

## Changing One's Mind: Philosophy, Religion and Science

### Editorial

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## Editorial note

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Our individual and personal minds, namely the norms and standards to which we are committed and which we employ in assessment, judgment, and criticism, undergo changes over time. We find our standards of propriety to have changed surreptitiously as we mature and our circumstances change. Collective, cultural norms are also subject to generational “revolutions,” social transformations that are often expressed as significant religious, intellectual, or normative shifts. Change of this transformative kind has received its epoch-making and paradigmatic expression in historical phenomena such as secularization, the scientific revolution, and the great political revolutions in modern history. Each of these shifts has been experienced by many as profoundly challenging and changing their normative self-perception. But can such conversational events be rationalized? Can we (qua individual or communal entities) change our minds in acts of reflexive agency?

The philosophical literature on personal identity, normativity, is rarely occupied with the question,<sup>1</sup> and some of those who have addressed it<sup>2</sup> have answered it with a resounding “no.” In sociology and philosophy of science, where the collective moves to the foreground, it is a question not as easily ignored, especially since the work of Karl Mannheim and mostly since the publication of Kuhn’s famous study of scientific revolutions. But even the attempts to account for the rationality of scientific framework transitions<sup>3</sup> have remained, according to Menachem Fisch, limited in scope, providing only a retrospective account of framework transition, not a thick description of the process itself.<sup>4</sup>

Menachem Fisch has tackled and highlighted the topic of normative change of individuals and collectives from a variety of perspectives: as historian and philosopher of science,<sup>5</sup> as a scholar of Rabbinic literature,<sup>6</sup> and mostly as systematic philosopher striving to understand the possibility of self-criticism and change.<sup>7</sup> In the last decade, Fisch’s main ideas became subject to broader discussion and reflection.<sup>8</sup> The idea that underlies this topical issue was born in the aftermath of a conference held in Tel Aviv University in November 2017, dedicated to the different realms of Menachem Fisch’s work. Though there is no direct link between the papers delivered in that conference and the articles included in this issue, the conference title

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<sup>1</sup> See Paul, *Transformative Experience* and discussion of relevant literature there.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Friedman, *Dynamics of Reason*.

<sup>4</sup> See Franks’ article in this topical issue, 705, 712.

<sup>5</sup> Fisch, *Creatively Undecided*.

<sup>6</sup> Fisch, *Rational Rabbis*.

<sup>7</sup> Fisch, *The View From Within*.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Tirosh-Samuelson and Hughes, *Menahem Fisch*.

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directly inspired the present title of this issue: "Changing One's Mind." This issue's editing also echoes the general methodological attitude toward the fundamental problem, adopting the different fields of Fisch's intellectual activity as legitimately corresponding fields of discourse that should provide a multi-faceted interdisciplinary framework.

Hence the eight papers gathered here are also moving between philosophy, history and philosophy of science, history and philosophy of religion, and systematic theology. However, it has no pretension to offer an exhaustive discussion on all those realms but again to provide an intriguing, changing, and challenging discussion of the same subject matter and see how much it might benefit from such a multidisciplinary perspective. In the following, we would like to offer a short reflection on the different papers and how they interact with each other and shed light on the general theme of this volume.

Menachem Fisch's opening article will provide the reader with a paradigmatic view of all aspects described above. Its point of departure lies in a historical communal phenomenon: Jewish traditional rabbinic discourse. According to Fisch, "Talmudic confrontational theology" touches upon Judaism's four primary sources of religious authority: Scripture, the tradition of religious law relying on them (oral Torah), the authoritative figure that emerges from this legal discourse ("Rabbinic tradition"), and God Himself as its theological foundation and direct subject. Fisch presents the central move of such Rabbinic discourse as a demand to create normative critical distance between the Rabbis and their very form of life. Moreover, he claims that the Talmud's unique and intense dialogism was adopted in self-conscious awareness of the impossibility of engaging in such normative self-critique monologically. Such a self-critical moment can be achieved only by keen and open exposure to significant others' normative critique. Moving then to the rationality of "scientific framework transitions," Fisch demonstrates the surprisingly universal implications of the particular Rabbinic case study.

The following paper of Heiko Schulz directly challenges a central element of Menachem Fisch's account of the (rational) transitions between normative frameworks and its necessary dialogical structure. While adopting many of Fisch's assumptions, Schulz argues from a perspective of systematic theology that normative criticism leveled at us by other human beings is neither sufficient nor necessary for our understanding of significant inner-transitions. Against Fisch's turn to Rabbinic Judaism, Schulz takes inspiration from the rich Christian tradition of conversion, as a fundamental change of one's mind. Relying heavily on Søren Kierkegaard's account, Schulz argues that Fisch's framework model has far-reaching transcendental implications that Fisch might ignore, and suggests that such neglect unnecessarily weakens the overall plausibility of Fisch's account.

The next two articles, by Paul Franks and Yemima ben Menachem, widen the scope of the encounter with Fisch's main ideas, taking in the history of philosophy and the philosophy of science.

Paul Franks dwells on the Kantian framework of Fisch's account of inter-personal critical dialogue as the necessary condition for reflective judgment. Franks points out that Fichte's idealist move entails much of Fisch's dialogical turn and illuminates a possible Jewish origin for this Fichtean key concept.

Yemima Ben-Menahem juxtaposes the views of two Israeli philosophers, Edna Ullmann-Margalit and Menachem Fisch, on radical changes of mind, as a pattern of activity that cannot be justified by reasons according to Schulz's paper. Ben-Menahem tends to suspect as well the emphasis on external intervention as a necessary condition of change. She confronts Fisch's conception of ambivalence with Hili Razinsky's ambivalence,<sup>9</sup> striving to understand it as an inbuilt feature of our web of belief, an inherent element of rationality, not its violation.

The last four articles undertake more particular case studies, either historical, or philosophical. Omer Michaelis takes Fisch's analysis of the significant role played by ambivalence and hybridity in enabling one to loosen the grip of one's steadfast normative commitments, and to stimulate critical reflection on one's entire normative framework. While Fisch's work tends to move between Antiquity (Bible), late antiquity (Rabbinic discourse), and modernity (from Scientific revolution to modern Physics and mathematics), and while David Ruderman, as quoted by Michaelis, provides this with historical justification, claiming that the

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<sup>9</sup> Razinsky, *Ambivalence: A Philosophical Exploration*.

blurring of the boundaries of identity and religion was a fundamental trait of modernity, Michalis argues that hybridity, and the ambivalence inherent in it, is a condition that strongly characterized Jewish existence in the Middle Ages as well. From a general historical perspective, hybridity is described here (just like ambivalence in Ben-Menahem's paper) not as a unique trait of a particular era but as a basic pattern of different ages.

Niccolò Guicciardini turns to a significant chapter in the history of science and emphasizes another crucial idea, that of intellectual and cultural "trading zones," as introduced by Peter Gallison in his *Image & Logic*. Guicciardini examines the gravitation theory of Robert Hooke often unfavorably contrasted to Newton as an eminent natural philosopher. Hooke is portrayed here as a paradigmatic thinker, trading and moving between the diverse locales of London – between watchmakers' shops, the chambers of the Royal Society, and the laboratory in Gresham College – and precisely, therefore, better equipped than the lonely Newton to fulfill the mathematized natural philosophy envisaged by the Royal Society. While presenting a particular case study, Guicciardini argues for a more comprehensive historical characteristic. At the same time, he attempts to rehabilitate the category of authorial intentionality – so prominent in Fisch and Benbaji's *The View from Within* – that is often bracketed out as irrelevant, unattainable, or even non-existent by scholars belonging to a wide array of philosophical/historiographical denominations.

Yael Gazit turns back from the synchronic social model of normative discourse to the diachronic axis of engaging the past, a very central moment in Fisch's own encounter with different traditions, but one on which he tends not to reflect systematically. Gazit considers the diachronic by examining Robert Brandom's notion of historical rationality, arguing that, in applying Brandom's premises, a false analogy between the present community and tradition might arise, obscuring the crucial differences between the two axes. Taking its cue from Brandom's critics, the article shows that Brandom's discourse with tradition is not, and cannot be, dialogical. Accordingly, historical rationality is not, and cannot be, governed by the same social structure of inferentialism. The article concludes by considering the implications of such a claim on Brandom's thesis as a whole and the role of tradition in the process of normative change.

The last article in this special issue is written by Ariel Furstenberg, who examines the basic idea of change from both analytic and neuroscience perspectives. Furstenberg discusses situations in which one has to select between arbitrary alternatives that make no difference to the agent, asking to what extent changes of mind that consist in "picking conditions" might still be relevant when looking at meaningful choices that hinge on one's self-identity. He also discusses empirical results regarding swift changes of mind and the significance of "the road not taken" to human agency.

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