

Appendix: Additional Contextualization

The notes below offer an additional historical contextualization of the problem at hand, as well as more specific contextualization concerning rabbinic mental states and mental acts.

Despite the alleged modern novelty of the question of relationships between philosophy and literature, the question of their relationship, as well as that of the relationship between concept and image, belong to a much longer history that continues to unfold. Scenes from this history are no less medieval and late ancient than they are modern.

A medieval (and well-studied) example of questioning the relationship between image and concept is the Averroist controversy on the roles of the material/passive intellect merely gathering images in comparison to the active/poetic intellect extracting a concept from an image, thereby establishing an object by combining image and concept. The crux of this question concerns whether humans, as no more than the site of the operation of intellect, can be held responsible for their actions. In other words, does active intellect act in me, in my soul, when intellection and thinking occur, or, alternatively, is it me/my soul who/what intellects and therefore thinks and acts? Answering this defines who is responsible for actions that I find myself performing (or am found to perform).

A late ancient—and heavily understudied—example would be the rabbinic practice of engaging with concepts via, and only via, their exemplifications in verbal images, either in formulating procedural rules (for one, in the Mishnah and its defense in the Babylonian Talmud) or in letting Scripture to refute provisional/hypothetical formulations of such rules, in Midrash. By way of example, in the Mishnah an image, a goring ox becomes an exemplification of a never abstractly formulated concept of “damage”; such an ox-image exemplifies legal concepts that are far more reaching than any empirical ox can afford. Similarly, in the Midrash, Scriptural wording and imagery of language becomes reconfigured, refuted and defended for the sake of a practical concept, as well. What are the mental states and the mental acts, both individual and collective that underlie and enable such symbiosis of concept and image via exemplification in the Mishnah and via refutation in midrash reading Scripture.

Medieval and modern rabbinic engagement with concepts via exemplifications in verbal imagery extends from later antiquity to contemporary thought of the rabbis and other thinkers and writers who thought with the rabbis about ethical, political, and epistemological problems, to which philosophy and literature, through through their histories, provided articulations.

The still unfolding history of relationships between concept and image, philosophy and literature can be accounted for in the framework of a history of noetics, i.e. a history of the theories of mental acts and the mental states.

For this special issue that means rabbinic noetics. This is a history of how the rabbinic works including their extended life in literature and philosophy in different chronological periods practice, deploy and/or discuss mental states and mental acts, whether these acts are individual (including collective individuals) or interactive. To produce the analysis of the rabbinic mental acts and states means to work not only from how the rabbis thematized them but also from how they have performed them in discussions in midrash, Talmud and beyond in different chronological periods and genres of their legal and homiletical and work. How did the rabbis and their readers know what they know and how this way of knowing places them in a relationship to the traditions of philosophy and literature becomes a version of the guiding question of this special issue.

Even more fundamentally that question becomes: What “mental” means in rabbinic corpora of text and thought. The balance of this sketch is to posit the question of the “mental” in a historical scope and to ask about rabbinic literature and thought therein.

“Rabbinic mind,” to borrow Max Kadushin coinage, attracted the attention of scholars on two main fronts. In *via positiva*, one group of scholars appreciated his use of organic metaphor of mind as an “organism,” and of specific word-usages (“concept-values” in his terms) as organs, in which the organism is always fully present but is never fully articulated. In *via negativa*, the other group of scholars disregarded both “organic” and “mind” parts of Kadushin’s approach and focused on what this scholars saw as exclusively empirical philological analysis (dubbed “textual analysis”) of rabbinic literary productions to pay attention to versions and variants of the corpus of rabbinic literature only, while deferring the analysis of its “spirit” that is to say of the “mind” (Geist, esprit) until the textual component is firmly established. Both factions of rabbinic scholars however run a modern predicament.

For Kadushin and his followers the predicament was an organicist understanding of mind, i.e. of the mental acts and states. The modern predicament of his philological-empirical opponents the predicament was that (late ancient) rabbinic compositions have authors (a modern notion) with their authorial intent behind the text (Halivni) or, alternatively, that the “author,” namely “the master of a pericope” (Friedman) is situated, following Foucault’s understanding of the ‘subject position’ both inside and outside the literary composition. Both modern groups, however, shared, either explicitly or tacitly, an unadulterated notion of the “mind” including “mind/intent of the author” as an overarching category for all mental acts and states.

However, far beyond its organic metaphor, mind has a complex history of confluences and differentiations leading to the as unadulterated as also syncretic modern notion, “mind.’ In the modern iteration it is the mind of a pre-existing

author or, alternatively, the mind of the author as an in-text-out-of-text figure and/or “subject position” (Foucault). Both groups of modern researchers of rabbinic literature drew on such modern (and syncretic) notions of the mind. Yet what is conflated in the modern notion of the “mind” is to be carefully differentiated in order to arrive at a less modernizing understanding of rabbinic work, literature and thought. Thus, in addition to the Greek terms and traditions of their understanding, such as nous (intellect) including nous poeticon (active intellect), entellechia (a thing if the fully arrived at destination of what it should be by its nature), and psyche (soul), the Latin mens and spiritus enter in play thus leading to a gamut of new questions. Some of these questions concern ambiguous relationships between mind and spirit, which, for one, in modern French usage are still just one word, esprit; and which show the same ambiguity, now inter-linguistically, as one translates Hegel’s Geist into English with “mind.”

Another group of the scholars addresses mental states and acts in asking the who-question. Mind is not a what, but rather a who. Whose mind is the mind that I experience working in me? One can isolate two radically different answers to this question. One answer rejects the question: mind as mens belongs to nobody, because mens is not a property of anything or anyone, or in more technical terms is not an attribute and not an accident of any substance or subject. This (augustinian) answer leads to a difficult question of individual responsibility for acts the individual commits based on what is going on his/her/their mens and anima.

An heuristically important controversy spurred from that difficulty. It became most widely known as a controversy between Averroes and Thomas on the question: does an individual human being think (and therefore act) or does mind/mens/intellect think in the individual. A practical, ethical, and theological significance of that debate was: Can individual be responsible for his/her/their actions based as they therefore are on thoughts operating in the individual soul. In doctrinal terms: can an individual sin? If yes, an individual salvation from sin is also possible; if no, salvation is not possible either..

One of the modern episodes in this long history of mental states and acts was the invention of “consciousness” as a mental state, in which an individual (including a collective individual, a group or even a nation) considers herself, himself, or themselves the complete proprietors, owners, doers, users and agents of all what is going on in “their” mind. That meant the advent of a “thinking I” who believes that it is it, that is to say the “I” who is doing all thinking in and by itself. The invention of consciousness or of the I seamlessly appropriating the thoughts operating in “me” as “my” thoughts meant – revolutionary – the arrival of full ascription of mental states and acts to the “I” or ego (against which Augustinian tradition of not ascribing mens to anything or anybody would argue.) The advent of consciousness made

an individual (including collective individual) fully imputable for their mental states, mental acts, as well as for physical acts resulting from that. With the invention/advent of consciousness, thoughts not only occur to me, given to me, take place in me, but I am also the one who does thinking and the one who therefore acts.

The modern consciousness gave birth to its antipode, too. The modern horizon of consciousness defined, as it was, by unreservedly ascribing or attributing thoughts, mental states and mental acts to the first person "I" lead in the later stages of the history of consciousness to the third person, the paradoxical impersonal person, the "it." That further development, however, continued to maintain a sharp contrast with Augustinian understanding of *mens*, and thus of the mental acts and mental states as non-ascribable to any substance, to any subject, to any "I", or for that matter for any "it."

In such a historical scope, the long past due question becomes: where does rabbinic work belong in the history of the mental acts and the mental states?

The above fragments of the complex history of the mental states and acts articulated themselves primarily on the horizon set by noetics constantly trying to position itself between Augustinian and Aristotelian traditions of thought. With rare exceptions, the question of the place of rabbinic noetics in that history has not been asked. However, it is not only Augustin or Aristotle, but also, in an arguably different way, Philo of Alexandria and his Latin interpreter Victorinus can be held responsible for asking a question of, in their terms, *existentia* (rather than *mens*) as that which cannot be attributed to anything while also not being able to be reductively described as a definable essence, to which to ascribe predicates or accidents either.

This only illustrates the broader this special issue seeks to address: where do rabbis of late antiquity or in other historical periods belong in the history of noetics? Are they solely versions of Aristotelianism? Augustinianism? Averroism? Theories of consciousness? Is there instead a line of noetics unfolding from Philo to Palestinian and Babylonian Rabbis and on, through the medieval period to modernity that offers a noetics that complicates the currently predominant picture painted on the canvas for which only Augustine and Aristotle make the supporting frame?