THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

MODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

Edited by Michael L. Morgan
Indiana University

Peter Eli Gordon
Harvard University

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521813129

First published 2007

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Morgan, Michael L., 1944–
The Cambridge companion to modern Jewish philosophy / Michael L. Morgan and Peter Eli Gordon.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13: 978-0-521-81312-9 (hardback)
ISBN-13: 978-0-521-01255-3 (pbk.)
1. Philosophy, Jewish. 2. Philosophy, Modern. 3. Jewish philosophers.
4. Judaism – History – Modern period, 1750–. I. Gordon, Peter Eli. II. Title.
B755.M67 2007
181′.06–dc22 2006031065

ISBN 978-0-521-81312-9 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-01255-3 paperback

13 Emil Fackenheim, the Holocaust, and Philosophy

MICHAEL L. MORGAN

Emil Fackenheim's intellectual career, if we date its origin with his entrance into the Hochschule in Berlin in 1935, spanned sixty-eight years (b. 1917–d. 2003). Looking back over his career, it is probably not inaccurate to take the Holocaust to be its core and to assess his post-Holocaust writings as his most important contribution and legacy. But for Fackenheim, the Holocaust was not solely a rupture in Jewish history and Jewish thought; it was also a rupture in world history and philosophical thought. Yet too little attention has been paid to the way in which for Fackenheim the Holocaust can be understood as a rupture in the philosophical tradition itself.

During Purim 1967, March 26, Steven Schwarzschild, then editor of *Judaism*, convened a symposium in New York at the annual meeting of the board of the journal and under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee, on the theme "Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future." Schwarzschild chaired a panel of four speakers, each of whom was invited to make a short statement; discussion followed. The four participants were George Steiner, Richard Popkin, Elie Wiesel, and Emil Fackenheim.[1] This was the first public occasion on which Fackenheim presented his formulation of the 614th commandment. It was an invitation, Fackenheim later said, that he could not refuse, although it took an extreme emotional and moral toll on him.[2]

By March of 1967, then, Fackenheim had begun to turn his thinking centrally to Auschwitz and how to confront it as a Jew. During that same year, he published in *Deadalus* a long essay entitled "On the Self-Exposure of Faith to the Modern-Secular World: *Philosophical Reflections in the Light of Jewish Experience*."[3] The essay is framed as a response to various critical trends in Christian theology, from Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Harvey Cox, to the "death of God" theologians then in vogue (Thomas Altizer, William Hamilton, Paul Van Buren), ending with a discussion of Buber's "eclipse of God" and some final, tentative reflections on the Holocaust. The thrust of those remarks is that a genuine

Jewish response may not be known to theologians or philosophers, but perhaps one might find something in the work of a novelist. Fackenheim cites, with little comment, passages from three novels by Wiesel – *Night*, *The Accident*, and *The Gates of the Forest*. Moreover, he registers a caution, that a facing up to Auschwitz that is a commitment to "survival for survival's sake is an inadequate stand."[4] In the symposium piece of March 1967 and then later in the essay "Jewish Faith and the Holocaust" and in the introduction to *Quest for Past and Future*, Fackenheim would say: "I confess I used to be highly critical of Jewish philosophies which seemed to advocate no more than survival for survival's sake. I have changed my mind. I now believe that, in this present, unbelievable age, even a mere collective commitment to Jewish group-survival for its own sake is a momentous response, with the greatest implications."[5] This evidence recommends the conclusion that in the summer of 1966, at the I. Meier Segals Center for the Study and Advancement of Judaism meetings in Quebec, Fackenheim's paper was gave a version of the long paper on faith, secularity, and the "death of God" phenomenon.

Some time, then, during the fall and winter of 1966–67, Fackenheim had changed his mind about the importance of a commitment to Jewish survival.[6] Between that summer and the next spring, he had immersed himself in thinking about the issue of Auschwitz and genuine or "authentic" Jewish response; the symposium statement was the outcome – or part of the outcome, the larger version of which appeared the next year in *Commentary* and in the introduction to *Quest for Past and Future*.[7] The invitation from Schwarzschild had presented him with a moral imperative and had put him in the position of making a public statement on an issue that he had, for years, suppressed or even repressed. What made it necessary and possible to do so?

One development was philosophical. During the years before the fall of 1966, Fackenheim the philosopher had been preoccupied with Hegel.[8] Since the mid-1950s, and indeed even earlier, he had been at work on a project concerning faith and reason in German philosophy, from Kant to Kierkegaard.[9] But, as Fackenheim would later note, the project reached an obstacle when he turned to Hegel and he began to immerse himself in Hegel's philosophy and the Hegelian system. On the one hand, he sought to understand the role of religion and faith in Hegel's system and hence in their relation to philosophical thought. On the other hand, he was interested in the Hegelian system itself, its claim to an encompassing reason, and its relation to historical actuality. By 1966–67, he had come to understand the Hegelian system, its inner workings, and its coherence, and he had come also to grasp the relation in Hegel

between historical reality and philosophical thought. He had also come increasingly to believe that Hegel himself, if he had lived during and after the Nazi destruction, the death camps, and the atrocities, would have seen in them an unprecedented and radical form of evil that would have defied Hegelian synthesis, that is, the assimilation of history into the philosophical thought that Hegelian philosophy represented as its highest form. He wrote about this claim, that the evils of Auschwitz could not be assimilated into the Hegelian system and hence by implication by any philosophical thought and indeed by any thought at all, briefly in his book *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought*, published in 1968, and then again in an essay, "Would Hegel Today Be a Hegelian?" in the Canadian philosophical journal *Dialogue* in 1970.[10] His study of Hegel had shown him that not only was Hegelian philosophy, and hence thought itself, vulnerable to critique from the point of view of the particular flesh and blood person, and the concrete encounter between that individual and God – the Kierkegaardian critique – but it was also vulnerable to a new critique, that of an evil that defied assimilation into the Hegelian system and hence defied all thought – an evil that was unexplainable, without any meaning or purpose, an absolute and unqualified rupture of Western thought and life.[11] This he called "the scandal of the particularity of Auschwitz."

But if the threat to philosophy and thought in general was radical, could there still be hope for the future? Could one go on after Auschwitz without capitulating wholly to its evil, to its negativity, to its destruction of our categories and principles? For Jews, what could remain of the ideas of salvation and redemption? Did integrity require complete despair?

Fackenheim often said, in later years, that what made possible the responsible and serious exposure to Auschwitz for Jews and for Jewish theologians like himself was the example of Elie Wiesel.[12] Fackenheim already hints at this at the end of the secularity essay and then again in the essay "Jewish Faith and the Holocaust" when he cites Wiesel's testimony in *Night*, *The Accident*, and *The Gates of the Forest*. Wiesel represented for Fackenheim, and for many of those who assembled for discussion in Quebec at the Segals meetings, the fact that faith had in fact exposed itself to the horrors of the death camps, been shattered, even virtually destroyed, and then recovered, if in revolutionary and surprising forms. The role that Wiesel played for Fackenheim was not as a novelist per se but rather as a survivor and a reflective one who expressed his experiences of descent and of recovery fictionally. But the central point is that Wiesel embodied the idea that resistance to the

evil of Nazism, total as it was, was necessary and possible. In "Jewish Faith and the Holocaust" and in the third chapter of *God's Presence in History*, this conviction becomes articulate as Fackenheim's claims that Auschwitz is "the rock on which throughout eternity all rational explanations will crash and break apart"; that "seeking a purpose is one thing, but seeking a response is another"; and finally that after twenty years, he had come to what he calls a "momentous discovery: that while religious thinkers were vainly struggling for a response to Auschwitz, Jews throughout the world. . . . had to some degree been responding all along."[13] This "discovery" was what the example of Elie Wiesel had taught Fackenheim. If response as resistance and recovery was actual, then it could be possible, and if possible, then we could "read off of existing responses" a set of norms or imperatives for how authentic response ought to be conducted. This is the source – for those who now recognize it – of Fackenheim's 614th commandment, of its origin and its content.

This intellectual situation gave rise to a complex and poorly understood reflection on the role of the Holocaust for Jews, Christians, historians, Germans, and others, a reflection articulated most fully in those years in the third chapter of *God's Presence in History*, but prefigured in the writings I have already cited. Fackenheim's reasoning proceeds this way. The task that faced him was manifold: to show how Auschwitz challenged all thought – how it was meaningless and without purpose and unexplainable; to show how the turn from thought to life – as he often put it "thought must go to school with life" – pointed to the actuality of resistance; to derive from this actual resistance a conception of why continued resistance is necessary; to give some content to the norms or imperatives that might be used to express that necessity; to explain what the ground of that necessity is – what the force of the obligation is – for believing and for secular Jews; and to say something about the possibility of our performing such obligations or imperatives. The formulation of the 614th commandment occurs within this line of thinking and incorporates several of its steps, which is part of what makes it so challenging and difficult to understand.[14] In it, Fackenheim is not doing one thing but rather many things at once. The commandment not to give Hitler any posthumous victories, that is, expresses the resistance of continued acts of faithfulness to Judaism and the Jewish people and to human dignity; it expresses the idea that a believing Jew would take such acts to be responses to a commandment and that the source of the commandment's authority would be Divine. Moreover, the commandment as it is formulated and then interpretively expanded into its four

parts is the outcome of how Fackenheim now – and those who would see things his way – would interpret the content of that resistance, that is, the shape that such resistance and continued fidelity to Judaism and humanity would take. Even in those years, and this is very explicit in the symposium piece and in the third chapter of *God's Presence in History*, Fackenheim never held that all Jews must take the imperative to be a commandment, strictly speaking, or that all Jews must take it to be a Divine commandment. Secular Jews would not. For them, there would be a sense of acting under an obligation even without an understanding of where it came from or what stood behind it, so to speak. This would be a sense of receiving an imperative without asking what gives it its authority.

This is the position that Fackenheim had come to by 1970. By 1974, a new project began to take shape, an extension of this line of thinking and the demands that it expressed – to take Auschwitz seriously and to take God and Judaism seriously. In 1976, Fackenheim was awarded a prestigious Killam Fellowship from the Canadian government to spend two uninterrupted years working on this new, expanded project on post-Holocaust Jewish thought and more, but, as so often happens, what had been planned as one book with six chapters became transformed in unforeseen ways.[15] As Fackenheim began to think through more deeply what the first chapter would contain, the challenges that faced him became more and more imposing.[16] The first chapter became a book on its own. It was completed in 1981, virtually on the eve of the family's departure to Israel on aliyah, as what we now know as *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought*, published in 1982.[17]

The central chapter of the book is Chapter IV, where Fackenheim enters the thought of Martin Heidegger to show how it fails to face up to Nazism and how neither Heidegger's early nor late thinking can prevent his failure of authenticity. Heidegger's account of the historicity of human existence called for standards of authenticity but could not provide them in a way that could block his commitment to Nazism and his failure to recant. From Heidegger, Fackenheim turns to other forms of inauthentic response to the Holocaust, including ones by Jewish thinkers, and then asks whether the result is not a total paralysis of thought, an impasse. It is here that thought must go to school with life. Fackenheim's inquiry becomes empirical, as he winds his way through an examination of the perpetrators, at all levels, and the victims, in order to descend to the depth of the horror and to recoil at it, to find a moment of self-reflective resistance, that is, at once a moment of horror, of surprise, and of resistance, all at once. Here what emerges is an imperative

of resistance and the ground for its possible accomplishment. At this point, however, when the rupture is as radical as it can be, philosophy offers no hope of articulating such an imperative, but Judaism does, in the form of a concept that acknowledges at once both an unconditional rupture and a post-rupture recovery, the concept of *tikkun olam*. It is under the umbrella of such a notion that philosophy, Christianity, and Judaism can take shape as post-Holocaust responses. The book ends with a further chapter on Judaism as a religion of *teshuvah*, in which Yom Kippur is recovered from its centrality in Rosenzweig, but with a new sense.

For our purposes, as we try to understand the stages in Fackenheim's appreciation of the role of the Holocaust for Jewish life and thought, for philosophy, and for much else, the main issues are raised by the central chapter, and specifically what he accomplishes once he locates the failure of Heidegger's philosophy to cope with Nazism and Auschwitz, and turns to an exploration of what he calls "resistance during the Holocaust" and then "resistance as an ontological category." What we have here is the deepest account Fackenheim gives of the evil of Auschwitz and the failure of all thought to understand or encompass it and, following that, his most sustained argument for the role and ground of resistance to that evil. The result of these two sections, sections 8 and 9 of Chapter IV, is that resistance to Auschwitz and all it stands for was actual, necessary, possible. But, I think, whereas *earlier*, in *God's Presence in History* and the essays that preceded it, Fackenheim was taken up *with understanding the ground of the necessity or normative force of the imperative to resist or oppose Nazi purposes and with its articulation* – which here occurs later as the filling in of the idea of *tikkun*, *here* his focus is on *the possibility of performing the obligation, of in fact continuing to live our lives as resisting actions*. To put it simply, resistance cannot be so easy for us today that it belittles those who did not exercise it in those days, nor can it be so hard today that it makes the resistance of those who performed it pointless, so that Hitler has indeed won his posthumous victories.[18]

Fackenheim is very explicit about the chief problem he felt in writing these sections of Chapter IV. In the Introduction to *To Mend the World*, he discusses how he had handled it earlier and why that treatment was inadequate, and he outlines how he will deal with it here, in sections 8 and 9.[19] What he says is this: it is his most profound example of "thought going to school with life." Earlier he had used two strategies to understand how the imperative of resistance – or what he then called the 614th commandment – could be performed, that is, how it was possible

to follow it. One strategy was to follow Kant, who argued that *ought* implies *can*, that morality requires freedom. To say that the command to oppose Nazi purposes existed was to say that those for whom it existed were free to act on it. Another, more theological, strategy was to follow Rosenzweig, who had argued that God, in giving the commandments, also gave us the freedom to follow them. This neo-orthodox strategy could be seen, I think, to be a religious version of the Kantian strategy, and the point of both was that the issue of possibility was, in a sense, treated as automatic. Fackenheim, however, came to see it in very concrete terms, that by calling upon either strategy, one was demeaning all those victims who did not resist and belittling all those who did. Most of all, as he came to see, such responses are "glib" and reveal how inadequately he had immersed himself in the dark world called Auschwitz.[20] He calls attention to the Musselmanner (a term used in the camps to describe those who had lost all hope), whom he had come to see – following Primo Levi – were the characteristic products of the death camps, and asks, "Who dares assert that, had he been then and there rather than here and now, he would not have been reduced to a Musselmann?" In other words, no account of how it is *possible* to accept the burden of an imperative of resistance today is genuine and responsible if it rules out the possibility that one could be overwhelmed, dehumanized, and annihilated.

This might seem to lead to a dead end. If we look hard enough at Auschwitz, we see only a "midnight of dark despair." But at the time of writing *To Mend the World*, Fackenheim believed that he could see, as he put it, a "shining light" in that dark night. That is, he felt that in the event itself, even if it was "irresistible," it was being resisted, and by locating that resistance, analyzing it, and clarifying it, he could find a ground for the possibility of our responding today to that horror then (and to our own horrors today). What he was looking for were lucid, transparent, acts of resistance, and he found them in several cases, especially in the life and then the writings of Pelagia Lewinska, a Polish noblewoman, whose acts of resistance and whose struggles for dignity were illuminated by a clear and focused understanding of the purposes of those who assaulted her and of the entire world of which that assault was a part.[21]

Fackenheim came to this answer to his central question: it is possible for us to resist Nazi purposes now because resistance was actual then in a way that understood itself as the target of radical evil and yet as acts of resistance against it. This result, coupled with the unique role of *tikkun* as the concept that facilitates our understanding of the modes of

resistance that follow, is the central teaching of Fackenheim's magnum opus, or at least its central teaching with regard to the Holocaust.

The core argument of *To Mend the World* has important implications. Among them is what it teaches about the very character of post-Holocaust philosophical thought. But it is a teaching that is hard to appreciate.

In Chapter I of *To Mend the World*, after contrasting the book's contents with that of *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, Emil Fackenheim points out:

> In the grim but ineluctable task of a direct confrontation with the Holocaust, our thought receives much help from historians, novelists, poets. It receives more help still – indispensable help – from witnesses that survived the ordeal and told the tale. But so far as thought (philosophical or theological) is concerned, one still is, except for a few comrades-in-arms, alone. (TMW, 22)

Let me draw attention to Fackenheim's acknowledgment of the central importance to his inquiry of what he here calls the "indispensable help" of the testimony of survivors and witnesses. A page later, having identified the central task of the work, to show how Jewish thought "can both expose itself to the Holocaust and survive," Fackenheim refers to the most important "help" that this testimony provides, "a shining light," he calls it, "in this midnight of dark despair"(25). What he is referring to is the "resistance in thought and the resistance in life" that grounds the possibility of Jewish thought's endurance, "*To hear and obey the commanding voice of Auschwitz is an 'ontological' possibility, here and now, because the hearing and obeying was* already an 'ontic' reality, *then and there*" (25). The crucial testimony, then, discloses "the shining light" of a resistance that is in some way paradigmatic. For those familiar with the work, it is no surprise that the testimony includes that of Pelagia Lewinska, from her memoir *Twenty Months in Auschwitz*, when she describes her first awareness of the Nazi intent and remarked that she "felt under orders to live" (Lewinska, 41ff., 50). From the first moment that Fackenheim learned of those remarks, reading about them in Terence Des Pres's *The Survivor*, when it was first published in 1976 (Des Pres, 62–63), their significance increased for him, culminating in their role in *To Mend the World*.

Lewinska's testimony Fackenheim later calls "a historic statement," and says that it is "pivotal" to the book. In section 8 of Chapter IV, he engages in a descriptive account of various types of resistance during the Holocaust, but in the "critical analysis" of "resistance as an

ontological category" in section 9, it is Lewinska's testimony that has pride of place. The thought that has tried in every way to confront and comprehend the evil of the death camps arrives at a "horrified surprise, or a surprised horror" (247), and this is a philosophical thought that is itself possible only because it was already exemplified in the Holocaust by resisting victims, preeminently by Pelagia Lewinska, whose grasp of the evil and her situation is "epistemologically ultimate" (249). At this pivotal moment in *To Mend the World*, Fackenheim draws the conclusion that "Resistance in extremity was a way of being," which he calls the end of a necessary excursus, clearly a philosophical one, in which the impasse of thought trying to comprehend and cope with Auschwitz is now seen to be neither absolute nor permanent. Post-Holocaust thought is possible now because resistance in thought was actual then, and because then it led to actual acts of resistance, whereas now it also must lead not just to thought but to life.

All of this deserves careful, critical examination, much more than it has thus far received, but the problem we want to uncover lies in a different direction. Pelagia Lewinska's testimony is not the only testimony Fackenheim appropriates and explores. Various witnesses are considered in his descriptive account of resistance, including Hasidim in Buchenwald and the Warsaw Ghetto fighers. But the role of these cases is to lead us to Lewinska's culminating testimony, with its self-awareness and its self-conscious commitment to life. Later, in sections 12–14, however, Fackenheim calls attention to cases of resistance for different purposes, as part of his articulation of post-Holocaust philosophy, Christianity, and Judaism. Post-Holocaust philosophical thought can occur today because there was already a resisting philosophical moment – what he calls a *tikkun* [mending] – during that event, by Kurt Huber and the "White Rose" in Munich (the German-Catholic resistance group). Post-Holocaust Christianity is possible now because of the resistance of one such Christian as Bernhard Lichtenberg, who responded to Kristallnacht with a public prayer in behalf of Jews. And post-Holocaust Jewish life is possible for Jews because of the resistance of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters, the Buchenwald Hasidim, and honorary Jews such as Pelagia Lewinska.

All this is to say that the testimony by witnesses of acts of resistance, and in particular the "indispensable testimony" of Pelagia Lewinska, occur at different moments in Fackenheim's central chapter in *To Mend the World*. First, they occur in the course of a philosophical analysis of exposure to the evil of Auschwitz and an attempt to grasp what the exposure leads to. Second, they occur in particular articulations of

post-Holocaust life and thought. What separates these two stages of Fackenheim's thinking may help us to understand the different roles that these citations play and more importantly to understand something important about Fackenheim's entire enterprise in *To Mend the World*.

The philosophical excursus, as he calls it, and the inquiries into post-Holocaust existence are separated by two important points. The first is the introduction of the notion of *tikkun*; the second is the formulation of what he calls a contemporary "hermeneutical teaching" that begins with historical situatedness. Let me say a word about each of these points.

First, *tikkun*. Fackenheim's recovery of this Jewish concept is not a matter of scholarly inquiry but is itself an interpretive appropriation of a Jewish idea through a brief reflection on its liturgical and Kabbalistic settings as well as its use in the work of a Budapest Hasid during the Holocaust. It is, then, itself an act of hermeneutical recovery of an element of the Jewish past via an encounter with its invocation during the Holocaust. In this case, however, this hermeneutical act of recovery is not conducted in order to articulate something about Jewish life exclusively. Rather it is intended to serve a philosophical purpose. Having argued that resistance during the Holocaust is ontologically ultimate, and the ground of the possibility of all subsequent existence, Fackenheim returns to ask how thought – philosophical thought – does not meet an impasse but can go on. But thought is constituted by concepts, categories, and principles. Once thought reacts with surprised horror to the evil itself, it still seeks to think. If there is a sense of imperative or obligation about going on as thought, then how does thought understand its going on? That is, Fackenheim sees philosophy as having reached a point where its own conceptual resources, the resources of the Western philosophical tradition, are inadequate. This point is not about having the conceptual resources to grasp the evil of Auschwitz. It is about having the conceptual resources to articulate grasping the evil with horrified surprise and reacting by going on and responding in opposition to it. What is needed, as Fackenheim sees it, is a "new departure and a new category" (249, 250). This new category must incorporate, with respect to the past and the present, a sense of total rupture or discontinuity and yet also, in some way, a sense of continuity and continuation, and it is Fackenheim's contention that there is no such concept available within the philosophical tradition. Rather, for it, one must turn to Judaism, and it is the idea of *tikkun* that he believes and seeks to show incorporates these almost paradoxical components, absolute rupture and fragmentary mending.[22] What the new category does is to provide a term, a concept,

for articulating post-Holocaust life: if such life is an attempt to obey the imperative of going on exposed to Auschwitz, then it is a *tikkun*, and in fact it is this term, rather than "resistance" that Fackenheim now proceeds to use – for philosophy and Christianity, as well as for Judaism. This concept or category of *tikkun*, then, is the bridge between a philosophical analysis of resistance that seeks to ground the possibility of post-Holocaust life in an actual resistance to radical evil during that event and a hermeneutical articulation of what that post-Holocaust life ought to be.[23]

The second point that separates the uses of the testimony of resistance and especially that of Pelagia Lewinska is the contemporary hermeneutic. In a note, Fackenheim explicitly refers to Heidegger, Gadamer, Bultmann, Ricoeur, Buber, and Rosenzweig as the figures he has in mind as the sources for this hermeneutical conception of human existence. For the moment, the crucial element of the hermeneutic is that it takes all human existence as historically situated, with all that implies about encountering one's situation with presuppositions of all kinds, not being able to escape one's embeddedness in traditions, practices, and so forth. And what this means is that what follows are examples of post-Holocaust existence – philosophy, Christianity, and Judaism – and that they are just that, examples, of a myriad of such cases, indeed of all the cases of post-Holocaust life that are responsible and serious. Moreover, all post-Holocaust existence, like all human existence, is hermeneutical and historically situated. To understand itself, each example must understand its situation, its prejudices, and presuppositions, and seek to recover the past for the present and future, if only fragmentarily, by returning to the past.

The appropriation of the testimony about resistance during the Holocaust, or what Fackenheim now calls *tikkun* during the Holocaust, is thoroughly hermeneutical. It is engaged in from our situated point of view, and, if Fackenheim is right, since that situation is a post-Holocaust situation, the appropriation is shaped – fundamentally but not exclusively – by Auschwitz. Who, then, are the agents of such *tikkun*? The answer of course is that we are, all of us, all who live now and seek to go on with our lives – as philosophers, historians, Americans, Jews, Christians, Germans, and so forth.

But now we draw near to the second point we have been seeking to articulate: who, then, was the agent of the earlier excursus, of the philosophical inquiry and analysis of resistance that yielded the account of thought's encounter with the evil as horrified surprise and a surprised horror and utilized, so centrally, the testimony of Pelagia Lewinska?

Clearly that agent was Emil Fackenheim. The thought is his; the description of types of resistance and the philosophical analysis of resistance as an ontological category is his. But here, then, is the question we have been seeking: what is the status of the excursus? What kind of philosophical analysis is it? Is it a mode of the old thinking or the new? Does it too take place within the hermeneutical standpoint of the "authentic" post-Holocaust philosopher? And if it does, what does that mean for its results, for its conclusions? What is their status? How can it be both a philosophical grounding of the necessity and possibility of post-Holocaust philosophical thought and also a hermeneutical expression of it?

In one sense, of course, Emil Fackenheim, as philosopher and as the author of *To Mend the World* and its philosophical excursus on resistance as ontological ground, is historically situated; his thinking and his life are set in North America (in those years), in Toronto, Canada, during the sixties and seventies and early eighties. He teaches at the University of Toronto, is immersed in the study of Kant, Hegel, and German Idealism, and is one among a circle of Jewish thinkers involved in exploring and clarifying a kind of Jewish existential theology. He is also, of course, motivated to confront the memories of Nazism and the Nazi atrocities and to rethink Judaism and Jewish life in its aftermath. And, in works from about 1966 to the writing of *To Mend the World*, he has been engaged in that project, while speaking widely of its significance and challenging others – often Christians – who attack the Jewish people, Israel, and Zionism.

But in another sense, Emil Fackenheim as philosopher takes himself, in these central sections of Chapter IV of *To Mend the World*, to be engaging in a philosophical reflection of ultimate significance, from a point of view that hovers back and forth from particular points of view to a detached, objective point of view, the perspective of reason, with the aim of arriving at secure and unconditional philosophical conclusions about the necessity and possibility of post-Holocaust life – all life, as he says, not only some one mode of life, of a *tikkun* that is *olam* (of the world or total) and not limited or parochial. That is, the author of the philosophical excursus wants to achieve philosophical detachment and objectivity. He will not be satisfied by a hermeneutically restricted or conditional set of conclusions. But how can Fackenheim think that he himself has accomplished this point of view? Does the later hermeneutical teaching, which Fackenheim accepts and endorses, not hold that *all human existence* is *historically situated* and hence qualified or conditioned by the specific presuppositions, traditions, communities, and

more that always define our particular points of view? Does the truth of such a hermeneutic not compromise the objectivity of the earlier excursus and its conclusions about the ultimacy of resistance and about the special status of the case of Pelagia Lewinska?

In different terms, does the hermeneutical nature of all human existence and hence of all post-Holocaust life, including that of the philosopher, in any way qualify the status of the earlier reflection as philosophy? Does it make it in some way less philosophical? Or does it make it differently philosophical? That earlier reflection was Hegelian in character, akin to that of the thought in Hegel's *Phenomenology* that moves from the stance of natural consciousness to that of absolute knowledge and back, hovering back and forth, moving from one mode of natural consciousness to another, yet at each stage rising above that natural consciousness to ask what is false and what is true in it, what is left behind and what is recovered at the next stage of the dialectic. In *To Mend the World*, the modes of existence or consciousness that Emil considers are modes of Nazi agency and then modes of resistance, at each stage thought trying to follow the agent's self-understanding and yet reflecting on it, seeking to grasp what is experienced more and more fully, until thought goes as far as it can – by confronting the evil as a whole of horror with a horrified surprise and a surprised horror, with an apprehension that is at the same time a resistance, an act of opposition. But for Hegel, the perspective of the philosopher is rooted in its being absolute knowledge that can move from the perspective of various agents to its own absolute standpoint, back and forth. Does Fackenheim's commitment to a historically situated hermeneutic of existence not exclude such an absolute standpoint? Does it not rule out the possibility of philosophical objectivity altogether? Does it do away with philosophy or alter it completely? And what is the relationship between the historically situated hermeneutic and the Holocaust? Does Fackenheim accept the hermeneutic for philosophical reasons or because of the radical nature of the evil of the Holocaust as a rupture?

These are important and central questions regarding Fackenheim's entire enterprise, in *To Mend the World*, and beyond. Moreover, he himself was aware of the issues. He knew that in a sense, *To Mend the World* would require a kind of "hovering" between perspectives or points of view, from engaged interpretation (which is my term, not his) to philosophical reflection, back and forth, although the hovering he had in mind was between the perspective of the perpetrators and the victims, on the one hand, and that of the philosopher, on the other. But recognizing that there is a problem about his own status as a philosopher and about the

status of the core of *To Mend the World* as philosophy and dealing with the problem are not one and the same. If Fackenheim did recognize the problem, how did he respond to it?

Here is one proposal. Fackenheim was persuaded by the historical situatedness of human existence and its hermeneutical character by 1966 or so. This commitment is already reflected in his account of textual interpretation in Chapter 1 of *God's Presence in History*, an account based on Collingwood's notion of reenactment but one that is also based on his reading of Heidegger. But what convinced him of the hermeneutic was the study of Hegel (and Heidegger and Gadamer, but later). Because the historical character of the Hegelian system exposed philosophical knowledge to history, the Holocaust refuted the very idea of such absolute knowledge, leaving behind philosophical reflection in situated human experience but nothing beyond it. This realization did not depend upon the outcome of the later analysis in *To Mend the World*, that the necessary and possible thought directed at the Holocaust must incorporate action in opposition to it. What it did depend upon were the assumptions that there is no more complete case of philosophical thinking than the Hegelian system, and that the evil of Auschwitz was such that even that system could not comprehend it. In principle, then, for Fackenheim by 1966 or so, and certainly in the years through 1970, a philosophically framed understanding of Jewish existence after the Holocaust was immersed in history, and no feature of it was in principle immune to historical or empirical refutation.

Nonetheless, insofar as he, Fackenheim, was a Jew and a philosopher, his own reflections always began with certain presuppositions, beliefs, conceptual resources, practical commitments, and so forth; what he did with them was then a hermeneutical matter. (There is no better overall account of this process than the one we find in *What Is Judaism?* published in 1987.) But this means that whatever "objectivity" arises from these kinds of philosophical reflections, say the ones in *To Mend the World* about epoch-making events and about resistance as an ontological category, is an objectivity within this hermeneutical framework. The accounts may be persuasive, compelling, and arrived at by a process of reasoning and analysis that one finds convincing. For example, one might treat the analysis as a kind of best explanation of how to understand the testimony of Pelagia Lewinska; Fackenheim himself argues that other types of explanations of resistance are inadequate. And since we do have that testimony and hence have reason to believe that she did in fact experience what she says she did, we might feel satisfied with Fackenheim's dialectical examination that shows why thought should

lead to a horrified surprise, and a surprised horror gives us an account of what it was that was going on in Lewinska's experience. We might judge it to be a better analysis than others that might be offered; in fact, we might agree with Fackenheim that no other could do equal justice to that experience. And since the experience was actual, it must have been possible, and we might take Fackenheim's dialectical account as a kind of best explanation of how it was possible. We might, that is, read it as a sort of transcendental argument for the possibility of a comprehending thought that was necessarily integrated with a resisting action, all at once. Hence, even if we realize that Fackenheim's account is based on his own situation, with his own presuppositions, we might take it to be persuasive and compelling, because it satisfies our concerns and convinces us. And that might be all the objectivity we get and all we can hope for. This insight of ours – and his – would be grounded in the thought that since there is no such thing as a point of view completely detached from historical situatedness, there are no absolute or unconditional truths or principles or doctrines or concepts. Fackenheim uses the Rosenzweigian vocabulary of old and new thinking at times, and we can appropriate it here as well. That there is a philosophical view of things that is utterly detached from history and the personal point of view is a construction of philosophy and a hallmark of the "old thinking," but in fact, as the "new thinking" realizes, all thinking, even philosophical thinking (and scientific and religious as well), is personal and historically situated. Hence, when we give up the "old" notion of objectivity, we need not have given up on objectivity altogether. What we mean by objectivity, however, is the kind of firmness, stability, and persuasiveness that we seek for our understanding of things and sometimes achieve, in our lives. And we can expect such virtues from Fackenheim's analysis of resistance as an ontological category, and even think that his account has achieved them.

If this way of reading Fackenheim's thinking in *To Mend the World* is plausible, is there evidence in that work that he himself holds it? Does he himself say anything about the status of his own philosophical reflection in that work? In the introductory chapter (pp. 19–28), as Fackenheim sketches the itinerary of the book, he does not directly answer our questions, but he does show very clearly that his stance as a philosopher is an issue for the work and how that stance influences the thinking in the excursus and prior to it.

First, after outlining his original plan for the project "Radical Responses to Epoch-Making Events in Contemporary Jewish History," Fackenheim remarks that the "neatness of the systematic project was soon to dissolve in the process of execution." In the original plan,

the first chapter was to deal with philosophical foundations and not until Chapters IV and V was he to arrive at the encounter with the Holocaust and the attempt to confront its utter uniqueness from various historically situated points of view. But, as he notes, in order to avoid losing the Holocaust in a priori conceptual reflections, it became necessary to place thought, "as it were, *beween* the concept 'epoch-making event' and *this* epoch-making event, prepared to be pulled in both directions . . . there had to be what may be called a selective anticipation of the 'empirical' . . . in the 'a priori'" (TMW, 20). Fackenheim calls this a change "at the empirical extreme"; it was a necessity grounded in the empirical uniqueness of the evils of Auschwitz. At the "a priori extreme," he notes a change as well, so that instead of beginning the project with bare philosophical speculation, he chose to engage "thinkers of the first rank" and use a more "goal-directed . . . historical-dialectical approach" by confronting "their thought with the events to which self-exposure is necessary" (20) – namely, the Holocaust.

These comments, of course, do not speak directly to the status of the philosophical excursus on resistance but rather to the attempt to understand the very concept of an epoch-making event. But these points, when taken together, are relevant to the questions we just raised. They concern the problems of anticipation and perspective. In general terms, these comments show that Fackenheim was aware that the philosophical preparations for the hermeneutical applications could not be completely severed from the introduction of the Holocaust and from the historical situatedness of post-Holocaust agents, nor could the philosophical preparations be carried out without attention to the way the Holocaust might shape those preparations. He admits that "such a method" of somehow thinking together the philosophical foundations and the hermeneutical articulations in terms of the Holocaust is "circular," but, he says, "provided this circle is recognized, and the recognition of it permeates the whole discourse, it merely illustrates . . . that a philosophical writer with a systematic purpose cannot say everything that needs to be said" (21).

But the question I have been asking is, in these terms, "recognized" by whom? By the philosopher as detached and neutral, or by the historically situated philosopher? And what does this imply about the objectivity of the outcome? Later in *To Mend the World*, Fackenheim presents and then challenges Heidegger's way of formulating and then coping with the ontic-ontological circle. Without examining Fackenheim's account in detail (pp. 162–166), we can distill from it, in the terms I have been using, the judgment that something is

amiss with a historical situatedness that is either guided by vacuous standards or wholly historicized. In terms of the problem of the status of the philosophical excursus on resistance, then, and the role of Pelagia Lewinska's testimony, presumably Fackenheim would not be happy with saying that they are integral to either a merely hermeneutical exercise or an utterly disengaged, detached one. Where, if anywhere, does objectivity lie?

In a discussion of language in the introduction to *To Mend the World*, Fackenheim addresses directly the questions of communicating the incommunicable and of objectivity (pp. 26–28). How, he asks, can the philosopher write about the Holocaust "*in its totality*," about the world of the victims and of the criminals? This question is not ours, but since he is asking precisely about how the philosopher can conduct the analysis into the whole of horror and resistance to it, his answer may help us to see what he thinks about the point of view or stance of the philosopher who carries out that analysis. "One may wish to reply," he says, "by resorting to a thought and a language that *enter into* that world and also seek a *transcending comprehension* of it" (27). This was Hegel's strategy, but, he argues, it cannot be his. Why not? Because Hegel's "ultimate Whole of wholes is one of wonder" whereas "the Holocaust . . . is a whole of horror. A transcending comprehension of it is impossible, for it would rest on the prior dissolution of a horror that is indissoluble. This horror leaves our thought and our language with but two choices. One is surrender. . . . The other is the 'no' of an ever-new, ever-again-surprised outrage . . . that would be lost by a 'clinical' tone of 'objective' detachment" (28) or by an expression of the writer's own feelings. What is necessary is a language and a thought "of sober, restrained, but at the same time unyielding outrage" (28). This is the perspective of the survivors, and it is one neither novelist nor historians, philosophers nor theologians should try to "transcend."

Can we apply this outcome to our question? Is the philosopher who engages in the analysis of resistance as an ontological category involved and engaged, hermeneutically situated in a post-Holocaust world? Is that analysis, in its own way, a response to that event? Is its objectivity compromised by its situatedness? Fackenheim seems to be saying that no philosophical analysis of the criminals or the victims should be disengaged and detached. If it enters into that world, it cannot simply then seek to transcend it. Rather it must follow the survivors themselves, thinking the event and yet with a "restrained and unyielding outrage." Even the analysis of the survivor's resistance itself must be an expression of such outrage; what philosophical thought does is to recast or

rearticulate that outrage, that 'no,' in a different language, in different words, but its outcome is, in a sense, self-confirming.

Is this a circle? And if it is, is it vicious? Do such philosophical conclusions have any objectivity at all? With these questions, we come to the conclusion both of the second point I mentioned earlier and of this chapter. Clearly, there is some kind of circle here, but for Fackenheim it certainly is not vicious. Philosophy may have once had the luxury, if one wants to call it that, of being purely cognitive, exploratory, or even descriptive. Today, after Auschwitz, it cannot be that. Thinking about the Holocaust and then about suffering and atrocity in today's world, philosophy must think as resistance, with a "restrained but unyielding outrage" – it must think with a moral edge. Such a conception of philosophy may require some serious revision and difficult recasting of the philosophical enterprise. But in a post-Holocaust world, it is unavoidable, and that is one of the central teachings of *To Mend the World*.

Notes

1. I have been told that the idea for the theme of the symposium that year – the year before, the theme had been about Jewish unity – came out of discussions at the Segal Institute the summer before – in 1966 – when it had been agreed that Wiesel represented something very important for the participants, the fact that Jewish faith could confront the horrors of the death camps and still survive, albeit in an embattled and conflicted form. Popkin, a historian of philosophy famous for his work on skepticism, was a colleague of Schwarzschild's at Washington University in St. Louis; Steiner, a literary critic from Cambridge and Switzerland, had published a powerful review of Wiesel called "The Language of Silence" and a collection of essays *Language and Silence*. He was also at work on a book, *In Bluebeard's Castle*, that dealt with such themes. He was a secularist and a strong advocate of German and modernist culture and literature. Wiesel had just published *The Jews of Silence* and was increasingly an emblem of memory about the Nazi atrocities.
2. Fackenheim discusses the event, the emotional toll it took, and his preparation for it, in the Preface to the Second Edition of *To Mend the World*, xvi–xx. Also in Emil Fackenheim, *An Epitaph for German Judaism* (University of Wisconsin Press, forthcoming), 158–159.
3. *Daedalus* 96 (1967), 193–219; also in *Religion in America*, edited by Wm. G. McLoughlin and R. N. Bellah (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), 203–229; and in Fackenheim's collection, *Quest for Past and Future* (Bloomington: Indiana, 1968), Ch. 18, 278–305.
4. "On the Self-Exposure. . . ," in QPF, 303.
5. "The 614th Commandment," reprinted in Michael L. Morgan (ed.), *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim*, 158.

6. In Fackenheim, *An Epitaph for German Judaism* (forthcoming), Emil recalls that at one of the Quebec meetings, Milton Himmelfarb, responding to someone who said that "mere survival" cannot be the "purpose" of either the Jewish people or Judaism, exploded: "After the Holocaust, let no one call Jewish survival 'mere'" (151). Over the years, he cited this remark regularly; it is likely that Himmelfarb had made it at the meeting during the summer of 1966 or possibly at the next meeting in 1967.
7. In discussing the chronology of these years with me on many occasions, especially in the early 1990s, during the time he was working on his memoirs, Emil contended that the earliest public occasion at which he spoke about the Holocaust seriously was at a conference on "The Future of Hope," convened by the department of religion at the University of California at Santa Barbara; other participants were Jurgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz, and the proceedings were published as *The Future of Hope* by Fortress Press in 1970, edited by W. H. Capps. Emil's contribution was "The Commandment to Hope: A Response to Contemporary Jewish Experience," 68–91, 93, 99–101, 131–133. Emil remembered the conference as occurring in 1966, but Capps, in the introduction to the volume, dates it to 1968. The content of Emil's presentation suggests the later date, since the formulation of a commandment for the future occurred, I think, during the fall and winter before the 1967 symposium. There is no other evidence of it prior to that date. In a recent conversation, however, Eugene Borowitz told me that late in the summer of 1965, after Fackenheim had attended the first of the Segals conferences earlier that summer, and had talked especially with Irving Greenberg about the death camps and Nazi assault, Fackenheim had said that he could no longer ignore the central importance of the Holocaust.
8. For brief comments, see Fackenheim, *An Epitaph for German Judaism*, 156–157.
9. The earliest prospectus for the project dates from the late 1940s. Essays on Kant and Schelling in the early 1950s are parts of it. His successful proposal for the Guggenheim Foundation, for 1956–57, outlines it.
10. Fackenheim shows how prominent Hegel was in his thinking during this period when he discusses the existentialist critique of Hegel's thinking and the "limits of the essence-approach," as he calls it, and asks how a Jew today must respond to the "here-and-now" that includes "the events associated with the dread name of Auschwitz." The discussion occurs in Chapter 1 of *Quest for Past and Future*, "These Twenty Years: *A Reappraisal*," published in 1968, pp. 15–17. The Preface of the book is dated October 4, 1967; one can date the writing of this previously unpublished chapter during the summer and early fall of 1967, just after the Six Day War, to which it refers. For an excellent discussion of the relation between history and philosophical thought in Hegel, see Fred Beiser, *Hegel* (Routledge, 2005).
11. This was something already signaled for Fackenheim by Schelling's treatment of radical evil in *Of Human Freedom*. See *An Epitaph for German Judaism*, 179–182.

12. Fackenheim says this explicitly in the Preface to the Second Edition of *To Mend the World*, xvi: "One participant would be Elie Wiesel, the one writer then known to me who genuinely confronted Judaism with the Holocaust – and the Holocaust with Judaism."
13. These quotations are from "Jewish Faith and the Holocaust," in *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim*, 163–164.
14. Fackenheim discusses some of the problems raised by his formulation, problems he tried to deal with earlier in the writings of 1967–1970 but which had plagued discussions of him, in the Preface to the Second Edition of *To Mend the World*, xix–xx.
15. An outline of the chapters of the book appears on p. 19 of *To Mend the World*. The book was to have a chapter on reading the Bible. It never materialized, although Fackenheim did give a set of lectures in Manchester and elsewhere that became *The Jewish Bible after the Holocaust*, published in 1993. Another chapter was to be on reading *midrash* after the Holocaust, a development beyond Chapter 1 of *God's Presence in History*, but this was never written. The chapter on Israel might be said to have emerged, in bits and pieces, over the years after 1983 and Fackenheim's aliyah to Israel. One might claim, that is, that the project as formulated in 1976 did become in one way or another the framework for Fackenheim's work during the remaining twenty years of his life, after the first publication of *To Mend the World*. Fackenheim discusses the book and the project, but not in any detail, in *An Epitaph for German Judaism*, 173–178.
16. In Chapter 1 of *To Mend the World*, he explains precisely how the first chapter came to be a book on its own. The original project was to have begun with a chapter on the concept of an epoch-making event, to be followed later in the book by empirical accounts of actual resistance during the Holocaust and philosophical reflection on them. But, as he explains, he came to realize that neither the a priori or conceptual discussion nor the empirical accounts could be carried out separately; in the end, one required the other or, perhaps better, the conceptual account of epoch-making events could not be carried out without some anticipation of the absolute rupture that was Auschwitz. The first chapter required thought to "hover" between the poles, and it required too much expansion and articulation.
17. Fackenheim discusses briefly the plan and its execution on pages 19–30 of the Introduction to the original edition of the book. It was subsequently reprinted in new editions, the second and the third, without changes but each time adding an additional preface or prologue, in 1989 and 1994.
18. I believe that Fackenheim's basic problem is akin to what Eliezer Berkovits calls the situation of "Job's brothers," all of us today who seek to respond to Auschwitz and to our Jewish situation. Our faith cannot be so easy to maintain that it demeans those who lost it in the death camps, nor can it be so hard to maintain that it degrades the simple faith who kept it. There are tremendous differences between the two, Fackenheim and Berkovits, concerning their outcomes and also the character of their systematic thinking, but still the dialectical way that

Berkovits characterizes authentic post-Holocaust faith does bear a similarity to what Fackenheim requires of a genuine post-Holocaust resistance. Fackenheim himself emphasizes the problem of the possibility of performing the imperative in his Preface to the Second Edition of *To Mend the World*, xx–xxii.

19. *To Mend the World*, 24–28.
20. *To Mend the World*, 24–25.
21. Lewinska is one of three examples he describes; the others are of Jewish mothers at Auschwitz and Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Meisels and his Hasidim in Buchenwald; see *To Mend the World*, 216–219.
22. It is worth noting two points concerning this new category. (1): As long ago as the introduction to *Quest for Past and Future* and the first chapter of *God's Presence in History*, Fackenheim had claimed that *midrash* expresses fundamental contradictions in human existence that philosophy seeks to dissolve or resolve; this view of religion as acknowledging and seeking to live with the contradictory or paradoxical character of human existence is something that Fackenheim derives, I believe, from his reading of Kierkegaard. (2) The theme that Western philosophy has something important to learn from Judaism is one central theme of *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* and goes back to Fackenheim's essays on Kant in the 1960s. It is tempting to think that in this regard, Fackenheim has some affinity with Hermann Cohen and his claims about Messianism and Kantian ethics.
23. In essence, all of this fills out the gap left in *God's Presence in History* between the identification of the imperative to respond to Auschwitz and the formulation of it as a 614th commandment, with its ramified content.