Jewish Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century

Personal Reflections

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CHAPTER 23

Skepticism and the Philosopher's Keeping Faith

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> Durch die Skepsis untergraben wir die Tradition, durch die Consequenzen der Skepsis treiben wir die versteckte Wahrheit aus ihrer Höhle und finden vielleicht, daß die Tradition Recht hatte, obwohl sie auf thönernen Füßen stand. Ein Hegelianer also würde etwa sagen, daß wir die Wahrheit durch die Negation der Negation zu ermitteln suchten.
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> FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Werke*, 3:342

Let me begin by posing the question that has preoccupied my thinking these many decades: what does it mean to speak of Jewish philosophy?[1] From one perspective, the answer is so obvious that it does not even merit asking the question: Jewish philosophy is the attempt to address the major tenets of Judaism from the different disciplines included under the rubric of philosophy. By this benchmark, the label suits me well. I have spent a lifetime dedicated to mastering both Jewish texts and philosophical literature out of the conviction that the particularity of the former can serve indexically as a marker of the universality propounded by the latter. The amalgamation of these two corpora has complicated the polarization of the universal and the particular customarily

1 An earlier attempt to engage this question can be found in the coauthored "Introduction: Charting an Alternative Course for the Study of Jewish Philosophy" in Hughes and Wolfson 2010, 1–16. For a penetrating and thoughtful reassessment of this topic, see now Hughes 2014. The author's summation of his argument is worthy of citation: "The purpose of Jewish philosophy . . . is not to reify terms such as particularism and universalism, but to show their artificiality, their investment in ideology, and their ultimate instability. The rethinking I am calling for is one that sees Jewish philosophy reflect upon displacement, upon exile, and upon—in the contemporary period—what Jewish sovereignty means in the land of Israel. This reflection cannot be about protectionism, about xenophobia, about neat lines (or, quite literally, walls) separating differences that have become transubstantiated as ontologies. Beyond universalism and particularism resides a commitment to plurality and equality as opposed to homogeneity, either on the grand (universal) or small (particular) scale. . . . Only by engaging such issues is it possible, I submit, to rethink Jewish philosophy in ways that move beyond the particular/universal impasse. Such an engagement has become the pressing task of Jewish philosophy at the present moment" (124–25).

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marked as Athens and Jerusalem. By pondering philosophy in relationship to my Jewishness and my Jewishness in relationship to philosophy, I have come to appreciate that the commensurability of the universal must be reckoned by the incommensurability of the particular and the incommensurability of the particular by the commensurability of the universal. Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me note that, in my estimation, particularity is not simply the concrete instantiation of universality, nor is universality simply the abstract idealization of particularity. Resisting a dialectical resolution that would yield the universalization of the particular in the particularization of the universal, I am committed to the proposition that the indeterminacy of the particular is always in the process of being determined by the determinacy of the universal, just as the determinacy of the universal is always in the process of being undetermined by the indeterminacy of the particular. Hence, I have sought to elicit and to assess—at times quite critically—the inimitable truths about Judaism from immersion in its textual details, rather than by providing systematic and totalizing generalizations based on the presumed existence of metaphysical absolutes or ontological essences.

Reading the texts of Judaism through the philosophical prism has alerted me to the fact that the answer to my initial question regarding the nature of Jewish philosophy is far from obvious; indeed, it is a question that stubbornly refuses to be settled. The deeper I delve into these texts, the more troublesome they become. In the search to resolve the one issue regarding the contours of Jewish philosophy, a host of other difficulties are brought to light: must the canon of this discipline be limited to Jews who write about Judaism in a philosophical vein, or is it possible to include Jews who contemplate philosophical issues from broader perspectives? Even more daringly, can this canon include non-Jewish philosophers, and not simply scholars of Jewish philosophy but constructive thinkers in their own right? If the discipline is to break through the straightjacket of identity politics, the latter option would be preferable. However, solving one problem invariably leads to another: would inclusion of non-Jews require of them to think Jewishly even if they are not focused on specifically Jewish matters? More fundamentally, can a path of thought be so demarcated? What does it mean to think Jewishly? Are there patterns of cogitation or principles of logic that may be described as distinctively Jewish to the exclusion of all other ethnocultural groupings?

Beyond the Hybridity Jew/Greek

Eschewing the possibility of delineating an essence of Jewish philosophy, I nonetheless affirm that the raison d'être of this undertaking at any historical

interval is shaped by the bifocal vision alluded to above, to envisage the philosophical through the lens of Judaism and to envisage Judaism through the lens of the philosophical. In this manner, we avoid a simplistic binary that creates a rift between the universal and the particular. My own personal stance is in accord with Emmanuel Levinas, who insisted that the "absolutely universal," which constitutes the essence of spiritual life, "can be served in purity only through the particularity of each people, a particularity named enrootedness" (Levinas 1990, 136).[2] The unique contribution of Judaism—when interpreted through the rabbinic corpus—is the consciousness of a "universalist singularity," a universalism expressed in the principle underlying Moses Mendelssohn's explanation of Israel's desire for emancipation, "To be with the nations is also to be for the nations" (Levinas 1994, 144). From Levinas's perspective, there is no conflict between the universal and the particular; indeed, the one can be realized only through the guise of the other. When devoted to their religious predilection, Jews give witness to the fact that universal significance must always be measured from the standpoint of a singularity that refrains from reducing the other to the same by collapsing the difference of identity in the identity of difference.

One can surely detect the Levinasian influence in Jacques Derrida's articulation of the "universal exception" or the "rule of the exception," *tout autre est tout autre*, which "signifies that every other is singular, that 'every' is a singularity, which also means that every is each one, a proposition that seals the contract between universality and the exception of singularity" (Derrida 1995, 87). The sameness of the universal is exemplified by the differential of the exception. This is the implication of the tautology that every other (*tout autre*) is altogether other (*tout autre*); that is to say, every other is other even to itself insofar as the irreducible nature of the other is such that it cannot be classified under any rule except as an exception to that rule. What is universally shared is the uniqueness of the individual that cannot be shared universally. This holds the key to understanding the critical relationship between Athens and Jerusalem. Moving beyond this binary, and even beyond James Joyce's hybrid Jewgreek/Greekjew notoriously appropriated by Derrida at the conclusion of "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" (Derrida 1978, 153),[3] I would submit that one must occupy the space of the *between*, wherein, as Derrida himself puts it elsewhere, the "architecture" is "neither Greek nor Judaic" (Derrida 2008, 116), a space that must be prior to the

2 Many scholars have weighed in on the question of the relationship between philosophy and Judaism in Levinas's thought. Compare Trigano 2001 and other references cited in Wolfson 2014, 428–29, n. 9.

3 For a more extended discussion, see Wolfson 2014, 161–66.

division of Jew and Greek. Embracing this Derridean view, I have advocated in my writing and teaching for a Jewish philosophical thinking that belongs neither to the Jew nor to the Greek, a mode of thinking that resists reduction to either one of these demarcations. It goes without saying that, historically, Hebraism and Hellenism were clearly not pure typological classifications, as the boundaries separating the indigenous and the alien were always fluid and subject to disruption and modification. But beyond the matter of factual accuracy, I would argue that conceptually as well the schism must be subverted by the adoption of a more porous delineation of outside and inside.

The sincerity of the reluctance to bifurcate Athens and Jerusalem cannot be doubted, and yet, we are left to mull over the viability of particularizing philosophy in this fashion. Is it any more reasonable to speak of a philosophy that is essentially Jewish than it is to speak of a Jewish mathematics or a Jewish physics? Naturally, if by "philosophy" we mean the conceptual articulation of the beliefs that inform the ritualistic actions of a given sociological constellation, then my query is both trivial and easily answered. We can safely assume that, by this yardstick, there is Jewish philosophy—just as there is Muslim philosophy, Christian philosophy, Hindu philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, Taoist philosophy, and so on—and its paramount concern would be to offer an ideological justification for the endurance of the Jews within the universal scheme of humanity. We might even go as far as to say that the Jew occupies a privileged position as the symbol of the proverbial other whose identity preserves the space of difference or, in Levinasian terms, the ethnos that stands as witness to the alterity that defies the subordination of the ethical to the ontological and the consequent violence of a politics predicated on the presumed conflation of the rational and the real. But if the matter of philosophy is not so constricted, we are justified to ask again about the conceptual legitimacy of delimiting philosophy by a specific religious tradition. Is it not the case that the various subjects included under the taxonomy of philosophy—logic, epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, ethics—defy any and every culturally restricted discrimination?

Striking Thinking at Its Roots

My own thinking has been especially inspired by the desire to forge an alliance between the spirit of Jewish philosophy and skepticism, that is, to survey the panorama of the former through the speculum of the latter. In accord with the editorial objectives of this volume, in the remainder of this essay I will offer some reflections on my personal engagement with this matter, not, however,

by recounting more specific autobiographical details but by performing philosophical exegesis written in the poetic idiom that is the signature of my writing style. More often than not, this is the way my story is told. I consider myself predominantly a dialogical thinker, inasmuch as I explicate the textual voice of others in order to give intonation to my own.

Needless to say, in the long and variegated history of philosophical speculation, the term *skepticism* has assumed a variety of meanings.[4] At the outset, therefore, it is necessary to be explicit about how it has shaped my pathway. In its most formidable sense, skepticism is the anxiety that ensues from the fact that it is entirely possible that we do not know what we think we know either about the external world or the nature of other minds (McManus 2004a, 1),[5] as René Descartes famously argued in the first of the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) in his insistence that, from a sentient perspective, we cannot ascertain the "sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep" (Descartes 1999, 2:13).[6] The potentially maddening consequence of this inability to differentiate between dream and wakefulness should be obvious. What is noteworthy is that even the self-validating *cogito* of the "I think, therefore, I am," which Descartes did not subject to doubt (Descartes 1999, 1:127), encompasses a diaphaneity so transparent that the distinction between sanity and lunacy is effaced. Finely attuned to the ramification of both the nonhyperbolic banality of natural doubt and the hyperbolic audacity of metaphysical doubt, Derrida noted that, with respect to the *cogito*, the "impenetrable point of certainty," the "zero point at which determined meaning and nonmeaning come together in their common origin" (Derrida 1978, 56), there is no need to shelter the mind "from an emprisoned madness, for it is attained and ascertained within madness itself. It is valid *even if I am mad*—a supreme self-confidence that seems to require neither the exclusion nor the circumventing of madness" (ibid., 55; emphasis in original).[7] Epistemically, the self-confidence in the mind's ability to ground its own existence masks an equally intractable lack of confidence in the mind's capacity to affirm the existence of the world apart from the *cogito ergo sum*. Analogously, in the preface

4 The scholarly literature on skepticism is considerable. For a useful overview, see Conant 2004.

5 Compare the discussion on philosophical skepticism and everyday life in Stroud 1984, 39–82, and the analysis of the criteria for knowledge and skepticism in Cavell 1999b, 37–48. For discussion of Cavell's position, see Putnam 2012, 552–64.

6 See Stroud 1984, 1–38. On Cartesian skepticism and the dream phenomenon, see sources cited in Wolfson 2011, 324 n. 80.

7 See the analysis of this passage in Naas 2003, 60–61.

to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), Immanuel Kant acknowledged the "scandal of philosophy and universal human reason that the things outside us (from which we after all get the whole matter for our cognitions, even for our inner sense) should have to be assumed merely on faith, and that if it occurs to anyone to doubt it, we should be unable to answer him with a satisfactory proof" (Kant 1998, 121). In his more extensive refutation of idealism, Kant responds to this scandal by insisting that the "inner experience" of the *cogito* is "possible only under the presupposition of outer experience" (ibid., 326), whence he elicits the following theorem: "The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me" (ibid., 327).

It is beyond the concerns of this chapter to explore in more detail Kant's argument that the persistence in perception of spatially exterior objects is dependent on the temporally determined consciousness of one's own existence, an insight that had a wide-ranging impact on subsequent philosophical reflections on the nature of time, especially in the phenomenological tradition. It is worthy to note, however, that, in his explication of Kant's remark concerning the scandal of philosophy in section 43 of *Being and Time* (1927), Martin Heidegger observed that, even though the internal experience of the "definiteness of time" (*Zeitbestimmtheit*) presupposes the existence of something persisting as an object of space, it is, nevertheless, the case that time carries the "burden of the proof," since it provides the "foundation for leaping" into that which is outside the subject (Heidegger 1993, 203–4; 2010a, 196).[8] The preference accorded to time over space has had an immense bearing on my own musings on temporality, but what is most relevant to our discussion is Heidegger's further observation that the very quest for a proof of things existing outside the self indicates that Kant did not escape the Cartesian dilemma and hence the starting point of his inquiry is the "ontic priority" that he accords to the "inner experience" of the "isolated subject" (Heidegger 1993, 204; Heidegger 2010a, 196). Moreover, from Heidegger's vantage point, the scandal

8 After citing Kant's words and clarifying his use of the term "existence" (*Dasein*), Heidegger (1993, 203–4; 2010a, 196) notes, "The proof for the 'existence of things outside me' is supported by the fact that change and persistence belong equiprimordially to the nature of time. My presence [*Vorhandensein*], that is, the presence given in the inner sense of a manifold of representations, is change that is present. But the definiteness of time [*Zeitbestimmtheit*] presupposes something present which persists. . . . The experience of the being-in-time of representations [*Erfahrung des In-der-Zeit-seins von Vorstellung*] equiprimordially posits changing things 'in me' and persisting things 'outside of me.' . . . For only 'in me' is 'time' experienced, and time carries the burden of the proof. It provides the foundation for leaping into the 'outside of me' in the course of the proof." See Merleau-Ponty 2012, 432–33.

of philosophy does not consist of the fact that a definitive response to the skeptic's doubt is lacking but rather "*in the fact that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again*." The demand to advance such proofs grows "out of an ontologically insufficient way of positing *what it is from which*, independently and 'outside' of which, a 'world' is to be proven as objectively present." A proper understanding of *Dasein* does not need proof of an external world, inasmuch as the human is constituted as a being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*), and, as such, "Dasein defies such proofs, because it always already *is* in its being what the later proofs deem necessary to demonstrate for it" (Heidegger 1993, 205; 2010a, 197; emphasis in original).

Heidegger's critique of the Cartesian and Kantian presentations of the idealist perspective opens the path to an even deeper dimension of skepticism that is not dependent on the pseudoepistemic problem generated by the fallacious ontological dichotomy of an exterior that is not determined vis-à-vis an interior and an interior that is not determined vis-à-vis an exterior. Skepticism, on this score, is a not a grappling with the possible existence of things outside the mind, but it is rather the ongoing quest to uncover the unreasonable in every postulate of reason, the task of interrogation whose roots may be sought in the ancient Pyrrhonian incredulity about the philosophical endeavor in general. David Hume well expressed the repercussion of the skeptical position when he noted in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) that "all knowledge degenerates into probability, and this probability is greater or less, according to our experience of the veracity or deceitfulness of our understanding, and according to the simplicity or intricacy of the question" (Hume 1978, 180). No scientific knowledge can spark confidence in the veracity of what the mind has discovered, even as it is reasonable to assume that there is a gradual amplification of certainty as the likelihood of a given stance increases. Skepticism, so conceived, leads logically to the suspension regarding the cogency of logic and the possibility of apprehending truth, or, in Hume's notable formulation, "*all our reasoning concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom*," and, consequently, "*belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures*" (ibid., 183; emphasis in original). If taken to the limit, the deferral of judgment undercuts all belief and opinion, yielding the self-contradictory proposition that there is no truth, a statement that can be true only if it is false and false only if it is true.

Here it is apposite to recall the contrast made by Edmund Husserl in his *Logical Investigations*, first published in 1900 and then in a second, revised edition in 1913, between the popular and philosophical senses of skepticism: the latter is applied to theories that "try to limit human knowledge considerably and on principle, and especially if they remove from the sphere of possible

knowledge wide fields of real being, or such especially precious sciences as metaphysics, natural science, or ethics as a rational discipline" (Husserl 2000, 137).[9] The skeptical posture implies that the "logical or noetic conditions for the possibility of any theory are false. . . . The concept of such scepticism applies to the ancient forms of scepticism with theses such as: There is no truth, no knowledge, no justification of knowledge etc. . . . That it is of the essence of a sceptical theory to be *nonsensical*, is at once plain from its definition" (ibid., 136–37; emphasis in original).

Philosophical skepticism, which Husserl further divides into epistemological and metaphysical, is to be contrasted with the more commonplace expression of suspicion. The denial of truth on the part of the philosopher is not merely a "question of arguments and proofs," but it entails "logical and noetic *absurdity*" (Husserl 2000, 137; emphasis in original). The nature of that absurdity is outlined in more detail in Husserl's lecture course on logic and the theory of knowledge given at the University of Göttingen in the winter semester of 1906/07:

> It is characteristic of all skeptical theories that they are absurd in their own distinctive way, namely, inasmuch as the content of their theses and theories denies precisely what in the absence of which their theories themselves, and as such, would lose any meaning. The extreme skepticism of someone like Gorgias says that there is no truth. Precisely in saying that, though, he is presupposing, as does anyone making an affirmation, and in doing so, that there is a truth, namely, the one that he is uttering and defending there. (Husserl 2008, 145–46)

To say that there is no truth involves a rescinding of the "absolute validity" of the law of contradiction, for the truth of the statement depends on its being false, and this leaves one "stuck in skeptical absurdity" (ibid., 146). I will have the opportunity to return to Husserl below, but suffice it at this juncture to note that, from his thought, we may educe the maxim that epistemological skepticism is essential to the philosophical vocation, since it "causes the most

9 In a similar vein, Wittgenstein proffered a distinction between ordinary and philosophical doubt: the former always relates to concrete circumstances, for example, a doctor inquiring if a particular person under anesthesia feels pain when he or she groans, whereas the latter is expressive of an uncertainty regarding the theoretical as opposed to the practical possibility of knowing anything at all. See Wittgenstein 1990, 34, and analysis in McGinn 2004, 249–50. For a criticism of the coherence of the skeptic's entertaining the possibility of the nonexistence of the world, see Putnam 2012, 547–50.

thoroughgoing shaking of all opinions and knowledge" and, consequently, "strikes thinking at its roots" (ibid., 177). To strike thinking at its roots is the philosophical mission in its most radical articulation—radical in the twofold sense of rudimentary and far reaching. The skeptic thus can effectuate the double duty of uprooting by taking hold of the root.

Eliciting a similar conclusion from the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Stanley Cavell observed,

> Disappointment over the failure (or limitation) of knowledge has, after all, been as deep a motivation to the philosophical study of knowledge as wonder at the success of knowledge has been. In Wittgenstein's work, as in skepticism, the human disappointment with human knowledge seems to take over the whole subject. While at the same time this work seems to give the impression, and often seems to assert, that nothing at all is wrong with the human capacity for knowledge, that there is no cause for disappointment . . . To me this fluctuation reads as a continuous effort at balance. . . . it seems an expression of that struggle of despair and hope that I can understand as a motivation to philosophical writing. (Cavell 1999b, 44)

According to Cavell's reading, Wittgenstein's thought—particularly in the *Philosophical Investigations*—is a response to skepticism that does not deny the veracity of skepticism. Recasting the significance of philosophical skepticism in light of the problematizing of knowledge culled from Shakespearean tragedy, Cavell characterized the skeptic pejoratively "as craving the emptiness of language, as ridding himself of the responsibilities of meaning, and as being drawn to annihilate externality or otherness . . . as seeking to escape the conditions of humanity" (Cavell 1999a, 237). Meticulously recapitulating Cavell's analysis of the skeptic as someone who seeks to escape from the responsibility of language and, by extension, from the responsibility toward the other, Hilary Putnam writes, "The challenge of skepticism, insofar as it is an *intellectual* challenge at all . . . lies in the fact that the skeptic threatens our conceptual system from *inside*. The reason skepticism is of genuine intellectual interest—interest to the *nonskeptic*—is not unlike the reason that the logical paradoxes are of genuine intellectual interest: paradoxes force us to rethink and reformulate our commitments" (Putnam 2012, 525; emphasis in original). Since the paradoxes do not convincingly show that knowledge is impossible, they need not be accepted by either the skeptic or the nonskeptic. It seems to me, however, that this argument is flawed inasmuch as it places the burden of logical proof on the shoulders of someone who does not accept the legitimacy of extracting

proof on the basis of deductive logic. We are left, then, with the inevitable conclusion that the constant probing for knowledge commences and culminates in the denial of the possibility of knowledge. Cavell refers to this inexorability as the "truth of skepticism" or the "moral of skepticism," which implies that "the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing" (Cavell 199b, 241). What appears from one end of the spectrum to be absurdity is discerned from the other end to be the epitome of lucidity. What we can know with certainty is the certainty of our uncertainty.

To the best of my recollection, the discipline of Jewish philosophy, whether in the medieval or in the modern periods, has never been examined from this vantage point. To be sure, there have been historical studies that have touched on the role of skepticism—and perhaps even more noticeably on the related themes of doubt and heresy—in the thought of particular Jewish philosophers,[10] but I am not aware of any study that attempts to think constructively about the enterprise of Jewish philosophy per se as a way of articulating a fundamental distrust in the power of reason to ascertain positive knowledge about the nature of being. There are examples of thinkers who viewed the faculty of reason with apprehension and even some who made rational demonstration subservient to prophetic revelation as the primary means to establish the ultimate metaphysical truth—Judah Halevi comes to mind—but, even in such cases, it is the commitment to reason that allows one to apprehend the limitation of reason. Hence, the presumption that there is a viable epistemological calculus of truth that is not a matter of contingency—the very thing the skeptic must deny[11]—is not called into question. *Prima facie*, this is somewhat surprising given the fact that skepticism, in the more radical sense, has been a crucial part of philosophy since antiquity. Moreover, we can fathom an affinity between the skeptical propensity of Greek philosophy—or at least one major trajectory thereof—to cast doubt on every statement of belief and the Talmudic penchant to inspect every legalistic or folkloristic pronouncement through a process of incessant inquiry. Indeed, rabbinically speaking, authority is tied as much to the scrutinizing of beliefs as it is to their transmission.

We might have expected that skepticism would have played a larger role in the conceptualization of the field of Jewish philosophy. And yet, if we dig a bit deeper beneath the surface, the lack of interest in examining Jewish philoso-

10 For instance, see Popkin 2003, 239–53.

11 Goodman 1983, 820: "For the Skeptics the issue was not the primacy of relativity (as perhaps in Protagoras) but rather the use of relativity to illustrate the absence of a criterion of truth."

phy from this perspective is not astounding in the least. After all, so much of what is presented under this rubric is, at best, an apologetic effort to consider philosophically the presuppositions of Judaism—whether construed theologically, psychologically, socioculturally, or anthropologically—and, at worst, a rational defense of the ethnic particularity that anchors the identity of the peoplehood of Israel and justifies its ontic autonomy and continual existence in the historical plane. The goal I have set for myself in my work is to think about the juxtaposition of "Jewish" and "philosophy" by deliberating on the aspect of philosophy that subjects every philosophical statement to critique, that is, the dimension of philosophy that deploys rational argumentation to render reason itself irrational.

Skepticism and the Fidelity of Doubt

Philosophy, in the broadest sense, can be defined as *reflective thinking*, the thinking that thinks about thinking, the thinking that constantly interrogates the premises of thinking. Rather than having an identifiable object, the datum of philosophy, first and foremost, is the act of philosophizing itself. I accept Jürgen Habermas's surmise that, even though philosophy "poses questions directed toward the universal," it "has no advantage over the sciences, and it certainly does not possess the infallibility of a privileged access to truth" (Habermas 1992, 14). Nonetheless, I would counter that philosophy is still to be distinguished from all other scientific investigation, whether empirical or speculative, inasmuch as it is the metadiscipline, the discipline that critically evaluates the hypotheses of the other disciplines and thus assumes the role of the unifying intellectual force that will account for the complex interplay of sameness and difference. The words of Stephen Mulhall well capture my own approach:

> While my genealogical myth is designed to capture the sense in which philosophy can be said to be rightly and intelligibly interested in everything, in all that is, it may also thereby create the impression that the philosopher must be occupying a position above or beyond all that is. . . . But philosophy does and must occupy a position within the domain that it aspires to take in as if from the outside. Just as philosophy's claim to be the university department that uniquely aspires to acknowledge the articulated unity of the university as a whole must cohere with the fact that it is also just one more department within that articulated unity, so philosophy's claim to be the singular point within the culture at which its

> articulated unity is acknowledged must cohere with the fact that it is simultaneously one node in that culture. It follows that philosophy's various ways of putting the deliverances of other intellectual disciplines in question can themselves be put in question from the perspectives afforded by those disciplines. (Mulhall 2013, 32)

Habermas himself concedes that there is one role in which philosophy does "step out of the system of the sciences, in order to answer *unavoidable* questions by enlightening the lifeworld about itself as whole. For, in the midst of certainties, the lifeworld is opaque" (1992, 16; emphasis in original). The illuminating of this lifeworld, I propose, is a facet of the hermeneutical self-reflexivity that is part and parcel of the skeptical foundation of philosophy. Proper attunement to this condition renders the dichotomization of the interpretative and the experiential inadequate. In thinking about thinking, the act of interpretation is itself the very experience that is being interpreted. The circularity of the venture is such that one cannot ruminate about philosophy without being implicated in the very practice that is the object of the rumination. Furthermore, the salient feature of that practice is the critical appraisal of the conjectures that undergird that practice. It follows that the plight of any philosophical construct is that it must be continually deconstructed and hence, at every turn, it must effectively unsay what it has previously said.

What I am here enunciating should not be confused with the gesture of apophasis; that is, I am not proffering that every philosophical affirmation is literally a speaking-away of what is spoken, an ineffable truth of which we cannot speak except by speaking-not, which technically should be distinguished from not speaking, the lack of any verbal utterance. My point rather is that philosophy, if true to its calling, entails a relentless clarification of its own language; there is no word that is not subject to further elucidation, and, in this sense, every utterance erases itself in the moment of its being uttered. The unremitting verbalization of doubt is indicative of the silence that precedes and succeeds every act of philosophical reasoning, the silence, to invoke Derrida once more, that "bears and haunts language, outside and *against* which alone language can emerge. . . . Like nonmeaning, silence is the work's limit and profound resource" (Derrida, 1978, 54; emphasis in original).

The obdurate questioning of the skeptic is indicative of the epistemological perspectivism championed by Friedrich Nietzsche, which is predicated on the collapse of the metaphysical distinction between truth and illusion, reality and appearance. As Nietzsche put it in *The Gay Science*, first published in 1882 and a second revised edition in 1887, to comprehend fully the *consciousness of appearance* (Nietzsche 2001, 63)—a consciousness in which the very

consciousness of appearance disappears insofar as there is no noumenal thing-in-itself that exists apart from the phenomenon[12]—is to discern the age-old wisdom that what we imagine to be real is naught but a dream and that enlightenment consists of waking from the dream that we are dreaming that we are waking from the dream.[13] Nietzsche's articulation of this gnosis is worth citing in full:

> I suddenly awoke in the middle of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I *must* go on dreaming lest I perish—as the sleepwalker has to go on dreaming in order to avoid falling down. What is "appearance" to me now! Certainly not the opposite of some essence—what could I say about any essence except name the predicates of its appearance! Certainly not a dead mask that one could put on an unknown x and probably also take off x! To me, appearance is the active and living itself, which goes so far in its self-mockery that it makes me feel that here there is appearance and a will-o'-the-wisp and a dance of spirits and nothing else—that among all these dreamers, even I, the "knower," am dancing my dance;[14] that the one who comes to know is a means of

12 Nietzsche 2003, 154, and compare the analysis in Wolfson 2014, 48–49.

13 Wolfson 2011, 274. See ibid., 43–45, where I discuss some aspects of Nietzsche's view on dreams. The hypothesis of my book is corroborated by the following statement of Fichte 1987, 63–64: "There is no being. . . . There are *images*: they are all that exists . . . images which do not represent anything, without meaning and purpose. I myself am one of these images. . . . All reality is transformed into a fabulous dream, without there being any life the dream is about, without there being a mind which dreams; a dream which hangs together in a dream of itself. *Intuition* is the dream; *thought* (the source of all being and all reality which I imagine, of *my* being, my power, my purposes), thought is the dream of this dream" (emphasis in original). See also the comment of Wittgenstein in Engelmann 1967, 7: "*Our* life is like a dream. But in our better hours we wake up just enough to realize that we are dreaming. Most of the time, though, we are fast asleep" (emphasis in original). The passages of Fichte and Wittgenstein are cited by Laycock 2001, 9.

14 On the thematic connection between philosophy and dance, see Nietzsche 2001, 246: "Maybe we philosophers are all in a bad position regarding knowledge these days; science is growing, and the most scholarly of us are close to discovering that they know too little. But it would be even worse if things were different—if we knew *too much*; our task is and remains above all not to mistake ourselves for someone else. We *are* different from scholars, although we are inevitably also, among other things, scholarly. We have different needs, grow differently; have a different digestion: we need more; we also need less. There is no formula for how much a spirit needs for its nourishment; but if it has a taste for independence, for quick coming and going, for wandering, perhaps for adventures of which only the swiftest are capable, it would rather live free with little food than unfree

> prolonging the earthly dance and thus is one of the masters of ceremony of existence, and that the sublime consistency and interrelatedness of all knowledge may be the highest means to *sustain* the universality of dreaming, the mutual comprehension of all dreamers, and thereby also *the duration of the dream*. (Nietzsche 2001, 63–64; emphasis in original)

The skeptic, who is on a par with the dreamer awoken in the middle of the dream to the discrimination that life itself is a dream about life (Nietzsche 2001, 71),[15] is keenly mindful of the fact that there is no reality that can appear but through the guise of image, no unmasking of the face but through the dissimilitude of the mask. Insofar as this is the case, it follows that the scrutiny executed by the skeptic is potentially endless: there is no naked truth to be divulged, only the semblance of truth unveiled in the veil of truth.[16] To the extent that the unveiling takes place through an act of misgiving, we can attri-

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and stuffed. It is not fat but the greatest possible suppleness and strength that a good dancer wants from his nourishment—and I wouldn't know what the spirit of a philosopher might more want to be than a good dancer. For the dance is his ideal, also his art, and finally also his only piety, his 'service of God'" (emphasis in original). In light of this description of philosophy, we understand why Nietzsche identified Zarathustra, the prophet of the new dawn of humanity, as a dancer, who could believe only in a God who dances (Nietzsche 2006, 29) and who speaks parables of the highest things through dance (ibid., 87). See ibid., 4, 79, 83–85, 132, 169, 175, 186, 196, 223, 239, 260–61.

15 Compare Nietzsche 2001, 146: "*Dreaming*.—Either one does not dream, or does so interestingly. One should learn to spend one's waking life in the same way: not at all, or interestingly" (emphasis in original).

16 On the link between skepticism and the veil of truth, see the curious aphorism in Nietzsche 2001, 72: "*Sceptics*.—I am afraid that old women in their most secret heart of hearts are more sceptical than all men: they believe the superficiality of existence to be its essence, and all virtue and depth to them is merely a veil over this 'truth,' the very desirable veil over a pudendum—in other words, a matter of decency and shame, and no more!" (emphasis in original). My view resonates with the following observation of Atlan 1993, 396: "One form of truth always kills, and must therefore be itself silenced; this is naked truth, stripped bare, in the name of the Good and out of hatred for falsehood, to be sure, like a Greek statue in the light of day, frozen, removed from its spatial context (the temple where it was erected) and temporal context (the evolutionary process which led to its existence). The veil of modesty that conceals this statue is language, with the polysemic and creative richness that can explain or suggest what it *means* behind what it says, who it is or could be behind what it appears to be—in brief, that animates it and gives it life: at the risk of falsehood and error, of course, if one believes that the garment is not a garment. . . . The garment, here, discloses more than nakedness can, because the latter merely reveals, once and for all, a reality that can only refer back to itself, whereas the former triggers the very process of unveiling" (emphasis in original).

bute an "affirmative tendency" to skepticism in the shaping of philosophical faith.[17] The groundlessness occasioned by the denunciation of the grounding of truth must itself be grounded.[18]

This is the intent of Denis Diderot's famous remark, "What has never been put in question has not been demonstrated. . . . Scepticism is thus the first step towards truth" (Diderot 1916, 45). Assessing Diderot's observation, Hans Blumenberg remarked that it "distinguished itself precisely by the fact that it is not appropriate to skepticism in general, certainly not in its ancient form. For this ancient Skepticism is not a way into philosophy but rather a way out of it" (Blumenberg 1983, 271). Could one not credibly argue, however, that the way out itself is but another way in, that the extreme postponement of belief is itself the consummate belief, the indubitable belief in the inability to believe? As I noted above, the dogmatic denial of the capacity to attain truth is itself a truth, albeit an incongruous truth, since its veracity depends on its falsity and its falsity on its veracity. Blumenberg alludes to this very paradox by giving the title "Skepticism Contains a Residue of Trust in the Cosmos" to his chapter (ibid., 269–77). Drawing the connection between the transcendental character of truth affirmed by adherents to Platonic orthodoxy and the demythologizing of this prospect by those who accepted the skeptic reversal, Blumenberg writes,

> That such probability can be, not misleading appearance, but rather a reflection of the true, and thus sufficient for man's action and for his

17 Such a position has been advanced by Köhne 2003 and Hüppauf 1998.

18 As Habermas 1992, 15, succinctly expresses the point: "Skepticism, too, has its grounds." See ibid., 29, where Habermas delineates ancient materialism and skepticism, late-medieval nominalism, and modern empiricism as "antimetaphysical countermovements" that "remain within the horizon of possible thought set by metaphysics itself." And compare Merleau-Ponty 2012, 309: "Rationalism and skepticism sustain themselves upon the actual life of consciousness that they both hypocritically imply, without which they could be neither thought nor even lived, and in which one cannot say that *everything has a sense* or that *everything is non-sense*, but merely that *there is sense*" (emphasis in original). From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, both dogmatism and skepticism with regard to absolute knowledge are overcome in the phenomenological assumptions that being is defined as "what appears to us" and that consciousness is a "universal fact." Hence, when I think a thought, that thought not only appears to me to be true, but it functions as a truth with which all other truths that I experience must be harmonized, even though I am well aware of the fact that it may not be unconditionally true (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 418–19). For a critique of Pyrrhonian skepticism on the basis of its making use of the very faith in the world that it seeks to unsettle, see Merleau-Ponty 1968, 5–7, and 95–97, where he outlines the mode of interrogation about the nature of being that is appropriate to our perceptual faith in the existence of the world.

> happiness—therein lies the whole of Platonism with its relation of correspondence between Ideas and appearances, between what really exists and its images. All the contradictions in which Academic Skepticism became entangled, and had to become entangled, are due to its Platonic residues, although this fact is linguistically disguised by its opposition to the Stoa. Thus it is, for example, in the attempt to prove that the characteristics of a cataleptic idea could also belong to false ideas. This argument involves the Skeptic in a burden of proof whose definition is self-contradictory because it presupposes the very distinction between true and false whose possibility it is supposed to be refuting. (Blumenberg 1983, 272–73)

Blumenberg perceptively articulated the contradictory nature that is inherent to the skeptical orientation: the necessity of true knowledge is a deduction that must be upheld in order to be discarded. The "residual dogmatism" of the skepticism that was taught in the academy consisted

> in the dependence of human self-reassurance on the single "truth" that truth is inaccessible. Thus the radicalization of Skepticism by its application to its own dogmatic employment is not primarily motivated by logical/systematic consistency or by epistemological resignation but rather by the precedence of existential fulfillment over every other human interest. . . . The fundamental question that is supposed to be the theme of every skepticism, the question whether something really is the way it appears to us, is itself the "original sin" of theory from which Skepticism promises to deliver us. (Blumenberg 1983, 274–75)

The promise notwithstanding, the logic inherent to the skeptical disavowal precludes the possibility of being delivered irrevocably from the epistemic inquisitiveness regarding the spurious presence of what is apparent but not real versus the veritable absence of what is not apparent but real. Even the Pyrrhonian skeptic, who brings "the cognitive process to a standstill in his *epoché*, in that he neutralizes the value goal of truth by denying the dependence of happiness upon it," must still remain "attentive to the truth that becomes evident from itself. In this understanding of truth, there still lives the inheritance of the hypothetical initial situation of Greek thought, in which truth was thought of as that which prevails of its own accord, even if from now on it is reserved for an as yet unknown experience" (ibid., 274).[19]

19 For discussion of the dialectic of destruction and affirmation in Blumenberg's skepticism, see Geulen 2012, 11–20.

The ancient skeptical claim, attested in the celebrated words attributed to Socrates in Plato's *Republic* 354b, "As for me, all I know is that I know nothing," can be considered an articulation of the unassailable axiom of philosophical reasoning that truth must always be manifest in the concealment of truth. To know the truth of this untruth is to appreciate the untruth of the truth that all we can know is that we do not know. Along similar lines, in the *Apology* 23b, Socrates is declared the wisest of human beings because he "recognizes that he is in truth of no account in respect to wisdom." In the *Meno* 80c, Plato applies to Socrates the state of *aporein*, "befuddlement," which corresponds to the view attributed to Socrates in Plato's *Theaetetus* 155d that philosophy begins in an act of "wondering," *thaumazein*, an idea echoed as well in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 982b, which has had an enduring impact on Western thought. Even more pertinently, in book 3 of the *Metaphysics*, 995a, Aristotle introduced the word *aporia* to mark the perplexity to which discursive analysis inevitably leads, an epistemological knot that paradoxically both impels and impedes the process of thinking. Particularly relevant to my argument is the explication of this concept on the part of Alexander of Aphrodisias in his commentary on the *Metaphysics*:

> If the discovery and establishment of the objects of the inquiry depends on the solution of the points of aporia, and it is not possible for people to untie a knot unless they first know it, i.e. how it has been tied . . . and if the aporia of thought is the knot in the matters under inquiry . . . it is necessary first of all to face the aporia concerning the matters under inquiry, the matters that are to be proven—given that discovery comes from solving the points of aporia, and only those who know how the aporia has developed can solve the points of aporia. (Alexander of Aphrodisias 1992, 89)

We may deduce that *aporia*, which etymologically means "without-passage," connotes the quandary of thought, the movement that is concomitantly lack of movement, motion at an impasse. Paradoxically, to untie the knot of not-knowing, one must know the knot, but, in knowing the knot, one persists in being bound by the very knot from which one seeks to be unbound.

In this regard, as G. W. F. Hegel argued in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), the "thoroughgoing skepticism" (*sich vollbringender Skeptizismus*) is "directed against the whole range of phenomenal consciousness" and is thus the criterion that "renders the Spirit for the first time competent to examine what truth is. For it brings about a state of despair about all the so-called natural ideas, thoughts, and opinions . . . with which the consciousness that sets about the examination [of truth] *straight away* is filled and hampered, so that it is, in

fact, incapable of carrying out what it wants to undertake" (Hegel 1977, 50; emphasis in original). Skepticism is the negativity that makes the positivity of truth possible, but this negativity is a "determinate nothingness" or a "determinate negation" rather than a "pure nothingness," that is, a nothingness "of that *from which it results*," a nothingness that has content and thus facilitates the "transition . . . through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself" (ibid., 51; emphasis in original). Hegel goes as far as to say that skepticism "is the realization of that of which Stoicism was only the Notion, and it is the actual experience of what the freedom of thought is. This is *in itself* the negative and must exhibit itself as such." Through skepticism, therefore, "the wholly unessential and non-independent character of this 'other' becomes explicit *for consciousness*; the [abstract] thought becomes the concrete thinking which annihilates the being of the world in all its manifold determinateness, and the negativity of free self-consciousness comes to know itself in the many and varied forms of life as real negativity" (ibid., 123; emphasis in original). Through the skeptical confrontation with the identity of nonidentity, "consciousness truly experiences itself as internally contradictory. From this experience emerges a *new form* of consciousness which brings together the two thoughts which Scepticism holds apart. . . . This new form is, therefore, one which *knows* that it is the dual consciousness of itself, as self-liberating, unchangeable, and self-identical, and as self-bewildering and self-perverting, and it is the awareness of this self-contradictory nature of itself" (ibid., 126; emphasis in original). Translating Hegel's dense language into a simpler idiom, we can speak of skepticism as the "driving force of philosophical activity," inasmuch as it "represents the negation of any determined thing in the dialectical movement of the mind or spirit" (Popkin and Neto 2007, 19).[20] Even if we are not prepared to affirm Hegel's dialectic, we still acknowledge the plausibility of his allegation that skepticism endures as the inessential other essential to philosophy's essence, the incertitude of the relative that engenders the absolute certitude that fidelity to the ideal of thinking must, in the final analysis, comport itself as the repudiation of that ideal.

In my estimation, Hegel's insights reverberate in Nietzsche's entry in his notebooks from summer-autumn 1873:

> But how is *skepticism* possible? It appears to be the truly *ascetic* standpoint of the cognizant being. For it does not believe in belief and thereby

20 For a detailed study of this topic, see Forster 1989, and the recent attempt to think constructively about the Hegelian art of negation in Hass 2014.

> destroys everything that benefits from belief. (Nietzsche 1995, 191; emphasis in original)

Skepticism "corresponds to *asceticism* with regard to truth," insofar as the skeptic, on the one hand, denies the "eudaemonistic demand" of truthfulness, "the foundation of all compacts and the prerequisite for the survival of the human race," and, on the other hand, acknowledges that "the supreme welfare of human beings lies rather in *illusions*" (ibid., 190; emphasis in original). As Nietzsche remarked in *The Gay Science*, "every great degree of caution in inferring, every sceptical disposition, is a great danger to life. No living being would be preserved had not the opposite disposition—to affirm rather than suspend judgement, to err and make things up rather than wait, to agree rather than deny, to pass judgement rather than be just—been bred to become extraordinarily strong" (Nietzsche 2001, 112). The truth of the skeptic, at best, is a *forbidden truth* (*verbotenen Wahrheit*), that is, "a truth whose function is to conceal and disguise precisely the eudaemonistic lie" (Nietzsche 1995, 190). Inasmuch as the purpose of the truth of skepticism is to hide the truth that there is no truth—a falsehood that is eudaemonistic since the well-being of humankind depends on it[21]—the skeptic shares something fundamental with the artist, who "speaks the truth quite generally in the form of lies" (ibid., 189).[22] Yet, as Nietzsche astutely notes, although skepticism suspects the very possibility of believing in the efficacy of belief, it cannot rid itself of belief in logic:

> The most extreme position is hence the abandoning of logic, the *credo quia absurdum est*, doubts about reason and its negation. . . . No one can

21 Compare Nietzsche 1995, 42: "Against Kant we still can object, even if we accept all his propositions, that it is still *possible* that the world is as it appears to us. On a personal level, moreover, this entire position is useless. No one can live in this skepticism. We must get beyond this skepticism, we must *forget* it! How many things in this world must we not forget! Art, the ideal structure, temperament. Our salvation does not lie in *knowing*, but in *creating*! Our greatness lies in the supreme semblance, in the noblest fervency. If the universe is no concern of ours, then at least we demand the right to despise it" (emphasis in original). The way beyond the skeptical doubt regarding the capacity to know truth in the world is the artistic ability to create the world, even if this means the extreme of despising it.

22 On the link between skepticism and the aesthetic, see Nietzsche 1995, 41: "We do not know the true nature of *one single causality*. Absolute skepticism: necessity of art and illusion." On deception and poiesis, see Nietzsche 2001, 144: "*Poet and liar*.—The poet sees in the liar a foster brother (*Milchbruder*) whose milk he has drunk up; that is why the latter has remained stunted and miserable and has not even got as far as having a good conscience" (emphasis in original).

> *live* with these doubts, just as they cannot live in pure asceticism. Whereby it is proven that belief in logic and belief as such are necessary for life, and hence that the realm of thought is eudaemonistic. But then is when the demand for lies arises. . . . Skepticism turns against the forbidden truths. Then the foundation for pure truth in itself is lacking, the drive for truth is merely a disguised eudaemonistic drive. (Nietzsche 1995, 191–92; emphasis in original)

The "sense of truth" to which Nietzsche himself must consent cannot be severed from the form of skepticism that calls for experimentation. Queries that do not partake of this spirit to experiment lack the courage suitable to truthfulness (Nietzsche 2001, 62). The thinker is thus described as one who "sees his own actions as experiments and questions, as seeking explanations of something: to him, success and failure are primarily *answers*" (ibid., 57; emphasis in original). I would counter that what has always mattered to me as a thinker are questions, not answers. Only with respect to the latter can we can speak of success and failure; in the domain of thought, the primacy of the question cannot be gauged by these artificial measures. In this matter, I am influenced equally by the Heideggerian notion that questioning is essential to the path of thinking—to be underway (*unterwegs*) on the path one must "become involved in questions that seek what no inventiveness can find" (Heidegger 1968, 8; 2002b, 10), for only the question, properly speaking, is thought provoking (*Bedenklichste*), since it is the gift (*Gabe*) that gives food for thought (Heidegger 1968, 17; 2002b, 19)—and the well-documented Jewish penchant for the question. Commenting on this stereotype, Scholem wrote in one of his early essays, "On Jonah and the Concept of Justice" (1919), "The question is an unending cycle; the symbol of this infinitude, in which the possibility of an empirical end is given, is the rhetorical question. This ('Jewish') question can be justly characterized as medial; it knows no answer, which means its answer must in essence be another question; in the innermost basis of Judaism the concept of an answer does not exist" (Scholem 1999, 356).

Here it is germane to recall the words of Husserl in the *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge*: "With the establishing of epistemological problems, authentic philosophy begins. Crossing the threshold into theory of knowledge and trading its ground, the ground of that skepticism, we are, therefore, beginners in true philosophy" (2008, 176). Husserl approvingly cites the saying of Johann Friedrich Herbart that every beginner in philosophy is a skeptic. Reiterating this theme in one of the lectures delivered in 1907 at Göttingen, and later published as *The Idea of Phenomenology*, Husserl observed that the "skeptical mood" is necessarily begotten by the "critical reflection about

cognition," and hence it "takes place on the natural level of thought," even prior to the "scientific critique of cognition" (1973, 20).[23] As Husserl perceptively noted in *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book* (1913), all "genuine skepticism" is marked by the paradox that "it implicitly presupposes as conditions of the possibility of its validity precisely what it denies in its theses." One cannot doubt the "cognitive signification" of reflection without asserting its countersense, insofar as the declaration of doubt presupposes the very act of reflection that is doubted (Husserl 1998, 185–86). Jean-Paul Sartre reached a similar conclusion regarding the confluence of belief and disbelief in his description of the unity of the immediate and the mediate in the non-thetic self-consciousness that is the translucency at the origin of all knowing:

> To believe is to know that one believes, and to know that one believes is no longer to believe. Thus to believe is not to believe any longer because that is only to believe . . . Thus belief is a being which questions its own being, which can realize itself only in its destruction, which can manifest itself to itself only by denying itself. It is a being for which to be is to appear and to appear is to deny itself. To believe is not-to-believe. . . . In this sense consciousness is perpetually escaping itself, belief becomes non-belief, the immediate becomes mediation, the absolute becomes relative, and the relative becomes absolute. . . . Every belief is a belief that falls short; one never wholly believes what one believes. (Sartre 1956, 69)

Philosophy and the Homelessness of Being at Home

The insight of Husserl is expanded by Heidegger in his approach to thinking that highlights the nexus between freedom and skepticism.[24] Explicating in his "Hegel's Concept of Experience" (1942–43) the aforementioned description of the presentation of phenomenal knowledge as a "thorough skepticism," Heidegger remarked that the original meaning of *skepsis* "signifies the seeing [*Sehen*], watching [*Zusehen*], inspecting [*Besehen*], that oversees [*nachsieht*] what and how beings are as beings. Skepsis understood like this follows the being of beings with its eyes open. . . . Thinkers are intrinsically skeptics about

23 See analysis in Ströker 1993, 49–50.

24 I have taken the liberty to rework parts of the section "Philosophical Skepticism and the Aporia of Reason" in Wolfson 2014, 102–6.

beings because of the skepsis into being" (Heidegger 2002a, 114; 2003, 152).[25] In uncovering the appearance of appearance, the truth of the untruth of phenomenal knowledge is manifest as an essential component of the mind's advance toward absolute knowledge: "Skepsis drops into consciousness, which develops into skepticism, which in the appearance of phenomena produces and transforms one shape of consciousness into the other. Consciousness is consciousness in the mode of thoroughgoing skepticism [*Das Bewußtsein ist des Bewußtsein in der Weise des sich vollbringenden Skeptizismus*]" (Heidegger 2002a, 115; 2003, 152–53).

The very history of consciousness is marked by the dual movement of skepticism as the negation that unfailingly casts doubt on what is posited by reason on the basis of appearance and then itself becomes undone by the affirmation that renders the doubt dubious. Skepticism is not to be regarded simply as "an attitude of the isolated human subject" resolved to pore over everything autonomously, never relying on another's authority, but it is rather the more elemental and universal responsibility of thought to look over "the whole scope of phenomenal knowledge" in the form of the "extension" (*Erweiterung*) of the *ego cogito* into "the reality of absolute knowledge," an augmentation of consciousness that "requires the antecedent skepsis into the breadth of the self-appearing unconditional subjectivity [*Sicherscheinens der unbedingten Subjektität*]" (Heidegger 2002a, 115; 2003,153–54). That Heidegger remained faithful to this view—even though he rejected the larger Hegelian framework—is confirmed in his remark, "For us, then, the essence of the undoubtable can very well be doubtful [*Das Wesen des Unbezweifelbaren* kann somit *für uns sehr wohl zweifelhaft sein*]." From the principle that the essence of the undoubtable can be doubted we can infer that the only thing that cannot be doubted is that everything can be doubted, a conviction that Heidegger cleverly tropes as the sense we feel when "we are not at home in our habitat [*wir in unserer Behasung nicht zuhause sind*]" (Heidegger 1995, 45; 2010b, 29).[26]

What are we to make of this curious locution, to feel not at home in one's own habitat? Surely, such a sentiment is disconcerting, perhaps the quintessence of disquiet, to be homeless in the abode that one identifies as home. Contrary to the conventional view, exile does not signify the nomadic wandering away from one's permanent place but rather the displacement that one feels in the very place in which one is embedded. The philosopher above all is

25 My analysis of this passage has benefited from the discussion in Wyschogrod 1998, 123–24, 143. See also Macomber 1967, 178–84.

26 On skepticism, transcendental philosophy, and Heidegger's analysis of truth as disclosedness, see Dahlstrom 1994, 407–23.

inured to this resolute homelessness, for philosophy is the mode of thinking that displays the inherent quality of lacking an inherent quality, the feeling of the uncanny, in German *unheimlich*, literally, unhomely, which can be experienced only when one is at home.[27] In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, first published in 1953 but based on the lecture course offered at the University of Freiburg in the summer semester of 1935, Heidegger engages in a detailed exposition of the sense of the uncanny as it pertains to the comportment of being human, inspired by the opening verses of the first choral ode from Sophocles' *Antigone*, "Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing / uncannier than man bestirs itself, rising up beyond him," which he renders as *Vielfältig das Unheimliche, nichts doch / über den Menschen hinaus Unheimlicheres ragend sich regt* (Heidegger 1983, 155; 2000, 156). The leitmotif of the poem—or what Heidegger refers to as its "individual saying" (*einzelnen Sagen*)—is captured in the assertion that the human being is *to deinotaton*, "the uncanniest of the uncanny" (*das Umheimlichste des Unheimlichen*). The Greek word *deinon* displays an "uncanny ambiguity." On the one hand, it denotes "the terrible in the sense of the overwhelming sway, which induces panicked fear, true anxiety, as well as collected, inwardly reverberating, reticent awe. The violent, the

27 Regarding this theme, see Moran 2010. See also the analysis of the images of alienation, the constitution of home, and the liminal experience of appropriation in Steinbock 1995, 178–235; and compare O'Donoghue 2011, 21–55; Capobianco 2010, 52–69; and Masschelein 2011, 139–42. Consider the distinction between "homeland" and "fatherland" made by Heidegger in the seminar "On the Essence and Concept of Nature, History, and State" (1933–1934) in Heidegger 2013, 55–56: "Homeland expresses itself in rootedness in the soil and being bound to the earth. . . . The homeland becomes the way of Being of a people only when the homeland becomes expansive, when it interacts with the outside—when it becomes a state. For this reason, peoples or their subgroups who do not step out beyond their connection to the homeland into their authentic way of Being—into the state—are in constant danger of losing their peoplehood and perishing. . . . In summary, then, we can say that the space of a people, the soil of a people, reaches as far as members of this people have found a homeland and have rooted in the soil; and that the space of the state, the territory, finds its borders by interacting, by working out into the wider expanse." See the analysis of this text in Žižek 2012, 880–81, reprinted in Heidegger 2013, 152–54. In the aforementioned passage from the seminar protocols, Heidegger weighs in on the status of nomads, using particularly disparaging words about "Semitic nomads" to whom the nature of the "German space" will never be revealed. See the analysis of this text in Gordon, "Heidegger in Purgatory," included in Heidegger 2013, 85–107, esp. 96–98. Let me note, finally, that I am in agreement with the claim of Lacoue-Labarthe 2002 that, after resigning from the rectorship in 1934, Heidegger seems to have shifted from a purely political sense of "the homeland" and of "the German" to a theological-poetic sense.

overwhelming is the essential character of the sway itself" (Heidegger 1983, 158–59; 2000, 159–60). On the other hand, it "means the violent in the sense of one who needs to use violence—and does not just have violence at his disposal but is violence-doing, insofar as using violence is the basic trait not just of his doing but of his Dasein" (Heidegger 1983, 159; 2000, 160).

The import of the uncanny turns on the etymological connection that Heidegger draws between the violent (*das Gewaltige*), the overwhelming (*das Überwältigende*), and the sway (*das Walten*). The first sense, the overwhelming that is occasioned by the sway, applies to beings as a whole, but it pertains especially to human beings, "inasmuch as it remains exposed to this overwhelming sway, because it essentially belongs to Being" (Heidegger 1983, 159; 2000, 160). This essential belonging entails that the human being is prone to—indeed, carries forth as its destiny—violence-doing (*Gewalt-tätigkeit*). Heidegger emphasizes that this should not be construed in the ordinary sense of perpetrating violent acts against another. Humanity is to be understood as violence-doing "solely in the sense that from the ground up . . . it uses violence against the overwhelming." The human being is thus designated the "uncanniest," *to deinotaton*, that is, the "most violent: violence-doing in the midst of the overwhelming." For reasons that should be conspicuous, Heidegger added a parenthetical comment in the 1953 edition to clarify his intentions regarding the violence-doing: "It gathers what holds sway and lets it enter into an openness [*Er versammelt das Waltende und läßt es in eine Offenbarkeit ein*]" (Heidegger 1983, 159; 2000, 160).

The decisive aspect of being human is thus linked to the quality of being uncanny, the essence determined as *deinon*, which is understood as "that which throws one out of the 'canny,' that is, the homely, the accustomed, the usual, the unendangered. The unhomely does not allow us to be at home" (Heidegger 1983, 160; 2000, 161). This is the intimation of the aforecited statement of Heidegger that "we are not at home in our habitat." In the 1955 essay "On the Question of Being," Heidegger commented that Nietzsche depicted nihilism as "this most uncanny of all guests [*dieses unheimlichsten aller Gäste*]" because "as the unconditional will to will, it wills homelessness [*Heimatlosigkeit*] as such. This is why it is of no avail to show it to the door, because it has long since been roaming around invisibly inside the house" (Heidegger 1996, 387; 1998, 292). For Nietzsche, as Heidegger ironically understood, the homeless are entrusted with the "secret wisdom" (*geheime Weisheit*) and "gay science" (*gaya scienza*) that prevent them from espousing a cultural chauvinism bordering on racist nationalism:

> With all this, can we really be at home in an age that loves to claim the distinction of being the most humane, the mildest, and most righteous age the sun has ever seen? . . . We who are homeless are too diverse and racially mixed in our descent, as "modern men," and consequently we are not inclined to participate in the mendacious racial self-admiration and obscenity that parades in Germany today as a sign of a German way of thinking and that is doubly false and indecent among the people of "historical sense". (Nietzsche 2001, 241–42)

It lies beyond the scope of this study to inquire into the subject of homelessness and the ideal of the homeland—with its ethno-linguistic and spatial factors—in more detail. I assume, however, that the reader will understand the relevance of these themes in evaluating Heidegger's affiliation with National Socialism and his attitude to German racism, a topic that has commanded much scholarly attention. From my limited discussion, it can be concluded that the violence to which Heidegger alludes as the essence of being human does not consist of acts of aggression against another person but rather resisting the overwhelming that results in one being cast from the sense of being ensconced securely at home. Hitting a comparable note, Theodor Adorno glossed another statement of Nietzsche, "it is part of my good fortune not to be a home-owner" (Nietzsche 2001, 147), with the following ethical directive: "Today we should have to add: it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home" (Adorno 1978, 39). The horrific destruction and appalling evil that civilized nations experienced in the twentieth century must jolt one from harboring a sense of refuge that comes with being at home. The moral response in a decidedly immoral universe is to cultivate a domestic alienation, not to be home in one's home. This very sentiment is the nihilistic underpinning of philosophy, a sense of estrangement fostered by the familiar, or in the articulation of Novalis, the sense of "homesickness" that results in "the *urge to be everywhere at home*" (Novalis 1997, 135; emphasis in original), belonging by not-belonging, as Derrida articulated the point: "Philosophy has a way of being at home with itself [*chez elle*] that consists in not being at home with itself, whence this double bind with respect to the philosophical" (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 55).

In a dialogue with Françoise Armengaud centered around the particular question of Jewish philosophy, Levinas conveyed a similar theme:

> Philosophical discourse will appear as a way of speaking addressed to completely open minds who require totally explicit ideas, a discourse in

> which all that is normally taken for granted is said. . . . But one day it is discovered that philosophy is also multiple, and that its truth is hidden, has levels and goes progressively deeper, that its texts contradict one another and that the systems are fraught with internal contradictions. (Levinas 1994, 168–69)

One might be inclined to view the mandate of the philosopher to render the truth coherently and overtly, a mode that would seemingly clash with a religious sensibility based on scriptural truth, which tends to be expressed in an implicit manner that demands ongoing interpretation and lacks a sense of harmony and uniformity. A more circumspect approach, however, recognizes that the truth of philosophy is hidden and multivocal in nature, and that it, too, requires an unrelenting examination of itself through which the inconsistencies reveal that any system is beleaguered by incongruities. "To philosophize," writes Levinas, "is to trace freedom back to what lies before it, to disclose the investiture that liberates freedom from the arbitrary. Knowledge is a critique, as a tracing back to what precedes freedom, can arise only in a being that has an origin prior to its origin [*une origine en deça de son origine*]—that is created" (Levinas 1961, 57; 1969, 84–85).

The movement proper to the "essence of knowing" is not grasping an object but being able to question it, to penetrate beneath the suppositions of its own ontic facticity. From the ethical perspective, this "knowing whose essence is critique cannot be reduced to objective cognition [*la connaissance objective*]; it leads to the Other. To welcome the Other is to put in question my freedom" (Levinas 1961, 58; 1969, 85). In my case, too, philosophy represents the persistent effort to sabotage itself by challenging its own inferences and thereby thinking what cannot be thought, that is, the Heideggerian unthought, which is not a thought that in the future will be entertained but rather that which perseveres in the face of the other as what can never be adequately thought except as what remains to be thought, the untruth that pervades all truth. Translated hermeneutically, the unthought is the potential to bring forth new meaning unremittingly in the curvature of time.[28]

The full force of Heidegger's sense of the unthought, which has illumined my own trail, can be appreciated if it is contrasted with the following comment in the preface to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "Thus the aim

28 With respect to the matter of the unthought, there is kinship between Heidegger and Levinas. See Heidegger 1968, 76–77; 2002b, 82–83. See also Heidegger 1992a, 16; 1992b, 12–13; and 1992c, 71; 1997, 105. Compare Wolfson 2012, 29–43, esp. 33–36; 2014, 94, 99, 105, 241.

of this book is to draw the limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thought: for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (that is, we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought)" (Wittgenstein 1974, 3). In the end, Wittgenstein cannot avoid the paradox of imposing on the human mind the directive to think what cannot be thought, but the latter is positioned on the other side of thinking, whereas for both Heidegger and Levinas, the unthought is not the limit of what is thinkable, that is, the unthinkable that can never be thought, but the enigma that lies at the center of whatever is thought, the primal mystery of thinking the being that can be thought only as what is yet to be thought, the *es gibt* for Heidegger and the *il y a* for Levinas. Just as the eye cannot fall within the visual field but nevertheless determines its bounds, so the unthought circumscribes the parameters of all that is potentially capable of being thought.

A critical distinction between Levinas and Heidegger is that, for the former, the aporetic nature of philosophical knowledge is the anarchic basis for ethics. As Levinas put it in *Totality and Infinity*, "The essence of reason consists not in securing for man a foundation and powers, but in calling him in question and in inviting him to do justice [*L'essence de la raison ne consiste pas à assurer à l'homme un fondement et des pouvoirs, mais à le mettre en question et à l'inviter à la justice*]" (Levinas 1961, 60–61; 1969, 88). Returning to this theme in *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas writes, "It is by the approach, the one-for-the-other of saying [*l'un-pour-l'autre du Dire*], related by the said [*le Dit*], that the said remains an insurmountable equivocation, where meaning refuses simultaneity, does not enter being, does not compose a whole. The approach, or saying, is a relationship with what is not understood in the together. . . . A subversion of essence, it overflows the theme it states, the 'all together,' the 'everything included' of the said. Language is already skepticism" (Levinas 1974, 216; 1991, 170). To specify language as the bearer of skepticism is to call into question the pairing of being and language that has informed Western philosophy from its pre-Socratic beginnings, epitomized in the statement of Wittgenstein, "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world. . . . What we cannot think, that we cannot think: we cannot therefore *say* what we cannot think" (Wittgenstein 1974, 149–51; emphasis in original). Wittgenstein well understood that the inability to disentangle the triangulation of speech, thought, and worldliness leads inevitably to the unsayable but evidently manifest truth conveyed by the solipsist: "In fact what solipsism *means*, is quite correct, only it cannot be *said*, but it shows itself [*nur lässt es sich nicht sagen, sondern es zeigt sich*]. That the world is *my* world, shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language (*the* language which I

understand) means the limits of *my* world" (Wittgenstein 1974, 150–51; emphasis in original).[29]

Although neither Heidegger nor Levinas would have assented to the solipsistic emphasis of Wittgenstein's argument and to the clear-cut distinction between the saying and the showing of truth, they share with him the inability to break out of the anthropocentric understanding of the nature of being and the privileging of language implied in the contention that the limits of the world are determined by the limits of language, which are determined by the limits of thinking. Both, however, problematize the matter of the semiotic circle—the limits of the world are determined by the limits of semiosis to the extent that the structure of reality is mirrored in the structure of the language that gives shape to that reality; hence, the signs through which we interpret the world are the very signs through which the world is configured[30]—by viewing the purpose of language as bringing to the fore the unsaid of the saying at the core of every said and thereby disclosing the invisible that makes all phenomena visible by eluding visibility.[31] Language, therefore, is not principally a form of communication of what we know to be indubitably true but rather the socially conditioned means by which we approximate meaning for the sake of facilitating intersubjective commerce and exchange. Reversing what common sense might dictate, it is more accurate to say, "I am heard by the other and hence I speak" rather than "I speak and hence I am heard by the other." Hearing precedes speaking since I cannot speak unless I anticipate someone listening. However, this does not guarantee that my words will be understood. On the contrary, I can only be assured of the fact that every utterance will leave as much unspoken as will have been spoken. The philosopher is obligated to expound the verbal gesticulation even as he or she knows that the true meaning cannot be ascertained. The categorical denial of finding the truth is exactly

29 See McManus 2004b, 143–47, and the comparative analysis of Philipse 2013. Philipse concentrates on the shared view of Heidegger and Wittgenstein that the skeptical problem of the external world is not a meaningful philosophical question and hence there is dissolution or destruction of the problem rather than resolution. I do not disagree with Philipse, but I have focused on another facet of skepticism that has had a more profound impact on these two thinkers.

30 Compare the analysis of this conceptual problem in the semiotics of Charles S. Peirce offered by Habermas 1992, 105–6.

31 For a discussion of unsaying and the originary saying in Heidegger and Levinas, see Wyschogrod 2006, 497–99. My own approach narrows the gap that Wyschogrod places between the two with regard to this matter. See the extended discussion in Wolfson 2014, 123–35. On the role of language and Levinas's account of the saying, see also Schrijvers 2011, 105–35.

what justifies and inspires the indefinite continuation of the search. Skepticism, accordingly, is the wellspring of philosophical curiosity.

It is within this line of thinking that I situate my own approach to Jewish philosophy, an intellectual project that is not simply an attempt to array Jewish matters in philosophical jargon, to translate Judaism into a Greek philosophical language, but to investigate those matters in the way that is applicable to the skeptical sensibility, to unsettle our habitual assumptions and to expose the shortcomings of our routine beliefs, to suffer the uncanny by making the familiar strange rather than domesticating the strange by making it familiar. As Hélène Cixous aptly put it in her reflections on Freud, "the *Unheimliche refers* to no more profound secret than itself: every pursuit produces its own cancellation" (Cixous 1976, 547). The toil of thinking is neither to affirm nor to deny but to endorse a sense of indifference to the indifference that results from the awareness that the search for truth has no *telos*, that the chase is justified by a process and not by an end, the provision that promotes the possibility of pragmatic decisions based on the relative utility of knowledge as opposed to the relative futility of ignorance. The philosopher is valorized to the extent that he or she performs this displacement and disorientation. The capacity to think, therefore, rests on the ability to dissect each and every one of our presumptions. Human freedom consists precisely of this ability to question and to doubt.

And this brings me back to the passage of Nietzsche that served as the epigraph of this study: skepticism destabilizes the tradition by driving the hidden truth out of the cave, but, in so doing, we discover that perhaps the tradition was right, even if standing on an unsound foundation. The dialectical nature of skepticism is underscored by the reference to the Hegelian view that we seek to determine the truth through the negation of negation (Nietzsche 1935, 342).[32] Skepticism is here ingeniously portrayed as accomplishing its opposite: by driving truth from its state of hiddenness and captivity in the cave—an obvious inversion of the Platonic metaphor according to which truth is to be sought not outside the cave by the soul that has escaped therefrom but inside the cave or, according to the terminology Nietzsche utilized elsewhere, in the "deeper cave," the cave within the cave, which is the "abyss behind every ground" (Nietzsche 2002, 173)[33]—the tradition is reinforced even as it is

32 The passage is cited in Blumenberg 2010, 27–28. Blumenberg, op. cit., 28 n. 52, expands on the thematic connection between this Nietzschean passage and Heidegger's depiction of truth as the unhidden being torn from the hidden, which was first noted by Ralfs 1956, 534.

33 See Wolfson 2011, 31.

undermined.[34] To suspend belief one must, at the very least, be committed to belief in the suspension of belief. Jewish philosophy, as I see it, would be immeasurably enriched if its protagonists were to inhabit this deeper cave, the spot wherein absolute positivity and absolute negativity converge. This topographical emplacement would secure that the most noble implementation of the philosophical occupation is to affirm tradition through the double negative, the negation of negation, which results in the withdrawal of the withdrawing, the unconcealment that is the concealment of the concealing. Only in eradicating the truth can the truth be shown to be true.

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34 It appears to me that the same logic is implicit in the aphorism on "Moral Scepticism in Christianity" in Nietzsche 2001, 117–18. Nietzsche begins by giving credit to Christianity for inculcating moral skepticism in every person by annihilating faith in virtues. He then goes on to say that this skeptical attitude has been applied "to all *religious* states and procedures, such as sin, repentance, grace, sanctification; and we have all allowed the worm to dig so deeply that even when reading Christian books we now have the same feeling of refined superiority and insight: we also know religious feelings better! And it is time to know them well and to describe them well, for even the pious of the old faith are dying out: let us save their image and their type at least for knowledge!"

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