

## Preface

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*Beniamino Fortis, Ellen Rinner, Lars Tittmar*

The relationship between philosophy and Jewish thought has often been a matter of lively discussion. But despite its long tradition and the variety of positions that have been taken in it, the debate is far from closed and keeps meeting new challenges. So far, research on this topic has mostly been based on historical references, analogies, or contacts among philosophers and Jewish thinkers. The contributors to this volume, however, propose another way to advance the debate: rather than adopting a historical approach, they consider the intersections of philosophy and Jewish thought from a theoretical perspective.

Every essay in this volume represents a contribution to the discussion about how two such different ways of thinking as the philosophical and the Jewish can relate to each other. But while some chapters aim to give insights into the way philosophy affects Jewish thought, others are more focused on the role of Jewish conceptions and motifs in the development of philosophical reasoning. In other words, the essays collected in this volume seek to answer the following complementary questions: What can Jewish thought gain from philosophy? And: What can philosophy learn from Jewish thought?

In both cases an encounter is implied – or better, recalling the term that appears in this volume's subtitle, both cases presuppose an intersection. This, however, can take two opposing trajectories. On the one hand, thinking processes developed in the field of philosophy can be used as keys to reading Jewish phenomena, which are thus reinterpreted in a new light and invested with new philosophical significance. On the other hand, ideas derived from Jewish sources can be thoroughly rethought and reshaped to be then integrated into secular contexts and contribute to the development of philosophical reflections. In short, philosophy can fruitfully affect Jewish thought and this, in turn, can play a significant role in several philosophical traditions. Both aspects are at issue in the following essays, which, from different perspectives, investigate the different modes of intersection.

**Christoph Schmidt's** chapter opens this volume with a thorough inquiry into the relationships between philosophy and Jewish thought in Gershom Scholem's conception. More precisely, Schmidt reads Scholem's investigations into Jewish mysticism against the backdrop of the neo-Kantian methodology that characterizes Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. The interaction between Scholem's understanding of Kabbala and Cassirer's philosophical method allows the Jewish tradition to be interpreted as a plurality of possible responses to the Revelation on Mount Sinai.

The Jewishness of Franz Rosenzweig's philosophy is the main topic in **Benjamin Pollock's** chapter. By examining how Rosenzweig understands, presents, and practices a form of Jewish thinking during the time he spent at the Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus in Frankfurt, Pollock delineates a novel account of what "Jewish thought" can be.

Secular and Jewish hermeneutics are at issue in **Massimo Giuliani's** contribution, which ponders and reevaluates Steven Schwarzschild's critique of Hans-Georg Gadamer's rehabilitation of authority and tradition. Both concepts play a decisive role in Jewish hermeneutics too, which is conceived of as *shalsholet ha-qabbalah* and claims to have divine origin (*Torah min ha-shanmaim*). But while Gadamer rehabilitates authority and tradition *against* the idea of *raison critique*, Schwarzschild recognizes a dialectical relationship between them.

In his first major book *Escape from Freedom* (1941), Erich Fromm analyzes human freedom as essentially dialectical in nature. The reflections developed in this work, moreover, seem to exert a strong influence on Fromm's interpretation of idolatry, expounded in *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966) twenty-five years later. On this basis, **Beniamino Fortis'** article focuses on how a philosophical conception like Fromm's account of freedom provides theoretical guidelines for dealing with a typical issue in Jewish thought: that is, the origin and meaning of idolatry.

The chapters by **Lars Tittmar** and **Mario Cosimo Schmidt** are dedicated to the central role the Jewish ban on images (*Bilderverbot*) plays in the field of critical theory. While Tittmar focuses on the connection between utopian thought and *Bilderverbot*, which allows Walter Benjamin to situate the utopian chance in the present rather than in the future, Schmidt concentrates on the aesthetic implications of the biblical law, analyzing them through a detailed comparison between Adorno's and Benjamin's conceptions.

Despite the worldwide attention that Etty Hillesum's diaries have received since their publication in 1981, little work has been done to date onto examining the influence of Jewish thought on Hillesum's intellectual profile. In her

essay, **Silvia Richter** tries to bridge this gap, by investigating Hillesum's Jewish identity and analyzing the contribution of Jewish sources to her conceptions of God and theodicy.

**Ellen Rinner's** essay proposes a comparative perspective between Aby Warburg's anthropological cultural science and Hans Blumenberg's philosophical anthropology. Warburg, who placed himself and his method of cultural study in the "tradition of German-Jewish intellectuality," is still a largely overlooked influence on Blumenberg's metaphorology. However, the paths of these two eminent figures in the intellectual landscape of pre- and postwar Germany never crossed directly: In 1933, Warburg's Hamburg library was forced into exile, and by the time Blumenberg began his philosophy studies there in 1945, it had already found a permanent home in London. In light of this disrupted tradition, the essay aims to show that a transdisciplinary perspective can reveal a hitherto undiscovered form of afterlife – to use Warburg's term – of Jewish thought.

In his study on Moses Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, **Michael Zank** explores the connection between Jewish thought, philosophy, and its literary form. Rather than addressing questions of genre or style, he examines the broader relationship between philosophical thought, language, and writing – namely, the relation between the appearance of truth in our minds and the linguistic or symbolic forms in which it invariably appears to us. By tracing the reception of the *Guide* through the centuries, he highlights the intrinsic connection between Maimonides' philosophy and the specific literary form it takes, thereby raising the question of its translatability.

To conclude, it is safe to say that, despite the variety of topics covered in this volume, each of them represents a significant theoretical intersection between philosophy and Jewish thought.

