

Remembering the Days of Old: The ambivalent Approach to History in Jewish Thought

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זְכוֹר יְמֵי עוֹלָם, בְּיַמֵּי שְׁנוֹת דָּר-דָּר; שְׂאֵל אָבִיךָ וּגְדָךְ, זְקֵנֶיךָ וְיִאמְרוּ לְךָ. (דברים לב:ז)

Today, the pursuit of history is an uncontroversial and rather commonplace feature of society. Historians are honoured within academic scholarship, popular literature and often religious thought too. The voices of those who challenge the legitimacy of the historian and his field present a truly atypical and sparse breed. However, as the foundations of modern historical scholarship were being established, a number of influential nineteenth century thinkers expressed extreme ambivalence over the worth of historical studies. In 1873, Nietzsche composed one of the most scathing critiques of history ever written: 'The unrestrained historical sense, pushed to its logical extreme, uproots the future, because it destroys illusions and robs existing things of the only atmosphere in which they can live'.¹ As modern historiography began to tread its first steps, Nietzsche railed against the catastrophic effects that history inflicts upon mankind.

Nietzsche was not alone in his contempt towards the negative elements of history. Kierkegaard also effusively explained that history's value was inherently limited by its impotence in being able to understand and aid religion; faith 'is a paradox, which history can never digest'.² This explosion of invective against history appears excessive and extreme in the eyes of those schooled with an appreciation for this field and its numerous benefits. However this scepticism towards history has numerous echoes within Jewish thought too. Indeed, Jewish thought has provided an exceptionally hospitable breeding ground for questioning the very foundations of historical study.

An overview of history in Jewish thought

In his seminal study on Jewish history, *Zakhor*, Yosef Yerushalmi asserted that for the greater part of Jewish history, historical studies have simply been neglected.³ The gaping void in Jewish historiography separating the Jewish-Roman historian Flavius Josephus from the nineteenth century *Wissenschaft* historians can hardly escape detection and is a clear sign of this neglect.⁴ Arnaldo Momigliano has similarly drawn attention to the reality that the only genre of historical writing which was pursued with any constancy was the 'history of the transmission of learning', the study of the chain of tradition.⁵ This narrow scope of historical study was questioned over time, however. Ibn Ezra lamented the absence of historical studies within the Jewish world; blaming the 'indolence' which led to this deficiency, 'they did not succeed ... to write their chronicles, and to remember their histories and traditions. It would have been fitting that they should not have ignored and despised such matters.'⁶ For most, however, the neglect of history was no mere coincidence, but rather formed an ideal worldview. The Rambam's description of history as a field comprising 'no wisdom, no purpose other than wasting time with useless matters' is paradigmatic of the 'unhistorical' approach towards the past adopted by many medieval Jewish thinkers.⁷ Centuries later, the Shulhan Arukh went one step further by issuing an outright prohibition on the study of 'the books of wars'.⁸ This recurring theme led R. J. J. Shachter to conclude that 'historical 'truth,' per se, as an independent value in and of itself, has not fared well in the Jewish tradition.'⁹

While the problematic nature of history has presented a noticeably perennial theme throughout Jewish thought, the advent of modernity radically widened the gulf already separating these two worlds. From the mid nineteenth century, Jewish thinkers across the religious spectrum began to develop systematic theories dedicated to drawing attention to the grave dangers involved in the study of history. R. Hirsch initiated a long tradition within German orthodoxy that openly expressed consternation over the threat academic history posed to the sacred Jewish world.¹⁰ Building upon the path paved by his Frankfurt predecessor, R. Shimon Schwab evoked a most extreme anti-historical vision of the past: 'Rather than write a history of our forbears, every generation has to put a veil over the human failings of its elders and glorify all the rest which is great and beautiful.'¹¹

In a significantly more moderate manner, R. Hayim Ozer Grodzinski was also to emphasise the triviality of history in the Jewish worldview;

'Torah luminaries never took upon themselves to probe the history of the People of Israel... Even the few great sages who did deal with history approached it sporadically and incidentally, devoting the majority of their time to knowledge of Torah... They delved into the words of our rabbis and not in their histories or places of residence.'¹²

Interestingly, the urge to resist history not only permeated the recesses of the yeshiva world, but had also travelled to Jewish thinkers immersed within the world of philosophy too. Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas, all revered in the Western philosophical canon, devoted extensive portions of their oeuvres to elaborating and explicating the flaws of history in a most extensive manner.¹³ This animosity displayed towards history, while differing from person to person in important ways, presents an unusual unifying theme amongst such an array of eclectic thinkers. The responses they developed to defend Judaism against the historical onslaught invites particularly close examination given that the challenges they confronted still face Judaism today.

The central question this study seeks to address is why history in particular has experienced such difficulty in gaining acceptance within the Jewish tradition. What particular facets of this field merited such hostile criticism? After all, the copious benefits afforded by a historical awareness cannot go unnoticed. On the pragmatic plane, countless historians have observed that an intimate knowledge of past mistakes offers mankind a 'limitless experiential resource' to aid future challenges and avoid further blunders.¹⁴ Santayana's aphorism ought to alert us to the dangers involved in avoiding history; 'when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'¹⁵ Furthermore, learning of man's triumphs and achievements can undoubtedly provide critical inspiration to a generation in urgent need of stimulus.

The importance of historical memory to Jewish thought is naturally given its most powerful thrust by the Torah itself. Moshe's valedictory address to Bnei Yisrael contains the injunction to 'remember the days of the world, consider the years of many generations.'¹⁶ This command, as explained by R. Aharon Lichtenstein, is not merely of pragmatic import, but additionally presents a wealth of spiritual value too; offering 'limited apprehension of the working of Providence' and 'insight into *tselem Elokim*.'¹⁷ History, to cite Herder, is the book 'of the human soul in times and nations.'¹⁸ In the halakhic realm, critical history also frequently allows one to construct a more accurate and comprehensive image of specific

positions taken by Rabbinic authorities.¹⁹ Jewish philosophy cannot brusquely disregard these multiple advantages of history without providing a most rigorous justification. Ironically, some historical perspective on the modern development of history is needed to shed light upon this move to resist history.

The rise of Historicism

The aversion towards history initially surfaced as a response to a fundamental shift in the conception of history at the turn of the nineteenth century. The renewed odium towards history within modern Jewish thought drew much of its élan from this clash. Accordingly, before analysing the modern Jewish perspectives, some of the key underlying features of nineteenth century historiography must first be addressed. In this period, an historical attitude developed positing that any past phenomenon could only fundamentally be understood by critically examining the contextual milieu and contributing causes of a given event. The linchpin of this philosophy was recently summarised by Walter Schultz: 'we are historical beings right to the inner core of our humanity'.²⁰ In this view, the historian was charged with the duty to forget all philosophical convictions and grand schemes of history as the historical event was to be examined in complete isolation. This perspective later came to be known as historicism.²¹

The presumption that no universal end-goal of history existed also constituted an emblematic feature of historicism. The narrative of mankind thus appeared as a diverse assortment of unconnected and discrete phenomena rather than a cogent and contiguous flow of events. In Meinecke's terminology, history was 'a countless number of individual foci, each charged with energy, and each carrying a particular destiny'.²² In short, this strand of historiography sought to elevate history into a rigid scientific methodology whereby events could be completely and systemically dismantled into a number of causes. As we shall later see, due to this heavy emphasis on causality within history, determinism was never too distant from this historical attitude.²³

This critical approach to history attracted the founders of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement who began to subject Jewish history to the same strictly scientific approach. No longer was history to be 'a handmaiden of dubious repute' and merely tolerated by Judaism.²⁴ This school of Jewish historians ensured that history would now ascertain the definitive value of Judaism. The leading *Wissenschaft* historian, Heinrich Graetz was to declare proudly that 'the totality of Judaism is discernable only in its history. Its complete nature, the sum of its powers, becomes clear only in the light of history'.²⁵ Many contemporaneous figures began to realise that subjecting Judaism to such unbounded historical criticism would ultimately damage the fundamentally sacred and religious nature of Jewish history.²⁶ Judaism, it was feared, would be transformed into just one phenomenon amongst many in the annals of world history.²⁷

The eternal value of Torah beyond history

For many Jewish thinkers, one of the principle dangers involved in adopting a strongly historicist approach towards the past risked holding the insights of the Sages as hostages to their times. Viewing an idea as a purely historical phenomenon detracted from its sacredness and its ability to touch the hearts and minds of the present. It was in this vein that Leo Strauss, the German political philosopher, outlined the critical flaw of historicism. He

described that historicism was critically hindered, its belief that 'all human thought is historical' meant that it was 'hence *unable ever to grasp anything eternal*.'²⁸ Indeed, many of the more radical scholars within the *Wissenschaft* movement, such as Abraham Geiger, deliberately and explicitly utilised historicist methods on halakhic decisions to neutralise the mandate of earlier rabbis in the modern world. R. Hirsch's strong criticism of history was deliberately aimed to stymie the attempts of the nineteenth century reformers to justify their programme of religious reform. R. Hirsch announced that 'instead of complaining that it is no longer suitable to the times, we should recognise only one legitimate complaint: that the times are no longer suitable to the Divine Word.'²⁹ R. Hirsch feared that the *Wissenschaft* movement was renovating Judaism into nothing more than a cabinet of curiosities. In R. Hirsch's footsteps many sought to underscore the eternal nature of the Torah, transcending both time and space, whose force is as binding today as in ancient history.

Twentieth century Jewish existentialists also sought to accentuate the counter-historical nature of both the Torah She'bikhtav and the Torah She'beal Peh. Levinas was to posit that Gemara is not to be viewed as an antiquated and irrelevant manuscript. Rather, 'the Talmud, despite its antiquity... belongs, as paradoxical as this might seem, to the *modern history* of Judaism.'³⁰ The debates replete throughout the Gemara directly address the contemporary world and guide the modern Jew in his confrontation with his environment. Franz Rosenzweig was also to maintain the belief that Divine truth, particularly manifest within halakhah, supersedes any particular historical context and maintains its integrity for eternity. Halakhah does appear within history, but is most certainly not crushed by its heavy load. Rosenzweig asserted:

'God withdrew the Jews from historical time by arching the bridge of His Law high above the current of time which henceforth and to all eternity rushes powerlessly along under its arches.'³¹

For both Rosenzweig and Levinas, it was of crucial importance to emphasise the fact that Judaism continues to seek its vitality from a distant, yet ever present, past. One must only remove the incidental historical veil of the past to reveal the kernel of eternal essence concealed within.

The presence of Jewish historical experience

The binding nature of halakhah in contemporary society was not the sole concern of Jewish thinkers in their negation of historicism. Modern Jewish thought was also adverse to the particular methodology advocated by historicists. The historicist was urged to distance himself from his subject area to enable the objective and impartial analysis of evidence. Leopold von Ranke, the father of German historicism, expressed the need to examine the past with neutrality and from a critical distance; to 'see with *unbiased eyes* the progress of universal history.'³² Conversely, central to Jewish thought is the notion that the past is not a fundamentally distant and inaccessible phenomenon, but rather plays an influential role in daily life. Thus, it was not only halakhah which transcended time, but collective Jewish experience too. For Judaism, the past remains a ubiquitous feature of contemporary life. Throughout the vast corpus of halakhah and Jewish philosophy imperatives abound which urge the individual to experience and re-enter the past. The obligation to 'view oneself as if one left Egypt oneself' is paradigmatic of the belief that one can experience the past.³³ Importantly, such attempts were not only possible, but even laudable.

It was perhaps this conviction which led Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi to exclaim that 'every day the heavenly voice resounds from Mount Horeb...'³⁴ Another formulation of this concept is the notion in the Torah itself that the entire Jewish people, even those not yet born, were present at Matan Torah: 'Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that stands here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day.'³⁵ One need only be familiar with a few pages of Gemara and its commentators to realise that its methodology flies in the face of historicist conception of time. Conventional barriers of chronology are overtly flaunted and all ages are arranged in 'an ever-fluid dialogue with one another.'³⁶ Latent within this conception of time lies the radical notion that one can bridge the seemingly impermeable abyss separating the past from the present.

Many of the plentiful Jewish philosophical works produced in the last century sought to emphasise this fundamental counter-historical 'fraternity' across time.³⁷ Consequently, Levinas could write of 'the unity of the consciousness of mankind, claiming to be *'fraternal* and one throughout time and space.'³⁸ Similarly, Rosenzweig inveighed against those who viewed Jewish history as inaccessible to the modern man. Rosenzweig explained that Judaism rejects 'historical memory' which remains 'a fixed point in the past that becomes more past every year by one year', instead an intimacy to the past is advocated, being 'always equally near, really not at all past, but *eternally present*.'³⁹ Not only do ideas transcend their temporal dwellings, but in addition historical experience is able to transcend the vicissitudes of time and etch their effect on the modern consciousness.

What we can see is that the animosity towards history found in much Jewish literature was not aimed at history *per se*, but only the particular brand of this field which sought to separate the past from the present. However, if one is able to overcome this tendency, a historical awareness is notably endorsed by Judaism. After all, many ideas laced within the fabric of halakhah encourage one to embrace past collective experience. Voices in the Gemara also felt that there exists a collective spirit which glides above the rise and decline of mortal individuals; 'there is no communal death.'⁴⁰ Evidently, an acute awareness of past suffering and victory plays a central role in conditioning the modern mindset.

The theory of historical progress

Another important feature of modern historiography which aggravated the dissonance between history and Jewish thought was the theory of historical progress. The Enlightenment heralded an era in which the theory of progress had become almost synonymous with the field of history. Many eighteenth century philosophers viewed 'the past as a period of ignorance and unhappiness from which men had emerged into a present that was clearly better.'⁴¹ In essence, the notion of progress purported that mankind was travelling on a constant and steady path towards societal and moral improvement. This conception of history, which came to be known as the 'Philosophy of History', attracted some of the Enlightenment's most eloquent advocates.⁴² It was Hegel who ultimately bequeathed this theory in its most developed form to the modern world.⁴³

Understandably, a range of philosophers were quick to enumerate the multiple flaws of this theory. Spengler's damning indictment is representative of the most common attack on the notion of 'progress'. He asserted that this universal theory of progress is a 'quaintly conceived system of suns and planets', in which the ground of Western Europe is 'arbitrarily'

declared sacrosanct as all remaining cultures are forced to 'revolve around in modesty'.⁴⁴ For Spengler, and a host of other thinkers, the very notion that contemporary Western culture ought to establish the benchmark for progress around the world and throughout history was an audacious and highly conceited belief.⁴⁵

Perhaps predictably, this theory of historical progress has experienced a troubled relationship with Judaism too. First, the heavy emphasis on free will in Jewish thought entails the worrying possibility that progress is not inevitable. Indeed, statements replete in the Gemara, such as R. Yohanan's: 'The son of David will come only in a generation that is either altogether righteous or altogether wicked', highlight the notion that society might gravely deteriorate in the final days prior to the final redemption.⁴⁶ The inexorable progress of mankind was by no means a guarantee.⁴⁷

Another salient feature of the Hegelian conception of progress is the confident vision of contemporary Western society as being necessarily 'superior' to past ages and cultures. In this view, the historical process has validated current trends and pronounced all other previous competing movements as deficient. Latent within this notion of progress is a total acceptance of the existing status quo as an improvement upon the past. However, for Jewish thought, the prevalence and pervasiveness of any particular trend in society is, in of itself, an irrelevance. Judaism has always vociferously advocated combing the depths of its own rich tradition for moral and political guidance rather than pure acceptance of the present. Indeed, it was this very motivation which underpinned Levinas' aphorism on history;

'The most ancient of claims is its [Judaism's] claim to a separate existence in the political history of the world. *It is the claim to judge history* – that is to say, to remain free with regard to events, whatever the internal logic binding them. It is the claim to be an eternal people.'⁴⁸

Supine resignation to the vicissitudes of time is simply not an option for the Jew who wholeheartedly rejects the determinism latent within the theory of inevitable historical progress. In this respect, an over-awareness of history can be most damaging and constricting not only in realm of theory but also in that of action. Excessive care to preserve that which has survived from the past often induces deep wariness and hesitancy at the prospect of creative change.⁴⁹ In a lecture dedicated to the analysis of historicism, Isaiah Berlin explained that such a deterministic view of history divests the individual of moral culpability and responsibility, with potentially worrying consequences.⁵⁰

It was this very insight which motivated Nietzsche's disgust at history; 'the historical sense makes its servant passive and retrospective.'⁵¹ History, in Nietzsche's eyes, quashed man's inner yearning to seek the establishment of an ideal and better world. Instead, history encouraged a comfortable retrospective acquiescence of what the past had bequeathed to contemporary society. However, the possibility of such fundamental personal transformation and the potential rejection of current trends are key principles in the world of Judaism, and specifically in that of teshuva. The Rambam writes that one seeking to repent 'ought to change his name, exclaiming: I am changed, I am not that same person who sinned.'⁵² In a similar vein, R. Soloveitchik understood that repentance incorporated 'a creative gesture which is responsible for the emergence of a new personality, a new self.'⁵³ Total severance from past actions and the divestment of established habits are actively encouraged when guided with authentic motivations. In this particular respect, both Nietzsche's critique of

history and R. Soloveitchik's conception of the creative halakhic personality unite in their common loathing of moral lethargy and the stubborn resistance to improvement.⁵⁴

The act of repentance is imbued with such immense power that it is capable even of rewriting history. This notion underpins Reish Lakish's view of teshuva: 'Great is repentance, for because of it, premeditated sins are accounted as errors'.⁵⁵ R. Soloveitchik understood this Talmudic dictum to mean that teshuva entailed a total re-creation of the past: 'The future imprints its stamp on the past and determines its image'.⁵⁶ Man can break free from his past self and reinterpret his entire history. R. Soloveitchik's view of teshuva presents a clear sign that past actions are not simply to be tolerated and accepted, but deserve repeated scrutiny and overhaul if necessary. Within the world of teshuvah, history is a malleable entity which can be moulded to harmonise with our changed selves and our vision of the future.

Concluding remarks

Over the course of this study we have witnessed a range of counter-historical views found in modern Rabbinic and Jewish philosophical thought. Some thinkers fought history to establish a dialogue with past Jewish experience whilst others sought to encourage the critical re-analysis of contemporary trends. However, it has emerged that these thinkers were not encouraging an all encompassing rejection of history.⁵⁷ They merely wished to warn their contemporaries of the manifold dangers involved in relying too heavily upon history. Even Nietzsche, whose lack of verbal restraint we have already witnessed, emphasised that history is only problematic if taken to an extreme; it is only 'by excess of history' that 'life becomes maimed and degenerate'.⁵⁸ Whether they were concerned with the preservation and protection of halakhah or the cultivation of a creative and authentic Torah personality, this group of thinkers ultimately indicated that there is a limit to the amount history can achieve.⁵⁹

A retrospective glance at the past may indeed yield a wealth of historical causes, universal laws of time and sociological motivations. But, what became unmistakably apparent was that history could not grasp what ultimately lay one step beyond the flow of historical causality, the realm of faith and freedom.

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¹ F. Nietzsche, *The uses and abuses of history*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York, 1957), 42

² S. Kierkegaard, 'Training in Christianity' in R. Bretall ed., *A Kierkegaard anthology* (Princeton, , 1946), 392. For a more extensive formulation of Kierkegaard's perspective on history, see S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific postscript*, trans. D. Swenson (Princeton, 1941).

³ Y. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish history and Jewish memory* (Seattle, 1982), 31

⁴ A. Momigliano, *The classical foundations of modern historiography* (Los Angeles, 1990), 27. L. Kochan, in his *The Jew and his history* (New York, 1977) has provided another study on the different perspectives taken on history within Jewish thought. He follows a similar track to the one taken by Momigliano and Yerushalmi. Bonfil has argued that medieval Jewish thought did indeed develop a number of historical perspectives in R. Bonfil, 'Jewish attitudes towards history and historical studies in pre-modern Times' in: *Jewish History* 11 (Spring 1977), 21.

⁵ A. Momigliano, *The classical foundations of modern historiography* (Los Angeles, 1990), 22

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- ⁶ Moshe Ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Iyunim v'ha-Diyunim: Al ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit*, ed. and trans. A. Halkin (Jerusalem, 1975), 50-51
- ⁷ Rambam, *Perush Hamishnayot*, Sanhedrin, 10:1; S. Baron 'The historical outlook of Maimonides' in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Volume 6 (1935), 11.
- ⁸ Shulhan Arukh, Orakh Hayim, 307:6
- ⁹ J.J. Schacter, 'Facing the truths of history' in *The Torah u-Madda Journal* 9 (1998-1999), 202. This multidimensional article presents a most extensive analysis of the positive role of history within Jewish thought.
- ¹⁰ For an analysis of R. Hirsch's understanding of history as a response to the *Wissenschaft* movement, see M. Breuer, *Modernity within tradition: The social history of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1992), 55-89
- ¹¹ R. Sh. Schwab, *Selected writings: A collection of addresses and essays on hashkafah, Jewish history and contemporary issues* (Lakewood, N.J., 1988), 233-234. For a discussion on the debate between R. Shimon Schwab and R. Mordechai Schwab on the role of critical history in Judaism, see N. Kamenetsky, *Making of a Godol: Study of episodes in the lives of great Torah personalities* (Jerusalem, 2004), xxiv-xxvii.
- ¹² Haskamah to R. Yehudah Lifshitz, *Dor Yesharim* (1908)
- ¹³ D. Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and its discontents in German-Jewish thought* (Princeton, 2003)
- ¹⁴ J. Tosh, *Why history matters* (Hampshire, 2008), 7
- ¹⁵ George Santayana, *The life of reason* (New York, 1954), 82
- ¹⁶ Devarim, 32:7
- ¹⁷ R. A. Lichtenstein, 'Torah and general culture: Confluence and conflict' in: *Torah's encounter with other cultures*, ed. J.J. Schacter (New Jersey, 1997), 241
- ¹⁸ J.G. Herder, *Die entstehung des historismus* (Berlin, 1936), 394
- ¹⁹ D. Berger 'Identity, ideology and faith: Some personal reflections on the social, cultural and spiritual value of the academic study of Judaism' in: *Study and knowledge in Jewish thought*, <http://hsf.bgu.ac.il/cjt/files/Knowledge/Table.htm>.
- ²⁰ Walter Schultz, *Philosophie in der veränderten Welt* (Pfullingen, Neske, 1972), 492-493
- ²¹ The term 'Historicism' only gained wider acceptance for this historical perspective in the early twentieth century. For a good summary of the etymological development of 'Historicism' see C. Rand, 'Two meanings of Historicism in the writings of Dilthey, Troeltsch, and Meinecke' in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 24/4 (Pennsylvania, 1964), 504-505
- ²² F. Meinecke, *Historicism: The rise of a new historical outlook*, trans. J. E. Anderson (London, 1972), 380-81
- ²³ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (New York, 1962), 113
- ²⁴ Y. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish history and Jewish memory* (Seattle, 1982), 84
- ²⁵ H. Graetz, *The structure of Jewish history and other essays* (New York, 1975), 65
- ²⁶ Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1949), 194.
- ²⁷ Y. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish history and Jewish memory* (Seattle, 1982), 89
- ²⁸ L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1953) p. 12
- ²⁹ R. S.R.Hirsch, "Der Jude und seine zeit" in: *Jeschurun* 1 (1854), 17
- ³⁰ E. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington, 1990), 6
- ³¹ F. Rosenzweig, *The star of redemption*, trans. Barbara Gelli (Madison, 2005), 339
- ³² L. von Ranke, *The secret of world history*, trans. Roger Wines (New York, 1981), 259
- ³³ Talmud Bavli Pesachim 116b.
- ³⁴ Pirkei Avot, 6:2
- ³⁵ Devarim, 29:13-14.
- ³⁶ Y. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish history and Jewish memory* (Seattle, 1982), 17.
- ³⁷ For an excellent description of Levinas' view on history in his Jewish writings, see S. Moyn, 'Emmanuel Levinas's Talmudic readings: Between tradition and invention' in *Prooftexts*, 23:3 (October 2003), 338-36
- ³⁸ E. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington, 1990), 6
- ³⁹ F. Rosenzweig, *The star of redemption*, trans. Barbara Gelli (Madison, 2005), 323
- ⁴⁰ Talmud Bavli, Horayot, 6a
- ⁴¹ C. Becker, *The heavenly city of the eighteenth century philosophers* (New Haven, 1970), 122
- ⁴² Kant, Voltaire, Condorcet and Ferguson have all developed detailed theories of historical progress in this fashion. See J. Bury, *The idea of progress* (London, 1921).

⁴³ For a contemporary articulation of this theory of progress see F. Fukuyama, *The end of history and the last man* (New York, 1992)

⁴⁴ O. Spengler, *The decline of the West: Volume 1: Form and actuality*, trans. Charles Atkinson (London, 1980), 17

⁴⁵ Perhaps the earliest proponent of this argument against universal history was Herder, in J.G.. Herder, *Philosophical writings*, trans. Micheal Forster (Cambridge, 2002), 298

⁴⁶ Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 98a

⁴⁷ Judaism, needless to say, wholeheartedly embraces the eschatological vision of a Messianic era of perfection. However, prior to this redemption, the inexorable march of human progress is by no means inevitable or certain.

⁴⁸ E. Levinas, *Difficult freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Séan Hand (Baltimore, 1990), 199

⁴⁹ F. Nietzsche, *The uses and abuses of history*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York, 1957), 18

⁵⁰ I. Berlin, *Historical inevitability* (Oxford, 1954). Karl Popper also found the methodology of historicism to be particularly problematic, see K. Popper, *The poverty of Historicism* (London, 1988).

⁵¹ F. Nietzsche, *The uses and abuses of history*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York, 1957), 49.

⁵² Rambam, *Hilchot Teshuvah*, 2:4

⁵³ R. J.B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic man*, trans. Laurence Kaplan (Philadelphia, 1983), 112

⁵⁴ Daniel Rynhold has provided an excellent comparison of the philosophies of Nietzsche and R. Soloveitchik in D. Rynhold, 'Modernity and Jewish Orthodoxy: Nietzsche and Soloveitchik on life affirmation, asceticism and repentance' in *Harvard Theological Review* (2008), 101, 253-284.

⁵⁵ Talmud Bavli Yoma 86b

⁵⁶ R. J.B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic man*, trans. Laurence Kaplan (Philadelphia, 1983), 115

⁵⁷ In this respect, Yeshayahu Leibowitz was unique. Leibowitz strongly advocates the complete severance of Jewish life from history. His 1980 lecture on 'Ahistorical thinkers in Judaism' emphasised that 'The service of God as crystallised in the halakhah is an ahistoric reality. Historical vicissitudes and changes have no bearing on man's posture before God.' See Y. Leibowitz, *Judaism, human values, and the Jewish State*, ed. E. Goldman (Cambridge Mass., 1992), 96-105.

⁵⁸ F. Nietzsche, *The uses and abuses of history*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York, 1957), 12

⁵⁹ E. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington, 1990), 6.