light of such works, and who gravitates toward naturalistic rather than miraculous explanation. As the remainder of this essay will make abundantly clear, I do not regard this as a rigid, impermeable classification.

the Islamic world confronted a similar range of choices, but what was perhaps most important was that they faced those choices in partnership with the dominant society. In ancient times, the philosophical culture was part of a pagan world that stood in stark opposition to Jewish beliefs. Under such circumstances, committed Jews faced the alternatives of unqualified rejection of that civilization or a lonely struggle to come to grips with the issues that it raised. Although the philosophical culture of antiquity retained its dangers for medieval Jews under Islam, the culture with which they were in immediate contact confronted the legacy of the past in a fashion that joined Muslims and Jews in a common philosophic quest.

Needless to say, there were fundamental, substantive reasons for addressing these issues, but it is likely that the very commonality of the enterprise served as an additional attraction for Jews. Members of a subjected minority might well have embraced the opportunity to join the dominant society in an intellectual quest that was held in the highest esteem. This consideration operated with respect to many religiously neutral facets of culture from poetry to linguistics to the sciences. It was especially true of philosophy, which succeeded in attaining supreme religious significance while retaining its religious neutrality. Among the multiplicity of arguments that one hears from Jews opposed to philosophical study, the assertion that it involves the imitation of a specifically Muslim practice played no role precisely because the problems addressed were undeniably as central to Judaism as they were to Islam.

The existence of a religiously neutral or semi-neutral cultural sphere is critically important for Jewish participation in the larger culture. The virtual absence of such a sphere in Northern Europe before the high Middle Ages—and to a certain degree even then—ruled out extensive Ashkenazic involvement in the elite culture of Christendom and may well have been the critical factor in charting the divergent courses of Ashkenazim and Sephardim. The issue, of course, is not religious neutrality alone. During the formative period of Middle Eastern and Iberian Jewry, the surrounding civilization was dazzling, vibrant, endlessly stimulating. During the formative years of Ashkenazic Jewry, the Christian society of the North was

primitive, culturally unproductive, and stimulated little more than the instinct for self-preservation.[3]

These central considerations were reinforced by a linguistic factor. In the Muslim orbit, the language of culture and the language of the street were sufficiently similar that access to one provided access to the other. By the end of the first millennium, Arabic had become the language of most Jews living under Islam, and mastery of the alphabet was sufficient to open the doors to an advanced literary culture. In Northern Europe this was not the case. Knowledge of German or even of early French did not provide access to Latin texts, and the study of such texts had to be preceded by a conscious decision to learn a new language.

The Jewish intellectual and mercantile class under Islam did not merely know the rudiments of the language. The letters of Jewish merchants that have survived in the Cairo Genizah are written in a good Arabic style, which must reflect familiarity with some Arabic literature.[4] The stylistic evidence is reinforced by the use of expressions from the Quran and *ḥadith*. In tenth-century Mosul, a group of Jewish merchants convened regularly to study the Bible from a philosophical perspective.[5] This level of knowledge underscores an additional, crucial point about the relationship between the cultural level of a dominant civilization and the degree to which Jews will be

3. Historians of the Carolingian Renaissance and other scholars who have rendered the term *Dark Ages* obsolete will no doubt take umbrage at this description, but even on a generous reading of the evidence, cultural activity took place within such narrow circles that I do not think apologies are necessary. For an overview and reassessment of the current status of research on early medieval Europe, see the discussion and extensive bibliography in Richard E. Sullivan, "The Carolingian Age: Reflections on its Place in the History of the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 64 (1989): 267–306.

For some observations on the importance of a neutral cultural sphere under Islam, see Joseph M. Davis, "R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller, Joseph b. Isaac Ha-Levi, and Rationalism in Ashkenazic Jewish Culture 1550–1650" (Harvard University dissertation, 1990), 26–27. (Davis's dissertation, which I shall have occasion to cite again in the section on Ashkenazic Jewry, was submitted after this essay was substantially completed.)

4. See S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* 2 (Berkeley, 1971), 180–81. This is not to say that every Jewish merchant could read Arabic (cf. p. 179).

5. See Haggai ben Shammai, "Ḥug le-'Iyyun Pilosofi ba-Miqra be-Mosul ba-Me'ah ha-'Asirit," *Pe'amim* 41 (Autumn, 1989): 21–31.

integrated into their environment. In a relatively backward society, an outsider can achieve economic success without attaining more than a superficial familiarity with alien modes of thought. In an advanced culture, maintaining ignorance while achieving success requires enormous dedication to both objectives; it may be possible, as some contemporary examples indicate, but it is extraordinarily difficult. The upper echelons of medieval Muslim society valued cultural sophistication, and a Jew who wanted access to the movers and shakers of that society even for purely pragmatic reasons could not allow himself to remain unfamiliar with its language, its literature, and its thought. This is true not only for merchants; communal leaders who wanted to lobby for essential Jewish interests also required a sophisticated command of the surrounding culture, and the phenomenon of the acculturated Jewish courtier, which reached maturity in Spain, was born in this environment.

Familiarity with Arabic language and literature exercised a significant influence on the development of a new phase in the history of Hebrew poetry and prose. Here too the primary locus of this achievement was Muslim Spain, where Hebrew literature attained dazzling heights, but the beginnings were clearly rooted in the Geonic Middle East. Not surprisingly, the most significant figure in this development was R. Saadya Gaon, whose works often follow Arabic models and who explicitly expressed admiration for the accomplishments of the dominant culture, and there is reason to believe that the Gaon refined and embellished a new literary trend that had already begun in the Jewish communities in Egypt and Israel.[6]

Another pursuit which combined intellectual sophistication, prestige, integration into the larger society, and economic success was medicine. Medical education could be obtained privately and was part of any advanced curriculum, and so no significant impediment limited minority access to the field. Moreover, the service provided by a physician is

6. See the eloquent remarks of Ezra Fleisher in his "Hirhurim bi-Devar Ofyah shel Shirat Yisrael bi-Sefarad," *Pe'amim* 2 (Summer, 1979): 15–20, and especially in his "Tarbut Yehudei Sefarad ve-Shiratam le-Or Mimẓe'ei ha-Genizah," *Pe'amim* 41 (Autumn, 1989): 5–20.

so crucial that any tendency to discriminate will be brushed aside by the all-powerful will to live; it is no accident that those who wished to discourage the use of Jewish doctors in Christian Europe could do so only by instilling the fear of death by poison. It is consequently perfectly natural that both religious minorities in the Muslim world entered the medical profession to a degree that was entirely disproportionate to their numbers; by the thirteenth century, this phenomenon was sufficiently striking to impel a Muslim visitor to observe that most of the prominent Jews and Christians in Egypt were either government officials or physicians.[7]

The flexible character of the educational system was not confined to medicine. The absence of governmental or communal control as the Islamic world was formulating its approach to the philosophical enterprise meant that no societal decision had to be made about proper curriculum, and diverse approaches could therefore coexist without formalized pressure for homogenization. In twelfth- and thirteenth-century Northern Europe, when medieval Christians first confronted the issue of philosophical study seriously, the situation was quite different. Ecclesiastical control of cathedral schools and the nascent universities created a more homogeneous position, which both legitimated and limited the philosophic quest. Thus, despite the persistence of diversity even in the Christian West, one can speak of a quasi-official, religiously domesticated philosophical approach, while Muslims and Jews faced an array of possibilities in which virtually no option was foreclosed.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the atmosphere of tenth-century Baghdad, which was the intellectual as well as political capital of the newly matured Muslim civilization, resonated with a bewildering variety of fiercely argued philosophical and religious doctrines. Two scholars attempting to convey a sense of the environment in which R. Saadya Gaon worked have reproduced a striking description which is well worth citing once again. A Muslim theologian who visited Baghdad explained why he stopped attending mass meetings for theological debate:

7. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* 2, pp. 242–43, 247–50. See also Goitein's "The Medical Profession in the Light of the Cairo Genizah Documents," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 34 (1963): 177–94.

> At the first meeting there were present not only people of various [Islamic] sects, but also unbelievers, Magians, materialists, atheists, Jews and Christians, in short, unbelievers of all kinds. Each group had its own leader, whose task it was to defend its views, and every time one of the leaders entered the room, his followers rose to their feet and remained standing until he took his seat. In the meanwhile, the hall had become overcrowded with people. One of the unbelievers rose and said to the assembly: we are meeting here for a discussion. Its conditions are known to all. You, Muslims, are not allowed to argue from your books and prophetic traditions since we deny both. Everybody, therefore, has to limit himself to rational arguments. The whole assembly applauded these words. So you can imagine ... that after these words I decided to withdraw. They proposed to me that I should attend another meeting in a different hall, but I found the same calamity there.[8]

Both the vigor of the intellectual debate and the opposition to its excesses left their mark on contemporary Jewish texts. In R. Saadya's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions,* we find the first major philosopher of the Jewish Middle Ages arguing for the legitimacy of philosophical speculation against explicit criticism of the entire enterprise. Any attempt to assess the size and standing of the various parties to this dispute during the Geonic period faces serious obstacles. Saadya himself cited the argument that philosophical study bore the seeds of heresy and maintained that this position is proffered only by the uneducated.[9] Salo Baron has dismissed Saadya's assertion as "whistling in the dark."[10] Even if the Gaon's

8. Cited from *Journal Asiatique,* ser. 5, vol. 1 (1853): 93 by M. Ventura, *Rab Saadya Gaon* (Paris, 1934), 63–64, and by Alexander Altmann in *Three Jewish Philosophers* (New York and Philadelphia, 1960), part II, 13–14. At the same time, the authorities did have a sort of inquisitorial mechanism for the enforcement of correct belief.

9. Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions,* trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven, 1948), Introductory Treatise, 26.

10. *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* 8 (New York, 1958), 69. Baron (pp. 67–68) also cites a ninth-century Muslim who maintained that Jews were uninvolved in scientific pursuits because they considered "philosophical speculation to be unbelief."

assessment does not result from wishful thinking alone, we cannot easily use it to determine the extent and character of the opposition since it may reflect Saadya's conviction that anyone making this argument is uneducated virtually by definition. At the same time, the passage is not historically useless. For all of Saadya's confidence, polemical aggressiveness, and exalted communal standing, I doubt that he could have written this sentence if recent Geonim or highly influential figures in the yeshivot had maintained a vehement, public stand against philosophical study. On the level of public policy in Saadya's Baghdad, philosophical speculation was either encouraged or treated with salutary neglect.

The introduction to *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* vigorously sets forth some of the basic arguments for this pursuit:

> [The reader] who strives for certainty will gain in certitude, and doubt will be lifted from the doubter, and he that believes by sheer authority will come to believe out of insight and understanding. By the same token the gratuitous opponent will come to a halt, and the conceited adversary will feel ashamed.

The conviction that philosophical certainty is attainable and that reasoned faith is superior to faith based on tradition alone underlies this argument and reflects the views of the Muslim *mutakallimun* whose approach Saadya shared. Indeed, he anticipated the assertions of later Jewish thinkers by maintaining that the Bible itself requires such investigation. Isaiah, after all, proclaimed, "Do you not know? Do you not hear? ... Have you not understood the foundations of the earth?" (40:21). And the Book of Job records the admonition, "Let us know among ourselves what is good" (34:4). Not only does Saadya take the term *know* as a reference to the understanding that results from philosophical speculation; he is so convinced of this that he regards these verses as decisive evidence that the talmudic rabbis could not possibly have intended to ban such speculation when they forbade investigation into "what is above and what is below, what is before and what is behind" (*M. Ḥagigah* 2:1).[11]

11. *Beliefs and Opinions*, 9, 27.

Saadya's confidence that reason can yield certainty is strikingly illustrated by his application to philosophy of a talmudic statement whose primary context was clearly that of Jewish law. The Rabbis inform us that legal questions used to be settled through an appeals process leading up to the high court in Jerusalem, but "ever since the number of disciples of Hillel and Shammai increased who did not attend scholars sufficiently, many disagreements have arisen in Israel" (*Tosefta Sanhedrin* 7:1). "This utterance of theirs," says Saadya, speaking of the benefits of philosophical speculation, "indicates to us that when pupils do complete their course of study, no controversy or discord arises among them."[12] It is difficult to argue against the sort of inquiry that is sure to lead to piety and truth.

Nonetheless, not everyone shared Saadya's certainty. The greatest of the Geonim other than Saadya was undoubtedly R. Hai, who flourished in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. In some respects, his views on these issues paralleled those of Saadya. He permitted Jewish teachers to instruct children in mathematics and the art of writing Arabic, and in the same ruling he agreed to allow non-Jewish children to study in the synagogue (presumably with Jewish students) if there is no way to prevent this without jeopardizing peaceful neighborly relations. As Shlomo Dov Goitein has pointed out, it would appear to follow that considerable time might be devoted to subjects other than Torah.[13] A famous report informs us that R. Hai sent a student to consult the Christian *catholikos* for assistance in understanding a biblical verse, and while this does not bear directly on the question of general culture, it reflects habits of mind that might well lead to a willingness to explore beyond the boundaries of classical Jewish texts.[14]

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12. *Beliefs and Opinions*, 13.

13. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* 2, p. 177. At the same time Goitein notes that genizah evidence does not indicate much formal study of arithmetic on the elementary level (pp. 177–78). For the text of R. Hai's responsum, see Simcha Asaf, *Meqorot le-Toledot ha-Ḥinnukh be-Yisra'el* 2 (Tel Aviv, 1930), 4–5.

14. See Joseph ben Judah ibn Aqnin, *Hitgallut ha-Sodot ve-Hofa'at ha-Me'orot: Perush Shir ha-Shirim*, ed. by A. S. Halkin (Jerusalem, 1964), 495.

Whatever the provenance of the poem *Musar Haskel* attributed to R. Hai, it is worth noting the advice to teach one's son a craft and to study "wisdom," mathematics, and medicine. See Asaf, *Meqorot* 2, p. 8.

At the same time, R. Hai had reservations about the results of philosophical study, and our assessment of his reservations depends to a critical extent on the authenticity of an important letter that he reportedly addressed to R. Samuel ibn Nagrela of Spain. The letter itself has come down to us in several versions. In the central passage that appears in all the sources, R. Hai admonishes R. Samuel to

> know that what improves the body and guides human behavior properly is the pursuit of the Mishnah and Talmud; this is what is good for Israel.... Anyone who removes his attention from these works and instead pursues those other studies will totally remove the yoke of Torah from himself. As a consequence of such behavior, a person can so confuse his mind that he will have no compunctions about abandoning Torah and prayer. If you should see that the people who engage in such study tell you that it is a paved highway through which one can attain the knowledge of God, pay no attention to them. Know that they are in fact lying to you, for you will not find fear of sin, humility, purity, and holiness except in those who study Torah, Mishnah, and Talmud.

A longer version of the letter preserved in the thirteenth-century *Sefer Me'irat 'Einayim* of R. Isaac of Acre places the issue in a concrete historical context. R. Hai forbids the study of *higgayon,* which undoubtedly means philosophy in this letter, and urges the constant study of Talmud in accordance with the practice of

> the beloved residents of Qairuwan and the lands of the Maghreb, may they be blessed in the eyes of Heaven. Would that you knew of the confusion, disputes, and undisciplined attitudes that entered the hearts of many people who engaged in those studies in Baghdad in the days of 'Adud al-Dawla [977–983] and of the doubts and disagreements that were generated among them with respect to the foundations of the Torah to the point that they left the boundaries of Judaism.

He goes on to say that "there arose individuals in Baghdad [apparently somewhat later] who would have been better off as Gentiles"; indeed, they went so far that they aroused the anger of non-Jews who were presumably concerned about the spread of philosophical heresy that might contaminate Muslims as well. Because of the damage that this caused, R. Hai intervened to stop these miscreants in particular and Jewish intellectuals in general from engaging in such pursuits. The letter goes on to assert that even the Gaon R. Samuel b. Ḥofni, who had read such material, saw the damage that resulted and refrained from doing so any longer.

Since the days of Graetz, the authenticity of this document has been the subject of scholarly debate. In the most recent discussion, two new, conflicting considerations have been raised. On the one hand, the name of the ruler in Baghdad is reported with a level of accuracy that might not have been available to a late forger; on the other, the section preserved in *Me'irat 'Einayim* often uses the first person singular, while it was the practice of the Geonim, without exception, to write in the first person plural. If this letter in its entirety was written by R. Hai, it provides fascinating information about extreme rationalism among Jews in late tenth-century Baghdad and about a very strong Jewish counterreaction. My own inclination, however, is to treat the document with considerable skepticism. The unique appearance of the first person singular is surely a weighty consideration, and an expert in the history of medieval Islam assures me that 'Adud al-Dawla's name was not so obscure as to be unavailable to a thirteenth-century Iberian forger (not to speak of an earlier one) even in its precise form. The unconditional denunciation in the letter is considerably stronger than what we would expect from R. Hai's other writings: there were a number of other appropriate opportunities in the Gaon's voluminous correspondence for him to have expressed such views, and yet this passage remains unique; the assertion that R. Samuel ben Ḥofni, for whom speculative pursuits were clearly of central importance, would have abandoned them because of this incident is both implausible in the extreme and reminiscent of other rereadings of history of the sort that produced a document attesting to Maimonides' late embrace of kabbalah; and the specific reference to the abandonment of prayer, an

issue which is unattested as far as I know in this early period, echoes similar charges in the literature of the Maimonidean controversy.

Whatever the authenticity of the original document, there is an illuminating aspect to the later textual history of this letter. One of the versions contains a brief addition clearly introduced by a reader who wanted to soften the antiphilosophical message of the Gaon. Where R. Hai criticized those who "pursue those other studies," our philosophically oriented copyist wrote "those other studies *alone*," and where R. Hai spoke about the purity and holiness of those who study Mishnah and Talmud, our copyist wrote that these qualities will be found only in those who study "Mishnah, Talmud, *and wisdom together, not wisdom alone.*" These revisions, which were introduced by the interpolater into a letter of Naḥmanides that quotes R. Hai, have been embraced to our own day by scholars who welcome an attenuation of the original message. In the event that the letter itself is inauthentic, there is a certain poetic justice in the undermining of its central point by yet another creative artist.[15]

15. R. Hai's letter is most conveniently available in *Oẓar ha-Geonim* to *Ḥagigah*, pp. 65–66. The most recent discussion of the problem of authenticity, which cites earlier studies, is in Amos Goldreich's dissertation, *Sefer Me'irat 'Einayim le-Rav Yiẓḥaq de-min Akko* (Jerusalem, 1981; Pirsumei ha-Makhon le-Limmudim Mitqaddemim, 1984), 405–7. Goldreich notes Shraga Abramson's observation about the Geonim and the first person plural, which was made in a different context; see Abramson, *Rav Nissim Gaon* (Jerusalem, 1965), 307. When I raised the issue in a conversation with Prof. Abramson, he confirmed that there are no exceptions to this usage; since R. Hai became Gaon when Samuel ibn Nagrela was a small child, the possibility that the letter was written before the author assumed his position must, of course, be ruled out. (In a personal communication, Menahem Ben Sasson has suggested the possibility that a shift from plural to singular might have taken place in the course of translation from Arabic into Hebrew.) See too Zvi Groner in *'Alei Sefer* 13 (1986): 75, no. 1099. I am grateful to Ulrich Haarmann, my colleague at the Annenberg Research Institute when this essay was written, for his assessment of the degree of familiarity with 'Adud al-Dawla in the thirteenth century.

For an example of the fortunes of the pro-philosophy version of the letter, see the various printings of C. D. Chavel, *Kitvei Rabbenu Mosheh ben Naḥman* (henceforth *Kitvei Ramban*), beginning with Jerusalem, 1963, 1, pp. 349–50. For the initial challenge to the letter's authenticity, see H. Graetz, "Ein pseudoepigraphisches Sendschreiben, angeblich von Hai Gaon an Samuel Nagid," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums* 11 (1862): 37–40. There is no concrete basis for Graetz's suspicions that the citation from R. Hai was inserted into Naḥmanides' letter by a

Whatever we make of the highly dubious report that R. Samuel ben Ḥofni stopped perusing philosophical books as a result of a particular incident, his study of such works is clear-cut and their influence upon him was profound. He rejected a literal understanding of the raising of Samuel's spirit by the witch of Endor, and according to R. Hai he denied various miracles that the Talmud attributes to the ancient rabbis, arguing that such miracles are associated only with prophets and that the talmudic reports are not "halakhah." The point here, if I understand the expression correctly, is not that the content of these passages classifies them as aggadic but rather that they are not normative in much the same way that a rejected legal position is not normative. Here, however, normative seems synonymous with "true," and the utilization of this category to reject the truth of a rabbinic narrative is striking, especially in the absence of any apparent effort at allegorization. Indeed, the most recent study of R. Samuel's thought argues that his position denying these talmudic miracles stemmed from a specifically Mu'tazilite position on the relationship between miracles and prophecy.[16]

later copyist; consequently, if the letter is a forgery, we probably need to assume that it was produced no later than the early months of the controversy of the 1230s and that it already deceived Naḥmanides.

16. See David Sklare, *The Religious and Legal Thought of Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon: Texts and Studies in Cultural History* (Harvard University dissertation, 1992), 74. Sklare's dissertation, which appeared well after the completion of this study, presents a broad characterization of Jewish high culture in Geonic times from "extreme rationalism" to traditionalism; see ch. 4, pp. 145–210. For attitudes toward *aggadah*, see pp. 64–75.

On the witch of Endor, see Radaq's discussion on I Samuel 28:25. For R. Hai's responsum, see *Oẓar ha-Geonim* to *Ḥagigah*, p. 15. On R. Hai's own reservations about the authority of *aggadah*, see R. Abraham b. Isaac Av-Beit Din, *Sefer ha-Eshkol*, ed. by A. Auerbach (Halberstadt, 1868), 2, p. 47. There is some confusion about R. Samuel's views on the talking serpent in Genesis and the talking donkey in Numbers; see the discussion in Aaron Greenbaum, *Perush ha-Torah le-Rav Shmuel ben Ḥofni Gaon* (Jerusalem, 1979), 40–41, n. 17. Whatever R. Samuel's position may have been, there were Geonic views that endorsed a nonliteral understanding of these accounts. For the expectation that R. Samuel would facilitate a student's pursuit of the sciences in addition to Mishnah and Talmud, see I. Goldziher, "Mélanges Judéo-Arabes, XXIII," *Revue des Études Juives* 50 (1905): 185, 187.

Although various Geonim were favorably inclined toward the study of philosophy, it is clear that the curriculum of the advanced yeshivot was devoted to the study of Torah alone. I am unpersuaded by Goitein's suggestion that the reason for this was the feeling that only those whose professional training would expose them to Greek science needed the protection afforded by the proper study of philosophy and theology. The private nature of philosophical instruction in the society at large made it perfectly natural for Jews to follow the same course; more important, the curriculum of these venerable institutions went back to pre-Islamic days, and any effort to introduce a curricular revolution into their hallowed halls would surely have elicited vigorous opposition. In any case, the absence of a philosophical curriculum in the academies has led to the recent suggestion that openness to Arabic culture by the later Geonim resulted precisely from the weakening of the yeshivot which freed someone like R. Samuel ben Ḥofni from the restraints of the traditional framework.[17]

We are even told in an early Geonic responsum that Bible was not taught in the academies. R. Natronai Gaon informs us that because of economic pressures which required students to work, the talmudic directive (*Kiddushin* 30a) that one-third of one's time be devoted to biblical study could no longer be observed, and the students relied upon another talmudic statement (*Sanhedrin* 24a) implying that Bible, Mishnah, and Midrash are all subsumed under Talmud. One wonders whether this was only a result of insufficient time. The all-consuming nature of talmudic study led to a very similar conclusion among Ashkenazic Jews; moreover, the fact that Judaism shared the Bible with Christianity and, to a degree, with Islam may have helped to generate an instinct that this was not a quintessentially Jewish pursuit. Only the Talmud was the special "mystery" of the Jewish people.[18]

17. So Sklare, *The Religious and Legal Thought of Samuel ben Ḥofni*, 96–99, 139–40. As Sklare notes, R. Saadya himself was educated "outside the orbit of the Gaonic yeshivot." For Goitein's remark, see *A Mediterranean Society* 2, p. 210.

18. For R. Natronai's observation, see Asaf, *Meqorot* 2, p. 4. Cf. Rabbenu Tam's remark in *Tosafot Qiddushin* 30a, s.v. *la ẓerikha leyomei*. On the Oral Law as the mystery of Israel, see *Pesiqta Rabbati* 5. On later reservations about biblical study, see below, n. 109.

The assertion that the Jews of Qairuwan studied Torah exclusively may well reflect their general orientation accurately. At the same time, we have evidence of some broader pursuits. Dunash ben Tamim of tenth-century Qairuwan wrote several astronomical works, one of which he composed to honor the local Muslim ruler, as well as a mathematical treatise and a commentary to *The Book of Creation (Sefer Yeẓirah)*. Moreover, the famous question from Qairuwan about the composition of the Talmud that elicited a classic responsum by R. Sherira Gaon may have been inspired as much by an interest in history, which is also attested in other ways, as by Karaite pressures.[19] Needless to say, the sort of interest in history that expresses itself as a question about the Talmud is itself a manifestation of the study of Torah, but the definition of the boundaries between the sacred and the profane is precisely what is at issue in much of the medieval discussion of pursuits that transcend a narrow definition of Torah.

MUSLIM SPAIN AND MAIMONIDES

The cultural symbiosis between Judaism and Islamic civilization grew to maturity in the Middle East during the time of the Geonim, but its classic expression and most dazzling achievements emerged from Muslim Spain in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries. We have already seen that linguistic acculturation is a precondition for such a symbiosis, and familiarity with Arabic literature was one of the most important stimuli to the development of a distinctive Jewish literary voice. Moses ibn Ezra's treatise on Jewish poetry contains a striking passage which reveals a frank recognition of this process by medieval Jews themselves:

> When the Arabs conquered the Andalusian peninsula ... our exiles living in that peninsula learned the various branches of wisdom in the course of time. After toil and effort they learned the Arabic language, became familiar with Arabic books, and

19. See Menahem Ben Sasson, *Hevrah ve-Hanhagah bi-Qehillot Yisrael be-Afriqah ha-Ẓefonit bi-mei ha-Beinayim—Qairuwan, 800–1057* (Hebrew University dissertation, 1983), 179, 185–86. R. Sherira's epistle is now available in N. D. Rabinowitch's English translation, *The Iggeres of Rav Sherira Gaon* (Jerusalem, 1988).

> plumbed the depths of their contents; thus, the Jews became thoroughly conversant with the branches of their wisdom and enjoyed the sweetness of their poetry. After that, God revealed the secrets of the Hebrew language and its grammar.[20]

The relationship between the study of Hebrew grammar, with all that it implies for the development of biblical exegesis, and the knowledge of a different Semitic language is self-evident. Medieval Jews had always known Hebrew and Aramaic, but the addition of Arabic, with its rich vocabulary and literature, enabled grammarians to understand the meaning of a host of difficult Hebrew words and to uncover the mysteries of the Semitic root. Unlocking the structure of the language provided a revolutionary tool for the indisputably religious enterprise of understanding the Bible. There can be no more eloquent testimony to the significance of this development than the extensive appeal to grammatical analysis by R. Abraham ibn Ezra, easily the greatest biblical exegete produced by the Jewry of Muslim Spain. It is consequently both remarkable and revealing that the greatest of medieval Jewish grammarians, Jonah ibn Janaḥ, alludes to Talmudists who regard the study of language as "superfluous," "useless," "practically ... heretical."[21]

The unavoidable connection between grammatical investigations and the study of non-Jewish works may well account for this attitude, which continued in certain circles through the Middle Ages and persists to our own day. It is difficult to think of any other consideration that could account for so extreme an assertion as the imputation of virtual heresy to grammarians. Considering the undeniable value of this pursuit for biblical study, opposition could be expressed only by Jews who attached little importance to the systematic study of the Bible itself and regarded the Talmud as the only proper subject of intense, regular, prolonged scrutiny. The denigration of biblical study, which we have already touched upon and which also persists in the same circles to this day, may well result not only from the fact that the Bible is shared with non-Jews but from the inevitable contact that it fosters with gentile scholarship

20. *Shirat Yisrael*, ed. by B. Z. Halper (Leipzig, 1924), 63, cited in Asaf, *Meqorot*, 2, p. 23.
21. *Sefer ha-Riqmah*, ed. by M. Wilensky (Berlin, 1929), p. v, cited in Asaf, *Meqorot*, 2, pp. 19–20.

and culture. A further consideration, which is not directly related to our theme, may have been the concern that biblical study undisciplined by the everpresent restraints of authoritative talmudic commentary could itself lead to heretical conclusions in matters of both theology and law.

Despite this evidence of opposition, the dominant culture of Andalusian Jewry embodied an avid pursuit not only of linguistic sophistication but of literary expression in the fullest sense. Ahad Ha-Am long ago coined the felicitous term *competitive imitation* (*ḥiqquy shel hitḥarut*) to describe the motivation and character of this culture,[22] and later scholars have elaborated the point with an accumulation of evidence of which Ahad Ha-Am was only dimly aware. In the words of a recent study, "Golden Age Hebrew poetry ... can be viewed as a literary discourse designed to mediate cultural ambiguity because it signifies both the acculturation to Arabic cultural norms *and* [emphasis in the original] the resistant national consciousness of the Jewish literati who invented it."[23]

Far more than ordinary intellectual competitiveness was at stake here. The beauty of Arabic was a crucial Muslim argument for the superiority of Islam. Since the Quran was the final, perfect revelation, it was also the supreme exemplar of aesthetic excellence, and its language must be the most exalted vehicle for the realization of literary perfection. When Jews compared the richness and flexibility of Arabic vocabulary to the poverty of medieval Hebrew, the Muslims' argument for the manifest superiority of their revelation undoubtedly hit home with special force. The quality of Arabic was evident not merely from a mechanical word count or even an analysis of the Quran; it shone from every piece of contemporary poetry and prose.

Consequently, Jews were faced with a dual challenge. First, they had to explain the undeniable deficiencies of the vocabulary of medieval Hebrew. For all its terrible consequences, the exile has its uses, and Andalusian Jews maintained that the untold riches of the Hebrew language had gradually

22. "Ḥiqquy ve-Hitbolelut," in *'Al Parashat Derakhim*, 2nd ed., 1 (Berlin, 1902), 175.

23. Ross Brann, "Andalusian Hebrew Poetry and the Hebrew Bible: Cultural Nationalism or Cultural Ambiguity?", in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times* 3, ed. by David R. Blumenthal (Atlanta, 1988), 103. See also Brann's book, *The Compunctious Poet: Cultural Ambiguity and Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain* (Baltimore, 1991).

been lost due to the travails of the dispersion. The numerous words that appear only rarely in the Bible and whose meaning we must struggle to decipher are but the tip of the iceberg; they testify to a language far more impressive than the one bequeathed to us by our immediate ancestors.

Moreover, and far more important, Jews were challenged to demonstrate that even the Hebrew at their disposal was at least as beautiful as Arabic and that Hebrew literature could achieve every bit as much as the literature of medieval Muslims. This created a religious motivation to reproduce the full range of genres and subjects in the Arabic literary repertoire, which meant that even the composition of poetry describing parties devoted to wine, women, men, and song could be enveloped by at least the penumbra of sanctity. There can be no question, of course, that even if the genre was born out of apologetic roots, it took on a life of its own, and not every medieval wine song was preceded by a *le-shem yiḥud*; at the same time, every such poem was a conscious expression of Jewish pride, which in the Middle Ages had an indisputably religious coloration. Furthermore, the power and beauty of the religious poetry of the Jews of medieval Spain were surely made possible by the creative encounter with Arabic models. Some of the deepest and most moving expressions of medieval Jewish piety would have been impossible without the inspiration of the secular literature of a competing culture.

Jews could have accomplished their fundamental goal by establishing parity between Hebrew and Arabic, but such an achievement is psychologically insufficient and polemically tenuous. Consequently, we find the glorification of Hebrew over Arabic and the assertion, which we shall find in other contexts as well, that Arabic culture, including music, poetry, and rhetoric, was ultimately derived from the Jews.[24]

On a less exalted level, poetry also fulfilled a social function. Businessmen had poems written in their honor which served the pragmatic

24. The footnotes in Brann's article provide a recent bibliography of the substantial work on this theme. See especially A. S. Halkin, "The Medieval Jewish Attitude Toward Hebrew," in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. by Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 233–48, and Nehemiah Allony, "Teguvat R. Moshe ibn Ezra la-'Arabiyya' be-Sefer ha-Diyyunim ve-ha-Siḥot (Shirat Yisrael)," *Tarbiẓ* 42 (1972/73): 97–113 (particularly the challenge from the beauty of the Quran on p. 101). Cf. also Norman Roth, "Jewish Reactions to the *'Arabiyya* and the Renaissance of Hebrew in Spain," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 28 (1983): 63–84.

purpose of useful publicity as well as the psychological purpose of boosting the ego. The ability to write poetry was the mark of an accomplished gentleman, and this too encouraged the cultivation of the genre.[25] As I have already indicated in passing, the existence of the class of Jewish courtiers created a firm social base for a Jewish literary and philosophic culture. Jewish communities in Muslim Spain became dependent upon the representation afforded by courtiers, and that representation was impossible without a command of the surrounding culture. Since courtiers came to expect poetic flattery, their presence and patronage gave the poet both support and standing, although it hardly needs to be said that the relationship between patron and poet is never an unmixed blessing.

Despite all this, disparagement of poetry and opposition to reliance on Arabic models were not unknown among the Jews of Muslim Spain. In some instances, however, even those who criticized what they perceived as an overemphasis on language and rhetoric did not reject the enterprise entirely, and there can be little doubt that the dominant social and intellectual class regarded literary skill as a fundamental component of a proper education. The ideal of *adab,* which roughly means general culture, was embraced by many Jews, and the praises of a great man would point to his mastery of the full range of medieval disciplines.[26]

Samuel ha-Nagid's description of God's kindness to him contains the central elements to be sought in the well-rounded Jewish intellectual: "He endowed you [i.e., Samuel] with wisdom of His Scripture and His Law, which are classified first among the sciences. He instructed you

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Le-shem yiḥud describes a dedicatory prayer recited by later Jews before fulfilling a religious obligation. Despite the anachronism and the resort to Hebrew, I cannot think of a better way to make the point.

25. See S. D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs* (New York, 1955), 162.

26. For references and discussion, see Bezalel Safran, "Baḥya ibn Pakuda's Attitude toward the Courtier Class," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* [1], ed. by Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 154–96. For some tentative reservations about the thesis of Safran's article, see Amos Goldreich, "Ha-Meqorot ha-'Arviyyim ha-Efshariyyim shel ha-Havḥanah bein 'Ḥovot ha-Evarim' ve-'Ḥovot ha-Levavot,'" in *Meḥqarim be-'Ivrit u-ba-'Aravit: Sefer Zikkaron le-Dov Eron,* ed. by Aharon Dotan (Tel Aviv, 1988), 185, 199, nn. 22, 95.

in Greek knowledge and enlightened you in Arabic lore."[27] In this passage we find only the most general categories of learning, and the sole hierarchy of values places Torah above other pursuits. When the general sciences are broken down in greater detail, a more nuanced picture emerges in which philosophy takes pride of place while the remaining disciplines are necessary both for their own sake and for their usefulness in preparing the student for ever higher forms of study. As a result of this concept of "propaedeutic studies," virtually every field can bask in the reflected glory of the queen of the sciences.

"It is certainly necessary," writes Maimonides, "for whoever wishes to achieve human perfection to train himself at first in the art of logic, then in the mathematical sciences according to the proper order, then in the natural sciences, and after that in the divine science."[28] More complete lists include logic, mathematics, astronomy, physics, medicine, music, building, agriculture, and a variety of studies subsumed under metaphysics. So much significance was attributed to the propaedeutic studies that one of the polemicists during the Maimonidean controversy maintained that the only people who became heretics as a result of reading *The Guide of the Perplexed* were those who came to it without the proper preliminaries. This argument led him to a new application of a famous Maimonidean admonition. No one, said Maimonides, should approach the study of philosophy without first filling his stomach with the "bread and meat" of biblical and talmudic law. In our context, says Yosef b. Todros Halevi, that metaphor should be applied not to "the written and oral Torah" but to

> the other sciences like the sciences of measurement and physics and astronomy. These are known as the educational, pedagogic sciences ... which lead the human intellect to approach the understanding of the divine science with a generous spirit, with passion and with affection, so they can be compared to this world in its capacity as a gateway to the world to come.[29]

27. Brann's translation (p. 108) from *Divan Shmuel ha-Nagid,* ed. by Dov Yarden, 1 (Jerusalem, 1966), 58.

28. *The Guide of the Perplexed,* trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago and London, 1963), 1:34, p. 75.

29. *Qevuẓat Mikhtavim be-'Inyenei ha-Maḥaloqet 'al Devar Sefer ha-Moreh ve-ha-Madda'*, ed. by S. Z. H. Halberstam (Bamberg, 1875), 10. *See Mishneh Torah, Hil. Yesodei*

Not all philosophers assigned such weight to these preparatory studies. Thus, Abraham ibn Daud derided excessive preoccupation with medicine, with the "still more worthless.... art of grammar and rhetoric," and with "strange, hypothetical" mathematical puzzles, when the only valuable aspect of mathematics is the one that leads to a knowledge of astronomy. Endless concentration on the means would steal time better devoted to the end, which clearly remained the study of metaphysics.[30]

By far the most significant challenge to the prevailing ideal of the philosophers came in R. Judah Halevi's revolt against Andalusian Jewish culture, a revolt so far-reaching that it actually serves to underscore the centrality of philosophical inquiry for that culture. Halevi's accomplishments as a poet and abilities as a thinker made him a sterling example of what Jewish *adab* strove to produce; when he revolted against the values of the Jewish elite, he challenged the very underpinnings of his society.[31] This challenge finds expression in his poetry, in his decision to abandon Spain for the land of Israel, and in his antiphilosophical philosophical work, the *Kuzari*.

Halevi substituted a deeply romantic, historically founded, revelation-centered, strikingly ethnocentric faith for the philosophically oriented religion of many of his peers. At the same time, the *Kuzari* operates within the matrix of medieval philosophical conceptions. Halevi could no more rid himself of the active intellect than a contemporary religious critic of evolution could deny the existence of atoms or DNA. More important, the antiphilosophical position of the *Kuzari is* an integral part of Halevi's revulsion at fawning courtiers, at Jewish groveling disguising itself as competitive imitation, at much of what "the exile of

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ha-Torah 4:13. On the propaedeutic studies, see inter alia, Harry A. Wolfson, "The Classification of Sciences in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," *Hebrew Union College Jubilee Volume* (Cincinnati, 1925), 263–315; A. S. Halkin, "Li-Demuto shel R. Yosef ben Yehudah ibn 'Aqnin," in *Sefer ha-Yovel li-khevod Ẓevi Wolfson,* ed. by Saul Lieberman (Jerusalem, 1965), 99–102; Halkin, "Yedaiah Bedershi's Apology," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies,* ed. by Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 170; Halkin, "Ha-Ḥerem 'al Limmud ha-Pilosophiah," *Peraqim* 1 (1967–68): 41; Baron, *History* 8, p. 143.

30. *Sefer ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* (Frankfurt a. M., 1852), part 2, introduction, p. 45.

31. For a powerful depiction of Halevi's revolt, see Gerson D. Cohen's discussion in his edition of Abraham ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah (The Book of Tradition)* (Philadelphia, 1967), 295–300.

Jerusalem that is in Spain" stood for. It is no accident that his famous line denouncing Greek wisdom for producing flowers but no fruit and for affirming the eternity of matter is part of a poem justifying his decision to abandon Spain for the land of Israel. To the degree that Halevi's position developed in stages, there can be little doubt that the radical social critique gave birth to the philosophical revisionism; he clearly did not decide to leave Spain as a consequence of his rethinking of the role of philosophical speculation. If he did, however, the point would be even stronger. Nothing could demonstrate more clearly the degree to which the philosophic quest had become part of the warp and woof of Spanish Jewish civilization.

Halevi's insistence on the radical superiority not only of Judaism but also of the Jewish people has disturbed and perplexed many readers, particularly in light of his assertion that even proselytes can never hope to attain prophecy. His position can probably be understood best if we recognize that the roots of his revolt lay not so much in an intellectual reappraisal as in a visceral disgust with the humiliation and self-degradation that he saw in the Jewish courtier culture. He describes acquaintances who attempted to persuade him to remain in Spain as drunk and unworthy of a response.

> How can they offer him bliss
> through the service of kings,
> which in his eyes
> is like the service of idols?
> Is it good that a wholehearted and upright man
> should be offered the happiness
> of a bird tied up in the hands of youths,
> in the service of Philistines,
> of Hagarites and Hittites,
> as alien gods
> seduce his soul
> to seek their will
> and forsake the will of God,
> to betray the Creator
> and serve creatures instead?

I have already noted the psychological inadequacy of attempting to demonstrate that Jews are just as good as non-Jews; in such a case, the standard of comparison remains the alien culture which Jews strive to match and imitate. Though Halevi was not the only one to assert that Jewish culture was not merely equal but superior, he appears to have regarded the protestations of others as halfhearted, inadequate, even pathetic. There was certainly nothing in the philosophical enterprise in its standard form that had the potential to demonstrate the superiority of Judaism over Islam. In Christian societies, philosophical arguments offered the opportunity of establishing the implausibility, even the impossibility, of distinctive Christian dogmas; in a society with a dominant religion which Maimonides himself described as impeccably monotheistic, this option was precluded. The only way to overcome the status of "despised people," a characterization which appears in the very title of the *Kuzari,* was to cut the Gordian knot and declare one's emancipation from the usual rules of the philosophical game. Judaism rests on a unique revelation, not a common philosophic consensus; Jews are set apart and above, their status ingrained and unapproachable even through conversion. Only such a position could speak to the psychic impulses that lay at the very roots of Halevi's revolt.[32]

Halevi's assertion that one who accepts Judaism because of faith in the revelation is better than one who tries to approach it through the

32. For the poetic passage quoted, see Hayyim Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-'Ivrit bi-Sefarad u-bi-Provence* 1 (Jerusalem, 1954), 498. For the passage about Greek wisdom, see pp. 493–94.

Several very recent studies have grappled with Halevi's position on the second class status of converts. Daniel J. Lasker's "Proselyte Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Thought of Judah Halevi," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 81 (1990): 75–91, addresses the issue without any effort to mitigate the sharpness of Halevi's assertion. Attempts to provide such mitigation appear in Lippman Bodoff, "Was Yehudah Halevi Racist?", *Judaism* 38 (1989): 174–84, and in Steven Schwartzschild, "Proselytism and Ethnicism in R. Yehudah HaLevy," in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter,* ed. by Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden, 1992), 27–41.

There is a talmudic passage which could have served as a source for Halevi's position about the denial of prophecy to proselytes. See *Kiddushin* 71b for the assertion that God rests his presence (*shekhinah*) only on families of unimpeachable Jewish lineage.

clever application of reason did not prevent him from maintaining, along with many other medieval Jews, that much of the wisdom of ancient Greece and Rome was derived from Jewish sources. Since the travails of exile have led to the loss not only of much of the Hebrew language but also of ancient Jewish wisdom, that wisdom has come to be associated with the Greeks and Romans. In the hands of rationalists, this argument served not only as an assertion of Jewish pride but as a legitimation of philosophical study. The wisdom of Solomon had to be redeemed from gentile hands. To a later figure like Naḥmanides, whose attitude toward speculation was complex and ambivalent, the fact that gentiles have been influenced by ancient Jewish learning was unassailable, but the lessons to be drawn were less clear. Since the crucial Jewish wisdom had been preserved within the fold, and the material embedded in the books of the Greeks could be recovered only through explorations fraught with spiritual peril, the decision to embark on such exploration required careful, even agonizing deliberation. Despite this ambivalence, the dominant message of the conviction that philosophy was purloined from the Jews was undoubtedly to establish its Jewish legitimacy and perhaps even its standing as a component of Torah itself.[33]

The position of medieval rationalists concerning the relationship between philosophy and Torah is crucial to our entire discussion, and it explains my scrupulous avoidance of the tempting and common term "secular studies." There was nothing secular about metaphysics, and because of the preparatory character of many other disciplines, they too assumed religious value. We have already seen Saadya's arguments for the existence of a religious obligation to engage in philosophical speculation, and similar arguments recur throughout the Jewish Middle Ages. Abraham, we are told repeatedly, attained his knowledge of God through philosophical proofs. We are commanded to "*know* this day ... that the Lord is God" (Deut. 4:39). David instructed Solomon, "*Know* the God of your father, and serve him with a whole heart and a willing

33. *Kuzari* 2:26; 66. Cf., *inter multa alia*, *Guide* 1:71. Many of the relevant references have been summarized in Norman Roth, "The 'Theft of Philosophy' by the Greeks from the Jews," *Classical Folia* 22 (1978): 53–67. For Naḥmanides, see *Kitvei Ramban* 1, p. 339, and see below for his overall stance.

soul" (I Chron. 28:9). Jeremiah wrote, "Let him that glories glory in this, that he *understands and knows* me ..., says the Lord" (Jer. 9:23).[34] These proof-texts, of course, were not unassailable, and antirationalists argued that there are superior ways of reaching God. Halevi, for example, cleverly reversed the rationalists' argument that Abraham had attained philosophical knowledge of God. The patriarch had indeed pursued philosophical understanding, but the Rabbis tell us that when God told him to go outdoors (Gen. 15:5), he was really telling him to abandon astrology and listen to the divine promise. In this context, astrology is merely an example of "all forms of syllogistic wisdom," which are to be left behind once direct revelation has been attained.[35]

The argument for speculation, however, was not wholly dependent upon proof-texts. If love of God, clearly a quintessential religious value, was to have any real meaning, it could flow only from a knowledge of the Creator's handiwork, and this required a pursuit of the sciences. Moreover, the knowledge of God that comes from tradition alone is inherently insufficient and is in any event secondary rather than primary knowledge. Only those intellectually unfit for speculation can be excused from this obligation; others who neglect their duty are guilty of what R. Baḥya ibn Paqudah called "laziness and contempt for the word of God and his Law" and will be called to account for their dereliction.[36]

A secondary argument pointed to the desirability, even the obligation, of impressing the gentiles with the wisdom and understanding of the Jewish people (cf. Deut. 4:6; *Shabbat* 75a). Baḥya made this point with exceptional vigor by maintaining that gentile recognition of Jewish wisdom can come only if Jews prove the truth of their faith

> by logical arguments and by reasonable testimony. For God has promised to unveil the minds of the nations of their ignorance and to show His bright light to prove the truth of our religion, as

34. On these and other arguments, see Herbert A. Davidson, "The Study of Philosophy as a Religious Obligation," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. by S. D. Goitein (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 53–68.

35. *Kuzari* 4:17, 27.

36. *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*, trans. Menahem Mansour (London, 1973), introduction, p. 94.

> it is said, "And many peoples shall go and say, Come yet and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3). Thus it becomes a certainty to us, through logic, Scripture, and tradition, that we are obligated to speculate upon every matter the truth of which is conceivable to our minds.[37]

This is a remarkable formulation. The object to Baḥya is not merely to cause gentiles to admire Jewish wisdom. Jewish philosophical expertise is the medium of an eschatological missionary endeavor. Non-Jews will accept the truth of Judaism at the end of days not because of a supernatural *deus ex machina* but because of the persuasive powers, aided no doubt by God, of Jewish philosophical arguments. Maimonides' well-known view that gentile recognition of the truth at the end of days will come through gradual preparation mediated by Christianity and Islam rather than through a sudden, miraculous upheaval may well be adumbrated in this strikingly naturalistic position in *The Duties of the Heart.* In any event, Baḥya has assigned philosophy nothing less than a messianic function.

In a famous and controversial extended metaphor, Maimonides graphically illustrated his conviction that philosophy alone affords the highest level of religious insight. Near the end of his *Guide,* he tells us that the varying levels of people's apprehension of God can be classified by analogy with the inhabitants of a city who seek the palace of the king. People who have no doctrinal belief are like individuals who have not entered the city at all. Those who have engaged in speculation but have reached erroneous conclusions can be compared with people within the city who have turned their backs on the palace. Then there are those who seek the palace but never see it: "the multitude of the adherents of the Law, ... the ignoramuses who observe the commandments." We then come to those who reach the palace but do not enter it: "the jurists who believe true opinions on the basis of traditional authority and study

37. *The Duties of the Heart,* ch. 1, p. 115.

the law concerning the practices of divine service, but do not engage in speculation concerning the fundamental principles of religion." At long last we come to those who have "plunged into speculation." Only one "who has achieved demonstration, to the extent that that is possible, of everything that may be demonstrated ... has come to be with the ruler in the inner part of the habitation."[38]

The supreme value that Maimonides attributed to philosophical speculation does not in itself demonstrate that he classified it as Torah. Several passages in the first book of his code, however, establish this clearly and reinforce the pride of place that he assigned to such speculation in his hierarchy of values. The first two chapters of the code deal in summary fashion with metaphysical questions which Maimonides then tells us represent what the Rabbis called the "account of the chariot." The next two chapters set forth the essentials of astronomy and physics which, says Maimonides, are "the account of creation." In combination, these chapters constitute what the Talmud calls *pardes,* which is clearly a term for the secrets of the Torah. Later he informs us explicitly that "the subjects called *pardes* are subsumed under the rubric *gemara,*" and in the *Guide* he describes the philosophical discussion of divine attributes, creation, providence, and the nature of prophecy as the mysteries and secrets of the Torah.

This, however, is not the end of it. Alone among medieval Talmudists, Maimonides took literally a rabbinic statement that the talmudic discussions between Abbaye and Rava are considered "a small matter" compared with the account of the chariot, which is "a great matter." Since the account of the chariot means metaphysical speculation, the value judgment expressed here is wholly consistent with the palace metaphor in the *Guide* and, to many medieval observers, no less disturbing.[39]

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38. *Guide* 3:51, pp. 618–19.

39. See *Hil. Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:11–12; 4:10, 13; *Hil. Talmud Torah* 1:11–12; *Guide* 1:35. Isadore Twersky has devoted a number of important studies to Maimonides' views on these questions. See especially his *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven, 1980), pp. 356–514, esp. pp. 488–507; "Some Non-Halakhic Aspects of the *Mishneh Torah,*" in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies,* 95–118; "Religion and Law," in *Religion in a Religious Age,* 69–82. That Baḥya regarded metaphysics as Torah may be reflected in his admonition that one must study metaphysics, but it

What renders Maimonides' position all the more striking is its potential implications for talmudic study. The introduction to his code contains a famous observation that it will now be possible to study the written Torah followed by "this [book]," from which the reader will know the oral Torah, so that it will be unnecessary to read any other book in between. The possibility that Maimonides meant to render the Talmud obsolete was raised in his own time, and he vigorously denied any such intention in a letter to R. Pinḥas ha-Dayyan of Alexandria. Nonetheless, the tone of even this letter reveals an attitude not wholly typical of medieval Talmudists, and some of Maimonides' epistles to his student Joseph ben Judah express relatively sharp reservations about extreme preoccupation with details of talmudic discussions at the expense of other pursuits.

In the letter to R. Pinḥas he testifies that he has not taught the *Mishneh Torah* for a year and a half because most of his students wanted to study R. Isaac Alfasi's legally oriented abridgment of the Talmud; as for the two students who wanted to study the Talmud itself, Maimonides taught them the tractates that they requested. Although he goes on to insist that he wrote the code only for people who are incapable of plumbing the depths of the Talmud, this description of his students certainly does not convey single-minded devotion to teaching the talmudic text.

Far more striking are the letters to Joseph ben Judah. In one section of this collection, Maimonides predicts that the time will come when all Israel will study the *Mishneh Torah* alone with the exception of those who are looking for something on which to spend their entire lives even though it achieves no end. Elsewhere he permits Joseph to

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is forbidden to do so (as in the case of Torah itself) for worldly benefit. See Safran, "Baḥya ibn Pakuda's Attitude" (above, n. 26), 160. For a halakhic analysis of Maimonides' position on the status of philosophical inquiry as a technical fulfillment of the commandment to study Torah, see Aharon Kahn, "Li-Qevi'at ha-Ḥefṣa shel Talmud Torah," *Beit Yosef Shaul: Qovez Ḥiddushei Torah* 3 (1989): 373–74, 386–403. In Kahn's view, even Maimonides believed that only philosophical discussions centered on sacred texts qualify for the status of Torah. While Kahn's interesting argument is based on instincts that are (and should be) difficult to overcome, the hard evidence for the conclusion remains rather thin.

open a school but urges him to pursue trade and study medicine along with his learning of Torah; moreover, he says,

> Teach only the code of R. Isaac Alfasi and compare it with the Composition [i.e., the *Mishneh Torah*]. If you find a disagreement, know that careful study of the Talmud brought it about, and study the relevant passage. If you fritter away your time with commentaries and explanations of talmudic discussions and those matters from which we have excused people, time will be wasted and useful results will be diminished.

Finally, a slightly later citation quotes Maimonides to the effect that talmudic scholars waste their time on the detailed discussions of the Talmud as if those discussions were an end in themselves; in fact their only purpose was to make the determinations necessary for proper observance of the commandments.[40]

These passages do not make explicit reference to what it is that one should do with the time saved by the study of the *Mishneh Torah*. It is perfectly clear, however, that Maimonides had in mind more than the study of medicine and the merchant's trade. One of the functions of his great halakhic work was to expand the opportunities for the pursuit of philosophical speculation.

Despite the frequency, clarity, vigor, and certainty with which Maimonides affirmed the supreme value of speculation and its standing at the pinnacle of Torah, the poetry and pathos of a single powerful passage reveal how all this can sometimes be overshadowed by the unshakable instinct of which I spoke at the outset: the instinct that it is the Torah that constitutes Torah. In his correspondence with R. Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel, Maimonides addressed various questions about specific rulings in his code. He was clearly moved by the informed reverence toward his magnum opus that he found among the rabbis of Provence and looked back with nostalgia on the years that he devoted to its composition. His formulation is both striking and problematic:

40. *Iggerot le-Rabbenu Moshe ben Maimon*, ed. and trans. Yosef Kafih (Jerusalem, 1972), 126, 134, 136.

> I, Moses, inform the glorious Rabbi R. Jonathan ha-Kohen and the other scholars reading my work: Before I was formed in the stomach the Torah knew me, and before I came forth from the womb she dedicated me to her study [cf. Jer. 1:5] and appointed me to have her fountains erupt outward. She is my beloved, the wife of my youth, in whose love I have been immersed since early years. Yet many foreign women have become her rivals, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. The Lord knows that they were not taken at the outset except to serve her as perfumers and cooks and bakers. Nonetheless, the time allotted to her has now been reduced, for my heart has been divided into many parts through the pursuit of all sorts of wisdom.[41]

There are no doubt ways to mitigate the incongruity of this passage. First, the allusion may well be to ancillary, propaedeutic studies whose status as "handmaidens of theology" was well established; neither metaphysics nor, arguably, even physics are necessarily included. Moreover, just a few lines later the letter concludes, "May the Lord, blessed be He, help us and you study His Torah *and understand His unity* so that we may not stumble, and let the verse be fulfilled in our own time, 'I will put my Torah in their inward parts and write it on their hearts'" (Jer. 31:33). Nonetheless, the passionate wistfulness of Maimonides' tone leaves me resistant to efforts at integrating this outburst of religious nostalgia seamlessly into the web of his thought.[42] One almost suspects that as Maimonides recovered from the surge of emotion that overcame him, he purposely inserted the crucial phrase into his final sentence so that no

41. *Teshuvot ha-Rambam,* ed. by Jehoshua Blau, 2nd ed., 3 (Jerusalem, 1986), p. 57.

42. See the attempt in Yosef Kafih, "Limmudei 'Ḥol' be-Mishnat ha-Rambam," *Ketavim* 2 (Jerusalem, 1989), 594, where the author nevertheless expresses doubts about Maimonides' authorship of these remarks. See too Rashba's comment in Abba Mari b. Joseph, *Sefer Minḥat Qenaot* (Pressburg, 1838), 40=*Teshuvot ha-Rashba,* ed. by Haim Z. Dimitrovsky 1 (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 342–43; Profiat Duran, *Ma'aseh Efod* (Vienna, 1865), 15–16. The immense religious value that Maimonides attached to philosophy as well as his ongoing philosophical scrutiny of Jewish religious texts would render this passage problematic even if we were to accept Kahn's conclusion that philosophical inquiry must be based on Jewish sources in order to qualify as Torah. See above, n. 39.

one should suspect that he had renounced some of his central commitments. We are witness here to a fascinating and revealing glimpse of the capacity of an unphilosophical, almost atavistic love for old-fashioned Torah to overwhelm, if only for a moment, the intellectual convictions of the very paradigm of philosophical rationalism.

Aside from the special case of Halevi, we have little direct evidence of principled opposition to philosophy in Muslim Spain. Some of the polemical remarks in the works of Baḥya, Maimonides, and others reveal the unsurprising information that there existed Talmudists who looked upon the enterprise with a jaundiced eye and resisted efforts to reread rabbinic texts in the light of philosophical doctrines. Nonetheless, there was no concerted opposition whose work has come down to us, and Samuel ibn Nagrela is a striking, early example of a figure of some stature in talmudic studies who represented the full range of *adab*. Moreover, we can probably be confident that the greatest Spanish Talmudist of the twelfth century did not maintain a vigorous antiphilosophical stance. R. Joseph ibn Migash, who taught Maimonides' father, did not, as far as we know, produce any philosophical work. At the same time, given Maimonides' oft-expressed contempt for Talmudists who opposed speculation, the great reverence with which he described his illustrious predecessor would be difficult to understand if ibn Migash was counted among them, and R. Abraham Maimonides listed him among the luminaries who "strengthened the faith that they inherited from their fathers ... to know with the eye of their intellect and the understanding of their mind" that God cannot be conceived in corporeal terms.[43] As in the case of Saadya's Baghdad, many Spanish Talmudists probably treated philosophy with salutary neglect while others, probably including ibn Migash, looked upon it with some favor even though it was not their particular field of expertise. With few significant exceptions, Spanish Jewry under Islam was unambiguously hospitable to the pursuit of philosophy, the sciences, and the literary arts.

43. See Abraham Maimonides, *Milḥamot Hashem*, ed. by Reuven Margaliyot (Jerusalem, 1953), 49–50. With respect to direct evidence, however, note Israel Ta-Shema's remark that "we do not have a scintilla of information on his pursuit of philosophy, grammar, or science"; see "Yeẓirato ha-Sifrutit shel Rabbenu Yosef ha-Levi ibn Migash," *Kiryat Sefer* 46 (1971): 137. In light of Abraham Maimonides' statement, this formulation may be a shade too vigorous.

THE GREAT STRUGGLE: PROVENCE AND NORTHERN SPAIN FROM THE LATE TWELFTH TO THE EARLY FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The great religious value of philosophy was inextricably intertwined with its great religious danger. Since reason and revelation were rooted in the same source, they could not conflict with one another;[44] at the same time, the study of philosophic texts generated a host of problems for traditional conceptions, particularly as Aristotelianism launched its triumphant march across the medieval intellectual landscape. To most believers, God had created the world out of nothing; to Aristotelians, a form of primeval matter had always existed. To the traditional believer, God's knowledge extended to the most minute details affecting the lowest of creatures, and his loving providence was over "all his handiwork" (Psalms 145:9); to the Aristotelian, he did not know particulars at all. To the person of faith, celestial reward awaited each righteous individual as a separate entity; to the Aristotelian philosopher, the soul's survival depended upon intellectual attainments and took a collective rather than an individual form. One is tempted to paraphrase Maimonides' exalted assessment of metaphysics by observing that these are indeed not small matters.

Medieval thinkers had a wide range of options in dealing with such issues. At one end of the spectrum were those who rejected philosophical inquiry on principle. On the other were those who accepted virtually the full corpus of Aristotelian conclusions and maintained that revealed religion, which should not be consulted for the answers to ultimate questions, was intended as a political instrument for ordering the life of the masses. Ranged between these extremes were the large majority of thinkers with greater or lesser inclinations toward the preservation of traditional beliefs. In any given instance, one could argue that the philosophical position was unproven and unpersuasive or that

44. For a sharp formulation of this point, see Norman Roth, *Maimonides: Essays and Texts, 850th Anniversary* (Madison, 1985), 94. He argues that from the point of view of medieval Jewish and Muslim rationalists there can be no conflict because "what prophetic revelation brings in the way of flashes of light to the masses, the philosopher sees in the full blaze of rational illumination."

the standard religious conception was not essential or had been misconstrued. The last approach was both controversial and fruitful because it required not only a rethinking of doctrine but a reinterpretation of classic texts. The allegorical understanding of both biblical and talmudic material is consequently an integral and significant part of our story. The attitudes of Jews toward general culture had a profound impact on their conceptions of Judaism itself.

The battle over philosophical study became a major theme in medieval Jewish history as a result of a watershed event: the migration of many Spanish Jews to Southern France in the wake of the Almohade conquest of the late 1140s. This conquest brought the history of Andalusian Jewry to a tragic end and opened a new chapter in the relationship between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews. A number of the exiles moved only as far north as Christian Spain, where some of them translated scientific and philosophical works that helped to transfer the advanced culture of the Muslim world into the ever more curious Christian Europe of the twelfth century. While this dimension of cultural activity did not play a central role within the Jewish community itself, it was a development of major importance in the evolution of European civilization.[45]

From an internal Jewish perspective, the major acts in this drama were to be played out in the south of France.[46] For the first time, substantial numbers of Ashkenazim and Sephardim confronted one another in the same community, and the immigrants resisted any assimilation into the cultural patterns of the native Ashkenazim. On the contrary, one

45. See M. Steinschneider's classic *Die Hebraeischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin, 1893). For a readable survey of medieval translations and the Jews, see section II of Charles Singer's "The Jewish Factor in Medieval Thought," in *The Legacy of Israel*, ed. by Edwyn R. Bevan and Charles Singer (Oxford, 1927), 202–45. On earlier contacts between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, see the important reassessment by Avraham Grossman, "Bein Sefarad le-Ẓarfat: ha-Qesharim bein Qehillot Yisra'el she-bi-Sefarad ha-Muslemit u-bein Qehillot Ẓarfat," in *Galut Aḥar Golah: Meḥqarim be-Toledot 'Am Yisrael Muggashim li-Professor Ḥaim Beinart*, ed. by A. Mirsky, A. Grossman, and Y. Kaplan (Jerusalem, 1988), 75–101. See now his *Ḥakhmei Ẓarfat ha-Rishonim* (Jerusalem, 1995), 554–71.

46. For a characterization of Provençal Jewish culture in this period, see Isadore Twersky, "Aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry," in *Jewish Society through the Ages*, ed. by H. H. Ben Sasson and S. Ettinger (New York, 1971), 185–207.

senses a degree of self-confident assertiveness that borders on cultural imperialism. The Provençal Jews needed to defend even their halakhic traditions against a Sephardic effort to impose the rulings of R. Isaac Alfasi, and the Spanish Jews brought with them a feeling of almost contemptuous superiority toward those who were untrained in the broader culture of the Andalusian elite. What made this challenge particularly effective was the inability of the Jews of Provence to point to their own unambiguous superiority in Torah narrowly construed. Although the immigrants themselves could offer no Talmudists to compete with R. Abraham b. David of Posquières or R. Zeraḥiah HaLevi of Lunel, they could point to a substantial cohort of distinguished rabbis produced by their native culture along with its philosophical achievements.

Under such circumstances, the argument that pursuit of philosophy enhanced religion by providing insight into the nature of God was difficult to resist. At the same time, the deviations from traditional religious conceptions that philosophy brought in its wake could not but cause concern in a society that was being exposed to such ideas for the first time, and the argument from the dangers of philosophical heresy loomed large. It may well be that this dialectic was responsible for one of the most important developments in the history of Judaism: the rise of mysticism as a highly visible factor in the intellectual constellation of medieval Jewry.

The central component of Jewish mysticism in the Middle Ages was its theosophic doctrine. Without detracting from the significance of ecstatic kabbalah, there can be little doubt that one seeking to understand the attraction of esoteric lore in the initial stages of its popularity must look at its doctrinal rather than its experiential aspects. Such an examination reveals that kabbalah provided the perfect solution, at least to people with a receptive religious personality, to the critical intellectual issue that confronted Jews at precisely the time and place in which mysticism began to spread.

The essential claim made by kabbalists was that God had revealed an esoteric teaching to Moses in addition to the exoteric Torah. This secret lore uncovered the deeper meaning of the Torah, and it also taught initiates the true nature of God and creation; it is here, not in Aristotelian physics and metaphysics, that one must seek the meaning

of the accounts of creation and of the chariot. Indeed, a recent study has argued that longstanding mystical doctrines were now at least partially publicized because the bearers of these doctrines could not suffer in silence the Maimonidean-style claim that the rabbis had referred to gentile disciplines as the secrets of the Torah. However that may be, kabbalah offered a revealed key to precisely the knowledge that philosophers sought. By locating that key in an inner Jewish tradition, kabbalists could argue that philosophy with all its dangers was superfluous, and even though rabbinic tradition had attributed spiritual peril to the study of mystical secrets, one could hardly compare the potential for heresy in the pursuit of revealed truth to the dangers of studying Aristotle. Even without reference to the problem of heresy, kabbalah promised the late twelfth-century Provençal Jew all that philosophy offered and more, since human reason is fallible while the word of God is not. Small wonder that Jewish thinkers began to respond, and mysticism embarked on a path that would lead it toward a preeminent position in Jewish piety and religious thought by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[47]

The penetration of Sephardic philosophical culture into Southern France in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries produced the first great conflict over the propriety of rationalistic speculation. The Maimonidean controversy erupted in the early 1230s as a result of the perception by R. Solomon ben Abraham of Montpellier that the study of certain works of Maimonides was leading people into heresy. Though the internal Jewish dynamic that we have been examining could have set these events in motion without any external impetus, there can be little doubt that the atmosphere of early thirteenth-century Christian Languedoc aided and abetted the process. The century had begun with

47. I made the essential point in "Miracles and the Natural Order in Naḥmanides," in *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. by Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass, and London, England, 1983), 111. Cf. the citation from A. S. Halkin in note 17 there. On the suggestion that mystics were responding to the claim that Aristotelian doctrines are the secrets of the Torah, see Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven and London, 1988), 253, and much more fully in sections I and II of his "Maimonides and Kabbalah," in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. by Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England, 1990), 31–50.

the Albigensian Crusade, and the decade of the Jewish controversy was also witness to the birth of an inquisition aimed at Christian heresies.

R. Solomon sent his distinguished student R. Jonah to bring the writings in question to the attention of his natural allies, the rabbis of Northern France. As a result of this initiative, the rabbis of the North proclaimed a ban against *The Guide of the Perplexed* and the first, quasi-philosophical section of the *Mishneh Torah* ("The Book of Knowledge"). At this point, the defenders of Maimonides in the South proclaimed a ban against R. Solomon and his disciples and sent the biblical commentator R. David Kimḥi (Radak) to their natural allies in what was now Christian Spain to obtain support for the second ban.

Radak discovered to his surprise that a mixed reception awaited him. While some Spanish communities affirmed the ban enthusiastically, the distinguished physician R. Judah Alfakar refused to offer support and instead wrote several sharp letters expressing his reservations about Maimonides' *Guide*. The ambivalence that Radak encountered in Spain speaks volumes for the fact that the direction of influence in the Sephardic-Ashkenazic confrontation of the previous decades was not reflected exclusively in the adoption of a philosophical culture by some Ashkenazim. The Ashkenazi impact on many Sephardim was no less profound. In some cases, this influence came through Southern France; in others, it was direct. Whatever the medium, however, Radak discovered a transformed Spanish Jewry whose attitude toward the culture produced by its own forebears could no longer be predicted with confidence.

This transformation is also evident in a letter by Naḥmanides that we shall have to examine later in which he attempted, with some success, to bring the controversy to a close. In the meantime, events in Montpellier overtook developments in Spain. Zealous anti-Maimonists approached local ecclesiastical authorities with what they presented as heretical Jewish books, and the churchmen obliged by burning the controversial works of Maimonides. Indignant Maimonists complained to lay authorities apparently unhappy with ecclesiastical intervention, and the anti-Maimonist delators were promptly punished by having a part of their tongues cut off. Contemporary Maimonists evinced no dismay at the harshness of the penalty; on the contrary, they regarded

it as an appropriate divine retribution for an offense whose seriousness in the medieval Jewish context could hardly be exaggerated. Though the internal Jewish controversy did not end immediately after these events, it began to die down, and the works of Maimonides remained undisturbed for decades to come.[48]

The issues raised in the substantial corpus of letters written during this controversy reveal the concerns, the tactics, and the deeply held convictions of most of the parties to the dispute. Regrettably, we possess only one letter from R. Solomon ben Abraham himself. It is of no small interest that he denies requesting a ban against the *Guide* and "The Book of Knowledge" and that he makes a point of his careful, sympathetic study of Maimonides' code in his yeshiva. What concerned him, he writes, was that some Provençal Jews had affirmed extreme philosophical positions that went so far as the allegorization of the story of Cain and Abel and even of the commandments themselves. R. Meir HaLevi Abulafia, who had questioned Maimonides' view of resurrection three decades earlier, reports that R. Solomon was motivated by a concern about rationalists who "wish to break the yoke of the commandments" by denying that God really cares for ritual observances. All God wants, they maintained, is that people know him philosophically; whether the body is pure or impure, hungry or thirsty, is quite irrelevant. R. Meir's brother Yosef b. Todros speaks of Jews who argued that all the words of the Torah and rabbinic tradition are allegories, who mocked the belief in miracles, and who regarded themselves as exempt from prayer and phylacteries. To what degree these assertions reflect reality is far from clear; what is clear is that the argument that rationalism has in fact

48. The clarity of this brief summary obscures the obscurity of the events. For an admirable effort to reconstruct the chronology of the controversy, see A. Schochet, "Berurim be-Parashat ha-Pulmus ha-Rishon 'al Sifrei ha-Rambam," *Ẓion* 36 (1971): 27–60, which takes account of the important sources in Joseph Shatzmiller, "Li-Temunat ha-Maḥaloqet ha-Rishonah 'al Kitvei ha-Rambam," *Ẓion* 34 (1969): 126–44. Cf. the earlier works by Joseph Sarachek, *Faith and Reason: The Conflict over the Rationalism of Maimonides* (Williamsport, Penna., 1935), and Daniel Jeremy Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180–1240* (Leiden, 1965). The best analysis of significant aspects of the debates is in Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition* (Cambridge, Mass, and London, England, 1982), 61–103.

produced heresy was one of the most forceful and effective weapons in the arsenal of the opposition.[49]

In addition to specific charges of disbelief and violations of law, rationalists also faced the accusation that they abandon the study of Talmud in favor of philosophical speculation. Thus, Radak found it necessary to testify that he studies Talmud assiduously and observes the commandments meticulously; the only reason that people suspected him, he tells us, is that he had indicated that the detailed exchanges in the Talmud will be rendered obsolete in the Messianic age when everything will become clear. Many Talmudists would surely have disagreed even with the assertion to which Radak admits, and Alfakar's letter to him explicitly speaks of the inclination to abolish the discussions of Abbaye and Rava in order "to ascend in the chariot."[50]

On the most fundamental level, Alfakar, whose letters evince an impressive level of philosophical sophistication, denied the controlling authority of reason. Any compelling demonstration, he wrote, requires investigation of extraordinary intensity because of the possibility of hidden sophistry, and an erroneous premise, no matter how far back in the chain of reasoning, can undermine the validity of the conclusion. Consequently, reliance on reason to reject important religious teachings is inadmissible.

Alfakar's specific examples concentrate on the denial or limitation of miracles. Maimonides, he says, regarded Balaam's talking donkey and similar biblical miracles as prophetic visions despite the Mishnah's inclusion of the donkey's power of speech among the ten things created immediately before the first Sabbath. This Maimonidean tendency is symptomatic of the deeper problem of attempting to synthesize the Torah and Greek wisdom. Radak had explicitly praised Maimonides' unique ability to harmonize "wisdom" and faith. On the contrary, says Alfakar, the attempt was a failure. Maimonides, for example, limited the number of long-lived antediluvians

49. See R. Solomon's letter in *Qevuẓat Mikhtavim*, 51–52; R. Meir in *Qovez Teshuvot ha-Rambam* (Leipzig, 1859) 3, p. 6a; R. Yosef in *Qevuẓat Mikhtavim*, 6, 21.

50. *Qovez Teshuvot ha-Rambam* 3, pp. 3a–4a.

> because his intention was to leave the ordinary operation of the world intact so that he could establish the Torah and Greek wisdom together, "coupling the tent together so that it may be one" (Exod. 26:11). He imagined that the one could stand with the other "like two young roes that are twins" (Song of Songs 4:5); instead, there was "mourning and lamentation" (Lam. 2:5). "The land was not able to bear them, that they might live together" (Gen. 13:6) as two sisters, "for the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women" (Exod. 1:19).

As for lesser figures than Maimonides, they reduce the number of miracles because "their soul does not consider it appropriate to believe what the Creator considered it appropriate to do."[51]

Yosef ben Todros Halevi affirmed the dangers lurking in the *Guide* by arguing that no one in his generation has the capacity to read the work without exposing himself to the danger of heresy. Consequently, he can justify the action of the Northern French rabbis without forfeiting his respect for Maimonides. Both "acted for the sake of heaven, each in his place and time." Moreover, he says, the dangers of speculation have even been recognized by the kings of the Arabs, who forbade "Greek wisdom" and philosophical study. If Yosef is referring to the Almohade rulers, we would have a striking appeal by a Jewish conservative to the judgment of persecutors of his people for the sake of validating or at least lending support to a decision affecting the internal spiritual life of Judaism.[52]

The Maimonist party responded with a vigorous defense of the value of general culture. Radak succeeded in eliciting a ban against R. Solomon and his students from the Jewish community of Saragossa, the text of which contains instructive arguments for the rationalist position taken from rabbinic literature.

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51. *Qovez Teshuvot ha-Rambam* 3, pp. 1a–2a, 3a.

52. *Qevuẓat Mikhtavim*, 21–22, 13–14. The term *malkhei ha-'erev*, based on I Kings 10:15, appears as *malkhei 'arav* in the parallel verse in II Chronicles (9:14) and was no doubt understood by Joseph as Arab kings despite the ambiguity introduced by the juxtaposition of the two phrases in Jeremiah 25:24.

> It is widely known among our people that our sages instructed and warned us to learn the wisdom concerning the unity of God as well as external forms of wisdom that will enable us to answer heretics and know the matters utilized by disbelievers to destroy our Torah. [They] also [instructed us to study] astrology and the vanities of idol-worship, [which] one cannot learn from the Torah or the Talmud, as well as the measurement of land and knowledge of solstices and calculations, as the learned teacher of wisdom said, "The pathways of the heavens are as clear to me as the pathways of Nehardea," and an understanding of the scope with which they measured at a distance on both land and sea. Moreover, they ruled that no one can be appointed to the Sanhedrin to decide the law unless he knows these disciplines and medicine as well.[53]

A particularly interesting aspect of this text is the distinction between "the wisdom concerning the unity of God" (*ḥokhmat ha-yiḥud*) and "external forms of wisdom" or "external disciplines" (*ḥokhmot ḥizzoniyyot*). The former requires no defense on instrumental grounds; it is part of the Torah, and the problem is just that the antirationalists do not recognize this. External wisdom, on the other hand, needs to be justified in other ways. The document provides rabbinic authority for some of these pursuits, whose purpose is often self-evident, but the only concrete argument set forth is the need to respond to heretics. This need, which was legitimized by a rabbinic text, was routinely cited in other contexts to defend so religiously dubious an enterprise as the study of the New Testament. Its application to our context is attested not only in the Saragossa ban but in the counterargument of Yosef ben Todros that the rabbis' intention in urging Jews to learn the appropriate response to heretics was manifestly "to reconstruct the ruins of the faith, not to destroy it." Yosef, in other words, regarded the use of this argument as the last refuge of scoundrels, a pro forma justification for a pursuit motivated by entirely different considerations.[54]

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53. *Qovez Teshuvot ha-Rambam* 3, p. 5b.

54. *Qevuzat Mikhtavim*, 14. On reading the New Testament to answer a heretic, see my comments and references in *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1979; rep., Northvale, N.J. and London, 1996), 309–10.

If the information of the Saragossa authorities was reliable, the text of their denunciation contributes to our knowledge of the ban issued by the antirationalists. The earlier ban, we are told, was directed not only against the *Guide* and "The Book of Knowledge" but against "anyone who studies any of the external disciplines." R. Baḥya ben Moses, the chief signatory of the Saragossa ban, repeats this information in a letter to the Jewish communities of Aragon.[55] On the one hand, we could be dealing with an exaggeration designed to facilitate the eliciting of additional counterbans; on the other, the fact that "external books" are denounced in the Mishnah renders it difficult to reject this report out of hand. However that may be, rationalists were clearly uncomfortable with the talmudic prohibition of "Greek wisdom," and we find efforts at redefinition that limit the meaning of the term to a kind of coded communication that has not survived and that therefore poses no limitation whatever to the philosopher's intellectual agenda. One Maimonist argued that however one understands the term, the prohibition can certainly not result from a concern with heresy since the Rabbis would never have excluded potential diplomats from the ban had the reason for it been that weighty.[56]

Defenses of rationalism and its allied disciplines appealed to other considerations as well. The argument that philosophical sophistication was necessary to impress gentiles was fairly widespread, and it occasionally took an even stronger form: the Jewish loss of Greek wisdom, which was, of course, originally Jewish wisdom, makes Jews an object of ridicule in the eyes of their educated neighbors.[57] During the Maimonidean controversy, a more fundamental argument appears in a novel formulation that may reflect the influence of a major Christian work. In the twelfth century, Peter Abelard wrote his celebrated *Sic et Non,* which challenged opponents of speculation to account for a variety of apparent contradictions

55. *Qovez Teshuvot ha-Rambam* 3, pp. 5b, 6a.

56. Samuel Saporta in *Qevuẓat Mikhtavim,* 95. On Greek wisdom, see Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1962), 100–114, and cf. the references in Davidson, "The Study of Philosophy as a Religious Obligation" (above, n. 34), 66–67, n. 44.

57. Samuel ibn Tibbon, *Ma'amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayim* (Pressburg, 1837), 173. On the need to impress gentiles, see Twersky, "Provençal Jewry," 190, 204–5.

in authoritative texts. The "authority" which is the presumed alternative to reason is simply not usable without its supposed rival. One Maimonist letter argues for rationalism by citing contradictions in rabbinic sources that can be resolved only by the sort of speculation that the antirationalists eschew.[58] Patristic contradictions have become rabbinic contradictions, but the Abelardian argument remains intact.

We have already seen that the anti-Maimonists' concern that rationalism tends to produce heresy constituted one of their most powerful arguments against philosophical study. A striking feature of the controversy is that the Maimonists argued that precisely the reverse was true: it was antirationalism that had produced a heresy more serious than the worst philosophical heterodoxy, because many naïve believers worshipped a corporeal God. The issue of anthropomorphism is therefore crucial to an understanding not only of the Maimonidean controversy but of the role that philosophy played in defining the parameters of a legitimate Jewish conception of God. There can be no higher stakes than these and no better evidence of the powerful, almost controlling presence of the philosophical enterprise at the very heart of medieval Judaism.

Maimonides listed belief in the incorporeal nature of God as one of his thirteen principles constituting the sine qua non of the faith. As he indicated both in his discussion of this creed and in his code, failure to affirm this belief is rank heresy which excludes one from a portion in the world to come. Maimonides has been assigned a highly sophisticated motivation for taking this position. Survival after death requires a cleaving to God that is possible only through the development of that aspect of the soul which perceives certain abstract truths about the Deity; the belief in an incorporeal God is consequently the minimum requirement for attaining eternal life.[59] While Maimonides may well have endorsed

58. Joseph Shatzmiller, "Iggarto shel R. Asher be-R. Gershom le-Rabbanei Ẓarfat," in *Meḥqarim be-Toledot 'Am Yisrael ve-Erez Yisrael le-Zekher Ẓevi Avineri* (Haifa, 1970), 129–40. Shatzmiller was struck by the argument but not by the Abelardian parallel, which is, of course, speculative. In a recent lecture, Bernard Septimus has noted that R. Asher may well have been making a sharp allusion to the Tosafists' own use of dialectic.

59. See Arthur Hyman's important article, "Maimonides' 'Thirteen Principles,'" in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 141–42.

this view, the immediate motivation for perceiving anthropomorphism as heresy was probably simpler and more fundamental: the believer in a corporeal God does not really believe in one God at all.

Maimonides drew the connection between unity and incorporeality forcefully and explicitly:

> There is no profession of unity unless the doctrine of God's corporeality is denied. For a body cannot be one, but is composed of matter and form, which by definition are two; it is also divisible, subject to partition.... It is not meet that belief in the corporeality of God ... should be permitted to establish itself in anyone's mind any more than it is meet that belief should be established in the nonexistence of the deity, in the association of other gods with Him, or in the worship of other than He.[60]

Maimonides' son provided an even sharper formulation. Anthropomorphism, he writes, is an impurity like that

> of idolatry. Idolaters deny God's Torah and worship other gods beside Him, while one who, in his stupidity, allows it to enter his mind that the Creator has a body or an image or a location, which is possible only for a body, does not know Him. One who does not know Him denies Him, and such a person's worship and prayer are not to the Creator of the world. [Anthropomorphists] do not worship the God of heaven and earth but a false image of Him, just like the worshippers of demons about whom the Rabbis say that they worship [such] an image, for the entity that they have in mind, who is corporeal and has stature or a particular location where he sits on a throne, does not exist at all. It was concerning those fools and their like that the prophet said, "He has shut their eyes, that they cannot see, and their hearts, that they cannot understand."[61]

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60. *Guide* 1:35, p. 81. Hyman is, of course, well aware of this passage but argues that the belief in incorporeality is what gives the very profession of unity its salvific value.

61. *Milḥamot Hashem*, 52. For a very strong (perhaps just a bit too strong) assertion of this understanding of Maimonides' motivation (without reference to *Milḥamot*

It is especially noteworthy that Maimonides does not appeal to tradition to validate his declaration that anthropomorphism is heretical. On the contrary, his comments on the motivation for his stand clearly reveal the determinative role of philosophy. He tells us in the *Guide* that if he wished to affirm the eternity of the world, he could provide a figurative interpretation to biblical texts that imply the contrary just as he has interpreted anthropomorphic verses figuratively. One reason for distinguishing the case of anthropomorphism from that of eternal matter is that the latter has not been proven. On the other hand, "that the deity is not a body has been demonstrated; from this it follows necessarily that everything that in its external meaning disagrees with this demonstration must be interpreted figuratively." Alfakar, while wrestling with the same problem, pointed to the fact that the Bible itself contains contradictory verses regarding the corporeality of God and argued that this legitimates figurative interpretation. Though Alfakar and Maimonides also cited Onkelos's alleged avoidance of anthropomorphic expressions as a precedent, and Naḥmanides, Abraham Maimonides, and Samuel Saporta provided a list of antianthropomorphic authorities beginning with the time of the Geonim, there can be little doubt that the driving force in the extirpation of a corporeal conception of God was the philosophic enterprise.[62]

The philosophers, in fact, did their job so well that contemporary Jews find it very difficult to acknowledge the existence of medieval Jewish anthropomorphism despite substantial, credible evidence. By far the best known testimony is the assertion by R. Abraham b. David of Posquières that greater Jews than Maimonides believed in a corporeal God because they were misled by the literal meaning of rabbinic *aggadot*. Maimonist rhetoric during the controversy is replete with assertions that the anti-Maimonists believe in a corporeal God and are consequently heretics. Some of these attacks may well be exaggerated, but they play

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Hashem), see Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought From Maimonides to Abravanel* (Oxford, 1986), 41: "Maimonides held that ... one who conscientiously observes the halakhah while believing in the corporeality of God is, in effect, performing idolatry."

62. See *Guide* 2:25, p. 328; *Qovez Teshuvot ha-Rambam* 3, p. 1b; *Kitvei Ramban*, 1, pp. 346–47; *Milḥamot Hashem*, 49–50; *Qevuẓat Mikhtavim*, 85–86, 90–91.

too prominent a role in the discussion for them to have been invented out of whole cloth. Abraham Maimonides reports that the prominent anti-Maimonist David ben Saul vigorously denied that he conceived of God in crudely anthropomorphic terms; at the same time, says Abraham, David affirmed his belief that God sits in heaven, where his primary grandeur is to be found, and that a partition separates the Creator from his creatures. In a particularly sharp attack, Abraham comments that Christian support for the anti-Maimonist cause is hardly surprising since the beliefs of the two groups diverge so little.[63]

Finally, we have the works of two Ashkenazic writers who explicitly express conceptions of God which are corporeal by Maimonidean standards. R. Moses Taku is the better known of these figures, and his *Ketav Tamim* is a polemic specifically directed against the Saadyanic and Maimonidean insistence on an incorporeal God. Taku, who is cited in *Tosafot* and was not an entirely marginal figure, not only affirmed a moderate kind of anthropomorphism but also accused the philosophers of heresy in terms strikingly reminiscent of Abraham Maimonides himself. In his vigorous reversal of the Maimonidean argument, Taku wrote,

> Who knows if the redemption is being delayed because of the fact that they do not know who is performing miracles for them. Moreover, if tragedy strikes, they cry out and are not answered because they direct their cries to something other than the fundamental object of faith; for this new religion and new wisdom recently came upon the scene, and its adherents maintain that what the prophets saw was the form of created beings, while from the day that God spoke to Adam and created the world through His word, we have believed it to be the Creator and not a creature.[64]

63. Rabad to *Hil. Teshuvah* 3:7; *Qovez Teshuvot ha-Rambam* 3, p. 3b; the letter of the Rabbis of Lunel and Narbonne in *Ẓion* 34 (1969): 140–41; *Milḥamot Hashem*, 69, 55. Note especially Schochet's vigorous presentation of the Maimonist polemic against anthropomorphism, *Ẓion* 36 (1971); 54–60. See also the literature cited in Kellner, *Dogma*, 233, n. 159.

64. *Oẓar Neḥmad* 3 (1860): 82–83.

In addition to *Ketav Tamim,* we now know of a late thirteenth-century French work which maintains the bizarre belief that the substance of God is to be found in the light above the firmament and in the air. The sun is nothing more than a moving window in the firmament, and what we see when we look at it is therefore the very substance of the deity. It is more than a little disconcerting to find a medieval Hebrew text that routinely refers to "the air, blessed be it [He?] and blessed be its [His?] name," but in this case at least, the author describes himself as the object of persecution, and he was no doubt on the theological margins of Ashkenazic Judaism despite the fact that he may have been the author of a rabbinic responsum. Nonetheless, in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, an Ashkenazic rabbi was still asking the basic question about the corporeality of God, and there can be little doubt that Ashkenaz in the high Middle Ages did not enjoy a consensus on this most critical of theological questions.[65] Thus, the presence of anthropomorphic conceptions among some medieval Jews provided the rationalists with a powerful religious argument for philosophical inquiry and even enabled them to reverse the accusation of heresy. Ironically, as the philosophers won their greatest victory, they destroyed the most effective argument for their importance.

For Taku, the major obstacle to the rejection of anthropomorphism was not only the plain meaning of biblical expressions; he was concerned to at least an equal degree with a multitude of rabbinic texts which he was unwilling to interpret nonliterally. In this and other contexts, conclusions drawn from philosophy and the sciences forced medieval Jews to confront the question of *aggadah* on a fundamental level, so that these pursuits once again impinged upon the study of Torah even in the narrowest sense. We have already seen that Geonim like R. Samuel b. Ḥofni and R. Hai had legitimated rejection of certain *aggadot,* although R. Hai had insisted on the need to make the most strenuous efforts to validate all rabbinic statements, particularly if they are incorporated in the Babylonian Talmud. The need to reinterpret

65. See Israel Ta-Shema, "Sefer ha-Maskil: Ḥibbur Yehudi Ẓarfati Bilti-Yadua mi-sof ha-Me'ah ha-Yod-Gimel," *Meḥqerei Yerushalayim be-Maḥashevet Yisrael* 2:3 (1982–83): 416–38; Ephraim Kupfer, "Li-Demutah ha-Tarbutit shel Yahadut Ashkenaz va-Ḥakhameha ba-Me'ot ha-Yod-Dalet-ha-Tet-Vav," *Tarbiẓ* 42 (1972/73): 114.

rather than reject outright was especially acute with respect to an issue like anthropomorphism, where the error was too profound to allow it to stand even as a minority view among the Rabbis. Consequently, by the time of Maimonides and the Maimonidean controversy, substantial precedent existed for a variety of approaches to aggadic texts.[66]

The issue of *aggadah* had already been raised by opponents of Maimonides in the debate over resurrection just after the turn of the thirteenth century, and the Northern French rabbis in the 1230s once again expressed concern. They believed that Maimonides had undermined the traditional understanding of reward after death and specifically criticized his rejection of a literal feast of Leviathan as described in rabbinic *aggadot*. It is of no small interest that while one defense of Maimonides argued that he had not in fact denied that this banquet would take place, Abraham Maimonides sardonically observed that the Rabbis had proffered this promise so that naïve believers like R. Solomon of Montpellier would have something to look forward to. On a more significant level, Maimonides' assertion that the biblical punishment of *cutting off* (*karet*) signifies the destruction of the soul was attacked as a contradiction of the talmudic perception that it refers to premature death. Maimonides' critics proceeded to denounce those who abandon "*halakhot* and *aggadot*, which are the source of life, to pursue Greek wisdom, which the sages forbade." The point here is not merely the choice of one pursuit over another, but the manner in which the study of the one distorts the understanding of the other. According to a Maimonist report, some of the Ashkenazim went so far as to propose that Rashi's interpretation of *aggadot* be made dogmatically binding.[67]

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66. On Taku, see his *Ketav Tamim: Ketav Yad Paris H711*, with an introduction by Joseph Dan (Jerusalem, 1984), introduction, 24. On the Geonim, see above, n. 16. For a survey of attitudes toward *aggadah*, see Marc Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England, 1980), 1–20, and cf. I. Twersky, "R. Yeda 'yah ha-Penini u-Perusho la-Aggadah," in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann*, ed. by S. Stein and R. Loewe (University, Alabama, 1979), Heb. sec., 63–82. See also Lester A. Segal, *Historical Consciousness and Religious Tradition in Azariah de' Rossi's Me'or 'Einayim* (Philadelphia, 1989), 89–114.

67. See Saporta, *Qevuẓat Mikhtavim*, 94; *Milḥamot Hashem*, 60–61; Joseph Shatzmiller, "Li-Temunat ...," *Zion* 34 (1969): 139; idem, "Iggarto ...," in *Meḥqarim ... Avineri*, 139. Note too Charles Touati's remarks in, "Les Deux Conflits autour de Maimonide et

The centrality of this issue is illustrated not only by the citations of various midrashic passages in the heat of the controversy but by Abraham Maimonides' special treatise on the *aggadot,* which undoubtedly emerged from these debates. This treatise not only proposes reinterpretation but recognizes the occasional need for outright rejection as well. "We are not obligated ... to argue on behalf of the Rabbis and uphold the views expressed in all their medical, scientific, and astronomical statements, [and to believe] them the way we believe them with respect to the interpretation of the Torah, whose consummate wisdom was in their hands."[68] The essence of this position had already been expressed in the *Guide* itself. Although Maimonides had argued that respect for the wisdom of the Sages requires us to strive to understand even their scientific assertions as consonant with the truth, he nonetheless laid down the following principle:

> Do not ask of me to show that everything they have said concerning astronomical matters conforms to the way things really are. For at that time mathematics were imperfect. They did not speak about this as transmitters of dicta of the prophets, but rather because in those times they were men of knowledge in these fields or because they had heard these dicta from the men of knowledge who lived in those times.[69]

Despite the apparent effort to impose Rashi's presumably literal understanding of *aggadot,* even Ashkenazic Jews were not wholly inflexible on this issue. Moses Taku himself indicated that his teachers had distinguished between rabbinic statements that appear in the Talmud and those that do not. "If a person sees a strange remark in external [rabbinic] books, he should not be concerned about it since it does not appear in the *aggadot* in our Talmud upon which we rely." Several disagreements with the Rabbis appear in the admittedly atypical *Sefer ha-Maskil,* and under the pressure of polemics with an apostate attacking

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des Études Philosophiques," in *Juifs et Judaisme de Languedoc,* ed. by M. H. Vicaire and B. Blumenkranz (Toulouse, 1977), 177.

68. *Ma'amar 'al Odot Derashot Ḥazal,* in *Milḥamot Hashem,* 84.

69. *Guide* 3:14.

the Talmud, R. Yeḥiel of Paris observed, if only for the sake of argument, that the *aggadah* does not have the same binding force as talmudic law.[70]

The most famous medieval assertion that aggadic statements are not binding also emerged out of the crucible of the Jewish-Christian debate, this time from a figure who played a crucial role in the Maimonidean controversy of the 1230s. In 1263, Naḥmanides faced a different apostate who attempted to utilize talmudic evidence for the purpose of demonstrating the truth of Christianity; in their disputation, Naḥmanides argued that midrashic statements should be treated as sermons which command respect but not unqualified assent. The sincerity of that argument has been the subject of controversy to our own day, but an analysis of Naḥmanides' commentary to the Torah leaves little doubt that he meant what he said.[71] Many medieval Jews wished to preserve considerable latitude in dealing with *aggadah,* and although a variety of motives were at work, philosophical considerations took pride of place.

Naḥmanides' role in the controversy and his stand regarding philosophical speculation are especially important both because his efforts appear to have effectively ended the Northern French intervention and because he represents a crucial transitional type in the evolution of medieval Jewish attitudes toward general culture. On the one

70. *Ketav Tamim,* Paris ms., 7b; *Oẓar Neḥmad* 3, p. 63; Ta-Shema, "Sefer ha-Maskil," 429; *Vikkuaḥ R. Yeḥiel mi-Paris,* ed. by S. Gruenbaum (Thorn, 1873), 2. See also the citation in Avraham Grossman, *Ḥakhmei Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim* (Jerusalem, 1981), 96, for Rabbenu Gershom's opposition to a deviation from a rabbinic interpretation on a nonlegal matter in a liturgical poem by a distinguished colleague. This may be at least a faint indication that some Jews in early Ashkenaz considered such deviations legitimate. It is, of course, a commonplace that twelfth-century Northern French exegetes proposed interpretations that deviated from those of the rabbis even on matters of law.

71. See *Kitvei Ramban* 1, p. 308, and Bernard Septimus's excellent, though preliminary discussion in "'Open Rebuke and Concealed Love': Naḥmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," in *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides,* 20–22. Marvin Fox, "Naḥmanides on the Status of Aggadot: Perspectives on the Disputation at Barcelona, 1263," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 40 (1989): 95–109, reaches a conclusion with which I am in fundamental agreement, although I cannot endorse several of his arguments. On one occasion (p. 101), he perpetuates a blurring of the distinction between rejection of *aggadah* and its allegorization; see my remarks in "Maccoby's *Judaism on Trial,*" *Jewish Quarterly Review* 76 (1986): 255, n. 2.

hand, he was hardly typical of the Andalusian-style Jewish philosopher. He expressed considerable hostility toward "the accursed Greek" Aristotle, described himself as a disciple of the Northern French Tosafists, and fully embraced the "hidden wisdom" of the kabbalah. On the other hand, he mastered the corpus of Jewish philosophical and scientific literature, practiced medicine, and pursued a sort of golden mean during the Maimonidean controversy. His extraordinary commentary on the Pentateuch, which mobilized the full range of his diverse interests, defies neat classification into any prior category of Jewish exegesis or thought.

In an oft-quoted passage from his *Sha'ar ha-Gemul,* a work that addresses the problem of theodicy, he denounces people who oppose any inquiry into the nature of divine justice as "fools who despise wisdom. For we shall benefit ourselves in the above-mentioned study by becoming wise men who know God in the manner in which He acts and in His deeds; furthermore, we shall become believers endowed with a stronger faith in Him than others." Despite the vigor of this formulation and its similarity to arguments for philosophical study in general, it is important to recognize that in Naḥmanides' case it is narrowly focused. Speculation about theodicy differs from investigation into the existence or unity of God in a way that illuminates Naḥmanides' fundamental approach to philosophical pursuits. A good philosopher speculates on the basis of empirical data. But the revelation of the Torah is an empirical datum par excellence; consequently, there is no more point in constructing proofs for doctrines explicitly taught in the revelation than for the proposition that the sun rises in the morning. At the same time, philosophical reasoning for the purpose of clarifying those doctrines is not only sensible but critically important. Although Naḥmanides never formulated this position explicitly, I think that it emerges from the pattern of his work and the issues that he addressed. It surely helps to explain why he wrote his magnum opus as a commentary to the revelation and why he was attracted to kabbalah, which provided, as we have seen, revealed information about key philosophical questions.

This nuanced approach placed Naḥmanides in a difficult position during the controversy of the 1230s. He opposed both untrammeled speculation and "fools who despise wisdom"; he admired both Maimonides and the rabbis of Northern France; he felt unreserved

enthusiasm for "The Book of Knowledge" and mixed emotions about the *Guide*. His own sophisticated synthesis of speculation and revelation, even in its exoteric form, could not be mechanically prescribed to the masses or, for that matter, to ordinary intellectuals. Consequently, the proposal that he made is a combination of tactful diplomacy and an effort to implement the values that he considered particularly important under the trying circumstances of the dispute.

His most important letter was directed to the rabbis of Northern France. It expresses great admiration for the addressees, defends Maimonides' orthodoxy with respect to key theological issues, explains the purpose of the *Guide*, whose intended audience needs to be appreciated by the Ashkenazim, and launches into a vigorous, even impassioned encomium to "The Book of Knowledge." At this point, Naḥmanides was prepared to offer a concrete proposal: The ban against "The Book of Knowledge" should be annulled, and the ban against the *Guide* should be reformulated to include public study only, which Maimonides himself had disapproved. In the spirit of R. Hai Gaon's letter, the pursuit of philosophy should be discouraged entirely, but since such a level of piety cannot be enforced for all of Israel, no broader ban is advisable.

The distinction between "The Book of Knowledge" and the *Guide* accords well with Naḥmanides' fundamental outlook because the former operates within the context of the revelation while the latter raises questions that approach the tradition from the outside. The difference, then, is as much one of structure as of content. The discouragement of any philosophical study even for the elite goes beyond Naḥmanides' position as it appears in his other writings, and it is likely that he adopted it because of the needs of the moment. Nonetheless, this proposal too reflects a genuine uneasiness with speculation and hostility toward the dominant form of Aristotelianism. Naḥmanides, who sought not so much a religious philosophy as a philosophical religion, embodies an approach that is reflected to a greater or lesser degree in figures like R. Meir Abulafia and R. Judah Alfakar and in some of his great successors among the Talmudists of Christian Spain.[72]

72. For a full exposition of my perception of Naḥmanides' position, see my master's essay, *Naḥmanides' Attitude Toward Secular Learning and Its Bearing Upon his Stance in the*

The waning of this phase of the controversy used to be attributed primarily to nearly universal revulsion at the burning of Maimonides' works. We now have reason to believe that Naḥmanides' letter played a major role by persuading the Northern French rabbis to withdraw from the fray.[73] In any event, despite an eruption in the 1280s involving a relatively minor anti-Maimonist agitator, the dispute about philosophical study did not regain its status as a cause célèbre until the first decade of the fourteenth century, when the issue was joined again. In many ways, the debate was unchanged, but in some respects it had been transformed in significant and revealing fashion.

The controversy began when R. Abba Mari of Lunel initiated a correspondence with R. Solomon ibn Adret (Rashba) to complain about the inroads made by extreme rationalism in Provence, especially in the person of Levi b. Abraham of Villefranche, who advocated an allegorical understanding of some biblical narratives. The first thing that strikes the reader of Abba Mari's work is the impact of philosophy in general and Maimonides in particular on this "antirationalist." Science and metaphysics should be studied only by one

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Maimonidean Controversy (Columbia University, 1965). See also my "Miracles and the Natural Order in Naḥmanides" (above, n. 47), 110–11, and Septimus, "'Open Rebuke and Concealed Love'" (above, n. 71). For brief characterizations of Naḥmanides, see my articles in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* 10 (New York, 1987), 295–97, and in *Great Figures in Jewish History* (in Russian [translated by the editorial staff], ed. by Joseph Dan and Judy Baumel [Tel Aviv, 1991], 77–84). On Abulafia, see Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, which also contains an insightful typology of approaches to philosophical study in this period. See also his "Piety and Power in Thirteenth-Century Catalonia," *Studies in Jewish History and Literature* [1], 197–230, for an effort to reconstruct a struggle between rationalists and Talmudists of Naḥmanides' type for political control of a Jewish community.

The interpretation of Naḥmanides' proposal is dependent on the resolution of textual problems in the letter. This is not the place for a detailed discussion. Suffice it to say that the emendation of *teḥazzequ* to *lo teḥazzequ* (*Kitvei Ramban* 1, p. 349), which eliminates the ban entirely, is, in my view, insupportable. For details, see ch. 5 of my master's essay and my forthcoming article, "What did Naḥmanides Propose to Resolve the Maimonidean Controversy?" [This article was published as "How Did Nahmanides Propose to Resolve the Maimonidean Controversy?" in *Meah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, ed. by Ezra Fleischer et al. (Jerusalem, 2001), pp. 135–146.]

73. See the letter of the Maimonists in Lunel and Narbonne, *Ẓion* 34 (1969): 142, and the discussion by Schochet, *Ẓion* 36 (1971): 44.

> who has filled his stomach with bread and meat, as we have learned from the Rabbi, the teacher of righteousness, from whose mouth we live through his true statements ... built upon the foundation of the Torah in "The Book of Knowledge" and *Guide of the Perplexed,* which illuminate the path of those who have been in darkness and cannot adequately be evaluated by the greatest of assessors.[74]

It is true that even in the 1230s, many antirationalists treated Maimonides himself with considerable respect. We have already noted R. Solomon b. Abraham's reference to the study of the *Mishneh Torah* in his yeshiva, and Judah Alfakar had distinguished rather sharply between the author of the *Guide* and those who had made it into a new Torah. At the same time, Alfakar had written that he wished that the *Guide* had never seen the light of day, and Abba Mari's encomium to precisely the two works that were at issue in the earlier controversy is striking testimony to the status that Maimonides himself had attained among all parties to the new dispute.[75]

Not only did Abba Mari express unqualified admiration for Maimonides; he even defended no less a rationalist than Aristotle himself. In a passage about the importance of the belief in creation out of nothing, where Abba Mari was clearly echoing an argument of Naḥmanides, he defended his predecessor's "accursed Greek" by noting that in the absence of the information provided by revelation, a gentile in antiquity could not have been expected to achieve an adequate level of understanding with respect to this issue. On the contrary, Aristotle deserves great credit for disseminating an accurate conception of the one God

74. *Minḥat Qenaot,* preface, p. 4 (unpaginated)=Dimitrovsky, 1, p. 228. For a summary of the events and arguments of the early fourteenth-century controversy, see Joseph Sarachek, *Faith and Reason* (Williamsport, Pennsylvania, 1935), 167–264. Despite a variety of subsequent studies that will be noted later, Sarachek's work can still serve as a useful orientation to the dispute.

75. For Alfakar, see *Qovez Teshuvot ha-Rambam* 3, pp. 2b–3a. On respect for Maimonides during the controversy of the early fourteenth century, see the remarks by Charles Touati, "La Controverse de 1303–1306 autour des études philosophiques et scientifiques," *Revue des Études Juives* 127 (1968): 23–24.

to a world rife with paganism. Moreover, Abba Mari's endorsement of Maimonides' assertion that creation from nothing cannot be proved philosophically served him as an explanation for the use of the term *ḥoq* as a designation of the law of the Sabbath. The term is usually used for regulations whose reasons are unfathomable; in this case, the purpose of the law, which is to remind us of creation *ex nihilo,* is clear, but the belief itself cannot be demonstrated by human reason. Maimonidean philosophy has been integrated by a Provençal conservative into the warp and woof of his study of Torah.[76]

Abba Mari provoked sharp disagreement from Rashba when he asserted that gentile philosophical works are not harmful since everyone recognizes their provenance. Since the legitimacy of Maimonides' treatises was surely not at issue, Abba Mari's ire was narrowly focused on what he perceived as the heretical teachings of the Jewish hyperrationalists. As he reports the situation, people like Levi b. Abraham understood Abraham and Sarah as matter and form, the twelve tribes as the twelve constellations, the alliances of four and five kings in Genesis 14 as the four elements and the five senses, and Amalek as the evil inclination.[77]

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76. *Minḥat Qenaot,* introduction, chs. 13–14, pp. 14–15=Dimitrovsky, pp. 255–58. On Abba Mari's philosophical orientation, see A. S. Halkin, "Yedaiah Bedershi's Apology," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies,* ed. by Altmann, 178; "Ha-Ḥerem 'al Limmud ha-Pilosofiah," *Peraqim* 1 (1967–8): 48–49.

The intriguing transformation of Naḥmanides' argument into a defense of Aristotle deserves brief elaboration. The original point was that miracles demonstrate creation *ex nihilo* because God would not have limitless control over matter as primeval as He. Since miracles are an empirical datum that became well known throughout the world, the affirmation of the eternity of matter by "the accursed Greek" is a denial of his own vaunted empiricism. Abba Mari accepts the argument with one small correction: miracles are attested in a revelation granted to the Jewish people that was not in fact widely known in Aristotle's world. Hence, although Naḥmanides is correct that creation *ex nihilo* can be proven, the demonstration depends on the knowledge of miracles, which is, or at least was, specifically Jewish knowledge; Maimonides is correct that the doctrine cannot be proven in a philosophical system uninformed by revelation. From this perspective, Naḥmanides' position is not an indictment of Aristotle but an exculpation. For a similar view of Aristotle by a somewhat earlier figure, see Septimus's citation of Judah ibn Matka's *Midrash Ḥokmah,* in *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition,* p. 97.

77. *Minḥat Qenaot,* letter 7, pp. 40–41=Dimitrovsky, ch. 25, pp. 343–44, and elsewhere.

Such accusations about rationalist allegorization appear in various works during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Even more seriously, we find the assertion that certain rationalists regarded verbal prayer as superfluous and did not observe various commandments either because they allegorized them or thought that they could fulfill their underlying purpose in a different manner. Thus, R. Jacob b. Sheshet maintained that contemporary heretics, in a fashion strikingly reminiscent of Christian polemic against Judaism, argued, "What is the purpose of this particular commandment? Reason cannot abide it. It must have been nothing but an allegory." Elsewhere, Jacob is quoted to the effect that in addition to heresies regarding primeval matter, divine providence, and reward and punishment, these rationalists assert that the purification of one's thoughts is a more than adequate substitute for prayer. Moses de Leon alleged that the adherents of "the books of the Greeks" do not observe the commandment of taking the four species on the festival of *Sukkot* because, they say, the reason the Torah provides is that this will enhance the joy of the holiday; well, they are happier with their gold, silver, and clothing than they could possibly be with the four species.[78]

During the controversy, we hear occasional references to a refusal to wear *tefillin* because of a philosophically motivated rejection of the commandment's literal meaning and even to wholesale allegorization of biblical law. In these extreme cases, however, the indictments appear to reflect the behavior of isolated individuals or even what the critic perceived as the logical consequence or underlying intention of the philosophical position. One allegation about *tefillin* refers to a single person, and Rashba is clearly describing a teaching that was not made explicit when he observes that "it is evident that their true intention is that the commandments are not to be taken literally, for why should God care about the difference between torn and properly slaughtered meat? Rather, all is allegory and parable." Although such claims are not entirely unfounded, the statement that the villains in this indictment

78. For Jacob b. Sheshet, see his *Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, ed. by Georges Vajda (Jerusalem, 1968), 145, and the citation in Isaac of Acre, *Sefer Me'irat 'Einayim*, ed. by Goldreich, 58–61. For de Leon, see his *Book of the Pomegranate*, ed. by Elliot Wolfson (Atlanta, 1988), 391.

"have regarded the Torah and its commandments as false, and everything has become permitted to them" was clearly a deduction. Indeed, Rashba explicitly asserts that the hyperrationalists maintain that everything in the Torah is allegory from Genesis until—but not beyond—the revelation at Sinai; nonetheless, he says, it is evident that they really have no faith in the plain meaning of the commandments either.[79]

As a result of these concerns, Rashba issued a ban which itself reflects the changes in this issue since the 1230s. Unlike Naḥmanides, Rashba was sufficiently concerned by the spread of rationalist extremism that he was prepared to go beyond the very narrow ban advocated by his predecessor and to forbid the study of philosophy and some sciences by anyone who had not reached the age of twenty-five. On the other hand, the works of Maimonides were entirely exempted from the prohibition during subsequent discussions clarifying its scope; the only reason this remains in some sense a "Maimonidean controversy" is that the targets of the ban made what Rashba and Abba Mari considered blatantly illegitimate use of Maimonides' works to justify their heresies. Though the distinction between Maimonides and his followers had been made earlier, it is now far sharper and more fundamental. Thus, when

79. On *tefillin*, see *Minḥat Qenaot*, letter 79, p. 152=Dimitrovsky, ch. 88, p. 721, which bans anyone who understands the commandments in a purely spiritual sense, and cf. letter 81, p. 153=Dimitrovsky, ch. 101, p. 735, where it is fairly clear that the concern was based on a specific statement made by a particular rationalist. Cf. also letter 7, p. 41=Dimitrovsky, ch. 25, p. 344. The passage in *The Book of the Pomegranate* cited in the previous note continues with the allegation that these reprobates also fail to wear *tefillin* because they understand the commandment in a spiritual sense. For the more general assertions, see *Minḥat Qenaot*, letter 20, p. 60=Dimitrovsky, ch. 38, pp. 411–12, and letter 10, p. 45=Dimitrovsky, ch. 28, p. 360. The last assertion is in a text that was distributed in connection with the ban; see Dimitrovsky, ch. 100, p. 727. On neglect of *tefillin*, see the references in Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), 24, n. 20. See also Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Rabbinic Attitudes toward Nonobservance in the Medieval Period," in *Jewish Tradition and the Nontraditional Jew*, ed. by Jacob J. Schacter (Northvale, New Jersey, and London, 1992), 3–35, esp. pp. 7–12; the issues there, however, are not philosophical. At the eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies in 1993, Aviezer Ravitsky described a hitherto unknown commentary on the *Guide* by a Samuel of Carcassonne, who indicated quite clearly that the philosopher need not observe commandments whose purpose he regards as no longer relevant.

modern scholars who see Maimonides as a philosophical radical tell us that the people attacked by Abba Mari were no more dangerous than Maimonides himself, they impose a reading of the Maimonidean corpus which the proponents of the ban did not share.[80]

The validity of the conservatives' perception of Maimonides is, of course, only one side of the coin; the other is the validity of their perceptions of the Maimonists. We have already seen that even the evidence of the antirationalist pronouncements suggests that assertions of wholesale rejection of the commandments by more than a handful of rationalists may be exaggerated. The vigorous response to the ban provides us with a substantial set of arguments for the religious orthodoxy of the philosophers and for the value of the maligned philosophical enterprise. The most extensive of these polemics that remains extant is the apology for philosophy addressed to Rashba himself by R. Yedaiah Bedershi.[81]

Though the work is written in a tone of extreme reverence for the addressee, it concedes virtually nothing to the allegations leveled in the ban. A handful of Provençal Jews may deserve censure for publicizing philosophical teachings best left to the elite, but the content of these teachings is untainted by heresy. The reports of allegorization of biblical narratives and commandments are wholly false; at most, one philosopher is known to have argued that the correspondence between the number of tribes and the number of constellations demonstrates that the Jewish people is bound by the stars, but even this deplorable position takes the reality of the twelve tribes for granted.

Moreover, says Yedaiah, the study of philosophy has overwhelming religious value. It provides proof of the existence and unity of God; demonstrates the falsehood of determinism, magic, and metempsychosis; establishes the truth of prophecy and the spiritual character of the immortal soul; and distinguishes between impossibilities that can be rendered possible through miracles and those which even divine

80. Touati, "La Controverse," 23–24; A. S. Halkin, "Why Was Levi ben Ḥayyim Hounded?", *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 24 (1966): 65–77.

81. See Halkin's articles cited in n. 76. The text appears as *Ketav Hitnaẓẓelut, She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Rashba* (Bnei Braq, 1958), 1:418, pp. 154–74, and was separately edited by S. Bloch (Lvov, 1809).

omnipotence itself cannot overturn. First and foremost, philosophy has extirpated what was once the epidemic of anthropomorphism. Here Yedaiah's formulation is extraordinarily strong:

> In the early generations, the corporeal conception of God spread through virtually the entire Jewish exile...; however, in all the generations there arose Geonim and wise men in Spain, Babylonia, and the cities of Andalusia, who, because of their expertise in the Arabic language, encountered the great preparatory knowledge that comes with smelling the scent of the various forms of wisdom, whether to a greater or lesser degree, which have been translated into that language. Consequently, they began to clarify many opinions in their study of Torah, especially with respect to the unity of God and the rejection of corporeality, with particular use of philosophical proofs taken from the speculative literature.[82]

The issue of tradition versus philosophical innovation emerges in even bolder relief than it did in Maimonides' discussion of anthropomorphism. Although Yedaiah explicitly denies that the ancient Rabbis were anthropomorphists, he sees the attaining of a purified conception of God in the Middle Ages as an achievement of a philosophical enterprise unaided by tradition but crucially dependent upon familiarity with Arabic texts. The very essence of the Torah, largely lost through the travails of exile, was restored through the discipline which the antirationalists would now undermine.

Once again we find the advocates of philosophy referring to non-Jews in an effort to legitimate speculation. Jacob ben Makhir pointed to

> the most civilized nations who translate learned works from other languages into their own ... and who revere learning.... Has any nation changed its religion because of this?... How much less likely is that to happen to us, who possess a rational Torah.[83]

82. *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Rashba* 1, p. 166.

83. Cited in Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* 1 (Philadelphia, 1961), 296.

Jacob's reference to the rationality of Judaism carries significance that goes beyond the specific point in this text. The fact that these discussions now take place in a Christian rather than a Muslim context means that the conviction that Judaism is more rational than its rival can be mobilized to enhance the importance of philosophical study by pointing to its value as a polemical tool. When a Jew justified speculation on the grounds of its usefulness in replying to heretics, the reference was not necessarily to Christians; nonetheless, when Bedershi tells us that one advantage of setting criteria for the possibility of miracles is that it enables us to rule out God's ability to make Himself corporeal, the implications for anti-Christian polemic are self-evident. R. Israel b. Joseph, a fourteenth-century Spanish rabbi who studied with R. Asher ben Yeḥiel, vigorously supported the study of "external disciplines" solely on the basis of their value in supplying "answers to those who err" and providing the ability "to defeat them in their arguments." Here too, while those who err no doubt included philosophical heretics, it is hard to imagine that R. Israel was not also thinking of the utility of philosophy for vanquishing the arguments of Christian missionaries. Ḥasdai Crescas' *Bittul 'Iqqarei ha-Noẓerim* constitutes eloquent testimony to the importance of philosophical sophistication for the late medieval Jewish polemicist in Spain, and it can be asserted with full confidence that no Jewish reader of that work could have come away from it with the slightest doubt that at least some Jews ought to study philosophy.[84]

84. For R. Israel b. Joseph ha-Yisre'eli's remarks, see his commentary to *Avot* 2:14, cited in Israel Ta-Shema, "Shiqqulim Pilosofiyyim be-Hakhra'at ha-Halakhah bi-Sefarad," *Sefunot* 18 (1985): 105. R. Israel noted that these external disciplines cannot be approached safely before the reader has become a mature talmudic scholar; hence, the rabbis forbade one to teach *higgayon* or Greek wisdom to one's son. The thrust of his observation, however, is permissive: It is prohibited for the father to teach his son, but it is permissible for the father to study on his own. See Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1962), 102–4. On Crescas, see *Bittul Iqqarei ha-Noẓerim*, ed. by Daniel J. Lasker (Ramat Gan, 1990), and Lasker's *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1977). On the use of more rigorous philosophical arguments for polemical purposes, see also Shalom Rosenberg, *Logiqah ve-Apologetiqah ba-Philosophiah ha-Yehudit ba-Me'ah ha-Yod-Dalet* (Hebrew University dissertation, 1974), 44. On answering heretics, see also n. 54 above.

In light of the usefulness of philosophy for anti-Christian polemic, it is ironic and intriguing that the desire to convert Jews impelled the governor of Montpellier to take the side of the rationalists at the height of the controversy. The advocates of philosophy had issued a counter-ban against anyone who would refuse to teach the banned disciplines to people under the age of twenty-five in obedience to the antirationalists' proclamation, and they sought legal backing from the civil authorities. Abba Mari informs us that although the governor did not grant all their requests, he lent some support because he was convinced that if Jews were to prohibit anything but talmudic study for a substantial period of a person's life, this would create a situation in which no Jew would ever convert to Christianity.[85]

85. The phrase that I have translated "talmudic study" literally means "the discipline (*ḥokhmah*) that you call Gamaliel" (*Minḥat Qenaot*, letter 73, p. 142=Dimitrovsky, ch. 92, p. 701). For the identification of "Gamaliel" with Talmud, see Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden* (Leipzig, 1863), 7, p. 276; Ch. Merchavia, *Ha-Talmud bi-Re'i ha-Naẓrut* (Jerusalem, 1970), 211, and Dimitrovsky, ad loc. ("apparently this refers to the Talmud"). For the view that "Gamaliel" means medicine, see David Kaufmann, *Die Sinne* (Budapest, 1884), 7, n. 12; D. Margalit, "'Al Galenus ve-Gilgulo ha-'Ivri Gamliel," *Sinai* 33 (1953): 75–77; Judah Rosenthal's review of Merchavia, *Kiryat Sefer* 47 (1972): 29; Joseph Shatzmiller, "Bein Abba Mari la-Rashba: ha-Massa ve-ha-Mattan sheqadam la-Ḥerem be-Barcelona," *Meḥqarim be-Toledot 'Am Yisrael ve-Ereẓ Yisrael* 3 (Haifa, 1974), 127. I cannot see why a Christian would find it necessary to describe medicine by its presumed Jewish name, especially since the ban does not call it Gamaliel, or even why the exclusion of medicine would need to be mentioned at all in this context. The fact that this would constitute the only attested use of Gamaliel in so broad a sense also militates against the identification. It is true that Talmud was not normally called a *ḥokhmah*, but in the context of this ban, I can easily see a Christian using the equivalent term, presumably *scientia*. Moreover, the Christian argument that the study of rabbinic literature is an impediment to conversion is attested as far back as Justinian's Novella 146 and was reiterated in the 1240s by Odo of Chateauroux. For Justinian, see the text and translation in Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Jerusalem, 1987), 405–10; for Odo, see the text in Merchavia, 450 ("... hanc esse causam precipuam que iudeos in sua perfidia retinet obstinatos"). Because the motive assigned by Abba Mari is so congenial to his own position in the controversy, we must read it with some skepticism; note Kaufmann's remark (loc. cit.) that the antirationalist Yosef Yavetz would have given a great deal to have known this quotation. In light of Odo's assertion, however, the report is entirely plausible.

There is strong reason to believe that a majority of the Jews in Montpellier sided with the rationalists.[86] The philosophical culture of Provençal Jewry was so pervasive that rationalist sermons were delivered in synagogues and even at weddings. Opposition to the ban came from the distinguished Perpignan Talmudist R. Menaḥem ha-Meiri, who argued that spiritual damage to a handful of people cannot be allowed to undermine entire fields of study, that even the books of the Greeks have great religious value, that Jews cannot allow gentiles to mock them for their intellectual backwardness, and that Provence can boast a variety of figures who have distinguished themselves in both talmudic and philosophical learning. Here again the antirationalist party demonstrated how much the atmosphere had changed since the 1230s: The reply to ha-Meiri by a disciple of Abba Mari fully conceded the great value of philosophy and pointed out that the ban was directed only at the young.[87]

Ha-Meiri himself was a paradigm of the ideal toward which moderate rationalists strove and to which even extreme rationalists paid lip service: a Talmudist of standing who valued philosophy and the sciences and devoted himself to their study. Ha-Meiri's openness to general culture combined with his well-known attitude of toleration toward Christianity suggests an additional dimension of the issue that we have been addressing. Intellectual involvement with the dominant society often goes hand in hand with social involvement of a relatively benign sort. By this time, Christian intellectuals had attained an impressive level of philosophical sophistication to the point where ha-Meiri could

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Note too Kaufmann's argument that philosophical allegory may have been influenced by Christian allegory and that this connection led to the hope for conversion through philosophical study; see his "Simeon b. Josefs Sendschreiben an Menachem b. Salomo," in *Jubelschrift zum Neunzigsten Geburtstag des Dr. L. Zunz* (Berlin, 1884), German section, p. 147. I doubt that Christian influence on rationalist allegorization was decisive, and the main point appears to have been that talmudic study retards conversion.

On the counterban and the governor, see the references in Marc Saperstein, "The Conflict over the Rashba's Herem on Philosophical Study: A Political Perspective," *Jewish History* 1:2 (1986): 37, n. 19.

86. Shatzmiller has argued this point persuasively in "Bein Abba Mari la-Rashba," 128–30.

87. See "Hoshen Mishpat "*Jubelschrift* ... *Zunz*, Hebrew section, pp. 142–74. For the last point, see especially pp. 162–64.

express concern about their contempt for ignorant Jews; consequently, familiarity began to breed respect. In ha-Meiri's case, this respect led to the formulation of a wholly novel halakhic category which roughly means civilized people, a category which helped to exempt Christians from a series of discriminatory talmudic statements. While this is not a case of incorporating an external value or doctrine into rabbinic law—the Christendom that ha-Meiri knew had hardly developed a theory of religious toleration—it probably is an instance of reexamining *halakhah* and Jewish values in light of habits of mind developed by exposure to a culture shared with the gentile environment. Once again, the core of the Torah was touched—or its deeper meaning revealed—through insights inspired by involvement in general culture.[88]

THE SEPHARDIM OF THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

The affirmation of the value of philosophy even by the conservatives in this dispute reflects a critically important characteristic of late medieval Jewish culture in Provence and in Spain. Virtually without exception, rabbinic figures of the first rank, whose pursuit of talmudic study was their central preoccupation, either devoted some time to the study of "wisdom" or expressed no opposition to its cultivation.[89]

Rashba himself was not uninfluenced by philosophical ideas. This would be evident even from Bedershi's apology, which clearly assumed that its recipient was receptive to the major thrust of the argument, but it is also explicit in Rashba's own writings. In one elaborate responsum,

88. On ha-Meiri and Christianity, see Yaakov Blidstein, "Yaḥaso shel R. Menaḥem ha-Meiri la-Nokhri—Bein Apologetiqah le-Hafnamah," *Ẓion* 51 (1986): 153–66, and the earlier studies cited there. See now the important analysis by Moshe Halbertal, "R. Menaḥem ha-Meiri: Bein Torah le-Ḥokhmah," *Tarbiẓ* 63 (1994): 63–118, which points to a specific philosophical context for ha-Meiri's position.

89. See Israel Ta-Shema's "Rabbi Yona Gerondi: Spiritualism and Leadership," presented at the Jewish Theological Seminary's 1989 conference on "Jewish Mystical Leadership, 1200–1270," esp. p. 11. A bound volume of typescripts of the proceedings is available in the Mendel Gottesman Library, Yeshiva University. See also Ta-Shema's "Halakhah, Kabbalah u-Filosophiah bi-Sefarad ha-Noẓerit—le-Biqqoret Sefer 'Toledot ha-Yehudim bi-Sefarad ha-Noẓerit,'" *Shenaton ha-Mishpat ha-'Ivri* 18–19 (1992–94): 479–95. For a balanced, moderate defense of a broad curriculum in fourteenth-century Spain, see Profiat Duran's introduction to *Ma'aseh Efod*, 1–25.

for example, he analyzed the parameters within which philosophical arguments can be brought to bear on the reinterpretation of sacred texts, and he staked out a position that we would expect from a disciple of Naḥmanides: there is a legitimate place for such arguments as long as the critical demands of tradition are accorded unchallenged supremacy.[90] R. Yom Tov Ishbili (Ritba), perhaps the greatest rabbinic figure in the generation following Rashba, wrote a work exemplifying the same general posture. He defended Maimonides against the strictures in Naḥmanides' commentary to the Pentateuch while at the same time affirming that in the final analysis Naḥmanides is usually correct.[91]

The endorsement of at least a moderate level of rationalism no doubt resulted from the importance of philosophy in traditional Spanish Jewish culture, but we should not underestimate the impact of the heroic image of Maimonides. Just as Naḥmanides' embrace of kabbalah made it very difficult to reject mysticism as a heresy, Maimonides' devotion to philosophy rendered its thorough delegitimation by Sephardic Jews almost impossible. Even some kabbalists attempted to synthesize their discipline with a reinterpreted Maimonidean corpus, though others went so far as to assert that the author of the *Guide* had seen the error of his ways once the secrets of the hidden wisdom were revealed to him. This last example is a rare case of the exception that really proves the rule, because it demonstrates that Maimonides' position stood as such a hallmark of legitimacy that some Jews could

90. *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Rashba* (1958) 1:9, also edited by L. A. Feldman, *Shnaton Bar-Ilan* 7–8 (1970): 153–61. For a thorough analysis of Rashba's stance, see the unpublished master's thesis by David Horwitz, *The Role of Philosophy and Kabbalah in the Works of Rashba* (Bernard Revel Graduate School, Yeshiva University, 1986). See also Carmi Horowitz, "'Al Perush ha-Aggadot shel ha-Rashba—Bein Qabbalah le-Pilosophiah," *Da'at* 18 (1987): 15–25, and Lawrence Kaplan, "Rabbi Solomon ibn Adret," *Yavneh Review* 6 (1967): 27–40. (I should probably not press the argument from Bedershi's perception too hard since *Ktav Hitnaẓẓelut* takes for granted the questionable proposition that Rashba would recognize the value of philosophy because of its ability to refute the belief in metempsychosis, a kabbalistic doctrine that Rashba probably endorsed.)

91. See his *Sefer ha-Zikkaron*, ed. by Kalman Kahana (Jerusalem, 1956), 33–34.

comfortably maintain a contrary position only by forcibly redefining the Maimonidean stance.[92]

Moderate rationalism was, of course, not the only approach endorsed by Provençal and Spanish Jews in the later Middle Ages. Despite the exaggerated nature of the conservative manifestoes issued during the controversy, some late medieval thinkers really did espouse radical positions with respect to many philosophical and exegetical issues. When Jacob b. Sheshet denounced rationalists who "assert that the world is primeval ..., that divine providence does not extend below the sphere of the moon ..., that there is no reward for the righteous or punishment for the wicked ... and that there is no need to pray but only to purify one's thoughts,"[93] he was engaging in hyperbole but not in fantasy. The rationalist propensity toward allegorization undoubtedly went beyond anything that rabbis like Rashba would countenance, and we should not allow the Maimonist arguments of Bedershi and his colleagues to blind us to this reality. The works of Samuel ibn Tibbon, Moses Narboni, Joseph ibn Kaspi, Gersonides, and Isaac Albalag constitute but part of a corpus of literature attesting to a flourishing tradition of vigorous rationalism that severely tested the prevailing boundaries of religious orthodoxy.

Philosophers of this stripe were often prepared to make an explicit case against excessive concentration on talmudic study. The most famous example of this attitude is the story ibn Kaspi tells in his will about the problem that arose during a party in his home when "the accursed maid"

92. For Abraham Abulafia's effort to create a Maimonidean kabbalah, see sections IV–VI of Moshe Idel's "Maimonides and Kabbalah," in Twersky, *Studies in Maimonides*, 54–78. On Maimonides as a kabbalist, see Gershom Scholem, "Me-Ḥoqer li-Mequbbal: Aggadot ha-Mequbbalim 'al ha-Rambam," *Tarbiṣ* 6 (1935): 90–98, and Michael A. Shmidman, "On Maimonides' 'Conversion' to Kabbalah," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Twersky, 2, pp. 375–86. For a discussion of this and similar legends in the broader context of folk conceptions about Maimonides, see the study by my father *z"l*, Isaiah Berger, "Ha-Rambam be-Aggadat ha-'Am," in *Massad: Me'assef le-Divrei Sifrut* 2, ed. by Hillel Bavli (Tel Aviv, 1936), 216–38; and compare his eloquent observations on the contrast between the folk images of Maimonides and Rashi in his "Rashi be-Aggadat ha-'Am," in *Rashi: Torato ve-Ishiyyuto*, ed. by Simon Federbush (New York, 1958), 147–49.

93. Cited in *Me'irat 'Einayim*, ed. Goldreich, 58.

placed a dairy spoon in a pot of meat. Poor ibn Kaspi had to go to the local rabbi, who kept him waiting for hours in a state of near starvation before apprising him of the *halakhah*. Nonetheless, he tells us, he was not embarrassed by his ignorance, since his philosophical sophistication compensated for the shortcomings in his halakhic expertise. "Why," he asks, "should a ruling or directive regarding the great existence or unity of God be inferior to a small dairy spoon?"[94]

Other expressions of this approach are less amusing but no less striking. Some Jews demonstrated the obscurantism of those who devote their lives to talmudic study by pointing to the Talmud's own assertion that the phrase "He has set me in dark places like the dead of old" (Lamentations 3:6) refers to the Talmud of Babylon. R. Judah ibn Abbas maintained that people who study Talmud constantly "neglect the proper service and knowledge of God" and described talmudic novellae and *Tosafot* as a waste of valuable time. It is a matter of no small interest that Ḥasdai Crescas wrote his philosophical refutation of Christianity in Aragonese or Catalan so that Jews could have ready access to his arguments; there was thus a substantial, sophisticated Jewish audience in late medieval Spain who could follow a difficult vernacular text but not a difficult Hebrew one.

Ibn Kaspi himself, in a work marked by the arresting assertion that Job's suffering was a just consequence of his failure to pursue a philosophical understanding of his faith, utilized the traditionalists' affirmation of the importance of talmudic study to support the indispensability of philosophy. After all, he argued, there exist both physical commandments and commandments of the heart or intellect. Everyone agrees that with respect to the former, an understanding of the intellectual underpinning is eminently desirable. "Why else should we toil to study the Talmud? We might just as well be satisfied with the rulings of Maimonides and R. Isaac Alfasi." Now there is surely no basis for distinguishing the latter commandments

94. Israel Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills* I (Philadelphia, 1926), 151–52. The somewhat awkward use of the term "great," which technically modifies *unity* in the original, is clearly intended to evoke Maimonides' straightforward understanding of the talmudic contrast between great and small matters. See above, n. 39. On ibn Kaspi's intellectual stance, see Isadore Twerksy, "Joseph ibn Kaspi: Portrait of a Medieval Jewish Intellectual," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* [1], pp. 231–57.

from the former with respect to this principle, and books of physics and metaphysics stand in the same relationship to the commandments of the heart as the Talmud does to the physical commandments. Originally, such philosophical works were written by Jewish sages like Solomon, but "we were exiled because of our sins, and those matters have now come to be attributed to the Greeks" except for scattered references in the Talmud. In other words, one cannot affirm the critical importance of talmudic study without being logically compelled to grant at least equal value to the pursuit of philosophy and the sciences.[95]

On the other side of the ledger, R. Asher b. Yeḥiel, who was born and trained in Germany, brought with him a pejorative attitude toward the value of general culture. In responding to the suggestion that no one without expertise in Arabic should render a legal decision, he maintained that his reasoning powers in Torah were in no way inferior to those of Spanish Rabbis, "even though I do not know your external wisdom. Thank the merciful God who saved me from it." The pursuit of such wisdom, he said, leads people away from the fear of God and encourages the vain attempt to integrate alien pursuits with Torah. Still, even R. Asher describes philosophers as very wise men, and an assessment of Spanish Jewish attitudes would have to assign greater weight to the remarkable suggestion that he rejected than to the negative reaction that he expressed.[96]

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95. On the "dark places" and the Talmud, see *Me'irat 'Einayim*, 62; Isadore Twersky, "Religion and Law," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, 77, and Twersky, "R. Yeda'yah ha-Penini," Altmann Festschrift, 71. The talmudic passage is in *Sanhedrin* 24a. For ibn Abbas, see Goldreich's quotations from the manuscript of *Ya'ir Nativ* (Oxford 1280, p. 50a) in *Me'irat 'Einayim*, 412–13. The oft-quoted curriculum in ibn Abbas's work, which culminates with the study of metaphysics, was published by Asaf, *Meqorot* 2, pp. 29–33. On the vernacular original of *Bittul 'Iqqarei ha-Nozerim*, see Lasker's edition, 13, 33. Note too the Castilian *Proverbos Morales* by the fourteenth-century R. Shem Tov ibn Ardutiel, *The Moral Proverbs of Santob de Carrion: Jewish Wisdom in Christian Spain*, ed. by T. A. Perry (Princeton, 1988).

If we contemplate for a moment the magnitude of Job's suffering, we can begin to appreciate the importance attached to the philosophic quest by a man willing to propose ibn Kaspi's explanation for such torment. This explanation appears along with the very clever argument linking talmudic and philosophical study in *Shulḥan Kesef: Be'ur 'al Iyyov*, in *'Asarah Kelei Kesef*, ed. by J. Last (Pressburg, 1903), 170–72.

96. See *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Rosh* (Venice, 1603), 55:9. Cf. Israel Ta-Shema, "Shiqqulim Pilosofiyyim," *Sefunot* 18 (1985): 100–108.

That suggestion reflects a real and significant phenomenon: the halakhic decision-making and talmudic study of Provençal and Spanish rabbis were sometimes affected by philosophical considerations. To begin with the most famous example in Maimonides himself, the omission in the *Mishneh Torah* of talmudic laws based on the intervention of the creatures that the rabbis called *shedim* was almost certainly the result of philosophically motivated skepticism. R. Zeraḥiah Halevi cited technical logical terminology and philosophical references in a halakhic discussion. Conceptions of providence were brought to bear on decisions regarding the remarriage of a woman whose first two husbands had died. A more general illustration of the pervasiveness of the philosophical atmosphere emerges from the first sentence of R. Yeruḥam b. Meshullam's introduction to a work of talmudic scholarship, where he informs us how "the scholars of [philosophical] research" have classified the considerations leading to the pursuit of wisdom.[97]

Most strikingly, it now appears that an innovative methodology of talmudic study which conquered Spain in the fifteenth century and dominated the approach of Sephardic communities for two hundred years was rooted in philosophical logic. R. Isaac Kanpanton produced guidelines which required the student to investigate the correspondence between the language and meaning of a talmudic text with exquisite care and to

97. On the impact of Maimonides' attitude toward "popular religion" on the *Mishneh Torah*, *see* Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides*, 479–84; see especially Marc B. Shapiro's forthcoming essay in *Maimonidean Studies* [published as "Maimonidean Halakhah and Superstition," *Maimonidean Studies* 4 (2000): 61–108]. I am unpersuaded by Jose Faur's effort in his generally perceptive *'Iyyunim be-Mishneh Torah le-ha-Rambam: Sefer ha-Madda* (Jerusalem, 1978), 1–2, n. 1, to minimize the philosophical motivation for the omission of *shedim*. For some observations on the impact of Maimonides' scientific posture on his halakhic approach, see Isadore Twersky, "Aspects of Maimonidean Epistemology: Halakhah and Science," in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding. Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, ed. by Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Nachum M. Sarna (Atlanta, Georgia, 1989) 3, pp. 3–23. For R. Zeraḥiah Halevi, see I. Ta-Shema, "Sifrei ha-Rivot bein ha-Ravad le-bein Rabbi Zeraḥiah Halevi (ha-Razah) mi-Lunel," *Qiryat Sefer* 52 (1977): 570–76. On the problem of remarriage, see Ta-Shema, *Sefunot* 18, p. 110, and Y. Buxbaum, "Teshuvot Ḥakhmei Sefarad be-Din Qatlanit," *Moriah* 7 [78/79] (1977): 6–7. R. Yeruḥam's comments are in *Sefer Mesharim* (Venice, 1553; rep., Jerusalem, 1975), 2a.

determine the full range of possible interpretations so that the exegetical choices of the major commentators would become clear. In setting forth this form of investigation, or *'iyyun,* Kanpanton made explicit reference to logical terminology, and Daniel Boyarin has recently made a compelling argument that the system as a whole and all its major components originated in the medieval philosophical milieu. He maintains that

> Jewish scholars in the final days of the Spanish Jewish community saw logic as the road to attaining truth in all sciences, including that of the Torah. Any argument which did not qualify under the canons of logical order was faulty in their eyes. Logical works and principles served as the foundation for scientific and philosophical investigation, and they pointed the way toward valid proof and the avoidance of error in these fields. Since the science of the Talmud differed in its language and its problems from the other sciences—mainly because it is essentially exegetical—the need was felt for general works specific to this field which would direct investigation there.[98]

These were indeed the final days of Spanish Jewry, and the connection between philosophical pursuits and the behavior of the community in extremis has exercised analysts both medieval and modern. Conservatives like R. Isaac Arama renewed the attack against allegorists by asking why they need the Torah at all. When it corresponds to philosophical truths, they accept it literally, and when it does not, they explain it figuratively; in either case, the knowledge they had before the revelation is coterminous with what they know after it. R. Yosef Yavetz attributed the relatively large number of conversions around the time of the expulsion to the corrupting influence of philosophical relativism, a judgment endorsed in the twentieth century by Yitzhak Baer. R. Abraham Bibago, on the other hand, writing in the middle of the fifteenth century, denied

98. Daniel Boyarin, *Ha-'Iyyun ha-Sefaradi* (Jerusalem, 1989), 48–49. The main documentation of Boyarin's general thesis is on pp. 47–68. For a similar development in the field of biblical exegesis, see Shimon Shalem, "Ha-Metodah ha-Parshanit shel Yosef Taitaẓak ve-Ḥugo," *Sefunot* 11 (1971–77): 115–34.

that philosophically oriented Jews were any less steadfast than pure Talmudists; spiritual weakness is not dependent upon intellectual orientation. More generally, Bibago's attack against extreme rationalists and especially against opponents of philosophy tends to demonstrate that both groups were active in late medieval Spain. Bibago himself was a relatively moderate rationalist who fits well into the category of Spanish Jews like R. Isaac Abravanel who studied philosophy but attempted to counter rationalist extremism through a conservative interpretation of Maimonides and his legacy. When such a person denounces fools who call "people of intellect and reason" heretics, his remarks deserve special notice; apparently, Spain too was not without thoroughgoing critics of the philosophical enterprise for whom even the rationalism of Bibago was an impermissible deviation from pristine Judaism.[99]

There is little evidence for the outright Averroist-style skepticism that Yitzhak Baer blames for the apostasy of beleaguered Iberian Jews. Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that an acculturated community is a less likely candidate for martyrdom than an insular one. Imagine two people with equal faith in the truth of Judaism confronting the executioner's sword. The first is an admiring participant in the culture he is being told to embrace, however much he rejects its religion; the second responds to that environment with visceral revulsion. While there are no easy formulas for determining the willingness to be martyred, the second type, who represents the Ashkenazic Jew of the first crusade, is surely more likely to choose death. On this level, the Jews of Spain paid a spiritual price for integration into the cultural milieu of their potential persecutors.

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99. See Yavetz's *Sefer Or ha-Ḥayyim* (Lemberg, 1874), ch. 2, and the references in Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* 2, 509, n. 12, and in Isaac E. Barzilay, *Between Reason and Faith: Anti-Rationalism in Italian Jewish Thought, 1250–1650* (The Hague, 1967), 148. For Baer's citation of Arama and indictment of Jewish Averroism, see his *History* 2, pp. 253–59. Baer's position was rejected by Haim Hillel Ben Sasson, "Dor Golei Sefarad 'al 'Aṣmo," *Ẓion* 26 (1961): 44–52, 59–64. On Bibago, see Joseph Hacker, "Meqomo shel R. Avraham Bibag ba-Maḥaloqet 'al Limmud ha-Pilosophiah u-Ma'amadah bi-Sefarad ba-Me'ah ha-Tet-Vav," *Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 3 (Jerusalem, 1972), Heb. sec., pp. 151–58. Cf. also the oft-quoted antiphilosophical responsum by R. Isaac ben Sheshet, *She'elot u-Teshuvot Bar Sheshet* (Vilna, 1878), no. 45.

As we have seen in various contexts, the pursuit of the natural sciences went hand in hand with philosophical study, and their status as a mere handmaiden of metaphysics did not prevent them from being investigated with intensity and sophistication. Jewish physicians remained prominent throughout the Middle Ages, and Maimonides' medical treatises contain insights of lasting value. Gersonides made impressive contributions to astronomy, including the preparation of astronomical tables at the request of influential Christians, and fourteenth-century Provençal Jews continued to translate numerous scientific texts. Ibn Kaspi took pleasure in the unvarnished meaning of a talmudic text which asserted that gentile scholars had defeated the sages of Israel in a debate about astronomy; this, he said, demonstrates that non-Jews have something to teach us and that their works should not be ignored.[100]

The relationship between astronomy and astrology raised scientific and theological questions which confound the usually predictable boundaries between rationalists and their opponents. From a modern perspective, Maimonides' vigorous opposition to astrology seems precisely what we ought to expect from a person of his intellectual bent. To many medievals, however, astrology was not only validated by rabbinic texts; it was a science like all others. Gersonides, for example, argued that the discipline was often empirically validated, and it was taken for granted

100. For a succinct summary of Maimonides' contributions to medieval medicine, see S. Muntner, "Gedulato ve-Ḥiddushav shel ha-Rambam bi-Refuah," in *Ha-Ram Bamza"l [sic]: Qovez Torani-Madda'i*, ed. by Y. L. Maimon (Jerusalem, 1955), 264–66. On Jewish physicians in general, see, inter alia, I. Munz, *Die Jüdische Ärzte im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main, 1922), and D. Margalit, *Ḥakhmei Yisrael ke-Rofe'im* (Jerusalem, 1962). On science in general and astronomy in particular, see Bernard R. Goldstein, "The Role of Science in the Jewish Community in Fourteenth-Century France," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 314 (1978): 39–49; reprinted in his *Theory and Observation in Ancient and Medieval Astronomy* (London, 1985); L. V. Berman, "Greek into Hebrew: Samuel b. Judah of Marseilles, Fourteenth-Century Philosopher and Translator," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 289–320; Twersky, "Joseph ibn Kaspi" (above, n. 94), 256, n. 52, where he cites a variety of references to divergent Jewish interpretations of the passage in *Pesaḥim* 94b concerning the victory of the gentile astronomers. On continuing astronomical study by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jews in the Eastern Mediterranean, see Goldstein, "The Hebrew Astronomical Tradition: New Sources," *Isis* 72 (1981): 237–51, also reprinted in *Theory and Observation*.

that miracles must overcome not only the regularities of physics but the astrological order as well. At the same time, nonrationalist religious considerations could produce opposition to astrology, so that on this issue the Maimonidean legacy found itself in the unaccustomed company of R. Moses Taku. In the case of Gersonides, astronomy and astrology were kept rigorously separated, so that the affirmation of astrological truths had no adverse effect on his important astronomical studies.[101]

Although Spain and Provence were the major centers of philosophical and scientific pursuits among the Jews of the high and late Middle Ages, they did not enjoy a monopoly. Byzantine Jewry lived in a culture which preserved much of the Greek legacy of antiquity, and its intellectual profile has been described as "catholic in outlook and integrated with its environment. Secular studies were pursued as much as traditional religious studies."[102] Israel Ta-Shema, who has read substantial portions of the massive, unpublished works of Byzantine Jews available in the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem, has spoken to me with wonderment of the immense size and scope of the

101. For Maimonides' position, see his letter in Alexander Marx, "The Correspondence between the Rabbis of Southern France and Maimonides about Astrology," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 3 (1926): 311–58. (This letter [p. 351] also contains Maimonides' well-known remark that he had read a multitude of Arabic works on idolatry, an observation which has been regarded as problematic in light of *Hil. 'Avodah Zarah* 2:2. For a discussion of the passage in *Hil. 'Avodah Zarah*, see Lawrence Kaplan and David Berger, "On Freedom of Inquiry in the Rambam—and Today," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 2 [1990]: 37–50.) For Naḥmanides' arguments from talmudic texts, see his responsum in *Kitvei Ramban* 1, 378–81; see also his *Commentary to Job*, *Kitvei Ramban* 1, 19, for the assumption that overturning someone's astrological fate requires miraculous divine intervention. Gersonides presented his argument as dreams, divination, prophecy, and astrology in *Milḥamot Hashem* 2:1–3 (Leipzig, 1866), 92–101; Levi ben Gershon (Gersonides), *The Wars of the Lord*, trans. Seymour Feldman, 2 (Philadelphia, 1987), pp. 27–41. On the frequent but imperfect success of astrologers, see p. 95; Feldman, p. 33. For his separation of astronomy and astrology, see Goldstein, "The Role of Science," 45. On Moses Taku, see *Ketav Tamim, Oẓar Neḥmad* 3, pp. 82–83. (I do not mean to imply that Taku's position, which is reflected in a fleeting remark, was fully identical with that of Maimonides.)

102. Steven B. Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium: 1204–1453* (University, Alabama, 1985), 168. Bowman goes on to suggest that this integration into Byzantine culture may have served to undermine the cultural independence of the established Jewish community in the face of the Ottoman conquest and Sephardic immigration.

encyclopedic compositions produced by that Jewry, although he is less impressed by their depth or creativity. Yemenite Jews, in part because of the influence of the Muslim environment and in large measure because of the inspiration provided by Maimonides, produced works reflecting familiarity with the full range of the medieval sciences. In an exceptionally strong formulation, R. Peraḥiah b. Meshullam wrote that "without the sciences of the intelligibles there would be no Torah," and Ḥoter b. Shlomoh reiterated the standard justification of scientific study as a preparation for metaphysical speculation.[103]

Similarly, the successor culture of medieval Spain was largely true to its heritage. The relative decline and stagnation of Muslim culture in the late Middle Ages had taken its toll on the intellectual creativity of Eastern Jewry, but under the stimulus of the Spanish immigration, the Jews of the Ottoman Empire displayed a renewal of cultural ferment. While this activity was mainly exegetical and homiletical, it included the study and translation of philosophical works. A recently published text provides a striking glimpse into a cast of mind which takes all learning as its province. A young scholar felt insulted when his town was denigrated as climatically unfit for the production of intellectuals. In an indignant response, he challenged the critic to do battle:

> Come out to the field and let us compete in our knowledge of the Bible, the Mishnah, and the Talmud, *Sifra* and *Sifre* and all of Rabbinic literature; in the external sciences—the practical and theoretical fields of science, the science of nature, and of the Divine; in logic ..., geometry, astronomy, and law; in the natural

103. The first major scientific work by a Yemenite Jew was Netanel al-Fayyumi's *Bustan al-'Uqul*, and interest in these disciplines persisted into the seventeenth century. See, inter alia, Y. Tzvi Langermann, *Ha-Madda'im ha-Meduyyaqim be-Qerev Yehuda Teiman* (Jerusalem, 1987); Yosef Kafih, "Arba'im She'elot be-Pilosophiah le-Rav Peraḥiah be-R. Meshullam," *Sefunot* 18 (1985): 111–92; David R. Blumenthal, *The Commentary of R. Ḥoter ben Shelomo to the Thirteen Principles of Maimonides* (Leiden, 1974); Meir Havazelet, "'Al ha-Parshanut ha-Allegorit-ha-Pilosofit be-Midrash ha-Ḥefez le-Rabbi Zekharyah ha-Rofe," *Teima* 3 (1993): 45–56; and the references in Amos Goldreich, "Mi-Mishnat Ḥug ha-'Iyyun: 'Od 'al ha-Meqorot ha-Efshariyyim shel 'ha-Aḥdut ha-Shavah,'" *Meḥqerei Yerushalayim be-Maḥashevet Yisrael* 6 (3–4) (1987): 150, n. 35.

> sciences—the longer commentary and the shorter commentary, *Generatio et Corruptio, De Anima* and *Meteora, De Animalia* and *Ethics*.... Try me, for you have opened your mouth and belittled my dwelling-place, and you shall see that we know whatever can be known in the proper manner.[104]

The polemical vigor and unmitigated pride in such remarks reflect a mentality that does not harbor the slightest twinge of doubt about the legitimacy and significance of all these pursuits.

At the same time, we have interesting evidence of opposition to philosophical study in this community. R. Menaḥem de Lonzano published an attack against philosophy which pointed to serious religious errors that it had inspired even in great figures of the past including Maimonides, R. Joseph Albo, and, strikingly, R. Baḥya ibn Pakuda. We have already seen that Baḥya decidedly belonged among the strongest advocates of speculation, but the piety that suffuses the bulk of his ethical work served to mute his rationalistic message and insulate him from serious attack by most antirationalists. De Lonzano was sensitive to this message and complained that Baḥya, like Maimonides, placed metaphysics at the pinnacle of human endeavor despite the implications for the status of straightforward study of the Torah; indeed, the broadside cites a nameless rabbinic contemporary in Istanbul who wondered why the *Guide* had been burned while *The Duties of the Heart* had remained untouched. On the one hand, it is clear that de Lonzano's attack reflected the view of an influential circle of Talmudists. It is equally clear, however, that he was deeply concerned about the likelihood that he would be subjected to scathing criticism for his position, and he describes contemporaries who advocated the study of halakhic codes rather than the

104. Joseph Hacker, "The Intellectual Activity of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. by Isadore Twersky and Bernard Septimus (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England, 1987), 120. (Hacker's translation was printed in a somewhat garbled form, and so I have modified it slightly on the basis of the Hebrew version of his article, "Ha-Pe'ilut ha-Intelleqtualit be-qerev Yehudei ha-Imperiah ha-'Ottomanit ba-Me'ot ha-Shesh-'Esreh ve-ha-Sheva'-'Esreh," *Tarbiẓ* 53 [1984]: 591.) Note also Hacker's citations from Solomon le-Beit ha-Levi and Abraham ibn Migash on pp. 123–26.

Talmud so that they could devote their time to other disciplines. While we cannot know with any certainty why this critique of philosophy was omitted from the second, early seventeenth-century version of de Lonzano's book, the opposition that it no doubt engendered is as likely an explanation as any.[105] Ottoman Jewry, though on the verge of cultural decline and by no means univocal in its attitude to general culture, remained generally loyal to the legacy of medieval Sephardic thought.

ASHKENAZ

The Northern European heartland of medieval Ashkenazic Jewry had a complex relationship with the dominant Christian civilization that defies the often simplistic characterizations describing the Ashkenazim as insular and narrow. There is no question that Northern French and German Jews, unlike their Sephardic counterparts, were deeply resistant to philosophical inquiry, largely because of the absence of a surrounding philosophical culture during their formative period; a Jewish civilization which reached maturity unaccustomed to speculation will be particularly sensitive to its alien dangers. Certainly the image of the Ashkenazim among Spanish and Provençal advocates of philosophy was that of benighted obscurantists. Radak wrote to Alfakar, "You and other wise men engage in the pursuit of wisdom and do not follow the words of the Ashkenazim, who have banned anyone who does so." R. Isaac of Acre, who became an advocate of such inquiry late in his life, reacted with disdain to those who refuse to examine

> a rational argument or to accept it. Rather, they call one to whom God has given the ability to understand rational principles ... a heretic and non-believer, and his books they call external books, because they do not have the spirit needed to understand a rational principle. This is the nature of the rabbis of France and Germany and those who are like them.

105. See Joseph Hacker, "Pulmus ke-neged ha-Pilosophiah be-Istanbul ba-Me'ah ha-Shesh-'Esreh," *Meḥqarim be-Qabbalah be-Pilosophiah Yehudit u-be-Sifrut ha-Musar ve-he-Hagut Muggashim li-Yesha'yah Tishbi bi-Melot lo Shiv'im ve-Ḥamesh Shanim* (Jerusalem, 1986), 507–36.

During the controversy of the 1230s, Maimonists in Narbonne sent a letter to Spain with a particularly vitriolic denunciation of the French rabbis as fools and lunatics with clogged minds, who are devoted to superstitious nonsense and immersed in the fetid waters of unilluminated caves.[106]

Even in the context of philosophical speculation narrowly defined, the situation was not quite so simple. A paraphrase of Saadya's *Beliefs and Opinions* that made its way to early medieval Ashkenaz had a profound effect on the theology of significant segments of that Jewry. Unusual works like *Ketav Tamim* and *Sefer ha-Maskil* demonstrate familiarity with some speculative literature, and the author of the latter treatise was conversant with a variety of up-to-date scientific theories and experiments. In general, technological advances, experimental results, and observations of nature raised no serious religious problems, and there was no intrinsic reason for people unaffected by a theory of propaedeutic studies to connect them to philosophy. We should not be surprised, therefore, that Ashkenazic literature, probably even more than that of the Sephardim, reflects the keen interest and penetrating eye of Jews evincing intense curiosity about the natural and mechanical phenomena that surrounded them.[107] Moreover, the moment we broaden the question to include the Jewish response to the surrounding culture in

106. For Radak, see *Qovez Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, 3b. For Isaac of Acre, see Goldreich's quotation from Oxford ms. 1911 in *Me'irat 'Einayim*, 412. The letter from Narbonne was published by Shatzmiller in *Zion* 34 (1969): 143–44.

107. On the paraphrase of Saadya and its influence, see Ronald C. Kiener, "The Hebrew Paraphrase of Saadiah Gaon's *Kitab al-Amanat Wa'l-I'tiqadat*," *AJS Review* 11 (1986): 1–25, and Yosef Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem, 1986), especially pp. 22–24. On science and philosophy in *Sefer ha-Maskil*, see Ta-Shema, "Sefer ha-Maskil," 435, 437–38.

Though the observation about propaedeutic studies is mine, I owe the vigorous formulation about the Ashkenazim's keen interest in the world around them to a conversation with Ta-Shema; cf. Noah Shapira, "'Al ha-Yeda' ha-Tekhni ve-ha-Tekhnologi shel Rashi," *Korot* 3 (1963): 145–61, where Rashi's extensive technological information is treated, probably wrongly, as exceptional. See now the brief but very important note by Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Ḥibbur Ashkenazi Bilti Noda' be-Madda'ei ha-Teva'," *Kiryat Sefer* 62 (1988–89): 448–49, where he describes a scientific treatise by a fourteenth-century French Jew who was particularly interested in practical science, including various instruments, and who reported that he had written a

general, we discover the possibility of creative interaction that may have transformed important aspects of Ashkenazic piety and thought.

First of all, the religious confrontation with the Christian world impelled some Jews to study Latin as a polemical tool. More important, the ruthless pursuit of straightforward interpretation, or *peshat*, by twelfth-century Jewish commentators in France can plausibly be seen as a Jewish reaction to nonliteral Christian exegesis. A Jewish polemicist insisting upon *peshat* in a debate with a Christian could not easily return home and read the Bible in a way that violated the very principles of contextual, grammatical interpretation that he had just been passionately defending. Even explanations that are not labeled as anti-Christian can be motivated by the desire to avoid Christological assertions. There is, moreover, substantial evidence of scholarly interchange of a cordial, nonpolemical sort among Jews and Christians attempting to uncover the sense of the biblical text, and the Jewish approach had a considerable impact on the churchmen of St. Victor and other Christian commentators. Finally, the fact that the explosion of Jewish learning and literary activity took place in twelfth-century France may well be related to the concomitant "renaissance of the twelfth century" in the larger society.[108]

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different work demonstrating how scientific knowledge sheds new light on the understanding of Torah. See also n. 131 below.

The warm, respectful welcome extended to R. Abraham ibn Ezra by prominent Tosafists certainly does not bespeak instinctive hostility to bearers of a broader cultural orientation. For Ta-Shema's more problematic assertion that Ashkenaz boasted full-fledged rationalist allegorizers, see his "Sefer ha-Maskil," 421; if such an approach had really attained an appreciable level of visibility in Northern Europe, it is hard to imagine that we would not find more substantial criticisms of it in the extant literature. Finally, it is worth noting an oral observation by Haym Soloveitchik that the major rabbinic luminaries of Northern France are not among the signatories of the ban against the *Guide* and *Sefer ha-Madda*.

108. See Aryeh Grabois, "The *Hebraica Veritas* and Jewish-Christian Intellectual Relations in the Twelfth Century," *Speculum* 50 (1975): 613–34; David Berger, "Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages," *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 576–91; Berger, "Gilbert Crispin, Alan of Lille, and Jacob ben Reuben: A Study in the Transmission of Medieval Polemic," *Speculum* 49 (1974): 34–47 (on the use of Latin texts by a Jewish polemicist); Avraham Grossman, "Ha-Pulmus ha-Yehudi-ha-Noẓri ve-ha-Parshanut ha-Yehudit la-Miqra be-Ẓarfat ba-Me'ah ha-Yod-Bet (le-Parashat Ziqqato shel Ri

The stereotype of the narrow Ashkenazi sometimes included the assertion that even biblical study was ignored, and there is a degree of validity in this image, particularly in the later Middle Ages.[109] Nonetheless, the innovative biblical exegesis in twelfth-century France demonstrates that this perception is selective and skewed. Not only did Ashkenazic Jews study Bible; biblical exegesis served as both a battleground and a bridge where Jews and Christians came into frequent, creative contact as enemies and as partners.

Qara el ha-Pulmus)," *Ẓion* 51 (1986): 29–60 (for persuasive examples of unlabeled anti-Christian commentaries); Grossman, *Ḥakhmei Ẓarfat ha-Rishonim*, 473–504; Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, 1964); Elazar Touitou, "Shitato ha-Parshanit shel ha-Rashbam 'al Reqa' ha-Meẓiut ha-Historit shel Zemanno," in Y. D. Gilat et al., eds., *'Iyyunim be-Sifrut Ḥazal ba-Miqra u-be-Toledot Yisrael: Muqdash li-Prof. Ezra. Zion Melamed* (Ramat Gan, 1982), 48–74 (on the impact of the twelfth-century Renaissance).

For the possible influence of Christian art on Ashkenazic Jews, see Joseph Gutmann's presentation and my response in J. Gutmann et al., *What Can Jewish History Learn From Jewish Art?* (New York, 1989), 1–18, 29–38. Gabriele L. Strauch's *Dukus Horant: Wanderer Zwischen Zwei Welten* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1990) analyzes a fairly typical medieval German romance written or copied by a fourteenth-century German Jew in Yiddish (or at least in Hebrew characters with some specifically Jewish terminology). Note also Dan, *Torat ha-Sod*, 37–39, for some general observations on the impact of folk beliefs about magic, astrology, and the like on Ashkenazic Jewry. Finally, Ivan G. Marcus has now presented an analysis of an Ashkenazic ritual for the purpose of illuminating the manner in which responses to Christian society can make their way into the religious life of both scholars and the laity; see his *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven and London, 1996).

109. See Profiat Duran's introduction to *Ma'aseh Efod*, 41, and the discussion in Isadore Twersky, "Religion and Law," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. by Goitein, 74–77. See also Mordechai Breuer, "Min 'u Beneikhem min ha-Higgayon," in *Mikhtam le-David: Sefer Zikhron ha-Rav David Ochs*, ed. by Yitzhak Gilat and Eliezer Stern (Ramat Gan, 1978), 242–64, and Frank Talmage, "Keep Your Sons From Scripture: The Bible in Medieval Jewish Scholarship and Spirituality," in *Understanding Scripture: Explorations of Jewish and Christian Traditions of Interpretation*, ed. by Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod (New York, 1987), 81–101. On evidence for Ashkenazic biblical study in the precrusade period, see Avraham Grossman, *Ḥakhmei Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim*, 240, 288–89, 323 (inter alia), and cf. my review, "Ḥeqer Rabbanut Ashkenaz ha-Qedumah," *Tarbiẓ* 53 (1984): 484, n. 7. For an overall analysis of the evidence, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Detroit, 1992), 79–85.

In the field of biblical study, interaction is firmly established; what requires elucidation is the extent and nature of its effects. We face a more fundamental problem with respect to the most intriguing question of all: Did the revolutionary use of dialectic in the talmudic methodology of the Northern French Tosafists owe anything to the intellectual upheaval in the larger society? There is hardly any evidence of Jewish familiarity in Ashkenaz with the study of canon law and philosophy, which were the two major areas in which the search for contradictions or inconsistencies and their subsequent resolution began to play a central role. It is even more difficult to imagine that Christians, whose familiarity with the Talmud was virtually nil, could have been much influenced by Tosafists. At the same time, the very individuals who pursued the new methodologies in fields unknown by the members of the other faith met on the terrain of biblical studies. Rashbam, who was a Tosafist as well as a *peshat*-oriented biblical exegete, is a good Jewish example. In light of these well-documented contacts, it surely cannot be ruled out—indeed, it seems overwhelmingly likely—that some taste of the exciting new approaches was transmitted. When the German pietists wanted to criticize the Tosafist approach, they denounced the utilization of "Gentile dialectic" (*dial tiqa* [*dialeqtiqah*] *shel goyim*); though we are under no obligation to endorse the historical judgment of the pietists, the criticism establishes at least a threshold level of familiarity with the term and its application.[110]

The relationship of these pietists to the surrounding culture is itself highly suggestive. The system of penances that they introduced into the process of repentance is no longer regarded as a defining characteristic of their movement; nonetheless, that system remains a major development in the history of Jewish piety, and despite a smattering of antecedents in rabbinic literature, it is overwhelmingly likely that the

110. See Kanarfogel, *Jewish Education*, 70–73. The pietists' denunciation of dialectic is in *Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. by J. Wistinetsky, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main, 1924), par. 752, p. 191. Note too the citation of some parallel methods in *Tosafot* and Christian works in Jose Faur, "The Legal Thinking of Tosafot: An Historical Approach," *Diné Israel* 6 (1975): xliii–lxxii. For intimate familiarity with Christian works in the writings of the probably atypical R. Elḥanan b. Yaqar of London, see G. Vajda, "De quelques infiltrations chrétiennes dans l'oeuvre d'un auteur anglo-juif du XIIIe siècle," *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 28 (1961): 15–34.

influence of the Christian environment was decisive.[111] With respect to quintessentially religious behavior, the inhibition against following Christian models should have been overwhelming, and I think that the psychological factor that overcame it was analogous to the competitive imitation that we have already seen in Muslim Spain. It was critically important for the Jewish self-image that Jews not be inferior to the host society. In Spain, the competition was cultural and intellectual; in Ashkenaz, given the different complexion of both majority and minority culture, it was a competition in religious devotion. I have suggested elsewhere that this consideration may account in part for the assertions by Jewish polemicists that the chastity of monks and nuns is more apparent than real. Celibacy was an area in which Jewish law did not allow competition, and so the problem was resolved by the not entirely unfounded allegation that the religious self-sacrifice of Christians was illusory. With respect to self-mortification for sin, Jewish law was not quite so clear, and Ashkenazic pietists set out to demonstrate that they would not be put to shame by Christian zeal in the service of God.[112]

In the late Middle Ages, Northern European Jewry was subjected to expulsions, persecutions, and dislocations which disrupted its cultural life and moved its center of gravity eastward. By the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, a figure like R. Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen of Prague demonstrates that some Jewish intellectuals had achieved familiarity with philosophy and general culture. In 1973, Ephraim Kupfer published a seminal article which attempted to establish the substantial presence of rationalism in Ashkenaz during this period. There can be no question that much of the evidence

111. On the Christian analogues to the penances of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz, see Yitzhak Baer, "Ha-Megammah ha-Datit ve-ha-Ḥevratit shel Sefer Ḥasidim," *Ẓion* 3 (1938): 18–20. For the new evaluation of the movement's center of gravity, see Haym Soloveitchik, "Three Themes in the Sefer Ḥasidim," *AJS Review* 1 (1976): 311–57. See also Ivan Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden, 1981).

112. On celibacy, see my observations in *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 27. I have elaborated somewhat in a forthcoming essay [published as "Al Tadmitam ve-Goralam shel ha-Goyim be-Sifrut ha-Pulmus ha-Ashkenazit," in Yom Tov Assis et al., eds., *Yehudim mul ha-Tzlav: Gezerot Tatnu be-Historiah u-ve-Historiografiah* (Jerusalem, 2000), 74–91, and translated into English in my book *Persecution, Polemic, and Dialogue: Essays in Jewish-Christian Relations* (Boston, 2004), 109–38].

that he adduced is significant and stimulating. We can hardly fail to be intrigued, for example, by an argument in an Ashkenazic text that ancient shifts in the *halakhah* of levirate marriage resulted from a rejection of metempsychosis by increasingly sophisticated rabbis. At the same time, it is far from clear that this material reflects the views and interests of substantial segments of Ashkenazic society, and it is very likely that one of the important figures in the article came to Europe from Israel bearing texts and ideas that stem from the Jewish communities of the Muslim East. Both the dissemination and the rootedness of philosophical study in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Ashkenaz remain an open question, and I am inclined to think that it stood considerably closer to the periphery than to the center.[113]

The question of the standing of philosophy among fifteenth-century Ashkenazim has a significant bearing on the proper evaluation of major trends and figures in the intellectual life of the burgeoning new center in sixteenth-century Poland. R. Moses Isserles and R. Mordecai Jaffe are the two most prominent examples of

113. See Kupfer, "Li-Demutah," *Tarbiẓ* 42 (1973): 113–47. It is noteworthy that one of the texts cited by Kupfer (p. 129) takes it for granted that the ancient rabbis learned proper methods of demonstration from the works of Aristotle, a position which reverses the standard medieval Jewish assertion about the source of Greek philosophy. See also Kupfer's brief supplementary notes in his "Hassagot min Ḥakham Eḥad 'al Divrei he-Ḥakham ha-Rav R. Yosef b. ha-Qadosh R. Yosef ha-Lo'azi she-Katav ve-Qara be-Qol Gadol neged ha-Rambam," *Qoveẓ 'al Yad* n.s. 11 [21] (1985): 215–16, nn. 2, 4. For some evidence of interest in philosophy outside the "Mühlhausen circle," particularly in *Sefer Hadrat Qodesh* written in Germany shortly before the middle of the fourteenth century, see Davis, *R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller*, 88–103, and see now his "Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism: The Evidence of *Sefer Hadrat Qodesh*," *AJS Review* 18 (1993): 195–222. For an early, brief expression of reservations about Kupfer's thesis, see Joseph Dan, "Ḥibbur Yiḥud Ashkenazi min ha-Me'ah ha-Yod-Dalet," *Tarbiẓ* 44 (1975): 203–6. For a more detailed critique, see Israel Jacob Yuval, *Ḥakhamim be-Doram* (Jerusalem, 1988), 286–311. In an oral communication, Moshe Idel has noted several considerations pointing to the likelihood that Menaḥem Shalem came from Israel: His non-Ashkenazic name usually refers to a Jerusalemite; he makes reference to Emmaus, which he identifies as Latrun; he had a text by Abraham Abulafia and a translation of an Arabic text by Abraham Maimonides. If Idel is correct, and if Kupfer's suggestion that the two Menaḥems in his study are really one and the same is also correct, then the dominant personality in the article was not an Ashkenazic Jew.

distinguished Talmudists who maintained a position of moderate rationalism in which a conservative understanding of Maimonides and a philosophical interpretation of kabbalah served to unite diverse strands of Jewish piety and theology in a manner that removed any threat to traditional religious affirmations.[114] If Kupfer is correct, then this position can be seen as a natural continuation of intellectual trends in late medieval Ashkenaz, and the approach of Isserles and Jaffe would fit well into their generally conservative posture. If he is not, then we must seek other sources for the penetration of philosophical ideas into Polish Jewish thought.

The first of these is the Northern European Renaissance, which affected both Poland and Bohemia and can consequently help to account not only for the elements of rationalism in the works of Polish rabbis but for the significant scientific and philosophical activity among the Jews of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Prague. In the case of David Gans of Prague, the relationship with Christian society is crystal-clear: Gans was the first influential Jew to confront Copernicanism, and he did so as a personal associate of Tycho Brahe and Johann Kepler. Gans's illustrious contemporary, R. Judah Loew (Maharal), produced an impressive theological corpus which made extensive, though cautious use of the Jewish philosophical tradition, and described astronomy as "a ladder to ascend to the wisdom of the Torah," while his student R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller, best known for his standard commentary to the Mishnah, displayed considerable interest in the pursuit of mathematics and astronomy. The period from 1560 to 1620 saw a significant increase in works of a philosophical and scientific nature throughout the Ashkenazic orbit, and the contacts between the Jewish communities of Prague and Poland no doubt contributed to the spread of these pursuits. A second significant source of cultural stimulation for Polish Jewry may well have been Renaissance Italy. Polish Jews were in continual contact with Italy

114. See Lawrence Kaplan, "Rabbi Mordekhai Jaffe and the Evolution of Jewish Culture in Poland in the Sixteenth Century," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. by Bernard D. Cooperman (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England, 1983), 266–82. On Isserles' thought, see Yonah Ben Sasson, *Mishnato ha-'Iyyunit shel ha-Rama* (Jerusalem, 1984).

in a multitude of contexts; numerous Padua-trained physicians came to Poland, and a constant stream of literary material crossed the border.[115]

The use of this material would have been legitimated in the eyes of some conservatives by the heroic image of Maimonides, whose orthodoxy was now beyond reproach. Once again, we find an exception which genuinely proves this rule. In mid-sixteenth-century Posen, the extreme and eccentric antirationalist R. Joseph Ashkenazi persuaded his father-in-law R. Aaron to deliver an uncompromising attack against the study of philosophy. Ashkenazi, as we know from a later work of his, attacked Maimonides with startling vitriol as an outright heretic who deserves no defense and who is largely responsible for popularizing the allegorization of the Bible and of *aggadah* that has undermined authentic Judaism. Nevertheless, he himself cited with disgust the unanimity of the admiring chorus of Maimonides' supporters, and R. Avraham Horowitz's attack on Ashkenazi demonstrates further the passionate reaction inspired by unrestrained criticism of the author of the *Guide*. Horowitz's work, which contains a vigorous defense of philosophical study, also reflects the presence in sixteenth-century Poland of unabashed exponents of speculation, although the author's partial revision of his rationalist views years later points to the countervailing forces that may well have been dominant even at that time, as they surely were by the dawn of the Jewish enlightenment.[116]

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115. On Gans in particular and Prague in general, see Mordecai Breuer, "Qavvim li-Demuto shel R. David Gans Ba'al *Ẓemaḥ David*," *Bar Ilan* 11 (1973): 97–103, and his edition of *Sefer Ẓemaḥ David le-Rabbi David Gans* (Jerusalem, 1983), esp. pp. 1–9. On Heller, see Davis, *R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller*, 339–517; for documentation on the upsurge in Ashkenazic works of a philosophical and scientific nature, see Davis, 121–29. On the contacts between Ashkenaz and Italy, see Jacob Elbaum, "Qishrei Tarbut bein Yehudei Polin ve-Ashkenaz le-bein Yehudei Italia ba-Me'ah ha-Tet-Zayin," *Gal'ed* 7–8 (1985): 11–40, and, more briefly, his *Petiḥut Ve-Histaggerut* (Jerusalem, 1990), 33–54. On Jews in the medical school at Padua, see Daniel Carpi, "Yehudim Ba'alei Toar Doctor li-Refuah mi-Ta 'am Universitat Padua ba-Me'ah ha-Tet-Zayin u-be-Reshit ha-Me'ah ha-Yod-Zayin," in *Sefer Zikkaron le-Natan Cassutto (Scritti in Memoria di Nathan Cassuto)*, ed. by Daniel Carpi, Augusto Segre, and Renzo Toaff (Jerusalem, 1986), 62–91.

116. Lawrence Kaplan has pointed out that despite the impression given by some earlier scholarship, Horowitz's revision does not represent a radical rejection of his earlier

Isserles' conservative philosophical treatise contained considerable scientific discussion as well, and he also wrote a separate astronomical work in the form of a commentary to the standard textbook in that field, Georg Peurbach's *Theoricae Novae Planetarum*. R. Solomon Luria, in an oft-quoted exchange with Isserles, denounced him for citing scientific information derived from gentile sources in a halakhic decision about the *kashrut* of a particular animal and for reading philosophical works at all, and he blames such attitudes for the bizarre and otherwise unattested phenomenon of young Polish Jews who recite an Aristotelian prayer in the synagogue. Isserles' response is revealing. He justified his actions, but made it clear that he gained his scientific knowledge only from Jewish books and that he pursued these studies only at times when most people are out taking walks on Sabbaths and holidays.

Recent research has tended to portray a greater openness to rationalism and science than we had been accustomed to ascribe to this Jewry. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to take the pulse of sixteenth-century Polish Jewish intellectuals with respect to our question: probably a small group of full-fledged rationalists, a substantial number of conservative advocates of a tamed philosophy, and a significant group of rabbis who either shied away from speculation or actively opposed it.[117]

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views; see "Rabbi Mordekhai Jaffe," 281, n. 8. Horowitz's attack was published and discussed by Ph. Bloch, "Der Streit um den Moreh des Maimonides in der Gemeinde Posen um die Mitte des 16 Jahrh.," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums* 47 (1903): 153–69, 263–79, 346–56. For an analysis of Joseph Ashkenazi and selections from his work, see Gershom Scholem, "Yedi'ot Ḥadashot 'al R. Yosef Ashkenazi, ha-'Tanna' mi-Ẓefat," *Tarbiẓ* 28 (1959): 59–89, 201–35. A detailed response to Ashkenazi by a contemporary Italian Jew was published by Kupfer, "Hassagot min Ḥakham Eḥad," *Qovez al Yad* n.s. 11 [21] (1985): 213–88. On Ashkenazi's denunciation even of Maimonides' code, see I. Twersky, "R. Yosef Ashkenazi ve-Sefer Mishneh Torah la-Rambam," *Sefer ha-Yovel li-Khevod Shalom Baron*, ed. by Saul Lieberman (Jerusalem, 1975), 183–94. The moderate rationalism of R. Eliezer Ashkenazi of Posen also deserves mention, although the fact that he spent many years in the East mitigates his significance for a characterization of Polish Jewry; see the analysis of Ashkenazi's exegetical independence in Haim Hillel Ben Sasson, *Hagut ve-Hanhagah* (Jerusalem, 1959), 34–38.

117. On Isserles' astronomical treatise, see Y. Tzvi Langermann, "The Astronomy of Rabbi Moses Isserles," in *Physics, Cosmology, and Astronomy, 1300–1700: Tension and Accommodation*, ed. by S. Unguru (Dordrecht and Boston, 1991), 83–98. For the

ITALIAN SYMBIOSIS

With respect to Poland and the Ottoman Empire, we could legitimately speak of successor cultures to Ashkenaz and Spain respectively, despite the fact that Middle Eastern Jewry had its own intellectual tradition before the Iberian immigration. Italy is a more complex and more interesting story. Despite their Christian environment, the Jews of medieval Italy appear to have maintained a greater degree of openness to the surrounding culture than did Ashkenazic Jewry. Shabbetai Donnolo is a well-known, early example of the sort of learned physician and scientist that we usually associate with Jews in the Muslim orbit. To some degree, this phenomenon may have resulted from the significant Muslim impact on Southern Italy, but I am inclined to attribute even greater importance to the fact that pre-twelfth-century Southern Europe maintained a greater continuity with the classical past than did the Christian communities of the North. A case in point is the familiarity of the anonymous tenth-century Italian Jew who wrote *Josippon* with earlier Latin works. By the thirteenth century, Italian Jews displayed a level of sophistication in philosophical and literary pursuits that owed something to contacts with Iberia but at least as much to a receptivity to the cultural developments in their immediate environment. Thus, easily the most philosophically sophisticated anti-Christian polemicist of the thirteenth century was Moses ben Solomon of Salerno, and the often secular, sometimes ribald poetry of Immanuel of Rome could not have been composed in any other Jewry in the medieval Christian world.[118]

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exchange between Isserles and R. Solomon Luria, see *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Rama*, ed. by Asher Siev (Jerusalem, 1971), nos. 5–7, pp. 18–38, and cf. the summary in Ben Zion Katz, *Rabbanut, Ḥasidut, Haskalah* 1 (Tel Aviv, 1956), 32–33. It is worth noting that even Luria maintains that he is as familiar with the disputed literature as Isserles (Siev, p. 26). On Poland specifically and sixteenth-century Ashkenazic Jewry in general, see Jacob Elbaum, *Zeramim u-Megammot be-Sifrut ha-Maḥashavah ve-ha-Musar be-Ashkenaz u-be-Polin ba-Me'ah ha-Tet-Zayin* (Hebrew University dissertation, 1977), 120–35; Elbaum, *Petiḥut ve-Histaggerut*, esp. ch. 5; Davis, *R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller*; and the still useful survey by Lawrence H. Davis, "The Great Debate: Secular Studies and the Jews in Sixteenth Century Poland," *Yavneh Review* 3 (1963): 42–58.

118. On Donnolo, see the discussion and references in A. Sharf, *The Universe of Shabbetai Donnolo* (New York, 1976). For the greater cultural continuity in Southern Europe,

Toward the end of the Middle Ages, both Sephardic and Ashkenazic immigrants introduced a mixture of new influences. Elijah del Medigo's late fifteenth-century *Beḥinat ha-Dat* is a clear-cut example of the impact of rationalism, but the fate of Aristotelian philosophy among the Jews of Renaissance Italy is bound up with central questions about their cultural posture. Lists of books in Italian Jewish libraries in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries appear to reflect a decline of interest in philosophy from the beginning to the end of that period, with the important and unsurprising exception of Maimonides' *Guide* and some of its commentators. This impression is reinforced by a complaint leveled by R. Isaac Abravanel in Venice as early as the late fifteenth century about the unavailability of Averroes' *Epistle on the Conjunction* and Moses of Narboni's commentary on it. If the requisite work were "*tosafot* or codes, I would borrow it from one of the natives, but in philosophy this is impossible." The declining philosophical content of Jewish sermons in the first half of the sixteenth century provides further evidence of the same significant development.[119]

The diminution of interest in metaphysics does not bespeak the end of Italian Jewish acculturation. First of all, the continuing use of the scholastic philosophical approach by no less a figure than R. Ovadiah Seforno demonstrates the persistent vitality of that tradition within

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see R. W. Southern's observations in *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven and London, 1953), 20–25. On *Josippon*, see *Sefer Yosifon*, ed. by David Flusser, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1978, 1980); in particular, note Flusser's well-documented observation that the author knew Latin works better than rabbinic literature. Moses of Salerno's philosophical polemic was published by Stanislaus Simon, *Mose ben Salerno von Salerno und seine philosophischen Auseinandersetzung mit den Lehren des Christentums* (Breslau, 1931). For Immanuel, see *Maḥberot Immanuel*, ed. by A. M. Haberman (Tel Aviv, 1946).

119. For del Medigo, see his *SeferBeḥinat ha-Dat*, ed. by Jacob Ross (Tel Aviv, 1984), and D. Geffen, "Insights into the Life and Thought of Elijah del Medigo Based on his Published and Unpublished Works," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 41–42 (1973–74): 69–86. On libraries, sermons, and the overall phenomenon, see Reuven Bonfil, *Ha-Rabbanut be-Italia bi-Tequfat ha-Renaissance* (Jerusalem, 1979), 173–206; *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford and New York, 1990), 270–323. For the citation from Abravanel, see Hacker, "The Intellectual Activity of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire" (above, n. 104), n. 47 (pp. 117–18).

important rabbinic circles. More important, Renaissance Christians were themselves engaged in disputes about the value of philosophy and tended to emphasize the scientific, ethical, and political dimensions of the Aristotelian corpus rather than its metaphysical component; in a sense, then, the very de-emphasis of the philosophical tradition can be seen not as a turning inward but as a reflection of a larger cultural trend. There is no denying that the gradual displacement of Aristotelianism by kabbalah in the minds of many Italian Jews reflected a desire to emphasize the uniqueness of the Jewish people and its culture in a manner reminiscent of Halevi, whose *Kuzari* underwent something of a popular revival; nonetheless, even R. Yeḥiel Nissim of Pisa, who produced the most impressive reasoned argument for this displacement, recognized the value of philosophical investigations, not to speak of scientific inquiry, provided that they were not assigned primacy in a rivalry with the Torah.[120]

Once we step outside the four ells of Aristotelian metaphysics, the evidence for Renaissance Jewry's immersion in the surrounding culture becomes overwhelming. Indeed, to an observer coming to the subject from the study of another Jewish community, including that of Iberia, the lively and genuinely significant historians' debate over the inner or outer directedness of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian Jews takes on a surreal quality. This is a community with intellectuals entranced by the rhetorical works of Cicero and Quintilian and with preachers who lace their sermons with references to classical authors while insisting that the Bible cannot be properly understood without a literary sensitivity nurtured by careful study of gentile as well as Jewish literature. It is a community with thinkers who set up the Renaissance ideal of homo universalis or *ḥakham kolel* as a paradigm of intellectual perfection attained by King Solomon and sought by anyone with healthy educational priorities. It is a community that produced a plan, at least on paper, of setting up what one observer has described as a Yeshiva University, where the primary emphasis would be on the study of "the written and oral Torah, laws, *tosafot*, and decisors," but instruction would also be provided in the works of Jewish philosophers, Hebrew grammar,

120. See Bonfil, *Ha-Rabbanut*, 179–90; *Rabbis*, 280–98.

rhetoric, Latin, Italian, logic, medicine, non-Jewish philosophical works, mathematics, cosmography, and astrology. It is a community with vigorous, ongoing exchanges with the contemporary Christian elite. Not only did Elias Levita teach Hebrew to Christian scholars; not only did kabbalah itself, which was sometimes taught by Jews, inspire the speculative creativity of Christian thinkers; it now appears likely that Pico della Mirandola's version of the quintessentially Renaissance definition of man as a median creature with the power to fashion himself in freedom owes much to a medieval Muslim formulation mediated by Pico's Jewish associate Yoḥanan Alemanno.[121]

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121. On rhetoric, see *The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow. Sefer Nofeth Suphim by Judah Messer Leon.* A Critical Edition and Translation by Isaac Rabinowitz (Ithaca and London, 1983). See also R. Bonfil's introduction to the facsimile edition of *Nofet Ṣufim* (Jerusalem, 1981). Like del Medigo, Messer Leon was interested in philosophy as well. On homo universalis and King Solomon, see Arthur M. Lesley, *The Song of Solomon's Ascents* (University of California at Berkeley dissertation, 1976), and the citation from David Messer Leon's *Shevaḥ Nashim* in Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, "In Defense of Jewish Humanism," *Jewish History* 3 (1988): 54 (n. 55); note also her remarks on p. 33.

On the proposal in 1564 to set up an academy for Torah and general studies in Mantua, see the text in Asaf, *Meqorot* 2, pp. 116–20; Asaf noted (p. 115) that only an Italian Jew could have thought of such a project. The apt analogy to Yeshiva University was made by Yeḥezkel Cohen, "Ha-Yaḥas le-Limmudei Ḥol me-Ḥazal ve-'ad Yameinu—Seqirah Historit-Sifrutit," in *Yaḥas ha-Yahadut le-Limmudei Ḥol* (Israel, 1983), 20. Although this would not have been a degree granting institution, the plan envisioned a preparatory program that would enable the student to enroll subsequently in a formal *studio* and receive a secular degree (*semikhah*!) in a very short time. On Elias Levita and the teaching of Hebrew and kabbalah to Christians, see the discussion in Yitzhak Penkower, "Iyyun Meḥuddash be-Sefer Massoret ha-Massoret le-Eliyyahu Baḥur: Iḥur ha-Niqqud u-Biqqoret Sefer ha-Zohar," *Italia* 8 (1989): 36–50, and the references in n. 93 (pp. 37–38).

For Alemanno's likely influence on Pico's crucial conception of man, see Moshe Idel, "The Anthropology of Yohanan Alemanno: Sources and Influences," *Topoi* 7 (1988): 201–10. David Ruderman has recently argued that Pico's replacement of a narrow vision of Christian culture with one that was more broadly human created a new challenge and a new opportunity for Renaissance Jews confronting their intellectual environment; see his very useful summary article, "The Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought," in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy, Volume I: Humanism in Italy,* ed. by Albert Rabil Jr. (Philadelphia, 1988), 382–433.

At the same time, vigorous opposition to philosophy and the humanist agenda produced a continuing debate. The fact that Joseph Ashkenazi wrote his vitriolic attack against Maimonides while in Italy is no doubt fortuitous, but it made enough of an impact there to have elicited an elaborate refutation. Yosef Yavetz's *Or ha-Ḥayyim* is the work of a Spanish exile in Naples who rejected philosophical pursuits as damaging to faith and did battle with the hallowed rationalist understanding of the biblical admonition to "know" God as a philosophical imperative; a pious individual needs to be rescued from "the ambush of human reason, which lurks in wait ... at all times." R. David Proventzalo advised the young David Messer Leon to follow the ways of distant Talmudists rather than the philosophical agenda of local rabbis, who appear to assign no value to the Torah and Talmud. R. Ovadiah of Bertinoro denounced the study of Aristotle in particular and philosophy in general in both his commentary to the Mishnah and his correspondence, writing approvingly of the untainted piety that he found in the land of Israel in contrast to the deplorable situation in Italy. In the introduction to his halakhic work *Giddulei Terumah*, R. Azariah Figo lamented his youthful pursuit of general culture in the late sixteenth century and described his decision to "expel this maidservant" and return to the Talmud, although it is noteworthy that he berated himself only for reversing the proper order of priorities, not for pursuing a forbidden path.[122]

122. On the response to Ashkenazi, see Kupfer, "Hassagot min Ḥakham Eḥad" (above, n. 113). For the translation from Yavetz's *Or ha-Ḥayyim* (Lublin, 1910), 74–76, see Arthur M. Lesley, "The Place of the *Dialoghi d'amore* in Contemporaneous Jewish Thought," in *Ficino and Renaissance Neoplatonism*, ed. by K. Eisenbichler and O.Z. Pugliese (University of Toronto Italian Studies I, Ottawa, 1986), 75, and cf. Barzilay's discussion, *Between Reason and Faith*, 133–49. For R. Ovadiah of Bertinoro, see his commentary to *Sanhedrin* 10:1 and the letter published in A. Kahana, *Sifrut ha-Historiah ha-Yisre'elit* 2 (Warsaw, 1923), 47, and cf. the commentary to *Avot* 5:22. Cf. also Immanuel Benevento's kabbalistically motivated hostility to philosophy; see the references in Segal, *Historical Consciousness and Religious Tradition*, 61–62 (n. 20). On Proventzalo's advice, see Bonfil, *Ha-Rabbanut*, 173–74; *Rabbis*, 270. For Figo, see *Sefer Giddulei Terumah* (Venice, 1643), and Barzilay, 192–209. A similar statement of regret at excessive attention to works of general culture appears in the early seventeenth-century *Shiltei ha-Gibborim* of Abraham Portaleone, but the book itself, despite its presumed character as an act of penitence for these intellectual

Despite the advice that he received, David Messer Leon ultimately opted for humanist pursuits to the point of arguing that the Talmudist who is also a *ḥakham kolel* is more deserving of rabbinic ordination than an ordinary Talmudist. When he left Italy for Constantinople, he found himself under attack for his frequent citation of classical literature in his sermons; in response, he produced a passionate defense of the humanist enterprise, arguing for the value of classical poetry and rhetoric in achieving human perfection, which is bound up with the quest for religious perfection. Two Jewish biographies, one of King Solomon, the other of Isaac Abravanel, written in Italy between the late fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries, clearly reflect Renaissance literary trends and further illustrate Jewish involvement in humanistic study and creativity. The seventeenth-century autobiography of Leone da Modena, which can be seen as an extension of this genre, is but one of many indications not only of its author's extraordinary range of interests but of the continuing, even growing Jewish familiarity with the broader culture well into the Baroque period. The glorification of Hebrew reached its peak at the height of the Renaissance, while in the post-Renaissance period even Jewish authors with an excellent command of Hebrew were ever more likely to write in the vernacular.[123]

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indiscretions, is replete with references to the classics; see Segal, 52, and the references in n. 23. In a personal communication, David Ruderman has underscored his view of Portaleone and Figo as anti-Aristotelians who nevertheless maintained a positive attitude toward empirical science.

123. Messer Leon's observation on the qualifications for ordination is reminiscent of the assertion that angered R. Asher b. Yeḥiel about the connection between knowledge of Arabic and the right to render a decision in Jewish law. The apologia for humanism is in Messer Leon's unpublished *Shevaḥ Nashim;* for a summary and analysis, see Tirosh-Rothschild, "In Defense of Jewish Humanism." On the biographies, see Arthur M. Lesley, "Hebrew Humanism in Italy: The Case of Biography," *Prooftexts* 2 (1982): 163–77. Da Modena was a multifaceted figure who continues to fascinate. See *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena's The Life of Judah,* trans. and ed. by Mark R. Cohen (Princeton, 1988), and cf. Cohen's "Leone da Modena's *Riti:* A Seventeenth-Century Plea for Social Toleration of Jews," *Jewish Social Studies* 34 (1972): 287–321. On the persistence and growth of certain forms of acculturation, including use of the vernacular, in the Baroque period, see Robert Bonfil, "Change in the Cultural Patterns of a Jewish Society in Crisis: Italian Jewry at the Close of the Sixteenth Century," *Jewish History* 3 (1988): 11–30.

In her study of David Messer Leon's work, Havah Tirosh-Rothschild observes that

> by the end of the fifteenth century, Jewish rationalist tradition had so absorbed Greek philosophy that it had become far less subversive and was even palatable. By David ben Judah's day, however, no such absorption had yet occurred of the poetry, oratory, geography, history and letters of classical antiquity—all introduced to Jews through Renaissance humanism. These subjects, if not philosophy, still seemed to threaten Jewish traditional values, at least in Constantinople if not in Italy.[124]

The point is an important one; nevertheless, most of these pursuits did not have the potential to challenge Judaism in the manner of Aristotelian philosophy. The one which did was history, and the Italian Jew who utilized the discipline dangerously generated a brief but revealing cause célèbre.

In its most common mode, history was a humanistic endeavor no more dangerous than poetry or rhetoric, and some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jews in Italy and elsewhere utilized it to provide religious consolation, to place the Jewish experience in a broader context, to validate the tradition, to set the stage for the end of days, to ponder

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For some observations on Italian Jewish familiarity with Christian philosophy and, more generally, on the relatively painless absorption by this Jewry of a multitude of diverse disciplines and approaches, see Yosef Sermoneta's review of Barzilay's *Between Reason and Faith* in *Kiryat Sefer* 45 (1970): 539–46.

Despite changes in orientation and advances in methodology, the material accumulated in Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia, 1959), and Moses Shulvass, *The Jews in the Life of the Renaissance* (Leiden, 1973), retains its value and documents Jewish activity in fields like art, drama, music and printing; which I have been unable to treat in this survey. The most vigorous and influential argument for a new perspective is Bonfil's "The Historian's Perception of the Jews in the Italian Renaissance. Towards a Reappraisal," *Revue des Études Juives* 143 (1984): 59–82, which sees Italian Jewish acculturation as part of a competitive struggle affirming Jewish identity in the face of pressure rather than a reflection of an idyllic cultural symbiosis. See now Bonfil's synthetic treatment, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1994).

124. "In Defense of Jewish Humanism," 39.

the causes of the Jewish condition, or simply to entertain. Some of these purposes had been pursued even in the Middle Ages by the few Jews who had engaged in the enterprise of setting down events that had, after all, already taken place and whose utility was consequently viewed with considerable skepticism. R. Sherira's epistle took the form of a standard responsum; *Josippon* provided a basic historical survey as well as implicit advice about appropriate Jewish behavior in the face of superior force; R. Abraham ibn Daud's *Book of Tradition* validated the tradition, defended the glories of Andalusian Jewry, and may have pointed esoterically to the date of the redemption; the crusade chronicles provided emotional release and religious inspiration in the wake of unspeakable tragedy.[125]

Whether or not the historical writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jews reflect a significant historiographical movement has recently become a disputed question. On the one hand, Jewish authors produced ten books of a roughly historical character in the course of about a century, a number that exceeds the entire output of the Middle Ages, and some of these are clearly indebted to the historiographic corpus that emerged in Renaissance society. On the other hand, a rigorous definition of *history* would exclude many, perhaps most, of these works, and even if they are all counted, they do not approach the number that one might reasonably expect in light of the proportion of Christian Renaissance works devoted to historiography.[126] In any event,

125. See *Sefer Yosifon*, ed. by Flusser; ibn Daud's *Sefer Ha-Qabbalah*, ed. by Cohen; Shlomo Eidelberg, *The Jews and the Crusaders* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1977), and Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987), 223–97. On R. Sherira, see above, n. 19. For an example of medieval Jewish denigration of the value of history, see Maimonides' *Commentary to the Mishnah, Sanhedrin* 10:1 (almost immediately before the list of the thirteen principles of faith).

126. See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish Histoty and Jewish Memory* (Seattle and London, 1982), 55–75, and his "Clio and the Jews: Reflections on Jewish Historiography in the Sixteenth Century," *American Academy for Jewish Research Jubilee Volume* (*PAAJR* 46–47 [1979–80]): 607–38; Robert Bonfil, "How Golden Was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?" *History and Theory* 27 (1988): 78–102. Bonfil accounts for what he regards as the relative paucity of Jewish historical works on the grounds that diaspora Jews did not have the sort of political and military history that lent itself to the narrative style most characteristic of Renaissance historiography.

despite the great interest of several of these books and despite their frequent debt to Christian models, they do not challenge Jewish tradition.

Except one. Azariah de' Rossi's *Me'or 'Einayim,* which is not a narrative history but a series of historical studies, utilized non-Jewish sources to test the validity of historical assertions in rabbinic texts to the point of rejecting the accepted chronology of the Second Temple and modifying the Jewish calendar's assumptions about the date of creation. The author was clearly sensitive to the prospect of opposition, and he defended the study of history on the grounds of religious utility and the intrinsic value of the search for truth. There is, however, considerable irony in his argument for rejecting historical statements of the Rabbis in favor of gentile authorities. The Sages, he writes, were concerned with important matters; with respect to trivial concerns like history, we should expect to find a greater degree of reliability in the works of gentiles, who after all specialize in trivialities.[127] The difficulty of distinguishing the strands of sincerity and disingenuousness in this assertion speaks volumes for the problematic nature of de' Rossi's undertaking. He can justify his methodology only by minimizing the significance of his discipline.

Contemporary historians differ about the novelty of de' Rossi's challenge. Since the reinterpretation and even rejection of *aggadah* had respectable medieval precedent, Salo Baron and Robert Bonfil have argued that Azariah did little more than broaden the grounds for such a step to embrace historical as well as philosophical or kabbalistic considerations. Yosef Yerushalmi, on the other hand, sees a more radical and significant innovation in *Me'or 'Einayim*; philosophy and kabbalah, he argues, had long been regarded as sources of truth, while Azariah was willing to utilize "profane history ... drawn from Greek, Roman and Christian writers" to judge the validity of rabbinic statements.[128] The distinction is important and the formulation can, I think, be sharpened. Philosophical truth was not based on the authority of Aristotle; it rested

127. *Sefer Me'or 'Einayim,* ed. by David Cassel (Vilna, 1866), 216.

128. See Baron, *History and Jewish Historians* (Philadelphia, 1964), 167–239, 405–42; Bonfil, "Some Reflections on the Place of Azariah de' Rossi's *Me'or 'Einayim* in the Cultural Milieu of Italian Renaissance Jewry," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century,* 23–48, esp. pp. 23–25; Yerushalmi, "Clio and the Jews," 634–35, and *Zakhor,* 72.

on arguments that Aristotle may have formulated but were now available to any thinker in an unmediated fashion. It was reason, not Aristotle, that required the reinterpretation of whatever rabbinic text was at issue. History is different. Although reason is very much involved and the decision to follow a gentile account instead of a rabbinic one does not result from a simple preference for Tacitus over Rabbi Yosi, the fact remains that on some level one is accepting the testimony of gentiles rather than that of the talmudic Sages. This may be a legitimate extension of the medieval precedent, but it is hardly a straightforward one.

This point tells us something significant about Italian Jewry and not merely about de' Rossi. Bonfil has demonstrated convincingly that the Italian attack on *Me'or 'Einayim* was much more limited in both its ideological scope and its degree of support than historians used to think. Since Bonfil himself does not see the work as radically innovative, he regards the relatively mild opposition as roughly the sort of reaction that we might have expected. Yerushalmi, writing before Bonfil's study, made the cautious observation that "it is perhaps a token of the flexibility of Italian Jewry that the ban upon the book, [which] only required that special permission be obtained by those who wanted to read it, was not always enforced stringently." If we accept, as I think we should, both Yerushalmi's perception of the book and Bonfil's findings about the ban, the implications for Italian Jewry become more striking. A substantial majority of the rabbinic leadership accepted with equanimity a work which treated the historical statements of the ancient Sages with startling freedom. The contrast with the intense opposition to *Me'or 'Einayim* from R. Joseph Caro in Safed and R. Judah Loew (Maharal) in Prague highlights the openness of sixteenth-century Italian Jews to non-Jewish sources and the willingness to utilize them even in the most sensitive of contexts.[129]

129. See Yerushalmi, "Clio," 635; *Zakhor*, 72–73. On R. Joseph Karo, see the references in Segal, *Historical Consciousness*, 68, n. 51; on the Maharal, see Segal, 133–61. Another, perhaps fairer way to make the point would be to say that Italian Jewry agreed with Bonfil while the Maharal and R. Joseph Caro agreed with Yerushalmi, but this alone would fail to convey the significance of the Italian position. For a nuanced discussion of major features of de' Rossi's work, see now Bonfil's elaborate introduction to his anthology, *Kitvei 'Azariah min ha-Adummim: Mivḥar Peraqim mi-tokh Sefer Me'or 'Einayim ve-Sefer Mazref la-Kesef* (Jerusalem, 1991).

THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION AND THE TRANSITION TO MODERN TIMES

Apart from the humanistic pursuits that characterized the Renaissance, early modern Europe also witnessed an increasing interest in the natural world. Though the most significant manifestation of this interest was the Copernican revolution and its aftermath, scientifically oriented Jews in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries evinced greater interest in new approaches to chemistry, medicine, zoology, botany, mineralogy, and geography. Hundreds of Jews graduated from the medical school in Padua. Various Jewish works demonstrate familiarity with Paracelsian chemical medicine and Cartesian mechanics, and they display an insatiable curiosity about wondrous beasts and other natural marvels widely reported in an age of exploration. We find a revival and elaboration of the medieval arguments for the Jewish origin of the sciences and their religious utility along with a recognition that the ancient philosophers had attained important religious truths unaided by Jewish instruction.[130]

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130. See David B. Ruderman, *Science, Medicine, and Jewish Culture in Early Modern Europe. Spiegel Lectures in European Jewish History* 7 (Tel Aviv, 1987), and his overlapping article, "The Impact of Science on Jewish Culture and Society in Venice," in *Gli Ebrei e Venezia* (Milan, 1987), 417–48. See also his *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1988). In light of Abba Mari of Lunel's salute to Aristotle for achieving genuine monotheism in the absence of revelation, Ruderman's description of Abraham Yagel's "remarkable" assertion that pagan philosophers "discovered their faith independently of Jewish revelation" (p. 146) needs to be toned down a bit; see above, n. 76. For Jews at the medical school in Padua, see above, n. 115.

On the Jewish origins of the sciences, see, in addition to the references in n. 37 of Ruderman's lecture, the introduction to David Kaufmann's *Die Sinne*, and D. Margalit, "'Al Galenus ve-Gilgulo ha-'Ivri Gamliel," *Sinai* 33 (1953): 75–77. On geography, see L. Zunz, "Essay on the Geographical Literature of the Jews from the Remotest Times to the Year 1840," in *The Itinerary of R. Benjamin of Tudela*, trans. A. Asher, 2 (London, 1841), 230–317; Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol* (Cincinnati, 1981), 131–43; André Neher, *Jewish Thought and the Scientific Revolution of the Sixteenth Century: David Gans (1541–1613) and His Times* (Oxford and New York, 1986), 95–165.

For a major synthesis and analysis of the entire subject, see now Ruderman's *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven, 1995).

Jewish enthusiasm for these new scientific pursuits was greatly facilitated by a critically important conceptual change. In the Middle Ages, the natural sciences were part of a larger tapestry whose dominant element was metaphysics. During the Renaissance and beyond, philosophy and certain kinds of science grew apart, and the scientific domain itself came to be divided between empiricist and rationalist-mathematical spheres. In this environment, certain scientific fields were uncontaminated by the philosophical baggage associated in some Jewish minds with Aristotelianism, and a Jew could remain a staunch opponent of rationalism in its medieval mode while retaining an intense interest in the new science.[131]

The Jewish absorption of the monumental revolution in astronomy was far more problematic. David Gans of late sixteenth-century Prague, though best known for his historical work *Ẓemaḥ David,* was the first influential Jew to confront Copernicanism, and his attitude to the new astronomy is characteristic of what was probably the dominant reaction by knowledgeable Jews through the early eighteenth century: interested awareness but ultimate rejection.[132] Although Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo, who studied with Galileo and ended his days in Prague, spoke very highly of Copernicus, two major compendia at the very end of our period still reject the heliocentric theory in sharp terms. Toviah Katz described Copernicus's position with some care and even presented a series of Copernican arguments; at the same time, he called him "the firstborn of Satan" and described the adherents of his view as heretics.[133] Similarly,

131. David Ruderman is largely responsible for sharpening my awareness of this point. On the division within the sciences, see Thomas S. Kuhn, "Mathematical vs. Experimental Traditions in the Development of Physical Science," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 7 (1976): 1–31. As I indicated above, it is important to note that for medieval Ashkenazic Jews, the link between empirical science and rationalist philosophy had never been made, and so their interest in the physical world was never encumbered by this complication.

132. See Neher, *Jewish Thought and the Scientific Revolution.*

133. *Ma'aseh Toviah* (Krakau, 1908), 43b–44b (" 'Olam ha-Galgalim," ch. 4). Ruderman (*Science, Medicine, and Jewish Culture,* 21) notes correctly that the chapter ends "limply," without any refutation of the Copernican arguments noted. Nonetheless, the conclusion is slightly more forceful than he indicates. Toviah does not assert that the unspecified counterarguments "are easily confusing [even] to one who

David Nieto dismissed the Copernican conception as an abomination.[134] By this time, the scientific defense of the Ptolemaic system had become very difficult, but Copernicus had still not carried the day among all intellectuals, let alone among the masses. Since most seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century European Jews, especially outside Italy, were relatively isolated from the burgeoning scientific community, and since they had rabbinic as well as biblical texts to inhibit their receptivity to the new astronomy, it is not surprising that they generally cast their lot with the rear guard action aimed against the Copernican revolution.

During the centuries in which modern Europe was being formed, the major Jewish cultural centers turned inward despite the growing Jewish involvement in national and international commerce. In a recent revisionist work, Jonathan Israel has argued that the period from 1550 to 1713, and particularly from 1650 to 1713, saw "the most profound and pervasive impact on the west which [the Jews] were ever to exert while retaining a large measure of social and cultural cohesion." To the extent that he applies this observation to economics and politics, including the ascendancy of Court Jews in Central Europe and elsewhere and the rough synchronism of Ashkenazic and Sephardic influence on finance and trade, he provides an important new perspective on early modern Jewry. On the other hand, he underestimates and misconceives much

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understands them"; he says that their validity is easily evident to such a person (*benaqel nekhoḥot,* not *nevukhot*). Moreover, the previous chapter sets forth six standard arguments against the Copernican theory.

On Delmedigo, see Isaac Barzilay, *Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo, Yashar of Candia: His Life, Works, and Times* (Leiden, 1974), and Yosef Levi, "Aqademiah Yehudit le-Madda'im be-Reshit ha-Me'ah ha-Sheva-'Esreh: Nisyono shel Yosef Shlomoh Delmedigo," *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies,* Division B, vol. 1, Hebrew section, 169–76.

134. This translation may be a trifle too strong for *piggul,* but Neher's effort to soften Nieto's anti-Copernicanism by taking "piggul hu lo yeraẓeh" in the narrow legalistic sense determined by the phrase's biblical context ("a sacrifice which would not be acceptable in the Temple") is an apologetic distortion of a very strong expression; see *Jewish Thought and the Scientific Revolution,* 256. On Delmedigo, Katz, Nieto, and others, see Hillel Levine, "Paradise Not Surrendered: Jewish Reactions to Copernicus and the Growth of Modern Science," in *Epistemology, Methodology, and the Social Sciences,* ed. by Robert S. Cohen and Mark W. Wartofsky (Dordrecht, Boston, and London, 1983), 203–25.

of medieval Jewish culture and considerably overrates the achievements of early modern Jews when he writes that "the radical transformation of Jewish culture which occurred during the middle decades of the sixteenth century was, assuredly, one of the most fundamental and remarkable phenomena distinguishing post-Temple Jewish history" and then extends his enthusiastic evaluation into the following century as well.[135]

As we have seen, Italian Jewish culture was indeed marked by an impressive synthesis of Jewish pride and openness to the surrounding culture. In the new Jewish community of seventeenth-century Holland, Sephardic Jews, including some with a Marrano past that made them fully conversant with Christian civilization, contributed philosophical, polemical, and scientific works that utilized wide learning and, when written or available in the vernacular, sometimes influenced European intellectuals. It was not only in Italy that Christian Hebraists held discussions with Jews about scholarly and religious issues. Court Jews were necessarily conversant with the surrounding culture while remaining, at least in many cases, loyal members of the Jewish community.[136]

At the same time, the major seventeenth-century Jewish centers outside Italy were either in a state of cultural decline or evinced relatively little concern with intellectual trends in the surrounding society. Jewry under Islam confronted a Muslim world that was itself culturally stagnant and consequently failed to provide the stimulus that Jewish thinkers needed for creative engagement with disciplines outside of Torah. Theoretically, this Jewry continued to value the sort of intellectual described in an early seventeenth-century chronicle from Fez as

> a complete scholar thoroughly familiar with all the sciences: the science of speculation (*'iyyun*) to an infinite degree, the science of

135. Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550–1750,* 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1989). The quotations are from pp. 1 and 70.

136. Israel, *European Jewry,* 70–86, 142–44, 216–31. On the former Marranos, see Yosef Kaplan, "The Portuguese Community of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century between Tradition and Change," in *Society and Community,* ed. by Abraham Hain (Jerusalem, 1991), 141–71, and Kaplan, "Die Portusischen Juden und die Modernisierung: zur Veränderung jüdischen Lebens vor der Emanzipation," in *Jüdische Lebenswelten: Essays,* ed. by Andreas Nachama et al. (Frankfurt a.M., 1991), 303–17.

> grammar, the science of philosophy, the science of metrical poetry. There was no one like him among all the scholars of Israel.... If anyone had an uncertainty regarding a passage in *Tosafot* or the work of R. Elijah Mizraḥi or the Talmud, he would come to this scholar and would not leave until those uncertainties would be fully resolved.[137]

Nevertheless, such scholarship, at least with respect to philosophy, meant mastery of an existing corpus rather than the production of original, creative work.

Ashkenazic Jewry had always felt more of an adversarial relationship with the surrounding society, and even the examples of cultural interaction that we examined earlier were often characterized by an element of reserve or competition. With the removal of the Ashkenazic center to the alien environment of Poland, the sense of existential separateness was reinforced, and Jacob Katz has noted that even the martyrdoms in seventeenth-century Poland differ from those of the Crusades as defiant confrontation gave way to a sense of isolation from a hostile environment.[138] Although sixteenth-century Poland was not unaffected by the intellectual currents inspired by humanism and the Reformation, the rationalism that found lukewarm expression in R. Moses Isserles and some of his contemporaries essentially came from a culture outside the immediate environment. As Poland became a cultural backwater in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, this mild philosophical interest found no reinforcement either in the surrounding society or the indigenous Ashkenazic tradition, and without such reinforcement it largely faded away.

Even in seventeenth-century Germany, which was closer to the center of European creativity, there was insufficient impetus for Ashkenazic Jews to overcome the cultural legacy of their formative period

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137. *Divrei ha-Yamim,* in *Fez va-Ḥakhameha,* ed. by David Ovadia, 1 (Jerusalem, 1979), 47–48. Cf. Elazar Touitou, *Rabbi Ḥayyim Ibn 'Attar u-Perusho Or ha-Ḥayyim 'al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1981), 28.

138. Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (Oxford, 1961), 131–55, and "Bein Tatnu LeTaḥ-Tat," *Sefer Yovel le-Yitzhak Baer,* ed. by S. Ettinger et al. (Jerusalem, 1961), 318–37.

without substantial struggle and considerable delay. In many cases, the communities were being reconstituted in the wake of expulsions and persecutions. The gradual opening of Christian society to some Jews began to undermine the observance of Jewish individuals rather than inspire an intellectual transformation and Renaissance.

Profound differences separated the medieval Iberian experience of a culturally stimulating environment from the situation of early modern Ashkenazim. First, the Jews of Northern Europe came to modernity with a deeply entrenched, fully formed approach that was highly suspicious of external wisdom. Second, the challenges of modern science and philosophical skepticism could not be faced in the kind of partnership with the dominant society that medieval Jews had enjoyed. It is true that Christianity had to face these challenges quite as much as Judaism, but the challenges emanated from Christian society itself, not from a philosophy inherited from classical antiquity. Thus, the search for intellectual allies was severely complicated. Traditional Christians were for the most part heirs to a fully developed, millennial legacy of contempt for Judaism; seventeenth-century skeptics and eighteenth-century *philosophes* regarded Judaism with at least as much disdain as they felt for Christianity and were in any event the authors of the very challenge that had to be faced. When medieval philosophers were called heretics, they usually denied the charge; the moderns often embraced it, indeed, shouted it from the rooftops. The pursuit of speculative thought became associated with irreligion to a far more profound and extensive degree than it had in the Middle Ages.

Moreover, the nature of modern philosophy was so different from that of the medieval past that the religious attractiveness of the discipline was severely undermined. To the medievals, if philosophy posed serious challenges to religious faith, it also provided indispensable insights into the nature of God. Modern philosophy seemed to supply little more than the problems. At best, religious philosophers could refute attacks against the faith, but they would probably not emerge with new insights about the issues that they were accustomed to regard as the classic subject matter of philosophy. They would find little but heresy on divine providence, hardly anything on attributes or incorporeality, and nothing at all about the recently deceased active intellect and celestial spheres. If

all philosophy could achieve was the neutralizing of its own evil influence, then ignoring the enterprise could achieve the same result at a great saving of time and effort, not to speak of averting danger to one's faith. The imperative of answering the heretic was rarely sufficient in itself to inspire philosophical study. In addition to these critical considerations, the religious value of philosophical inquiry was radically diminished by the conviction of many traditional Jews at the dawn of the Enlightenment that the crucial information about God was available through kabbalah.

For the sake of sharpening the analysis, I have intentionally formulated these points with one-dimensional vigor. If modern philosophy did not provide solutions to medieval questions about God and creation, it might nevertheless suggest new areas of fruitful inquiry. The medieval argument that studying the world inspires love of God seemed all the more persuasive to believers beholding the mathematically elegant universe of the new science. We cannot, however, expect the rabbinic leadership of Ashkenazic Jewry to have known the evolving new approaches well enough to have formulated an innovative positive response; indeed, in the early stages they did not know them well enough even to have fully appreciated the new dangers.

Thus, when we do find an interest in philosophical inquiry among the rabbis of early modern Ashkenaz, it tends to take a very traditional form. R. Yair Ḥayyim Bacharach, for example, laid great emphasis on the practical primacy of talmudic study and the theoretical primacy of kabbalah, while demonstrating considerable familiarity with Jewish philosophical literature. In a study of Bacharach, Isadore Twersky observes that "philosophic literature was studied for religious reasons, as part of a spiritual quest, totally separate from external contacts and influences." R. Jacob Emden reports in his autobiography that his father Ḥakham Ẓevi Ashkenazi read secular works "in his spare time" and studied "other knowledge" with the scholars who attended the *klaus* that he headed in late seventeenth-century Hamburg "until they achieved perfection in Torah and wisdom"; here too we are undoubtedly dealing with something other than a fresh and creative confrontation with the world of modern wisdom.[139]

139. On Bacharach, see I. Twersky, "Law and Spirituality in the Seventeenth Century: A Case Study in R. Yair Ḥayyim Bacharach," in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth*

By the mid-eighteenth century, Emden's own ambivalent attitude to the study of the "external" disciplines reflects the growing impact of the European opening to the Jews. His essential position is quite negative; at the same time, he speaks of a yearning for the sciences which he fulfilled in part by reading Hebrew books in fields like history and geography and in part by studying the works of non-Jews in the bathroom. His familiarity with the New Testament is striking, and it comes together with a relatively favorable attitude to Jesus and even to Paul. What is most interesting is a recurring justification for secular study that does not appear in premodern times. Jews, says Emden, must achieve some familiarity with gentile language and culture for the sake of mingling comfortably with people. This is a striking reflection of a changed social atmosphere with far-reaching importance for the integration of Jews into European society.[140]

Outside of rabbinic circles, incipient social integration in a world of growing religious skepticism gradually eroded the loyalties of some Ashkenazic Jews. Beginning around the end of the seventeenth century, substantial numbers of Jews began to drift away from accepted religious norms and a smaller number may even have rejected traditional beliefs under the influence of Enlightenment thought. The official community, however, did not begin to change until the second half of the eighteenth century, when leaders of the Jewish Enlightenment began to demand curricular reform and social accommodation.[141]

Century, 447–67 (quotation from p. 455). On Ḥakham Ẓevi, see Emden's *Megillat Sefer*, ed. by D. Kahana (Warsaw, 1897), 11, 16–17, cited in Jacob J. Schacter, *Rabbi Jacob Emden: Life and Major Works* (Harvard University dissertation, 1988), 587–88.

140. See ch. 6 of Schacter's dissertation for a discussion of Emden's general stance, and see especially p. 505, where he notes the novelty of the argument from social interaction.

141. On the timing and extent of these transformations, see the debate between Azriel Schochet, *'Im Ḥillufei Tequfot* (Jerusalem, 1960), and Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto* (Cambridge, 1973). Cf. Schochet's "Reshit ha-Haskalah ba-Yahadut be-Germania," *Molad* 23 (1965): 328–34. See also Israel, who argues very strongly that there was widespread abandonment of tradition, including outright conversion (*European Jewry*, 254–56). On apostasy in the wake of Sabbatianism, see Elisheva Carlebach, "Sabbatianism and the Jewish-Christian Polemic," *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C, 2 (1990): 6–7. For a relevant analysis that focuses primarily on a later period, see David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840* (New York, 1987).

Despite the fact that these demands were often made in the name of the well-attested rationalist tradition that we have examined throughout this study, the timing, the context, and the orientation of the new movement made it a threat to the established order both politically and religiously. European Jewry, like European Christendom, faced a world in which religion itself could no longer be taken for granted. In the new, largely secular order that established itself in the eighteenth century and continues to our own day, the legitimacy of general culture remained an issue only for the traditionalist segment of the Jewish people, and the terms of the debate were narrowed and transformed. For some, the overwhelming new dangers required an ever more stringent isolation from the evils of modernity. For others, these dangers could be tamed by selective admission of the religiously neutral elements of the new society and culture. For a few, the Torah itself required a heroic confrontation with modernity in all its fullness, a confrontation that would enrich both Judaism and the world.

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Gottesman Library of Yeshiva University in preparing the final version of the study. While I have added references to more recent scholarship and included many observations reflecting subsequent research, the 1990 text remains at the core of this work.

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JUDAISM'S ENCOUNTER WITH OTHER CULTURES

REJECTION OR INTEGRATION?

The Goldberg Edition

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