Nachman Krochmal

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"If you wish to recognize Him who spoke and the world came to be—study aggadah; thus will you come to recognize Him and cleave to His ways."

"Said R. Yehoshua ben Levi: This aggadah—one who writes it has no share [in the world to come], one who expounds it is obliterated, one who listens to it receives no reward. All my days I have not looked at aggadah . . ." ¹

Krochmal's chapter on aggadah opens with the juxtaposition of these conflicting rabbinic pronouncements. He cites them to illustrate the deep ambivalence of Jewish culture toward this genre of rabbinic discourse. On the one hand, in the aggadah one finds much rabbinic reflection on the nature of God and providence; it is, thus, an indispens-
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able, if problematic, resource for the construction of rabbinic theology. On the other hand, the aggadah is replete with scientific and historical errors; angels, demons and evil spirits; and stories about the rabbinic sages that cast them in a bad light and seem to promote questionable ethical practices. Further, both "good" and "bad" aggadot are embedded in a form that on the surface suggests the rabbis were incapable of systematic—that is, good, Western—thought, even allowing for the different modes of expression appropriate to religious rather than philosophical speculation. They abound with anthropomorphic, hyperbolic and mythological formulations. Thus, both types of aggadic material were problematic from a modern perspective, for, as a recent work on medieval aggadic interpretation opens "on the face of it, nothing could be more alien to the nature of systematic religious philosophy than the aggadah of the classical rabbinic literature." ²

Of course, Nachman Krochmal was scarcely the first to try to dissolve the ambivalence created by this unusual literature. Jewish culture is replete with attempts to explain (away?) the presence of some of the more troubling elements in the aggadah. The standard approach of the rationalists, with Maimonides in the vanguard, was to reinterpret the offensive anthropomorphic and mythological passages to bring them into accord with reason; they even imputed great profundity to them. ³ Within limits, Krochmal is quite sympathetic to this approach. Others, led my Naḥmanides in his record of his disputation with Pablo Christiani in Barcelona in 1263, simply deny that the aggadah has any authority. Jews are free to accept or reject the import of aggadic statements as they see fit. To this position as well, Krochmal is somewhat sympa-
As far as the historical and scientific errors in the aggadah are concerned, the issue had been dealt with by Azariah de Rossi (c. 1511–c. 1578), who argued that the authority of the rabbis is limited to "those things dependent on prophecy," but in matters of science and history their opinions are "entirely human"; that is, there is no qualitative difference between the opinions of the rabbis, and those of later scholars. In fact, the later scholars have the advantage of a greater pool of knowledge from which to draw. Lengthier analysis of Azariah's position is not necessary, for, here as well, Krochmal, within limits, accepts the validity of this approach (Guide, p. 246).

That this problem is dealt with continually throughout Jewish history is itself eloquent testimony to the fact that none of the "solutions" was fully satisfactory. From Krochmal's perspective it is clear that none of the approaches mentioned effectively dealt with all the problems presented by the aggadah. For even after we have dismissed all the historically and scientifically incorrect claims of the rabbis; even after we have been shown the profound esoteric content of the anthropomorphic and mythological stories; even after we acknowledge that the aggadah is not authoritative in the sense that it would be incumbent on Jews to accept all aggadot as unquestionably true, there remain many aggadot that still reveal superstitious and offensive modes of thought. That is, there remain aggadot that cannot be allegorically dissolved; there remain aggadot that cannot be dismissed as merely representative of the level of scientific knowledge of the day. Further, none of these approaches deals sufficiently with the historical questions regarding the aggadot they explain away. Where
did they come from? What purpose did they serve? Among the tasks Krochmal sets for himself is to explain how, and by whom, such aggadot were created, and how they found their way into rabbinic literature, in particular the Babylonian Talmud.

The Problem of Aggadah in the Modern Period

If the problem had not yet been resolved, a new guide was necessary. But, of course, this new guide would have to take into account a set of facts with which Krochmal’s predecessors had already dealt, but which had become more acute in the modern period. As Krochmal was fully aware, it was not only Jews who were familiar with—and had profound difficulties with—the aggadah. In the modern period, the aggadah had become a general source of scorn directed against the rabbis (Guide, p. 248); it became the occasion for “simpletons”—gentiles as well as Jews—to depict the rabbis as fools (Guide, p. 245). Try as Westernized Jews might to distance themselves and their religious heritage from this literature, others, Jews and gentiles alike, refused to let them. Try as the former might to rely on Maimonides and others, the latter would pull out the support from under them. Try as they might to drive a wedge between aggadah and halakhah, asserting that only the latter represents rabbinic thinking, their opponents would ignore or deny the distinction. Thus did the aggadah become a weak link in the Jewish quest for religious respectability in the modern world.7

The establishment of the confused and chaotic world of the
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aggadah as the yardstick by which to measure the rabbinic intellect was already a commonplace of Enlightenment thinkers, as Arnold Ages has shown. For example, Denis Diderot, in his article “Juifs” in his famous *Encyclopédie*, noted the high level of rabbinic superstition, concentrating his critique on rabbinic angelology and demonology, precisely the focus of Krochmal’s apologia. This tendency was to receive further impetus in the abbé Luigi Ciarini’s *Théorie du judaïsme*, the work of a figure otherwise quite distant from the world of the Enlightenment. Ciarini (1789–1832), a professor of Oriental languages at the University of Warsaw, published his *Théorie* as a prolegomenon to a French translation of the Talmud; the translation, in turn, was designed to open this arcane document to modern Jews, thereby demonstrating to them the silliness of continued adherence to a Judaism founded on it. While Ciarini did not live long enough to redeem his pledge of a French translation of the Talmud, his *Théorie* did create quite a commotion for a short time, and seems to have contributed to the outbreak of anti-Semitism in France at the end of the century.

Ciarini’s work made no lasting original contribution; as Zunz and Jost have shown, he was actually remarkably unoriginal, borrowing heavily from Eisenmenger, Buxtorf and Raymond Martini. It is, however, precisely this fact that makes his work noteworthy; in it one will find centuries of Christian reflection on rabbinic thinking and values. In addition, one will find there Ciarini’s one significant original contribution, namely, an attempted refutation of various Jewish apologists of the Berlin Haskalah, Aaron Wolfssohn in particular, who strove to distance themselves and their religious heritage from
the more offensive aspects of rabbinic aggadah. Finally, Chiarini is of interest here because the structure of his critique of rabbinic Judaism, particularly of rabbinic aggadah, corresponds closely to the concerns expressed by Krochmal in his chapter. If, then, Krochmal was not responding to Chiarini per se, he was responding to the claims that find expression in his work. 

Chiarini challenged the notion that the aggadah in its original context should be seen as deliberately cast in images and parables so as to not lead the masses astray, a claim that was central to much Jewish apologetic. He claims that Maimonides, for example, in advancing his position forgot that the original locus of this material was the Talmud itself, by which he apparently means the academic setting from which the Talmud emerged. It was thus never directed at the masses and never intended for them. One cannot therefore say that the rabbis formulated their thinking in a fabulous manner to conceal esoteric doctrine from the masses; put bluntly, given the locus from which the material emerges, the only justifiable conclusion one can reach is that they really believed that nonsense, or simply enjoyed wasting their time with it.

Another standard of Jewish apologetic is that the aggadah must be sharply distinguished from the halakhah, not only in terms of methodology, but in terms of authority. There is no obligation to believe anything that violates one's sense of order and propriety—so it has been claimed throughout the ages. Chiarini challenges this claim as well, arguing that the aggadah emerges from the same people and institutions as does the halakhah. Further, the aggadah is used to support the same
goals as is the legal material, and, in fact, is sometimes used as the basis of, or support for, a legal ruling.\textsuperscript{15}

Thus, the aggadah, having the same goal and objective as the halakhah, for it demands and prohibits the same things, must be as obligatory as the latter; for the one and the other turn on the same commanded and prohibited things, not to annul each other but to mutually guide the hand. In this sense, there is not, nor could there be, any divergence of opinion relative to the authority of the aggadah; in attacking the latter, one equally undermines the authority of the halakhah.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus, the attempts by Jewish apologists from Maimonides through Aaron Wolfssohn to deny the authority of the aggadah are undermined by reconstructing the alleged perspective of the talmudic rabbis themselves.

Chiarini was well aware that there are those committed to the talmudic tradition who deny the literal authority of the aggadic materials. This matters little for, he claims, following Maimonides, the number of such Jews is very small, and, in any event, their views do not correspond to those of the ancient rabbis. Thus, Chiarini claims that the first of the three different attitudes to aggadah discerned by Maimonides—namely, to believe them literally, and to deny any esoteric interpretation at all—predominates in Jewish culture. The result is that

there is this striking difference between the Jews and other peoples: even the Israelite scholars have never been much different than the vulgar and coarse of their nation. That is why, except for two or three talmudists who may be cited as opposed to the authority of the aggadah, all the others have recognized and do recognize that
authority as prevalent, and belong, consequently, in this first class of believers in the simple, literal meaning of aggadot]. (Ibid., p. 48)

As for the third class of Maimonides, those who acknowledge an esoteric content within the fabulous aggadic shell, Chiarini claims the number is remarkably small (as Maimonides himself acknowledges). Further, Maimonides "found almost all his contemporaries ready to arm themselves against him, and to declare him heretical. It is at least incontestable that his authority and that of the small number of other Israelites who, by conviction, think as he does regarding the nature of the aggadah exercise no influence on the mass of Jews, particularly the Jews of Poland. While that mass is today more advanced than it was in the time of Maimonides, and while it is finally persuaded that man has his eyes in the front and not in the back, it keeps them ever closed to the truth so as not to see it" (ibid., p. 51). Thus, he claims, the fact that a few Jewish scholars interpreted the aggadot figuratively throughout the centuries had little impact on Jewish culture. Most Jews continued to believe the stories literally. On this point it seems that Krochmal agreed with Chiarini; many Jews did interpret the aggadot literally. For the former, however, such people are not representative of Judaism per se, but rather represent the distortion of Judaism from within. They are part of the self-proclaimed pietists, the anti-intellectual Jews who are the cause of the rejection of religion by its cultured despisers.  

In any event, for Chiarini, the fact that there were those who understood the aggadot allegorically could not be cultur-
ally influential, for these allegorists offer interpretations that seem arbitrary, each commentator interpreting in his own way, without ever discerning the actual meaning of the passage in question. Given the history of aggadic allegorization, no authoritative nonliterary interpretation could emerge to compete with the literal meaning of the aggadot (ibid., vol. 1, p. 71). Thus, a theory of Judaism is perfectly justified in treating the aggadah as an authoritative body of literature, whose creators believed it literally, and which most later Jews felt obligated to believe and interpret literally; it may accordingly judge the rabbis as superstitious and foolish men who had little understanding of natural processes, who firmly believed in magic and demons. While today few would doubt that the rabbis believed in magical incantations and demons, a century and a half ago, such a position would instantly discredit, not only in rationalist circles, but even among romantics who ostensibly had a greater appreciation for the mythological and irrational.\footnote{It is to be noted, in anticipation of what is to come, that Chiarini’s position can only be maintained if he is right about the original locus from which this material was generated—namely, the rabbinic academy—and if all the aggadot actually emerged from within the rabbinic estate.}

Krochmal’s self-appointed task was to present an understanding of the aggadah that would dissolve the challenges outlined above, and thus affirm the credibility of his portrait of rabbinic Judaism as a profound and theologically advanced tradi-
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tion. The first step in executing this task is to define aggadah, as opposed to halakhah, by noting the methodological distinctions between them.\(^1^9\) The cornerstone of both is scriptural exegesis, or midrash; however, the type and extent of midrash differs greatly. For the aggadist it is perfectly proper to distance a verse from its simple meaning far more radically than could the halakhist. For the latter, the process of midrash is a far more intellectual one; the consequences are of great importance, and consistency, achieved by the proper exercise of reason, is essential. From the disciplined halakhic midrash one can see that aggadic midrash is not representative of what the rabbis think a scriptural verse actually means. For the aggadist, by contrast, freer use of imagination is permissible, since there are no practical consequences. Thus, the aggadists sometimes take a metaphorically intended verse literally, and vice versa. They feel free to ignore tense and person whenever it suits them. To them, all biblical verses are equal; one could readily compare a verse from the Prophets to one from the Pentateuch—unthinkable for the halakhist. Finally, the aggadist addresses some immediate problem, and is not necessarily concerned with the establishment of something lasting, while the halakhist is concerned with determining everlasting norms.\(^2^0\) These distinctions illustrate that, while both halakhah and aggadah are based on midrash, they are essentially two separate disciplines, and one cannot judge the one on the basis of the other. Thus does Krochmal attempt to restore the distinction between halakhah and aggadah challenged by Chiarini. Krochmal had no illusions of innovation here; the need for his restatement is overtly polemical. As he put it, the distinction between halakhah and aggadah is obvious, and
has been said many times; it needs, however, to be said many more times, given the emergence of those in modern times who yet refuse to acknowledge it, motivated either by simplistic and misplaced piety, or by the desire to cast scorn on the rabbis and thereby discredit them. These two perspectives correspond to the two distorting religious tendencies discussed in chapter 1 of the present book (Guide, p. 240).

Given that the aggadah had no practical authority, what purpose did it serve? For Krochmal the answer is quite obvious. The aggadah was directed by the rabbinic leaders to the masses, to instill reverence and morality—among other things—in them; in achieving this goal the rabbis were largely successful. It is this audience and this goal that are responsible for the form of many of these aggadot. For in addressing the masses, the profound content of the message must be masked. Without allegorical, esoteric/exoteric devices, the aggadist cannot attain his goal. Not only are such devices necessary, they are in fact quite common; they are known to both ancient and modern authorities. Indeed, “it is practically impossible to be without them for one who wishes to teach theological matters” (Guide, p. 242). Thus, aggadic thinking, if not its specific forms, is not some rabbinic aberration, but rather, is universal, and necessary for one who wishes to impart a theological truth without undermining the faith of the theologically uninitiated.21

Here again, Krochmal echoes Maimonides; he will proceed, however, with a different emphasis, choosing to more forcefully address the original locus of this material, and thereby render Chiarini’s objection incorrect. That is, according to Krochmal, the majority of aggadot did not originate in the
rabbinc academies, but rather in the synagogue. They are records of sermons, sometimes delivered by preachers of the first rank, sometimes by lesser figures. They were intended for the “ignorant, their wives and sometimes their children [who] came from their homes in the hamlets and villages to the nearest town” to hear preaching. The preacher, who often came from the academy, would prepare a clever opening, a rhetorically embellished request for permission to preach, and an appropriate sermon (Guide, p. 249, note).²²

These sermons were not preserved in any fixed form. They were repeated by members of the audience in various ways, but were not “published” in an official version as were the halakhot; they were thus subject to much corruption. Only late in the amoraic period did there appear “organizers of aggadot,” who attempted to provide some fixed form to the sermonic materials in circulation. Yet even here, “since [such collections of material] were not [preserved] in the general academy as was the gemara, they did not achieve a fixed order until the time of the composition of the [known] midrashic collections, which was very late” (Guide, p. 249). This absence of fixed form or academic locus accounts for the numerous repetitions of material, in different versions, that occur throughout the existing rabbinic corpus. Thus, this type of aggadah was neither fixed nor studied in the academy. Its journey from oral presentation to published form—comparable to the children’s game of “telephone”—may account for some of the more idiosyncratic elements in this literature.

Of course, not all aggadot are designed to instill theological or moral matters; some are created to instruct in more mundane areas. In pursuing the matter in greater detail, Krochmal
Nachman Krochmal discerns four different types of aggadot, only the most important of which are intended to instruct in theology, morality and physics (natural philosophy). The first type of aggadah is the fable, comparable in form and intent to Aesop’s fables. The second type is the parable, in the literal sense of the term. That is, the parable type seeks to instruct through comparison, explaining a given situation by invoking a more familiar analogue; these were so common among the Pharisees, that Jesus, seeking to emulate them, often used them in addressing the masses.23

The third type is a fabricated story designed to instill admiration for great historical figures or events, and the desire to emulate them. Such stories are not to be taken literally, nor does the teller intend that one depend on them for historical explanation. It is in keeping with Krochmal’s approach that he feels compelled to add that they should not be seen as self-aggrandizing lies; they are intended for a useful purpose—respect and admiration for the legislative authorities—and are presented in a manner suited to the audience.

The fourth type is the allegory, created in order to impart theological and scientific knowledge. The allegory is always dressed in the garb of a strange story, in accordance with the level of the intended audience. In this type of aggadah the creator will often take natural events that conform to natural laws and provide other explanations for them. (Lest his reader miss the point, Krochmal adds that this is not to be taken as a seriously believed explanation of the phenomenon.) Other times the teller will rely on enormous exaggeration to make his point. The specific device used will depend on the audience and the time.
Krochmal has presented and defended all these types, and described their original locus and publication history. Yet, there still remains the fact that the rabbis seem to have actually held certain views that are demonstrably false; even these can be explained, although Krochmal remains somewhat embarrassed by them.24 Beyond this, and despite the long apologetic tradition, which Krochmal reviews, still troublesome are the aggadot that include childish superstitions, stories regarding the efficacy of magic, incantations and demons, as well as those that appear blasphemous, and those that denigrate the prophets and sages. (Guide, p. 246). The majority of such aggadot are to be found in the Babylonian Talmud. Here the recourse to sermonic allegory is of no avail, for no amount of creativity can interpret these stories as conveying an appropriate moral or theological lesson. In fact, Krochmal claims, these superstitious and blasphemous aggadot cannot be defended; they must be rejected as totally unrepresentative of rabbinic thinking and culture.25

The issue before Krochmal is to explain how these aggadot came to be included in the various collections in which they are to be found, primarily the Babylonian Talmud. For if it can be shown that these aggadot are not authentically rabbinic, and found their way into rabbinic collections in a manner different from, and inconsistent with, the way in which the other aggadot came to be included, they will no longer pose a threat to the authentic aggadot, to the genre as a whole, nor, most importantly, to the reputation of the rabbis.

Characteristically, Krochmal feels compelled to explain why it is that the previous sages who deny the authority of the
ag gadah saw fit to conceal the manner in which these aggadot found their way into the collections, while he sees fit to divulge this information. As is to be expected, Krochmal appeals to the great differences that exist between the medieval and modern periods. With the advent of printing, knowledge that previously was reserved for the scholar is now available and known to all; in the modern period even the uneducated and unsophisticated know much more about the physical sciences and ancient history. In addition, in the modern period the needs of the community are so much different, for the desire to learn from the Torah has been limited, and there has been an increase in the number of arrogant who boast of being able to attain truth, without having pursued it at all. And if already in the days of the earlier sages, in which books were not available to the worthy and unworthy alike, and the gentiles were not at all learned in the books of the Jews, there were those, most of them sincere, who pressed and compelled them to say what they did... what can intelligent people, observers of the Torah, do when they are forced onto such a narrow path, on which there is not room to stray to the right or the left? On the one side are the petty obscurantists who have increased among the insignificant learners of Torah, who take the midrashic explanation [i.e., aggadic] for the meaning of the text, and the poetic garb, designed to explain or instill something in the hearts of the masses, for the essence of the matter... and the private opinions that pertain to a specific time for eternal verities. And even with the [indefensible] aggadot they say that they are among God's secrets for his reverers, and they offer explanations that are close to the worst idolatry... They call this Jewish faith, and anyone who denies it a heretic. For the sake of peace I will not delve further and show by example the great, terrible damage to the purified faith.
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that sprouts from such people. On the other side there are those scholars in various fields from among us who are not yet sufficiently initiated in matters of faith . . . and many others among the general readers in the European nation in which we live, all of whom laugh at and mock the strange aggadot, and go on to mock the entire Gemara, and ultimately come to denigrate the sages, and despise those who revere and respect them. (Guide, pp. 247–48; emphasis added)

Thus, in a refrain that should be quite familiar by now, Krochmal insists that given the realities of the nineteenth century, what was once meant to be kept away from the public must now be offered to them, for the very respectability of Judaism was at stake. The edifice cannot be allowed to fall because of some strange aggadot. It is, therefore, imperative for Krochmal that the literary presentation of the aggadah be examined critically, so that we can understand how it came to exist, and how it came to be included in the various collections.

Krochmal presents his views in six numbered paragraphs, which, taken together, explain the origins and nature of the aggadic texts. Given the author's emphasis on the book's structure, which we have seen, it seems advisable that we follow the method of presentation found in the Guide, with interpretive remarks included along the way.

1. The beginnings of the aggadah are to be found in the scriptural exegesis that was designed to foster morality and proper belief among the masses. The teachings were publicly delivered in sermonic form on the Sabbaths and holidays. Sometimes these sermons were designed to teach halakhah through the aggadah, and many such sermons are preserved
in the collections known as Numbers Rabbah and Deuteronomy Rabbah. As we saw above, Krochmal believed these sermons were not transmitted in a fixed form, or order, until well into the eighth century, when “redactors of aggadot” began to create collections. Already here we find a characteristic of aggadah that indicates its inferiority in the rabbinic hierarchy of values; the halakhot were transmitted in fixed form because they had practical authority, but also because they represented the legitimate tradition, and preservation in fixed form preserved the integrity of that tradition. The aggadot, on the other hand, were not endowed with authority, and were not considered part of the authentic tradition. If they were, they would have been preserved more exactly and with greater care. This characterization of the aggadot, however, does not apply to those found in the tractate Avot, or Avot d’Rabbi Natan. While these also attempt to instruct in morals and faith, they have much greater authority; their form was fixed, and transmitted orally throughout the centuries. They are to be considered as equivalent to other tannaitic sources, and are called “aggadah” only because of an imprecise extension of the word. Thus, the tannaitic attempts to instruct in morals and faith found in these tractates are not to be considered part of the aggadah, and are therefore untouched by Krochmal’s analysis.

2. Also considered aggadah only in the most imprecise sense are the esoteric doctrines of the rabbis—namely, the account of creation, the account of the chariot, and the secret reasons for the commandments. This exclusion is to be expected, given Krochmal’s approach to rabbinic esoterica that we have seen previously. The entire legitimacy of Krochmal’s project is based on the claim that the rabbis engaged in the
study of physics and metaphysics, albeit in a nonphilosophical form. It is therefore impossible for Krochmal to consider such esoteric studies part of the aggadah, which derives from public sermons, whose form was not preserved, and whose authority was limited. Rather, these materials must be seen as part of the precisely formulated and preserved elements of rabbinic study, comparable to halakhic statements, in both their literary history and their authority.

3. In terms of the sources of aggadah, there are four levels to be distinguished. The first level contains the Mishnah, Tosefta and the Midreshei Halakhah. The aggadot contained therein are all of high quality, and most of them derive from public sermons delivered in the tannaitic period. The second level contains the aggadot found in the Palestinian Talmud and all the other Palestinian aggadot. Strange aggadot are very rare in these collections; in general, most of them are “pleasant and good,” and contain many useful historical details. The third level contains the “late midrashim” which include the Pesiqta d’Rav Kahana, and Tanhuma, Tanna d’Be Eliahu and others. Krochmal makes no comment regarding any of these collections, as to their merit in gaining a third rank. It is apparent that to him they contain many more strange aggadot than the Palestinian Talmud, and fewer than the fourth-level Babylonian Talmud, which, despite containing many precious aggadot, includes most of the strange and damaging ones, as well.

4. Krochmal claims that it is clear that the aggadot were written down long before the halakhot, albeit in a haphazard and unfixed manner, and he provides a number of proofs from the Talmuds to show that there existed, already at the time of R. Yohanan (third century), books of aggadot. The reason
that the aggadot could be written at a time when the halakhot could not is probably due to the fact that the aggadot had no legal authority, as they were stated to suit the hour, to arouse the audience to a specific need. In addition, there were "experts" in aggadah who were inferior to the halakhists, and they were lenient with themselves. Krochmal's claim that the aggadot were written down does not necessarily contradict his previous claim that the aggadot were not transmitted in fixed forms. For, while it is true that once committed to writing there is a fixed wording, it does not follow that this wording is identical to the original wording, nor that an aggadah was written down only once, in one collection. Specific aggadot may have been included in more than one collection, and in each in a different form.

However we evaluate the above claim regarding the writing of the aggadot, it is clear that Krochmal regards this claim as yet further evidence of the inferiority of the aggadah vis-à-vis the halakhah. For it is the halakhah that was oral Torah, and could not be committed to writing, while the aggadah was not to be included in this category, and thus could be written.

5. From the fact that many of the peculiar aggadot—those that deal with demons, incantations and other absurdities—are not formulated in the language of the Mishnah or the Gemara, but rather in some Aramaic/Persian combination, which was the language of the masses, it follows that there were aggadic collections created by the uneducated and slightly educated rabble, as well as by rabbis addressing the masses. It is, Krochmal claims, only within the collections of the rabble that one finds these strange aggadot, not within the collec-
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tions of the scholars. Krochmal "proves" this by a citation of a talmudic passage which seems to indicate that there were books, prevalent among the masses, that deal with the interpretation of dreams. Thus, the strange aggadot are in no way to be seen as representative of rabbinic Judaism. The direction of Krochmal's thought here is clear, and requires no comment.

6. Not only were there collectors of stories among the rabble, but there were also some imbeciles, from which no people or generation is free, among the writers of aggadot, who were scornful of the scholars. Indeed, the Talmud itself reports that even in the courts of the exilarchs, and among their entourages, there were those who despised the sages. It is they who are responsible for the existence of aggadic collections that denigrate the sages, and depict them as engaged in unethical practices. Such stories therefore are not to be seen as an example of intra-rabbinic bickering or jealousy; such aggadot are not authentic products of rabbinic Judaism, and in no way should be considered illustrative of rabbinic values.

Having established that some types of aggadot are not authentically rabbinic, the question naturally arises, how did they come to be included in the Babylonian Talmud, one of the most sacred texts of the Jews? In answer to this question Krochmal briefly relates the history of the talmudic text. In its particulars Krochmal's history follows closely that of R. Sherira Gaon, and therefore need not detain us here. What is of importance is that, according to Krochmal, the Talmud was essentially complete at the time of the death of Rav Ashi (427), and in the ensuing seventy-three years (or until the death of Ravina II) some additions were made, and perhaps
some small changes in order. Thus, with the exception of a few additions of later scholars, called Saboraim, the Talmud was closed in the year 500: its closure was due to the persecution of Jews in Persian lands. All Talmudic material was transmitted orally during this time; the writing of this material began at the earliest in the year 589, when yeshivot were reestablished, and probably not until the Islamic era. On the other hand, the aggadot existed in written form as early as the third century, as we have seen. When the Talmud was finally set to writing, the scribes, unable to discern the wheat from the chaff, included the various aggadic collections in their transcriptions of the Talmudic material. Thus, the inclusion of the strange aggadot in the Babylonian Talmud does not represent a conscious choice on the part of the rabbinic leaders of the Jewish community, but rather the ignorance or malevolence of the scribal class. Again, authentic rabbinic Judaism is absolved of all responsibility for the creation and "canonization" of superstitious and derogatory aggadot.

The final step in Krochmal's defense of rabbinic Judaism in the face of the intolerable aggadot is to explain why they were retained in the Talmud even though their original inclusion was not sanctioned. To this Krochmal responds that their deletion was made unnecessary by the development, and widespread use, of halakhic compendia, such as the *Halakhot* of Alfasi, which themselves deleted all aggadic material. Since the aggadot were rarely studied, there was no compelling reason to delete them from the texts despite their spurious nature.

Krochmal's attempts to disinherit the unacceptable aggadot are completely without foundation, and represent nothing less
than a deus ex machina. In general, his theories regarding the aggadah did little to advance the discussion in a serious way, despite the fact that his work is still cited. Most of what Krochmal claimed that can stand the test of time was already to be found in Zunz’s study of Jewish sermons. Nevertheless, Krochmal’s chapter on aggadah remains important for three reasons. The first is that it exercised a not inconsiderable influence on nineteenth-century thinking on aggadah, particularly among Eastern European scholars. Echoes of Krochmal’s view may be found in Rapoport’s Erech Millin in a more tentative and toned-down manner, in Isaac Baer Levinson’s Zerubabbel, as well as in Isaac Hirsh Weiss’s Dor Dor v’Dorshei.

A second and more important reason why Krochmal’s chapter on aggadah is more than a passing curiosity is the light it sheds on the process of modernization as it confronted “enlightened” Jews who wished to remain loyal to their religious tradition. For Krochmal’s disowning of a part of the aggadic corpus represents an act of remarkable desperation. It is explicable only in terms of a man who sees his religious culture under attack at its weakest point, and who can find no other refuge from the attack but to partially concede the point in order that the other, more important elements may continue to flourish. Other literature from the period, although choosing less radical responses, also provides evidence of the extent to which aggadah became an enormous intellectual challenge, indeed, a source of embarrassment. In Isaac Baer Levinson’s Beit Yehudah, written at approximately the same time as Krochmal’s chapter, the works of many non-Jews, including Voltaire, are cited as examples of those who denigrate Judaism on account of its aggadic teachings. Levinson juxtaposes them
to other non-Jewish works that are more sympathetic to the aggadah and to the Talmud more generally.\textsuperscript{32}

This approach, while fascinating, and itself shedding much light on the nature of intellectual modernization, was not acceptable to Krochmal, as, in the end, it failed to address the fact that, however one lines up previous Jewish and gentile scholars, the reality is that the critics of aggadah were right, \textit{within carefully defined limits}. That is, while one could cite a pro-aggadah Jew to respond to an anti-aggadah Jew, and a pro-aggadah gentile to respond to an anti-aggadah gentile, none of this addressed the substance of the matter. For Krochmal, one fact was inescapable. A very small percentage of aggadot were simply offensive to the modern consciousness; worse yet, such aggadot were taken as demonstrative of the capabilities of the “rabbinic mind.” The only appropriate solution was to disinherit them. If the primary source of scorn against rabbinism was shown to be a foreign growth within the corpus of rabbinic literature, surgery to remove it would lead to rabbinism’s healthy rehabilitation. The path to modernity of the traditional Jew could not traverse the entire expanse of aggadic literature, even as it could not bypass it totally either. Rather, portions of this literature had to be acknowledged as an expression of sublime philosophical concepts, while other portions had to be recognized as the rantings of foolish people, and excised from the Jewish cultural patrimony. Only thus, claims Krochmal, could a Jew successfully negotiate the difficult path that circumstances and intellectual curiosity had opened before him.

The final reason that Krochmal’s discussion remains interesting is that it illuminates the limits of the ostensible roman-
tic attachment to the irrational, as perceived by one of the age's more perspicacious students.\textsuperscript{33} That is, it is remarkable that even in the age in which many had come to appreciate the irrational elements of culture, Krochmal felt he had no choice but to excise the most irrational aspects of rabbinic culture in order for the remainder to thrive. This cannot be attributed to a facile rationalism on the part of Krochmal, as he, perhaps more than any other Wissenschaft scholar, had a deep appreciation for the irrational forms of religious expression. On the other hand, this appreciation had its limits, nowhere better illustrated than here in the discussion of aggadah.\textsuperscript{34}

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are often pictured as an age in which the simplistic rationalism of the Enlightenment gave way to a far greater appreciation of other cultural manifestations. Both the epistemological investigations of Kant and the Idealists, and the historical thinking of Herder, C. G. Heyne\textsuperscript{35} and others opened up another side of culture in which ideas, such as the incarnation of God in a human, became explicable and defensible expressions of human need.\textsuperscript{36} The concept of myth, and its application to the world of biblical study and well as to the understanding of the Greco-Roman world, allowed a new, sympathetic, understanding of the ancient world to emerge. No longer were ideas cast in irrational form to be rejected on those grounds. All of this, however, had its limits—limits that often go unnoted, but that Krochmal's discomfort forces us to confront.

The irrational was esteemed to the extent that its irrationality could be dissolved—that is, to the extent that herme-
neutics emerged that allowed for myths to be deciphered in ways that impressed the modern soul. Numerous examples of this may be drawn from one of the true classics of the age, Herder's *Vom Geist der hebräischen Poesie*. In this work, a brilliant, insightful and sympathetic hand illuminates the way in which the so-called "oriental mind" perceived the world and expressed this perception in tropes of various kinds. Yet Herder's apologetic motive, and his theological boundaries, are apparent throughout. Most relevant in light of the problems Krochmal experienced with aggadah is Herder's treatment of the biblical Satan, as he appears in the book of Job.

He is simply one of the angels, i.e., one among the attendant train of the Supreme Sovereign. In this character he is sent as a messenger to search through the world and bring information. He merely acts in accordance with the duty of his office. . . . God maintains the right, though for a long time, indeed, he permits Job to be severely tried; and at the end of the book Satan is no longer heard of. This conception of him, as an angel or messenger of God, is so widely different from the later Chaldee conception. . . . The Chaldee Satan is the opposer of Ormuzd, and the primitive cause of all evil. The agent represented in Job cannot even be compared with the Typhon of the Egyptians, or what the ancients called a man's evil genius. He is nothing but the attendant angel of the tribunal, a messenger sent out to make enquiry, to chastise and to punish. I have already remarked, how much the reference of every thing to a court of justice prevails throughout the book. 37

Thus, not all poetic, irrational expressions are created equal. Some continue to speak to us in ways that impress, while others bespeak an understanding of the world that is primitive and theologically offensive. In such an environment, herme-
neutics that dissolve the irrational character of demons and supernatural evildoers remain elusive.\textsuperscript{38}

The limits of Krochmal's appreciation of the irrational elements in rabbinic aggadah are quite close to those of Herder. Like Herder, and unlike Heinrich Heine,\textsuperscript{39} for example, the poetic, allegorical nature of the genre is highly esteemed. However, the nature of the genre does not mean that any and all ideas expressed within it are necessarily of value. Foolish ideas do not become less foolish because they are enigmatically expressed. Placed in the hands of foolish people—for Herder, the Chaldees and others, for Krochmal, the semi-educated rabble—the genre quickly disintegrates into offensive nonsense, to be disinherit ed by people of culture. Further, like Herder, Krochmal wished to demonstrate the extent to which the ancient world still has much to say to us and teach us, despite the fact that the ancients did not speak the way we speak, and did not always think the way we think. Accomplishing this goal required a certain selectivity with regard to what the ancients had bequeathed.

In his discussion of aggadah we see Krochmal at his most bold and desperate; it is this boldness and desperation that make the chapter interesting. Nevertheless, the nature of his presentation remains within the contours of the portrait of Nachman Krochmal that emerges from an analysis of his work and place in nineteenth-century Jewish culture: a strong advocate for the continued viability of traditional Jewish life, a passionate believer in the religious genius of the rabbinic tradition.
NOTES

1. The first passage is from Sifre Deuteronomy, an early rabbinic commentary on Deut., par. 49. The second passage is from the Yerushalmi (Palestinian Talmud), Shabbat 16:1.

2. Marc Saperstein, Decoding the Rabbis (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 1. Saperstein’s entire first chapter is a good treatment of the problem of the aggadah for medieval thinkers. These problems were compounded by the more recent ones.

3. See Maimonides, Moreh, pp. 8–10 (introduction); also, Saperstein, throughout. For the use of the aggadah by Maimonides, see, W. Bacher, “Die Agada in Maimunis Werken,” in Bacher vol. 2, pp. 131–97. Also David Hartman, Maimonides: Torah and Philosphic Quest (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1976), pp. 28–101. In his work Maimonides divides the students of aggadah into classes, differentiating those who believe it literally from those who recognize the esoteric content of this material. To say that this differentiation is often quoted would be an understatement. Virtually all subsequent students who deal with the issue of the aggadah, from Azariah de Rossi to the Maharal of Prague, from Rapoport to Luigi Chiarini (on all of whom, see the text below) quote this differentiation.

4. There have been those who question the sincerity of this statement of Nahmanides; for a review of the issue, and a forceful, and, in my view, correct, defense of Nahmanides’ sincerity, see Marvin Fox, “Nahmanides on the Status of Aggadot: Perspectives on the Disputation at Barcelona, 1263,” in JJS, vol. 40 (1989), pp. 95–109. Fox does not note that most nineteenth-century scholars assumed Nahmanides’ sincerity as a matter of course, although probably more for apologetic than scholarly reasons.

5. Azariah de Rossi, M’or Einaim, David Cassell, ed., 3 vols., repr. (Jerusalem: Makor, 1970/71), vol. 1, pp. 196–97. See in general chapters 14–28, pp. 196–278. Azariah’s position regarding scientific claims is in fact much older; already R. Sherira Gaon had denied that the rabbinic statements deserved greater credibility than expert medical opinion. (For the source of Sherira’s responsum, and a review of the literature on this issue, see the comments of Reuben Margoliot in
note 18 to his edition of Abraham Maimonides' "Ma'amor al Odot D'rashot Chazal", appended to his edition of the latter's *Milhamot ha-Shem* [Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, n.d.], p. 84.) This position was also echoed by Maimonides, and by his son Abraham. Cf. *Be'er ha-Golah* of Judah Loew b. Bezalel (the Maharal of Prague), who responded to de Rossi in the sharpest terms at the end of "be'er shishi." He writes:

But one who says that the aggadot are not words of Torah just like the rest of the Torah that was spoken at Sinai has no portion in the world to come. It may be proven from the very material he has cited as support that the aggadot may be recognized as words of divine wisdom by one who understands them, although not by one who has no wisdom or knowledge at all, who can only grasp the physical things that are in front of him, for the words of the sages are a very, very profound science. (*Be'er ha-Golah*, in *Sifre Maharal* [Jerusalem; 5732], p. 135)

The Maharal closes his polemic with the prayer that "He, may He be blessed, save the seed of the remnant of Israel, that there be not found among us another breach that gives honor and glory to foreigners. Amen Selah." It is to be noted that the Maharal, too, for all the respect he gives to the aggadah as Torah, engages, perhaps more than anyone else, in extensive allegorization of the aggadot, thus betraying the same ambivalence as others.


7. Many before Krochmal recognized the fact that aggadah was a source of scorn among gentiles. As Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson relates, Hayyim b. Bezalel, the brother of the Maharal, saw the aggadah as the primary barrier keeping Christians from respecting the Talmud and Judaism. See his *Hagut ve-Hanhagah*, (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1959), pp. 38–39. Similarly, R. Yitzhak Wetzlar, in the middle of the eighteenth century, noted that Jews and Judaism are routinely mocked by the upper classes of gentile society. He recommends that teachers not teach the *Ein Ya'aqob*, the most important collection of
aggaot, to the youth for they interpret the aggaot literally, and
treat them as representative of Jewish thought. See Azriel Shochet,

8. Arnold Ages, _French Enlightenment and Rabbinic Tradition_ (Frankfurt
am Main; Analecta Romanica, Heft 26, 1970), throughout, esp. pp.
29-47.

9. See Denis Diderot “Juifs (Philosophie des),” in _Oeuvres complètes_ (Paris:
Assezat, 1876), pp. 386–97. A recent compendium of rabbinic an-
gels and demons is Reuven Margoliot’s _Mal’akhe Elyon_ (Jerusalem:
Mossad Harav Kook, 5748, 3rd edition. Part one provides a list of
references to the good angels, while the second part collects data
pertaining to the evil spirits found within rabbinic and kabbalistic
literature.

10. On Chiarini, see Arnold Ages, “Luigi Chiarini: A Case Study in
Intellectual Anti-Semitism,” in _Judaica_, vol. 37, no. 2 (June 1981),
pp. 76–89.

11. See ibid., pp. 81–82, 87. Regarding the translation, two volumes
appeared in 1831; Chiarini’s death the following year brought an end
to the project. See ibid., pp. 77–78, for a discussion of the translation
project. Ages does not mention that, according to Zunz, anyway,
the whole project was commissioned by the Russian government for
the sum of twelve thousand thalers. See Zunz’s “Beleuchtung der
_Théorie du Judaïsme_ des Abbe Chiarini” in his, _Gerammelte Schriften_

12. See Zunz, _Schriften_, pp. 290–94; Jost, _Was hat Herr Chiarini in
Angelegenheiten der Europäischen Juden geleistet? Eine freimütige und un-
partheische Beleuchtung des Werkes: Theorie du Judaïsme_ (Berlin: 1830),
pp. 24–35.

13. It should be noted that Chiarini’s work was written for the purpose of
reforming Polish Jewry, and was apparently commissioned by the
Russian government (see above, note 11). Levinson testified that by
the fifties Chiarini’s work was virtually unknown, having been thor-
oughly discredited by Zunz and Jost. See his _Zerubabel_, pt. 1, p. 13.

54–56. He writes:

Enfin, il faut ranger dans la troisième et dernière catégorie les _Agadas_ qui
doivent leur origine à l’extrême sécheresse qui accompagne partout la _Halacha_
dans la _Thalmod_, et qui a paru insupportable aux Rabins eux-mêmes,
quoiqu’ils en soient les auteurs. . . . Cette troisième espèce d’_Agadas_ reparaît

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à chaque instant dans la Thalmud, et même les deux premières dont nous venons de parler, et qui, dans l'origine, étaient peut-être telles que nous les avons définies, y renvoient souvent dans cette dernière catégorie, c'est-à-dire y sont citées sans égard pour le sens caché qu'elles renferment, mais seulement pour laisser poser le lecteur et le délasser de la fatigue que la Halacha lui a fait éprouver. En effet, le Thalmud a été écrit pour les savants et non pour le commun des hommes; et sous ce rapport, ses allégories ne peuvent, en aucune manière, être assimilées aux Mythes du vieux Testament et aux paraboles du nouveau. (Emphasis added)

The last clause is not unexpected from the Catholic priest; the attempt to differentiate rabbinic writings and the Gospels of the New Testament is not uncommon in nineteenth-century Christian writings on rabbinics. This need to differentiate may help to explain the vigor of Chiarini's denunciation of aggadah and rabbinic writings generally.

15. He cites the example of R. Gamliel and his sons found in the very first mishnah (M. Berakho t 1:1). Krochmal, Guide, p. 248, denies that aggadot ever served as the source of a law, although they do at times justify observance of a law; he cites the position of Rashi at Shabbat 30b, s.v., mutav she-t'khabeh nero. This position is, of course, ad locum, but Krochmal treats it as a general proposition.


17. See above, chapter 1, pp. 16–18.

18. This will be discussed further in the text below.

19. Defining aggadah has never been all that simple. In some way or another it is almost always defined, fully or, as here, partially, in terms of halakhah. Saperstein, e.g., claims that it is "best defined negatively as the nonlegal component of rabbinic discourse" (p. 213). While this is probably true, for Krochmal it is not enough; his understanding of the problem required that the methodological distinctions be clear, so that the claim that they try to do the same things would lose credibility.

20. This echoes Zunz; see his Vorträge, p. 61.

21. We see once again the way in which religious representations are seen as enveloping speculative truth. As we shall see, though, the concept of religious representations will go only so far in Krochmal's reconstruction of rabbinic aggadah.

22. There are in fact many classical sources that support the position that the aggadot were originally preached to the ame ba'aretz (the common folk). These are reviewed by Levinson in Zerubabbel, pt. 1, p. 50.
23. Ibid., p. 243. It is not insignificant that Krochmal presents the Pharisees as Jesus’ model, imitation being the sincerest form of flattery. Chiarini’s claim that the rabbinic parables are not comparable to those of the New Testament is not only contested thereby; it is turned upside down: Jesus is not a superior creator of parables, but rather an unoriginal imitator. This is one of many attempts by Jewish scholars in the nineteenth century to depict Jesus as an unoriginal and inferior product of his Jewish environment. Abraham Geiger’s approach to the question has now been exhaustively studied by Susannah Heschel in her “Abraham Geiger on the Origins of Christianity” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1989). There were many other Jews who pursued similar lines of argument, even as there were many Christians who, like Chiarini, sought to distance Jesus from the world of Palestinian Judaism, dismissing apparent parallels between Jesus’ activity and that of the rabbis as merely superficial. A comprehensive study of this would be welcome.

24. Guide, p. 245. He quotes a passage from Maimonides, also referred to by Azariah, to the effect that rabbinic scientific opinions cannot be seen as inspired or holy, but rather as indicative of the state of scientific knowledge at the time. See Maimonides, Moreh p. 459 (3:14). See above, note 5.

25. It is interesting to compare Krochmal’s position here with that of the otherwise far less traditional Peter Beer, who in the face of undecipherable stories remarks:

Es ist hier kein anderes Mittel, als entweder diese Männer für wahnsinnung zu erklären, oder einen verborgenen Sinn, wenn nicht darin zu suchen, (denn wer würde sich jetzt die Mühe dazu nehmen) aber doch zu muthmassen. Das erste gehet schon darum nicht an, weil viele Sentenzen dieser Männer in andern Stellen, der Vernunft in vollem Masse zu sagen. Es muss also hier der zweite Fall eintreten, und—so verhält es sich auch. (Peter Beer, Geschichte Lehren und Meinungen aller bestandenen und noch bestehenden religiösen Sekten der Juden und der Geheimlehre oder Cabbalah [1822], vol. 1, p. 295)

Beer goes on to explain that the path from oral to written form rendered the hidden meaning and lessons forever lost. He would never dream of actually removing these passages from the authentic rabbinic corpus. This is one example in which more conservative scholars adopt more radical scholarly positions in the hope of preserving the modern relevance of the tradition.
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26. This too follows Zunz Vorträge, p. 182. Krochmal’s claim, as Zunz’s, is based primarily on BT Gittin 60a, where it is reported that R. Yohanan and R. Simon b. Lakish (third-century rabbinic sages) used to read from a book of aggadah on the Sabbath. They lived long before the Talmud itself was completed or committed to writing.


28. Again here, Chiarini, echoing Eisenmenger, made much of the ethically negative portraits of sages that appear in the Talmud. These portraits suggested to him that Jews, subject to the corruption of the rabbinic mind, were incapable of decency and civility, thus necessitating a wholesale reform of their religious lives. See Ages, “Chiarini,” pp. 81–82.

29. For a critique of Krochmal’s views on the aggadah and its origins, see the review of the Guide by “SHALOSH” (Hirsh Mendel Pineles, abbreviated “shalosh” after the last letter in each of his names) in He-Haluz, vol. 1 (1852), (photographic reprint, Jerusalem: Makor, 1972), pp. 127–33. There Pineles disputes the claim that the strange aggadot were unknown to the Amoraim, and did not derive from them. In his support he quotes numerous Talmudic passages in which amora’im are seen discussing these aggadot. While sympathetic with Krochmal’s attempt to defend the honor of the rabbis, Pineles nonetheless is unable to refrain from showing the former’s errors, although he certainly does not wish to in any way damage the reputation of the rabbis, and does not feel that he has. Krochmal undoubtedly was aware of the Talmudic discussions that Pineles cites; we must conclude, assuming (as I do) he was intellectually honest, that he considered the discussions as pseudepigraphic, this being an occasion in which the claim of pseudepigraphy would relieve rather than exacerbate the perplexities of the time.

30. Characteristically, Krochmal tries to show that he is not totally innovative here, discerning allusions in the works of Maimonides and Yehudah Halevi that suggest, to him, anyway, that they, too, suspected that some aggadot did not originate in rabbinic circles. See Guide, p. 256.

31. See Levinson, Zerubabbel, pt. 1, p. 56.

32. See Levinson, Beit Yehudah, chapter 112 (=pt. 2, pp. 77–86). Similarly, earlier in the century, Peter Beer lamented, “Aber empörend scheint es uns dennoch, wenn Menschen aus Gehässigkeit und Par-teisucht, sämtliche Talmudisten für den Abschaum der Menschheit
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erklären, und ihnen alle Vernunft und allen Sinn für Moralität ab-sprechen." He responds to the charge, "Man findet wahrlich in dieser Sammlung, neben manchem für uns unverständlich Gesagten und Gedachten, sehr vieles, das gut gesagt und trefflich gedacht ist. Auch sogar vieles, welches der reinstes Moralist unserer Zeit nicht besser sagen könnte" (Beer, p. 297).

33. Jan de Vries's characterization of the age is typical. He writes, "Jetzt wird der Irrationalismus gepredigt; die Seelenkräfte, die eben ausserhalb des Intellektes tätig sind, brechen mit eruptiver Gewalt hervor; das Gemütsleben mit seinen Leidenschaften und die Phantasie, das sind jetzt die grossen Triebfedern der neuen Kunst" (Forschungsgeschichte der Mythologie [Munich: Karl Alber Freiburg, 1961], p. 121).

34. See also above, chapter 2, note 44.


36. Both Kant and Hegel contributed to this, each in his own, apologetic, way. For Kant as a moralistic *darshan*, see Religion, throughout, esp. pp. 54–72. For Hegel as a *darshan*, see LPR, vol. 3, throughout, esp. pp. 301–4, 311–12, 322–47. Each of them was quite willing to view the Scriptures as examples of nonrational expressions of rational doctrine. Thus, unlike, say, Voltaire, they were each prepared to defend the continued importance of this nonrational ancient literature.


38. Peter Beer cites Herder's theories of poetry and allegory at some length in his attempt to explain aggadah relatively favorably. See Beer, pp. 285–87. (His citation is drawn from Herder's *Briefe über das Studium der Theologie.*) Chiarini cited the same passage, no doubt drawing it from Beer, whom he quotes copiously, but dismissed it as a defense of aggadah, for the number of aggadot to which Herder's position is relevant "est aussi limité dans le Thalmud que celui des bonnes traditions qui tombent dans la première époque de la Halaca" (Chiarini, vol. 2, p. 53). Krochmal understood the contours of the discussion better than Beer in recognizing the limited relevance of
Herder's work to resolving the problem, and in recognizing the limited contribution his work made to exacerbating the problem.

39. For Heine, the very nature of allegory and what he calls romantic poetry, given that it seeks to grasp the infinite that is beyond humanity's ken, leads to a high level of mystification that ultimately, inevitably, produces the negative effects Krochmal discerned in aggadah. (See his "Romantic School" in idem, *The Romantic School and Other Essays* [New York: Continuum, 1985], p. 9.) For Krochmal, given his traditional leanings, such a position is untenable. The infinite can be grasped in thought, and can be expressed rationally. Communication with the uninitiated led to the allegoristic form, but this did not lead to "abortions of imagination"—as Heine put it—at all. Indeed, in the hands of the sages, aggadah, allegory, is an indispensable and deftly exercised tool in educating the masses and in communicating publicly with each other; only in the hands of fools does it become an embarrassing abortion of the imagination.