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# The Jewish Ethical Tradition in the Modern University\*

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To speak of “the Jewish ethical tradition in the modern university” is to tell a very recent story about the intersection of two great traditions, each having its own very long history. The Jewish ethical tradition goes back at least as far as the time when the Jewish people accepted God’s law at Mount Sinai. Since that time it has had a continuous and multifaceted development. In fact, it is still developing and shows every indication of continuing to do so far into the future. The modern university traces its origins back to the Middle Ages in Europe. It too is a tradition, which is most evident on every ceremonial occasion, when university faculty and students don medieval academic garb. A tradition must regularly celebrate its origins in order to sustain its identity even as it grows in different ways.

For almost all of their respective histories, the Jewish ethical tradition and the tradition of the European-then-North American university have not intersected at all. Indeed, until very recently, any suggestion that they should become acquainted with one another would have been regarded as bizarre, even inappropriate. At the beginning of my own university education, in the late 1950s, I learned that lesson the hard way.

In my first year as an undergraduate in The College of the University of Chicago, certainly a first-rate academic environment, in a particular class in philosophy, we were assigned to write an essay on a section of a book, which to this day I still think is the greatest philosophical work ever written, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. At the same time, I was actively pursuing my talmudic studies with a pious and

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learned rabbi, who lived in the neighbourhood of the university, although as far as the culture of the university was concerned, he could have been living on Mars. In writing my essay for class, dealing with Aristotle's discussion of justice in the fifth book of the *Ethics*, I was struck by certain similarities between what the great philosopher was saying and what some of the great Rabbis were saying in the section of the Talmud, the tractate *Baba Kama*, I was studying with my rabbi. So, I decided to incorporate some of the talmudic material into my essay in philosophy. The reaction of my professor, who himself happened to be, as he put it, "of Jewish origin," caught me quite unawares. He called me into his office and told me that normally he did not return a class essay to be rewritten and resubmitted. However, he said he was doing so in my case because he thought I had intellectual potential, and he did not want me to "get into any bad academic habits." Then he said, "To put it to you straight Mr. Novak, your talmudic examples were inappropriate for this essay." Being a rather brash young man, I retorted, "But sir, weren't the Rabbis and Aristotle employing very similar methods of analysis in dealing with the question of restitution?" He then smiled and said, "That may well be true, but you still don't get my point. To be blunt, the examples you brought are from a culture that has no place in the modern university except, perhaps, in the department of anthropology, where primitive practices are observed. This is not a yeshiva!" And by "yeshiva," which I suspected may have been a place he knew personally from his "Jewish origin," he meant a school where the Jewish ethical tradition has normative authority.

Somewhat shaken by this encounter as only the young and naive can be, I went to my rabbi for reassurance. But, in effect, I went, as they say, "from the frying pan into the fire." My rabbi actually agreed with my professor, but for opposite reasons, of course. For him too, my bringing the Talmud to the university class was inappropriate. In fact, he quoted a passage from the Talmud to me: *ve-lo tehe Torah shlemah shelanu ke-seehah betelah shelakhem*, namely, "let not our perfect Torah be like your idle conversation." In other words, for my rabbi, the Jewish ethical tradition, which Jews traditionally call "Torah," was too good to be exposed to the nonbelievers at the University of Chicago, or at any modern university for that matter. Indeed, he went on to gently chastise me for studying something as "dangerous" as philosophy. He felt that if I were in the Business School, I wouldn't have this kind of problem. So, for the rest of my university education, I kept the Torah in one place and worldly wisdom in another, only relating the two in private thoughts and private conversations, neither

with professors nor with rabbis, but with the very few traditional Jewish students at the university who were studying things like philosophy. It was a lonely life, let me tell you.

Let us now ask: If the Jewish ethical tradition can now be taught in a modern university, indeed a major modern university like the University of Toronto, why has it been so long in coming? And we must ask: If the Jewish ethical tradition can now be taught in a modern university, what does it give *to* the university, and what does it take *from* the university? Let these two questions guide our brief look at the relation—or until now the “nonrelation”—of the Jewish ethical tradition and the university.

The first reason for the nonrelation of the Jewish ethical tradition and the university is that neither needed the other. Each supplied its own data and its own methodology for understanding that data. In a discipline like sociology, on the other hand, even though society supplies the data, the methodology comes from the university. Thus the serious study of society is either done within the university or by university trained specialists. But the Jewish ethical tradition is more of a discipline like law. For law, not only does the data come from outside the university, but the courts as the primary legal institution supply their own methodology. That is why, until quite recently, in many Western countries, one did not even need a university education to become a lawyer. One could “read the law” by apprenticing oneself to a lawyer, who gave one practical experience in the methods or procedures of the courts. Even today, I am told, there are tensions between the way judges decide cases and the way university professors teach them. And, along the lines of this analogy, it is somewhat interesting to note that we have a few very traditional Jewish students here at the University of Toronto—and we are not unique I have been told—who avoid courses in Jewish Studies, even courses in Jewish ethics that deal with the very norms by which they live, because they are convinced that the secular methodology of the university is inappropriate for the study of the sacred data of their tradition. At the beginnings of the tradition of the university, the feeling was mutual.

At this time, not only was the study of Judaism excluded from the university, so were Jews themselves. The culture of Europe, whatever its particular variations, was to be Christian. Let it be remembered that “culture,” which was not a word used in the Middle Ages, derives from the Latin *cultus*, namely, “religious worship.” Religion and culture were, in fact, inseparable, hence there did not have to be a word for the substance of the common life other than *religio*. In this environment, the universities began as theological seminaries for the

training of clergy, which gradually expanded their curriculum to include "secular sciences," and their student body to include laymen. The full name for this institution was *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, namely, "the world of teachers and students." But in societies where Jews were politically disenfranchised from citizenship, they were certainly to be excluded from a culturally elite institution like the university. For here, Christian theology was still very much *regina scientiarum*, the "queen of the sciences," everything else being *ancilla theologiae*, "theology's handmaiden." Whenever "Judaism" was studied, which was almost always the "Old Testament" alone, it was seen as something totally subsumed by Christianity. Neither the data nor the methods of living Judaism nor living Jews themselves were needed. A residue of this is still seen at Oxford, where the Regius Professor of Hebrew must be a member of the Church of England. At Harvard, the first professor of Hebrew in the eighteenth century, one Judah Monis, was a Jew who had to convert to Christianity before receiving his appointment. Needless to say, at that time, he did not have any Jewish students. There were none at Harvard then. And, by the way, Monis did not receive tenure after all.

Whatever Jews may have thought of their precarious political situation in these medieval societies, they did not seem to mind their exclusion from the student body of the university, nor the exclusion of their intact tradition from its curriculum. Nothing was given to the university, and nothing was taken from it. This fact was brought to my attention recently when a prominent Jewish thinker told me of his visit to the Catholic University of Lublin in Poland in order to deliver a lecture on Judaism. When this Jewish thinker arrived, he noticed that directly across the street from the university was a large building that before World War II had housed a great institution of talmudic learning, *yeshivat hakhmei Lublin*, "the yeshiva of the Torah sages of Lublin." He noted that in all the years these two institutions had been across the street from each other, there had been no intellectual contact whatsoever between them. Yet, surely, neither the Catholic scholars nor the Jewish scholars then and there felt that the others were discriminating against them. They occupied two different, incommensurate, worlds of "teachers and students." Both were quite happy, each with their own. In Poland, where in many ways the Middle Ages lasted into the twentieth century, there are still recent reminders of this situation of total separation of the Jewish tradition and the university.

The "modern" university takes a different direction with the rise of modern, secular, nation-states (like Canada) which, among many

other things, politically enfranchised Jews by granting them citizenship. Although political advances come before cultural advances, no culture remains the same once the political situation has so radically changed. In most cases the culture could be called "Christian," even though the consistent theological basis for it that had functioned in the Middle Ages had been very much compromised. Religion was now seen as part of culture rather than its basis. As for the university, the admission—however limited by quotas—of Jews, to every faculty but that of theology, made a big difference. How different a "Christian culture" is from a "Christian society" is illustrated by a story told to me by one of the last students of the great German Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen, who was the first practicing Jew to be tenured as a professor of philosophy (the new "queen of the sciences") in a German university. It seems that at the University of Marburg, a provincial university that Cohen more than anyone else helped make a major centre for philosophy, there was to be a university-wide celebration of the birthday of Martin Luther, the great Protestant Reformer. A Catholic colleague asked Cohen if he, as a Jew—for whom Luther is as big a problem as he is for Catholics—planned to attend. Cohen's answer was: "Es ist für den Vaterland. Ich kann Nichts anders!" (It is for Germany. I cannot do otherwise!) Here, in the most ironic way possible, Cohen was parodying Luther himself, who when defending himself against charges of heresy at the Diet of Worms in 1521, said "Ich kann Nichts anders," meaning that he could not change his *religious* beliefs to please those having political (that is, ecclesiastical) power over him. But what Cohen meant is that a *cultural* celebration of Luther was by now so "cultural" in character and devoid of religious meaning, it posed no problems for either Jews or Catholics, both in the minority at the officially "Protestant" University of Marburg. It was what the great Protestant theologian, Karl Barth, one of Hermann Cohen's last students at Marburg, sneeringly called *Kulturprotestantismus*, "cultural Protestantism," which is similar to the nonreligious "Judaism" of those who still call themselves "cultural Jews."

In North America, religion and culture became explicitly separate with the establishment of officially secular universities. In the new, slightly more open, atmosphere of the modern, secularized, university, the study of Judaism began to find an opening for itself. This began in the German universities, whose division of academic disciplines has most greatly influenced our universities in North America. Following a medieval distinction, everything that was not theology (or the professional disciplines of law and medicine) was called

"philosophy." Thus, for example, to this day at Oxford, the holder of the chair in physics is called the "Professor of Natural Philosophy." Into the faculty of philosophy there developed subfaculties dedicated to the study of languages ("philology") and history. Since Jews certainly have a language: Hebrew, and they certainly have a history, especially a literary one, the study of Judaism gradually became included in those disciplines.

Now this was an improvement over the medieval situation inasmuch as not only were Jews as Jews now admitted to the university, but Judaism did not have to be subsumed under another religion. As such, it enabled Judaism to actually give something *to* the university: the rich data of its own tradition. And, simultaneously, it took something *from* the university. It took what we call "critical-historical" method. Just as in the Middle Ages Jews had learned natural science and philosophy from the Arabs—although not in any institutional setting—and had applied their methods to the study of Judaism by Jews, so now they learned critical-historical method from the Germans, primarily, and also applied it to the study of Judaism by Jews. In both cases, the study of Judaism within the Jewish community was enriched, although then as now there have been traditionalists within the Jewish community who have been opposed to learning anything from anyone else. Along these lines, there is a very traditional distant relative of ours who, as a matter of principle, will not even use an edition of a classical Hebrew text if it has been edited by a scholar trained in the critical-historical method. But virtually all other Jewish scholars, including some very traditional ones, have learned a good deal from the critical-historical study of Judaism, however uncomfortable some of them are with what they had to take from it. And, of course, there would be no such Jewish scholarship if the Jews and the study of Judaism had not become part of the modern university in Germany in the last century. When university methods were applied to the study of Judaism, there emerged *die Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, "the science of Judaism," the word "science" being used like the French *sciences humaines*.

Despite the fact that Judaism was now being studied in the modern university, it was really being studied not on its own terms but still as part of someone else's story. Judaism was studied, for the most part, within the study of the "Ancient Near East." And despite the fact that no one any longer had to convert to another religion in order to study Judaism in the university, one still had to keep any specifically Jewish commitments within himself or herself. This did not mean that one had to literally hide the fact of being Jewish, but one

could not very well bring that fact into his or her scholarship without compromising what is called “scholarly objectivity.” That point was made clear to me when I was a rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. My professor of the codes of Jewish law, a subject every rabbi has to know in order to give proper normative leadership to the community he serves, was also a noted scholar of the relation of Jewish law to Roman law. Once, when a prominent scholar of ancient law from Oxford came to lecture at the seminary, some of us students were invited to a luncheon in his honour. When the distinguished guest stated how his approach to the study of legal sources, including Jewish law, was “totally objective and dispassionate,” my teacher announced “that is exactly my approach too!” I must admit, I chuckled a bit to myself when hearing this because only a few days earlier, this same teacher had a student expelled from the seminary for violation of a detail of the Sabbath laws. His knowledge of Jewish law, which he applied to this case, was hardly “totally objective and dispassionate.” Of course, what this illustrates is that the division between the normative, that is, what we live *by*, and the academic, that is, what we look *at*, was still quite large. Perhaps in my teacher’s response, “that is exactly my approach too,” the key word is *too*. His critical-historical scholarship was in the end something added on to his normatively relevant Jewish learning—what is called *parpara’ot le-hokhmah*, literally, “dessert for wisdom,” the latter—Torah wisdom—being the main course. But how he digested the two together is still a mystery to me.

The fact that the university was not yet ready for the Jewish ethical tradition as a source of moral truth, and perhaps the Jewish ethical tradition was not yet ready for the university, is seen clearly in the career of probably the greatest modern “Jewishly” Jewish—as distinct from merely being of “Jewish origin”—philosopher: Hermann Cohen. You will recall I mentioned earlier that Cohen, whose dates were 1842 to 1918, was the first practicing Jew to achieve a tenured professorship in a German university teaching philosophy. Cohen began to make his mark in German philosophy in 1869 with his doctoral dissertation on Kant. It was Cohen, more than anyone else, who turned German philosophy back to Kant—*zurück zu Kant*. What comes out in all of Cohen’s philosophical works is that his main attraction to Kant is because of Kant’s insistence that the highest form of philosophy is ethics. In the Middle Ages, the highest form of philosophy had been metaphysics. And Kant’s philosophical revolution, for Cohen, seemed to be a very Jewish way of looking at things. After all, in Judaism, is not *halakhah*, “the law,” of greater authority than *aggadah*,

which might be termed "speculation"—including metaphysical speculation? At times, despite the fact that Kant disliked Judaism even though being very favourable to Jews personally and politically, Cohen seems to have made Kant an honorary Jew.

Throughout his academic career, Cohen wrote a number of important essays on Judaism for Jews, but his work at the university, the work that got him tenured and brought him intellectual acclaim, was devoted to philosophy per se. Although there are hints of the Jew lurking behind the philosopher in some of his academic works, especially in what for me is his greatest philosophical work, *Ethik des reinen Willens* ("Ethics of Pure Will") of 1904, Cohen was not really able to ever teach the Jewish ethical tradition in Marburg. That had to wait for his retirement in 1912. At that time, he and his wife moved to Berlin, where he began to lecture at the liberal rabbinical seminary, *Die Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums* (The Institute for the Science of Judaism). This institution was run like a university, even though it had no official connection to the great University of Berlin, where many of its students also studied. Cohen's lectures at the *Hochschule*, where he was disappointed in the small attendance, dealt with Judaism per se. These lectures resulted in his one distinctly Jewish book, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judenthums*, "Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism," posthumously published by his widow in 1919. In reading this great work, where the Jewish ethical tradition is so central, one gets the impression that Cohen had this book in mind when writing all of his earlier philosophy in the university. The university, though, was as yet unable to hear it. Although the university had gone from being "monocultural" in a religious sense to becoming "monocultural" in a secular sense, it was still unable to accept any other culture as having any normative value for it. The ethics which the university and its supporting culture advocated was only to be heard from one dominant voice. Every other voice had to, in effect, sing along with it. And as the late Professor Marshall McLuhan of this university immortalized himself by saying: "the medium is the message."

The entrance of "Jewish Studies" as a distinct discipline per se had to wait for a third cultural atmosphere to arrive in our society and in our universities. That atmosphere, which began to emerge in the great cultural upheavals of the 1960s, has been called "multicultural." The term "multicultural," literally "from many (*multa*) cultures," has also been more widely termed: "pluralism." It means that we are now to recognize that the notion of a "mono" or *singular* culture is a myth perpetuated by those having political or cul-



tural power. Needless to say, it has a special resonance here in Canada, where unlike the United States, one cannot assume a "monoculture," even at the very founding of the society. Indeed, one can say that in this country like few others elsewhere, the attempt to recognize multiculturalism within one polity, let alone one society, is the question, *la question même*.

The advance that multiculturalism brings, finally so it seems, is that the Jewish tradition—like other minority traditions—can now be taught as its own story and not part of any other story, be it religious or secular. The Hebrew Bible can now be taught as a literary work having its own Jewish tradition of interpretation. No longer need it be subsumed under the literature of the "Ancient Near East," even though very important comparisons and even precedents can and should be learned from such texts as those in Akkadian or Ugaritic, which are texts that can only be learned in universities since they are no longer part of any living tradition. And closer to my own academic interests, the philosophical reflections of the great Jewish theologians of the Middle Ages need no longer be subsumed under the general category "Medieval Philosophy." For even though Jewish theologians like Maimonides and Crescas learned much from Greek philosophy transmitted through the Arabs, in an atmosphere of Jewish Studies one can much better see how their interest in philosophy was already something strongly suggested by their own tradition.

Because of this new cultural opening, and because of an increasing investment of the time of Jewish students and the generosity of Jewish laypeople, Jewish Studies has been a remarkable academic success in the universities of North America. The professional organization of teachers of Jewish Studies in North American universities, the Association for Jewish Studies, now has over six hundred members. In fact, we have had to move our annual meeting in Boston to a larger hotel because the hotel where we began almost thirty years ago cannot accommodate our sessions any longer. And, as for the publication of books of Jewish scholarship, there is now hardly a major university or commercial press today that does not have a section on "Judaica" in its catalogue.

In terms of enrollment, this success is not only because many more Jewish students are interested in Judaism now than when I was a student. It is also due to the fact that Judaism is of very broad interest to students from non-Jewish backgrounds. Obviously, if courses in Jewish Studies attracted no Jewish students, the atmosphere for Jewish scholarship in such an environment would be difficult. But, on the other hand, if only Jewish students took courses in Jewish Studies, it

would be difficult to justify their being taught by professors for credit rather than by clergy in noncredit courses. Happily, here at the University of Toronto, courses in Jewish Studies are of interest to both Jewish and non-Jewish students. And that is the case almost everywhere else I know of. In fact, Jewish Studies is being taught by professors, both Jewish and non-Jewish, in some universities and colleges where there are virtually no Jewish students. When a member of the Jewish community expressed her surprise at this, I informed her, by analogy, that successful courses in Buddhism do not have to wait for Buddhists to enroll in them.

For many, this is about as far as one can hope for Jewish Studies to come in the modern university. We are no longer required to subsume it under someone else's religion, even having it taught by non-Jews to other non-Jews only. And we are no longer required to subsume it under some other culture, even where there can be both Jewish teachers and Jewish students of that culture. We can now study and teach Judaism on its own terms, in its own language, to Jews and non-Jews alike. Furthermore, this has been a success. Is it not, therefore, impertinent of someone like myself, who has so obviously benefitted from the success of Jewish Studies, to publicly question whether this is as far as we can and should go with Jewish Studies in the modern university? For to say we can move beyond our recent success surely implies it is still incomplete, hence not "final" (in the sense of the Greek *teleios*), not without lack. So, what does it lack, and how can that lack be filled?

The lack is that under the multicultural model, Judaism—like the other minority cultures—is, in effect, given its own little corner. Even the study of what still seems to still be the religion of the majority: Christianity, now is given its little corner too and, at least by implication, like Judaism it should keep its own voice to itself. In the culture of the modern university, committed Christians are a minority too. But is this not a recipe for intellectual ghettoization? I might add that in order to prevent as much as possible such intellectual ghettoization of Jewish Studies here at the University of Toronto, Jewish Studies is a "program," not a "department" unto itself. All our courses are taught in various, appropriate departments. Thus students of Jewish religious thought study it in the Department for the Study of Religion, utilizing the latest methods for the study of religious thought along with students of other traditions of religious thought. And the same is the case with the study of ancient Jewish texts in the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, and the study of Jewish history in the Department of History.

Nevertheless, the truly normative voice of the university, as the culture-forming institution it is, is to be the voice of a self-conscious, modern, even militant, secularism. It is one that celebrates its own autonomy, its own power to create itself, as it were. In other words, any attempt to enter voices from other cultures that do not regard radical autonomy as being normatively foundational, any such "older" voices are to be effectively kept out of the real conversation. That "real" conversation is the *political* one in the sense that Aristotle saw "politics," namely, how we are to order our lives together. Any other culture—and cultures not invented but inherited inevitably have religious sources—any other such culture is, in effect, granted in principle the same exemption from participation in the real, moral/political discussion we grant to "conscientious objectors" in wartime. We are to respect their differences from "us," and we are to keep "them" at a distance lest they try to tell us in any way what to do. We protect them from us, and us from them.

This moral isolation has become quite apparent this month, when some Orthodox Jewish students at Yale University protested being forced to live in dormitories where men and women even have to use the same bathing facilities, and where sexual practices they regard as immoral are allowed—even encouraged. A celebrated lawyer, himself a pious and learned Jew, is planning to argue their case *pro bono*. I have heard that he will defend their right to live elsewhere as a "right to privacy." In other words, the *public*, moral, question of whether a university ought to be advocating, explicitly, any sexual practices, has been, in effect, tabled. Legally, that is probably the best strategy as a law professor friend of mine told me last week. Nevertheless, it does beg the larger question, which is a question that the Jewish ethical tradition has much to say about—much to say for more than just Jews. Maybe it is no accident that at Yale, among the several scholars who teach Jewish Studies there, none of them is a Jewish ethicist. And if there were a Jewish ethicist at Yale, would his or her opinion be consulted?

At Yale, as at so many North American universities, multicultural pluralism functions as a centrifugal force, that is, it keeps all the intellectual minorities *away* from the center of things, from the "moral action" as it were. It also goes to show that in such elite academic institutions, and their less than elite followers, one need not be "religious" at all to engage in what amounts to proselytizing the students. And the students resisting such secularist proselytizing efforts need not have been Orthodox Jews. They could have just as easily been from other backgrounds, what the American anthropologist Clif-

ford Geertz has famously called "thick cultures." In other words, the protesters could have been Muslims, traditional Catholics, Evangelical Protestants, Mormons, or others. But on a personal level, I am rather proud that it was a group of Orthodox Jews who called the public moral question at Yale. They were, in a very real sense, teaching the Jewish ethical tradition in the modern university—teaching it with all the vulnerability of the untenured.

What is required, then, for the successful teaching of the Jewish ethical tradition in the modern university is what is being attempted here in Canada, a country that perhaps more than anywhere else, is what I would call an "intercultural" society. Unlike a "multicultural" society, which often seems to be where one culture still predominates and all other cultures are granted their "exemptions," an *intercultural* society is one where moral consensus is to be reached by rational discussion of the approaches of a variety of cultures. In such a discussion, each culture is not only to bring data from its own background to the moral foreground. Only bringing data means only bringing examples rather than principles by which to interpret the data. But data from a minority culture like Judaism, without some of their own principles of interpretation, most often appear more "interesting" than actually edifying. In other words, they cannot be seen as giving any real moral guidance. As for moral governance, a tradition can only offer that to its own members "at home," so to speak.

However, the main argument against including other cultural voices in political/moral discourse is that these "other" cultures are "so parochial." The main argument of the radical modern secularism that has proclaimed its own autonomy, its own independence from past tradition, is that it alone is truly *universal*, that is, *for everyone*, irrespective of where and from whom they have come into society. Indeed, the main modern dismissal of Judaism has been that it is so particularistic, so "clannish," that it cannot have anything to say to anyone other than those who want to live in its protected enclaves. The attraction of many modern, "universalistic," ideologies for many intelligent Jews is proof of the success of that argument.

However, that argument must be refuted if the Jewish ethical tradition is to be taught with any integrity in the modern university. It is wrong on two counts.

First, as the contemporary philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has shown with remarkable insight, every way of thinking comes out of someone's very particular tradition. To deny that is an act of intellectual repression that is ultimately as futile as the repression of one's physical or emotional needs. It is something we have to live with, and

surely develop, but it is not something we can arrogantly transcend. We are all formed by traditions. The question is how can we get our respective traditions to interact for the sake of moral consensus in the very nontraditional society in which we all are living together, like it or not. The great moral issues we now face, issues like gender roles, abortion, euthanasia, criminal punishment, or poverty, all of these issues can no longer be intelligently discussed, let alone resolved, if we still assume that we have but one general culture to rely on for guidance in our deliberations. Indeed, as some of the francophone citizens of Canada remind the anglophone majority, the notion of one monoculture is itself a moral problem, not a source for the solution of other moral problems.

Second, this secularist dismissal ignores the fact, whether consciously or unconsciously, that great traditions—that is, those that have lasted and grown over many centuries—have constituted a universal horizon for themselves. That is, a tradition like Judaism has formulated ethical principles it is convinced apply to all human beings. Now some within the Jewish tradition see that universal application being one of authority, namely, “do what we tell you to do because we have gotten it straight from God.” But there is another strand of the Jewish ethical tradition, what I would call “inherent Jewish rationalism,” which sees that application as being one of intelligent persuasion. When it comes to the Jewish ethical tradition, which may be defined as that which pertains to interhuman relations, what is called in Hebrew *bein adam le-havero*, the overwhelming majority of its rules and principles can be seen to be based on rational, that is universally knowable and applicable, criteria. Thus the Mishnah, the second most important Jewish book after the Bible, at the end of a large subdivision dealing with property law, records that “Rabbi Ishmael said that whoever wishes to become wise (*she-yakhhim*) should immerse oneself in Jewish civil law because there is not an angle of the Torah wider than it; it is like a flowing source of water (*ke-ma`yan hanovea*).” Commenting on this, a mid-nineteenth century Polish rabbi, Israel Lifschitz of Danzig, a man who probably never saw the inside of a university, stated: “There is no other area among the laws of the Torah where the human intellect (*sekhel ha-enoshi*) is given permission to soar as much as it can, to enquire and determine according to what appears right to it than Jewish civil law.” It is this civil law, and its closely related criminal law, which form the data of the Jewish ethical tradition. But only when the contemporary university is part of a truly *intercultural* society can this ethical tradition—or any ethical *tradition*—be effectively taught. For as Aristotle said about the good, the

most basic ethical term for him, our task is not mainly to know it but to do it. Only in an intercultural society can the Jewish ethical tradition teach what it believes to be good for everyone with its own voice in the world.

At this point, we see that the Jewish ethical tradition not only gives data to the university but method as well. It is enabled to remain intact even when relating to an "other." But what does the Jewish ethical tradition take *from* the contemporary university? For there can be no true dialogue without mutual giving and mutual taking. And by "taking," I mean what is taken back to the community in which the Jewish ethical tradition has its roots and its nurture. I mean the traditional Jewish community, whose ultimate concerns are even deeper than those of ethics. What is taken back *there* from the university, from university professors and university trained scholars who live there even when working *here* in the university? What is taken back to the traditional places of the study of the Torah, what the great modern Hebrew poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik called *bet ha-yotser le-nishmat ha'ummah*, "the creative house of the soul of the people"? What is taken back there when at long last the Jewish ethical tradition can be taught in the university? It seems to me, two things can be taken back with great profit, indeed with gratitude.

First, we can take back what the modern university first gave us: the critical-historical method of the study of the texts of our tradition. We simply cannot study these texts anymore without being enriched by the insights of university trained scholars. Indeed, just recently, such a pious and learned teacher of Jewish Studies, Professor B. Barry Levy of McGill University, showed in a popular Canadian Jewish periodical how his university scholarship helps traditional Jewish Bible study from succumbing to pseudo-scientific readings of Scripture, which claim that present day events can literally be deduced from the text. And he did this by showing through his university methods just how such an approach cheapens the deeper religious and moral meaning of the Bible—for Jews. In studying the Jewish ethical tradition as much more than history, I am constantly enriched in looking at the central rabbinic documents of that tradition by the pious-and-critical scholarship of this century's great master of that literature, my late revered teacher Professor Saul Lieberman. Any tradition whose authority cannot be maintained in the face of critical-historical scholarship is simply not very much of a tradition. Surely, the Jewish ethical tradition is not relativized out of normative existence by being examined with a worldly microscope.

Second, we must take back from the modern university philosophical method. In the case of the Jewish ethical tradition, we must take back to the community the best methods of ethical theory. Since ethical theory in a university deals with what is to be done by all rational human beings under similar circumstances, taking it back to the community means that we can use it to better develop more rationally convincing interpretations of Jewish law, especially as it pertains to interhuman and interpersonal relations. In my own case, my lifelong interest in the philosophical tradition of natural law has enabled me to discover within the Jewish ethical tradition great truths that I would have surely overlooked had I not been university educated, and were I not a teacher in a university in regular contact with colleagues and students from many different backgrounds. Natural law is the idea that our most basic moral principles are universal and universally accessible to human reason.

Because of this new intersection of the Jewish ethical tradition and the university, both *in* the university and *in* the Jewish community, each tradition has been enriched. Indeed, a new time has come to our culture and the university that is part of it, and to the Jewish ethical tradition, whose genuine moral insights are receiving an unprecedented hearing. I am grateful to the authorities of the University of Toronto, who have chosen me to teach this tradition here. I am grateful to the generous donors of the chair I now hold, especially to Dick and Dorothy Shiff for whom the chair is named. And on an occasion of gratitude, I am grateful to her, she who has been my faithful and loving companion since the days of our youth. Time is short and work is long. I pray God to be worthy of both the time and the work given me in this place.