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POLITICS AND CULTURE IN JEWISH STUDIES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

by

Alessandro Guetta

Alessandro Guetta holds a doctorate in religious sciences and is a lecturer at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (the School for Higher Studies in Social Sciences) in Paris. His works include a phenomenological study of Italian Judaism (*La differenza invisibile: itinerario per teste e immagini tra gli ebrei italiani* [Florence: La Giuntina, 1988]) and the forthcoming *Entre Hegel et le Zohar: la philosophie religieuse d'Élie Benamozegh*.

I. Introduction

Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God is by now a commonplace of European intellectual discourse. Far lesser has been the posthumous glory of French scholars and thinkers of the same period, whose concerns were hardly far removed from those of the German philosopher. The crisis of religion was experienced just as intensely by them, and the solutions they proposed to it were often characterized by a tone no less prophetic than that employed by the author of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. But no Heidegger pored over their works, and thus they have not captivated the interest of theorists trying to describe our complex, fragmented, "postmodern" era.

My aim is not merely to acquaint my readers with some forgotten philosophers, as though this were a subject worth delving into for purely academic reasons. Instead, I would urge them to consider the possibility that these thinkers, neglected by contemporary historiography, may be far more interesting than might be expected. I admit that compared with the vitality of German philosophy of the last century, the production of French thinkers may appear to be no more than dusty

scholarship. The situation was already stated brilliantly by their contemporary Joseph Ferrari, in his work *The Salaried Philosophers*: practitioners of philosophy in nineteenth-century France can be seen as wage-earners under the tutelage of eclectic philosopher Victor Cousin (1792-1867); they toiled in the service of an official state culture, as they strove to legitimate the political order and safeguard the precarious equilibrium that had been achieved between Church and State.¹ Moreover, we may fault these philosophers for their prophetic, bombastic style. Nonetheless, the questions they raised and the answers they suggested were of decisive importance.

The pages that follow examine some of these questions and answers as they emerged in a particular discipline: oriental, or more precisely Jewish, studies. In the nineteenth century, to undertake research in that field meant subscribing to specific ideological positions on universalism, freedom, science, progress, the fate of religion, and the separation of humankind into races. The entire set of questions that preoccupied the intellectual world can thus be read within some extremely academic works.

My study lays no claim to exhaustivity. It suggests only one line of inquiry and is based on a limited number of examples, which nonetheless are quite significant.²

II. Universalism

In 1892, James Darmesteter published *The Prophets of Israel*, a series of essays on Judaism, or as he termed it, "Hebraism," by which he meant "Judaism without rituals" [*le judaïsme sans culte*].³ Darmesteter—Jewish by background, secular by training and conviction—had by then achieved brilliant success as a scholar of oriental studies. He

¹Joseph Ferrari, *Les philosophes salariés* (Paris, 1849), new ed. by S. Douailler and P. Vermeren (Paris: Payot, 1983). [Throughout this article, titles and quotations are translated by me, except when a published English version is cited. —Trans.]

²On this subject, see Pertine Simon-Nahum, *La cité investie: la "science du judaïsme" française et la république* (Paris: Cerf, 1992); and Jean Baumgarten and Shmuel Trigano, ed., "La religion objet de science: la Wissenschaft des Judentums," *Parades* 19-20 (1994), pp. 25-327.

³James Darmesteter, *Les prophètes d'Israël* (Paris, 1892), p. 295. On Darmesteter and his elder brother Arsène, see the recent contribution by Yakov Malkiel, "Les frères Darmesteter et l'aube de la philologie française," *Revue des études juives* 153 (1994), pp. 383-401.

had been professor at the École des Hautes Études [School of Advanced Studies] and subsequently occupied the chair of Iranian studies at the Collège de France. His works on Persian religion, such as *Haurvatât et Ameretât* and *Ormuzd et Abritman*, were immediately recognized as authoritative.⁴ His accomplishments included translations of the *Zend Avesta*, the basic text of Mazdaism, into English (at the urging of German-born British philologist Friedrich Max Müller) and French. Along the way, he also produced several essays on English literature, including a volume on Shakespeare as well as critical editions of *Machbeth* and Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

In addition to pursuing his scholarship, Darmesteter was an active participant in the intellectual debate of the last decades of the century, which addressed the crisis in values brought about by the rapid decline of religion and the brilliant triumphs of science. *The Divine Legend*, published by Darmesteter in 1890, speaks lyrically of the hope harbored by the "believing atheist," who experiences the crisis of religion and tries to overcome it: "Thou sufferest, because thou art the future."⁵ His *Prophets of Israel*, coming two years later, proposes specific ways out of the crisis.

The fiery eloquence of these two books contrasts strangely with the sobriety of Darmesteter's scholarly works, in which rigorous argumentation and painstaking philology combine to provide well-articulated overviews of theology. In his writings that debate societal questions, a romantic visionary comes to the fore:

For more than a century now, France and Europe have been seeking a new god and are scouring all points of the horizon in search of good tidings. Good tidings are needed, not only because humankind must have faith, but most of all because it must have rules. Every religion that falters, though it be to the benefit of a better faith, brings morality down with it into the abyss. By uprooting Christianity, the modern conscience has uprooted itself.⁶

Darmesteter noted that science had swept away religious beliefs, all the more easily as the Church had obstinately defended untenable positions without comprehending present-day demands. But science, by its

⁴Darmesteter, *Haurvatât et Ameretât: essai sur la mythologie de l'Avesta* (Paris, 1875); *Ormuzd et Abritman: leurs origines et leur histoire* (Paris, 1877).

⁵Darmesteter, *La légende divine* (Paris, 1890), p. 112.

⁶Darmesteter, *Les prophètes d'Israël*, p. iii.

very nature and own admission, could not respond to the call for ethical values and existential guidelines. Whence the need for a doctrine that acknowledged truth while pursuing goodness and justice.

Darmesteter argued that such a doctrine had already existed for twenty-five centuries, in the form of the teachings of the prophets of Israel:

Their spirit is in the modern soul. Little does it matter that they spoke in the name of a god, Jehovah, whereas the modern age speaks in the name of the human mind; for their Jehovah was nothing but the apotheosis of the human soul, their own conscience projected onto the heavens. They cherished everything we cherish, and none of their ideals ran counter to reason or conscience. . . . They transformed law into a force, thought into a deed before which all deeds falter; by dint of believing in justice, they set it into motion within history.⁷

For Darmesteter, prophetism is not identical with Judaism; nor is it just some other organized religion or priestly vocation. Judaism he saw as a religion based in ritual and doomed to extinction or rigidification. The world, in its quest for a new religion, did not need another ready-made dogmatic system to be consigned someday to the graveyard of history. Because "pure" prophetism sought after truth, Darmesteter conceived of it as allied with science; through its ideal of justice, it had inspired all that was best in Christianity. Having nourished both science and Christianity, prophetism would permit their peaceful coexistence.

Darmesteter's program might seem vague and purely rhetorical, but it partook of a clear project inspired by the ideals of the French revolution: the exaltation of reason, the cult of the republic (as the political instrument best suited for disseminating reason throughout the world) and the accomplishment of the civilizing mission history had assigned to France as the depository of reason and republicanism. (Darmesteter's identification with the destiny of France was so great that he published, under the significant pseudonym of J. D. Lefrançais, a small volume of *Patriotic Readings on French History for Use in Primary Schools*, containing edifying accounts on every French hero from the ancient Gauls through Joan of Arc up to contemporary scientists.⁸) France was to spread the civilization of the future to all humankind, and scientific

⁷Darmesteter, *Les prophètes d'Israël*, p. xv.

⁸J. D. Lefrançais, *Leçons patriotiques sur l'histoire de France à l'usage des écoles primaires* (Paris, 1881).

progress was deemed indissociable from social justice. Paris was the new Jerusalem, holding forth a promise of peace and fulfillment for all.

This universalistic project led to what we today would call pluralism, nourished by the veritable fieldwork undertaken by these scholars, who approached Eastern cultures with an open mind. It is said that Darmesteter felt at home both among Afghan mendicant poets and the last Mazdaist sages. Racism, developing menacingly in Germany in the form of nationalism and antisemitism, was thoroughly criticized by Darmesteter. He warned of the social dangers that would ensue when the notion of "race" was "flung to the masses" and proposed replacing it with that of "tradition," more concrete and intellectually fruitful.⁹ By thus introducing the perspective that would come to characterize cultural anthropology, Darmesteter showed himself well ahead of Ernest Renan, the great historian of religion who set the standards among French orientalists.¹⁰

The philosopher and Hebraist Adolphe Franck echoed Darmesteter's concerns.¹¹ At the height of the colonial enterprise, Franck—despite his thorough involvement in French institutional life—criticized the arrogance of the European conquerors. He argued for appreciation of diversity and intermingling:

The diversity of races, which is impossible to deny, is linked to one of the greatest forces for civilization and constitutes one of the greatest charms of society; the diversity of aptitudes and talents brings harm neither to the moral and intellectual unity of humankind nor—but this is the same thing—to the universality of the laws of reason and conscience.¹²

Darmesteter recalled with great emotion the funeral of Joseph Salvador, author of *Paris, Rome, Jerusalem, or the Religious Question in*

⁹Darmesteter, *Les prophètes d'Israël*, p. 270.

¹⁰In his article "Race et tradition" (*Les prophètes d'Israël*, pp. 247-77), Darmesteter implicitly criticized Renan, who, despite his liberalism, secularism, and opposition to racism, approached the notion of race with a stereotypically Euro- or Aryo-centric vision. To quote Renan: "The Semitic race is to the Indo-European family what a charcoal drawing is to painting: it lacks that superabundance of life which is the condition of perfectibility" (Ernest Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, 4th ed. [Paris, 1863], p. 17).

¹¹For bibliographical information on Adolphe Franck, see Eugène Mannuel's preface to Franck, *Nouvelles études orientales* (Paris, 1896), and Hartwig Derenbourg, *Opuscules d'un arabe* (Paris: Charles Carrington, 1905), pp. 243-56.

¹²Franck, *Études orientales* (Paris, 1861), p. ix.

the Nineteenth Century, who argued for religious conciliation among the three great monotheistic faiths, all the while claiming the right to remain loyal to Judaism.¹³ Salvador's ceremony began in a Protestant church and ended in a Jewish graveyard. Darmesteter experienced the mournful knell of the churchbell as the first chiming to emerge from a truly universal church of biblical Catholicism.

III. The Uses of the Kabbalah

At about the same time, Aimé Pallière, a young Christian who would become a great defender of Jewish spirituality, found himself hearing other churchbells, in Tuscany. Those bells, accompanying the morning prayer of Pallière's master, the Kabbalistic rabbi Élie Benamozegh, symbolized the religious universalism contained in Benamozegh's theology.¹⁴

Quite different from Darmesteter's rootedness in France was Benamozegh's position. This Italian rabbi of Moroccan origin wrote in French to expose a wider public to his thought, founded on the traditional cornerstones of rabbinic and esoteric Judaism. Nonetheless, the conceptions of the two thinkers were quite close; the hoary Kabbalistic ideas inspired a universalism responding to nineteenth-century needs.

Benamozegh (1823-1900) developed his system in several theological treatises and volumes of biblical commentaries, written in Hebrew or Italian. His crowning achievement was *Israel and Humanity*, a long exposition in French of the universalistic potentialities of Judaism, which attempted the thorny task of reconciling Israel's role as the chosen people with the equality of all nations. Preceded in this respect by the German Jewish philosopher Nachman Krochmal (1785-1840), Benamozegh elaborated a theory of the races or "geniuses" of the various peoples. This conception was founded on an old rabbinic idea, which reappears in the Zohar, concerning angels or divine ministers—*sarim*, in Hebrew. Each nation had been assigned to the care of a *sar*, except Israel, who had a direct, unmediated relationship with God.

¹³Joseph Salvador, "in Darmesteter, *Les prophètes d'Israël*, p. 384; Joseph Salvador, *Paris, Rome, Jérusalem, ou la question religieuse au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1860).

¹⁴Aimé Pallière, "Preface to the First Edition" in Élijah [Élie] Benamozegh, *Israel and Humanity*, trans. Maxwell Luria (New York: Paulist, 1994 [orig. French ed. 1914]). [Pallière and Benamozegh are also discussed in Charles Mopsik's contribution to this issue of *Shofar*.—Trans.]

Benamozegh identified the Jewish people as the religious nation par excellence. As such, it was to lead the concert of nations in which each would express itself according to its particular faculties. If we rid this idea of its apologetic aspect, it illustrates the concern with universality and the notion of the guiding people that characterized Darmesteter's writings.

Moreover, Benamozegh shared with his contemporaries across the Alps an enthusiastic faith in the worldwide progress of reason. He went so far as to present the Kabbalah as a perfectly rational system of thought, once he had cleared it of the dust that had settled on it over the course of the centuries. Benamozegh took pains to distinguish the Kabbalah from the obscurantist and superstitious customs of the "*bastardim*, miracle-working rabbis of Russia and Poland."¹⁵ (Salomon Munk, the author of splendid *Miscellanea on Jewish and Arabic Philosophy*, published in 1865, and of a now classic translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, also spoke of the Kabbalah in purely conceptual terms.¹⁶)

From an historical point of view, it is interesting that the immediate source for Benamozegh's universalistic conception was Kabbalistic literature generally and the Zohar in particular. This body of work is considered a peculiarly Jewish legacy, insofar as its secret doctrine was held to have been transmitted to a chosen few. Benamozegh's articulation of unity and plurality is less surprising, however, when we recall how preoccupied Kabbalistic literature is with the contradiction between the unity of God and the multiplicity of *sephiroth*. (A subject of controversy among Kabbalists, *sephiroth* has been given several definitions: divine attributes, emanations, or tools used in creating the world and intervening in it.) During the Renaissance—a period like the nineteenth century in its intense striving to comprehend the Other—the Kabbalah had already been celebrated by eclectic thinkers such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Johannes Reuchlin, and Guillaume Postel, who sought to provide Christianity with a universal basis. We may also consider from this universalistic perspective the messianic movements led by Sabbetai Tzvi and Jacob Frank. The Kabbalistic "heresy" preached by Sabbetai Tzvi, who ultimately converted to Islam, occurred in the

seventeenth century, when religious exclusivism had somewhat diminished and efforts to reconcile the various faiths had begun. Likewise, Frankism in the eighteenth century resulted in conversion to Catholicism on the part of its founder and many of his disciples.

An equally interesting and even more astonishing use of the Kabbalah was made by Adolphe Franck, who was one of the major philosophers and historians of philosophy of the second half of the nineteenth century. A professor of natural law and civil rights at the Collège de France, Franck is often considered an unconditional devotee of Victor Cousin, and a *longa manus* active in the dissemination of Cousin's brand of eclectic thought.¹⁷ *The Dictionary of Philosophical Sciences*, edited by Franck, is a work of great clarity and abundant information, but it has most often been read as simply echoing Cousin's spiritualist, secularist but nonetheless conservative academic thought.¹⁸ However, a summary examination of some of the more significant entries in the *Dictionary* as well as some other works by Franck makes it clear that they are guided by an interpretation of human history in terms of freedom and progress. Basing himself in a dense historical framework informed by recent orientalist scholarship, Franck sketched the evolution that had led humankind from authoritarian rule to its present state of autonomy. In intellectual history, this evolution corresponded to the transition from positive religion to philosophy—a philosophy that unlike Hegelianism would be free of all-encompassing ambitions, since it could accept the idea of infinity and accommodate the necessity for religion as a fruitful and irrepressible tendency.

Within this evolutionary framework, the Kabbalah played a significant role, as we see in Franck's *The Kabbalah, or the Religious Philosophy of the Hebrews*.¹⁹ This study—certainly dated with respect to its corpus of references but still interesting for its clarity and profound insights—attempted to describe the Kabbalah as a system of thought whose coherence (as Franck's title makes clear) permitted a quasi-rational synthesis to be drawn from it. Franck also set himself the task of as-

¹⁷"The disciple was no more than the voice of his master" is how Franck is described in Jean-Pierre Cotten, *Autour de Victor Cousin: une politique de la philosophie* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1992), p. 185.

¹⁸Benamozegh, *Israel and Humanity*, p. 78.

¹⁹Salomon Munk, *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe* (orig. ed. 1865; repr. New York: Arno, 1980), pp. 275–91; Maimonides, *Le guide des égarés*, trans. Munk, 3 vols. (Paris, 1856–63).

signing to the Kabbalah its rightful place within the orderly system whereby human thought manifested itself.

Different minds, wrote Franck, react in varying manner to the religious impulse, perceived at its origin as a revelation. Those unwilling to yield any ground to individual initiative push the principle of authority to its ultimate consequences. They bridge the gaps in the sacred text, which cannot answer all questions, by means of infallible interpretations of supposedly divine origin. Others, trusting only themselves and their own understanding, examine dogma rationally with the tool of autonomous reflection, and thus engage in philosophy. Between these two extremes lies a third class of thinkers, who do not accept the authority of tradition but dare not employ reason alone. These are the mystics, whose souls are too elevated to accept a single meaning for the text, but who cannot believe that humankind can entirely forego revelation. Among mystics, Kabbalists occupy an important place. In fact, their merit is dual:

Whatever may be the value of the doctrines contained in them [the Zohar and the *Sepher Yetzirah*], they will always be worthy of preservation as a monument to the long and patient effort of intellectual liberty in the heart of a people and a time when religious despotism made the most use of its power. But this is not the only claim to our interest. As we have already said, and as we shall soon be convinced, the system they contain is, in itself, by reason of its origin and the influence it exercised, a very important factor in the history of human thought.²⁰

Franck saw great achievements among the Kabbalists. Inspired by the theology of the ancient Persians, they transformed dualism into a doctrine that was essentially unitary, even though it bordered on pantheism; and, more notably, they replaced mythology with metaphysics.

Franck's research in this area not only buttressed the rapidly expanding field of oriental studies, but also represented his contribution as a Jew to the legitimization of his culture of origin. In addition, his work was a manifesto of the belief in liberty and progress applied to an unexpected domain. Though voicing reservations, Franck brought legitimacy to an esoteric body of knowledge that had been regarded with suspicion by many practitioners of the contemporary *Wissenschaft*

des Judéuntums.²¹ His desire was to show that the force of an ideal lay in its imperviousness to efforts made by authorities of any kind to stifle it.²²

IV. The Uses of Judaism

"If one word has often reverberated these days throughout the controversy among schools and parties, it is *pantheism*," wrote Émile Saisset in the entry he contributed to the *Dictionary of Philosophical Sciences*.²³ In France, the controversy surrounding pantheism had taken a less purely theological form than in Germany. There, the rebirth of interest in Spinoza had been one of the central developments in intellectual life at the beginning of the century. The accusation of pantheism—which had become identified with atheism—cost Fichte his prestigious university post at Berlin.

The ethical, or even political, implications of pantheism were foremost in France and were oriented around Victor Cousin's philosophical doctrines.²⁴ Cousin suffered attacks both from radical thinkers, such as Joseph Ferrari,²⁵ and from Catholic ones, such as the Abbé Henri Maret and the Italian Vincenzo Gioberti. The Catholic philosophers accused

²⁰ *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, "the science of Judaism," was the movement among German Jewish scholars of the last century to provide a philological and historical framework for the study of Judaism. It is dealt with at length in Sylvie Anne Goldberg's article in this issue of *Shofar*. [Translator's note.]

²¹ This idea inspired Franck with a very particular solution to the *vexata quaestio* of the antiquity of the Zohar: the decision to "sacrifice grammar and history to the interest of an exalted idealism"—made when the letter of the law was assigned utmost theological importance—reveals that a secret doctrine had already existed in the Talmudic era (*The Kabbalah, or the Religious Philosophy of the Hebrews*, p. 74).

²² Émile Saisset, "Pantheisme," in Franck, ed., *Dictionnaire des sciences philosophiques* (Paris, 1849), vol. 4, p. 521 (emphasis in the original).

²³ For a comparison of romanticism in France and Germany, see Georges Gusdorf, *Le romantisme* (Paris: Payot, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 625–56.

²⁴ Joseph Ferrari—whose university career was abruptly cut short by the monarchy instituted in July 1830—portrayed a fictitious dialog between Victor Cousin (whose lines are quotations from his philosophical works) and an "intelligent courtier." The "philosopher" says: "Multiplicity does not alter the unity within me, but rather causes the fecundity of my unity to appear. The same is true of God." To which the "courtier" replies: "Surely you jest. Let me say it again: we need a God who does not put us on bad terms with the Church" (Ferrari, *Les philosophes salués*, p. 133).

²⁵ Franck, *The Kabbalah, or the Religious Philosophy of the Hebrews*, p. 120.

him of professing a disguised pantheism, ultimately leading either to atheism or to a vague and feeble religious sentimentalism, perfect for a society that had distanced itself from organized religion.²⁶

On the other hand, a Cousinian like Adolphe Franck saw a great danger in pantheism, as regarded both its theory and its recent manifestations in France, inspired by the Hindu doctrines contained in Schopenhauer's writings. Tending towards passivity and the annulment of will, pantheism ran counter to a model of society based on the free and active participation of its members.

Franck's philosophy had immediate, practical implications. The philosopher was not to consume himself in sterile discussions, but should intervene in human affairs. He had no right to withdraw into "that form of egoism called abstraction."²⁷ Approaching Franck's philosophical works nowadays, we may feel they are situated at the point where philosophy dissolves into politics. The movement he so ardently desired, leading from the ivory tower into the world, "that is to say, into the general commerce of ideas,"²⁸ bore witness to a nation in full expansion, whose intellectuals felt a decisive responsibility to their own society and the world at large.

Franck's lecture on January 19, 1889, to the Society of Jewish Studies, on "Oriental Pantheism and Hebrew Monotheism," is full of stirring moments. Pantheism, he argued, begets passivity by releasing human actors from all responsibility. On the one hand, if nature and thus life are mere appearances, the slightest value ought not to be attached to them. On the other hand, if God is everything, He causes all our actions, and thus it matters not at all whether we engage in good or evil. Such a doctrine engenders pessimism, "which weakens all resolve, undermines the finest instincts, and leaves us totally indifferent to the choice between freedom and the most unspeakable autocracy."²⁹ Franck explained that monotheism, the sworn enemy of pantheism, was first the religious doctrine of the Hebrews before becoming that of the

Christians and the most enlightened peoples. The idea of a free, creative God, the giver of human freedom and understanding, was the great Jewish contribution to world civilization.

Franck was at one and the same time an active member of the French Jewish community and an intellectual profoundly engaged in the cultural and institutional life of his country. His crucial initiatives included setting up programs for teaching moral values in secondary schools and publishing a primer on the subject that met with great success.³⁰ Franck's address to the Society for Jewish Studies shows him to be a moderate, liberal republican, whose sympathies lay far from the extremes of communism and autocracy, both of which he felt would put an end to individual freedom. He waxed indignant as he spoke of the racist tendencies manifesting themselves in Germany:

At the precise moment when we are preparing the centenary of 1789—the revolution that proclaimed freedom of conscience and shall always demand the respect of the world so long as it escapes usurpation by Jacobins, communards and autocrats—we see the rebirth of antisemitic passions, whose partisans claim that the Hebrew people, throughout its long existence, has contributed nothing to civilization, to the moral and religious advancement of humankind. How dare they?³¹

A philosophy that saw as its finest outcome ethical and political action thus helped to forge an image of Judaism as a practical, or positive religion, contrasting with Christianity, more marked by dogmatism and spontaneous outbursts of spirituality. Darmesteter maintained that Jews were less affected by the nineteenth-century crisis of values, because the simple principles of their religion resisted radical transformations of thought and exposed to doubt only specific religious forms and "poetic legends." Christians, having formed a body of doctrine on all questions that the Bible did not address directly, suffered more dramatically from the collapse of institutions under the weight of free inquiry.

Contrarily, the thrust of Benamozegh's writing and teaching was that Judaism was not solely the religion of the Bible—noble, simple and unencumbered with theology. According to Benamozegh, a religion could not have possibly lived for so long without satisfying the intellectual needs of its followers, for practice without theory was as absurd as blind faith. The theory of Judaism, said Benamozegh, was the Kabbalah,

²⁶Henri Marcé, *Essai sur le panthéisme dans les sociétés modernes*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1840); Vincenzo Gioberti, *Considerations sur les doctrines religieuses de M. Victor Cousin* (Rheims, 1844 [orig. Italian ed. 1840]).

²⁷Franck, "Sur les devoirs de la philosophie," introduction to *De la certitude* (Paris, 1847), p. xxvii.

²⁸Franck, "Sur les devoirs de la philosophie," p. xxxviii.

²⁹Franck, *Nouvelles études orientales*, p. 376.

³⁰Franck, *Éléments de morale*, 1st ed. (Paris, 1868).

³¹Franck, *Nouvelles études orientales*, p. 378.

which provides a thoroughgoing foundation and justification for the impressive system of Jewish ritual. Nonetheless, like Franck and partially like Darmester, he found within Judaism qualities that enhanced its ethical and political relevance and made it viable for organized social life. Christianity—emphasizing the hereafter and imposing a morality that demanded far too much—had suffered its worst defeats when it sought to dictate the rules of political conduct. Because it was too lofty a doctrine, it had produced the cruel contradiction known as a state religion:

Now, what is a state religion? It is conscience treated as a citizen, the spirit regimented as the body is, faith subjected to tormentors, violence placed in the service of a religion charitable by its very nature. A morality that had preached only love but not respect—a subordinate but infinitely more necessary virtue—and had wanted to be more than just, was condemned to be violent.³²

Franck, though insisting on the Biblical character of Judaism, said much the same thing. The noble outbursts of the Christian soul were not always adapted to the demands of social life, whereas the strength of Judaism lay precisely in its practicality and spirit of moderation.³³ Franck's works suggest an image of Christianity as 'feminine' in nature, respectable but incapable of providing a model for society; Judaism was 'virile,' of a constructive, non-violent virility tempered by a sense of moderation. Thus it offered the very image of the ideal citizen of a non-extremist republic.

V. Particular and Universal History

A comparison—necessarily rapid—between the enterprise of these nineteenth-century men and that of recent thinkers may be quite instructive. Not only the limits but also the qualities of the earlier scholars become apparent when they are examined, for example, in the light of the two most remarkable twentieth-century students of the Kabbalah, Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel.

Thanks notably to Scholem's work, the Kabbalah has been brought out of the isolation to which it had been consigned by the Enlighten-

ment-minded thinkers of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Scholem's philological and historical studies are of such significance that for half a century the scholarly world and a large portion of the cultivated reading public virtually identified the Kabbalah with him, and accorded it tremendous prestige. What ultimately led the German-Israeli scholar to devote his energies to this neglected material was his personal quest for the clandestine source that sustained the Jewish people throughout its long and tragic history.³⁴ This aspect of Scholem's itinery differentiates him from the German-language scholars of previous generations, who he felt had vitiated the energies of the Jewish people and ultimately furthered assimilation.

Despite the accusation of "comparatist mania" that has been leveled against him,³⁵ Scholem's interest was most of all directed to the Jewish world. That factor, along with the prudence natural to a scholar, explains why Scholem, despite his voluminous work on the Kabbalah, offered relatively few overarching judgments and why his contextualizations generally remained within the Jewish frame of reference.

The merit of Moshe Idel, whom the intellectual community has hastily identified as Scholem's successor, resides principally in his widening the historical perspective. Idel has brought to prominence aspects of the Kabbalah—such as magic, the Golem, and neoplatonic tendencies—whose importance was perhaps underestimated by Scholem. Idel's great erudition has allowed him to suggest heretofore unsuspected networks of influence, including sources remote in time and place as well as non-Jewish cultural references. Only rarely does Idel venture onto the domain of general philosophy, preferring instead to remain faithful to his role as an historian who avoids grand syntheses and searches laboriously for atoms of meaning that have combined in various ways throughout history.³⁶

Nineteenth-century scholars had fewer scruples in this regard. It is true that despite the crisis of values, Europeans then still sought after

³²Benamozegh, *Morale juive et morale chrétienne: examen comparatif suivi de quelques réflexions sur les principes de l'islamisme* (Paris, 1867), p. 21.

³³Franck, *Nouvelles études orientales*, p. 384.

³⁴See Muki Tsur, "With Gershom Scholem: An Interview," trans. Moshe Kohn, in Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, ed. Werner J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken, 1976), p. 19.

³⁵See Charles Mopsik and Éric Smilievitch, "Observations sur l'œuvre de Gershom Scholem," *Pardes* 1 (1985), pp. 7–30.

³⁶See, for example, Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

"grand narratives,"³⁷ visions of the world and of history that could offer keys to universal understanding. We have become accustomed to judge such visions as authoritarian, artificial, and simplistic. Nonetheless, the intellectuals we have considered in the course of our all too rapid review were not crushed under the weight of the overarching principles that guided their research. The set of concerns that preoccupied them did not undermine the seriousness of their work or their tolerant outlook on other cultures, and their emphasis on the final outcome of history did not prevent their appreciation of the uniqueness of each moment within it. Their eclecticism was far more felicitous than the dull and indistinct intermingling most often associated with that label. It was such a grand vision that inspired Franck as he penned the last page of his work on the Kabbalah. Despite his "conclusion that the materials of the Kabbalah were drawn from the theology of the ancient Persians," Franck added:

we believe we have demonstrated at the same time that this loan did not destroy the originality of the Kabbalah. . . . This seems to us to be the general law of the human mind. No absolute originality, but also no servile imitation from one nation and from one century to another. Whatever we may do to gain unlimited independence in the domain of moral science, the chain of tradition will always show itself in our boldest discoveries; and no matter how motionless we sometimes appear to be under the sway of tradition and authority, our intelligence paves the way, our ideas change with the very power that weighs them down, and a revolution is about to break loose.³⁸

True, these scholars often made things easy on themselves, neglecting significant aspects of history which did not fit into their general design. For example, they either ignored altogether, or considered no more than superficially, the entire Kabbalistic production starting with Moshe Cordovero in the fifteenth century, which they considered to be an aberrant deviation from the semi-metaphysical profundity of the Zohar. Even a Kabbalist like Benamozegh avoided these texts, when he

³⁷See the reflections on "grand narratives" in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 15, 31–41. [Translator's note.]

³⁸Franck, *The Kabbalah, or the Religious Philosophy of the Hebrews*, p. 307. Munk, too, was concerned with Jewry's contribution to the world. Though a specialist in Jewish philosophy, and personally much more of a traditionalist than Franck, he nonetheless acknowledged without hesitation the limited importance of his area for European civilization as a whole (Munk, *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe*, p. 510).

wished to inscribe his doctrine within global philosophical debate. But the determination of these nineteenth-century scholars to install a particular people's fate within the grand design of what they called "general history" demands that we give their work the value it deserves. It was a search for meaning, laden with a heavy agenda but nonetheless open-minded. Its purview coincided with that of humankind as a whole.

—Translated by Alan Astro