

Two Study-Houses: Authority in Goldschmidt and Jewish Tradition

Hermann Levin Goldschmidt Memorial Lecture 2013

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I'm very grateful to Willi Goetschel for the invitation to speak to all y'all this afternoon, and it is always a pleasure for me to return to Toronto, to see my former teachers Bob Gibbs and David Novak, and to try to persuade them that I've remembered what they tried to teach me. These two individuals and other teachers—especially the late Edith Wyschogrod—have taken up permanent residence in my head; I have deferred writing projects repeatedly because I am still trying to answer comments that I imagine them making when I read drafts. I hope they never leave (both my mind and the world), and I look forward to arguing with them and learning from them for many years to come (in both my mind and the world).

On the one hand, what I have just said is a merely disposable introductory comment. On the other hand, it lies at the heart of what I want to speak about this afternoon. For a teacher is a person who has some kind of authority over me. But how much authority does a teacher have? Certainly the extremes are not worth considering. The less authority a teacher has, the less evidence there is that a student's words reflect the teacher; in other words, it seems as if the teacher has not taught the student anything. But the more authority a teacher has, the greater the risk that a teacher will be *authoritarian*, controlling students' output, and as a result producing only megaphones who

parrot the teacher's words; here too, I think one might safely say that the students of such a teacher give no evidence of having been *taught*, for they could parrot anyone or anything. Obviously, the pedagogical ideal lies somewhere in between. But how should one articulate this between? For the question here is one of how a student's novelty is produced *by* and *through* mastery of the past—the discourse and the content that the teacher passes down. How does the new arise from the old, yet still retains the marks of the old?

These questions run through my mind whenever I read the writings of Hermann Levin Goldschmidt, Franz Rosenzweig, and others who have taken up the institution of the *Lehrhaus* (the German word that literally translates the Hebrew *bet midrash*, study-house) as a model educational program for contemporary Jewry. (Rosenzweig led the Frankfurt Lehrhaus from October 1920 until his death in 1929; Goldschmidt led the Zurich Lehrhaus from 1951 until 1961.) This afternoon, I will argue, with regular reference to Goldschmidt's chapter on the Lehrhaus in his 1960 *The Message of Judaism*, that Goldschmidt's vision of the Lehrhaus movement allows us to tackle these questions about the relationship between the teacher's authority and the student's authority—in a way that allows us both to see how Goldschmidt moves past Rosenzweig, and to see how we, the hearers of Goldschmidt, can move past Goldschmidt in learning from him. I will talk about two kinds of study-houses: the *bet midrash* of Jewish antiquity, and the twentieth-century Lehrhaus. I will argue that authority in the study-house is socially distributed, and that this explains a rhetorical difficulty in texts from antiquity about the *bet midrash*, as well as in Rosenzweig's and Goldschmidt's texts about the Lehrhaus. And I hope that focusing on the study-house as a site of contest in this manner allows me to perform a

broader claim for which I will not have time to argue: novelty arises *as a matter of course* in any and all narratives that take up, and thereby respond to, the past.

The received narrative about the Lehrhaus is that it is student-centered, and as a result differs from traditional notions of rabbinic authority. In a passage from Rosenzweig's address celebrating the opening of the Frankfurt Lehrhaus, he stated (in a passage quoted by Goldschmidt) that the novelty of the Lehrhaus movement lies in the acknowledgment that no one has expertise, everyone is alienated, and the person who will be the most successful is the person "who brings the most of what is foreign."¹ And in the treatment of the Lehrhaus movement in his book *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany*, Michael Brenner claims that Rosenzweig gives authority to the outsider to tradition: "Rosenzweig made it clear that the *'am ha-aretz* and not the rabbi occupied the central role in the teaching body of the Lehrhaus." As an example of this shift away from rabbinic authority, the Frankfurt rabbi Nehemiah Nobel, who was responsible for bringing Rosenzweig to Frankfurt, was viewed by Rosenzweig with disdain due to his failure to understand the Lehrhaus's aims.² Nevertheless, I think that it is possible to raise two criticisms of this compact summary of the Lehrhaus model "on one foot," as it were.

The first is that, while Rosenzweig may have imagined the Lehrhaus in this way, it is not necessarily clear that, although the German word "Lehrhaus" translates the Hebrew words *bet midrash*, the discourse of the Lehrhaus maps onto the discourse of the *bet midrash* of antiquity. At the very beginning of his chapter on the Lehrhaus in *The Message of*

¹ Franz Rosenzweig, "Neues Lernen," in *Zweistromland*, eds. Reinhold Mayer and Annemarie Mayer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), 509. I have altered Nahum Glatzer's translation that appears in "Upon Opening the Jüdisches Lehrhaus," in *On Jewish Learning* (New York: Schocken, 1955), 99.

² Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 80.

Judaism and in other places in his writings, Goldschmidt reminded his readers that the phrase *bet midrash* first appeared at the close of the second-century BCE text Ben Sira.³ However, Ben Sira’s *bet midrash* is anything but student-centered. The closing verses of that text promise students divine reward if they take Ben Sira on as their teacher. Ben Sira has already described himself as having accessed wisdom, using language that seems to be erotic in nature (“my hand forced open her portals,” as Takamitsu Muraoka has translated 51:19).⁴ Therefore, he is an exemplar for his audience (51:23): “turn to me, O foolish ones, and take up lodging in my house of study.” As an exemplar, Ben Sira mediates wisdom for his students, allowing them to have the same mastery and understanding that he has already received (51:26): “submit your neck to her [wisdom’s] yoke, and may your mind [*nafshekhem*] receive its oracle.” In this text, at the origin of the *bet midrash*, the study-house is a place of heteronomy. While it might not be the rabbi who occupies the seat of authority here—this section of Ben Sira never explicitly links Torah and wisdom—the teacher in the *bet midrash* is supervising a scene of subjection. The student is decidedly *not* “to bring what is most foreign,” as Rosenzweig wrote in his address inaugurating the Lehrhaus. Rosenzweig may have described the Lehrhaus as a scene in which “in being Jews, we must not give up anything, not renounce anything, but lead everything back to Judaism,”⁵ but the subjection of the student in the original *bet midrash* of Ben Sira is a subjection to one specific path of learning—that of Ben Sira’s wisdom—and no other. The relationship between the Lehrhaus and the *bet midrash* can therefore legitimately be described as one between *opposites*. The former is a scene in

³ Hermann Levin Goldschmidt, “Vom Lehrhaus,” in *Die Botschaft des Judentums*, ed. Willi Goetschel (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1994), 157.

⁴ Takamitsu Muraoka, “Sir. 51, 13–30: An Erotic Hymn To Wisdom?” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 10 (1979), 166–78, quotation at 172.

⁵ Rosenzweig, “Neues Lernen,” 509; “Upon Opening the Jüdisches Lehrhaus,” 98.

which the roles of teacher and learner are blurred because everyone is equally alienated from the past, while the latter is a scene in which the roles of teacher and learner are clearly delineated, with the teacher having mastery over the learner.

The point I have just made may seem somewhat banal. After all, the title of Rosenzweig's address upon the opening of the Lehrhaus describes it as a scene of "new learning"; therefore, perhaps it is not like the old learning of the *bet midrash*. Why should we ever have expected anything different? And yet this point is not so banal, I think. It would be banal were the language of discipline in Ben Sira's discourse of wisdom—especially in the earlier account of wisdom as a yoke in Ben Sira 6—simply not to be found in Rosenzweig's account of the Lehrhaus. And yet there is some similarity between these two discourses. In other words, I want to suggest that there is more subjection, more discipline, in Rosenzweig's account of the Lehrhaus than one might at first suspect. The spatial metaphors of Rosenzweig's discourse about the Lehrhaus are metaphors in which there is some alteration of the self: "from life, from a world that knows nothing of the Law, back to the Torah," "from the periphery back to the center," "groping one's way home," "finding the way back into the heart of our life."⁶ If students in the "new learning" of the Lehrhaus bring what is most foreign, then the rhetoric of ending *in a different place* than one began—center, heart, home, but not the margins—suggests that the foreign content that is brought into the Lehrhaus either disappears or is somehow transfigured in the act of learning. The student does not move the periphery to the center; the student herself ends up moving elsewhere. What causes that motion? What motors it? The need to ask these questions of Rosenzweig's Lehrhaus suggests that affirmation of the student *as an authority* is not quite the end of the story in Rosenzweig's

⁶ Rosenzweig, "Neues Lernen," 509; "Upon Opening the Jüdisches Lehrhaus," 98–99.

model of Jewish education. If the student's move is caused by something, then that cause is the authority, and not the student.

The notion that a student is subjected *to* something opens up the second point I want to make about the summary of the Lehrhaus "on one foot." Perhaps it is equally banal. It is the point that classes at the Lehrhaus have syllabi. They have programs. If we are going to ask what it is to which students are subjected in the Lehrhaus, the answer is simple: a schedule of readings, decided upon by a teacher or teachers, for which they are responsible. The teacher may not, for Rosenzweig, be the authority in the sense of being an expert. But the teacher is certainly an authority insofar as the teacher is one who puts together the programming! Goldschmidt noted in 1960 that Rosenzweig kept thinking of new ways to organize his lectures at the Lehrhaus. In the opening address, the course is divided into periods: "classical, historical, and modern" Judaism. But "already by the next course, Rosenzweig was trying a new taxonomy, in order better to reflect the whole."⁷ As a result, in 1921, the three divisions are not about orders of time, but about making links between orders of time (past and present, present and future, moment and eternity); in 1922, the divisions lie in accordance with the three Kantian ideas (God, world, and the human person). Three decades later, Goldschmidt's programming seems to have little taste for giving theoretical overviews of Judaism. In *The Message of Judaism*, there is some discussion of synoptic courses: he mentions a 1955 overview of modern Judaism, and a course that treats Jewish history from the Babylonian exile to the beginning of the modern era. But more often, the programming in Zurich is narrower: a 1958 course on Leo Baeck, lectures on Jewish themes in poetry, programming in 1954 commemorating the 750th anniversary of Maimonides's death, and

⁷ Goldschmidt, "Vom Lehrhaus," 159, 160.

courses on sections of the Bible. (My favorite title from the ones that Goldschmidt lists is a 1954 one entitled “Ezekiel—and us?!”)⁸

Whether the Lehrhaus course is meant to give a student a sense of Judaism as a whole or to apply that sense to a narrower body of writings, my point so far is simply that insofar as a student places him- or herself under a teacher at the modern Lehrhaus or at the *bet midrash* of antiquity—a student places him- or herself under an authority. The alienation from the past that the student has in either the Frankfurt or the Zurich Lehrhaus, or the foolishness of those to whom Ben Sira is marketing his services, is extirpated insofar as the student gains something that he or she did not have before: a new teacher or teachers, and a new body of knowledge. The student changes, and changes as a result of the teacher’s authority.

If this criticism of the Lehrhaus—that it is not quite and can never be “new learning”—were to have any legitimacy, it would be a powerful one. Nevertheless, one might think that it is easily answered with reference to Rosenzweig’s and Goldschmidt’s statement about the *aims* of the Lehrhaus, and specifically about how the *form* of learning in the Lehrhaus achieves those aims. Specifically, insofar as the rhetoric about the Lehrhaus privileges the present situation of the student—insofar as it is not that of Ben Sira’s *bet midrash*—it has a different temporality and therefore a different authority structure, one that ultimately acknowledges that the student’s understanding of the text is the transcendental condition of the possibility of the past having any authority at all. In other words, those studying in the Lehrhaus act as if the past has authority. But that authority does not actually exist objectively; it is only maintained by virtue of the decision or the desire of those in the present to *grant* it that authority. As a result, power is lent to

⁸ Ibid., 164–72.

the past by the present; the past does not gain its authority by virtue of its having passed. Thus, when Goldschmidt described the theory of the Zurich Lehrhaus, he wrote that “despite their historical succession, it was never the case that first the past and then subsequently the present and the future were treated.” The present is the support for the past for Goldschmidt, and as a result, the past has no “aloofness [*Abseitigkeit*]” from the present moment.⁹ Scholars are quick to dismiss such privileging of the present today, but that strategy did real *work* for Goldschmidt and Rosenzweig. This is clearest in Rosenzweig’s description of the Lehrhaus seminar in his open letter to Eduard Strauss from January 1920 outlining his vision of adult education, entitled “Of *Bildung* there is no end.” The students in the Lehrhaus, for Rosenzweig, by virtue of desiring education, “give testimony that the Jewish human being is alive in them. Otherwise they would not come.”¹⁰ The present student in the Lehrhaus carries more than one time frame—attests that the past is not detached from her or his present, that the adjective “Jewish” applies to her- or himself just as much as it did to Ben Sira. Yet as a result, this means that Judaism as a whole is, to some respect, exterior to the teacher, who exists in a different lived present than the student. This is because, to some respect, the teacher does not exist in the present at all; her or his duty is to transmit *the past*—whether recent or far-off—to the student in the present. As a result of this, the teacher must be able to place her- or himself in the position of learning from the student: for Rosenzweig, the ability to use the adjective “Jewish” to describe both the teacher and the student means that the teacher

⁹ Ibid., 164.

¹⁰ Rosenzweig, “Bildung und kein Ende,” in *Zweistromland*, 501. The authoritative translation of this essay is that by Michael Zank, entitled “Of Bildung there is no end,” which appears as the first half of Zank, “Franz Rosenzweig, the 1920s, and the <email> moment of textual reasoning,” in *Textual Reasonings*, eds. Peter Ochs and Nancy Levene (London: SCM, 2002), 229–50; the quotation appears at 237.

“must be a master at the same time that he is a student.” A longer quote from Rosenzweig, in Michael Zank’s translation:

It is not at all sufficient for him [the teacher] to ‘know’ himself, nor that he ‘can teach.’ . . . In the very speaking space and at the same speaking time that the students are found, the teachers will be discovered as well. And perhaps the same person will be discovered at the same speaking time *qua* a master *and* a student. Indeed, whether he [the teacher] is suitable as a teacher is entirely certain only once this occurs.¹¹

On this reading, even those descriptions of the Lehrhaus that seem to give authority to the past should be reinterpreted so that the present gains the primacy that is its right. It gains this right due to a simple fact about authority: authority is meaningless without its being freely consented to, and therefore authority truly lies with the student (not with the teacher, and certainly not with God). For example, in Goldschmidt’s description of the Zurich Lehrhaus’s Bible study, when one reads that “the Bible can and should immediately address every hearer, also the contemporary hearer, and every reader, also the contemporary reader, and in every language it does address them so immediately,” it is tempting to infer that this refers to the sacrality of the Biblical text, to its power to transcend the limits of language, time, and the social context of its readers.¹² Instead, this should be understood in terms of the student’s power over the Biblical text, that power to wrest it out of the past and re-situate it in the context of his or her own interests. Indeed, for Goldschmidt there are ethical stakes in the difference between the hearer/reader of the Biblical word and the Biblical text itself. For it is the pastness of the text—the inability to translate biblical history into the present day—that prevents the reader from

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Goldschmidt, “Vom Lehrhaus,” 172–73.

taking it up with an attitude of *Schwärmerei*.¹³ Ironically enough, it is only a self-consciously historicist and *wissenschaftlich* stance vis-à-vis the Bible that frees up the reader to relate to the Bible only in terms of what Goldschmidt takes to be its living call in the present, in any language. The content of that call is left unspoken by Goldschmidt; the multiplicity of the ways in which the Bible speaks to its hearers and readers means that its call varies from individual to individual.

At this point, I may have answered the criticism that the Lehrhaus is just as authoritarian as the *bet midrash* of antiquity, and undesirable as a result. Nevertheless, I fear that steering the argument in this direction leads to a new worry. For if Goldschmidt's vision of the Lehrhaus is such an individualistic one, is it not fragmented at the end of the day? Does the Bible have any objective content? Does it bind its audience together, and if so how? And perhaps most importantly, if Goldschmidt's vision of the Lehrhaus were indeed so fragmented—placing so much authority in the student that the texts of the Jewish tradition or the main texts of Jewish modernity become screens upon which the student projects his or her own desires of the tradition—wouldn't it mark a turn *away* from the account of the Lehrhaus that Rosenzweig gave in the 1920s? For in his letter to Strauss, Rosenzweig predicts that the student in Jewish adult education “will envisage the whole. ... it is impossible for the human being to miss the whole, the whole that is destined for him, as long as he really finds the strength to make that simple and most modest beginning.”¹⁴ What “the whole” in this passage means has long been unclear to me, but in summarizing Rosenzweig's program for the Lehrhaus, Goldschmidt mentions that in Rosenzweig's program of study, “the past and the future are expressly

¹³ Ibid., 173.

¹⁴ Rosenzweig, “Bildung und kein Ende,” 500; “Of Bildung there is no end,” 236.

united with the present.”¹⁵ In other words, in envisaging the whole, the Lehrhaus student would no longer sense any alterity between the contemporary world of her or his present and the world of antiquity (or earlier periods in modernity). The student would be a microcosm of the Jewish tradition, and Jewish tradition would be one. Nevertheless, if this were the case, then we would not expect the Bible to speak differently to different hearers and readers in different historical period; the lack of alienation would be completed if the Bible were to say *the same thing* to all of these hearers and readers. The Jewish tradition would become just like Ben Sira, claiming authority and power over the readers who would become merely imitators of past ages of tradition, not their “comrades-in-arms [*Mitkämpfer*],” as Goldschmidt described them.

At this point, although my title promised a discussion of authority in two study-houses—the *bet midrash* and the Lehrhaus—it seems we now have three: the *bet midrash*, the Frankfurt Lehrhaus, and the Zurich Lehrhaus. Moving through these study-houses is a narrative in which more and more authority is given to the student, although I’ve suggested that there are normative problems in preferring any one of these study-houses over the other two. However, a way out from this normative dead-end shows itself once we admit that Rosenzweig is simply not always clear in his corpus on what the result of learning in the Lehrhaus is; this ambiguity allows us to read Goldschmidt not as *departing* from Rosenzweig, but as *solving a problem* in Rosenzweig. In early 1920 Rosenzweig predicted that the student in the Lehrhaus will envision the whole, forge a link to the Jewish tradition, a link that Rosenzweig believes to have been severed in the modern era in several ways (acculturation, denominationalism, and Zionism). But three years later, in the famous letter to Martin Buber entitled “The Builders,” Rosenzweig gave up on this

¹⁵ Goldschmidt, “Vom Lehrhaus,” 160.

sense of wholeness that would involve transcending temporal frameworks. In making a distinction between the subject matter of learning (*Lernstoff*) and teaching (*Lehre*) that is individuated, Rosenzweig accepted the claim that the teaching of the Jewish tradition is never objective: “the teaching itself is nothing knowable, it is only my and your and our knowledge.”¹⁶ (This sentence is so important that I never cease to be amazed by the fact that Nahum Glatzer omitted it from his translation of “The Builders” in Rosenzweig’s *On Jewish Learning* volume.) *There is no whole*; the content of this knowledge is something that only appears as communities put various knowledge-claims about the Torah into practice. It is for this reason that in June 1925, Rosenzweig wrote to Buber that he refused to say in advance where interpretation of the tradition would become illegitimate, or whether divine law might prove itself an exception from other law systems.¹⁷

It seems to me that Goldschmidt, in his 1960 essay on the Lehrhaus, moves decidedly away from the Rosenzweig of 1920, who wrote that “whatever is genuinely Jewish must be all three [classical, historical, and modern] simultaneously,”¹⁸ and toward the Rosenzweig of the following years who was more open to fragmentation. This is because, in the last sections of Goldschmidt’s chapter on the Lehrhaus, he adds something new to the model, specifically his own thinking of dialogic. As Willi Goetschel has helpfully shown, Goldschmidt’s dialogic begins from the assumption that the whole is simply unmappable in an elegantly systematic manner. Goldschmidt’s reasons are in part intertwined with the new horizons opened up by research in the sciences, specifically the

¹⁶ Rosenzweig, “Die Bauleute,” in *Zweistromland*, 702.

¹⁷ Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, eds. Rachel Rosenzweig and Edith Rosenzweig-Scheinmann with Bernhard Casper (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 1040; “Revelation and Law,” in *On Jewish Learning*, 118.

¹⁸ Rosenzweig, “Neues Lernen,” 510; “Upon Opening the Jüdisches Lehrhaus,” 101.

non-classical behavior of quantum phenomena; Goldschmidt had sent a copy of his *Philosophy as Dialogics* to the physicist Wolfgang Pauli after a meeting they had had early in 1948, to show Pauli how philosophy might be responsive to scientific advances. In Goetschel's account of Goldschmidt, given the reality of contradiction in experience—given the impossibility as discovering the real as long as we are attached to systematic rational categories—

we are confronted with the task of coming to terms with our own particular positionality and the particular viewpoints it makes possible. To become complete, the process of knowledge therefore requires that every viewpoint is recognized as being complemented by its opposite and that the opposite position of each viewpoint is taken into account as part of the knowledge of the whole that no single perspective can claim to represent.¹⁹

In the context of the Lehrhaus, Goldschmidtian dialogic always serves to posit the whole as something that remains ever distant from those finding their way back to tradition. It “indicates and makes possible that reciprocal arrangement, that in each of the directions (of which only one can be relevant at a time), is precisely consistent with, in patience and forbearance, the claim that the current direction contributes to the whole, without laying claim to the whole itself in this manner.”²⁰ I find this sentence of Goldschmidt's quite complex—in part because I'm not so great a translator—but it seems to me that for Goldschmidt, unlike the Rosenzweig of 1920, the whole is *posited* and *deferred*, as opposed to *promised* to the student. Each of the interpretations offered by students and teachers at the Zurich Lehrhaus go against other interpretations, and yet Goldschmidt still claims that all of these interpretations are part of the whole called “Judaism,” that all methods of

¹⁹ Willi Goetschel, *The Discipline of Philosophy and the Invention of Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 125.

²⁰ Goldschmidt, “Vom Lehrhaus,” 177.

analysis—which Goldschmidt claimed to have an “unrestricted usability”—hit at something in the text that make it speak to a wide variety of hearers and readers. Goldschmidt seems to be aware that his own hearers and readers may be taking this claim to be something less than an argument, that the “confidence of dialogic, joyful in decision” marks a turn to an ungrounded “certainty of faith” that extends beyond philosophizing.²¹ Goldschmidt denied this vehemently, insisting that religion and reason always remained exterior to each other in dialogics, preventing the completion of truth.

What justifies this method, especially when applied to the Lehrhaus? I have just mentioned advances in quantum physics, and both in the 1948 book *Philosophy as Dialogic* and in a 1964 essay of the same title, Goldschmidt quoted Ben Sira 33 and 42, taking the latter chapter’s claim that “all things come in pairs, one opposite the other, and God has made nothing incomplete. Each supplements the virtues of the other” (42:24–25) seriously.²² And yet I worry that such a justification is insufficient. Part of this worry has to do with the fact that so much is dependent upon the noncanonical text of Ben Sira. This worry is autobiographical on my part; I once attempted to link a postmodern notion of messianism back to the antique Jewish text *Pesikta Rabbati*, and an esteemed scholar of Jewish philosophy told me that the text was too minor: “If you’d analyzed a Talmudic text, then we could talk!” But part of my worry is also that in Goldschmidt’s writing about the Lehrhaus, his own desires have too much authority: introducing dialogic to Europe after the Second World War and after the Holocaust is a way to prevent Europe

²¹ Ibid.

²² Goldschmidt, “Philosophie als Dialogik,” in *Aus den Quellen des Judentums*, ed. Goetschel (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2000), 107. In a letter to Goldschmidt, Wolfgang Pauli noted that his appreciation for Goldschmidt’s 1948 book *Philosophie als Dialogik* was bound up with his own seeking “an equilibrium between opposing pairs.” This letter is translated at Suzanne Gieser, *The Innermost Kernel* (Berlin: Springer, 2005), 27–28.

from laying claim to the whole in the future, and introducing dialogic to Europe in the specific figures of the Jewish tradition is a way to maintain the tension between Europe's past and present in a manner that produces a stable future. But how might we have confidence that such pragmatics actually ties back to the tradition, that the authority of Goldschmidt's desires is something that we—Goldschmidt's readers—can take to be justified? Don't we need something like Rosenzweig's rhetoric of the whole—some kind of access to it—to have the confidence that Goldschmidt associated with dialogic?

So far in my remarks, I have moved from the *bet midrash* to Rosenzweig to Goldschmidt, noting an arc of increasing freedom of subjectivity along the way, in order to argue that the Lehrhaus indeed gives primacy of authority to the interpreter of tradition. But to answer the questions I've just asked, I will now move *backwards*, first back to Rosenzweig, and then to another *bet midrash* (this time, from a Talmudic story, not from Ben Sira), maintaining the authority of the interpreter of the tradition, and now justifying it—arguing that the Lehrhaus *rightly* gives primacy of authority to the interpreter of tradition, because we can point to nodes in the tradition (not the tradition as a whole, but nodes within it) that give primacy of authority to the interpreter, to the listener, to the reader.

At the end of Rosenzweig's Lehrhaus lectures entitled "Science of God" given in the Fall 1921 semester, Rosenzweig too spoke of contradiction (like Goldschmidt). But somewhat differently from Goldschmidt, the contradiction of which Rosenzweig spoke was not that between different methods of analysis, or different testimonies about the past. Rather, it was between thought and fact, between ideal and material. And yet this contradiction always comes together, in reality (*Wirklichkeit*). Indeed, Rosenzweig defined reality as only "a contradiction between an experience and a thought and to the

necessarily indissoluble connection between the two.” The example that he gave his students was that of marriage:

A thought and a fact, although they do not become one, necessarily again and again come together—they both are actual, the fact and the thought. Take a marriage [for example]. The betrothal is the thought. Married life is the fact. When is the marriage *actual*?! ... And by what means is the betrothal verified? “made-true”! By married life. The contradiction, the difference is here enormous; everyone knows that. But exactly this difference belongs to it. All that is actual verifies itself *as* actual, insofar as it occurs a second time. The second time is the renewal of the first, but the renewal is first the coming-true (*die Bewahrheitung*).²³

Rosenzweig went on to argue that God is only real insofar as believers take God as ruling over them. I think that one could make a more prosaic and radical inference from this text. That point is that the authority of a state of affairs—the sentence “Derek and Gene are married,” for example—depends not only on a life (i.e. not only upon its not being merely ideal)—but by the fact that in that life everyone *acknowledges* the actuality of that state of affairs, the married life of the couple. What verifies the betrothal is not simply a piece of paper that says that I am married, or the life that maintains that state of affairs; rather, it is also the acceptance of the validity of that piece of paper by other jurisdictions (hence the current debates in the United States about interstate marriage recognition of same-sex couples, for example) and by other people (wedding guests, school administrators, hospital administrators, party hosts, cake decorators, tax collectors, etc.). The husband and wife *by themselves* do not verify the betrothal. If it did, we would have many more elopements! I make this point to deepen Rosenzweig’s points about the enormity of the contradiction between thought and fact. A thought is renewed not only a

²³ Rosenzweig, “Die Wissenschaft von Gott,” in *Zweistromland*, 641–42. I have somewhat altered Barbara Galli’s translation: Rosenzweig, “Science of God,” in *God, Man, and the World: Lectures and Essays* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 60.

second time by the speech-act of marriage, but those speech-acts are confirmed by judges, or disconfirmed by those witnesses who wish to protest a wedding, or by those authorities who have the power to annul marriages. As such, while the betrothal serves as a precondition for the married life of the couple, it is also the case that it is not the *only* precondition.

Let us analogize this example to a text of a religious tradition. A text has no meaning unless it is put into action by its hearers and readers in some way, just as an engagement has no meaning unless it fulfills and verifies itself in married life. However, the example of the text is more complex. Most of the time, I need no proof of marriage from people who say they are married; I do not regularly go asking my colleagues for copies of their marriage licenses. But I *do* ask members of my religious community why they are interpreting a text in this way. I grant them the authority that is due to them as readers on the basis how they hook their plan of action back into the text that they take as being authoritative over them. Rosenzweig spoke of a first and a second, a thought and a fact. But there is also a third (and a fourth and a hundredth and a thousandth, etc.) that Rosenzweig did not on this occasion mention: the members of the community. Each of them has the power to proclaim that the thought and the fact—the concept and the practice, or the ruling and the way of life that responds to that ruling—can come together in another way, or that there is no justification for that way of life that currently is accepted as a legitimate verification/interpretation of the text. The contradiction between thought and fact can always reappear as a contradiction within various factions in social life. Authority, therefore, is neither solely within the interpreter or the text, neither solely within the teacher or the student. It is the social dispersion of authority—because authority or any other normative status is what Robert Brandom would call

“attitude-dependent,” i.e. dependent on the acknowledging of authority²⁴—that explains the various shifts in authority-language (past and present, text and reader) that we have seen both in Rosenzweig and Goldschmidt, and even in Ben Sira (who, of course, needs students to verify his own claims to wisdom!).

Such debates about authority are not foreign to the Talmud. In an article published a year ago in *Soundings*²⁵, I turned to the quite well-known Talmudic narratives about the deposition of Rabban Gamaliel (the Roman-installed patriarch of the rabbinic collegium around the turn from the first to the second century CE) by his colleagues in the collegium following upon his harsh treatment of another rabbi, R. Yehoshua, in order to link them with Hegelian accounts of kenosis. In the time that remains, I want to state three things about these stories that motion toward a claim that the shifts in authoritative statuses that are a hallmark of the *Lehrhaus* are indeed part of the normative Jewish tradition; I apologize for narrating the shape of the stories so quickly.

The first of these stories is a debate in the Mishnah about judging when the first sliver of the waxing crescent of the new moon has appeared in the land of Israel to mark the beginning of the month of Tishri—getting this calendrical issue correct is essential for determining when the festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur properly take place. Rabban Gamaliel and other rabbis, including R. Yehoshua, are debating the trustworthiness of witnesses to the new moon. The interesting thing about that brief debate is that the Talmud does not describe Rabban Gamaliel as asking the witnesses questions about what they saw; his astronomical skill (a tradition that has the authority of “the house [his] father’s father”) leads him to accept the witness’s testimony about having

²⁴ See Robert Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 61ff.

²⁵ Martin Kavka, “Can Jews Be Radical Theologians?,” *Soundings* 95.1 (2012): 48–72.

seen the sliver of the new moon. The other rabbis, however, challenge the inferences that the witnesses have made from the shapes they say they saw in the sky to the conclusion that it was the new moon. This debate is one between what it means to have mastery of a concept or norm. For Rabban Gamaliel, mastery is purely cognitive; his charts tell him the proper length of the lunar month, for example. Yet for the other rabbis, mastery of a concept is *practical* mastery—knowing how to make good inferences from reports and how to challenge bad ones (for example, by pointing out, as these other rabbis do, incompatibilities in perceptual claims). At the end of this story, Rabban Gamaliel humiliates R. Yehoshua by making him come see him with his staff and his money stick on the day that R. Yehoshua believed to be Yom Kippur—violating the halakha prohibiting carrying that applies to that day (as it does to the Sabbath). From this story and its ending, I want to make the point that the Talmud here refuses to endorse a notion of authority that is wholly aligned with factual knowledge; even if that knowledge exists, right authority rests on being able to *justify* that knowledge to others in the community. Assuming that such justification is not necessary leads to the shaming of those who do not deserve it.

Second, in both the Mishnah and in an expansion of this story in the Talmud, R. Akiba comforts R. Yehoshua by telling him, in effect, that he has not violated some real occurring Yom Kippur out in the world. He does this not with recourse to direct empirical encounters with the world, but with recourse to the text that structures those encounters: the Torah. Through a midrashic re-reading of verses from the end of Leviticus 22 and the beginning of Leviticus 23 so that we have three apparently extraneous occurrences of the word “you” which therefore call out for interpretation, R. Akiba tells R. Yehoshua, “you [may fix the date of the festivals] even if you err

inadvertently; you, even if you are fully conscious of your error; you, even if you are being misled.” As a result, what a concept such as “festival” represents is nothing worldly, but only something that exists within human practices. For the sentence “Today is Yom Kippur” to be true, the utterer of such a claim must be recognized by others as entitled to the belief behind that claim, based on the viability of inferences to or from that claim, and the compatibility of that claim with others that the utterer makes. From this story, then, I want to hearken back to Goldschmidt’s privileging of the present over the past, of the reader over a text. And yet I also want to point out that this story does not quite refuse to lay claim to the whole insofar as the whole is deferred; rather, the whole opens itself up as the temporally extended *tradition* of people making inferences from the Bible, the Talmud, and other authoritative sources to justify various normative plans, and the temporally extended tradition of people keeping score (to use a phrase of Brandom’s) on each other to ensure that these normative plans are as consistent as possible. In this way, one direction of inquiry (one way of life) contributes to the whole, even though another inquirer or another generation of inquirers may judge it to be the wrong direction in which inquiry should head.

Finally, after Rabban Gamaliel is deposed by the other rabbis for his actions of shaming, another rabbi (R. Eleazar ben Azariah), the Talmud states that “on that day many benches were added” to the *bet midrash*, referring to the seats for the students, who—as I take it—are now no longer blatantly excluded from the community’s process of deciding upon norms. This is the *bet midrash* that the Lehrhaus, both in Frankfurt and Zurich, continues and by which it is authorized. It is not the model of Ben Sira demanding submission to the yoke of wisdom. Instead, it is the model of at least these sections of the Talmud, which acknowledge that submission to a teacher has its telos in

responding to a teacher, in which the student adds one's own voice, one's own (hopefully) well-justified inferences from the text, and transforms the study-house into something that looks on the surface to place authority in the student. Yet it could not look that way without the teacher who in the authority of his or her living word, grounds a student's response by calling it forth. Thank you.

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