Introduction

Philosophical reflection on autonomy is modern. The problem of autonomy as manifested in the tension between individual rights and the correlative duties entailed by membership in a civic community arises with the development of the natural rights tradition in European thought in the seventeenth century, a tradition associated with the writings of Grotius, Hobbes, Locke and others. As such, this problem enters Jewish thought at a later date, with emancipation and deghettoization at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Simply put, before Jews became citizens of modern states, reflection on autonomy in this political sense did not, indeed could not, arise among them. Associated with this political debate is the epistemic and, ultimately, religious worry of whether autonomous human reason, reason by itself, can (or cannot) provide the grounding or foundation for morality and religion. This discussion, most prominently associated with Kant at the end of the eighteenth century, entered Judaism almost simultaneously. As both the political and the religious side of the modern discussion concerning autonomy make clear, the entire issue focuses upon the relation of the individual to the community. To what extent does the individual have rights which no civic society can abrogate? To what degree is the individual the ultimate authority or judge in matters of morality and religion? When, if ever, can the individual delegate decision making in such spheres to others?

Although such questions have a decidedly modern ring, one would be wrong to think that analogues cannot be found in earlier ages. Cognate issues are indeed to be found in ancient and medieval times, both within the Jewish world and outside it. Plato and Aristotle, for example, address themselves to the worry of whether the human being is by nature a political animal or whether the human good is to be found outside the political arena. In Jewish thought this core issue is little different. Thinkers throughout the ages, from bibli-

cal through rabbinic and medieval to modern times, are preoccupied with the relation of the individual Jew to the community and to the world at large. One way the philosophers of Judaism characterized the issue was in asking whether knowledge of God, *ex hypothesi* the highest good and a cognitive attainment of a particular individual, is to be understood as a sort of contemplative activity which distances the thinker from the social and political realm or as an activity which motivates moral and political action; and if it is the latter, then how? Further, while premodern philosophers, Maimonides and Aquinas, for example, do not concern themselves with Kant's problem of whether morality and the moral law can be grounded in the nature of practical reason, they do worry about the general intelligibility of the law, about the linkage between reason and virtue, and about the capacity of human reason to secure, unaided, the good. They ask: What is the relationship between (divine) law and human reason? between law and morality? What is the ultimate source of obedience to the law?

This overview should at least make clear that philosophical reflection on the relation of the individual to the community is both perennial and universal. And as such, it is part of the tradition of Jewish philosophy. No one philosophizes in a vacuum, and as, I think, this volume makes amply clear, Jewish philosophy flourishes by engaging in lively dialogue with the entire Western philosophical tradition.

This dialogue presents itself both systematically and historically, and this volume consists of essays which emphasize one or the other aspect. Each of the essays in the first part sets out the general problem which confronts every modern Jew: How can the individual Jew retain a rich sense of self, while also remaining squarely within the historically covenanted community? Again, how can the individual Jew square a sense of autonomous selfhood with the ongoing reality of the tradition, however the latter is interpreted? In response to this problematic, the first two essays complement each other by virtue of their opposing philosophical affiliations. Eugene Borowitz, in "Autonomy and Community," takes up the issue of the individual and the community from the standpoint of an anti-Kantian religious existentialism. For Borowitz, arguing against both Hermann Cohen and Mordecai Kaplan, the crucial issue for the liberal, non-Orthodox Jew is how to develop a robust sense of a *Jewish* self, such that the

(liberal) denial of the validity of the Sinaitic revelation does not undercut the individual's commitment to the Jewish people.

In response to Borowitz, Kenneth Seeskin, in "Autonomy and Jewish Thought," approaches the issue of individual freedom and autonomy and obedience to the Law from the side of a committed Kantianism. While fully cognizant of and sympathetic to the Maimonidean emphases on God's transcendence and surpassing wisdom, Seeskin wishes to defend a notion of Judaism which emphasizes a strong commitment to self-determination and autonomy. For Seeskin, insofar as the tradition is a tradition of laws directed to free individuals, it entails a notion of the self as a self-legislating, moral agent, an agent capable of assenting to the Law, of taking the Law upon oneself. But with this comes a problem: How can a free and autonomous individual, whose rationality requires obedience to universal law, rest content with a tradition in which he or she is commanded to obey a *particular* historical legislation? Seeskin faces the problem squarely, contextualizing it by reference to Platonic, Maimonidean and Kantian notions of autonomy and selfhood.

In the third and final essay of this part, Ze'ev Levy, in "Tradition, Heritage and Autonomy in Modern Jewish Thought," makes use of Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of historical interpretation, his hermeneutical theory, in presenting his own view of the role that tradition should play in the life of the individual (Jew). Each human being is born into a tradition, but, lest one be crippled by it to the extent of forfeiting one's autonomy, one must 'stand back,' reflect upon, and then use the tradition for current purposes. With specific reference to Judaism, Levy, a secular Zionist, urges the modern non-Orthodox Jew, for whom Halakhah is not definitive of his or her being, to make every effort to invest those aspects of the tradition which are vital with new meaning. Levy's essay will profitably be read in connection with the earlier essay by Borowitz.

In turning from the general to the more particular, the second part presents, first, three historical studies. Each of these essays focuses on one or more historical periods and figures therein and attempts to tease out some normative implications for Jewish thinking about autonomy and the moral/political relationship of the individual to the community and to the world at large.

Lenn Goodman, in "The Individual and the Community in the Normative Traditions of Judaism," focuses on the biblical, prophetic and rabbinic periods and forcefully stresses that the modern tension between the individual and the community, a Hobbesian and Enlight-

enment development, is singularly absent in early Jewish literature. The early literature, the legal and moral code of the Torah and its rabbinic elaborations, presents a reciprocating relationship between the individual and the community, such that individual dignity is guaranteed only in the context of the community *and* that the community serves to foster individual well-being, materially, morally and intellectually. Fascism is thus precluded, but so too is the atomization of the individual which characterizes the modern industrial state. The reader will want to compare the view of human nature outlined by Goodman on behalf of the ancients with the modern view of the autonomous human being outlined in the essays of Borowitz, Seeskin and Levy.

In "The Elimination of Perplexity: Socrates and Maimonides as Guides of the Perplexed," I focus on the Rambam and, by comparison with Plato and the Platonic Socrates, try to show that the impetus which moves their respective attempts to force the would-be knower to confront and overcome his ignorance is moral and, even more importantly, political. Both Socrates and Maimonides hope that by eliminating and individual's perplexity and ignorance they shall thereby create better and more reflective citizens in their respective communities. For these two thinkers, the *summum bonum* is to be found not in other-worldly, apolitical contemplative activity, but rather in enlightened, metaphysically grounded, political leadership and legislation.

In turning to the modern era, Martin Yaffe, in "Autonomy, Community, Authority: Hermann Cohen, Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss," constructs an historical dialogue, which, in microcosm, is *the* discussion of modernity, namely, the relation of the individual to the community. Cohen's late, Kantian-inspired, Jewish writings reveal (for Cohen) the Jewish sources as embodying an apolitical ideal for the human being (and Jew), an ideal of a cosmopolitan society commensurate with individual moral autonomy. In Yaffe's dialogue, such cosmopolitanism, such unconnectedness of the individual to political institutions, is strongly opposed by Schmitt, himself a former neo-Kantian like Cohen. Schmitt, for his part, wishes to 'politicize' human life again, and to find in the political community and the state the locus of morality and the human good. In responding directly to Schmitt, Leo Strauss accepts Schmitt's critique of Cohenian 'liberal' cosmopolitanism. But in reflecting upon Schmitt's statism, Strauss attempts to resuscitate a conception of the political which is at once attentive to the human need for community as well as to the abiding

desire to transcend it, through philosophy. For Strauss, Plato and Maimonides, not Kant or Hobbes, are the paradigms for the modern Jew, indeed for every modern wishing to confront his or her tradition.

The volume concludes in a contemporary vein. The final two essays address themselves to contemporary Jewish perspectives on issues in communal responsibility and social justice. The reader will note in these last essays an emerging view of the individual as *by nature* a social being. This view, premodern in its orientation, may be understood as an alternative, indeed antidote, to the atomic, a(nti)social view of the individual which predominates in the modern period, and which motivates the very problem with which this entire volume is concerned. From this perspective, these final essays are of a piece with the prophetic and rabbinic conception of the human being outlined in Goodman's essay and in marked contrast to the modern conception outlined in the essays of Borowitz, Seeskin and Levy in the first part; put another way, these final essays present a view of human nature compatible with that of Strauss rather than that of Cohen.

Robert Gibbs, in "A Jewish Context for the Social Ethics of Marx and Levinas," illuminates the social theory of Marx and Levinas by comparing them with each other, and then fructifies the debate by injecting it with the messianic political ideal and the rejection of the state which one finds in normative (biblical and rabbinic) Judaism. Gibbs' essay is part of his own ongoing reflections about 'ethical sociality,' about the meaning and viability of such social institutions as enhance and preserve individual responsibility and freedom, but which are unencumbered by state sponsorship and control. The model for Gibbs is the sociality and sense of community fostered by *galut* Judaism in its creation of a society without a state.

In "Individual and Communal Forgiveness," Elliot Dorff turns his attention to the history of Jewish persecution by the Catholic Church and addresses himself to the meaningfulness, the philosophical intelligibility, of Jews forgiving Catholics for past wrongs, even though contemporary Catholics and Jews neither perpetrated nor directly suffered from those wrongs. In defending the intelligibility of such forgiving, Dorff develops a notion of forgiveness, "reconciliation," which he argues can meaningfully be extended by members of communities which are ontologically the same as those of the past, even though they are physically different from them. But meaningfulness and intelligibility do not, by themselves, carry prescriptive force, and thus in the final sections of the essay Dorff ana-

lyzes the arguments for and against extending such forgiveness to Catholics.

And now, let us begin.