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RESPONSE TO CRITICS

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Before responding to the diverse and fascinating contributions of the three symposiasts, I want to express my gratitude to T. Ryan Byerly and the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* for arranging this symposium. My thanks also to the illustrious symposiasts themselves for giving me so much food for thought and for engaging so thoroughly with my work.

RESPONSE TO GERICKE

DRAFT

Jaco Gericke notes that he and I "come from very different backgrounds." Coming from very different backgrounds, in and of itself, needn't be an obstacle to fruitful dialogue. Indeed, it's my fervent hope that *The Principles of Judaism* will be of interest to people of multiple faiths, and of none. But I concede that if the background assumptions of two people are sufficiently at odds with one another, and if two people aren't able to agree upon a single set of background assumptions to function as the "common ground" for a conversation, even if only for the sake of the conversation itself, then significant and long-lasting dialogue can (sadly) prove to be impossible.[1] Is that the sort of chasm that stands between us?

Gericke seems to find something objectionable about a methodology which he describes as follows:

> The reader may not pursue lines of questioning, the answers to which would suggest Orthodox Judaism and its principles are themselves untrue; 2) the reader must assume what the author says is true unless the author can be shown to put forward an argument or idea in conflict with the first law; 3) the reader can assume their own point of view and are by implication invited to debate the points as long as what they have to say does not violate the first and second laws.

If Gericke is criticizing a thinker, unwilling to have his or her fundamental assumptions questioned, then I'm in full agreement with him. That thinker is shirking a crucial epistemic obligation. I hope that I'm not guilty of any such fault. I don't assume, in my book, that Orthodox Judaism is true. That's a debate I'm interested in having. It would require patient and thorough analysis of every argument one could level both for and against Orthodox Judaism. I'm entirely open to that project, but it isn't the project of this book.

If, by contrast, Gericke is suggesting that there is no utility in pursuing a philosophical investigation to discover what might follow from certain assumptions, and — in the execution of that investigation — provisionally ruling out of order any objections to the assumptions themselves, then I disagree entirely.

Moreover, it would be difficult to assess the case for or against Orthodox Judaism until we have a sufficiently robust understanding of the truth-evaluable claims upon which it must stand or fall. My project, in this book, was to discover what those claims might be. That project requires something like the methodology that Gericke describes, but not because of a fundamentalist close-mindedness.

It's perfectly legitimate to pursue Euclidean geometry, for example, without questioning its axioms, to see where it leads, so long as, beyond the execution of that project, one is open to the possibility that those axioms are false. By analogy: it's perfectly legitimate for someone to assume that Orthodox Judaism is true (whatever exactly that might mean), and then to investigate what might follow from that assump-

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1 I am here alluding to Robert Stalnaker's notion of a conversational common ground (Stalnaker, 2002).

tion, so long as — beyond the execution of this project — one is open to the possibility that Orthodox Judaism is false (whatever exactly that might mean).

Gericke characterizes analytic theology as a "safe space" in which theists can play at philosophy without being challenged. I disagree. Analytic theology is just an extension of the collaborative project of analytic philosophy, *writ large*, which seems to be interested, of late, in exploring, and fleshing out, various competing metaphysical pictures of the world. Accordingly, when I read an article by David Lewis, I don't criticize him for his unquestioning Humeanism. Rather, I recognize that he's making a contribution to fleshing out what a Humean philosophy would have to look like. We can then take it or leave it, depending upon our assessment of what it can achieve, and how likely we think its foundational assumptions are to be true.

To be worthwhile, an exploratory project of the type I envisage — be it an exploration of Euclidean Geometry, Humeanism, or Orthodox Judaism — must have foundational assumptions that are, at least, somewhat plausible to begin with. We don't see any worth in exploring the philosophical ramifications of assuming that the tooth-fairy is real. And perhaps that Gericke's underlying contention. Orthodox Judaism is more like belief in the tooth-fairy than it is like Humeanism.

A passing acquaintance with the history of the ancient near east, and with Second Temple Judaism in particular (and Gericke has much more than a passing acquaintance) is sufficient, you might think, for knowing that the assumptions that Orthodox Judaism would require to stand it up are without any merit whatsoever. Indeed, to talk about Orthodox Judaism as an intellectual spiritual movement reaching back in time to its Rabbinic founders, or even further back, to the revelation at Sinai, is already to make an assumption laughable to anyone who knows the relevant history; the assumption that there is some sort of "ship" called Orthodoxy:

> sailing through history, fending off heresy and ultimately manned by a captain and crew who have always been on the same page as to where they come from, what they are doing, what the ship needs to sail and where they are headed.

Only historical naivety could allow for such a thought to take root. But I don't need to make any essentialist assumptions about a historically extended Orthodoxy of thought in the Jewish world. All I assumed, in the writing of my book, is that the messy process of evolving and competing pictures, or forms of life, that vie for the allegiance of the Jewish people over time, is a process that is, in ways I describe in the book, touched by the Divine. This is all that Orthodox Judaism actually requires. It requires no historical naivety, unless one argues that theism itself is inherently naïve, nor does it require an essentialism about doctrinal purity over time, so much as an essentialism about the identity of a national community over time. Controversial, but surely not to be dismissed summarily.

It's hard to avoid the conclusion that the assumption that Gericke really finds to be outlandish, or the source of ensuing outlandishness, is nothing more (nor less) that the assumption of the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and loving God. Now, I fully concede that if that assumption is dropped, then the system I'm trying to construct, along with its "purported solutions," its "ad hoc hypotheses", its "appeals to authority", and its assorted "error theories constructed as to why it all does not convince others" will almost certainly appear "too disingenuous to be convincing." But if one *is* willing to assume the existence of the God that Gericke rejects, things will look very different.

If the assumption of such a God is so outlandish as to be unworthy of philosophical consideration to begin with; so outlandish as to be comparable to belief in the tooth-fairy. I don't think that it is. If Gericke thinks otherwise, it's not clear to me that that we have enough of a common ground to hold a meaningful conversation on these topics. There really is a chasm between us.

I do have a work, forthcoming (Lebens, 2022), in which I try to lay out my reasons for thinking theism to be plausible, but Gericke may dismiss such work as "apologetics." Damned if you do, and damned if you don't!

I'm grateful to Gericke for his sincere engagement with my work, and for the congenial, witty, and erudite spirit in which he raised his objections. I'm sorry for the chasm that divides us, though I recog-

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nize I have much to learn from his scholarship in those areas upon which we can find a workable common ground.

RESPONSE TO VERBIN

Nehama Verbin takes me to be much more dogmatic than I actually am. To some extent, the fault must be my own, since she isn't the first to record such a reaction. In an otherwise complimentary review, Jonathan Sarna wrote that "even those who reject Lebens's Orthodox triumphalism will be fascinated by his analytic approach and insightfulness" (Sarna, 2021, p. 1093). I certainly didn't intend to adopt a triumphalist tone, and thus I'm grateful to Verbin for providing me with the opportunity to clarify my position.

Verbin cites the following passage as "the most painful component" of my book, for its bombastic exclusivism:

> The claim that Orthodox Judaism is the only legitimate heir to the religious covenant sealed at Sinai is, on the surface of things, an integral part of Orthodoxy itself. So far as this is the case, Orthodoxy cannot truly regard non-Orthodox Judaism as Judaism. Rather, it can regard these movements as Jewish—culturally, socially, and nationally. In that spirit, this work of Orthodox theology is called *The Principles of Judaism* without qualification…
>
> (Lebens, 2020, p. 1)

But Verbin glosses over a number of crucial qualifications in the very words she cites. First, I say that Orthodoxy's claim to be the sole legitimate heir to the covenant is only, *on the surface of things*, an integral part of Orthodoxy itself. And yet, as I'll try to make clear in what follows, much of the *rest* of the book is dedicated to showing that this claim doesn't stand up to scrutiny and will not remain in any plausible Orthodox theology, once the founding principles of that theology have been worked out.

Next, I qualify the claim that Orthodoxy cannot regard other Jewish movements as legitimate expressions of Judaism. I qualify it as being true *only so far as* the previous claim about Orthodoxy's sole legitimacy is true. Since the book comes to the conclusion that the claim about Orthodoxy's sole legitimacy cannot be a final commitment of Orthodox Judaism, it follows that the book comes to the conclusion that other forms of Judaism cannot be ruled out in the way that Orthodox folk-theology might think.

Having said that, Verbin is right to point to my unapologetic title. Instead of calling my book, *The Principles of Orthodox Judaism*, I had the audacity to call it *The Principles of Judaism*. I stand by that title, even though (as we shall see) much of the book seeks to attenuate the very spirit that gave rise to it, but I do so only in the name of honest and open debate. Let other theologians write books that disagree as to what the principles of Judaism should be. Let Reform and Conservative theologians write their own systematic theologies. If they call their books, "The Principles of Judaism," I'll have no complaint. Instead, I will regard it, to quote the Mishnaic idiom, as an argument for the sake of heaven. Such arguments can and should be held without venom, triumphalism, or hurt feelings.

But, as I hope to demonstrate, I think that Verbin is quite wrong to conclude from the way in which I title my book, and from a number of quotations in which she overlooks my qualifications, that my Orthodoxy provides me "with the basis for discarding other forms of Judaism as culturally, socially or nationally Jewish but nevertheless, as religiously un-Jewish." Despite appearances to the contrary, that misrepresents my thoughts. To the extent that it's my fault that readers have taken my words to be triumphalist, exclusivist, or bombastically dogmatic, I owe them an apology.

In actual fact, one of the more subversive goals of my book was to challenge, from within Orthodoxy itself, and under the very title that I gave my book, any claim to sole legitimacy or exclusivity. It was also among my subversive aims to challenge the racist and right-wing politics with which Orthodoxy is all too often associated in Israel (an association to which Verbin alludes in a footnote). Let me now explain the ways in which I sought to establish these somewhat subversive goals.

First: I tried to demonstrate that the very sources that Orthodoxy respects as most authoritative give rise to a puzzle about the nature of revelation (this is the topic of chapter 6). I then go on to argue that

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the best way to resolve this puzzle is to adopt a model of revelation according to which revelation is an ongoing historical process (this is the topic of chapter 7). As I say on the very first page of the book, what emerges from the most plausible solution to this puzzle is a view according to which:

> Orthodoxy can only coherently claim that the warrant of Sinai flows today most *forcefully* in the direction of Orthodoxy. But this is neither to say that Orthodoxy has a monopoly on religious truth, nor is it to say that Orthodoxy has no religious lessons to learn from other Jewish movements.

Verbin notes how I deny that Orthodoxy has a monopoly on religious truth, but because she overlooked the qualifications in the words that she'd already cited, she could see no way of making sense of my making this claim. So, I'll try to explain it better.

On the model of cumulative revelation that I present, it's true that Orthodox communities can claim to receive the lion's share of contemporary warrant from Sinai. Nevertheless, there are two details of this model of revelation that completely go against standard folk-theology in the Orthodox community, even though the model of revelation that I develop is rooted in texts that those communities venerate. The two details are these:

1. Revelation is a cultural process that takes place within the Jewish people. It is influenced by movements outside of the Jewish people, but it is most centrally influenced by movements within it, including non-Orthodox movements. Indeed, to the extent that feminism has made (and continues to make) inroads into the Orthodox world, it could be argued that it has done so because of the influence of Reform and Conservative Judaism over Orthodoxy (and by feminism from the outside-world over those Jewish movements). Moreover, to the extent that feminism itself has come to be (or is coming to be) central to the revealed Torah, as that Torah continues to unfold, it turns out that Reform and Conservative Judaism have been key vehicles in the process of ongoing revelation.
2. Revelation is never complete. It therefore follows that whatever rituals and laws currently characterize Orthodox Judaism, stand to be superseded, as does Orthodox Judaism itself, since no word is the final word in a process that goes on forever (or, at least, until the eschaton — whichever is sooner!). Accordingly, by its own lights, contemporary Orthodoxy cannot be the final word on God's will.

I accept that these claims are subtle, so perhaps it isn't clear to people outside of the Orthodox world, just how revolutionary these two claims are. Given these claims, the most that I can say for Orthodox Judaism today, basing myself only on source material that it venerates, is the claim that "the warrant of Sinai flows most *forcefully* today in the direction of Orthodoxy" (Lebens, 2020, p. 187). Verbin notes my "non-dichotomous" terminology here, but she dismisses it. Instead, she claims that "it is crystal-clear that for him, an abyss separates "Orthodox Judaism" from all the other Judaisms."

There is certainly just such an abyss in contemporary Orthodox folk-theology, but it is that very abyss that I have tried to render, in my book, into something more like a continuum. It still might seem like an affront to non-Orthodox movements for them to be told that they receive less warrant from Sinai than do the Orthodox communities. But to that I would say two things: (1) it's legitimate for a Reform Jew to tell me that she thinks that Reform Judaism is closer to the truth than Orthodox Judaism. When the roles are reversed, there might be a social obligation to dress one's words with a greater degree of care and respect because of the political dominance of Orthodox Judaism in some geo-political contexts, but with that caveat in place, I don't recognize the vice of which I'm accused; and (2) it would be unfortunate for non-Orthodox readers of this book not to recognize its subversive subtext, and the extent to which I've tried to move Orthodoxy on from its more chauvinistic, dogmatic, and exclusivist folk-theology.

It would likewise be a shame to ignore the way in which my book seeks to undermine any exclusivist or xenophobic reading of the election of the Jewish people (Lebens, 2020, p. 138); or the ways in which I seek to place a concern for social justice, ecology, and a distinctively progressive politics at the heart of its conception of the commandments (Ibid., pp. 206–208). Moreover, one shouldn't ignore the final passage

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of the book, in which I argue that more than adherence to any principles of faith, Judaism calls for, as its most fundamental demand, humility, compassion, kindness, and the loving embrace of the stranger (Ibid., pp. 293–297). In these ways and more, my book seeks to move Orthodoxy away from some of the very undesirable traits with which it's been associated in recent years, especially in Israel. To brand it as dogmatic Orthodox triumphalism is, I think, to ignore a central subtext of the book.

In the next part of her contribution, Verbin tries to pin a *reductio* on me by demonstrating that the great Maimonides, somewhat absurdly, wouldn't count as Orthodox on my account.

In response, let me note the following: the most ambitious claim that I make about the conjunction of my principles is that "a good case" can be made for their necessity (Lebens, 2020, p. 275). I probably shouldn't have said even that much. As Paul Franks recognizes, in his contribution to this symposium, my considered and explicit position is much more modest.

The only modal claim I officially endorse about my principles is that they are *jointly sufficient* for rational commitment to an Orthodox Jewish life (Ibid., p. 198). Failure to have faith in my three principles is not therefore, by my lights, sufficient for failing to live up to the cognitive demands of Orthodox Judaism. And thus, even if Verbin *can* demonstrate that Maimonides would reject one or more of my principles, it will not follow, by my lights, that Maimonides fails to be Orthodox. That's the short response.

Having said that, it's not at all clear to me that Maimonides, or even her example of Yeshayahu Leibowitz, would fall foul of my principles. Leibowitz may well have abhorred my entire project. For him, as Verbin rightly notes, it was conformity of practice rather than conformity of belief that really functioned as the glue that bound the Jewish people together. The search for definitive doctrine would be anathema to him.

But did Leibowitz believe that God was the creator of the universe? It seems that he was neither comfortable affirming this claim nor denying it. All he was willing to infer from the first verse of the Bible, for example, was that the world is something wholly distinct from God (Leibowitz, 1988, p. 13). But this reluctance to embrace the first of my principles more full-heartedly stems from his underlying apophaticism, which he inherited from Maimonides. So when — in what follows this detour through Leibowitz — I relate to Maimonidean apophaticism, I hope to establish a very real sense in which both Leibowitz *and* Maimonides might be able to embrace my first principle.

Did Leibowitz believe my second principle, that Jewish law binds us because it is the manifestation of God's will? He certainly seemed to. He claims that the only religiously legitimate reason to wear phylacteries, for example, is to comply with "the will of God, who commanded the wearing of phylacteries" (Leibowitz, 1992, p. 20).

Did Leibowitz believe in some doctrine of Divine providence, however minimal, and some notion of messianism, even as a regulative ideal that is never actualised? It seems to me that he did.[2] Therefore it's far from clear that Leibowitz, however much he may have disliked my project, fell short of having faith in my three principles!

To motivate her skeptical reading of Maimonides, and to demonstrate her case that Maimonides would have denied my three principles, Verbin has to rely upon a popular, but to my mind wholly unsatisfactory and revisionary distinction between: Maimonides-the-author-of-*The-Guide-for-the-Perplexed* (i.e., the "real" Maimonides) on the one hand, and both Maimonides-the-author-of-the-*Mishna-Torah* and Maimonides-the-author-of-the-*Commentary-to-the-Mishna,* on the other. In those two works, Maimonides seems explicitly committed to God's being the creator of the world, to His being the source of revelation, and to His being involved in providential governance of the universe resulting in the coming of the Messiah.[3] If we're forced to make Verbin's disassociation, then perhaps I should concede that two

2 See the famous video in which Leibowitz avers that the Messiah *will* come, but that anybody who ever thinks that he *has* come, is a heretic. In other words, messianism was a regulative ideal for Leibowitz. But one to which he nonetheless subscribed (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz-QMDPW5RM).

3 See the introduction to his commentary to the tenth chapter of Tractate Sanhedrin in his *Commentary to the Mishna*, and read *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* in his *Mishna Torah*.

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of the three Maimonideses have faith in my principles, and that one of them didn't. Will the real Maimonides please stand up?

In order to demonstrate that the author of *The Guide* would have rejected my principles, Verbin points to his apophaticism, which leads him to deny that God stands in any relation to the world. How can a God who doesn't stand in relation to the world be its creator, its legislator, and its redeemer? Verbin is right that the author of *The Guide*, like Leibowitz, would deny that God stands in any relation to the world. But, given the very words she cites from *The Guide*, it's clear that the negation in question is metalinguistic. Maimonides (like Leibowitz) isn't denying, of some set of relations, that God stands in any of them to the world. Instead, he's saying something deeper. He's saying that the very attempt to predicate a relation of God, and — by parity of reason — any attempt to negate a relational-predicate of God, results in some sort of ill-formed nonsense.

In my book, I suggest that Maimonides might be able to relate to some of his own theological pronouncements as a species of illuminating falsehood. I now think that Verbin is right to criticize me for this way of putting things. After all, we're not really dealing with falsehood here, according to Maimonides, but *nonsense*. In fact, Verbin is in good company, noticing this infelicity in my dealing with apophaticism (Hewitt, 2020, p. 50). Consequently, I accept that I have more thinking to do on this subject — thinking about the difference between falsehood and nonsense, and thinking more about this illusive notion of illumination, or Wittgenstein's notion of *showing* as opposed to *saying*. On the other hand, it's not clear to me that there can't be illuminating nonsense, in addition to illuminating falsehood. Moreover, for Wittgenstein, the category of nonsense anyway overlaps with the category of falsehood, since — according to Wittgenstein — any proposition that is necessarily false is also nonsensical (see, for example, *Tractatus* 4.461).

But what Verbin crucially, and perhaps conveniently ignores, is how Maimonides (and to some extent — if only by extension — Leibowitz) arrives at his apophaticism. As I document, if only very briefly, in the first chapter of my book, Maimonides endorses a cosmological argument for the existence of God; an argument according to which God is the uncaused cause of everything else. While making that argument, he ends up saying quite a bit about God. Only later in the dialectic does Maimonides recognize that for a being to play the role that the cosmological argument gives to it, that being will have to be beyond the reach of predicates. Ironically, even the predicates that the cosmological argument seems to use itself — such as *creator* or *cause* — get ruled out.

If we take his apophaticism at his word, then we undermine the very arguments that led Maimonides to his apophaticism to begin with. For that reason, I suggested, in my book, that he would have room for the notion of more and less illuminating falsehoods about God — or, as I now recognise I should have put it, more and less illuminating *nonsense* about God. It is for the same reason that, even if we come to know God more and more by negating more and more predicates of Him, there might still be room for something like philosophical theology, so long as it doesn't take itself to be uncovering any final truths, so much as becoming ever more verisimilar; or so long as it takes itself as an ever improving stream of nonsense converging in infinity upon truth. Perhaps this is what the other Maimonides was doing, in his *Mishna Torah* and his *Commentary to the Mishna*.

And thus, I can say two things in response to Verbin's *reductio*. (1) My principles are nowhere endorsed as necessary conditions for Orthodox Judaism. Accordingly, if Maimonides doesn't have faith in them, it doesn't follow — even by my lights — that he should thereby be disqualified of his Orthodox credentials. Furthermore (2), the evidence that Maimonides *didn't* have faith in my three principles as, at the very least, some sort of illuminating nonsense, or as manifesting a high degree of verisimilitude, is far from straightforward or clear.

In the final section of her contribution, Verbin turns to her own understanding of religious language, inspired by the later Wittgenstein. I have a lot of sympathy for the underlying sensibility that her account of religious language displays. In my account of religiosity, in the final chapter of the book, I make the claim that propositional content is only one small part of what religiosity includes. Equally if not more

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central to the religious life, I claim, is the life of the imagination which must fully engage with the stories, imagery, and symbolic landscape of a religious faith.

Philosophy of religion has got a lot wrong in recent decades, by focusing almost exclusively on the content of religious beliefs, in order to assess whether that content is true or false (Does God exist? Was Jesus the Messiah? Is there an afterlife? Etc.). I think that noncognitive accounts of religious language can serve as an important corrective, forcing us to focus on the rich layers of religious life that are totally ignored by a myopic focus on the content and truth-value of religious belief. But the corrective goes too far, I think.

Movingly, Verbin asks:

> Did those (righteous, hungry and forsaken ones) who uttered [religious] words in the Ghetto have a positive cognitive attitude toward them? Is the person who sang, "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah" in the transport to Treblinka best understood as having a "positive cognitive attitude" toward "divine providence", and the coming of the Messiah?

I think it would terribly reductive to say that all that they were expressing was a positive cognitive attitude. But I think it would be equally reductive to claim, in addition to all of the ineffable feelings and hopes that they were expressing, that they had no positive cognitive attitude that informed their unquenchable faith in God.

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RESPONSE TO FRANKS

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Out of Paul Franks' contribution, I extract two key claims to which I want to respond.

The first claim is that my book manifests a certain sort of irony. It is an attempt to bring Jewish philosophy, kicking and screaming, into the analytic age. And yet, as Franks understands it, the metaphysics that I end up associating with Orthodox Judaism, turns out to be nothing new. In fact, it turns out to be a pretty standard form of German idealism. And thus, I haven't been able to escape from the clutches of continental philosophy — the traditional nemesis of analytic philosophy.

The second claim is that I misrepresent the theological problem to which the Lurianic doctrine of *tzimtzum* was supposed to be the solution and that I misconstrue the solution. One of the causes of this alleged misrepresentation is my fixation with the account of the doctrine put forward by Rabbi Hayyim Vital in his book, of 1573, *Eytz Chayim*. As far as Franks was concerned, this was a strange focus, since:

> Israel Sarug's version of Lurianic kabbalah, not Hayyim Vital's, was widely promulgated in Europe… The first published account of Tzimtzum appeared in Shabbetai Sheftel Horowitz, *Shefa Tal* in 1612, drawing on Sarugian formulations, and the first work insisting on a non-literal interpretation was by Sarug's student, Abraham Cohen Herrera, in *Puerte del Cielo*… While the Hebrew version of Herrera's book was influential among kabbalists and Hasidic thinkers, the Latin translation was known to European philosophers in general, and — directly or indirectly… — to post-Kantian philosophers in particular… I am not sure why Lebens focuses only on a text by Vital rather than the far more extensive — and far more philosophically engaged — texts by Sarug and his followers.

As I explain in the second part of my book, I relate to revelation as a process that occurs, primarily *within* the Jewish people and its evolving canon of texts. However influential Rabbis Sarug and Herrera may have been over Jews and Gentiles alike, it would be hard to argue, I think, that internally, in the evolving literature of the communities of God-fearing Jews, Rabbi Sarug was anywhere near as central to the reception of Lurianic *Kabala* as was Rabbi Vital.

It is Rabbi Vital, and not Rabbis Sarug or Herrera, who is cited repeatedly and centrally by both the *Tanya* and *Nefesh HaChayim*, the two most popular works of mystical Jewish thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (respectively). What emerges from this discussion is a sense that an objective intellectual history is more central to Franks' concern than to mine, and that a sensitivity to the evolving and often resolutely ahistorical *reception* of texts and ideas *within* the study halls and synagogues of committed Jewry is more central to mine.

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More substantively, Franks is concerned that I have misdiagnosed the philosophical problem to which *tzimtzum* was supposed to be the solution. Let's take the central passage in which Rabbi Vital presents the doctrine of *tztimtzum*:

> You should know that before the emanations were emanated and the creations created, a most supreme, simple light filled the whole of existence. There was no vacant place, no aspect of empty space or void, but everything was filled by that simple, infinite light... When it arose in His pure will to create worlds and to emit emanations, to bring out the perfection of His actions, His names, and His attributes — for this was the reason that the worlds were created ... — then Eyn-Sof contracted itself at its midpoint, in the exact centre of its light. And after He contracted that light and withdrew away from that mid-point to the sides surrounding it, it left a vacant space — an empty, hollow void ...
>
> (Vital, 1999, p. 13)

Drawing from work that I co-authored with Tyron Goldschmidt, I took Rabbi Vital to be presenting something like the following problem: God's perfection somehow leaves no logical space for the creation of a universe outside of Him. We called this the "really real problem of creation" (Goldschmidt & Lebens, 2020; Lebens, 2020, p. 83). There are various ways in which God's perfection could give rise to this problem, but I leave that to the side for now. Franks thinks that our account of the problem is inaccurate. To see to the heart of what's really going on, we must pay attention to the reason that Rabbi Vital provides for God to create the world. It was, "to bring out the perfection of His actions, His names, and His attributes," or, as Rabbi Vital had put it a few pages earlier, God created the world in order:

> to be complete in all of His deeds and His powers, and all of His names of greatness, perfection and honor. If He had not brought forth His deeds and His powers, He could not have been called complete, so to speak, either in His actions or in His names or in His attributes.
>
> (Ibid., p. 3)

God creates the world to arrive at some sort of fulfilment or completion. Franks then adds an unstated assumption:

> This fulfilment or completion can occur only if a process is initiated that creates the possibility of these perfections not only being exercised but being *recognised* as exercised.

This recognition requirement has two aspects: (a) the recognition has to come from a being who is distinct from the Eyn-Sof; but (b) the recognition would only be worthwhile if this other being, "in some respect also participates in divine freedom and, to this extent, is not wholly other than Eyn-Sof." And thus, the real problem, for which *tzimtzum* was the response, had more to do with God's making room for another who was both sufficiently distinct from Him to grant Him recognition, but sufficiently connected to Him to render such recognition worthwhile.

Presented in this way, this central problem of Lurianic Kabala becomes a clear precursor to the problem of "reciprocal recognition explored by Fichte, Hegel and other post-Kantians." But here, I think that Franks might be too heavily influenced by the reception of these Kabbalistic texts in non-Jewish philosophy than by their reception in the world of the Jewish faith communities. I merely note that the text that we've cited, from Rabbi Vital, alludes to completion and fulfilment, but it doesn't allude to *recognition*.[4] That is a notion that Franks has smuggled in from elsewhere. To my mind, talk of God's names coming into fruition seems to have more in common with Ibn Arabi's doctrine of the actualization of God's names than it has to do with the need for reciprocal recognition.[5]

It might not be relevant to Franks that in popular Jewish texts right up until today, the central problem for which *tzimtzum* is suggested as the answer really is a problem to do with God taking up too much room for creation to be possible.[6] Goldschmidt and I were trying to make sense of *that* problem, as it is popularly

4 Unless we read into the notion that God is called by a name, the requirement that He be called by another.
5 See (Elmore, 2001)
6 I could point to any number of popular Jewish texts that present the problem in these terms. One example, chosen pretty much at random, is: (Sacks, 2005, p. 74).

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understood. Is it an accurate portrayal of the problem in Jewish intellectual history? I am certain that Franks is better qualified than I am to answer that question. But, as I've mentioned already, for principled reasons, I'm more interested in ideas and concepts as they have been, and continue to be, received in the Jewish tradition. This fact leaves me relatively unmoved by Franks' critique of my treatment of the philosophical problems that give rise to *tzimtzum*.

Moreover, the problem of recognition — whether it bothered Rabbi Vital or not — doesn't seem to be half as pressing, philosophically, as the set of problems that Goldschmidt and I develop. In addition to my interest in how ideas have been and continue to be received in the Jewish world, I'm also interested in the philosophical and theological issues raised by those ideas. The fact that our "really real problem of creation" is actually a problem in need of a response matters more to me than various questions raised by the objective study of intellectual history (important and instructive though that study may be).

In his analysis of my actual account of non-literal *tzimtzum*, Franks commits me to the general claim that "non-literally X happened" entails that X did not happen, and that, instead, an illusion of X happened or is happening. In actual fact, I don't make that general claim at all. I'm quite aware that it's non-literally true, for example, that no man is an island. This non-literal truth doesn't interfere with the fact that literally no man is an island. And thus, I'm perfectly aware that "non-literally X" does not entail "not-X." I only made the much more limited claim that those who endorse the doctrine of non-literal *tzimtzum* tend to deny that *tzimtzum* literally happened, and affirm that some sort of illusion of *tzimtzum* happened in its place. This wasn't intended as a general claim about how non-literal locutions work, or about how these thinkers regarded metaphor in general. I would argue that my claim can be seen clearly in many central texts, especially in the Hassidic tradition. I quote one central example, also cited in my book:

> [E]ven the earth and that which is below it are completely nonexistent and empty from the perspective of the Holy One, blessed be He . . . [W]ith his attribute of Gevurah [restraint] and Tzimtzum, he hides and conceals the life-force which flows into the heavens and the earth, so that they and all their hosts should appear as if they were independently existing entities. The Tzimtzum and concealment is, however, only from the perspective of the lower realms, but from the perspective of the Holy One, blessed be He, everything before Him is considered actually as naught…
>
> (Tanya., II:6)

The language of concealment, and therefore illusion, and the claim that in some sense or other *tzimtzum* did not occur, are right there on the surface of the text, and of many others. What I've sought to do here, is to respond to Franks' criticisms concerning my presentation of the doctrine of *tzimtzum* and its background. Much more interestingly, I think, is the clash of meta-philosophical priorities that emerges from this discussion.

I lament the fact that a great deal of analytic philosophy of religion operates in a vacuum of knowledge regarding the history of religions and philosophy. In my work, by contrast, I have tried to produce something that is historically aware. But despite my efforts, I am not as accomplished an historian (nor as accomplished a philosopher) as Paul Franks. Had I had Franks, or his encyclopaedic knowledge of Jewish and Western intellectual history, on hand in the writing of this book, I know that I would have written a better work. Having said that, the philosophical aim of this book was to articulate a set of claims that would:

> … seek to draw as much as it can from every movement of the faithful, within the Jewish tradition, from the medieval rationalists, to the ancient mystics, and the Hassidim, reconciling all of these different strata, as far as is possible, into a cohesive whole.
>
> (Lebens, 2020, p. 221)

The aim was:

> … to articulate principles of Judaism that carve a path of best fit among all of these different and often conflicting schools of thought. This way of proceeding is inspired by the thought that, through an ongoing

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> process, to which all of the varied schools of Jewish thought contribute, something heavenly is unfolding—such is the claim that emerges from the second principle [a principle regarding the nature of revelation].
>
> (Ibid.)

My hope is that these considerations inoculate me somewhat from the concerns that Franks raises with my treatment of *tzimtzum*.

Now for the supposed irony of my German idealism. I present Hassidic idealism as something like an extension of Berkeleyean idealism. According to Franks, this was a misstep. In actual fact, Hassidic idealism, even as I present it in my book, has more in common with Kant and post-Kantian forms of idealism. In fact, the way that I save Berkeleyan idealism from the clutches of various Kantian and post-Kantian critiques is to appeal to something "entirely absent from Berkeleyan idealism: a commitment to God the storyteller."

Now of course, nobody denies that Berkeley was committed to the existence of God. But Berkeley's God isn't a storyteller and, on Berkeley's view, we are not merely "characters in a narrative imagined by God." But, once you endorse the God-as-storyteller-hypothesis, you can make sense of the "distinction between the way things are for us *within* the divine narrative, and the way things are for God outside that narrative." If that's the move that I'm making, Frank contends, then I'm basically a Kantian!

> [O]nce the distinction between the two standpoints is introduced, it becomes clear that Hasidic Idealism is not a version of Berkeleyan idealism at all. It is a version of transcendental or speculative idealism, fundamental to which is the distinction between our human perspective and the way things are in themselves for a divine intellect.

Here, let me say that Franks is probably right. I have to confess that despite valiant efforts to remedy my lack of knowledge of both Kant and German Idealism, I have always found the primary sources to be almost impenetrable. I find the language of truth-relative to a fiction, and the notion of levels of reality, one grounded on the other, to be easier to grasp than the language I often hear from German Idealists. If Franks tells me that what I've arrived at is a version of Kantian or transcendental or speculative idealism, then I'll take his word for it.

My love for and allegiance to analytical philosophy has never been accompanied by partisan disregard for Continental philosophy, or a desire to police the distinction between the two schools. I could try and defend Michael Rea's schematic characterisation of analytic philosophy, upon which I passingly relied in my book, against the concerns and counterexamples that Franks raises against it. But, in presenting Rea's account, I was only trying to convey something of a general feel for the sort of characteristic style that has come to be associated with analytic philosophy. I didn't really intend to put forward a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for being an analytic philosopher (despite the love that analytic philosophers have for necessary and sufficient conditions). Moreover, I agree with Franks: what really characterises my own work as analytic, and what characterises most analytic philosophy as analytic, is the cast of philosophers who get cited and engaged with. And, to a lesser extent, the cast that don't.

There is something about the clarity and argumentative rigour of analytic philosophy, at its best, that I feel to have been lacking from the great Jewish philosophers of the last couple of centuries (with some notable exceptions). Perhaps Franks will disagree with the following generalisation, drawn by Daniel Ryhnold in his illuminating Foreword to my forthcoming book:

> [M]uch Jewish philosophy of the past hundred years took the "scenic" continental route, which focuses more on "the human condition" than on formulating logically precise arguments or necessary and sufficient conditions in an attempt to define key concepts. Thus, whatever their philosophical insights might otherwise be, you would be hard pressed to find an argument formulated in terms that would be acceptable to analytic philosophers in the work of Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Emmanuel Levinas, or even Joseph Soloveitchik.
>
> (Lebens, 2020, p. x)

That was the trend I was trying to buck. If I succeeded in formulating logically precise arguments, and forming necessary and sufficient conditions in an attempt to define certain key concepts, then I can rest

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happy. If the conclusions drawn from this process happen to have been hiding in plain sight in the often obscure prose of a Hegel or a Fichte, then that's really of no concern to me. If anything, I'm happy to have such heavyweight thinkers on my side.

Have I merely reinvented the wheel? Perhaps. But if the original invention of the wheel was described in prose that many found to be impenetrable, and if it had been arrived at in a process that would be difficult to parse into premises and conclusions, then we might very well value the reinvention of the wheel if it were described in prose that people could grasp, in a process that can be easily tracked, replicated, and understood.

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