KROCHMAL CLAIMED that his metaphysical speculation represents the metaphysical position that is at the root of Judaism, and of which Jews have been aware, in full or inchoate form, throughout their history. That Jewish metaphysics is so fully encoded within Jewish scriptures, laws, rituals, and folklore, and that all Jews are in some unarticulated way aware of God as the ground of all being—that is, as absolute spirit—is crucial for Krochmal in his understanding of the course of Jewish history. He claimed that the Jews survived through history as a creative force by virtue of their unique faith, which preserved their national and religious identity in the face of catastrophes. Stated this way, however, Krochmal's point is at best banal, at worst a complete tautology. In order to more fully appreciate what is at stake here it will first be necessary to look at the philosoph-
NACHMAN KROCHMAL

ical and historiographical issues that raise the question of Jewish survival in the first place. This requires that we first examine what view of history animates the Jewish tradition, as Krochmal seems to have recognized it, and what challenged that view, generically and specifically, in the early nineteenth century.

History as Tradition

It is by now a truism that the Jewish tradition is informed by a concern for history and its meaning, perhaps more than any other tradition. Its primary source, the Bible, is largely a series of narrative histories. In addition, many of the prophetic pronouncements found in the biblical books are reactions to historical events or predictions of future ones; in either case, they are based on the assumption that there is a direct correlation between historical activity and national destiny. As Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi has most eloquently described the biblical view of things, "[s]uddenly, as it were, the crucial encounter between man and the divine shifted away from the realm of nature and the cosmos to the plane of history, conceived now in terms of divine challenge and human response" (Yerushalmi, p. 8). In the Bible, then, it is on the plane of history that the human and the divine meet.¹

In the Bible much is assumed to be ultimately dependent on the pious and impious activity of Israelites, and, especially, their rulers. Yet, in this world, historical destiny is not entirely contingent upon the activities of the present; the patterns of the past are often the frames of reference for the subsequent events. There are a limited number of possible
KROCHMAL'S THEORY OF HISTORY

destinies, all grounded in the sacralized events of a sacred past. This is perhaps best illustrated in the historical narratives collectively known as the Deuteronomistic history. Whether the Bible critic John Van Seters is correct in considering this history the first of the biblical histories or not I cannot determine; but the significance of this history lies not in its chronology, but in the power of its vision and the coherence of its message. In the portion of this work that makes up the books of Kings, we can see most clearly how the success or failure of a given king, and thus, the destiny of the nation as a whole, is dependent on the degree of proximity of the monarch to the preferred, Davidic model.

In particular, the stories of Manasseh and his successors, including the "good" king Josiah, indicate the degree to which destiny is rooted in the patterns of existence established by the past. The continual repetition of the phrase "and king X did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father(s) had done" (2 Kings 21:20, 23:32, 23:37, 24:9, 24:19; see also 21:2, and compare 22:2) serves to indicate the accumulation of divine wrath that will ultimately come to visit destruction upon the community of Judah. Especially instructive is 2 Kings 23:26. After completing the story of Josiah with the encomium that his piety was unprecedented among the kings, the observation is inserted that for all of Josiah's piety and his returning of the people to God, it was simply not enough to sway the wrath of God instigated by the behavior of Manasseh, Josiah's grandfather. This wrath, which could not be deflected, would ultimately be the cause of the destruction of Judah (2 Kings 23:27). The remainder of the book serves to indicate the deep-seated nature of Manasseh's corruption of
the commonwealth, and the inability of his successors, save Josiah, to break out of the pattern, so that the destiny of Judah is sealed. As Van Seters argues, the author of this history is engaged in “rendering an account of the past in the sense of articulating the people’s identity” (Van Seters, p. 320). That is, the very sense of self, both personal and national, is rooted in where the people came from—far more, I would add, than in where they are going.

Of greater import for our discussion is the whole cycle of patriarchal narratives, which Jewish tradition has generally seen as in some sense predictive of the future destiny of the people. The lives of the patriarchs and their descendants are interpreted typologically, to be seen as comprehending the essential possibilities of Jewish existence. The prescription for receiving divine blessing, and the understanding of that blessing as rootedness in the land, as well as the prescription for receiving divine disfavor and its apprehension as exile, are found, first, in the Adam and Eve story and run throughout the biblical record. Further, the promises made to the patriarchs serve in some way as the assurance of the continued vitality of the people, an assurance most welcome in the wake of the exile in 586. Indeed, the theme of an eternal covenant rooted in ethnic ties is repeated elsewhere in the Bible and becomes fundamental in later Jewish thought. Again here, the crucial point is that the basic patterns of Jewish existence and destiny are rooted in God’s original plan and are manifest in the earliest history of God’s chosen people.

We must be careful to distinguished this claim from the far more banal notion that we are in some inscrutable way the products of our past, that our pasts contribute to our being.
KROCHMAL'S THEORY OF HISTORY

The view I am insisting upon here goes well beyond that to suggest that in the biblical histories there is a sense that the past does not merely contribute to what Israel is, but that the events of the past that have been sacralized by being revealed are the determining factors in what Israel is and in what it can and cannot become.

The biblical events that proved most determinative, both within the Bible itself and in subsequent Jewish tradition, are certainly the enslavement of Israel in Egypt and Israel's subsequent exodus therefrom, the wandering in the desert and the entry into the promised land. The miraculous exodus in particular was cited as the justification for many of the laws and rituals ordained by the Bible. The Passover and Sukkot holidays are presented as remembrances of this event and its aftermath. Even the incest laws of Leviticus 18 are grounded in the historical experience of the nation, as they are prefaced by the caveat not to be like the Egyptians in whose land you once dwelled—you have been brought out of their land, leaving behind their mores. The Sabbath rest as prescribed in the Second Decalogue is grounded in the memory of slavery and redemption (Deut. 5:15-16). Perhaps most telling of all is the confessional of the pilgrim bringing his first fruits to the place of the Lord, in which the pilgrim recounts the sacred history of his nation (Deut. 26:5-10) serving as the immediate cause of his turning over his first fruits to the Lord. The very relationship between Israel and God is grounded in the power of the divine redemption of Israel—a redemption that will continue to reverberate throughout time.

This reverberation extends to the hope for the future after the catastrophes of destruction and exile. Thus, we find the
prophet Isaiah promising those exiled by the Assyrians that they shall be redeemed from the hands of their enemies just as the Israelites were redeemed from the Egyptians, and this promised redemption shall be effected in the same manner (Isaiah 11:15–16). The prophet Micah delivers the same message (Micah 7:15). It is, then, in terms of this ever-present past event that subsequent hope can be articulated. It is part of the legacy of biblical thought to Judaism that it is the past manifestations of God’s power, love and anger, the exodus and the exile in particular, that reveal the patterns and limits of subsequent (and consequent) existence.

Although it is notoriously difficult to reconstruct “rabbinic thought” on any given subject, and therefore any statement that one might make must be considered speculative, I do not see anything in rabbinic literature that calls for a different picture from the one we find in biblical thought. Here too we find a strong sense that the sacred national past already contains within it all that one needs to know about the working and boundaries of history. As Yerushalmi writes:

For the rabbis the Bible was not only a repository of past history, but a revealed pattern of the whole of history, and they had learned their scriptures well. They knew that history has a purpose, the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, and that the Jewish people had a central role to play in the process. They were convinced that the covenant between God and Israel was eternal, though the Jews had often rebelled and suffered the consequences. Above all, they had learned from the Bible that the true pulse of history often beat beneath its manifest surfaces, an invisible history that was more real than the world, deceived by the more strident outward rhythms of power, could recognize. . . . Ironically, the
very absence of historical writing among the rabbis may itself have been due in good measure to their total and unqualified absorption of the biblical interpretation of history. (Yerushalmi, pp. 21–22)

It was this absorption of the biblical view of the determining nature of the past that allowed, for example, the stories and legends of the destruction of the Second Temple to be recounted as exegesis of the book of Lamentations, which “described” the destruction of the first, and, more generally, allows the rabbis to discuss contemporary and future events on the basis of biblical prooftexts. As all the possibilities are encoded within Scripture, there is no need, and in some sense it would be improper, to discuss the course of time and its meaning in anything other than an exegetical mode. Thus, the fate of world powers is delimited by scriptural verses; similarly Israel’s fate is so delimited. To the skilled reader Scripture is a picture of all that did occur, which, in turn, is the blueprint for all that can occur.

Here again, the exodus is crucial and formative. The importance of keeping the memory of this constellation of events alive is crucial to Jewish ritual developed in the rabbinic period. As the Mishnah states, “in each generation a person is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt.” This memory provided both solace and hope; the reassuring element of the memory of the Exodus is visible in the discussion of the Mishnah regarding the blessing to be recited after the telling of the story of the Exodus on Passover night. First the participant recites part of the Hallel prayer (Psalms 113–18), itself a reenactment of what, according to one Talmudic tradition (BT Pesahim 117a), the Israelites did upon being redeemed. This is closed by a blessing:
Rabbi Tarfon [second century] says [the blessing is as follows]: He that redeemed us and redeemed our father from Egypt and brought us to this night to eat therein unleavened bread and bitter herbs. But there is no eulogy [to this blessing]. R. Aqiba adds: Therefore, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, bring us in peace to the other appointed times and festivals which are coming to meet us, while we rejoice in the restoration of your city and are joyful in your service; there we shall eat of the sacrifices and Passover-offerings (whose blood has reached with acceptance the wall of your altar, and let us praise you for our redemption and for the ransom-ing of our soul). 6 Blessed are you, O Lord, who has redeemed Israel. (Mishnah Pesahim 10:6)

The connection drawn by this mishnah between the past event and the “future event” is clear. There is no indication of any doubt about whether this future event will occur; its promised occurrence is guaranteed by the original redemption.

What is particularly noteworthy in this passage, and in the many like it, is the connection between the messianic age—the age of the renewed cult and rebuilt city—and the previous, glorious redemption. In this view the messianic age is not something apart from history, nor is it something new in history; rather, it is the restoration of the glories of the past to a nation bereft of them. 7 In this view even the messianic age is subject to the basic, discoverable patterns—laws, if you will—of divinely ordained history. 8 This passage demonstrates the power of the vision of a completed past, for whose renewal the present and, alas, the future desperately await, and its incorporation into a ritual, liturgical setting.

Similarly, the morning prayer services as they developed through the centuries also accentuate the connection between the redemption from the Egyptians and the expected redemp-
tion in the messianic age. Thus, while there were other rabbinic views regarding the messiah and his age, the connections drawn in the liturgy exercise considerable power in shaping the expectations of Jews; here again we find that the vision of the present and future configured by the patterns of the past is fundamental. As we shall see, this view is quite different from that of modern historical thinkers.

There ought to be nothing surprising in this view that came to predominate in rabbinic thinking. After all, rabbinic Judaism understood itself as the tradition par excellence, and traditions in general understand themselves as defined by their pasts. As Edward Shils describes the characteristics of “tradition,” it is “the large residual category of persistences arising from attachments to past things, to past persons, past societies, past practices, the performance of actions practiced in the past, the adherence to modes of perception, belief and appreciation received from those who observed them previously” (Shils, p. 123). For a community to adhere to what it knows as its tradition, it must necessarily assume that its own set of historical circumstances does not radically differ from those of earlier generations, or, at least, that such differences as there may be are irrelevant to the fundamental legitimacy of the tradition. Further, it cannot assume that it has progressed, qualitatively, beyond the time in which the tradition took shape, or that this time has been in some way transcended, for to then submit to the authority of the tradition anyway would be enslaving. Rather, the traditional community must assume that it is, at best, the spiritual equal of the original bearers of the tradition in order to adhere to it in a coherent way.

Now, in rabbinic documents we see that many rabbis ap-
NACHMAN KROCHMAL

parently found least dissonance in the proposition that adherence to the dictates of the past is grounded in the conviction that the past represents some kind of spiritual golden age, qualitatively superior to their own time. To cite but two examples that could readily be multiplied, in the Tosefta Hagigah (2:9) we find the statement that in the beginning (whenever that would have been, but certainly prior to the destruction of the Temple) there were no disputes in Israel; however, when the “students of Hillel and Shammai who did not serve [their masters] properly kal zarkhan] increased, so too did disputes increase in Israel.” As we move from the end of the Temple times and beyond, the capacity of students to properly understand and transmit the law waned, with the result that a once unified legal system—capable of achieving definitive closure in conducting its business—became the fragmented accumulation of conflicting opinions we now know as rabbinic literature. This view is buttressed by the well-known statement in the Babylonian Talmud, attributed by Raba b. Zimuna to R. Zera,11 “If the earlier scholars were like angels we are like men, and if the earlier scholars were like men we are like asses, and not [even] like the asses of R. Hanina b. Dosa and R. Phineas b. Yair, but like other [lesser] asses.” 12

Thus, subordination to the rabbinic tradition was, in some ways, justified by the claim that Jews of the rabbinic period and beyond are not the spiritual equals of their forebears, and can best achieve solace and salvation by submitting to the traditions received from them, their superiors, who had the good fortune to more fully apprehend the power of the divine word. Once again, we see here a vision of a completed past, which must be allowed to inform the present.

112
Against this vision of a completed past that reverberates throughout time we must juxtapose the views on the course of history that were becoming increasingly common in modern reflections on history, in order to fully understand the perplexity addressed by Krochmal. For in the area of the philosophy of history, modern thinkers presented Judaism with a formidable challenge.

Although there are, of course, significant differences among modern thinkers who addressed the question of history, there is a common thread that runs through the thought of virtually all of them—certainly those with whom Krochmal would have been familiar. That common thread is the acceptance of the idea of a human species that is in some way progressing throughout the course of history. This vision became the foundation of much that is new in nineteenth-century political thought, and had a significant impact within the realm of religion as well. With the conviction that we as a species are progressing, one is justified in attempting to overcome whatever traditions have held the social group together, some would say back, and to proclaim that a new and better age is dawning. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were filled with people animated by this conviction (or by the more cautious formulation that we as a species are fully capable of progressing beyond our past), from Kant to Lessing, to Herder and Hegel. As we shall see, this conviction often had direct and important implications for the understanding of Judaism.

In G. E. Lessing's work, "The Education of the Human Race," for example, we find the conviction that human history
can be understood as a process of providential education, and, reflecting a rather clear Protestant point of view, this process can be divided into three periods. The first corresponds to the period of the Old Testament, in which God, as the grand instructor, offered the Jews a primer to make this “rude, crude people” aware of the reality of the one God. “But,” he continued,

every primer is only for a certain age. To delay the child, who has outgrown it is harmful. For to be able to do this in a way that is at all profitable, you must insert into it more than there is really in it, and extract from it more than it can contain. . . . This gives the child a petty, crooked, hairsplitting understanding: it makes him full of mysteries, superstitious, full of contempt for all that is comprehensible and easy. The very way in which the Rabbis handled their books. The very character which they thereby imparted to the spirit of their people! A better instructor must come and tear the exhausted primer from the child’s hand. Christ came!” (Lessing, WS, p. 91)

Thus, with the advent of Jesus, Judaism is superseded. A new “textbook,” the New Testament, with its teaching of the immortality of the soul has replaced the old one.

Eventually, humanity will come to depend less on this text as well, as it will finally learn the sublime truths through reason rather than through revelation. While less overtly political or nationalistic than were other apostles of progress, Lessing’s schema betrays a certain triumphalism regarding the spirit of the modern age and its superiority over that which comes before it. Particularly of note for our purposes is his clear sense that the “educational” value of the first period has been superseded by the later periods. Since, after all, human
history is nothing more than a lengthy educational process, this supersession of the Old Testament by the New—now argued in ostensibly secular, philosophical terms—consigns the former to the historical wastebasket. Whatever value this period once offered humanity in its educational endeavor has been incorporated into that which came later.\textsuperscript{14}

In his perhaps better-known play, \textit{Nathan the Wise}, Lessing advances an argument whose nuances seem to be different but whose essential point is the same. It is only when we get beyond the age of religious communities and the divisiveness they offer to a more ecumenical and universal view will we have successfully realized the latent content of the message of the human religious impulse. As such, history can be seen as the progressive movement from particular communities to a universal human brotherhood, in which the historically distinguishable elements of the religious communities will be overcome.

Lessing's "Education" exercised a considerable influence on the rather unusual figure of Johann Gottfried von Herder. He, too, took an interest in the course of human history, and, unlike Lessing, was aware that a philosophy of human history required a broader sweep than those represented by the biblical communities. Thus, Herder's \textit{Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit} examines the history of the "Oriental" and Greco-Roman worlds as well as that of the Christian Occident. Yet he, too, while much more aware than most of the dangers of "Eurocentrism," ultimately constructs a view of the course of human history that is distinctly oriented toward envisioning its culmination in the development of the culture of modern Europe. Thus, he concludes his work with
an answer to the question, “How, therefore, did Europe achieve its culture, and the rank it thereby obtained above other countries?” (Book XX, chapter 6).

Herder argues that all of human history is a unified struggle toward the ideal of “humanity,” to which each world-historical culture makes its contribution; however, each particular state, and nation, goes through a life cycle comparable to that of organisms, after which it perishes, as do all organisms, while human culture lives on, moving from one center to another. Here again we find the image of past civilizations being superseded, dying out to make room for the contribution of others in this human struggle for self-realization. The merits of Herder’s argument cannot concern us here; our question must address the import of this argument for general historical understanding and Jewish self-understanding.

What Herder’s view of human history means from a Jewish perspective does not require any insight or detailed exegesis, for the author is quite content to spell it out for us. He treats Jewish history in the twelfth book of his Ideen, entitled “Near Eastern Beginnings.” For him the positive contribution of the Jews, or Hebrews, to the development of humanity is reflected in the Pentateuch and some of the other poetic portions of the Hebrew Bible. However, even in the pre-exilic period of Jewish history (pre-586 B.C.E.) that saw the emergence of these documents, the great Mosaic constitution, which should have been a “law of political liberty” became, according to Herder, a “law of bondage” (Sklavengesetz). When the Persian monarch Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their land, and reestablish their commonwealth, matters did not improve; legalism remained endemic:
Their religion was Pharisaism; their learning, a minute nibbling at syllables, and this confined to a single book; their patriotism, a slavish attachment to laws misunderstood, so as to render them ridiculous or contemptible to all the neighbouring nations. Their only consolation—and their hope—rested on some ancient prophecies, which, equally misconceived, were supposed to promise them the illusory sovereignty of the entire world. (Herder, *WE*, p. 62)

To be sure, there was one more positive element that derived from the continuation of Jewish history past the Babylonian exile, and that, of course, was Christianity. Other than that Jewish culture was barren and Jews could contribute no more to the development of “humanity.” The fact that the Jews continued to exist until Herder’s own day did not challenge his notion that their culture was dead:

Let no one, however, from this, surreptitiously infer a revolution, at some period or other to be wrought by these people on all the nations of the Earth. All that should have been accomplished has probably been accomplished; and neither in the people themselves, nor in historical analogy, can we discover the foundation of any other [possible accomplishment]. The continuance of the Jews is as naturally to be explained as that of Brahmans, Parsees or Gypsies. (Herder, *WE*, p. 66)

Thus, not only do the Jews have nothing more of significance to accomplish, this situation is the product of the (presumably divine) intention that guides humans on their course toward their destiny. The Jews have made their contribution to the greater totality Herder calls humanity, and their continued maintenance of a separate religious and national identity has no value.\(^{15}\)
Finally, describing the lessons to be learned from the study of civilization’s Near Eastern beginnings, Herder writes:

Finally, from the whole region over which we have wandered, we perceive how transitory all human structures are, indeed, how oppressive the best institutions become in a few generations. The plant blossoms, and withers; your fathers have died and decayed. Your temple is fallen; your tabernacle, the tables of your law, are no more: language itself, that eternal human bond has grown old. (Herder, WE, p. 88)

Clearly, for Herder, Second Commonwealth Judaism and beyond should be seen as a relic, a fossil; the Hebraic spirit had run its course and was no more.

While Hegel’s understanding of the process of human history differed markedly from Herder’s, seeing it as dialectical rather than organic, his notion of its course was actually quite similar. For Hegel, world history is the process of the development of spirit and the consciousness of freedom, which progresses dialectically; this process passes through its “Oriental” beginnings, moving on to Greek culture and beyond. The Jewish contribution to this process is subsumed under that of the Orient, Persia in particular (Hegel, LPH, pp. 195–98). That is, Jewish creative vitality reached its height of expression during the sixth and fifth centuries before the Christian era, after which these creative forces ebbed and disappeared. Thus, while Hegel would grant the Jews an extra century or two of creative existence, his judgment is ultimately no different from Herder’s: Jews have had their world-historical era, and the rules of the game are that no people experience more than one such era.
KROCHMAL'S THEORY OF HISTORY

It is further of note that for Hegel only nations that are constituted as states can contribute to the world-historical process of maximizing freedom. The reasons for this claim are grounded in Hegel's views of the state as the projection of the ethical core of a civilization, in which each individual who participates may be said to be truly free, as opposed to the freedom of acting from individual maxims grounded in individual autonomy (the position of Kant). This position is grounded in Hegel's conviction of the superiority of what he calls ethics (Sittlichkeit) to morality (Moralität), and is in no way directed toward anything Jewish. Nevertheless, approaching this position with the highly sensitive antennae of Jews convinced of the vitality of their culture, this vision represents a challenge that also required a response. If a national culture can only be developed through its political institutions, then Jews, possessing no state for nearly two millennia, once again may be considered historically irrelevant. Ultimately, in the works of these three scholars and others, Krochmal was confronted by a Protestant philosophy of history that could not imagine history as anything other than a process culminating in its own emergence.

Whatever we may think of such musings, the organismic, evolutionary model of human history was accepted among many as scientific. Even those who might reject the model in all its particulars were nevertheless drawn to the essentially Pauline conception of Jewish history that resulted; in particular, this view exercised considerable influence on modern biblical scholars, who tended to view the Babylonian exile as a cultural watershed.

Further, despite the fact that there is much in such theories
that can be seen as having a strong link to the traditional Christian reading of world events, because the *Tendenz* of the modern philosophy of history was less obvious, and was argued in terms of the advance of rational processes, there were Jews who accepted the model, and with it its judgment of the ossification of Jewish culture. In particular, Jewish intellectuals were drawn to Hegel's philosophy, and found their own tradition primitive by comparison. Consider, for example, the following statement regarding the emergence of modern Europe, advanced by the president of the Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden, Eduard Gans, in a speech to that organization:

In order to bring forth this totality, the Orient contributed its monotheism; Hellas—its beauty and ideal freedom; the Roman world—the gravity of the state vis-à-vis the individual; Christianity—the riches of universal human life; the Middle Ages—its stratification into sharply defined classes and estates; the modern world its philosophical strivings; within that [totality] they all reappear as moments after their temporal domination has ceased.¹⁹

To subsume Judaism under the rubric of the ancient Orient, and to identify the Orient as merely the first rung on the ladder that leads to the more important totality of modern Europe, is to acquiesce to the judgment that Judaism is nothing other than a relic. It is not surprising that Gans, less than three years after delivering this speech, abandoned Judaism altogether.²⁰

In looking at the theories of history that prevailed in the two worlds that are of importance to an understanding of Krochmal, we find that they are irreconcilably opposed to one
another; the traditional manner of thinking about time insists that the (selected) past—as it is sacralized and remembered—exercises a controlling function regarding all future possibilities. For modern historical thinking, as Krochmal would have recognized it, while the present and future cannot escape from the past entirely, the movement of time is a movement upward, in which the past is largely superseded. To put it another way, for Jewish tradition, and indeed, traditional thinking in general, we have a picture of a completed past, which reverberates throughout all subsequent time. Modern historical thinkers, and Hegel in particular, would view the past as incomplete, as steps toward the coming to consciousness of absolute spirit.

It is of more than passing interest to note that this dichotomy was noted by Krochmal's contemporary, the Jewish philosopher Salomon Formstecher, who, in his *Die Religion des Geistes* (1841) treats the rabbinic view of time, with its insistence on the superiority of the past, as one of the truly archaic elements in rabbinic Judaism, standing in opposition to what is modern and therefore positive. It is to these apparently irreconcilable views of the past, and the place assigned Jewish culture within the various historical schemata that emerged in modern philosophy, that Krochmal's treatment of history is addressed.

In light of recent work in this area, however, some evaluation of the claim of disjunction between modern and traditional approaches to history is in order. In the last forty years there has been a parade of scholars, with Karl Löwith in the vanguard, who would insist that, in fact, there is minimal disjunction between traditional and modern historiosophies,
as the two views converge in the eschatological commitments of "Judeo-Christian" thinking. That is, they argue that the progressive program of modern historical thought is essentially a "secularization" of traditional eschatology, the latter leading naturally into the former. It seems to me, as Hans Blumenberg has argued, that Löwith underestimates the radically unhistorical nature of both Jewish and Christian eschatology. Regarding the former—the only thing of interest here—the eschaton can in no way be seen as the culmination of the historical process, if by "process" we understand some set of causally linked preparatory events, that actually bring about the end of time. Rather, the concept of an eschaton represents a rebellion against history; it is the "great and terrible day of the Lord" on which history will be overcome, and a new era of human existence will be ushered in. The pre-eschaton is the age of history, of tradition with all that that entails.

The Guide

Krochmal does not challenge this Eurocentric triumphalism head-on. He prefers instead to demonstrate that Jewish tradition is insulated from the inevitable demise modern historical thinking demands, by virtue of its unique conception of God as absolute spirit. In his treatment of Jewish history he insists this unique faith serves as a historical preservative, allowing the Jews to continue to survive with cultural vitality beyond the one period of world-historical significance that the regnant theories would grant them. In the process he demonstrates that the concept of progress is, for the most part,
irrelevant to a comprehension of Jewish history. Thus, his treatment of Jewish history is carried out on both the theoretical and historical planes. It would be useful for the discussion that follows to cite Krochmal's theoretical statement at some length:

In the natural course of events, there are three periods which transpire for each nation of antiquity, from the time that they first form a nation until they vanish and perish.

1. The period of blossoming and the birth of the [national] spirit which we have already mentioned, characterized by the emergence of its inchoate matter into limbs ordered in various ways, and their efforts [operating in] unison as [do those of] an individual man, ready to accept all elevation and perfection. And this is called the nation's period of blossoming and growth.

2. Afterward, all the good systems and spiritual portions to which we have previously alluded are fully actualized, perfected and exalted; through them all, the nation matures to fame and splendor for a long or short time; this is known as the period of strength and activity.

3. But just as all natural organisms incorporate the cause of their degeneration and death, so too, during the second stage the causes of destruction and disappearance will be created; later, these [destructive elements] will grow and spread to loosen all ties and do away with all good law[s], until the honor of the nation will gradually dwindle and diminish, that is, until it disappears entirely. And this time is known as the period of melting away and perishing.

Now this is the way it is with all nations whose spiritual essence is partial and thus finite and destined to perish. However, with our nation—though with relation to material and sensual things we too are subject to this natural order—it is as our sages, may they
NACHMAN KROCHMAL

be blessed, have said, "when they were exiled to Babylon, the divine presence was with them, when they were exiled to Elam, the divine presence was with them, etc."); that is, the general spiritual essence within us will shield us and save us from the fate of those who vanish. All this follows readily from what was said above. Thus, we have seen fit to review the periods of our history from the time of our blossoming until this day, so as to clearly show how the three-period cycles which we have mentioned were duplicated and triplicated with us, and how with the completion of the period of withering away and vanishing, there always emerged a new and reviving spirit; and if we fell, we arose and were fortified, and did not abandon our God. (Guide, pp. 40-41; emphasis added)²⁷

Krochmal's position here is both organismic, in that nations follow the same patterns as living organisms, and, with Jewish history, in some sense cyclical, in that the patterns of organic development are duplicated and triplicated. We must, however, carefully attend to Krochmal's stated purpose. He will not try to prove the basic three-period pattern of Jewish history. This he already knows; what requires demonstration is the repetition of the three-period pattern. Offering this demonstration is his only stated purpose, and it must be seen as a polemical response to the conception of a superseded Judaism that prevailed in Protestant historiography in the modern period.

Thus, the entire historiographical section (some seventy pages in length in the Rawidowicz edition) that follows this statement is designed to prove that Israel undergoes revivals that are beyond the ken of other ancient peoples; it is not designed to prove that Jewish history recapitulates the organismic patterns per se, as this is taken for granted, both with
KROCHMAL'S THEORY OF HISTORY

respect to Jewish history, and general history as well. While his historical chapters do—en passant—attempt to demonstrate that Jewish history proceeded in accord with the expected organismic pattern, this is not their primary purpose. Indeed, as the above citation makes clear, Krochmal takes the pattern for granted; he does not prove it in his history, but rather imposes it on the events he describes.

Furthermore, Krochmal's theory of history does not derive from an inductive investigation of the Jewish past; he presents this theory as a general one, applicable to all ancient peoples. Yet, again, at no time does he attempt to prove this general claim. Krochmal takes the organismic-biological historical model for granted since it was very much a commonplace in modern historical thought. For our purposes this may be most easily illustrated by the fact that a scholarly dispute has arisen as to which of various thinkers—Lessing, Herder, Vico, or Hegel—was the primary influence on Krochmal's approach. Resolving this dispute seems to me to be hopeless, and certainly pointless. The fact that competent scholars can find elements of all these thinkers in Krochmal's work suggests that we take a different approach—one that follows Krochmal's text and argument closely, which will show that Krochmal was not overly interested in resolving the distinctions among these thinkers, but rather in pursuing a response to their common elements.

Finally, we must note that nowhere in Krochmal's presentation does he attempt to develop the philosophical significance of his organismic-cyclical theory. This significance is hardly self-evident; a full discussion is mandatory if we are to understand what this ostensibly novel view demands. In fact,
NACHMAN KROCHMAL

in no way should this position be seen as a “philosophy of history,” for there is no philosophy here, there is no statement pertaining to ultimate meaning. Rather, the problem must be viewed as follows: the organismic side of Krochmal’s discussion is not part of the answer, but rather part of the problem—it demands the death of all cultures; the cyclical side represents part of the response, but not through the affirmation of true cyclicality, which, with its implications of meaninglessness, can represent a profound philosophical reflection on the nature of human endeavor. Rather, Krochmal’s advocacy of cycles is to be seen as a stratagem—the means through which to establish the eternality of Israel, without contesting the historical rules demanded by the age. The organismic-cyclical model provides the appropriate “historical” tropes through which Krochmal can affirm that most unhistorical of notions, the eternality of Israel, and contest the equally unhistorical claim of progressive human development toward the emergence of modern European life.

Metaphysics, History, the Supersession of the Jews

Evidently, Krochmal believed that Jews defy the “laws” of human history because they, unlike all others, do not partake of partial spirituality, but rather have developed an absolute metaphysical position. Since they do not view God as bound by anything, they are capable of surviving the vicissitudes of history that destroyed the spiritual essence of other peoples, whose view of the spiritual forces animating their culture and religion was only partial. He acknowledges that the exter-
nals of Jewish culture do indeed develop within history, and are therefore subject to the normal pattern of growth, development, and decline; Jewish spirituality, on the other hand, stands at the culmination of the historical process. Therefore, while Israel is also subject to the ineluctable decay that completes the cycle, it is not subject to the demise that ensues because of its consciousness of God as absolute being. Its attachment to its culture's animating spiritual force remains unbroken. Israel, then, will not disappear but will begin the process anew. It is important to point out that in this picture the absolute being is not described as the active force ensuring Israel's survival; rather the people, having been brought to the awareness of the unity of all existence in God, are capable of weathering circumstances, such as exile, that other cultures, due to their incomplete spirituality, are not.

The essence of Krochmal's response to Hegel, then, is that the Jewish people cannot be seen as superseded by others in the movement of world history toward absolute spirit, for Jews have already inculcated this position into their religious texts and rituals. The corollary to this position is that Krochmal, supposedly the most historical of early nineteenth-century Jewish thinkers, is in fact claiming that the "essence of Judaism," although revealed in history, is actually beyond history; it cannot develop in time because it is already absolute. In viewing Judaism against the context of other world cultures, Krochmal claims that it alone has achieved the understanding which everyone else can first achieve after traversing a lengthy, cumulative process.

Thus, the basic understanding of the course of human history found in Herder and Hegel, in particular, is actually
quite correct. They are in error, however, in believing that Jewish culture was only a lower rung on the world-historical ladder leading to either a self-realized humanity or the consciousness of the absolute. In fact the Jews have already, early in the history, completed the process; their historical role now is to "return to the cave," as it were, and lead the rest of humanity to the recognition of the totality of all existence in God (see Guide, p. 38). In response to the triumphalist reading of history that we find in Hegel, which claims, inter alia, that the train of history has passed Jews by, Krochmal's equally triumphalist claim is that, in fact, Jews are the conductors of that train; it is they alone who are capable of leading humanity to its promised land. 33

It remains for Krochmal to demonstrate this claim within the realm of history; for claiming on philosophical grounds that Jews are exempt from the "laws" of history accomplishes nothing if the historical facts seem to support the reading of Herder and Hegel (not to mention dozens of others). That is, Krochmal undertakes a review of Jewish history to indicate—historically—that the Jews do not undergo the demise that the philosophy of Hegel and others requires; only with a successful execution of this plan can the claim to unique Jewish spirituality, grounded in absolute spirit, be substantiated.

If this interpretation is correct, Krochmal need only demonstrate that the Jews defy the rule once. That is, Krochmal need not survey all of Jewish history; a successful demonstration that Second Commonwealth Judaism (from the sixth century B.C.E. to the second C.E.) was at least as vital and creative as that of the First Commonwealth will suffice. Were
he attempting to construct an overarching theory of Jewish history, Krochmal would have to present evidence from its entire expanse. A glance at the structure of Krochmal’s presentation will show that he follows the first pattern, focusing almost exclusively on the Second Commonwealth period.

He begins his historical survey with the three periods (growth, maturity, decline) of pre-exilic Jewish history, commencing with the patriarchs and concluding with the Babylonian exile. This review of over thirteen centuries of history (by Krochmal’s calculation) is accomplished in nine pages in the Rawidowicz edition (Guide, pp. 41–49). The next cycle of three periods (750 years, extending through what is generally known as the Second Commonwealth period, according to Krochmal), takes up sixty-three pages (Guide, pp. 50–112), while the next cycle (over 1,500 years) is dispensed with in half a page, for “we cannot complete the recounting of, and research into [midrash], the ensuing generations.” Although the Guide as a whole is unfinished, the historiographical section is brought to a definitive close, indication that Krochmal’s point was not dependent on a review of Jewish history beyond the year 135 C.E. Were it crucial to his argument to deal with the third cycle, he would not have abandoned his historiographical presentation. However, his procedure makes sense if his point is to establish the “revivability” of the Jews in principle; it would not were he trying to present an overarching theory of Jewish history.

Furthermore, the following four chapters of the Guide (covering another 140 pages) also deal with aspects of Jewish life during the second cycle, and attempt to demonstrate the vitality of Jewish spirituality during this time. In all, there
are 290 pages in the Guide (out of a total of 334 pages) that deal with topics that are chronologically definable. Of these, approximately 230 are confined, exclusively or primarily, to the second cycle. Clearly, then, Krochmal's primary historiographical goal is to establish the renewed spirituality of Second Commonwealth Judaism.

Given that the guide to the perplexities created by modern historiosophy is to show Jewish defiance of its central law, it would be instructive to see how Krochmal demonstrates this. The first cycle extends from Abraham to the death of Gedaliah. The first period within it—extending from Abraham to the death of Moses—is the period of birth and generation. It is characterized by the emergence of monotheism. The second period in the cycle extends from the entry into the land after Moses' death until the death of Solomon (920 B.C.E.); it is difficult to see why this should be understood as a period of maturity, except, of course, the theory demands it. Krochmal, relying on the biblical narrative, describes it as a period of political and spiritual turmoil, whose high point is reached at the end, with the construction of the Temple in the reign of Solomon. Here we see the rejection of "particular" worship and a commitment to a national, centralized worship. This, however, never firmly took root within the people, and therefore with the death of Solomon and the division of his kingdom the period of decline begins. This period is characterized by particular and foreign worship; together with the Deuteronomist, Krochmal castigates the monarchs of this epoch for not realizing that fortune cannot be achieved by mimicking gentile kings, as "there is no survival or salvation for Israel other than by cleaving to the Lord their God, and by preserv-
ing the principle of monotheism as it was handed down to them, free of all idolatry and any semblance of idolatry” (Guide, p. 49). The first cycle as a whole may be described as one in which the monotheistic idea emerged among the “Jewish” people, but it did not sufficiently take hold within the entire community. The monotheistic idea, representing but one element in the spiritual marketplace of the time, could not yet be described as “absolute spirit,” as there did not exist a community that had committed itself to it. Absolute spirituality is grounded not only in the emergence of the correct metaphysics, but in a community of believers “to whom it is clearly known” (Guide, p. 44). Nevertheless, there remained sufficient commitment to the reality of the universal God that this religio-national group did not disappear from history, but reemerged with a more profound religious understanding in the next cycle of its existence.

It should be noted that in his reconstruction of this lengthy period Krochmal remains attached to traditional language and concepts; in particular, Krochmal retains the concept of chosenness as traditionally understood. God chose Abraham—after the latter rejected idolatry—and his progeny to be his people, and revealed his law to them that they may succeed. Similarly, the entire history of this period is described as the result of divine providence. God directed the children of Israel to Egypt, there to be enslaved and ultimately redeemed. So too, Krochmal remained committed to the essential program of the Deuteronomist, insisting on the relationship between one’s faith in God and historical destiny. Nevertheless, the approach here is quite different, as historical failure is not grounded in God’s wrath but in the inevitable immanent
forces of decay that result from religious and cultural degradation. Thus, Israel's idolatry does not lead to divine retribution, it leads to historical retribution, in that Israel, as a people, becomes the cause of its own inability to creatively respond to the world around it.

With the dawn of the second cycle comes a major shift in Jewish religious consciousness. The period of growth in the second cycle, extending from Cyrus to Alexander, is characterized by a great renewal of spirit, manifest in the fact that the Jewish people, dispersed though they were, were able to unite into a nation with a common identity and purpose—something they never could do during the first cycle (Guide, p. 50). 35 Jewish spiritual identity now transcended territorial boundaries (p. 51). Despite the loss of many of its spiritual treasures, the Jewish community—in its entirety—was instilled with "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord" (ibid.; this is a paraphrase of Isaiah 11:2). 36 This new-found spirit enabled the people to recognize the treasure that was their patrimony; to establish a community based on principles of the Torah; "to collect, write and copy what was preserved of the Holy Books, to study and understand them clearly and intelligently, until the Torah was established in each diaspora community, and they studied, understood and observed it, each in accordance with his ability, throughout the various lands of (Jewish) domicile" (ibid.). Further, the Jews of this time were free of idolatry, thus showing the spiritual advance of the people as a whole.

The first period of the second cycle was highlighted by the prophecies of the second Isaiah, Haggai and Zechariah, by the
work of Ezra, who was comparable to Moses in his time, and
the establishment of the Great Assembly, about all of which
Krochmal will have more to say in his biblical and rabbinic
studies. In contradistinction to the first cycle, it is a period in
which all the people were spiritually uplifted—in varying
degrees, of course—by the new spirit of the nation; indeed,
spirit is here understood as the collective mind of the Jewish
people as a whole, as fashioned by the leadership. Also in
contradistinction to the first cycle, political factors, while
contributing to the shaping of the destiny of the people, are
not ultimately critical. During this first period of the second
cycle Jews did not enjoy political independence—although
they did enjoy quiescence—and yet they were able to realize
the prophecies of the second Isaiah (Guide, p. 54).

During the second period of the second cycle— the nation's
maturity—the Jewish people, as a whole, further develop
those spiritual blessings manifest in the first period. Indeed,
for Krochmal, it is at this time that Jewish history reaches its
height, as "the daughter of Jeshurun has not had as precious a
time as this from its inception until this very day" (Guide, p.
60). Jewish spirituality was, and would remain, absolute,
while, throughout most of this period, historical circum-
stances were favorable as well, allowing for unparalleled crea-
tivity in the diaspora and the Holy Land.

The spiritual heights of this period—which extended from
Alexander to Pompey—were manifest in the activity of the
Jews of Ptolemaic Alexandria who "were not inferior to the
Greeks in wisdom and skill, and were their superior in ethics and
morals" (p. 61; emphasis added). In Judea, there emerged a
"Great Assembly" whose activities in developing Judaism's
sacred texts and traditions continued unabated for over a century. (We will discuss this more fully in chapter 5.) Their cudgels were taken up by "the teachers of halakhot," whose activity began with Simon the Just, around the year 200 B.C.E., and continued to the end of the cycle. Thus, this period saw the beginnings of rabbinic Judaism; it also saw the completion of the Bible, a number of Psalms, as well as the books of Daniel and Esther. Moreover, the Maccabean uprising (165–161 B.C.E.) led to a rededication of purpose, as Jews renewed their devotion to the universal God.

In all, for Krochmal, the time was one of great spiritual vitality for the Jewish people, demonstrating their ability to revive from decline and achieve world-historical significance once again. What Krochmal has cleverly done here is to use the conclusions of modern biblical scholarship, and the conclusions he developed regarding the emergence of the rabbinic tradition, to argue against those who would claim that Jewish creativity ceased with the closing of the biblical canon, or even before.

While the substance of Jewish spirituality is absolute, according to Krochmal, its outward manifestation is dependent on material structures that are subject to all the vicissitudes of history. As such, Jews, like all peoples, are unable to sustain a period of strength and maturity indefinitely; decay must set in. So it was with the Jews after the death of Alexandra Salome and the arrival of Pompey (63 B.C.E.). A spirit of contentiousness, already apparent during the second period in the cycle, overcame them; imminent eschatological expectation was rampant, and suicidal zealotry carried the day. As a result, the institutions that tended to the spiritual needs of
the people—Temple, priesthood, house of study—were no longer able to do so properly; the spiritual standard of the people declined. I must stress, again, that for Krochmal the absolute nature of the Jewish spiritual message was not in itself compromised; only the institutions that carried that message degenerated, leading to a decline in Jewish spiritual activity, such as study and contemplation (p. 91). Given that the essence of Jewish faith remained intact, Jews were once again able to rebound from decline, and begin anew. Indeed, even during this period of decline which extended until the fall of Betar, in 135 C.E., there was a remnant, led by Yohanan ben Zakkai, that was able to begin the process of reinvigoration, dedicating their lives to Torah and its dissemination, even in the face of catastrophe (pp. 103ff.).

When we combine Krochmal's metahistorical and historiographical claims the following understanding of Jewish history emerges: Jewish faith is unique and absolute; as such Jews are exempt from the law of demise, to which all other nations are subject, although not from the organismic process as a whole; Jews are not entirely exempt from the organismic course of human history because they—being human—remain subject to the laws that pertain to all physical things; as such, as far as their material existence is concerned, they have a history as do all other peoples; however, their spiritual essence remains beyond time, even as their external spiritual institutions are subject to it.

This view of Jewish history provides a partial apologia for the traditional view of the past, while at the same time conceding much to modern sensibilities. What Krochmal retains is a view of a completed past, a past rooted in divine
providence, in which the Jewish people achieved a level of religious sophistication that could not be transcended. Thus, the tradition speaks to modern Jews just as it had to premodern Jews. Further, the patterns of the past, as established by divine providence and as discovered by modern philosophy, remain in some way formative for subsequent existence, as, from the period of decay in the first cycle forward, the essential patterns of Jewish belief and survival are firmly implanted. However, from the middle of the first cycle forward, Jewish history is understood as an immanent process of spiritual development or decay, in which God does not serve as the central figure in determining the destiny of the people. That role is played by their own religious consciousness. Further, the notion of steady generational decline that became so prominent in Jewish tradition has no place in Krochmal’s schema; this view is simply too antithetical to the modern spirit to be retained. It is, however, replaced by the view of inner stasis. Given Krochmal’s views regarding the achievements of Second Commonwealth Jewry, however, the rejection of generational decline would not lead to the dissonance that probably produced such a doctrine in the first place, as this Jewry achieved a spiritual height that has been equalled by its successors, but not excelled (see the discussion of progress below).

Krochmal’s view of history also responds fully to the view that prevailed in the modern period. How this vision responds to the specific reading of Jewish history in Herder and Hegel is clear; in particular, Krochmal turns the tables on Hegel, as it were, arguing in Hegelian terms for a different view of Jewish history, a view that sees this history as existing in a
state of being rather than becoming, having arrived at the telos toward which general human history is yet traveling. Moreover, Krochmal has placed Jewish spirituality beyond time, and in some sense outside of history. That is, if history is viewed as the development of spirit in time, Judaism must be seen as insulated from this process, from the time of the exile (supposedly the beginning of Israel’s degeneration) forward. In this way Krochmal neutralizes the relativism inherent in historical thought; the absolute nature of Jewish faith renders its spiritual essence beyond history, and it therefore cannot be compared to or compromised by any other history. It is true that for Krochmal, to the extent that Jews are subject to the physical laws of history, their experiences can be fitted into a larger framework of human experience and thereby elucidated (see esp. Guide, p. 167). However, Jewish faith cannot be viewed as merely another manifestation of the human religious impulse, for it is absolute, and thus distinct from all other religious cultures by definition. Ultimately, then, we can say that Krochmal’s historiography attempts to historicize without relativizing; this is achieved by distinguishing between external manifestation and inner, essential core.

Progress

If the specific, Western, reading of Jewish history could no longer be sustained, there remained the general problem of history as progress, which, if it could not demand Judaism’s supersession any longer, still seemed to demand that Judaism undergo its own internal movement forward. Needless to say,
such a theoretical demand was antithetical to traditional patterns of thought. Thus, at this point further discussion of both the doctrine and Krochmal’s response to it are in order.

As Robert Nisbet has pointed out, there are two related but distinguishable views of human progress in the Western philosophical tradition. The first is that humanity is progressing in its accumulation and improvement of knowledge. The second is a vision of human spiritual and moral progress, or, I would add, at least the potential for such progress, leading toward an “ever-greater perfection of human nature” (Nisbet, p. 5). Although philosophers have addressed both views, it seems to me that the first relies on history to discover the pertinent data, which the philosopher may then use to address the second view; it is, thus, ultimately philosophically trivial. The second, on the other hand, relies on philosophy to discover the rational—usually metaphysical—workings of the process; while historical events may be cited to demonstrate a particular point, ultimately the vision is metahistorical.

Despite the claims of some of Krochmal’s interpreters to the contrary, it seems to me that Krochmal did not espouse a vision of sustained progress in the second sense—at least not as far as Jewish history was concerned. To be sure, in Krochmal’s reading, Jews (Israelites) undergo an enormous, progressive change between the first and second cycles; thus, Krochmal claims, not even those Israelites who witnessed the theophany at Mount Sinai were able to achieve an understanding of God comparable to that achieved by the Jews of the second cycle, as the latter were simply better prepared (p. 39). This progress, however, came to a halt with the second cycle, when the Jews achieved full awareness of the absolute
spirit, for a people cannot progress beyond this level of consciousness, the telos of the historical process. Speaking of the Jewish recognition of absolute spirit, Krochmal writes, “From thence forward [the beginning of the second cycle] it was as imprinted on our hearts; throughout the generations we never strayed from it, and we were its teachers to many nations, and with it we remain to this very day, and through it we shall survive and enjoy eternal redemption” (ibid.). Further, as we have already seen, during the period of maturity of the second cycle, Jews reached the pinnacle of human spiritual development, which—obviously—they have never surpassed. “The daughter of Jeshurun has not had as precious a time as this from its inception to this very day” (p. 60). Indeed, the very notion of an absolute faith precludes the possibility of further progress.

This does not mean that Jewish spirituality does not change; as a religion, Judaism’s absolute spiritual content had to be concretely conceptualized and externalized. The external manifestations were (and are) obviously not immutable. Thus, Jews, influenced by their interaction with other peoples, are constantly adopting new forms of spiritual expression. However, although Jewish spirituality undergoes external changes, it does not progress.

Given Krochmal’s attachment to Jewish tradition, his rejection of the doctrine of progress—as it relates to Jews—is not surprising. For the notion of an all-encompassing tradition that is the vehicle of absolute spirit is antithetical to a vision of sustained progress. If Jewish spiritual nature is always progressing, rabbinic tradition, the great bearer of Jewish spirituality, will ultimately prove inadequate and merit
supersession; the whole point of Krochmal’s Guide, however, is to prove that rabbinic tradition remains the epitome of religious consciousness, as we have already seen, and shall see yet again. Further, progress is basically a doctrine designed to describe the human spiritual condition; as we have seen, for Krochmal, Jewish spirituality remains beyond history. Sustained progress is thus irrelevant to the movement of Jewish tradition through time.

It seems likely, however, that Krochmal did not reject the doctrine of progress as it applies to humanity in general. With Jews in the vanguard, humanity slowly progresses through history, ultimately to achieve the recognition of the absolute spirit together with their Jewish brethren (pp. 38–39). That is, the course of human history is very much as Herder and Hegel described it. They erred, in Krochmal’s view, regarding the Jews; the Guide attempts to correct the error. The result is that Krochmal has found a philosophico-historical basis for the very traditional notion that Jews and gentiles have entirely different historical destinies, brought about by distinct processes. He has used modern historical thinking, rather than traditional thought, to elucidate what that destiny is, and what process will lead to it. Despite this minor concession, Krochmal’s discussion here must be seen as an attempt to justify traditional Jewish understanding of the Jewish place in the world.

Krochmal was by no means alone among modern Jewish thinkers in recognizing the conflict between traditional and progressive thinking, and in rejecting progress. The doctrine had already been rejected in no uncertain terms by Moses Mendelssohn in his Jerusalem. Responding to Lessing, Men-
KROCHMAL’S THEORY OF HISTORY

delssohn claims that he can see no basis whatsoever for the claim that humanity is progressing. Alexander Altmann has correctly pointed out that Mendelssohn is philosophically precluded from accepting the doctrine because of his commitment to the position that “eternal truths of natural religion are accessible at all times and in all places” (Mendelssohn, pp. 95–97, 212–13). It seems to me that equally at issue is the accessibility and applicability of the “revealed legislation,” and the traditional interpretation thereof, whose authority Mendelssohn upholds. This revelation and interpretation could not morally demand the allegiance of a people who had progressed religiously beyond the time of the original revelation and tradition; the revelation retains authority only to the extent that it can continue to address the needs of its “subjects.” Thus, Mendelssohn and Krochmal both understood that the philosophical approach to human history that views it as a progressive, universal, teleological process is inimical to a tradition for which the teleology of world history is inextricably bound to the destiny of a given people throughout all time, whose guide toward this telos is itself millennia old. Torah—God’s revelation in time—is seen as perfect and complete; it prescribes to all ages (equally for Mendelssohn, progressively and then equally for Krochmal), implicitly ruling out the notion of historical progress. For both, times change and therefore needs change; there can be no vision of human progress, however, explaining these changes.

We should note, though, that Krochmal’s attempt to insulate tradition from modern historical claims, based as it is on a partial concession to its central doctrine of progressive development, actually produced a vision of tradition that was
quite untraditional. In attempting to defend the vitality of Jewish life beyond the First Commonwealth period, Krochmal develops a doctrine of limited progress within the Jewish tradition that effectively dates the true origins of that tradition to the Second Commonwealth period; in effect, Krochmal argues that what we know as Judaism originated after the Babylonian exile. This position was becoming a commonplace among historians, both Jewish and gentile. It was, of course, anathema to the Orthodox. Krochmal, despite his allegiance to Jewish tradition, obviously feels that modern historians had credibly made their case. It would be sheer obstinacy to demur.

This leads, then, to subtle reworkings of traditional material. To better illustrate this, recall the passage quoted above to the effect that not even those who witnessed the theophany at Sinai were able to achieve an understanding of God comparable to that achieved by the Jews of the second cycle; to this compare the following passage from the Mekilta:

"This is my God and I will glorify him" (Ex. 15:2) R. Eliezer says: Whence can you say that a maidservant saw at the sea what Isaiah and Ezekiel and all the other prophets never saw? It says about them, "And by the ministry of the prophets I have used similitudes" (Hos. 12:11). And it is also written: "The heavens were opened and I saw visions of God" (Ezek. 1:1). . . . But as soon as they (the maidservants at the sea) saw Him (without similitudes) they recognized him, and they all opened their mouths and said: "This is my God and I will glorify him." (Laut. pp. 24–25; slightly modified)

Now, to be sure, the Mekilta passage is scarcely normative, and may merely represent a rabbi drawing connections be-
tween verses in Scripture without necessarily intending to state anything at all regarding the course of Jewish history or anything else. Still, this well-known passage, implanted within an authoritative text, suggests that there was no greater awareness of the reality of God on the part of the Jewish people than at the Exodus from Egypt. Both the historian and the polemicist in Krochmal lead him to disagree. As we shall see in our discussion of Krochmal’s biblical work, he is aware of the fact that the needs of the time—that is, his desire to save tradition—necessitate compromising on some aspects of traditional self-understanding. As he puts it in the Introduction to the work as a whole, there was a time in which Judaism was better served by the assumption that everything was early. Times, however, have changed, and there is nothing more important to the integrity of the tradition as a whole than to establish the actual, and more gradual, historical sequence of the unfolding of the tradition. It remains his profound conviction, then, that such compromise in the end will yield a tradition better able to cope with the challenges of modern (Protestant) culture, and better able to survive with self-assurance and commitment. In this case, it allows him to affirm that Jews achieve their height of cultural creativity at precisely the time Protestants insisted they ceased to possess a vital culture.

Krochmal’s treatment of Jewish history, like his metaphysics, can only be understood from the perspective of the basic Kulturkampf engulfing Jews in the modern world. The Guide attempts to address the profound discord between the traditional Jewish and the modern Protestant and/or secular ways of ordering reality. He concedes much to the latter, always,
in his own mind anyway, in the service of the former. It is from this perspective that the treatment of Jewish history may be understood as part of a guide of the perplexed of the modern age.

NOTES

1. As the previous chapter makes clear, however, for Krochmal the location of the divine-human encounter in history does not involve a negation of the natural realm as yet another locus of this encounter. For Krochmal, all reality, historical and natural, derives from the "one shepherd."

2. For more on this, see Arnold M. Eisen, *Galut* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987), chapter 1.

3. This point is made by John Van Seters in his *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), esp. pp. 263-78. Van Seters's approach to the emergence of the text is far more critical than was that of Krochmal or almost any other Jewish scholar of the 1830s. Still, Van Seters's conclusions are quite relevant since the function of the Abraham stories is not necessarily dependent on their origins. Thus, for Van Seters the story recounted in Genesis 15 was created for the purpose of providing solace to the exiles, whereas for a traditional Jewish scholar the story was an accurate portrayal of a past event that had implications for the whole course of history. My reliance on Van Seters is not an endorsement of his approach to the historical texts. It seems to me that the critique of his approach by Baruch Halpern is right on target. (See Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), pp. 192-94 and throughout.) Nevertheless, while I would agree with Halpern that the writers of these narratives are writing history and not what he would call romances, it seems to me that Van Seters may still be right regarding the function this history served, which is to understand the present in terms of the past.

4. See in particular, Lamentations Rabbah, chapters 1 and 2, which also contain stories pertaining to the Hadrianic persecutions, esp. at 2:2.
The assimilation of the destruction of the Second Temple is to be found in the earlier documents as well. Indeed, we find in the Mishnah the statement that both Temples were destroyed on the ninth of Av (Ta'anit 4:5); the Talmud (Ta'anit 29a) states that we know that the Second Temple was destroyed on that day because it was already established as a day of "obligation"—that is, as the day on which Israel would pay for its sins. It then proceeds to describe other similarities between the two events. The process of assimilation works both ways, however. Thus the same mishnah states that the city of Jerusalem was breached on the seventeenth of the month of Tammuz. This, however, does not accord with the biblical "evidence" which gives the date as the ninth of this month (Jer. 39:2, and 52:5–6). In the Bavli (Ta'anit 28b), we find attributed to the Amora Rava the statement that the biblical date refers to the First Temple while the Mishnaic date refers to the Second Temple. However, in the Yerushalmi we find the claim that the biblical calculation was simply erroneous, that in fact, the seventeenth was the date for this event. It seems to me that here we may have a case in which the assumption of patterns prevails, but the biblical evidence is made to conform to the later, and traditionally sanctioned date for the breach of the city. In general, there are many catastrophes assigned to the two dates, the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av. See Mishnah Ta'anit 4:5.

5. See, e.g., BT Sanhedrin 96b–99a and BT Avodah Zarah 2b–3a.
6. The passage in parentheses is omitted in many versions of the Mishnah, which reads simply "etc." (v'khule).
7. Its emergence does, however, represent a divine "intrusion" into history. That is, the messianic age is not the culmination of some historical process, but is rather the subversion of that process. See below.
8. Now to be sure there are other points of view represented in rabbinic literature regarding the messianic age, and it is my view that we cannot speak at all of a rabbinic messianology. In the various documents that make up the construct "rabbinic literature" we find all kinds of sayings regarding the messiah, what he shall effect, under what circumstances he shall come, what, if anything, Jews can do to hasten his arrival, to what extent Jews are responsible for his tarrying, etc. It is, thus, in my view impossible to speak of a messianic idea in
NACHMAN KROCHMAL

rabbinic Judaism as Scholem does, although his basic typological
distinction between utopian and restorative messianism seems to be
supported by most of the variegated evidence. In any event, Neusner,
in his Messiah in Context, also rejects the notion of a messianic idea,
but he too tends to construct systematic visions, not, as does Scho-
lem, by generalizing from all rabbinic literature, but rather by gen-
eralizing regarding the positions found in each of the documents
he examines. Given his assumption that these documents represent,
at the redactional level, systematic statements, he is quite justified in
doing this. I do not, however, share this assumption, and I do not
see how we can speak even of the messianology of the Bavli or the
Yerushalmi.

9. Quite obviously, I am arguing here against those who would insist
that Jewish concepts of history are essentially linear; in some trivial
sense I suppose this is true in that history has a beginning and an
end. But the process of history—that is, the movement of historical
time—is scarcely linear. As Jews awaited the messianic age, there
was no sense that history was progressing toward it; if rabbinic Jews
living later than others were closer chronologically to the messiah's
advent, this was an accident created by the flow of time—they would
not have claimed that their time was somehow qualitatively distinct.
For them all time since the destruction of the Temple was known as
"this time."

10. To a large extent, it is this issue that separates Burke and Paine in
their "debate" regarding the value of the French Revolution and its
overthrow of the ancien régime.

11. The printed texts have the names in the other order, but this is
apparently a mistake; cf. Yerushalmi Sheqalim 5:1, and Hanokh

12. Again here, I am not claiming that this idea was unanimously ac-
cepted, nor that it represents the rabbinic concept regarding the issue.
Rather, I am claiming that later post-Talmudic Jewish culture was,
to a large extent, convinced of the correctness of this appraisal; it thus
represents "rabbinic thought" in its appropriation by later genera-
tions. For a partial list of other sources that disseminate this idea, see
the important essay by S. Z. Havlin "On 'Literary Closure' as a Basis
for Halakhic Periodization" (Hebrew), in Researches in Talmudic Lit-
erature (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1983),

146
KROCHMAL'S THEORY OF HISTORY

p. 170, n. 98. Havlin's claim that the doctrine of generational decline does not adequately explain why greater authority is granted to earlier "periods" of halakhic activity seems essentially correct, if perhaps overstated. Still, the fact that greater authority was granted to earlier periods (say, tannaim vs. amoraim) served to reinforce the notion of generational decline, helping thereby to reinforce it as an important doctrine of the rabbis.

13. I do not intend by this to challenge Peter Gay's nuanced reconstruction of Enlightenment thinkers, in which he denies that their view of history should be seen as strictly committed to progress. However, since virtually all the philosophes would have agreed that humans have both the capacity and existential need to progress beyond the world of the ancient Orient and beyond the Middle Ages, it matters little to the Jewish traditionalist that they located their models of humanity in the ancient Greco-Roman world. The doctrine still champions the capacity of the species to distinguish itself qualitatively from past manifestations. (See Peter Gay, The Enlightenment [New York: Norton, 1966], vol 1, pp. 31-71, esp. 31-38.)


15. I do not pretend to have exhausted Herder's views on this subject. His approach to history is richer than I have sketched, and certainly his views regarding Jews and Judaism are more diverse. (See Isaiah Berlin, Vico and Herder [New York: Vantage, 1976], pp. 159n, 160n, 182, 186, 192, 214, and the monographic treatment of the subject by Ze'ev Levy, "The Place of Judaism in Johann Gottfried Herder's Philosophy of History" (Hebrew), in Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, vol. 1, no. 4 [1982]; I have touched on those points in Herder's most significant work on human history, points which seem to me to have shaped the way that Krochmal viewed the development of
NACHMAN KROCHMAL

human history, and which certainly played a role in Hegel's thought as well.

16. See the section entitled “Absolute Spirit and Jewish Religious Consciousness” above, chapter 2, where I have dealt with the philosophical side of Krochmal's response.

17. I should clarify my use of the term “organismic” to describe Hegel's view of history. The organismic model is decidedly nondialectical, and Hegel specifically denies that human history as a whole can be viewed in an organic way (Reason in History [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953], p. 69). Still, while the process of history as a whole is not organic, the fate of the given states resembles that prescribed by the organismic model, in that states, embodying a particular national spirit, are destined to develop, mature and then disappear (by being aufgehoben by the ensuing bearer of spirit). It is for this reason that Hegel can speak of a state's Greisenalter, a decidedly organic formulation. Hegel's Philosophy of Right, paragraphs 341–360 (esp. 344, 346, 347 and 360) support my description of his thought.

18. Foremost among these was W. M. L. de Wette, who viewed the exile as the point of transition from “Hebraismus” to “Judentum,” the latter a derogatory term.


20. I cite this speech because it is, I think, as clear a statement as one can find regarding the influence of Hegel on Jewish thinkers—as it relates to their self-understanding as Jews—in the early decades of the nineteenth century. I am not claiming that Krochmal actually was familiar with this speech; I can see no reason to think that. He was, however, familiar with Gans (see below, chapter 5), and certainly knew the attraction that Hegel's philosophy of history had for him, insofar as Gans was the editor of the first edition of Hegel's lectures in this area. Another example of the influence of Hegel's thought on Jewish intellectuals is the following story regarding Moses Moser, another founder of the Verein. "Allein er [Hegel] bezog Wol-
KROCHMAL'S THEORY OF HISTORY


21. Formstecher writes:

In der Form herrschte bei den Geistesprodukten jener Zeit das objective [which for Formstecher is bad] und in dem Inhalte das, ihm entsprechende, antike Element vor. Der Kampf zwischen antiken und modernen, so wie der zwischen jüdischen und heidnischen Elementen erscheint auch in diesem Zeitabschnitte mit vorherrschender Objectivität, doch nur mit dem Streben nach religiösem und nicht politischem Separatismus. . . . So wie in der äusseren Erscheinung, so musste auch in Innen des religiösen Lebens das antike Element dem modernen immer mehr weichen, trotz seinem Streben, sich in der Theorie sowohl wie in der Praxis zu behaupten. In der Theorie wurde behauptet, dass die Geisteskräfte der Menschen immer tiefer von der früheren Höhe herabsanken (Sanhedr. 11. Sota 45.), und dass somit spätere Geschlechter stets unvollkommener als frühere (Sabbath 112. Schekalim 5, 1 . . . ), deshalb auch nicht in Stande seien, frühere religiöse Bestimmungen zu modifizieren.

Thus, for Formstecher, there can be little doubt that rabbinic thinking, at least as it relates to this issue, is archaic and antiprogressive. Formstecher's book appeared one year after Krochmal's death, and therefore, obviously, the latter did not know it. He would, however, have agreed with Formstecher's description, if not his value judgments, regarding rabbinic historical thinking. See Salomon Formstecher, Die Religion des Geistes (reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1980), p. 311.

22. This point has already been made by Nathan Rotenstreich in his Tradition and Reality, chapter 1.


25. For an attempt to mediate the dispute between Löwith and Blumenberg—actually to save Löwith from Blumenberg—see Panajotis

26. Thus, he does not deny the general understanding of the emergence of Europe; he simply challenges the notion that Jewish history can be understood in terms of its contribution to it. Although Krochmal seems to allow for progress in the spiritual development of the rest of the world (on which see below), in his treatment of legal history, with which he opens his study of rabbinic literature, it is clear that he was drawn to the more conservative “Historical School” of Savigny, which is predicated on the denial of transnational progress necessitating new legal enactments. Given Krochmal’s commitment to the continuity of rabbinic Judaism, this is in no way surprising. See below, opening section of chapter 5.

27. My translation of the final sentence requires some comment. The sentence reads:

ve-im nafalnu, qamnu ve-nit 'odad ve-lo 'ZVNW ha-shem eloqenu

Steven Schwarzschild has translated the latter part of this sentence “and the Lord our God did not forsake us.” (See his “Two Modern Jewish Philosophies of History: Nachman Krochmal and Hermann Cohen” [Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew Union College, 1955], p. 54, and similarly Michael Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History* [New York: Behrman House, 1974], p. 203.) This translation is grammatically possible, perhaps even preferable given the absence of the accusative particle “et.” Nevertheless, it seems to me to be incorrect. Clearly, the subject of the first two verbs is “we,” and thus it seems likely that the subject of the third verb is also “we,” although this is scarcely decisive. More important, the first half is clearly a paraphrase of the Psalmist (20:9). It seems to me that the latter half is a paraphrase of the Chronicler (2, 13:10), where the reference is to the fact that Israel did not forsake its God (“As for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken him”). This kind of almost unconscious paraphrasing is very common in the Guide. Finally, my translation better suits the rest of Krochmal’s argument here. Israel survives through history because of its recognition of the universal, absolute God. See, in particular, *Guide*, p. 44, where Krochmal writes, “And this faith was vital and strong within the nation at all times, and it always knew the absolute spirit within it. For this is the great principle; although
KROCHMAL'S THEORY OF HISTORY

a certain spirituality manifests itself within a particular nation, this is not sufficient until it becomes clearly conscious of it, realizing that what is emerging from among them is a spiritual matter which upholds and sustains the nation." As for the "divine presence was with them," clearly, for Krochmal, this refers to the representational way in which the rabbinic sages gave voice to their comprehension of the fact that God is a universal and absolute spirit, bound by neither place nor historical circumstance; further, this is the way the rabbis give voice to the conviction that the people of Israel remained committed to their God even in exile.

28. It cannot be claimed that Krochmal does not deal with the history of other peoples because it is beside his point. The proper understanding of the history of other peoples is fundamental to his purpose. For, only if the other nations go through the process he describes and then disappear is there anything unique about the Jews. He does not need to deal with the course of general history because it is, for him, a settled matter. The historiography of his time had taken care of that. We must take him very seriously when he states that he is trying to prove the repetition of the pattern among the Jews, rather than attempting to prove the veracity of the pattern itself.

29. See, for example, Rawidowicz, Introduction, pp. 117-21; Lionel Kochan, The Jew and His History (New York: Schocken, 1977), p. 74; Jacob Taubes, "Nachman Krochmal and Modern Historicism," Judaism, vol. 13 (1963), throughout. The issue cannot be decided because Krochmal simply does not sufficiently elaborate on his historical model. The fact is that Krochmal's approach resembles that of each of these thinkers in certain particulars, indicating that Krochmal was quite satisfied to incorporate the common denominator among these various positions. Such a laconic and eclectic presentation would have no place in a work designed to present an original theory of history, for it could not hope to convince; it does quite well, however, in a work designed to respond to the common thread in modern historiography. Rawidowicz has argued for a connection of Krochmal's theories with those of Vico's, and in one respect—maintaining the eternality of Israel and its exemption from "normal" patterns—they are extremely close. But, as opposed to the organismic pattern of national histories, Krochmal can scarcely treat this eternality as established, and in any event, his attachment to this most traditional of notions is
hardly dependent on Vico's articulation of it. For example, see another Catholic philosopher of history, Bossuet, albeit in the more traditional Catholic manner of viewing the Jews as a witness, in his *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, part 2, chapters 20–21 (I have used the 1874 Hachette repr. where the relevant pages are 271–98). The connection between Krochmal, Vico and Bossuet is commonality of larger purpose: negating any commitment to progress, affirming the reality of providence and the exceptional nature of the biblical histories.

30. A similar argument is advanced by Krochmal's son Abraham in an essay, "Y'ridat ha-Umah, Hit'alut ha-Emunah," in idem, *Aggudat Ma'amirim*, p. 13ff. See *Guide*, pp. 50–53. Krochmal's view of Jewish survival does not seem to me to be consistent with attempts to see him as a proto-Zionist. While Krochmal was far more of a Jewish nationalist than was his son, he would not have defined that nationalism as deriving its vitality from a place rather than from a culture that had transcended geography by virtue of its absolute spirituality. Cf. Most recently, Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 14–22. For other works, see the bibliography in Klausner.

31. Cf. Rotenstreich, *Ha-Mahashavah ba-Yehudit b'Et ba-Hadashah*, vol. 2, pp. 161–63. (See also his "Muhlat ve-Hitrahshut be-Mishnato shel Ranak," in *Knesset le'Zekher Bialik*, no. 3, [1941]). The problems raised by Rotenstreich result from a "Hegelianized" reading of Krochmal. That is, Rotenstreich makes the argument that for Krochmal God, as absolute being, is devoid of all personality, and thus, the activity of God in the contingent historical process is philosophically problematic. Yet, Krochmal affirms on a number of occasions, as we saw in the previous chapter, that God as absolute being is capable, on the basis of a free act of will, of a self-limitation, which would allow for—indeed demand—his activity in history, and we find such activity in prophecy and in the original providential act of election of Israel (see *Guide*, p. 38). Still, here Krochmal does not argue for divine activity in Israel's revival, for this would fail to address the historical issues raised by the philosophy of history. Here he must, and does, argue that Jewish survival is grounded in the immanent forces of history as they would have been recognized in his own day.
32. This essence is, however, discernible in history. In a celebrated passage, Krochmal writes:

And know, it is a fundamental and honored principle that it is proper, indeed, obligatory, for us to investigate the ideas, mores and characteristics that have emerged from within our nation over the course of time, through our past. [We must study] the unions and associations we have developed with others to a greater extent than any other people, albeit with limitations. [We must study] the way we have related to—and been transformed by—these ideas, mores and characteristics, and how, on their basis, we have interacted with others—those who were distant from us and have come closer to some extent, borrowing from our ways, such as the Greeks at the time of Plotinus and Proclus, and, in a different way, Mohammed, as well as those who were close to us and distanced themselves such as the early Christians, or Spinoza and his followers. It is obligatory for all who are wise and prominent among us to delve into these things and to achieve a fundamental understanding of them. All this is for the purpose of arriving scientifically at clear impressions, and, ultimately, to a clear recognition of our essence and being—the general soul of Israel—and how that essence has revealed itself through various events and through changing eras. (Guide, p. 167)

33. The prophetic roots of this position are obvious.

34. In addition to chapters 9 and 10, which contain the survey of Jewish history in the Second Commonwealth period, chapter 11 deals with biblical books, every one of which Krochmal dates to this period (on this, see the next chapter). Chapter 12 deals with Alexandrian Jewry in general and Philo in particular—again, the focus is on the Second Commonwealth period. Chapter 13 is a discussion of the emergence of the rabbinic tradition up to the time of the Mishnah—again, almost exclusively focused on this period. Chapter 14 treats the nature of rabbinic aggadah, with a substantial concern for the "tannaitic period," most of which overlaps with the period of the second cycle.

35. It is to be noted here, that Krochmal, in contradistinction to Hegel, claims the nation is the primary bearer of culture rather than the state. That is, the Volk, rather than the Staat, the external political projection of the Volk, can retain vitality and creativity apart from political institutions. It is, of course, not surprising that a Jew would offer such a claim, and it is certainly consistent with the position of Herder, for whom a literature and especially a language are determining factors in culture.
36. It should be noted that this verse, viewed in its original context as traditionally understood, refers to the qualities of the messiah. In some sense it is the people who redeemed themselves through their renewed spiritual commitment.

37. See, e.g., Guide, p. 60. This distinction can be illustrated by Krochmal's treatment of the pre-exilic and post-exilic prophets. The former are seen by Krochmal as individuals who stand above the rest of the community which is still practicing idolatry. The latter by contrast preach to a community that is ready to hear their words. The former issue admonitions that fall on deaf ears; the latter issue consolations that the people take to heart. For this reason, the heyday of pre-exilic prophecy is seen by Krochmal as a period of decline; the spiritual heights attained by these select individuals cannot change the overall status of the people. The post-exilic prophets are seen as operating in a period of great rebirth, not because they are spiritually superior to their predecessors, but because the people as a whole are superior.

38. I have emphasized this last phrase as an illustration of Krochmal's desire to show that Jewish culture is, in fact, morally superior to other surrounding cultures, to whom Jews need not feel inferior. In chapter 12 of the Guide, Krochmal discusses the work of Philo of Alexandria, and attempts to show that at the core of Philo's thought is the same commitment to absolute spirit as is manifest in other Jewish cultural movements. See Lachower, "Nigleh v'Nistar," pp. 307–21, esp. 315.

39. The implicit message is that there is no real distinction between the community in which the prophetic writings and some psalms originated, on the one hand, and the traditions preserved in the rabbinic writings on the other. See below, chapters 4 and 5.


41. Some critics have argued that Krochmal did indeed believe that Judaism is subject to the same progressive process as humanity in general. It seems to me that this error is due to one of two possibilities. The first is the interpretation that all subsequent cycles stand in the same relation to one another as do the first and second. That is, clearly Krochmal believed that Jews had progressed spiritually from the first cycle to the second; interpreters, such as Schwarzschild,
KROCHMAL'S THEORY OF HISTORY

simply assume that this pattern is carried forward. It is clear, I hope, that this approach is simply not correct. The second source of error here is the imposition of the interpreter's understanding of the course of Jewish history onto Krochmal's. This is particularly characteristic of Schweid, who sees in Jewish medieval philosophy an advance beyond what preceded it, and in modern philosophy a further advance yet. Whatever the merits of this understanding of Jewish history, it has no foundation in Krochmal's work. In the first place, for Krochmal religion and philosophy are essentially identical in content; thus philosophy adds nothing but clarity to religious expression. As such, there would be no essential distinction between the representational mode of rabbinic thought and the philosophical mode of medieval and modern thought, as we saw above in chapter two. In the second place, there is no circumventing the fact that Krochmal claims the second cycle was the pinnacle of Jewish spiritual achievement, and that virtually all the historiography in the Guide is geared toward proving precisely that. All this rules out a doctrine of progress as Schweid would reconstruct it. Finally, as I have just argued, adherence to the notion of sustained progress in Jewish history undermines Krochmal's view of the rabbinic tradition.

42. This claim stands in strong contradistinction to Mendelssohn, who, in the introduction to his Bible commentary, Netivot ha-Shalom (better known as the Biur), "Or la-Netivah," stresses the immutability of the Torah text and implies that the tradition as a whole, particularly as regards the biblical text, originates with Moses. This is also implicit in Jerusalem, pp. 127–28. As we shall see in chapter 5, Krochmal regards the traditional laws as being the product of a much lengthier process, in which the implicit is made manifest over time.

155