

# Bringing Philo Home: Responses to Harry A. Wolfson's *Philo* (1947) in the Aftermath of World War II\*

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## ■ Abstract

In 1947 Harry Austryn Wolfson published his massive and revisionary *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. With the book, Wolfson aimed at proving that Philo was an innovative and highly influential philosopher—by no means an isolated Jew of no consequence to the history of philosophy. As becomes clear from numerous letters written to Wolfson on the occasion of the publication of the book and stored at the Harvard University Archives, for Jewish readers Wolfson's proposed rehabilitation of Philo could provide a point of orientation. It served as a source of comfort and of pride in the post-war years. While the main thesis of Wolfson's book, Philo as the precursor of medieval philosophy, was rejected by most scholars of Philo and ancient philosophy, the letters and notes discussed in this article show that much more was at stake than a purely academic discussion.

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## ■ Keywords

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## ■ Introduction

In 1947 Harry Austryn Wolfson, Nathan Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy at Harvard University, published his grand study on Philo of Alexandria: two volumes amounting to a thousand pages. The simple main title, *Philo*, is followed by a telling and far-reaching subtitle: *Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*.<sup>1</sup> Wolfson's thesis in the work is as straightforward as it is far-reaching: Philo, who lived approximately from 20 BCE to 50 CE, was not just a Jewish-Hellenistic exegete and philosopher who was enthusiastically welcomed (and transmitted) by early Christian readers, but much more than that; with Philo began, according to Wolfson, "a fundamentally new period in the history of philosophy."<sup>2</sup> For Wolfson, Philo represents the paradigm of what was to become the "synthetic mediaeval philosopher." Certainly influenced by but essentially different from Greek philosophers, Philo represents a new kind of philosophy. The adherents of this new philosophy believe "in one infallible source of truth, and that is revelation, and that revelation is embodied in Scripture, be it Old Testament or New Testament or Koran."<sup>3</sup> With the introduction of Scripture as a major (if not *the*) point of reference, Philo introduced something essentially different, something that Wolfson at the end of his study calls the "Philonic revolution," and claims lasted throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup> That new philosophy as a "handmaid of Scripture," ushered in by Philo, came to an end in the seventeenth century with a new revolt by another Jew, the Dutch philosopher Benedictus de Spinoza on whose ethics Wolfson had published a monograph in 1934.<sup>5</sup> As a matter of fact, Wolfson's *Philo* was part of a larger project: a portrait of the *longue durée* of Jewish philosophy or rather of philosophy in general, ranging from classical Greek philosophy down to Spinoza. For Wolfson, Spinoza stands at the other end of the spectrum. By removing Scripture from philosophy, with his "denial of revelation," Spinoza "pulled down," as it were, the philosophy that Philo had "built up."<sup>6</sup> Wolfson constructed a powerful argument (against Hegel who subordinated Jewish and Muslim philosophers to Christian ones<sup>7</sup>) in order to

<sup>1</sup> Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947).

<sup>2</sup> Wolfson, *Philo*, 2:444.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:446.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:458.

<sup>5</sup> Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934).

<sup>6</sup> Wolfson, *Philo*, 2:458–60.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:440–1.

prove that Philo was by no means an isolated Jew of no consequence to the later history of philosophy. According to Wolfson, Philo was innovative, consistent, and influential. In his words:

Philo will emerge from our study as a philosopher in the grand manner, not a mere dabbler in philosophy. He did have the power of intellect to be able to reject the theories of other philosophers and to strike out a new and hitherto unknown path for himself. He is to be given credit for originality in all the problems dealt with by him, for in this particular set of problems he was the originator of every fundamental concept which continued to be discussed thereafter throughout the history of philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

Wolfson wanted to bring Philo back to life—and launched a gigantic resurrection operation. He promulgated the grand importance of a Jewish philosopher who hitherto had often been overlooked. When the volumes were published in 1947 (two years after World War II), they were widely noticed and made an impression far beyond a small group of specialists. As we shall see, the responses ranged from enthusiastic endorsement to outright rejection. In this article, I am interested in the wider contexts of these reactions. What exactly was at stake for the various respondents to Wolfson's *Philo* in the late 1940s?

That his book quickly reached a wide audience was in large part the result of Wolfson's own efforts. With the help of Harvard University Press he made sure that copies of *Philo* were sent out to a great number of scholars, rabbis, and libraries in the United States, Europe, and Palestine. In handwritten notes entitled "Copies of Philo mailed [1947]," Wolfson lists around 130 addressees (mainly scholars as well as some libraries). Wolfson kept the letters and thank-you notes sent to him by those who had received copies of his book. The letters are kept at the Harvard University Archives and, so far, have not been used for a better understanding of what Wolfson's *Philo* triggered at the time and what the book meant to him.<sup>9</sup> Together with the reviews published in newspapers and journals, these notes and letters allow for firsthand insights into the sensibilities around a seemingly harmless topic: the place of Philo of Alexandria in the history of philosophy.

A biographical sketch may be in order: Harry (Zvi Hirsh) Austryn Wolfson was born in 1887 in Ostrin, Lithuania, and died in 1974 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As a young man, he studied Talmud at the renowned Slobodka Yeshiva. In 1903, he arrived together with his family in the United States. After high school he successfully applied for a scholarship to Harvard where he received his MA in

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:114.

<sup>9</sup> All letters and notes cited in this article are from the "Philo" file in the Papers of Harry Austryn Wolfson stored at the Harvard University Archives: HUGFP 58.10, box 1. As far as I can tell, most of these documents so far have remained unknown. Martin Ritter, "Auf dem Weg zum System: Harry A. Wolfsons judeozentrische Philosophiegeschichte im Horizont seiner Vorläufer und Anfänge" (PhD diss., FU Berlin, 2005) 4 and 260, briefly refers to the letter by Gershom Scholem and the polemics around the review by Emil Fackenheim, discussed below, but then primarily focuses on Wolfson's study on Crescas.

1912. With the help of a traveling fellowship, he spent the next two years pursuing research on medieval Hebrew manuscripts at a number of libraries in Europe. That work prepared him for what was to become his dissertation at Harvard on “Crescas on the problems of infinity and divine attributes.” He received his PhD in 1915. Wolfson started teaching at Harvard, and in 1925 became the first Nathan Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature and Jewish Philosophy. He was the first to hold a chair entirely devoted to Jewish Studies in the United States and stayed at Harvard throughout his life.<sup>10</sup>

Early on, Wolfson was involved in the Zionist movement: born “into a family of Hebraists and Zionists,”<sup>11</sup> during his time as a young student at the Slobodka Yeshiva he was active in the local Zionist movement and became the editor of a Hebrew journal (“Ha-Zeman”).<sup>12</sup> The sociologist Lewis Feuer describes Wolfson’s Zionist loyalties in his recollections as “always strong, with a nationalistic bent; he admired the Revisionist leader, Vladimir Jabotinsky, at a time when many American Zionists were expressing themselves bitterly against the latter.”<sup>13</sup> Wolfson’s love for the Hebrew language remained strong throughout his life. As a student at Harvard, he wrote poems in Hebrew.<sup>14</sup> In 1959, in a letter to David Ben Gurion, Wolfson calls the Hebrew language “a symbol of its [Israel’s] external singularity and internal vitality.”<sup>15</sup> Remarkably, however, Wolfson never visited Israel.<sup>16</sup> Early in his career, in 1926, he turned down an offer for a permanent appointment at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> On Wolfson’s life, see Leo W. Schwarz’s informative, but hardly objective biography *Wolfson of Harvard: Portrait of a Scholar* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1978) and idem, “A Biographical Essay,” in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of his Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (Jerusalem: American Academy of Jewish Research, 1965) 1–46. Further biographic information on Wolfson can be found in Isadore Twersky, “Harry Austryn Wolfson (1887–1974),” *The American Jewish Year Book* 76 (1976) 99–111; Lewis S. Feuer, “Recollections of Harry Austryn Wolfson,” *American Jewish Archives* 28 (1976) 25–50; David Winston, “Wolfson, Harry Austryn,” in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 1345–46.

<sup>11</sup> Joel Perlmann, “The American Jewish Future after Immigration and Ethnicity Fade: H. A. Wolfson’s Analysis in 1918,” *Religions* 9 (2018) 2.

<sup>12</sup> Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Feuer, “Recollections of Harry Austryn Wolfson,” 37.

<sup>14</sup> Schwarz, “A Biographical Essay,” 3–4.

<sup>15</sup> Eliezer Ben-Rafael, *Jewish Identities: Fifty Intellectuals Answer Ben-Gurion* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) 350.

<sup>16</sup> Feuer, “Recollections of Harry Austryn Wolfson,” 41: “He never visited Israel, he once said, because he feared that doing so might sully his images and feelings toward the country.” On Wolfson’s Zionist agenda, see also Deborah Rose Sills, “Re-inventing the Past: Philo and the Historiography of Jewish Identity” (PhD Diss., University of California, Santa Barbara 1984); *non vidi*, summary in *Philo of Alexandria: An Annotated Bibliography, 1937–1986* (ed. Roberto Radice, David Runia, and R.A. Bitter; Leiden: Brill, 1988) 352.

<sup>17</sup> Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, 80–82, prints Wolfson’s response to Judah Magnes, president of the Hebrew University (January 28 1927). Wolfson saw his “immediate duty” to remain at Harvard: “While I cherish the traditional hope that some day, and ‘even speedily and at a near time,’ I may

Wolfson's study on Philo of Alexandria is without doubt a major achievement in Philonic scholarship. It is impressively learned and remains until today by far the most detailed monograph on Philo's philosophical and theological thinking. It is a treasure of insights covering questions of theology, philosophy, ethics, and political theory. However, in a number of respects the book is also highly problematic.<sup>18</sup> Throughout his study, Wolfson shows a strong tendency to resolve all inconsistencies in Philo, an approach doomed to failure in light of Philo's very diverse discussions on a variety of themes. This shortcoming in Wolfson's work is, to a large extent, the result of a methodological approach which Wolfson called the "hypothetico-deductive method of text-study." With the help of this method, which Wolfson labeled as "Talmudic" and which was already at the core of his books on Crescas and Spinoza, he aimed at uncovering the logical chain of reasoning—free of contradictions—which led to Philo's philosophy.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, his grandiose interpretation of Philo as the spiritual founder of all of medieval philosophy needs to be qualified as exaggerated. Wolfson overreacted to a widespread image of Philo at the time: a Jewish philosopher (if a real Jew and if a philosopher at all) who simply collected what was already around, a mediocre eclectic.<sup>20</sup> Wolfson's Philo is the opposite: innovative, lively, and influential.

The work of Philo has only survived due to the early and intense interest of Christian readers, starting with Clement of Alexandria around 200 CE. Christians transmitted, but to some extent also colonized Philo. He became a "church father

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find it possible to return to Palestine and to cast in my lot with you, I feel that I must stay on here to try to justify some of the hopes that have been placed in the new Chair which was established only a year ago" (80).

<sup>18</sup> For a balanced review by one of today's leading Philo scholars, see David T. Runia, "History of Philosophy in the Grand Manner: The Achievement of H.A. Wolfson," *Philosophia Reformata* 49 (1984) (reprinted in idem, *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria* [Variorum Collected Studies Series 332; Aldershot, Variorum, 1990] 112–33). On Wolfson's work in general, see more recently, Jonathan Cohen, *Philosophers and Scholars: Wolfson, Guttman and Strauss on the History of Jewish Philosophy* (trans. Rachel Yarden; Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2007) and Carlos Fraenkel, "Philo of Alexandria, Hasdai Crescas, and Spinoza on God's Body," in *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Ra'anan S. Boustan et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013) 809–19. The wider context of Wolfson's philosophical approach and its prehistory in *Wissenschaft des Judentums* is convincingly discussed in Martin Ritter, "Auf dem Weg zum System."

<sup>19</sup> Wolfson, *Philo* 1:106: "We must try to reconstruct the latent processes of his reasoning, of which his uttered words, we may assume, are only the conclusions." See Martin Ritter, "Scholarship as a Priestly Craft: Harry A. Wolfson on Tradition in a Secular Age," in *Jewish Studies between the Disciplines: Papers in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday* (ed. Klaus Herrmann, Margarete Schlüter and Giuseppe Veltri; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 435–55, at 441–42, Jacob Haberman, "Harry A. Wolfson's Utilization of the Hypothetico-Deductive Method of Text Study," *Shofar* 30 (2011) 104–28," and Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, 55–56.

<sup>20</sup> Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:97–99. Wolfson refers critically to the work by Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, Erwin R. Goodenough, Wilfred L. Knox, and Arthur D. Nock.

*honoris causa*.<sup>21</sup> Wolfson tried to bring Philo back both into Jewish as well as general philosophy.

It needs to be noted that Wolfson's thesis was not exactly a *creatio ex nihilo*. From the mid-nineteenth century on, when Hellenistic Judaism became a topic in *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, some scholars and rabbis such as Maurice Wolff and Manuel Joel promoted Philo as an important Jewish voice.<sup>22</sup> As Martin Ritter has shown, some of Manuel Joel's arguments anticipate Wolfson quite a bit: already Joel presents Philo as a systematic and highly influential philosopher. Joel, too, places him in relation to Spinoza and asks the question which became fundamental in Wolfson's study: what is new in Philo ("Was ist das Neue, das Originelle in Philo's Lehre")?<sup>23</sup> There is no doubt, though, that Wolfson with his massive *Philo* went far beyond his predecessors whose studies were much more limited in scope.

### ■ Letters and Notes in Response to Wolfson's *Philo*

To enter an archive and read through letters that were not meant to be seen by the great public can make one feel somewhat uncomfortable. It may even be seen as an intrusion into the privacy of a past generation of scholars. At the same time, letters are an extremely valuable source for reconstructing a scholar's biography. In the case of Harry Wolfson, it is probably safe to say that he would not have minded us reading through the letters and notes (or most of them) that he received on the occasion of the publication of his *Philo* between the summer of 1947 and the summer of 1948. Many of the recipients of the two volumes reacted: some limited themselves to brief thank-you-notes, others wrote actual letters. Most letters are written in English, some in Hebrew, and a few in German. Harry Starr, the president of the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, which supported the publication of Wolfson's *Philo* with a grant, wrote on 28 November 1947, in a letter to Jacob Billikopf (a prominent figure in Jewish philanthropy and social work): "If you ever get up to Cambridge, make Harry Wolfson show you some of the letters he received about this work from the greatest names in philosophy and Semitics."<sup>24</sup> It seems that

<sup>21</sup> David Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature* (Assen: Fortress, 1993), taken up by Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Philon d'Alexandrie: un penseur en diaspora* (Paris: Fayard, 2003) 321–54. On Philo among early Christian writers, see more recently, Jennifer Otto, *Philo of Alexandria and the Construction of Jewishness in Early Christian Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Maurice Wolff, *Die Philonische Philosophie in ihren Hauptmomenten dargestellt* (Leipzig: Bonnier, 1849); Manuel Joel, "Ueber Philo, den hervorragendsten Vertreter der jüdisch-alexandrinischen Geistesrichtung. Zwei Vorträge aus dem Jahre 1862," in idem, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie* (vol. 2; Breslau: Skutsch, 1876) 12–33. Cf. Ritter, "Auf dem Weg zum System," 16–71, and Maren Niehoff, "Alexandrian Judaism in 19th Century Wissenschaft des Judentums: Between Christianity and Modernization," in *Jüdische Geschichte in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit. Wege der Forschung: Vom alten zum neuen Schürer* (ed. Aharon Oppenheimer; München: Oldenbourg, 1999) 9–28.

<sup>23</sup> Joel, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, 25. Cf. Ritter, "Auf dem Weg zum System," 46. Wolfson's study culminates in ch. 14, "What is New in Philo?"

<sup>24</sup> Harry Starr then compares Wolfson with the historian and philosopher Arnold J. Toynbee: "It is, indeed, a magistral work, and sometimes I think that this whole philosophic enterprise, of

Wolfson was proud of the responses he received to the well-orchestrated promotion of his book.<sup>25</sup> I will first discuss positive (if not enthusiastic) Jewish responses, then mixed and critical ones from both Jews and non-Jews. As will become clear, often much more was at stake than a purely academic discussion.

## ■ Rehabilitating the Jewish Philo

Most of the letters, articles, and notes in the Philo papers at the Wolfson archive at Harvard University are positive appraisals of the book. Of course, many of them are thank-you letters, and their authors were eager to show their gratitude for having received a free copy of the book. However, the excitement about Wolfson's *Philo* was often more than a gesture: it is especially tangible in letters from Jewish scholars and rabbis living in the United States. Many praised Wolfson for his fresh, Jewish interpretation of Philo. Leo Schwarz, Wolfson's biographer, writes to him: "as in your previous volumes you have given Jewish philosophy a habitation and a name."<sup>26</sup> Especially rabbis from Reform communities enthusiastically endorsed Philo's return to Judaism: "you have made a real Jew of Philo," writes Rabbi Felix A. Levy, a Reform rabbi in Chicago.<sup>27</sup> Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon, professor of Jewish theology at the Hebrew Union College and a leader of the Reform movement, expresses in his letter his deep gratitude to Wolfson for placing Philo at the "headwaters of the Christian, Islamic and Jewish philosophic streams," because, so far, Philo had "not received a square deal."<sup>28</sup> Ralph Marcus, a friend of Wolfson's and himself a great specialist of Hellenistic Judaism, speaks of a "rehabilitation of Philo."<sup>29</sup>

Particularly enthusiastic are the reactions of some of the scholars who write to Wolfson in Hebrew: Shalom Spiegel, Professor of medieval Hebrew literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary and author of *Hebrew Reborn* (1930), writes to Wolfson that he received the volumes on the evening of Yom Kippur and that he could not stop reading. Wolfson, Spiegel writes, is Philo's redeemer (גואל) "who

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which the PHILO volumes are only a part, may ultimately receive the attention of the scholarly world, as has Toynbee's work after years of quiet labor." Harry Starr, letter to Jacob Billikopf, 28 November 1947.

<sup>25</sup> The volumes also sold fairly well, as is reported by Wm. Warren Smith Jr., business manager at Harvard University Press, in a letter to Harry Wolfson dating from 26 October 1949: by October 1949, 1484 copies of the book were sold.

<sup>26</sup> Leo Schwarz, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 20 October 1947. In his biography on Wolfson, Schwarz writes: "Wolfson had retrieved Philo from the catacombs of scholarship and restored him to a place of honor among the great philosophers" (Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, 156).

<sup>27</sup> Felix A. Levy, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 27 November 1947.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel S. Cohon, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 5 October 1947.

<sup>29</sup> Ralph Marcus, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 25 September 1947. Marcus writes that he is going to give two papers on Wolfson's *Philo* under the title "The Rehabilitation of Philo." "Thus I am playing Aaron to your theses," Marcus writes (referring to Moses' brother and assistant Aaron). Marcus was a professor of Hellenistic culture at the University of Chicago and a former student of Wolfson at Harvard: Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, 77–79. For more responses by Marcus see below.

returned him to his people and to the inheritance of his ancestors and also brought him back to the significance he deserves given his influence in the history of philosophy.”<sup>30</sup> Chaim Tchernowitz, a fervent Zionist who, like Wolfson, was first trained in a Lithuanian yeshiva and then later became a professor of Talmud and Rabbinic literature at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, uses very similar language: he is grateful to Wolfson because he “restored the former Jewish glory that the Goyim had taken from Philo and his name.”<sup>31</sup> Tchernowitz shows great sympathy for Wolfson’s take on rabbinic parallels in Philo: there must have been an exchange between Alexandria and the rabbinic movement. If Philo had written his oeuvre in Hebrew, Tchernowitz continues, there would now be a “Midrash Alexandria,” a “Rabbi Yediyah” (the Hebrew name for Philo since Azariah de’ Rossi) or maybe even a third Talmud, in addition to the Bavli and the Yerushalmi, a “Talmud Alexandria.” However, Philo would not have deserved that, Tchernowitz writes to Wolfson, because Philo “sinned” by not writing his tractates in Hebrew (and Wolfson, too, Tchernowitz adds, should have written his book in Hebrew!<sup>32</sup>). Another reaction full of excitement came from Harry Blumberg, who at the time taught Hebrew at the James Monroe High School in New York and published several Hebrew textbooks.<sup>33</sup> In his letter, written in Hebrew, Blumberg shows his deep gratitude to Wolfson for having corrected the “misconceptions and prejudices of scholars such as Ziegert and Goodenough (. . .) who did not refrain from humiliating the value of Philo and the Jews in Alexandria.”<sup>34</sup>

To these Jewish scholars, more important than Wolfson’s main thesis (Philo as a predecessor for medieval thought) was that Wolfson restored Philo’s Judaism. He

<sup>30</sup> Shalom Spiegel, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 1 October 1947; (גם לשעור הקומה הראוי לו לפי השפעתו בתולדות הפילוסופיה). Shalom Spiegel, *Hebrew Reborn* (New York: Macmillan 1930). On Spiegel see Judah Goldin, “Of Shalom Spiegel,” *Prooftexts* 8 (1988) 173–81.

<sup>31</sup> Chaim Tchernowitz, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 2 October 1947; (אתה החזרת ליושנה את העטרה). On Tchernowitz see David Ellenson, “The 1946 Exchange between Rav Tzair (Chaim Tchernowitz) and Rav Binyamin (Yehoshua Radler-Feldman) on Bi-Nationalism and the Creation of a Jewish State,” *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* 66 (2019) 137–49.

<sup>32</sup> Wolfson’s *Philo* was translated into Hebrew in 1970 (פילון: יסודות הפילוסופיה הדתית היהודית) [ed. Moshe Maisels; Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1970]. In the Hebrew translation the subtitle was thus adapted to “The Foundations of Jewish Religious Philosophy.” Much earlier, the chapter entitled “What is New in Philo?” was translated into Spanish (“¿Qué es nuevo en Filón?” *Davar* 17 [1948] 7–24) and into Yiddish (Michael Lejbovitch, “וואס האט פילון מחדש געווען?” *Davke* 7:27–28 [1956] 144–58).

<sup>33</sup> See Blumberg’s plea for more intense Hebrew courses at American high schools in Harry Blumberg, “Increasing Reading Experience in Hebrew,” *The Modern Language Journal* 3 (1942) 199–204.

<sup>34</sup> Zvi (Harry) Blumberg, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 28 September 1947 (הדעות המשובשות והמשפטים) . . . שלא נמנעו מלהשפיל את ערכם של פילון והיהודים באלכסנדריה . . . (הקדומים של חוקרים כגון זיגערט וגודנו . . .). Paul Ziegert, “Über die Ansätze zu einer Mysterienlehre bei Philo,” *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 67 (1894) 706–32, and Erwin R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935) interpreted Philo as a mystical author, influenced by hellenistic mystery religions. Wolfson discusses Ziegert and Goodenough critically in Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:44–45.

brought Philo home. And he brought him much closer to the world of the rabbis and to the Hebrew language. According to Wolfson, Philo knew Hebrew. True, it is obvious that Philo used the Greek text of the Bible in his exegetical work, but that is because he wrote for a Greek readership: “Writing in Greek for Greek readers, he would naturally quote the translation familiar to his readers, even though his knowledge of Hebrew was such that he could himself without too much effort provide his own translation.”<sup>35</sup> With this Wolfson distanced himself from scholars such as Isaak Heinemann (see below) according to whom Philo did not know Hebrew. Especially in light of the numerous Hebrew etymologies in his exegesis, Wolfson believed that “the burden of proof is upon those who would deny that he [Philo] possessed such a knowledge [of Hebrew].”<sup>36</sup> According to Wolfson, Alexandrian and Palestinian Judaism were by no means two worlds apart. Rather, the Alexandrian Jewish community endorsed “the dominant element” which came from Palestine and which “ultimately gave rise to Pharisaism.”<sup>37</sup> To readers such as Chaim Tchernowitz and Shalom Spiegel, both promoters of the Hebrew language, Wolfson’s portrait of Philo as being in an intense exchange with rabbinic thinking in Palestine was very attractive indeed, a treat for the Jewish high holidays in 1947 when the book came out. Two years after the end of World War II and the Holocaust, Wolfson’s grand work could be read as proof of a strong and lively Jewish presence in intellectual history. As noted before, Wolfson was not the first to stress the importance of Philo in both Jewish and non-Jewish intellectual history. Nor was he the first to situate Philo within a larger Judaism that included the rabbinic movement. Prior to Wolfson, Samuel Belkin, who was Wolfson’s student at Harvard, had already argued in his *Philo and the Oral Law*, that Philo had been considerably influenced by rabbinic, that is Palestinian, Judaism. Belkin, too, aimed at stressing Philo’s Jewish identity: “Philo has been studied with great interest, but *Judaeus* has been left unnoticed.”<sup>38</sup> But the scope of Belkin’s study, which grew out of a Brown University dissertation, was much more confined and, in comparison with the reception of Wolfson’s *Philo*, caused no commotion.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:88.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:89.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:4. On the place of Hebrew in Wolfson’s work, see Warren Zev Harvey, “Hebraism and Western Philosophy in Harry Austryn Wolfson’s Theory of History,” *Immanuel* 14 (1982) 77–85. For a recent review of the question of Philo’s knowledge of Hebrew, see René Bloch, “How Much Hebrew in Jewish Alexandria?,” in *Alexandria: Hub of the Hellenistic World* (ed. Benjamin Schliesser et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021) 261–78.

<sup>38</sup> Samuel Belkin, *Philo and the Oral Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940) vii. *Ibid.*: “it is quite certain that there existed a great interdependency of thought between the Alexandrian and Palestinian Jewish communities and that we cannot regard them as two entirely separate forms of Judaism.” After having received a copy of Wolfson’s book, Belkin writes to him: “your approach to Philo is new and refreshing and not a repetition of the empty phrases and fanciful theories that are to be found in the secondary sources. . . . I hope and pray that you are well for you are probably the only man to-day who is making a lasting contribution to Jewish scientific scholarship” (Samuel Belkin, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 9 September 1947).

<sup>39</sup> On Belkin, who later was to become president of Yeshiva University, see Rabbi William G.

## ■ In the Shadow of World War II

Wolfson's goal was to rehabilitate Philo, to secure his place in the library of Jewish philosophy. In the light of his greater history of philosophy, Wolfson's "real critical thrust," was, as Leon Wieseltier rightly notes, "toward a reassessment of the place of Judaism within Western culture."<sup>40</sup> Wolfson wanted to show how influential Philo was for later medieval thought centered around Scripture. The young Morton Smith sent Wolfson a thank-you note, written in Hebrew, in which he called Wolfson's *Philo* "the best preface to Christian theology."<sup>41</sup> However, to Wolfson, Philo was more than that, more than just a preparatory author.<sup>42</sup> The conviction that the contributions of Jewish philosophy had been greatly underestimated and that there was an urgent need for a reevaluation had been driving Wolfson's research early on.<sup>43</sup> With *Philo*, that conviction reached a pinnacle. It is not clear when exactly Wolfson started working on Philo, maybe as early as in 1937.<sup>44</sup> In 1942, he published a substantial article on Philo's take on free will which became one of the backbones of the later monograph. In 1944 and 1946 two brief studies on Jewish citizenship and the Synhedrion in Philo followed.<sup>45</sup>

Wolfson wrote his *Philo* during the Second World War. It is difficult to imagine that his strong emphasis on the Jewish momentum in the history of philosophy, while already present in his earlier work, was not also the result of the continuing marginalization of the Jews in Europe (and elsewhere). What seems to be clear from the letters at the Wolfson archive is that in the post-war years of mourning and uncertainty, *Philo* could provide an orientation for comfort and a source of pride for Jewish readers. Henry Hurwitz, the editor of *The Menorah Journal* (to which

Braude, "Samuel Belkin (1911–1976)," *PAAJR* 44 (1977) xvii–xx and Victor B. Geller, *Orthodoxy Awakens: The Belkin Era and Yeshiva University* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> Leon Wieseltier, "Philosophy, Religion, and Harry Wolfson," *Commentary Magazine* 6 (1976) 57–64, at 60.

<sup>41</sup> Morton Smith, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 22 September 1947 (המבוא הטוב ביותר לתאולוגיה) (הנוצריה). Smith sent the brief letter from his address in Baltimore. In the following year Smith filed his dissertation (in Hebrew) on *Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels* at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; cf. William M. Calder III, "Morton Smith (1915–1991)," *Gnomon* 64 (1992) 382–84.

<sup>42</sup> In *Philo*, 2:440 Wolfson criticizes the traditional approach according to which "everything that came before Christianity is to be considered only as preparatory to it and everything that happened outside of Christianity is to be considered only as tributary to it."

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Wieseltier, "Philosophy, Religion, and Harry Wolfson."

<sup>44</sup> Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, 144, refers to a statement about Philo in an interview given in 1937. Philo as an important source for ancient Judaism was, of course, on Wolfson's horizon earlier in his career. According to Schwarz, Wolfson argued already in the 1920s, in a course on post-biblical Jewish history, against a deep breach between Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism. Later on, Wolfson apparently deleted an early draft of 100 pages on the history of the Jews of Alexandria and condensed it to a few sentences in the first chapter (*Philo*, 1:4–5; Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, 147).

<sup>45</sup> Harry A. Wolfson, "Philo on Free Will," *HTR* 35 (1942) 345–70 (ch. 8 in *idem.*, *Philo*); *idem.*, "Philo on Jewish Citizenship in Alexandria," *JBL* 63 (1944) 165–68; *idem.*, "Synhedrion in Greek Jewish Literature and Philo," *JQR* (New Series) 36 (1946) 303–6.

Wolfson had contributed several articles in earlier years),<sup>46</sup> writes to Wolfson: “It is thrilling to contemplate that two Jews have divided the substance and history of post-Greek European philosophy between them—Philo and Spinoza. Yet there are those who say that Jews are aliens in Europe!”<sup>47</sup> In an emotional letter, the ancient historian Eugen Täubler writes from Cincinnati to congratulate Harry Wolfson on his “opus grande” on Philo. Struggling with the English language, Täubler switches in the middle of a sentence to his native German (apologetically reminding Wolfson that German is not only the language of today’s Germany, it was also the language of pre-war Germany). He had always hoped, Täubler writes, “that Judaism would one day be recognized not only as a tolerated but as an indispensable part of European intellectuality.” What was left, he continues, were “two question marks: European culture? Judaism?”<sup>48</sup> Täubler’s appreciation for Wolfson’s Philo is to be understood against this background: throughout his work, Täubler stressed that Jewish history needs to be understood within universal history.<sup>49</sup> Täubler, who was forced out of his professorship at the University of Heidelberg in 1933, took note of Wolfson’s repositioning of Philo in the history of philosophy with some satisfaction.

Laudatory language on Wolfson’s *Philo* can also be found in the Jewish Press. In a long review, published in the Passover edition of *The Jewish Advocate* in 1948, Rabbi Joseph Shubow, who served as a military chaplain in Europe and was a prominent Zionist leader, praises the book in the most enthusiastic terms: when he read the book, Shubow felt himself to be “in a state of spiritual ecstasy.” “Nobody,” Shubow writes, “has ever so fully depicted the majesty and inner depth of value and enriching influence which Jewish political thought merits.” The review, surrounded by large “Happy Passover” ads, is a long hymn on how Wolfson liberated Philo, and Jewish philosophy in general, from slavery.<sup>50</sup> Later in the year, in December of 1948, the “Jewish Book Council of America” awarded Wolfson the prize for

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Perlmann, “The American Jewish Future after Immigration and Ethnicity Fade.”

<sup>47</sup> Henry Hurwitz, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 18 September 1947. In the letter, Hurwitz notes some modern projection in Wolfson’s *Philo*: “And coming down to date in the European island of America, of Manhattan: I find a direct reference, whether or no you intended it, to the Jew of modern Alexandria, New York—your two terminal paragraphs of Chapter I (vol. I, pp. 85–86).”

<sup>48</sup> Eugen Täubler, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 22 March 1948: “Ich hatte immer gehofft, dass das Judentum einmal nicht nur als tolerierter, sondern als unentbehrlicher Bestandteil der europäischen Geistigkeit anerkannt werden würde. Übrig geblieben sind nur zwei Fragezeichen: europäische Kultur? Judentum?” (full letter in Appendix).

<sup>49</sup> On Täubler, see Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg, “Einleitung,” in Eugen Täubler, *Der römische Staat* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1985) vi–ixx; Heike Scharbaum, *Zwischen zwei Welten: Wissenschaft und Lebenswelt am Beispiel des deutsch-jüdischen Historikers Eugen Täubler (1879–1953)* (Berlin: Lit, 2000); Salo W. Baron and Ralph Marcus, “Eugen Täubler,” *PAAJR* 22 (1953) xxxi–iv. See also Albert I. Baumgarten, *Elias Bickerman as a Historian of the Jews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 185–89.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph S. Shubow, “Wolfson’s “Philo”—An Event in the History of Ideas,” *The Jewish Advocate*, 22 April 1948 (Passover ed.) 1–3A. Shubow and Wolfson were close friends; cf. Lewis H. Weinstein, “Epilogue: The Last Decade,” in Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, 250.

the best non-fiction Jewish work of the year. Wolfson was the first recipient to be awarded this prize.<sup>51</sup>

### ■ Irony and Critique: Scholem, Bickerman, Heinemann

Among the letters that were sent to Harry Wolfson on the occasion of the publication of his *Philo* one also finds responses that were less enthusiastic than others, sometimes not without hints of irony. Thus Gershom Scholem, the great specialist of Jewish mysticism, writes from Jerusalem to Harry Wolfson: “I am filled with wonder about the discussions it [the book] certainly should entail. I am very glad I am not a historian of philosophy as your book would put me in great distress as to what to do about all that goyish gibberish which hitherto has been called history of philosophy. Now it seems that the Jews have stolen the show for another time: three philosophers who count, and two of them Jews. יהי רצון [may it be] that you are right of which, of course, I am not sure having not yet studied the volumes.”<sup>52</sup> Scholem does not hide that he has doubts about Wolfson’s grandiose repositioning of Philo in the history of philosophy. However, in the letter one also notices, beyond the irony, a sympathetic wondering about Wolfson’s new take on Philo.<sup>53</sup> With “three philosophers who count, two of them Jews” he means, as he states in his critical review on Leo Schwarz’ biography of Wolfson from 1979, Aristotle, Philo and Spinoza. In that review, published more than thirty years later, Scholem leaves no doubt that in his opinion Wolfson greatly exaggerated the importance of Philo as a philosopher: “Wolfson, in his big work on Philo of Alexandria, maintained the bold thesis that Philo was the most important philosopher between Aristotle and Spinoza, thereby making out that two of the great pillars of Western philosophy were Jews—a contention scarcely acceptable to many of Wolfson’s readers, or of Philo’s, for that matter, Jews and Gentiles alike.”<sup>54</sup> Naturally, in his thank you note to Wolfson, Scholem phrased his critique in a much less skeptical tone. But at the time, under the immediate impression of the Holocaust, Scholem may even have felt some sympathy for Wolfson’s grandiose thesis.

Wolfson’s book raised eyebrows, especially among those who otherwise did not have great interest in or sympathy for Philo. The ancient historian Elias Bickerman,

<sup>51</sup> *The Jewish Bookland*, 15 March 1949. The ceremony took place on 22 December 1948 at the Jewish Community Center in Washington, D.C. Members of the committee that awarded the prize were Joshua Bloch, Ben Halpern, Leo Jung, and Jacob Shatzky.

<sup>52</sup> Gershom Scholem, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 15 October 1947 (full letter in Appendix).

<sup>53</sup> The year before, in 1946, Scholem had been sent by Hebrew University to Europe to rescue Jewish books. That trip to destroyed cities, almost void of Jews, was a traumatic experience for Scholem that left him frustrated and exhausted for some time: see David Biale, *Gershom Scholem, Master of the Kabbalah* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018) 156–64, at 164: “When he returned to Jerusalem at the end of August 1946, he was exhausted both physically and mentally.”

<sup>54</sup> Gershom Scholem, “The Sleuth from Slobodka,” *TimesLitSupp*, 23 November 1979, 16. See also the response to Scholem (and Schwarz) by Judah Goldin, “On the Sleuth of Slobodka and the Cortez of Kabbalah,” *The American Scholar* 49 (1980) 391–404.

who at the time had a research fellowship at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, writes to Wolfson: “I don’t know anything about Philo. Except his political tracts, I could never compel myself to read more than a couple of pages of his tiresome homiletics. You, however, succeed in making this synagogal preacher interesting and important. Viewed in the line of Maimonides and St. Thomas, even Philo appears endowed with reason (. . .).”<sup>55</sup> It can be doubted that Wolfson’s book left a lasting impression on Bickerman or that it changed the latter’s opinion on Philo.

Bickerman was a historian, a specialist of the Hellenistic period and the Maccabees. Much closer to Wolfson’s interests was the classicist Isaak Heinemann, who at the time was already an established Philo scholar. Heinemann, who came out of a modern-orthodox Jewish family in Frankfurt am Main, was the author of *Philons jüdische und griechische Bildung*, published in 1926, and since 1919 the co-editor of the German Philo edition.<sup>56</sup> To Heinemann it was clear that Philo did not know Hebrew. He tries to show that Philo was much closer to Greek legal and philosophical thinking than to Jewish “oral law” (with a few exceptions).<sup>57</sup> For Heinemann, one could say, Philo in a way represented an integrated German Jew *avant la lettre*.<sup>58</sup> Heinemann’s approach to Philo differed, then, quite a bit from Wolfson’s. Heinemann wrote a letter in German from Jerusalem (he had emigrated to Palestine in 1939) to thank Harry Wolfson for having sent him a copy of *Philo*. In the letter, Heinemann, who was Wolfson’s senior by about ten years, lets Wolfson politely know who is ahead in the study of Philo: “you made yourself quite successfully familiar with a field which in your earlier research you have touched upon less.”<sup>59</sup> Heinemann barely mentions any points of disagreement: “we entirely agree on many points” (in vielem sind wir uns vollkommen einig). This, though, was the polite language of a thank-you letter. That Heinemann was not convinced by Wolfson’s main thesis becomes clear from two review essays he

<sup>55</sup> Elias J. Bickerman, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 25 September 1947 (full letter in Appendix). On Bickerman see Baumgarten, *Elias Bickerman*.

<sup>56</sup> *Philo von Alexandria. Die Werke in deutscher Übersetzung* (6 vols.; ed. Leopold Cohn, Isaak Heinemann, Maximilian Adler; Berlin: M. & H. Marcus, 1909–1938). On Heinemann, see Christhard Hoffmann, *Juden und Judentum im Werk deutscher Althistoriker des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Leiden: Brill, 1988) 219–32; “Heinemann, Isaak,” *Lexikon deutsch-jüdischer Autoren* (ed. Renate Heuer; vol. 11; Munich: K.G. Saur, 2002) 30–37.

<sup>57</sup> Isaak Heinemann, *Philons griechische und jüdische Bildung: Kulturvergleichende Untersuchungen zu Philons Darstellung der jüdischen Gesetze* (Breslau: M. & H. Marcus, 1932).

<sup>58</sup> Heinemann was, though, also aware of the limitations of that integration—whether in Philo’s time or his own: see Christhard Hoffmann, “Antiker Völkerhass und moderner Rassenhass: Heinemann an Wilamowitz,” *Quaderni di Storia* 25 (1987) 145–57. See also Daniel R. Schwartz, “Hitler and Antiochus, Hellenists and Rabbinerdoctoren: On Isaak Heinemann’s Response to Elias Bickerman, 1938,” in *Strength to Strength: Essays in Honor of Shaye J. D. Cohen* (ed. Michael L. Satlow; Brown Judaic Studies 363; Providence: Brown University, 2018) 611–29.

<sup>59</sup> Isaak Heinemann, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 1947 (exact date not legible): “daß Sie sich mit vollem Erfolge in ein Gebiet eingearbeitet haben, das Sie in Ihren früheren Forschungen noch weniger berührt hatten” (full letter in Appendix).

published on the book: the first in Hebrew, the second—with a more substantial critique—in German.<sup>60</sup> Heinemann rejects Wolfson's view that Philo introduced philosophy as a handmaid of Scripture. Philo, Heinemann argues, was much more embedded in Greek philosophy (and much further away from the rabbis) than Wolfson suggests. Moreover, according to Heinemann, Wolfson overlooks the fact that the Greeks, too, could think of law as something inspired and that for Philo the concept of revelation was not that essential after all (much less than for medieval philosophers). Neither was there a clear cut between Greek philosophy and Philo, nor was Philo the predecessor of medieval philosophy tout court. Heinemann's and Wolfson's methodological approaches to Philo were worlds apart: here the classicist trained by German philologists (Heinemann wrote his dissertation on Solon in Berlin under the supervision of Hermann Diels), there the philosopher whose "Talmudic hypothetico-deductive method" was based on the assumption that every text passage is significant and part of a reasoning that can be deduced.<sup>61</sup>

### ■ Goodenough's Critique and Marcus's Defense

In many respects, Heinemann's critique coincided with that of Erwin R. Goodenough, the historian of religions at Yale University and Wolfson's great rival.<sup>62</sup> Goodenough and Wolfson each imagined a very different Philo. For Goodenough, the author of *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (1935), Philo was primarily a mystic, his Judaism, mystical Judaism.<sup>63</sup> Wolfson rejects that view early on in his monograph.<sup>64</sup> There are two letters from Goodenough in the Wolfson papers at Harvard. In the first, Goodenough congratulates Wolfson on this "accomplishment," not without indicating that they will probably continue to disagree.<sup>65</sup> In the second letter, the tone continues to be friendly, but Goodenough remains firm with regard to one of his main critiques (shared by Heinemann): the parallelization of Philo with rabbinic sources. Just how rabbinic sources could possibly "throw light on a period from two to ten centuries before they were written," remains methodologically questionable to Goodenough. Such a

<sup>60</sup> Isaak Heinemann, *Kirjat Sefer* 24 (1948) 208–12; idem, "Philo als Vater der mittelalterlichen Philosophie?," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 6 (1950) 99–116. Heinemann had also reviewed Wolfson's *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* rather critically: see Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, 99–100, and Ritter, "Auf dem Weg zum System," 258–64.

<sup>61</sup> See Ritter, "Scholarship as a Priestly Craft," 441–42.

<sup>62</sup> According to Feuer, "Recollections of Harry Austryn Wolfson," 35, Wolfson made sure that Harvard University Press would not contact Goodenough as an external reviewer of his manuscript, "a scholar who as likely as not would be predisposed to reject Wolfson's method and interpretation. Wolfson simply would have none of it. Whereupon the authorities of the Press enacted a bylaw exempting Wolfson's work from the rule of external referees."

<sup>63</sup> Goodenough, *By Light, Light*. See Samuel Thomas, "Goodenough, E. R.," in *Dictionary of Early Judaism* (ed. John J. Collins and Daniel Harlow; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 682–83.

<sup>64</sup> Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:44–45.

<sup>65</sup> Erwin R. Goodenough, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 15 August 1947.

method “has never been proposed, let alone demonstrated.”<sup>66</sup> Like Heinemann, Goodenough published a review essay on Wolfson’s book.<sup>67</sup> In the review, he rejects Wolfson’s concept of “native” Judaism in which rabbinic and Jewish-Hellenistic thought convene. For Goodenough, Wolfson, although he makes Philo a greater person than he had ever been, does not do justice to the Alexandrian philosopher. Very much like Heinemann, Goodenough criticizes Wolfson’s urge to “reconcile inconsistencies.”<sup>68</sup> With such an approach, according to Goodenough, Wolfson belittled the complexities of Philo’s thinking which allowed for contradictions. In the eyes of Goodenough, Wolfson may have promoted Jewish philosophy, but not Philo of Alexandria.<sup>69</sup> With this, Goodenough declared a failure what was most important to Wolfson: to prove the importance of the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria. Such a critique was not to remain without a response. It was his friend and mentor Ralph Marcus, an established scholar of Josephus and Philo, who came to Wolfson’s assistance. In a review article published in the spring of 1949, Marcus defends Wolfson against some of the critiques, especially the one by Goodenough. By stating that Wolfson’s *Philo* “surpasses the studies of earlier scholars in breadth and depth,” he places Wolfson above Goodenough.<sup>70</sup> Following up on Wolfson’s last chapter (“What is New in Philo?”) Marcus asks: “What is new in Wolfson’s *Philo*?” While Marcus is not willing to endorse Wolfson’s grand thesis of Philo as the founder of medieval philosophy, he repeats publicly what he had written to Wolfson in a private letter<sup>71</sup> and what to him as a Professor of Hellenistic culture apparently was most important: before Wolfson, Philo had “not been adequately recognized as a philosopher in his own right.”<sup>72</sup> As becomes clear from a letter that Marcus sent to Wolfson in the summer of 1948, the review was orchestrated by the two: “My own adverse comments on *Philo* are few and detailed, not too *gefährlich*. . . . If you’re not pleased by my review, boy, you sure aint never gonna be pleased by any review.”<sup>73</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Erwin R. Goodenough, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 7 July 1948 (full letter in Appendix).

<sup>67</sup> Erwin R. Goodenough, “Wolfson’s *Philo*,” *JBL* 67 (1948) 87–109. This was the June issue; Goodenough’s letter from 7 July 1948 thus follows up on the review.

<sup>68</sup> Goodenough, “Wolfson’s *Philo*,” 94.

<sup>69</sup> Goodenough’s review ends with the following harsh verdict: “The mistake is to call it [the book] simply Philo, for I found little of Philo himself or his spirit in it” (109).

<sup>70</sup> Ralph Marcus, “Wolfson’s Revaluation of Philo: A Review Article,” *RR* 13 (1949) 368–81, at 369.

<sup>71</sup> See above.

<sup>72</sup> Marcus, “Wolfson’s Revaluation of Philo,” 381. In a poem entitled “In Praise of Harry Wolfson,” presented on the occasion of Wolfson’s sixty-eighth birthday, Marcus wrote: “Harry Wolfson, fulfilling the Scripture on Shiloh, / Has bestowed the royal sceptre of learning on Philo” (Schwarz, “A Biographical Essay,” 33).

<sup>73</sup> Ralph Marcus, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 23 July 1948.

## ■ Emil Fackenheim's Review of *Philo*

As becomes clear from a number of letters and notes in the Harvard Archives, another review (or rather a review essay), published in the newly founded journal *The Review of Metaphysics*, made Wolfson truly furious. The author of the review was the young Emil L. Fackenheim, at the time a recent PhD in philosophy from the University of Toronto and rabbi at a reform community in Hamilton, Ontario.<sup>74</sup> The review may show a bit of *ardor iuvenilis*, but it is by no means spiteful. Rather, Fackenheim discusses in a balanced way the merits and shortcomings (some of which he does not hesitate to call “serious”) of the book. Fackenheim endorses Wolfson's initial observation that in scholarship Philo had been neglected as a philosopher. He praises Wolfson for having demonstrated to what extent Philo corrects Plato's theory of knowledge (by recognizing the need for revelation). And he discusses in most laudatory terms Wolfson's interpretation of Philo when it comes to ethical questions. At the same time, Fackenheim notes three methodological limitations in Wolfson's *Philo*. First, he rejects Wolfson's “hypothetico-deductive method of text-study.” That method, Fackenheim writes, “fetters the creative potential of philosophic ideas to conditions behind them; it makes Philo, a pious Jew with sincere philosophic aspirations, *perforce* face the problem of reconciling Scripture with Greek philosophy, and *relentlessly* be driven to certain conclusions.”<sup>75</sup> What Fackenheim, the reform rabbi, rejects is Wolfson's proneness to make Philo an orthodox Jew. In some ways, Philo becomes here the object of an inner-Jewish dialogue on orthodoxy and liberalism. The second critique concerns Wolfson's hesitation, in Fackenheim's view, to ask how and why a doctrine in Philo came about. Third, Fackenheim criticizes Wolfson for not looking more into *historical* realities when explaining the peculiarities of Philo's arguments.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, Fackenheim regrets that Wolfson sometimes did not dig deeper. If in Philo reason is subordinate to faith, how can reason then explain the true meaning of Scripture, Fackenheim wonders.<sup>77</sup> Towards the end of his nineteen-page review essay, Fackenheim—he, too, a Jewish immigrant (from Halle, Germany)—goes so far as to criticize Wolfson's English: “His style, while on the whole adequate, is

<sup>74</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, “Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam by Harry Austryn Wolfson,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 1 (1947) 89–106. On Fackenheim, see Michael L. Morgan, “Tikkun olam,” in *Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur* (ed. Dan Diner; vol. 6; Stuttgart: Metzler, 2015) 102–6 and *Emil L. Fackenheim: Philosoph, Theologian, Jew* (ed. Sharon Portnoff, Jim Diamond, Martin Yaffee; Leiden: Brill, 2008). Fackenheim first studied to become a reform rabbi at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin. He was ordained as a rabbi just before fleeing Germany to Scotland and later to Canada. In 1945 Fackenheim received his PhD from the University of Toronto with a dissertation on medieval Arabic-Jewish philosophy. Later Fackenheim became an important Jewish voice on the Holocaust; see Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Schocken, 1982).

<sup>75</sup> Fackenheim, “Philo,” 92.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 91–94.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

sometimes absurdly involved, and there are grammatical mistakes.”<sup>78</sup> As becomes clear from letters that ensued, it was in particular Fackenheim’s critical remarks with regard to language that hurt Wolfson tremendously. Remarkably (or maybe naively), Fackenheim sent offprints of the review to Wolfson. In an enclosed letter, written on 15 May 1948 (the day after the Israeli declaration of independence), Fackenheim stresses “how very instructive and stimulating” he found the reading of the “two learned volumes:” “Had I not been entrusted with the task to review them, I should probably not have found the time to study them as carefully. It has been most worthwhile.”<sup>79</sup> When Wolfson received Fackenheim’s letter, he had already seen the review and intended to publish a sharp response. Here, too, it was Ralph Marcus who tried to calm Wolfson down. In two letters to Wolfson, Marcus strongly advised against writing “a rejoinder in a ferocious tone.”<sup>80</sup> In the first two weeks of May 1948, Wolfson exchanged letters with the editor of *The Review of Metaphysics*, Paul Weiss, as well as members of the editorial board of the journal (Anton Pegis and Charles Hartshorne). Weiss showed little sympathy for Wolfson’s reaction, but was willing to publish a response under the condition that Fackenheim would be allowed to respond in the same issue of the journal.<sup>81</sup> That condition, however, was not acceptable to Wolfson (“I will not debate with a man who went out of the way to be personally insulting”).<sup>82</sup> In another letter to Paul Weiss, Wolfson indicates that he would not want to exclude writing a response at some point—“in a form both satisfactory to myself and suitable for your Review.”<sup>83</sup> Wolfson’s poisonous response to Fackenheim was never printed.<sup>84</sup> On 25 May 1948 Wolfson wrote an angry letter to Fackenheim, accusing him of acting like a “stern schoolmaster, querying, spattering corrections, and handing out advice.” In the letter, he rejects Fackenheim’s points of critique in toto. He ends by writing: “I am sorry for you.”<sup>85</sup> Nowhere in these letters is there mention of what was happening in mid-May of 1948 in the Near East. Harry Wolfson, a fervent Zionist from his youth, got caught up in his own battlefield.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>79</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 15 May 1948.

<sup>80</sup> Ralph Marcus, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 24 April 1948, and *ibid.*, 29 April 1948. Advice against a response came also from Erich Frank (Erich Frank, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 12 May 1948).

<sup>81</sup> Paul Weiss, letters to Harry A. Wolfson, 5 May 1948, and 17 May 1948. Charles Hartshorne and Anton Pegis also tried to calm Wolfson down (Charles Hartshorne, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 12 May 1948, and Anton Pegis, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 18 May 1948). Weiss had reviewed Wolfson’s *The Philosophy of Spinoza* critically in a review published in *The New Republic* 80, 1035 (1934) 220–21, to which Wolfson responded in the same journal (*The New Republic* 81, 1051 [1935] 306–7): see Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, 100–3.

<sup>82</sup> Harry A. Wolfson, copy of letter sent to Paul Weiss, 7 May 1948.

<sup>83</sup> Harry A. Wolfson, copy of letter sent to Paul Weiss, 18 May 1948.

<sup>84</sup> There are several typed drafts of Wolfson’s response to Fackenheim’s review in the Wolfson Papers.

<sup>85</sup> Harry A. Wolfson, copy of letter sent to Emil Fackenheim, 25 May 1948.

<sup>86</sup> Another critical review came from the young Samuel Sandmel (*CP* 44 [1949] 49–52), who argues against Wolfson’s strong tendency to include Philo in the wider rabbinic movement: “I should

## ■ Bringing Philo to Germany

Wolfson promoted his book with an almost missionary effort. Copies of the volumes were sent out to different parts of the world. Among the addressees, German scholars figure particularly prominently. It seems that Wolfson wanted to make sure his *Philo* reached German scholarship. For this purpose, he had received help from Erich Frank, the philosopher who, until his expulsion in 1936, had been Martin Heidegger's successor in Marburg, and now taught philosophy at Bryn Mawr College. Frank sent Wolfson several letters in which he referred to (mainly) German scholars who would be interested in his *Philo* such as Ernst Käsemann (Mainz), Günther Bornkamm (Göttingen), Joseph Pascher (Munich) and Gerhard Kittel (Tübingen).<sup>87</sup> On Wolfson's own lists of scholars who were to receive copies of *Philo* German scholars, especially theologians (but also journals and libraries), also figure prominently: Rudolf Bultmann (Marburg), Martin Dibelius (Heidelberg), Heinrich Schlier (Bonn). As for Wolfson's motivations to promote his book strongly in Germany one can only guess (besides the fact that in Germany Philonic scholarship was more present than elsewhere). It may not be too far-fetched to assume that Wolfson wished that his portrait of a Jewish Philo who was so important for all of medieval philosophy would also take foot in the country which had led such a gruesome war against the Jews. As a young man, after having visited Germany on his travel fellowship, he reported in rather pessimistic language about the possibility of a full acceptance of Jews in German society: "that the Jews are capable of being good patriots is no longer questioned, but can they be genuine ones? Will not the Jews always remain the carriers of an alien culture, unabsorbable and unassimilable, despite their conversion and intermarriage? It is this problem that confronts the Jewish intellectuals in Germany."<sup>88</sup>

Strikingly, in the Philo-correspondence in the Wolfson archive, there is only one brief response that was sent to Cambridge *from* Germany: the psychiatrist Karl Jaspers thanked Wolfson for this "offenbar ungemein gründliche, historisch genaue

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cast my tentative vote for Philo's being outside rabbinic developments and unrelated to them" (50). Haberman, "Harry A. Wolfson's Utilization of the Hypothetico-Deductive Method of Text Study," 104–28, mentions that in "a testy letter to Sandmel, Wolfson accused him of being a mere stooge for Wolfson's archival Goodenough" (HUA HUG [FP] 58.10 Box 274, S-folder).

<sup>87</sup> Erich Frank, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 8 May 1947, *ibid.*, 10 September 1947, and *ibid.*, 24 (?) September 1947. On Kittel, Frank notes (*ibid.*, 8 May 1947) that he "was Nazi [sic] and might have been dismissed" (as he indeed was). In one letter (*ibid.*, 10 September 1947), Frank reports on his "friend," the director of the Hannover library who "is enthusiastic about the proposal of getting" Wolfson's book and who suggests it be sent also to the "new Libraries" of Mainz, Düsseldorf, and Stuttgart "which under the present conditions play the rôle of Universities-Libraries." Shipping books to the different zones of post-war Germany was not easy. The copy that Harvard University Press had sent to Hans Leisegang, Freie Universität Berlin, in 1949 was returned with the note "no printed matter to Berlin" (according to business manager at Harvard University Press, Wm. Warren Smith Jr., letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 26 October 1949).

<sup>88</sup> Harry Wolfson, "Jewish Students in European Universities," *The Menorah Journal* 1 (1915) 26–31, at 31. See Ritter, "Auf dem Weg zum System"; Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, 41–48.

und begrifflich konstruktive Buch” (“this clearly extremely thorough, historically accurate and conceptually constructive book”).<sup>89</sup> For whatever reason, Wolfson’s *Philo* was not well received in Germany. The points of critique were similar to those we have already encountered in the reviews by Goodenough, Heinemann, and Fackenheim. Wolfson was criticized for his tendency to harmonize inconsistencies in Philo’s work, for over-systematizing Philo, for artificially bringing rabbinic thought into proximity with Greek philosophy, but also—as the church historian Walther Völker (Mainz) put it—for his strong “Jewish point of view.” For Völker, Wolfson’s self-confident presentation of a greatly influential Philo must have been too provocative. In his own monograph on Philo, published in 1938, Völker had argued the opposite: that early Christian piety has very little in common with Philo. In his review, he compares Wolfson with Jewish-Hellenistic authors who claim that Plato had plagiarized Moses.<sup>90</sup> Other reviews published in Germany were less harsh on Wolfson, but far from endorsing his thesis.<sup>91</sup> Wolfson cannot have been pleased with the reception of his *Philo* in Germany.

## ■ Conclusion

Wolfson’s revisionary outline of ancient and medieval philosophy triggered disparate reactions. Both established and rising scholars of Philo and ancient philosophy rejected the main thesis of *Philo*. Leo Schwarz, Wolfson’s friend and biographer, greatly exaggerates when he writes that Wolfson’s *Philo* “was quickly acclaimed in the learned and general press.”<sup>92</sup> While reviewers often show great sympathy for Wolfson’s impressive erudition, many have serious reservations with

<sup>89</sup> Karl Jaspers, letter to Harry A. Wolfson, 12 September 1947. Jaspers did not hide that he had not read large parts of the work yet. He would make use of it, Jaspers wrote, when his teaching would touch on the topic again: “Ich konnte nur einen schnellen Blick hineinwerfen und muss die gründliche Lektüre auf den Zeitpunkt verschieben, an dem meine Vorlesungen wieder auf dieses Gebiet kommen.”

<sup>90</sup> Walther Völker, review of Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo*, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung für Kritik der internationalen Wissenschaft* 71 (1950) 289–95. Völker criticizes Wolfson in harsh, if not disrespectful language: “Nur in der Durchführung ist der heutige Autor seinen alten Gesinnungsfreunden überlegen” (292). Völker criticizes Wolfson for the “Jewish point of view” in his presentation of the history of philosophy. According to Völker, Wolfson places Jewish philosophy as an “overarching power” at the center of everything else, not giving sufficient justice to Christian motives, which are “of a different kind” (294). Völker’s own monograph on Philo was entitled *Fortschritt und Vollendung bei Philo von Alexandrien: Eine Studie zur Geschichte der Frömmigkeit* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1938). In that book, Philo served as a control group of sorts in his endeavor to present mysticism as something genuinely Christian. Erwin R. Goodenough, who saw in Philo very much a hellenized mystic, reviewed the book in *CP* 35 (1940) 225–26, calling it “a dangerous study to use.”

<sup>91</sup> Hartwig Thyen, “Die Probleme der neueren Philo-Forschung,” *Theologische Rundschau* (Neue Folge) 23 (1955) 230–46 and Karl Bormann, *Die Ideen- und Logoslehre Philons von Alexandrien. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit H.A. Wolfson* (PhD diss., Universität Köln, 1955).

<sup>92</sup> Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, 156.

regard to his methodology.<sup>93</sup> Positive appraisals in scholarly journals were the exception.<sup>94</sup> As has become evident from Wolfson's reaction to Emil Fackenheim's review, he did not take such critique lightly, to say the least. That his proposal of a history of philosophy with Philo and Spinoza as cornerstones did not find support among scholars (Jewish and non-Jewish) must have been a major disappointment to Wolfson.<sup>95</sup>

However, as has become clear from the letters and notes that were sent to Wolfson after the publication of *Philo*, this is not the whole picture. The book evoked strong sentiments and the reception of the study includes expressions of gratitude. Many Jewish readers—scholars, rabbis as well as non-academics—genuinely welcomed Wolfson's new, fresh, and Jewish Philo, even if only in private. Scholarly critique of Wolfson's main thesis could seemingly coincide with great appreciation for the overdue "rehabilitation of Philo" (Ralph Marcus). Many Jewish readers of Wolfson reacted enthusiastically, some of them writing to Wolfson in Hebrew: Wolfson was Philo's "redeemer" (Shalom Spiegel). In addition, what shines through from a number of notes as well as from the Jewish press reporting on the book, is that Wolfson's triumphant *Philo*, released only two years after the worst catastrophe in Jewish history, could serve as an antidote to the postwar Jewish experience. Even if flawed, or at least overstated, this version of Philo offered a Jewish moment of inclusion that landed on fertile soil.

<sup>93</sup> Other critical reviews, besides those already mentioned, were published by Floyd Filson, *JQR* 39 (1948–1949) 97–102 and Henry Chadwick, "The Philosophy of Philo," *CR* 63 (1949) 24–25.

<sup>94</sup> Jean Daniélou, the French Jesuit and patrologist who, a decade later, would publish his own introduction to Philo (Jean Daniélou, *Philon d'Alexandrie* [Paris: Fayard, 1958]), takes a clear stand against Goodenough and in favor of Wolfson in Jean Daniélou, "The Philosophy of Philo: The Significance of Professor Harry A. Wolfson's New Study," *Theological Studies* 9 (1948) 578–89. Daniélou endorses the main thesis of the book ("It can truthfully be said that he [sc. Philo] is . . . the founder of Judaeo-Christian philosophy") and is grateful to Wolfson for allowing Philo "to take his rightful place in the history of philosophy" (584). Other sympathetic reviews were published by George Boas, "Professor Wolfson's *PHILO*," *JHI* 9 (1948) 385–92 and Leo Roberts, "Wolfson's Monument to Philo," *Isis* 40 (1949) 199–213.

<sup>95</sup> Isadore Twersky, "Harry Austryn Wolfson, in Appreciation," in Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard*, xiii–xxvii, at xvii.

## ■ Appendix: Selected Letters to Harry A. Wolfson Written on the Occasion of the Publication of *Philo*<sup>96</sup>

*A. Gershom Scholem to Harry A. Wolfson (handwritten letter)*

October 15, 1947

Dear Professor Wolfson

Let me thank you for your magnum opus on Philo which you were kind enough to have sent to me. It arrived some days ago and I am filled with wonder about the discussions it certainly should entail. I am very glad I am not a historian of philosophy as your book would put me in great distress as to what to do about all that goyish gibberish which hitherto has been called history of philosophy. Now it seems that the Jews have stolen the show for another time: three philosophers who count, and two of them Jews. יהי רצון that you are right of which, of course, I am not sure having not yet studied the volumes. I am looking forward to do [sic] that in connection with my own work, and I am sure I will learn a lot from you.

All good wishes and best regards to you

yours sincerely

G. Scholem

*B. Elias J. Bickerman to Harry A. Wolfson (typed letter)*

September 25, 1947

Dear Professor Wolfson:

From Harvard University Press I have just received your Philo. May I express my sincerely [sic] meant thanks for this splendid gift. I don't know anything about Philo. Except his political tracts, I could never compel myself to read more than a couple of pages of his tiresome homiletics. You, however, succeed in making this synagogue preacher interesting and important. Viewed in the line of Maimonides and St. Thomas, even Philo appears endowed with reason and his allegorizing acquires a deep meaning as a chapter in the warfare between Faith and Reason. In your book I again see the advantage of regarding not only antecedents but as well the sequel of a historical fact. "The Tree is known by his [sic] fruit".<sup>97</sup>

I can only regret my inability to send you an ἀντιδωρεά. But perhaps you will accept some offprints forwarded by the same mail as a sign of my thanks and appreciation.

Truly yours

Elias J. Bickerman

<sup>96</sup> Courtesy of the Harvard University Archives. Papers of Harry Austryn Wolfson, HUGFP 58.10, box 1.

<sup>97</sup> Luke 6:44.

*C. Isaak Heinemann to Harry A. Wolfson (handwritten letter)*

[no date]<sup>98</sup>

Sehr geehrter Herr Kollege,

Sie hatten die Freundlichkeit, mir Ihr großes Philon-Werk zu übersenden. Haben Sie herzlichen Dank, und nehmen Sie zugleich meine besten Glückwünsche zur Vollendung dieses Buches entgegen, das jedenfalls zeigt, daß Sie sich mit vollem Erfolge in ein Gebiet eingearbeitet haben, das Sie in Ihren früheren Forschungen noch weniger berührt hatten. Das Material, das auf diesem Gebiet zu unserer Verfügung steht, läßt nicht selten dem Forscher einen gewissen Spielraum, und in manchen Fragen, etwa nach Philons jüdischer Bildung, gehen wir nicht völlig überein (II, 410, 59 haben Sie allerdings meine Auffassung doch wohl etwas zu scharf wiedergegeben). Aber in vielem sind wir uns vollkommen einig; ich werde Ihnen in naher Zeit einige Aufsätze übersenden, die längst gedruckt sind, aber Freixemplare bekomme ich erst, wenn die betr. Gelegenheitsschriften herausgekommen sind. Ich konnte Ihr Buch dort noch nicht zitieren; aber in den Anmerkungen zu דרכי האגדה und zur 2. Aufl. von טעמי המצוות konnte ich es noch berücksichtigen.<sup>99</sup> Besonders wichtig ist, daß es eine Reihe neue, berechtigte Fragestellungen enthält.

Ich nehme an, daß Sie meinen Aufsatz של ר' יהודה הלוי erhalten haben.<sup>100</sup> Natürlich würde ich mich sehr freuen, Abzüge Ihrer Arbeiten aus unserem gemeinsamen Forschungsgebiet zu erhalten; ich bitte, von meiner Adresse (umseitig) Kenntnis nehmen zu wollen. Darf man fragen, ob Sie uns in absehbarer Zeit die so dringend erwünschte Edition des אור השלוח schenken werden?<sup>101</sup>

Meine in deutscher Sprache geschriebenen Bücher (auch "Philons Bildung" und die Übersetzung) werden demnächst in den Verlag E.J. Brill in Leiden übergehen.

Mit frdl. Gruß

ergebenst

Heinemann

<sup>98</sup> According to the note "Copies of Philo mailed" from 1947 in the Wolfson Papers, Wolfson's *Philo* was sent to Heinemann on September 15, 1947.

<sup>99</sup> Isaak Heinemann, *Darkhe ha-Aggada* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1949); idem, *Ta'ame ha-Mitsvot be-Sifrut Jisrael* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1942).

<sup>100</sup> Isaak Heinemann, "The Historical Picture of R. Yehuda Halevi," *Zion* 9 (1944) 147–77 (Hebrew).

<sup>101</sup> Crescas, *Or Adonai*. Wolfson published a partial edition, with translation, of the work in *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle: Problems of Aristotle's Physics in Jewish and Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1957).

*D. Erwin R. Goodenough to Harry A. Wolfson (handwritten letter)*

July 7, 1948

Dear Professor Wolfson,

Your extremely generous letter has just reached me, and I thank you deeply for it. When scholarly differences of opinion can be kept as such, with no feeling of personal rupture or violence, human nature is about at its best. It delights me to see such an attitude in you, and my admiration for you reaches a new high.

It will be very good indeed if you can clear the vexed question of how to use rabbinic sources to throw light on a period from two to ten centuries before they were written. Such a methodology has never been proposed, let alone demonstrated. As you know I studied under G.F.,<sup>102</sup> but agree entirely with Porter<sup>103</sup> that GF only added confusion to the problem as a whole, much as he contributed in detail. The whole history of Judaism is impossible until a critical study and use of rabbinic writings is made possible by such a methodological foundation. I speak out when I consider those sources are misused, but it is of course utterly beyond my power to make the constructive study myself.

I hope your patristic volume is coming well.

Sincerely,

Erwin R. Goodenough

*E. Eugen Täubler to Harry A. Wolfson (typed letter)*

March 22, 1948

Dear Professor Wolfson,

I appreciate highly the great honour that you have paid to me by sending me your opus grande on Philo. I have been really moved by your kindness. You can not [sic] be able to understand sufficiently what that means. My fate stands behind this feeling. What a fate!

I thought to know Philo in some measure. I can think it only now. It is not only das Zu- und Umlernen in Einzelheiten . . . aber damit bin ich von selbst in die deutsche Sprache hineingekommen, und es wird für Sie leichter sein, mein Deutsch als mein Englisch zu verstehen. Erlauben Sie mir darum, in dieser Sprache, die ja nicht nur die Sprache des heutigen Deutschlands ist, fortzufahren. – Zu dem vielen, dem ich nachtrauere, gehört mit in erster Linie der Verfall der humanistischen europäischen Kultur. Ich hatte immer gehofft, dass das Judentum einmal nicht nur als tolerierter, sondern als unentbehrlicher Bestandteil der europäischen Geistigkeit anerkannt

<sup>102</sup> George Foot Moore, professor of the History of Religion at the Harvard Divinity School. See Goodenough's critique of Moore's and Wolfson's concept of a "normative" (Moore) or "native" (Wolfson) Judaism in his review essay "Wolfson's *Philo*," 89–90, 99–100.

<sup>103</sup> Frank Chamberlin Porter, professor of Biblical Theology at the Yale Divinity School.

werden würde. Übrig geblieben sind nur zwei Fragezeichen: europäische Kultur? Judentum?

Judentum ist nach meiner Überzeugung nur im Rahmen einer universalen humanistischen Kultur als lebendige Erscheinung denkbar. Ihr Werk führt vom Philosophischen her an die Wurzel der existenziellen Problematik heran, und der Weg zu Spinoza hin wird sie, nach dem Ausweis des bisher für die Anfänge und die Überwindung dieser "mittelalterlichen" Epoche geleisteten, in einer Weise aufdecken, dass die Wirkung nicht nur wissenschaftlich überzeugend sondern innerhalb des Judentums auch existenziell wirksam werden wird: wenn der Träger der Wirkung sich noch aus dem lethargischen, inhalts- und problemlosen Zustand seines inneren Seins retten lässt.

Ich begann mit dem Lesen am Abend des Tages, an dem ich Ihr Werk erhielt, und seitdem war durch Monate der grösste Teil langer Abende seinem Studium gewidmet. Erst nun ist es mir möglich, von einer weitgehenden (aber noch keineswegs abgeschlossenen) Kenntnis des Werks her meinen Dank als einen vollbegründeten aussprechen zu können. Ein Gespräch, das kein Ende finden könnte, würde auf einem Spannungsverhältnis beruhen. Sie geben das geistige Gebilde, ich suche den Typus des hellenistischen Juden als ersten Vertreters der Assimilation: das Wort im grossen Sinn genommen, nicht in dem der Anpassung, sondern der Auseinandersetzung, die dem Judentum seine aktive Teilhaberschaft an der universalen geistigen Bewegung sichert. In diesem Sinne steht der oft akademisch-leblos anmutende Philo als eine ringende Persönlichkeit uns näher als die spanisch-jüdischen Philosophen, und auch viel näher als moderne Versuche und Versucher, Judentum aus dem Geist einer bestimmten Philosophie heraus zu verstehen. Ich habe damit die Richtung angedeutet, aus der heraus ich sofort zu einer viel eindringlicheren Nutzung Ihres Werkes kommen werde. Ich deute ein Werk an, dessen erster Band kurz vor dem Abschluss steht: *Ideology and Reality*. – *The Jewish Fate*.<sup>104</sup> Sie werden sich keinen dankbareren Nutzer Ihres Werks denken können, als ich es für den zweiten Band sein werde.

Ich wäre sehr froh, Ihnen einiges darüber mitteilen und von meiner Seite zu dem Brückenschlag zwischen uns schon jetzt etwas tun zu können.

Mit bester Empfehlung bin ich,

Ihr sehr ergebener

E. Täubler.

<sup>104</sup> This study (also mentioned as forthcoming in Baron, Marcus, "Eugen Täubler," xxxiv) seems to have remained unfinished. There is no manuscript of this title at the Täubler archive at the Basel University Library.