

of Jewish DPs as morally lax, natural criminals and black marketers, leftist agitators and communists were commonplace” (169). Even Protestant ministers who had opposed National Socialism were prone to convey these negative representations. Some Jews were granted a place in the workforce by the American occupation authorities, some even as policemen. This reversal of position, from one of persecuted to one more visible in society, even as law enforcers, provoked a massive unease within the German population. It is true that many Jewish DPs were active on the black market, but so was a large part of the German population.

Laura J. Hilton describes the reconstruction of the Frankfurt Jewish community in contrast with the nearby DPs camp of Zeilshim. A small group of Jews had survived in Frankfurt, in hiding or because they were in a mixed marriage.

Hagit Lavsky renders the specific experience of the DP camp in Bergen Belsen. The volume “We Are Here” is completed with three original contributions: Margarete Myers Feinstein examines Jewish religious observance in camps and Shirli Gilbert analyses the songs of Jewish Displaced Persons. Finally, Tamar Lewinsky describes the uses of Yiddish in DP camps, seen as the last concentration of Yiddish-speaking people in Jewish history. As a whole, Berkowitz and Patt have produced a highly valuable and well-edited volume, which would have greatly benefited from a conclusion.

Note

- [1] Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Lebensmut im Wartesaal die jüdische DPs im Nachkriegsdeutschland* (Frankfurt/Main, Fischer Taschenbücher, 1994).

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New Directions in Jewish Philosophy

AARON W. HUGHES & ELLIOT R. WOLFSON (Eds)

Indiana University Press, 2010

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Jewish philosophers have probably lost count of the number of books in their field that begin with (failed) attempts to define Jewish philosophy. In their superior iteration of this time-honoured tradition, the editors Aaron Hughes and Elliot Wolfson pledge in their introduction to redress the “overwhelming reliance on historical context” (5) in Jewish philosophy. When scholars reduce a work to the simple arithmetical sum of its influences—so that Hermann Cohen just becomes Kant with a *kippah*—us simple philosophers can find ourselves losing grip on the *philosophical* nature of the endeavour. So this volume’s “new direction” instead charges writers with the philosophical task of addressing lacunae in their subfields and questioning regnant orthodoxies, opposing the

reductionist turn that “smother[s] philosophy with philology or historical contexts” (9), and analytic philosophy’s “leveling of the particular” (7). What emerges is a fascinating if eclectic volume in terms of style *and* content.

Mindful that any categorization is somewhat subjective, certain chapters focus primarily on lacunae—Kalman Bland on constructions of animals in medieval Jewish philosophy and Steven Wasserstrom on cross-faith pollination in matters of esotericism—while others concentrate more on questioning orthodoxies, some through relatively traditional means—Dana Hollander’s enlightening chapter on Hermann Cohen’s affidavit for the Marburg Anti-Semitism trial of 1888 and Michah Gottlieb’s excellent piece on Mendelssohn’s aesthetics—some in far less conventional terms. Thus, Sergei Dolgopolski develops the concept of “virtuality” to “interrogate the boundaries” (254) between philosophy and Talmud (not *the* Talmud, for “stripping the Talmud from the *the*” (278) is key to his development of what he terms a mutual hermeneutics); and Almut Sh. Bruckstein develops a “theory of (Jewish) aesthetics” that “[seeks] a way out of the violent conceptual presuppositions of Oneness through a hermeneutics of the visual field, which allows for a perceptive glance at the simultaneity of differences blurring the boundaries between text and image” (149–50). My need for quotation over paraphrase in these cases is indicative of a defining feature of the volume that will either enchant or exasperate. Contemporary academic philosophy is a contested sphere. There are analytic philosophers who would not spit on a work of continental philosophy if it were on fire, and continental philosophers who feel likewise about their analytic counterparts. As one educated in a narrowly analytic environment who has come to appreciate the continental tradition, I nonetheless crave the clarity of the former even when dealing with the concerns of the latter. So I should admit that I found myself bewildered by these pieces—which will no doubt be highlights for other readers. In justifiably following its remit of questioning traditional boundaries, reading this volume cover to cover is for Jewish philosophers with pretty catholic tastes, so to speak.

The diverse essays do contain certain recurring themes, notably that of aesthetics. Alongside Bruckstein’s piece, Gottlieb’s study has Mendelssohn arguing for a Hebraic biblical aesthetic built around the “correlating poetic/living script,” in opposition to the “alienating plastic/dead letter” Greek aesthetic (327). This aesthetic allows philosophers to re-engage with biblical poetry, presenting us with what Mendelssohn terms “effective knowledge,” which though less “clear,” is more vivid than intellectual knowledge and enables heart and mind to be brought into harmony. Biblical poetry thus plays a role analogous to that of the ritual law for Mendelssohn, packaging metaphysical truths aesthetically, and in a motivationally attractive manner.

Poetic imagery also features in Elliot Wolfson’s argument for a Rosenzweig who has at least an “affinity . . . to the Jewish esoteric tradition” (93), if not an actual debt to kabbalah itself; a Rosenzweig who in *philosophically* articulating “a foundation for belief in a living concrete God” (91), transgresses the putative boundaries between philosophy and mysticism in the mystical vision with which the *Star* peaks. While Wolfson questions whether Rosenzweig’s project ultimately succeeds, his piece again emphasizes how the poetic nature of language yields a convergence of the visual and verbal, revealing an essential similarity between revelation and poetry.

Among other highlights, Martin Kavka's piece on Levinas's problematic relationship with the discipline of Jewish philosophy highlights the central tension running through the very discipline of Jewish philosophy and this book. Kavka claims that the constructive nature of Levinas's thought meant that he devoted little time to discussing his forbears in Jewish philosophy so that one cannot straightforwardly map him onto that tradition. Kavka's analysis of essays where Levinas *does* look to the ghosts of Jewish philosophers past reveals how Levinas "misreads" his affinities both to Maimonides and Halevi, exposing "yet another piece of evidence in support of the contention that traditions are constructed. ... [W]e assimilate them to ourselves" (42). Kavka argues that this Levinasian relation to the canon of Jewish philosophy authorizes the autonomy and agency of practitioners in the field.

But this, it seems to me, is how Jewish philosophers have always acted. As James Diamond masterfully articulates in his chapter, even Maimonides "engaged in his own variation of midrashic discourse" (288), to generate new meanings out of biblical verses. But Maimonides therefore is as "autonomous" (or not) in relation to the tradition as is Levinas, and ever was it so. The contributors to this collection are doing what Jewish philosophers have traditionally done – interpreting their subject matter in a way that makes best sense of the tradition by their own philosophical lights, though in a sense this is *not* what Jewish philosophers have always done, since contemporary writers are more self-conscious of the fact that in Judaism "each interpretative venture ... is a reenactment of the revelatory experience, albeit from its unique vantage point," as Wolfson writes (96).

The vast majority of the essays here *do* build on figures from the Jewish philosophical past, and do not read like Levinas's constructive philosophy. In order for this to be *Jewish* philosophy, such historical engagement is surely necessary and inevitable. But even if the declaration of a new direction is therefore a little overstated, this volume still stakes an important claim for Jewish philosophy. For some, "scholarship" necessitates having an algorithm of transparently articulated rules and methodological prescriptions, which is likely what leads some to acclaim the historical route as more "academic," and causes apoplexy at a statement such as that made by Aaron Hughes—that we gain much philosophically if we "ahistorically, read Saadya using the light supplied by Rosenzweig" (62). But Hughes is correct. This—whatever exactly "this" is—is what philosophers *should* do. A well-respected philosopher once explained his methodology to me as follows: he reads, he thinks about what he has read, and then he writes what he thinks (which does *not* obviate the need for specific training and skills). While not every essay will be to the philosophical taste of every philosopher, this volume encourages Jewish philosophers who wish to reclaim their title to do so unapologetically, for which it should be lauded.

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