

VILÉM FLUSSER On "JEWISH PHILOSOPHERS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA"
by AVIGDOR DAGAN.

He who writes on philosophy must tackle the well-known problem of defining his subject. (An unfortunate task, because condemned to failure.) Mr. Dagan does not attempt it explicitly in the paper under consideration, and he was wise not to do it. But implicitly, of course, he cannot escape it. And the result is rather disappointing. On the one hand, (understandably, because Mr. Dagan is committed to prove that philosophy is well represented among Czechoslovak Jews), he extends the meaning of the term "philosophy" to include things like Talmudic research and the Zionist movement. Very few will agree to such an extension. On the other hand the only true "technical" philosophers among Jews who have something to do with Czechoslovakia, (Husserl and Jacobson), from serious consideration. Understandably so, because any consideration of those two would have exploded both the scope and the form of his paper. One cannot see, however, how Mr. Dagan could have escaped from the horns of this dilemma. Possibly there is no sense in trying to write about philosophy from a geographical viewpoint, even where the field seems to be particularly rich, (like "German" or "English" philosophy), which is, one has to admit it, not the case where Czech Jews are concerned. Can anyone imagine for instance a paper on "Protestant Philosophers in Germany" or "Aristocratic Philosophers in England"? The fact is that philosophy, even more than other disciplines, is an activity which goes on in a super-structure very autonomous from geographical, (and other), determination. It is to a high extent a "pure" activity, and every attempt to explain it from geographical, ethnological and similar conditions is anti-philosophical and in this sense falsifies it. Husserl, for instance, if explained as a "Czech Jew", becomes a slightly comic figure, and the fundamental revolution which the phenomenological attitude represents, becomes a farce. But this is not to deny that in Husserl's "Epoché" there is a sabbatical element, which is quite possibly in some sense Jewish. It is a pity that Mr. Dagan did not tackle his task more philosophically to show this.

The paper, as it stands, gives some information otherwise not easily accessible, and this is its merit. It may satisfy those interested in Czech Jews, (and this may be its purpose), but it does not satisfy a philosophical reader.