The Dialectic between Theory and Practice in Rabbinic Thought

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Theoria and Praxis

It would seem that the question of the dialectic between the theoretical and the practical is a perennial philosophical question. It is a question that has been asked time and time again in the history of philosophy. It is still being asked today. It is the quest for the relation between what the Greeks (the first philosophers per se) called theoria (in Latin contemplatio) and praxis (in Latin actus): How does one distinguish between them? How does one connect them? Is it correct to say that each discipline is on its own, as Hume did? Or does theoria take precedence over praxis, as Aristotle would say? Is it correct to say that practical reason takes precedence over pure (speculative) reason, as Kant would have it?

However, there is a question Jewish thinkers must ask themselves before ever embarking on this type of inquiry into classical Jewish sources, namely: Is it possible to raise adequate questions about issues in classical Jewish texts when these queries are formulated using Greek philosophical terminology (or any other terminology), unknown to the authors of the classical Jewish texts, especially to the Rabbis of the talmudic period? Indeed, these Rabbis are the prime example of traditional Jewish thinkers who lived in an historical period before the introduction of academic philosophy and its language into normative Jewish discourse. All this notwithstanding, I think that when pondering

3 See Critique of Pure Reason, B596-599.
4 Although it is quite likely that the Palestinian Rabbis were familiar with various intellectual aspects of the Graeco-Roman culture of their time and place (generally called "hokhmah yevanah"), there does not seem to be any evidence of their use of
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rabbinic literature, it is possible to ask philosophical questions, such as the one about the dialectic between the theoretical and the practical, and that it may even be possible to find some appropriate answers. In fact, there are definite precedents to this approach in our traditional Jewish literature, even in literature not usually classified as 'Jewish philosophy'. I would like to demonstrate this point by citing a well known rabbinic anecdote and the teaching it contains. This is done by utilizing the interpretation of a great pre-modern Jewish thinker of the 17th century, who explained it using Aristotelian philosophical terminology, which he no doubt learned from the Hebrew writings of medieval Jewish Aristotelians. It is important to keep in mind that this later thinker is not writing Aristotelian philosophy; he is using Aristotelian terminology in the service of Jewish conceptuality. The Jewish conceptuality is primary; the Greek terminology only secondary. Nonetheless, because of her Greek service to her Jewish mistress, the maidservant is still needed and cannot be sent away as having performed no more than a one time service. Once introduced, her service is continually required. She, as it were, becomes a permanent guest among us. That is, without this philosophical terminology being regularly kept in mind, the deeper meaning of this rabbinic teaching diminishes in intellectual value. Therefore, one may pose the question of the mutual relation of theoria and praxis in a philosophical way within the domain of normative Judaism, and do so with profit. One can, moreover, formulate an answer (or begin to do so) to the issue there, a solution that could not be formulated elsewhere.

This anecdote (with certain minor textural variations) is found in several places in rabbinic literature. Here I quote the version of Sifre on Deuteronomy:

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Greek philosophical texts, or even of formal philosophical terms, as was the case with Philo and some other Hellenistic Jewish authors. See my late revered teacher, Prof. Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, 2nd ed., New York 1965, pp. 15-28; idem, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 2nd ed., New York 1962, pp. 100-114. The use of formal philosophy per se did not come into rabbinic Judaism until the encounter with Greek philosophy via the Arab *fasifa* beginning in the 9th century.

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Rabbi Tarfon, Rabbi Akibah, and Rabbi Yose the Galilean were already dining in the home of Aris in Lydda when the following question was put before them: What is greater, learning [talmud] or practice [ma'aseh]? Rabbi Tarfon said practice is greater. Rabbi Akibah said learning is greater. But those assembled all answered by saying learning is greater because it brings one to practice. Rabbi Yose the Galilean says learning is greater since Israel was learning the law of the dough-offering [ḥallah] forty years [in the Wilderness before having to practice it in the land of Israel].

One must understand 'learning' (talmud) not as 'study' in the modern sense, which often is a private activity, but as an essentially public act of communal education.

Viewed historically, there are two approaches one could take in regard to this text. First, during the Roman persecution of the Jews at the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt (around 135 C.E.), the Roman government looked upon public Judaism, especially public Torah instruction, and the political meanings inherent in its very publicity, as being a revolutionary activity. The fact that Rabbi Akibah, the most prominent Sage of his time, was an open supporter of the Bar Kokhba revolt, no doubt lent credence to these imperial fears. So it seems that for reasons of political security, Rabbi Tarfon was convinced that it was necessary to temporarily cease from public Torah instruction (talmud torah), and that despite this Judaism could survive in the long run. After all, most of the commandments could be observed clandestinely, away from the prying eyes of the government and its informers. Rabbi Akibah, though, disagrees. He is convinced that without uninterrupted public Torah learning Judaism, as a living reality, is doomed. Without this regular public activity, even in dangerous times, the Jews would become like ‘fish out of water’, who after fleeing

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7 For the priority of public over private learning so that the latter is taken to be a means to the former, see B. Baba Kama 17a and Rashi, s.v. le-migmar; and Tos., s.v. veha-ammar (Rabbenu Tam's interpretation); B. ṾAvodah Zarah 19a and Rashi, s.v. u-khtiv (2nd opinion).
their natural aquatic pursuers realize, to their sorrow, that what seemed like a place of refuge is in fact 'a place of our death'. As is well known, Rabbi Akibah paid for his conviction, which he not only preached but practiced, with his life, having been gruesomely tortured and killed as a martyr by the Romans because of his insistence on 'assembling groups in public' for Torah instruction.

The solution of the other Rabbis, who all attempted to resolve the impasse between Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akibah, demonstrates the victory of Rabbi Akibah's point of view. That is, practice is contingent on learning in a way learning is not contingent on practice: Learning brings one to practice, but practice does not bring one to learning. Along these lines, Rabbi Yose the Galilean cites as proof that in the past there had been a hiatus between the giving of certain commandments and their actual practice, but there had been no such hiatus between the giving of these commandments and their being learned; that was done immediately and perpetually. Thus there are times when the Jews can survive without the actual practice of a commandment, but they cannot survive without the continual process of learning what the commandment is and how it should be practiced, even when it is too dangerous for Jews to practice the commandment at present.

The mediaeval commentators, at least as far as I have been able to check, did not delve into the debate between Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akibah as a pragmatic political problem arising in a certain period of Jewish history. They did not seem to be concerned with the subject as a question of public policy. They did not seem troubled by the obvious question: Does saving Jewish lives take precedence over Judaic public instruction or not? Instead, these commentators delved into the debate as an intellectual matter, which for them could only be theological. Especially in the conclusion of the other Rabbis present at the debate, these commentators saw a glaring contradiction in their attempt to synthesize the view of Rabbi Akibah with the view of Rabbi Tarfon. But what is the contradiction? It is as follows: If learning is 'greater' (gadol), why does one have to justify its greatness by reasoning: 'it

8 B. Berakhot 61b.
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brings one (nevi) to practice'? By giving such a reason for the greatness of learning Torah, do not they make it a means towards an end outside itself, and greater than itself? Are not the ends always greater than the means to them? And indeed, in a parallel text in the Babylonian Talmud, the primary mediaeval glossators, Tosafot, say in the name of the most famous medieval commentator, Rashi: 'One has to say practice is greater ["adif"]'.10 If so, however, the question remains: If practice is greater, it is as Rabban Simeon ben Gamliel put it a generation later: 'Not enquiry [ha-midrash] but practice is of the essence'.11 By what logic, then, did the other Rabbis come to the conclusion 'learning is greater'? How could Rashi say: 'Who depends on whom? Is it not that the lesser [ha-qatan] which depends on the greater [ha-gadol]?!'12 Isn't the means dependent on its end in a way the end is not dependent on its means? Nevertheless, the medieval commentators seem to evade this inner contradiction. In effect, they resolved it by assigning Rabbi Tarfon's view to one kind of situation and Rabbi Akibah's to another.13 In other

10 B. Baba Kama 17a, Tos., s.v. ve-ha-amar. Cf. B. Yoma 72b and Rashi, s.v. ve-tar'a; also, M. Avot 3.9.
11 M. Avot 1.7.
12 Quoted by the gloss on B. Kiddushin 40b, Tos., s.v. talmud.
13 However, they do this following Bavli's resolution of a contradiction between two different texts. The first (B. Kiddushin 40b) emphasizes the priority of talmud, being a variant of the locus classicus we have been examining. The second text (B. Baba Kama 17a) is based on an anecdote about Rabbi Yohanan bar Nappaha performing several practical commandments before answering a halakhic question asked by his pupil, Rabbah bar Bar Hanah, which the Bavli seems to infer as a normative precedent for the priority of ma'aseh. Rashi and Rabbenu Tam (see n. 6 above) assume that the anecdote about Rabbi Yohanan refers to his private study that is trumped by his individual practice, which wouldn't be the situation were he called to engage in truly public instruction. Were that the case, talmud would take precedence since public need has priority over private need (see for example B. Berakhot 47b). But, the gloss on B. Baba Kama 17a (Tos., s.v. ve-ha-amar) quotes what seems to be a lone opinion, that of She'ilot, which gives precedence to private study. Hence Rabbi Yohanan performed these practical commandments before instructing his pupil, which does seem to be a matter of public instruction. Were he confronted, though, with the choice of first engaging in his own private study, he would have made that his priority since it would lead him to ma'aseh. See She'ilot de-Rav Ahai Gaon, E. M. Kenig ed., Jerusalem 1940, pp. 8b-9a. Maimonides (Mishneh Torah: Talmud Torah, 1.3), in effect, ignores the anecdote about Rabbi Yohanan and concludes that in all cases talmud takes precedence over ma'aseh.
words, they took a direct dispute of an identical point ('either/or' logic) and turned it into two non-contradictory views about two different kinds of situations ('both/and' logic). Thus these glossators advocated that in some situations learning ought to precede practice, whereas in others practice ought to precede learning. Each situation calls for a different mode of action; Rabbi Tarfon's opinion pertains here and not there, and Rabbi Akibah's opinion pertains there and not here. To use the language of Aristotelian logic: the excluded middle has been re-included.

**Causality: Teleological or Creative?**

The first, and perhaps only, exegete to grab the bull by the horns, so to speak, by attempting to solve the inner contradiction in the compromise between the views of Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akibah and their colleagues, is Rabbi Isaiah Halevi Horowitz, the author of the widely read quasi-kabbalistic work, *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit*. Horowitz is generally called by the acronym of his magnum opus: the Shelah. As an exegete and a theologian, he is not usually thought of as a Jewish 'philosopher', which might be a title reserved for those Jewish theologians who make explicit and continual use of philosophical literature in their work. Nevertheless, in his brief treatment of the rabbinic text we have been discussing, the Shelah shows a remarkable use of philosophical logic. And so he writes:

The well-known difficulty that earlier and later thinkers so struggled with, is that the reason 'because it [learning] brings one to practice' contradicts its own premise. If the end is practice, isn't it obvious that the end is superior [meʾuleh] to what comes before it [as its means]?! ... We are able to answer that by saying: 'learning brings to practice'; does not this mean the matter is in the category of an end achieved by a means? Rather, it is in the category of a cause [sibbah] and its effect [mesovav]: learning is the cause and practice is the effect. The superiority of cause over effect has already been assumed.14

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14 *Shenei Luḥot ha-Berit* 3: Reʾeh, Amsterdam 1648, 82b-83a.
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What is the difference between learning as a means for the sake of practice as its end, and learning as a cause of which practice is the effect? For the solution to this problem, which will lead to the solution of the contradiction of the rabbinic compromise between the views of Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akibah, we need to understand how the Shelah uses two different models of causality and how he raises one of them to a higher theological level than the other. As such, we are here dealing with a model of philosophical theology conducted with logical sophistication and rigor. The first model of causality used is Aristotelian; the second seems to be more dependent on the Creation theory of Maimonides (and perhaps also on that of Crescas).

According to Aristotle, there are four essential points in any causal order, under the general heading aitia, meaning 'irreducible first principles.' All four points function together in one unified process. They are: (1) the material cause (ha-homer in Hebrew); (2) the efficient cause (ha-po’el in Hebrew); (3) the formal cause (ha-zurah in Hebrew); (3) the final cause (ha-takhlit in Hebrew). For Aristotelians, the causal process is best illustrated by the building of a house. (1) There are building materials at hand. (2) The builder takes these materials and begins to build something from them, based on (3) the image of the house before his or her eyes. (4) The end-result is the house according to the physical reality intended by the builder in the first place. The emergence of the house is the completion of the whole causal process. Therefore, in more philosophical terms: the efficient cause brings what is potential (dynamis) into actuality (energia) or teleological fulfillment (entelechy). This actuality is envisioned from the start by the efficient cause through vision of the formal cause as archetype. First is thought, then the act.

In this example, Aristotle describes a tangible effect: a thing. More pertinent to our reflection on the mutual relation between learning and practice is the question how does this causal process operate in the area of intelligent human action, especially as discussed in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. There we have four interrelated loci. (1) The

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15 See Physics, 2.3.194b16-36.
16 Ibid., 3.1.201a5-15.
innate moral nature of human beings, which is their initial capacity for moral development in a morally constituted human society. (2) The moral agent himself, who is the human being capable of moral development by engaging in a teleologically intended action. (3) The form, i.e., the idea of the good, which the moral agent wants to attain by actualizing it in himself. (4) The end, namely the act itself, which is done for its own sake and not as a means or an instrument for the sake of something external and superior to it, which is something better than it.\footnote{17} As a genuine process, this is the final goal, the ultimate purpose beyond which there can be nothing of greater worth. To borrow a rabbinic phrase to make this point: ‘what is last is most precious’.\footnote{18}

When this precise philosophical terminology is brought into the domain of rabbinic Judaism, the Judaism operative from the close of the biblical canon until the present day, as the Shelah has done, we witness the following scheme: (1) The material cause is the Torah, whose commandments are waiting to be actualized by (2) the Jew who has accepted these commandments and who is the efficient cause of their actualization. (3) The formal cause is the practical meaning of the Torah, which is \textit{how} the commandment is to be practiced (\textit{halakhah le-ma’aseh}). (4) The final cause is the actual practice of the commandment as a fully intelligent act, one whose actor is aware of its intentionality and makes that intentionality evident in any public context, when and where he or she is acting. One might say that the end becomes fully actualized when as action \textit{per se} it makes an intelligent statement in the world. With this type of scheme in mind, Maimonides writes: ‘Thus one finds throughout the Torah the commandment: \textit{you shall learn them} (Deuteronomy 5:1), and thereafter: \textit{to do them}. Learning [\textit{ha-talmud}] is prior \textit{qodem} to practice because through learning one will come to practice’.\footnote{19} Therefore, practice is better (\textit{cadif}) and so Rashi too explained in the Babylonian Talmud’s version of the story of the dinner party in Lod.

A fundamental feature of the Aristotelian causal scheme is that all

\footnotetext{17}{\textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, 2.1.1103a25-30; 6.2.1139a20-32.}
\footnotetext{18}{\textit{Bereshit Rabbah} 78.8 re Gen. 33:2.}
\footnotetext{19}{\textit{Commentary on the Mishnah}: Introduction, Y. Kafih trans. (Heb.), Jerusalem 1976, vol. 1, p. 23.}
four causes are included in one finite process, which is known from start to finish, with every act being for the sake of the final cause or end (*telos*). Yet, when the Shelah distinguishes between teleology and causality, he seems to be basing himself on the ontological-cosmological theory of Maimonides and, up to a certain point, on that of the anti-Aristotelian cosmology of Hasdai Crescas, even though he does not mention Maimonides or Crescas in his brief statement. Thus Maimonides, in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, claims that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, which he calls there 'the necessary foundation of the whole Torah', does not correspond to Aristotle's theory of causation. If God is the cause of all causes, He who is not included in the finite causal process, there is no limit to the number of effects of His causality. God is the creator who absolutely transcends His entire creation, the creator who is not limited to any cosmic entelechy. As creator of a world, or even of worlds, out of nothing, God causes effects that are impossible for any creature to create or even anticipate. No creature could envision such effects *ab initio*, since they do not yet exist, even potentially. No human being could know the final end for which these effects are intended since its form could not be known by any created being *ab initio*. Creative intelligence seems to be spontaneous. We are here in the realm of infinite possibility, not finite potentiality. Although in ordinary language potentiality and possibility are often used interchangeably, in philosophically more precise language they are very different. Potentiality is defined by the end for whose sake it...
David Novak is prepared, to be in-formed by the image of that end. Potentiality is correlated with the actuality that is its end, that is, the end the efficient cause intends for it. Potentiality is implicit in actuality; indeed, potentiality is inferred from actuality post factum, not vice-versa. To use rabbinic language: ‘what is earlier is elucidated in retrospect [yesh breirah] by what comes afterwards’.24 Taken by itself, however, potentiality has no discernable existence, since it is totally uninformed, which means it could not be an object of our experience inasmuch as it is infinite, whereas we can only experience that which is finite. Even revelation is experienced through the finite word of God, as revealed by God.

Conversely, there is no limit to the active power of the creator, seeing that this power has an infinite number and range of possibilities. Here the conceptuality, perhaps even the causal terminology is unmistakably Hebraic. There is no Creator-God in the cosmology of Aristotle, not even in the cosmology of Plato (which Maimonides at times seems to prefer to that of Aristotle).25 Accordingly, when these effects are caused, the manner in which they will be caused, and why they will be caused, all this is what 'no eye but God's can see'.26 The uniqueness of the biblical idea of divine creativity, which has its philosophical expression in the idea of creatio ex nihilo, is that of the absolute freedom of God to do whatever He will, all things being possible for Him. This is what the great Israeli Bible scholar and philosopher of history, Yehezkel Kaufmann, emphasized as being the most original idea in the Hebrew Bible.27

How are we to understand a causality that is not delimited in the context of the dialectic between learning and practice in rabbinic thought? Following the Shelah's causal distinction, there are two kinds of causality of which one can speak:

First of all, there is the usual personal causality when the Torah commands us to observe a certain commandment. Halakhic reasoning explains how this should be properly done. Aggadic speculation at

24 B. Bezah 37b and parallels.
26 B. Berakhot 34b re Isa. 64:3.
times explains why it is to be done. Learning (talmud) is the preparation for the act which will predictably be done afterwards, hopefully with sufficient intentionality. Learning is practical instruction (hora'ah).\textsuperscript{28} Even though the situation in which the act is to be done could arise suddenly, there is no real spontaneity inasmuch as our knowledge of what is to be done - that is, according to the law and its method - has already been codified.

Secondly, there is causality that is unusual, whose method of doing is not learned from the commandments written in the Torah as God's explicit decrees. Rather, this method of doing is deduced from the acts of God. For the Rabbis, these acts of God are learned from history, that is, from the scriptural narratives about the relationship between God and humanity, especially between God and His people Israel. These stories and their elaborations constitute the core of aggadah. As for human acts modeled after these acts of God, that is, human acts of imitatio Dei, it is impossible for a person to adequately prepare for them in advance. From these narratives (haggadot) normative action is derived, but not action that can be permanently codified as law to be officially practiced (halakhah le-ma'aseh).\textsuperscript{29} The method of action is ad hoc, devised on the spot so to speak, depending on the existential needs of the personal object of this action, the manifestation of which is often unpredictable. Thus it states in Sifre on Deuteronomy:

\begin{quote}
To walk in all His ways (Deuteronomy 11:22): these are the ways of God - the Lord, compassionate and gracious (Exodus 34:6) … But how is it possible for any human to be called by the name of God? Well, as God is called compassionate and gracious, so you are to be compassionate … Those who expound the narratives [dorshei haggadot] say that if you want to apprehend
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\textsuperscript{28} Thus there are certain laws that can only be discussed theoretically, but which are not to be publicly advocated for actual normative practice. See for example B. Bezah 30b; B. Berakhot 33b and Rashi, s.v. halakhah; B. Baba Batra 130b; also P. Kilayim 4.2, 29b.

\textsuperscript{29} See P. Peah 2.4, 17a; see also B. M. Lewin, Òzar ha-Geonim 4 (Hagigah), Jerusalem 1931, nos. 67-69, pp. 59-60. Nonetheless, there are numerous cases where haggadot inspired individual action, some of which eventually did become codified; see for example B. Shabbat 127a; B. Sotah 14a.
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He-who-spoke-and-the-world-came-to-be, study haggadah since out of that you will recognize Him-who-spoke-and-the-world-came-to-be, and you will cleave to His ways.30

When a person learns Torah for its own sake (lishmah), one's intention is not to prepare oneself for a definite act as the purpose of that learning. Torah learning is an end in itself, even though one might not understand that when first engaging in such learning.31 But when one gains knowledge of the commandments of the Torah in a practical halakhic way (halakhah le-ma‘aseh) as preparation for a specific act, one then comes to know just how he or she will be able to properly perform that act, whenever the occasion for doing so will arise in the foreseeable future.32 One can even imagine what is meant to be done in the far off messianic future (hilkhata le-meshiḥa).33 Therefore, in the concluding part of the rabbinic text we have been examining earlier, Rabbi Yose the Galilean does not solve the inner-contradiction contained in the answer of the Rabbis that 'learning is greater because it brings one to practice'. Rabbi Yose the Galilean only shows the chronological precedence of learning over practice. Israel had to wait forty years to be able to practice the law of the dough-offering, but Israel did not have to wait at all to gain knowledge of that law, or ever cease at all from learning it, even when, at times in Jewish history, that law could not be practiced. Nevertheless, this denotation of priority is not the ontological priority that the word 'greater' (gadol) might well imply.34

When a person understands the acts of God, those revealed (and perhaps those concealed), as Torah for its own sake, he or she is unable to imitate God in definite acts whose modus operandi can be anticipated and prepared in advance. A person does not know how or when the divine exemplar will influence or inspire him, to lead him or her in relationships of loving-kindness (gemilut ḥasadim), acts which

30 Sifre: Devarim, no. 49, p. 114. See, also, Mekhita: Shirata 3; and B. Shabbat 133b re Exod. 15:2.
31 See B. Nazir 23b and parallels.
32 See for example B. Megillah 4a. Cf. B. Sanhedrin 71a and parallels.
33 See B. Zevahim 45a and Tos., s.v. hilkhata.
34 See P. Nedarim 9.4, 41c re Gen. 5:1.
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'have no measure'. All that depends on the *ad hoc* circumstances of a neighbor he or she is commanded to love as the situation arises. As such, this is unlike Israel in the Wilderness who already knew from their learning just how they would be able to practice the commandment of the dough-offering upon entering the land of Israel after forty years. A person does not really know in advance just how to love his or her neighbor like oneself, prior to the time when he or she comes face to face with that neighbor. Here God is the cause, and the human being imitating God, is the vessel through whom this new effect itself becomes a world like 'a new creation out of nothing'. In this regard, we are engaging in ontology and not just in ordinary morality (as would seem to be Maimonides' view at the very end of the *Guide of the Perplexed*). In my humble opinion, this is the meaning of the Shelah in his explication of the theological dialogue at the dinner party in Lod. It would seem that this is the result of his delving into Greek philosophy, albeit filtered through Hebrew translations and transpositions, as a supplement and aid to the higher wisdom of the Torah. Nevertheless, can one say that this is the import of the opinions of Rabbi Akibah and the other Rabbis who attempted to reconcile their opinion with that of Rabbi Tarfon?

To answer this question we need to learn something from the well-known legend in the Babylonian Talmud about Moses in the academy of Rabbi Akibah. Moses became depressed when he did not understand the discourse of Rabbi Akibah. He regained his composure when he heard from the mouth of Rabbi Akibah himself that the basis of his teaching is 'a law given to Moses at Sinai' (*halakhah le-Mosheh mi-Sinai*). There are two ways to explain why Moses (that is, the 'Moses'

35 M. Peah 1.1.
36 See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Evel* 14.1 re Lev. 19:18. So, for example, in comforting mourners, which is a major act of *gemilut hasadim*, one is to wait for the spontaneous speech of the mourner himself or herself before expressing one's own words of comfort in response. Indeed, one does not know how to comfort a mourner, which is to truly address his or her sorrow, until that mourner reveals his or her own particular sorrow on the spot to those coming to comfort him or her. See B. Mo'ed Qatan 28b re Job 2:13-3:1.
37 *Guide* 3.54 re Jer. 9:23.
38 B. Mena'ot 29b.
of the imagination of whoever thought up this legend) felt better about the teaching of Rabbi Akibah. First, there is the minimal explanation: Moses saw that Rabbi Akibah's teaching did not contradict his own. Likewise, one could say that the philosophical interpretation of the Shelah does not contradict the teaching of the Rabbis' reconciliation of the views of Rabbi Akibah and Rabbi Tarfon. Secondly, there is the maximal explanation: Moses saw in the instruction of Rabbi Akibah the further development of his own, something that could only be seen post factum. To use more precise philosophical language, one could say that in the first instance Moses' teaching is the necessary cause or condition for that of of Rabbi Akibah; its conditio sine qua non. Moreover, one could say that the teaching of Moses is the sufficient cause or ground for Rabbi Akibah's; it is the conditio per quam.39 In the first instance, the earlier teaching is essentially a negative limit of the latter; hence the later teaching must only not contradict the evident meaning of the earlier teaching. In the second instance, the earlier teaching is essentially a positive source of that which follows. The later act has to return regularly to that source in order to be sustained by it, and to search it again for its heretofore hidden meanings.

In the second instance, do we have the right to develop the teaching of our ancestors and to carry it to lengths they themselves did not imagine? Isn't this, in fact, using their teaching as a mere pretext (asmakhta) for our own ideas?40 Quite to the contrary! If we do not develop the studies of our ancestors, which means letting them bring about new effects long after they themselves have had nothing more to teach, that teaching will remain, as the Talmud strikingly puts it, 'folded up and lying in some corner'.41 It is only possible for us to draw from the past by putting its content into new vessels in the present. The past is brought to us, but we can never return to it as it was in its own time. Only naive historicists think we can know the past 'as it really was' (wie es eigentlich gewesen). In this or any philosophical retrieval - be it the Shelah's of rabbinic teaching, or our reclamation of his retrieval

39 See I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, Bxxiv-xxv.
40 See Judah Halevi, Kuzari 3.73; see also B. Menahot 92b and Tos., s.v. girsa.
41 B. Kiddushin 66a.
of rabbinic teaching - what is regained changes like something that moves; nonetheless, it does not turn into something else so as to completely lose its own coherent identity. Moses can still recognize his teaching as being essential within the teaching of Rabbi Akibah. It would thus seem that there is a causality in this development which not only operates on potential but, even more so, realizes truly future possibilities, operating as it were in an open rather than a closed universe of discourse. To use a rabbinic metaphor: Do not these developments occur more like water gushing from a fountain than water drawn from a sealed cistern?42

Looking at the mutual relation between teaching and practice in rabbinic thought through the philosophical prism of the dialectic between *theoria* and *praxis*, has enabled us to see the ontological dimension of this issue over and above its more immediate moral or political meaning. This prism has helped us formulate the matter more precisely. By looking for an answer within the theological domain of Judaism we find one, even if, perhaps, only an approach towards an answer, which could not be found anywhere else. Philosophy has served the Torah well.

42 M. Avot 2.8.