

**In Memory
of
Amos Funkenstein**



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IN MEMORY OF AMOS FUNKENSTEIN contains selections from the proceedings of a memorial conference arranged by friends and associates of Amos Funkenstein and by the Department of History at the University of California at Berkeley. This unusual memorial edition of the *Occasional Papers* has been made possible by the contributions of Professor Funkenstein's associates and students, and most importantly by support from the the Koret Professorship of Jewish History, a chair administered by the Department of History at the University of California at Berkeley. Isaac Miller, a student of Amos Funkenstein, deserves special thanks for the efforts he has extended in assembling these documents for the Townsend Center.

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PREFACE

In publishing this Occasional Paper with the financial co-sponsorship of the Koret Chair, The Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities has the rare opportunity to honor a scholar whose participation in the Humanities at Berkeley and in Townsend Center programs has been so enlightening to so many scholars. At the time of his death in November, 1995, Professor Amos Funkenstein was teaching a Townsend Center-sponsored Interdisciplinary Graduate Research Seminar with Professor Anthony Long of the Department of Classics. He had also just given a completed article on terrorism and Hegel to *Qui Parle*, a publication sponsored in part by the Center and administered by graduate students in a variety of humanistic disciplines.

Professor Funkenstein's contributions to the Center and to the entire University of California system will be felt for many generations to come. With this special memorial publication, we join our colleagues in commemorating the gifts bestowed by this illustrious scholar.

CHRISTINA M. GILLIS
Associate Director
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FOREWORD

The death of Amos Funkenstein in November 1995, though it had been imminent for a year, opened such a gap in the lives of his friends, colleagues, and students that we scarcely knew how to respond collectively to the loss. Amos had come to Berkeley in 1991, after two decades at UCLA and a brief sojourn at Stanford. I like to think that it was at Berkeley that he found his most congenial, and energizing, intellectual climate. He rapidly developed a number of new, close friendships. People were drawn to him not only because of what he had to offer with his brilliance and his astounding erudition but also because of his kindness and generosity, his subtle humor, and his absolute authenticity as a person. He became an indispensable participant in the campus sub-communities with which his work involved him: the Department of History, the Program in Jewish Studies, the Group in Ancient Studies, and the Townsend Center for the Humanities. He soon attracted a devoted following of graduate students, quite like the almost legendary following he had created in his years at UCLA. He also launched on a major new book project, completing several long chapters in the last year of his life even as his health was failing.

It was impossible for us to imagine filling the breach that Amos' passing had left, but it was also difficult enough even to think of how we might properly honor his memory. After some brief discussion, his friends and colleagues concluded that a conventional memorial meeting consisting of eulogy and reminiscence would not be appropriate. Any effusion or self-conscious rhetoric, however heartfelt, would hardly have been in keeping with his own sense of things. He was above all a man steadily focused on matters of intellectual substance, and so we tried to devise a program that would have the sort of substance he himself might have respected.

The afternoon dedicated to the memory of Amos Funkenstein took place on March 1, 1996, at the Women's Faculty Club on the Berkeley campus. The first part of the program was devoted to Amos' work, his intellectual biography, his distinctive style as a teacher and mentor, both in his years at UCLA and here at Berkeley, and the

nature of the project in intellectual history that he was working on in the last year of his life.

Each of these presentations was undertaken not as a gesture of eulogistic oratory, but as an effort to render a faithful, even analytic, account of his distinctive presence and intellectual aims. Two of these talks were by distinguished historians who had been his students at UCLA and who remained close to him: David Biale and Steven Zipperstein. A third was by a Berkeley student who had been writing his dissertation under Amos' guidance, Isaac Miller. The fourth was by a friend and co-teacher (they were offering a seminar together at the time of Amos' death), Anthony Long, the eminent authority on ancient philosophy.

In the original program on March 1, 1996, three academic papers on topics that addressed some of Amos' broad concerns followed, given by his friends Chana Kronfeld (Hebrew and Comparative Literature), Michael André Bernstein (English and Comparative Literature), and Bluma Goldstein (German). It was decided not to include these papers in the present publication in order to maintain a unified focus here on the figure of Amos Funkenstein. In any case, each of the three talks is part of a larger project of its presenter and so will eventually be published in another framework.

The power of Amos Funkenstein's work is there for all to see in the enduring contributions he made to the history of science, to general intellectual history, and to Jewish history. He had the rare gift of combining the weightiest learning with a beautiful clarity of thought, and he had an independence of mind that repeatedly led him to ask new questions of old problems and to propose fresh, eminently sensible solutions. But those who had the privilege of knowing him personally also were able to perceive his remarkable originality of character: his unswerving sense of scholarly vocation, his sheer delight in ideas, his rigor, his playfulness, his offbeat charm. It is the great virtue of the essays presented here that they evoke these qualities so vividly, without sentimentalization, providing the precious links that only those who knew Amos could between the man and the work.

—Robert Alter
1996

Contents

**The Last German Jewish Philosopher: An Intellectual
Biography of Amos Funkenstein**

David Biale 1

Amos Funkenstein: On *The Disenchantment of Knowledge*

Anthony Long 9

Reflections on Pedagogy and the Academy

Isaac Miller 19

Genius and its Vicissitudes: Amos Funkenstein as Teacher

Steven J. Zipperstein 27

The Last German Jewish Philosopher

An Intellectual Biography of

Amos Funkenstein

David Biale

The Last German Jewish Philosopher

DAVID BIALE

When Amos Funkenstein, the great Jewish historian who died at age fifty-eight last November, was twelve years old, he assembled his schoolmates in the courtyard of Jerusalem's famous religious school, Maale, and declared that there was no God. Called on the carpet by the school principal, he refused to repent, thus beginning a lifelong career of *épater les religieux*. Like Spinoza, whose philosophy played a central role in his work, Amos was a true *epikores*, a heretic from within his tradition. The term *epikores*, self-evidently derived from "Epicurean" in the Greek, originally signified in the rabbinic idiom a Jew who, like the Epicurean philosophers, did not believe that the gods intervened in the affairs of this world. On one level, this was certainly Funkenstein's position. But in popular parlance, the *epikores* signifies much more broadly the rebel against Orthodox Jewish belief and practice whose rebellion is thoroughly grounded in the classical sources themselves. It is in this latter sense that one thinks of Funkenstein, the heretic who knew the Jewish tradition better than most who call themselves Orthodox.

Like Spinoza, however, Funkenstein was not content to deny the existence of God. Instead, it is fair to say that he spent the next forty-six years of his life, up to the moment of his death last November, in trying to understand this very Being whose existence he doubted, in trying to write God's biography. This was a task he did by indirection: by engaging the most profound thinkers in the Western tradition, pagan, Jewish and Christian, from the Greeks and the Hebrew Bible through the rabbis and church fathers, medieval Jewish philosophers and mystics, Christian scholastics and up to the creators of modern science and philosophy. No stone could

be left unturned, no thinker, either close to home or alien, could be ignored in this quest. If religious thought was close to the task, science and mathematics were equally to be pressed into service. In the final analysis, it seems to me that only by understanding Funkenstein's intellectual life as an unceasing search for ultimate Being is it possible to bring together all of its seemingly disparate parts: Jewish history, scholastic philosophy and history of science, to name only the three most prominent. How else can we grasp a mind equally obsessed with biblical exegesis and twentieth-century mathematical logic, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*?

In these brief remarks, I wish to call attention to some of Funkenstein's major intellectual contributions, but also to some features of his method. As I have already suggested, I believe that the power of his work stems from the congruence of profound intellectual curiosity with questions of deep existential urgency. Yet, its power also derived from his ability to hold the personal in abeyance and to speak through the sources he studied. In the introduction to *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, he described the emergence of secular theology in the seventeenth century, defined as the collapse of professional scholastic theology and its appropriation by lay thinkers. The study of this world became, as he says, "its own religious value in that, if well done, it increases God's honor." For the seventeenth century—and, dare we say, for Funkenstein himself—for the non-religious, even the anti-religious, to take on the questions of medieval theology and turn them towards this world became, paradoxically, a new form of worshipping God. It is in just such surprising and radical inversions that Funkenstein's work is at its most original.

The architecture of *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* suggests the philosophy of history with which he operated. The book is divided according to the scholastic attributes of God: omnipresence, omnipotence, providence and divine knowledge. In each chapter, he seeks to show how the categories of scholasticism fed the discourse of the revolution against scholasticism. In the chapter on divine providence, for instance, he demonstrates how the medieval argument that God spoke the language of human beings—a doctrine he calls the principle of accommodation—was secularized and radicalized in Spinoza's biblical exegesis. The process of appropriation was not usually this direct, however. Many of the connections that

he was able to draw required the kind of dialectical inversions so characteristic of his sensibility. He shows, for example, how the impossibility of a vacuum in Aristotelian and medieval science provided the dialectical fulcrum for modern physics, which developed its mechanics by imagining an ideal type of motion in a vacuum. Medieval impossibilities became limiting cases in these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century inversions.

This sustained argument for grounding modern thought in its medieval and ancient predecessors points to one of the characteristic features of Funkenstein's method. He held that to fully understand an idea, one had to know its origins, even if those origins appeared to lie in seemingly contradictory schools of thought. All thought, he believed, was connected in a grand chain of tradition: one could not speak about Kant without understanding Aquinas, just as one could not speak about Hermann Cohen without understanding Maimonides. This presupposition led by necessity to intellectual history in the grand style, the kind of *Geistesgeschichte* once beloved of the German academy, where Funkenstein did his training, but now largely out of favor throughout the academic world. It was not only because of his synoptic and encyclopedic knowledge that Funkenstein seemed so unique, but also because of a method virtually unknown in contemporary cultural studies and those other directions that intellectual life has taken. With no apologies for Eurocentrism or gestures towards the social context of the intellectual, Funkenstein engaged the canonical thinkers of the West in a dazzling dialogue over the centuries.

Perhaps, though, I have used the word canon too quickly, since there is one feature of Funkenstein's work that belies the canonical. The Western tradition has classically been understood as starting with the Greeks and then passing into the hands of Christian thinkers of late antiquity and the Middle Ages. The Hebrew Bible occupies an uneasy place in this canon and the later Jewish tradition is conspicuously absent. From his earliest work, Funkenstein set about to correct this portrait. His doctoral dissertation, *Heilsplan und natürliche Entwicklung*, is an account of the complex relationship between conceptions of natural historical development and supernatural eschatology. This interest in the religious origins of modern historical consciousness was to resurface in the *Theology* book and, again, in *Perceptions of Jewish History*. What is striking, though, is how this brief and densely argued account

of Christian philosophy of history begins with varieties of Jewish apocalyptic and eschatological thought in late antiquity. In the work he undertook after the dissertation, whether comparing Maimonides and Aquinas on law and history or examining the theologies of anti-Jewish polemic in the Middle Ages, Funkenstein sought to infuse the study of the medieval Christian scholastics with their Jewish counterparts. By the time he published *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, Jewish intellectual history had assumed as important a place as Christian in his dialectic of Western thought.

What one senses in all this work is the mutual way in which Jewish thought illuminates Christian and Christian illuminates Jewish. For Funkenstein, the history of relations between these two traditions was always one of tensions and polemics, but neither was it devoid of creative borrowings. In his unique vision, neither Jewish nor Christian intellectual history could be done without the other. Their often hostile symbiosis, if one can use an oxymoron, required of the historian command of both the Latin and Hebrew traditions and a willingness to venture beyond the familiar into the realm of the Other.

What I am seeking to evoke here is not only an intellectual stance, but also something of a singular personality. Funkenstein was deeply, passionately a Jew who liked nothing better than to deflate academic pretensions with a well-placed Yiddish *bon mot*. In this turn to Yiddish, he enjoyed the classic Jewish move of ridiculing the world of high, non-Jewish culture by reducing it to Jewish provincialism. But he was just as interested in establishing a discourse of equals between the Jewish and Christian intellectual traditions. This was the Funkenstein who related with relish how he conversed in medieval Latin with a French monk he happened to meet. Only he could thus recreate the intellectual symbiosis of the Middle Ages in an Israeli taxi.

For all his deep forays into the worlds of medieval Christian scholasticism and modern science, Funkenstein never left those Jewish texts he acquired in his rebellious boyhood. Although he received almost no formal academic training in Jewish history or thought, he steeped himself in the whole range of Jewish sources throughout his life. As is characteristic of great intellects, he seemed to have most of his most original ideas worked out at the very beginning of his career. In the last years of his life, he collected together his essays on Jewish history and added new ones in

a book first published in Hebrew and then in English under the title *Perceptions of Jewish History*. Here he closed the circle that he had opened with his doctoral dissertation, showing now, as he had then for Christian philosophy of history, the connections between secular forms of Jewish historical consciousness and their traditional, religious roots. Against Yosef Haim Yerushalmi's argument for a distinction between memory and history in Jewish thought, he traced the dialectical interplay between these two seemingly opposed attitudes towards the past. Once again, the modern, for all its revolutionary radicalism, turned out to be grounded in the ancient and medieval.

One of the last chapters in the *Perceptions* book is entitled "Franz Rosenzweig and the End of German-Jewish Philosophy." But, we may ask, did German Jewish philosophy in fact end with Rosenzweig? On the contrary, I believe, it is in Amos Funkenstein that we have the true last German-Jewish philosopher. To be sure, no Jew after the Holocaust could ever imagine a German-Jewish symbiosis, as had Hermann Cohen. Nor could the sensibility of one who had grown up in mandatory Palestine and gone through the siege of Jerusalem in 1948 remotely resemble a Moses Mendelssohn or a Franz Rosenzweig. Yet, in his complex relationship to Germany, where he did most of his academic training and whose language he spoke and wrote flawlessly, Funkenstein was closer to his German-Jewish ancestors than he himself might have been willing to admit. Even more, his intellectual sensibility was, throughout, German. It was even more German than the Germans—and in this, too, he resembled the tradition of German-Jewish philosophy. His very method, that of searching for origins, owes much to Hermann Cohen's *Ursprungsprinzip*, which Funkenstein analyzed and which, characteristically, he traced back to Moses Maimonides.

But as German as the intellectual method may have been, the person behind the method was, throughout, Jewish. Like Heinrich Heine, his favorite German poet, Funkenstein could never be anything but a sardonic outsider to German culture, just as he was always an outsider to American culture. His commitments and his passions remained in Israel, where he returned to teach part time starting in the 1970s and where he took active part in the struggle for peace with the Palestinians. He achieved that impossible high-wire act that all modern Jewish intellectuals have attempted,

but few have succeeded in accomplishing: to be at once a universal intellectual and a very particularistic Jew.

Albert Einstein is quoted as saying: “I want to know how God created this world . . . I want to know his thoughts; the rest are details.” Amos Funkenstein, too, wished to read God’s mind. In the great intellectual adventure that was his life, he never deviated from this goal. He traveled far in search of the answer, geographically, intellectually and religiously, yet in the final analysis, he never really left home.

Amos Funkenstein

*On The Disenchantment
of Knowledge*

Anthony Long

Amos Funkenstein

TONY LONG

Remembering Amos is easy because he was unforgettable. Celebrating his work is difficult for reasons that pertain to his remarkable qualities, both personal and scholarly. Bibliophile though he was, there was always more to him than his reading and writing encompassed. You had to hear Amos and talk to him fully to appreciate the special passion with which he lived ideas and vivified thoughts. Yet, Amos' writing, more than that of most scholars, captures much of the man—his inimitable blend of clarity, polymathy, originality, energy and epigram. In these brief remarks I shall try to give you samples of Amos the writer from work he was doing right up to the end. But I want to begin with a more personal and general recollection.

The ancient Stoics, whom Amos understood at a level of high professionalism, advocated living every day as if it were one's last; it was their version of *memento mori*. Amos could not have been more different. His adage, implicitly at least, was *memento vivere*, 'be mindful of living'. He no more accepted the imminence of dying than of ceasing to work and to teach. Last August he and I designed the syllabus for a graduate seminar we had undertaken to teach in the fall semester under the interdisciplinary aegis of our Townsend Center for the Humanities. We called it, "Theories of the Origins of Culture, from Homer and Genesis to Vico." With any collaborator but Amos I would never have dared to offer a theme extending over some two thousand four hundred years, but Amos reveled in its scope, and I knew that however often I might be at a loss he would never be so. At our first session, the room was packed with about thirty-five students. Their home departments, apart

from Classics and History, included the Graduate Group in Ancient History and Mediterranean Archaeology, Comparative Literature, Rhetoric, Ethnic Studies, Near Eastern Studies, and Jewish Studies.

The seminar began with a splendid introduction from Amos, meditating on the human propensity to explain the world by reference to origins, and it continued with a memorable question and answer session, masterminded by him, on the dynamics of the Genesis narrative from Eden to Abraham. Thenceforth, illness restricted Amos' participation in the seminar, to a point when he was no longer able to attend.¹ But, as he said to me, one week before his death, he would be back very soon. The remark sounds courageous, but it was more than a sign of courage. It showed rather, as Plato argued in the last proof of the soul's immortality in the *Phaedo*, that life does not admit death. Amos was alive up to the last minute.

Many of you will have your own experience of that wonderful fact. What is less known, I think, was how much new writing and thinking he generated during the final year. When we first became closely acquainted—only three years ago, though I feel that I knew him much longer—he had begun to plan a book of breath-taking range and boldness—a book on knowledge in Western thought from Greek and Jewish antiquity up to the present day. I had read and discussed with him the first two chapters, which he drafted before he became ill. Now, and only now, I have just read the drafts of two further chapters, most of them written during the last twelve months of his life. This book, incomplete though it is, makes a contribution that clamors to be published.

Amos entitled the book *The Disenchantment of Knowledge: Moments of Transition in the History of Western Epistemologies*. His word “disenchantment” is a marvelous pun, which needs his own gloss in order to be appreciated. Let me quote from his introduction: “In two senses of the word, the history of western attitudes towards knowledge since the Middle Ages can be read as a history of increasing disenchantment. Until the Enlightenment, they testify to a growing *demystification* of knowledge, to the rationalization and secularization of ever more of its aspects. Many trends converged during the eighteenth century into the Enlightenment ideal of salvation through knowledge. Since that happy hour, a deepening *disillusionment* of the claims, expectations and scope of knowledge has taken place.”

One may be puzzled about his choice of the eighteenth century rather than the year 1870 or so, as the acme of the “happy hour”; but from what Amos says later, I take him to regard Nietzsche as the terminus whence, as he puts it, “hope and expectation give place to awe and the fear of being manipulated—a fear that every systematic knowledge must by definition be socially discriminating and oppressive.” With this formulation, Amos shows that he is primarily thinking of Michel Foucault’s work. In two, alas, unwritten chapters Amos evidently intended to explore and take issue with Foucault’s deconstruction of the subject. Not that his attitude to Foucault was purely negative. He acknowledges the value of Foucault’s work and its influence on his own. But, as he writes, “I shall argue that the subject—whether in philosophy or life—has no ready substitute, assuming its reality is unavoidable even while taking it apart. My aim is to restore a modicum of faith, however qualified and self-critical, in the unique subject of knowledge.” (Here, if I am not mistaken, we get another pun—with “subject” standing for both the knower and the known.) “Its story (i.e. the story of the subject), warts and all, is as yet the most reassuring story of all aspects of human endeavor.”

This ringing sentence is all that we have, in this torso of a book, concerning Amos’ intentions for his final chapter, to which he gave as title: “The Unity of Knowledge and its Hope.” Yet, from our knowledge of the man we can conjecture how he might have phrased his guardedly optimistic conclusion. Amos was both a historian and a comparatist, a philosophical comparatist. His acute sense of time and place prevented him from treating ideas in a vacuum; but at the same time, he prized thoughts, no matter where and when they arose, which in their logical and empirical grounding it would be irrational not to prize as tokens of knowledge. One of his favorite examples was what, in *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (p. 43), he calls “the devastating critique of anthropomorphic images [of divine corporeality] by Xenophanes,” the sixth-century Greek philosopher poet. In what may be the earliest constructive use of counterfactual inferences, Xenophanes had argued that if cows or horses had gods they would have represented them as bovine or equine, just as different human societies portray gods in their own image, dark skinned, blue-eyed etc. ² For Amos, Xenophanes’ debunking of anthropomorphism was a salient moment in the history of knowledge, anticipating Feuerbach’s powerful theory of the divine as human projection, and echoed, as Amos pointed out in our seminar,

by Nicholas of Cusa in the fifteenth century. So far as I am aware, no specialist in Greek philosophy has ever picked up Cusanus' Christian use of Xenophanes. Amos, thanks to his vast range of reading, did so. Xenophanes- Cusanus-Feuerbach: in this juxtaposition we have an excellent instance of Amos' fascination with an idea that is a paradigm of the scientific mentality.

The Disenchantment of Knowledge is a natural successor to Amos' *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*. There, although he had focused on the period, ca 1200-1750, his terms of reference included the Greek contribution to medieval philosophy and science. In the new book Greek philosophy sets the stage for what follows, but Amos actually begins still further back, with the exile from Eden and the Greek myth of Prometheus. The first phase in his story of changing models of knowledge is captured by what he calls "the possessive attitude and its adversaries." "In both [Eden and the Prometheus myth]. . . a kind of knowledge that enables human beings to achieve a relative degree of independence from the gods. . . was illicitly appropriated by the human race. Once the property of the gods. . . it became humanized." I have no time unfortunately to elaborate on Amos' subtle treatment of Eden and Prometheus, but I must draw your attention to a marvelous parallel he draws with Rome—of which I had had no inkling. Originally, he points out, legal procedure at Rome was the monopoly of the *pontifices*.

I now cite Amos directly: "Of Cn. Flavius. . . we are told that he stole and made public a book of *legis actiones* written by his master. Of Tiberius Coruncanius, the first plebeian high priest, it is said that he was first to make (about 254 B.C.) the science of law public. . . . Here as in other societies, the first breach in the possessive attitude towards knowledge may have been its secularization, in an act that was remembered by the Romans as a theft, as an infringement on the monopoly of priests."³

As his examples make clear, the knowledge that interests Amos is not human competence in general but "the open character of a body of knowledge. . . hitherto treated as the reserve of a few." His object in this opening chapter is to explain the emergence and the success of the ideal of open knowledge—knowledge that is open, not only in the sense of being publicly available, but also in the sense of being "transparent, open to review and criticism."

Standard explanations of the Greek enlightenment dwell on democracy, public debate, freedom of speech. Amos is aware of all this, but he concentrates instead on one of Plato's most brilliant passages—the episode in the dialogue *Meno* where Socrates gets an uneducated slave-boy to work through a geometrical proof. Plato's official purpose here is to exemplify the thesis that knowledge is a process of recollecting forgotten truths that the soul acquired before birth. Scholars generally make this point the focus of their comments, but Amos sees that Plato is saying something profound about knowledge, irrespective of the doctrine of recollection. Socrates' encounter with the slave-boy, he says, is both a proof of the geometrical theorem and also, and more importantly, a proof of the transparency and demonstrability of learning, i.e., of acquiring knowledge. No other scholar, I think, has drawn attention to the point: “that the choice of a slave is no coincidence. In that he is a nobody. . .and in that he remains. . .utterly passive he renders for the pedagogical theorem a service similar to that rendered by the [visible] square for the geometrical one; namely, to make the universal visible through the particular. . . he represents the lowest common denominator of humanity. Any mental effort he is capable of, everyone else is capable of making at least as well.”

Did Plato, then, seek to democratize knowledge? In beautifully balanced pages Amos likens Plato to Heraclitus. Both thinkers, as he observes, see that objective knowledge must be universally valid and accessible to all; yet neither of them thinks that, given human weakness, objective knowledge is really accessible to all. Unlike the Sophists, who proposed that knowledge is teachable at a fee, Plato, in spite of his ideal of openness, “partly revived the aristocratic claim that there is more to the pursuit of true knowledge. . .than can be taught—let alone for money.”

Contrasting Plato with Aristotle, Amos views the plainness of Aristotle's prose (his avoidance of metaphor, etc.) as a deliberate gesture against esoteric knowledge. But although Aristotle grounded knowledge on experience and treated it as a universal human objective, he did not, Amos says, “answer the question why it is that universal concepts are also shared by all . . . why it is that what is common to all things is also common to humans.” It was the Stoics, Amos suggests, “who showed how all humans are well-equipped to know.”

They did so, he argues, by making the clear perception of *individual* things (rather than their generic forms) the foundation of knowledge, and also by their proposal that everyone is born with “pre-cognitive advance-conceptions,” which can guide the formation of scientific ideas. These *prolepseis*, as the Stoics called them, are not innate ideas, endowed with conceptual content; rather, they are innate dispositions to form concepts, under the influence of perceptual experience. One might compare Stoic *prolepseis* (the comparison is mine) to the deep structure Chomsky invokes in his account of transformational grammar, which explains the universality of human linguistic capacity and syntax.

The details of the Stoic theory, and Amos’ discussion of it, are too technical for me to rehearse here. I want to make just two points. First, as someone who has toiled for years over Stoic philosophy, I gained a great deal from reading his account of their epistemology. Second, as so often in this typescript, he makes an apparently simple point that has not been made before. He is quite right in claiming that there is nothing in Aristotle’s philosophy of mind that fills the place occupied by the Stoics’ “preconceptions.” I wish there had been an opportunity for me to discuss this point with Amos. As things are, I shall need to think deeply about it. Provisionally, I will just say that the Stoics’ identification of this mental capacity fits their universalist conception of humanity, which rejected, unlike Aristotle, all innate differences between human beings in respect of race, gender and status.

Amos himself suggests that “the democratization of knowledge” (i.e. the Greek tendency towards increasing openness) was a part of a *political* movement towards increased democratization. That may be true for the Sophistic period, but it does not seem to me to work for Plato and later. Stoicism developed in the world of Hellenistic monarchies, and Aristotle, whom Amos cites at this point, was no friend of actual democracies. The fact is that even post-Platonic philosophy combines ecumenicism with elitism. According to the Stoics, only the wise man (who is as rare as the phoenix) is genuinely knowledgeable, and the Epicurean school had a hierarchical structure. Amos is a little too fond of the “possessive/open” antithesis. What I miss in his account is recognition of the extremely strict conditions all Greek philosophers attached to knowledge. This helps to explain why the Stoics and Epicureans were constantly challenged by the Academic skeptics. That challenge is one of the high-

points in the history of Greek epistemology, but it does not form a part of Amos' story. Many of the most powerful Greek thinkers doubted the possibility of knowledge, not as a result of theology or esotericism, but because they questioned the existence of any incontrovertible criterion of truth.

Knowing Amos, I am sure he would have wagged his finger at this point, and said, "Yes, I know, but . . ." After the "but" would have come a devastating disclaimer, or an admonition to the effect that I had missed his point. Perhaps so. Given his staggering erudition, one had only rare opportunities to say something he had not anticipated or that might give him pause. My own expertise gives out at the point of his typescript I have now reached. What follows is a riveting treatment of "dogmatic knowledge and its environment." Here Amos sets out to explain how and why the dichotomy between open and closed knowledge fails to fit the knowledge embedded in Christian doctrine.

He begins by suggesting that this "dogmatic knowledge. . .has no parallels in another culture, and no real antecedents in the Greek or in the Jewish horizon." Dogmatic knowledge, as he defines it, is infallibly true, but its truth "is neither apparent nor uncontested. . .and may even be paradoxical." It is knowledge sanctioned by the proper institutions of the Church, and it has the force of law. His story about its origins involves three phases.

First, the early Christians characterize themselves as having the knowledge that saves—the knowledge about Jesus. But this was not yet dogma or doctrine. The early Christians, in contrast with their Gnostic rivals, did not promulgate secrecy or a religion accessible only to a few initiates. Hence they disseminated the knowledge that saves in plain and accessible language. Thus far Christian knowledge had a feature of openness, and Amos treats its open dissemination as the second phase in his account of the emergence of Christianity. Yet, the early Church, because it was riven with schisms and heresies, required, thirdly, a theology in order to settle disputes. Theology was done by the Church authorities, and thus it instanced closed knowledge. As Amos puts it, "Unlike the false and dangerous Gnostic teachings, there could be nothing secretive or hidden in the doctrines of the Church; but unlike Greek science or philosophy, they were not all transparent, open to dialectical or

demonstrative proofs. Their deepest comprehension and explication were reserved for a few.”

My brief remarks cannot convey the richness of Amos’ treatment of “dogmatic knowledge.” Much of what he says is premised on detailed remarks about its relation to the Rabbinical tradition, the Dead Sea scrolls, and other matters which will surely give experts a field day for debate. As in his classic book *Theology*, we witness his ability to enter into the thought-world of those about whom he is writing, both sympathetically and dispassionately, refraining from explicit judgement even as he implicitly indicates his own preference for openness and rational argument. As he says of Duns Scotus in the last completed chapter: “The best hour for a philosopher strikes when he or she can ask ‘why not?’ against an almost unanimous tradition which states of some thing or the other that it is impossible.”

Amos himself was a master of asking “Why not?”—of seeing glimmers of reason and seminal insight amidst thickets of obscurity and obscurantism. His own guarded optimism shines through this latest work. All of a piece with his own scholarly life, it justifies our own continuing faith in the possibility of achieving some degree of knowledge and objectivity.

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- 1 I should like to take this opportunity to thank four of my colleagues who stepped in at the last minute and gave splendid presentations on topics that Amos had hoped to deal with: Michael Nagler on Augustine, David Winston on Philo and Maimonides, Bill Bouwsma on Montaigne, and Martin Jay on Vico.
 - 2 See R.D. McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates* (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1994), 60-61.
 - 3 See Nikolaus von Kues, *Werke* ed. P. Wilpers (Berlin 1967), vol. I, 300: *Sic si leo faciem tibi (sc. domino) attribueret, non nisi leoninam iudicaret, et bos bovinam, et aquila aquilinam:*
“So if a lion were to attribute an appearance to You, he would invariably judge You to be leonine, and a cow would think You bovine, and an eagle, aquiline.”
 - 4 Amos’ sources for these reports are the Roman jurist Sextus Pomponius (cf. I.2.2.6, and I.2.2.35), Livy, IX.46.5 and Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 33.17.

Reflections on Pedagogy and the Academy

Isaac Miller

Reflections on Pedagogy and the Academy

ISAAC MILLER

I am going to speak briefly about my own experience as a graduate student who worked with Amos Funkenstein continuously over the past four or five years since he arrived at Berkeley. In doing so, I am also conscious of speaking for a group of other students who worked on a wide range of subjects in European intellectual history, who showed up regularly for Amos' seminars, who consulted him on their projects, and who generally formed a cohesive, stimulating, and diverse community within the larger structures of the Academy. The possibility for this group, its inclusiveness and the atmosphere in which it undertook intellectual work reflects, I believe, qualities of Amos' own methods and what we might consider in a loose way, the style of his approach to the study of ideas. Certainly, one aspect of working with him which recurs to me quite powerfully was the charge of witnessing his mental powers and processes, and the way this experience affected and animated the conditions of work for all of us who were studying with him. The quality of his intellectual style is certainly apparent to anyone having read his work or heard him speak, but its relevance to the conditions of learning and the socially mediated production of thought deserves special mention.

For those of us who studied under Amos while he was at Berkeley, there were certain contingencies in our connection to him which accentuated some of the extraordinary features of working with him. Many of us were already at Berkeley when he came, or were already on our way here. His presence was not initially part of our academic projections. There was a real sense of fortuitous surprise in having him available to work with. In addition to this unexpectedness, what is certainly true

for me but not for me alone, some of us were a bit unsettled within the institutional structures of the Academy, not quite fitting into a well defined specialization or a clearly established direction of work and research. The idea of identifying with a “field” produced rather anxious notions of what to trim away, what to emphasize, what was to be given up and what was required to belong there. For those of us in this predicament, Amos’ presence proved to be something of a haven. He seemed to provide a space where the various loose ends and collected interests could find, if not an actual, at least a potential coherence. The atmosphere he created inspired a sense of pursuing and following up interests rather than putting them aside. And he was not only adept at finding the relevance within an assortment of ideas, but also, and perhaps as an effect of this, he managed to bring together a group of students working on very different subjects. He integrated a group of people as well as a collection of ideas. Through his presence and through a continuous process of working with him we found the relevance of one-another, and of thinking through each other’s ideas and sources, of putting seemingly distant concerns into the same arena. This aspect of working with Amos I find particularly striking because it indicates a quality which is neither the same as being a good scholar nor the same as being an inspiring teacher. It is somewhere in between or at the intersection of these two positions. In addition, it is a quality which suggests an intersection between the internal and privatizing production of thought and the make-up or foundation of social forms in which such thinking occurs. What is the relationship between the kind of thinking we engage in and the kind of community we live in, between the quality and boundaries of our thinking and those of our lives? Whatever the connection may be, it is certainly one of the oldest philosophical questions on record.

I will try to specify from my own experience three of these attributes which I think comprised jointly Amos’ intellectual style and the quality of working with him as a student and as part of a group of students. One of these attributes would belong under concepts like “inclusiveness” and “relevance.” Anyone who has read him, or attended one of his seminars or worked with him on an idea has experienced something like a widening of the circle of relevance which is characteristic of his thinking. In many ways he seemed to think in groups. The discussions which he conducted in his courses and in his writing consisted of a tightly interconnected

cluster of reflections which passed through long spans of time, various disciplines of thought, several languages, and even widely divergent historical issues and concerns. Wherever you happened to insert yourself in this complex web of history, in working with him you were constantly made aware of the thinkers and ideas beyond the horizon of your own familiar domain. And you became aware, moreover, of the relevance and significance these horizon figures had for your own work. This sense of having the frame of one's thought become suddenly and dramatically extended was immediately evident to me from my first interactions with Amos.

When I first met him, I was working on a project concerning notions of the individual and the self in medieval thought which mostly centered on Augustine and his reworking of certain ideas from classical antiquity, and I was vaguely trying to connect with some writers of the later Middle Ages. Amos was conducting a seminar on the self in the history of philosophy which began with the late Middle Ages and continued on through Nietzsche. My initial reaction was, well it's a stretch but maybe I can get away with it. The first meeting of the seminar created a peculiar sort of tension for me. He produced a dazzling display of ideas which touched on many things which were directly related to my project: Aristotle, gnosticism, patristic thought. He managed to open up for me several lines of inquiry just within the first half hour of class. Then he announced that at least half the semester would be devoted to reading Hegel. Of course I wanted to take the course, but I was also troubled by the sense that this was going to be far afield from my own work. I suspected that the allure of the course consisted in that classic graduate student tactic of evasion by reading everything other than that which is directly pertinent. After the class I spoke with Amos to explain my interest and express my concern about the relevance of reading Hegel all semester. He shrugged and said that insofar as the issue was a theoretical one Hegel would be useful. I am still working through ideas which I began to think about in that course. Hegel has yet to make his way into my dissertation, but he is one among many of these horizon figures I have become aware of as extending a pull of relevance over my own thinking.

Those of us who studied with Amos were involved in a rather unique learning environment which he shaped, and which in many ways was all about issues of relevance and relatedness within the history of ideas. In covering the material of his

courses, the span of time, the different domains of thought, we were engaged in a process of setting up a range of ideas to reflect the conceptual, logical and historical space they held in relation to each other. The proximity and distance between these ideas was measured by the way in which motifs, assumptions and attitudes were reversed, or displaced, refracted or lost sight of altogether. A peculiar brand of temporality inhabited this approach to the study of thought which made it impossible either to construe ideas as frozen idealizations, or to reduce them to effects of some other historical process. And ultimately, one of the most consistent lessons to be drawn from this method was precisely the notion and value of making ideas relevant to one another. One always had the feeling in his classes of being inside of a complex hall of mirrors trying to gauge the angles of reflection required to produce certain appearances. And as one would expect from such an analogy, there were always surprises in this environment. The reflections through mathematics, science, theology and philosophy, and the collection of angles informing certain articulations were startling. They made you want to look again, to reread, to rethink. For this reason, many of us who worked with him ended up sitting in his seminars every semester, which is not, I think, typical of American graduate education. And it was not so much the topics that we went to learn about as it was the process of working through these ideas which was so engaging and attractive.

This inclusiveness and expansion of relevance which informed Amos' style of thinking obviously had effects not only on the organization of ideas, but also on the atmosphere and conditions in which his students worked together. The sense of relevance which animated clusters of ideas reflected as well upon the people working with or on those ideas. Those of us who gathered into a loose group to work together did so after the manner and methods we followed in Amos' courses. He provided a field of coherence in which it made sense for the modernists to read Aquinas and the medievalists to read Hegel. I suppose it is a fairly standard practice for study groups to emerge and evolve with the shifting contours of academic interests. But it is worthwhile to notice this process taking effect, to see how a person like Amos can become a kind of center of gravity or point of mediation around which a collection of ideas and a group of people achieve some sort of form and definition. Clearly this is not a bureaucratic or organizational question. The issue is how a particular intellectual style or atmosphere has the force to create a social form, and the

reflection or correspondence between that intellectual style and the tenor of cohesion which brings people together. For that reason it is, I think, worthwhile to acknowledge him for helping to shape an atmosphere of inclusiveness and relevance regarding a body of diverse and wide-ranging material. Obviously it is something of a cliché to complain of overspecialization and narrowness in the Academy, so I will refrain from it. But I will offer these statements as a special mention of the possibility for formalizing openness and despecialization.

Another quality which characterized the experience of working with Amos I will refer to as accessibility. I mean by this not simply that he was easy to get in touch with, but that he was ready to work with you at any moment you presented him with an idea or text you were thinking about. Approaching him to work did not require the structure of a course or a formalized project. No other guise was needed than the task of sifting through ideas and finding their significance. In fact, it often seemed that Amos fit rather oddly within the departmental organization of course work. My memory is that there was usually great confusion around the listing of his courses every semester. For one thing, he taught a large number of courses, covering both Jewish history and intellectual history. And then each one of these courses had several numbers attached to it and could be taken to fulfill a variety of different requirements. Beyond the nightmare of paperwork this caused in the offices, this is a sort of offhand testimony to the fact that he was something of an institution all to himself. His courses were by and large defined by the way in which he worked, and for that reason you really did not even need a course at all to work with him. On many occasions I presented him with a text or a passage which I was confused by or was struggling to connect with something else, and this would initiate a substantial session of reading it through, working out the implications, and posing the right questions. This combination of informality and serious attention was an extraordinary resource, one that did not require any structure other than his presence. And he was accessible in a manner even more committed than in those spontaneous and impromptu meetings. About four years ago, just after I had first started working with him, a friend and I decided we wanted to read Nicholas of Cusa over the summer and we thought to ask Amos whether he would give us some input and discuss the material with us. I think we were expecting perhaps that twice over the course of the summer we would check in with him, discuss what we had been reading and

thinking, and get some feedback. Immediately upon hearing the proposal he presented us with a list of works we should read in preparation for an informed study of Cusa, and said that he would meet with us every week for this purpose. An entire course was conjured up at a moment's notice. Actually, something more than a course. That was several years ago, and I am just getting to Cusa now.

And finally, there is one more quality which I think defined an intersection between his own intellectual style and the experience of working with him. I would call this quality an "immediacy of thought." It is an attribute which facilitated the accessibility and the inclusiveness about which I have been speaking. What I mean by immediacy is that he approached texts with a directness and engagement that did not depend on whatever scholarly apparatus may have surrounded them. When you studied with him it didn't really matter whether you were an expert on the work at hand or whether you had never read it before. The challenge he posed in reading and in thinking implicated your own methods and habits of thought, and produced an immediate attentiveness to the interpretive moment. Confrontations with the past were also confrontations with the present, in such a way that the historical objects were available and accessible without seeming overly embedded in the institutions established to study them. At one point in the manuscript he was working on concerning the history of theories of knowledge, Amos acknowledges that this very question about reflection on the foundations of knowledge has been a continuous refrain since the origins of Western philosophy. He was not simply pointing out a feature of this historical tradition, but explicitly identifying the burdens and debts, the difficulties and the baggage which imposes upon anyone who engages such a tradition. And he suggests that the only way to proceed in this situation is to ask the questions freshly, as if they had never been asked before. Working with Amos, whether in courses or individually, was animated by this quality of freshness, of looking again as if for the first time. It is an atmosphere which he created in his written work and in his interaction with students, and one which made a wide body of ideas accessible and relevant. In many ways his example offered a liberating and challenging way to proceed within an academic environment which is often constrained by its own weight and closed off by its own forms. There are, of course, alternative possibilities for intellectual work, both as an internal operation and as a socially mediated activity. For those of us who studied with him at Berkeley, Amos was an important example of what such an alternative might be like.

Genius and its Vicissitudes

Amos Funkenstein

as Teacher

Steven J. Zipperstein

Genius and its Vicissitudes

STEVEN J. ZIPPERSTEIN

I first met Amos as an adolescent. I was draped in a suit, a *kippah* on my head, my father at my side. My father had brought me along to hear Amos lecture. He must have arrived in Los Angeles not long before. I recall sitting in a sparse classroom in Bunche Hall—it was evening—and a man with an impossible accent lectured about the medieval philosopher Saadia. Perhaps we talked. I can't remember.

It was as a new Russian history graduate student at UCLA that I, prompted by my then-new friend David Biale, signed up for a seminar of Amos' on the medieval biblical exegesis of Ibn Ezra and Nahmanides. Amos tended to teach much the same texts over the years; I suspect that there are others in this room who attended essentially the same seminar ten, perhaps twenty years later. The class was held late—it started at 7:00 p.m.—and its formal ending time was treated by Amos with much the same casual, regal, Kropotkin-like disdain with which he handled most dispensable formalities: class time bled into nighttime, bleeding into chess time. Amos talked, he smoked, he set up impossible challenges, he embarrassed us, he left us stunned and we—nearly all of us—fell in love.

Here, and in his writings, too, he showed himself a master of conversation—a raconteur of the grand scale for whom written prose, when most effective, resembled talk: confrontational talk, talk that was astonishingly seductive and witty precisely because it was built as an assault on high places. I recall few modern thinkers in Judaism, with the exception of Nahman Krochmal or Gershom Scholem, who were left unscathed. He insisted that we, raw though we were, interrogate them, too. It

is said of the young Saul Bellow that even before he achieved prominence he was the only one of his Partisan Review orbit who acted toward Tolstoy or Dostoevsky as a peer, as a member of the same literary guild. Amos' power was made of similar stuff and what distinguished this—as in Bellow's case—from hubris was an astonishing range and lucidity of mind.

Others today will talk about the content of his thought. It is fair to say that there was an intimate connection here between architecture and substance. In both his prose and teaching, he would often begin with something familiar, a text that was well-known, a cultural moment already seemingly honed to the point of instant, deceptive transparency. What would follow in a seminar was text reading—students, or Amos himself, would recite and translate. If you hadn't before experienced a class with him, you might at such moments ask yourself what the excitement was all about: all appeared, at the outset at least, rather staid, solid, predictable, even dry.

This was, as I now see it, part of his intent, whether conscious or not. He was a born teacher, a natural most at home in the seminar room but often brilliant, stunning as a lecturer as well. The textual readings would establish a documentary basis for further discussion. They also served to lull listeners into an expectation of the mundane that Amos would then implode. There was here a keen appreciation for theater: that elastic face (animated even when colorless for lack of sleep or too much nicotine), those amazing eyes, that sharp, calculating mind with its appreciation of the impact of his own presence. He set up for us in classroom and seminar foils for demolition, too-easy explanations that would, by the end of the session, be laid bare, too facile to consider seriously.

As different as our work was, he taught his graduate students to see easy historical explanations—the sort so often published by our peers—as deplorable. He taught us that anything, even insomnia, was preferable to mediocre historical work. Often, on sleepless nights, weighing a day's imperfect labor, I think of Amos and my relationship with him as a blessing and, as that deadly 4:00 a.m. hour arrives, as a curse. Those of us who studied with him absorbed that terrible, anxious *dybbuk*, who would intervene to haunt us with premonitions of lack of nerve, the prospect of producing the sort of second-rate, unambitious work Amos taught us, quite simply, to hate.

So, where others finished papers or books, we knew we had only second or third drafts. Eventually, his voice was so much a part of ourselves that we no longer needed him quite so much as at first to comment on our texts—this, the trademark of a natural teacher, a master. He taught us to read ourselves, as well as others, with at least something of his terrible, wonderful, lacerating questions.

As broad as his interests were, they had, of course, their hierarchies. To sustain our intellectual independence some of us chose, often consciously, to cultivate precisely those areas where he hadn't formulated one of his startling, seductive conclusions. The price we paid was his sometimes waning interest: his hand would begin curling at the back of his neck, his eyes would grow weary, you found yourself working hard, feverishly at times, to recapture his interest. In desperation, you might then bring the conversation back to one of the (admittedly many) themes he loved. He fingers now relaxed, his eyes became playful again, the smile returned, his translucent skin now looked less greyish white: a happy, vibrant, Yeminite-looking man sat before you and conversation would, once again, begin.

As severe as he was when reading others, he was no less generous—perhaps, at times, excessively so—to his students. There was, as I saw it, something of an open admissions policy that Amos employed at UCLA: it was much the same system as an elite *yeshiva* like Volozhin. If interested, you were accepted and you swam or sank. Rarely would Amos tell even the most dubious student to leave. One who might have been given this message, I remember, Amos kept assigning more and more papers on Spinoza. When I returned to UCLA years later, a new PhD, and ran into him, he told me—soberly, evenly, without a hint of self-awareness—that he was at work, once again, on a new paper on Spinoza. When at my PhD orals, I was asked the name of a governor general of Siberia at the time of the Great Reforms of Alexander II in the 1860s, I must have gasped with fear, and I recall Amos smiling, turning to my Russian history mentor Hans Rogger and asking gently, 'How important is that to know?' I could have embraced him. I now wish I had.

**IN MEMORY OF
AMOS FUNKENSTEIN**

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