



BRILL

THE REVIEW OF RABBINIC JUDAISM 24 (2021) 265–275

The Review of
Rabbinic Judaism
Ancient, Medieval
and Modern

brill.com/rrj

Review Essay



How to Live Communally Amidst Doubts: Moshe Halbertal, *The Birth of Doubt: Confronting Uncertainty in Early Rabbinic Literature*

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1 In Face of Doubt: Three Strategies

Contending with doubt is essential to human life. How people handle this condition, though, varies significantly. Some choose to (i) repress doubt's very existence by denying the dynamic and plural character of this world and a recourse to a detached, Platonist realm of ideas. Others (ii) give up certainty altogether, in a radical skepticist fashion, converting their doubts into dogmatic certainty. The case of Descartes's hyperbolic doubt demonstrates how strategies (i) and (ii) can be mutually supportive. A third group, typically pragmatist, travels the uneasy road of trying to live with doubt productively. It essentially means, due to the plurality of human life, living with doubts, i.e., with many forms of doubt. It seems that the plurality of doubts might be even more paralyzing than the appearance of doubt itself; the strategy of binding all types of doubts and ascribing them jointly to some metaphysical entity – which typically leads toward Gnosticism – seems to be a usable way of gathering the plural uncertainty of doubts and ascribing them to a unified agent, typically Satanic, toward which one can efficiently revolt. The rabbinic sages of the Talmud belong to the third group, acknowledging the realness and indispensability of doubts without attempting to bind them together in a way that denies the heavy existential and normative burden they create.

Doubt is seemingly a theoretical problem for us moderns. But as we learn from John J. McDermott, the scholar of pragmatism, “Modern man is also a victim of clarity. Much of our difficulty proceeds from the demand for certitude and an inability to recognize and live with the irreducibility of shadows.”¹ Doubt occupies the minds of human beings wherever they are, but it is the Cartesian hyperbolic doubt (in René Descartes’s *Meditations*) that casts its particular shadow over the modern mind. The will for absolute certainty and knowledge, coupled with Cartesian skepticism, and fueled by the “evil demon,” all make modern humans especially irritated by doubt and doubting. Cartesian hyperbolic doubt is what brought Charles S. Peirce, the founder of American pragmatism, to criticize Descartes and to set forth a moderate foundationalist approach, which is predicated on local (as distinct from universal and artificial) doubts.² Following important scholarly contributions by Peter Ochs, Menachem Fisch, Hannah E. Hashkes, Yonatan Y. Brafman, David Brezis, and others, I am inclined to think that pragmatism, with its emphasis on the sociality of reason and on the value of sociality, is an important key to the gates of the talmudic *beit-midrash*. In the following sections it will become clearer why.

2 The Birth of Rabbinic Contending with Doubts

Moshe Halbertal’s book *The Birth of Doubt: Confronting Uncertainty in Early Rabbinic Literature* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2020; hereafter: *BoD*) provides an illuminating perspective on the tannaitic way of contending with normative doubts. The early rabbis clearly belong to the third group classified above, namely, pragmatists who travel the uneasy road of living with doubt productively. Even though the term *pragmatism* to its declensions does not appear in Halbertal’s book, it seems to me that pragmatism is relevant for understanding the intellectual impetus of this book and of the talmudic textual corpus it examines. This book joins other works by Halbertal, most importantly his (Hebrew) 1997 book, *Interpretive Revolutions in the Making: Values as Interpretative Considerations in Midrashei Halakhah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press,

1 *The Drama of Possibility: Experience as Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 350.

2 See Peirce’s 1868 article, “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), vol. 5, §§264–317. For a philosophical topography of the spectrum between foundationalism(s) and skepticism(s), see my “The Rejection of Radical Foundationalism and Skepticism: Pragmatic Belief in God in Eliezer Berkovits’s Thought,” in *Jewish Thought* 1 (2019), pp. 201–246 (in Heb.).

1997), which read closely various talmudic *sugyot* while providing precious large-scale observations on the nature of halakhic thinking.

The translator from the Hebrew of *The Birth of Doubt*, Elli Fischer (a scholar in his own right), impressively accomplished the complex task of translating a book with meticulous halakhic discussions and numerous technical terms. *BoD* concentrates on tannaitic works (Mishnah, Tosefta, Midrashim) on various doubt-related halakhic topics across the Six Orders (*SHaS*), but considers relevant Amoraic interpretations of the halakhic issues under discussion, and the discussions of these *sugyot* in modern-day scholarship. Halbertal's choice to encompass various halakhic fields is ambitious and allows him to reach broad conclusions about the rabbinic approach to normative doubts.

The overarching rabbinic strategy vis-à-vis halakhic doubts is described by Halbertal as follows: "The sages' complex distinctions [...] stem from their attempt "to moderate, not expand, the fear of uncertainty" (57). They do so in order "to regulate broad areas of life through rules of a high resolution" (146). "The objective of Halakhah is directed toward the real world; its goal is to improve and sanctify it by means of a set of rules that indicate proper action and encompass every facet of human life" (208).

According to Halbertal, talmudic sages handle halakhic doubts three main ways. The first, countering doubts, is context-sensitive:

Tannaitic literature does not present one principle for states of uncertainty in every realm of the law; rather, it produces a variety of rules – from imposing a higher threshold for incrimination in capital cases, to imposing a low threshold of probability to warrant the violation of prohibition in order to save lives. [...] This broad spectrum of rules for cases of uncertainty stems from the relationship between the required level of uncertainty and the cost of error. [...] The study of the rules governing uncertainty is thus a key to understanding the varying weight that Halakhah assigns to different potential errors, and such study is a way to understand tannaitic Halakhah's hierarchy of considerations and value judgments (208).

The second guiding principle concerns "the price of error." Halbertal points out the nominalist trajectory of the rabbis (209), according to which certain "toxic" halakhic or spiritual entities can be conceived in a way that loosens the bindingness of halakhic categories, such as forbidden foods or doubtful *mamzerut* conditions. On such a nominalism, halakhic duties and prohibitions are perceived as largely (Halbertal uses the word "solely") constituted by the law. The third principle is "the rejection of the sectarian alternative"

(209), which makes communal life and commerce, as well as the life with non-Jews, virtually impossible. “By distinguishing between the public and private domains in their rulings on uncertainty, the sages made room for meticulousness without incurring the cost of separatism” (210).

2.1 *The Content of the Book*

Let us review very briefly the main content of each chapter and then suggest some reflections in the next section. The *Introduction* lays the ground by stating, “If one surveys all the extant nonrabbinic legal material from that era and earlier – the Apocrypha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, and Josephus – one will not find any directives or discussions of uncertain states. The burst of intense engagement with uncertainty is thus a unique feature of early rabbinic law” (1). The next chapters are not arranged according to distinct halakhic fields (monetary law, personal status, forbidden foods, etc.), but bring together bundles of related halakhic topics, which together comprise a thematic umbrella. Despite the attempt by R. Judah the Prince (*haNasi*) to compile the SHaS according to distinct halakhic fields, every student of the Mishnah knows that there are many entanglements between the subjects, and in this sense the editing of *BoD* makes much sense.

Chapter 1, *Prohibitions, Uncertainty, and the Price of Error*, defines the nature of statistical decision making in Halakhah and then investigates it within halakhic areas such as the status of food items found in the marketplace, uncertainty concerning the ability of a woman to remarry when her husband fell into delimited or endless waters, etc. Such cases involve conceptual problems such as when it is halakhically justified to violate the Mosaic law in order to preserve life and fulfil certain values, which are often in conflict. In a non-ideal world of chance and arbitrariness, the sages did their best to minimize evil and maximize the common good.

Chapter 2, *Uncertainty and the Marketplace: Majority, Sectarianism, and Guilt*, deals with tithes and the status of produce that may or may not have been completely tithed (*dema'ei*), as it was found in the marketplace; the chapter investigates which principle (*kavu'a* or *parish*) determines whether this produce (or food) is considered fully tithed. The chapter clarifies the meanings of the term *hazakah* (possession, presumption, status-quo, acquisition) and what role it plays in the statistical grappling with halakhic doubts across various areas: *niddah*, *gittin*, *parah*, *hammetz*, *mikvaot*, *ketubot*, *orlah*, and so on. It turns to the problem of religious guilt (Bava b. Buta and his obsessive guilt offering) and how it is nourished by troubling doubts.

Chapter 3, *Purity and Doubt: Between Strictness and Separation*, analyzes the status of impure persons and objects in private- and in public-spaces (and in

between them) and highlights the inclination of the tractates of Order Taharot to practice leniency: uncertain impurities in the public sphere are (generally speaking) deemed pure. This halakhic policy reflects, according to Halbertal, an anti-sectarian sensibility (85), which stands out when compared to the Dead Sea sect. The chapter considers how the Tannaim strived to create a public sphere that enables social interaction.

Chapter 4, *Lineage, Uncertainty, and the Boundaries of the Community*, explores the complex problems of uncertainty in determining family lineage, parenthood, and so on. The anxiety about pedigree (103) has numerous halakhic ramifications and involves aspects of social status, conversion (*giyyur*), inheritance rights, *mamzerut*, and many more. The chapter considers the way marital relationships are construed between Priests, Levites, and Israelites in tractate Kiddushin and other relevant texts, while commenting on the social and inter-communal tensions (between Eretz Israel and Babylonia, and also vis-à-vis the Karaites and Samaritans) that ancestral doubts create.

Chapter 5, *Monetary Law: Possession, Evidence, and Doubt*, addresses uncertainties within monetary laws, of purchase, ownership, and so on. A large portion of the chapter examines the application of the rule concerning the burden of proof that rests on the claimant (*hamotzi meḥavero alav hare'ayah*), and why in some cases the resolution is to divide the object (or its monetary worth) between the parties, and sometimes the principle of *ḥazakah* (possession) is preferred. The choice between the two is often far from ideal and yet reflects the talmudic inclination toward fair or good-enough arbitration.

Chapter 6, *Doubt and Vagueness*, investigates halakhic ambiguities pertaining to time (e.g., *bein ha-shmashot* between day-time and night-time) and gender or sex categorical ambiguities. The former subject has ramifications for laws such as prayer (until when, e.g., can *minḥah* be recited) and *niddah*; the latter impacts the exemption from time-bound positive (*asseh*) precepts, and many other issues. As Halbertal writes, “the sages recognize two borderline cases that challenge the man/woman binary. The first is the *androgynos*, a person who was born with both male and female genitalia. The second is the ‘tumtum,’ a person whose sexual organ is not apparent” (185). Using a gender-neutral pronouns (“ze” and “hir”) to indicate the uncertain status of the *androgynos* in tannaitic texts, the chapter delineates how the rabbis tried to minimize legal ambiguity in various contexts (such as laws of *nazir*, *bikurim*, and marriage) while preserving the human dignity of such individuals. In recognizing that there are borderline cases, the rabbis revealed sensitivity to the challenges under consideration (202).

The *Conclusion* presents tractate *Kinnim* and the sophisticated logic it manifests about the laws of bird-offerings and how errors in identifying the birds

for this sacrifice should be solved. Halbertal goes on to make some general, principal observations about how the rabbis contend with doubt.

3 Some Reflections on *The Birth of Doubt*

The above bird's eye view obviously cannot get close to the precision of Halbertal's comprehensive discussion of the primary sources, not to mention the rich footnotes and the secondary sources he provides. Based on the talmudic rule that silence constitutes agreement (B. Yeb. 87b), I will comment only on some issues in *The Birth of Doubt*.

3.1 *How Deep Are the Gaps between the Hebrew Bible and the Tannaim*

There is an obvious (Thomas Kuhnian?) temptation to portray the relationship between the Mosaic stratum and its rabbinic interpretation as a gulf. However, as we learn from Isaac L. Seeligmann,³ Michael Fishbane,⁴ and from Halbertal's own work,⁵ there are continuities between the biblical tradition and its post-biblical commentaries. Contrary to the Cartesian method of philosophizing (presumably) *ex-nihilo*, the sages not only interpreted the Bible but also relied on certain biblical interpretive strategies and developed them further. To be sure, as we learn from Saul Lieberman, Maren Niehoff, Yakir Paz, and others, those strategies were immensely enriched by the encounter with Hellenistic philology. In this context, then, we may consider the following moments in *BoD*.

Halbertal's claim (*BoD*, 1) that there is no precedent in the Hebrew Bible (and Second Temple legal texts) to the tannaitic method of contending with doubts seems to disregard biblical passages that deal explicitly with cases of legal doubt, e.g., the Sotah (Num. 5:11–31), as Halbertal himself states (89). If the seeds of recognizing legal ambiguity are found in the Bible,⁶ it does not diminish but emphasize the tannaitic normative trajectory. After all, the scribes of the Dead Sea sect were acquainted with the biblical corpus, but, for sectarian reasons (that Halbertal illuminates), chose to deploy a strict legal policy.

3 "The Beginnings of Midrash in the Books of Chronicles," in *Tarbiz* 49 (1980), pp. 14–32.

4 *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

5 *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

6 See also the reference to the biblical use of lot (*goral*) by Nachum L. Rabinovitch in his *Probability and Statistical Inference in Ancient and Medieval Jewish Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973, rep. 2018), pp. 21–29. Not surprisingly, Rabinovitch refers to C.S. Peirce's contribution to the formation of modern statistics (9).

Another instance of an argument concerning unprecedented tannaitic innovation is the claim (*BoD*, 82) that, in the context of purity laws, there is no precedent for the separation between private and public domains. This invites further reflection. Consider the awareness in the laws of the *metzor'a* (Lev. 13:46) for how to minimize the presence and spread of contagious diseases in the public arena. To be sure, the excluded person who suffers from leprosy does not stay in a standard private space, namely, at home, but outside the camp. Yet this law provides a model for how public space can remain available and (relatively) safe for the majority of the community.

Another biblical instance reflecting the purifying impact of bringing or exposing the private to the public is the ritual of *vidduy* (Lev. 5:5). This ritual involves making explicit an individual's otherwise hidden thoughts or memories of sin. Performed in a public space (the Temple), the ritual exemplifies how the public sphere can purify or help bring about atonement. Even if this is not a direct foundation for the tannaitic purity laws, it is an example of how social interaction has a redemptive capacity.⁷ As such, the practice of *vidduy* provides an axiological backup for the construction of rabbinic purity laws.

A broader question concerns the purposes of purity laws and whether they invariably aim to separate the impure from the pure. Consider the claim in *BoD* that, "In biblical law, and in other religious traditions, the idea of distinguishing purity from impurity aims to enforce separation and segregation" (83). Yet, to paraphrase George Orwell, while all impurities are equal, it seems that some impurities are more equal. Put differently, some impurities are less equal, in that Jewish law tends to demonstrate greater acceptance of them; this argument is exactly the trajectory that Halbertal discerns in tannaitic law. The question, once again, is whether this hermeneutical sensitivity has a basis in Mosaic law. Here we see that there are differences concerning how severe is the impurity under consideration. The biblical instruction concerning women in their menstrual period (Lev. 15:19–27), e.g., is different from the *metzor'a*, as it is unclear whether those women should leave the community.⁸ The tannaitic policy of inclusion regarding the public sphere vis-à-vis the private domain

7 On the other hand, there is a tremendous value in Jewish tradition to individuality and the protection of privacy. See Kenneth A. Bamberger and Ariel E. Mayse, "Privacy in Society: Jewish Law Insights for the Age of Big Data" (forthcoming in *Journal of Law and Religion*).

8 It is also unclear in M. Nid. 7:4 what exactly the *beit ha-tum'ot* ("hut of impurities") is and to what extent it was used by rabbinic Jews. In the tradition of Ethiopian Jewry, however, there surely were menstruation huts at the margins of the community (named *marjam gogo*), and the exclusion of menstruating women was strict. See Sharon Shalom, *From Sinai to Ethiopia: The Halachic and Conceptual World of Ethiopian Jewry*, trans. Jessica Setbon (Jerusalem and New York, 2016), p. 211. I thank Rabbi Shalom for a helpful correspondence.

thus has some precedents, and its inclusivity (so it seems) does not stem invariably from the distinction between the private and the public.

3.2 *Realism, Nominalism, and In-between*

Another intellectual axis in *BoD* concerns the question of (i) realism and (ii) nominalism. In Yoḥanan Silman's famous definition,⁹ those are the notions that (i) the world exists independently of our minds or that (ii) the world is constructed by our minds. These two options, however, require further refinement, as Halbertal and other scholars of Halakhah have shown. From a pragmatist's perspective, the need for mediation between realism and nominalism stems from the quest to secure a critical common sensism (to use Peirce's term) that establishes a middle path between realism and nominalism. Radicalizing realism tends to lead to materialism, whereas pushing nominalism to the edge creates acosmism or unio-mysticism. The pragmatist middle ground between realism and nominalism is proximate to what I term moderate foundationalism (see §1 above). Let us briefly examine how realism and nominalism are at play in *BoD*.

Halbertal claims that the sages practice leniency or a nominalist inclination in cases such as legitimizing foods of uncertain origins (57). This claim is reinforced when we consider the concept of *ha'aramah* (legal-cunning or – circumvention; see M. M.S. 4:4), which is a technique of using legal ambiguities to fulfil the core values of the law. The plausible reason for the rabbis' increased leniency in various cases of laws between humans and God (*bein adam lam-aqom*) and in certain *d'rabanan* (rabbinic, rather than *de'oraita*, or Mosaic) precepts is that God, so to speak, gives up his honor in order to promote the wellbeing of humans.¹⁰ But this nominalist flexibility does not imply that the rabbis abandoned their naïve realism altogether.

If the way tannaitic rabbis contend with legal doubts can be identified as pragmatic, it is not surprising that this teleological halakhic route is contrasted with absurdity. As Halbertal states, the nominalist tendency is at risk of ending up with absurdity (79): "Halakhah can render a pure object impure, or an impure object pure, without changing its intrinsic features. It cannot, however, treat a person as being dead and then alive." This observation is crucial, for it seems that, in many cases, absurdity is a nominalism run amok. Since rabbinic Halakhah seems to be premised on the intelligibility of the earthly realm and on legal consistency, radical nominalism seems harmful to halakhic thinking.

9 "Halakhic Determinations of a Nominalistic and Realistic Nature: Legal and Philosophical Considerations," in *Dine Israel* 12 (1984), pp. 249–266 [Heb.].

10 See Eliezer Berkovits, *Halakhah: Its Role and Function* (Jerusalem: Mosad haRav Kook, 1981), pp. 159–177 [Heb.].

The need for refinement of the realism-nominalism divide comes from the following argument in *BoD*:

Had impurity really been considered “poisonous,” it would not have been possible to formulate a doctrine of uncertainty like the one produced by the sages. Once the limitations imposed by a dangerous substance were removed, it became possible to entertain various policy considerations that could guide decision making in cases of uncertainty. These policy considerations led to the creation of rules that include those who meticulously maintain purity even in spaces that are saturated with uncertainty, and it is in this policy that a profound shift in the purpose of distinguishing purity from impurity finds expression (98).¹¹

The question is yet invoked: Should it be assumed that the recognition of an acute social need implies that rabbinic realism concerning the hazardousness of certain impure objects/foods/para-physical entities (such as *ḥametz*) has been totally overcome? Another option is that impurity is often considered poisonous by the sages, but at the same time they thought this hazardous property can be overridden or temporarily suspended by other (nominalist) policy considerations. How can rabbinic realism and nominalism be reconciled? It seems that Kantian Pragmatism can be helpful here, if we recall the concept of *postulate*: the idea that some concepts, however empirically un-provable (such as free will), are indispensable for normative systems. One such postulate in the halakhic context is the notion that religious properties are (at least in some cases) real and that some ritual properties – such as impurity – are indispensable for a ritualistic system. And yet, a healthy amount of nominalism is practiced by religious traditions that strive to balance traditional categories with vital human needs. This, to my best understanding, is fully compatible with the core arguments of *BoD*.

3.3 *Doubt, the Boundaries of Knowledge, and Renewing Conventions*

This review opened by highlighting the relevance of pragmatist doubt-contending for the modern mind and its obsession with achieving absolute (Cartesian) certainty. It is worthy to mention in this regard that some technologies immensely improved our knowledge of empirical reality, in ways that

11 In a lecture at Bar-Ilan University (March 13, 2018), Halbertal insightfully connected the terms רִיאָלִיזְם and רַעַל (poison), to create the term “רַעַלִיזְם,” which elegantly captures cases in which halakhic realism relates to hypostases conceived as toxic. On the tannaitic treatment of such metaphysically-loaded entities/concepts, while deploying the argument אַם כֵּן אֵין לְדַבֵּר סוּף, see my “If so, there would be no end to the matter’ as Halakhic Argument in Rabbinic Texts,” MA thesis (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 2006) [Heb.].

necessitate a reconsideration of the old rabbinic presumptions about knowledge and uncertainty. For example, Halbertal refers (91) to Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel (in T. Tah. 6:12), who explains, “Why is uncertainty in the private domain deemed impure, while uncertainty in the public domain is deemed pure? Because an individual can be questioned, but the masses cannot be questioned” (91). As we know, the ability to gather information from and about the masses has tremendously improved in recent decades due to information technology and Big Data. It comes out, then, that our ability to attain real knowledge about the world has dramatically increased.¹² As we see in the case of presumed determination of Jewishness according to these and other DNA surveys, it seems that our ability to gather data, counterfactually, might harm our ability to practice the inclusive halakhic strategies that Halbertal investigates.¹³

The need to reconsider the ancient conventions concerning uncertainty has another interesting aspect in the context of inheritance laws, in a case in which a couple inhabiting a house that collapsed had died. “It is not known,” writes Halbertal, “and it will never be known, who died first – a question with ramifications for the division of their assets between the husband’s heirs and the wife’s heirs, who are not always the same heirs” (141). That was probably true for the Mishnah, but in the age of the “quantified self,” many things that were formerly deemed unknowable are in fact knowable, e.g. if a person wears a smart watch that monitors blood pressure. Halbertal’s initial assessment remains, but when looking on the ancient texts, we should keep in mind that some new developments create shifts in our social presumptions, which in turn should lead to a reconsideration of halakhic conventions. In an opposite direction, we should recall that the lenient ruling of the Tannaim about a food item of unknown origin (e.g., a piece of meat in the marketplace) is not necessarily more lenient than today (“A contemporary halakhist would tell a questioner who found meat in the street: ‘If you don’t know where it’s from, it’s forbidden’”; 14), if we consider the vast difference between our modern nutrition security and that of the average Jew in late antiquity.

The changing conceptions of social knowledge lead to another observation on the use of pronouns in *BoD*. Given the impressive scholarly work done in the sixth chapter of *BoD* about pronouns, it is surprising that the book uses the masculine pronoun as the default for referring to rabbinic texts. On p. 164, for instance, Halbertal comments that, “for in any event he will not profit from his

12 Yet we should definitely be humble about our capacity; Heisenberg’s *Uncertainty Principle* remains valid for both the particle-level and, *a-fortiori*, the macro level.

13 Compare Elad Caplan, “Who is a Jew.Com: The Databases of the [Israeli Chief] Rabbinat,” in *De’ot* 81 (2017), pp. 4–9 (Heb.).

deceitful attempt.” Here and in numerous other cases, why use “he” and not “she”? The talmudic *weltanschauung* is no doubt patriarchal, yet many rabbinic statements (surely in civil law cases) refer to both men and women. A proximate question concerns a statement on p. 193: “A regime based on inequality and domination will tend to create the means of identification and separation that will prevent the dilution of a distinction that is central to the very construction of society and law.” Can Halakhah be described as straightforwardly predicated on inequality and domination? In the specific context of gender, Halbertal contends that, “The ruling that an *androgynos* dresses like men and not like women teaches that the concern about man becoming a woman is greater than the transformation of a woman into a man” (194). Were sages terrified by a man being feminized, or perhaps the rabbis (at least some of them) rather respected the right of women, at least in some vulnerable cases, for safe spaces, free of males?¹⁴ *BoD* beautifully opens the door to further discussion.

4 Conclusion

Halbertal’s book is a major scholarly achievement that combines careful reading of tannaitic *sugyot* with analytical rigor and lucid philosophical analyses. The book closes by asking, “what broader assumptions enabled the birth of the realm of uncertainty and the expansive rules that grew up in its wake?” (211). I am inclined to speculate that these broader assumptions are pragmatist ones, which arguably characterize the profound project of rabbinic hermeneutics. There are obviously many other currents in talmudic culture. But at least when it comes to the challenge of contending with live doubts, it seems that the rabbinic responses demonstrate many pragmatist trajectories. *BoD* hence invites further investigations of pragmatist strategies of giving birth to doubts, and raises the question of how these strategies differ from legal trajectories that tend to abort doubts altogether, by (as proposed at the outset) packing them into an all-too-elegant monolithic doubt.

To sum up, *The Birth of Doubt* is a pioneering work that paves a scholarly way within rabbinic studies. This book will interest scholars and students of Talmud and Jewish law and has vast relevance for law, religion, and philosophy.¹⁵

14 Similarly to concerns presently expressed by J.K. Rowling and other British feminists.

15 For helpful comments on an earlier draft, I thank Hanan Mazeh. Any deficiency remains my own.