

## E L E V E N

## *Towards a Historical Definition of the Haskalah*

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**E**VEN though the Haskalah movement ended a century ago it remains exceptionally difficult to define it precisely. Unlike other agents of change in modern Jewish history, the Haskalah had no ideological and institutional coherence, comprehensive organization, constitution, generally agreed programme, principles, or allegiance to a specific defined ideology. Although the term 'Haskalah' was so continuously used that it was at the epicentre of bitter polemics and on everyone's lips, it remains ambiguous and elusive since every modern Jew was identified as a maskil and every change in traditional religious patterns was dubbed Haskalah.

The European Enlightenment met a similar fate, and until recently many scholars were totally frustrated by attempts to find a common denominator for what appeared to be a motley collection of national, religious, and local Enlightenments, *philosophes*, and *Aufklärer* of different and even contradictory kinds.<sup>1</sup> 'Within limits', writes the English historian Norman Hampson, 'the Enlightenment was what one thinks it was . . . There does not seem to me much point in attempting any general definition of the movement. Such a definition would have to include so many qualifications and contradictions as to be virtually meaningless.'<sup>2</sup>

Despite these difficulties, we should not abandon all systematic attempts at arriving at a historical definition of 'Haskalah'. On the contrary, the fact that the Haskalah eludes efforts to place it within an ideological and chronological framework, a locality, and defined institutions makes it all the more imperative to grapple with the question of definition. In addition, the new research that enriches our knowledge of the movement's history, personalities, and ideas, as well as advancing new interpretations, compels us to come to grips with the fundamental question: how is the term 'Haskalah' to be understood? What were the affinities between Haskalah and Enlightenment? What were its geographical boundaries, local centres, and chronological limits, its basic assumptions, thought patterns, programmes, and methods of activity? Finally, in what ways was the Haskalah connected to the pro-

cesses of modernization and secularization? The absence of dictionaries and lexicons of Jewish historical terms does not absolve students of Jewish history from the attempt to delineate the context and chronology of the Haskalah.<sup>3</sup>

More easily defined movements and trends existed before, after, and at the same time as the Haskalah movement: hasidism, the mitnagedim of the Lithuanian yeshivas, the *musar* movement, the first Zionist movement Hibbat Zion, the early Jewish socialist movement in eastern Europe, the Reform movement, Positive-Historical or Conservative Judaism, Orthodoxy, and Wissenschaft des Judentums in central and western Europe. While there is general agreement over the ideological and programmatic content, principal figures, and coherent social frameworks of these movements, in all these respects the Haskalah is rather blurred. It is usually causally lumped together with the other historical processes of emancipation, religious reform, assimilation, nationalism, and the development of modern Hebrew literature. Hence a historical definition of Haskalah would liberate it by rendering it an independent concept. Only after the Haskalah has achieved this 'emancipation' and 'autonomy' will it be possible properly to place it within the wider historical context, and revitalize the crucial and intriguing question of its role in the process of historical change, secularization, and modernization that affected central and east European Jewish society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A definition of Haskalah would enable us to arrive at a more precise differentiation of Jewish modernization, be more faithful to historical truth, and highlight the historical meaning of the movement.<sup>4</sup>

### REDEMPTIVE HASKALAH: SELF-DEFINITIONS

More important than the overdue and detached analyses of historians are the perceptions of contemporaries, especially those who considered themselves members of the Haskalah movement and who explicitly defined themselves as maskilim. As we shall see, their approaches varied widely, and the self-understanding of the Haskalah underwent a number of changes.<sup>5</sup> The maskilim's own distinction between 'true' and 'false' Haskalah, for example, was used as a rhetorical and ideological device to define the boundaries of the movement, and thus offers one way of

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Horst Stuke's definition of 'Aufklärung' in his *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Stuttgart, 1977), and a brief article by Dominique Bourel on the Haskalah in Germany, 'Haskalah: Jüdische Aufklärung', in Werner Schneiders (ed.), *Lexikon der Aufklärung* (Munich, 1995), 174-5.

<sup>4</sup> For new views and directions in the research on Jewish modernization see Jonathan Frankel, 'Assimilation and the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Towards a New Historiography?', in Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (eds.), *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 1992), 1-37.

<sup>5</sup> Only in 1990 was the first attempt made to clarify the concept 'Haskalah'. See Uzi Shavit, 'An Examination of the Term Haskalah in Hebrew Literature' (Heb.), *Mehkarei yerushalayim besifrut ivrit*, 12 (1990), 51-83.

<sup>1</sup> Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (London, 1990); Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> *The Enlightenment* (Harmondsworth, 1968).

arriving at a more precise definition; it also illustrates the ambivalent relationship between the Haskalah and modernity.

In order to understand the meaning of Haskalah we must therefore consider a whole spectrum of definitions, not only of Haskalah itself, but of other related terms, such as the frequently used *Aufklärung*. The 140-year history of the changing self-definition of the movement is more than a lexicographical or philological exercise; it is a fascinating journey into the minds and lives of its followers.

### *Haskalah as Philosophy*

The early maskilim in Germany, Naphtali Herz Wessely, Moses Mendelssohn, Isaac Satanow, and others, began their literary careers between the 1750s and 1770s before forming defined circles and a movement, and before the first Haskalah forays into education (the Berlin *Freyschule*) and literature (the Torah translation and commentary called *Biur*). The dominant activities at this stage of early Haskalah were the renewal of the Jewish scientific tradition, Hebrew grammar, and to a lesser extent the Jewish philosophical tradition.<sup>6</sup> As Uzi Shavit has shown, the term Haskalah appeared a number of times in essays such as Maimonides' *Biur milot hahigayon*, which was published with Mendelssohn's commentary (1762, 1765), and Wessely's *Yein levanon* (1775).<sup>7</sup> Here, however, 'Haskalah' meant philosophy and almost nothing else.

Two contradictory trends were prominent in the early Haskalah. One considered philosophy to be a significant contribution to scholarship and belief, while another rejected philosophy out of fear that it would undermine religious faith. This is especially true of early Haskalah devotees in Poland and Lithuania, who focused on the natural sciences and had serious reservations about the study of philosophy.<sup>8</sup> The basic question was whether rationalist enquiry and the adoption of the rules and basic concepts of philosophy was legitimate, or whether they contradicted perfect faith, kabbalah, and divine wisdom originating in revelation. Wessely, for example, who was among those who were apprehensive of potentially negative influences, argued that one should go no further than harnessing 'rational proofs' to strengthen 'beliefs and opinions'.<sup>9</sup> Mendelssohn, on the other hand, as early as the publication of his first Hebrew work *Kohelet musar*, believed that philosophy (i.e. Haskalah) was eminently compatible with the sources of Judaism.<sup>10</sup> In the preface to *Biur milot hahigayon* he praised Haskalah and recommended that

<sup>6</sup> See David Sorkin, 'From Context to Comparison: The German Haskalah and Reform Catholicism', *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte*, 20 (1991), 23–41; id., 'The Case for Comparison: Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment', *Modern Judaism*, 14 (1994), 121–38.

<sup>7</sup> Shavit, 'The Term Haskalah', 62–70.

<sup>8</sup> See Immanuel Etkes, 'On the Question of the Precursors of the Haskalah in East Europe', in id. (ed.), *Religion and Life: The Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1993), 25–44 and Shmuel Feiner, 'The Early Haskalah in the Eighteenth Century' (Heb.), *Tarbiz*, 62/2 (1998), 189–240.

<sup>9</sup> Shavit, 'The Term Haskalah', 62–3; Wessely's letter to Mendelssohn (1768), in Mendelssohn, *Ketavim ivriyim* [Hebrew Writings], in id., *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, vol. xix (Stuttgart, n.d.), 120–3.

<sup>10</sup> Mordecai Gilon, *Mendelssohn's 'Kohelet musar' in its Historical Context* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1979).

every maskil and scholar should apply philosophy in general, and logic in particular, to his search for truth. The methods and paths of Haskalah, he wrote, were not alien to Jews. On the contrary, 'there is no doubt that He who gave man knowledge also implanted within his heart the inclination to Haskalah and established virtuous laws and rules so that he might understand intricate matters and grasp subtleties'.<sup>11</sup> Thus the maskil is the philosopher who 'with scholarly methods seeks truth through Haskalah'.<sup>12</sup>

The early Haskalah represented the start of the transformation of traditional Jewish scholarship that sought to revive what was believed already to exist in the Jewish literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and it can only partly be considered as precursor of the Haskalah movement. Its fields of study were limited to seeking truth in the world of thought, strengthening faith, and, at most, upholding the standing of the Jewish community in the eyes of the world. This underwent a drastic change in the late 1770s when the Haskalah developed into a world-view associated with a comprehensive programme of social and cultural transformation. The translation of the Pentateuch into German was more than a literary project; it was an attempt to draw Jews into European culture. Philanthropic motives stemming from an identification with the absolutist and mercantilist ethos were the driving force behind the establishment of the modern Jewish school in Berlin in 1778, and its founders consciously sought to educate Jews to be of service to the state in their occupations and social life. In 1782 Wessely's *Divrei shalom ve'emet* espoused an ideology and programme based on the belief that a new Europe was dawning, and along with it the vision of the Jew who was also a man and a citizen.<sup>13</sup> The first organized maskil group, Hevrat Dorshei Leshon Ever (Society for the Promotion of the Hebrew Language) founded in Königsberg in 1782, cultivated a distinct self-consciousness of pioneers paving the way for others. Its public declarations had a manifesto-like and revolutionary character which combined great enthusiasm with the promise of a new kind of secular redemption: 'The time of science has arrived for all peoples . . . Why should we be so lazy and do nothing? Please, O brothers, rise up and rescue the [previous] stones from heaps of rubble! . . . Men of truth will illuminate the path and the sun of justice will shine upon us from above and be the light of eternity'.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Biur milot hahigayon leharav hehakkham beyisra'el . . . moreinu verabeinu moshe ben rabi maimon, im peirush mehatorani morenu harav rav moshe midesau* [Logical Terms . . .] (Berlin, 1765), preface.

<sup>12</sup> *Biur mendelssohn lemegilat kohelet* [Mendelssohn's commentary on Ecclesiastes] (1770), in Mendelssohn, *Ketavim ivriyim*, vol. i, p. vii; Shavit, 'The Term Haskalah', 10.

<sup>13</sup> Naphtali Herz Wessely, *Divrei shalom ve'emet* [Words of Peace and Truth] (Berlin, 1782). See also Mordecai Eliav, *Jewish Education in Germany during the Haskalah and Emancipation* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1960), and Shmuel Feiner, 'Educational Agendas and Social Ideals: Jüdische Freischule in Berlin, 1778–1825', in Rivka Feldhay and Immanuel Etkes (eds.), *Education and History: Cultural and Political Contexts* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1999), 247–84.

<sup>14</sup> Hevrat Dorshei Lashon Ever, *Nahal habesor* [Announcement] (Königsberg, 1783). See also Shmuel Feiner, 'Isaac Euchel: Entrepreneur of the Haskalah Movement in Germany' (Heb.), *Zion*, 52 (1987), 427–69.

### What Is Enlightenment?

It was precisely during the years when the Haskalah movement in Germany was shaped that the question 'Was ist Aufklärung?' was being debated in Germany. Even before the discussion was officially opened by the editor of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in 1784, a variety of definitions had been offered,<sup>15</sup> but now it became the crucial question for the future of the movement in Germany, and for its sense of identity.<sup>16</sup> The answers Immanuel Kant and Moses Mendelssohn offered are the most important and best known. Typically, Mendelssohn treated the question in a philosophical manner. He defined *Aufklärung* as rational thought, the theoretical aspect of the broader term *Bildung*,<sup>17</sup> which also included *Kultur*, the practical component related to crafts and cultural life. To all intents and purposes Mendelssohn maintained what he had already argued in his early Hebrew works: *Aufklärung* was understood as enlightenment in the sense of rational philosophy. It pertained, Mendelssohn stressed, to the human being as human being and was a universal value. The exaggerated use of *Aufklärung*, or its enlistment for harsh criticism, would be an abuse of the term and lead to moral lassitude and egotism, atheism, and anarchy, and should therefore be avoided.<sup>18</sup>

In Kant's eyes, by contrast, *Aufklärung* was not a relatively abstract category but a historical process, moving from a condition of immaturity, ignorance, and blind obedience to past and present authorities towards maturity. The sign of this intellectual and historical maturity was the slogan of the *Aufklärung*: free and independent rational thought. This transition, indeed the entire process, was an act of self-liberation, the acquisition of freedom, of individual autonomy. Even if Kant was excessively cautious in drawing the boundaries of freedom in order to avoid conflicting with the laws of Frederick the Great's Prussia (reason as much as you like and on any subject you like—but obey!), one cannot deny the revolutionary potential implied by Kant's definition: acquire knowledge, use reason, be critical and free of conventions so that you become a mature autonomous person! More than just individual and theoretical categories is implied, but an evolving, comprehensive historical process: we are not yet living in an enlightened age, but in an Age of Enlightenment.<sup>19</sup>

It seems that, with regard to the Haskalah, Mendelssohn's definitions more aptly

<sup>15</sup> See n. 3 above.

<sup>16</sup> See Ehrhard Bahr (ed.), *Was ist Aufklärung? Thesen und Definitionen* (Stuttgart, 1974); Natan Rotenstreich, 'Enlightenment: Between Mendelssohn and Kant', in S. Stein and R. Loewe (eds.), *Studies in Jewish Religion and Intellectual History* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1979), 279–363; J. Schmidt, 'The Question of Enlightenment: Kant, Mendelssohn and the *Mittwochsgesellschaft*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50 (1989), 269–91.

<sup>17</sup> See George L. Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism* (Bloomington, Ind., 1985); David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840* (New York, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, 'Über die Frage, Was heisst Aufklärung?', *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, 4 (1784), 193–200. See also Shavit, 'The Term Haskalah', 58–9.

<sup>19</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Beantwortung der Frage, Was ist Aufklärung', *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, 4 (1784), 481–94.

characterize the stage of 'early Haskalah', whereas the maskilim who understood their Haskalah in Kantian terms properly defined what developed in the 1770s and 1780s.

### Guiding the Public

Even if the ideological meaning of the term 'Haskalah' was not yet explicit in the Hebrew sources, the maskilim used a rhetoric that assigned to themselves the historic task of leading their brethren in the transition from the epoch of immaturity to the epoch of maturity. They were the 'society' or 'fraternity' of maskilim, and their call for the mobilization of members and supporters was directed as 'young maskilim who love morality and knowledge'.<sup>20</sup> The call to leadership was already evident in 1783–8, the primary stage of the evolving Haskalah movement. More than anything, maskilim felt a sense of responsibility to the general public: 'know that we are your brothers who love you and are not seeking material benefit or making a name for ourselves, but work for your sake alone, dear brothers! Your benefit is our only objective.'<sup>21</sup> From the start, the maskilim assumed the position of a socially critical minority, a new intellectual class of teachers and writers who were waging all-out war against ignorance and were convinced that their victory would greatly benefit the Jewish community. The maskilim in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century were interested in something more than Mendelssohn's theoretical guidance. Some even proclaimed that government intervention was not needed to rid Jewish society of flaws in its education, culture, and leadership. Isaac Euchel, who has lately been regarded as the key figure of the Haskalah movement, insisted that Jews should transcend ignorance through their own efforts. A reformed education and the evolution of a new class of future leaders would be initiated by the maskilim alone, and they would foster Jewish regeneration. The maskilim saw themselves as 'moral physicians'—a common self-image, explaining to themselves and others that more than anyone else they had the right to prescribe the bitter pill which must be swallowed.<sup>22</sup>

The atmosphere of Hevrat Dorshei Lashon Ever in Königsberg was that of a reading club, a Jewish *Lesegesellschaft* of those seeking security and solace in the company of maskilim against 'the complacent and arrogant'. The circle preached the same transformation demanded by Kant, and was profoundly influenced by the programme for Jewish improvement proposed by the Prussian intellectual Christian Wilhelm Dohm. In the words of the Hebrew poet Shimon Baraz,

Then they will be ready to improve those like them  
Sow seeds of reason where chaos reigns,  
Imbue dolts with comprehension

<sup>20</sup> *Takanot hevrat shoharei hatov vehatushiyah* [Regulations of the Society for the Propagation of Goodness and Virtue] (Berlin and Königsberg, 1787): 'it should be printed at the beginning of the book that maskilim have examined and found that the book is honest and correct'.

<sup>21</sup> *Naḥal habesor*.

<sup>22</sup> See Feiner, 'Isaac Euchel', 446–8.

Youths with shrewdness  
 Teach wisdom [*hokhmah*] to impetuous blunderers  
 And reason and intelligence that will fill the earth with knowledge!<sup>23</sup>

This poem expresses the essence of the Haskalah experience for the next hundred years: a group of young people with a traditional education and family and social expectations of persevering in the study of Talmud, who had internalized some *Aufklärung* concepts, were exposed to European literature, met on the basis of common belief, youthful ideological exuberance, consciousness of entertaining not-quite-legitimate ideas, and a deep sense of their worthiness to preach to and rebuke a society that had lost its way. Above all, their mission was to herald a new historical age in Europe—the ‘modern age’.<sup>24</sup> From then on the maskilim were those who identified with the Haskalah experience, took part in it, and were participants in the new consciousness of historical change and a programme of reform which, to their minds, stemmed from that change.

Distinctions between the terms Haskalah, enquiry (*hakirah*), and knowledge or wisdom (*hokhmah*) were virtually non-existent at the end of the eighteenth century. Moreover, use of ‘Haskalah’ in the sense of philosophy was maintained by maskilim such as Wessely and Satanow, who made the transition from the early to the ideological stage of the Haskalah. As has been noted, Wessely was one of the founders of the evolving Haskalah ideology. This was evident in his manifesto-like response to Joseph II of Austria’s Edict of Tolerance and his efforts to convince the Jewish public of the need for basic, revolutionary changes in educational curricula. For Wessely, however, the term ‘Haskalah’ only meant rational philosophy and, like his predecessors, he believed it posed a threat to religious belief. Therefore, in *Sefer hamidot* he recommends that ‘Haskalah and enquiry’ should be restricted and made subordinate to ‘morality and fear of the Lord’.<sup>25</sup> Satanow, the most prolific Hebrew writer of the period, had no such fears. He too interpreted Haskalah as rational philosophy, but found no better moral edification for his generation than ‘Haskalah deeds’. Continuing in Mendelssohn’s path, Satanow maintained that philosophical enquiry was imperative for a believing Jew: ‘For wonderment [*pehiah*] is the reason for Haskalah in God’s verities. For he who does not wonder will not enquire, and he who does not enquire will not gain knowledge [*yaskil*].’ In *Mishlei asaf* (The Proverbs of Asaf, 1788) ‘Haskalah’ still means philosophy (‘enquiry which leads to truth is called Haskalah’), but now there appear ideological implications such as that of the metaphorical opposition of reason (*sekhel*) as light and sun, to ignorance and darkness. ‘Haskalah’ is now an opposing option with a transformative purpose.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Shimon Baraz, *Ma’arakhei lev* [Workings of the Heart] (Königsberg, 1784).

<sup>24</sup> See Shmuel Feiner, *Haskalah and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Naphtali Herz Wessely *Sefer hamidot, vehu sefer musar haskel* [The Book of Ethics, a Book of Morals] (Berlin c. 1785/7), 37. See also Shavit, ‘The Term Haskalah’, 66.

<sup>26</sup> Isaac Satanow, *Sefer hamidot* [Book of Ethics] (Berlin, 1784), 7a; Shavit, ‘The Term Haskalah’, 72. Cf. the definition in Christoph M. Wieland, ‘Sechs Fragen zur Aufklärung’, *Der Teutsche Merkur*, 66 (Apr. 1789), 97–105.

### *Achieving Wisdom*

In 1788, the peak organizational year of the Haskalah movement, *Hame’asef*, which had recently been moved from Königsberg to Berlin, published a discussion of basic concepts. The term used to denote the true outlook of the Haskalah is *hokhmah*, and is given a very broad definition: ‘All labour and study and every kind of activity and leadership that brings a person closer to the goal of perfection’. Perfection is an individual’s goal, and as the pinnacle of the creation he has a mind capable of enlightenment (*nefesh maskelet*). Solomon Maimon, in his 1791 book *Givat hamoreh*, had already explicitly used the term ‘Haskalah’ in this connection: ‘everything has within it the potentiality of perfection; for the tree, for instance, it is the production of fruit, for man it is Haskalah’.<sup>27</sup> It is his duty to explore the environment and the world of humanity as much as he can, and along with knowledge and rational thought he must also adopt moral philosophy. Neglect of *hokhmah* is condemned as one of the most serious failures of traditional Jewish culture: ‘There are so few maskilim’ (i.e. people who create and foster *hokhmah*), and ‘a proliferation of ignoramuses’. Euchel, the editor of *Hame’asef* and the man who penned these thoughts, henceforth placed his maskilic journal at the service of *hokhmah* against those who ‘are afraid’, ‘belittle’, and ‘fight against’ reason. Maskilim, who struggle to entrench *hokhmah* in society, are vilified and misunderstood, the social price of adopting a stance considered suspicious from the standpoint of faithfulness to religion: ‘And they will attack him and say that he has lost all sense, his breath has gone bitter, he can no longer see what is holy, he has turned towards falsehood and cast faith behind his back.’<sup>28</sup>

The organized circle of maskilim and the editors of *Hame’asef* considered themselves the protectors of ‘the young men of Israel marching towards’ *hokhmah*, but who were fearful and hesitant. They saw the battle as the war of progress and light against backwardness and darkness; the consciousness of God was no longer conditioned only by tradition and Holy Writ, but also by knowledge and rational understanding of the world. Indeed, this was, in Kant’s words, a process demanding courage and even audacity. As *Hame’asef* pleaded in 1788: ‘Therefore, brothers, fear no one, seek justice, acquire knowledge from the wise and morals from those who understand. Now you are suffering, but you will be rewarded. Seek the great and awesome God from the depths of the *hokhmah* of His creation. *Hokhmah* will be your staff to guide you successfully to all its hidden knowledge.’<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Solomon Maimon, *Givat hamoreh* [The Hill of the Guide], ed. S. H. Bergman and Nathan Rotenstreich (Jerusalem, 1966), 1.

<sup>28</sup> [Isaac Euchel], Preface (Heb.), *Hame’asef*, 4 (1788), unpaginated. On the connection between *hokhmah* and the Greek ideal of wisdom see Ya’akov Shavit, *Judaism in the Mirror of Hellenism and the Appearance of the Modern Hellenistic Jew* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1992), ch. 5.

<sup>29</sup> [Euchel], Preface. Moshe Hirschel of Breslau in 1788 defined *Aufklärung* in a similar vein, as liberation from superstition, the development of friendly relations between nations and religions, an attempt to fulfil civic and social duties, and an expression of the desire to attain human rights such as freedom of conscience and religion. Contemporary Jewish society, Hirschel claimed, did not match up

Indeed, in its self-image the Haskalah in Prussia in the 1780s was first of all a rebellion of young maskilim in the name of *hokhmah* and universal knowledge. The terms were rather abstract, but could nonetheless serve as the slogans of a programme of reform, especially in education. The maskilim had no intention of damaging religious faith and practice. Religious morality (*musar torati*) stood alongside moral philosophy, as did knowledge of man (*torat ha'adam*) alongside God's laws (*torat hashem*). The ideal maskil was also required to fear God.<sup>30</sup> Their objective was to restore the balance that they believed had been upset in recent generations, especially in Ashkenazi Jewry, between Jewish culture and universal culture, but their picture of the future still included religious scholars, rabbis, religious observance, and Torah study.<sup>31</sup> 'Acts of Haskalah' (*ma'asei haskalah*) were presented as a divinely orchestrated historical transformation even as the movement advocated the liberation of the autonomous human being: 'For the Lord has enjoined His people to liberate their enchained minds'.<sup>32</sup>

### *Enlightenment as Natural Religion*

As I have outlined, in its early stage the Haskalah was understood in terms of rationalist philosophy but by the late eighteenth century the Kantian definition of a process of self-liberation through reason came to dominate. The reforms proposed to bring this about depended to a certain extent on the development of Hebrew language and literature, the translation of the Bible and prayer-book into German, the publication of sermons in both Hebrew and German and of a Hebrew-German journal, *Hame'asef*, a critique of customs and superstitions, and the establishment of schools with secular curricula to supplement traditional education. By the 1790s, however, even before it had become sufficiently entrenched, the first mutations in the meaning of the Haskalah and of its social and cultural roles began to appear. The accelerated processes of acculturation, the struggle of the wealthy Jewish elite for political equality, and the appearance of groups of Jewish Deists—processes that were especially marked in Berlin—led to the fragmentation and eventual dissolution of the Haskalah movement.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the problem of defining who was a Jew in religious terms became more compelling than the question of enlight-

to the conditions prevailing in the 18th cent., which to his mind was the 'aufgeklärte Jahrhundert'. Moshe Hirschel, *Kampf der jüdischen Hierarchie mit der Vernunft* (Breslau, 1788), 68–9.

<sup>30</sup> See, among others, [Isaac Euchel], 'The Letters of Meshulam Ha'eshtemoi' (Heb.), *Hame'asef* (1789–90), repr. in Yehuda Friedlander, *Studies in Hebrew Satire, i: Hebrew Satire in Germany* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1979), 41–58.

<sup>31</sup> See Feiner, 'Educational Agendas'.  
<sup>32</sup> Isaac Euchel, *Toledot rabenu hehakhm moshe ben menahem* [Biography of our Wise Rabbi Moses Son of Menahem] (Berlin, 1789), 5. Cf. the opening sentence of Kant, 'Beantwortung', 452.

<sup>33</sup> See Steven M. Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community: Enlightenment, Family and Crisis 1770–1830* (New York and Oxford, 1994); id., 'Soziale Aspekte der Krise des berliner Judentums, 1780 bis 1830', in Marianne Awerbuch and Stefi Jersch-Wenzel (eds.), *Bild und Selbstbild der Juden Berlins zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik* (Berlin, 1992), 81–105.

enment, and the concept of *Aufklärung* assumed new overtones of a natural religion.

In 1793 the German philosopher and educator Lazarus Bendavid defined *Aufklärung* as a concept midway between the preservation of old-style Judaism and total religious apathy. In his eyes, the *Aufklärer* was an 'adherent of genuine natural religion'.<sup>34</sup> Seven years later Aaron Wolfsohn, a teacher in a modern school in Breslau, defined true enlighteners as devotees of natural religion, adherents of a new Jewish school of thought founded, according to him, by Mendelssohn and whose opponents belonged to the obscurantist camp.<sup>35</sup> In 1823 Leopold Zunz defined *Aufklärung* along similar lines as purified Jewish religion combined with European culture,<sup>36</sup> and about the same time Sabbatja Wolf claimed that only those who had formulated clear concepts about the true essence of the Jewish religion and who advocated religious reforms could be called truly enlightened. The members of this group believed in God and the immortality of the soul; they were moral and rationalist. Their failure to achieve reform led some of them to abandon religious life and the synagogue, but they rejected the option of conversion because it smacked of intellectual dishonesty.<sup>37</sup>

### *'To Guide the People in the Way of Light'*

From the early nineteenth century the term 'Haskalah' became even more muddled. It had to be precisely defined, suggested an essay written in Prague in 1800, 'because encrustations had spread upon the word *Aufklärung* and every youth nowadays thinks he understands it without thoroughly knowing what it really means'. The broad definition, the essay stated, should reject a superficial understanding of the term and stress that it was primarily an intellectual category, a road sign of compass serving as a pathfinder in the search for the true, the good, and the moral: 'For this word teaches us to understand the difference between truth and falsehood, good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, and happy is he who chooses it'.<sup>38</sup>

The author of the essay was apparently Baruch Jeteles, a key figure in the Prague Haskalah circle. Jeteles may also have written the essay 'On Enlightenment', which appeared in 1802 in a short-lived Prague maskilic journal published by

<sup>34</sup> Bendavid, *Etwas zur Charakteristik der Juden* (Leipzig, 1793), 51.

<sup>35</sup> Aaron Wolfsohn, *Jeschurun, oder unparteyische Beleuchtung der dem Judenthume neuerdings gemachten Vorwürfe* (Breslau, 1804), 113.

<sup>36</sup> See Joseph Gutmann, 'Geschichte der Knabenschule der jüdischen Gemeinde in Berlin, 1826–1926', in *Festschrift zur Feier des hundertjährigen Bestehens der Knabenschule der jüdischen Gemeinde in Berlin* (Berlin, 1926), 16–17.

<sup>37</sup> Michael A. Meyer, 'The Orthodox and the Enlightened: An Unpublished Contemporary Analysis of Berlin Jewry's Spiritual Condition in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 25 (1980), 101–30.

<sup>38</sup> [Baruch Jeteles], *Conversations Between the Year 1800 and the Year 1801, by a Lover of Truth* (Heb.) (Prague, 1800), 3. See also Shmuel Werses, *Haskalah and Shabbateanism: The Story of a Controversy* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1988), 79.

the Gesellschaft der Jungen Hebrär.<sup>39</sup> Here, too, the author complained about the abuse of the term and the confusion surrounding it. In his vicinity, he protested, every enlightened person was considered a destroyer of faith and morality, an anarchist living within, but corroding the life of society. *Aufklärung*, he pleaded, was 'to regard each matter from its true point of view'.<sup>40</sup> This was the first time an attempt had been made to delve into the semantics of the term, to clarify obscure concepts, and to set out the intellectual goals of the Haskalah: acquiring the ability to make moral distinctions, being liberated from error and prejudice, examining the capabilities and destinies of human beings, and applying these general rules in all areas of life, including physical health, education, and the behaviour appropriate to citizens of the state and members of human society.<sup>41</sup> Thirty years later, Judah Jeiteles, editor of the Austrian *Bikurei ha'itim*, recorded the gist of the definition explicitly using the term 'Haskalah'. Its goal, he declared, was to 'lead the people to where light dwells, to open the eyes of the blind, and enlighten those who lack understanding, to teach the knowledge of man, walk humbly with God, and treat others morally and with respect'. Examples of such behaviour, he continued, could be found among other nations to 'serve as our guides in Haskalah and Enlightenment', and to achieve its goal through literary means by publishing essays that 'bring light to our minds and purge them of nonsensical notions with neither fear of failure nor pursuit of misleading ideas, but for the love of truth and in order to do the right and honest [thing]'.<sup>42</sup>

Shalom Hacohen, who made a lone attempt to renew *Hame'usef* in the first decade of the nineteenth century when the Haskalah in Germany was already declining both as an ideology and as the focus of a social circle, warned against misrepresenting the term *Aufklärung* by identifying it with Deistic interpretations, rapprochement with Christians, or abrogation of Jewish law. According to Hacohen, the correct meaning of *Aufklärung* in the Jewish context was the cultivation of Hebrew language and literature, especially Hebrew poetry. It should be stressed that this 1807 definition was defensive: the preservation of the patriarchal religion; the encouragement of a romantic relationship with Hebrew as the original language of the people; the revival of Hebrew poetry as a treasure-house of the greatest talents of the Jewish people: all were attempts to protect the Jewish community and its traditions at a time when they seemed to be in great danger.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> See Ruth Kestenbergl-Gladstein, *Neuere Geschichte der Juden in böhmischen Ländern* (Tübingen, 1969); and also her 'A Voice from the Prague Enlightenment', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 9 (1964), 295-304.

<sup>40</sup> *Yiddish Deutsche Monatsschrift* (Prague and Brünn, 1802), 49.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 54-6.

<sup>42</sup> Judah Jeiteles, 'Announcement' (Heb.), *Bikurei ha'itim*, 12 (1831), 184; Shavit, 'The Term Haskalah', 77-9.

<sup>43</sup> Shalom Hacohen, *Mata'ei al admat tsafon* [Orchards of Yore on Northern Soil] (Rödelheim, 1807), pp. v-vi. Cf. Judah Leib Ben Ze'ev's critique, *Yesodei hadat* [Foundations of Religion] (Vienna, 1806), preface: 'they wanted to pull down the good old house because it was full of cracks and falling apart, but they didn't replace it with a new house... they razed the old house and didn't build another one in its stead'.

### *Living the Haskalah*

None of the attempts at the beginning of the nineteenth century to retrieve the original definitions of Haskalah made much of an impression in Germany. A good example of this can be seen in a comparison of Hacohen's definition with that of the teacher and later Reform preacher Gotthold Salomon in his article 'On Enlightenment and Enlighteners', published in the German Jewish journal *Sulamith* in 1808.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, Salomon's definition was similar to that of Judah Jeiteles: precise terminology and a distinction between the light of reason and the darkness of superstition. On the other hand, he also distinguished between two aspects of *Aufklärung*: 'scientific or learned' and 'religious'. The former consisted of the totality of scientific research in all fields; the latter—relevant and important for Jews—was the correct study of pure religious truths as a way towards perfection. The 'religious' *Aufklärung* was the future reformed religion of the Jews that would prevail over religion as a system of laws, precepts, and abstract reflection.

In Germany in the first decades of the nineteenth century young Jewish intellectuals were abandoning Haskalah in favour of religious reform, modern Jewish scholarship, and political, social, and cultural integration. In the process, *Aufklärung* assumed a content that had little to do with Haskalah. In eastern Europe at exactly the same time, however, the Haskalah movement was taking its first steps. More precisely, the maskilim in Galicia were self-consciously appropriating the outlook, ideas, and methods of their German predecessors. These maskilim saw themselves as the direct descendants of Haskalah activists of the past thirty to forty years. Meir Letteris, editor of the short-lived journal *Hatssefirah* published in Galicia in 1824, declared it to be the heir of *Hame'usef*. His image of the maskil left no room for doubt: he loved *hokhmah*, had experienced a kind of cultural conversion, a deep transformation of consciousness and outlook, and struggled against 'the anger of hard-hearted men', especially the hasidim.<sup>45</sup> The maskilim in Galicia experienced a sense of mission similar to that of their predecessors in Germany ('the great desire to be of benefit to our brethren and environment'), and their manifesto—'To the Maskilim of My People'—was also reminiscent of Germany.<sup>46</sup> According to the elderly Menahem Mendel Lefin in his address to Nahman Krochmal, the recognized leader of the Haskalah in Galicia in the first half of the nineteenth century, the maskil's primary goal was to spread rays of light among the people, especially in times of crisis when so many deviated from the path of reason.<sup>47</sup>

The maskilim defined themselves as a minority in a Jewish society that was divided into at least three main groups: the simple and ignorant who blindly followed tradition out of force of habit; fanatical militant hasidim; and *gebildeten Aufklärer*, the maskilim. Joseph Perl of Tarnopol in eastern Galicia, who fought against hasidism,

<sup>44</sup> 'Über Aufklärung und Aufklärer', *Sulamith*, 2/1 (1808), 217-32.

<sup>45</sup> Letteris, 'A Word to the Reader' (Heb.), *Hatssefirah* (Zolkiew, 1824), unpaginated [pp. 1-6].

<sup>46</sup> Jacob Samuel Bick, 'To the Maskilim of My People', *ibid.* 71-7.

<sup>47</sup> *Kerem hemed*, 1 (1833), 74-5.

defined the maskilim as 'men whose sole desire was that the Jews should not be a mockery in the eyes of other nations, [who wished] to learn various languages and disciplines, but without—perish the thought—abandoning the ways of our ancestors and in accordance with the faith and fear of God'.<sup>48</sup> Despite this moderate self-image as faithful adherents of tradition rather than revolutionaries—as people assuming leadership out of a sense of responsibility and whose modest educational demands included the study of foreign languages, science, and the pursuit of productive occupations—they locked horns with the hasidim in an all-out battle of cultures. In their attempt to mobilize allies they appealed to 'Fair youths with unbent necks . . . whose delicate souls have not been warped by the malicious evil-hearted destroyers among us',<sup>49</sup> and they saw themselves as martyrs for their cause. Their acceptance of suffering and pain in this cultural war was seen as an integral part of the maskilic experience. We see this, for example, in a letter from the scholar Shneur Sachs (1815–92) to the physician and satirist Isaac Erter:

I certainly knew that you, too, would also have to run the gauntlet through the devil's minions stationed along the path to *hokhmah*. For there isn't a single God-seeking maskil beckoned by truth who ascends the spiral staircase of the wondrously built temple of *hokhmah* who doesn't have to struggle with a thousand on one side and ten thousand on the other grabbing his nape and throwing him down the stairs—that's the reward awaiting seekers of knowledge, the prize awaiting every maskil who wants truth!<sup>50</sup>

The experience of cultural 'conversion' appears repeatedly as an integral part of the making of a maskil. It was seen as a kind of rebirth and unshackling of the spirit, or even as divine inspiration and the descent of the spirit of prophecy upon the maskil. It was said of Erter, who became a maskil under the influence of Joseph Tarler, that he was given 'a life of spirit and contemplation and liberation of soul that enabled him to follow the road of reason'.<sup>51</sup> This personal experience was also expressed collectively by the group of young Galician men which formed spontaneously and informally in the area of Lvov and Zolkiew under the revered Nahman Krochmal in the 1820s and 1830s. As Jacob Bodek testified, they saw themselves as a band of prophets engulfed by the holy spirit: 'one spirit, the spirit of *hokhmah* and understanding and truth-seeking Haskalah, animated them and bound their hearts!'<sup>52</sup> Like the groups of maskilim in eighteenth-century Königsberg and Berlin, they experienced 'the association of comrades, shepherds of reason whose zeal inspired

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Perl, *Bohen tsadik* [Who Tries the Righteous] (Prague, 1838), 47; N. M. Gelber, *Zu Vorgesichte des Zionismus* (Vienna, 1927), 259–61.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Perl, 'Oil for the Lamp' (Heb.), *Kerem hemed*, 2 (1836), 38–9.

<sup>50</sup> In *Kanfei yonah*, supplement to *Hayonah* [The Dove], 1st booklet (Berlin, 1848), 33.

<sup>51</sup> Meir Letteris, 'Biography of the Author' (Heb.), introduction to Isaac Erter, *Hatsofeh leveit yisra'el* [The Watchman of the House of Israel] (Warsaw, 1883), p. xv.

<sup>52</sup> Bodek, 'Additional Details' (Heb.), additional section for the year 1824 in Abraham Triesbesch, *Korot ha'itim* [History] (Lemberg, 1851), unpaginated.

them', and cultivated an avant-garde consciousness and missionary desire to generate a maskilic revolution: 'Our blood will purify our hearts . . . we will go from darkness to light, put an end to conventions and carry the torch of reason through a dark land; [we will be] a lamp unto the feet of those who walk in darkness to illuminate their paths.'<sup>53</sup>

### *The Metaphysical Essence of Haskalah*

At this point there should no longer be any doubt about the meaning of the Hebrew term 'Haskalah'. A precise translation and definition can be found in *Te'udah beyisra'el* by Isaac Baer Levinsohn, for instance, who studied with the Galician maskilim and later returned to his native Kremenetz in Russia. Levinsohn wrote in 1823 (the book itself was published in 1828) about 'the sun of *hokhmah* and Haskalah [*die Aufklärung*]', and in his later book, *Efes damim* (1837), explained: 'One cannot imagine how much Haskalah [*die Aufklärung*] has spread among the Jews, and in all countries Jews, as in the past, are learning the languages of the country because they know it will help them earn a decent living, as doctors, professors, or the like.'<sup>54</sup>

Thus the term 'Haskalah' was the precise translation of the German version of the European term. Because Germany was the dominant cultural region throughout most of the Enlightenment movement, the German version encompassed both the general Enlightenment and the particular Jewish phenomenon. But what exactly was understood to be the content of the Haskalah in Russia, the greatest centre of the Jewish Enlightenment in the second half of the nineteenth century? As the maskilim's pathos-filled rhetoric attests, Haskalah was conceived as a process of secular revelation and redemption through the acquisition of knowledge. In the eyes of Levinsohn, for instance, it was the light of the sun dispersing the darkness of stupidity that had covered medieval Europe, a light that had even penetrated the masses and was generating a radical mental transformation: 'Even the masses among the gentiles who lived in darkness have seen a great light, and have become caught up in the fire of Haskalah that has brought *hokhmah* to their hearts and morality and knowledge and the Torah of man into their dwellings.' The secular development of religious toleration, political rights, human morality, and progressive education, which were taking Jews to the threshold of a spiritual resurrection, inspired Levinsohn to quote the prophecies of the end of days. 'Open your eyes, my people', he pleaded, 'and understand that the bountiful waters of Eden are flowing about you by the grace of our king.'<sup>55</sup> In this secular, messianic vision, the maskilim performed the function of seers of modernity mobilized 'for the swelling of Haskalah throughout Russia'.

<sup>53</sup> Samson Halevi Bloch, *Shevelei olam* [Ways of the World], vol. i (Zolkiew, 1822), unpaginated.

<sup>54</sup> *Te'udah beyisra'el* [Testimony in Israel] (Vilna and Horodno, 1828), 182; id., *Efes damim* [No Blood; against blood libel] (1837; Warsaw, 1879), 47.

<sup>55</sup> Levinsohn, *Te'udah beyisra'el*, 182.

This self-consciousness appears to have been more forcefully expressed during the period of the government-sponsored Haskalah project (*haskalah mita'am*) in the 1840s, than at any other time. Haskalah rhetoric in public and private letters soared to dizzying new heights and was laden with images borrowed from the physics of transformation and modernization: ice-thawing, earthquakes, electrical charges, erupting volcanos, and so on. Nonetheless, it was the secularized theological concepts that were especially prominent. Maskilim spoke of the 'footsteps of Haskalah' drawing nigh; of the 'Haskalah sun' appearing as a divine revelation ('the revelation of Haskalah in our city of Vilna', for example); of maskilim as labourers in the 'temple of *hokhmah*' and at the 'altar of Haskalah'. Samuel Joseph Fuenn, in an emotional oath of faith, declared: 'The Haskalah is more dear to me than all the vanities and pleasures of the world, and the truth for me is *hokhmah*, the pillar of light illuminating the darkness of my life.'<sup>56</sup> The maskilim were the apostles of this new message, the 'soldiers of Haskalah' honing their weapons for the imminent battle to persuade the Jewish public to accept the new education. They had sworn allegiance to Haskalah until the goal of 'the spiritual emancipation of the Jewish people' had been accomplished.<sup>57</sup>

An especially metaphysical and mystical vision of a redeeming Haskalah was penned by Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg of Vilna, a leading maskil in the 1830s and 1840s:

Haskalah is the spring whence the old hero renews the strength of his youth, imbibes rejuvenation in his old age, [retrieves] *hokhmah* and the light that has dimmed; [it is] a place of refuge for persecuted truth, consolation for the bereaved; it makes order out of the laws of life that have gone astray and annuls the laws of falsehood that stem from corruption of desire; it retrieves the truth of justice in matters of the heart; defends what society had thoughtlessly banned; breaks down barriers between people; strips away fancy clothes from a body without a soul; weighs heart against heart in the scales of justice, spirit against spirit and strength against strength; gives preference to the person deserving honour; judges the tree by its fruit—not by the ground upon which it grows and the person who planted it; wields the tiller in its hand to steer the ship of life safely into port through stormy seas.<sup>58</sup>

Haskalah was now much more than a programme of reform or a body of useful knowledge and learning; it was a redemptive formula. Guenzburg endowed it with the quality of holy, sin-purifying water, a fountain of youth, where those who bathed were reborn without blemish. Bathing in the waters of Haskalah purged impurities and brought about a total transformation. Haskalah served as a kind of supreme court of morality and truth. Guenzburg essentially maintained the char-

<sup>56</sup> *From Militant Haskalah to Conservative Maskil: A Selection of S. J. Fuenn's Writings* (Heb.), ed. Shmuel Feiner (Jerusalem, 1993), 186.

<sup>57</sup> Anonymous article written in Lublin, published in *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, 2 (Dec. 1841), 18–21.

<sup>58</sup> Guenzburg, 'The Wisdom of Toilers' (Heb.), in id., *Devir*, 2 vols. (1844 and 1862; Warsaw, 1883), i. 22–41.

acterization of Haskalah as a marvellous, organic entity that could not be broken down into component parts. The maskil who did not grasp the Haskalah's message for the present and future, and insisted on seeking its roots or legitimization in tradition, drained it of content and consigned it to oblivion. This was a thinly veiled criticism by a future-oriented maskil of the Russian maskilim, for whom Haskalah was the study of history which sought to justify enlightenment as a restoration of Judaism by uncovering what already existed in Jewish tradition. The belief in Haskalah burned in the hearts of the maskil prophets, and they yearned to put it into practice. However, the maskil who

seeks to crack Haskalah open to see its innards—nothing can stop him. He'll grab a knife, cut Haskalah open and analyse it bit by bit, pick at its tendons and arteries, gaze at them, count them, and keep going until he gets to the heart, uncovers every little bit and has overlooked nothing. In reality what he has seen is nothing but a body without a soul, dead, lifeless bones. Perhaps he located the well, but there was no water inside...<sup>59</sup>

### *The Cultural 'Conversion'*

By the second half of the nineteenth century the term 'Haskalah' was common coin. It was the Hebrew translation of *Aufklärung*,<sup>60</sup> and implied a world-view disseminated through literature and newspapers by maskilim,<sup>61</sup> the 'enlightened or people for whom reason lit the way, *die Aufgeklärten*'.<sup>62</sup> The period was perceived as utterly new and unprecedented—the 'modern age'—'unsere neue ganz oifgeklärte zeit' ('our new and completely enlightened age'),<sup>63</sup> fully dominated by the laws of nature, which had displaced superstition, mysticism, and all kinds of devils, demons, and ghosts.

As in Galicia, the personal cultural conversion that each and every maskil underwent from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, was a fundamental experience perceived as parallel to the larger historical transformation from the old to the new. In retrospect, the decision to join the maskil camp was an act of awakening or of the revelation of the Haskalah spirit as the spirit of prophecy. As Abraham Baer Gottlober wrote in his autobiography, 'for my eyes were opened and I saw new vistas that I had never before imagined'.<sup>64</sup> The Hebrew lexicographer Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, who became a maskil in Lithuania in the 1870s, recalled the clandestine,

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

<sup>60</sup> See e.g. Samuel Resser, 'The Work of the Enlightenment and Education in Modern Times', in *A Concise History of the World* (Yiddish) (Vilna, 1864), 219–21.

<sup>61</sup> An example of a headline from *Hamelits*, edited by Alexander Zederbaum, that began publication in Odessa in 1860: 'Hamelits, a publication that will spread the spirit of knowledge and Haskalah among the nations'. See also Shavit, 'The Term Haskalah', 79–80.

<sup>62</sup> Abraham Baer Gottlober, *Bikoret toledot hakara'im* [A Critique of Karaite History] (Vilna, 1864), 126 n.

<sup>63</sup> Isaac Meir Dick, *Alte idishen zogen* [Old Jewish Sayings] (Vilna, 1876), 2.

<sup>64</sup> 'Zikhronot miyemei ne'urai' [Memoirs of My Youth] ([Warsaw], 1886), in id., *Zikhronot umasaot*, ed. R. Goldberg, vol. i (Jerusalem, 1976), 81–2.



forbidden, illegitimate process that had the nature of a conversion, that worked its way through young men for whom traditional talmudic Jewish scholarship had been their entire world. For them Haskalah meant first of all an expansion of the library that provided inspiration and taught about life. One sought refuge, was drawn towards Haskalah, bit into the fruit of the tree of knowledge, encountered a new taste, opened once blind eyes, and went out into a new world:

That was the onset of my Haskalah. But I do not know if I would actually have been caught up by the spirit of Haskalah . . . [if not for] the head of the yeshiva, Yossi Bloiker, who opened my eyes and let the light of the Haskalah in; I was drawn towards this pleasant heresy . . . Torah, Gemara, Rashi, and the Tosafists, the *posekim*, *Guide of the Perplexed*, [Albo's] *Principles of the Faith*, *Fundamentals of Hokhmah hashi'ur*, [Slonimsky's] *Kokhva deshaviv*, *Treasury of Wisdom* by Tsvi Rabinowitsch, were the books I secretly studied at night, and I believed with a perfect faith that they really contained all the *hokhmah* the human mind was capable of, and that through them I would reach the highest level of human science and the attainment of the perfect happiness discussed in the *Guide of the Perplexed* . . .<sup>65</sup>

### *The Movement Divides*

Differences of opinion and the proliferation of sub-groups in Russia, at its height in the 1860s and 1870s, led to a constant battle over the meaning of 'Haskalah':

The term 'Haskalah' has not yet been properly defined and understood because so many people, depending on their education and knowledge, use it for different purposes. Some say that knowledge of Scripture and the Holy Tongue is Haskalah; [others that] he who studies traditional texts and can write elaborate letters is considered a maskil; others exalt and esteem as Haskalah the knowledge of Russian or German or one of sciences everyone needs such as mathematics, geography, or history. There are even those who say that, more than anything, [Haskalah is] the desire to relax, to a greater or lesser extent, time-hallowed customs and ways of life because they are not compatible with the needs of the present generation . . . and because of the confusion over Haskalah there are those who praise and others who condemn it, some who revere and sanctify and others who curse it, and many who wonder where it can be found, who laid its cornerstone, set its boundaries, defined its rules and regulations, and what it is that requires us to abide by it and follow its path.<sup>66</sup>

'The meaning of Haskalah has not been sufficiently established . . . and how is it possible to spread Haskalah without yet knowing its nature in the world?'<sup>67</sup> Moses Leib Lilienblum, who asked this question, had a liberal, pluralist outlook, and suggested that everyone should approach Haskalah as they saw fit. However, under the influence of Russian radicalism he had taken a stronger line, demanding change from the elitism of the pantheon of Haskalah authors to a more populist approach:

<sup>65</sup> Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, *Dream and Awakening: A Selection of Letters on Language Issues* (Heb.), ed. R. Sivan (Jerusalem, 1986), 60-2.

<sup>66</sup> Samuel Joseph Fuenn, 'Haskalah and Halakah' (Heb.), *Hakarmel*, 7/14 (1868), 105-6.

<sup>67</sup> Lilienblum's letter from Odessa to Gordon, 21 July 1872, in *Letters of M. L. Lilienblum to J. L. Gordon* (Heb.), ed. S. Breiman (Jerusalem, 1968), 133.

'We need mass Haskalah, a Haskalah where all Jews learn to recognize the value of life in this world, citizenship and civilization and work towards breaking the chains binding us to the Dark Ages, the spirit of the Talmud, and the Asiatic wilderness.'<sup>68</sup> Lilienblum was so bitter that he referred to the old kind of Haskalah as the 'empty chaos our writers call Haskalah'.<sup>69</sup> Another time, in a special article written in 1878, he lashed out again: 'And what is Haskalah as understood by young men and by most writers? A puff of wind, a vacuous, vain concoction! A person who can write Hebrew is only a person who can write . . . a person who has read many different books and still has no clear knowledge is only someone who has collected a handful of wind.'<sup>70</sup> As an alternative to this 'useless' Haskalah Lilienblum advised exchanging *belles-lettres* and historical research for the sciences, 'absolute *hokhmah*', that would at least be of benefit in the real world.

Other radical maskilim similarly demanded that the Haskalah should focus on the masses and on real-life situations. 'Natural Haskalah should always take precedence over spiritual Haskalah', declared Isaac Kovner, who also insisted on well-formulated and precise definitions. 'Individual Haskalah' meant 'each person reckoning with his soul, cognizant of his duties in relation to society; 'general Haskalah' aimed to transform the people and the quality of leadership: 'ameliorating the state of the people, its unity, the wholehearted, willing guidance of its leaders, the willingness of the people to follow honest leaders'.<sup>71</sup>

The moderate maskilim against whom this criticism was directed became increasingly defensive, and emphasized the conservative and theoretical components of Haskalah. Now, like Perl in the struggle between the hasidim and maskilim, they took pains to add oaths of loyalty to faith and Torah every time they mentioned their own definition of Haskalah and their reformist goals. According to Eliezer Zweifel, for instance, Mendelssohn 'illuminated the Haskalah with the lamp of religion',<sup>72</sup> and Yehiel Michael Pines proclaimed that Haskalah was not only the sister of religion, but also its daughter: 'the Haskalah and the need to understand worldly issues, which until now has been inimical to religion, will actually enhance religious feelings and guard the mitzvot'.<sup>73</sup> Fuenn on the other hand reconstructed the development of Haskalah as pattern embedded in Jewish history that had been blurred by European influence. On one occasion he described it as 'religious Haskalah', whose pillars were the Hebrew language, love of the Jewish people, belief in

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 132.

<sup>69</sup> *Hatot ne'urim* [Sins of My Youth] (1876), in *Autobiographical Writings* (Heb.), ed. S. Breiman (Jerusalem, 1970), 129.

<sup>70</sup> 'What is Haskalah?' (Heb.), 1st pub. in *Hatsafrah* (1878); repr. in *The Complete Works of Moses Leib Lilienblum* (Heb.), vol. ii (Kraków, 1912), 113-16.

<sup>71</sup> See Shmuel Feiner, 'Jewish Society, Literature, and Haskalah in Russia as Represented in the Radical Criticism of I. E. Kovner' (Heb.; Eng. abstract), *Zion*, 55 (1990), 310-11.

<sup>72</sup> *Shalom al yisra'el* [Peace Upon Israel], vol. i (Zhitomir, 1868), 20-2. The quotation is from S. J. Fuenn, *Kiryah ne'emanah* [Faithful City] (Vilna, 1860), 141-3.

<sup>73</sup> *Yaldei ruhi* [My Spiritual Children], vol. i (Jerusalem, 1934), 63.

God, and faithfulness to Torah; elsewhere, he described it as a general compass and method of rational thought—'It illuminates the mind in everything: study of Torah, *hokhmah*, morality, way of life and vocation'—and fostered a proper understanding of all of life's needs.<sup>74</sup>

As opposed to the 'mass' and 'natural' versions of the Haskalah advocated by the radicals and the 'religious Haskalah' of the moderates, a 'national Haskalah' evolved in the 1860s. Its main spokesman was Peretz Smolenskin, whose essays appeared in the journal *Hashahar*. Like the radical Haskalah, it was motivated by revision: after the destruction of the Mendelssohn myth, it raised concerns about the movement's future, and cast doubt on its optimistic and reformist outlook.<sup>75</sup> In the 1870s more and more of its central beliefs, such as the hopes pinned on benevolent absolutist regimes and faith in history's progress towards a brighter future, were being destroyed by radical and nationalist maskilim.<sup>76</sup> In an attempt to rewrite Jewish history for the modern age, Smolenskin called upon maskilim to change their order of priorities and give preference to the struggle against all forms of anti-nationalist assimilation. The image of Haskalah until now, he asserted, had not provided a suitable blueprint for the future of the Jewish community. On the contrary, it had seriously jeopardized the Jews' collective existence and national consciousness. 'Won't everyone finally understand that it was all a pack of lies and Haskalah couldn't possibly have improved our lot?'<sup>77</sup> Smolenskin dislodged the concept of Haskalah from its ideological moorings, and, very much like Fuenn, left it neutral and in the individual realm:

What is Haskalah? For people to learn what is to their benefit. Everyone who seeks the right way to live is a maskil because he thinks about what is beneficial and is wary of what is harmful. Haskalah is meant to stimulate each person's natural intelligence so that they don't blunder about uselessly, but do their work just like the organ of the body . . . Everyone needs Haskalah to the extent their intelligence and bodily strength allows . . . That is the theory of Haskalah, to enlighten [*lehaskil*] and fill a person with intelligence so that he does what he can to bring benefit to his spirit or body and not waste his strength and time in vain pursuits.<sup>78</sup>

### 'HASKALAH-HATING MASKILIM': THE END OF THE HASKALAH

It was statements like Smolenskin's that probably led to the dissolution of the Haskalah as separate movement with a clearly defined world-view. The question

<sup>74</sup> Fuenn, *From Militant Haskalah to Conservative Maskil: Letters*, 145–6.

<sup>75</sup> See Shmuel Feiner, 'Smolenskin's Haskalah Heresy and the Roots of Jewish National Historiography' (Heb.), *Hatsiyonut*, 16 (1992), 19–31.

<sup>76</sup> See e.g. Judah Leib Levin's poem 'The Issue at Hand', in id., *Memoirs and Pensées* (Heb.), ed. Y. Slutzki (Jerusalem, 1968), 140–3.

<sup>77</sup> Peretz Smolenskin, *Derekh la'avor ge'ulim* [To Pass Through Redemptions] (1881); pt. 2, *Ma'amarim* [Articles] (Jerusalem, 1925), 174.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 172.

whether the Haskalah had indeed reached a dead end was raised subsequently and even more forcefully after the pogroms in Russia in the 1880s and the establishment of Hibbat Zion, which greatly affected the relative strength of the different camps. Lilienblum demanded that the question of Haskalah—in reality the struggle for religious reform—should be deferred because of the need for the maskilim and Orthodox to co-operate to further the idea of Hibbat Zion. Judah Leib Gordon sought a formula that would allow continued adherence to 'Europe' and Haskalah, even when the trend towards 'Asia' and nationalism was gaining the upper hand. For Gordon the historical task of the Haskalah was to resolve the cultural conflict within Jewish society; this was an absolute precondition for the success of the nationalist movement. Mendele Mokher Seforim, a radical maskil of the 1860s, reflected on events in the camp of the maskilim with astonishment:

How the generations and people's spirit have changed! . . . It used to be that men your age, with shortened sidelocks and shortened clothes, boasted about Haskalah and considered it to be the Jews' dew of revival, source of life, and redemption of their souls. They defended it against all comers, and many a spirited argument was then heard in these parts; they underwent physical deprivation for its sake and were thrown out of their homes; sons ran away from their fathers' houses, students from yeshivas, and bridegrooms from their father-in-laws' homes and took to the roads to find a place where they could become enlightened—even in abject poverty. And there were those who, though they did not run away, hid in cellars and attics and other hideaways . . . and now . . . now . . . everything has gone topsy-turvy and I see—Haskalah-hating maskilim!<sup>79</sup>

Even as this rearguard battle over Haskalah was in progress, its great stalwarts such as Gordon seemed to realize that the Haskalah was drawing its last breath. Especially in the 1890s, the first histories of the Haskalah were written with the sense that it was a phenomenon of the past.<sup>80</sup>

The maskilim gave the struggle among themselves a public airing in the journals of the 1880s and 1890s. What had brought about the dissolution of the maskil camp, asked Zalman Epstein on the pages of *Hamelits*: had the 'forty-year war' come to an end? Had they abandoned the battle on the threshold of victory? Was the Erets Yisrael solution dependent on being liberated from 'European civilization'?<sup>81</sup> Hebrew literature spoke of a new era, a 'new move', and novels such as

<sup>79</sup> 'The Academy in Heaven and the Academy on Earth', in Mendele Mokher Seforim, *Complete Works* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1952), 435. Cf. Ehud Luz, *Parallels Meet: Religion and Nationality in the Early Zionist Movement in East Europe (1882–1904)* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1985), 64–9. Shavit, *Judaism in the Mirror of Hellenism*, 147–9. A particularly incisive critique of the maskilic concept of progress and security in Europe can be found in a poem by Abraham Jacob Paperna, 'Animal and Bird Talk' (1893), in *Collected Writings* (Heb.), ed. Y. Zmora (Tel Aviv, 1952), 344–6.

<sup>80</sup> See, among others, Ze'ev Yavetz, 'The Tower of the Century' (Heb.), *Keneset yisra'el*, 1 (1886), 89–152; Judah Leib Kantor, 'The *Me'asef* Generation', in *The 'Me'asef' Book: Addendum* (Heb.) (Warsaw, 1886) 1–34; A. H. Weiss, 'The Beginning of the Haskalah in Russia' (Heb.), *Mimizrah umima'arav*, 1 (1894), 9–16.

<sup>81</sup> Zalman Epstein, 'The Division of our Maskilim' (Heb.), *Hamelits*, 24 (1882), 475–80.

*Al haperek* (On the Agenda, 1887), by A. Z. Rabinovich made a final reckoning with Haskalah and the maskil who had come to a bitter end.<sup>82</sup> The Orthodox were well aware of this turn of events and made maximum use of the opportunity to lash out at their opponents. So, they mocked, even some maskilim have come to the conclusion we proclaimed long ago—that the message of the Haskalah was nothing but a lie!<sup>83</sup> Gordon, then the main defender of the Haskalah, took on all comers, whether Orthodox or breast-beating erstwhile maskilim. Nevertheless, even in that rearguard battle the concept of Haskalah underwent a transformation that blunted its ideological barbs:

Haskalah, known among the nations as culture, is the spiritual property of all peoples, the light of life that illuminates all people, the catalytic element in the world. There is no Berlin or Volozhin Haskalah, no Greek Haskalah, and no Israelite Haskalah—there is only one Haskalah for anyone with a mind. Haskalah is not something that stands on its own, but is a description of other things. Each one has an address and distinctive features.<sup>84</sup>

Of the nationalist maskilim who followed Smolenskin, Ahad Ha'am was the most prominent, and he further abandoned the Haskalah. He defined it in retrospect as a 'movement of the negative-minded' which endangered the continued existence of the Jewish people and undermined its unity.<sup>85</sup> In an article entitled 'The Man in the Tent' he said its outlook was summed up in Gordon's slogan, 'Be a man in the street and a Jew at home.' Indeed, Ahad Ha'am argued, this 'man' was no more than a camouflage for the imitation of other nationalities, while the 'Jew' was totally neglected. The pogroms, however, had led to a rude awakening: 'He came to his senses and understood that he had been fed a pack of lies decked out in alien garb that hardly suited his spirit.' Haskalah lost all influence in one fell swoop. The new national option repudiated Haskalah, denouncing it as an ideology promoting assimilation and imitation of alien cultures, and called for the development of an authentic, home-bred national culture. Now, Ahad Ha'am wrote, be a Jew in the street, and only then 'a man in your home'.<sup>86</sup>

Fearful of a return to the situation prior to the Haskalah, Moses Reines (the son of Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines) adopted a more balanced stance: 'Have the dark dreary clouds truly shut out the light of day, darkened the sun of Haskalah . . . and set the clock back to the dismal days of yore? . . . Are we witnessing the spirit of

<sup>82</sup> See Ben-Ami Feingold, 'A. Z. Rabinovich's *Al haperek* and the Haskalah's Soul-Searching' (Heb.), *Mozna'im*, 49 (1979), 119–26.

<sup>83</sup> Jacob Lipschitz, 'A Generation and its Writers' (Heb.), *Hakerem* (1888), 165–91.

<sup>84</sup> Judah Leib Gordon, 'Mehi Kavel' (Heb.), *Hamelits*, 10–15 (1888). See also Gedalia Alkoshi, 'Judah Leib Gordon the Critic' (Heb.), *Metsadah*, 7 (1954), 481–4; Michael Stanislawski, 'Haskalah and Zionism: A Re-examination', *Vision Confronts Reality: The Herzl Yearbook*, 9 (1989), 56–67.

<sup>85</sup> Ahad Ha'am, 'On the History of Positive and Negative' (1891), in *Collected Writings* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1947), 77–8.

<sup>86</sup> 'The Man in the Tent' (Heb., 1891), in *Collected Writings*, 50–1; 'A Small Briefcase' (Heb.), *Hashiloah*, 2 (1897), 279–80. Cf. Micha Joseph Berdyczewski, 'On Hasidism' (Heb.), *Hamagid le-yisra'el*, 33 (1897), 264.

reaction?' Reines thought that it was too early to bury and eulogize the Haskalah, because in the final analysis, at least in Russia, it had been a resounding success. With caution, and with respect for the Jewish heritage, Haskalah, Reines wrote, had prevailed over 'the sons of darkness'. The crisis after the 1880 pogroms had created a false impression of failure; critics had claimed that the Haskalah had failed to reach its goal of improving the Jews' lot, and that nationalism had taken its place. However, from the standpoint of 'pure Haskalah'—the type of Haskalah that even maskilim devoid of belief had not managed to distort—there was actually no cause for disappointment. Haskalah had instead:

turned us into civilized people and members of general human society . . . We are the wiser, more knowledgeable, and understanding for it . . . It got rid of the chaotic lack of order in our inner lives; weakened the phoney hasidism; did much to improve the material lot of our people; put an end to immature marriages; and in general enhanced our respect in the eyes of the nations. All this, however, is nothing when compared to its greatest benefit: the revival of the Hebrew language!<sup>87</sup>

As late as 1900 an article was published defending the 'Haskalah's honour', condemning the ingratitude of critics who had forgotten its contribution to literature and art, and, finally, begging 'forgiveness for the maskilim because their Haskalah was inadequate for the twentieth century'.<sup>88</sup> But this, too, was an apologetic response to harsh criticism, more specifically that of Mordecai Ehrenpreis (1869–1951):

When a century ago a group of enthusiastic young men gathered in Berlin and Königsberg to found a kind of literary congregation, they did not create a literary movement that echoed the sound of the people, but fashioned something disfigured and inferior instead, called Haskalah. The major characteristics of this 'Haskalah' . . . the literary efforts of dilettantes . . . did not come from within the nation, neither did it nourish the nation . . . [and] it had no relation to the culture of the time. It was not part of the general spiritual movement of a period, but stood outside the general spiritual trend.<sup>89</sup>

In this *fin-de-siècle* atmosphere Mordecai Ze'ev Feierberg sent his anguished hero Nahman out into the Russian Jewish Hebrew-reading public sphere to express his unease at the 'new literature'. Indeed, there was no denying the Haskalah's historical function, 'for many have toiled to bind the nation's wounds . . . fight death and petrification wherever they were'. Now, however, writers and maskilim were like 'fish swimming in a vessel of murky water' and 'this new literature was the throes and sighs of the nineteenth century'.<sup>90</sup> Only in 1909 did Shai Ish Horowitz's

<sup>87</sup> Moses Reines, 'Spirit of the Time' (Heb.), *Otsar hasifrut*, 2 (1888), 45–69 (the quotation is on p. 56). Samuel Leib Zitron, 'Literature and Life' (Heb.), *Pardes*, 1 (1892), 173–204, also thought that it was too early to say that the Haskalah was over: 'Many say and believe that this transitional period from ignorance to Haskalah is passing on (in truth it is not so!)' (p. 185). Unlike Reines, however, Zitron had doubts about the Haskalah's success.

<sup>88</sup> Y. A. Trivetsch, 'In Honour of the Haskalah' (Heb.), *Ahi'asaf*, 8 (1900), 225–39.

<sup>89</sup> 'Where To?' (Heb.), *Hashiloah*, 1 (1897), 489–503.

<sup>90</sup> Feierberg, *Writings* (Heb.), ed. A. Steiman (Tel Aviv, n.d.), 97–8.

summation come to terms with the historical end of the Haskalah movement, the fact that its picture of the future had not been fully realized and that it had to make room for new experiments:

Years have passed. After momentous events and the well-known 'propaganda' that came hard on their heels, Haskalah has come to an end in midstream . . . What it did manage to do was instil in many hearts the feeling of being human beings, to demand respect as human beings, and crave liberty and a normal life as human beings, but it has not managed to take the Jew out of exile and the ghetto, and liberate him from the yoke of the oppressive traditions of exile . . . The Jewish heart halah era as not rid itself of all its rot. And now we are at the *fin de siècle* that marks the end of our Haskalah and many other sound movements in general human culture . . .<sup>91</sup>

### A MODERATE OPTION FOR MODERNIZATION

#### *Unity and Continuity of the Haskalah*

This survey of self-definitions of the Haskalah confirms the basic assumption of this chapter: the Haskalah movement, like the Enlightenment in general, was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. There is no doubt, however, that maskilim, even when struggling with an exact definition and trying to prevent misinterpretations from the right (the Orthodox) and the left (Deists, libertines, and assimilationists), believed that there was only one Haskalah: a historical phenomenon that had a clear and recognizable identity.

Beginning with the Prussian Haskalah and continuing for almost 120 years maskilim, whether in Prague, Amsterdam, Posen, Vienna, Lvov, Brody, Jaroslav, Tarnopol, Bolichov, Vilna, Kovno, Kremenetz, Berdichev, Odessa, or elsewhere, considered themselves members of a single continuous movement founded in Berlin by the revered Moses Mendelssohn and his associate Naphtali Herz Wessely. The figures, models, concepts, slogans, and institutions of that formative Prussian period remained a continuous source of reference. The history of the movement was portrayed as a passing of the torch of Haskalah from one generation to the next and from one Haskalah centre to another. One expression of the movement's vertical unity was its literary continuity: Haskalah books first published in Berlin were reprinted time and again in Vienna, Prague, and Brünn, and some of them in Russia, especially Vilna and Warsaw, in the nineteenth century. The essays of Mendelssohn and Wessely were translated into French in Alsace, into Dutch in Amsterdam, and into Italian in Austrian Italy. From the 1820s onwards, the pan-Austrian journal *Bikurei ha'itim* reprinted entire sections of *Hame'asef*. Members of Hevrat To'elet in Amsterdam in the 1810s and 1820s gathered to read portions of *Hame'asef*, and both they and Galician maskilim read Ben Ze'ev's influential grammar, *Talmud leshon ivri*. Among the 'heretical' works confiscated in 1869 from the lending library

<sup>91</sup> Shai Ish Horowitz, 'Hasidism and Haskalah' (Heb.), *He'atid*, 2 (1909), 29–99.

established in Vilkomir, Lithuania by Lilienblum, and for which he was persecuted and forced to flee, was Wessely's *Shirei tiferet*, first published in Berlin in 1788. The libraries established by east European maskilim in Jerusalem in the 1870s and 1880s contained selections of works by Galician and Russian maskilim. The discovery of works by Isaac Baer Levinsohn, Joseph Fuenn, and Kalman Schulman in the libraries of Jerusalem incensed the Orthodox and the libraries were closed.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Orthodox opposition only strengthened the movement's sense of identity. Orthodox opponents considered maskilim members of the 'cult of Moshe Dessauer', that is, Mendelssohn, and referred to them as 'Deitchen' and 'Berliners'. In their eyes, the maskil camp was united, powerful, and full of intrigues. All this contributed to the definition of the Haskalah as a distinct and recognizable movement in Jewish society.<sup>93</sup>

These images and the movement's high degree of self-awareness were promoted by the international connections of its leading figures: Mendel Lefin—Berlin to Galicia; Shalom Hacohen—Berlin to Vienna via Amsterdam, Hamburg, and London; David Friedrichsfeld—Berlin and Amsterdam; Isaac Baer Levinsohn—Galicia and Russia; Bezalel Stern—from Odessa to Brody and Tarnopol; and there were many others. A ramified system of correspondence created literary networks: in the nineteenth century a network was established that linked Poland, Lithuania, Galicia, Germany, Holland, Bohemia, Moravia, and Hungary, and by the end of the century extended to communities such as Salonika, Mogador, Tunis, Algiers, and Jerusalem. This functioned alongside the internal networks of correspondence of each country. In the absence of a single organizational framework (the idea had been raised at various times as a vital necessity), and where only few formal organizations and permanent circles existed, correspondence was a crucial means of communication. Journals provided another ideological and literary forum and were the focus of intense debate and discussion; it can be argued that they were the

<sup>92</sup> For book printing, journals, reading clubs, and libraries see, among others, Peter Beer, 'Über Literatur der Israeliten in den kaiser österreichischen Staaten im letzten Decenio des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts', *Sulamith*, 2/1 (1808), 342–457; 421–6; 2/2 (1809), 42–61; Michael Silber, 'The Historical Experience of German Jewry and the Impact of Haskalah and Reform in Hungary', in Jacob Katz (ed.), *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model* (New Brunswick, NJ and Oxford, 1987), 107–8; Menucha Gilboa, *Hebrew Periodicals in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1992), 57–76; Joshua Heschel Schorr, 'Prophecy on Rabbis' (Heb.), *Hehaluts*, 3 (1857), 71; Lilienblum, *Hatot ne'urim*, 138 ff; Joseph Michman, *Studies in the History and Literature of Dutch Jewry*, Jubilee volume (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1994), 207–28; P. Tuinhout-Keuning, 'The Writings of Hevrat To'elet in Amsterdam and the Haskalah in Germany', in Joseph Michman (ed.), *Studies in the History of Dutch Jewry* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1988), 217–71; Dov Sidorovsky, *Libraries and Books in Late Ottoman Palestine* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1990), 113–53, and appendices 4–5; Mordechai Zalkin, *A New Dawn. The Jewish Enlightenment in the Russian Empire: Social Aspects* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 2000), chs. 4 and 7.

<sup>93</sup> See e.g. Lilienblum's testimony, *Hatot ne'urim*, 146–7. Cf. Israel Bartal, 'Simon the Heretic: a Chapter in Orthodox Historiography', in Israel Bartal, Ezra Mendelssohn, and Chava Turmiansky (eds.), *According to the Custom of Ashkenaz and Poland: Studies in Jewish Culture in Honour of Chone Shmeruk* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1993), 243–68.

real meeting-ground of the Haskalah as a movement. Alongside the journals there were, of course, the books that were distributed first among those most involved—the maskilim themselves—but also to circles relatively far removed from the inner movement and its ideological ferment: those with moderate Haskalah interests, and readers and benefactors who subscribed to the maskilim's publications. Not infrequently the establishment of a library with a collection of traditional and modern 'Haskalah culture' books turned into a 'readers' club', in actuality a cell of maskilim. Some of these were kept secret for fear of hostile reactions. Together they constituted a satellite ring around the Haskalah 'literary republic'. Linking the inner and outer rings were printers and proof-readers, such as the printing house of Hevrat Hinukh Ne'arim (Society for the Education of Youth) in Berlin under Isaac Satanow, that of Anton Schmid in Vienna where Judah Leib Ben Ze'ev and Shlomo Levisohn worked as proof-readers, the presses adjacent to Perl's school in Tarnopol, Fuenn's in Vilna, Smolenskin's in Vienna, and others, all of vital importance to the Haskalah.<sup>94</sup>

#### *The Characteristic Maskil Type and the Maskilic Experience*

The Haskalah movement was fostered by what could be called the 'maskil type', a distinctive figure both in his own eyes and in the eyes of those around him. The biographies of many maskilim are identical in terms of their experience and socio-cultural background: they typically shared the same attitudes, moved in the same conceptual world, and were characterized by the same rhetoric, slogans, and allusions; despite some recognizable differences, they generally shared the same world-view and ideology. The maskil had no precedent in Jewish history. As in the parallel process taking place in eighteenth-century European society, a secular Jewish intelligentsia was emerging powerful enough to challenge the traditional authorities such as Talmud scholars, preachers, homileticists, and rabbis.<sup>95</sup> For the first time, from a traditional society and religious culture came modern writers, sharp-witted publicists, and secular preachers who exposed the flaws that they believed had entered Jewish life. They also professed a new teaching that contained a detailed, comprehensive programme of modernization. They offered this alternative in the belief that, if realized, it would normalize Jewish existence and integrate Jews into the modern, progressive European world. Out of an avant-garde self-awareness, the maskil presumed to be a guide to an entire society, claiming to know better than anyone else how to read the map of history. With the call 'Follow me' he

<sup>94</sup> For printing houses see Moritz Steinschneider, 'Hebraeische Buchdruckerei in Deutschland', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, 5 (1892), 166–82; A. M. Haberman, 'The Hebrew Press in Tarnopol', in *Pages in Bibliography and Jewish History*, year 2, pamphlet 1 (Vienna, 1935), 24–31; Mordecai Letteris, 'Some Issues Matter' (Heb.), *Bikurim*, 2 (1866), 20–38; Hayim D. Friedberg, *History of the Jewish Press* (Heb.) (Antwerp, 1937), 94–101.

<sup>95</sup> See Porter, *The Enlightenment*, 70–5.

sought to lead the people into a new era of critical historical change.<sup>96</sup> The journal, the textbook translated into German, and biting satire were his literary weapons and propaganda tools.

The maskil was a transitional type. It was uncommon to find a 'born' maskil; in most cases Haskalah was not passed from father to son. Each generation experienced the transition to Haskalah, a distinct process usually occurring in a person's late twenties. Euchel became a maskil in 1775, Perl in 1810, Baer Levinsohn in 1820, Fuenn in 1830, Lilienblum in about 1860, and Ben-Yehuda in the 1870s. Sons and daughters of maskilim did not have to grapple with this transitional process, were hardly concerned with Haskalah struggles, and generally entered other modern occupations such as banking, business, the universities, and other professions. The 'maskil experience' was inseparable from the maskil image. The transition in consciousness from the old to the new, which had the force of a conversion or an eye-opening sense of discovery, left a deep mark. Since becoming a maskil was a personal and individual experience, due at times to the influence of another maskil or to independent study, the maskil sought solace among other maskilim.

These groups were united on the basis of an extremely ambitious programme to create the new Jew and a new Jewish society. The spirit of modernism pulsed within them. In their self-awareness they believed that they had discovered a new continent in time, a 'New Age'. This was what fuelled the maskilim and was the basis of their politics, their demand to lead the Jews into the brave new world. Everything they did derived from this consciousness. Just as they underwent a personal transition, they became harbingers of change for all Jews—an intelligentsia whose chief desire was to lead Jewish society from one epoch to another.<sup>97</sup> The maskilim were critics of the old age, and the nursemaids, heralds, preachers, and guides of the new. They proclaimed the Jewish renaissance and were the prophets of modernity.

All this, however, was in the domain of wishful thinking. The actual experience of most maskilim was quite different. With few exceptions their socio-economic status was low to middling, and in order to survive, publish their books, and find work as private tutors or clerks, they needed the patronage of the wealthy. The maskil's status in society, especially in eastern Europe, was that of a despised and even threatened minority. Most of society and the spokesmen of the traditional scholarly or hasidic elite considered the maskilim a menace. Isolation, sometimes even persecution, was the price they paid for Haskalah, and slander and excommu-

<sup>96</sup> Gillon, *Mendelssohn's 'Kohélet musar'*, ch. 10; Shavit, *Judaism in the Mirror of Hellenism*, 95–6, defines the maskilim as follows: 'A socio-culturally new type of Jew appearing in Europe during the eighteenth century, before what was later called "intelligentsia". This group had its own socio-cultural consciousness. It was aware of the change it wanted to generate and worked for its own ends in different ways . . . This is a new social group that did not bow to the traditional spiritual-social authority . . . It was interested in the vision of "modernization", in other words a "Europeanization" of the Jews.'

<sup>97</sup> See Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London, 1971), 133–8.

nication were often part of that experience. They lived in tension and felt persecuted and illegitimate, like people who had secretly tasted forbidden fruit ('death in the pot of Haskalah') and drunk stolen water, but they were fortified by the desire for victory and to show everyone that light, justice, and truth were on their side. When and where the cultural climate was fairly open there was no need for Haskalah. The consciousness of mission felt by pioneers, the self-image of elite soldiers of modernity and captains of the ship, were particularly relevant and perhaps only valid in historical situations where the maskil lived in a hostile atmosphere.

Nor is there any doubt that an added motivation for the Haskalah was aroused by the rulers of the centralized states and spokesmen of the non-Jewish intelligentsia. These were Dohm, Lessing, and Nicolai in Germany, Joseph II in Austria, and Alexander I, Nicholas I, Serge Uvarov, his minister of education, and Alexander II in Russia. The confidence of maskilim in the modern age depended on belief in political change in Europe, identification with the centralized state, and reliance on 'angels of grace' who sought to reform and improve the circumstances of the Jewish community. Even in North Africa, where Europe's image was that of a colonial power threatening cultural conquest, there were similar expectations, even if the few maskilim there saw their mission mainly as deterring French influence.<sup>98</sup>

#### *A Dualistic World-View*

These experiences and the maskilim's self-image as healers of the world's afflictions led to a unique rhetoric. A certain pathos sharpened the consciousness of the avant-garde, reflected the maskil mentality, and sometimes went far beyond the realities of the 'war for Haskalah'. The rhetoric of the Haskalah was black and white. Even moderates did not distinguish intermediate shades, but generally adopted their own single-minded approach that negated both left and right. Few, indeed, were ready to accept ideological pluralism. Everything moved between truth and lies, 'morning light' and dark clouds, lofty idealism and defamation, perception and blindness, wisdom and stupidity, goddesses (adulation) and she-devils (idolatry), youth and old age, common sense and superstition, and a magnificent temple of wisdom versus a decrepit edifice of ignorance.

The 'war for Haskalah', or the image of the sons of light fighting the sons of darkness, was indeed meaningful for small groups with consummate faith in their view. The Haskalah's ideology, however, did not propose a total abrogation of tradition; it did not seek to build a new world on the ruins of the old. The Haskalah was the

<sup>98</sup> See Joseph Shitrit, 'New Awareness of Anomalies and Language: Beginnings of the Hebrew Haskalah Movement in Morocco at the End of the Nineteenth Century' (Heb.), *Mikedem umiyam*, 2 (1986), 129-68; id., 'Hebrew Nationalist Modernism as Opposed to French Modernism: The Hebrew Haskalah in North Africa at the End of the Nineteenth Century' (Heb.), *Mikedem umiyam*, 3 (1990), 11-76; Yaron Tsur, 'Tunisian Jewry at the End of the Pre-Colonial Period' (Heb.), *Mikedem umiyam*, 3 (1990), 77-113; id., 'Jewish Sectional Societies in France and Algeria on the Eve of the Colonial Encounter', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 4 (1994), 263-76.

first ideology to advocate Jewish modernization. Yet its revolution was to introduce a dualism into Jewish society and offer itself as a cure for Judaism's ills. The personal transformation to Haskalah did not demand a burning of bridges; it was not assimilation or baptism. Conversion to Haskalah was actually a transposition from a world depicted as one-dimensional to a more complex world, but in no case was there a total abandonment of the community, Jewish society, or Judaism. Just as the maskil did not reject the Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, and other halakhic works, but sought to redress an imbalance by adding to his library new works in Hebrew and other languages, so he adopted new ideas without rejecting more traditional ones. Haskalah spoke and preached with a dual tongue, demanding that balance be restored in all areas: study the Torah of God together with that of man; be a Jew but also a man and a citizen; practise Torah and *mitsvot* but also learn European languages and read their literature; cultivate the Hebrew language (but get rid of Yiddish unless it can be of tactical and propagandistic use!) but also improve your knowledge of the language of the state and the language of European culture; cultivate a deep attachment to the new Europe—but do not abandon your Asiatic heritage. As Israel Bartal has shown, the language issue is a good example of the movement's transformation:

The future vision of the Haskalah Movement in Eastern Europe was not aimed at an abrogation of bilingualism, but at a replacement of its two components: Yiddish by the language of the state or a major European language (usually German), and the 'holy tongue' by biblical Hebrew. Perhaps more than anything else the new bilingualism . . . reflected the dual nature of Haskalah: the corporative pre-modern society that was to be displaced by identification with the modern state, and the religious language and spiritual creativity that was to be purified and cut off from its supposedly corrupt and defective parts.<sup>99</sup>

The same was true for the Haskalah's image of the future. The Haskalah never sought to take the Jews beyond Judaism and Jewish society, but to effect a transformation that would repair rather than destroy what was 'antiquated'. The rabbi as maskil was the highest aspiration of the maskilim. Other 'traditional' aspects of their programme included: a non-coercive community in matters of faith; a *Shulhehan arukh* winnowed by the rabbis themselves of customs that made life difficult for Jews; a rabbinical academy training a modern, Torah-educated elite unsullied by the mystical and magical; a grammatically correct Hebrew; the thorough study of Torah with the aid of the clarifying terms of an advanced European language; rationalist *musar* books; a reliance on universalist rational truths and the belief in revelation and historical tradition; and a Jew who, like his ancestors, earned his daily bread from farming or a craft rather than petty business—a Jewish farmer who studied Torah in his spare time (Perl's *Bohen tsadik*), enrolled his daughters in a Russian gymnasium, but hired a tutor to teach them Hebrew and Judaism. Thus the Haskalah offered a variety of solutions, transitional and permanent, for Jewish

<sup>99</sup> 'From Traditional Bilingualism to National Monolingualism', in Lewis Glinert (ed.), *Hebrew in Ashkenaz: A Language in Exile* (New York and Oxford, 1993), 141-50.

life in the modern world, all of which encompassed a duality of internal and external, sacred and profane, old and new.

For more than a century all ideological shadings of the Haskalah were variations on this basic dualism. The difference in emphasis between one maskil, Haskalah centre, or period and another was a difference of degree. The spectrum created by a dualistic approach left much leeway for variety, and for secondary Haskalah types—radical and moderate, Deist and socialist, materialist and nationalist. So long as this duality was maintained—Judaism and the Jews, Europe and its culture—one could still speak of Haskalah. Only when it was abandoned, as in David Friedländer's attempt to become a Christian on his own terms, or Solomon Maimon's journey from Haskalah to philosophy, or Abraham Uri Kovner's abandonment of Hebrew literary criticism, or Samuel Jacob Bick's condemnation of Haskalah and endorsement of hasidism, do we see paths out of Haskalah.

### *Boundaries and Branches*

The Haskalah's boundaries can be drawn on the basis of chronology, geography, and the ways in which different groups approached the modern, non-Jewish world. As I have outlined, the eighteenth-century Haskalah movement was preceded by the 'early Haskalah',<sup>100</sup> but its beginnings as an ideological movement lay in Prussia in the late 1770s. The *Biur* project began in 1778, the year the first modern Jewish school, the *Freyschule*, was established by Hevrat Hinukh Ne'arim with great expectations for the realization of the maskil programme. Until the end of the eighteenth century, the Haskalah's centre was in the Prussian cities of Berlin, Königsberg, and Breslau, with minor branches in such cities as Hamburg, Cassel, and Frankfurt am Main, as well as in Prague, Amsterdam, Trieste, Metz, and Shklov, with readers and subscribers to Haskalah literature elsewhere. With the exception of Breslau, and the Polish districts annexed by Prussia, such as Posen, where a group of maskilim coalesced under David Caro, the Prussian phase came to an end at the turn of the eighteenth century. However, centres of Haskalah in Germany (Dessau and Cassel) and the Austrian empire (Bohemia, Moravia, Galicia, and Hungary) consciously brought the 'Berlin Haskalah' into the beginning of the nineteenth century, as did groups and individual maskilim in Holland and England.<sup>101</sup>

From the 1820s onwards, the movement was almost exclusively located in eastern

<sup>100</sup> Etkes, 'On the Question of the Precursors of Haskalah'; Sorkin, 'From Context to Comparison'. On the early Enlightenment in Germany see John G. Gagliardo, *Germany under the Old Regime, 1600-1790* (London and New York, 1991), ch. 15; Feiner, 'The Early Haskalah'.

<sup>101</sup> See Silber, 'The Historical Experience of German Jewry', and also the following chapters in Katz (ed.), *Toward Modernity*: Israel Bartal, 'The Heavenly City of Germany and Absolutism à la mode d'Austriche: The Rise of the Haskalah in Galicia' (pp. 33-42); Hillel Kieval, 'Caution's Progress: The Modernization of Jewish Life in Prague, 1780-1830' (pp. 71-105); Joseph Michman, 'The Impact of German Jewish Modernization on Dutch Jewry' (pp. 171-88); Lois C. Dubin, 'Trieste and Berlin: The Italian Role in the Cultural Politics of the Haskalah' (pp. 189-224); and Todd Endelman, 'The Englishness of Jewish Modernity in England' (pp. 225-46).

Europe. Especially intense in Galicia until 1848 and in Russia from the 1840s, it won supporters and members until it peaked in the 1860s and 1870s. Nonetheless, the 'German' character of the Haskalah was preserved even among maskilim who had a strong affinity with Russian culture and language. German was the maskil's second language even after the Russian romance; the Haskalah was rooted in its hero, Mendelssohn, and Berlin remained a focal point long after it ceased to be an active centre.

The branches of the east European Haskalah in some major North African communities are now being examined for the first time. The travels of European maskilim in the Islamic countries, the importation of Hebrew Haskalah literature (by Abraham Mapu, Peretz Smolenskin, Kalman Schulman, and others) led a number of teachers, printers, and booksellers to encounter the Haskalah. Individual maskilim lived in different parts of the Ottoman empire throughout the nineteenth century. Among the most prominent was Jacob Judah Nehama of Salonika, who can be considered a full member of the mid-nineteenth-century 'literary republic'.<sup>102</sup> However, intensive activity on the part of individual maskilim and in Haskalah circles with a strong reformist motivation in Tunis, Algiers, Mogador, and elsewhere began only in the last two decades of the century. These maskilim not only subscribed to such publications as *Hamagid*, *Hakarmel*, *Hatsefirah*, and *Hashahar*, the 'brothers from afar' also contributed articles, bought Haskalah books, published Arabic-Hebrew newspapers, and translated essays and books by east European maskilim: for example, Schulman's *Harisot beitar* (The Ruins of Betar) and his Hebrew translation of Eugène Sue's *Mystères de Paris*, and Mapu's *Ahavat tsiyon*. They internalized the rhetoric, values, concepts, and criticism of society characteristic of the east European Haskalah. Isaac Ben-Ya'ish of Mogador, for one, fought the superstition prevalent among Jews and Muslims, and Shalom Flah of Tunis declared that the 'light of civilization' shining throughout Europe, that had reached 'some of the cities of Africa and Asia to illuminate the dark night of ignorance, is spreading its wings over the entire breadth of the lands of the savages'.<sup>103</sup>

The colonial circumstances of these countries influenced the special character of their Haskalah. The fact that the main agent of secularization was the Alliance Israélite Universelle placed the maskilim in a defensive position almost from the beginning. The Haskalah in Tunis, Morocco, and Algeria was in most cases a disillusioned opposition to the Alliance. The maskilim were wary of what they considered an exchange of the *talmud torah* that the French organization had promised to cultivate in its schools for *talmud tsarfut*, the study of French culture, and warned that the Alliance schools might ring the death knell of Hebrew and Judaism: 'The

<sup>102</sup> Jacob Judah Nehama, *Mikhtavei dodim miyayin* [Letters More Delightful than Wine] (Salonika, 1893). See David Benvenisti, 'Rabbi Jacob Judah Nehama, Precursor of the Haskalah Period in Salonika', in M. Zohory, A. Tartakover, M. Zand, and A. Hains (eds.), *Studies on Jewish Themes by Contemporary Jewish Scholars from Islamic Countries* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1981), 144-66.

<sup>103</sup> Flah, 'Our Distant Brethren' (Heb.), *Hatsefirah*, 15/45-6 (1888), 45-6.

chief desire of the Hebrew maskilim in North Africa was to propose a Hebrew national track to compete with the general French modernization track.<sup>104</sup> In the moderate Haskalah of eastern Europe that position was a dialectical product and articulated a change in the maskilim's thought; it was the starting-point of the North African Haskalah which fought for 'the true Haskalah whose foundations are high up in the mountains of pure religion', and a reformed Hebrew education to counter that of the Alliance. 'The French Haskalah,' Shalom Flah wrote in *Hatsefirah*, printed in Warsaw, 'that reigns supreme and unlimited over the children in the Alliance general school, was a source of destruction for Jewish life . . . The Age of Enlightenment might be illuminating the night of ignorance and chasing bats out of human habitations, but it is replacing them with beasts of prey.'<sup>105</sup>

The Jerusalem branch of the east European Haskalah was much more militant and determined. After Yisrael Frumkin became editor of *Hahavatsalet* in 1870, and especially after Eliezer Ben-Yehuda joined in 1881, it struggled against the opponents of educational reform, the leadership, the *halukah* system of charity, and the occupations preferred by members of the old Yishuv: 'The rebels against the light will not prevail. Despite them, the sun of Haskalah will shine in Jerusalem, the clouds will disperse, shadows disappear and the light of knowledge will shine for all of Israel.'<sup>106</sup> The Jerusalem maskilim were a varied lot, and their educational and literary activity centred on the new schools, the Zionist Hovevei Zion, the new public libraries, and on journals. They had constant contact with Russian and Galician maskilim through correspondence and visits, and received encouragement and promises of support. Abraham Baer Gottlober of Zhitomir, Aaron Dornzweig of Lvov, Berish Goldberg of Tarnopol, Abraham Shapira of Warsaw, and others pinned great hopes on the new Jerusalem branch's success:

The time has come for the Holy Land to shake off its dust, remove the garb of mourning, and become another of the enlightened countries that follow the light of *hokhmah* and science that now illuminates the earth . . . How good it is that you wise, reverent, and perfect men are the pioneers leading our people in their Holy Land towards straight paths in the eyes of God and man.<sup>107</sup>

The Haskalah movement's continuity can be seen on the shelves of the two public libraries set up by Jerusalem maskilim in 1874 and 1884. Visitors could read the works of Mendelssohn and volumes of *Hame'asef*, as well as many European-language journals and the works of Wessely, Ben Ze'ev, Baer Levinsohn, Perl,

<sup>104</sup> Shitrit, 'Hebrew Nationalist Modernism', 12. For the Alliance Israélite Universelle school system in the Islamic countries, see Aaron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington, Ind., 1998).

<sup>105</sup> Flah, 'Pain of Love' (Heb.), *Hatsefirah*, 15/89 (1888), 3-4; id., 'Observer of Tunis' (Heb.), *He'asif*, 6 (1894), 78-94.

<sup>106</sup> Yisrael Frumkin, 'On Education' (Heb.), 1st pub. *Hahavatsalet*, 15-17 (1880); repr. in *The Collected Writings of Yisrael Dov Frumkin* (Heb.), ed. G. Kresel (Jerusalem, 1954), 93.

<sup>107</sup> Abraham Baer Gottlober, 'From Zhitomir' (Heb.), *Hahavatsalet*, 25 (1872), 196.

Abraham Uri Kovner, Mapu, Smolenskin, Zweifel, Fuenn, Guenzburg, and Schulman.<sup>108</sup>

The writings of Frumkin, Ben-Yehuda, Dov Steinhardt, and other teachers and journalists show that they had absorbed maskil rhetoric and slogans to argue that the conditions prevailing in the Yishuv showed the need for Haskalah and reforms. They provoked a cultural battle, demonstrating the same inner struggles typical of the transitional stage of Haskalah. But like the Haskalah in North Africa, the Jerusalem version was of the moderate east European type that was concerned about the future of the Hebrew language, national unity, and religious belief. In a manner reminiscent of maskilim such as Flah in Tunis, Frumkin and his Jerusalem colleagues rejected the French modernization of the Alliance in favour of the 'national Haskalah' advocated by Smolenskin, and rejected criticism of religion and religious laxity.

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The first and formative German period of the Haskalah movement was short-lived, being over by about 1800. But the movement's final stage did not occur until the 1890s, simultaneous with the development of nationalism and the appearance of counter-Haskalah patterns. Whether or not nationalism was the alternative to Haskalah, it was clear that a fundamental change had taken place. The main spokesmen in eastern Europe died in the 1880s and 1890s<sup>109</sup> and were replaced by a new generation of writers, most of them nationalists who had not undergone the maskil experience. The basic Haskalah programme was simply accepted, a new and wide reading public had emerged that was not terribly interested in culture wars and ideology, and a modern education was considered to be important: 'Sons of the poor . . . leave their countries and towns . . . and penniless, travel to seek *hokhmah* and knowledge; societies for spreading Haskalah, modern schools and libraries are established all the time; even the religious and ultra-Orthodox expose their sons and daughters to Haskalah studies; [and] rabbis, rabbinical adjudicators and teachers encourage their sons to study the "Haskalah demanded by the time"'.<sup>110</sup> The culture war had passed on to another stage, and the Haskalah as an ideology of transition ended. Even the term maskil assumed a neutral meaning, and referred to someone with book learning, and an interest in literature, science, and the issues of

<sup>108</sup> For the Haskalah in Palestine see Yehoshua Kaniel, 'The Beginnings of the New Yishuv in Jerusalem', in M. Eliav (ed.), *The Book of the First Aliyah* (Heb.), vol. i (Jerusalem, 1982), 319-36; Joseph Salmon, 'Urban Ashkenazi Settlement in Erets Yisrael from the Time of the First Aliyah', in I. Kolatt (ed.), *History of the Jewish Yishuv in Erets Yisra'el from the Time of the First Aliyah* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1990), 580-605; Yisrael Hanani, 'The Haskalah Movement in Erets Yisrael' (Heb.) (Ph.D. diss., Jerusalem, 1959); Galia Yardeni, *Hebrew Journalism in Erets Yisrael, 1863-1904* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1969), 55-81; Sidorsky, *Libraries and Books in Late Ottoman Palestine*, ch. 3.

<sup>109</sup> David Gordon, 1886; Eliezer Zweifel, 1888; Abraham Baer Gottlober, 1889; Samuel Joseph Fuenn, 1890; Judah Leib Gordon, 1892; Alexander Zederbaum, 1893; Joshua Heschel Schorr, 1895; Kalman Schulman, 1899; Moses Leib Lilienblum, 1910.

<sup>110</sup> Reines, 'Spirit of the Time', 66.



the day. The ideological, contentious party connection grew dim and gave way to new polemics. In North Africa the maskilim failed in their attempt to weaken the European cultural influence of the Alliance schools, and the maskilim in Palestine retreated to such an extent that when some of them realized with disappointment that the Zionist, partly secular, new Yishuv was gaining the upper hand, they even adopted an Orthodox anti-Haskalah stance.

### *Haskalah and Modernity*

The Haskalah movement played a crucial role in the modernization of the Jews. Yet the limitations it set itself as a controlled and limited option for change were characteristic. The relationship between Haskalah and modernization was not clear-cut but ambivalent: support and enthusiasm on the one hand, constraint and control on the other.<sup>111</sup> At every point and in almost every Haskalah centre, the position of the maskil was somewhere between right and left. Despite conventional opinion, the Haskalah can be held responsible neither for the entire process of modernization and secularization, nor for the full extent of Jewish acculturation that preceded it. Likewise the Haskalah did not in itself produce either assimilation, conversion, and religious reform, or the struggle for emancipation. Militant Orthodoxy, especially hasidism, stood to its right, while at the left was what the maskilim referred to as 'false Haskalah', the religiously indifferent, Deists, libertines, assimilationists, and others whose acculturation was rather shallow, but who nevertheless boasted about 'their' Haskalah. Maskilim repudiated these phenomena time and again, blaming them on the inflexible rejection of Haskalah by their opponents on the right. Here Haskalah was actually seen as a bulwark against heresy, apostasy, and moral corruption.<sup>112</sup> Suffice it to say that the frequent distinctions made by the maskilim between legitimate, 'real' Haskalah and 'counterfeit' Haskalah were an important component of their self-definition and identity. That was the borderline. Everything beyond an 'inner Haskalah deriving from introspection and study',<sup>113</sup> everything alienating and damaging to Jews and Judaism, was beyond the Haskalah.

Their secularism was also limited, moderate, and controlled. The writers and teachers were indeed a secular intelligentsia who constituted an alternative to the traditional scholars and rabbis. The maskil associations represented a secularization of the traditional house of study and charity associations; they introduced the

<sup>111</sup> See Israel Bartal, 'Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg: A Lithuanian Maskil Faces Modernity', in F. Malino and D. Sorkin (eds.), *From East and West: Jews in a Changing Europe 1750-1870* (Oxford, 1990), 126-47; Shmuel Feiner, 'The Modern Jewish Woman: A Test-Case in the Relationship between the Haskalah and Modernity' (Heb.; Eng. abstract), *Zion*, 58 (1993), 453-99; Fuenn, *From Militant Haskalah to Conservative Maskil*, ed. Feiner.

<sup>112</sup> See Shmuel Feiner, 'The Pseudo-Enlightenment and the Question of Jewish Modernization', *Jewish Social Studies*, 3/a (1996), 62-88; Dan Miron, *Between Vision and Reality* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1979), 277-9.

<sup>113</sup> *Letters of M. L. Lilienblum to J. L. Gordon*, 79.

modern school and rabbinical academy, a secularized *heder* and yeshiva; they pioneered grammatically correct aesthetic Hebrew and the new Hebrew literature and poetry, and they secularized *lashon hakodesh*, the Holy Language.<sup>114</sup> Yet there was good reason for maskilim, at a certain point in their lives, to consider themselves no less a bulwark against radical innovation than critics of the obsolete. The world of the maskilim was broad: they believed in the power of knowledge to improve people and society; they took universal morality and reason as their guides, and believed that there was a crucial need to change the outdated social, economic, political, and cultural patterns that were no longer relevant in the 'modern age'. The cultural war was directed at religious issues, rabbis, and hasidic leaders, but not against Torah or religion itself. The Haskalah opposed the dominant socio-cultural function fulfilled by Talmud, but in the main (with some exceptions such as *Hehaluts* publisher Joshua Heschel Schorr in Galicia) it was not against the Talmud itself, even if it may be safely assumed that the maskilim were not unaware that their cultural programme meant modifying the influence of the Talmud. A clear religious and theological orientation was characteristic of the post-Haskalah stage in Germany, but only after the issues concerning the legitimacy of sciences (*hokhmot*) and European languages had already been resolved. Even the polemic associated with religious reform in Russia at the end of the 1860s had nothing to do with theology, but was concerned rather with certain *halakhot* (such as eating legumes on Passover) versus the exigencies of 'life', that is, the dire poverty of the Jews in Russia.<sup>115</sup>

### *Haskalah and Enlightenment*

Recent research which recognizes the national variations in the period of the Enlightenment<sup>116</sup> helps us see the Haskalah as one of them. There is no doubt, for instance, that the Haskalah was far from the French Enlightenment's political radicalism and anti-clericalism. Even the closest example, the German Protestant *Aufklärung*, with which the Prussian maskilim had direct contact, was unlike the Haskalah. The *Aufklärer* consisted of government officials, clergy, and university lecturers; none of these professional groups existed in the Jewish community.<sup>117</sup> There were only isolated cases of Enlightenment aside from the Haskalah that lasted throughout the nineteenth century. Moreover, it cannot be said that the maskilim were part of the great family of *philosophes* in Peter Gay's sense.<sup>118</sup> It would also

<sup>114</sup> Bartal, 'Traditional Bilingualism'.

<sup>115</sup> See Gideon Katznelson, *The Literary War between the Orthodox and the Maskilim* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1954); Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (New York, 1988), chs. 5 and 6.

<sup>116</sup> Porter, *The Enlightenment*.  
<sup>117</sup> Horst H. Möller, *Vernunft und Kritik. Deutsche Aufklärung im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986); Franklin Kopitzsch, *Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland* (Munich, 1976).

<sup>118</sup> Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York, 1966).

appear that the famous case of Moses Mendelssohn, and to a lesser extent Marcus Herz and David Friedländer, were exceptions that prove the rule. Other characteristics of the maskil type, such as self-consciousness, a modernist mentality, a sense of prophecy, activism, discovery of the 'modern era', rhetoric, and so on do have similarities with other versions of the Enlightenment.<sup>119</sup> Nonetheless, it is also necessary to emphasize that the maskilim hardly attempted to underscore their Enlightenment connection. Thus surprisingly little was done to make the Enlightenment's main literary works available in Hebrew. Maskil translators mainly translated educational textbooks, travelogues for young men, or the plays by Lessing or satires by Wieland that had relevance for Jews, while the works of Voltaire, Locke, Montesquieu, Hume, Kant, and other major European thinkers were left untranslated.

## CONCLUSION

### *The Definition*

Having examined the self-definitions of the maskilim and the results of historical research on the general Enlightenment and its major tenets it is possible to offer a historical characterization and delineation of the movement.

The Haskalah was one of the European Enlightenment movements that existed between the 1770s and the 1890s in western, central, and eastern Europe (the Berlin Haskalah existed only in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, in Galicia and Russia throughout the entire nineteenth century), with branches at the end of the nineteenth century in Palestine and North Africa. It brought the Jews' ideology of transition into the 'modern age'. The maskilim were mainly writers and members of a new secular intelligentsia who had themselves gone through the experience of transition from a world of 'old' knowledge and values to the 'new' world of Haskalah. This intellectual, variegated elite was the carrier of the first modern ideology in Jewish history with a general liberal rationalist orientation. The maskilim were not organized on a formal basis but maintained a kind of literary republic of writers and journals, reading clubs and libraries, circles of maskilim and supporters of Haskalah.

Haskalah was one form of modernization available to Jews. The Haskalah's version was characterized primarily by its ideological nature and its awareness of modernity. Its major feature was dualism: an attempt to maintain a balance between the inner and the outer, between the 'Torah of God' and 'knowledge of man'; between the cultural patterns, religion, and customs of the Jewish heritage and European culture and its civic ethos. The policy of the centralized European state to ameliorate the Jews' condition was generally enthusiastically and actively fostered by the maskilim. It served as the Haskalah's main catalyst and helped it elicit the patronage and support of wealthy Jews. Haskalah advocacy involved a critique of

<sup>119</sup> 'The Enlightenment was the era which saw the emergence of a secular intelligentsia large enough for the first time to challenge the clergy': Porter, *The Enlightenment*, 72-3.

institutions, thought, and behaviour, past and present, that was meant to bring about a fundamental regeneration and transformation and which included independent and autonomous thought, humanism and tolerance, a change of values to new social, economic, and cultural ideals, and the normalization of Jewish existence. However, the Haskalah set limits to these aspirations for renewal in order to prevent the annihilation of Jewish culture. Because the maskilim were intimately involved in Jewish ethnicity, religion, and culture, they were acutely aware of the destructive influence of a superficial and external modernism. They often altered their stance from a straightforward struggle against the 'old' to conserving and protecting the 'old' against the 'new'. They sought some form of golden modernizing mean.

In its conscious and reasoned critique of Jewish tradition, the Haskalah provoked Orthodox reaction, the Jewish *Kulturkampf* that has lasted more than 200 years. Yet the Haskalah built its support for Jewish renewal on Jewish tradition, especially the Hebrew language, Bible, and national history. In comparison with other options for modernization, the Haskalah seems relatively conservative and moderate. Although its programmes pointed to a comprehensive reformation of the life of the Jewish community, in practice the maskilim were mainly active in the fields of *belles-lettres*, journalistic writings, and education and only occasionally assumed the new political role of liaison between Jews and government authorities, or launched organizations and projects to reform Jewish life. The Haskalah played a crucial but not exclusive role in the process of Jewish secularization, and it was fundamental to the development of the culture, mentality, and state of mind characteristic of the liberal modern Jew.