Nachman Krochmal

Harris, Jay

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CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

KROCHMAL'S WORK remains of interest for at least three reasons. It represents an important Jewish reaction, both critical and sympathetic, to the intellectual modernization that shook the foundations of traditional society; it provides a different model of coping with the modern age from those that came to prevail in Germany and have dominated the discussion of Jewish modernization; its philosophical sections, including its phenomenology of rabbinic learning, remain an untapped resource in the continuing efforts to achieve a successful Jewish reorientation in the modern age. In addition, it is clear that Krochmal exercised an important influence on conservative Jewish historiography in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Understanding him and the issues he confronted will aid in our understanding of the general conservative attempt to deal with historical criticism.
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*Krochmal and the Modern Intellect*

Throughout this book, I have shown that Krochmal's work must be seen as a reaction to particular philosophical and historiographical approaches that seek to deny legitimacy to rabbinic Judaism. In essence, he countered the triumphalism of the modern, largely Protestant, self-judgment, which saw itself at the pinnacle of human achievement, and, perhaps, even the culmination of world history, with an equally triumphant Jewish self-evaluation that sought to shatter this self-serving construct. In this respect, Krochmal should be seen as part of the general conservative reaction of the early part of the nineteenth century.

What distinguishes him from much of this reaction is that despite his attraction to certain romantic notions, particularly pertaining to the *Volk* and its *Geist*, Krochmal rebelled against recourse to highly romantic, antirational or fideistic postures. Instead, for the most part, he combated modern triumphalism by trying to turn the tables on it — by using the very criteria that ostensibly undergirded it to undermine it. This is most evident in his metaphysics and understanding of Jewish history, in each of which he adopts the criteria of his various disputants to show that their evaluation of Judaism and its place in the history of culture is simply incorrect. In this respect, we should see him as one of the pioneers of a conservative, but essentially modern reorientation to the transitions accompanying the modernization process.

Grappling with Krochmal's polemic may help humanists bring into focus yet once more the extent of the cultural imperialism of modern philosophical and historical thinking.
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For the underlying polemic of Krochmal's *Guide* indicates the way in which a Jewish scholar understood the encounter between philosophical and historical scholarship and Judaism, while the "guide" itself attempts to counter the disdainful one-sidedness of this encounter.

The two giants of modern philosophy prior to Krochmal's death were, of course, Kant and Hegel. Many have written of their attitudes toward Judaism, and I have added my own observations as they became relevant throughout this book. Of importance here is the fact that these negative views of Judaism (and virtually all non-Protestant religions) are embedded in works that pretend to be philosophical studies of religion in general. Yet Kant, in attempting to identify religion within the limits of reason alone, has no reservations about writing a book that is essentially an ethical reduction of Christianity, whose method is to "midrashically" reinterpret the relevant passages of the New Testament in light of his own moral theory. Kant provides no evidence of having studied other religions and their scriptures seriously, other than the Old Testament, of course.¹ He nevertheless feels perfectly justified in locating rational religion within the doctrines of Christianity, as best he can identify them. Similarly, Hegel's philosophy of religion, while far more sophisticated and learned than Kant's, is also constructed as a philosophical defense of Protestant Christianity, which it labels the absolute religion.²

Now, of course, Kant and Hegel are free to develop their understanding of Protestantism as they see fit. Certainly one could not, on the basis of Krochmal's defensive reaction, criticize their theological stance. What Krochmal's work does bring into sharp focus is the enormous self-confidence that
allows them to embed these views within an ostensibly impartial consideration of the universal phenomenon labeled religion, whether understood historically or “within the limits of reason alone.” Krochmal’s work shows how one can adopt their theological and/or ethical criteria and, on the basis of a different set of data and existential needs, arrive at an opposing point of view.

The methods employed in the understanding of human history share similar biases. In the third chapter of this work, I have discussed this in detail. Here I wish to add the following observations. The philosophers of history seek to explain the historical development that led to contemporary Western European culture. The arguments are deductive, and are based on the judgment that theirs is the highest culture humanity has ever known. What is striking here is that such thought is facilely understood as a philosophy of the history of human-kind. Entire civilizations are reduced to their putative contribution to Western culture. It has been claimed that such forays into universal history are not Eurocentric, since the understanding of the emergence of Europe is truly universal in scope, encompassing as it does the vast “oriental” world, and not just the Roman-Germanic civilization. But this simply indicates that men such as Herder and Hegel were not racist, xenophobic maniacs as were some of their contemporaries. They were, however, people quite certain of the superiority of their world to any that history had yet witnessed.

The more liberal scholarly work of the period, then, seems to have been dominated, no less than the conservative, by the mentality that produced Schiller’s famous remark, “die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht.” I do not understand the
adaptation of this remark by Hegel as merely a theodicy, but also as reflecting a position that world history is like a judicial proceeding in which there are winners and losers, innocent and guilty. The criteria on which such judgments are based are tailor-made to suit the judge's biases, just as the criteria for evaluating the various religious traditions were fashioned. In this world court, Protestant scholarship was judge and jury, Protestant/German culture the victorious claimant.

Viewed against this backdrop, Krochmal's work can be seen as a resoundingly defiant response to the scholarly work that preceded him. It represents a clarion call to the Jew to reject the judgment that would doom his culture to oblivion. It was a demand for broader and deeper Judaic knowledge, so that modern Jews would rebel against those who would deny them continued legitimacy. Somewhat paradoxically, the intellectually honest way to coherently achieve this rejection is through a strong commitment to philosophical and historical research. Thus, one is led to acknowledge that, for all its flaws of execution, modern scholarship must change the way Jews see themselves and their tradition. For, stripped of its biases, modern scholarship opened up new avenues to human understanding that could not be ignored. If philological analysis could establish that the book of Qohelet could not be a tenth-century product, it would be sheer obstinacy to claim otherwise—particularly so given that a more recent date served to depict Jewish vitality as that much greater. If Hegel had unlocked the clue to human history and the mystery of human spirit, as Krochmal apparently believed he had, let his work be stripped of its Lutheran apologetic and used to illuminate the sources of Judaism. Thus does Krochmal call on his reader.
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to adapt modern scholarship to interpreting Judaism's essential message, confident that such an adaptation will vindicate the Jewish tradition in the world court.

Krochmal and Modern Judaism

Todd Endelman has complained of the Germanocentric bias of recent histories of modern Judaism, and has tried to redress the balance with his own study of Anglo-Jewry. For all of the merits of his study, by virtue of its focus on a Western Jewry, it, too, deals with issues such as acculturation, religious accommodation and emancipation. Thus, while the story is quite different the themes overlap significantly. In Krochmal's work we find a response to modernity in which none of these issues is truly relevant; it, in turn, sheds important light on the reality of "modernization" in Galicia, and the limits of the haskalah movement there.

While Krochmal was probably the most "acculturated" of his colleagues in the sense that he was fully at home in the world of German culture, the fact is that he did not live within this cultural sphere. He lived in a society in which the surrounding culture was Polish, and there is no evidence of familiarity with it. The cultural world he knew did not overlap with his immediate social environment at all. The same may be said for all of his most important colleagues and students, even if they were far less at home in the world of German learning.

The aspirations of Western Jews to achieve a modern religious orientation was inextricably linked to hopes of acculturation and emancipation. The hopelessness of such aspirations
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in Galicia meant that the desire for religious accommodation would scarcely resemble Western attempts. Krochmal’s work betrays no program for religious accommodation in the sphere of Jewish praxis. All agree—enemies and friends alike—that he was punctilious in his own observance. Further, he defends the importance of halakhah on both national and philosophical-theological grounds. What he and his kindred spirits hoped to accomplish was the intellectual transformation of contemporary Jewry, rabbinate and laity alike. They hoped to stamp out the alleged superstitions of Hasidism, the close-minded dogmatism of the rabbinate, and the philosophical and historical ignorance of the Jewish masses. None of this was to lead to an abandonment of traditional practice, but to a renewed intellectual—indeed, modern—commitment to it.

As far as emancipation goes, I have already indicated that this was scarcely a realistic prospect for Galicia’s Jews. The promise of the Josephine reforms of the 1780s was quickly and cruelly squelched in the subsequent decades. Thus, while some maskilim hoped for government help in eradicating Hasidism and in modernizing their educational system, hopes for full-scale emancipation were rarely articulated in the decades of Krochmal’s productive life. Jewish modernization in Galicia was not shaped by the quest for emancipation as it was elsewhere.

A study of Krochmal’s work cannot neglect his immediate, Jewish social environment. Yet his Guide is unique in providing a picture of the intellectual challenges of modernity and a Jewish response to them that is cut off from identifiable social and political concerns. It is a scholarly response to a scholarly set of challenges. In this respect, it provides us with an

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important picture of the intellectual disorientation wrought by modernity.

If we bring together all of Krochmal's historical studies, it is clear that his response is of two kinds. The first directly challenges certain historical constructs that conflict with traditional self-understanding. The second and more interesting response challenges the philosophical implications of historical thought. Krochmal taxes his ingenuity to neutralize the disorienting effects of historicism without denying the validity of historical research. He acknowledges that the Jewish tradition has unfolded over the course of time, and that it has been affected by the same immanent causality as all other human achievements. Yet he denies that this truly affects the essence of that tradition. The essence of Torah, the essence of Jewish theology exists beyond history; they are absolute. At the same time they must be expressed and experienced through human institutions. Thus, there is no suggestion here that Jews exist beyond history; they live in history, and it is only through a study of history that one can fully appreciate the essence of Judaism (Guide, p. 209). However, that essence, while discernible in history, exists beyond it. It is absolute and thus secures for the Jews as eternal existence.

It is in the context of his battle against relativism that we can best understand the interplay between philosophy and history throughout the work. Historians, qua historians, do not recognize absolutes. They deal with facts (alleged or real), possibilities, assumptions, could-haves, might-haves—that is, contingencies. Philosophers in Krochmal's day, on the other hand, saw it as their business to comprehend the infinite, the absolute, and to understand its relation to the finite.
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—a task that must take account of history to be complete. Making sense of all this is more readily accomplished by someone operating with biases inherited from a Protestant Weltanschauung, or for anyone who can live with an allegedly sublated past. For them, the absolute can be conceived as engaged in a lengthy process of self-realization that is played out over the millennia of human history.

For Krochmal, impressed as he was by the grandeur of this metaphysical vision but devoted nevertheless to Jewish tradition, the business of making sense of all this was trickier. On the metaphysical level, the self-realization drama of the absolute is played out through creation, revelation and the consequent recognition of God as absolute being on the part of Israel. Subsequent history then becomes the stage on which this completed drama's effects may be witnessed; the action, however, has already reached its denouement. On the other hand, on the historical level, now stripped of ultimate importance, events may be reconstructed using the tools of critical research. It is imperative that we know when and how texts and ideas emerged; otherwise our understanding of Judaism would be incomplete. Such reconstructions cannot, however, diminish the absolute nature of the culture whose external manifestations they describe. Thus, history may replace memory, but Judaism remains intact, indeed, enhanced, as a better historical picture serves to more fully illustrate its absolute nature.

Throughout this book, specific examples of this point abound. Here it will be sufficient to rehearse but two of them, for they are central to Krochmal's attempt to historicize without relativizing. In response to the claims of Spinoza—that otherwise
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most unhistorical of thinkers—that the Bible must be read literally and historically, that is, as the product of a time and place, and thus not metaphorically, Krochmal claims that symbolic language is universal and therefore the Bible (and rabbinic documents) must be read as symbolic statements. Furthermore, the nature of symbols and metaphors is itself universal so that the Bible is as accessible today as it was when it was first composed. Indeed, as our base of knowledge grows, the Bible becomes more accessible. Krochmal will historicize the text, acknowledging that it has an original historical locus. More than that, on the basis of historical considerations he will argue for untraditional dates for much of it, albeit not the Pentateuch. He nevertheless refuses to historicize basic human mental structures, for to do so would be to abandon the plausibility of sacred history, and would make the primary texts of Judaism distant and inaccessible.

In his discussion of the history of rabbinic texts, Krochmal describes the historical process that led to their emergence, but denies that the essential contents of these texts were subject to such a process. (This, of course, excludes, specific ordinances designed to deal with a specific set of circumstances; it refers to the interpretations of the Mishnah and the Scriptures that define and determine their practical contours.) To claim otherwise would be to acknowledge that these documents are the result of specific, variegated historical circumstance, making their interpretations and legal prescriptions contingent rather than absolute. As Krochmal saw clearly from contemporary scholarship, such an acknowledgment is tantamount to saying that rabbinic Judaism represented an important cultural achievement in its day, but its day has
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passed, and its laws and values may be rejected. Combating this position is a central goal of the Guide. Thus, history was not the enemy, relativism was. Krochmal’s approach was to argue that we can have the former without the latter.

More than any other issue touched on in the Guide, the disorientation brought on by relativist historicism remains a crucial difficulty for Jews in the modern world. Jewish thinkers in this century, from Franz Rosenzweig to Emil Fackenheim, have continued the struggle to develop a vision of Judaism that is intellectually honest yet insulated from the destructive effects of historicism. I will leave it to others to judge whether their visions are more compelling than Krochmal’s.

The problem is not confined to Jewish “thinkers.” The various modern movements that characterize Judaism in the modern age have also struggled with the issue. It seems to me that were Krochmal alive today he would be tragically disappointed with what has been accomplished. Many, although certainly not all, of the modern Orthodox have taken refuge from the problem in their denial of history as a category relevant to their self-understanding. Already Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888), one of the most significant figures in the emergence of this Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century, insisted that Orthodox tradition admits of no history at all. The entire tradition originated at Sinai.6 There may be a history of the Jews but not a significant history of Judaism. This position has been carried forward into the twentieth century by many of Hirsch’s followers, as well as by Joseph D. Soloveitchik and many of his disciples.7 Krochmal, of course, would be greatly distressed by this unwillingness to
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confront historical consciousness and to adapt Jewish self-understanding to it.

He would, I think, be yet more distressed by the direction of liberal versions of Judaism, which concede too much to history. A Reform Judaism for which every aspect of Jewish culture, save for the monotheistic idea itself, is seen as historically conditioned allows for no absolute and binding demands. In the name of historicism the very connection to history has been severed, and the absolute nature of Jewish spirituality stands unperceived. He would not, I think, judge modern conservatism any less harshly, although he would appear to have the most in common with it. For modern conservatism, too, has failed to develop a response to the challenge of relativism, to compellingly articulate the manner in which Judaism transcends history. Thus, for Krochmal, it too concedes far too much to modernity and modern values, cutting itself off from the absolute nature of traditional Jewish awareness. Maybe Krochmal’s distress should not concern modern Jews; maybe, as Mordecai Kaplan has often insisted, it is a sign of Jewish maturity that Judaism no longer insists on its grasp of absolute truth, such a claim being necessarily a vain delusion. Yet I cannot help but feel that modern Judaism will continue to drift aimlessly or take refuge in fideism if it cannot resolve—for itself—the problem of historical relativism, and self-confidently affirm a transcendent and binding set of principles. This is the challenge Krochmal’s work forces modern Jews to face; whether his solution is compelling is for the reader to judge.

Turning once again to Krochmal’s debt to modern philosophy, we can see that in addition to providing a compelling
metaphysical vision, modern philosophy provided Krochmal with a new branch of hermeneutics with which to unlock the treasures of Judaism. It provided him with the means to read texts, such as Ibn Ezra’s Bible commentary, in a novel way. Using this approach, he could construct a response to modernity that was both daring and yet conservative. Thus, in Krochmal’s vision of Judaism, the fundamental elements of traditional Jewish thought remain: God as an instructor in faith through revelation; the authenticity and antiquity of the oral law; the inspired leadership of the Great Assembly, Pharisees and rabbis; the qualitative distinction between Judaism and all other religions, despite acknowledgment of some common elements; Israel as the light unto the nations; the eternity of Israel. Yet all of these elements are provided with historical and/or philosophical foundations that are quite different from earlier justifications of these essential principles. For Krochmal knew perfectly well that times had changed and the needs of his audience were different. A new philosophically sophisticated justification was needed.

Krochmal’s response to modernity then is quite distinct from that of all others. It is the response of an intellectual looking to ease the path of lesser intellectuals as they confront new ways of viewing the world. It embraces modernity cautiously, but only after it has redirected the course of its most significant intellectual trends, adapting them to a modern reconstruction of Jewish principles. It implicitly recognizes the intellectual foundations of modernity, as they were articulated by the giants of Western, primarily German, thought, as inimical to Jewish survival, and seeks to turn them upside down. He articulates the foundations of modern thought
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drawing from Jewish sources, thereby ensuring Jewish survival.

The Question of Influence

Somewhere toward the end of the nineteenth century, Solomon Schechter wrote, "I may assert with the utmost confidence that there is scarcely a single page in Krochmal's book that did not afterwards give birth to some essay or monograph or even elaborate treatise, though their authors were not always careful about mentioning the source of their inspiration." Yet, in 1945 Gershom Scholem bemoaned the fact that Krochmal's work exercised virtually no influence on other Wissenschaft scholars. How are we to make sense of these two completely opposing positions?

A full response to this question would require treatment of almost all subsequent Jewish scholarship in areas touched by Krochmal's Guide. This, of course, cannot be done here. I can, however, provide some general reflections on the direction of jüdische Wissenschaft after 1851, and thereby explain the conflicting evaluations of Krochmal's place in modern Jewish history.

Much of the distinction between Schechter and Scholem is tied to the different interests of the two scholars. Schechter's concerns are far broader than Scholem's, and take into account, inter alia, the direction of rabbinic scholarship in the nineteenth century. Scholem's concerns are characteristically narrow, and are directed to Krochmal's positive evaluation of Jewish mysticism, a position not shared by most of his colleagues.
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Adopting Schechter’s broader perspective, we must still allow for considerable hyperbole on his part; nevertheless, there can be little doubt that Krochmal’s was among the most influential of voices regarding the history of the rabbinic tradition. His work suited the conservative scholarly temperament, eschewing the hypercritical skepticism of someone like Jost, while at the same time recognizing that traditional claims could not stand as stated before historical scrutiny. He thus developed a historical form of hermeneutics in which traditional claims are always taken seriously, but not literally. In this way he relieved the ancients of the charge that they were speaking self-serving nonsense. More than that, he helped his modern reader bridge the alleged gap between himself and his ancestors—the cause of much of the perplexity of the time—by showing that the ancients were no less capable of serious and systematic theological and legal thinking.

This approach suited conservatives quite well. While Heinrich Graetz’s fourth volume of his Geschichte der Juden, which treated the rabbinic period, came out too soon after Krochmal’s Guide to have been influenced by it, we can see a certain similarity of purpose. Each understood the political needs of the time; each saw the need to treat the rabbis sympathetically, to explain their achievement in terms that made sense in the nineteenth century, and that could serve to justify continued adherence to rabbinic practices. While their specific reconstructions differed, their basic approach overlapped considerably.

The influence of Krochmal’s specific reading of the rabbinic past begins to emerge in Zechariah Fränkel’s Darkhe ha-Mishnah, in which the former’s vision of the Soferim and his
understanding of the *halakhah l’Moshe mi-sinai* are rehearsed and developed. Similarly, Krochmal’s influence on Isaac Hirsh Weiss (1815–1905), Hanokh Albeck and Chaim Tchernowitz are palpable, despite explicit disagreements on particulars. Even David Zvi Hoffmann’s work betrays grappling with, and partial acceptance of, Krochmal’s conception. The list of lesser scholars similarly impressed could go on at some length. Today, to be sure, time has passed his vision by. But seen in the context of the political, scholarly battles of the nineteenth century; seen as the pioneering effort it was; seen in the context of conservative scholarship in general in the nineteenth century, and conservative Rechtswissenschaft in particular, Krochmal’s efforts in constructing a coherent picture of rabbinism are quite impressive.

As Isaac Hirsh Weiss pointed out long ago, Krochmal’s efforts in the philosophical area were to bear less fruit.\(^8\) It seems that Krochmal’s Eastern European students were far less impressed with Idealist metaphysics than was the master. Certainly, his appreciation of Jewish, Neoplatonic mystical sources, central to his metaphysics, was shared by few, and led Scholem to his view that Krochmal had little influence. His reading of Ibn Ezra, while not wholly devoid of effect, was either too difficult, too fragmentary or too tendentious to have exercised broad influence.\(^9\) In general, then, Krochmal’s efforts as philosopher and as historian of Jewish thought were attended to by few. This strikes me as unfortunate, for Krochmal’s reconstruction of the metaphysics he finds implicit in Jewish sources seems to me to be a potential resource in the effort to articulate a compelling Jewish metaphysics, something severely lacking in modern Jewish thought.
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As a biblical scholar, Krochmal's work was simultaneously too timid for modern critics and too radical for traditional scholars to have found broad acceptance. Still, his work gave voice to an approach that had appeal to a segment of conservative scholars from Rapoport, whose early work on Isaiah bears Krochmal's stamp, to Graetz, whose treatment of Psalms and Qohelet represent applications of Krochmal's approach, to Isaac Hirsh Weiss. These scholars all embraced Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and understood the religious stakes in compromising on this point. At the same time, they treated other parts of the Bible in a critical manner, albeit using the tools of modern scholarship in a partisan way.10

The question of Krochmal's influence must go beyond the literary record. Certainly no one doubts the enormous effect Moses Mendelssohn had on modern Judaism. One would be hard pressed, however, to find significant attachment to his conception of Judaism as articulated in Jerusalem. Even the great Biur was to exercise far greater influence on Jews in the East than in Germany. Mendelssohn's importance derives in large measure from the very fact of his existence—the worlds he tied together, the example he set, the attitudes he transmitted. So it is with Nachman Krochmal.

The list of figures who were inspired by him is long. It includes someone like Yehoshua Heshel Schorr, a radical otherwise contemptuous of conservative scholars who, allegedly, compromised on their scholarly claims because of religious attachments. His admiration for Krochmal, however, was undiminished. This may be due to a meeting between the two, which took place early in Schorr's life, that clearly left an impression on the younger man. Whatever the cause of
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Schorr's uncharacteristic admiration for Krochmal, it is clear that the former saw the latter as a source of inspiration.

Similarly, Micha Yosef Berdichevski (1865–1921), in both his pre-Nietzschean and Nietzschean stages, referred to Krochmal as the source of wisdom from which Jewish scholars in the East must draw. He finds in Krochmal an authentic and original Jewish voice. Even when criticizing, Berdichevski is always reserved and respectful—qualities not generally associated with him. 11

The most significant testimony to Krochmal's greatness and importance comes from his contemporaries—the people who knew him and whose lives were changed by this acquaintance. Virtually all who have written on Krochmal's life, from Rapoport to Bloch, Letteris to Weiss, and Rawidowicz most of all, have commented on the effect that Krochmal exercised on those who knew him. He seems to have had the unique quality of being able to discern the talents that people had and to push them to develop them to the fullest. His role as the "Socrates of Galicia" had an enormous impact on the direction of Jewish scholarship in the East, including the research of Rapoport and Zvi Hirsh Chajes.

In bringing together encyclopedic interests with towering learning and scrupulous religious commitment, Krochmal served as an example of a religious figure who could confront the disorienting perplexities of the modern age and emerge with his religious commitment and scholarly integrity intact. His self-imposed, truly Herculean task, was to build anew the historical and philosophical structure of Judaism so as to redirect the course of Jewish modernity. No longer were Jews to be perplexed by modernity because of their ignorance of
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Judaism. The creative power of their minds was to reinterpret Judaism and its history in modern terms, and thereby transform the modern world, forcing it to grapple with the reality of Judaism rather than complacently disregarding it or considering it sublated. That few chose to walk on Krochmal's particular path cannot diminish the power that his example exercised on the scholarly Jews of Eastern Europe. For ultimately, Krochmal's work—his teaching as well as his written legacy—was dedicated to the proposition that Jewish tradition contained within itself the means to combat the dogmatism and materialism that were destroying Jewish life. The religionational pride in this stance was to become a hallmark of much Eastern European culture.

NOTES

1. The ignorance manifest in Kant's claim that reconstructing the grammar of the Hebrew language may not be possible because there is only one book in this language is astonishing. (See Religion, p. 155.) It is quite clear that he, in contrast to Hegel, felt no obligation to educate himself in matters Jewish (a point made by Emil Fackenheim in his Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy [New York: Basic Books, 1973], p. 52 and chapter 3, passim).

2. See part 3 of Hegel's LPR, passim. This tendency is also characteristic of Schleiermacher's On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1958), which also pretends to be an analysis of religious life in general. See speech 5, passim, esp. pp. 241–53; see also Martin Redeker Schleiermacher: Life and Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 50. The essentially Lutheran nature of German Idealism was fully recognized by Jürgen Habermas, who writes, "It remains astonishing how productively central motifs of the philosophy of German Idealism shaped so essentially by Protestantism can be developed in terms of the experience of the Jewish tradition."


4. Cf. Walter Kaufmann’s Hegel: A Reinterpretation (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), p. 261. Hegel’s use of the phrase in his Philosophy of Right, par. 341, supports my understanding. I should point out that for Hegel, the winners are not judged on the basis of “mere might” but rather in terms of “the actualization of the universal mind” (par. 342).

5. Much of this is in accord with the presentation of Edward W. Said’s Orientalism (New York: Vintage, 1978). A more comprehensive and less politically motivated study of Orientalism would include a treatment of the Jews and Judaism in Western scholarship.


7. The absence of any serious consideration of history in Soloveitchik’s main works is palpable. See also the work of Yeshayahu Leibowitz, in which, yet again, the relevance of history is denied.

8. See his memoirs, Zikpronotai (Warsaw: 5655), p. 117.

9. That is was too difficult seems to have been the judgment of Weiss (ibid.). David Herzog, the editor of the Zofnat Pameach, probably the most important commentary on Ibn Ezra’s commentary, remarked that Krochmal’s work was too fragmentary to be of value in understanding Ibn Ezra’s philosophy. See his review of Y. L. Krinsky’s Mekokkeke Yehudah in the Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft, vol. 64 (1910), p. 219, n. 4. That it was tendentious, and represented more of Krochmal’s views than Ibn Ezra’s, is the position of most twentieth-century scholars who have addressed the question. See above, chapter 2, note 28. Rawidowicz insisted that it was more
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influential than generally acknowledged. See his “Rabi Avraham Ibn Ezra b’Ha’arato shel Rabi Nachman Krochmal,” in Rabi Avraham ben Ezra: Kovets Ma’amirim al Toldotav vi-Zirato (Tel Aviv: Zion, 5730), p. 185. Krinsky in the “Karne Or” section of his commentary Mebokeke Yehudah, quotes from Krochmal’s work quite extensively, particularly on Genesis 1:1 and Exodus 3:15, presumably with approbation. Through this work, Krochmal’s reading of Ibn Ezra was brought to the attention of a much larger audience than he would otherwise have had. Whether his views were accepted by Krinsky’s readers I cannot say.
