PART THREE

THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF FACKENHEIM'S THOUGHT
In his preface to *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, Fackenheim adjures his readers to be mindful of the “systematic impulse” of combining two disciplines—Jewish thought and philosophy—which informs an enterprise that otherwise appears as a collection of disparate essays. It was an impulse, he tells us, he was “forced to hold apart for nearly three decades.” In other words, his systematic impulse was suppressed by a “systematic resistance.” That resistance ceased because of his admission; “Obeying that impulse I consider a demand at this hour in Jewish history.” Succumbing to this impulse was Fackenheim’s own acting out what he advocated was the historicity of human nature, a nature that cannot escape its own human situatedness, perpetually engaged in a process of self-making. Fackenheim’s own particular situatedness was being Jewish at a certain point in history, consciousness of which transformed history for him into “Jewish history.”

More importantly, the normative framing of his “impulse” in terms of “demand” and “obedience” raises the stakes of his project to a performance of a *mitzvah*, a particularly Jewish prescription for action. He has therefore also assumed the mantle of the Jewish theologian who he has warned not “to ignore contemporary history. For the God of history cannot be God of either past or future unless He is still God of the present.” What liberated him from the restraints forcing him to maintain a rigid separation between Jewish thought and philosophy for a prolonged period was, I argue, the realization that the rabbinic tradition offers philosophically sophisticated responses to what he considered to be formidable challenges to Jewish religious existence posed by modern philosophy. Biblical figures such as Elijah and Abraham, as conceived by the classical rabbis, strike *philosophically* at the very heart of, primarily, Hegel’s relegation of Judaism to a curious anachronism.

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1 EMJ vii.
2 GPH 31.