Nachman Krochmal

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

THERE ARE at least two different approaches one can take in writing the biography of a towering intellectual figure such as Nachman Krochmal (1785–1840). One is to carefully track the events of his life, his friends, acquaintances and enemies, and try to integrate this material with his scholarly achievement. The second is to write an in-depth study of Krochmal’s scholarly work, and its place in Jewish and general intellectual history. That is, one can write a biography of the mind that produced the great work, the More N’vukhe ha-Z’man (The Guide of the Perplexed of the Time). The first approach has already been taken by Simon Rawidowicz, in the introduction to his magisterial edition of Krochmal’s work. Although occasionally marred by conjecture and uncritical devotion to his subject, Rawidowicz’s work may be seen as the definitive realization of the first approach to writing Krochmal’s biography.

This book takes the second approach; although I will pre-
sent some of the more pertinent biographical details, this book aims to present the story of Krochmal’s thought and its place in human attempts to comprehend the world about us. I do not mean to suggest that I am the first to adopt this approach; on the contrary, many have focused on some of the crucial elements of Krochmal’s thought and its place in Jewish intellectual history. The present book, however, is the first attempt to take account of Krochmal’s entire oeuvre while viewing it as a single and complete statement regarding the challenges facing the Jewish community in the modern period, and not as a series of loosely related independent studies regarding this and that. It insists that Krochmal’s mind was an integrated one, and that his reconstruction of the emergence of the rabbinic movement was as much intended to guide the perplexed as was his reconstruction of Jewish metaphysics. In both cases, Krochmal recognized the very basic confrontation between traditional and modern ways of viewing reality and attempted to dissolve it. In both cases, Krochmal recognized the extent to which modern thought and historiography were essentially the tools with which the modern Protestant intelligentsia oriented itself in a changing world, and tried to show Jewish intellectuals that they, through their own tradition, could do the same. In both cases, Krochmal insisted that a critical knowledge of Jewish sources was the sine qua non for coping with the whirlwind of intellectual changes. Thus, while we must begin with the life of the man, the real story I seek to tell is the life of the mind drawn against the backdrop of his time and his tradition.
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KrochmaVs Life

The epoch in which Nachman Krochmal lived was a most decisive one in the life of Israel, in his native Galicia, as well as elsewhere. His youth coincided with the French Revolution, the waning of the Aufklärung in Germany, and the reign of the Habsburg monarch, Josef II (1741–1790), over newly acquired Galicia. All these factors brought major changes to Jewish life and thought.²

In Galicia, the logic of absolutism demanded an end to Jewish autonomy—the power the Jewish community had over the religious and economic lives of its members.³ In 1785, this autonomy was for the most part suspended, and the Jewish community exercised control only over some of its religious and charitable institutions. The most disastrous element of this suspension, from the point of view of Galicia's traditional Jews, was the transference of control over Jewish education to the Austrian authorities. More problematic yet, from this perspective, in 1787 it was decreed that Galician Jews were to serve in the army together with other Austrian subjects.

Despite lip service to the contrary these changes were not accompanied by any relief for Jewish political or economic difficulties. On the contrary, a number of truly oppressive measures were imposed on the community during Krochmal's lifetime. In an effort to change the Jewish economic profile, Jews in villages were forbidden to engage in trade; the so-called "Edict of Toleration" of 1789 banished Jews from these villages unless they engaged in handicrafts or agriculture. Jews were allowed to settle only in certain areas, and, in some of these, ghettos were introduced.
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In addition, many taxes specific to Jews were retained from earlier times or were newly imposed. A special tax on ritual slaughtering was introduced in 1784 and tripled over the next thirty-two years. In 1797, a candle tax was imposed, in which every married Jewish woman had to pay a tax on two candles whether she had money to buy the candles or not. Failure to pay meant that the tax collector could enter that person's home on Friday night and confiscate the household goods. In addition, there was a marriage tax, a residence tax, and an annual synagogue tax.  

Parallel to this economic exploitation of the Jewish community were the flagrant attempts by the Austrian government to germanize its Jews. Jewish children were prohibited from studying Talmud in a school until they had completed a course of study in a government school. Any voter in kehillah elections was required to demonstrate fluency in German, and Jews were prohibited from marrying until they had demonstrated such fluency.

The political situation in Galicia meant that the Jewish confrontation with modernizing tendencies would travel a different course than it did in Germany, despite some superficial resemblances, principally in the area of educational theory. Max Wiener has pointed out the enormous effect the political changes in Europe and the emancipation (or, to be more accurate, the quest for emancipation) had on Jewish aspirations. These changes rendered Jewish life as it had previously been known "simply impossible," as for the first time Jews could think of themselves apart from their communities, and were forced to ask themselves what role—if any—their ancestral faith was to play in their lives. The
theories of Judaism produced by the Germans, from Mendelssohn on, were designed to deal with this question.

In Galicia, the loss of full autonomy did open the Jewish community to options it had never before experienced, but the hopelessness of its political and economic situation—illustrated by the very attempt at coerced enlightenment, an oxymoron if ever there was one, without real political amelioration—served to curtail the realization of these options. Jewish life in Galicia did undergo profound changes during Krochmal's lifetime, but for the most part, these changes were contained within the boundaries of traditional Jewish life and practice. Only the most radical of the maskilim (enlightened ones), as they were called, produced a program for even modest religious reforms outside the area of education. Most of the maskilim active in Krochmal's lifetime were, in fact, observant Jews, who opposed attempts to limit the authority of the Talmud or to suppress its study.7 They did, however, aspire to the intellectual modernization of their tradition and their communities—increased general education and awareness of the world around them and participation in the recent surge in historical consciousness—and greater toleration for, and interaction with, the surrounding gentile communities. (The latter objective was to remain, for the most part, a pipe dream, as there was no community on the other side willing to reciprocate.) Thus, both the essential conservatism of the Galician haskalah (enlightenment), at least in Krochmal's lifetime, and the political circumstances in which it was advanced served to differentiate it from Jewish intellectual life in Germany. The scholarship produced by the Galician maskilim never had the sometimes unmistakable
political edge of that produced by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement in Germany.\textsuperscript{8}

The haskalah's aspirations often stood at odds with the aspirations of other members of the Jewish community, and this fact influenced the program of the maskilim considerably. In particular, many of the maskilim regarded the expanding Hasidic community as their enemy, and some, most notably Joseph Perl, sought to limit if not eradicate this movement.\textsuperscript{9} The Hasidim were considered simply too anti-intellectual and superstitious for enlightenment to reach them; therefore, many of the maskilim themselves sought to create educational institutions, attendance at which would be mandatory, that would promote enlightenment and oppose Hasidism.\textsuperscript{10}

For very different reasons, neither the government nor the Jewish population was overly sympathetic to the aspirations of the maskilim.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, pursuit of haskalah was reserved for a very small group of what Jacob Katz has called the "Geisteselite," people whose vision extends beyond the world in which they grew up. Given the absence of communal or governmental sympathy, the path of this "Geisteselite" in Galicia was very difficult. As Shlomo Yehudah Rapoport (1790–1867) put it in his necrology for Krochmal, written in 1841:

Understand denizens of Germany and be astonished! Among you it is easy for one to study in different areas, for there are many educational institutions and teachers in every field of knowledge. It is not the case in the northern lands until this day, and certainly not thirty or forty years ago. There is no teacher and there is no instructor and there is no one to support the Jew who wishes to obtain some betterment, and to know a bit more than what grows on him. He who wishes to embark on a new path, he, and no one else, shall blaze it himself. After he has found it there are many
stumbling blocks on all sides, and many impediments from acquaintances and relatives to frighten him from this path. His loved ones come to him and pressure him to remove all books of [secular] knowledge from the house. They say to him: "Do you have any more?" And he says, "None." And they say, "Quiet, for you must not mention them, lest you and they—perhaps even we—be burned in fire. Do you not now that there are Hasidim in the country and city, and the frogs are swarming in every house and every room..."  

Although we must allow for considerable hyperbole here, it is true that pursuit of general learning was quite dangerous, and required an enormous existential commitment on the part of the would-be maskil. As Rapoport concludes, there were very few such maskilim, and only those with the mightiest of souls succeeded. Such a one was Nachman Krochmal.  

Nachman Krochmal was born in Brody in 1785. Unlike many other Galician cities, Brody was not overly impoverished. It was a "free city," meaning that it enjoyed trading privileges denied other locales. The Jews were the dominant group in the city, comprising approximately 88 percent of the population in 1820 (Mahler, p. 32). His father was Shalom Krochmalnik, a merchant who traveled often to Germany, and had apparently made the acquaintance of Moses Mendelssohn and other figures of the Berlin Haskalah. Brody at the time was the central city of the Galician Haskalah, counting among its inhabitants Mendel Lefin (1741–1826) 13 and Dov Ber Ginzberg, both of whom Krochmal was to come to know, as well as Yehudah Leib Ben-Ze'ev (1764–1811), whose work, if not whose person, would exercise a considerable influence on Krochmal's reading of the Bible. 14  

Krochmal's education appears to have been the standard
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one for Jewish children at the time: Talmud and codes and little else. Yet, as Rawidowicz relates, there appears to have been less extremism in Krochmal's education than prevailed in other places, given the relatively open atmosphere of Brody. This may help account for Krochmal's open-mindedness and commitment to toleration. In any event, this education was to serve Krochmal in good stead, as it provided him with strong moorings in the Talmudic tradition when he later came to pursue studies in philosophy and history.

As was the custom among East European Jews at the time, Krochmal married at an extremely young age; he was not yet fourteen when, in the fall of 1798, he took Sarah Haberman of Zolkiev as his bride. It appears that his well-to-do father-in-law agreed to take him in and support him while he pursued his studies. Even at this early age it seems that Krochmal's predilection for haskalah had already been developed, as he sought out the leading maskilim of his new city —Zolkiev—and, in particular, made the acquaintance of a Baruch Zvi Neieh, who is reported to have possessed a very impressive library, containing volumes in various languages. In 1803, Krochmal began to teach himself to read German by reading the newspapers.

Upon mastering German, Krochmal began to read the philosophical works of the eighteenth century that had already achieved immortal status. He read Mendelssohn (1730-1786), Lessing (1729-1781) and Solomon Maimon (1754-1800). Subsequently, he turned his attention to Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel (Rawidowicz, p. 28). The letters that date from this period state that he studied continuously, and indeed he must have, as he also learned French, Latin, Arabic
and Syriac during his years in Zolkiev; with his newly developed ability to read French, Krochmal read J. Basnage’s *L’Histoire des Juifs*. While doing all this, he continued his studies of classical Jewish sources, and studied Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* with the commentary *Giv’at ha-Moreh* of Solomon Maimon, the *Zohar*, and the historical/critical work of Azariah de Rossi (c. 1511–1577), *Me’or Eynaim*. Further, in addition to the Jewish Aristotelianism of Maimonides, Krochmal was drawn to the Jewish Neoplatonism of Abraham Ibn Ezra, and the kabbalistic investigations of Nahmanides and his immediate predecessors and successors (Zunz, pp. 151–152). Each of them was to exercise a considerable influence on his thinking.

According to his son-in-law, by the year 1808, Krochmal was a fully developed scholar, already proficient in the many areas in which his work displays excellence. Yet this intensive period of study took its toll on his health, and in 1808 Krochmal took severely ill. Indeed, a rumor had spread that the young man had died (Zunz, p. 152). That rumor, of course, was more than thirty years premature. Unable to procure the medical attention he needed in Zolkiev, he moved to Lemberg (Lwow), and there, very slowly, his condition improved.

While in Lemberg he made the acquaintance of that city’s maskilim, whom he taught and with whom he studied; as Rawidowicz describes the situation, he became “the guide to the perplexed of Lemberg” (p. 32). Indeed, Krochmal seems to have found his niche as a teacher and guide of young maskilim. In Lemberg, he befriended Shlomu Yehudah Rapoport, who testifies “when I spoke with him a spirit of
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understanding and knowledge flourished within me, and I was practically transformed into a new man” (Kerem Hemed, vol. 6, p. 45). Similarly, Samson Bloch testifies that when he first met Krochmal he was “devoid of all reason . . . my soul was deprived of all wisdom, and sagacity was repelled by it.” But, “like grapes in the desert and suckle in an arid land, I have found the one my soul loves, who nurses from the breasts of wisdom. . . . How excited I then became! How you attracted me! . . . From then on our souls were joined by a sense of attachment and with bonds of love they were united.”

It seems, then, that Krochmal, through the force of his wisdom and willingness to share it, exercised considerable influence on the Lemberg maskilim, and helped each of them find a place in the history of Jewish scholarship and belles lettres in the nineteenth century.

As far as his own Bildung was concerned, during this period Krochmal was forbidden by his physicians to study philosophy, which apparently was, for him, extremely strenuous. Thus he turned to a more systematic study of history than had characterized his earlier studies. In particular, he undertook a careful study of the Me’or Eynaim of de Rossi, together with other, more recent, historical works, including Isaak Markus Jost’s multivolume Geschichte der Israeliten (Zunz, p. 152). With these studies Krochmal became acquainted with the data that he would much later come to schematize in his Guide.

His stay in Lemberg did not last long, although we have no precise information regarding when he returned to Zolkiev. When he returned he was no longer deathly ill, but his health was quite fragile and apparently was to remain so the rest of
his life. According to the report of Letteris, the pious of Zolkiev saw in Krochmal's weakened health and apparently ghastly appearance the hand of God exacting punishment on one whose life had turned to haskalah. In any event, despite his weakened condition, over the approximately twenty-six years Krochmal was to remain in Zolkiev, his life was divided between two distinct pursuits. He was a not particularly successful community leader and businessman on the one hand, and a teacher and scholar on the other.

According to Zunz's report, upon his partial recovery Krochmal was overcome by a desire to "turn outward," and to have a spiritual influence upon his environment. Assuming the role of community leader was not an easy thing for someone of Krochmal's bent to accomplish. It became particularly difficult after 1815, when Krochmal had his most dangerous confrontation with the Hasidic communities of Galicia. Our knowledge of this affair derives from Zunz's necrology, based on a family report, as well as Krochmal's own more abbreviated report. It seems that Krochmal and an unnamed Karaite leader maintained a correspondence for some time.

The powerful Hasidic sect, to whom Krochmal must have appeared as a very dangerous person, was steadily intent on, wherever possible, rendering him suspected of heresy, which was not easy, given his strongly religious lifestyle. When they heard about this correspondence, and that Krochmal occupied himself with Karaite writings, one of them hastened to Kokusow, and persuaded the good-natured (Karaite) scholar to turn over some letters, ostensibly to show some of them to young students-in-training as an example of Hebrew style. Among these letters was found a missive from Krochmal in which he assured the [Karaite] scholar of his lasting
friendship, and offered him hope for a future reward, despite his rejection of the rabbinic tradition. Many copies of this letter were sent to the biggest Jewish communities of Galicia and Russian Poland, to serve as proof that Krochmal was already estranged from Orthodox Judaism and wished to join the Karaites. (Zunz, p. 154)

Krochmal was upset and he too released a circular, acknowledging that perhaps he was overly exuberant in his praise of the Karaite scholar, whom he calls "David"; the letter was written in haste and in rhyme, and thus subject to some hyperbole. He does not apologize for his contacts with the Karaites, however, and, in defense of his actions, refers to many earlier scholars, such as Maimonides, who permitted contacts with Karaites, and who were prepared to grant them the possibility of salvation. More than anything else, he argues that the Karaites are people who are now in a difficult state, and it would be heartless to cut them off and treat them as though they were unworthy of social contact. Further, Krochmal took the offensive against the Hasidim, and near the end of his letter proclaims, "May the merciful protect us from the persecuted sect that has become the persecutor" (Guide, pp. 413-16). In truth, Krochmal was deathly afraid of being the subject of a Herem (ban) which could have had serious repercussions for him. He thus did not pursue the matter further, and in time it died down. His hatred of Hasidism was, however, forever sealed.

Despite this brief period of notoriety, sometime before 1821 Krochmal assumed the position of community leader. Rawidowicz surmises that Krochmal achieved this position in spite of the opposition to his intellectual pursuits, because he
was universally acknowledged to be fair and honest. Be that as it may, the position of head of the community, while devoid of many of the responsibilities that once came with it, did carry with it a number of duties. He served as an assistant to the tax collectors, as an intermediary between the government and the Jewish community when necessary, and, perhaps most onerous of all, was responsible for supplying the military with Jewish youths. He filled this role while also owning the only liquor sale franchise in the district of Zolkiev (Mahler, p. 35).

Neither of these pursuits—that of community leader and businessman—was marked by particular successes; indeed, by 1836 Krochmal appears to have been alone and destitute. He did, however, succeed in distinguishing himself as a scholar and teacher. Often, he would go on walks into the hills surrounding Zolkiev with students and friends, and there would teach and learn about philosophy, history and Jewish law and lore. These walks into the hills made quite an impression on Krochmal's companions. Rapoport writes, "I still remember those precious times when I traveled to him from time to time for a day or two, or a week, or he came to me, and we went out to talk in the fields. How these trips were sweeter to me than all the pleasures of this world! I could never have enough of his wisdom, and with each word he added a new insight" (Kerem Hemed, p. 47).

Krochmal's last ten years in Zolkiev were to be very difficult ones for him. In 1826, his wife died, leaving him to raise the younger two of their four children. In addition, his economic circumstances took a turn for the worse; by 1836, when he left Zolkiev to return to Brody, Krochmal appears to
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have been destitute. His life was made more difficult yet by
the awareness that many of his students had published various
works and had established names for themselves, while he was
yet walking through the hills of Zolkiev, giving of his knowl-
edge, but writing virtually nothing. As attested by his letter
to Samuel David Luzzato, written in the summer of 1836, he
suspected his days were numbered. He very much wished to
"proclaim his voice in public in the twilight of life, and to
leave behind a blessing (it should only be so, and God knows
that which is hidden), for the years of my senescence are
approaching." 28

Thus it was that in the last four years of his life, two spent
in Brody and two in Tarnopol where his daughter and son-in-
law lived, Nachman Krochmal worked feverishly to complete
his literary legacy. It was a race against time that he was
destined to lose. Happily, he succeeded in producing enough
that we can see the way this great scholar viewed the meta-
physics and history of his tradition. While lacunae remain, in
Krochmal's Guide of the Perplexed of the Time we have one of
the great works of Jewish thought and jüdische Wissenschaft
of the nineteenth century.

The Guide of the Perplexed of the Time

Krochmal died in the summer of 1840 with his work, The
Guide of the Perplexed of the Time, unfinished. 29 Moreover, the
materials that he had completed were not in a well-organized
state; some studies were mere fragments, and on a couple of
occasions the treatment of various issues is promised but never
delivered. The exact sequence of chapters was not established,
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and many aspects of the work's intended form were unknown. This mass of inchoate material was sent, in accordance with the author's wishes, to Leopold Zunz (1794–1886), for redaction and publication. Although personally unacquainted with the deceased, Zunz agreed to take on the project, and after much heartache, the Guide was published in Lemberg in 1851.

The finished product consists of seventeen chapters, with an anthology of Abraham Ibn Ezra's writings appended. The first four chapters consist of a general introduction, which describes the impetus for undertaking a new guide, and described the methods to be used in the work. The placement of these four chapters corresponds to the list of contents sent by Krochmal's family to Zunz. The fifth chapter addresses the question of teleology and intention; it seems likely that Krochmal did not intend the chapter to be here originally, although given the clearly hasty manner in which this chapter was penned, it is possible that Krochmal wrote the chapter long after its surrounding ones but actually did intend to insert it here. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with aspects of Jewish metaphysics and Religionsphilosopbie; chapters 8 through 10 with Jewish history and its patterns. Chapter 11 provides Krochmal's critical analyses of biblical books, while chapter 12 presents a discussion of Alexandrian Jewish culture, in particular the writings of Philo. Most of this material consists of translations of two German works on the subject. Chapter 13 deals with the emergence of the rabbinic tradition, in particular its legal aspects, while chapter 14 discusses the history of the aggadah. Chapter 15 is a fragment devoted to early Jewish gnosticism; chapter 16 is a fragment devoted to
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culling from Hegel's work those concepts and definitions necessary for an understanding of Jewish metaphysics. Chapter 17 then provides a presentation of central Jewish metaphysical doctrines, refracted through the prism of the work of Ibn Ezra, but in many ways standing far closer to kabbalistic forms of Jewish Neoplatonism.

A description of the contents of this work scarcely does justice to the enormous learning evident on every page, nor does it even remotely suggest the extent to which this book represents an important window on the mentality of Jews living in Galicia, confronting modernity. It is the burden of the ensuing chapters of the present book to bring this out. In the remainder of the Introduction, I wish to focus on the distinct elements of the title, which will allow us to see the book in its proper context.

The Time

Studies of the process of modernization, and the confrontation of traditional societies with it, abound. The discussion of "The Time" in Krochmal's title will not be advanced by rehearsing the contents of this literature. Rather, I wish to focus on Krochmal's view of "the time." What were the circumstances that moved him to write? How did this Galician Jewish savant view the world about him?

In the first chapter of the Guide, Krochmal characterizes his own generation's religious problems. His discussion here resembles nothing so much as Schleiermacher's Speeches on Religion, in that Krochmal, like Schleiermacher, claims that religious life has descended into an extremism that causes continued
adherence to appear ridiculous. Those who live within the traditions have displayed marked tendencies toward what Krochmal calls Schwärmerei (hallucinations)—imagining that they can attain some kind of magical creative powers, ultimately becoming partners with God; or Aberglauben (superstition)—imagining that creating intermediary beings will somehow lead to the curing of a sick soul—this may actually become idolatry; or Werkheiligheit (literally, the holiness of deeds)—imagining that increasing the number of rituals, in particular nonrational ones, will somehow allow one to avoid the previous difficulties, thus producing a kind of mindless religious praxis. Though attachment to these extremes is presented as a phenomenon found in all religious communities, it is clear he is thinking of specifically Jewish manifestations of these tendencies. Thus, the first and second can be safely identified as characterizing the religion of the Hasidim, which Krochmal despised, and latter-day Kabbalists. The last can be identified with those mindless Orthodox elements for whom all of Judaism was reducible to the externals of halakhah, or Jewish law. This religious decadence represented an intolerable distortion of true religion, and had to be combated.

What made these distortions so utterly unacceptable was that each distortion called forth a corresponding distortion in the opposite direction. That is, corresponding to these caricatures of proper religious faith are three opposing positions that are equally obsessive and false. Those repulsed by the hallucinatory excesses of the first group have come to deny the existence of the spiritual realm altogether, feeling that strictly natural causal explanations are sufficient for all phenomena, including emotional and intellectual states. There can be little
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doubt that here Krochmal is referring to the argument of Spinoza's *Ethics*, and the highly mechanistic theories that characterized the anthropology of some of the *philosophes*. Those repulsed by the superstitions of the second faction ultimately lose their faith in such propositions as the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the possibility of prophecy as traditionally understood. Here, as well, one readily thinks of Spinoza, although he was hardly the only modern philosopher to deny these two propositions. The complete abandonment of the commandments—their efficacy as well as their morality—corresponds to the soulless piety of the third group. Krochmal may have the followers of Spinoza, Kant and Hegel in mind here. In any event, the attack on the commandments was widespread. While ultimately it is difficult to determine definitely whom Krochmal is opposing from what he presents here, it is safe to say that the major patterns of traditional Jewish life in Eastern Europe (Hasidism and Orthodoxy), as well as many of the atheistic and deistic trends of the time met with his disfavor. It is also clear that Krochmal felt that Judaism was strongly challenged by these trends and that the traditionalists within the Jewish community had no adequate response to them. Krochmal's *Guide* was written to provide the response, to indicate that the extremes that have taken root in the religious community are not "true" religion, and the antireligious extremes they have called forth are therefore not legitimate. Thus, "the time" is one of horrifying religious decadence.32

The response of Western thinkers to this state of religious crisis was, for a traditional Jew, equally problematic. The response came in the form of a supposedly new discipline, the
philosophy of religion. This discipline attempted to isolate the essential elements of the human religious impulse, and to determine the philosophically correct understanding of God. Mirabile dictu, it was discovered that Christianity alone—in its properly understood Protestant form, of course—was the only historical religion that in fact incorporated a philosophically acceptable theology, and that successfully accommodated the human religious impulse. This position is most characteristic of Hegel's thought, although quite different variations may be found, inter alia, in Kant, Schleiermacher, and Schelling. Thus, for Jews, the response was no better than the challenge; continued adherence to Judaism was philosophically suspect, whether on Spinozistic or Hegelian grounds.

"The time" also brought with it an intensive historical assault on cherished Jewish ideals and ideas. The world of critical scholarship—of Wissenschaft—had succeeded in reordering the way people understood their pasts. The tools of criticism rendered traditional historical understanding implausible or impossible. Unlike the philosophical trends, this reorientation of the mind was not the result of distortion, but of the free and creative exercise of human reason. It therefore could not be opposed; it had to be accommodated. Thus, in the paragraphs that now serve as a preface to the Guide as a whole, Krochmal remarks that it was once to the benefit of traditional self-understanding to view, say, Psalm 137—which describes the angst of those exiled to Babylon—as the product of David's pen, although he lived many centuries before the events described. In this way, one's belief in the power of divine inspiration was enhanced. However, "as with the Spanish commentators, and how much more so in our day, this
view is as unconvincing to a knowledgeable audience, particularly the young, given the state of our knowledge, as it was once convincing through hope and faith" (Guide, p. 5). Not only does historical understanding demand that we view this Psalm as the product of the sixth century B.C.E., rather than the tenth; Jewish life in modern times would itself be enhanced if we accept such a dating, as it allows for greater understanding of the historical nature of Jewish commitments. "The time," then, demanded a reorientation of Jewish historical understanding; no longer could Jews attach themselves to demonstrably false claims. As we shall see, Krochmal was aware of the profoundly perplexing nature of such a reorientation. One goal of his Guide is to show that the Jewish tradition can accommodate it and remain intact.

"The time" then represents the fundamental challenges faced by Jews in modern times: atheism, deism, Protestant theology masquerading as universal philosophy of religion and historical criticism. Simultaneously, it represents Krochmal's view of the Jewish community in the early nineteenth century, a community ill equipped to respond to the challenges of modernity because of its pervasive anti-intellectualism.

**The Perplexed**

Who were Krochmal's "perplexed"? Clearly, they were not those who were at home with the patterns of life that prevailed in the traditional Galician Jewish communities. Such people were, for Krochmal, seduced by the corruption of religious life that characterized the times. Neither were they Judaism's "cultured despisers"; that is, unlike Schleiermacher, Kroch-
mal was not writing for those who had abandoned their religious commitments in favor of atheistic, deistic or materialistic philosophies. They were, as he tells us, those who found the religious decadence of their times repugnant. While they were profoundly shaken by that decadence they were not prepared to adhere to the opposing trends. They were those who preferred a middle path between the extreme corrupting forces of their age.

But who were they really? That, ultimately, is a question that cannot be answered definitely. While it is easy to identify a few by name, we cannot isolate a historically identifiable group of people as Krochmal's intended audience. What we can do is look at what he imagines this audience to be in concrete terms. For one thing, his intended audience was people who were at home in the language of traditional Jewish thought. Krochmal's work is written in a clumsy, medieval style, suitable only for those who were schooled in the translations of the Ibn Tibbon family. These people were to be drawn from all over Europe. As he wrote to Luzzato, his problem was to come up with a language in which to address "the Italian Jew and the Eastern Jew; the scholars of Germany and the Hasidim of the northern kingdom." That the Hasidim were really part of his intended audience we can scarcely take seriously. Further, the choice of Hebrew as his medium suggests that he was probably not interested in addressing the more assimilated part of the German-Jewish scholarly community, for whom Hebrew was long since considered a deficient vessel for modern scholarly communication. Rather his "perplexed" seem to be limited to Galician, Bohemian, Moravian and Italian maskilim, for whom Hebrew was the lan-
guage of choice, and more traditionally oriented scholars in Germany, who could be expected to read this work and take its message to heart.

Further, Krochmal fully expected his audience to be at home in the world of traditional Jewish learning. His text is filled with scores of oblique references to biblical, rabbinic, philosophical and kabbalistic texts, in addition to dozens of explicit references to these bodies of literature. Assuming that he wrote with some concern for his potential readership, we must say that he assumed his readers to be scholars of sacred Jewish texts.

Krochmal's intended audience, his "perplexed," were people who were aware of the new historical scholarship that was on the rise. In his discussion of Bible criticism, Krochmal assumes his readers are already familiar with many of the seminal works and central ideas of modern Bible critics. He presupposes that they are at least vaguely aware that scholars, primarily Germans—both Jewish and gentile—have scrutinized rabbinic texts and found them, particularly the "strange" aggadot, to be filled with nonsense. Further, he assumes that they are aware of the new philosophical trends of their day. As we shall see in chapter 2, his own philosophical discussions are addressed to an audience that has read—or gained familiarity second-hand with—the epistemological, metaphysical and ethical constructs in the works of Spinoza, Kant, Schelling and Hegel. Finally, his work takes for granted that there are Jews familiar with the various philosophies of history that were, in fact, triumphalist Protestant apologia. That is, his treatment of the patterns of Jewish history makes sense only if the readership is assumed to be
troubled by the works of Lessing, Herder and Hegel, among others.

“The perplexed,” then, are those who have experienced the profound intellectual disorientation of modernity without a loss of Jewish commitment, yet; they have not, however, successfully weathered the intellectual storm and successfully reoriented themselves. The young, in particular, who are being raised in this new world are particularly vulnerable to losing this commitment, if someone does not show them “the path between the extremes.”

The Guide

In the ensuing chapters, I will focus on the specific “guides” Krochmal provides for the problems of the age. Here I wish to deal with the general method of response Krochmal outlines in what he calls his “general introduction.”

The primary reason Jews have become so susceptible to the religious distortions outlined above is their ignorance of the esoteric doctrines that are contained in the two Talmuds and the various midrashim. These esoteric doctrines have traditionally been divided into three distinct categories, whose nomenclature Krochmal adopts. The first category is known as Ma’aseh Merkavah, identified as metaphysics. If Jews properly understand this branch of Jewish learning they would never fall prey to the distortions of the first corresponding pair, namely, Schwärmerie and the denial of spirituality. The second branch of learning, Ma’ase Bereshit, corresponds to what had come to be called in Krochmal’s day the philosophy of nature. Thorough knowledge of this branch would prevent
the onset of the second pair of distortions, Aberglauben and the loss of faith in the basic principles of Judaism. The third category is called Sod Ta'ame ha-Misvot, the esoteric reasons for the commandments. If one were well versed in this area, the third pair would present no threat. Thus, “the guide” entails instruction in the fundamental esoteric principles of Judaism. That is, avoiding the extremes requires a historical-philosophical comprehension of the Jewish “science of faith.” In keeping with the style of Krochmal’s work, he argues that the rabbis of old already anticipated the emergence of distorted interpretation of the Torah, and provided the solution: “This Torah is like two paths: one of fire, the other of ice and snow. If a man goes in one direction, he will die in the fire, in the other direction death from freezing awaits him. What then should he do? Go in the middle” (Guide, p. 10).41

In Krochmal’s creative exegesis of this passage the advice to walk in the middle does not mean one should seek some point equidistant, as it were, between the corresponding distortions, but rather one should seek a point that represents a categorical rejection of them both. He claims the opposition between the distortions outlined previously, as well as various antinomies inherent within Jewish tradition, can be resolved not through compromise, but rather through historical-philosophical research, which will lead to “the main source and the beginning of things in such a way that the questions will be resolved, and the antinomies negated” (Guide, p. 16). The conflict that needs to be resolved for his generation is that which seemingly prevails between the rabbinic way to eternal truths, the way of faith, and the critical scholar’s way, which is that of empirical demonstration. For Krochmal the middle

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path means the kind of research into Judaism, in all its variegated forms, which will discover the origins of things and thus allow them to be seen in their original clarity. The goal of this research is to show that there is no conflict between Judaism and modern historical and philosophical thought.

What are the appropriate methodological boundaries of such a recasting of Jewish thought? Or to put it another way, why should anyone find Krochmal's rereading of Jewish sources—his "guide"—at all convincing? In response to this concern Krochmal turns to the "science" of epistemology:

It is natural for the human mind to create its structures in a realm that is thoroughly cognitive, taking the material for this structure from the sensual world and then providing it with its essential form. That is, the mind transforms and raises the material from sensual stimuli to preliminary concepts—*Vorstellungen*—and from them to concepts of the understanding—*Begriffe*—and from them to purely cognitive concepts of reason—*Ideen*. (Guide, p. 12)

Krochmal is here developing a notion of symbolic expression; there are different degrees of abstraction and cognition in the formulation of thoughts. Most people never cognize sensual stimuli beyond the level of the *Vorstellung*, or the representational mode of thought. Given the broad base of any successful religious community, it is of the nature of religious communication to be formulated representationally. Such representations differ from the more abstract formulations of *Ideen* only descriptively, but they are no less an apprehension of truth. Thus, for Krochmal, while religions always communicate representationally, they are nevertheless focusing on
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speculative concerns, and convey no less truth than the abstract formulations favored by philosophy. In fact, there is always a direct correspondence between the two; every religious symbol or statement carries with it a latent philosophical claim. Abstracting the representations characteristic of Jewish religious expression will yield a philosophically sophisticated worldview. This method allows Krochmal to reconstruct the essentials of Jewish faith in philosophical terms, showing the latent philosophical content in the ideas of religiously highly conscious, but philosophically uninitiated holy men. As Nathan Rotenstreich has pointed out, Krochmal claims religion and philosophy are essentially identical, in that both represent processes of speculation, which are equal in their apprehension of truth.\(^\text{42}\)

Of course, much of this discussion parallels those of Kant and Hegel, who also claim that religions communicate representationally what philosophy does abstractly. The difference is that for them \textit{Ideen} are superior not only by virtue of their philosophical clarity, but also by virtue of their conceptual necessity. \textit{Vorstellungen}, on the other hand, can be interpreted in various ways, and are not always successful in imparting their speculative message.\(^\text{43}\)

In Krochmal's version, the relationship between representations and their corresponding ideas is governed by an inner necessity, and therefore each representation admits of one correct speculative interpretation. Thus, his reconstruction of Judaism's latent philosophical content can claim to be demonstrable and not merely arbitrary. This claim is based on the assertion that the relationship between representation and idea is like that of a metaphor to that which it represents. For
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Krochmal metaphors are not expressions of poetic genius and creativity; rather, they are rooted in the universal mind—the essence of human spirituality—and therefore virtually all metaphors are equivalent in many different languages. Thus, the meaning of a metaphor (or symbol) is not a subjective judgment on the part of the reader, but can be arrived at by applying objective criteria, based on an understanding of the human intellect. The argument for the universality of symbols and metaphors establishes the timeless quality of linguistic expression, and renders the Bible and Talmuds as comprehensible, in their own terms, to someone in the nineteenth century as they were to their original audiences. Once this point has been established, the way is open for an exegetical reconstruction of Jewish faith that will alleviate the perplexities of the traditional intellectual for whom Krochmal is writing.

Krochmal's interpretive method may be seen as a middle ground between the methods of interpreting sacred documents of Maimonides and Spinoza. For the former, prophecy, for example, represents a certain perfection in the nature of the human being, in addition to its dependence on the will of God. The prophets, and, for that matter, the sages, are men of speculative insight, who speak in parables specifically designed to conceal the meaning of their words from those whom they might otherwise mislead. Thus, for Maimonides, the biblical and rabbinic authors can be seen as philosophers who spoke in parables and riddles. For Spinoza, on the other hand, there can be no relationship between the content of philosophy and theology at all. The role of the latter is simply to instill beliefs necessary for obedience; those beliefs are far inferior to the insights of speculative philosophy, or
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intuitive knowledge. Thus, for Spinoza, there is no truth to be sought in Scripture.\(^4^6\)

Krochmal's position can be seen as a compromise. He accepts from Spinoza—in accord with Hegel—the notion that prophets and theologians cannot be considered philosophers, while accepting from Maimonides—again with Hegel—the notion that there is, nevertheless, an integral relationship between theology and truth. While religious speculation is not expressed with the logical clarity with which philosophical inquiry proceeds, it does grasp metaphysical reality in a more immediate manner, and, as such, is a source of truth. He may therefore define "Torahitic faith" as "the knowledge of the absolute truth—God, may He be blessed—and the knowledge of that which has reality and existence within Him—the spiritual essence—to the extent that it is implanted within the hearts and minds of all men, great and small, when the forces of their souls are aroused to such things" (Guide, p. 30; emphasis added). The fact that these ideas are impressed on the hearts and minds of their recipients representationally, rather than logically, does not detract from their truth, for, "with Torahitic concepts the truth is, in its essence, one, whether it be expressed as representations or rational concepts" (ibid.).

Krochmal of course was hardly the first to attempt a philosophical reconstruction of the Jewish faith. He was, I believe, the first to offer an epistemological theory which not only justified such an attempt, but absolutely mandated it. While his predecessors tended to focus on the intellectually troublesome elements within the Jewish tradition, Krochmal presents an argument that is universal in scope, claiming that
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one cannot grasp the true message of Judaism without discerning the abstract meaning of all its teachings, symbols and rituals. Of course, in the end Krochmal's work is no different than that of earlier Jewish scholars, focusing on those particular problems that beset his place and time. Still, to effectively guide his perplexed readers, he had to formulate his arguments in universal terms, for this was the demand of the time.

The Guide of the Perplexed

For any Jewish scholar in the nineteenth century to entitle a work "The Guide of the Perplexed" of anything is an act of audacity and daring, for such a title carries with it at least two highly controversial claims. The first claim is that the original Guide of the Perplexed by Maimonides is now outdated and no longer capable of addressing the religious needs of the existing community. The second claim is that the author of such a work is capable of addressing those needs in as profound a way as Maimonides could some six-and-a-half centuries earlier. The latter assertion is grounded in a rather high level of self-esteem on the part of the author; it also displays an appreciation of the power of Maimonides' work, in its day, and a belief in the essentially homologous nature of the twelfth-century and nineteenth-century religious crises. That Krochmal would like to do for his age what Maimonides did for his is stated explicitly and often in the Guide; this, despite the fact that in his view the problems of his age are much more difficult to deal with than were those Maimonides confronted. He seems quite convinced that his Guide would be equal to
the task. On the other hand, the first claim—that Maimonides is now outdated—is never advanced explicitly, but is implicit not only in Krochmal’s title, but throughout the book as well.

The need for a new “guide of the perplexed” was necessitated by the perceived obsolescence of Maimonides’ Aristotelianism. As we shall see, the gist of Maimonides’s metaphysics were viewed by Krochmal as part of the problem, as Jewish metaphysics were now compared to those emerging from Idealist circles. From such a comparative perspective, Maimonides’ stark theological transcendentalism seemed to necessitate an incomplete conception of God, and an immature relationship with Him. The answer, for Krochmal, was to turn to Jewish Neoplatonism, specifically the teachings of Ibn Ezra, Nahmanides and the Kabbalists, from which a more comprehensive theology could be developed. It is from this perspective that the time had passed Maimonides by.

If the substance of much of Maimonides’ philosophy was obsolete, his method remained exemplary. In Krochmal’s view, Maimonides’ Guide, while conceding much to Aristotle, was seen as championing the cause of traditional Judaism in the face of the ravaging effects of Aristotelianism. It is clear that Krochmal thought of Maimonides as the great savior of traditional Judaism, who rescued his generation from religious decadence. Krochmal, in his Guide, will also concede much to modern thought and historiography. His goal, though, is to do what the great Maimonides had done—turn these concessions to the benefit of the traditional Jewish community, to pave the way for a comfortable reorientation in the face of modern challenges. His perhaps inflated view of the
success of Maimonides in his pursuit of this same goal provided the inspiration and hope that it could once again be successfully accomplished.

Krochmal's use of Maimonides' *Guide* as his model helps to explain the essentially medieval nature of much of his own *Guide*, not merely from the perspective of style, but of substance as well. It appears that Krochmal seriously underestimated the nature of modernity and the extent to which it rendered the medieval solutions implausible. Krochmal thought that the needs of the time could be addressed by the medieval method of leaving all external structures of traditional religious life intact, but radically interpreting their religious and intellectual significance, and, in some cases, reassessing their origins as well.

In some measure, this underestimation may be accounted for by the distinction between Galicia and Germany. In the former, most Jews apparently felt little was to be gained from responding positively to the demands for religious reform. There was no outside world into which one could hope to assimilate, despite the fact that some maskilim wrote as if there were. Certainly, for Krochmal himself, the outside world in which he participated intellectually was German and not Polish; he admitted though that this world was not for him a living reality, it was not a world in which he could actively participate. He was a recipient of German culture, but, unlike the German Jews, could harbor no hope of participating in its shaping. Thus, his underestimation of the transformative character of modernity may be due to the fact that he experienced it from a distance and in strictly theoretical way. In any event, the adoption of the Maimonidean model in many ways
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ensured that Krochmal’s project could not succeed in its entirety. On the other hand, his conscious adaptation of Maimonidean methodology points to the crisis confronting Jewish thought in the modern period. Medieval Jewish thought proceeded from the premise that the sacred documents of Judaism incorporated truth. The task of the religious thinker was then to reveal what that truth was and where it was located. That is, medieval religious thought was perforce exegetical; it engaged the classical sources of the tradition, interpreting them in accord with the demands of that other source of truth, reason. The uniquely modern element in modern religious thought is its challenge to the fundamental premise of the medievals. The claims of a particular religious tradition might be true, but there could be no commitment to their truth a priori. Therefore, Jewish thought in the modern age could not adopt a strictly exegetical (or eisegetical) approach and hope to fully succeed. The philosophy of religion and historical thinking had rendered the a priori claim that a particular religious tradition can fully embody truth an arrogant absurdity. On the other hand, “Jewish thought” that was not exegetical—that is, that did not fully engage traditional sources—would have difficulty advancing the claim to be “Jewish.” Thus, modern Jewish thinkers have adopted, for the most part, a self-consciously selective approach to Jewish sources. Krochmal, on the other hand, while necessarily selective in practice, advanced the claim that Judaism is a complete religious totality, all of whose authentic sources contribute to the development of its speculative message. For this reason, Krochmal’s Guide must take account of all kinds of
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Jewish texts, from those of the rabbis, medieval philosophers and mystics, to Philo, Jewish Gnostics and Essenes. All of them can be expected to reflect, in different idioms, the essential truths of Judaism, or, at least, some part thereof.\(^{54}\)

Krochmal's "medievalism" lends credence to the thesis of this book, that, ultimately, Krochmal's *Guide* is a reflection of a confrontation of cultures. Through this text we can view the understanding of modernity of a traditional but "gebildete" Jewish savant. This provides a new vantage point from which to view the confrontation of tradition and modernity. For implicit in Krochmal's text is the understanding that the modern age has provided the freedom and vocabulary to finally express metaphysical and historical truth directly and clearly; at the same time, the content of those truths are identical with previous, Jewish, indirect expressions. Of greater significance, implicit in Krochmal's text, as the ensuing chapters will clarify, is the understanding that a substantial portion of the modern philosophy of religion and history is nothing more than dressed up Protestant theology and historical triumphalism. Presumably "objective" philosophical metaphysics are in fact permeated with Christian symbols, and are supported by citations from and interpretations of the Christian Bible, especially the Gospels. The "objective" patterns of history turn out to be nothing more than reconstructions of the emergence of Protestant Europe, it being self-evident that this represents the height of culture. As we shall see, Krochmal challenges these assertions head-on, essentially exchanging one brand of triumphalism for another. It is Judaism whose religious tenets are founded on the "absolute" of modern Idealist philosophy. It is Judaism whose history has attained unprecedented spiri-
tual heights long ago; it is only now that the rest of the world is beginning to catch up. It is in Jewish sources that modern truths are to be found. Thus, the inquiring student should not be led astray by the pervasive Christian imagery and symbolism that triumphantly undergirds the nascent modern disciplines, the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of history. Rather, the student should turn to his or her own tradition; with proper guidance (the Guide) he will be astonished by the realization that this tradition already encompassed—and built its religious edifice upon—the fundamental truths emerging from the world of modern thought. While not the only Jew in the nineteenth century to advance such a claim, Krochmal is unique in his commitment to halakhah as the means of maintaining this absolute religious community, and in locating the absolute nature of Judaism in a wide array of sources, including the rabbinic and “sectarian” writings rather than, say, in prophetic ethics alone.

The Guide demands of its readers yet one more thing. Unlike Aristotelian philosophy, whose challenges to Judaism were strictly those of an independent philosophical system, modern philosophy of religion and history presumes to make many assertions directly denigrating Jewish life and mores, and directly and specifically challenging many of its claims to truth. This strong critique was internalized by many Jews, who, as minorities often do, looked to the dominant culture that was now beckoning as superior to their own. Again here, Krochmal’s text demands that its Jewish reader adopt a more critical orientation within his or her tradition. Such an orientation would reveal that those various challenges are not founded on deep knowledge of Jewish history or metaphysics, but on
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the self-confidence of German Protestants that their world is the world. Krochmal calls on his reader to walk with him on the path to self-knowledge. Such a path would reveal that modern philosophical and historical claims are fully compatible with the historical Jewish tradition and its self-understanding. In short, Krochmal's Guide seeks to instill in its reader the same self-confidence in the legitimacy of the Jewish way of life as is to be found in Krochmal's Protestant contemporaries. It is to the elucidation of this thesis that we now turn.

NOTES

2. See Jacob Katz's Out of the Ghetto (New York: Schocken, 1973) where the importance of all these elements is discussed.
5. Mahler, pp. 3-7. The measures pertaining to education were never very successful, as Jews protested vigorously against surrendering control of the education of their children. As we shall see presently, Krochmal's education was not affected by these measures. Still, it is useful to be mindful of these regulations, as they illustrate the attitudes of the government authorities toward their Jews. In insisting on the political hopelessness of Galicia's Jews, I am not questioning the genuinely radical inclinations of Josef II in issuing his various edicts; he seems to have been truly committed to the integration of
his Jews into the corresponding gentile social classes. I am simply suggesting that these inclinations died with Josef (1790), and, with the exception of Mendel Lefin, Joseph Perl and a few others, did not significantly influence the intellectual program of the maskilim into the nineteenth century. The maskilim aspired to reformed education, the removal of the burdens of the rabbinate on their lives, and the eradication of Hasidism, but not political integration. See Israel Bartal, "'The Heavenly City of Germany' and Absolutism à la Mode d'Autriche: The Rise of the Haskalah in Galicia," in Jacob Katz, ed., Toward Modernity (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1987), pp. 33-42.


7. See Mahler, pp. 41-44. Krochmal himself was in the forefront in insisting on the importance of Talmudic education. See his letter to his son Abraham, written in the spring of 1840, shortly before his death. He writes, "And know my beloved son, whatever you choose to do after thought and reflection, you shall pave your way, whatever it is, when you hold fast to the study of the Talmud and the decisors—in which you have already achieved a certain level of completion (shlemut)—together with proper diligence in the study of the holy tongue and the German language—writing fluently in both—and arithmetic. God forbid that you be slothful in this" (The Guide to the Perplexed of the Time, Simon Rawidowicz, ed., 2nd edition, [Waltham: Ararat Press, 1961], p. 452). (Throughout, page references to the "Letters" section of Rawidowicz's edition will be to "Guide").

8. Wissenschaft des Judentums is the scholarly study of Judaism. This is not to suggest that the Galician haskalah did not have its "politicians." To be sure, someone like Josef Perl is to be understood in terms of his political agenda: educational reform and the eradication of Hasidism. Nevertheless, the scholarship of people like Krochmal and Shlomo Yehudah Rapoport, not to mention many lesser lights, was not directed toward achieving political emancipation, but to broadening the intellectual horizons of their readers.

9. See Perl's Über das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim, Avraham Rubinstein, ed. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1977), which was written in 1816. Perl bitterly complained about the at-
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tachment of this sect to its leaders, its zaddikim, defining its fundamental principle as “Blinder Glauben und Anhänglichkeit an den Rebi” (pp. 78–79). He writes further “Wenn sogar der Zadik wieder das Gesetz handelt, so muss man doch alle Gefühle und Sinne unterdrücken, und nur das thun, was der Zadik befehlt” (p. 107). Their alleged immorality is also vigorously denounced: “Alle ihre Werke sind voller Immoralität, Intoleranz und Verachtung alles dessen, was nicht chussid ist. Sie lehren öffentlich und ganz ungescheut, dass man den Akum [gentile] betrügen darf, die Ämter bestechen soll” (pp. 141–42). This book was sent to local governor Franz von Hauer for approval, accompanied by a letter that reads, in part, “Hasidism is comparable to a cancer that will grow from hour to hour, if it is not cut out at its roots” (ed. intro. p. 11). This work was apparently known to Krochmal, whose own descriptions of the spread of Hasidism are nearly identical; Krochmal’s description can be found in English in Mahler, p. 9.

10. This is true already of Mendel Lefin, a disciple of Mendelssohn’s, who as early as 1789 was inveighing against Hasidism and the damage it did to progressive tendencies. See N. M. Gelber’s introduction to his “Mendel Lapin-Satanower’s Proposals for the Improvement of Jewish Community Life Presented to the Great Polish Sejm (1788–1792)” (Hebrew), in The Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume (New York: 1964), pp. 271–84; also Mahler, p. 122.

11. For discussion, see Bartal, p. 37.

12. This necrology was published in 1841, in the sixth volume of the Hebrew periodical Kerem Hemed. This excerpt was cited by Rawidowicz in his introduction, p. 23. Similar tribulations were described by Moshe Leib Lilienblum (1843–1910) in his autobiography, Hattot N’urim; thus in Russia some twenty-five years later it was still dangerous, in some places, to attempt to educate oneself in anything other than traditional Jewish texts.

13. Most sources give 1819 as the date of Lefin’s death. Gelber, in his study of Brody (see next note), provides 1826 as the date. In support of Gelber’s date is the fact that Lefin’s name appears among the subscribers to Levinson’s Teudah b’Yisrael. This subscriber list was compiled in 1823–24, proving that Lefin was alive at the time, unless, of course, this list was put together by Richard Daley’s machine in Chicago.
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15. This despite the efforts of Austrian government to compel the Jews to provide a general education. Rawidowicz relates that Krochmal’s mother paid six ducats a year to the “German school,” with the proviso that Nachman did not have to attend. In general, Galician Jewry fought vigorously against the government-sponsored schools, and they were abolished in 1809.

16. In a letter written a few months before his death to his son Abraham (who was then approximately fourteen; see Isma Schorsch, “The Production of a Classic: Zunz as Krochmal’s Editor,” *LBIY* (1986), p. 284, n. 16 and text thereto), Krochmal exhorts him not to cease learning Talmud and Codes, while also continuing his studies in the German and Hebrew languages. The goal of study, he wrote, was ‘iblimut,’ comprehensive knowledge, which required knowledge of classical Jewish sources.

17. So Leopold Zunz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Berlin: 1876), p. 151: “Im Herbst 1798, also noch nicht 14 Jahre alt, ward Krochmal verheirathet.” Rapoport reports that Krochmal married at sixteen or seventeen, but Zunz’s date, also reported by Letteris, would seem to be confirmed by the letter of Krochmal’s son-in-law to Zunz, shortly after the publication of Zunz’s necrology. See Schorsch, p. 285 and letter thirteen there, p. 303.

18. For the date, see Schorsch, ibid.

19. I will discuss the influence these works exercised on Krochmal’s thought in the subsequent chapters.

20. Schorsch, ibid.

21. Quoted by Rawidowicz, p. 32. The rather flowery language derives from the biblical Song of Songs which Bloch quotes and paraphrases.

22. For further details, see Rawidowicz, pp. 30ff.

23. See ibid., pp. 32–33.

24. Krochmal was drawn to business pursuits by the death of his mother-in-law, with whom he lived, in 1814, at the same time that his previously well-to-do father’s circumstances had taken a turn for the worse. Thus, at the age of twenty-nine, Krochmal was forced to begin supporting himself for the first time.

25. Krochmal’s report of the incident denies that he maintained a corre-
spondence, although he proudly acknowledges acquaintance with two Karaite scholars; also, he provides the name “David” for the Karaite who figures in this story.


27. Jost was to comment on this “weird” aspect of Krochmal’s intellectual life in 1846, long before the publication of the Guide. Because Krochmal had published so little, but yet had a reputation as the greatest of Galician scholars, Jose referred to Krochmal’s “Socratic” nature. See his Neure Geschichte der hraeliten von 1815 bis 1845 (Berlin: 1846–47), p. 106, n. 2. Cf. note 28 below.

28. Guide, p. 425. Rapoport notes the absence of publication in his necrology. His words are instructive:

I will only further comment on the way of our ancient rabbis, may their memory be for a blessing, who originally wished to prevent all writing other than the holy scriptures; other things—all halakhah, all aggadah and all wisdom was transmitted [orally] from sage to sage. In this way they kept this from the masses, lest each person become an arbiter regarding sublime matters. . . . Similarly, some ancient Greek scholars behaved this way, such as Pythagoras and his disciples—who wrote nothing, but secretly transmitted the teaching of sages to students—and other excellent scholars such as Socrates and those like him, who left no writings. Their words of wisdom were what was remembered by students. In this manner behaved a few Polish scholars, who are worthy to be called such. They expended more energy on their teachings (imrotehem) that others did on several books; among them was this wise man” [i.e., Nachman Krochmal]. (Kerem Hemed, vol. 6, p. 46)

29. That this title is Krochmal’s and not Zunz’s, as has been alleged, is now firmly established in Schorsch.

30. Now chronicled in the correspondence between Zunz and Krochmal’s family and friends; see Schorsch, ibid.

31. For further discussion of this, see my “Rabbinic Judaism in Confrontation with Modern Scholarship: Nachman Krochmal’s Guide of the
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32. It is important to bear this in mind when we confront Krochmal's philosophy of history. Many of Krochmal's interpreters insist that Krochmal actually saw a revival in his own day, no doubt reading into him their own views of modernity. This is particularly the case with Jacob Taubes. "Nachman Krochmal and Modern Historicism" in Judaism vol. 13, 1963, p. 160. Taubes, primarily on the basis of Krochmal's use of the potentially eschatological phrase acharit ha-yamim to describe his own day, argues that Krochmal saw in his own time the onset of redemption, now appropriately secularized and subordinated to the historical process. This reading is unacceptable on many grounds, not the least of which is the fact that Krochmal uses the phrase acharit ha-yamin while actually referring to contemporary decadence in his letter to Luzzato (Guide, p. 425). There is no way to understand this reference as in any way extolling the virtues of the new age. Rather, Krochmal simply had no other word/phrase on hand that could refer to the modern age—an age that obviously differed from that which preceded it, but which was not to be seen as better. Further, it is not the case that this phrase always had an eschatological ring to it in traditional sources. See, e.g., Genesis 49:1, for a use that is not understood traditionally as eschatologically intended (see also the remarks of Samuel b. Hofni on this verse). For further discussion of Krochmal's view of history, see below chapter 3, and also my dissertation, chapter 3, where I develop the argument of this note at greater length.

33. The relevant details will be supplied at length in the following chapter; for now my purpose is simply to provide a general picture of the time.

34. Note that the rabbis—those responsible for the attribution of the Psalms to David—are presented here as serving the religious needs of the multitude in dating the Psalms. Note also the distinction between earlier times, when people's understanding was supposedly grounded in fideism, with modern times in which knowledge is decisive.

35. Both the term I have translated "scholar," mitchakhe me ashekaz, and the term I have translated Hasidim, mitchasde malkbut tzafon, can have pejorative connotations. In particular, Krochmal generally referred to
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the Hasidim as *mitchasdim*, perhaps translatable as the "self-righteous ones."

36. See the discussion of this in Michael Meyer's *Origins of the Modern Jew* (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1967), pp. 116–21. Even Abraham Geiger considered Hebrew to be deficient for modern scholarly purposes, although he was later to write some important articles in that language. See, e.g., Geiger's letter to Zunz in which he castigates Rapoport for wanting to create a Hebrew scholarly journal. Once this journal, *Keren Hemed*, was actually created though, Geiger admitted that Hebrew was indeed the most appropriate tool with which to communicate with the intended audience, given that their knowledge of German was not yet sufficient. See *WZJT*, vol. 4 (1839), p. 471. Cf. Geiger's *Nachgelassene Schriften*, vol. 2, pp. 286–88.

37. At the very least, he takes for granted that his readers know the work of J. G. Eichhorn. For details, see below, chapter 4.

38. See below, chapters 5 and 6.

39. It is impossible to determine how many Jewish scholars actually fit this mold. In his response to Zvi Menachem (Hirsch Mendel) Pineles, who had asked him for an explanation of Kantian epistemology, Krochmal complains that among his many "students" none seemed interested in these issues before Pineles (*Guide*, p. 420). Allowing for some exaggeration, this still suggests that among Krochmal's friends and disciples the discipline of philosophy was the least popular. At the same time, it must be noted that Pineles published his question and Krochmal's response in *Karem Hemed* (vol. 2, pp. 108–13) under "pressure" from Shmuel Leib Goldenberg and Moses Hayyim Hakohen, suggesting that there was some interest in the issue among a very small group of Galician maskilim. Similarly, Chajes expressed interest in philosophy.

40. See esp. the first paragraph on p. 158 of the *Guide*.

41. The citation is from Y. Hagigah 2:1.


43. It is nevertheless the case that both Kant and Hegel engage in a kind of "midrash" on their biblical sources, each attempting to show that behind the representations of the Bible stand sophisticated philosophical reflection on the nature of humans and their weaknesses. See Kant, *Religion, Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper
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44. See Moreh, 2:32. Throughout this work I refer to Maimonides’ Guide of the Perplexed this way, so as to avoid confusion with Krochmal’s Guide.

45. Moreh, introduction to part 1.


47. For details and further discussion, see below, chapter 2.


49. Krochmal was undoubtedly conscious of the fact that, in attaching himself to Ibn Ezra, he was rejecting Maimonides. That is, he insisted that Ibn Ezra’s thinking, which he thought he found in the Sefer Sha’ar ha-Shamayim (see chapter 2), was quite distinct from Maimonides’. See Kerem Hemed, vol. 5, p. 93.


52. I will address the issue of Krochmal’s “success” and his continuing relevance in the concluding chapter.
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53. From this perspective the second part of Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem* may also be considered as inextricably linked to the medieval heritage even as the problems he is addressing are uniquely modern. For this reason, not even Mendelssohn’s closest disciples were convinced by it. For an early denunciation of Mendelssohn’s disciples for their failure to carry out the master’s program, see Isaac Samuel Reggio, *ha-Torah v’ha-pilosofia* (1828), pp. 143–63, esp. 152–63.

54. Thus, Maimonides’ theological transcendentalism, while ultimately a distortion of Jewish metaphysics, does successfully reflect one aspect of them, such that his work remains essential to an understanding of the latent philosophical content of Judaism.