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Jewishness in Philosophy

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The articles collected in this section of the *RUDN Journal of Philosophy* introduce specific aspects of the thoughts of Moses Mendelssohn, Salomon Maimon, Franz Rosenzweig, Simone Weil and Jacques Derrida. The contributions also deal, although indirectly, with the broader question of the status of Jewish philosophy.

As known, the expression “Jewish philosophy” was used as a historiographic category in 1847 by Salomon Munk in his article “Juifs (Philosophie chez les)” for the *Dictionnaire des Sciences Philosophiques*, published under the direction of Adolphe Franck. Aware of the problematic nature of the expression [1. P. 366], Munk proposed it again in his book *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe* (1857—1859), intending to indicate with it only the “Jewish scholasticism” that in medieval civilization used Greek conceptualism to interpret the religious tradition, thus reconciling faith and reason.

However, since the nineteenth century, philosophical self-legitimacy has been one of the forms through which Judaism, and especially German Judaism, sought to realise its own cultural emancipation and integration into society. The *Judenfrage* (“Jewish question”), i.e. the fundamental question of identity in Jewish

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self-consciousness — “the question of the meaning of Judaism for the Jews”, to use the words of Martin Buber [2. P. 11] —, provided a philosophical translation of some of the main ideas that belonged to the Jewish tradition and way of thinking, thereby placing them in dialogue with the prevailing categories of Greek-Christian culture. The results of this were multiple and sometimes divergent (in addition to assimilation/translation and mutual enrichment/convergence, there were also forms of rejection/conflict), but were united by the intention to compare and possibly combine the West and the East — in other words, to bring together Athens, a metonymy for “Greek thought” and therefore for philosophy as such, and Jerusalem, the symbol of Jewish continuity.

From a historiographical point of view, a first reconstruction of this issue is at the same time, according to Leon Roth, “the last product in the direct line of the authentic Judaeo-German ‘Sciences of Judaism’ [*Wissenschaft des Judentums*]” [3. P. 3]. Such a reconstruction was provided by Julius Guttman in his fundamental book programmatically entitled *Die Philosophie des Judentums* (1933), which was not accidentally translated into English, also referring to the extended version in Hebrew, with the plural title *Philosophies of Judaism*. “The Jewish people” — Guttman writes — “received philosophy from outside sources, and the history of Jewish philosophy is a history of the successive absorptions of foreign ideas which were then transformed and adapted according to specific Jewish points of view” [4. P. 3]. These are philosophies of Judaism — let us add — in the twofold sense of the subjective and objective genitive, by which Judaism is both the subject and the object of speculation.

Without claiming to give an exhaustive answer to this complex issue, for which there is no shortage of authoritative literature [among others, see 5], we can, by way of example, point to the position of Paul W. Franks, who prefers to speak not about Jewish philosophy, but about Jewishness in philosophy, which, in his opinion, brings great clarity to the phenomenon of Jewish philosophy itself. “First,” — he notes — “it is not necessary that any Jew — self-identifying or other-identified — be involved. Second, the very factors that render a philosophy susceptible to Jewish construal may also render it susceptible to *Christian* construal. For Christianity also involves divine unity, law, and messianism, and there are also Christian syntheses of Aristotelianism and Neo-Platonism, indigenous Christian theosophical traditions, and even Christian versions of Kabbalah. Much of what has been said here could also help to explain the possibility of Christian post-Kantianism. Third, the Jewishness of a philosophy does not entail any positive relationship to the practice of Judaism” [6. P. 68—69].

The essays in this section of the *RUDN Journal of Philosophy* offer a complex image of Jewish philosophy and how it interprets the difference and at the same time the connection between Athens and Jerusalem. They are primarily aimed at placing the specific problems that they address — the concept of religious pluralism, the Kabbalah, the religions of the Far East, the connection between study and prayer, the notion of the Other — in the context of the relation that the philosophers under discussion had with their *Zeitgeist* (“spirit of the age”), be it the

Enlightenment (for Mendelssohn and Maimon), German Orientalism (for Rosenzweig), modernity (for Mendelssohn, Rosenzweig, Levinas and Weil) and even postmodernism (for Derrida). Weil and Derrida do not formally belong to Jewish philosophy, but have repeatedly dealt with the cultural legacy of Judaism. On the whole, the Jewishness' contribution to philosophical reflection is quite obvious — in some cases this contribution was very fruitful and, in some respects, can still be considered relevant.

Ludmila E. Kryshtop (RUDN University) focuses on Mendelssohn's latest works, *Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum* (1783) and *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes* (1785), to show how, for the philosopher, the recognition of three fundamental truths — the existence of God, Divine providence and immortality of the soul — is the core of natural religion and the basis for peaceful coexistence, but without the need to abandon a specific religious doctrine in favour of a universal religion (deism, natural religion or authentic religion) — a fundamental difference compared to other thinkers of the Enlightenment. This is a very rationalist point of view in which, on the one hand, Mendelssohn almost equates Judaism with the religion of reason and, on the other hand, he keeps revelation clearly separate as its historical component; there is also a happy conjunction of the particular and the universal, where diversity is inevitable and not at all contrary to the Enlightenment idea of humanity. The basis of this diversity is found by Kryshtop in the theory of knowledge proposed by Mendelssohn, who, following Hume, thinks that the actual existence of represented things is guaranteed inductively and probabilistically by the sensations and by the comparison of manifold subjective appearances, which is made possible by language as a means of communication.

If, in the context of Judaism, Mendelssohn's Enlightenment condemned him to be opposed by Eastern orthodox circles and to be soon forgotten by Western reformers — despite the fact that the latter fell under its strong influence in their first generation — the relevance of the religious pluralism he advocated is obvious in relation to human rights, both at the philosophical and at the political level.

Even more confusing and tragic was the fate of another Jewish philosopher, a contemporary of Mendelssohn and Kant, namely Salomon Maimon. Throughout his life and work, he demonstrated the impossible possibility of unity in difference and tried to achieve it, belonging neither to orthodox Judaism, despite never leaving the soil of Judaism and Jewry, nor to the intellectual community of Enlightened Germany, although his apology of reason surpassed that of Kant himself. Maimon consistently sought to unite philosophy and Kabbalah, reason and the Jewish faith [cf., for example, 7]. Therefore, even the smallest details are very important to the formation and development of Maimon's views, from his first works written in Hebrew to his later fundamental studies of the Kantian system of transcendental philosophy. And if the latter have received fairly comprehensive and diversified consideration, the same cannot be said for Maimon's early works.

The article “Kabbalah and Philosophy in the Early Works of Salomon Maimon” by Uri Gershowitz (Saint Petersburg State University) is remarkable even

just for trying to fill this gap in the analysis of this Jewish thinker. But it is also noteworthy for another important reason: the desire to consider more accurately Maimon's early work, which is undoubtedly important to understand the whole philosophy of this thinker. In our opinion, much attention should be given to the main conclusion drawn by Gershowitz: in the early period Maimon considered Kabbalah as a higher level of wisdom than philosophy, but believed it was impossible to ascend to it without mastering the latter. An equally interesting claim made by Gershowitz based on the analysis of Maimon's early works — mainly *Hesheq Shelomo* (1778) — is that many rationalistic ideas of Maimon's late philosophy (e.g. the doctrine of actual infinity) also arose long before he became acquainted with Descartes', Leibniz's or Kant's philosophical systems.

The contribution of another German-Jewish thinker, Franz Rosenzweig, to the philosophy of religion and inter-religious dialogue is not as easy to evaluate. Indeed, the fruitful interaction that he indicates in *Der Stern der Erlösung* (1921) between the *religious experience* of Jews and Christians is beyond doubt: if the “fire” of eternal truth burns in Judaism, Christianity follows its “rays”; Israel, to whom the *Torah* was given, has “eternal life”, while *ekklēsia*, which is gathered around Christ, testifies to faith along the “eternal path” [cf. 8. P. 317 ff., 357 ff.]. Islam, by contrast, is a “parody” [9. P. 131] of Judaism and Christianity, and precisely for this reason it is a *religion*; moreover, “things go badly for the favorites of modernity, the ‘spiritual religions of the Far East’” [9. P. 120] — as Rosenzweig writes in the article “Das neue Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum ‘Stern der Erlösung’”, which appeared in *Der Morgen* in 1925.

In his essay, Hanoch Ben Pazi (Bar Ilan University) tries to show in a positive way the role played, on the one hand, by Indian Hinduism and Buddhism and, on the other hand, by Chinese Confucianism and Taoism in Rosenzweig's book, which was influenced — according to Ben Pazi — by Buber's *Ekstatische Konfessionen* (1909, 2nd ed. 1921). This interpretation raises many philological doubts, since it is clear from Rosenzweig's correspondence that he only read Buber's work in November 1922 [cf. 10. Vol. 2. P. 842]. Despite this, though, the theoretical thesis is stimulating, linking *Der Stern der Erlösung* to German Orientalism and mostly showing how China and India, in Rosenzweig's opinion, express what in the dynamics between nothing and being is ultimately ineffable, i.e. the mysticism of self-conquest and self-concealment, respectively. It follows — as Ben Pazi notes several times — that “the god heads of China and India are immense edifices built from the blocks of ancestral times; like monoliths, they still tower up to this day in the cults of the ‘primitives’” [8. P. 43]. It is important to keep in mind that for him these should not be seen as a primitive form of religion, but as the highest form of spiritual religion.

However, we have to point out that, unlike Ben Pazi, Luca Bertolino quoted elsewhere [11. P. 69—70] that same excerpt to argue that for Rosenzweig it is indeed this ‘primitiveness’ that dooms India and China to inconsistent religiosity, whose figures “take flight [...] into the dense fogs of abstraction” [8. P. 43]: in the Indian and Chinese religious traditions, the voice of no god is heard (to such an

extent that they represent a model for all kinds of atheism), the world is not seen, and the Self is eluded [cf. 8. P. 45—46, 68, 84—85]. In this sense, Rosenzweig claims that they are axiologically inferior to other religions.

Rosenzweig's criticism of the totalizing and totalitarian metaphysics that characterises modernity is instead indisputable. In his essay, Aleksandr I. Pigalev (Volgograd State University) emphasises not only the opposition of the author of *Der Stern der Erlösung* to the dominance of the philosophical *logos*, but also the refusal that Rosenzweig expresses in *Hegel und der Staat* (1920) regarding the universalizing power of world history. In this respect, Judaism is an insulated particularity based on the commonality of blood, but at the same time it participates in the universality of eternal life: as a "cultural nation" — to use here the category proposed in 1908 by Friedrich Meinecke [12. P. 3] — it presents a type of identity which, according to Pigalev, is comparable to that of the modern national state.

Turning directly to Rosenzweig and going beyond him, Levinas escapes from metaphysical imperialism through the notion of the Other, which resists the appropriation of the I and makes us think about identity in relational and not ontological terms. Levinas' rejection of essentialism, by the virtue of which the Other is a face and ethics becomes the first philosophy, finds completion — this is one of Pigalev's theses — in Derrida's thought. The deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence, in fact, is an acknowledgement of the inseparability of identity and difference: it is therefore necessary to blur the identity and grasp the *différance*, i.e. the systematic play of the traces of difference. This leads to anti-representationalism and anti-essentialism, where *in the beginning is difference* in itself and from itself, where the boundaries between the I and the Other are always porous, and where there is neither a pure and simple Jewish identity nor a pure and simple Greek logocentrism.

Thus we come back to Athens and Jerusalem, which can be visited in the following pages along a path that crosses modernity and postmodernity and shows various ways of interaction between the universal and the particular. Along the way, issues of political philosophy, philosophy of religion, epistemology, ontology, and ethics are touched upon. Most of all, there are crossroads going in opposite directions, revealing the feature of Judaism that Judith Butler rightly called, though in a socio-political key and wishing to put forward a criticism of Zionism, "the disquiet of ambivalence" [13. P. 53]. Jewish philosophy, in this sense, teaches how to fruitfully populate the borderland between the two cities.

Now, if we use the relationship between the two cities to evaluate Simone Weil's work, it may seem that this direction of analysis is not only erroneous, but also impossible in principle. Her life was so vigorous and energetic, so bright, short yet filled with many abrupt changes, that any categorization risks being a gross simplification, if not a vulgarization. Nevertheless, we dare say that the deep root of this French woman's controversial actions and provocative thoughts was a combination of the suffering of the Jewish people embedded in her genetic code and the suffering of Christ found in her historical fate. Levinas, although criticizing her preference for the New Testament over the Hebrew Bible, admitted that Weil

“lived like a saint and bore the sufferings of the world” [14. P. 133]. It is no coincidence that Levinas was attracted by Weil’s work, because it gave a voice to that Other who was unrecognized, oppressed, humiliated, insulted and rejected; and this idea would become fundamental to all European anti-totalitarian thinking.

Finally, in this regard, let’s come to the article “Simone Weil’s ‘Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God’: A Comment” by W. John Morgan (Cardiff University). It is devoted to the analysis of a short but informative essay by the French thinker, which reveals the necessary connection between school education and religious upbringing. The Russian language makes it possible to read symbolically the concept of “education” (*obrazovanie*) through the religious concept of “form (image) of God” (*obraz*) and to understand any education, including the school one, as the process of forming the image of God in a student. Weil, in her essay, addresses this element of education as attention, insisting on the need to develop the students’ attention to school subjects. Such a careful attitude, which removes the distinction between necessary-unnecessary, important-unimportant, significant-insignificant, in her opinion has the spiritual meaning of the divine presence in every little thing in life and, even more so, helps the believer to heed the depth and power of prayer. Weil’s insight into the undoubted connection between seemingly unrelated phenomena such as school education and prayer to God is astounding. Morgan rightly underlines the importance and relevance of Weil’s idea of cultivating in schoolchildren the ability to pay deep and penetrating attention, which in the modern world has already become almost a ‘spiritual rarity’.

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