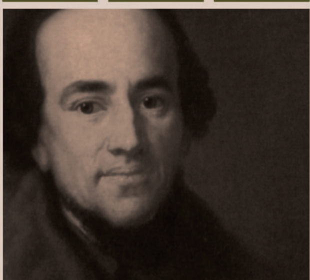
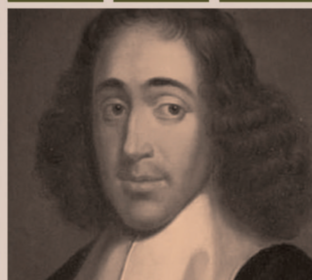
FAITH, REASON, POLITICS

Essays on the History of Jewish Thought

Michah GOTTLIEB





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For my parents Laurie and Bruce
and for my sister Arielle

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Preface

The recent rise in religious violence has turned the public's attention to the faith-reason debate once again. But the debate is often treated in generic terms, without paying attention either to differences between religious traditions or to the historical development of these traditions. In particular, the Jewish tradition with its emphasis on religious law yields insights into the political dimensions of the problem that differ greatly from Christian approaches.

This volume collects previously published essays that treat Jewish approaches to the faith-reason debate from the twelfth to twentieth centuries. While the thinkers that I analyze are united by a (more or less) common Jewish textual tradition and their being minorities within majority Christian and Islamic states, they adopt strikingly different conceptions of the nature of Judaism, the place of rational arguments in determining religious truth, and the proper relationship between religion, politics, and morality. By bringing these essays together, I seek to convey a sense of both the unity and diversity in Jewish approaches to faith, reason, and politics.

While for all of these thinkers, law is at the center of their understanding of Judaism, their conceptions of the purpose of revealed law and its relation to state authority differ greatly. Thus both the twelfth-century Moses Maimonides and the seventeenth-century Benedict Spinoza argue for the necessity of state religion, but conceive the nature of this state religion in radically different ways. In contrast, for the eighteenth and nineteenth-century thinkers, Moses Mendelssohn, Samson Raphael Hirsch, and Samuel David Luzzato, the notion of state religion is anathema (at least until the messianic era), though they still preserve a political function for religion as a means of promoting ethical behavior. And the twentieth-century conservative thinker Leo Strauss seeks to renew the pre-Enlightenment idea of state religion, though on an entirely different basis.

This collection can be read as a companion to my first book, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought* (Oxford

University Press, 2011). Many of the arguments that I present briefly in *Faith and Freedom* are treated more extensively in these essays, and in the final chapter I present my reasons for endorsing religious rationalism more forcefully and explicitly than I did in *Faith and Freedom*.

For the most part, the essays appear as they were originally published, though some contain significant updates and corrections/elucidations. I have also retitled the first essay "Two Paradigms of the Nexus Between Philosophy and Mysticism: Judah Halevi and Moses Maimonides" to more accurately reflect its content.

I thank the Tikvah Fund for supporting the publication of this book and the director of the Tikvah Project at Princeton, Leora Batnitzky, for providing a very congenial environment during my year at Princeton when I wrote one of these essays and worked on revising the others. I thank the members of the Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic studies at NYU for their support and my wife Ilana for her love and dedication. Finally, I thank my parents, Laurie and Bruce and my sister Arielle for their unfailing encouragement. I dedicate this book to them.

I. Two Paradigms of the Nexus Between Philosophy and Mysticism: Judah Halevi and Moses Maimonides*

In *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism,* Gershom Scholem draws a sharp distinction between Kabbalah and Jewish philosophy, noting five contrasts between them. First, philosophers use allegory, which involves assigning definite metaphysical referents to biblical terms. Kabbalists, however, interpret the Bible as a series of symbols, that is, poetic ways of representing truths that can neither be clearly understood nor precisely articulated using rational, discursive thought.[1] Second, whereas for philosophers the practice of Jewish law (Halakhah) has no intrinsic significance, for kabbalists Halakhah is of supreme importance as a theurgic instrument to effect changes in the Godhead that help preserve the cosmos.[2] Third, whereas philosophers denigrate rabbinic fantasies (Aggadot) as stumbling blocks to truth, kabbalists embrace Aggadah, seeing it as continuous with their mystical experience and containing esoteric wisdom.[3] Fourth, whereas philosophers devalue

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* I thank Warren Zev Harvey and the editors of the volume in which this essay originally appeared, Tamar Rudavasky and Steven Nadler for their helpful suggestions. I am especially indebted to Diana Lobel for generously sharing her learning with me, supplying me with secondary literature, and helping me with the subtleties of philosophical Judeo–Arabic. I also thank Shari Lowin for her help with the Judeo–Arabic.

1 Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 25–8; Gershom Scholem, *Explanations and Implications* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975), 226–9 [Hebrew]; Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, trans. R. Mannheim (New York: Schocken, 1969), 36. Also see Joseph Dan, ed., *The Early Kabbalah* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 9–12; Isaiah Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy* (Ramat Gan: Makor, 1964), 11–14 [Hebrew]. On the concept of kabbalistic symbol, see Elliot Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York, Fordham University Press, 2005), 26–40. Yehuda Liebes attempts to distinguish between kabbalistic myth and symbol. See Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. A. Schwartz, S. Nakache, and P. Peli (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), 179 n. 116; Yehuda Liebes, "Myth vs. Symbol in the Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah," in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 213. See Wolfson's critique of Liebes in Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 36–45.

2 Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 28–30; Alexander Altmann, *The Meaning of Jewish Existence*, ed. Alfred Ivry, trans. Edith Ehrlich and Leonard Ehrlich (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 1991), 18–9; Daniel Matt, "The Mystic and the Mitzvot," in *Jewish Spirituality*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroads, 1986), 370–400.

3 Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 30–2.

prayer, kabbalists infuse it with meaning by assigning prayer theurgic functions.[4] Finally, while philosophers deny the reality of evil, seeing it as a mere privation of being, kabbalists affirm the ontological reality of evil.[5]

Recent scholars have rightly criticized Scholem's sharp dichotomy between mysticism and philosophy.[6] In the context of this chapter, however, it is neither possible nor desirable to undertake a systematic analysis of Scholem. Rather, I will outline two approaches to the relationship between philosophy and mysticism in medieval Jewish philosophy.

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4 Ibid., 33–4; Gershom Scholem, "The Concept of Kavvananh in the Early Kabbalah," in *Studies in Jewish Thought*, ed. Alfred Jospe (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 162–80; Efraim Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbalah Literature*, ed. Jospeh Hacker (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press, 1986), 38–55.

5 Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 34–7; Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, ed. Jonathan Chipman, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 56–87; Isaiah Tishby, ed., *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vols. I-III, trans. David Goldstein (London: Littman, 1989), 449–58.

6 Scholem's dichotomy has been understood as stemming from his interest in reversing what he perceived to be the unjust dismissal of Kabbalah by the nineteenth-century bourgeois originators of modern Jewish studies (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*). According to Scholem, these scholars tendentiously cast rationality as the essence of Judaism, which resulted in a desiccated version of Judaism that could only be remedied by a retrieval of the dynamic, mythical, and imaginative elements found in Kabbalah. See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 1–3; Gershom Scholem, *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in our Times*, ed. A. Shapira, trans. J. Chipman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 53–71; Eliezer Schweid, *Judaism and Mysticism According to Gershom Scholem*, trans. D. Weiner (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 145–65. Compare Idel's critique of Scholem's reading of nineteenth-century scholarship on kabbalah in Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1988), 13–4. For critique of Scholem's distinction between philosophical allegory and kabbalistic symbol, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 200–22; Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 272–351; Schweid, *Judaism and Mysticism According to Gershom Scholem*, 126–8; Frank Talmage, "Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism," in *Jewish Spirituality*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroads Press, 1987), 343–4. For critique of Scholem's account of Kabbalistic theurgy, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 156–99; Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988), viii; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 36–7. Idel and Wolfson both question Scholem's distinction between the kabbalists' theurgic interpretation of Halakhah and the philosophers' instrumental interpretation of Halakhah, noting nontheurgic kabbalistic interpretations of Halakhah. See Moshe Idel, "Some Remarks on Ritual and Mysticism in Geronese Kabbalah," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1994): 127–30; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 39–49; Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988), 137–45. Elliot Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia: Kabbalist and Prophet* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2000), 178–228; Elliot Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 188–90. Frank Talmage questions Scholem's contention that the authority of Halakhah is lessened for Jewish philosophers. See Talmage, "Apples of Gold," 337–44. For critique of Scholem's theurgical interpretation of kabbalistic prayer, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 103–11. For critique of Scholem's account of the kabbalistic view of evil, see Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 449; Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*, 212–21.

Before I begin, a word on the term "mysticism." Although the definition of mysticism is a matter of dispute,[7] I find Idel's broad definition of mysticism as "contact with the Divine, differing from the common religious experience cultivated in a certain religion both in intensity and spiritual impact" to be useful, and this chapter will proceed on the basis of this expansive understanding of mysticism.[8]

Two Types of Mysticism

In his study of vision and imagination in medieval Jewish mysticism, Elliot Wolfson distinguishes between two forms of mysticism. "Cognitive" mysticism (which I will call "revelatory" mysticism) affirms that spiritual knowledge "comes by way of revelation, intuition, or illumination."[9] For the revelatory mystic, God is perceived "within the parameters of phenomenal human experience" in sensible images through the imagination. Imagination is superior to reason for imagination is "the divine element of the soul that enables one to gain access to the realm of incorporeality . . . through a process of understanding that transcends sensory data and rational understanding."[10] In contrast, "introvertive" mysticism (which I will call "apophatic" mysticism) rejects the idea that images are adequate to mystical insight. The apophatic mystic believes that God is beyond all representation whether through the imagination or through the intellect and is most accurately conceived *via negativa*. Images are only appropriate as educational vehicles to inculcate recognition of God's existence to those for whom mystical insight, "an intellectual vision devoid of percept or concept" is unavailable.[11]

The Bible abounds with accounts of revelatory visions of God such as Isaiah 6:

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7 Important discussions of how to define mysticism include: William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans, 1928), 379–82; Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1951), 1–32; David Baumgardt, *Mystik und Wissenschaft* (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1963), 7–21; Richard Jones, *Mysticism Examined: Philosophical Inquiries into Mysticism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), 1; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3–7.

8 Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, xviii.

9 Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 60.

10 Ibid., 63.

11 Ibid., 59.

> In the year that King Uzziah died, I beheld my Lord seated on high on a lofty throne and the skirts of His robe filled the Temple. Seraphs stood in attendance on Him. Each of them had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his legs and with two he would fly. And one would call to the other, "Holy, holy, holy! The Lord of Hosts His presence fills all the earth." The doorposts would shake at the sound of the one who called, and the House kept filling with smoke.[12]

These mystical visions likewise occur in the earliest texts of the Kabbalah. Consider the following text from *Shi'ur Qomah*:

> How much is the measure of the stature of the Holy One, blessed be He, who is concealed from all creatures? . . . The circumference of His head (*igul rosho*) is three hundred thousand and thirty three and a third [parasangs] something which the mouth cannot speak nor the ear hear . . . The appearance of His face and the appearance of His cheeks are like the image of the spirit and the form of the soul, for no creature can recognize Him. His body is like beryl (*ketarshish*), His splendor is luminous and glows from within the darkness, and cloud and thick darkness surround Him . . . There is no measurement in our hands but only the names are revealed to us.[13]

This text presents a remarkably anthropomorphic revelatory vision of God. What is striking, however, is that although it presents a visual image of God, which includes precise measurements of God, it likewise recoils from this image remarking that "God is concealed from all creatures," and that "there is no measurement in our hands." This tension between visualization of God and the sense that visualization is impossible is implicit in the Bible itself where visions of God such as Isaiah 6

12 Isa. 6: 1–5.

13 Peter Schäfer, ed., *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1981), 294 (§948-949); partially cited in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 90.

are counterbalanced by passages like Isaiah 40:18, "To whom will you liken God? What likeness [*demut*] will you compare Him to?"

Elliot Wolfson shows that the tension between the desire to visualize God and the sense that God cannot be visualized lies at the heart of Jewish mysticism. Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that, "in great measure the history of theosophical speculation and mystical practice in Judaism has been driven by a hermeneutical effort to resolve this fundamental tension."[14] A number of questions therefore emerge from revelatory mysticism: Does mystical vision occur by means of the outer eye or by means of some other sense? If the latter, what is this sense and how does it operate? Does the mystic see something real or is what is visualized a construct of the mystic's imagination? If it is a construct, is there any correlation between the object of vision and the image constructed in the mystic's imagination? Does the mystic visualize God or some other created divine being? If the mystic sees a created divine being, what is the relationship between this being and God? How do mystical visions of God relate to rational approaches to knowing God?[15]

Turning to apophatic mysticism, scholars trace the impact of the *via negativa* on medieval Jewish mysticism to a number of sources. One of the most important of these sources is Neoplatonism. Plotinus, whose work was known to medieval Jewish and Muslim thinkers in a number of forms,[16] provides a classic formulation of negative theology:

> The beyond-being does not refer to a some-thing since it does not posit any-thing nor does it "speak its name." It merely indicates that it is not that. No attempt is made to circumscribe it. It would be absurd to circumscribe that immense nature. To wish to do so is to cut oneself off from its slightest trace.[17]

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14 Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 394.

15 Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, outlines medieval Jewish attempts to conceptualize the nature of mystical visionary experience.

16 These sources include *Theology of Aristotle*, *Long Theology*, and *Risāla fil-ʿIlm al-Ilāhī* (mistakenly attributed to Fārābī). See Alfred Ivry, "Neoplatonic Currents in Maimonides' Thought," in *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies*, ed. Joel L. Kraemer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 117, n. 5.

17 Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber and Faber, 1917-1930), 5.5.6, 11–17, cited in Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 15. For discussion, see Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 14–33.

Medieval Jewish philosophers such as Isaac Israeli, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Baḥya ibn Paquda, and Maimonides were important mediating sources transmitting Neoplatonic negative theology to kabbalists.[18] The apophatic view of God is represented by the concept of *ein-sof* (literally

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18 See Daniel C. Matt, "Ayin: Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism," in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, ed. Lawrence Fine (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 73–5; Gershom Scholem "La lutte entre le dieu de Plotin et la bible dans la Kabbale ancien," in *Le nom de dieu et les symbols de dieu dans la mystique juive*, ed. and trans. M. Hayoun and G. Vajda (Paris: 1983), 25–6; Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R. Werblowsky, trans. A. Arkush (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 422–3; Alexander Altmann, "The Divine Attributes," *Judaism* 15 (1966): 46–54; On Maimonides' adoption of Neoplatonic negative theology, see Ivry, "Neoplatonic Currents in Maimonides' Thought," 127–8, 133; Alfred Ivry, "Maimonides and Neoplatonism: Challenge and Response," in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (Albany, NY:SUNY Press, 1992), 138. Aside from Neoplatonism other sources of negative theology that may have influenced Kabbalah include Pseudo-Dionysus as adapted by John Scotus Erigena, Isma'ili mysticism, and Mutazilite Kalam. For discussion, see Gershom Scholem, "Schöpfung aus Nichts und Selbstverschränkung Gottes," in *Über einege Grundbegriffe des Judentums*, ed. Gershom Scholem (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 70–5; Scholem, "La lutte entre le dieu de Plotin et la Bible dans la Kabbale ancien," 25–6; Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 422–4; Matt, "Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism," 67–73; Altmann, "The Divine Attributes," 41–5; Harry Wolfson, "The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity," *Harvard Theological Review* 49 (1956): 1-18; Harry Wolfson, "The Philosophical Implications of the Problem of Divine Attributes in the Kalam," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79 (1959): 73-80. According to Harry Wolfson, Philo is the first thinker to articulate negative theology, which he derives from biblical sources rendered philosophically. The Church fathers, the Gnostic Basilides, Plotinus, and Albinus adopt negative theology from Philo. On Philo's negative theology, see Harry Wolfson, *Philo: The Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), 94–164. On the negative theology of the Church fathers, see Harry Wolfson, "Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides," in *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol. 1, ed. I. Twersky and G.H. Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 131–9. On Basilides' negative theology, see Harry Wolfson, "Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides," 139–42; Scholem, "Schöpfung aus Nichts und Selbstverschränkung Gottes," 68–9; Matt, "Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism," 69. On Albinus' negative theology, see Wolfson, *Philo: The Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism*, 158–60; Harry Wolfson, "Albinus and Plotinus on the Divine Attributes," in *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol. 1, ed. I. Twersky and G.H. Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 119–22. On Plotinus' negative theology, see Wolfson, "Albinus and Plotinus on the Divine Attributes," 124–30; Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 14–33; John Bussanich, "Plotinus's Metaphysics of the One," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 38–42; Frederick Schroeder, "Plotinus and Language," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 336-355. Wolfson's thesis that the impetus for Philo's negative theology derives from the Bible has been challenged. David Winston notes that Philo's doctrine involves "the convergence of his Jewish inheritance with his Greek philosophical antecedents" by which Winston refers to Middle Platonism and Neopythagorean traditions, but Winston concludes that Philo's "philosophical commitment . . . (pace Wolfson) was clearly the decisive element." See David Winston, "Philo's Conception of the Divine Nature," in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), especially 21–3.

"endless"), the aspect of *deus absconditus* first described by kabbalists in the thirteenth century.[19] Azriel of Gerona (1160–1238) expresses the convergence of philosophical negative theology with kabbalah in his statement that "the philosophers [*ḥakhmei ha-meḥqar*] agree with us that our comprehension [of God] is solely *via negativa* [*ki 'im 'al derekh lo'*]."[20]

Alongside *ein-sof*, central to kabbalistic theosophy are the *sefirot*, the divine potencies that emanate from *ein-sof*. Although there are different kabbalistic understandings of the precise nature of the *sefirot*, they are clearly linked with the positive attributes of God found in biblical and rabbinic texts, and so represent *deus revelatus*.[21] A tension therefore emerges between *ein-sof*, which is described apophatically, and the *sefirot,* which are described kataphatically. How do these two accounts of the deity cohere? More philosophically, if kataphatic descriptions of God involve positing distinction and differentiation in the deity whereas apophatic descriptions assume a unique deity beyond all differentiation, how do we resolve this contradiction? Can one have any relationship with God conceived apophatically? What is the connection among philosophical ratiocination, apophasis, and mystical experience?[22]

We therefore have two sets of problems emerging from revelatory and apophatic mysticism, respectively. In what follows, I will sketch two influential approaches to these problems. For problems emerg-

19 On the concept of *ein-sof* and the emergence of apophasis in Kabbalah see Scholem, "Schöpfung aus Nichts und Selbstverschränkung Gottes"; Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York, Quadrangle Press, 1974), 88–96; Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 28-35, 265–72, 420–44; Elliot Wolfson, "Negative Theology and Positive Assertion in Early Kabbalah," *Daat* 32-33 (1994): v–xi; Matt, "Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism." Idel has called into question the extent to which the early kabbalistic account of *ein-sof* reflects Neoplatonic negative theology, noting that many kabbalists hold negative theology to be an exoteric view while esoterically maintaining that *ein-sof* can be described as a luminous *anthropos* comprising ten supernal *sefirot*. Idel does concede, however, that this "esoteric" view was not put forward consistently and that at times kabbalists reverted to a more rigorous account of the unknowability of *ein-sof,* which reflects the Neoplatonic view. See Moshe Idel, "The Image of Adam above the Sefirot," *Daat* 4 (1980): 41-55; Moshe Idel, "The Sefirot above the Sefirot," *Tarbiz* 51 (1982) [Hebrew]; Moshe Idel, "Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance," in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), 339–44; Wolfson, "Negative Theology and Positive Assertion in Early Kabbalah," xii–xxii.

20 Azriel of Gerona's statement is cited in Wolfson, "Negative Theology and Positive Assertion in Early Kabbalah," vii; Matt, "Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism," 74. I have altered the translation slightly.

21 On various kabbalistic interpretations of the *sefirot* see Scholem, "On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism," 96–116; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 136–53.

22 See E. Wolfson, "Negative Theology and Positive Assertion in Early Kabbalah," xii.

ing from revelatory mysticism, I choose Judah Halevi (1085–1141), whereas for problems emerging from apophatic mysticism I choose Moses Maimonides (1135–1204).[23] Other thinkers could have been selected, but I have chosen to focus on Halevi and Maimonides for two reasons. First, each provides a perspicuous theoretical discussion of the problems mentioned, especially as regards the relationship between mystical experience and philosophical ratiocination, which forms the main subject of this chapter. Second, although Halevi and Maimonides are philosophers,[24] they also had mystical inclinations[25] and their approaches to the relationship between mysticism and philosophy proved very influential for later kabbalists and philosophers alike.[26]

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23 This is not to deny that there are apophatic themes in Halevi and revelatory themes in Maimonides, but I think that Halevi provides the fullest discussion of problems emerging from revelatory mysticism and Maimonides provides the fullest discussion of problems emerging from apophatic mysticism.

24 Halevi's being considered a philosopher has been called into question. See Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1952), 98–104; Dov Schwartz, *Contradiction and Concealment in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002) [Hebrew]. Although it is true that Halevi is sharply critical of philosophy, in categorizing Halevi as a philosopher I follow Elliot Wolfson who emphasizes the fact that Halevi's "terms and modes of discourse [are] derived from philosophy proper." See Elliot Wolfson, "Merkavah Traditions in Philosophical Garb: Judah Halevi Reconsidered," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 57 (1990): 184 n. 15.

25 I will demonstrate this later.

26 For Halevi's influence on later kabbalists see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 24: "There is a direct connection between Jehudah Halevi, the most Jewish of Jewish philosophers and the Kabbalists"; ibid., 173; Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 222–4, 410–11; David Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre in der Jüdischen Religionsphilosophie der Mittelalters* (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1877), 166–7 n. 120; E. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 181, 184 n. 247, 294–96, 303. For a specific example of the Zohar's use of Halevi, see Warren Zev Harvey, "Judah Halevi's Synthesthetic Theory of Prophecy and a Note on the Zohar," in *Rivkah Shatz-Uffenheimer Memorial Volume Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. XII, ed. Rachel Elior and Joseph Dan (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1996), 153–5. Scholars have noted the influence of Maimonides' negative theology on Kabbalah. See most recently Wolfson, "Via Negativa in Maimonides and its Impact on Thirteenth Century Kabbalah" *Maimonidean Studies* 5 (2008), 368-412. On the Zohar's dependence on Maimonides see Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Quadrangle Press, 1974), 156, 159, 224; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 173, 183–4, 240, 390–1 n. 77, 395 n. 141; W. Harvey, "Judah Halevi's Synesthetic Theory of Prophecy," 155. On kabbalists' appropriation of Maimonides' identification of God and nature, see Moshe Idel, "Deus sive Natura: The Metamorphosis of a Dictum from Maimonides to Spinoza," in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, ed. Robert Cohen and Hillel Levine (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000). There is a burgeoning literature on the influence of Maimonides' esotericism and his notion of conjunction with God on kabbalists. See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 138–9, 383 n. 76; Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 1–38; Moshe Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 54–80; Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 438–47; Moshe Idel, "Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and the Kabbalah," *Jewish History* 18 (2004): 197-226; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia: Kabbalist and Prophet*, esp. 52–93, 152–85, 197–

Halevi's Revelatory Mysticism

Halevi's only philosophical work, *Kuzari*, considers a range of challenges to Judaism, including Christianity, Islam, Karaism, and Kalām. However, as Leo Strauss points out, "one is entitled to consider *Kuzari* primarily as a defense of Judaism against philosophy."[27] The confrontation between the philosophical approach to truth and a mystical alternative grounded in a revelatory experience of the divine is the major theme of the work. I divide Halevi's defense of a mystical alternative to philosophy into three parts: (1) analysis of philosophy; (2) critique of philosophy; and (3) defense of revelatory mysticism.

1. Analysis of philosophy

According to Halevi, although philosophers pride themselves on their critical faculties, they too often take the project of philosophy for granted, simply assuming its value and capacity to attain truth. Philosophers think that human beings have a divine faculty, which they call "intellect (*ʿaql*)."[28] By using the proper philosophical method,

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204; Elliot Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," in *Moses Maimonides: His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts*, ed. Görge Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse (Berlin: Ergon Verlag, 2004). Maimonides' centrality for subsequent Jewish philosophers is well established. Consider Julius Guttmann's judgment that "Maimonides is not only the basis of all [Jewish] philosophical activity which follows him, but this activity is always connected with him anew- at times continuing where he left off and at times criticizing him. Therefore one can explicate the problems of medieval Jewish philosophy as a whole in light of Maimonides' system." See Julius Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge*, ed. S. Bergman and N. Rotenstreich, trans. Saul Esh (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1955), 86 [Hebrew]. Warren Zev Harvey renders a similar judgment. See Warren Zev Harvey, "Maimonides' Place in the History of Philosophy," in *Moses Maimonides: Communal Impact, Historic Legacy*, ed. Benny Kraut (New York: Center for Jewish Studies, Queens College, 2005), 27–32. On Halevi's influence on later Jewish philosophy see Dov Schwartz, "The *Kuzari* Renaissance in Jewish Philosophy," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. III (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) [Hebrew]; Dov Schwartz, "Land of Concreteness and Dialogue: Buber as a Commentator on the *Kuzari*," in *Between Tradition and Innovation*, ed. Eliezer Don Yehiya (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2005); Eliezer Schweid, "Halevi and Maimonides as Representatives of Romantic versus Rationalistic Conceptions of Judaism," in *Kabbalah und Romantik*, ed. Eveline Goodman-Thau, Gerd Mattenklot and Christoph Schulte (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1994); Adam Shear, *The Later History of a Medieval Hebrew Book: Studies in the Reception of Judah Halevi's Sefer ha Kuzari* (PhD Dissertation, University of Philadelphia); Adam Shear, "Judah Halevi's Kuzari in the Haskalah: The Reinterpretation and Reimagining of a Medieval Work," in *Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture*, ed. Ross Brann and Adam Sutcliffe (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2004); and more recently idem, *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity 1167-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For Halevi's influence on Rosenzweig in particular, see below note 119.

27 See Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 103.

28 See Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, ed. Hartwig Hirschfeld (New York: Pardes Publishing House, 1964),

human beings can know objective truth through this faculty. Halevi asks us to consider the structural features of the philosophical mind-set. Philosophers prize theoretical knowledge above all else. Truth is reached through a dispassionate application of one's mind to the object contemplated. Philosophers try to exclude all nontheoretical interest from this study for they are concerned that such interest will lead to subjective distortion. Because they seek knowledge of a fixed truth, the object being studied is conceived as inert.[29] Hence philosophers focus on understanding *being*, and it is not incidental that the most fundamental of Aristotle's ten categories is substance.

According to Halevi, although God is the highest object of knowledge, philosophers are moved to seek knowledge of God from the same curiosity that moves them to inquire into any truth. So, for example, knowing God is on par with knowing the place of the earth in the planetary economy.[30] As such, knowledge of God is not momentous or dramatic. It is cold, safe knowledge, for which one would not risk one's life.[31] Philosophers train their intellectual gaze toward the object they seek to grasp. Being finite human beings, they must use discursive reason,[32] and as such, the process of philosophizing is time-bound. For this reason, Halevi describes philosophizing as akin to "narrating" (*ka-al-ḥadīth*).[33]

Following Aristotle, Halevi divides philosophy into theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy.[34] The aim of philosophers is to achieve perfection, which involves activity and at its best is constituted

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V.12, 265–6. I will cite from the Hirschfeld translation (which is badly out of date, but the only full English translation currently available) according to part number, section number, and page number. In preparing this chapter, I have consulted *Sefer ha-Kuzari: Maqor ve targum*, trans. Joseph Qafah (Kiryat Ono: Makhon Mishnat ha-Rambamm 1996) [Hebrew-Arabic edition], Judah Ibn Tibbon's medieval Hebrew translation, Yehuda Even-Shmuel's modern Hebrew translation, and Charles Touati's French translation.

29 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, V. 12, 265–6, where Halevi reports the philosophers' view that although reasoning operates in time the knowledge that it achieves is timeless.

30 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 13, 217–9; David Baneth, "Judah Halevi and al-Ghazzali," in *Studies in Jewish Thought*, ed. Alfred Jospe (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 185.

31 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 17, 223–4, where Halevi claims that Abraham began knowing God as a philosopher through logic. It was only after God revealed Himself to Abraham and told Abraham to leave aside his "philosophizing" that Abraham was willing to suffer for God. Also see Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 5, 213–4.

32 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari,* IV. 3, 206–7.

33 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 6, 214; V. 12, 265–6.

34 See Halevi/Qafah, *Kuzari* V. 12, 265–6.

by doing theoretical philosophy.[35] In doing philosophy, one's aim is to achieve a state in which one's mind accurately mirrors external reality.[36] To better understand this, it is useful to set out Halevi's account of the philosophers' theory of knowledge, which he presents in part five, chapter twelve of *Kuzari*. Halevi's account is drawn from an early treatise of Avicenna entitled *Treatise on the Soul* (*Risala fi al-nafs*).[37]

Knowledge is attained through a complex interplay of different faculties. The philosophers distinguish between outer (*al-ẓāhira*) and inner (*al-bāṭina*) senses. The outer senses are the five senses. The inner senses include common sense (*al-mushtarika*), which is identified with retentive imagination, productive imagination *(al-qūwa al-mutakhayyila*), memory (*al-qūwwa al-mutadhakira al-ḥafiẓa*), and the faculty of estimation (*al-qūwa al-mutawahhima*).[38] Knowledge of the external world begins with our five senses. To transform sense perception into knowledge, sense perceptions must be analyzed. Here the common sense plays a central role: its function is to coordinate data originating from different senses. Through common sense the "common sensibles" are known, which include notions such as figure, number, size, motion, and rest.[39] The faculty of estimation instinctually judges whether the object perceived should be pursued or avoided. So, for example, the faculty of estimation signals that one should flee from a hungry lion.[40]

To attain knowledge of external objects, we must store percep-

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35 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari* I. 1, 37–39.

36 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 13, 217–9.

37 Samuel Landauer published the complete Avicennian text with a partial German translation. See Samuel Landauer, "Die Psychologie des Ibn Sina," *Zeitschrdift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 29 (1876): 335-418. There is also an English translation of this work. See Avicenna, *A Compendium on the Soul*, trans. Edward Abbott van Dyck (Verona: Stamperia di Nicola Paderno, 1906).

38 For a good discussion of the inner senses in ancient and medieval philosophy see Harry Wolfson, "The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew Philosophi Texts," in his *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol. 1, ed. I. Twersky and G. H. Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), especially 267–94. I divide Halevi's account of the inner senses somewhat differently than does Wolfson. Also see Wolfson's discussion of Maimonides' account of the internal senses in Harry Wolfson, "Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides," in Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol. 1.

39 See Harry Wolfson, "Notes on Proofs of the Existence of God in Jewish Philosophy," in Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol. 1, 565.

40 For discussion of Avicenna's account of the faculty of estimation, see Diana Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya ibn Paquda's* Duties of the Heart (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 71–6.

tions so that we can compare perceptions recorded at different times with one another. The faculty of memory stores perceptions as well as the judgments of the faculty of estimation. While the outer senses passively receive sensations, the productive imagination is active, accessing perceptions stored in memory and combining them. Hence the productive imagination is also called the "combining faculty" (*qūwat al-tarkb*). If the productive imagination combines images and compares them according to the dictates of the intellect, then it generates true knowledge. The intellect includes self-evident, primary truths, which are known intuitively such as the law of noncontradiction or the axiom that the whole is greater than the part. It attains truth by telling the productive imagination how to combine perceptions received through the five senses and stored in memory so that the intellect can form syllogisms and demonstrative proofs. In this way, we derive philosophical knowledge of ontology, physics, cosmology, and metaphysics.[41]

Practical philosophy includes both moral and political philosophy. It is grounded in optimism about the human capacity to control/organize society and individual desires. At the center of practical philosophy is law. "Rational laws" (*al-sharā'i' al-'aqliyya*) (also called "political laws"—*al-sharā'i al-siyāsiyya*) include laws of justice, which are necessary for any society to function.[42] Religious laws instill "humility, worship of God, and moral virtue," which help the individual "purify his heart" and so prepare him to contemplate God.[43] In light of this, it is not surprising that philosophers consider all law, including religious law, to be of instrumental value. The philosopher tells the Khazar king not to "worry about which religious law you adhere to"[44] for the king can "create his own religion" or "ground his religion in the rational laws of the philosophers."[45]

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41 Although Avicenna claims to be able to know the first cause a priori through the ontological proof, Wolfson points out that Halevi believes that philosophers can only establish God's existence through the a posteriori cosmological proof. See Wolfson, "Notes on Proofs of the Existence of God in Jewish Philosophy," 568–72. On Avicenna's proofs for God's existence, see Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelean Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 261–5.

42 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, II. 48, 111–2.

43 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 1, 38–9.

44 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 1, 38–9

45 Ibid. See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, II. 49, 112 where the Khazar king notes that according to the philosophers it is irrelevant whether one approaches God through "Judaism, Christianity, something else, or whatever religion you create for yourself."

2. Critique of philosophy

According to Halevi, philosophers commonly critique popular religious beliefs for being anthropomorphic and anthropopathic. They invoke metaphor as a way of explaining biblical texts that seem to ascribe all-too-human characteristics to God such as limbs and emotions.[46] While philosophers think that reason provides a way of grasping God in God's otherness, Halevi charges that philosophers themselves anthropomorphize God. The difference is that rather than conceiving God through the lens of the imagination, they conceive God through the lens of the intellect. The intellect is not, however, a clear glass through which one perceives truth—it is itself a filter that gives the percept a particular coloration.

The philosophers' God is "elevated above all desire (*munazzah 'an al-irādāt*)."[47] Will is denied of God, for having a will to do something would imply a lack in God.[48] Using intellect, philosophers seek fixed truth. This leads them to focus on God's being, and it is not incidental that they describe God as a substance whose existence is identical with His essence.[49] This is reflected in the philosophical interpretation of the Tetragrammaton, the most sublime biblical name of God, which philosophers take to refer to God's necessary existence.[50] Furthermore, God is the most perfect being whose perfection is constituted by God always knowing the most perfect object in the most perfect way. Because God

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46 For example, see Saadia Gaon's *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, part VII, section 2. This appears in Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), on pages 265–7. I cite from the Rosenblatt translation according to part number, section number, and page number. In preparing this chapter, I have also consulted Joseph Qafah's Hebrew-Arabic edition, Saadia Gaon, *Kitâb al-amanât wa-al i'tiqadât*, ed. Joseph Qafah (Jerusalem: Sura, 1960).

47 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 1, 36.

48 Ibid.

49 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 25, 236. See al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. and ed. Michael E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), second introduction, 5.

50 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 25, 236. The contrast between Halevi's treatment of the Tetragrammaton and Maimonides' is very instructive. For Maimonides, the Tetragrammaton signifies that, "there is no association between God, may He be exalted, and what is other than He." Maimonides also writes that the name may indicate necessary existence. As I will show later, for Halevi the Tetragrammaton is a personal name that signifies God's direct creation without intermediaries. For Maimonides' interpretation of the Tetragrammaton, see *Guide of the Perplexed,* I:61, 64, which appears in Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, vols. I and II, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), on pp. 147–8, 156-157. I have likewise consulted Joseph Qafah's Arabic/Hebrew edition, Samuel Ibn Tibbon's medieval Hebrew translation, and Michael Schwarz's recent Hebrew translation of the *Guide*.

is the most perfect being, God is always in the process of contemplating Himself, and what follows from His nature, that is, the cosmos. As true knowledge is eternal and unchanging, God cannot know particulars. For particulars change with time, and although God could know all future events eternally there would be a change in God's knowledge when an event went from being potential to being actual.[51]

Halevi notes that the philosophers' God is remarkably similar to the perfect philosopher. Like the perfect philosopher, God is dispassionate and focused on contemplating eternal truth. Like the philosopher, God's perfection rests in God's relation to Himself rather than in God's relation to others.[52] God's governance of the world flows incidentally from God's being and is not the primary aim of God's activity.[53] Halevi's critique calls to mind Spinoza's remark that "if a triangle could speak it would say that God is eminently triangular."[54]

Halevi claims that philosophers are skeptical by nature—they do not wish to believe anything not confirmed by sense perception and rational understanding.[55] Although for philosophers all knowledge begins with sense perception,[56] they do not believe that sense perception of God is possible.[57] Hence, philosophers hold that knowledge of God is deduced cosmologically from our understanding of nature.[58]

According to Halevi, the philosophers' understanding of nature is determined by their intellectual orientation. Nature is approached as an object to be grasped by the intellect. The way of the intellect is to seek rational order, so it is no accident that philosophers conceive of nature

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51 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 1, 36.

52 See *Kuzari*, Halevi/Hirschfeld, IV. 19, 224–5.

53 See *Kuzari*, Halevi/Hirschfeld, IV. 13, 217–9.

54 Letter 56, Spinoza 1995. This line of theological critique goes back to Xenophanes who famously quipped that if horses and oxen had hands and could draw pictures, their gods would look like horses and oxen.

55 Leo Strauss stresses the skeptical disposition of the philosopher by noting that the philosopher's speeches always begin with the philosopher stating what he does *not* believe in. See Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 112; Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 1, 36; I. 3, 39.

56 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, V. 12, 265. The only exception is the "primary intelligibles," which are known "by nature" and include axioms such as that the whole is greater than its parts. See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, V. 12, 263–8. Halevi's view of whether mathematical truths are known a priori or a posteriori is unclear to me.

57 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 3, 210; Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, V. 14, 272–3. On philosophers' distrust of mystical experience see Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 105.

58 In the entire dialogue, Halevi never mentions the ontological argument for God. See Wolfson, "Notes on Proofs of the Existence of God in Jewish Philosophy," 568–72.

as a totality whose constituent parts are eternal and which operates in a determined way.[59] In particular, they observe finite physical causes and effects in the universe, and seek to transform their ad hoc observations into universal, inexorable laws.[60] As they only perceive natural causes and effects, they (unjustly) declare the principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit* (nothing comes from nothing) to be inviolable, and so conclude that the world is eternal, and that miracles are impossible.[61] Although the world is eternal according to philosophers, they still need to explain the cause of the entire infinite series of causes. Once again they overreach intellectually for not only do they assume that the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit* applies absolutely to *events within the world*, they likewise assume that the *entire series of events* is subject to this principle. Given that the cosmos is eternal and that an actual infinite series of events is impossible, the philosophers require a self-caused starting point for the whole series. They therefore posit an eternal, necessarily existent God whom they call the "first cause" (*al-sabab al-awwal*).[62] As God is eternal, God's nature must be defined by something eternal. Furthermore, as a perfectly ordered cosmos proceeds from God, God must be an ordering principle.[63] From the philosophers' own experiences, however, it is intellect, which systematizes and intellect is the only faculty, which operates outside of time.[64] Hence they conclude that God must be an intellect and the world must proceed from God's eternal thought. Given that the cosmos exists necessarily, God cannot have a will.

Despite the impressive rhetoric of philosophers,[65] Halevi thinks that they enjoy prestige that they do not deserve. Echoing a theme found in his older Muslim contemporary Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī, Halevi claims that because philosophers achieve a high degree of certainty in math-

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59 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, V. 10, 256–9.

60 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 3, 210–1. Al-Ghazālī makes a similar point. See al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism*, trans. and ed. R. J. McCarthy (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2000), 74: "[The philosophers] conceived things to be in accord with their own experience and comprehension, while presuming the impossibility of what was unfamiliar to them." For trenchant comparisons of Halevi and al-Ghāzālī see Baneth, "Judah Halevi and al-Ghazzali"; Barry S. Kogan "Al-Ghazali and Halevi on Philosophy and the Philosophers," in *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. John Inglis (Surrey: Curzon, 2002).

61 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 1, 36; IV. 3, 210–1; V. 10, 256–9; I. 65, 53–4.

62 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 1, 36; IV. 13, 217–9.

63 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 15, 220–3.

64 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, V. 12, 265.

65 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 17, 224.

ematics and logic, people unjustly assume that they achieve the same certainty in physics and metaphysics.[66] When, however, one examines the state of cosmology and metaphysics, one finds endless disagreements.[67] In cosmology, Halevi echoes some of al-Ghazālī's critiques of the philosophical view,[68] and there are even more serious problems in metaphysics.

Halevi begins by noting that although philosophers ascribe knowledge, will, and power to God, they acknowledge that God's knowledge, will, and power are structurally different from human beings'. Human beings represent truth through three different capacities, which following *Book of Creation* (*Sefer Yetzirah*) Halevi calls "calculation" (*sefar*), "speech" (*sippur*), and "writing" (*sefer*). A person represents truths mentally through intellect, communicates truths orally through speech, and transmits them in written form through writing. Human knowledge is *receptive* and involves accommodating our mind to truth. In contrast, God's knowledge is *creative*. God's capacity for calculation

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66 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari,* V. 14, 268; al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism*, 31–2, 34; al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, first introduction, 4.

67 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 13, 45; IV. 25, 239; V. 14, 273. See Diana Lobel, *Between Philosophy and Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 68–71.

68 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 25, 238–49; V. 14, 273. The philosophers' cosmology is based on the principle that from one only one follows. The philosophers (here Halevi seems to refer to Farabi; Avicenna's account is slightly more complex) assume that from God thinking Himself the first intellect is emanated. From the first intellect contemplating its cause the first intellect emanates a second intellect and from the first intellect contemplating itself, it emanates the sphere of the fixed stars. From the second intellect contemplating itself and its cause the second intellect emanates a third intellect and the sphere of Saturn. All this continues until it terminates with the tenth intellect, the agent intellect. Halevi raises a number of problems with this schema. First, why are there only ten emanations? Why does not the agent intellect emanate more intellects and spheres? Second, why does the third intellect only emanate two things? It should emanate four things-- one from thinking itself, another from thinking the second intellect, a third from thinking the first intellect, and a fourth from contemplating God. Third, why does the intellect thinking itself emanate a sphere and thinking its cause emanate an intellect and not vice versa? Fourth, why when does Aristotle not emanate a sphere when thinking himself and why does he not emanate a separate intellect when thinking of God? Fifth, does not the fact that an intellect emanates two things violate the principle of from one only one follows? Halevi's criticisms seem to have been suggested by al-Ghazālī. See al-Ghazālī, *the Incoherence of the Philosophers,* discussion 3, third aspect, 65–78. Maimonides likewise mentions some of the Ghazalian critiques. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:22, 317–8. For discussion of Halevi and Maimonides' criticisms of the philosophers' cosmology and their relation to al-Ghazālī see Harry Wolfson, "Hallevi and Maimonides on Design, Necessity and Chance," in his *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol. 2 ed. I. Twersky and G. H. Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 8–15; Arthur Hyman, "From What is One and Simple Only What is One and Simple Can Come to Be," in Goodman, *Neoplatonism*, 111–35; Baneth, "Judah Halevi and al-Ghazzali," 184.

(*sefar*), speech (*sippur*), and writing (*sefer*) is a unity through which God brings the world into existence. God's ability to calculate is His thought, which comprises the mathematical relations between objects. God's speech is His will through which things are created (as in Genesis where God creates through speech), and God's writing is His action, which expresses His power and is coextensive with His will. For Halevi philosophical ratiocination must employ language.[69] Given that we use the same words to describe God's attributes as to describe our own, philosophical ratiocinations concerning God's nature are necessarily misleading and imprecise.[70] Along similar lines, Halevi notes that philosophers agree that God is a timeless unity.[71] Given that as finite creatures, human beings use discursive reason and so must represent God's attributes separately over time, we can never properly grasp God's nature.[72] Halevi's critique of the human ability to grasp God is ontological as well as epistemological. Given the discrepancy between God's infinite essence and human beings' finite intellect, any being grasped by human beings could not be God.[73]

Halevi notes an inconsistency in the philosophers' claim not to accept anything not derived through rational analysis. His criticism is related to a criticism mounted by al-Ghazālī and so it is worth beginning with al-Ghazālī. At the beginning of his autobiography, *The Deliverance From Error* (*al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*), al-Ghazālī notes the inability of reason and the senses to ground themselves. Al-Ghazālī recounts his youthful confusion over the many theological disputes among Muslims. To escape this confusion, he resolves only to accept ideas about which he cannot entertain the slightest doubt.[74] He begins with two apparently infallible sources of knowledge, sense perception (*al-ḥissiyāt*) and self-evident truths (*al-ḍarūriyyāt*) such as the law of noncontradiction. Al-Ghazālī begins by noting that sense perception is not always infallible. For example, a star appears to the senses as a small dot, whereas reason judges it to be much larger than the earth. Reason likewise can be doubted, for although the self-evident truths

69 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 5, 213–4.

70 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 25, 228–9.

71 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, II. 2, 84.

72 Putting together Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 25, 228–9; IV. 5, 213–4; IV. 6, 214.

73 See Halevy/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, V. 21, 291. Guttmann points out that F.H. Jacobi makes the same point some seven hundred years later. See Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge*, 67.

74 Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism*, 20.

seem certain, who is not to say that what seems certain in light of reason might not be doubtful in light of a higher faculty? Just as reason is able to correct sense perception, so a higher faculty may be able to correct reason. Al-Ghazālī reinforces this idea by appealing to the state of dreaming. We are often certain in dreaming that what we perceive is true, but when we awake it becomes clear that what we dreamed was false. If reason can be doubted, however, there seems to be no hope of ever escaping the skeptical predicament for it is then impossible to ever formulate an argument with certainty. Al-Ghazālī notes that this realization made him a complete skeptic for two months. He describes his overcoming his skepticism as follows:

> At length God most high cured me of that sickness [skepticism]. My soul regained its health and equilibrium. The necessary truths of intellect became once more accepted as I regained confidence in their certain and trustworthy character. But this was not achieved by constructing a proof or putting together an argument. On the contrary, it was the effect of a light, which God most high cast into my breast. *And that light is the key to most knowledge* (emphasis mine).[75]

Because we can never perceive reality as it is *in se*, we can never be certain that reason accurately represents reality. This realization brings al-Ghazālī to a critical insight—all trust in reason presupposes faith in God, for only God can guarantee the correspondence between reason and external reality. As skeptical as philosophers may seem, their trust in reason belies an implicit faith in God.[76]

Halevi offers a similar critique of philosophy. Philosophers think that human knowledge of external reality must begin with sense perception. What characterizes the senses is that they perceive accidental properties of things rather than essences. Essences are known by intellect rendering *judgments* on sense perceptions. Halevi gives the example of perceiving a king. One sees a person one day waging war, another day adjudicating a case, and another day giving a speech to his people. One

75 Ibid., 23.
76 Ibid., 17–24.

sees the person as a child, in middle age, and on his deathbed. Intellect judges that all these representations are of a single individual who is the king. As soon as the person on his deathbed dies, however, intellect judges that what one perceives is no longer a king, but rather a corpse.[77] What guarantee do we have that our sense perceptions give us accurate data about external reality? Perhaps our senses so distort what they perceive as to make knowledge of external reality impossible. Because philosophers hold that we have no way of knowing external reality independently of our senses, there is no way that we can verify that our senses give us reliable data. How then can we attain certainty? Halevi's response is reminiscent of al-Ghazālī's:

> But our intellect . . . cannot penetrate into the true nature of things except through *God's grace*, which implanted powers in our senses, which correctly mirror the sensible accidents (emphasis mine).[78]

The myth of philosophy is that we can know based on our native powers alone, and that God is a conclusion only reached at the end of inquiry. In reality, belief in God is a necessary presupposition for the very project of philosophy. For philosophers' trust in their ability to attain truth presupposes ungrounded faith in God who ordains a correspondence between sense perceptions and external reality.[79]

The philosophical mindset likewise has deleterious moral consequences. The philosopher claims that he is the most moral individual. For as he only cares for intellectual perfection and regards religious norms as arbitrary, he is supremely tolerant.[80] Halevi notes, however, that given that intellectual perfection is the supreme value for the philosopher, morality is only of instrumental importance in achieving intellectual perfection, and God, having no will, is unconcerned with moral obedience. As such, in cases in which the philosopher's perfection can be furthered by compromising ethics, there is nothing to re-

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77 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 3, 205–8. The analogy is slightly imprecise since being a king is an accidental attribute rather than an essential one for a human being, but the point is still clear.

78 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 3, 206–7. The translation is my own.

79 This conclusion is similar, *mutatis mutandi*, to Descartes' in his 1641 *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

80 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 3, 39; IV.13, 217–9.

strain the philosopher from deviating from moral norms.[81] Indeed, it was this perception of Halakhah as of merely instrumental value that led the great rabbinic sage Elisha ben Abuya to sin.[82]

Furthermore, Halevi writes that philosophers seek to fill their minds with knowledge of eternal, unchanging things, thinking that such knowledge will bring them peace and tranquility. As we have seen, through reason philosophers are unable to achieve certainty in cosmology and metaphysics.[83] Given their inability to achieve their aims through intellect alone, philosophers often assume dogmatic, tyrannical dispositions. Although they are fond of critiquing adherents of positive religion for servile conformism [*taqlīd*], any agreement found among philosophers is "not the result of research and investigation which established their views decisively, but because they belong to the same philosophical sect which they conform to such as the schools of Pythagoras, Empedocles, Aristotle, Plato, or others."[84] Devoid of certainty, philosophers become zealous partisans who seek to impose their views on others through force of personality and prestige rather than through demonstrative argument.[85] Halevi thinks that this approach to philosophical truth has its counterpart in religious groups. Lacking the certainty that derives from true revelation and authentic tradition, the Karaites, Christians, and Muslims invent religious systems based on arbitrary interpretations of scripture. Given their arbitrary interpretations of scripture, these religious sects have no certainty that their religious views are correct and, feeling insecure, they seek to impose

81 See Halevi/Hirschfuld, *Kuzari*, IV. 19, 224–5. Strauss emphasizes this point. See Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 113–4, 135-141; Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge*, 77. Howard Kreisel discusses the philosopher's possible response to this criticism. See Howard Kreisel, "Rabbi Yehuda Halevi and the Problem of Philosophical Ethics," in *Between Religion and Ethics*, ed. Avi Sagi and Daniel Statman (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993).

82 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, III. 65, 190.

83 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, V. 14, 268, and compare al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence,* first introduction, 4. Halevi not only criticizes philosophical cosmology and metaphysics, he likewise presents astute criticisms of philosophical physics. See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, V. 14, 269–70.

84 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 25, 238–9. Compare al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, religious preface, 2. See Lobel, *Between Philosophy and Mysticism*, 71.

85 See al-Ghazālī, who claims that philosophers seek to impose their opinions by claiming that metaphysics is a very subtle science, which requires special intelligence to understand. By using highly abstract concepts, philosophers try to obscure their inability to provide truly demonstrative proofs of their positions and account objections to their positions as failure to understand them. See al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers,* fourth introduction, 8–9.

their views on others through rhetoric and/or force.[86] For this reason, Halevi calls adherents of these religious groups those who "*philosophize* in relation to God (emphasis mine)."[87]

3. Halevi's revelatory alternative

Philosophy is seductive. It dangles before us the possibility of escaping this world of suffering and passion, and becoming godlike beings who know neither pain nor desire and blissfully contemplate eternal truth. Philosophers are by nature distrustful—they do not wish to rely on others whom they fear may deceive or disappoint them. So they clutch at the illusion that they can attain this peace and tranquility through their native powers. Honest analysis, however, shows the futility and contradictions in the philosophers' approach. Philosophers, who pride themselves on being so critical, should know this and perhaps do at some level; however, wishful thinking is very powerful, and it is only because of the philosophers' need to deaden their suffering that they can delude themselves into having faith in their Sisyphean project.

For Halevi, clearing away philosophical illusion opens an alternative approach. Although philosophers seek to curb passion,[88] which they see as an impediment to knowing truth, Halevi sees passion as the very condition of truth. Philosophers claim that all knowledge must originate in sense perception, and God must be deduced from our perception of the cosmos. Halevi accepts the principle that sense perception is the foundation of knowledge, but he thinks that the only adequate way to know God is through mystical sense perception. The people who sensibly perceive divine forms are the prophets. It is important to note, however, that for Halevi, prophecy is not just a remote event in the past. Any authentic mystical vision is prophecy, for the prophet is a visionary mystic, albeit a perfect type.[89] If, however, God has no physi-

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86 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari,* III. 37, 168–9. Daniel Lasker and Diana Lobel both correctly point out the connection between Halevi's critique of Karaism and his critique of philosophy. See Daniel Lasker, "Judah Halevi and Karaism," in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest Freirichs, and Nahum Sarna (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 118-125; Lobel, *Between Philosophy and Mysticism*, 55–78.

87 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 11, 216. I have altered Hirschfeld's translation.

88 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 19, 224–5.

89 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, III. 65, 189–9. See Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 172: "For Halevi . . . the mystical vision of the chariot approximates the prophetic experience . . . "; Wolfson, "Merkavah Traditions in Philosophical Garb," 241. Wolfson likewise shows that this identification of prophecy and revelatory mysticism is prevalent among medieval kabbalists.

cal form, how can He be sensed?[90] Halevi's approach to this problem is best understood against the background of one of his most important Jewish philosophical predecessors, Saadya Gaon (882–942).

Saadya assumes four sources of knowledge: sense perception; self-evident truths;[91] logical inference;[92] and authentic, revealed tradition. If one is in possession of revealed truth, one must accept it in its literal meaning as the basis of all of one's knowledge.[93] This does not mean rejecting the other sources of knowledge, for the paradigmatic example of authentic, revealed truth, the Torah, corroborates the validity of the other sources of knowledge.[94] What then happens if revealed truth contradicts the other sources of knowledge, such as when we read corporeal descriptions of God while reason and tradition confirm that God cannot have a body?[95] Saadya offers two ways of resolving this contradiction. As regards texts that incidentally seem to describe God in corporeal terms such as the ascription of eyes to God in Deut. 11:12,[96]

See Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 288: "the kabbalists considered visionary gnosis of the *sefirot* phenomenologically on a par with prophetic experience, which was understood to be a contemplative or mental vision." Scholem also makes this point. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 419.

90 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 89, 62–3; II. 1, 83; IV. 3, 203–4. Halevi alludes to the tension between the desire to visualize God and the idea that God cannot be sensed in his poem "Your Glory Fills the World" (*K'vodkha Malei Olam*) translated as "God in All." See Judah Halevi, *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi*, ed. H. Brody, trans. Nina Salaman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1946), 134–5.

91 See Saadia, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Intro. 5, 16–8. See Israel Efros, "Saadia's Theory of Knowledge," in *Saadia Studies*, ed. Abraham Neuman and Solomon Zeitlin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1943), 138–49; Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy," in Neuman and Zeitlin, *Saadia Studies*, 274–86. Self-evident truths include the principle of identity and the principle of noncontradiction. Scholars debate whether according to Saadya this knowledge is innate or empirically derived. Efros favors the view that for Saadya the knowledge is innate, but that it is awakened through empirical experience. See Efros, "Saadia's Theory of Knowledge," 144–9.

92 Logical inference involves the denial of ideas, which contradict sense perceptions or self-evident truths, and the affirmation of ideas the denial of which entail the denial of sense perceptions or self-evident truths. See Saadia, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Intro. 5, 16–7; Efros, "Saadia's Theory of Knowledge," 149–59.

93 See Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinion*, VII. 2, 265; Saadia Gaon, *Saadya's Commentary on Genesis*, ed. Moshe Zucker (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1984), 191 [Hebrew and Arabic].

94 See Saadia, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions,* Intro. 5, 18–9; Efros, "Saadia's Theory of Knowledge," 162–4.

95 On reason's affirming that God cannot have a body, see Saadia, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* II. Exordium, 92; II. 8, 111–2. Also see Saadya's refutation of the Trinity in II. 5, 103–7; II. 7, 109–10. For discussion, see Wolfson, "Saadia on the Trinity and the Incarnation," in Wolfson, *Studies II*.

96 "[Canaan] is a land which the Lord your God looks after, on which the Lord your God always keeps

Saadya argues that such texts must be interpreted figuratively.[97] In the case of Deut. 11:12, Saadya notes other places where the Torah uses the term "eye" (*'ayin)* metaphorically such as Gen. 44:21,[98] where "eye" is a metaphor for watchfulness. Saadya therefore takes Deut. 11:12 to refer to divine providence.[99]

Although Saadya thinks that metaphorical interpretations are appropriate for individual terms that seem to ascribe corporeality to God, he thinks that in cases of elaborate visions of God such as Isaiah 6, it is impossible to appeal to metaphor, for the prophet is clearly describing something perceived through sense perception and what is perceived through sense perception is true.[100] How could one perceive God sensibly? Saadya squares this circle by accepting that the prophets report real visions, but claiming that these visions are of a created light, which he identifies with the biblical divine glory[101] or the feminine presence of God, the *Shekhinah*.[102] In his commentary on the *Book of Creation*, Saadia presents an expanded explanation of the nature of this created glory. He distinguishes between two "airs," a first air, which permeates all beings and a second air (*avir sheni*) into which God creates light and forms into visible images, which God then reveals to His prophets.[103] So prophetic visions are real visions of divine forms seen with one's eyes, but they are not of God Himself.[104]

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his eyes (*einei YHVH*) from year's beginning to year's end."

97 Saadia, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* II. 2, 100; II. 10, 116–7; Saadia, *Commentary on Genesis*, 191–2.

98 "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eye [*eini*] on him.'"

99 Saadia, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions,* II. 10, 118.

100 See Saadia, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Intro. 5, 19–20. Saadya allows that sense perceptions may be mistaken, but true prophets are never deceived. Of course this begs the question of who are true prophets. On Saadya's criteria for determining true prophecy see Saadia, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions,* III. 5, 151; Efros, "Saadia's Theory of Knowledge," 136, 155; Heschel, "The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy," 1943, 276; Howard Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), 42-55.

101 Saadia, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, II. 10, 121–2; II. 12, 130–1. The divine glory is mentioned in Exod. 24:16-17, Exod. 40:34-35, and Ezek. 1:27-28 among other places.

102 Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Daniel, Translated and Commentary by Saadia Gaon*, ed. and trans. Yosef Qafah (Jerusalem: Dror, 1981) [Hebrew and Arabic], commentary to Daniel 7:9, 132-6; see Saadia, *Beliefs* II. 10, 120–2: II.12, 130–1. Also see Saadya's comments quoted in Judah Barzilei, *Commentary on the Book of Creation*, ed. Solomon Halberstam (Berlin: 1885), 20–2 [Hebrew].

103 Saadia Gaon, *Commentary on the Book of Creation*, ed. and trans. Yosef Qafah (Jerusalem: Dror, 1972) [Hebrew and Arabic] commentary to 4:1, 105–8.

104 Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 126–7; Alexander Altmann, "Saadya's Theory of Revelation: Its Origin and Background," in his *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969); Kreisel, *Prophecy,* 56-89.

Turning back to Halevi, in his discussion of divine attributes the Khazar king asks how the Torah could use terms which imply corporeality and change in God when both reason and the Torah itself rejects these ideas.[105] In response, the rabbi replies that the attributes of God found in the Torah form three classes, none of which describe the divine essence.[106] Relative attributes include terms such as "blessed" (*barukh*), "holy" (*qadosh*), and "praised" (*mehulal*), and are simply designations that people use to exalt God. Negative attributes are terms that are phrased positively, but whose sole purpose is to negate their opposites. For example, God is described as "living" (*ḥai*),[107] but finite human beings only comprehend life by means of our senses when we sense something that moves. God, however, is incorporeal and immutable so the sole meaning of the attribute "living" is to negate from God the attributes of being inanimate and dead.[108] In truth, it would be correct to likewise negate "living" from God because "living" does not apply to God in the way that we generally understand the term (that is, connected with corporeality and movement). However, because there is a sense in which God lives that we do not fully understand (as it is unconnected with corporeality and movement), the Torah does not deny life of God.[109] Attributes of action are names that people give to God on the basis of their experiencing God's actions in the world, and they form two classes. The first class includes attributes that people ascribe to God in virtue of good and evil which befall them. Hence when people experience good fortune they call God "merciful" (*raḥum*),[110] whereas when they suffer they call God "vengeful" (*qan'a*).[111] In truth, God is an unchanging, just judge and these attributes are simply human projections.[112] The second class includes attributes, which describe God in anthropomorphic ways such as "seeing" (*ro'eh*). Halevi interprets such attributes as metaphors so, for example, God's

105 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, II. 1, 83.

106 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, II. 2, 83–6. The one exception is the Tetragrammaton, which is a proper name as I will discuss below.

107 See, for example, Joshua 3:10, Deuteronomy 5:22.

108 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, II. 2, 84.

109 What exactly it means to understand that God is "living" given that our usual understanding of the term is inapplicable to God is unclear to me, and Halevi does not flesh out this point.

110 E.g., Exodus 34:6.

111 E.g., Nahum 1:2.

112 See , Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*II. 2, 83.

"seeing" refers to divine omniscience.[113]

Like Saadya, Halevi does not think that metaphor can explain elaborate prophetic visions, and Halevi agrees that God, being incorporeal, cannot be perceived sensibly.[114] He therefore offers two interpretations of prophetic visions. The first interpretation follows Saadya as Halevi suggests that the prophet may see a created glory, which God fashions into particular images out of a fine substance, which Halevi calls the "holy spirit" (*ruaḥ ha-qodesh*).[115] God creates these forms by shining a ray of divine light into the fine substance. But Halevi is careful to make clear that this light is created and hence the spiritual form seen by the prophet is not identical with God's essence in any respect.[116] The second possibility is that the glory seen by the prophet includes an array of spiritual beings including all the angels, the firmament, and the divine throne, chariot, and wheels, which the prophet sees in the form of a luminous *anthropos*.[117] This *anthropos* is a created being, which is eternal *a parte poste*. Alexander Altmann has pointed out that this is a Karaite doctrine, although Elliot Wolfson has suggested that Halevi may also have been influenced by the chariot-mysticism of the Jewish tradition.[118]

Halevi goes beyond Saadya in an important respect, however. Given that the created glory is a fine spiritual substance, there seems to be no way that our physical eye could perceive it. Halevi carves episte-

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113 See Halevi/Hirschfeld,*Kuzari*, II. 2–4, 86–7.

114 See W. Harvey, "Judah Halevi's Synesthetic Theory of Prophecy," 145.

115 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, II. 2, 87.

116 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, II. 7-8, 88. For discussion see Wolfson, "Halevi and Maimonides on Prophecy," 88–9; Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy,* 113-117. Wolfson notes the possible influence of Neoplatonism on this doctrine.

117 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 3, 211. See Harry Wolfson, "Hallevi and Maimonides on Prophecy," in Wolfson, *Studies II*, 86–95.

118 See Altmann, "Saadya's Theory of Revelation," 154–5; Moshe Idel, "The World of Angels in Human Form," in *Studies in Philosophy, Mysticism, and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Joseph Dan and Joseph Hacker (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986) 15–9 [Hebrew]; Daniel Lasker, "Judah Halevi and Karaism," in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest Freirichs, and Nahum Sarna (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 115; Daniel Lasker, "The Philosophy of Judah Hadassi the Karaite," in *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday*, vol. 1, ed. Moshe Idel, Zev Harvey, and Eliezer Schweid, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 7 (1988), 487–9; W. Harvey, "Judah Halevi's Synesthetic Theory of Prophecy," 148–9; Wolfson, "Merkavah Traditions in Philosophical Garb," 194–235. Lasker points out that there are three Karaite views on when the luminous *anthropos* was created. Benjamin Nahwandi's view is that it was the first thing created, Yefet ben-Ali holds that it was created on the second day, and Sali ben-Matzliaḥ holds that it was created on the fourth day.

mological space for such a perception by adding a fifth inner sense to the four inner senses of the philosophers. This so-called "inner" (*al-bāṭina*) eye, which Halevi sometimes links with a special operation of the imagination,[119] parallels the operations of the outer eye.[120] Just as the outer eye provides the raw data concerning sensible things, which is then analyzed, synthesized, and interpreted by intellect, so the inner eye provides the raw data concerning the spiritual forms, which must be analyzed, synthesized, and interpreted by the intellect.[121] The imagination plays a special role here, for what the inner eye "sees" has no visible corporeal form. The images "seen" by the prophet are, in fact, supplied by the imagination.[122] This is not, however, a product of the independent, free play of the prophet's imagination. For God creates spiritual forms in such a way that when perceived by the inner eye, the prophet's imagination is stimulated to "clothe" these spiritual perceptions in particular forms. The perceptions of the inner eye are therefore

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119 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 3, 205–12; Lobel, *Between Philosophy and Mysticism*, 89–146. On the relationship between the inner eye and the imagination, see W. Harvey, "Judah Halevi's Synesthetic Theory of Prophecy," 143–9. My reading of Halevi is informed by what Alfred Ivry has called an "existentialist" interpretation of Halevi. See Alfred Ivry, "The Philosophical and Religious Arguments in Rabbi Judah Halevi's Thought: An Assessment," in *Thoughts and Action: Essays in Memory of Simon Rawidowicz on the 25th Anniversary of his Death*, ed. A. Greenbaum and A. Ivry (Tel-Aviv: Tcherikover, 1983), 29–31 [Hebrew]. Elliot Wolfson has provided an excellent reading of Halevi in this vein. See Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 163–87. Franz Rosenzweig points to this dimension of Halevi's thought, which Rosenzweig sees as prefiguring his own philosophy. Thus in a letter to his mother Rosenzweig describes himself as a reincarnation of Halevi. See Nahum Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Death* (New York: Schocken, 1961), 167. Similarly, Rosenzweig translated Halevi's poems and commented on them seeing his comments as an example of his "new thinking." For discussion, see Barbara Galli, "Rosenzweig's Philosophy of Speech: Thinking Through Response to the Poetry of Jehuda Halevi," *Studies in Religion* 23 (1994): 413-427; Barbara Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Judah Halevi: Translating, Translations and Translators* (Montreal: McGill-Queens Press, 1995); Michael Schwarz, "Franz Rosenzweig's Commentary to Rabbi Judah Halevi's Poetry," *Daat* (2006): 5-30 [Hebrew].

120 Scholars have pointed out that Halevi's notion of the "inner eye" is probably drawn from al-Ghazālī and Sufism. See W. Harvey, "Judah Halevi's Synesthetic Theory of Prophecy," 145. Also see Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 163–87. Harvey points out that although Halevi's discussion of the "inner eye" occurs within the context of Aristotelian psychology (according to its Avicennian formulation), he breaks sharply from Aristotelian psychology insofar as he allows the inner eye, *qua* inner sense to perceive external things directly, whereas according to Aristotelian psychology inner senses can only process data received by the outer senses. See, "Judah Halevi's Synesthetic Theory of Prophecy," 147.

121 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 3, 205–12.

122 W. Harvey calls this a "synesthetic" process involving a coordination of senses similar to when a mystic sees voices (cf. Exod. 19:14; 20:18). See W. Harvey, "Judah Halevi's Synesthetic Theory of Prophecy," 147–51.

the product of the direct, specific will of God. Furthermore, God wills prophecy to Jews alone,[123] and only in the land of Israel.[124] The preparation needed to achieve prophecy is obedience to the law (Halakhah) revealed to the Jews.[125]

If prophetic perceptions are not of God Himself, what is their purpose and why is God often perceived as a human being? As we have seen, sense perception and intellect work in tandem. In the example of the king mentioned above, the intellect judges various sense perceptions to be of a king.[126] In a similar manner, while the inner eye perceives spiritual forms, the intellect links these perceptions with the divine referent. So, for example, Halevi interprets Isaiah's seeing God seated on a throne as a visual, poetic metaphor for God's being exalted above all beings.[127] If this is the case, what is the advantage to the perception of these spiritual forms? Why not just deduce God's existence from the world as the philosophers do? Is it not very misleading to represent God in corporeal form as a human being?[128]

In response, Halevi distinguishes between the perception of the world through the outer eye and the perception of the spiritual forms through the inner eye. In perceiving the world through the outer eye, we set ourselves against the world and seek to distinguish and categorize material objects and determine the eternal, unchanging principles underlying the natural order. The *mode* of cognition, however, conditions

123 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 115, 79–81; I. 25-27, 46–7. See Harry Wolfson, "Hallevi and Maimonides on Prophecy," in Wolfson, *Studies II*, 97–8. For an insightful discussion of Halevi's attitude toward non-Jewish prophecy see Robert Eisen, "The King's Dream and Non-Jewish Prophecy," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1994): 231-247.

124 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, II. 10–14, 88–92; Alexander Altmann, "The Climatological Factor in Rabbi Judah Halevi's Theory of Prophecy," *Melila* 1 (1944): 1-17. Halevi notes that although prophets living outside of the land of Israel record prophecies, these prophets still prophesied for the sake of the land.

125 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari,* I. 109, 75–7; II. 34, 107–8; III. 7, 141–2; III. 11, 143–50; III. 23, 161–4. For discussion, see Wolfson, "Hallevi and Maimonides on Prophecy," 97–8, 116–7; Lobel, *Between Philosophy and Mysticism*, 47–8. Guttmann points out that Halevi's view that only specific practices ordained by God bring about divine illumination is found in al-Ghazālī. See Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge*, 24. On the similarities as well as crucial differences between Halevi's theory of prophecy and the Neoplatonic theory see W. Harvey, "Judah Halevi," 149–51. For Halevi, observing the moral law is a necessary prerequisite for observing the ritual law, and both of them are contained in Halakhah.

126 See , Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari,* IV. 3, 206.

127 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 3, 203. On the role of metaphor in prophet vision for Halevi, see W. Harvey, "Judah Halevi's Synesthetic Theory of Prophecy," 152–3.

128 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 4, 212.

the *substance* of the cognition. As we have seen, by rigorously subjecting physical reality to the principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit* the philosopher views the world as an eternal necessary order and the God deduced from this order is a static God of *being* whose most important attribute is intellect and who possesses no will. In such a world miracles are impossible, God has no chosen people, and there is no divinely revealed Halakhah.

God, however, cannot be placed in neat categories. By perceiving the spiritual forms as an *anthropos*, the prophet encounters God as one who calls to him as a lover, a friend, a father, and a king. The prophet encounters God as one who expresses love and demands that he reciprocate. God thus encountered is not an *object* of knowledge but is a dynamic *subject,* with whom the prophet forms a personal relationship and for whom he is willing to die.[129] Passion is not an impediment to knowledge of truth, but rather is the very condition of this knowledge. For Halevi, the prophet's God, the so-called "God of Abraham" is far different from the philosopher's God, the so-called "God of Aristotle."[130] The prophet encounters a God of *becoming* whose most important attribute is will. As a result, the prophet understands creation as occurring *ex nihilo* as the result of God's spontaneous free will, and nature is subject to God's unexpected, miraculous intervention at any time. God has a chosen people to whom He reveals His divine law.[131] The difference between the philosopher and the prophet is expressed in Halevi's account of the Tetragrammaton. Unlike the philosopher for whom the Tetragrammaton is an impersonal noun expressing necessary existence, for the prophet Tetragrammaton is a personal name, which signifies creation without intermediaries.[132] In line with this, Halevi tells us that "the matter of the Tetragrammaton cannot be comprehended through logic, and there is no proof of it except through prophetic vision."[133]

According to Halevi, visualizing the divine *anthropos* is thus critical to knowing God, for it is one thing to say that God knows and cares for us, but it is entirely another thing to be led to this notion through

129 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 5, 213–4. See Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge*, 76–7.

130 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 16, 223.

131 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, V. 21, 290–2.

132 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 1, 199; II. 2, 85–6.

133 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 15, 222. Note that Hirschfeld's translation mistakenly replaces the Tetragrammaton with the name *adonai*. Also see IV. 3, 202–3. See Wolfson, "Merkavah Traditions in Philosophical Garb," 237–40.

the sense perception of a king who lovingly looks down upon us from His throne. The distinction between one who encounters divine forms directly and one who learns discursively about God's traits is like the difference between one who lives in a country and one who reads about it. What is represented discursively is a pale shadow of what is experienced immediately and one can never fully capture in discursive language all that one experiences in a single moment.[134]

There are other reasons why the prophetic way of knowing God is vastly superior to the philosophical way for Halevi. As we have mentioned, because philosophy uses discursive reasoning, it requires a long process to unpack and "narrate" God's attributes, and as such it is unable to represent adequately God's unity. The prophet who grasps the divine *anthropos* "in the blink of an eye" through a sudden, immediate experience is, however, better able to apprehend God's unity.[135] Indeed, Halevi thinks that suddenness and spontaneity are marks of divinity.[136] Whereas according to the natural order individuals develop gradually over time as they strive to actualize their essences,[137] God can miraculously effect radical changes at any time. This then marks the difference between human and divine religions. Human religions develop slowly over time appearing "among single individuals who support one another in upholding the faith which it pleased God they should promulgate. Their number increases continually, they grow more powerful or a king arises and assists them and also compels his subjects to adopt the same creed."[138] In contrast, a divine religion "arises suddenly. It is bidden to arise and it is there like the creation of the world."[139] Judaism is such a religion for it begins with Israelite slaves being miraculously taken out from Egypt and revealed the Torah on Mount Sinai.[140]

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134 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 5, 213–4; IV. 6, 214; V. 16, 274–5. See Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge*, 66, 76.

135 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 5, 213–4. Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge*, 76.

136 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 81, 58.

137 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 73–4, 55.

138 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 80, 57–8.

139 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 81, 58.

140 Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, I. 83, 58–9. A problem stemming from Halevi's account of prophecy is that it seems that only the prophets are able to know and love God and the other members of the Jewish religion must learn of prophetic visions secondhand. Halevi's response, although not completely developed, is that the pious who observe Halakhah are able to encounter the divine firsthand by seeing what Halevi sometimes calls spiritual "lights," and at other times a "hidden spiritual *Shekhinah*." The nature of this "hidden *Shekhinah*" is, however, not clear. See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, V. 16, 275; V. 23, 293. For discussion, see Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge*,

The prophetic approach to metaphysical truth is likewise superior to the philosophical approach from an ethical standpoint for Halevi. As we have seen, for the philosopher the moral law is of merely instrumental value and God, having no will, neither rewards obedience nor punishes disobedience. Since the moral law is of instrumental value, in cases where the purpose of the moral law can be attained by violating it, the moral law becomes dispensable. In contrast, according to the prophet God ordains religious law, which includes the moral law, and its full purpose is beyond human scrutiny. The omniscient, omnipotent God rewards obedience and punishes disobedience; hence, the moral law is categorically binding and allows no exceptions.[141]

Furthermore, unlike the philosopher the prophet recognizes that through his own powers he is unable to know metaphysical truth. This, however, leads him to be more confident and peaceful, for the prophet has certain faith in his self-confirming divine illumination. Whereas the philosopher is filled with self-doubt and arrogantly seeks to impose his opinions on others, the prophet is secure in his faith and is thus more allowing and peaceful. Halevi concludes that those who have the exalted virtue of "faith" (*al-īmān*) that comes "naturally" (*bi-al-ṭabīʿa*) are much more fortunate than skeptics who, tormented by doubt, must rely on uncertain philosophical reasoning to grope for a truth that they may never attain.[142]

Maimonides' Apophatic Mysticism

Maimonides has often been cast as a harsh critic of mysticism. In his *Geschichte der Juden*, Heinrich Graetz contrasts Maimonides with the kabbalist Nahmanides:

> If Judaism for Maimonides was a cult of the intellect, for Nahmanides it was a religion of feeling. According to the former, there was no secret in Judaism, which could not be disclosed to thought; according to the latter, the

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141 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, IV. 17, 223; Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge*, 77; Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 113–4, 135–41.

142 See Halevi/Hirschfeld, *Kuzari*, III. 37, 168–9; V. 1–2, 248–50; Lasker, "Judah Halevi and Karaism," 120–1.

> mystical and unknown were the holiest elements of Judaism, and were not to be profaned by reflection.[143]

Although scholars generally agree that Maimonides' thought evinces little positive influence from kabbalah,[144] many recent scholars have seen intimations of mysticism in his account of passionate love of God [Arabic: *'ishq*, Hebrew: *ḥesheq*] and in his apophatic (negative) theology.[145] These mystical impulses, which are deeply bound with

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143 Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. 3, trans. Bella Lowy (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 534. Similarly, in a classic piece on Maimonides' attitude to Jewish mysticism Alexander Altmann writes, "Maimonides' system contains some formal elements of mysticism . . . the question whether Maimonides should be classified as a mystic with respect to his teachings and attitudes will have to be answered all the more emphatically in the negative." See Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides' Attitude toward Jewish Mysticism," in *Studies in Jewish Thought*, ed. A. Jospe (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 201. Shlomo Pines similarly remarks that "Maimonides was no mystic." See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, xcvi. Maimonides' negative attitude to mysticism seems to be reinforced by his famously harsh attack on *Shi'ur Qomah* about which he writes, "it is a great *mitzvah* to delete and eradicate mention of its subject matter." See Altmann, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism*, 187. According to Moshe Idel, Maimonides' negative attitude to mysticism is likewise apparent in his studied silence regarding Jewish mystical sources such as *Beraita deMa'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* with which he was surely familiar. See Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 34; Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 22, n. 18; Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge*, 96–7. Menachem Kellner's book *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism* (London: Littmann, 2006) enumerates six areas where Maimonides opposes "proto-kabbalistic" tendencies of his age. These include: Halakhah, holiness, ritual purity and impurity, the nature of the Hebrew language, the differences between Jews and non-Jews, and angels. Kellner's general view is that Maimonides opposed "proto-kabbalistic tendencies" in favor of a "religious nominalism" that understood the aforementioned categories in functionalist rather than in spiritual-ontological terms.

144 See Wolfson, "Merkavah Traditions in Philosophical Garb," 181–3. Steven Harvey suggests that Maimonides may have used terminology and symbolism from chariot mysticism in his nonkabbalistic account of the secrets of the divine chariot. See Steven Harvey, "Maimonides in the Sultan's Palace," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, ed. Joel Kraemer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 60–75. Kellner's suggestion that Maimonides critiqued "proto-kabbalistic" tendencies of his day suggests a negative influence of kabbalah on his thought. In outlining this argument, Kellner develops an idea suggested by Moshe Idel. See Moshe Idel, "*Sitre Arayot* in Maimonides' Thought" in *Maimonides and Philosophy,* ed. Shlomo Pines and Yirmiyahu Yovel (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1986), 79-91; Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism*, esp. 1-31.

145 See David Blumenthal, "Maimonides' Intellectualist Mysciticsm and the Superiority of the Prophecy of Moses," *Studies in Medieval Culture* 10 (1981): 51-77; David Blumenthal, "Maimonides: Prayer, Worship, and Mysticism," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, vol. 3, ed. David Blumenthal (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 1-16; Jose Faur, *Homo Mysticus: A Guide to Maimonides'* Guide of the Perplexed (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999); Simon Rawidowicz, "Man and God: A Study in the Maimonidean Philosophy of Religion," in *Studies in Jewish Thought*, 2 vols., ed. Benjamin Ravid (Jerusalem: Rubin Mas, 1969), 297-333 [Hebrew]; Diana Lobel, "Silence is Praise to You: Maimonides on Negative Theology, Looseness of Expression and Religious Experience," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76 (2002): 25-49. In his later writings, Pines recants his earlier view and writes about Maimonides' "intellectualist mysticism."

philosophical ratiocination, can only be understood against the background of Maimonides' discussion of biblical and rabbinic kataphatic descriptions of God. In this section, I will sketch the relationship between apophatic and kataphatic expression in Maimonides' dialectical philosophical mysticism.

1. Love and fear of God

Maimonides offers two accounts of the relationship between love and fear of God. In a number of places, he describes a developmental relationship between the two. One begins by worshipping God out of fear of punishment [*yir'ah*] or hope for reward. This is the method of worship of "ignoramuses, women, and children."[146] Training in this method of worship can lead one to a state in which one worships through love and, "believes in the truth for its own sake."[147] In his "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," however, Maimonides offers this famous account of the relationship between love and fear of God:

> And by what means is one to attain to this love and fear of Him [*le'ahavato veyir'ato*]? When a person meditates on His wondrous, majestic works and creatures and beholds in them His transcendent, boundless wisdom, he will straightaway love, praise, glorify, and passionately desire [*umit'aveh ta'avah gedolah*] to know the Great Name, as David said: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God (Ps. 42: 3)." But on contemplating [*besha'a sheyitbonen*] these very things, he will straightaway re-

See Shlomo Pines, "Le Discours Théologico-Politique dans les Oeuvres Halachiques de Maïmonide Comparé ave Celui du *Guide des Égarés*" in *Maimonide, délivrance et fidelité: texts du colloque tenu a l'Unesco en decembre 1985 a l'occasion du 850e anniversiare du philosophie* (Paris: 1986), 23–4; Shlomo Pines, "The Philosophical Purport of Maimonides' Halachic Works and the Purport of *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. S. Pines and Y. Yovel (Dordrecht: Martin Nijhoff, 1986), 9. For discussion of the evolution of Pines' position, see Warren Harvey, "How Strauss Paralyzed the Study of the *Guide*," *Iyyun* 50 (2001): 388–91 [Hebrew]. More recent discussions of Maimonides' mysticism include: Gideon Freudenthal, "The Philosophical Mysticism of Maimonides and Maimon" in *Maimonides and his Heritage* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 113-152; Wolfson, "Via Negativa in Maimonides." There is also a complete volume of the journal *Da'at* (vol. 64-66, 2009) devoted to the theme of Maimonides and mysticism.

146 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuva X.1.

147 *Commentary on the Mishnah,* Introduction to Chapter Ḥeleq. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuvah X.1, X.5; *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Avot I:3. See Georges Vajda, *L'amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du moyen age* (Paris: Vrin, 1957), 125–30.

> coil, in fear and dread, knowing that he is but a petty creature, ignoble and opaque, standing with paltry, trifling knowledge, before the Perfect in Knowledge, as David said: "When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers . . . what is man that You are mindful of him [and the son of man that You care for him] (Ps. 8: 4–5)?"[148]

Here love and fear are *simultaneous* reactions to contemplating God's work. Although Maimonides uses the same word for "fear" (*yir'ah*) in this passage as he does in the "Laws of Repentance," here *yir'ah* is more akin to awe at God's sublime wisdom, rather than the fear of punishment described in the "Laws of Repentance." These two types of *yir'ah* correspond to two ways of worshipping God, one bordering on idolatry and the other being the proper method of worship. Maimonides sees the main task of the Torah as guiding individuals from idolatry to correct apprehension of God.[149] What characterizes idolatry in its many forms is that while it seems to involve pious reverence for the deity, it is really a type of egoism, in which one looks to God to satisfy one's desires, or in which one projects one's desired perfections on to God with which one then falls in love. To move individuals to a proper relationship to God, the Torah initiates individuals into a dialectical process of affirmation and denial in which one rises from infantile wish fulfillment to openness to God who is paradoxically both a mysterious, ungraspable Other, and an overwhelming presence who inspires passionate love, and sublime awe, fear, and respect.

As we have seen, from the passage just quoted in the "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," love of God involves the desire to know His great name," that is, love derives from *seeking* knowledge of God. In the "Laws of Repentance" 10:6, Maimonides writes that, "a person only loves God according to the knowledge with which he knows Him. Love is proportionate to apprehension—if there is little apprehension there will be little love, if there is much apprehension there will

148 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah II.2. Translation from Daniel Frank, Oliver Leaman, and Charles Manekin, eds., *Jewish Philosophy Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), 226.

149 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:29, 517, 521; III:31, 523; III:37, 542. Also, see Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot II: 4. Compare *Sifre* to Num. 15:23; Babylonian Talmud, *Horayot*, 8a; *Qiddushin*, 40a; *Ḥullin*, 5a.

be much love."[150] So here love follows *possessing* knowledge of God.[151] On my interpretation, there is a complex interplay between love and awe and knowledge and ignorance that illustrates a crucial Neoplatonic current in Maimonides' thought. Love of God flows from knowledge in the sense that true knowledge involves recognizing our inability to comprehend God's essence, which fills us with awe and passionate love for God.

2. Idolatry

Maimonides identifies at least two types of idolatry. In his famous discussion of the origins of idolatry, Maimonides notes that idolatry began as star worship. The ancients believed that the stars were living beings whose movements impacted events on earth. The stars were seen as God's regents whom God deemed worthy of worship. Although the stars were originally worshipped as a way of honoring God, they came to be worshipped as *substitutes* for God.[152] For false prophets arose who claimed that God or the stars had spoken to them and commanded them to create physical representations so that the stars could be worshipped more easily.[153] These idols were said to be able to "do good and evil thus it was worthwhile to worship and fear them."[154] The people became so preoccupied with the worship of these physical idols that they forgot about God completely.[155] This type of idolatry is deeply tied to belief in astrology and magic. For false prophets and priests told the people that by worshipping the stars through the performance of ritual acts, they could bring about propitious events such as rainfall,

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150 Maimonides repeats this view at the end of the *Guide*. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:51, 620–2.

151 These two types of love seem to be alluded to in Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah IV. 12, where Maimonides writes that "when a person contemplates these things and recognizes all of the creations from the angel and sphere to people and the like, and when a person sees the wisdom of God in all creation, he will *add love for God* and his soul will thirst for God and his flesh *will crave to love God*" (emphasis mine). See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah IV.12.

152 See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot I: 1-2; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:36, 82–5.

153 See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot I: 2.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid. See Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 42–5; Lawrence Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn on the Origins of Idolatry," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, ed. A. Ivry, E. Wolfson, and A. Arkush (New York: Harwood, 1998), 423-445.

fertility, the prolongation of life, and protection from calamity.[156] For example, pagan priests commanded their faithful to have a beautiful girl graft the bough of one tree to a tree of a different species while a man had intercourse with her to increase the trees' fertility.[157]

In sum, this type of idolatry is ultimately a means to fulfill human desires. People were drawn to it because they felt weak and sought the means to control their fates.[158] Priests and prophets took advantage of the people and induced them to follow the priests' and prophets' dictates through fear of punishment and hope for reward, which was said to accompany the performance of (or failure to perform) pagan rituals. In general the pagan prophets' warnings would not materialize—there was no connection between performing pagan rituals and receiving good things. On occasion, due to pure chance, the prophets' warnings would be borne out, and the performance of a pagan ritual would be followed by a beneficial event or the failure to perform a pagan ritual would be followed by a calamity. The people, being very prone to superstition, would latch on to these chance occurrences and completely ignore the majority of cases in which the prophetic promises and warnings did not come to pass. In this way, people came to believe that performing pagan rituals allowed them to control nature.[159]

In addition to the first type of idolatry, Maimonides identifies a second type that is both more pervasive and insidious. Although the worship of stars and physical idols involves worshipping *substitutes* for God, there is also a form of idolatry that involves misconceiving God Himself. This is the idolatry of anthropomorphism and anthropopath-

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156 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:30, 522–3; III:37, 540–50; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot I: 2.

157 Note that in his "Letter on Astrology" and in Hilkhot Teshuvah, Maimonides links astrology with fatalism. It is unclear to me how this fatalism coheres with the account in the *Guide* and Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim in which astrology is connected with an attempt to *control* one's fate. See Lerner 2000, 184; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuvah V.4, 233–4; Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, VIII, 84. For a nice discussion of Maimonides' view of astrology, see Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Maimonides' Repudiation of Astrology," in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, ed. Robert Cohen and Hillel Levine (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 148–52.

158 In his "Letter on Astrology," Maimonides casts idolatry as a futile way of trying to control the future. He explains the rabbinic claim that the first Temple was destroyed because of the sin of idolatry as referring to the fact that Israelites lost their state because they wasted their time seeking help from idols and stars instead of learning the art of war. See Ralph Lerner, *Maimonides' Empire of Light* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 179–80.

159 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:37, 540–50, especially 545–7. See Langermann, "Maimonides' Repudiation of Astrology," 145.

ism in which one projects imaginative conceptions of human perfection onto God. For example, one assumes on the basis of one's limited imaginative experience that everything that exists must have a body.[160] God, being the most perfect being, must therefore have the most perfect body, a body "bigger and more resplendent than ours, the matter of which is not composed of flesh and blood."[161] Similarly, since the most exalted human beings such as kings and princes expect to be adored and get angry with those who do not show them proper respect, God, who is the most exalted and honored of all beings, must feel extreme anger toward those who do not worship Him properly.[162] Ascribing anger and indignation to a disrespected deity in turn reinforces the idea that feeling anger is an appropriate response to not receiving the honor one is due.

Maimonides makes clear that idolaters can love their deities.[163] What unites the two species of idolatrous love is their being grounded in imperfect imagination, intemperate desire, and narcissistic inwardness.[164] While the first type of idolatry involves imagining God as a means to satisfy one's bodily needs, the second type involves hypostasizing one's imagined perfections, which are then deified and deemed worthy of reverence and imitation. So idolatrous love is, in all cases, rooted in self-love.

3. The Torah as corrective

The Torah is an educational tool par excellence whose aim is that everyone should be perfect, that is, to wean individuals from childish, imagi-

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160 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:26, 56–7; I:46, 98.

161 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:1, 21. Maimonides may be implicitly criticizing the imaginal view of God represented in *Shi'ur Qomah*. For discussion of *Shi'ur Qomah,* see Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 90–1, 96; Martin Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983); Martin Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1985).

162 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:29–30, 62–4; I:36, 84–5.

163 See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot III: 6.

164 Maimonides makes clear that the imagination is a bodily faculty, which when imperfect, is connected to intemperate desire. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:36, 372; I:2, 23–6. Also see II:12, 280 where Maimonides claims, "imagination is also in true reality the *evil impulse* [*yetzer har'a*]." Intemperate desire is one of the impediments to acquiring true knowledge of God. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:34, 76–9; II:39, 380–1; III:8, 432–6; III:9, 436–7; Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, VII, 80–3. However, Maimonides holds that imagination can be perfected and brought under the control of reason. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:36, 369–73.

native views of God to mature, intellectual apprehension of God.[165] Given the power of imagination, accomplishing this is no mean task, for not everyone is able to free themselves from inadequate conceptions of God.[166] The Torah's wisdom lies in its ability to address individuals at different stages of intellectual maturity and move them each according to their capacity to more adequate ways of conceiving God. For there are many levels of apprehension of God.[167]

The key to the Torah's method of education is the doctrine of accommodation whose basic principle is, "a sudden transition from one opposite to another is impossible, and therefore man, according to his nature [*ṭabīʿat al-insān*], is not capable of abandoning suddenly all to which he was accustomed."[168] Were the Torah written as a recondite philosophical work, it would be useless to most people. Given the Torah's interest in the perfection of the Jewish nation as a whole, it must address individuals at their particular level of understanding. As we have seen, the root cause of idolatry is that individuals are under the sway of imagination, and the way to proper worship God is through intellect. It is therefore worthwhile noting some of the differences between the imaginative and rational faculties for Maimonides.[169]

The imaginative faculty (*al-qūwa al-mutakhayyila*) is bound to matter and to the use of sensible images.[170] It includes two powers. First, imagination "apprehends what is individual and composite as a whole."[171] This apparently corresponds to the operations of common sense and the retentive imagination, which coordinate and preserve different perceptions.[172] Second, it has a productive function, combining images

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165 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:39, 381.

166 On the impediments to achieving metaphysical knowledge, see Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:31, 66–7; I:34, 72–9. On the power of the imagination, see Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:49, 109.

167 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:18, 45; II:36, 372; III:51, 618–21.

168 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:32, 526.

169 For detailed discussion of Maimonides' theory of intellect, see Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides on the intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics," in *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modernen Aufklärung*, ed. A. Altmann (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987), 60–91. Also see Josef Stern, "Maimonides' Epistemology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, ed. Kenneth Seeskin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 107–115.

170 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:73, 209–10.

171 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:73, 209.

172 Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, I, 63; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:36, 370. See Harry Wolfson, "Maimonides on the Internal Senses," in Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, 351.

that are separate to represent objects that have never been perceived by the senses before.[173] The rational faculty (*al-qūwa al-nātqah*) comprises practical (*'amalī*) and theoretical (*naẓari*) reason. Practical reason includes a productive (*mihnī*) part through which one acquires skills such as carpentry and agriculture, and a reflective (*fikrī*) part through which one considers which acts are to be done and which are not to be done. Reflective practical reason includes political and ethical thinking (what Maimonides calls reflection on "noble [*al-jamīl/al-ḥasan*] and base [*al-qabīḥ*] actions").[174] Theoretical reason includes the intellect, which knows the essences of things, that is, the intelligibles (*al-'ulūm*).[175]

Maimonides calls intellect "the contrary" of the imagination.[176] As an Aristotelian, he thinks that knowledge must begin with the senses.[177] Nevertheless, intellect treats sense data very differently than imagination. Whereas imagination is tied to sensible representations, intellect abstracts from sensible representations conceiving objects not according to how they present themselves to the senses, but rather according to their rationally apprehended causes. Once intellect abstracts from the sensible objects, it can form syllogisms that allow it to know independently of the senses. Whereas the imagination perceives multiplicity in the world by focusing on individual phenomenal representations, the intellect apprehends unity by seeking the single, universal, unchanging essence underlying diverse phenomena. Whereas the productive imagination unites representations arbitrarily, intellect divides and abstracts essences according to the strict rules of demonstration found in logic and mathematics.[178]

For Maimonides, the difference between the operations of the imag-

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173 Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, I, 63; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:73, 209.

174 See Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, I, 63; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:53, 121; I:72, 191. Compare I:2, 24–26, where Maimonides seems to attribute ethical/political thinking to the imagination. On this apparent contradiction see Warren Zev Harvey, "Maimonides and Spinoza on Knowledge of Good and Evil," *Iyyun* 28 (1978): 167-185; Lawrence Kaplan, "I Sleep but my Heart Waketh: Maimonides' Conception of Human Perfection," in *The Thought of Moses Maimonides: Philosophical and Legal Studies*, ed. I. Robinson, L. Kaplan, J. Bauer (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1990), 150–4.

175 See Maimonides, *Treatise on Logic* XIV, 38; Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, I, 63–4; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:73, 209.

176 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines I:73, 209.

177 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines III:16, 463; III:21, 484–5.

178 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:73, 209–12. Maimonides deems logic and mathematics indispensable prerequisites for acquiring metaphysical knowledge. See "Epistle Dedicatory," 3; I:34, 75; II:23, 321.

ination and the intellect is the difference between accurate and inaccurate measures of necessity, possibility, and impossibility. Imagination represents many things to itself as possible, which are impossible, and it represents many things to itself as impossible, which are possible. For example, imagination conceives of God as having a body. On the other hand, imagination cannot conceive of the asymptote, that is, two lines, one curved and one straight, which begin at a certain distance from one another where the distance between the two diminishes without the lines ever meeting. Intellect, however, demonstrates that it is impossible for God to have a body and that it is possible for two lines to approach one another without ever meeting.[179]

Recognizing intellect as the proper measure of necessity, possibility, and impossibility plays a crucial role in how one conceives the world. Because imagination represents things arbitrarily and not according to fixed rules, the imaginative conception of the world is grounded in seeing truth as conventional.[180] As Maimonides puts it, "there can be no critical examination in the imagination."[181] It is thus not surprising that the Mutakallimun, Islamic dialectical theologians who took the imagination as the measure of truth, were occasionalists who did not believe in fixed laws of nature and who thought that God arbitrarily creates the world anew at every moment.[182] In contrast, philosophers who consider the strict rules of logic and mathematics as the measure of truth conceive of the world as operating according to fixed, natural laws.[183]

For Maimonides, the belief in magic is an imaginative belief as it implies that through performing ritual acts in service of pagan deities human beings can cause effects to follow from causes that violate the

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179 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:73, 209–11; Gad Freudenthal, "Maimonides' Philosophy of Science," in Seeskin, *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, 137–8. Maimonides acknowledges that it is not always simple to differentiate between what is cognized according to the intellect and what is cognized according to the imagination. See Maimonides, G*uide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III. 15, 459–63.

180 See Maimonides, G*uide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:2, 23–6.

181 Ibid., I:73, 210.

182 See Ibid., I:73, 200–3.

183 See Ibid., II:10, 269–73; II:12, 277–80. See the equation of natural acts with divine acts at I:66, 160; III:32, 525. For discussion, see Idel, "*Deus sive Natura*," 87–90; Lenn E. Goodman, "Maimonidean Naturalism," in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, ed. R.S. Cohen and H. Levine (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 57-85.

natural laws of physics.[184] Undermining the belief in magic is a central aim of the Torah,[185] and using the principle of accommodation the Torah prescribes rituals and teaches opinions, which are designed to gradually wean people away from this idolatrous belief.[186] So, for example, because of the pagan belief that through a sex-ritual involving grafting trees of different species the trees could be made fertile, the Torah forbids grafting trees of two different species.[187] Similarly, while pagans claim that worshipping certain deities will bring good fortune, the Torah teaches that worshipping these gods will bring calamity, whereas if one worships God alone and performs proper rituals in His service, one will receive benefits such as rainfall, fertile land, and peace and security.[188]

Although all this applies to counteracting belief in *substitutes* for God, the harder and more important task of education involves curing people of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic conceptions of God. Anthropomorphism/anthropopathism originates either from a *dearth* of thought or from an *excess* of it. Recall that imagination is necessarily bound to sense perception. A simple person conceiving God according to the imagination will imagine God in a familiar way as the most perfect, powerful human being they can conceive of, frequently as the perfect father who will protect, reward, and punish people and who is on this account to be feared and love. It is not only simple people who hold imaginative beliefs about God, even sophisticated thinkers can fall prey to imagination. For reasons that we will see later, Maimonides thinks that it is impossible to grasp God's essence intellectually. Al-

184 Of course biblical miracles also seem to involve the violation of natural laws. For Maimonides' complex approach to miracles, see Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Maimonides and Miracles: The Growth of a (Dis)belief," *Jewish History* 18 (2004): 147-172; M.Z. Nehorai, "Maimonides on Miracles," in *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume*, vol. 2, ed. Moshe Idel, Warren Harvey, and Eliezer Schweid (Jerusalem: Mehqere Yerushalayim, 1990), 1-18 [Hebrew]; Hannah Kasher, "Biblical Miracles and the Universality of Natural Law: Maimonides' Three Methods of Harmonization," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1998): 25-52.

185 See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot XI: 15-16; Langermann, "Maimonides' Repudiation of Astrology."

186 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III. 29, 517–8.

187 See ibid., III. 37, 548. On the prohibition of grafting two different species of fruit trees see *Mishnah Kil'ayim*, I: 7; Babylonian Talmud, *Kiddushin*, 39a; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Kil'ayim I: 5-6.

188 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:29, 522–3. Maimonides' own view concerning individual providence and reward and punishment is complex. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:17-24, 51-54, 464–502, 618–38.

though true philosophers embrace this, emotionally immature thinkers seek clear knowledge of God's essence. Given the impossibility of such knowledge, they end up retreating to the only way of giving a clear description of God—through the imagination—and God becomes the hypostasis of imagined perfections. Indeed according to Maimonides it was the failure to accept the impossibility of grasping the divine nature that led to the great rabbinic sage Elisha ben Abuya to sin.[189]

Yir'ah (fear/awe) has a crucial prophylactic function: It helps prevent individuals from seeking what is beyond their grasp. Whereas Elisha ben Abuyah is a model of one who overreached his ability and so ended up in error, Moses is an example of one who correctly recognized the bounds of what he could understand. So Maimonides explains the verse "And Moses hid his face because he was afraid (*yareh*) to look upon God" (Exod. 3:6) as referring to the fact that Moses felt awe (*yistaḥiyyu*) at God's sublimity and so held back from seeking to understand what was beyond his capacity. On account of this intellectual humility, Moses was able to grasp more than any other human being.[190]

The Torah addresses individuals at different stages of intellectual development. It does so through the use of parables [*al-mathal*]. Unlike philosophical discourse, which is abstract and appeals to the intellect alone, parables use images, which make them an appropriate educational vehicle for people under the sway of imagination. Furthermore, unlike philosophical discourse, which is precise and in which a single intention is conveyed, parables are open to multiple interpretations and so can convey numerous intentions. At one level the parable may convey an imaginative understanding of truth, but at a deeper level it can point to a rational conception of the same truth. Finally, parables are ambiguous and their meaning is obscure and elusive. This obscurity mirrors the obscurity of metaphysics itself so the form of instruction is appropriate to its content.[191]

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189 Ibid., I. 32, 68–70; I. 5, 30.

190 See Ibid., I. 5, 29; I. 54, 123–9. I am indebted to Warren Zev Harvey for this insight. See Warren Zev Harvey, "Maimonides on Human Perfection, Awe, and Politics," in *The Thought of Moses Maimonides: Philosophical and Legal Studies*, ed. I. Robinson, L. Kaplan, and J. Bauer (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1990), 1-15. Harvey notes that in a personal conversation with Pines, Pines told him that although he had translated *yistaḥiyyu* as "feel awe," a preferable translation would be "be abashed." See W. Harvey, "Perfection, Awe, and Politics," 13, note 8.

191 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, Introduction, 9: "because our capacity falls short of apprehending the greatest subjects as they really are, we are told about those profound matters –

Parables are constructs of the imagination; however, given the deceptiveness of the imagination, how can parables ever be used? In *Guide of the Perplexed* Maimonides claims that one of the characteristics of the prophet is a perfected imagination.[192] The imagination is a bodily function tied to desire.[193] If a person is ruled by intemperate desire, his imagination will reflect this and he will conceive reality according to his desires. By achieving rational and moral virtue, however, the imagination can be trained to be obedient to intellect. To be a prophet, one must have acquired all the rational virtues, most of the moral virtues, and have perfected one's imagination.[194] Despite the emphasis on the role of human activity in prophecy, Maimonides still seeks to preserve a measure of divine voluntarism by noting that even after a person has acquired all of these perfections, God can still withhold prophecy.[195] But while God could potentially withhold prophecy from one who is worthy, He never actually does so.[196] The prophet's perfected imagination serves an important political function enabling the prophet to communicate metaphysical truths grasped rationally to the majority

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which divine wisdom has deemed necessary to convey to us- in parables [*al-mathal*], and in very obscure [*mubhama*] words." See Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, trans. Fred Baumann (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1987), 74; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia: Kabbalist and Prophet*, 48–9. Yair Lorberbaum suggests that Maimonides' use of the so-called "seventh cause" of contradictions in the *Guide* is likewise on account of the obscurity of cosmology and metaphysics. See Yair Lorberbaum, "The 'Seventh Cause': On Contradictions in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*," *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 211-37 [Hebrew].

192 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:36, 369; II:38, 377. Jeffrey Macy notes that in Maimonides' discussion of prophecy in the *Haqdama lePereq Ḥeleq* Maimonides does not speak of a role for the imagination in prophecy. Macy sees a "transitional view" in *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, chapter 7. See Jeffrey Macy, "Prophecy in al-Farabi and Maimonides," in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. S. Pines and Y. Yovel (Dordrecht: Martin Nijhoff, 1986), 192–4.

193 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:36, 372; I:2, 23–6; II:12, 280.

194 Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, VII, 80–3; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah VII. 1; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:36, 369.

195 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:32, 361–2. My interpretation follows Lawrence Kaplan. See Lawrence Kaplan, "Maimonides on the Miraculous Element in Prophecy," *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977): 233-256. Kaplan notes that the medieval commentators Kaspi, Narboni, Shem Tov, Efodi, and Abravanel all anticipate this line of interpretation. More recently Strauss espouses it. See Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 84. An alternative interpretation of Maimonides' view is that although only people who have perfected themselves can achieve prophecy, prophecy only occurs through a special act of divine will. The medieval commentators Crescas and Albo adumbrate this interpretation and more recently Zvi Diesendruck and Harry Wolfson defend it. See Zvi Diesendruck, "Maimonides' *Lehre von die Prophetie*," in *Jewish Studies in Memory of Israel Abrahams* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion, 1927), 73-174; Wolfson, "Prophecy."

196 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:32, 529; Kaplan, "Maimonides on the Miraculous Element in Prophecy," 254–6.

of people who are under the sway of the imagination. This occurs by the prophet's metaphysical knowledge known through his intellect "overflowing" to his imaginative faculty so that he communicates his intellectual apprehension in parables.[197] It is the task of the sage to instruct individuals in the figurative meaning of these parables, thereby guiding individuals from imaginative conceptions of God to rational ones through a dialectical process of affirmation and negation.

4. The dialectical process in action: Maimonides on divine knowledge

The first task of the Torah is to direct people to the existence of a perfect being. This is especially important because if people were never taught about the existence of God, even the most brilliant minds might never attain this knowledge.[198] Indeed, according to Maimonides, it took the great philosopher Abraham until he was forty years old to discover the existence of a unique deity who governs the universe.[199] The Torah

197 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:36, 369–73; II:37, 373–5; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah VII. 3. This applies to all the prophets except for Moses, who prophesied through intellect alone. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:39, 378–81; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah VII. 6. How does Maimonides' claim that Moses prophesied through intellect alone fit with the fact that the Torah is filled with imaginative language? As Lawrence Kaplan points out, Maimonides' position seems to be that although Moses, the greatest prophet, apprehended God through the intellect alone without any admixture of imagination, he gave the intellectual truths that he apprehended imaginative clothing through his personal initiative rather than his intellectual knowledge "overflowing" to his imaginative faculty. See Kaplan, "Maimonides' Conception of Human Perfection"; Alvin Reines, *Maimonides and Abravanel on Prophecy* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1970), 135–48, 353–8; Kalman Bland, "Moses and the Law According to Maimonides," in *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Daniel Swetschinski (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1982), 61–6. Bland focuses on Moses' legislation alone, but the point is the same. Strauss offers a similar, but slightly different solution to this contradiction. See Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 130–1.

198 See the impediments to achieving metaphysical knowledge discussed in Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:31–34, 65–79.

199 See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot I: 3. In *Genesis Rabba*, 64: 4 there is a dispute between Rabbi Yohanan, who says that Abraham recognized the Creator at age forty-eight and Resh Laqish who says that Abraham recognized the Creator at age three. Resh Laqish's opinion is found in the Talmud at *Nedarim*, 32a. Maimonides apparently adopts the opinion of R. Yohanan, although it is unclear why there is a discrepancy between Maimonides' account of Abraham being forty and R. Yohanan's opinion that Abraham was forty-eight. R. Meir ben Yekutiel of Rothenberg, author of the commentary *Hagahot Maimoniyot*, thinks that there is a misprint in the extant version of the *Mishneh Torah*, which should read that Abraham was forty-eight. R. Yosef Karo, author of the commentary *Kesef Mishneh*, thinks that Maimonides had a different version of the midrash, which read that Abraham was forty. In the parallel passage in the *Guide*, Maimonides does not give an age for Abraham. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:29, 514–5.

therefore seeks to instill proper beliefs as a way of preparing people to attain philosophical understanding of God. Maimonides calls the acquisition of these beliefs the "welfare of the soul" [Arabic: *ṣalāḥ al-nafs*/ Hebrew: *tiqqun ha-nefesh*].[200] Given that at the outset people only conceive things according to their imaginations, the Torah introduces belief in a perfect deity through imaginative descriptions of God, which accord with what the *imagination* deems perfection.[201] One of the ideas that the Torah seeks to instill is the idea of God as the perfect knower. At an early developmental stage, people realize that their eyes play a central role in how they know the world, so the Torah describes God as having eyes.[202] To prove that the Torah actually uses the principle of accommodation, Maimonides makes the interesting observation that the Torah only ascribes certain sensible faculties to God and not others. Although God is described as seeing, hearing, and occasionally as smelling, God is never described as tasting or touching. The reason is that people generally conceive the senses of sight, hearing, and smell, which do not involve direct physical contact with objects, as more perfect ways of perceiving than the senses of touch and taste, which require direct contact with the object perceived.[203]

It is problematic to ascribe eyes and sight to God. Given God's incorporeality, ascribing these to God "abolishe[s] belief in the existence of the deity" according to Maimonides.[204] For a person to hold a belief, the belief must refer to something outside the mind.[205] Saying that God has eyes and sees is like saying that an elephant has one leg, three wings, swims in the sea, and talks. For the person with this understanding of the term "elephant," the term does not refer incorrectly—it does not refer at all.[206] To remedy this problem, Maimonides claims that once the idea of the existence of God is firmly implanted in people's minds they must be commanded to believe that God does not have eyes and sight

200 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:27, 510–2.

201 Ibid., I:26, 56–7; I:46, 98–102; I:47, 104–6; I:49, 108–10; I:60, 147.

202 See ibid., I. 46, 98–9; I. 44, 95; I. 4, 27–8.

203 Ibid., I:47,–6.

204 Ibid., I:60, 145.

205 Ibid., I:50, 111. For an excellent discussion of Maimonides' concept of belief, see Charles H. Manekin, "Belief, Certainty, and Divine Attributes in the *Guide of the Perplexed*," *Maimonidean Studies* 1 (1990): 117-141.

206 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:60, 146–7.

whether they can understand this or not.[207] As people become habituated to the idea that God does not have eyes or sight, they will become perplexed over traditional biblical texts, which seem to ascribe these things to God. At this point, perplexed individuals must be initiated into the subtleties of biblical interpretation. The terms "eye" (*'ayin*) and "sight" (*ra'oh*) have, in addition to their literal sense, a figurative sense according to which they mean intellectual apprehension. Whenever it is said that God sees something through His eyes, this in fact means that God apprehends something intellectually.[208]

Most people never get beyond this level of understanding. More philosophically inclined individuals are taught that ascribing knowledge to God is likewise a distortion, for it compromises divine unity by conceiving of God as a subject with attributes superadded to His essence.[209] In reality, God's knowledge is identical to His essence.[210] We only imagine knowledge as an attribute added to God's essence because knowledge is an accidental quality in relation to our essence. Given that God's knowledge is not an attribute that is distinguished from God's

207 Ibid., I:35, 81.

208 Ibid., I:35, 81; I:4, 27–8. Maimonides cites Psalms 11:4 as an example of *ayin* being used for intellectual apprehension and Ecclesiastes 1:16 as an example of *ra'oh* being used for intellectual apprehension. Also, see ibid., I:44, 95. Unlike Saadya and Halevi, Maimonides sees no difficulty in interpreting prophetic visions as elaborate metaphors constructed by the imagination without any sensible correlate. Maimonides considers Saadya/Halevi's view that the prophets see a "created glory" in a number of places. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:27, 57; I:21, 51; I:28, 60; I:76, 229. In general, although Maimonides says that there is "no harm in this view," he does not seem to endorse this perspective. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:5, 31; I:18, 44–5; I:19, 46; I:21, 51. But compare I:10, 37; I:25, 55; I:64, 156; III:7, 430, where Maimonides seems to accepts the idea of created light as an explanation of Moses' ascent to God (Exodus 19:3) and of various descriptions of the "glory of God" (*kavod YHVH*) (e.g Exod. 24:16-17; Exod. 40:34-35; Ezek. 1:27-28). For discussion, see H.A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 460–61 n. 93; Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Thought,* 214-215; Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism,* 179-215.

209 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:51, 113–4. Maimonides' view that ascribing the attribute of knowledge to God compromises God's unity shows that Maimonides' ontology is neither nominalist nor Platonic universalist. Maimonides rejects the Platonic view that universals can exist separate from matter, but he also does not accept the nominalist view that universals are mere names that do not refer to real things in subjects. Rather, universals have both real and ideal existence. Although universals are known through the mind alone, they are not mental constructs, but rather are real things discovered in individuals. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah IV.7; Wolfson, "The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew Philosophical Texts," 257–9; Josef Stern, "Maimonides on Language and the Science of Languest," in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, ed. Robert Cohen and Hillel Levine (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 210.

210 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:53, 122–3; I:57, 132–3; Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, VIII, 94; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah II.10.

essence, it is problematic to say that God is knowing. An alternative suggested by the Kalam thinker Nazzam is to gloss "God is knowing" as "God is knowing but not through knowledge because knowledge is His essence and His essence is knowledge."[211] Although this formulation is an improvement on the proposition "God is knowing" *simpliciter*, it is still misleading. Although Nazzam's proposition states that God's knowledge is nothing other than God's essence, the logical structure of this proposition is a third adjacent with a subject linked to a predicate through a copula that implies that the subject (God) has a quality added to His essence.[212] Furthermore, the proposition is misleading because it uses the term "knowing," which suggests that God's knowledge is like human knowledge only of a greater degree. In reality, God's knowledge is completely unlike ours for at least six reasons. First, if God is all-knowing, God must know many things. Given God's absolute unity, God knows many things with a single knowledge. According to our concept of knowledge, however, one who knows many things must have multiple insights, which when applied to God would compromise divine unity.[213] Second, if God is all-knowing God must know all events future and past. According to our conception of knowledge this contradicts God's immutability for if God knows the future His knowledge must change when He knows that future events actually come to pass.[214] Third, it is impossible for us to conceive how a being could know infinitely many things, but God knows infinitely many things.[215] Fourth, there are three elements of knowledge: the potentially intellectually cognizing subject, the potentially intellectually cognized object, and the potential intellect itself. When human beings' intellects are actual, these three elements become one, but given our finitude, these three elements are often separate. God's intellect, however, is always actual and these three elements are always one in Him.[216] Fifth, given that we

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211 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:53, 132; III:20, 482. See Harry Wolfson, "Maimonides on Negative Attributes," in his *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol. 2, ed. I. Twersky and G. H. Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 199–200.

212 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:52, 114–6; I:57, 132–3; I:58, 134–5. Even if "knowing" is a description of God's essence, it still implies that God has causes anterior to his essence. See ibid., I:52, 114–5.

213 See ibid., I:46, 102; III:20, 480.

214 See ibid., 1:60, 144; III:16, 463; III:20, 480–3.

215 Ibid., III:20, 481.

216 Ibid., I:68, 165; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah II.10.

are finite beings, our knowledge of finite particulars depends on our sense perceptions of the world. In a word, our knowledge is *receptive*. God's knowledge, however, is *spontaneous* and *creative*, for God knows all things before they come into existence and causes them to come into existence.[217] Sixth, although God knows all future events, God's knowledge does not compromise human free will. This is impossible according to our conception of knowledge.[218] These differences between God's knowledge and ours show that it is impossible for us to ever adequately understand God's knowledge.[219] The only way we could ever understand it would be to become God.[220] The term "knowledge" as applied to God's knowledge and ours is therefore purely equivocal as there is absolutely no relation between our knowledge and God's.[221]

To what then do the descriptions of God's knowledge in the Torah refer? Here Maimonides introduces his famous doctrine of negative attributes. Given the enormous differences between our knowledge and God's, if knowledge is to be predicated of God's essence it must be glossed negatively as a negation of a privation. "God is knowing" should therefore be understood to mean that God is not ignorant. There are two ways that privation can be negated. Privation can be negated in the sense that it implies that the subject possesses a particular habit. So, for example, saying that Adam is not blind means that Adam sees because sight and blindness are applicable to Adam and there is no intermediary between having sight and being blind. Privation, however, can also be negated in the sense that the whole category to which the privation belongs is inapplicable to the subject. Thus, when one says that the wall is not blind this does not imply that the wall sees, but rather that blindness/sight does not apply to the wall. For Maimonides, negative attributes are of the second kind. When "God has knowledge" is glossed as "God is not ignorant," this implies that the category of knowledge/ignorance as we typically understand it is inapplicable to God. Given this meaning of negative attributes, negative attributes can

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217 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:16, 463; III:21, 484–5; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah II: 10.

218 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:20, 483; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuva V.5.

219 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:59, 137; III:20, 482–4; III:23, 496–7; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuva V.5, 234–6; Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, VIII.

220 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:21, 485.

221 Ibid., I:56, 30–131; III:20, 482–4.

only "conduct the mind towards the utmost reach that man may attain in apprehension of Him, may He be exalted."[222]

What then is referred to in the proposition "God is not ignorant"? The only positive content we can give to this is that it refers to God's existence, which is inseparable from God's essence. For all that we can understand in the proposition "God is not ignorant" is that God apprehends in the most basic sense that apprehension involves living, that is, that God exists.[223] Hence attributing knowledge to God is just a way of affirming that God is. Maimonides repeats many times that we can only apprehend the fact that God *is* and not his quiddity. Beyond this we only have silence.[224] Why then do we gloss "God is knowing"

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222 See Ibid., I:58, 135–7. The literature on Maimonides treatment of negative attributes is extensive. Among the most important discussions are: Harry Wolfson, "Crescas on the Problem of Divine Attributes" and "Maimonides on Negative Attributes," in his *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol. 2 ed. I. Twersky and G. H. Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); Joseph Buijs, "The Negative Theology of Maimonides and Aquinas," *The Review of Metaphysics* 41 (1988): 728-738; Ehud Benor, "Meaning and Reference in Maimonides' Negative Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 88 (1995); Kenneth Seeskin, *Searching for a Distant God: The Legacy of Maimonides* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Lobel, "Silence is Praise to You."

223 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:42, 92–3; I:53, 122–3; I:58, 135; I:68, 163. Strictly speaking "living" as predicated of God must be glossed negatively as "God is not dead" for God does not live according to our usual understanding of the term. Similarly, the statement "God exists" is misleading because the term "existence" as applied to God and us is equivocal.

224 See ibid., I:58, 135, 137. See Steven Harvey and Warren Zev Harvey, "A Note on the Arabic Term 'Anniyya,'" *Iyyun* 38 (1989): 167-171. Josef Stern offers a fascinating explanation of this claim. In Aristotelian and medieval logic there are different types of demonstration. A demonstration *propter quid* proceeds from causes to effects (analytically) and gives knowledge of the essence of the cause. In contrast, a demonstration *quia* proceeds from effects to possible causes (synthetically) without giving essential knowledge of the causes. Stern claims that Maimonides' demonstrations of God's existence only provide demonstrations *quia*, not *propter quid*. This distinction allows Stern to explain the apparent contradiction between Maimonides' proofs of God's existence and his negative theology. See Josef Stern, "Maimonides' Epistemology," in Seeskin, *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, 120–2; Josef Stern, "Maimonides' Demonstrations: Principles and Practice," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001): 55–64, 71–2; Josef Stern, "Maimonides on the Growth of Knowledge and the Limitations of the Intellect," in *Maimonide: Philosophe et Savant*, ed. Tony Lévy and Roshdi Rashed (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 165–7. Stern is a major player in the debate over whether Maimonides was a dogmatist or a skeptic. Shlomo Pines' skeptical interpretation of Maimonides triggered the debate. See Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 82-109. Stern defends the skeptical interpretation of Maimonides, as does Kenneth Seeskin. See Seeskin, *Searching for a Distant God*. Major defenders of the dogmatic interpretation of Maimonides include Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics"; Manekin, "Belief, Certainty, and Divine Attributes"; Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992): 137-156; Alfred Ivry, "The Logical and Scientific Premises of Maimonides' Thought," in *Perspectives on Jewish*

as "God is not ignorant" and not as "God is not knowing"? Strictly speaking, it would be proper to gloss "God is knowing" as "God is not knowing" given that in the usual sense of the term, "knowing" refers to human knowledge. The Torah, however, seeks to lead us to conceive of God as the most perfect being, and because knowledge is deemed a perfection by us, to say that "God is not knowing" implies that God is imperfect.[225]

Still, there remains a sense in which the *via negativa* is misleading because it uses discursive language to represent God who is a pure unity.[226] Therefore, Maimonides claims that there is a higher form of apprehending God than the *via negativa*. Although he is quite brief on this point, Maimonides speaks of a power of "intuition" (*shuʿūr/ḥads*) through which "the mind goes over premises and conclusion in the shortest time so that it is thought to happen in no time at all."[227] Through this power truth "flashes" to the knower such that she is able to grasp speculative matters intuitively without recourse to discursive reasoning.[228] This way of immediate knowing, which we might call intellectual intuition, is a much more adequate way of representing God's timeless unity. This intuition can, however, only be grasped at particular instants, and for most people it is impossible to sustain this insight over extended periods of time.[229]

Thought and Mysticism, ed. Alfred Ivry, Elliot Wolfson, and Allan Arkush (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1998), 63-97.

225 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:46, 98–102; I:49, 108–110; I:60, 147.

226 Compare Stern, "Maimonides on Language and the Science of Language," 215–7.

227 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:38, 376.

228 Ibid., II:38, 377.

229 This intellectual intuition appears to be alluded to in Maimonides' famous claim that although the divine secrets are never "fully and completely known," truth may "flash out to us." According to the intellectual hierarchy in the introduction to the *Guide*, the highest degree of intuitive knowledge was attained by Moses for whom "the lightning flashes time and time again, so that he is always, as it were, in unceasing light." See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, 7–8. The source of Maimonides' account of intuitive metaphysical knowledge seems to be Avicenna. For discussion, see Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 85, 94–5; Alvin J. Reines, *Maimonides and Abrabanel on Philosophy* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press,1970) 338–43; Binyamin Abrahamov, "Maimonides and Ibn Sina's Theory of Hads: A Re-examination of the *Guid eof the Perplexed*, II:38," in *Proceedings of the 7th Conference of the Society of Judaeo-Arabic Studies*, forthcoming, and Eran, "The Penetration of Ibn Sina's Notion of Intellectual Prophecy from Maimonides' Mystical Interpretation through Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav," *Daat,* vol. 64-66 (2009): 71-76 (in Hebrew). On Maimonides' differences with Avicenna, see Amira Eran, "Hads in Maimonides and Rabbi Judah Halevi," *Tura* 4 (1994): 121–9.

5. Apophasis and mysticism

Does the *via negativa* constitute knowledge of God? What is the difference between the philosopher who speaks *via negativa* and the simple person who on authority says that he understands nothing of God? The difference could not be greater. Maimonides distinguishes between three levels of understanding. The first level is where one voices opinions, but has no understanding of what these opinions actually signify. The second level is where one is able to give reasons for one's opinions, although not demonstrative reasons. The third and highest level is where one is able to give demonstrative reasons for one's beliefs such that "a different belief is in no way possible."[230]

There is a huge gulf separating the individual who simply utters the claim that he knows nothing about God and the individual who can give demonstrative reasons why he has no knowledge of God. The difference is akin to that between one who cannot see because of an absence of light and one who cannot see because of overpowering light. For the person who expresses ignorance without reasons, God's existence is an empty notion. God is absent. For the philosopher who has gone through the dialectical process of affirmation and negation, God's being is understood to be so transcendent and perfect, that it is overpowers his understanding and stuns him into silence. God is overwhelmingly present:

> Thus, all the philosophers say: We are dazzled by His beauty, and He is hidden from us because of the intensity with which He becomes manifest, just as the sun is hidden to eyes that are too weak to apprehend it . . . The most apt phrase concerning this subject is the dictum occurring in *Psalms*, "Silence is Praise to Thee (Ps. 65: 2), which interpreted signifies: silence with regard to You is praise.[231]

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230 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:50, 111–2; Manekin, "Belief, Certainty, and Divine Attributes in *The Guide of the Perplexed*."

231 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:59, 139. Compare III:9, 436–7; Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, VIII, 94–5. See Lobel, "Silence is Praise to You," 43–9. The image of the sun goes back, of course, to Plato's *Republic*, but Maimonides may have adopted it from Ibn Bajja. See Alexander Altmann, "Moses Narboni's Epistle on *Shi'ur Qoma*," in his *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism*, 84–8.

Whereas the person who uncomprehendingly says that he knows nothing of God is left cold by his utterance, the philosopher who understands that God is unknowable is filled with love and awe. Like a person madly in love with a beloved who briefly appears only to withdraw, the philosopher is consumed with passion for God who is ungraspable in His overwhelming presence.

> What is the proper love of God? It is that one should love God with a great, powerful love until his soul is entwined with the love of God and he is madly obsessed [*shogeh*] as if he is sick with love. [It is like the love of a woman] where one's thoughts are never free from loving this woman and one is madly obsessed with her when he sits, when he rises, when he eats and when he drinks. The love of God in the hearts of those who are madly obsessed with God is stronger than this.[232]

Just as a lover will do anything to come closer to his elusive beloved, so the philosopher seeks to link his entire being, body and soul, to God. At the highest level, he will be preoccupied with God in all of his activities and will experience great pleasure in this love:

> And there may be a human individual who, through his apprehension of the true realities [*al-ḥaqā'iq*] and his joy [*al-ghibṭa*] in what he has apprehended, achieves a

232 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuva X. 3; compare Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:51, 620–30. Steven Harvey has been pointed out that when speaking of love of God in the *Guide* Maimonides uses the term Arabic term '*ishq*, which implies bodily love. Although previous Jewish philosophers had refrained from using this term in reference to loving God, preferring the more staid term *mahabbah,* Islamic thinkers debated whether it was appropriate to apply this term to God, and Maimonides, perhaps following Avicenna's lead, boldly embraces its use. See Steven Harvey, "The Meaning of Terms Designating Love in Judeo-Arabic Thought and Some Remarks on the Judeo-Arabic Interpretation of Maimonides," in *Judeo-Arabic Studies*, ed. N. Golb (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1997), 175-196. Also see Blumenthal, "Maimonides: Prayer, Worship, and Mysticism," 94–5; Shlomo Pines, "The Philosophical Purport of Maimonides' Halachic Works and the Purport of *The Guide of the Perplexed,*" in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. S. Pines and Y. Yovel (Dordrecht: Martin Nijhoff, 1986), 9. For a recent discussion of Maimonides' use of the term '*ishq,* see Amira Eran, "Strong Passion or Girded Passion: The Connection Between Maimonides' Linguistic use of the Term '*Hesheq*' to Intellectual Passion ('*ishq*) in Avicenna and al-Ghazali" in *Maimonides: Conservatism, Originality, Revolutionary*, ed. Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2009), volume 2: 465-480 (in Hebrew).

> state in which he talks with people and is occupied with his bodily necessities while his intellect is turned wholly towards Him, may He be exalted, while outwardly he is with people in the sort of way described by the poetical parables that have been invented for these notions: "I sleep but my heart waketh: the voice of my beloved knocketh" (*Song of Songs* 5:2).[233]

The person who enjoys this passionate love of God is said to be experiencing a divine "kiss" [*neshiqa*].[234] Unlike Sufi thinkers, however, Maimonides does not think that union with God is possible.[235] Love and awe come from recognizing God's overwhelming presence, which is inaccessible to reason. Whereas the immature person, guided by imagination, loves and fears God by assimilating God to her own categories of thought, the mature thinker loves God and is in awe of Him by recognizing God's supreme otherness, which breaks through all categories of human thought and fills her with erotic desire to know Him. This divine "kiss," which involves continually, obsessively contemplating God in silence constitutes the mystical culmination of Maimonides' philosophy.

Conclusion

I began by distinguishing between two types of mysticism, "revelatory" and "apophatic" mysticism. To clarify problems emerging from each type, I presented close readings of Judah Halevi and Moses Mai-

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233 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:51, 623.

234 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:51, 628. Scholars have pointed to the similarities between Maimonides' notion of communion with God and the concept of *devequt* (literally "cleaving" to God) that later becomes a central idea in kabbalah. See Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 205; Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 413; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 138–9, 383 n. 76; Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* vol. III, 980–98; Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 1–31; Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 76–8; Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle."

235 See Rawidowicz, "Man and God," 330; Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge*, 96; Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 4; J. Stern, "Maimonides' Demonstrations," 80. The one opening for an individual achieving union with God involves Maimonides' acceptance of the Aristotelian epistemological schema according to which the knower achieves union with the essence of the object known by acquiring demonstrative knowledge of the essence of the object. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:68, 164–5. For the reasons we have seen, Maimonides thinks that it is impossible for finite human beings to know God's essence. Hence union with God is impossible.

monides. I will conclude by briefly summarizing some of the main differences between Halevi and Maimonides' accounts of the relationship of mysticism to philosophy.

For Halevi, the prophet is a revelatory mystic who passively receives visions of divine forms through his inner eye and the imagination. In contrast to philosophers who are tormented by doubt and so must resort to discursive rational inquiry to seek a religious truth that they may never attain, the prophet enjoys "peace of the soul" in his self-confirming divine visions. Love of God comes from the passion of engagement. The prophet passively encounters God through a supernatural act of divine grace. God reveals the divine forms to the prophet's inner spiritual eye and causes the prophet's imagination to clothe these inner perceptions with specific images. These forms then serve as sensible metaphors for God, inculcating proper knowledge, love, and fear of God. God chooses with whom He will communicate. He has chosen the Jewish people and among the Jewish people, He chooses the prophets with whom He only communicates in the Land of Israel. God ordains commandments to the Jew as a prerequisite for achieving mystical vision, but fulfilling these commandments is no guarantee of achieving mystical vision. The prophets are not philosophers, but rather pious individuals who contemplate God imaginatively.

In contrast, Maimonides derogates opinion/faith (*itiqād*) without rational understanding as vastly inferior to philosophical knowledge. One who approaches God through the imagination alone risks worshipping his own projected fantasy, which constitutes the essence of idolatry. For Maimonides attaining correct apprehension of God requires active, spontaneous effort. One cannot know God directly, but must rise in understanding slowly, first learning logic and mathematics, then physics and cosmology, and finally metaphysics. Furthermore, one must perfect one's moral traits and one's imagination. Prophetic knowledge is rational—the imagination is the vehicle through which the prophet communicates his insights to the people for their gradual education. Prophecy is the culmination of an active, natural process involving acquiring moral, intellectual, and imaginative perfection. The pinnacle of knowledge involves recognizing one's inability to know God positively, which fills one with awe and passionate love for God. This constitutes true worship of God and is the mystical peak of Maimonides' philosophical–religious system. Although the path to knowing God is open

to all human beings, the numerous obstacles along this path mean that the majority of people will never enjoy the divine "kiss." Maimonides would therefore certainly agree with Spinoza's famous dictum that "all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare."[236]

236 See the end of Spinoza's *Ethics*.

II. Spinoza's Method(s) of Biblical Interpretation Reconsidered*

Central to securing Spinoza's place in the history of Bible criticism is his contention that the truth of the biblical text must be distinguished from its meaning.[1] Distilling the meaning of Scripture (identical to authorial intent for Spinoza) requires a proper method. This method, which Spinoza sets forth in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (henceforth: *TTP*), requires technical knowledge. This includes a proper understanding of biblical grammar, vocabulary, and phraseology; an understanding of the life, character, and pursuits of the particular biblical author including who he was, on what occasion he wrote, for whom and in what language; and a proper textual history of the Bible including what happened to the book(s) in question, how it was received, what variant editions exist, and by whose decision each book was accepted into the canon.[2] Applying this method leads Spinoza to conclude that the Pentateuch had multiple authors and that the Masoretic text is not original. In this way, Spinoza is a founder of both "higher" and "lower" biblical criticism.

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1 See Samuel Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 205; Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz Koelln and James Pettegrove, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 184; Willi Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 62. David Savan sees Spinoza's significance beyond biblical interpretation claiming that, "Spinoza is the founder of scientific hermeneutics." See David Savan, "Spinoza: Scientist and Theorist of the Scientific Method," in *Spinoza and the Sciences*, ed. Marjorie Grene and Debra Nails (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1986), 97. Curley rightly takes Savan to task for this overblown claim. See Edwin Curley, "Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece," in *Spinoza: The Enduring Questions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 67–76.

2 See *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in *Spinoza Opera*, ed. C. Gebhardt, vol. III (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925), vii, 101–102, 106. English translation: Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), 90, 94. In the future, I will cite the Latin text using the acronym *TTP*, followed by the chapter number, and then cite the English text using the acronym *TPT*.

But Spinoza's method of biblical interpretation arouses considerable perplexity on at least two counts. First, in addition to the historical-critical method, he licenses two other exegetical approaches that violate this method. Second, Spinoza deploys his historical-critical method in an odd way, at once claiming that there are universal doctrines in Scripture, and indicating places where these doctrines are not held. Not surprisingly, these tensions have led to conflicting assessments of Spinoza's method of biblical interpretation.

In an influential article, Yirmiyahu Yovel claims that Spinoza deploys his method of biblical interpretation for polemical purposes, namely to undermine the authority of Scripture. As Yovel puts it, "[Spinoza] believed that given the actual nature of the Bible and of prophetic inspiration, an objective, scientific approach would prove more detrimental to Scripture's authority than any biased attack."[3] Yovel contrasts Spinoza's historical-critical method of biblical interpretation with Kant who, "has no intention of expounding the authentic intentions of the authors... and recommends attributing meanings to the text which are taken from external, a priori schemes, in this case his own practical philosophy."[4]

Yet turning back to one of Spinoza's earliest biographers, we find the claim that Spinoza makes biblical interpretation arbitrary, not objective. In his *Life of Benedict de Spinosa* (1706), the Lutheran Minister Johannes Colerus recounts some early reactions to the *TTP*. He cites the opinion of Spitzelius who writes in his *Infelix Literator* that the *TTP*, "ought to be buried forever in an eternal oblivion ... seeing that that wicked book does altogether overthrow the Christian religion by depriving the sacred writings of the authority on which it is solely grounded and established."[5] But it is not Spinoza's *objective* method of biblical interpretation that disturbs Spitzelius:

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3 Yirmiyahu Yovel, "Biblical Interpretation as Philosophical Praxis: A Study of Spinoza and Kant," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 11 (1973): 191. In his later book, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason*, Yovel modifies this claim somewhat asserting that Spinoza also seeks to reinterpret Scriptural religion as a popular version of a universal religion of reason. But Yovel does not develop this point well and indeed is extremely confusing on the relation between this aim and Spinoza's commitment to "Biblical science." See Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 133. For my criticism of Yovel's later position, see below, note 9.

4 Yirmiyahu Yovel, "Biblical Interpretation as Philosophical Praxis," 205.

5 Johannes Colerus, *Life of Benedict de Spinosa* (London: B. Bragg, 1706), 59–60.

> If what Spinoza affirms were true, one might indeed very well say that the Bible is a wax-nose which may be turned and shaped at one's will; a glass through which everybody may see exactly what pleases his fancy: a fool's cap, which may be turned and fitted at one's pleasure a hundred ways. The Lord confound thee, Satan, and stop thy mouth![6]

I will argue that it is not incidental that the title of Spinoza's masterwork on the Bible is called the "Theological-Political Treatise," for the theological-political problem shapes Spinoza's approach to biblical interpretation. Spinoza is concerned by the attempts of orthodox Calvinist theologians to stifle free inquiry and to use politics to enhance their power.[7] Given that these theologians rely on biblical authority, the Bible

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6 Colerus, 59. In saying that Spinoza treats the Bible as a "wax-nose that may be turned and shaped at one's will," Colerus is ironically turning a charge that Spinoza had levied against others against himself. In chapter nine of the *TTP*, Spinoza mocks those who seek to deny that errors have crept into the Bible through far-fetched interpretations remarking that, "if one can assume such license in expounding Scripture, transposing entire phrases and adding to them and subtracting from them, then I declare that it is permissible to corrupt Scripture and *treat it as a piece of wax on which one can impose whatever forms one chooses"* (emphasis mine)." See Spinoza, *TTP,* ix, ad. 20, 259; *TPT,* n. 20, 235-236.

7 While I fundamentally disagree with many features of Strauss's interpretation of the *TTP* in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1952), 142–201, Strauss's early interpretation of the *TTP* in a 1924 piece on Hermann Cohen is much closer to my own view. See Leo Strauss, "Cohen's Analysis of Spinoza's Bible Science," in *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings,* ed. and trans. Michael Zank (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 140–172. In *Persecution and the Art of Writing* Strauss explicitly rejects reading the *TTP* in its historical-political context (see Strauss's distinction between "interpretation" and "explanation" on pp. 143–144 of that work). But in the earlier piece on Cohen Strauss undertakes precisely this type of analysis. I found many of my conclusions anticipated in Strauss's early essay, although I arrive at the conclusions in a different way. Strauss's early essay also sensitized me to the connection between Spinoza's treatment of the Bible and his defense of liberty of thought. For a nice analysis of Strauss's early essay, see Leora Batnitzky, "Hermann Cohen and Leo Strauss" *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 12, no. 3 (2006): 1–26. Strauss also accepts the historical-critical approach in his 1930 book *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft Untersuchungen zu Spinozas Theologisch-Politischem Traktat* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag), 1930; English translation: Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, trans. E.M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965). Spinoza's rejection of his earlier historical-critical method of analyzing Spinoza is alluded to at the end of his well-known 1965 preface to the English translation of his 1930 book on Spinoza where he writes: ". . . I now read the *Theologico-Political Treatise* differently than I read it when I was young. I understood Spinoza too literally [that is, by means of historical-critical contextualization—MG] because I did not read him literally enough [that is, by means of Strauss's later method, which does away with historical-critical contextualization and resolves textual ambiguities and apparent contradictions imminently by claiming that the text has an exoteric and esoteric meaning—MG]." See Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 31.

must be confronted.[8] But Spinoza does not see the Bible as a purely dark force. Rather, it is a potentially powerful resource in creating a stable polity, which preserves freedom of thought. *Pace* both Yovel and Colerus, Spinoza's problem is not with the Bible *per se*, but rather with theologians who seek to control its meaning. Instead of viewing Spinoza as an "objective" Bible critic who consistently employs the historical-critical method, I argue that Spinoza is better understood as one motivated by political ends who employs multiple, conflicting methods of biblical interpretation to further his goals.[9] And yet, there is some basis to Spinoza's claim that he employs a scientific method of biblical interpretation as Spinoza's pragmatic approach to biblical interpretation is informed by recognition of a real problem in textual interpretation–the problem of the hermeneutical circle.

I

The subtitle of the *TTP* makes clear Spinoza's aim in the work. Spinoza writes that the *TTP* "contains various discussions by means of which it is shown not only that freedom of philosophizing can be allowed in preserving piety and the peace of the republic; but also that it is not possible for such freedom to be eliminated unless piety and peace of the state are also destroyed." Spinoza elaborates on his intentions in a letter to Henry Oldenberg in which he writes that in the *TTP* he seeks to justify, "the freedom to philosophize and [to] say what we think . . . for it is in every way suppressed by the excessive authority and egotism of preachers."[10]

So the purpose of the *TTP* is to defend freedom of thought, whose

8 Although the term "Bible" or "Scripture" does not appear in the title of the *TTP*, it is clear that the question of the proper approach to biblical interpretation is central to the work. Hence in Letter 30 Spinoza calls the *TTP*, "a treatise on my views regarding Scripture." See Baruch Spinoza, *The Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Press, 1995), 185.

9 My argument is directed especially against Yovel's 1973 article mentioned above in note 3. But even in his later *Spinoza and Other Heretics* where Yovel writes that Spinoza expects the Bible "to serve as a means for reforming historical religion," Yovel offers no account of how this fits with Spinoza's desire that "Biblical hermeneutics become an objective and autonomous science." Nor does Yovel mention the tension between the different methods of biblical interpretation employed by Spinoza, or connect Spinoza's biblical hermeneutics with his political philosophy.

10 See Letter 30. Spinoza, *The Letters*, 185. In the same letter Spinoza also writes that his intention in the *TTP* is to "oppose the prejudices of the theologians," and to refute the charge of atheism commonly raised against him.

fate is intertwined with politics and religion. In the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (henceforth: *TdIE*), Spinoza tells us that his goal is to achieve the "highest good" which involves "the knowledge of the union of the mind with all of nature."[11] In other words, the highest good involves philosophical contemplation, which presupposes freedom of thought. Moreover, Spinoza does not merely strive for this perfection for himself alone, but he "strives that many acquire it."[12] In the state of nature people's unrestrained appetites set them against one another thereby creating an insecure environment.[13] A polity is needed in order to restrain the destructive passions that cause individuals in the state of nature to live in fear. By reducing the fear and anxiety arising from the possibility of being harmed at any moment, the state affords individuals the mental tranquility needed for philosophical contemplation. Furthermore, by encouraging economic diversification and specialization, individuals living in a stable state are able to have the strength and time needed to acquire "the arts and sciences which are indispensable to the perfection of human nature and its blessedness."[14] So in the interest of securing the freedom of thought needed for blessedness, Spinoza seeks to demonstrate how a state can best achieve political stability. But the state might be concerned that allowing freedom of thought would undermine its authority. Hence Spinoza also seeks to show that freedom of thought is fully compatible with political stability and indeed is necessary for it.[15]

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11 See *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* in *Spinoza Opera* ed. C . Gebhardt, vol. II (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925), 8; English translation: *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect in The Collected Works of Spinoza*, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 10. I will abbreviate the Latin text using the acronym *TdIE*, and the English text using the acronym *TEI*. See Baruch Spinoza, *Ethica*, Part 4, Propositions 26–28. In citing from the *Ethica*, I will use "E" for *Ethica*, "P" for Proposition, "S" for Scholium, and "C" for Corollary. For the Latin I use *Spinoza Opera*, ed. C . Gebhardt, vol. III (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925). For the English I use *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley, vol.1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

12 Spinoza, *TdIE*, 8; *TEI*, 10; E4P37.

13 See Spinoza, E4P32–34; E4P37S2; Spinoza, *TTP*, xvi, 189–191; *TPT*, 174–176; See Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus* in *Spinoza Opera*, ed. C . Gebhardt, vol. III (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925) chapter 1, Section 3, 274. English translation: Baruch Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 38. I will abbreviate the Latin text using the acronym *TP*, and the English text using the acronym *PT*.

14 Spinoza, TTP, v, 73; TPT, 63.See Edwin Curley, "The State of Nature and its Law in Hobbes and Spinoza," *Philosophical Topics* 19 no.1 (1991): 101–102.

15 See Spinoza, *TTP*, praefatio, 7; TPT, 3. "I think I am undertaking no ungrateful or unprofitable task in demonstrating that not only can this freedom [of thought] be granted without endangering piety and the peace of the commonwealth, but also the peace of the commonwealth and piety

It is not free thinkers who threaten the state, but unscrupulous religious leaders who seek to establish political authority independent of the state or worse turn the state into a tool for the enforcement of their religious ideals. In seeking to control people's minds, these religious leaders pose a danger to both the philosopher and the statesman. The philosopher and statesman's interests converge in opposing power-hungry theologians.

II

Spinoza witnessed severe theological challenges to the republican government of his day. Following the death of the Orangist Stadtholder William II in 1650, Jan de Witt formed a republican government without a Stadtholder.[16] De Witt's government showed relative tolerance for other religions, thus incurring the ire of the Counter-Remonstrant Calvinists. The Orangists, seeking a return to power, allied themselves with the Counter-Remonstrants.[17] Since the sixteenth century, the Dutch had frequently understood their history in light of ancient Israel's.[18] The Counter-Remonstrants played on this, demanding a restoration of the Stadtholderate which they viewed as a latter-day incarnation of the ancient Israelite monarchy.[19] The Counter-Remonstrants claimed that all Christians owed a double allegiance—to the state in temporal matters and to the Church in spiritual matters. Significantly, these preachers viewed themselves as contemporary representatives of the biblical priests and prophets. As such, they claimed that the Church should be independent of state authority, with the exclusive right to appoint ministers and promulgate doctrine.[20] But given that both church and state form the bases of "Christian society," a proper civil authority should use its power to establish godly norms of behavior in accordance with the Counter-Remonstrants' interpretations of Scripture. In this way, these

depend on this freedom." Spinoza calls this, "the main point, which I have sought to establish in this treatise."

16 See Michael Rosenthal, "Why Spinoza chose the Hebrews," in *Jewish Themes in Spinoza's Philosophy*, eds. H. Ravven and L. Goodman (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 244.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., 243. See Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 26–27.

19 Rosenthal, "Why Spinoza chose the Hebrews," 245.

20 See Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowdon (New York: Verso, 1998), 20.

clergymen sought authority over the state.[21] Indeed, Scripture itself demonstrated that the secular authorities were bound to promulgate Scriptural law as interpreted by the Counter-Remonstrants for the ancient Israelite state was governed by biblical law as interpreted by the Levitical priests. Similarly, the Counter-Remonstrants argued that the state should monitor the heresies of those whose ideas conflicted with biblical truth.[22]

Spinoza is appalled by this and in response articulates his theory of the relationship between religion and the state.[23] For Spinoza, right is coextensive with power.[24] In the state of nature there is no civil law or morality. As a result, individuals live in a precarious condition of fear.[25] Individuals thus realize that, "in order to achieve a secure and good life, [they] must unite into one body."[26] To do so, they agree that the right possessed by each individual should be placed into "common ownership." The process of turning over individual right to the community is the social contract, which forms the foundation of the state. But given that right is coextensive with power, turning one's right over to the community involves granting the community the power to rule in whatever way it sees fit.[27] The common right possessed by the community is what Spinoza calls "sovereignty" (*imperium*).[28] If the community as a whole retains the common right, then the form of government is a democracy.[29] However, the community can also decide to transfer this right to a single person or a small group of people. If a single person is given the common right, then the sovereign is a monarch, while if a small group of

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21 See Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Scripture*, 18–19; Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches,* 381; Rosenthal, "Why Spinoza chose the Hebrews," 243.

22 Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics,* 20.

23 Important discussions of Spinoza's political philosophy include: Robert McShea, *The Political Philosophy of Spinoza* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); Steven Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 119–144; Henry Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 176–204; Lewis Feuer, *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984); Edwin Curley, "Kissinger, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. D . Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 315–342.

24 For a reconstruction of Spinoza's arguments to this effect see Curley, "Kissinger, Spinoza and Genghis Khan," 318–322; Curley, "The State of Nature and its Law in Hobbes and Spinoza," 102–114.

25 See Spinoza, *TTP*, xvi, 191; *TPT*, 175; *TP*, 281; *PT*, 43–44.

26 Spinoza, *TTP*, xvi, 191; *TPT*, 175.

27 See Curley, "Kissinger, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan," 325.

28 See Spinoza, *TP*, 282; PT, 44.

29 Spinoza, *TP*, 282; *PT*, 44; *TTP*, xvi, 192, *TPT*, 177.

people are given this right, then the sovereign is a group of aristocrats.

Receiving full coercive authority, the sovereign has the right to force individuals to act in whatever ways it deems necessary in order to ensure peace and stability. To this end, the sovereign promulgates laws of justice and morality, which the sovereign enforces. But here the relation between state and religion becomes a key concern. For if religion retains the authority to prescribe actions independently of the sovereign, or worse if priests impose religious law on the sovereign, there is a threat of factionalism, religious warfare, and a return to the chaotic state of nature. To avoid these problems, the sovereign must have full control over the practice of religion in the state.[30]

While the sovereign has authority over the practice of religion, the wise sovereign will not impose complex rituals or dogma. Rather, it will use religion to solidify civic virtue and political stability. The ideal religion of the sovereign will therefore "regard piety and religion as consisting solely in the exercise of charity and just dealing."[31]

While the state has full right to control the practice of religion, it has only a very limited right to control beliefs associated with religion. For while controlling people's minds would result in the state never needing to resort to force to implement its decrees, the state can never completely accomplish this, and trying to do so risks creating great danger to itself.[32]

Attempting to control people's thoughts leads people to dissemble their true opinions, thereby encouraging social vices such as sycophancy and dishonesty.[33] It also leads to sedition, for human nature is such that the greater the attempt to control thought, the more men of "integrity"[34] will fight to preserve their opinions, even unto death.

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30 Spinoza, *TTP*, xvi, 199; *TPT*, 182–183: "But in matters of religion men are especially prone to go astray and contentiously advance many ideas of their own devising. . . . It is therefore quite clear that if nobody was bound by right to obey the sovereign power in those matters which he thinks pertain to religion, the state's right would then inevitably depend on judgments and feelings that vary with each individual. . . . Now since the right of the state, would in this way be utterly destroyed, it follows that it belongs completely to the sovereign power on whom alone both divine and natural right impose the duty of preserving and safeguarding the laws of the state to make whatever decisions it thinks concerning religion, and all are bound by their pledged word . . . to obey the sovereign power's decrees and commands in this matter."

31 Spinoza, *TTP*, xx, 247; *TPT*, 229.

32 Spinoza, *TTP*, xx, 239; *TPT*, 222.

33 Spinoza, *TTP*, xx, 244; *TPT*, 226.

34 Ibid.

Death, in turn, makes these men martyrs, further fomenting seditiousness.[35] Moreover, as the wealth and power of the state depend on the development of the arts and sciences, which require the exercise of the free judgment of citizens, a state which attempts to control thought and speech will eventually become impoverished.[36] Given that people naturally say what they think, attempts to stifle free speech are doomed to failure.[37] The state thus does not have the right (that is, the power) to control religious thought and/or the expression of religious beliefs through coercive measures.

We therefore have two competing views of religion's relation to the state. The Counter-Remonstrants claim that the state must be a vehicle for the promulgation and enforcement of religious law, while Spinoza maintains that the state must control public religion. Spinoza understands that for most Dutch people in his day, religion's authority is grounded in Scripture. The authority of the sovereign over religion therefore rests on its ability to control the interpretation of Scripture. But interpretation is an act of the mind.[38] Given the difficulty in controlling minds, how can Spinoza establish the sovereign's right over religion? For Spinoza, the sovereign's right over the interpretation of Scripture lies chiefly in its ability to persuade its citizens of the truth of its interpretations. This requires an explanation of the proper method of biblical interpretation.

III

In chapter seven of the *TTP*, Spinoza contrasts "theologians'" arbitrary methods of Scriptural interpretation with a "true method of Scriptural interpretation":

> We see that nearly all men parade their own ideas as God's Word [*sua commenta pro Dei verbo*], their chief aim being to compel others to think as they do, while using religion as a pretext. We see, I say, that the chief concern of theologians on the whole has been to extort from the Sacred Texts [*Sacris Literis*] their own arbitrarily invented

35 Spinoza, *TTP*, xx, 247; *TPT*, 229.

36 Spinoza, *TTP*, xx, 243; *TPT*, 226.

37 Spinoza, *TTP*, xx, 240; *TPT*, 223.

38 On this point see Berel Lang, *The Anatomy of Philosophical Style* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 238.

> idea, for which they claim divine authority . . . In order to escape this scene of confusion, to free our minds from the prejudices of theologians and to avoid the hasty acceptance of human fabrications as divine teachings, we must discuss the true method of Scriptural interpretation and examine it in depth, for unless we understand this, we cannot know with any certainty what the Bible or the Holy Spirit intends to teach.[39]

By a "true method of Scriptural interpretation," Spinoza means a scientific method. In adumbrating this method, he draws on two great scientific theorists of his day, René Descartes and Francis Bacon.[40]

In his *Discourse on Method*, Descartes describes how in the course of reflecting on what he was taught he came to doubt all intellectual authority. He notes that, "regarding the opinions to which I had hitherto given credence, I thought that I could not do better than undertake to get rid of them, all at one go, in order to replace them afterwards with better ones, or with the same ones once I had squared them with the standards of reason."[41] Descartes resolves only to accept what he himself

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39 Spinoza, *TTP*, vii, 97–98; *TPT*, 86–87.

40 To be sure, Spinoza's method of biblical interpretation draws on elements not found in Descartes or Bacon, such as his emphasis on Hebrew grammar, which he finds among medieval Jewish exegetes such as Ibn Ezra and Rashi, the textual criticism of Christian scholars such as Cappel, Rivet, and Saumais, and the rudimentary source criticism of Ibn Ezra, La Peyrière, Hobbes, and Fisher. But while all of these scholars provide tools that Spinoza makes use of, none of them outlines a scientific method. For this, Spinoza turns to Descartes and Bacon. For discussion of the Hebrew grammarians and the Christian text critics, see Edward Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 59–84. For discussion of Ibn Ezra, La Peyrière, and Fisher as precursors to Spinoza's "source criticism," see Richard Popkin, "Spinoza and Bible Scholarship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 385–404; Harvey, "Spinoza on Ibn Ezra's 'Secret of the Twelve,'" in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise,* eds. Yitzhak Melamed and Michael Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 41-55. For the relationship between Hobbes' analysis of the Bible's authorship and Spinoza's, see Edwin Curley, "'I Durst Not Write So Boldly' or How to Read Hobbes' Theological-Political Treatise," in *Hobbes e Spinoza*, ed. Daniela Bostrenghi (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1992), 497–593; Harvey, "Spinoza on Ibn Ezra's 'Secret of the Twelve,'" in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise,* ed. Yitzhak Melamed and Michael Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 54-55. An excellent discussion of the rise of text and source criticism in the Renaissance is Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chapter 3.

41 *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. J. Cottingham et. al., vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 117.

perceives "clearly and distinctly."[42] Similarly, seeing the great disputes over Scriptural interpretation in his time, Spinoza resolves to reject interpretations of Scripture based on authority, accepting as Scriptural teaching only what he derives "clearly" from it:

> ... when I saw that the disputes of the philosophers are raging with passion in Church and Court and are breeding hatred and faction which readily turn men to sedition, together with other ills too numerous to recount here, I deliberately resolved to examine Scripture afresh, conscientiously and freely and to admit nothing as its teaching, which I did not most clearly derive from it [*quod ab eadem clarissime non edocerer*].[43]

While Descartes' method of doubt provides Spinoza with a starting point for his inquiry into Scripture, in a famous passage Spinoza compares the study of Scripture to the study of nature. Scholars have generally looked to Bacon's approach to the study of nature as Spinoza's influence here.[44] I agree that Bacon is an important source Spinoza, but I think that Spinoza likewise departs from Bacon in significant ways.

Michel Malherbe offers a concise description of Bacon's philosophical method:

> Knowledge starts from sensible experience, rests upon natural history, which presents sense data in an ordinate distribution, rises up from lower axioms or propositions to more general ones, and tries to reach the more fundamental laws of nature (the knowledge of forms) . . .[45]

The scientist aspires to know the general forms, which express the most fundamental causes of nature. The "interpretation of nature" accomplishes this. It seeks the ultimate, most general principles of nature.

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42 See ibid., 120.

43 Spinoza, *TTP*, praefatio, 9; *TPT*, 5. See Curley, "Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece," 77–81.

44 Smith, 61–65. Also see Curley, "Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece," 77–81; Zac, *Spinoza et l'interprétation de l'écriture* (Paris: PUF, 1965), 29–33; Savan, "Spinoza: Scientist and Theorist of the Scientific Method," 122.

45 Michel Malherbe, "Bacon's Method of Science," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon*, ed. Markku Peltonen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 77.

However, to guard against rash abstractions and errors drawn from limited perceptions, the "interpretation of nature" operates using a gradual process of abstraction moving from the "forms" or real causes of particular things to the most general forms of nature as a whole. Bacon uses gold as an example. One first seeks the "simple natures" of gold. To avoid the problem of haphazard and unreliable sense perceptions, one composes an "experimental and natural history." For example, we formulate our knowledge of gold by culling and organizing observations about the various properties of gold that have been recorded over history and derived from carefully controlled experiments. This information is organized into "tables of presentation" which include the tables of "presence," "absence," and "degree."[46]

Once one arrives at an understanding of the simple natures of gold, which include that it is yellow, heavy with a certain weight, malleable to a certain degree etc.,[47] one seeks a more fundamental understanding of these natures. For example, one seeks to understand "yellowness" by composing new tables of presentation that include diverse yellow objects such as gold, corn, and the sun. One then seeks to uncover the latent structure that underlies these qualities and the process that brings them into being by understanding the more fundamental qualities of nature such as color and texture, and ultimately the basic nature of elements that are not qualitative, such as figure and bulk.[48] These are the general "forms" of nature.[49]

In a famous passage, Spinoza follows a long tradition comparing the method of interpreting Scripture to the method of interpreting nature:[50]

> To sum it up briefly, I say that the method of interpreting Scripture does not differ from the method of interpreting nature, but agrees with it completely. For just as the method of interpreting nature [*interpretandi naturam*]

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46 See ibid.

47 See Francis Bacon, *New Organon*, trans. and ed. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 105.

48 See Antonio Pérez-Ramos, "Bacon's Forms of Nature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon*, ed. Markku Peltonen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 103.

49 For a more detailed discussion of this process, see Malherbe, "Bacon's Method of Science," 86–98.

50 Discussion of the two divine "books" (Scripture and nature) goes back at least to Hugh of St. Vincent in the twelfth century. For discussion of the analogy between Scripture and nature, see Harrison, 3ff.

> consists above all in putting together a history of nature [*historia naturae*] from which, as from certain data, we infer the definitions of natural things, so to interpret Scripture it is necessary to prepare a straightforward history [*sinceram historiam adornare*] of Scripture and to infer the mind of the authors of Scripture from it, by legitimate reasonings as from certain data and principles [*ex certis datis & principia*]. For if someone has admitted as principles or data for interpreting Scripture and discussing the things contained in it only those drawn from Scripture and its history, he will always proceed without danger of error [*sine ullo periculo errandi*] and will be able to discuss the things which surpass our grasp as safely as those we know by the natural light.[51]

Following Bacon, Spinoza claims that the study of nature begins with a "history of nature." From this history we infer the "definitions" of finite things. These "definitions," also called "essences" or "natures" by Spinoza,[52] seem to correspond to Bacon's particular "forms."[53] So in this passage Spinoza seems to say that we know the forms of finite natural things from the history of nature alone. Spinoza never describes in detail how these forms are derived. But in his *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, he notes that to know the nature of things one must "collect the differences, agreements, and oppositions of things."[54] Scholars have noted that this is based on Bacon's tables of degree, presence, and absence.[55]

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51 Spinoza, *TTP*, vii, 98.

52 See Spinoza, E1P19.

53 Spinoza does not define "essence" in the *Ethics*, but he defines what "belongs" to an essence as follows: "I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which being given the thing is also necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing." See Spinoza, E2D2. For a good discussion of Spinoza's doctrine of essence see Alan Donagan, "Essence and the Distinction of Attributes in Spinoza's Metaphysics," in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Marjorie Grene (Garden City: Doubleday/Anchor Press, 1973), 164–181.

54 Spinoza, *TdIE*, 12; *TEI*, 15.

55 See Alan Gabbey, "Spinoza's Natural Science," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 170–171; Savan "Spinoza: Scientist and Theorist", 122, n8. These scholars do not, however, explain the precise relationship between Bacon and Spinoza on this point, and it is unclear to me.

Just as the interpretation of nature requires a history of nature, so the interpretation of Scripture requires a history of Scripture. This history mirrors the history of nature, albeit loosely. The statements of Scripture on a given subject must be organized into tables. One begins by identifying the clear pronouncements of each book. One then classifies the contents of each book of the Bible under different headings, noting passages that are obscure or contradict. Contradictory statements should be resolved using metaphorical interpretation in light of clear statements. Spinoza gives an example. In seeking to understand Moses' conception of God, Spinoza notes that Moses claims that God is both fire and jealous (Deut. 4:24). Fire, however, is inanimate, so these two statements contradict. In a third place, however, Moses claims that God has no form (Deut. 4:15). Spinoza also notes that in Job 31:12, fire is used as a metaphor for jealousy. Thus, the statement that God is fire is a metaphor describing God's jealousy.[56]

While this method of tabular organization seems to be informed by Bacon's "tables of presentation," there is no precise correspondence. For Bacon, the table of presence involves recording those instances where a quality is present.[57] The table of absence involves recording those instances where one would expect a given quality to be present, but it is absent.[58] The table of degree comprises those instances where a quality is present in varying degrees depending on the circumstance.[59] Spinoza's tables are based on finding obscure or contradictory texts under a particular heading, rather than composing tables of presence, absence, and degree for each subject. In addition, Spinoza's method requires biographical data that facilitates understanding the mind of the biblical author, and so recovering authorial intent. Both Bacon and Spinoza

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56 See Spinoza, *TTP*, vii, 101; *TPT*, 89. Why Spinoza deems it admissible to bring a prooftext from Job is unclear to me. Although Spinoza cites the view that Moses was the author of Job, he writes that he is "inclined to agree with Ibn Ezra that [the book of Job] is a translation from another language." See Spinoza, *TTP*, x, 144–145; *TPT*, 130–131. For discussion of Spinoza's interpretation of these verses in relation to Maimonides, see James Diamond, "Maimonides, Spinoza, and Buber Read the Hebrew Bible: The Hermeneutical Keys of Divine 'Fire' and 'Spirit' (*Ruach*)" *The Journal of Religion* 91 no. 3 (2011): 324-328.

57 Bacon, *New Organon*, 110. Bacon uses the example of "heat." The first instance of heat that Bacon uses is the sun's rays, especially in the summer and at noon.

58 Ibid., 111. The first instance of absence of heat that Bacon uses is the moon's rays, which one would expect to be hot, but are not.

59 Ibid., 119–120. Bacon cites the heat of plants as an instance of degree. Plants generally are not hot to human touch, while certain vegetables (that is spicy ones) are warm to the palate or stomach.

agree, however, that nature has no intentions.

There is one area where Spinoza's method of interpreting Scripture seems to diverge much more dramatically from Bacon's method of interpreting nature. As we have seen, for Bacon science aims at a progressive, stepwise understanding of the most general forms of nature. He explicitly attacks the method that begins with general forms and interprets particulars in light of those axioms. In describing the method of interpreting Scripture, however, Spinoza seems to proceed in precisely this manner. He notes that in order to interpret Scripture, "we must first seek from our study of Scripture that which is most universal and forms the basis and foundation of all of Scripture . . ."[60] Spinoza then notes that, "having acquired a proper understanding of this universal doctrine of Scripture [*universali Scripturae doctrina*], we must then proceed to other matters which are of less universal import, but affect our ordinary life and which flow from the universal doctrine like rivulets from their source."[61]

Why this divergence? In fact, Spinoza breaks from Bacon not just when it comes to the interpretation of Scripture, but likewise with regard to the interpretation of nature. For according to Spinoza interpreting nature requires beginning by uncovering the universal features of nature and then interpreting the particular things in nature in light of these universal features.[62]

Spinoza's divergence from Bacon's method is principled. Whereas Bacon censures those who would derive the general features of nature hastily on account of their having performed an incomplete induction, according to Spinoza one knows the general definitions and universal axioms and postulates of nature without detailed empirical study. In E2P10 he criticizes those who think that they can know created things without prior knowledge of God. The empiricist mistakenly believes that "the divine nature, which they should contemplate before all else (because it is prior both in knowledge and in nature) is last in the order of knowledge, and that the things, which are called objects of the senses are prior to all."

60 Spinoza, *TTP*, vii, 102–103; *TPT*, 90–91.

61 Spinoza, *TTP*, vii, 102–103; *TPT*, 90–91.

62 Spinoza, *TTP*, vii, 102; *TPT*, 90: "In examining natural phenomena we first of all try to discover those features that are the most universal and common to the whole of Nature, to wit, motion and rest [*motum* & *quietum*] and the rules governing them which Nature always observes and through which she constantly acts: and then we advance gradually from these to other less universal features."

In fact, as Spinoza makes clear at E1P15 and E2P45, individual, finite things are finite modes of God's infinite attributes and hence require prior understanding of God's infinite attributes to be fully understood. Furthermore, we know from letter sixty-four of Spinoza's epistles that Spinoza considers motion and rest to be an immediate infinite mode of God,[63] and from E1P21D, it is clear that immediate infinite modes follow directly from the attributes, which are known without an inductive study of nature.[64] Thus when in the passage just cited Spinoza speaks of motion and rest as constituting the universal features of nature, it is clear that he thinks that these are derived immediately from our knowledge of the attributes.[65]

Bacon considers knowledge of the general forms of nature that is not grounded in a careful accumulation of experimental data to be subject to error.[66] But Spinoza makes clear in letter two of his epistles, that Bacon is simply wrong about this.[67] For Spinoza, what is perceived clearly and

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63 See Spinoza, *The Letters*, 299.

64 See Spinoza, *TdIE*, 20; *TEI*, 20; E1P24–26; G.H.R. Parkinson, *Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 77–79; Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza,* 72–73. Whether and to what extent empirical knowledge is involved in our knowledge of the definitions, axioms, and postulates is a question that is debated among scholars, but all agree that the definitions, axioms, and postulates are not derived through discursive inductive reasoning. See Spinoza's correspondence with Oldenburg, letters 2–4. In Ludwig Meyer's introduction to Spinoza's *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy* which was approved by Spinoza himself, Meyer makes clear that definitions are explanations of what is contained analytically in, "the words and terms by which the things to be discussed are designated." Postulates and axioms (the latter term is one which Meyer identifies with "common notions of the mind") are "propositions so clear and evident that no one can deny his assent to them provided only that he has rightly understood the terms themselves." See Spinoza, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy* in *The Collected Works of Spinoza* vol. 1, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 225. Martial Gueroult notes that definitions are of real things and that axioms are "true and immediately certain." See Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza I: Dieu* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), 20–23, 85; *Spinoza II: L'âme* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), 34–36. Curley considers the axioms as "propositions so fundamental to our thought about the world that we cannot rationally doubt them," but not necessarily immediately certain. See Edwin Curley, "Rationalism," in *A Companion to Epistemology*, ed. J. Dancy and E. Sosa (London: Blackwell, 1992), 411–415; Edwin Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza* vol.1, s. v. axiom, 626–627; Edwin Curley, "Spinoza's Geometrical Method" *Studia Spinozana* vo1.2 (1986): 151–168. Bennett understands the definitions, axioms, and postulates as "general hypotheses" that must be checked against the data of experience and may be revised. See Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), 20. See below note 103 where I take issue with Bennett.

65 See Spinoza, E2P10S.

66 See Bacon, *New Organon*, 79.

67 Spinoza, *The Letters*, 62–63: "[Bacon] takes for granted that the human intellect, besides the fallibility of the senses, is by its very nature liable to error and fashions everything after the analogy of its own nature, and not after the analogy of the universe . . ."

distinctly mirrors reality perfectly. Thus, the interpretation of nature requires not only a history of nature, but must begin with knowledge of universal motion and rest which is deduced from the universal attributes.

As we have seen, Spinoza claims that the method of interpreting Scripture is "in complete accord" with the method of interpreting nature. But how can one achieve knowledge of Scripture's universal teachings without careful accumulation of data? Before addressing this, I will aggravate the issue by exposing further difficulties in Spinoza's method of biblical interpretation.

IV

Recall Spitzelius's claim that Spinoza's method of biblical interpretation is arbitrary. For Spitzelius, the doctrine of accommodation stands at the root of Spinoza's method of interpretation. Philosophers such as Maimonides and Spinoza's friend Ludwig Meyer understand accommodation as the idea that the prophets received their prophecies through the medium of their imaginations. For both Maimonides and Meyer, the prophets were philosophers and this accommodation was merely a way of clothing their philosophical knowledge in imaginative form.[68] Given the rational core of biblical religion, it is legitimate to use philosophy to interpret Scripture. In his early writings circa 1665, Spinoza appears to accept the accommodationist doctrine as Maimonides and Meyer understand it.[69] But in the later *TTP* (1670), Spinoza abandons his early view and radicalizes Maimonides' accommodationism. He affirms

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68 See Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), Part II, chs. 36–38; Moses Maimonides, *Book of Knowledge*, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," ed. S. Rubenstein (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook), chapter 7, law 1. On Meyer see Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Scripture,* 34–67.

69 See Spinoza, *The Letters*, 135 (Letter 19); Descartes' "Principles of Philosophy," Appendix II, chapter 8 in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 331. See Jay Harris, *How Do We Know This?* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 123–125. More recently, see Carlos Fraenkel, "Could Spinoza have Presented the *Ethics* as the True Content of the Bible?" in *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy,* vol. 4m eds. Daniel Garber and Steven Nadler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1-50. Curley claims that Spinoza's early Maimonideanism is "ironic." See *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley, vol.1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 331, n. 22. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 196, suggests that Spinoza's "early" view is an exoteric position meant to disguise his esoteric rejection of Maimonidean accommodationism. For further discussion, see note 138 below.

that prophecies were indeed accommodated to the imagination of the prophet, but he drops the notion that there was a rational core behind this imaginative clothing. Rather, biblical prophecies reflected whatever each prophet imagined God to be like.[70] Spinoza criticizes Maimonides and Meyer, claiming that a historical-critical reading of Scripture shows that the prophets were neither scientists nor philosophers, and held divergent and quite ordinary conceptions of God and nature.[71] Scientific/philosophical truth must be separated from scriptural meaning, and it is foolish to use reason to interpret biblical prophecies.[72] Rather than intellect, what distinguished the prophets was that their minds were "directed exclusively to what was right and good [*aequum & bonum*]."[73] Their different conceptions of God reflected the various ways each prophet imagined God and was thereby moved to preach ethics.

But Spinoza does not rest with this observation. As Spitzelius correctly observes, Spinoza claims that just as the prophets represented God in different ways, so it is perfectly in keeping with the spirit of the Bible for the contemporary reader to interpret Scripture in whatever way will move him or her to piety:

> I will not level the charge of impiety against those sectaries simply because they adapt the words of Scripture to their own beliefs. Just as Scripture was once adapted

70 This is the case for the prophets. However, Spinoza claims that Christ and the Apostles, especially Paul, philosophized, but accommodated their teachings in accordance with the understanding of the common people. See Spinoza, *TTP,* xi, 157; *TTP,* 143. Spinoza famously writes that Christ "communed with God mind to mind" and he speaks of Christ accommodating his teachings to the level of understanding of the people. See Spinoza, *TTP,* i, 21, *TPT,* 14; *TTP,* ii, 43, *TPT,* 33; *TTP,* iv, 64; *TPT,* 54-55. Spinoza writes of Paul that, "none of the Apostles did more philosophizing than Paul," who accommodated his teachings to his audience, speaking as "a Greek with the Greeks and a Jew with the Jews." See *TTP,* ii, 42, *TTP,* 32; *TTP,* iii, 54; *TPT,* 43-44; *TTP,* iv, 65, *TPT,* 55; *TTP,* vi, 88, *TPT,* 77-78; *TTP,* xi, 156-157, *TPT,* 143. The one biblical prophet that Spinoza attributes philosophical knowledge to is Solomon about whom Spinoza writes that "no one in the Old Testament speaks more rationally of God," and that he "possessed the natural light of reason beyond all men of his time" See *TTP,* ii, 41; *TPT*, 31. For other places where Spinoza attributes philosophical knowledge of God to Solomon, see *TTP,* i, 23, *TPT,* 16; *TTP,* iii, 45, *TPT,* 35-36; *TTP,* iv, 66-67, *TPT,* 56-57; *TTP,* vi, 87-88, *TPT,* 77; *TTP,* xviii, 224; *TPT,* 208; *TTP,* xix, 229, 231; *TPT,* 213, 215. Spinoza does not, however, think that Solomon was a skilled mathematician. See *TTP*, ii, 36-37; *TPT,* 27. Unlike Christ and Paul, I do not find any instance where Spinoza claims that Solomon accommodated his teachings to the masses.

71 Spinoza, *TTP*, cap. i–ii.

72 Spinoza, *TTP*, ii, 29–44; *TPT*, 21–34.

73 Spinoza, *TTP*, ii, 31; *TPT*, 23.

> to the understanding of the people of that time, in the same way anyone may now adapt it to his own beliefs [*suis opinionibus accomodare licet*] if he feels that this will enable him to obey God with a heartier will in those matters that pertain to justice and charity.[74]

But matters get more perplexing, for in a number of places Spinoza employs the very method of biblical interpretation that he criticizes Maimonides and Meyer for using. One of the boldest examples of this is Spinoza's treatment of miracles. Miracles play a central role in the Bible. From the burning bush to the ten plagues to Jesus rising from the dead, miracles abound. Furthermore, the Bible makes clear that miracles are critical to proving God' s existence and power. Consider Exodus 10:1–2:

> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh. For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his courtiers in order that I may display these My signs among them, and that you may recount in the hearing of your sons and of your sons' sons how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed my signs—in order that you may know that I am the Lord."

Or consider John 20:29–31, where Jesus speaks to Thomas after Thomas witnesses him risen from the dead:

> Jesus said to him: Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are they that have not seen yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus perform in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and that believing you might have life through his name.

But in discussing biblical miracles, Spinoza makes the incredible

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74 Spinoza, *TTP*, xiv, 173; *TPT*, 158. Leo Strauss misinterprets this passage, claiming that it means that, "piety requires . . . that one should give one's opinions a biblical appearance." See Strauss, *Persecution*, 180.

claim that "Scripture itself makes evident that miracles do not affirm true knowledge of God . . . [or of] God's providence."[75] Indeed, according to Spinoza *Scripture itself* denies the possibility of miracles. Scriptural descriptions of miracles are merely prophetic accounts of natural events accommodated to the imagination of the masses as a way of exciting their imagination and moving them to reverence and piety.[76] Spinoza goes so far as to claim that "nowhere does it state [in Scripture] that something can happen in nature that contravenes her laws or that cannot follow from her laws; so neither should we impute such a doctrine to Scripture."[77] I cannot explore Spinoza's efforts to justify this interpretation of Scripture, though there are good reasons to find it thoroughly unconvincing.[78] That Spinoza is aware that he is violating his own principle of distinguishing truth from meaning is clear, for near the end of the chapter on miracles he writes that, in discussing miracles, he has "adopted a method very different from that employed in dealing with prophecy." While in the case of prophecy Spinoza draws his evidence from Scripture alone, in the case of miracles he draws his conclusions "from the natural light of reason."[79]

Miracles are not the only case in which Spinoza attributes philosophical doctrines to Scripture in the *TTP.* He interprets the Tetragrammaton as referring to the fact that God is eternal and unrelated to created things[80] and he frequently attributes philosophical teachings to Solo-

75 Spinoza, *TTP*, vi, 88; *TPT*, 77.

76 Spinoza, *TTP*, vi, 90; *TPT*, 79.

77 Spinoza, *TTP*, vi, 95; *TPT*, 84.

78 For example, Spinoza notes that before bringing the plague of boils upon the Egyptians, Moses was told to scatter ashes (Exodus, 9:10). Spinoza takes this as evidence that Moses knew that boils could not simply appear, but must have a natural cause. But what does bringing ashes have to do with spreading boils? This seems to be more akin to a magical understanding of events rather than a proof that Moses knew that nature only operates according to natural causes. See Spinoza, *TTP*, vi, 90; *TPT*, 79.

79 Spinoza, *TTP*, vi, 94–95; *TPT*, 83. Husik notes the inconsistency of Spinoza's interpretation of miracles, as does Strauss. See Isaac Husik, "Maimonides and Spinoza on the Interpretation of the Bible," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 55 (1935): 38; Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 164–167. While Husik simply leaves this as an inconsistency, Strauss attempts a resolution. Leora Batnitzky understands Strauss as arguing that Spinoza interprets the Bible as rejecting miracles in order to undercut the possibility of supernatural revelation. See Leora Batnitzky, "Spinoza's Critique of Miracles," 10–11. I will take up this point later in the chapter.

80 See Spinoza, *TTP*, ii, 38, xv, 169; *TPT*, 29, 154.The idea that the Tetragrammaton refers to God's essence is found in Maimonides. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:61, 64, 147–8, 156-157. For discussion, see Zev Harvey, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Hebraism," in *Jewish Themes in Spinoza's Philosophy*, eds. H. Ravven and L. Goodman (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 110–111; Yitzhak Melamed, "The Metaphysics of the Theological-Political

mon, Jesus, and the Apostles, especially Paul.[81]

The arbitrary nature of Spinoza's method of biblical interpretation is also seen in his claim that all the prophets agreed that God, "demands nothing from men but . . . obedience to God [which] consists solely in loving one's neighbor [*amore proximi*]."[82] Spinoza further claims that recognizing that the majority of people would not act morally without holding certain theological beliefs,[83] the prophets *all affirmed* seven dogmas about God, which are necessary for ethical piety. These dogmas or "tenets of faith" include: (1) God exists and is supremely just and merciful; (2) God is one; (3) God is omnipresent and omniscient; (4) God has the supreme right and dominion over all things; (5) worship of God and obedience to him consist solely in justice and charity; (6) all who obey God and those alone are saved; (7) God forgives repentant sinners.[84]

To contemporary Bible scholars this must seem a strange and arbitrary claim from the founder of their discipline! And indeed Spinoza's proofs that these doctrines are found everywhere in Scripture are extremely slight. His main proof that the prophets consistently preached ethics is based on a passage from Deuteronomy 13, where "Moses gives warning that if any prophet should seek to introduce new gods, even if he should confirm his teaching by signs and wonders, he must nevertheless be condemned to death."[85] Spinoza reasons that since a wonder-working prophet who preached violating ethical norms was put to death, proph-

Treatise," in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise,* eds. Yitzhak Melamed and Michael Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 137-140.

81 See note 70 above. We also find Spinoza giving philosophical interpretations of Scripture in his posthumous *Ethics* such as interpreting the Scriptural term for "glory" (*kabod*) as referring to intellectual love of God. See Spinoza, E5P36S. The source of this interpretation is again Maimonides. See Maimonides' interpretation of Isaiah 58:8 at the end of *Guide of the Perplexed,* III:51, 628. For discussion, see Zev Harvey, "The Biblical Term 'Glory' in Spinoza's *Ethics*," *Iyyun* 48 (1999): 447–449; Zev Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19 (1981): 169–171. In the *Ethics,* Spinoza likewise presents an allegorical interpretation of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden interpreting it as referring to the philosophical doctrine that "if men were born free, they would form no concept of good and evil as long as they remained free." See Spinoza, E4P68S.

82 Spinoza, *TTP*, xiii, 168; *TPT*, 154.

83 See Spinoza, E5P41S.This became a standard view in the eighteenth century. Kant, in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, thinks that one could not will the moral law without postulating the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. Mendelssohn also affirms that without belief in God, the immortality of the soul, and divine providence, we would be miserable and could never be motivated to act morally. See Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Ismar Elbogen, Julius Guttmann, Eugen Mittwoch (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1929), 3.2, 68.

84 See Spinoza, *TTP*, xiv, 177–178; *TPT*, 162.

85 Spinoza, *TTP*, ii, 30; *TPT*, 22.

ets must have been distinguished by their concern for morality. The problem is that in the passage in question (Deut.13:2–6), the prophet was not disqualified because he taught hatred of one's neighbor, but rather because he commanded the people to worship other gods:

> If there appears among you a prophet or a dream-diviner and he gives you a sign or portent saying, "Let us follow and worship another god" whom you have not experienced—even if the sign or portent that he named to you comes true, do not heed the words of that prophet or that dream-diviner. For the Lord your God is testing you to see whether you really love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul . . . As for that prophet or dream-diviner, he shall be put to death.

There seems to be little proof that the prophets universally taught love of the other. While one can cite passages such as Leviticus 19: 18 or Matthew chapters 5–7 that tend in that direction, they are opposed by passages such as Deuteronomy 7: 1–2 and 25: 17–19 that preach genocide, or by Matthew 10: 34–36, where Jesus told his disciples that he has "not come to bring peace to the earth ... but a sword."

Regarding the seven dogmas, Spinoza's claim is even more tenuous. He offers *no textual support* that the biblical authors universally held these views. Indeed, his "proof" that these dogmas were taught consistently in Scripture is based on the pragmatic consideration that most people need to believe in them to practice morality.[86]

But Spinoza is not such a poor scholar, and despite affirming these "universal doctrines" of Scripture, he contradicts himself noting instances where these doctrines are not found in Scripture.[87] Thus, the ancient Israelites were encouraged by Moses to consider non-Israelites to be "God's enemies for whom they felt an implacable hatred" (see Ps. 139:21–22).[88] Adam, Abraham, and Moses did not know that God was

86 See Spinoza, *TTP*, xiv, 177; *TPT*, 161: "A catholic faith should contain only those dogmas which obedience to God absolutely demands, and without which such obedience is absolutely impossible . . . I can now venture to enumerate the dogmas of universal faith, the basic teaching which Scripture as a whole intends to convey . . . No one can fail to realize that all these beliefs are essential if all men without exception are to be capable of obeying God . . ."

87 See Strauss, *Persecution*, 195–197.

88 Spinoza, *TTP*, xvii, 214; *TPT*, 197–198: "Therefore the patriotism of the Hebrews was not simply

omniscient (see Gen. 3:8, Gen. 18:24, Exod. 4:8) thus contradicting the third dogma,[89] and Samuel taught that God did not alter any decision He has made, even if a person repented (see I Sam. 15:29), thereby contradicting the seventh dogma.[90] So in claiming that the prophets universally taught universal ethics and the seven dogmas of faith, Spinoza seems to be applying a modified version of the exegetical method I mentioned above, namely adapting Scripture in such a way as to help move *others* to ethical obedience.

Spinoza's approach to biblical interpretation seems deeply muddled. He apparently sanctions at least three different methods of biblical interpretation: (a) the historical-critical method; (b) the method that harmonizes Scripture with philosophical truth; (c) the view that every individual has the authority to interpret Scripture in whatever way will move him, her or others to piety. Does Spinoza have a consistent method of biblical interpretation?

V

In chapter twelve of the *TTP*, Spinoza equates the "word of God" with the divine law, which is sacred.[91] As he makes clear in chapter four, the divine law contains the rules for living an ethical life. In discussing the divine law, Spinoza uses the language of the Deist doctrine of natural law morality noting that, "it is natural knowledge that teaches us ethics and true virtue, once we have arrived at the knowledge of things and have tasted the excellence of the understanding."[92] Deists such as Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1624)[93] had claimed that morality is not contingent

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patriotism but piety and this together with the hatred for other nations was so fostered and nourished by their daily ritual that it inevitably became part of their nature. For their daily ritual was not merely quite different, making them altogether unique and completely distinct from other people, but also utterly opposed to others. Hence this daily invective, as it were, was bound to engender a lasting hatred of a most deep-rooted kind, since it was a hatred that had its source in strong devotion or piety and was believed to be a religious duty for that is the bitterest and most persistent of all hatred." See Strauss, *Persecution*, 196.

89 Spinoza, *TTP*, ii, 37–38; *TPT*, 28. See Strauss, *Persecution*, 196.

90 Spinoza, *TTP*, ii, 42; *TPT*, 32.

91 Spinoza, *TTP*, xii, 162; *TPT*, 148.

92 Spinoza, *TTP*, iv, 68; *TPT*, 57.Of course natural law morality has a long history going back to the ancients. For discussion, see Paul Sigmund, *Natural Law in Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Winthorp, 1971). I link Spinoza to the Deist conception of natural law morality, because in the *TTP* Spinoza's uses deistic rhetoric.

93 Herbert of Cherbury, *A Dialogue between a Tutor and his Pupil* (1748). Scholars consider this work,

on the revealed will of God, but rather is "revealed" to natural reason. For these Deists, "natural religion" consists of basic precepts such as worshipping God by loving one's neighbor, repentance for wrongdoing, and reward and punishment.

But while Spinoza often adopts the rhetoric of Deism and natural religion in the *TTP*, he is fundamentally opposed to it for several reasons. First, while Deism proposes that God's existence is easily known through reason, Spinoza makes clear that "God's existence is not self-evident," but requires that we "fix our attention on . . . universal axioms and connect them to the attributes that belong to the divine nature."[94] In other words, to know God's existence, we must understand the ontological argument as laid out at the beginning of the *Ethics*.[95] Second, as we have seen, for Spinoza the state of nature is an amoral state. Moral laws only gain force within the state when the sovereign ordains them.

Spinoza thinks that people need to be inspired to act ethically. For the masses, who are under the sway of the passions, this requires appealing to their imagination. While, in principle, there may be many ways to accomplish this, in practice, given the recognized authority of Scripture in European society, Scripture is indispensable to this end. Spinoza notes that "knowledge of these writings [that is, Scripture] and belief in them is in the highest degree necessary for the common people [*vulgo*]."[96] The majority of people will not act morally without holding the seven "dogmas of faith." So for the Bible to be the "word of God," it must be read as everywhere commanding the moral law and teaching the seven dogmas of faith. In this way, given that the moral law only acquires force when enacted by the sovereign, it is *the sovereign who turns Scripture into the "word of God."*

But as we have seen, a fair reading of Scripture does not bear out the claim that it everywhere teaches the seven dogmas and love of one's neighbor. Spinoza's distinction between Scripture and the "word of God" helps resolve this paradox. For Spinoza, Scripture is not equivalent to the "word of God" *per se*. For a thing is not sacred in virtue of

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published posthumously, to be an original version of Herbert's 1645 Latin treatise *De religione gentilium*. See John Mackinnon Robertson, *A History of Freethought* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1969), 614.

94 Spinoza, *TTP*, ad. 6, 252–253; *TPT*, n. 6 232.

95 Spinoza, E1P20.

96 Spinoza, *TTP*, vi, 78; *TPT*, 67.

some intrinsic property, but rather in view of its effects. As he puts it, "a thing is called sacred and divine when its purpose is to foster piety and religion [*pietati & religioni*], and it is sacred only for as long as men use it in a religious way."[97] Scripture is thus the "word of God" only insofar as it inspires people to act ethically.[98] It must therefore teach love of one's neighbor and the seven dogmas everywhere to be the "word of God." We have seen that for Spinoza the scientific method of interpretation requires beginning with universal axioms. Spinoza adheres to the scientific method of interpretation by *imposing on Scripture* the universal doctrines that he claims to find in it. In this way, he shows how the sovereign can turn Scripture into the "word of God."

But Spinoza's approach not only serves his political objectives, it likewise meets a philosophical need. The problem of the hermeneutic circle is an old one going back to Luther.[99] It is first formulated as a problem in textual interpretation, though later thinkers give it an ontological meaning.[100] Briefly, the problem is that interpretation requires a conception of the whole to begin, but any conception of the whole must be based on an understanding of the parts. How then is interpretation possible?

One common answer to this problem is that although hermeneutics is indeed circular, the circle is not vicious.[101] While it is true that to interpret a text one must begin with a prior understanding of whole, this prior understanding need not be immutable. Interpretation may begin with a provisional understanding of the meaning of the whole, which is continually revised in light of one's emerging understanding of the parts. Thus interpretation can progress as one moves closer and closer to authorial intent.[102]

Spinoza cannot accept this view of textual interpretation since he thinks that the interpretation of Scripture can only be a science if it is identical in method to the interpretation of nature. However, the in-

97 Spinoza, *TTP*, xii, 160; *TPT*, 146.

98 See Spinoza, *TTP*, xii, 161; *TPT*, 147: "Scripture likewise is sacred and its words divine only as long as it moves people to devotion towards God."

99 See John Connolly and Thomas Keutner, eds., *Hermeneutics versus Science* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 7.

100 E.g. Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Division II, Part III, sections 62–63.

101 See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Division I, Part V, Section, 33.

102 See Edwin Curley, "Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece," in *Spinoza: The Enduring Questions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 82.

terpretation of nature begins with absolutely firm definitions, axioms, and postulates.[103] But if the general doctrines of Scripture are only set out provisionally and are constantly subject to revision in light of our understanding of particular passages, this makes the interpretation of Scripture less certain than the interpretation of nature, thereby calling into question the "scientific" nature of biblical hermeneutics. For biblical hermeneutics to be a science thus requires an account of the general doctrines of Scripture, which is not subject to revision. As these doctrines cannot be derived from Scripture itself, they must be imposed on it.

But what about passages that contradict these universal doctrines? Spinoza's hermeneutical method provides guidance, for having firmly established the universal teachings of Scripture, all particular teachings must "flow from the universal doctrine like rivulets from their source."[104] In other words, particular teachings in Scripture which conflict with the general doctrines of Scripture do not change our understanding of these general doctrines, but rather must be interpreted in light of them. For Spinoza, the discrepancies reflect an awareness on the part of the biblical authors that the universal divine law required being adapted to particular circumstances.

For example, Moses taught love of the neighbor as directed solely to fellow Israelites, for at the time he viewed this as a means of solidifying

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103 See Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza I: Dieu* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), 20–23, 85–92. In *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, Jonathan Bennett claims that Spinoza applies a "hypothetico-deductive method" which involves beginning with "general hypotheses." From these hypotheses, one then deduces consequences which one checks against empirical data. If empirical data contradicts these hypotheses one must revise one's hypotheses in light of the data. According to Bennett, Spinoza's definitions, axioms, and postulates are general hypotheses. This seems to me an anachronistic reading of Spinoza. In Ludwig Meyer's introduction to Spinoza's *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*, which was approved by Spinoza himself, Meyer claims that, "certain and firm knowledge of anything can only be derived from things known *certainly* beforehand (my emphasis)." See Spinoza, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy* in *The Collected Works of Spinoza* vol.1, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 225. But even if one claims that Spinoza did not accept Meyer's understanding of his epistemological method, there is no evidence that Spinoza saw the definitions, axioms, and postulates that he lays out at the beginning of the *Ethics* as in any way subject to correction. In letter seventy-six of his epistles Spinoza famously claims: "I do not assume that I have discovered the best philosophy, but I know that I understand the true one." Furthermore, as I will show immediately, when in the *TTP* Spinoza uncovers prophetic views of God which contradict his account of the universal doctrines of Scripture, Spinoza does not revise his account of these universal doctrines, but rather reinterprets the individual prophetic views in light of the universal doctrines.

104 Spinoza, *TTP*, vii, 103; *TPT*, 91.

Israelite patriotism and maintaining the integrity of the state. Christ, on the other hand, wrote at a time when the Jews had lost their political authority, and thus deemed it inappropriate to preach hatred of those nations under whose rule the Jews lived and therefore preached universal love of humankind.[105] Spinoza leaves it up to the contemporary sovereign to determine how to interpret the command to love one's neighbor, though he notes that the command to hate non-citizens only suits a state that can survive in isolation from all other states.[106]

Similarly, while divine knowledge is generally an important doctrine for instilling obedience among the people, Moses found it necessary to expound a limited version of this doctrine, perhaps because he felt that too rigorous a notion of divine knowledge called free will into question, thereby leading to resignation and moral laxity. Likewise, while the efficacy of repentance is generally an important value that encourages piety by preserving hope, Samuel felt that the principle had to be limited when King Saul made the grave error of not slaying the Amalekite king Agag. Despite his pleas for repentance, Samuel determined that for the sake of the political welfare of Israel Saul had to be removed. Therefore Samuel informed him that, "the Eternal of Israel (*Nezah Israel*), does not deceive or change His mind for He is not a human being that He should change his mind."[107]

Just as in the Bible we find the universal doctrines adapted to particular circumstances, so the contemporary sovereign as the sole legitimate "interpreter of the divine law,"[108] may tweak the universal doctrines of Scripture in whatever way will help make Scripture into the "word of God."[109] But it is not only the sovereign who may adapt the meaning of Scripture. Spinoza notes that, "opinions vary as much as tastes,"[110] and as such, people have different conceptions of God. But given that to be the "word of God," the Bible must *at present* promote piety, it is in the in-

105 Spinoza, *TTP*, xix, 233; *TPT*, 216.

106 Spinoza, *TTP*, xviii, 221; *TPT*, 205.

107 I Samuel, 15:29.

108 Spinoza, *TTP*, xix, 232, *TPT*, 215.

109 Given the role of human interpretation in Scriptural exegesis it is not surprising that there is a difference between the relation of the part of the whole in the study of nature and Scripture for Spinoza. In the case of nature the universal controls the meaning of the parts, which must be brought into conformity with the universal. In the case of Scripture the meaning of the universal is the general meaning, while specific instances diverging from the universal meaning are modifications meeting circumstantial necessities.

110 Spinoza, *TTP*, xx, 239; *TPT*, 222.

terest of the sovereign to allow every person to imagine God in whatever way will most effectively promote ethical behavior. Spinoza's theory of prophecy supports this. Just as the prophets represented God in different ways according to what most effectively moved them and their audiences to piety, so the contemporary reader has the right to interpret biblical pronouncements concerning the seven dogmas in whatever way will move him or her to act ethically as long as he or she grants this right to others.[111] The simplicity of the seven dogmas promotes piety, as the dogmas admit a wide range of understandings of God.[112] Equally important, giving the people the right to interpret the seven dogmas as they see fit and requiring that they grant this right to others supports freedom of thought.

Spinoza's concern that the interpretation of Scripture be under the authority of the sovereign, likewise drives both his efforts to separate the question of the truth of Scripture from the question of its meaning, and his violation of this principle. One might think that Spinoza's opposition to harmonizing Scripture with philosophy is motivated by his desire to secure freedom of thought.[113] But the harmonistic approach to Scripture is no threat to freedom of thought because the philosophical harmonist can read into Scripture whatever reason teaches. Rather, Spinoza's concern is that if philosophy becomes the arbiter of the meaning of Scripture the sovereign risks losing control over religion, for the people would then turn to philosophers rather than to the sovereign for their understanding of Scripture:

> If this view [that is, that philosophy must decide the meaning of Scripture] were correct, it would follow that the common people, for the most part knowing nothing of logical reasoning or without leisure for it would have

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111 Spinoza, *TTP*, praefatio, 11; *TPT*, 6: "As men's ways of thinking vary considerably and different beliefs are better suited to different men, and what moves one to reverence provokes ridicule in another, I repeat the judgment that everyone should be allowed freedom of judgment and the right to interpret the basic tenets of faith as he sees fit and that the moral value of a man's creed should be judged only from his works."

112 Arthur Hyman emphasizes the wide range of ways in which the seven dogmas can be interpreted. See Arthur Hyman, "Spinoza's Dogmas of Universal Faith in Light of their Medieval Jewish Background," in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 183–195.

113 Zac makes this claim. See Zac, *Spinoza et l'interpretation de l'ecriture*, 123–124.

> to rely solely on the authority and testimony of philosophers for their understanding of Scripture.[114]

This observation leads Spinoza to note a way in which Judaism was superior to Christianity. While Spinoza frequently praises Christianity at the expense of Judaism,[115] Judaism's superiority lies in the fact that in it, politics and religion were never separate. But *pace* the Counter-Remonstrants who claim that the Israelite rulers were instruments for the enforcement of priestly law, Spinoza claims that in its original and most successful constitution the Mosaic state comprised a sovereign who centralized power and controlled religious ritual.[116] Moses originally had the power to legislate, enforce and interpret the law, judge, wage war and peace, and appoint all religious functionaries.[117] In contrast, Christianity arose concurrently with the decline and destruction of the Jewish state, and one of Christ's great innovations was to provide a model for religion independent of state control.[118]

But herein lies the great danger to the state posed by Christianity. For in freeing religion from control by the state, Christianity set up an independent authority that could rival the state for its citizens' loyalty. This threat became a reality when medieval popes rivaled kings for political power.[119] How did Christianity remain separate from the state? While

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114 Spinoza, *TTP*, vii, 115; *TPT*, 101.

115 This occurs especially in the first five chapters of the *TTP*. Discussions of Spinoza's view of Christianity include Zac, 167–174, 190–199; Andre Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza* (Paris: Aubier Montagne, 1971); Graeme Hunter, *Radical Protestantism in Spinoza's Thought* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004); Strauss, *Persecution,* 171–176.

116 See Spinoza, *TTP*, v, 17–19.

117 See Spinoza, *TTP*, xvii, 207–208; *TPT*, 190–191. Later, in the interests of inspiring reverence and devotion for the state, Moses built a national Tabernacle and appointed his brother Aaron as the head of it. As the Tabernacle was to be the house of God, Moses gave Aaron the right to interpret the laws. But Aaron only had this right when consulted by Moses—and his interpretations only acquired the force of law when Moses accepted them. This right was originally supposed to pass to the firstborns of each tribe, thus giving all the people a part in the interpretation of the law, but after the sin of the Golden Calf, in order to punish the people, God made the Levites the administers of the religious rites in the Tabernacle (later the Temple) and the interpreters of the law. This proved disastrous, for the people resented supporting these idle men and the Levites were constantly rebuking and annoying the people. Eventually, in the second Temple period, the Maccabean Levites seized political power, acquiring control over the army and the power to legislate. They tried to extend their control over the people by legislating new, complex religious ritual and convoluted dogma, as well as interpreting Scripture to license their immorality. At this point, the Jewish commonwealth was doomed. See Spinoza, *TTP*, cap. xvii–xviii.

118 See Spinoza, *TTP*, cap. v, vii, xix.

119 Spinoza, *TTP*, xix, 234; *TPT*, 218. See Rosenthal, 242–247.

there were a number of factors, the most important was that in contrast to Judaism, which made obedience to the law its central religious obligation, Christianity emphasized complex dogma. This prevented the secular authorities from gaining control over religion, for given the complexity of Christian dogma, only a theologian/philosopher could be the head of the church as a secular political leader would not have the leisure to become an expert in theology/ philosophy.[120] The simplicity of the biblical dogmas of faith thus serves a second purpose, namely facilitating state control of religion.

Just as political considerations explain Spinoza's distinguishing the truth of Scripture from its meaning, they likewise explain his collapsing this distinction in the case of miracles.[121] Spinoza locates the origin of superstition in the masses' feelings of powerlessness:

> When fortune smiles on them, the majority of men, even if quite unversed in affairs, are so abounding in wisdom that any advice offered to them is regarded as an affront, whereas in adversity, they know not where to turn, begging for advice from any quarter; and then there is no counsel so foolish, absurd or vain that they will not follow . . . If they are struck with wonder at some unusual phenomenon, they believe this to be a portent signifying the anger of the gods or of some supreme deity, and they

120 Spinoza, *TTP*, xix, 200; *TPT*, 220.

121 Many of Spinoza's philosophically informed interpretations of Scripture are tied to his endeavor to undermine the authority of miracles. This is seen clearly in Spinoza's metaphorical interpretation of Christ's resurrection. But it is likewise behind Spinoza's interpretation of the Tetragrammaton as referring to God's essence, which is unrelated to created things. For the Tetragrammaton had frequently been interpreted as referring to God's providential rule of the world. From the Septuagint's rendering of the Tetragrammaton as *Kurios*, through the Vulgate's rendering of it as *Dominus*, to Luther's rendering of it as *der Herr*, the Tetragrammaton was interpreted to mean "Lord." The most well known example of this in English is the King James Bible's famous rendition of Psalm 23:1; "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." This view is likewise expressed in traditional Jewish practice where the *Tetragrammaton* is forbidden to be pronounced as written and is instead vocalized as *Adonai*, meaning "my Lord." See Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, *Scripture and Translation*, trans. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 99–113. Also see *Genesis Rabba* 12:15, cited in Rashi's commentary to Gen. 1:1 (eleventh century), where the *Tetragrammaton* is interpreted as referring to God's attribute of mercy, and Judah Halevi (twelfth century) who interprets the *Tetragrammaton* as referring to God's creating the world through His direct will without intermediaries. See Judah Halevi, Kuzari, trans. Y. Kafah (Kiryat Ono: Machon Moshe, 1997), part II, chapter 2, 46 (but compare part IV, chapter 25, 182).

> therefore regard it as their pious duty to avert evil by sacrifice and vows, addicted as they are to superstition and opposed to religion [*superstitioni obnoxii, & religioni adversi*]. Thus there is no end to the kind of omens that they imagine and they read extraordinary things into Nature . . .[122]

Credulity concerning miracles is associated with weakness and the desire to uncover a power which people can channel in order to gain control over their circumstances.[123] Some prophets claim to have privileged access to such a power as evidenced by their ability to control nature or miraculously predict changes in it. These prophets offer to put this power at people's disposal if the people obey them. In this way, such prophets threaten to establish an authority independent of the sovereign which is extremely dangerous. Belief in miracles is thus a chief reason why people obey religious leaders rather the sovereign.

Scripture is a prime source for the belief that miracles provide a foundation for trusting a prophet. Thus in Deuteronomy 18:15–22, the Bible makes clear that a prophet was deemed reliable on account of his ability to miraculously predict the future.[124] Similarly, I Kings 18:20–38 famously recounts how in the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Ba´al, Elijah proved himself the true prophet through his ability to miraculously call forth fire from heaven. But given that the state is the foundation of morality, to ensure that Scripture is the "word of God," it is necessary to undercut the authority afforded to unscrupulous theologians by belief in miracles. Furthermore, given the authority that people accord Scripture, Spinoza claims that Scripture sees miracles as psychologically effective in moving people, but never deems miracles a true sign of prophecy. Among Spinoza's proofs are that Moses commands the people not to follow a prophet who produces miracles if the prophet commands the people to worship other gods (Deut. 13), and that Scripture records instances where false prophets produce miracles

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122 Spinoza, *TTP*, praefatio, 5; *TPT*, 1.

123 Spinoza, *TTP*, vi, 81; *TPT*, 71.

124 "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people, like myself [i.e. Moses]: him you shall heed . . . And should you ask yourselves 'How can we know that the oracle was not spoken by the Lord?' if the prophets speaks in the name of the Lord and the oracle does not come true, that oracle was not spoken in the name of the Lord; the prophet uttered it presumptuously: do not stand in dread of him."

if the prophet commanded the people to worship other gods (Deut. 13), and that Scripture recorded instances where false prophets produced miracles (I Kings 22:23).[125] But it is Spinoza's interpretation of Scripture in which he claims that Scripture itself denies the possibility of miracles which constitutes his boldest attempt to undercut the authority of miracle working prophets.[126]

This interpretation of biblical miracles likewise preserves freedom of thought. As Leora Batnitzky has pointed out, divine revelation, as popularly understood, presupposes the possibility of miracles.[127] Spinoza defines "revelation" as "sure knowledge of some matter revealed by God to man."[128] He divides "revelation" in two. Natural knowledge can be called "revealed" since all scientific knowledge depends on "knowledge of God and of his eternal decrees [i.e. the laws of nature]." But since "the multitude are ever eager for what is strange and foreign to their nature, despising their natural gifts,"[129] the masses only consider supernatural knowledge divinely revealed. Supernatural revelation assumes that God miraculously imparts knowledge to human beings. But supernatural revelation presents a real threat to freedom of thought. For if the Bible contains supernatural ideas unknowable to natural reason, theologians can claim that people must surrender their rational understanding in favor of Scriptural mysteries.

Although Spinoza writes that, "there is nothing to prevent God from communicating by other means to man that which we can know by the natural light,"[130] I do not think that he is being completely sincere—at a minimum he is quite misleading. For supernatural communication presupposes the possibility of miracles. But in chapter six Spinoza shows not only that miracles are impossible, but also that *Scripture itself* denies

125 Spinoza, *TTP*, ii, 30–32: *TPT*, 22–23.

126 Discussions of Spinoza's view of miracles include: Edwin Curley, "Spinoza on Miracles," in *Proceedings of the First Italian International Congress on Spinoza* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1985),421–438; G.H.R. Parkinson, "Spinoza on Miracles and Natural Law," *Revue internationale de philosophie* XXXI (1977): 145–157; Manfred Walther, "Spinoza's Critique of Miracles: A Miracle of Criticism?," in *Spinoza: The Enduring Questions*, ed. Graeme Hunter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 100–112. More recently, see Michael Rosenthal, "Miracles, Wonder, and the State in Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise,*" in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise,* eds. Yitzhak Melamed and Michael Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 231-249.

127 See Leora Batnitzky, "Spinoza's Critique of Miracles," 10–11.

128 Spinoza, *TTP*, i, 15; *TPT*, 9.

129 Ibid.

130 Spinoza, *TTP*, i, 16; *TPT*, 10.

their possibility. By showing that the prophets' "strange" ideas were merely the product of an overactive imagination and that the prophets really held quite ordinary views of God, Spinoza opens the field to people employing reason freely in metaphysics.

Scholars have noted an ambiguity in Spinoza's statements concerning the audience of the *TTP*. On the one hand, he writes that the *TTP* is not intended for philosophers since "its main points are quite familiar to philosophers." But he then writes that since the "masses can no more be freed from their superstitions than from their fears" he "does not invite common people to read from this work."[131] Who then is the audience of *TTP*? Strauss and others have argued that the *TTP* is aimed at theologians who are potential philosophers, but worry that Scripture proscribes philosophizing.[132] I agree with this in part. Yitzhak Melamed has convincingly shown that the *TTP* contains many of the heterodox metaphysical doctrines founds in the *Ethics,* though one must read carefully to detect them.[133] In my view, Spinoza's occasional ascription of philosophical teachings to Scripture especially to the wise men Solomon, Jesus and Paul is meant to present the intellectually curious theologian with biblical precedents for his own philosophical quest.[134] But the philosophically curious theologian is not the only audience for the *TTP,* which as we have seen is also a *political* treatise. The second audience is the non-philosophical sovereign. The *TTP* is both supposed to convince the sovereign to uphold freedom of thought as well as teach the sovereign how to use religion effectively to promote social stability.[135]

In sum, Yovel's picture of Spinoza as an "objective" Bible critic who seeks to undermine Scriptural authority through rigorous historical analysis is partial at best. Spinoza licenses three contradictory methods of biblical interpretation: (a) the historical-critical method; (b) the method that harmonizes Scripture with philosophical truth; (c) the view that every individual has the authority to interpret Scripture in whatever way will move him, her, or others to piety. Spinoza uses

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131 Spinoza, *TTP,* praef.; *TPT,* 7-8.

132 See Strauss, *Persecution,* 162-163; Steven Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 43-44.

133 See Melamed, "The Metaphysics of the Theological-Political Treatise," 128-142.

134 Unlike the *TTP,* the *Ethics* is written for philosophers. In my view, Spinoza uses philosophical interpretations of Scripture in the *Ethics* more as a rhetorical flourish than anything else.

135 Insofar as its aim is to teach the sovereign how to rule effectively, the model for the *TTP* is Machiavelli's *The Prince.*

the historical-critical method to strip authority from theologians who would use Scripture to suppress freedom of thought, but he also see Scripture as having positive uses. Harmonizing Scripture with philosophical truth helps guide the curious theologian towards philosophy; controlling the interpretation of Scripture, gives the sovereign an important tool in promoting civil stability; and allowing individuals to interpret descriptions of God in accordance with what will move people to piety, preserves freedom of thought while promoting the ethical obedience that civic order depends on. These goals help create conditions to enable the maximum number of people to achieve the highest goal of life, the *vita contemplativa*.[136]

136 At this point, I would like to explain my disagreement with Strauss's view in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. In that work, Strauss claims that Spinoza' method of biblical interpretation is aimed at signaling to the astute reader that there are contradictions in Scripture. Spinoza's alleged rule is that in cases where an author who admits that he sometimes writes, "after the manner of men" contradicts himself, one must assume that his vulgar view is exoteric posturing, while the statement opposing the vulgar view represents the author's esoteric, "serious" position. Strauss then claims that Spinoza's method of biblical interpretation must be applied to the *TTP* itself. The *TTP* contains numerous contradictions. In each case the vulgar, popular position must be considered Spinoza's exoteric view, while the heterodox opinion contradicting the vulgar view must be considered Spinoza's esoteric, true view. See Strauss, *Persecution*, 176–187. As regards Strauss's claim that according to Spinoza the Bible abounds in contradictions, I see no evidence for this. As I have explained, Spinoza's view is that there are certain universal doctrines of Scripture. Deviations from these universal doctrines are explained by reference to the fact that the prophets adapted the universal messages to particular circumstances. Indeed, with regard to Scriptural contradictions, I do not see how one can decide which view is vulgar and which is heterodox. Is it more vulgar to believe that God is omniscient as taught "everywhere in Scripture" or that God has limited knowledge (which is closer to polytheism) as is sometimes taught by Moses? The same problem applies to Strauss's interpretation of Spinoza's writing. Spinoza employs the historical-critical method of interpretation as well as the method that harmonizes Scripture with reason. Strauss claims that the historical-critical method is meant to undermine the authority of Scripture in the minds of potential philosophers. Hence this is the more heterodox view and must be Spinoza's true, esoteric view. But this would be very strange since the historical-critical method is laid out and defended most explicitly, while the method that harmonizes Scripture with reason is only briefly alluded to. While Strauss is interested in all sorts of contradictions in the *TTP*, my sole interest is in the contradictions pertaining to Spinoza's method of biblical interpretation. I do not think that Spinoza's use of a scientific method of biblical interpretation contradicts his position that the Bible contains certain universal teachings. Indeed, I have shown that it follows from it. In the case of the contradictions between the different methods of interpreting Scripture, my claim is that Spinoza did not have a true method that he adhered to. For his interest was only in how Scripture could be effective in promoting ethical obedience and preserving free inquiry.

Conclusion

From a critical contemporary vantage point, Spinoza's method of biblical interpretation seems quaint at best, and often bizarre. Who could really believe that the Scriptural authors did not believe in miracles or that Scripture consistently teaches the seven dogmas of faith?

But I think that it is more than just our critical sensibilities that cause our discomfort—it is likewise our very different politics. In America, the idea that the sovereign should control religion is anathema. Toleration is grounded in respect for religious pluralism rather than in a unified religious message of the sovereign. Given these commitments, I think that we are inclined to see divergent voices in Scripture rather than a single unified message. Values and scholarship are not so easily disentangled.

Among those with critical sensibilities, attempts by readers to find a single, unified message in Scripture often arouses the suspicion that such readers harbor illiberal commitments. It is therefore important not to simply assimilate Spinoza's method of biblical interpretation to critical scholarship or to post-modern theories of textual indeterminacy. It is true that Spinoza's method of biblical exegesis rests in part on his commitment to freedom of thought, which leads him to stress the divergent views of God held by the prophets while conferring on the individual the right to interpret Scriptural descriptions of God in whatever way will move her to ethical piety. But Spinoza's approach to biblical exegesis also reflects his commitment to authoritarian state control of religion, which expresses itself in his account of the universal doctrines of Scripture. The distance between Spinoza's political commitments and our own is obscured in some recent work on Spinoza.[137] But to my mind, what makes Spinoza interesting is not the ways in which his philosophical, theological, and political views reflect our own, but the ways in which they diverge from them.

137 See my review essay, "Defending Spinoza?" in *AJS Review* 30, 2 (2006): 427-433.

III. Moses Mendelssohn's Metaphysical Defense of Religious Pluralism*

> *In a sense signification is to perception what the symbol is to the object symbolized. The symbol marks the inadequateness of what is given in consciousness with regard to the being it symbolizes.*
>
> Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics and the Face," in *Totality and Infinity*

Monotheism has a bloody history. It has become common to account for this bloodiness by contrasting monotheism's exclusiveness with polytheism's tolerance. According to Jan Assman, the root of monotheism's intolerance lies in its *untranslatability*. For pagans, the gods of different civilizations could be identified with one another. This served as a form of "intercultural translation" that promoted tolerance. In contrast, Mosaic religion emphasized the existence of a single God and rejected all pagan gods. This served as a form of "intercultural estrangement" that bred hatred and violence.[1]

But there is another side to monotheism. For in claiming the universality of religious truth, monotheism contains a strong foundation for human unity. In the wake of the Reformation and the Hundred Years' War, many European philosophers sought to articulate a conception of

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1 See Assman, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); idem, *The Price of Monotheism* trans. Robert Savage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), esp. 8-30. Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit eloquently express the brief against monotheism: "Monotheism, in its war against polytheism, is an attempt to impose unity of opinions and beliefs by force, as a result of an uncompromising attitude towards the unity of God. Polytheism, by contrast, by its very nature includes an abundance of gods and modes of ritual worship, and so has room for different viewpoints and beliefs and therefore is pluralistic. This pluralism is not just the product of compromise, but is in fact an ontological pluralism that constitutes a deeper basis for tolerance." Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry,* trans. Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 8.

monotheism that allowed for and indeed encouraged religious pluralism. Moses Mendelssohn, the great Enlightenment Jewish philosopher, is known for his eloquent pleas for the political tolerance of religious difference.[2] From his own lifetime until today, however, observers have questioned the sincerity of Mendelssohn's commitment to religious difference on the basis of his metaphysics. Hence, in 1782, the military chaplain David Ernst Mörschel wrote to Mendelssohn charging him with being a Deist whose commitment to Judaism was insincere. This view has been recently restated by Allan Arkush, who claims that Mendelssohn's defense of Jewish difference was disingenuous and must be understood as an attempt to refashion the Jewish religion into a vehicle for the acculturation of Prussian Jewry.[3]

Emmanuel Levinas offers a different assessment of Mendelssohn's achievement. Levinas sees a metaphysical basis for Mendelssohn's commitment to both the universality of metaphysical truth and religious difference in Mendelssohn's theory of *translation*: "But it was Mendelssohn who, in his idealist theory of religious revelation . . . reached beyond ethical humanism and respect for the person in others. He placed particular emphasis on *the intellectual unity of humanity centered on the same truths, or on conflicting but always reciprocally translatable truths—which indicates the profound unity of human civilization. And does not that promise of conflicting truths constitute humanity's life in common, or the very definition, or at least essential promise of the West?*"[4]

Levinas's comment is inchoate—he does not spell out what Mendelssohn's theory of translation amounts to. I think that Levinas here alludes to Mendelssohn's metaphysical defense of religious pluralism at the end of *Jerusalem*.

While some scholars have taken note of this argument, there has been little critical work analyzing it.[5] I will argue that Mendelssohn's

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2 See Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998), 421-553; David Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 91-146.

3 See Allan Arkush, "Introduction," in his *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994).

4 Emmanuel Levinas, *In the Time of the Nations,* trans. Michael Smith (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 144-45 (my emphasis).

5 In their anthology *The Jew in the Modern World,* Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz present an excerpt from the end of *Jerusalem* with a note indicating that it contains a "call for religious tolerance and pluralism." The editors, however, attempt no explication of this argument. See Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University

defense of religious pluralism rests on his conviction that metaphysical truths can be known but cannot be adequately signified in language. In consequence, given the multiplicity of human languages, different religious groups naturally signify metaphysical truths in diverse ways. For Mendelssohn, multiple representations of religious truth help prevent people from imagining that their particular religious symbols adequately signify the unconditional. This is essential for preserving pure monotheism, for when people come to think of their religious symbols as adequate representations of the divinity, they come to view them as divine. This, however, is the essence of idolatry.

An Enlightened Appeal for Religious Union

In 1782, Mendelssohn published a translation of Menasseh ben Israel's *Vindication of the Jews (Vindiciae Judaeorum)*—a plea for the Jews' readmission to England. He wrote an introduction to Menasseh's piece, in which he argued that no religious authorities, including Jewish ones, have a right of excommunication. In 1783, Mendelssohn received an anonymous response to his preface entitled "The Search for Light and Right." The Searcher noted with approval Mendelssohn's rejection of the coercive power of religion.[6] But for the Searcher this coercive power was the very basis of Judaism and what distinguished positive, historical Judaism from Christianity. Was not the Sabbath violator to be stoned? Did God not promise great temporal rewards to those who fulfilled his law and destruction to those who violated it? While coercive power was at the heart of Judaism, authentic Christianity was pure, rational religion whose only commands were ethical duties and whose only co-

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Press, 1995), 68-69. Simon Rawidowicz summarizes Mendelssohn's argument, but without much critical insight. See Rawidowicz,"The Philosophy of *Jerusalem*" [in Hebrew], in *Hebrew Studies in Jewish Thought,* ed. Benjamin Ravid (Jerusalem: Ruben Mass, 1971), 105-7. In his notes on Arkush's translation of *Jerusalem,* Altmann declares that the end of *Jerusalem* contains "a metaphysical rationale for Mendelssohn's pluralistic view of state and society" (see Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem,* trans. Allan Arkush [Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1983], 240). Similarly, in his article "The Philosophical Roots of Mendelssohn's Plea for Emancipation," Altmann briefly discusses Mendelssohn's "metaphysical . . . argument for religious pluralism." See Alexander Altmann, *Die Trostvolle Aujklärung* (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog. 1982), 225-26. Altmann, however, only discusses what I see as the second part of the argument. Furthermore, I will argue that Altmann's discussion is mistaken.

6 Scholars agree that the anonymous Searcher was the journalist A. F. Cranz. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn,* 509.

ercive power was the individual's conscience. By rejecting the coercive power of Judaism, Mendelssohn was in fact rejecting positive, historical Judaism. The Searcher interpreted Mendelssohn as espousing "a wider sense" of Judaism, which was no different from enlightened Christianity: "In the wider sense of the expression, the faith of your fathers is that to which Christians lay claim. It involves worshiping the one sole God, observing the divine commandments [*Gebote*] given through Moses, and gathering all peoples into a single flock under the universal scepter of a Messiah proclaimed by the prophets."[7]

Given the identical content of enlightened Judaism and Christianity, the Searcher encouraged an amalgamation of the two religions, which would fulfill both religions' messianic expectations: "In any event, the foundation will be laid for seeing the fulfillment of the prophecy [*jene Weissagung*] (for it is not just a dream) that before the end of days, God shall be the universal shepherd [*der algemeine Hirte*] and all His people only a single flock. Only the truth can lead to this—the truth, either on your side or on ours or, if we step forward from both sides, perhaps in the middle."[8]

Mendelssohn's response to the Searcher was *Jerusalem*. Throughout the second part of *Jerusalem,* Mendelssohn eloquently defends his faith by arguing that Judaism, properly understood, involves no religious coercion. At the end of *Jerusalem,* Mendelssohn takes up the Searcher's appeal for religious union: "There are some who want to persuade you that if only all of us had one and the same faith we would no longer hate one another for reasons of faith, of the difference of opinion; that religious hatred and the spirit of persecution would be torn up by its roots and extirpated; that the scourge would be wrested from hypocrisy and the sword from the hand of fanaticism [*Fanatismus*], and the happy days would arrive of which it is said 'the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard beside the kid'" (Isa. 11:6).[9]

But Mendelssohn is very wary of religious union and sees it as a

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7 A. F. Cranz, "Das Forschen nach Licht und Recht," in *Moses Mendelssohn: Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. F. Bamberger et al. (Berlin: Akademie, 1929), 8, 86, and "The Search for Light and Right" in *Moses Mendelssohn: Writings on Judaism, Christianity and the Bible,* ed. Michah Gottlieb (Hanover: Brandeis University Press), 57. The standard edition of Mendelssohn's writings is *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe* (hereafter *JubA).* In citing Mendelssohn subsequently, I will first give the German citation and then the English one.

8 Cranz, "Das Forschen nach Licht und Recht," 86, and "The Search for Light and Right," 66.

9 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8: 200-201, and *Jerusalem,* 136.

disguised way to fetter liberty of conscience: "Beware, friends of men, of listening to such sentiments without the most careful scrutiny. They could be snares which fanaticism grown impotent wants to put in the way of liberty of conscience. You know that this foe of the good has many a shape and form: the lion's fury and the lamb's meekness, the dove's simplicity and the serpent's cunning . . . it feigns brotherly love [*Bruderliebe*], effuses human tolerance [*Menschenduldung*] and secretly forges fetters which it means to place on human reason, so that it may hurl it back again unawares into the cesspool of barbarism, from which you have begun to pull it up."[10]

But why is religious union opposed to liberty of conscience? Mendelssohn claims that it is because people naturally represent religious truth differently: "Shall we say that all of you would think alike concerning religious truths? Whoever has the slightest conception of the human mind cannot allow himself to be persuaded of this. The agreement, therefore, could lie only in the words, in the formula. . . . None of us thinks and feels exactly like his fellow man [*Nebenmensch*]; why then do we wish to deceive each other with delusive words?"[11]

It is an irreducible feature of the human mind that people will not think alike. Attempting to eliminate religious differences is an illusory endeavor in which vague, general formulas are used to paper over real differences. The different ways in which human beings naturally conceptualize religious truth seemingly explain religious diversity. But does this not contradict Mendelssohn's conviction in the universality of religious truth?

It is important to note that Mendelssohn specifically doubts whether religious doctrines could be agreed on. This is not incidental, for he does not entertain similar doubts concerning doctrines in other disciplines—say mathematics. For example, in Mendelssohn's day, Euclidean geometry was considered absolutely certain knowledge. This body of knowledge had remained, for all intents and purposes, the same from the days of Euclid himself. Mendelssohn was not disturbed by the fact there existed such a "unified geometry." It did not seem "contrary to human nature" that people should agree about such truths. Why then this

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10 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8: 200-201, and *Jerusalem*, 136.

11 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:202, and *Jerusalem,* 137-38.

difference between metaphysics and mathematics? Why do people naturally represent differently metaphysical, but not mathematical, truths?

For Mendelssohn, the subject matters of mathematics and metaphysics are fundamentally different. Mathematics is a science of quantity or magnitude, while metaphysics is a science of quality. These two realms are not, however, independent of each other, for each quality must have a particular quantity, and each quantity must be a quantity of some quality.

Since geometry is the main example Mendelssohn uses in discussing mathematical knowledge, I will focus on it. Geometry is a science of space. Geometrical knowledge comes from representing limits to space by drawing lines, planes, and points. From these sensible representations, one can derive mathematical truths by applying the logical principle of noncontradiction. Since geometry is a science of space, the sensible signs one uses are isomorphic with what one wishes to represent and, hence, are called by Mendelssohn "essential" or "natural" signs.[12]

In contrast, metaphysical knowledge proceeds by the analysis of qualities. By analyzing qualities, one seeks to distinguish a thing's intrinsic characteristics. This is an intellectual process that by its nature cannot proceed through the senses. So, there is a fundamental heterogeneity between thoughts (concepts) and the words one uses to signify concepts. In this sense, the signs that one uses must be what Mendelssohn calls "arbitrary" or "conventional."[13]

In an influential paper, Arnold Eisen claims that Mendelssohn was deeply skeptical about the ability of thought and language to capture metaphysical truth. Eisen adduces two passages in *Jerusalem* that attest to Mendelssohn's "skepticism" regarding our ability to know metaphysical truth. In the second part of *Jerusalem,* Mendelssohn notes that Judaism is unique in that it commands actions that call one to contemplate eternal metaphysical truths rather than formulate doctrines into dogmas of faith. Judaism's avoidance of dogma points to our inability to know metaphysical truth and express it in language. Mendelssohn's

12 See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:171, 2:280-81, *Jerusalem*, 105, and *Philosophical Writings,* ed. and trans. Daniel Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 264-65.

13 A comparison between Mendelssohn's distinction between essential and arbitrary symbols and Charles Sanders Peirce's distinction between representations based on similarity, metonymy, and convention is worthwhile, but beyond the scope of this article. See *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce,* eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, vol. 8 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931-58). See Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry,* chapter 2.

understanding of Judaism's opposition to dogma is summarized in the following passage: "I have sketched the basic outline of ancient, original Judaism such as I conceive it to be. Doctrines and laws, convictions and actions. The former were not connected to words or written characters which always remain the same for all men and all times amid all the revolutions of language, morals, manners, and of conditions words and characters which invariably present the same rigid forms into which we cannot force our concepts without disfiguring them."[14]

As Eisen puts it, dogma uses words, which is problematic since "concepts are inherently elusive . . . and the translation of concept to language is always inexact and inadequate."[15] On inspection, however, this interpretation does not seem to be borne out by this passage. Mendelssohn is focusing neither on our inability to know metaphysical truth, nor on our inability to translate this truth into language per se. Rather, Mendelssohn is indicating that while words are rigid forms, their meaning changes over time with different usages. Committing eternal concepts to words risks misleading people, for as the meaning of a word changes, people's understanding of the concept can become distorted.[16] Indeed, on reflection, it is clear Mendelssohn thought that we could know metaphysical truth. The central argument of the *Prize Essay* is that metaphysical truths allow of the same certainty as mathematical ones. His 1767 *Phaedon* offers rational proofs for the immortality of the soul. His 1784 *Sache Gottes* defends divine providence on rational grounds, and his 1785 *Morning Hours* presents new proofs for God's existence in light of Immanuel Kant's critique of rationalist metaphysics.[17]

A second passage cited by Eisen refers to Mendelssohn's argument against the practice of requiring teachers and priests to affirm their acceptance of doctrines of faith under oath. For Mendelssohn, belief can-

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14 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:160, and *Jerusalem*, 102; Arnold Eisen, "Divine Legislation as 'Ceremonial Script,'" *AJS Review* 15, no. 2 (1990): 246.

15 Eisen, "Divine Legislation as 'Ceremonial Script,'" 246.

16 Compare Mendelssohn's discussion of language in the *Prize Essay:* "the soul must constantly fix its attention on the arbitrary combination of signs [*willkürliche Verbindung der Zeichen*] and what is designated, a combination established at some point in the past. For this reason the slightest inattentiveness makes it possible for thought to lose sight of the subject matter, leaving behind merely empty signs [*leeren Zeichen*] in which case, of course, the most cogent philosopher must appear to be merely playing with words" (Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 2:290, and *Philosophical Writings*, 272).

17 I discuss some of Mendelssohn's proofs for God's existence in Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 4.

not be coerced and must be based on rational conviction. The purpose of oaths, then, is to reinforce people in beliefs which they accede to rationally but do not always live by because of laziness. However, Mendelssohn does not deem employing oaths a worthy approach for affirming eternal metaphysical truths for the following reason: "The perceptions [*Wahrnehmungen*] of the internal sense [*innern Sinnes*] are in themselves seldom so palpable that the mind is able to hold on to them securely and give them expression as often as it may be desired."[18]

The "perceptions of the internal sense," which here refer to our metaphysical concepts, are not sufficiently "palpable." Eisen interprets Mendelssohn as affirming that metaphysical concepts are always subject to doubt. But Mendelssohn himself cautions the reader not to interpret him this way: "Dear reader, whoever you may be do not accuse me of skepticism or of employing some evil ruse to turn you into a skeptic."[19]

I think that Mendelssohn's aesthetic writings provide an important elucidation of his intention. One of the central aesthetic concepts explored by Mendelssohn is the "sublime." Briefly, for Mendelssohn, sublime objects are objects that display internal complexity, but which cannot be perceived as unities because of their enormity. Sublime objects include things that are gigantic in size, such as "the unfathomable world of the sea, a far reaching plain, or the innumerable legion of stars."[20] However, Mendelssohn likewise notes that a living being can be sublime if she displays an enormous degree of power, genius, or virtue. For Mendelssohn, God is the paradigmatic example of a sublime being since, hard as we try, we can never grasp God's goodness, wisdom, or power, nor adequately represent God using signs or images. As Mendelssohn puts it: "As far as their nature is concerned, some things are so perfect, so sublime that they cannot be reached by any finite thought, cannot be adequately intimated by means of any sign [*Zeichen*] and cannot be represented as they are by any images [*Bilder*]. Among such things are God."[21]

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18 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:134, and *Jerusalem,* 66.

19 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:134-35, and *Jerusalem*, 66-67.

20 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:398, and *Philosophical Writings*, 144.

21 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:465, and *Philosophical Writings,* 202. Mendelssohn presents a similar point in his commentary on Exod. 33:23, where Moses asked to see God's glory and was permitted to see God's back, but not God's face. Mendelssohn comments: "For this is the limit of what it is possible for a created being to know of the essence of his glory, may it be blessed. Moses attained [more knowledge] than any other person. Before him and after him no person will reach his exalted

For Mendelssohn, we can neither adequately grasp God's nature nor adequately express it in language. But how does this jibe with Mendelssohn's dogmatic conviction that reason can give us certain knowledge of metaphysical truth? While this is a complex issue, the outline of his position is clear: while we can know that God exists, is omnipotent, omniscient, all-good, and so on, given God's infinite nature and the finitude of our minds, we can neither fully comprehend God's attributes nor adequately express them in language.[22]

In sum, there are two reasons why human beings naturally express religious truth in multiple forms. First, because the signs used to express metaphysical truth are conventional. Second, because any signs used to depict God are necessarily inadequate. Mendelssohn assumes, however, that all religions agree in their basic metaphysical commitments. Mendelssohn's doctrine of "common sense" supplies the premise underlying this assumption.[23]

Common Sense and the Universal Knowledge of Metaphysical Truth

Mendelssohn's encounter with Cranz was not his first experience with attempts to convert him. As is well known, in 1769 Johann C. Lavater challenged Mendelssohn to refute Charles Bonnet's philosophical de-

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honor in attaining knowledge of God and an understanding of the ways and principles by which he guides his creatures. Beholding his visage is the apprehension of God and knowledge of His ways essentially. This is impossible for all created beings" (Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 16:348).

22 There is a similar tension in Maimonides between his affirmation that God exists, is one, is omnipotent, and is an intellect, and his doctrine of negative attributes. See Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed,* trans. S. Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pt. I, chapters 31, 47,50-59, and 68; pt. 2, chapters 1, 24, and "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," in *Book of Knowledge,* ed. S. Rubenstein (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1989), chapter 1, laws 7, II. There is enormous debate on how to interpret Maimonides on this issue. The classic discussion is Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature,* ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 82-99. Some recent discussions include Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1991-92): 49-103; Joseph Buijs, "Is the Negative Theology of Maimonides Intelligible?" in *Torah and Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman,* ed. R. Link-Salinger (New York: Sheingold, 1992), 9-17; Josef Stern, "Maimonides Demonstrations: Principles and Practice," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10, no. 1 (2001): 47-84.

23 Mendelssohn equates the terms "healthy human understanding" (*gesunde Menschenver·stande*), "healthy reason" (*gesunde Vernunft*), "healthy human sense" (*gesunde Menschensinne*), "plain human understanding" (*schlichten Menschenverstande*), "straight sense" (*Gerade Sinn*), and "*bons-sens.*"

fense of Christianity or convert. This put Mendelssohn in a bind, for he was loath to challenge the religion of the monarch under whose indulgence he was living.[24]

In his reply to Lavater, Mendelssohn declined to attack Christianity explicitly but implicitly took aim at Lavater's profession of faith. He presented Judaism as a tolerant religion of reason that only requires adherence to the tenets of universal natural religion for salvation.[25] While not discussing Christianity explicitly, this account of Judaism was meant to lead the reader to compare Judaism favorably with Christianity, which demands belief in irrational dogma such as the Incarnation and vicarious atonement for salvation, and which actively seeks converts.[26] Mendelssohn thought Judaism's tolerant position a theological necessity, for making salvation dependent on accepting dogmas of a particular religion would violate God's power and goodness:

> I therefore do not believe that the powers of human reason are insufficient to persuade men of the eternal truths which are indispensable to human felicity, and that God had to reveal them in a supernatural manner. Those who hold this view detract from the omnipotence or goodness of God, on the one hand, what they believe they are adding to his goodness on the other. He was, in

24 For a description of this encounter, see Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn,* chapter 3. In Prussia at the time there were several forms of civil status available to Jews. A small group possessed "general privilege," which involved the right to settle in any localities open to Jews, equality with Christians in economic transactions, and the right of children to inherit these privileges. A second group, the "protected Jews" or so-called *Schutzjuden*, were granted a right of settlement, but no right of mobility, and only one child could inherit their status. A third group were the extraordinary *Schutzjuden,* who, while having a right of settlement in a certain locality, could not transfer this right to any child. Despite Mendelssohn's literary fame, he died as an ordinary *Schutzjude.* Indeed after his death in 1786, his wife Fromet had to leave Berlin and apply for readmission. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 16-17.

25 Mendelssohn claimed that the so-called seven Noahide Laws were equivalent to the dictates of natural religion. See Mendelssohn, *Moses Mendelssohn: Writings on Judaism, Christianity and the Bible,* 6-15. Also see Mendelssohn's letter to Jacob Emden in *JubA,* 19: 173-74; idem, *Writings on Judaism, Christianity and the Bible,* 32-35. For discussion, see David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew* in *Judaism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1979), 369-77; Steven Schwarzschild, "Do Noachites Have to Believe in Revelation?" pts. 1 and 2, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 52, no. 4 (1962): 297-308; 53, no. 1 (1962): 30-65.

26 Mendelssohn explicitly criticizes Christianity in his unpublished "Counter-Reflections on Bonnet." See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 7: 90-106; idem, *Moses Mendelssohn: Writings on Judaism, Christianity, and the Bible,* 16-30.

> their opinion, good enough to reveal to men those truths on which their felicity depends, but not omnipotent or good enough to grant them the powers to discover those truths themselves. Moreover by this assertion one makes the necessity of supernatural revelation more universal than revelation itself. If, therefore, mankind must be corrupt and miserable without revelation, why has the far greater part of mankind lived without *true revelation* [*wahre Offenbarung*] from time immemorial? Why must the two Indies wait until it please the Europeans to send them a few comforters to bring them a message without which they can, according to this opinion, live neither virtuously nor happily?[27]

For God to deny salvation to those who have never heard of Christianity impugns His goodness (assigning him an arbitrary, sadistic will) or His power (claiming that He had no power to save those unaware of Christianity). Making salvation contingent on the rational recognition of God and the dictates of morality does not by itself, however, solve this problem. For in making salvation dependent on rational metaphysical and moral knowledge, it seems that only intellectuals can be saved. Thus, Mendelssohn claims that to recognize the truths of natural religion, discursive reason is not needed—simple common sense is sufficient:

> Now it seems to me that the evidence of natural religion is as clear and obvious, as irrefutably certain, to uncorrupted common sense [*unverdorbenen, nicht gemißleitenen Menschenverstanden*] that has not been misled as is any theorem in geometry. At any station of life, at any level of enlightenment [*jeder Stufe der Aufklärung*], one has enough information and ability, enough opportunity and power, to convince himself of the truths of rational religion [*Vernunftreligion*]. The reasoning of the Greenlander who, as he was walking on the ice with a missionary one beautiful morning, saw the

27 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:160-61; 19:173-74, and *Jerusalem,* 94.

> dawn streaming forth between the icebergs and said to the Moravian: "*Behold, brother, the new day! How beautiful must be he who made this!*" This reasoning, which was so convincing to the Greenlander before the Moravian misled his understanding, is still convincing to me.[28]

While European religious thinkers frequently dismiss their non-European counterparts as idolaters, given Mendelssohn's account of common sense, it is not surprising that he finds much more reason in polytheism than Jews or Christians normally assume. Indeed, in his commentary on the Pentateuch, Mendelssohn takes a very broad view of polytheism. Commenting on the first of the Ten Commandments, "I am the Lord your God" (Exod. 20:2), Mendelssohn writes:

> With regard to intellectual apprehensions, the children of Israel have no distinction or advantage over the other nations. *All [nations] acknowledge the divinity of God*. Even those who worship other gods admit that God most high is omnipotent [*shehako'ah hagadol vehayekholet hagemura le'el elyon*].[29] This is what the Rabbis said: "They call Him, the God of Gods.[30] In the same way the verse says, "For from where the sun rises to where it sets, My name is honored among the nations and ever incense and pure oblation are offered to my name [Malachi 1:10]. And it is possible that this is what the Psalmist meant when he wrote: "The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky

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28 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2: 197-98; idem, *Moses Mendelssohn: Writings on Judaism, Christianity and the Bible*. This is not the place to examine Mendelssohn's conception of common sense in detail. For detailed discussion, see my unpublished dissertation, Michah Gottlieb, "The Ambiguity of Reason: Mendelssohn's Writings on Spinoza" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2003), 135-57. Most recently, see Gideon Freudenthal, *No Religion Without Idolatry: Mendelssohn's Jewish Enlightenment* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2012), 21-64.

29 Mendelssohn here follows Nahmanides' comments on Exod. 20:3.

30 See *Babylonian Talmud* (henceforth B.) Menahot, 110a. The full passage reads as follows: "R. Abba bar Rav Isaac said in the name of R. Hisda and others say R. Judah said in the name of Rav, 'From Tyre to Carthage the nations know Israel and their Father who is in Heaven; but from Tyre westwards and Carthage eastwards the nations know neither Israel nor their Father who is in heaven.' R. Shimi b. Hiyya raised the following objection against Rav: 'Is it not written, "For from where the sun rises to where it sets, My name is honored among the nations and ever incense and pure oblation are offered to my name"' (Mal. 1:10). He replied, 'You, Shimi! They call him the God of Gods.'"

> proclaims his handiwork [Psalms 19:2]"; "There is no utterance, there are no words without their voice being heard [Psalms 19:4]" The meaning is that this speculation [i.e. recognition of God on the basis of physicotheology] becomes known in the world without utterance or word [i.e. through intellect alone]. For every utterance and word [*ma'amar vedibur*] is only known to the speakers of a particular language, but the "declaration of the heavens and its handiwork" are understood to all human beings.[31]

For Mendelssohn, even those nations that worship other gods acknowledge God's supreme dominion and omnipotence. An example will help illustrate Mendelssohn's view of the continuity between monotheistic and polytheistic religions.

Consider two images. First, God commands Moses to place in the Tabernacle the Ark of the Covenant, a gold box with two cherubs over it. Second, according to Mendelssohn, Indian "philosophers" affirm that the world is balanced on the head of a snake and that the snake rests on the back of a tortoise.[32] Mendelssohn claims that both of these images actually express one metaphysical truth—divine providence.

In claiming that the cherubs express divine providence, Mendelssohn relies on a Rabbinic tradition: "'the [cherubs] shall face one another (Exod. 25:20)' . . . but isn't it written, 'the cherubs stand on their feet and face the Sanctuary of the Temple' [*ufneihem labayit*] (Chron. II, 3: 13)?[33] This is not a difficulty [*lo kashia*]. The first verse refers to when Israel performs the will of God [*retzono shel makom*], while the second verse refers to when Israel does not perform the will of God [*retzono shel makom*]."[34]

In other words, the cherubs facing one another symbolize divine

31 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 16:186 (my emphasis).

32 See ibid., 8:180, and *Jerusalem,* 114-15. Assessing the accuracy of Mendelssohn's depiction of Hindu doctrine is beyond the bounds of this article.

33 Rashi notes that the cherubs described in Exodus differ from those described in Chronicles. The Exodus cherubs were made of pure gold and were part of the Ark of the Covenant, while the Chronicles cherubs were only gold plated and were placed on the ground. Despite these differences, the Talmud assumes that both sets of cherubs should be placed in identical positions (see Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Batra*, 89a ad. loc).

34 Ibid., 99a.

protection, which is consequent on obeying the divine will, while the cherubs turning away from one another symbolize divine punishment, which is consequent on disobeying the divine will.[35] The cherubs thus symbolize God's providential governance of the world.[36]

Mendelssohn notes that European readers frequently "laugh" at Indian cosmology describing the earth as balanced on a snake and a tortoise. In dismissing this cosmology, however, they act injudiciously, for this image actually contains a powerful symbol of divine providence. Here Mendelssohn relies on the then recently published work by J. Z. Hollwell, *Reports from Bengal and the Empire of Hindustan*.[37] According to Mendelssohn, Hollwell studied the sacred books of the Gentoos with a native Brahmin and so was able to discern their true meaning. Mendelssohn quotes Hollwell:

> The Eternal spoke . . . thou *Bistnu* [Hollwell glosses: power of preservation]! protect and preserve, according to my ordinance, the things and forms created ... *Bistnu* transformed himself into a mighty boar [Hollwell glosses: symbolizing strength, according to the Gentoos, because, relative to his size, he is the strongest animal], descended into the abyss of *Johala,* and on his tusks brought up *Murto* [Hollwell glosses: the earth]—Then spontaneously there issued from him a mighty tortoise [Hollwell glosses: symbol of stability, according to the Gentoos] and a mighty snake [Hollwell glosses: their symbol of wisdom]. And *Bistnu* put the snake erect on the back of the tortoise, and placed *Murto* upon the head of the snake.[38]

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35 It should also be noted that in Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma*, 54a-54b, there is a tradition that the cherubs did not simply face one another but rather sexually embraced one another, a more powerful symbol of divine love.

36 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:180, and *Jerusalem,* 114. Mendelssohn does not cite the rabbinic source of his claim, nor does Altmann in his note.

37 The full title is *Interesting Historical Events Relative to the Provinces of Bengal, and the Empire of Indostan . . . as also the Mythology and Cosmology, Fasts and Festivals of the Gentoo's, followers of the Shastah, and a Dissertation on the Metempsychosis, commonly, though erroneously called the Pythagorean Doctrine.* The book was published in English in two parts. Part 1 was published in 1765, and pt. 2 in 1767. A German translation of pt. 1 appeared in 1769. See Altmann's note in Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem,* 225.

38 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8: 180-81, and *Jerusalem*, 115.

The meaning of the Gentoo myth is that God creates the world (*Murto*) through his power (*Bistnu [Vishnu],* the boar) and then governs it in accordance with a stable (the tortoise), wise (the head of the snake) law. This divine governance is providence. We are therefore confronted with a number of questions. First, given Mendelssohn's account of common sense, what is the source of religious error? More specifically, what constitutes idolatry? Second, while Mendelssohn's understanding of the relations among concept, sign, and metaphysical truth explains the fact of religious pluralism, it does not explain by what right it should persist. Arguing for the persistence of religious difference from its existence involves an illicit jump to "ought" from "is." In other words, while Jews, Christians, and Hindus may each have their own way of expressing religious truth, there is no apparent reason not to seek a universal religion that uses a single set of symbols. To solve these problems, it is necessary to turn to Mendelssohn's claim that multiple expressions of religious truth promote accurate knowledge of metaphysical truth.

The Value of Religious Diversity

Mendelssohn supplements his argument concerning the fact of religious diversity with a claim concerning its value: "Brothers, if you care for true piety, let us not feign agreement where diversity is evidently the plan and purpose of providence. . . . Why should we make ourselves unrecognizable to each other in the most important concerns of our life by masquerading, since God has stamped everyone, not without reason, with his own facial features? Does this not amount to doing our very best to resist providence, to frustrate, if it be possible, the purpose of creation? Is this not deliberately to contravene our calling, our destiny in this life and the next?"[39]

For Mendelssohn, religious diversity is the "plan and purpose of providence." Altmann argues that Mendelssohn's claim is grounded in ideas that he formulated in an exchange concerning a work by Baron Karl Theodor von Dalberg.[40]

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39 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:202, and *Jerusalem*, 138.

40 See Altmann, "The Philosophical Roots on Mendelssohn's Plea for Emancipation," 225-26, and *Moses Mendelssohn*, 313-14.

In 1777, Dalberg published a metaphysical work entitled *Reflections on the Universe (Betrachtungen über das Universum)*. In June of that year, Dalberg's admirer J. E. Grafen von Görz sent a copy of Dalberg's treatise to Mendelssohn for comments. Mendelssohn delivered his opinion on Dalberg's work in two letters—one to von Görz and one to Dalberg himself.

In the *Reflections,* Dalberg argues that the universal law governing the coexistence of things is their universal tendency to seek perfection by striving to assimilate to one another. For Dalberg, each individual thing has a number of qualities, which are partly alert and partly dormant. These qualities would persist in their respective states if not for the fact that things have a tendency to "sympathy" and "love," which inclines them to assimilate to one another.[41]

Mendelssohn offers two criticisms of Dalberg. First, Mendelssohn notes that Dalberg's method is to seek "the simplest and most certain principles of existence" *(die einfachsten und allergewissesten Grundsätze)* and then, through comparison of these principles, to uncover the single most basic principle governing all things. Dalberg's contention that "assimilation" is this most basic principle is uncertain, however. The tendency to assimilation assumes difference—without difference there would only be identity *(Einerleiheit)* and so no striving for assimilation. But if difference is an irreducible part of phenomena, "manifoldness" *(der Mannigfaltigkeit)* would seem to be a coequal principle with any supposed tendency to "assimilation."[42]

Second, Mendelssohn doubts whether the tendency of beings is, in fact, to assimilation. Mendelssohn distinguishes between "unity" *(Einheit)* and "identity" *(Einerleiheit)*. While unity connects the manifold, identity cancels the manifold. The "unity" of reality is greater the more diverse the manifold and the "more intimately" *(je inniger)* it is connected. When the manifold is connected "harmoniously" *(harmonisch),* this unity becomes "perfection" *(Vollkommenheit)*.

Mendelssohn shares Dalberg's teleological assumption that things strive for perfection. But whereas Dalberg thinks that identity constitutes perfection, Mendelssohn follows Leibniz in claiming that unity, or the "harmonious connection" of the manifold, constitutes perfection.

41 See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 313-14.

42 Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 12:2, 91. Altmann does not mention this criticism.

For Mendelssohn, what constitutes the "harmonious" connection of the manifold is the fact that all beings have a single final purpose, namely, the tendency to seek perfection. Insofar as finite beings represent the common drive to perfection uniting all beings, they themselves become more perfect. Thus, while for Dalberg the tendency of things is to real identity *(dingliche ldentität),* for Mendelssohn the tendency of things is to an ideal identity—the universal recognition of the single purpose uniting all beings.[43]

Altmann's claim that Mendelssohn's commitment to the metaphysical principle of "unity" underlies his defense of religious pluralism is unclear. How does a justification of religious pluralism follow from the idea that the tendency of all beings is to connect the manifold according to a common purpose? Assuming that there are many ways to represent the connection of the manifold, there still may be one way to represent it that is clearest, and hence one for which all thinking beings should strive. How then does Mendelssohn's commitment to the principle of "unity" entail the intrinsic value of many different representations of religious truth?

In the passage from *Jerusalem* cited above (see n. 39), Mendelssohn claims that religious diversity is the "plan of providence," and, as a good Leibnizian, he considers providence a function of maximizing perfection. Famously, Gottfried Leibniz holds that God thinks many possible worlds and wills the most perfect one possible into existence. The most perfect world is, not surprisingly, the world with the maximum number of the most perfect beings. Perfection is a function of having the most perfect representations. Rational perfection involves having the clearest and most distinct representations of reality.[44]

Providence is the law of governance that God uses to maximize the perfection of finite beings. Suffering, for example, is a divine prompt to perfect oneself, and on this basis Mendelssohn rejects the idea of eternal punishment.[45] Religious diversity reflects divine providence insofar as it

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43 Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 12:2, 94; Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 314.

44 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* vol. 3.1, 56; *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings,* ed. and trans. Eva Jospe (New York: Viking, 1975), 201: "We therefore have every reason to assume that the striving for perfection, the growing inner excellence, constitutes the destiny of all rational beings, hence also the end-purpose of all creation. We may safely say that this cosmic structure, great beyond measure, was created so that rational beings, progressing step by step in moral and spiritual awareness, may gradually become more perfect, finding their happiness in inner growth."

45 For a more detailed discussion of Mendelssohn's reasons for rejecting eternal punishment, see

helps assure proper representations of divine truth. In Mendelssohn's language, religious pluralism helps prevent idolatry.

In their book *Idolatry,* Halbertal and Margalit distinguish four senses of idolatry. Idolatry can refer to: (a) the worship of beings other than God; (b) incorrect representations of God; (c) intellectual errors; and (d) incorrect forms of worship.

As we have seen, Mendelssohn rejects the notion that the worship of beings other than God constitutes idolatry. In the *Bi'ur,* he follows Nahmanides in claiming that the prohibition of worshipping other gods contained in the commandment "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3) applies to Israel alone.[46] Other nations are permitted to worship angels, heavenly bodies, demons or human beings, and even sensible representations of these beings as long as the worshippers recognize the supreme authority of God.[47] There is no intellectual reason to forbid the worship of everything other than God.[48]

In *Jerusalem,* Mendelssohn explains the nature of idolatry. Idolatry

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Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment,* 61-62; Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom,* 20-21.

46 See Nahmanides' comments on Exod. 20:3; Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry*, 190-97.

47 See Mendelssohn's comments to Exod. 20:3, in *JubA*, 16:186, where he justifies his claim that Gentiles can worship other beings by recourse to the doctrine that "Gentiles were not prohibited from *shituf."* As Jacob Katz and others have shown, this doctrine emerged from a Tosafistic comment on Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, 63b, which states that, "it is forbidden for a person to set up a partnership [*shutfut*] with a Gentile lest the Gentile become obligated to swear an oath by his God. And the Torah stated, 'It shall not be heard on your mouth'" (Exod. 23: 13). The implication of the passage was that in a business transaction a Jew was never permitted to require an oath of a Gentile. This put the Jew at a great disadvantage. The medieval exegete Rabbi Isaac (some sources mistakenly cite Rabbenu Tam as the source), however, permitted the Jews of his day to require oaths as he claimed that although the Gentiles of his time (that is, Christians) would swear by Jesus Christ, since they still believed in a universal God, their oath to Jesus could not be considered idolatry. Rabbi Isaac justified this on the grounds that Gentiles were not prohibited from associating *(leshattef)* other beings with their worship of God. Joseph Karo, the author of the authoritative sixteenth-century halakhic work the *Shulhan Arukh,* cites the Talmudic prohibition on making partnerships with Gentiles. But in his glosses to the *Shulhan Arukh,* Rabbi Moses Isserles writes: "there are some who permit partnerships with Gentiles in our time, since the Gentiles of our day do not swear by other deities. And although they mention other deities [in their oaths], nevertheless, their intention is to the Creator of Heaven and Earth. The difference is that they associate [*shemeshatfin*] the name of heaven with something else. And we do not find that one transgresses the prohibition of placing a stumbling block in front of the blind since they are not prohibited from *shituf."* See Moses Isserles, *Orah Hayim* (Jerusalem: Bloom, n.d.), sec. 156. See Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 34-36, 162-81; David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 42-52, and idem, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism,* 107-49, 369-77. Mendelssohn clearly draws on Isserles, but he goes beyond him, claiming that not only do Christians refer to the unique God in their idolatrous practice, but that all idolaters do likewise.

48 Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:186-87; idem, *Jerusalem,* 120-2l.

involves an incorrect representation of God, which culminates in substituting the symbol for God himself. Mendelssohn offers a genealogy of idolatry. As we have seen, arbitrary signs must be used to represent metaphysical concepts. Originally, peoples used living things to represent these concepts. Animals were the first things used. Thus, for example, the lion may have been used to represent God's power. Later, images of the living things were used. So, instead of using the actual lion to designate God's power, a statue of the lion may have been used. Eventually, metaphysical concepts were represented using written, imagelike symbols such as hieroglyphics.[49] Idolatry stems from people coming to regard the signs "not as mere signs but as the things themselves."[50] But how did the people become convinced that the sensible symbols of God were themselves divine? The reason is that people came to see the signs not as arbitrary symbols of divine attributes but as essential symbols. The symbols were taken to be incarnations of the divinity whose existence inhered in the symbols themselves.[51]

God, in His goodness, could not allow people to go astray without help. As is well known, Mendelssohn thinks that God chose Israel as a bulwark against idolatry. God prohibited the Israelites from worshipping anything in addition to himself and from using sensible symbols to represent him. Instead, God instructed the Jews to perform actions (that is, the ceremonial law) to direct the individual Jew toward the contemplation of metaphysical truths. This was and continues to be an effective protection against idolatry, for unlike sensible signs, religious actions, which are "transitory," are clearly arbitrary and therefore can never be mistaken for essential symbols of the divinity. In this way, God chose Israel to be a light unto the nations, a preserve of pure monotheism.[52]

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49 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8: 173-74; idem, *Jerusalem,* 107-8.

50 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:177; idem, *Jerusalem,* 111.

51 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:173-83; idem, *Jerusalem,* 107-17. Mendelssohn's account bears important similarities as well as differences to Maimonides' theory of idolatry in Maimonides, "Laws of Idolaters," in *Book of Knowledge,* 1: 1-2. For a penetrating comparison of the two, see Lawrence Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn on the Origins of Idolatry," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism,* ed. A. Ivry, E. Wolfson, and A. Arkush (New York: Harwood, 1998), 423-45. Compare Nahmanides' comments on Exod. 20:3. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 16:186-87; Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 226. The best recent discussion of Mendelssohn's theory of idolatry is Freudenthal, *No Religion Without Idolatry*, 105-184.

52 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:183-85, and *Jerusalem,* 117-19. See Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish*

Eisen considers Mendelssohn's account of the law as a prophylactic against idolatry "painfully weak." He raises two important objections. First, Eisen claims that it is possible to understand how actual animals being used to symbolize the divine qualities might explain the move to idolatry—it is natural to assume that people might forget that the animals were symbols and come to worship them as divine themselves. But Eisen claims that it is far from clear "how most images or hieroglyphs, let alone a language of written letters, would have had that result."[53] Second, Eisen claims that given that Mendelssohn thought that in his day all nations worshipped God and were not idolaters, it is unclear why the commandments should still apply.[54] One might add to Eisen's questions the problem of how nations that had never heard of Israel or people who lived before Israel came into being would be protected against idolatry.

I suggest that, according to Mendelssohn, religious diversity plays a providential role in preserving monotheism. Idolatry arises from regarding one's own metaphysical symbols as essential, adequate signs of the divine. Religious diversity helps impress on people that any signs used to represent God are arbitrary and inadequate. In this way, the inclination to deify these symbols is weakened. This, I believe, is one of the central reasons that Mendelssohn opposes a union of faiths even if such a union were articulated in philosophical terms. The danger is that by unnaturally and arbitrarily designating a single set of symbols to represent God, people would come to imagine that God can be represented adequately. And since imagining that one can adequately symbolize God leads to fetishizing one's symbols, people would be led to idolatry.

It is important to note that Mendelssohn recognizes that the problem of idolatry is not limited to the use of images to represent God. He notes that the Pythagoreans used numbers to represent the divinity so that their signs would not be misinterpreted. However, this failed as people came to fetishize the numbers, "ascribing miraculous power to them."[55] The same danger is clearly present when "written letters" are used.[56]

History, 227; Rawidowicz, "The Philosophy of *Jerusalem,*" 97.

53 Eisen, "Divine Legislation as Ceremonial Script," 255.

54 Ibid., 256.

55 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:182; idem, *Jerusalem*, 117.

56 Thus certain kabbalists ascribe magical powers to the letter of the Torah assuming that the letters are incarnations of the divine potencies.

It must be stressed that both of these divine stratagems for preserving monotheism (that is, the ceremonial law and religious diversity) are not foolproof. Mendelssohn notes that almost immediately after receiving the Torah, the Israelites worshipped the golden calf.[57] Similarly, simply recognizing the plurality of ways of representing metaphysical truth does not guarantee that one will not worship one's own representations. One may regard the other representations as deviant and seek to stamp them out. The idea, rather, is that given the human tendency to error and deception, these two stratagems aid individuals in avoiding idolatry.

In sum, Mendelssohn's account of the plurality of religious expression is not merely a statement of fact. Rather, religious pluralism is a value insofar as it protects against the tendency to distort religious truth by thinking that it can be represented perfectly adequately using sensible signs. In this way, religious diversity promotes human perfection. The potency of Mendelssohn's defense of religious pluralism derives from its uniting monotheism's doctrine of divine unity with the pagan notion of divine translatability.

Critical Appraisal

Mendelssohn's theory of religious diversity raises a number of problems. First, it seems to threaten religious "anarchy." If more representations of identical religious truths are better, this seems to encourage differentiation not only between religious groups but likewise within them. Apparently, the more religious groups divide and subdivide the better. But does not this potentially destroy the integrity of the positive religions that Mendelssohn strives so strenuously to preserve?

Second, does Mendelssohn's theory do justice to the unique features of positive religions? By explaining religious language as expressions of rational, universal religious ideas, is he not imposing on historical religions an artificial structure that masks the uniqueness of particular religious traditions and that threatens to level the historical diversity found within them? Recall the criticism leveled by the founder of neo-Orthodoxy, Samson Raphael Hirsch, exactly fifty years after Mendelssohn's death. In his *Nineteen Letters on Judaism,* Hirsch praised Mendelssohn's "brilliant personality" but complained that Mendelssohn "did not build

57 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8: 185-86; idem, *Jerusalem*, 120; idem, *JubA,* 16: 327-341.

up Judaism as a science from *within* itself."[58]

Despite these reservations, it is worth noting an intriguing implication of Mendelssohn's theory. Maximum religious diversity is part of the providential design, which one must not frustrate. Therefore, one must not abandon one's religion without regard for that religion's future. The responsibility for maintaining religious diversity, however, seems to apply not only to one's native religion but to all religions. Hence, Mendelssohn's theory yields the result that every individual has a duty to foster the existence and rationality not only of their native religion but of other religions as well.[59]

What impact did Mendelssohn's defense of religious pluralism have on subsequent religious philosophy? This is an extremely complicated issue, so I will limit myself to three observations. First, in the German philosophical world, Mendelssohn's theory was of little importance as most thinkers considered his commitment to speculative metaphysics out of date in light of Kant's critical philosophy. Second, many of Mendelssohn's disciples neither appreciated nor understood their master's theory. Thus, a mere thirteen years after Mendelssohn's death, his protégé David Friedländer cited *Jerusalem* extensively in his famous letter to Provost Abraham Teller in which he proposed merging Enlightened Judaism with Enlightened Christianity. Third, while many German Reform Jewish thinkers looked to Mendelssohn as having laid the groundwork for defining Judaism as ethical monotheism, Mendelssohn's defense of religious pluralism played little or no role for them. While these thinkers are quite diverse, many tried to justify separate Jewish religious existence by claiming Judaism's unique *philosophical theology*, a point that Mendelssohn rejected.

In the twentieth century, Jewish thinkers such as Abraham Joshua Heschel, Joseph Soloveitchik, and David Novak have, each in their own ways, offered Jewish theological defenses of religious pluralism. A detailed investigation of how Mendelssohn's defense of religious pluralism compares with recent Jewish theories of religious pluralism is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, I would like to venture a few prelimi-

58 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Nineteen Letters on Judaism,* trans. B. Drachman (New York: Feldheim, 1969), 123; my emphasis.

59 In pleading for religious diversity in *Jerusalem,* Mendelssohn is concerned with addressing Christian rulers such as Joseph II, who hoped for religious union as a way of facilitating the conversion of the Jews.

nary observations on the relationship between Mendelssohn's theory and the thought of Heschel.

Heschel was among the twentieth century's most passionate defenders of religious pluralism. With his characteristic flair for the dramatic, Heschel called for the creation of a body called "The United Religions," which would parallel the United Nations.[60]

The theoretical mechanics of Heschel's defense of religious pluralism are remarkably close to Mendelssohn's, although Heschel never mentions the great *Maskil* by name. Like Mendelssohn, Heschel stresses that all religions worship the same God, even citing the verse from Malachi (1:11) quoted by Mendelssohn.[61] Heschel likewise notes that God transcends all religions and calls any attempt to identify God with a particular religion "idolatrous," writing: "Religion is a means not an end. It becomes idolatrous when regarded as an end in itself. Over and above all being stands the Creator and Lord of history. He who transcends all. To equate God and religion is idolatry."[62] Like Mendelssohn, Heschel holds that God cannot be adequately described: "The ultimate truth is not capable of being fully and adequately expressed in concepts and words . . . the voice of God reaches spirit of man in a variety of ways, multiplicity of languages."[63]

Finally, Heschel suggests that religious diversity is part of the providential plan[64] and he rejects attempts to form a unified religion.[65] But while Heschel follows Mendelssohn very far, he accepts the Kantian critique of Mendelssohn's rationalist metaphysics, and this, to my mind, introduces an incoherence into Heschel's position. According to Heschel, individual, emotional faith is the primary vehicle for belief in God.[66] This faith is a distinctively private affair.[67] At the same time, as we

60 Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion Is an Island," *Union Theological Seminary Quarterly Review* 21, no. 2 (1966): 11.

61 Ibid., 14. See n. 30 above.

62 Ibid., 13.

63 Ibid., 15.

64 See ibid., 14: "perhaps it is the will of God that in this aeon there should be diversity in our forms of devotion. . . . In this aeon diversity of religions is the will of God."

65 Abraham Joshua Heschel, "From Mission to Dialogue," *Conservative Judaism* 21, no. 3 (1967): 7, and "No Religion is an Island, n. 11: "In a world of conformity, religions can be easily leveled down to the lowest common denominator."

66 As Heschel eloquently puts it, "individual moments of faith are mere waves in the endless ocean of mankind's reaching out to God" ("No Religion is an Island," n. 9).

67 Ibid., 11: "Faith and the power of insight and devotion can only grow in privacy." While accepting Kant's critique of Mendelssohn's rationalist metaphysics, Heschel clearly does not accept Kant's

have seen, Heschel affirms that all religions worship the same God.[68] But without a rational basis for belief in God, how does Heschel know that individuals from different religions worship the same God? Heschel, whose primary audience is Jewish and Christian, has a ready answer. This certainty comes from the fact that Jews and Christians both accept the Hebrew Scriptures. But this, of course, begs the question in relation to Muslims, who think that the Jews corrupted the Hebrew Scriptures and even more so for religions that do not accept the authority of the Hebrew Bible.

In sum, by acknowledging the difficulty in fully grasping God while affirming that God's existence and attributes can be known through reason or common sense, Mendelssohn is able to present a robust defense of religious pluralism that embraces both the unity of all religions as well as the necessity of religious diversity. While contemporary theologians such as Heschel gravitate toward the skeptical side of Mendelssohn's position, many are deeply uncomfortable with the dogmatic side. At the same time, many contemporary theologians do not want to dispense with the idea that all religions worship the same God, which is seen as key for making religion a basis for human unity. The question is: Can we affirm the common divine center of all religions once we abandon rational theology?

rational theology. His position is far closer to Friedrich Schleiermacher's.

68 Heschel, "From Mission to Dialogue," 6, "No Religion is an Island, n. 9.

IV. Aesthetics and the Infinite: Moses Mendelssohn on the Poetics of Biblical Prophecy

Recent discussions of Jewish aesthetics have challenged the once-standard view that while Greek culture is essentially ocular, Hebraic culture is essentially aural.[1] On the standard view, the Jewish eschewal of the visual is rooted in the second of the Ten Commandments, which prohibits the fashioning of "a sculptured image or any likeness of what is in the heavens above or in the earth below or in the waters under the earth."[2]

Elliot Wolfson stresses the tension within Judaism between the sense that God can be perceived in physical form and the biblical prohibition against making visual representations of God.[3] One way that mystics and philosophers navigated this tension was by claiming that the mystic could visualize God through the imagination.[4] But recognizing the necessary limitation of any visualization of God,[5] mystics often interpreted these visions as hermeneutical operations of the imagination that clothed the perception of the divine in sensible forms. Given God's ineffability, these forms necessarily occluded God in the very process of revealing him.[6]

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1 See Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ:: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3-5, 13-16, 393-95; Kalman P. Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3-4, 13-15. For examples of authors who employ this typical contrast, see the sources quoted in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 13, especially Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 3-23; Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1967), 3, 179-91; Martin Buber, *Darko shel Hamikra* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1978), 41-58.

2 See Exod. 20:3; Deut. 5:8.

3 See E. R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum,* 394.

4 Ibid., 7-8, 324

5 See Exod. 33:20; Deut. 4:12, 15.

6 See E. R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum,* 7-8, 181, 207. Aaron W. Hughes shows how a similar approach animates medieval Jewish Neoplatonists, who see terrestrial beauty as a means of attaining knowledge of the divine despite the inadequacy of these images. As beauty is perceived through the imagination, the imagination is "primarily hermeneutical . . . mak[ing] the incorporeal

Like Wolfson, Kalman Bland criticizes the dichotomy between Greek ocular and Hebraic aural culture. But Bland's focus is different, for he is primarily interested in showing that this dichotomy reflects a distorted view of Judaism's attitude toward the visual arts. Following Moshe Barasch, Bland distinguishes between a "comprehensive" and a "restrictive" interpretation of the second commandment. The "comprehensive" interpretation "rejects every mimetic image" regardless of what the image depicts, while the restrictive interpretation only prohibits fashioning icons of the divinity.[7] Bland argues that the "restrictive" interpretation of the second commandment reflects a "pre-modem consensus," while the "comprehensive" interpretation is an invention of modern "Germanophone" Jewish thinkers. Writing in the wake of Kant and Hegel, these thinkers arbitrarily defined Judaism as "preeminently spiritual, coterminous with ethics, and quintessentially universal."[8] Drawing on Romantic treatments of poetry, they reinforced this account by developing the myth of Jewish aurality and aniconism.[9] In this way, Bland concludes that Judaism has not traditionally been averse to the visual arts.

Bland's work on German-Jewish aesthetics is pioneering and very suggestive. But by beginning with Jewish responses to Kant and Hegel, he omits the founder of German-Jewish philosophy, Moses Mendelssohn. In the introduction to his book, Bland writes that his task is "not to write the complete and final word . . . [but] to put things on the agenda . . . [with the] hope that our work is superceded." My intention is not to supercede Bland's work, but to build upon it.

Like later German-Jewish thinkers, Mendelssohn contrasts Hebraic and Hellenic art, but his contrast is different. For Mendelssohn, the dichotomy is not between Hebrew aurality and Greek visuality, but rather between alienating plastic/dead letter and correlating poetic/living script. While Hellenic poetry generally aims at inflaming the senses, Hebraic poetry aims at putting heart and mind in harmony by giving sensible expression to abstract metaphysical truths through vivid visual imagery.

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corporeal and . . . giv[ing] the formless form." See Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 113, 147, 160.

7 See Moshe Barasch, *Icons: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 13, 15-18, cited in Bland, *Artless Jew*, 59-60.

8 Ibid., 5, 14-16.

9 Ibid., 16, 20.

Mendelssohn's biblical aesthetics are conditioned by the context in which he writes. While Bland identifies Kant and Hegel as the central polemical context for later German-Jewish aesthetics, I see Spinoza's treatment of prophecy as Mendelssohn's main concern. In Mendelssohn's view, the chief weakness of Spinoza's historical-critical approach is that it seeks the Bible's literal meaning at the expense of appreciating its literary features. The source of this is Spinoza's failure to understand aesthetics as a sphere with its own standards of validity. In consequence, Spinoza interprets prophetic visions as literal truth claims about God and nature, which unsurprisingly he finds philosophically wanting. For Mendelssohn, however, aesthetic considerations show how these visions are better understood as religious poetry, whose purpose is to convey metaphysical truths in emotionally stirring ways.

It would be wrong, however, to reduce Mendelssohn's position to countering Spinoza. For Mendelssohn's biblical aesthetics emerge from a complex of factors, including his development of philosophical Wolffianism, his theological optimism, his commitment to religious pluralism, his affirmation of biblical and rabbinic authority, his opposition to Christology, and his immersion in medieval Jewish philosophy. These factors, by no means exhaustive, are woven into a coherent whole through Mendelssohn's genius.

This chapter will have four parts. In the first part, I will discuss Spinoza's challenge to biblical authority and the dissemination of these views in Mendelssohn's time. In the second part, I will outline Mendelssohn's aesthetics and the connection between his aesthetics and philosophy of religion, which forms the background for his biblical aesthetics. In the third part, I will sketch Mendelssohn's claim that Hebrew aesthetics are superior to Greek aesthetics in facilitating the transmission of abstract metaphysical truths in moving ways without succumbing to idolatry, and I will connect this with his treatment of ritual law in *Jerusalem*. I will conclude with some methodological reflections.

Spinoza's Challenge

Mendelssohn had a complex relationship with Spinoza. When Mendelssohn began his literary career, Spinoza was widely vilified as an atheist. In Mendelssohn's first published work, *The Philosophical Dialogues* (1755), he defended Spinoza by claiming that Spinoza made crucial

contributions to the development of the German Enlightenment. But in his last works, *Morning Hours* and *To Lessing's Friends* (1785-1786), Mendelssohn was forced to fend off charges that his friend Lessing was a Spinozist, and he attacked Spinoza for his atheism.[10] But Spinoza's atheism was not all that Mendelssohn found problematic, for in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (henceforth: *TTP*) Spinoza had outlined an historical-critical approach to the Bible that threatened Mendelssohn's commitment to biblical and rabbinic authority.[11]

Mendelssohn considers Spinoza's approach to biblical prophecy especially troubling. Spinoza questions the validity of the biblical prophets' teachings about God and the universe. While Maimonides claimed that the prophets had perfected intellects and that their visions should be understood as allegorical presentations of rational truths, Spinoza's historical method, which involves reading the Bible literally through a proper knowledge of Hebrew grammar and sensitivity to the context in which the Bible was originally written, leads him to conclude that the prophets are best understood as oriental soothsayers dominated by overactive imaginations.[12] So, for example, while Maimonides claims that Moses was a philosopher who affirmed the unity and incorporeality of God, Spinoza argues that careful study of the Bible shows that Moses was a primitive thinker who believed in the existence of multiple deities and who thought that YHWH was corporeal being dwelling in the heavens.[13] Spinoza concludes that since many of the prophets' metaphysical doctrines are irrational and contradictory, one need not accept the Bible's authority in the realm of speculation and that people should be free to think for themselves.[14]

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10 I explore Mendelssohn's relationship to Spinoza in detail in my book *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

11 Spinoza's approach to the Bible cannot be seen as an attack on biblical authority *in toto,* since he seeks to preserve biblical authority in the moral and political spheres. See chapter 2 of this book. Mendelssohn's difficulties with Spinoza's conclusions in the *TTP* are multiple. Spinoza's rejection of Jewish election and the authority of ritual law especially disturbed him. For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on issues directly related to Spinoza's method of biblical interpretation. For detailed discussion of some of the other issues, see Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom,* chapter 2.

12 See Benedict Spinoza, *TTP,* in *Spinoza Opera,* ed. Carl Gebhardt, vol. 3 (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925), 15-44, 97-117; *Theological-Political Treatise,* edited and trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2001), 9-34, 86-104 (henceforth: *TPT*).

13 See Spinoza, *TTP,* 29-44, 70; *TPT,* 21-34, 60.

14 A second element of Spinoza's approach to the Bible that Mendelssohn found troubling was Spinoza's questioning the origin and integrity of the Masoretic Bible and his mocking rabbinic interpretation. Edward Breuer has dealt with some of these issues in *The Limits of Enlightenment:*

The extent to which Mendelssohn had firsthand knowledge of Spinoza's biblical criticism is an open question.[15] But there is no doubt that Spinoza's approach to the Bible was well known to him through contemporary writers who adopted Spinoza's methodology and disseminated his views. Spinoza's view of biblical prophecy was made widespread through Lessing's sensational publication of Hermann Samuel Reimarus's *Fragments of the Unnamed Author*, to which Lessing appended "Counterpropositions," which affirmed that the Old Testament prophets taught metaphysical doctrines that contravened natural religion.[16] And in his *Education of the Human Race,* Lessing famously criticized the rabbis for trying to read rational doctrines back into the Bible through "petty, warped, hairsplitting" interpretations.[17]

Jews, Germans, and the Eighteenth Century Study of Scripture (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). I have some things to add to Breuer's excellent work on this subject, but I leave it to another occasion.

15 Most scholars assume that Mendelssohn read the *TTP* carefully. See Julius Guttmann, "Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* and Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise,*" in *Studies in Jewish Thought,* ed. Alfred Jospe (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 361-86; Michael Morgan, "History and Modem Jewish Thought: Spinoza and Mendelssohn on the Ritual Law," *Judaism* 30, no. 4 (1981): 467-78; Ze'ev Levy, *Baruch Spinoza-Seine Aufnahme durch die jüdischen Denker in Deutschland* (Berlin: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2001), 31-58. Friedrich Niewöhner, however, challenges this prevailing assumption, claiming that Mendelssohn had no firsthand knowledge of the *TTP.* See Niewöhner, "'Es hat nicht jeder das Zeug zu einem Spinoza.' Mendelssohn als Philosoph des Judentums," in *Moses Mendelssohn und die Kreise seiner Wirksamkeit,* ed. M. Albrecht and E. Engel, N. Hinske (Tübingen; Max Niemeyer, 1994), 291-314. For our purposes, it is not important to decide this issue.

16 In the fourth fragment, published by Lessing in 1777, Reimarus argues that the Bible does not conform with reason as evidenced by its failure to teach rational doctrines such as the immortality of the soul, reward and punishment in a future life, and the union of pious souls with God. See *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing Werke,* ed. Wilfred Barner, et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989), 8:246-247 (henceforth: Lessing, *Werke*) Mendelssohn is clearly familiar with the Reimarus Fragments because Lessing showed him Reimarus's entire manuscript in 1770, some seven years before he published fragments from it. See Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (London: Littmann, 1998), 254-56. In Lessing's fourth "Counterproposition" to the Reimarus Fragments, Lessing goes even further, noting that the Old Testament does not teach monotheism or the immortality of the soul. The Jews only developed these doctrines when they encountered philosophically informed nations while in Babylonian captivity (586-516 BCE). See Lessing, *Werke,* 8:328-30; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, translated and ed. H. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 75-77 (henceforth, *Philosophy and Theological Writings*). See also Lessing's *Education of the Human Race,* part of which he appended to the fourth "Counterproposition" and which he published in full in 1780 in Lessing, *Werke*, 10:75-88; *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 218-31. According to Julius Guttmann, Reimarus's critique of the biblical prophets is drawn indirectly from Spinoza by means of the English Deists William Warburton and Thomas Morgan. See Guttmann, *Religion and Knowledge* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), 224 n. 3 [in Hebrew].

17 See Lessing, *Werke,* 10:88, #55; *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 230, #51.

In confronting the Spinozist challenge to prophetic authority, Mendelssohn is caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, his critical exegetical sense as well as his interest in opposing Christological allegoresis leads him to accept Spinoza's emphasis on literal meaning *(peshat),* which demands knowledge of Hebrew grammar and sensitivity to historical context.[18] But as a committed Jew, Mendelssohn cannot accept Spinoza's conclusions regarding biblical prophecy.

The Archimedean point of Mendelssohn's reply to Spinoza is that Spinoza's exclusive emphasis on literal interpretation is far too limited. For Spinoza, literal interpretation involves translating prophetic pronouncements about God and nature into speculative, semantic truth claims that not surprisingly end up appearing primitive, unscientific, and confused. What Spinoza lacks is an appreciation that biblical prophecy should be understood using aesthetic criteria, which have their own standards of validity, rather than as primitive speculation. In a word, what leads Spinoza astray is his crude understanding of aesthetics.[19]

For Spinoza, human perfection involves the "knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole of nature."[20] "Beauty," however, is a mode of imagining that is grounded, not in the nature of things, but rather in human enjoyment.[21] Spinoza adopts a relativistic, instrumen-

18 On the centrality of *peshat* for Mendelssohn, see Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Stuttgart-Band Cannstatt: F. Frommann, 1971), 14:244-45 (henceforth: Mendelssohn, *JubA*). On Mendelssohn's emphasis on the necessity of knowing Hebrew grammar for understanding *peshat*, see Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:249-67. On the importance of knowing historical context for understanding *peshat*, see Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:95, 304, 12.2, 22; 16:58-59; 18:133. See David Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 65-87.

19 James Morrison notes that Spinoza's writings "contain only a few brief and scattered remarks about art and beauty" and that Spinoza was "fundamentally alien, even hostile towards art and beauty" ("Why Spinoza Had No Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47 [1989]: 359-65). The critique that Spinoza has an inadequate theory of aesthetics goes back to Leibniz. See Filippio Mignini, "Le Problème de l'esthétique a la lumière de quelques interpretations de Leibniz à Hegel," in *Spinoza Entre Lumière et Romantisme*, ed. J. Bonnamour (Fontenay: École Normale Supérieure, 1985), 123-42; Lee Rice, "Spinoza's Relativistic Aesthetics," *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie* 58, no. 3 (1996): 476-89. Rice attempts a more positive reading of Spinoza's attitude toward aesthetics.

20 See Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus de Intellecus Emendatione*, in *Spinoza Opera*, ed. C. Gebhardt, vol. 2 (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925), 8 (henceforth: *TIE*). English translation, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, translated and ed. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 1:10 (henceforth: *TEI*); Spinoza, *TTP*, vol. 2, 59-60; *TPT*, 49-50.

21 See Spinoza, *Ethica,* in *Spinoza Opera,* Appendix to Part I, Vol. 2, 81-82 (henceforth: Spinoza, *Ethica*. In referencing particular passages in the *Ethica*, I will use the following standard abbreviations:

talist account of beauty, according to which people call those objects "beautiful" that they imagine exist for the purpose of being "conducive to their health [*valetudini conducat*]."[22] But since people have different bodies, it is no wonder that "so many controversies" have arisen about what constitutes beauty.[23] Furthermore, since the notion of beauty presupposes intentionality, it is based on the mistaken assumption that nature contains final causes.[24] In consequence, the person who understands reality through intellect alone observes no beauty.[25] And given that Spinoza identifies perfection with reality, beauty is not a perfection.[26]

In the *TTP,* Spinoza opposes imagination to reason. He presents a negative view of the imagination, associating it with subjectivity and error while connecting reason with objectivity and truth.[27] Since the

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E=Ethica, followed by the part number; D=definition; A=axiom; P=proposition; C=corollary; S=scholium); English translation: *Ethics in the Collected Works of Spinoza*, 1:444 (henceforth: Spinoza, *Ethics*); Baruch Spinoza, *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley and ed. Michael Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), letter 32, 848; letter 54, 899.

22 See Spinoza, *Ethica*, 82; *Ethics*, Appendix to Part I, 445; Spinoza, *Complete Works*, letter 54, 899 (henceforth: *Letters*). This is likewise evident in Spinoza's account of the medicinal value of art. See *Ethica*, EIVP45C2S, II:244-45; *Ethics*, 572. In the preface to Part IV of the *Ethics*, Spinoza gives the example of music, which he writes is good for one who is experiencing melancholy, and bad for one who is in mourning. See ibid., EIV, preface, II:208; *Ethics*, 545. Note that Shirley translates the term *valetudo*, not as "health" but as "well-being."

23 See Spinoza, *Ethica*, 81-83; *Ethics*, 444-45. It is important to consider how this fits with Spinoza's claim that one may use an "exemplar" of human nature as a model for human perfection. See Spinoza, *Ethica*, 208; *Ethics*, preface to Part IV, 545. If one can find certain things that promote health in people generally, it may be possible to form a notion of "objective" beauty in the sense of intersubjective agreement. Lee Rice tries to offer a reconstruction of Spinoza's position along these lines in "Spinoza's Relativistic Aesthetics," *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie* 58, no. 3 (1996): 481-89.

24 Spinoza, *Ethica*, 2:77-83; *Ethics*, Appendix to Part I, 439-46. Given that human beings are part of nature, Spinoza would appear to level the difference between the natural and the artificial such that there can be neither natural nor artificial beauty. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 3:57-58; *TTP*, 48. However, there is an important scholarly debate over whether or not Spinoza allows final causality in respect to human beings. See Edwin Curley, "On Bennett's Spinoza: The Issue of Teleology," and Jonathan Bennett, "Spinoza and Teleology: A Reply to Curley," in *Spinoza Issues and Directions*, ed. Edwin Curley and Pierre François Moreau (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 39-53 and 53-57, respectively. For further discussion, see Michael Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," in *the Cambridge companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 252-57.

25 See Spinoza, *Letters*, letter 54, 899.

26 See Spinoza, *Ethica* IID6, 2:85; *Ethics*, 447; Spinoza, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*, in *Collected Works of Spinoza*, Proposition 6, Lemma I, Note 2, vol. 1, 251-52. But see Spinoza, *Ethica*¸ 2:208-209; *Ethics*, preface to Part IV, 545-46.

27 Shlomo Pines points out that in the *TTP* Spinoza casts the imagination and intellect as opposed faculties. Unlike Maimonides, who thinks that the imagination can be brought under the dominion of the intellect, for Spinoza these faculties are so opposed that they exclude one another.

prophets were dominated by their imaginations, Spinoza thinks that they were not generally fit for philosophical contemplation.[28] Given that Spinoza valorizes rational knowledge as true perfection and does not consider beauty a perfection, it is not surprising that he severs the aesthetic qualities of the Bible from objective, rational truth. For Spinoza, the imaginative fantasies of the prophets were means of promoting moral and political obedience. These imaginative fantasies were only true accidentally.[29]

In contrast to Spinoza's relatively scant treatment of aesthetics, for Mendelssohn aesthetics was a major philosophical concern. Indeed, many scholars have considered Mendelssohn's greatest philosophical contribution to be his work on aesthetics.[30] But what has been generally overlooked is how Mendelssohn's aesthetics inform his approach to the Bible and constitute a crucial element in his response to Spinoza's biblical criticism.

Mendelssohn's aesthetics are grounded in his three-faculty doctrine of the soul.[31] Although he presents this doctrine in various places in slightly different forms, its basic outline is clear. The soul has three capacities: the cognitive capacity (*Erkentnissvermögen*), the approval capacity

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So if the prophets possessed lively imaginations, they could not also have possessed perfected intellects. While overtly opposed to Maimonides, Pines points out that Spinoza could have drawn the conclusion that the prophets were not philosophers from an esoteric interpretation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, part II, chapter 29, and Pines notes how Spinoza was preceded in his view of the prophets by the fourteenth-century Spanish Jewish philosopher Isaac Pulgar in his dialogue *Ezer ha-Dat*. See Pines, "Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the Jewish Philosophical Tradition," in *Studies in the History of Jewish Thought*¸ ed. W.Z. Harvey and M. Idel (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 5:712-16. For further discussion of the problem of prophetic error in medieval Jewish philosophy, see Charles Touati, "Le problème de l'inerrance prophétique dans la théologie juive du moyen àge," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 174 (1968): 169-87. It is important to note that in the *Ethics* Spinoza does not cast the imagination and intellect as opposed to one another as he does in the *Tractatus*. See Gilles Deleuze, "Spinoza and the Three Ethics," in *The New Spinoza,* ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 21-34; Edwin Curley, "Experience in Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge," in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Marjorie Grene (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor Press, 1973), 35-59.

28 Spinoza does allow certain exceptions including Solomon, Paul, and Jesus. See Spinoza, *TTP,* 29, 41, 66-68; *TPT,* 27, 31, 56-57 and above, chapter 2.

29 On role of Bible in promoting morality for Spinoza, see above chapter 2.

30 See Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1996), 326; Ernst Cassirer, "Die Philosophie Moses Mendelssohn," in *Moses Mendelssohn zur 200 jährigen Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages* (Berlin: Lambert Schneider, 1929), 55; Frederick Beiser, *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 196.

31 My understanding of Mendelssohn's aesthetics has been greatly advanced by Frederick Beiser's discussion in *Diotima's Children,* chapter 7.

(*Billigungsvermögen*), and the capacity for desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*).[32] Mendelssohn accepts Wolff's teleological psychology according to which human beings' sole drive is to seek perfection, which Mendelssohn defines as "the harmony of the manifold."[33] The term *Bildung* (education, formation) describes the process of perfecting one's faculties in general, but each faculty has its own distinctive perfection. Perfecting the cognitive capacity involves knowing the true, and the process of achieving this is called "enlightenment" (*Aufklärung*).[34] Perfecting the capacity for approval involves feeling the good and the beautiful, while perfecting the capacity for desire involves seeking to actualize the good and creating beauty in the world. The process of perfecting the capacities of approval and desire is called "culture" (*Kultur*).[35] Mendelssohn summarizes his ideal of perfection in his favorite motto; "Man's destiny: to seek truth, love beauty, will the good, and do the best."[36]

In contrast to Spinoza, for Mendelssohn there is a deep connection between rational perfection and the appreciation of beauty. Mendelssohn defines beauty as a "sensuous knowledge of a perfection."[37] In doing so, he follows Leibniz's understanding of sensation and Christian Wolff's definition of perfection: Leibniz defines "sensation" as confused knowledge, that is, knowledge where one cannot clearly separate all the distinguishing features of a thing,[38] while Wolff defines "perfection" as the harmony of a maximally diverse manifold.[39] For Mendelssohn, sensuous knowledge of perfection therefore involves "perceiving a large array of an object's features all at once without being able to separate them

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32 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2, 59-66, 69-71. Throughout his career, Mendelssohn speaks of three basic capacities, though his terminology changes. In a short piece from 1776, Mendelssohn divides the soul into the capacity for knowledge *(Erkentnissvermögen),* the capacity for feeling *(Empfindungsvermögen),* and the capacity for desire *(Begehrungsvermögen).* See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.1, 276-77. In his 1763 *Treatise on Evidence,* he distinguishes between reason *(Vernunft),* sense and imagination *(Sinne und Einbildungskraft),* and inclination and desire *(Neigungen und Leidenschaften).* See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 2:326. For a trenchant analysis of Mendelssohn's theory of the soul's faculties, see Beiser, *Diotima's Children,* 240-243.

33 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:325-26; Mendelssohn, *Philosophical Writings,* ed. D. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 90-91 (henceforth: *Philosophical Writings).*

34 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 6.1, 115; *Philosophical Writings,* 313-14.

35 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 6.1, 115; *Philosophical Writings,* 313.

36 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2, 66; Alexander Altmann, "Mendelssohn on Education and the Image of Man," in *Studies in Jewish Thought,* ed. Alfred Jospe (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 399. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 15.2, 23-24.

37 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:431; *Philosophical Writings,* 172.

38 See Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Leibniz* (London: Routledge, 1997), 168.

39 See Mendelssohn, *JubA* 1:325-26; *Philosophical Writings,* 90-91.

clearly."[40] There are three elements that make an object appear beautiful. First, the object has to be perceived as a unity whose various parts serve the whole. Second, it has to be perceived as complex, having many parts that can be taken in all at once. Third, these parts have to be sensed in such a way that one cannot distinguish these parts clearly. For example, a rose is beautiful insofar as we can sense it as a whole, distinct from other things, and take in its various parts—that is, its many petals, its stem, its leaves, and its thorns—all at once without clearly distinguishing the parts in the moment of perception. The sensation accompanying experiencing beauty is pleasure.

Consider an example of how the various faculties can be perfected, using the doctrine of divine providence. As regards the cognitive capacity, perfection involves clear knowledge of the law of divine providence according to which various individuals receive their just deserts.[41] When this law is not known clearly but is experienced sensibly, one feels beauty, which, for example, we appreciate in viewing artistic creations in which justice prevails.[42] The beauty that we appreciate in artistic works that depict the triumph of justice can in turn awaken our desire to promote justice in the world, which constitutes the perfection of our faculty of desire.[43]

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40 Ibid.

41 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:251-53: *Philosophical Writings*, 23-24.

42 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 15.2, 23-24.

43 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3:1, 276-77; *Philosophical Writings,* 309-10. Mendelssohn's doctrine of human perfection forms an important contrast with that of Maimonides and explains a difference in their respective approaches to beauty. Like Mendelssohn, Maimonides posits different faculties of the soul. But while Mendelssohn's conception of perfection is egalitarian, with each faculty having equal dignity and no perfection being subservient to another, for Maimonides these perfections are arranged hierarchically, with the *telos* of human existence being philosophical contemplation of God through the faculty of reason. In consequence, unlike Mendelssohn, for whom appreciation of beauty is an independent perfection on par with intellectual perfection, for Maimonides appreciation of beauty is of merely instrumental value, settling the individual's disposition to prepare him for intellectual perfection. See Maimonides, "Eight Chapters," chapter 5 in Moses Maimonides, *Ethical Writings of Maimonides,* ed. Raymond Weiss and Charles Butterworth (New York: Dover, 1975), 75. In stressing its instrumental function, Maimonides' understanding of beauty resembles Spinoza's. The main difference between Spinoza and Maimonides is that for Maimonides imagination can be perfected and be brought under the dominion of the intellect and so transmit rational truths in sensible forms, which is what happens in prophecy. In contrast, at least in the *TTP*, Spinoza casts imagination as so opposed to intellect that it cannot be brought under its control and thus generally errs. See Spinoza, *TTP*, chapters 1-2; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:32. But see I:73, where Maimonides describes imagination as the "contrary" of reason and see note 27 above. For further discussion of the role of imagination in prophecy for Maimonides and the contrast with Mendelssohn's account of prophecy, see note 74 below.

In sum, both Spinoza and Mendelssohn agree that beauty presupposes final causality. But while Spinoza views final causality as an imaginative idea that is not a property of nature considered in itself, Mendelssohn thinks that final causality is demanded by the principle of sufficient reason and hence is an objective aspect of nature.[44] This then leads to differing assessments of beauty. For Spinoza, beauty is an imaginative judgment inhering in the mind of the observer alone. Appreciation of beauty cannot then constitute a perfection, since perfection is equivalent with reality. For Mendelssohn, however, beauty constitutes the sensible correlate of contemplating perfection intellectually. While grasping perfection intellectually is the function of philosophy and leads to the perfection of the intellect, sensing this harmony yields aesthetic appreciation and leads to the perfection of the faculty of approval. This is a distinct perfection of equal value with intellectual perfection.[45]

Mendelssohn on the Aesthetic Education of Man

For Mendelssohn, aesthetics serve a crucial pedagogic function. While for Spinoza aesthetics are valuable as a means of encouraging political obedience among the masses through the heart rather than the mind, for Mendelssohn aesthetics are a way of bringing the heart and mind into harmony. Mendelssohn's account of the educational function of aesthetics grows out of a difficulty that he finds in Wolff's philosophical anthropology. While Mendelssohn accepts Wolff's claim that our sole drive is to achieve perfection, from early in his literary career he is bothered by the problem of how a person could willingly choose imperfection.[46] This is why Mendelssohn's first work on aesthetics, the *Letters on Sentiments,* concludes with an extended discussion of why a person would ever commit suicide.[47] In other aesthetic writings Mendelssohn addresses why we enjoy violent spectacles (e.g., cock fighting) or tragic theatre.[48] For our purposes, however, the most relevant problem that Mendelssohn confronts is how a person can will evil. In his earliest writ-

44 See note 24 above.

45 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2, 68.

46 See Beiser, *Diotima's Children,* 199-210.

47 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:271-75, 287-303; *Philosophical Writings* 39-43, 55-70.

48 See Mendelssohn, *JubA* 1:268-69, 274-75; 290-91, 305-309, 383-97; *Philosophical Writings,* 36-37, 42-43, 58, 72-75, 131-44, 173-74.

ings, Mendelssohn accepts Plato's solution to this problem: a person chooses evil because she mistakenly perceives it to be good.[49] But Mendelssohn soon realizes that this solution is incomplete, for there clearly are cases where people know the good intellectually, yet nevertheless choose evil. Mendelssohn first discusses this problem in his 1756 essay, "On Controlling Inclinations," but he addresses it most fully in his 1761 essay "Rhapsody."[50]

In "Rhapsody," Mendelssohn distinguishes between two ways in which we can know the good. There is insight that is purely theoretical but that has no effect on our actions, which he calls "speculative" (*speculative*) or "ineffective" (*unwirksame*) knowledge. But there is likewise insight that stirs us to action, which he calls "pragmatic" *(pragmatische)* or "effective" *(wirksame)* knowledge.[51] The "effectiveness" of knowledge is a function of three factors. First, there is the *degree* of the perfection represented. The greater the perfection represented and the more vivid our representation of it is, the stronger its effect on the will. Second, there is the degree of our *knowledge* of the perfection. The more clearly we know the perfection and with more cognitive certainty, the stronger the effect on our will. Finally, there is the *speed* with which we perceive the perfection. The faster that we perceive it, the more powerfully it will affect our will.[52]

On the basis of these distinctions, Mendelssohn notes that it is possible for a perfection known less clearly to have a greater power over our will than one known more clearly if we perceive the perfection more vividly and quickly. Perfections are perceived more vividly and quickly when they are taken in sensibly than when they are known intellectually.[53] Since art is a means of representing perfections sensibly, it can therefore be a far more powerful motivator than philosophy. Poetic images and similes are particularly effective ways of making ideas vivid.[54]

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49 See Plato, *Protagoras,* in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato,* ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 344-48 (352a-357e of the standard pagination of Plato's works); Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:257, 260, 304-5, 412; *Philosophical Writings,* 28, 30, 71, 158.

50 See Altmann, "Mendelssohn on Education and the Image of Man" 394-401; Beiser, *Diotima's Children,* 203-206.

51 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:413; *Philosophical Writings,* 159; *JubA,* 2:326; *Philosophical Writings*, 304.

52 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:414-15; *Philosophical Writings,* 160. Cf. *JubA* 2:327-28; *Philosophical Writings*, 305-6; Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohns Frühschriften zur Metaphysik* (Tubingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1969), 383-91; Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:112-13; *Jerusalem,* 42-43.

53 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:416; *Philosophical Writings*, 161.

54 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:437; *Philosophical Writings*, 178.

These distinctions help explain how we can know that something is evil in theory and nevertheless desire it. For while we may know intellectually that a particular action is vicious, if it is presented aesthetically in a way that stirs our senses to represent the action as leading to greater perfection in the short term, we can be seduced to choose the vicious course of action against our better judgment.[55] For example, we may know that regularly eating McDonald's bacon double cheeseburgers will lead to the imperfection of our bodies, but if the bacon double cheeseburgers look tender and juicy and are associated with smiling people looking satisfied after having eaten them, we can be led to act against our intellectual judgment. But while art can, in this way, be a force that divides our desires from our intellect, it can also be a way of putting our intellect and desires in harmony. By presenting true perfection in a sensibly pleasing light, art can spur us to virtuous action. Mendelssohn notes that history and fables can make abstract ethical principles concrete, and poetry, painting, sculpture, and rhetoric can "transform dry truths into ardent and sensuous intuitions . . . by transforming impulses into penetrating arrows and dipping them into enchanting nectar."[56] For Mendelssohn, metaphysics plays a crucial role in ethics because three metaphysical principles—God's existence, divine providence, and the immortality of the soul are needed both to ground morality rationally and to motivate one to act ethically.[57] It is worth exploring these points.

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55 This understanding of aesthetics is reflected in Mendelssohn's account of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. Like Maimonides, Mendelssohn takes prelapsarian Adam to reflect the ideal human state. But while Maimonides sees Adam's eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as his turning from his intellectual contemplation of the true and false to involvement with the imaginative fine and bad, Mendelssohn thinks that good and evil are intelligibles. Adam's ideal state was one of harmony between his powers of intellect *(ko'ah ha-sekhel; Erkentnissvermögen),* desire *(ko'ah ha-teshukah; Begehrungsvermögen)* and feeling *(ko'ah ha-hush; Empfindungsvermögen).* He was perfect when he knew the good intellectually, felt it aesthetically as beautiful, and desired it. Adam's sin came about when the power of desire was severed from the true good by being overly strengthened and his thereby becoming drawn to apparent goods. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 15.2, 23-24. Zev Harvey traces Mendelssohn's theory of the harmonious balance of faculties to Plato and Judah Halevi. See Harvey, "Mendelssohn and Maimon on the Tree of Knowledge," in *Sepharad in Ashkenaz*, ed. Irene Zwiep, Andrea Schatz, and Resianne Smidt van Gelder-Fontaine (Amsterdam: Edita, 2007), 185-89.

56 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:423; *Philosophical Writings,* 166-67. Compare *JubA,* 2:327-28; *Philosophical Writings,* 305-306; *JubA* 14: 206; *JubA* 14:76. Also compare Mendelssohn's essay, "What is Enlightenment?," where he writes that enlightenment is related to culture as theory to practice. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 6.1: 115; *Philosophical Writings,* 314. Also see *JubA,* 1:427-28; *Philosophical Writings,* 169-70.

57 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:131; *Jerusalem,* 63. In his "Counter-Reflexions," Mendelssohn enumerates three principles of Judaism: God's existence, divine Providence, and divine revelation of the law.

In a number of places, most notably in his *Treatise on Evidence,* Mendelssohn makes clear that reason can demonstrate the highest principles of ethics without appealing to religion.[58] Ethical obligations are universal, rational laws, which follow from our nature as beings with intellect.[59] One of the ways in which we can know the fundamental law of ethics is by finding the common denominator of all of our natural drives. Given that Mendelssohn thinks that all of our actions aim at perfection, the fundamental law of ethics is "Make your intrinsic and extrinsic condition and that of your fellow human being in the proper proportion as perfect as possible."[60] Our extrinsic condition refers to our body, while our intrinsic condition refers to our soul. Our obligation to seek the perfection of others derives from our desire for our own perfection. Since our perfection is a function of our representations of perfection, we seek to create a world in which we represent others as attaining perfection as well.[61]

But while reason can uncover the universal law of morality, Mendelssohn argues in the *Phäedon* that without belief in immortality of the soul, this law can become contradictory. He begins his argument by accepting Aristotle's definition of the human being as a *zoon politikon,* that is, a political animal. Mendelssohn interprets this to mean that without society a person can achieve neither safety nor perfection, for perfection includes both culture and enlightenment, which cannot be achieved in the state of nature.[62] But for a society to be able to protect itself, it must have a moral right to demand that its citizens sacrifice their lives for the state if the state requires this for its continued existence. According to Mendelssohn, without belief in the immortality of the soul, one's life on earth becomes the "highest good."[63] But if the highest law of morality is to seek perfection and this world is the only place in which perfection

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See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:95.

58 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 2:315-30; *Philosophical Writings,* 295-310; *JubA,* 19:178-79; 15:2, *Commentary to Genesis* 2:9, 23-24.

59 Ibid.

60 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 2:316; *Philosophical Writings*, 296.

61 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:405-408; *Philosophical Writings,* 151-54; *JubA*, 2:316-17; *Philosophical Writings,* 296-97.

62 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:109, 116; *Jerusalem,* 40, 47; *JubA,* 15:2, *Commentary to Genesis* 2:18, "lo tov," 26.

63 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.1, 116. This premise assumes that life is at all times better than death a point that Mendelssohn does not argue for in the *Phäedon*. He argues for this point in letter fourteen of *On Sentiments*. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:293-296; *Philosophical Writings,* 59-63.

can be achieved, one has an "exactly opposite right" *(ein gerade entgegensetzte Rechte)* to preserve one's own life and so to refuse any request to lay down one's life for the state. Indeed, Mendelssohn goes so far as to claim that if one does not believe in the immortality of the soul, then one is within one's right and perhaps even obligated "to cause the destruction of the entire world if this can help prolong one's life."[64] But if one recognizes in this extreme circumstance equally opposing moral rights, this creates intolerable confusion in the moral world.[65] For the idea of two contradictory rights is absurd, given that the moral law is a law of reason.[66] Hence, moral reason demands belief in the immortality of the soul.[67]

But it is not only moral reason that demands theological beliefs; these beliefs are likewise needed in order to be motivated to act ethically. In his defense of divine providence entitled *God's Cause,* Mendelssohn notes that while people generally recognize that morality is binding, they often notice the suffering of the righteous and the prospering of the wicked, which can cause them to despair of morality. It often seems that righteousness is an impediment to prosperity, because the wicked person who takes moral shortcuts is able to get ahead faster.[68] As such, benevolence can come to be seen as "a foppery into which we seek to lure one another so that the simpleton will toil while the clever man enjoys himself and has a good laugh at the other's expense."[69] While the wise man recognizes that benevolence is a crucial component of perfection and hence is its own reward, most people consider benevolence to be a sacrifice *(Verlust)* that demands compensation.[70] Since they do not see this compensation in this world, they require the belief that this

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64 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.1, 117.

65 Ibid.

66 See Mendelssohn, *JubA* 8:115; *Jerusalem*, 46.

67 In the introduction to the *Phädon,* Mendelssohn notes that this argument for the immortality of the soul is completely original. But while the argument can be elaborated by means of the strictest logic, Mendelssohn admits that in the *Phädon,* he presents it in a more popular, less rigorous way. In particular, Mendelssohn does not explain the philosophical basis of our moral obligations. He also does not philosophically deduce the state's right to demand that we sacrifice our lives in times of danger. A number of questions arise from Mendelssohn's presentation. Assuming that one does not believe in the immortality of the soul and that one's life in this world is the highest good, is there a moral obligation to enter society, given its right to demand that one sacrifice one's life?

68 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 14, *Commentary to Ecclesiastes* 9:10, 193.

69 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:131; *Jerusalem,* 63; *JubA,* 14, *Commentary to Ecclesiastes* 9:10, 193.

70 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2, 236-40. On the idea of benevolence as its own reward, see *JubA,* 8:111, 116; *Jerusalem,* 41, 47; *JubA* 6.1: 38,47; *JubA,* 1:405-8; *Philosophical Writings*, 151-54.

injustice is rectified in the next world in order to be motivated to act ethically.[71]

But in order for the metaphysical truths of God's existence, providence, and the immortality of the soul to be effective motivators, they must not simply be uttered or defended through reason, they must be presented in sensibly stirring ways.[72] This helps explain Mendelssohn's concern with developing an attractive philosophical style for which he was famous in his day.[73] It is not only philosophy, however, that has an educational task. The purpose of religion is to educate people to convictions that will motivate them to fulfill their moral duties to one another. As such, religion will naturally be inclined to teach metaphysical truths aesthetically.[74] The problem is that aestheticizing religion runs the risk

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71 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2: 236-40.

72 At the end of the *Treatise on Evidence,* however, Mendelssohn does consider the possibility of a "fortunate genius" *(glückliche Genie)* who can be motivated by reason alone. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 2:329. For some reason, Dahlstrom does not translate this passage.

73 See Aaron W. Hughes's discussion of the literary style of Mendelssohn's *Phädon* in *The Art of Dialogue in Jewish Philosophy,* 138-66, esp. 153-55. Mendelssohn used the form of epistolary exchange in his 1755 *On Sentiments (Über die Empfindungen).* In addition to using the dialogue form in his 1767 *Phädon,* he used the dialogue form in his 1754 *Philosophical Dialogues (Philosophische Gespräche)* and in lectures 4, 14, and 15 of the 1785 *Morning Hours (Morgenstunden).*

74 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:109-10; *Jerusalem,* 40-41. At first glance, Mendelssohn's account of the role of aesthetics in religion seems to have a deep affinity to Maimonides' account. Maimonides notes that the prophet must have a perfected imagination, through which he teaches metaphysical truths using parables and vivid imagery. So, like Mendelssohn, Maimonides holds that one function of prophecy is to present metaphysical truths aesthetically. But there are crucial differences between Maimonides and Mendelssohn on this score. For Maimonides, the aesthetic presentation of religious truth serves a cognitive as well as a moral/political function. On the cognitive level, the prophet uses imaginative imagery to transmit truths to the masses who would not attain this knowledge on their own. For example, Maimonides explains that the Bible describes God as having a body, because the masses imagine that only something physical can exist. However, once people are convinced that God exists, they are instructed that the terms indicating that God has a body have secondary meanings, which do not imply corporeality. Thus, for example, *ayin,* the term used for God's eye, can also mean "providence." See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:26, 44. On the moral/political level, the prophet uses imagery to transmit ideas about the divinity that foster obedience even though such ideas may be false. For example, the Bible often portrays God as getting violently angry with sinners, which Maimonides admits is philosophically untrue though politically useful. See III:28. So for Maimonides, religious aesthetics are needed to guide the masses, who are under the spell of the imagination; whereas for the philosopher, who is guided by intellect, they are unnecessary. In contrast, Mendelssohn thinks that the masses can attain true knowledge of God on their own through common sense and that this knowledge can motivate moral action. The function of aesthetic presentations of religious truth is to put the heart and mind in harmony. This, however, is something needed by all people, philosophers and common people alike. Hence, Mendelssohn's understanding of the role of aesthetics in religion is more egalitarian, blunting the elitist edge present in Maimonides' account.

of idolatry.[75] One of the ways the Bible navigates this danger is by representing God using oral poetic imagery rather than visual images.[76]

Mendelssohn on the Function of Biblical Aesthetics

While Mendelssohn's discussion of idolatry in *Jerusalem* has been treated frequently, it is worthwhile reviewing a few of its main elements. Mendelssohn's conception of idolatry is grounded in his assumption that idolatry emerges from an original, proper conception of God.[77] Idolatry turns on the means used to represent God. Since the function of religion is to transmit metaphysical ideas in emotionally stirring ways, early religious teachers used hieroglyphs and other symbols to represent the deity. The use of these symbols, however, quickly descended into idolatry as people came to fetishize the symbols seeing them as partaking of the divine essence and thus ascribing to them all sorts of magical, divine powers.[78]

For Mendelssohn, representing God using sensible images is not intrinsically problematic. Following Nahmanides, Mendelssohn adopts an extremely restrictive interpretation of the second commandment, according to which the commandment does not even prohibit the fashioning of idols, let alone visual art in general; it only prohibits the fashioning of idols with the intention of worshipping them.[79]

Mendelssohn interprets Jewish ritual law as a divine means to help Jews acquire living, effective knowledge of metaphysical truths, while

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75 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:173-91; *Jerusalem*, 107-25.

76 For a trenchant comparison between Maimonides and Mendelssohn's accounts of idolatry, see Lawrence Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn on the Origins of Idolatry," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism,* ed. A. Ivry, E. R. Wolfson, and A. Arkush (New York: Harwood, 1998), 423-56. For Mendelssohn's account of the role of common sense in religion, see Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2, 33-34, 51-52, 80-83, 197-99; vol. 12.1, 148-51; vol. 12.2, 185-86. Most recently on these issues, see Gideon Freudenthal, *No Religion Without Idolatry: Mendelssohn's Jewish Enlightenment* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), chs. 1, 4-7.

77 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 16:186; 8:179-82; *Jerusalem,* 113-16. See Lawrence Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn on the Origins of Idolatry," 430-31; Michael Stanislawski, "Towards an Analysis of the *Bi'ur* as Exegesis," in *Netiot Ledavid,* ed. Y. Elman, E. Halivni, and Z. Steinfeld (Jerusalem: Orhot, 2004), 144-52.

78 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:176-83; *Jerusalem,* 110-17; *JubA,* 16, *Commentary on Exodus* 32:4, 329.

79 See Mendelssohn; *JubA,* 6, *Commentary on Exodus* 20:4, 189. Compare Nahmanides on Exod. 20:3. While both Nahmanides and Mendelssohn do not see the second commandment as a general prohibition on fashioning idols, they do see such a general prohibition in Exod. 20:20, 34:17 and Lev. 26:1. According to Mendelssohn, God only ordained the more general prohibition after the sin of the golden calf. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 16, *Commentary on Exodus* 34:17, 354.

avoiding idolatry. For the nature of actions is that they are transitory and as such cannot become objects of worship.[80] There are two ways that Halakhah transforms abstract metaphysical truths into effective knowledge. First, Halakhah directs the Jew to contemplate metaphysical truths, since ritual laws are correlated with metaphysical truths. Insofar as Halakhah governs a Jew's daily practice, theological truth is made part of daily living.[81] Second, Halakhah unites heart and mind through its essentially oral nature. The written law has never been sufficient for practice, but requires oral explanation and the living example of a teacher and a community. This helps truth penetrate the heart of the practitioner.[82]

While scholars have noted the educational function of the ritual law for Mendelssohn, they have tended to neglect the fact that biblical poetics serve a similar role for him.[83] Already in *Jerusalem,* Mendelssohn writes that the Bible is a work of "divine beauty" *(göttlichen Schönheit)* that contains an "inexhaustible treasure of rational truths and religious

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80 Of course, rituals can become fetishized, a problem that Mendelssohn does not explicitly address in *Jerusalem.*

81 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:84-185; *Jerusalem,* 118-19. For some recent interpretations of how Halakhah connects doctrine and life according to Mendelssohn, see Michael Morgan, "History and Modern Jewish Thought: Spinoza and Mendelssohn on the Ritual Law," *Judaism* 30:4 (1981): 467-78; Arnold Eisen, "Divine Legislation as 'Ceremonial Script': Mendelssohn on the Commandments," *AJS Review* 15, no. 2 (1990): 239-68; Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment,* 207-21.

82 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:168-70; 184-85, 192-93; *Jerusalem,* 102-4, 118-19, 127-28.

83 I would suggest that part of the reason for this general neglect is the hackneyed slogan that Mendelssohn holds that laws can be revealed, but not doctrines. Recently, Allan Arkush has shown how problematic this view is. Arkush points out that in his "Counter-Reflexions" Mendelssohn writes that "the book of Job . . . the Psalms of David, all the prophets and all the Talmudic books" contain the doctrines of divine providence and immortality of the soul. And in *Jerusalem* itself, Mendelssohn makes clear that while pagans often cast God as malicious and angry, God revealed His merciful attributes to Moses. Arkush does, however, think that Mendelssohn at times claims that Judaism knows no revealed doctrines. In light of this contradiction, Arkush considers Mendelssohn's claim that Judaism knows no revealed doctrines to be a rhetorical slogan that derives from Mendelssohn's recognition that Judaism does not conform to natural religion. By using this slogan, Mendelssohn is able to sidestep contradictions between natural religion and Judaism. See Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* 181-85. Lawrence Kaplan does not see a contradiction in Mendelssohn. He notes that in a key passage in *Jerusalem,* Mendelssohn writes that Judaism "knows of no *exclusive (ausschließenden)* revelation of eternal truths that are indispensable to salvation" (emphasis Mendelssohn's). According to Kaplan, Mendelssohn holds that while there are "no revealed Scriptural doctrines forced upon our belief, i.e., that we are commanded to believe, there certainly are revealed doctrines . . . presented to our understanding, i.e., that are commended to our knowledge." See Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn on the Origins of Idolatry," 451 n. 31; see Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:164; *Jerusalem,* 97.

doctrines."[84] Mendelssohn develops his biblical aesthetics, however, only in his Hebrew writings. Central to Mendelssohn's account of biblical aesthetics is his understanding of the unique qualities of Hebrew.

While acknowledging that biblical Hebrew is not a philosophically precise language, Mendelssohn claims that what it lacks in philosophical precision it makes up for in imaginative richness.[85] Following Judah Halevi, Mendelssohn claims that biblical Hebrew is the oral language par excellence, which is able to preserve many of the features of oral communication in writing.[86] Oral communication is superior to written communication because it can convey meaning and arouse emotions through intonation, stresses, and gestures in a way that writing cannot. Biblical Hebrew is able to convey these emotions because Moses transmitted the Pentateuch with special accents *(te'amim),* which serve multiple functions.[87] On the one hand, they are like punctuation marks that indicate questions, emphases, endings, and so forth. But they are superior to conventional punctuation marks insofar as they also help the listener distinguish the different grammatical parts of the verse. For example, in Genesis 4:10 God confronts Cain after his having slain Abel:

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84 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:166; *Jerusalem*, 99.

85 Nicolai, *Über meine gelehrte Bildung,* This text is quoted in full in Hermann Meyer, *Moses Mendelssohn Bibliographie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965), 113.

86 See Judah Halevi, *Kuzari,* trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld (New York: Schocken, 1964), 126-27 (part 2, par. 72). Indeed, it is significant that when discussing his method of biblical interpretation, Mendelssohn compares the style of the Bible to the way the "natural speaker" *(hamedaber hativ'i)* communicates. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:148-51. For discussion of Mendelssohn's relation to Halevi on this point, see Jospe, "The Superiority of Oral over Written Communication: Judah Halevi's Kuzari and Modern Jewish Thought," in *Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox,* vol. 3, ed. J. Neusner, E. Freirichs, and N. Sarna (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 127-136.

87 On Mendelssohn's use of the accents in his biblical interpretation, see Edward Levenson, "Moses Mendelssohn's Understanding of Logico-Grammatical and Literary Construction in the Pentateuch" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1972), 1-64. In his unfinished *Hebrew Grammar,* Spinoza says that he originally adhered to Halevi's view that the accents indicate emotions, which allow the written text to preserve the features of oral communication. But Spinoza tells us that on further reflection he decided that this was not true since the accents frequently confuse the text. For example, the accents fail to indicate when a text is ironic or simple, and the same accent can be used to indicate "a period, a semicolon, and a colon." Spinoza thus concludes that the accents were actually a late invention of the Pharisees, who introduced them simply to prevent the Bible from being read too quickly in public. See Baruch Spinoza, *Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae,* in *Spinoza Opera,* ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1987), 5:8-10; *Hebrew Grammar,* in *Complete Works,* chapter 4, 594-95 (henceforth: *HG).* I have emended the English translation.

Vayomer meh asita Then He said: "What have you done?	*kol d'mai aḥikha* The blood of your brother
tzo'akim elei cries out to me	*min ha'adama* from the ground!

Mendelssohn notes that there is a major pause indicated by the accent *etnahta* under *"asita"* ("have you done"). This indicates that the voice should be raised as a question. But there are likewise minor pauses indicated by the accent *zakef katon* under *"aḥikha"* ("of your brother") and *tifḥa* under *"elei"* ("to me") before the verse closes with *"min ha'adama"* ("from the ground"). According to Mendelssohn, these minor pauses indicate different grammatical parts of the verse. *"Kol d'mai aḥikha"* ("the blood of your brother") refers to the actor in the verse, *"tzo'akim elei"* ("cries out to me") refers to the action, while *"min ha'adama"* ("from the ground") refers to the place where the action occurs. By distinguishing these different logical parts of the verse, the accents help "external speech [i.e., the verse] to be aligned to internal speech [i.e., thought] with great perfection."[88]

The accents also aid comprehension insofar as they also serve as musical tropes.[89] These tropes convey various emotions such as "love, hatred, anger, pleasure, warning, vengeance, joy and sadness."[90] While one may state a concept with great precision, if stated without voice modulation, it will remain "as a dish without salt that will not enter the heart of the listener."[91] Music, however, is able to "sweeten an idea like honey, such that its intentions enter the heart like stakes and pegs that are implanted in the hearts of the listeners."[92] By indicating how the verse is to be sung, the accents help the written word preserve the features of oral communication and penetrate the heart.

Mendelssohn's emphasis on the orality of Hebrew is especially evident in his approach to biblical poetry. Mendelssohn contrasts biblical poetry with Greek and Latin poetry. While Greek and Latin poetry are focused primarily on the enjoyment of sounds, the Bible's emphasis is

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88 See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:217, Compare Spinoza's discussion of this issue in Spinoza, *HG*, 595-99.

89 Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:217.

90 Ibid., 218.

91 Ibid., 217.

92 Ibid., 218.

on imprinting understanding on the heart. This explains the fact that while Greek and Latin poetry depend on metrical rules based on the number of long or short syllables or on rhyming, biblical poetry does not. For while meter and rhyming are pleasant to the ear, they are rigid structures that make conveying understanding more difficult. In addition, biblical poetry was designed to be set to music. However, it is very difficult to adapt metered and rhyming poetry to music without changing words around, which frequently distorts the poem's meaning.[93]

Biblical poetry also has a special structure that helps it connect the heart to the mind.[94] Following Azariah de Rossi and Robert Lowth, Mendelssohn claims that biblical poetry consists of short units of words (which modern scholars call "versets") that are parallel to one another. These parallels usually consist of versets that are of similar meaning but use different terms, or of versets that are opposed in meaning but use similar terms, though sometimes the parallel between the versets is only partial.[95] Employing short units is effective in transmitting concepts, for it allows frequent rest periods giving the audience time to absorb the idea, reflect on its meaning, and remember it. Furthermore, by repeating concepts in different ways, the concept can penetrate the heart more easily, allowing one "to consider the matter on all sides until nothing is unclear or hidden."[96] Typically, versets have two to four components. At times versets with the same number of components follow

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93 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 16:125-28; 1:445-47; *Philosophical Writings*, 185-87. See Judah Halevi, *Kuzari,* 125-27 (part II, par. 70-74).

94 Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 16:126.

95 See *JubA,* 15.2, *Commentary on Genesis* 4:23, 46-49. This threefold classification of parallelism reflects Lowth's distinction between "synonymous," "antithetical," and "synthetic" parallelism. See Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews,* trans. G. Gregory (London: J. Johnson, 1787), 2:24-59. Lowth's work was originally published in 1753 as *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum,* and Mendelssohn published a lengthy, glowing review of it in 1757. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 4:20-62. In a Hebrew letter from Mendelssohn to Lowth dated 26 April 1781 that Mendelssohn enclosed with a copy of his *Bi'ur* to Genesis and Exodus, Mendelssohn addresses Lowth as a "prince of Torah and wisdom *(sar hatorah v'hahokhma)"* and he thanks Lowth for his writings on biblical poetry, which were like "good wine to my palate." See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 19:274. Recent scholars have challenged Lowth's classification. Thus, J. P. Fokkelman notes that "synthetic" parallelism is "a basket term that covers everything that cannot be called synonymous or contrasting" and as such is "a counsel of despair . . . which strikes at the root of the entire triadic structure." See Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide,* trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 26.

96 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 16:126. In his aesthetic writings, Mendelssohn notes that a similar effect can be achieved by using "unfinished sentences, interrupted references, or monosyllabic words." See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:465-66; *Philosophical Writings*, 202-204.

one another, while at other times versets of differing lengths alternate with one another.

An example of parallelism adduced by Mendelssohn is Moses' poem in Deuteronomy 32. The parallelism of the first verse is as follows:

Ha'azinu	*Hashamayim*	*V'adabera*
V'tishma	*Ha'aretz*	*Imrei-fi*
Listen	O Heavens	And I will speak
Hear	O Earth	The words of my mouth

While recent scholars have questioned the provenance of parallelism in Hebrew poetry and demonstrated the greater complexity in it than was recognized by Mendelssohn, parallelism remains a central concept in the modern study of biblical poetry. Thus James Kugel, one of the strongest recent critics of the emphasis on parallelism in the study of biblical poetry, nevertheless concludes that parallelism "is the most striking characteristic of this style."[97]

Aesthetic considerations also inform Mendelssohn's approach to biblical interpretation in his treatment of the "sublime" *(das Erhabene),* which he calls "the height of perfection in writings."[98] Mendelssohn's conception of the sublime is dependent on his account of beauty. As we have seen, there are three elements that make an object beautiful: (a) the object has to be perceived as a complete whole; (b) it has to be perceived as complex, having many parts that can be taken in all at once; (c) these parts have to be sensed in such a way that one can not distinguish these parts clearly.

Mendelssohn distinguishes between two types of beauty, which we may call "external" and "internal." External beauty refers to objects whose unity in multiplicity is revealed in their sensible form. But one can also perceive something as beautiful on account of its inner traits. For example, a person with a lovely face is beautiful in the external sense, while one who is able to unite the powers of her soul according to a unity of moral purpose, intelligence, or artistic vision, is beautiful in the internal sense.[99]

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97 See James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 51. On parallelism, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 3-27; J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry,* 15-36, 61-87.

98 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:455; *Philosophical Writings*, 192.

99 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:433-34; *Philosophical Writings*, 174-74.

External and internal beauty can come together in the appreciation of a work of art. For example, not only do we take pleasure in appreciating an actual rose, but we also take pleasure in appreciating an artistic representation of a rose. Indeed, at times we enjoy the representation more than the object itself. For Mendelssohn, this is because in appreciating artistic representations we enjoy a double pleasure. Not only do we enjoy the unity in multiplicity of the represented rose, we also take pleasure in the genius of the artist who is able to integrate the various powers of her soul to create a beautiful object according to a unified vision.[100]

Whereas one experiences beauty when sensing complexity in a unity that one perceives all at once, Mendelssohn notes that there are likewise objects that cannot be perceived as a unity because of their enormity. He calls such objects "sublime." While the feeling that accompanies perceiving beauty is pleasure, the feeling that accompanies perceiving the sublime is "awe" *(Bewunderung)*. Mendelssohn compares the experience of awe to a lightning bolt, which "stops us in our tracks, astounded."[101] Awe is a pleasant fear that we experience when we sense the immensity of the perfection of the object, which we realize is much greater than we can behold.[102]

As with beauty, we can distinguish external from internal sublimity. Externally sublime objects include those that are gigantic in size, such as "the unfathomable sea, a far-reaching plain, or the innumerable legion of stars."[103] Internally sublime objects include those that exhibit vast "perfections of spirit" such as an "enormous intellect, enormous and uncommon sensibilities [*Gesinnungen*], a fortunate imagination joined with penetrating sagacity, and noble and passionate emotions that elevate themselves above the conceptions of commoner souls."[104] These two types of sublimity can be united in works of genius that represent

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100 Ibid.

101 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:461-62; *Philosophical Writings*, 198.

102 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:458, 456, 398-399; *Philosophical Writings,* 195, 193, 144-45.

103 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:456, 398; *Philosophical Writings,* 193, 144. I choose to call both the extensively enormous and intensively enormous "sublime," even though Mendelssohn seems to want to reserve the term "sublime" for those that are intensively large, while calling those that extensively large "gigantic" or "enormous." See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:456,459; *Philosophical Writings,* 193, 196. One reason for Mendelssohn's apparently wishing to use two different terms is that while the extensively large object arouses a pleasant shudder that ends in disgust, the intensively large object generates no feeling of disgust.

104 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:461; *Philosophical Writings*, 198.

sublime objects. In appreciating such works, we experience awe both at the objects represented and at the genius of the creative artist.[105]

There is an intimate relation between the sublime and the simple, or as Mendelssohn calls it, "the naïve."[106] Given the enormity of a sublime subject, if the representation of it is too complex, the observer will become dumbfounded, which will disrupt her feeling of awe. This occurs with the use of too-elaborate similes or excessive embellishment in painting. The most effective way of representing the sublime is through simple representations in which the discrepancy between the simplicity of the representation and the enormity of the object represented accent the object's perfection.[107] By not saying too much, the skilled artist is able to awaken the observer to "think more than what is said to him."[108]

For example, one of the most effective tools for representing the internally sublime is to associate it with an image that is externally sublime,[109] as "the impressions of the inner sense . . . [are] strengthened if the outer senses are harmoniously attuned to it by a similar impression."[110] Hence, the skilled artist can induce a heightened sense of awe by associating the internally sublime object with a simple, externally sublime object.

Mendelssohn considers the Psalms a stunning example of the use of sublime imagery.[111] In his 1771 essay "On the Sublime and Naïve in the Fine Sciences" he discusses Psalms 36: 6-7:

> *YHWH b'hashamayim ḥasdekha, emunatekha ad sheḥakim Tzidkatekha k'harerei el, mishpatekha tehom rabba*
>
> *Herr! Deine Gnade reicht über die Himmel, und deine Wahrheit über die Wolken.*
>
> *Deine Gerechtigkeit, wie die Berge Gottes, und dein*

105 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:459-60; *Philosophical Writings,* 196-97.

106 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:462-63; *Philosophical Writings*, 199-200.

107 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:488,484-85; *Philosophical Writings,* 226, 222-23.

108 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:463; *Philosophical Writings*, 200.

109 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:461; *Philosophical Writings*, 196.

110 Ibid.

111 Mendelssohn's translation of the Psalms appeared in 1783, but he cited many examples of sublime biblical poetry from the Psalms in the 1771 revised version of his essay "On the Sublime and Naive in the Fine Sciences," which was originally published in 1761. See Mendelssohn. *JubA* 1:465; *Philosophical Writings,* 202; *JubA,* 16, *Commentary on Exodus* 33:23, 348.

Recht, eine unergründliche Tiefe!

Lord! Your grace extends above the heavens, and your truth above the clouds

Your justice, as mountains of God and your law, an unfathomable depth.[112]

Associating divine justice with mountains conveys the unshakeability of God's justice while associating God's grace with the heavens, the abode of the eternally happy angels, conveys the grandeur of divine love. But by employing a naïve image obviously inadequate to the concept represented, the Psalmist is able to awaken in his audience a heightened feeling of awe for God who exceeds human comprehension. Furthermore, the poetic skill of the divinely inspired prophet inspires awe at the power of God to move a person to produce such work of genius. Hence the Psalms are a remarkably effective means of instilling an emotionally moving sense of God's power, wisdom, and goodness, which can in turn spur a person to ethical action.

In sum, an important context for understanding Mendelssohn's biblical aesthetics is as a response to Spinoza's historical-critical approach to the Bible. For Spinoza, beauty is a subjective judgment formed by

112 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 1:465; *Philosophical Writings,* 202. Robert Lowth also cites these verses as an example of the sublime. See Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews,* 1:353-54. Mendelssohn's translation basically follows Luther, with the exception of his translation of *ḥasdekha,* which Luther renders as "goodness" *(Güte)* and the fact that Mendelssohn translates the first verse as God's grace and truth extending beyond the heavens and clouds, while Luther translates it more literally as saying that God's goodness and truth extend "to the heavens…and clouds" (*so weit der Himel…so weit die Wolcken gehen*). Mendelssohn's rendering of *ḥasdekha* as *Gnade* (mercy) apparently follows Lowth, while his rendering of God's grace and truth extending beyond the heavens and clouds apparently follows from his desire to make the Bible's teachings about God conform with truth. This does not happen if, like Luther, one translates the verse as speaking of God's grace reaching to the heavens and His truth to the clouds, but by implication not beyond them. In his 1783 translation of the Psalms, Mendelssohn renders the verses more literally: *Herr! Deine Güte reicht bis in die Himmel! Deine Treu, so hoch die Wolken gehn! Dein Recht, wie Gottes Gebirge! Dein Rathschluß-unabsehbare Tiefe!* ("Lord! Your goodness extends to the heavens! Your faithfulness as high as the clouds! Your justice, as mountains of God! Your will—a vast abyss!") See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 10.1, 57, Here Mendelssohn also follows Luther in rendering *ḥasdekha* as "goodness"' (*Güte*), but he now renders, *emunatekha, tzidkatekha,* and *mishpatekha* differently. In his long 1757 review of Lowth, Mendelssohn translates these verses according to Lowth's translation: *Deine Gnade Jehova! reichet in die Himmel, Deine Wahrhaftigkeit in die Wolken, Deine Gerechtigkeit, wie die Berge Gottes, Deine Urtheile, eine unabsehliche Tiefe* ("Your mercy, Jehovah extends to heaven. Your truthfulness to the clouds. Your justice as mountains of God, your judgment, a vast abyss"). See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 4:39-40.

the imagination. Lacking a theory of objective aesthetics, Spinoza interprets biblical descriptions of God as primitive truth claims about God and nature. The function of biblical aesthetics is to promote moral/political obedience—they have no essential connection to truth.

Mendelssohn agrees with Spinoza that a function of biblical aesthetics is to promote ethical action, but here the agreement ends. Unlike Spinoza, Mendelssohn considers beauty a sensible representation of an objective perfection, which constitutes a perfection of the soul equal in value to rational perfection. Biblical aesthetics perfect feeling and desire by aligning heart and mind through the use of vivid imagery conveyed by means of the unique oral properties of Hebrew. For Mendelssohn, the theological doctrines contained in the Bible are not just useful in promoting morality—they are true. Like later German-Jewish thinkers, Mendelssohn contrasts Hebraic and Hellenic aesthetics. For Mendelssohn, however, the contrast is not between Hellenic visuality and Hebraic aurality, but rather between alienating Hellenic plastic/dead letter and correlating Hebraic poetic/living script.

Conclusion

I have outlined Moses Mendelssohn's biblical aesthetics, indicating how they differ from the Germanophone conception of Jewish aesthetics described by Bland. I will conclude with some methodological reflections, which I will set out by way of contrast with Bland.

First, Bland's treatment of Jewish aesthetics implies a normative conception of Judaism. Thus, he assumes a traditional Jewish approach to aesthetics (what he calls the "premodern consensus"), which German-Jewish philosophers distort by employing Romantic notions of poetry to invent the myth of Jewish aniconism. In this respect, Bland's methodological approach is reminiscent of Julius Guttmann's. For according to Guttmann, Judaism at its source is unphilosophical, and Jewish philosophy involves adapting originary Judaism to foreign ideas, which often results in the distorting of original Judaism.[113] I, however, do not see Judaism as a tradition with a clear and evident meaning that think-

113 See Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism: A History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig,* trans. David W. Silverman (New York: Schocken, 1964). Bland approvingly quotes Guttmann's claim that philosophy is alien to essential Judaism. See Bland, *The Artless Jew,* 5.

ers disfigure by importing foreign ideas. Rather, I see Judaism as a tradition whose boundaries are constantly being renegotiated. As such, while Mendelssohn's distinction between Hellenic and Hebraic art might have been an innovation alien to prior Jewish thinkers, I would not call this a distortion of some essential Jewish tradition. In this respect, I feel an affinity with Shlomo Pines; who eschewed the idea of non-native Judaism or non-native Jewish philosophy.[114]

Second, Bland makes clear that his research is guided by the assumption that "ideas and events are rooted in their historical contexts."[115] While I accept this assumption, central to Bland's thesis is his thematizing social and political circumstances, for example, assimilation and anti-Semitism as the catalyst for the development of German-Jewish aesthetics. While this approach can be very illuminating, taken too far, it can lead to reducing a thinker to a set of "influences." I, however, also strive to understand philosophers holistically. To this end, I seek to demonstrate how seemingly divergent statements reflect an integrated system of thought and to draw inferences as to the author's views even when they are not explicitly stated. Here I feel an affinity with Harry Wolfson, who in studying a particular thinker set as his task "thinking out their philosophy in all its implications."[116]

Third, Bland claims that understanding the past on its own terms is impossible. As he puts it, postmodern thought has taught us that "the noble dream of neutral disinterested 'objectivity' in history writing has vanished."[117] While Bland does not expressly tackle the implications of this claim for the study of the past, some contemporary Jewish scholars have taken this recognition as a license to make past thinkers conform

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114 See Zev Harvey, "On Professor ShIomo Pines and His Approach to Jewish Thought," in *Jubilee Volume for Professor Pines,* vol. 1, ed. Moshe Idel, Zev Harvey, and Eliezer Schweid *(Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought,* 7 [1986]): 4-11.

115 Bland, *The Artless Jew*, 10.

116 See Wolfson *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 27. The subtitle of Wolfson's book *The Philosophy of Spinoza* is "unfolding the latent processes of his reasoning." In this book, Wolfson makes a distinction between what he calls the "explicit author" and the "implicit author." Identifying the implicit author requires understanding the inner thought processes of a particular thinker, while identifying the explicit author involves understanding the author's use of literary sources and terminology to express his thought processes. See Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), vii. While I regard Wolfson's assumption of an "implicit author" as very fruitful, I think that he goes too far in assuming that the "explicit author" always uses preexisting philosophical sources to express his ideas.

117 Bland, *The Artless Jew*, 10.

to contemporary points of view. Thus, Steven Kepnes has explicitly claimed that the aim of "postmodern Jewish philosophy" should be to adapt Jewish thought to the insights of postmodernism.[118] I, however, tend to concur with Harry Wolfson's claim that "it is certainly no compliment to a philosopher of the past who is prominent enough for us to study him to say that only by being misunderstood does he become philosophically important."[119] I am less sanguine than Harry Wolfson was about the possibility of understanding the past in a way that is not colored by my own subjectivity. But in my view, this recognition does not contradict the aim of understanding past thinkers on their own terms, but rather is a means to this end.

In squaring this circle, I draw on methodological reflections that Elliot Wolfson has adumbrated in a recent article entitled "Structure, Innovation, and Diremptive Temporality: The Use of Models to Study Continuity and Discontinuity in Kabbalistic Tradition." Wolfson engages the problem of whether kabbalistic thinkers should be studied as unique individuals or by using conceptual paradigms such as ecstatic verses theosophical; mystical versus magical and so on. While many see these two approaches as utterly opposed, Wolfson views them as complementary. Wolfson correctly notes that understanding individuality requires imposing conceptual structure. As Wolfson puts it, "The variable [only] becomes apparent through the prism of the constant."[120] In other words, while any concepts used to understand the past will necessarily be imperfect, appreciating the ways in which past individuals both conform and fail to conform to particular conceptual models is the best way to achieve understanding. The indispensability of using concepts to understand the past is clear from the fact that were we to take the claim that the task of the scholar is to understand the past independently of any conceptualization to its logical conclusion, there would be nothing to understand. For individuality is itself a concept without which one could never speak of particular thinkers, only of discrete thoughts. Fur-

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118 See Steven Kepnes, ed., *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1-5; Steven Kepnes, Peter Ochs, and Robert Gibbs, eds., *Reasoning after Revelation* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), 13. Also see my review of two recent works on Spinoza, Michah Gottlieb, "Defending Spinoza?" *AJS Review* 30, no. 2 (2006): 427-33.

119 See Harry Wolfson, *Philosophy of Spinoza,* vi.

120 Elliot R. Wolfson, "Structure, Innovation, and Diremptive Temporality: The Use of Models to Study Continuity and Discontinuity in Kabbalistic Tradition," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 6:18 (2007): 150-51.

thermore, Wolfson notes the circularity of the claim that the past can never be understood through conceptual frameworks as this is itself a conceptual assumption applied to the understanding of the past.[121]

I conclude that the dichotomy between the positivist historian who aims at understanding the past "as it really transpired" and the postmodern historian who claims that there is nothing "outside the text" is a false one. The fact that we approach the past through our subjectivity is not an impediment to understanding the past but rather the very condition for understanding. Assuming that a scholar has the requisite philological and philosophical training, her subjective concerns can then help bring to light new insights that may have eluded scholars who were animated by different concerns.[122]

The deepest insights into the past are achieved not by seeing the ways in which the past *fits* our familiar conceptual frameworks, but rather by seeing how it diverges from these frameworks. The task of the historian of Jewish thought is neither to understand the past "objectively" (whatever this might mean), nor to restate what we already know in different terms. Rather, the aim is to use her subjectivity to illuminate aspects of the past not noticed by previous scholars with the hope of breaking open new horizons for understanding the past that offer new possibilities for thinking about the future.

121 Ibid., 154.

122 See Emanuel Levinas, "Revelation in the Jewish Tradition," in *The Levinas Reader,* ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 191-96. Franz Rosenzweig declares passions and subjectivity the conditions of knowing truth. See Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy,* trans. Nahum Glatzer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 35-53. Also see E. R. Wolfson's discussion of Rosenzweig's approach to systematicity in "Structure, Innovation, and Diremptive Temporality," 156-58.

V. Counter-Enlightenment in a Jewish Key
Anti-Maimonideanism in Nineteenth-Century Orthodoxy

Several recent books have portrayed Maimonides as a rationalist.[1] For these writers, Maimonides introduces a critical spirit into Judaism that opposes authoritarian Jewish religious approaches and accommodates Judaism to secular knowledge.[2] In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many *Maskilim* and Reformers adopted the Maimonidean mantel to critique the Judaism of their day and justify introducing religious and social changes within the Jewish community. Jewish traditionalists formulated a response, which became known as "Orthodoxy." Several Orthodox writers were willing to criticize Maimonides, seeing in his philosophy the roots of Haskalah and Reform.

In this chapter, I will explore two Orthodox nineteenth-century critics of Maimonides, Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865) and Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888). [3] While there are significant ideological differences between them, Luzzatto and Hirsch share the conviction that participation in non-Jewish cultural and intellectual life is compatible with firm adherence to Halakhah. Yet they both have grave doubts about the ethical trajectory of enlightened European society. I will argue that while criticizing the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*), these Orthodox critics in fact identify with many of its ideals. But for them it is

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1 Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides Confrontation with Mysticism* (London: Littmann, 2006); Herbert Davidson, *Maimonides the Rationalist* (London: Littmann, 2010).

2 Kellner is most concerned about what he calls the "creeping Haredization" of Orthodox Judaism, which is anti-rationalist in its understanding of Judaism. See Kellner, *Maimonides' Critique of Mysticism,* 290.

3 In accounting Luzzatto and Hirsch "Orthodox," I follow Jacob Katz who defines "Orthodoxy" as those who "oppose . . . the relinquishing of traditional Jewish customs" in conscious "awareness of other Jews' rejection of tradition." See Jacob Katz, "Orthodoxy in Contemporary Perspective," in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, ed. Peter Medding (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), 3–4. Similarly, these thinkers would be considered "Orthodox" according to Aviezer Ravitzky's definition of "Orthodoxy" as Jews who are skeptical of the modern valuing of change and progress. See Aviezer Ravitzky, "Introduction: On the Boundaries of Orthodoxy," in *Orthodox Judaism: New Perspectives*, eds. Y. Salmon, A. Ravitzky, and Adam Ferziger (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2006), 1–18. For a more restrictive definition of Orthodoxy, see Moshe Samet, "The Beginnings of Orthodoxy," *Modern Judaism* 8 (1988): 249–250.

authentic Judaism rather than rationalism that provides the best means to actualize these ideals, hence their criticism of the "arch-rationalist" Maimonides.

I

Samuel David Luzzatto was one of the most distinguished figures of nineteenth-century Italian Jewry. A man of immense learning and humanistic spirit, he corresponded with many of the leading exponents of the Science of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*) including Isaak Marcus Jost, Abraham Geiger, and Solomon Judah Rappaport. Luzzatto wrote voluminously, producing tracts on biblical grammar, talmudic historiography, philosophy, theology, and a complete Bible commentary, as well as original poetry.

In 1838, Luzzatto penned a famous attack on Maimonides. Luzzatto's criticisms center on Maimonides' intellectualism and moral system, which Luzzatto takes to be at odds with authentic Judaism. Scholars have pondered why Luzzatto evinces such rancor towards Maimonides. Jay Harris seeks to anchor these criticisms in nineteenth-century intellectual life, arguing that in criticizing Maimonides, Luzzatto's real target is Kant and his nineteenth-century Jewish adherents.[4] Harris's arguments are, however, unconvincing.[5] While I agree that it is fruitful to

4 See Jay Harris, "The Image of Maimonides in 19th Century Jewish Historiography," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 54 (1987): 121–123.

5 In claiming that Luzzatto uses Maimonides as a proxy to attack Kant, Harris focuses on Luzzatto's criticism of Maimonides' supposed denial of the resurrection of the dead. In this, Harris takes Luzzatto to be criticizing Kantian ethics, which denies moral value to actions performed for eudemonistic ends. According to Harris, Luzzatto equates Maimonides' denial of resurrection with Kant's denial of moral value to actions done with the intention of being rewarded. In the same vein, Harris points to a letter from Luzzatto to Zunz where Luzzatto notes that K-A-N-T spelled backwards yields T-N-A-K (Hebrew Bible) which Harris takes to indicate that for Luzzatto, "Kantian ethics and Torah ethics are exact opposites." There are several problems with Harris's arguments. First, were Kant Luzzatto's real opponent, it is not clear why Luzzatto would not criticize Kant directly. Second, attacking Maimonides to criticize Kant's non-eudaemonistic ethics does not make sense since Maimonidean ethics are themselves eudaemonistic. Third, it would be odd for Luzzatto to criticize Kant by means of Maimonides since there are many ethical assumptions that Luzzatto and Kant share against Maimonides. For example, both Luzzatto and Kant privilege moral action over philosophical speculation and have great respect for the common man who acts ethically, while Maimonides considers the theoretical life the *summum bonum*, which leads to his intellectual elitism. Finally, Harris' citation of the letter to Zunz does not support his argument, for close inspection of the letter shows that Luzzatto does not say that Kantian *ethics* are opposite to Torah *ethics*, but rather that their respective conceptions of God are opposed. See *Luzzatto's Letters* (Pryzemysl: 1882), vol. 8, 1134. Kant's God is a postulate of reason that is

seek a contemporary impetus for Luzzatto's opposition to Maimonides, one needs to explore how Maimonides was being appropriated at the time.[6]

In the late eighteenth century, Maimonides became a crucial figure for *Maskilim* seeking a reorientation of traditional Judaism. The *Maskilim* wished to acquire *Bildung* as a way of moving towards greater participation in European cultural and social life, and they were very critical of the xenophobia, superstition, and crudeness that they perceived in traditional Judaism. For the *Maskilim*, Jewish education required major overhauling, stressing clarity of thought and moral refinement rather than what they saw as theoretical, illogical Talmudic disputation.[7] But they were operating against the assumed authority of Judaism, so they had to show how Judaism authorized embracing secular knowledge and culture. To this end, Maimonides became a central figure for them.

In 1761, the leading figure within the Berlin Haskalah, Moses Mendelssohn, published a commentary on Maimonides' *Treatise on Logic*. Mendelssohn's commentary was meant to stimulate Jewish interest in the study of logic and so broaden Jews' cultural and intellectual horizons. In the introduction to his commentary, Mendelssohn imagines a traditionalist arguing that it is improper to study Aristotelian logic. In response, Mendelssohn assures his reader that he is not, God forbid, recommending reading Aristotle the Greek, but rather understanding the teachings of "the Prince of Torah [*Sar Ha-Torah*] our master Moses bar Maimon (may his righteous memory be for blessing) who collected and gathered food from waste and acted with this Greek as Rabbi Meir acted with Aher [i.e., Elisha ben Abuya]. He ate the fruit and discarded the rind."[8] The fact that Aristotelian logic is studied through Maimonides'

abstract and impersonal, while Luzzatto's God is a living being, who is sensed and with whom one establishes a personal, emotional relationship. While Luzzatto does have a real disagreement with Kant, on this issue, it is irrelevant to Luzzatto's ethical criticisms of Maimonides.

6 See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Peninei Shadal* (Przemysl: 1888), 417.

7 See Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, 221–242; *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, ed. Michael Meyer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 355–380.

8 Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Stuttgart-Band Cannstatt: F. Frommann, 1971), 14, 29. The reference is to the famous story of Rabbi Meir and his teacher Elisha ben Abuya. See TB Hagigah 15b. For some recent treatments of this story, see Jeffrey Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 64–104; Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *The Amnesiac and the Sinner: The Rabbinic Invention of Elisha ben Abuya and Eleazar ben Arach* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Yehuda Liebes, *The Sin of Elisha: Four Entered the Orchard and the Nature of Talmudic Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1990).

rendering of it guarantees that it is kosher.

A striking example of the maskilic appropriation of Maimonides is Simon Baraz's 1786 biography of Maimonides. Baraz's biography is ostensibly a description of Maimonides' life and works, but its contemporary resonance is unmistakable.[9] For Baraz, Maimonides' first major achievement was his commentary on the Mishnah. By writing the commentary in the Arabic vernacular, presenting the Mishnah in logical fashion, and teaching purified religious concepts, love of Torah, good morals, and refined manners, Maimonides showed his commitment to popular ethical-religious education and eschewed the prevailing method of study, which was theoretical and confusing.[10] Maimonides' concern with popular education was also evident in his *Mishneh Torah*, which made knowledge of practical Halakhah widely accessible and laid special emphasis on promoting ethical action towards Jews and Gentiles alike.[11] And in his *Book of Commandments*, Maimonides gave reasons for many of the commandments so that people would understand what they were observing and so practice Judaism freely.[12]

Turning to the *Guide*, Baraz has boundless admiration for Maimonides' deep knowledge of all branches of wisdom including physics, metaphysics, law, ethics, and astronomy. Maimonides' profound engagement with Gentile philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, Galen, and Themistius "distinguished him from all the other famous sages," and in consequence, "all nations praise him as the one who rolled back darkness before light, turned back the night, and brought day."[13] But, notes Baraz, the Jewish world did not always appreciate Maimonides. Whether it was for his codification of Halakhah, his thirteen principles of faith or his engagement with philosophy, jealous, ignorant Rabbis attacked him.[14] In his great humility, Maimonides would not respond. The *Maskilim* can then take comfort that in being scorned by tradition-

9 Baraz's article originally appeared in the maskilic journal *Hame'asef* and was republished in 1824 in *Bikkurei Ha-Itim*. Since Luzzatto was probably familiar with the version in *Bikkurei Ha-'Itim*, I cite from that version.

10 Simon Baraz, "Toledot Rabbeinu Moshe Ben Maimon," in *Bikkurei Ha-'Itim* (Vienna: 1824), 95–104.

11 Ibid., 100–101, 111.

12 Ibid., 103–104.

13 See James Lehmann, "Maimonides, Mendelssohn, and the Me'asfim," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 20 (1975): 95–96; Baraz, "Toledot Rabbeinu Moshe Ben Maimon," 112–113.

14 Ibid., 107–110.

alists they are in good company.[15] Maimonides is thus presented as a model for the contemporary *Maskil*. Addressing his contemporaries, Baraz writes: "You the *Maskilim* among the nation should hang at the gates of Maimonides' books . . . [and] follow his path loving truth and peace, seeking the good of all peoples Jews and Gentiles alike, and so become an ornament among the nations."[16] Following the teachings of Maimonides will make Jews worthy of respect in Gentile eyes.

Luzzatto was attracted to Haskalah from his youth. At age fourteen, he bought many of Mendelssohn's books and translated parts of them into Italian for himself. Some teachers in his school knew Mendelssohn personally, and his mentor Raphael Baruch Segré, who later became his father-in-law, was a friend of Mendelssohn's colleague Herz Homberg.[17] Luzzatto's first book, *The Bible Interpreted* (*Ha-Torah Nidreshet*), which he began when he was eighteen, was aimed at reconciling the Torah with logical principles.[18] By age twenty-five, Luzzatto was a rising star among the *Maskilim*. That Luzzatto was familiar with Baraz's appropriation of Maimonides is nearly certain. In 1824, Baraz's article on Maimonides was reprinted in the maskilic journal *Bikkurei Ha-'Itim,* to which Luzzatto was a frequent contributor. Indeed, in the very next issue Luzzatto published his first book of poetry, *Kinor Na'im*, which contained an ode praising Mendelssohn.[19]

The reasons for Luzzatto's turning from Haskalah are complex, but we have autobiographical testimony as to how he wished to represent it. In 1836, after the death of one of his four children Luzzatto's wife became profoundly depressed. In a letter to Isaak Marcus Jost, Luzzatto describes her condition as being such that she could "neither do anything nor speak, and it is necessary to feed her like a one-year-old

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15 Ibid., 110–111.

16 Ibid., 114. See James Lehmann, "Maimonides, Mendelssohn, and the Me'asfim," 102.

17 Rivka Horowitz, "The Models of the Religion of the Noahides and the Religion of Abraham in the Thought of Mendelssohn and Samuel David Luzzatto," in *The Faith of Abraham*, eds. Moshe Hallamish, Hannah Kasher and Yohanan Silman (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), 268 [Hebrew].

18 This book was never completed. The unfinished manuscript appears in Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism* (Warsaw [1912]), vol. 2, 51–109. For discussion, see Noah Rosenbloom, *Luzzatto's Ethico-Psychological Interpretation of Judaism* (New York: Yeshiva University, 1965), 20.

19 *Bikkurei Ha-'Itim* (Vienna: 1825), 1–148. On Luzzatto's early attraction to Haskalah, see Shmuel Feiner, "A Critique of Modernity: S. D. Luzzatto and the Anti-Haskalah," 147–150. On Luzzatto's complex relationship to Mendelssohn, see Rivka Horowitz, "Rational and Anti-Rational Motifs in the Teaching of Samuel David Luzzatto," *Eshel Be'er Sheva* 2 (1981): 287–310 [Hebrew].

child."[20] This depression lasted six years, until her death in 1842,[21] and led Luzzatto to question the Haskalah's optimism and emphasis on autonomy, which he increasingly regarded as naïveté and arrogance.[22] He first gave expression to this new attitude in the 1838 essay critical of Maimonides.[23]

Luzzatto's approach to Maimonides is determined by his famous dichotomy between "Atticism" [*Atticizmus*] and "Abrahamism" or "Judaism" [*Abrahamizmus, Yudaizmus*].[24] The term "Atticism" is significant, for it is remarkably close to the term "atheism." This is even more evident in the Hebrew, where the difference between "Atticizmus" and "Atti'izmus" turns on a single letter. For Luzzatto, there is a perennial struggle between Atticism and Judaism. Atticism is identified with the way of philosophy and is grounded in a particular axiology. Atticism is egoistic valuing the cultivation of individual intellectual perfection above all else.[25] It is arrogant, believing that we can perfect ourselves through our powers alone, and it is authoritarian and intolerant, asserting that philosophers alone know the truth. Believing in the continual progress of civilization, the Attics reverse the rabbinic slogan of "if our ancestors were men, we are as donkeys" to read, "our ancestors were donkeys and we are men."[26]

In contrast, Judaism is grounded in social responsibility and ethical action. The basis for ethics is not reason but feeling. Judaism teaches humility, encouraging one not to overly rely on one's native physical and intellectual powers, but rather to cultivate one's feelings of love

20 Samuel David Luzzatto, *Luzzatto's Letters*, ed. S. Graber (Cracow: 1899), 722.

21 See Shmuel Feiner, "A Critique of Modernity: S. D. Luzzatto and the Anti-Haskalah," 155–156.

22 See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, v–vi.

23 But note that elsewhere, Luzzatto claims that he began to formulate critical comments on Maimonides as early as 1831. See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Peninei Shadal* (Przemyśl: 1888), 419.

24 Luzzatto first adumbrates this distinction in an 1838 essay. See Shalom Spiegel, *Hebrew Reborn* (New York: MacMillan, 1930), 87–89; Noah Rosenbloom, *Luzzatto's Ethico-Psychological Interpretation of Judaism*, 28. The distinction goes back to the second-century Church father Tertullian, but became very important in the nineteenth century. A famous discussion of it is Matthew Arnold's essay "Hellenism and Hebraism" in his 1869 *Culture and Anarchy*. On this theme in nineteenth-century British literature generally, see David Delaura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England: Newman, Arnold, and Pater* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969).

25 See Shalom Spiegel, *Hebrew Reborn*, 87–89.

26 See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, v–vi. The original rabbinic statement is found at TB Shabbat 112b. The full statement is "if our ancestors were as angels, we are as people, if our ancestors were as men, we are donkeys. And not as the donkey of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa [which displayed intelligence] but as other donkeys." Also see Samuel David Luzzatto, *Selected Writings*, ed. M. E. Artom, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1976), 53; Shalom Spiegel, *Hebrew Reborn*, 87–89.

and compassion, which become active in relation to others. Unlike Atticism which esteems cultivation of intellect as the highest good and sees morality as a way of preparing one for intellection, Judaism considers morality the highest good and knowledge, at its best, is a way of promoting moral action. The proper basis for ethics is our innate goodness, which is not acquired through civilization, but which can be corrupted through it.[27] The task of Judaism is not to improve our basic nature, but to recover it. Judaism accomplishes this by teaching us to humbly trust in divine providence and to obey the laws of the Torah, which aim to instill compassion and mercy.[28] Judaism's emphasis on compassion is reflected in the fact that its founder was Abraham, who was renowned for his acts of kindness. For this reason, Luzzatto uses the terms "Judaism" and "Abrahamism" interchangeably.[29]

Luzzatto regards the Enlightenment as a contemporary representative of Atticism, which deepens Atticism's moral shortcomings. Like classical Atticism, the Enlightenment considers individual perfection the aim of life and sees scientific knowledge as essential to this end. But while classical Atticism sees the cultivation of intellect as an end in itself, the Enlightenment seeks to enlist reason to promote human flourishing. It does this by using reason to control nature so that we can increase our material comforts. But the Enlightenment has not kept its promise of furthering human flourishing, as its rampant individualism has led to increased jealousy, more wars, and the fraying of family bonds.[30] Nevertheless, Atticism seeks to be an object of full devotion, alienating

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27 See Spiegel, *Hebrew Reborn*, 87–89.

28 See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, 11–12, 15–16; idem, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1976), 68–70.

29 See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, 9. Luzzatto's emphasis on Abraham as the founder of Judaism is in marked contrast to Maimonides, Spinoza, and Mendelssohn for whom the lawgiver Moses is the founder of Judaism. For discussion of Maimonides' position, see Lawrence Kaplan, "Maimonides on the Singularity of the Jewish People," *Daat* 15 (1985): v–xxvii; Aviezer Ravitzky, "Introduction: The Binding of Isaac and the Covenant," in *The Faith of Abraham*, 14–19 [Hebrew]. For Spinoza's position, see Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001), chapter 5, 17. For Mendelssohn's position, see Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, trans. Allan Arkush (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1983), 89–90. According to Hasdai Crescas, Abraham is the founder of the Jewish people, but only because Abraham was the first one to promulgate Halakhah. See Hasdai Crescas, *Or Adonai*, ed. S. Fisher (Jerusalem, 1990), 3. For discussion of Crescas' position, see Aviezer Ravitzky, "Introduction: The Binding of Isaac and the Covenant," 19–25.

30 See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, vii, 244; idem, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 42–49, 52–56, 61, 64.

people from the true God of compassion and mercy. Parodying the first of the Ten Commandments, Luzzatto casts the first commandment of Atticism as: "I, Atticism took you out from the darkness of ignorance and brought you to the light of reason, the light of civilization."[31]

Despite the stark divisions between Atticism and Judaism, Luzzatto notes that for hundreds of years Judaism has had to contend with thinkers who surreptitiously sought to introduce Attic principles into Judaism. While Ashkenazic scholars such as Rashi and the Tosafists and critics of rationalism such as Yehudah Halevi heroically strove to defend authentic Judaism, Spanish scholars seduced by Arabic *Falasifa* such as Abraham ibn Ezra and Maimonides contaminated Judaism by introducing Attic principles into it, which they claimed represented authentic Judaism.[32]

Luzzatto launches his 1838 attack on Maimonides with the famous salvo, "Maimonides, with all of his philosophizing, was *be-'okhreinu* [*ve-hineh ha-rambam 'im kol hitpalsefuto hayah be-'okhreinu*]."[33] It is worth considering the term *be-'okhreinu*. In the biblical context the root 'ayin-kaf-reish refers to causing distress or trouble, and is twice used in the construction, "trouble-maker for Israel" (*'okher yisrael*).[34] The Midrashic compilation *Sekhel Tov*, however, brings a number of other interpretations of the term. These include one who causes "confusion which disturbs peace and brings conflict"; one who "clouds clear water"; and one who covertly "makes things rot" as when "a person thinks that his food is giving off a good smell [*menodef re'ah na'im*] but then checks it to find that it is in fact rotted [*mevo'ash*]." The midrash then applies this usage to the example of where "a person imagines that his friend is trustworthy but then finds out that he has, in fact, betrayed him [*nimtza' she-bagad bo*]."[35]

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31 Samuel David Luzzatto, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 52. Compare this with Feiner's citation of *Maskilim* who speak of the "temple of *Hokhmah* (wisdom)" and the "altar of Haskalah." See Shmuel Feiner, "Towards an Historical Definition of 'Haskalah,'" in *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*, 198. Also see Feiner's citation of S. J. Fuenn, who wrote: "The Haskalah is more dear to me than all the vanities and pleasures in the world." This quote is found in *From Militant Haskalah to Conservative Maskil: A Selection of S. J. Fuenn's Writings*, ed. Shmuel Feiner (Jerusalem, 1993), 186 [Hebrew].

32 See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, vi, 193–197; Shmuel Vargon, "The Polemic over Abraham Ibn Ezra as a Reflection of the Haskalah," in *Samuel David Luzzatto: The Bi-Centennial of His Birth*, 25–54 [Hebrew].

33 See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, 164.

34 I Kings 18:17; I Chron. 2:7.

35 See *Midrash Sekhel Tov* to Gen. 34, section 30.

This last interpretation is especially significant for Luzzatto's approach to Maimonides. For given Maimonides' great authority among traditional Jews, the fact that he sought to introduce Attic ideas into Judaism makes him one of Judaism's most dangerous threats. While Maimonides' intentions may have been good, his acceptance of Attic intellectualism renders his philosophy functionally atheistic thereby undermining the true essence of Judaism, which is universal ethics.[36] Linking Maimonides with atheism seems extreme, if not absurd. It begins to make sense when one appreciates that for Luzzatto true religion does not merely involve belief in God *per se*, but rather belief in a God who rewards and punishes. Reward and punishment are central to religion since without belief in reward and punishment people lack the necessary incentive for acting morally.[37] Two presuppositions for belief in reward and punishment are divine providence and the immortality of the soul. Maimonides' intellectualism, however, leads him to reinterpret these ideas to the point of denying them.

According to Luzzatto, for Maimonides, the intellectual part of the soul is a potentiality, which is only actualized when a person acquires knowledge.[38] The intellect is, however, the only part of the soul which survives death.[39] The implication then is that only philosophers survive death while non-philosophers are simply annihilated. As such, there is no otherworldly punishment for evildoers.[40] Furthermore, the immortality of the soul, which is limited to the small intellectual elite, is very thin as Maimonides' conception of immortality is not personal, but rather involves the conjoining of whatever knowledge one has acquired with the active intellect.[41] Immortality thus involves neither memory of one's life nor persistence of one's personality and there seems to be no necessary connection between this immortality and ethics as a person who perfects his intellect will achieve immortality even if he lives a self-

36 See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Peninei Shadal*, 416.

37 Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, 21, 32.

38 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1:70, 173–174.

39 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:27, 511; *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 4:8–9; "Laws of Repentance," 8:2–3.

40 See for example, Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Repentance," 8:5.

41 This is a controversial issue in Maimonides' interpretation, but Maimonides does seem to hint that this is his view. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:74, 221, and Pines' note 11 ad loc.

ish, immoral life, while the person who acts ethically but does not perfect his intellect will be annihilated.[42] For Luzzatto, a much more adequate notion of immortality is resurrection of the dead which is available to all as a reward for moral obedience. But following Maimonides' early critics, Luzzatto claims that Maimonides covertly denies this popular, unphilosophical doctrine.[43]

Maimonides' intellectualism likewise leads him to deny divine providence. Famously, he writes that providence is dependent on the degree to which one has perfected one's intellect.[44] Luzzatto interprets this to mean that for Maimonides God helps those who help themselves by acquiring wisdom. In other words, the wise who know how to look after themselves will generally prosper while fools who act without foresight are more likely to suffer.[45] In this way, however, the moral efficacy of the belief in divine providence has been eliminated for there is no natural connection between acting ethically and prospering, as nice guys often finish last.[46] Maimonides, who values knowledge above all else, disdains the belief in corporeal descriptions of God.[47] But, asks Luzzatto, what is so terrible about these beliefs if believing that God watches all with his eyes and writes everything in a book encourages one to act ethically?[48] Indeed, if you needed help whom would you turn to, a simple Jew who believes that God watches over all his actions, or a philosopher who seeks intellectual perfection alone?[49]

Luzzatto not only criticizes Maimonides' intellectualism for undermining ethical motivation, he also tars this intellectualism with being authoritarian and intolerant. Maimonides' authoritarianism is expressed in the fact that he is so certain of Aristotelian philosophy that he has the audacity to codify elements of it as Halakhah.[50] In addition, Maimonides takes the unprecedented step, not found in the Talmud or in the writings of the Geonim, of stipulating thirteen principles of faith

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42 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:27, 511.

43 Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, 165–168.

44 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:18, 474.

45 For a similar recent interpretation of Maimonides, see Alvin Reines, "Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 43 (1972): 169–206.

46 Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, 243.

47 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, I:36, 82–85.

48 Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, 243.

49 Ibid., 244; Samuel David Luzzatto, *Peninei Shadal*, 416.

50 See, for example, Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," chs. 1–4.

that all Jews must believe.[51] In enumerating principles of belief, Maimonides was led astray by his commitment to Atticism, which considers intellectual belief supremely important. In contrast, the talmudic rabbis would judge a person by how ethically they acted, not by what exact beliefs they held.[52]

Maimonides' intolerance is reflected in the disdain with which he regards non-philosophers. Luzzatto cites a statement from the commentary to the Mishnah where Maimonides writes that one who does not perfect his intellect is not truly a human being.[53] But from disdain to hatred is a small step, for Maimonides writes that a Jew without proper belief, i.e., who does not believe what Maimonides considers to be the basic principles of Judaism, is not an Israelite, but a heretic whom one is commanded to hate and kill.[54] Maimonides' intellectualism likewise leads him to adopt hateful attitudes towards Gentiles. As Maimonides considers intellectual virtue to be the true mark of a human being, he concludes that Gentiles who generally hold incorrect religious beliefs need not be treated as human beings.[55] This is expressed in his *Mishneh Torah*, where Maimonides rules that one is not permitted to save a dying Gentile.[56] Maimonides thus gives ammunition to Gentiles who wish to justify ill treatment to Jews since they can point to the great authority Maimonides as proof of Jewish hatred towards them.[57] Indeed, notes Luzzatto, it was reading Maimonides that convinced the seventeenth-century Dutch Orientalist Costantin Van Oppyck that Jews regarded Gentiles as animals.[58] So, following Maimonides' path will not, as Baraz had claimed, lead a Jew to be considered as "an ornament among the Gentiles," but just the opposite. If a Jew wishes to be well-regarded by his Gentile peers, he should remain committed to authentic Judaism, which judges people on the basis of the morality of their actions, rather

51 See Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, introduction to Sanhedrin chapter 10.

52 Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, 168.

53 Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Baba Kama, 4:3.

54 Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, 165–166; idem, *Peninei Shadal*, 416, 440. See Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, introduction to Sanhedrin chapter 10; *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Idolaters," 2:8–9; "Laws of Rebels," 3:1; "Laws of Murder," 4:14–15.

55 Samuel David Luzzatto, *Peninei Shadal*, 416.

56 See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Murder," 4:16, 2:10; "Laws of Theft and Lost Objects," 11:4.

57 Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, 165–166.

58 See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 130, n. 39. The basis for this was Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Baba Kama, 4:3.

than on the truth of their religious beliefs.[59]

From these criticisms of Maimonides, we see that even after his disenchantment with Haskalah, Luzzatto remained committed to Enlightenment ideals such as tolerance, justice, universal brotherhood, and respect for the common man. Indeed, in his 1848 essay, "The Essence of Judaism," he thanked God that these ideals "were becoming increasingly widespread" in European society. But, for Luzzatto, it was traditional Judaism with its emphasis on compassion and its relative indifference to religious belief that best promoted these ideals, not maskilic rationalism.[60]

II

The founding work of German Neo-Orthodoxy, Samson Raphael Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters* (1836), contains another important attack on Maimonides. Like Luzzatto, Hirsch's attitude to Maimonides is conditioned by how Maimonides was appropriated by contemporary Jewish thinkers. But while Luzzatto criticizes the attempt to use Maimonides to sanction the moderate maskilic thesis, i.e., combining urbane, bourgeois civility with adherence to Jewish law, Hirsch is concerned with the appropriation of Maimonides to justify the radical maskilic attempt to reform Jewish law or discard it completely.[61]

Hirsch was born to an enlightened, halakhically observant family.[62] His paternal grandfather knew Mendelssohn personally, and his uncle Moses was known as "Moses Mendelssohn of Hamburg."[63] But as Michael Meyer has noted, "by the second decade of the nineteenth century, a portion of Hamburg Jewry had become highly secularized,"

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59 Samuel David Luzzatto, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 1, 168.

60 See Samuel David Luzzatto, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 46.

61 Note that in the *Nineteen Letters*, the Rabbi's perplexed interlocutor does not advocate religious reform, which he regards as "producing an arbitrary patchwork (*willkürliches Stückkram*)," but rather discarding Judaism entirely. See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum* (Altona, 1836), 4; *Nineteen Letters*, ed. Joseph Elias (New York: Feldheim, 1995), Letter 1, 6. In Letter 17, however, Hirsch engages Reform in detail. In general, I follow Elias's translation, but I frequently adjust it as it contains numerous errors.

62 Hirsch described his family as "enlightened and religious" (*erleuchtet religiös*). See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 5; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, 13.

63 See Noah Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1976), 44–53.

and in 1818 the first Reform Temple was dedicated there.[64] The Hamburg Temple provoked controversy, and Hirsch, who was ten years old at the time, observed the controversies between the reformers and the traditionalists as his own family unsuccessfully sought to stem the tide of religious reform.[65] Witnessing these controversies, Hirsch decided to devote his life to defending traditional Judaism.[66] Hirsch remained committed to his family's ideal of combining *Bildung* with strict adherence to Halakhah. For Hirsch, however, the moderate Haskalah had not shown the proper way to accomplish this synthesis. By appealing to Maimonides to justify their agenda, the moderate *Maskilim* had paved the way for radical Haskalah.

Although Hirsch does not explicitly name radical *Maskilim* or Reformers who invoke Maimonides, Solomon Maimon (1754–1800) is the most famous example of this tendency.[67]

Born Solomon ben Joshua, Maimon adopted his surname out of reverence for Maimonides. Central for Maimon is his acceptance of Maimonides' notion that intellectual perfection constitutes the highest human good. This intellectualism becomes the key to Maimon's justifying his rejection of Halakhah. An example of this is Maimon's account of a conversation he had with the friend of his youth, Moses Lapidot.[68] Through the course of their conversations, Lapidot and Maimon gradually became religious skeptics and their halakhic observance lapsed. One day, while passing outside the local synagogue at the time of prayer they began to discuss the fact that they no longer prayed. While Lapidot exhibited feelings of guilt, Maimon was guiltless. Appealing to Maimonides, Maimon noted that the aim of human life is knowledge of God

64 Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 53–55.

65 See Robert Liberles, *Religious Conflict in Social Context* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 115–116; "Samson Raphael Hirsch. Ein Lebensbild," in *Samson Raphael Hirsch-Jubilaüms-Nummer der Israelit* (Frankfurt, 1908), 6. On the Hamburg Temple and the ensuing controversy, see Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 55–61.

66 See Samson Raphael Hirsch, "Ein Lebensbild," in *Samson Raphael Hirsch-Jubilaüms-Nummer der Israelit*, 5–17; Robert Liberles, "Champion of Orthodoxy," *AJS Review* 6 (1981): 44–46. Liberles (ibid., 54) questions the accuracy of Hirsch's portrayal of the defeat of the traditionalists. See also idem, *Religious Conflict in Social Context*, 115–116.

67 In a recent book, George Kohler mentions several early nineteenth century Reform writers who invoke Maimonides including Gotthold Salomon and Isaak Marcus Jost. See Kohler, *Reading Maimonides' Philosophy in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 39-49.

68 *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, ed. Zwi Batscha (Frankfurt am Main: Judischer Verlag, 1995), 163; *Solomon Maimon: an Autobiography*, ed. Moses Hadas (New York: Schocken, 1947), 227.

and the imitation of His actions.[69] As prayer is merely an expression of our knowledge of divine perfections,[70] it is intended for the common man who cannot attain this knowledge himself and is accommodated to his primitive understanding of God. Maimon concludes: "As we see into the end of prayer and can attain to this end directly [i.e., through our independent philosophical speculation--MG], we can dispense with prayer altogether as something superfluous."[71] Maimon also appeals to Maimonides' instrumentalist approach to Halakhah to mock many parts of the Talmud. For if, as Maimonides claimed, Halakhah is a means to facilitate philosophical contemplation,[72] the irrational, tortured study of Talmud, which often centers on practically irrelevant laws, such as laws of the Temple service, is a massive waste of time. Maimon laments the memory of "the best days of our lives when the powers are in full vigor being spent in the soul-deadening [*geisttötende*] business of studying Talmud."[73] And he scoffs at many of the practical details of Halakhah, such as the fact that killing a louse on the Sabbath is permitted, while killing a flea is a mortal sin.[74] While for Maimon casting off the ceremonies meant abandoning Judaism,[75] by the first decade of the nineteenth century, it became clear that there was another option, namely reforming Judaism. The first religious reforms were relatively

69 For example, see Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 1:1, 2:1–2; "Laws of Character Traits," 1:6; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:54, 637–638.

70 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:32, 526–527; 3:35, 537; 3:44, 574.

71 *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, 93; *Solomon Maimon: An Autobiography*, 147. For discussion of the centrality of Maimonides' notion of intellectual perfection for Maimon, see Abraham Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Solomon Maimon* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 82–84, 127–142.

72 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:27, 510–512.

73 *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, 222–223; *Solomon Maimon: an Autobiography*, 159–160.

74 See TB Shabbat 107b; *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, 29; *Solomon Maimon: An Autobiography*, 28.

75 This was likewise the assumption for Mendelssohn's student David Friedländer. In his 1799 *Open Letter* to Provost Teller proposing conversion to Unitarian Christianity, Friedländer ridicules hairsplitting Talmud study and criticizes halakhic observance as "works of righteousness . . . empty trivialities, and castigation of the body." After mounting these criticisms, Friedländer considers the possibility of reforming Judaism, but ultimately rejects this option as impractical since it would involve creating "a middle thing between Jews and Christians that would be regarded as a sect that, isolated and without following, would have great difficulty existing and prospering." So like Maimon, Friedländer ends up equating Judaism with strict observance of Halakhah, which in the *Open Letter* he rejects. See David Friedländer, *A Debate on Jewish Emancipation and Christian Theology in Old Berlin*, eds. Richard Crouter and Julie Klassen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 41–78. After his abortive attempt to convert to Christianity, Friedländer did, however, turn to reforming Judaism. See Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 44–45.

minor, but gradually became much more radical as the Reformers gained confidence.[76] In 1833, the Reform scholar Michael Creizenach published the first volume of his legal compendium *Schulchan Arukh, a Comprehensive Presentation of Jewish Law*. Creizenach's work aims to explain Halakhah to the non-talmudically trained student in order to help him distinguish between the spirit of law and its formal details.[77] In this way, the student can learn to discern which laws are truly "religious provisions" (*Religionsvorschriften*) and which are merely the product of social circumstances and so can be modified or discarded.[78] While Creizenach does not specifically invoke Maimonides, as seen from Maimon, distinguishing the true purpose of the law from its practical details is a Maimonidean theme.[79]

Hirsch was certainly familiar with Creizenach, as he visited Creizenach before enrolling at the University of Bonn in 1830.[80] Indeed, it was at Creizenach's house that Hirsch first met Abraham Geiger, the major Reform theoretician who was at first Hirsch's close friend and later his intractable opponent.[81]

Like Luzzatto's, Hirsch's critique of Haskalah is informed by a typological contrast between Greek and Jewish thought. In an 1856 essay devoted to an analysis of Chanukah, Hirsch describes Hellenism and Judaism as "two principles, two conceptions of life (*zweier Lebensanschauungen*), two civilizing powers (*zweier Bildungsmächte*) which, up to the present time have been striving for mastery of the world."[82] Unlike Luz-

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76 See Robert Liberles, *Religious Conflict in Social Context*, 23–65; Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 28–142.

77 See Michael Creizenach, *Schulchan Aruch* (Frankfurt: 1833), vol. 1, vii.

78 See Michael Creizenach, *Schulchan Aruch*, vol. 1, x, xiii–xiv.

79 For discussion, see Robert Liberles, "Champion of Orthodoxy," 47–48. Of course this theme likewise occurs in the Pauline distinction between the spirit of the law and the letter of the law. But for a Jewish thinker Maimonides would have been the natural source. For a famous discussion of the distinction between spirit and letter, see Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 11–78.

80 Liberles claims that Hirsch's *Horeb* (completed 1835, published 1838) was deeply influenced by Creizenach's *Schulchan Arukh*. See Liberles, "Champion of Orthodoxy," 47–49. In his 1838 *Naftulei Naftali: First Communications from Naphtali's Exchange of Letters*, Hirsch extensively criticizes Creizenach's approach to Jewish Law. See Isidor Grunfeld, "S. R. Hirsch the Man and His Mission," in *Judaism Eternal* (London: Soncino Press, 1956), vol. 1, xxxvii.

81 See Isaac Heinemann, "Samson Raphael Hirsch: The Formative Years of the Leader of Modern Orthodoxy," *Historia Judaica* XIII (1951): 33.

82 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," *Jeschurun* III (1856–1857), 111; *Judaism Eternal*, vol. II, 187. I have altered Grunfeld's translation at some places.

zatto, however, Hirsch is not uniformly critical of Greek ideals. Hirsch follows biblical tradition in identifying Hellenism and Judaism with two sons of Noah, Japheth and Shem.[83] Central for his understanding of the relationship between Hellenism and Judaism is Genesis 9:27: *Yaft elohim l'yefet v'yishkon b'oholei shem vihi khena'an eved lamo* ("May God enlarge Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be a slave to them"—JPS translation). In his Pentateuch translation, Hirsch translates the verse as follows: *Gemüther öffnet Gott dem Japheth wohnt jedoch in Hütten Schem's; möge Kenaan ihnen Knecht werden* ("God opens minds to Japheth, however, [Japheth] dwells in Shem's tents that Canaan may become their servant").[84] Expanding on a Midrash, which claims that Jewish proselytes will come from Japheth,[85] Hirsch interprets the verse to mean that Japheth will first spiritually conquer the world, thereby preparing the way for Shem, who will spiritually conquer Japheth.[86]

According to Genesis, Noah had three sons—Japheth, Ham, and Shem.[87] For Hirsch, each exemplifies a human capacity. Japheth exemplifies mind (*Gemüth*), Ham exemplifies sensuality (*Sinnlichkeit*), and Shem exemplifies spirit (*Geist*). While Hirsch acknowledges that each of these three capacities exist in every nation and in every individual, he thinks that each son represents a civilization in which one of the capacities is dominant.[88] Hirsch notes that Noah curses Ham's son Canaan with slavery.[89] Ham/Canaan represent "primitive" civilizations in which most people live slavish existences. This slavishness is a function of the fact that one who prizes sensual gratification above all else is always dependent on the external means needed to satisfy these desires.[90] Furthermore, by seeing wellbeing as dependent on forces of nature beyond their control, people come to be oppressed by violent emotions,

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83 See Gen. 10:2 where *Yavan* (generally translated as "Greece") is identified as a descendent of Japheth and Gen. 10:23 where the "Hebrew children" (*benei 'ever*) are identified as children of Shem. See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 112; *Judaism Eternal*, 188; idem, *Der Pentateuch, überseßt und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen. 9:27 (Frankfurt: 1867), 179–180.

84 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch, überseßt und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen. 9:27, 179.

85 See Midrash Rabbah 38:8. Compare Targum Jonathan to Gen. 9:27.

86 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 112; *Judaism Eternal*, 189.

87 See Gen. 6:10.

88 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch, überseßt und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen. 9:27, 179–180.

89 See ibid., 179. And see Gen. 9:25–27.

90 See ibid., 178.

especially fear.[91] Unscrupulous leaders then teach the people that these forces of nature are divine and that the only way to prosper is to curry favor with these angry and cruel deities. This requires bringing sacrifices to priests and recognizing the political authority of kings who are the gods' earthly deputies, if not gods incarnate. In these ways, man is always "taught to look outwards" and his individual personality is reduced to "complete insignificance."[92]

Hellenism, which swept across the ancient world, sought to redeem humanity by stressing the value of the individual. For Hirsch, mind (*Gemüth*) is an intermediate capacity between spirit and sensuality, which includes both aesthetic appreciation and intellect. Hellenism, which values mind above all else, teaches self-respect and self-confidence by upholding individual aesthetic and intellectual perfection as ideals.[93] Appreciation of the beautiful tames the passions by actively weaving them into a refined harmony, and striving for intellectual perfection frees man by making his autonomous reason the ground of his convictions and the basis for how he lives his life.[94] In consequence, under Greek influence man became increasingly "incapable of bowing slavishly to his equals who claim to be godlike."[95] Man came to appreciate his own worth and so seek his "inalienable claim to recognition of equality." In this way, Hellenism became the "nurse of justice and liberty [*Pflegemutter des Rechts und der Freiheit*]."[96]

But while Hellenism constitutes a major triumph for humanity, it is liable to degenerate into "error and servitude" for three reasons. First, while Hellenism stimulates the individual to seek truth intellectually, the finite human intellect is unable to attain certainty due to the gap

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91 Hirsch links the name "*Ham*" etymologically to the Hebrew root H-M-M, which means restive movement (*unruhige Bewegung*), and so Ham means excited sensuality, which cannot govern itself and is incapable of freedom (*der Freiheit unfähig*). See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch, überseßt und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen. 9:25, 26, 178–179. Also see Hirsch's more complicated etymology at Gen. 6:10 where he suggests that Ham's sensuality can, however, be harnessed for good (ibid., 130).

92 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 112–113; *Judaism Eternal*, 189. Compare Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, introduction.

93 In his Biblical commentary, Hirsch gives priority to the aesthetic dimension of Japheth, which he links to the Hebrew root Y-P-Th meaning "beauty." See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch, überseßt und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen. 6:10, 130–131.

94 See ibid., 178.

95 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 113–114; *Judaism Eternal*, 189–190.

96 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 116; *Judaism Eternal*, 192.

between mind and external reality.[97] The intellectual search for truth then inevitably results in fruitless, paralyzing skepticism. Indeed, the culmination of Hellenism's striving for intellectual certainty is German Idealism, which claims that the mind "creates, reveals and dispenses truth."[98] But for Hirsch this is a desperate ploy, a slim substitute for true certainty.[99] Second, by upholding the egoistic ideal of pleasure through its valuing of aesthetic perfection, Hellenism fails to provide an adequate means for elevating man above his brutish nature. For just below the "polished exterior of a refined culture there remains sybaritic pleasure-seeking and brutish animal-like sensuality" ready to erupt into violence and subjugation at any moment.[100] Hellenism's inability to fully sublimate anarchic, brutal sensuality derives from its failure to enlist the senses for a unified purpose. Since aesthetic elation is fleeting, it is only in "rare moments, life's festive hours . . . [that] man rises above himself and forgets the drabness of reality . . . For the rest [of the time] one's personality and reality remains enslaved [*verfallen*] by the misery and wretchedness of an empty and meaningless [*bedeutungslosen*] existence."[101] Furthermore, as the ideal of perfection is individual, Hellenism is incapable of providing a coherent way of life for the family and society as a whole and so ends up alienating the individual from those around him.[102] Finally, Hellenistic individualism renders ethics problematic. Hellenistic ethics are grounded in the worth of the individual—since I have value and wished to be treated as such, I accord others respect. But given that human value is dependent on man's ability to achieve aesthetic and intellectual perfection, which so few are capable of achieving, it is not surprising that the Greeks did not extend equality and justice to all, but reserved it for the elite. Indeed, Hirsch notes that in ancient Attica, "the finest state in the Hellenic civilization," there were 130,000 free men but 400,000 slaves. The cultured classes were

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97 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 115; *Judaism Eternal*, 191; *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 6; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, 14. Hirsch's arguments against the possibility of knowledge of the external world are meager.

98 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 115; *Judaism Eternal*, 191.

99 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 115–116; *Judaism Eternal*, 191. Of course this is a very simplistic view of German Idealism. Compare Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism: 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

100 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 116; *Judaism Eternal*, 191.

101 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 115; *Judaism Eternal*, 192.

102 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 117; *Judaism Eternal*, 193.

quite willing to tolerate tyranny and violence as long as their own rights were respected.[103]

For Hirsch, Judaism, which is represented by Shem, completes Hellenism's drive to restore human dignity. It accomplishes this by enthroning spirit over both mind and sensuality.[104] The enthronement of spirit does not, however, stifle the mind and the passions, but liberates them.[105] Hirsch notes that the one area where human intellect most nearly attains certainty is modern science. But science is implicitly dependent on Judaism's idea of the world as the creation of an all-wise, all-powerful God inasmuch as it assumes purposefulness and rational order in every part of nature. As Hirsch puts it, "every new discovery made even by an atheist scientist, is, nevertheless, a homage to the God of Shem whom the narrow-minded scientist sneeringly repudiates."[106] Furthermore, by making the good consequent on a single obligation, to obey the laws of the Torah, Judaism endows life with a unity of purpose. This then redeems sensuality and intellect, by enlisting them for a higher purpose.[107] By trusting in the authority of the Torah a person is spared endless speculation into truth and so is freed to actively pursue the actualization of God's law on earth, which aims to create a harmonious family and society. Finally, Judaism's idea of an omniscient, omnipotent, good Creator founds a truly universal moral code. For according to the Torah, *all* human beings are descended from Adam and Eve who were created in the divine image, and so all people have equal intrinsic worth. That the Torah's universal morality contrasts sharply with Hellenistic ethics is clear insofar as the Torah commands people to act justly towards every human being and to show special compassion for the most needy—the downtrodden, the poor, the weak, and the unfortunate.[108] In a word, by

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103 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 117; *Judaism Eternal*, 192–193.

104 Christianity plays an interesting role mediating between Judaism and Hellenism. Following Judah Halevi and Maimonides, Hirsch sees Christianity as introducing Jewish ideas to the pagan world, albeit in a "mutilated (*verstümmelt*)" form. In this way, Christianity helps further pave the way for the acceptance of Jewish ideals. See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 119–124; *Judaism Eternal*, 195–199.

105 Hirsch links "Shem" with the Hebrew root Sh-M, which means "name (*Name*)" or the "concept of an object (*Begriff des Objects*)." This refers to Shem's ability to order things according to their proper "spiritual place (*gestigen Raum*)." See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch, überseßt und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen. 6:10, 130.

106 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 118; *Judaism Eternal*, 194. Kant makes a similar point. See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Leipzig: 1790), Section 68, 381–384.

107 See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Der Pentateuch, überseßt und erläutert*, erster teil, Gen. 6:10, 131.

108 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 119; *Judaism Eternal*, 195.

tying "all individual and social life to . . . the one conception of God . . . all contradictions vanish in life that is one and indivisible just as God is one and indivisible."[109] So Judaism provides an antidote to the alienating, oppressive tendencies of Hellenism.

Hirsch notes that the struggle between Hellenism and Judaism has not passed as "these two tendencies are *again today* struggling for mastery in the Jewish world" (emphasis mine).[110] In his criticism of Haskalah in the *Nineteen Letters*, Hirsch makes clear that the linchpin of Haskalah is its accepting the Hellenic view that individual perfection constitutes the purpose of human existence. In making this claim, however, Judaism comes to be measured by its ability to contribute to this end and so can be judged inadequate.[111] In upholding individual perfection as the highest ideal in *Judaism*, the *Maskilim* sought a justification for this in Jewish sources, which they found in Maimonides.[112] So, for Hirsch, confronting Haskalah requires confronting Maimonides.[113]

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109 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 123–124; *Judaism Eternal*, 198–199.

110 See Hirsch, "Kislev: Der Hellenismus und das Judenthum," 111; *Judaism Eternal*, 187. While Luzzatto sees the esteeming of power, pleasure, and wealth as an adaptation of Atticism's emphasis on perfection, Hirsch identifies this as a separate phenomenon, which he calls "Rome." For Hirsch, while Hellenism and Judaism can collaborate, Rome and Judaism are completely opposed. As he puts it, "It is not Hellas that Judaism has to fear, but Rome. It is not the Hellenic spirit (*der hellenische Geist*) that caused the downfall of all that is sacred to Judaism, but the Roman sense (*Sinn*) and Roman tendencies . . . Not Hellenic idealism, but Roman materialism is what we have to fear." See Samson Raphael Hirsch, "Teweth: Das Judenthum und Rom," *Jeschurun* IV (1856–1857), 165–172; *Judaism Eternal*, 202–209. It is significant that Hirsch sees contemporary Judaism as vacillating between Hellenism and Judaism, not between Rome and Judaism. This explains the positive value that he finds in Haskalah and Reform.

111 See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 5–9; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, 13–16.

112 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 93–96; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, 269–272.

113 While in the *Nineteen Letters* Hirsch is willing to harshly criticize Maimonides, some twenty years later he shifts strategy and uses Maimonides' teachings to criticize Reform's break with strict halakhic observance. Thus in his 1854 article, "Judaism Allied to Progress," Hirsch extensively quotes from the *Mishneh Torah* to show that Maimonides held that anyone seeking to annul the authority of Halakhah was a heretic. Apparently seeking to avoid criticizing Maimonides, towards the end of the piece Hirsch reverts to an old apologetic trope of distinguishing between Maimonides himself and the misuse of his teachings, writing: "True Maimonides' *Guide* was burnt. But he would have been the first to consign it to flames had he been alive to see the manner in which it has been and still is being used today." See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal*, part II, 239–244. Also, in two other essays from 1854, Hirsch attacks attempts to reform Jewish law without mentioning Maimonides. See the essays "Der Jude und Seine Zeit," *Jeschurun* I (1854–1855), 14–25; *Judaism Eternal*, part II, 213–223; "Die jüdischen Ceremonialgesetzte," *Jeschurun* II (1854–1855), 70–78; *Judaism Eternal*, part II, 245–252. Why eighteen years after publishing the *Neunzehn Briefe*, Hirsch avoids criticizing Maimonides is an important question that I hope to

Hirsch's approach to Maimonides is not uniformly negative in the *Nineteen Letters*. He notes that in Maimonides' day Judaism was in a sorry state. Because of petulant disputes between the Geonim, Judaism was atrophying into a religion of stale practice. Seeking spiritual sustenance, Jewish youths turned outside of Judaism, to the bourgeoning Greek philosophy of the Arab schools. But embracing Greek philosophy necessarily created problems as the Greek views of God and the purpose of human existence clashed with those taught in the Bible. Maimonides inserted himself into this conflict seeking a synthesis between Judaism and Greek philosophy.[114] To his merit, Maimonides firmly upheld the authority of Halakhah. Indeed, "the preservation of practical Judaism until the present day" is due to Maimonides' codification of Jewish law in his *Mishneh Torah*.[115] But Maimonides' method of reconciling Judaism with Greek philosophy was inadequate as his approach involved accepting Greek philosophical ideas and then showing how the Bible could be interpreted to reflect these doctrines. While Maimonides used this approach to defend Judaism, he ended up undermining it. For by accepting the Hellenic notion that intellectual perfection constitutes the highest good, he was forced to interpret all Halakhah as a means to this end, and so, Halakhah could be discarded if one could achieve intellectual perfection by other means.[116] This conclusion was reinforced by the fact that Maimonides only offered reasons for the laws in general and not for their details.[117] For example, if as Maimonides had claimed the purpose of the Sabbath was to rest from the toil of the week and remember that the world was created, why observe all the prohibitions down to the writing of two letters? Wasn't this just "spiritless cruelty [*geistlose Quälerei*]"?[118] Similarly, Maimonides only gave explanations

investigate on another occasion.

114 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 87–90; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, 264–266.

115 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 89; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, 265.

116 It was only a latter-day Moses, Moses Mendelssohn, who included aesthetic perfection as an ideal as well. See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 93; *Nineteen Letters*, ed. Joseph Elias (New York: Feldheim, 1995), Letter 18, 269. On the importance of aesthetic perfection for Mendelssohn, see Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, eds. E. Mittwoch, I. Elbogen, and J. Guttmann (1929–), vol. 3.1, 266–267; vol. 3.2, 66, 69–70; vol. 6.1, 113–119.

117 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 95; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, 271; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:26, 509.

118 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 94; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, 270. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, II:43.

for the laws written in the Bible (the so-called written Torah), not for laws contained in the Talmud (the so-called oral Torah).[119] As such, the Talmud with its pages and pages of subtle dialectic came to seem like "nitpicking subtleties [*milbenklaubende Spißfündigkeiten*]."[120]

For Hirsch, Maimonides was too quick to accept the Hellenistic view of intellectual perfection as the ultimate aim of life, which in Maimonides' day had already been challenged by Jewish thinkers such as Judah Halevi.[121] Once, however, Kant has made clear the severe impediments to knowing metaphysical truth, Maimonides' notion that intellectual perfection constitutes the highest good is completely untenable.[122] More generally, Hirsch attacks the idea of grounding ethical authority in self-perfection. For if acting unethically is merely sinning against oneself, what can one answer a person who is willing to forego his own perfection?[123]

Hirsch also criticizes Maimonides for accommodating Judaism to Greek moral and philosophical ideals on historical grounds. Employing the rhetoric of the bourgeoning historical sciences, Hirsch argues that since Judaism is "an historical phenomenon" (*ein geschichtliche Erscheinung*) understanding it requires that the Torah be studied on its own terms, as it appears in its "destiny and teachings" (*nach Geschick und Lehre*).[124] The foundational document of Judaism is the Torah, so the Torah must be the first object of study. To understand the Torah historically, one must read it as it was originally intended. This requires setting aside our prejudices about it and approaching the Torah as if we have never encountered it before. To this point, Hirsch's method sounds very much like the historical-critical method. But unlike the historical critics for whom original intent is known through contextualization, philologi-

119 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines, III:41, 558.

120 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 94; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, 270.

121 The fact that Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters* is modeled on Halevi's *Kuzari* reflects an affinity that is more than stylistic. On the attraction to Halevi among many nineteenth-century Jewish thinkers seeking an alternative to Haskalah, see Eliezer Schweid, "Halevi and Maimonides as Representatives of Romantic versus Rationalistic Conceptions of Judaism," in *Kabbala und Romantik*, eds. Eveline Goodman-Thau, Gerd Mattenklot and Christoph Schulte (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1994), 279–292.

122 See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 6; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, 14. Compare Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, in *The Basic Political Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), part II, 11.

123 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 6; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, 14.

124 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 7; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, 15. The Elias edition mistranslates this as "history and teachings" misreading "*Geschichte*" for "*Geschick*."

cal analysis, and textual history, Hirsch argues that these tools occlude rather than reveal original intent. The Torah was intended as a guide to living for all future generations. For this reason, one can only grasp its original intent if one reads it as if one is personally addressed by it.[125] So one must read the Bible with an open, receptive heart and mind before one "may cast stones on it" (*den Stein darauf werfen*).[126]

Taking a page from Spinoza, Hirsch argues that the method for studying the Torah must be like the method used to study nature.[127] Briefly, for Spinoza the study of nature requires beginning with an *a priori* understanding of universal laws of nature, which control our interpretation of any empirical data that we observe. In the same way, understanding Scripture requires assuming that Scripture is a product of the natural world, and so subject to the universal laws which govern it. This involves reading the Bible not as a product of timeless supernatural revelation, but rather as an historical work specific to a certain time and place. As the Bible was written in social and political circumstances very different than the present, the historical approach opens a rift between the present reader and the Bible, thereby creating the likelihood that many of the Bible's laws and teachings may need to be updated or rejected.[128]

For Hirsch, a scientific study of nature seeks to explain empirical data by hypothesizing, *a posteriori*, laws which govern the facts that we observe. If, however, the data does not conform to these laws then one must revise one's understanding of these laws—one must never adjust the data to fit one's hypotheses. In the same way, the proper study of the Bible involves seeking reasons for the Bible's laws and teachings through careful investigation of the Torah itself. But if a particular law or teaching does not conform to one's understanding of the reasons for it, the law in question cannot be rejected. Rather, one must revise one's understanding of the reasons for it.[129]

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125 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 7–8; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, 15–16.

126 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 8; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 2, 16.

127 See Baruch Spinoza, *Spinoza Opera*, ed. C. Gebhardt, vol. III (Heidelberg: 1925), 98.

128 For a more detailed discussion of the analogy between the study of Scripture and the study of nature, see chapter 2 above.

129 See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 93, n. 3; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 18, 271–272, note d. Hirsch's analogy between the study of nature and the study of the Bible raises serious questions. First, while Hirsch rejects an approach to the Bible which involves historical contextualization, Hirsch recognizes that certain halakhot such as the Temple laws are specific to a particular historical context and hence are no longer practiced. Hirsch would say that this is not because these laws are longer valid, but rather because the Temple no longer stands. Once

Proper study of the Torah shows that its values are diametrically opposed to the anthropocentric egoism of the Enlightenment. Genesis teaches that the world is the creation of a unique, just, loving God. God sets laws for all beings, which puts them in harmony with one another. God likewise gives human beings laws whose observance promotes the harmonious order of nature. But there is a difference between human beings and everything else. For while all beings other than man follow their laws of necessity, man has the freedom to obey or disobey.[130] The Torah teaches that man has not been put on earth for his own pleasure. Rather, he was created in order to take responsibility for other beings, human, animal, and plant alike. In a word, the world does not exist for the sake of man, man exists for the sake of the world. His purpose is to imitate God by acting with justice and love. If man obeys the universal moral laws given by God, he brings harmony to nature.[131] But if he arrogantly disobeys these laws instead seeking egoistic pleasure, then he brings destruction and suffering.[132] While all human beings are given basic ethical commands, God chose the Jews, a small, weak people to educate the world that the purpose of life is humble reliance on God, rather than the arrogant seeking of power. The Jews exemplify humble obedience to God by observing the 613 commandments that God revealed to them on Mount Sinai.[133]

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the Temple will be rebuilt the laws will again be practiced. But why couldn't one claim that other ritual laws such as the dietary laws are inseparable from life in the land of Israel and so lose their applicability once the Jews no longer live in this land? Indeed, this had been suggested not only by Spinoza, but also by the medieval Rabbinic authority Nahmanides basing himself on a midrash. For Nahmanides, the only reason Jews must continue to practice Halakhah outside the land of Israel is for educational purposes, that is, so that they will remember how to practice Halakhah once they return from the exile. See Nahmanides, *Commentary to Leviticus* 18:25; *Sifre Ekev*, 43. Second, Hirsch's analogy between the study of Torah and the study of nature seems to involve a confusion between facts and laws. According to Hirsch, science seeks laws, which are principles explaining the operation of the facts of nature. But Hirsch accounts the laws of the Torah themselves as facts, whose purposes are its principles. Science, however, assumes that nature does not operate with intentions and hence does not seek purposes of nature.

130 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 9–22; *Nineteen Letters*, Letters 3–4, 27–34, 55–60.

131 Hirsch identifies the universal moral laws given to all mankind with the so-called seven "Noachide" laws found in rabbinic literature. See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 25, n. 3; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 5, 77, note c. For Hirsch these laws instantiate principles of justice, but not loving-kindness.

132 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 22–28; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 5, 75–80.

133 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 35–37, 37–41; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 7, 105–107, Letter, 8, 113–117.

Hirsch's criticism of the radical Jewish followers of Maimonides is of a piece with those eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critics of the Enlightenment who chided Enlightenment thinkers for using reason to judge tradition. For Hirsch, the Maimonidean-Maskilic approach to Judaism fails to understand Jewish tradition properly because it seeks to interpret it in light of its philosophical commitments (especially the commitment to the supreme value of egoistic happiness), which are alien to Judaism. This epistemological failure is rooted in a moral shortcoming—the arrogant trust in the power of human reason. To gain a proper understanding of tradition, one must possess the moral trait of humility, i.e., the willingness to let oneself be instructed by the tradition. While *Maskilim* judge Halakhah by how it fits into their lives, "the proper approach" is to judge one's life by how it fits into the halakhic system.[134]

But for Hirsch, just as Hellenism serves the cause of Judaism, so the contemporary Jewish representatives of Hellenism help promote authentic Judaism in two ways. First, an impetus for Reform's abandoning Jewish ritual is that it considers this necessary for Jewish emancipation. Reformers' discarding of much of Halakhah is a response to anti-Semites who claim that Jews are not eligible for citizenship because their ritual observances separate them from their Gentile neighbors and alienate their loyalty to the state.[135] In opposing these anti-Semites, Hirsch recognizes the good intentions of many Reformers as political emancipation with its "proper regard for justice" is a major step forward in humanity's fulfilling its divine mandate.[136] But abandoning Halakhah for the sake of emancipation loses sight of the true value of emancipation, which is to help Jews fulfill their task of educating humanity to obey the ethical divine will. For Hirsch, the economic and social oppor-

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134 See Isaak Heinemann, "Introduction" to *Nineteen Letters* (Jerusalem: 1965), 10.

135 Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal*, vol. II, 224–225. For an example of the claim that observance of Jewish law makes emancipation impossible, see Johann David Michaelis' 1782 response to Dohm reprinted in *The Jew in the Modern World*, eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 42–43. For discussion of eighteenth-century debates over Jewish emancipation, see Robert Liberles, "From *Toleration* to *Verbesserung*: German and English Debates on the Jews in the Eighteenth Century," *Central European History* 22 (1989): 3–30.

136 See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 81; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 16, 226: "I bless Emancipation when I see that nowadays no ideological principle, not even one born of delusion (*wahngeborenes*), stands in its way and its only opponents are narrow-minded greed and degrading selfishness. I rejoice when I perceive proper regard for justice—for the human right to be accepted as a man among men (*Mensch unter Menschen zu seyn*) . . ."

tunities afforded by emancipation are only valuable insofar as they help Jews become "respected, influential models of righteousness," which occurs when Jews use economic prosperity to obey God's will through the practice of Halakhah rather than using this prosperity for egoistic satisfaction.[137] Since Jews' obedience to Halakhah encourages Gentiles to fulfill their true vocation, not only does halakhic observance not alienate Jews' loyalty to their fellow citizens, it is the greatest expression of this loyalty. For all the good intentions of the Reformers, they too often lose sight of the true purpose of emancipation seeing it as a means to selfish pleasure alone.[138]

Second, Hirsch lauds the Reformers as "having the best intentions for the welfare of their brethren" at heart in condemning much of contemporary Jewish practice and education.[139] Reformers correctly observe that traditional Judaism has all too often become "the mechanical practice of parents' customs" with the Bible and Talmud taught in such a way as to be "little understood and little digested."[140] In light of this, Hirsch himself adopts the slogan of reform, calling for "work[ing] with all our might, with all the resources of goodness and nobility to reach this ideal [i.e., reform]."[141] But for Hirsch, reforming Judaism does not involve discarding or altering halakhic practice to make Judaism more meaningful, but rather revitalizing Judaism by paying "renewed attention to Judaism, intellectually comprehended." This requires revamping Jewish

137 Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 78–82; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 16, 223–227.

138 See Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal*, vol. II, 213–223. Hirsch offers a biting criticism of the Reform claim that "participation in modern civilization with its improved means of communication and transportation" requires loosening Sabbath observance, noting that the Reformers likewise permit smoking on the Sabbath, thereby violating the explicit Biblical prohibition of lighting a fire on the Sabbath (cf. Exod. 35:3). Hirsch remarks ironically, "[apparently] the smoldering of tobacco leaf is also part of civilization!" See Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal*, vol. II, 233. On a pragmatic level, Hirsch criticizes the political stupidity of seeking to trade Jewish ritual observance for political emancipation. Gentiles have much greater respect for Jews who conscientiously observe their ancestral religion than for those ready to discard it for economic and social opportunities. See "Judaism Allied to Progress," in *Judaism Eternal*, 236, 238. Indeed in 1782, Michaelis wrote: "When I see a Jew eating pork, in order no doubt, to offend his religion, then I find it impossible to rely on his word, since I cannot understand his heart." See "Arguments against Dohm (1782)," in *The Jew in the Modern World*, 42; Hirsch, *Religion Allied to Progress*, 224.

139 See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, pp 1–3; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 1, 3–4.

140 Ibid.

141 See Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe Über Judenthum*, 83–86; *Nineteen Letters*, Letter 17, 241–242.

education to stress a more sophisticated, intelligent understanding of Judaism and showing the connections between Judaism and the nobler parts of European culture.[142] Hirsch's first two works, *The Nineteen Letters* (1836) and *Horeb* (1838), are first forays in this direction.

So like Luzzatto Hirsch accepts the enlightened/maskilic ideals of tolerance and universal justice and thinks that Haskalah is in danger of compromising these ideals. Luzzatto and Hirsch agree that it is traditional Judaism rather than Haskalah that truly promotes Haskalah's ideals by stressing obedience to the divine, ethical will embodied in the Torah rather than the cultivation of individual perfection. So the way to save the Haskalah is by returning to authentic Judaism. But while Luzzatto's approach to Haskalah is uniformly negative, Hirsch has a more dialectical view of the relationship between Haskalah and Judaism, praising the fundamental impulse of Haskalah as noble and seeing its critique of contemporary Judaism as a means for promoting a deeper understanding of Judaism that will help Judaism fulfill its true mandate.

Maimonideanism has been understood as involving accomodating Judaism to secular knowledge, which is the quintessential opposite of fundamentalism. This opposition between Maimonideanism and fundamentalism is morally charged for it implies that accommodating religious texts to secular knowledge implies an open-minded, tolerant, universalism while rejecting this accommodation implies a close-minded, intolerant, exclusivism. Luzzatto and Hirsch call this moral equation into question, considering unaccommodated, "authentic" Judaism the best means to promote the maskilic ideals of tolerance, justice, and intellectual freedom. Indeed, in criticizing the authority of Maimonides, in interrogating whether Judaism and rationalism are compatible, and in questioning whether rationalism can ground ethics, Hirsch and Luzzatto show much greater intellectual independence than their maskilic counterparts.

Scholars have noted how deeply Luzzatto and Hirsch's notions of authentic Judaism are indebted to non-Jewish philosophical discourse. Luzzatto's emphasis on compassion and pity as the defining features of Judaism draws on Rousseau and the German Romantics.[143] Hirsch's

142 On Hirsch's approach to Jewish education, see his essays in *Judaism Eternal*, part I, 155–252.

143 On Luzzatto's debt to Rousseau, see Joseph Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, vol.

rejection of reason to judge the contents of Judaism draws on Schleiermacher and German Historicism, while his notion of retrieving a pure national tradition that provides a refuge from the ills of modernity reflects the discourse of the German Romantics, especially Herder.[144]

The fact that these opponents of Maimonides draw on non-Jewish thinkers in sketching their conceptions of authentic Judaism shows how, like Maimonideanism, anti-Maimonideanism accommodates Judaism to secular knowledge, though this accommodation is often overtly denied. So insofar as "Maimonideanism" represents introducing a questioning spirit into Judaism and accommodating Judaism to secular knowledge, Luzzatto and Hirsch may be more worthy of the title "Maimonidean" than many of the *Maskilim*.

2 (Jerusalem, 1952), 11–15 [Hebrew]. On his relation to Romanticism, see P. Lahover, *First and Last* (Jerusalem, 1951), 47–53 [Hebrew]; Ron Margolin, "The Role of *Hemlah* (Compassion) in Luzzatto's Thought," in *Samuel David Luzzatto: The Bi-Centennial of his Birth*, eds. R. Bonfil, I. Gottlieb, and H. Kasher (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004), 132–133 [Hebrew]; Isaac Heinemann, *The Reasons for the Commandments in Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem, 1942), vol. 2, 66, 90 [Hebrew].

144 See Benjamin Ish-Shalom, "On Knowledge and Spiritual Perfection: The Critique of Modernity and Post-Modernity of Rabbi Soloveitchik and Neo-Orthodox Thought," in *Faith in Changing Times*, ed. Avi Sagi (Jerusalem: WZO, 1996), 361 [Hebrew]; Noah Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*, 23, 152–153. Rosenbloom also argues for Hegel's extensive influence on Hirsch. See ibid., 26–36, 155–178, 292–295, 295–314.

VI. Publishing the Moses Mendelssohn *Jubiläumsausgabe* in Weimar and Nazi Germany

In 1926, the *Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums* (henceforth, *Gesellschaft*) published its annual report for 1925.[1] The report contained a short announcement that preparations were underway to produce a new comprehensive edition of Moses Mendelssohn's works to honor the 200th anniversary of the philosopher's birth in 1929. An appeal was made to the public for any available manuscripts, first editions, and letters.[2] In 1933, with the Nazi rise to power, the project was halted. But in the following year it was resumed with renewed vigor. This chapter traces the history of the so-called *Jubiläumsausgabe* (Jubilee edition) of Mendelssohn's collected works through 1939. This investigation will shed light on the changing perceptions of Mendelssohn's signifi-

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1 I thank the Jewish National and University Library at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for use of the Julius Guttmann Archive, 401280 #24. I thank Thomas Meyer for helpful comments on a prior draft of this essay. On the *Gesellschaft*, see Leopold Lucas, "Zum 25 jährigen Jübilaum der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* (henceforth, *MGWJ*) vol. 71, no. 6 (1927): 321–331; Ismar Elbogen, "Zum Jubiläum der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums," *MGWJ* vol. 72, no. 1 (1928): 1–5.

2 See "Geschäftsbericht für das Jahr 1925," *MGWJ* vol. 70, no. 2 (1926): 143; "Bitte," *MGWJ* vol. 70, no. 2 (1926): 141. An announcement about preparations for the *Jubiläumsausgabe* also appeared in the *Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins zur Gründung und Erhaltung einer Akademie für Wissenschaft des Judentums* (henceforth, *Korrespondenzblatt*). See Julius Guttmann, "Bericht des Wissenschaftlichen Vorstandes," *Korrespondenzblatt* vol. 7 (1926): 42. No comprehensive, scholarly edition of Mendelssohn's collected works had appeared prior to the *Jubiläumsausgabe*. In his lifetime, Mendelssohn published numerous books and reviews, but he never produced a collection of his writings. The first edition of his collected writings appeared in twelve volumes from 1819–1821 in Ofen and was reprinted in Rödelheim in six volumes. A hefty single volume of his works appeared in Vienna in 1838. From 1843–1845 Georg Benjamin Mendelssohn, a grandson of Moses Mendelssohn, published a collection of Mendelssohn's works in seven volumes in Leipzig. This was the most comprehensive and reliable edition to date and included most of the printed German works, some manuscripts and many letters, but no Hebrew writings were included. See Günther Holzboog, "Zur Geschichte der Jubiläumsausgabe von Moses Mendelssohns Gesammelte Schriften," *Mendelssohn Studien* vol. 4 (1979): 277. On the history of G.B. Mendelssohn's edition, see Alexander Altmann, "Moses Mendelssohn's Gesammelte Schriften: Neuerschlossene Briefe Zur Geschichte ihrer Herausgabe," *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts* vol. 42 (1968): 73–115.

cance from late Weimar to the Nazi period.[3]

Producing the *Jubiläumsausgabe* was a massive project that drew on the best talents of German and world Jewry. Organizationally it involved the collaboration of three bodies: the *Gesellschaft*; the *Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (henceforth, *Akademie*),[4] and Mendelssohn and Co., the banking house founded by Moses Mendelssohn's sons Abraham and Joseph. The work was to be published by the *Akademie-Verlag*, the publishing arm of the *Akademie*,[5] and was heavily subsidized by Mendelssohn and Co., so that the volumes would be affordable for libraries and individuals alike.[6] In 1928, both the *Akademie* and the *Gesellschaft* announced that three or four volumes out of a total of fifteen (the following year the number was expanded to sixteen) would

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3 Günther Holzboog's article is the only one I am aware of that treats the history of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*. See Günther Holzboog, 277–292. Holzboog was the publisher of the *Jubiläumsausgabe* when it was resumed in 1971. While Holzboog's article contains valuable information, it does not incorporate important documents such as the reports in the *Korrespondenzblatt* and the unpublished documents in the Julius Guttmann Archive in Jerusalem. In addition, Holzboog is not concerned with what Mendelssohn represented for those associated with the *Jubiläumsausgabe*. For discussion of the perception of Moses Mendelssohn in the 1930s, see Guy Miron, "The Emancipation 'Pantheon of Heroes' in German-Jewish Public Memory in the 1930s," *German History* vol. 21, no. 4 (2003)" 476–487; *idem*, "Between History and 'A Useful Image of the Past': Representations of the Jewish and German Past in the Liberal-Jewish Historical Discourse in Weimar Germany (in Hebrew)," *Zion* vol. 66 (2001): 309–313; Michael Brenner, "The Construction and Destruction of a Jewish Hero: Moses Mendelssohn's Afterlife in Twentieth Century Germany," in *Mediating Modernity: Challenges and Trends in the Jewish Encounter with the Modern World: Essays in Honor of Michael A. Meyer*, ed. Lauren Strauss and Michael Brenner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 274-289. For a discussion of Mendelssohn Jubilee celebrations from 1829 to 1929, see Christhard Hoffmann, "Constructing Jewish Modernity: Mendelssohn Jubilee Celebrations within German-Jewry, 1829–1929," in *Towards Normality? Acculturation and Modern German-Jewry*, ed. Rainer Liedtke and David Rechter (Tübingen: Mohr Sieback, 2003) (Schriftenreihe wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen des Leo Baeck Instituts 68), 27–52.

4 The *Akademie* was founded in 1919 following the call for its establishment by Franz Rosenzweig in his open letter to Hermann Cohen entitled "*Zeit ist's*" (It's Time). See Franz Rosenzweig, *Zeit ist's: Gedanken über das jüdische Bildungsproblem des Augenblicks. An Hermann Cohen* (Berlin and Munich: 1918). As originally conceived, the *Akademie* was to comprise two parts, a research institute and an academy with members, but only the former came into being. On the *Akademie*, see Julius Guttmann, "Die Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums," in *Festgabe zum zehnjährigen Bestehen der Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Berlin: 1929), 3–17; "Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums," *Korrespondenzblatt*, vol. 9 (1928): 53–58; David Myers, "The Fall and Rise of Jewish Historicism: the Evolution of the *Akademie für Wissenschaft des Judentums* (1919-1934)," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 63 (1992): 107-144.

5 See "Geschäftsbericht für das Jahr 1927,"*MGWJ* vol. 72, no. 1 (1928): 110.

6 "Geschäftsbericht für das Jahr 1928," ibid., vol. 73, no. 3 (1929): 172; Carl Lewin, "Bericht des Vorwaltungsvorstand," *Korrespondenzblatt* vol. 10 (1929): 42; Guttmann Archive, Contract between the *Akademie* and the *Gesellschaft*, 3 May 1929.

be ready by Mendelssohn's birthday jubilee on 6 September 1929.[7] The volumes would be produced in three formats: cloth (12 Reichmarks per volume), half-leather (15 Reichmarks per volume), and a luxury edition produced with handmade Dutch paper (30 Reichmarks per volume). Three volumes would appear each year and would be available on a subscription basis only.[8]

Editorial responsibilities were assigned to four entities: an honorary board (*Ehrenausschus*), an overseeing committee (the *Mendelssohn Komitee*, henceforth, *Komitee*), supervising editors, and so-called "department" editors (i.e. editors of specific volumes).[9] The honorary board included Jews and Christians, scholars and philanthropists from Germany, France, England, and America. Heading the board were Adolf von Harnack, the leading liberal Protestant theologian in Germany, and Moritz Sobernheim, a major Orientalist and the chairman of the *Gesellschaft*. Other prominent members of the board included: Ernst Cassirer the pre-eminent German Kant scholar of the day; Eduard Spranger, the well-known philosopher and psychologist; Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, a leading French anthropologist and philosopher; Claude Montefiore, a major Jewish liberal theologian in England, and Cyrus Adler, then head of Dropsie College and later chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. The board also included the philanthropists Oscar Wassermann, the director of *Deutsche Bank* and President of *Keren Hayesod*, Ludwig Vogelstein, Chairman of the American Metal Company, as well as numerous members of Mendelssohn and Co.

The *Komitee* comprised six individuals two representing each of the three main bodies sponsoring the work, (Mendelssohn and Co., the *Akademie* and the *Gesellschaft*). Paul von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and Franz von Mendelssohn represented Mendelssohn and Co. Julius Guttmann, the leading historian of Jewish philosophy in Germany and

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7 See Moritz Sobernheim and Ismar Elbogen, "Protokoll über die Sitzung des Ausschusses der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums am 20. März 1929," *MGWJ* vol. 73, no. 3 (1929): 169; "Geschäftsbericht für das Jahr 1928," ibid., 172; Julius Guttmann, "Bericht des Wissenschaftlichen Vorstandes," *Korrespondenzblatt* vol. 9 (1928): 44.

8 See *Korrespondenzblatt*, vol. 11 (1930): 41. Originally the plan was only to produce the volumes in cloth and half-leather. The price was to be 137.60 reichmarks for the entire set in cloth and 169.60 reichmarks for the set in half-leather if orders were received before 1 July 1929. The price would increase by twenty percent thereafter. See *Korrespondenzblatt* vol. 9 (1928): 52.

9 See Fritz Bamberger, "Julius Guttmann–Philosopher of Judaism," in *LBI Yearbook* vol. 5 (1960): 3–35.

director of research at the *Akademie*, and Gustav Bradt, the secretary of the administrative board of the *Akademie*, represented the *Akademie*.[10] Sobernheim and Ismar Elbogen, an expert on Jewish history and liturgy and the secretary of the *Gesellschaft* represented the *Gesellschaft*.[11] When Sobernheim died in 1933, Leo Baeck took his place on the *Komitee*, and the Orientalist Eugen Mittwoch, who had replaced Sobernheim as head of the *Gesellschaft,* joined the *Komitee* sometime before 1936.[12]

The *Komitee* was responsible for the logistical aspects of the project including working with the publishing house, and corresponding with the departmental editors about the progress of their work and their honorariums. The *Komitee* appointed three supervising editors for the project: Elbogen, Guttmann, and Mittwoch. These three individuals were responsible for outlining the project and reviewing the work of the departmental editors. The sixteen volumes were divided into four sections: writings on philosophy and aesthetics; German writings on Judaism; Hebrew writings; and German correspondence and belles-lettres. Guttmann was in charge of the philosophical and aesthetic writings, Elbogen of the German writings on Judaism, and Mittwoch of the Hebrew writings. Bruno Strauss, though not a supervising editor, was put in charge of the German correspondence and belles-lettres.[13]

The project was not merely a pious tribute to Mendelssohn, but a major scholarly undertaking. An enormous amount of previously unknown material by Mendelssohn, including handwritten outlines, unpublished short essays, and dozens of newly discovered letters were included.[14] Each

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10 On Julius Guttmann, see ibid., 3–24; Leon Roth, "Yitzhak (Julius) Guttmann," *Iyyun* vol. 2 (1951): 3–10. On Bradt, see Julius Guttmann, "Gustav Bradt,"*Korrespondenzblatt* vol. 9 (1928): 1–3; Leo Baeck, "Gustav Bradt," in *Festgabe zum zehnjährigen Bestehen der Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, (Berlin: 1929), 18–21.

11 See Julius Guttmann, "Bericht des Wissenschaftlichen Vorstandes," *Korrespondenzblatt* vol. 7 (1926): 42; "Geschäftsbericht für das Jahr 1925," *MGWJ* vol. 70, no. 2 (1926): 143. On Elbogen, see Alexander Marx, "Ismar Elbogen: An Appreciation," in Ismar Elbogen, *A Century of Jewish Life*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1944), xi–xx; Salo Baron, "Personal Notes: Ismar Elbogen," *Jewish Social Studies* vol. 6, no. 1 (1944): 91–92; Erwin Rosenthal, "Ismar Elbogen and the New Jewish Learning," *LBI Year Book* vol. 8 (1963): 3–28.

12 See Leo Baeck and Ismar Elbogen, "Protokoll," *MGWJ* vol. 77, no. 1 (1933): 80. The Guttmann Archive contains numerous letters from the *Komitee* signed by Mittwoch. As the letters in the archive only begin in 1936, it is unclear when Mittwoch joined the *Komitee* and I have been unable to find an official announcement that clarifies this issue. On Mittwoch, see Walter Gottschalk, "Die Schriften Eugen Mittwochs," *MGWJ* vol. 81, no. 2 (1937): 243–250.

13 See Julius Guttmann, "Bericht des Wissenschaftlichen Vorstandes," *Korrespondenzblatt* vol. 7 (1926): 42.

14 See "Geschäftsbericht für das Jahr 1928," *MGWJ* vol. 73, no. 3 (1929): 172; Guttmann Archive,

volume contained extensive introductions to Mendelssohn's pieces, a newly re-edited text, copious notes, and textual variants (*Lesarten*). The editors of the particular volumes were mostly promising younger scholars, many of whom would later achieve renown. Fritz Bamberger was to edit volume 1 on philosophical writings. Bamberger and Leo Strauss were assigned volumes 2 and 3.1 on philosophical and aesthetic writings. Leo Strauss was to edit volume 3.2 on philosophical and aesthetic writings. Volumes 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, and 13, on Mendelssohn's German correspondence and belles-lettres, were entrusted to Bamberger and Bruno Strauss. Simon Rawidowicz was assigned volumes 7, 8, 9, and 10 on Mendelssohn's German writings on Judaism. And Haim Borodianski (later Bar-Dayan) was to edit volumes 14, 15, and 16 on Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings and Hebrew correspondence.[15]

The 200th anniversary of Mendelssohn's birth on 6 September 1929 was a day of celebration throughout Germany. According to Christhard Hoffmann, "there was hardly a Jewish community in Germany that did not organize a Mendelssohn jubilee celebration."[16] In Dessau, Mendelssohn's birthplace, the Jewish community held a three-day festival at which many government officials were present.[17] In Berlin, the *Gesellschaft* in conjunction with the Berlin Jewish community hosted an "extraordinarily well-attended celebration."[18] Important government officials including the German *Reichsinnenminister* Carl Severing and the Mayor of Berlin Gustav Böß addressed participants before Leo Baeck delivered the keynote address.[19] Throughout Germany numerous radio programs about Mendelssohn were aired, exhibitions relating to his life and work were unveiled in Berlin, Dessau, and Frankfurt, and at the opening of the Berlin exhibition the first volume of the *Jubiläumsausgabe* was presented to the public.[20] The jubilee celebrations received extensive

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Bruno Strauss to "Komitee," 8 June 1937.

15 See Guttmann Archive, Mittwoch to M&H Marcus Verlag, 7 July 1936.

16 See Hoffmann, 48. The Leo Baeck Institute in New York possesses dozens of Jewish community newspapers (*Gemeindeblätter*) from September 1929. Almost without exception every one put the Mendelssohn celebrations on the cover.

17 Ibid.

18 "Protokoll der Vorstandssitzung der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums," *MGWJ* vol. 73, no. 6 (1929): 424. All translations are mine unless otherwise specified.

19 See Moritz Sobernheim and Ismar Elbogen, "Protokoll der Vorstandssitzung der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums," *MGWJ* vol. 73, no. 6 (1929): 424; "Feiern um Mendelssohn," *C.V. –Zeitung*, vol. 37 (1929): 497; Hoffmann, 48.

20 See "Geschäftsbericht für das Jahr 1929," in *MGWJ* vol. 74, no. 2 (1930): 155f. One can see the

coverage in both the Jewish and non-Jewish presses.[21]

In 1929, there was also a flurry of publications on Mendelssohn in Germany. Two biographies, five *Festschriften* comprising over thirty studies, and at least eighteen separate articles appeared, including scholarly pieces on Mendelssohn's philosophy by Ernst Cassirer and Fritz Bamberger.[22] In addition to the first volume of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*, volume 16 was published and three collections of letters and testaments by Mendelssohn and his contemporaries were produced. By comparison, in 1986 the 200th anniversary of Mendelssohn's death, only two books, six articles, and no festschriften in *any language* were published. Why this profound interest in 1929? What did Mendelssohn represent to those connected with the *Jubiläumsausgabe*?

In the introduction to volume one of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*, the supervising editors note Mendelssohn's significance for both Germans and Jews: "Today the world of German *Bildung* celebrates the philosopher who, in his work and personality, embodied the noblest powers of German Enlightenment and prepared the way for the ideal of humanity of our [i.e. German] classical era." World Jewry honors Mendelssohn as the leader who guided Jews "to the world of modern culture, with which a new era in Jewish history began."[23] The report of the *Gesellschaft* for 1928 adds that the anniversary of Mendelssohn's birth has special significance for the Jewish people since Mendelssohn's decisive role in "the cultural renewal of Judaism (*kulturelle Erneuerung des Judentums*) is uncontested."[24] So, to the editors of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*, Mendelssohn represented the promulgation of the classical spirit of German humanism, Jewish entry into German society, and the cultural renewal of Judaism.

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items in the exhibitions in their catalogues. For the Berlin exhibition, see Moritz Stern and Karl Schwarz, eds., *Moses Mendelssohn Ausstellung, September 1929*, (Berlin: 1929). For the Dessau exhibition, see Ludwig Grote and Paul Wahl, eds., *Führer durch die Mendelssohn Gedächtnis-Ausstellung* (Dessau: 1929). For the catalogue of the Frankfurt exhibition, see *Mendelssohn-Ausstellung im Museum jüdischer Altertümer,* (Frankfurt am Main: 1929). See also Hoffmann, 48.

21 See Hoffmann, 48.

22 See Ernst Cassirer, "Die Idee der Religion bei Lessing und Mendelssohn," in *Festgabe zum zehnjährigen Bestehen der Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Berlin: 1929); idem, "Die Philosophie Moses Mendelssohns," in *Moses Mendelssohn zur 200jährigen Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages* (Berlin: 1929); Fritz Bamberger, "Mendelssohns Begriff vom Judentum," *Korrespondenzblatt* vol. 10 (1929): 4–19; *idem*, "Die Geistige Gestalt Moses Mendelssohns," *MGWJ,* vol. 73 (1929): 81–92.

23 See Moses Mendelssohn, *Jubiläumsausgabe* (henceforth, *JubA*), (Berlin: Akademie, 1929), vol. 1, ix.

24 "Geschäftsbericht für das Jahr 1928," *MGWJ* vol. 73, no. 3 (1929): 172.

We gain a deeper appreciation of Mendelssohn's significance by examining Leo Baeck's address to the *Gesellschaft*, which reportedly "made a profound impression" on the audience.[25] Baeck begins by noting that Mendelssohn was a typical Enlightenment thinker who embodied the tendencies of his age, but did not give his age a new intellectual direction.[26] However, there was one critical way in which Mendelssohn saw deeper into the meaning of the Enlightenment than any of his contemporaries, and, according to Baeck, this represents his genius. Mendelssohn matured intellectually in eighteenth century Berlin, a cosmopolitan city whose enlightened politics allowed individuals from different nationalities and religious persuasions to mingle in an atmosphere of relative tolerance. In this respect, Baeck compares Berlin to America, even calling it the "American Berlin."[27] It was Mendelssohn's synthesis of his Jewish and German sides, his Judaism with Enlightenment ideals that constitutes his lasting achievement. How these two parts of Mendelssohn's personality came together, how the bold Enlightenment thinker could be a conservative Jew, has long perplexed commentators. But in the final analysis, any attempt to give priority to one side of Mendelssohn's being—to either see him as an Enlightenment thinker and only incidentally as a Jew, or as a Jew and incidentally also as an Enlightenment thinker—is misguided. One completely misunderstands Mendelssohn if one fails to see that he was at once an Enlightenment thinker *and* a traditional Jew without compromise.

According to Baeck, prior to Mendelssohn the Jewish personality was formed entirely within the confines of Judaism, and entering Christian society (except in certain economic areas) required abandoning one's Judaism. Mendelssohn was the first to see that the promise of the Enlightenment—in its embrace of freedom, equality, and diversity of thought—meant that one could be both a European and a Jew. But while this was a theoretical possibility in Enlightenment thought, it required a person like Mendelssohn to show how it could become a reality.[28] In this, Mendelssohn revealed a deeper understanding of the Enlightenment than his contemporaries and those who came after him. For even his

25 "Geschäftsbericht für das Jahr 1929," ibid., vol. 74, no. 2 (1930): 155.

26 See Leo Baeck, *Mendelssohn Gedenkfeier der jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin am 8. September 1929: Gedenkrede* (Berlin: 1929), 3–4.

27 Ibid., 8.

28 Ibid., 14f.

enlightened contemporaries persisted in the medieval belief that joining European society required a Jew to abandon his Judaism. This included not only the well-known Christians who attempted to convert him, but also his own followers such as David Friedländer who proposed union with enlightened Christianity, four of his own six children who converted to Christianity, and the many converts to Christianity among enlightened nineteenth century German Jews.[29]

But just as Mendelssohn's loyalty to Judaism did not contradict his commitment to Enlightenment ideals, his commitment to German nationalism did not do so either. Mendelssohn had a humanistic interpretation of German national culture which emphasized its openness to different perspectives, rigorous science, and beautiful language. For Mendelssohn, German identity was synonymous with intellectual rigor, cosmopolitanism, and appreciation of the German language.[30]

Baeck notes that this vision is deeply relevant for the present since in 1929 "Germany is struggling to rebuild its standing in the world."[31] This does not, however, mean sacrificing German difference, but rather offering a vision of what it involves. As "an early defender of the right of the individual … that belongs to each individual *and each group,*" Mendelssohn remains an important model.[32] For just as embracing the universal does not require sacrificing the particular, so embracing the particular does not require sacrificing the universal. Rather, the particular can serve the universal "not by abandoning or limiting [the community's] inner and deepest special character and worth . . . but rather by including its particularity . . . in the great whole, in the state and in humanity."[33] Baeck emphasizes that the way to rebuild Germany's standing is not through xenophobia and violence, but through a renewal of Mendelssohn's vision of humanistic German culture. Jews will firmly establish their place in the world not by abandoning their Judaism but by returning to their national and cultural identity and showing its universal relevance. In 1929, a time of great crisis for Germany, Mendelssohn "must, therefore, not only represent an external form [*äußere Form*], but also a spiritual

29 Ibid., 17f.
30 Ibid., 19f.
31 Ibid., 20.
32 Ibid., 21. Emphasis mine.
33 Ibid.

value [*seelische(n) Wert*]."[34] Just as at the end of *Jerusalem* Mendelssohn offered a defense of religious pluralism that concluded with Zechariah's words "Love truth, love peace,"[35] so today, Baeck adds "we understand Mendelssohn . . . because for him truth followed peace inasmuch as peace required not leveling difference (*Gleichmachen*), but rather particulars acting together for the sake of the greater good (*für das große Ganze*)."[36]

We gain further insight into Mendelssohn's significance by examining a Hebrew piece that Rawidowicz published in 1929 for the Berlin based journal *Hatekufah*.[37] This is especially valuable as Rawidowicz, unlike the other editors of the *Jubiläumsausgabe,* was not a native born German Jew, but rather an Eastern European Jew who received a traditional *yeshiva* education. Rawidowicz's piece reflects the significance of Mendelssohn for an Eastern European émigré to Germany who was attracted to enlightened European ideals, but retained a traditionalist sensibility.

Rawidowicz opens by noting that Mendelssohn marks the end of the "ghetto period" in Jewish history and that he ushered in an intellectual revolution so important that one can speak of Jewish history as "pre-Mendelssohnian" and "post- Mendelssohnian."[38] But, Rawidowicz points out, Mendelssohn has been misunderstood. On the one hand, Jewish nationalists have derided him as a father of assimilation, a "hater of Israel" (*sone yisra'el*) who seduced Jews away from their national Jewish heritage. On the other hand, liberal Jews have celebrated Mendelssohn as a "Germanizer" of Jewish culture, and as a reformer of Judaism who paved the way for freeing Jews from the oppressive chains of Jewish ritual law.[39] In reality, comments Rawidowicz, Mendelssohn

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34 Ibid., 22.

35 Zechariah VIII:19.

36 Leo Baeck, "Mendelssohn Gedenkfeier," 22.

37 *Hatekufah*, which was founded in 1918, was edited at the time by Saul Tschernichowski, Ben-Zion Katz, and Rawidowicz. See Simon Rawidowicz, "Moses Mendelssohn," *Hatekufah* vol. 25 (1929): 498–520, and vols. 26–27 (1930): 547–594. The piece that Rawidowicz published in 1929 was to be a prelude to a book-length comprehensive reassessment of Mendelssohn's thought and life that Rawidowicz was preparing under the title "Moses Mendelssohn: his Life and Work." This book never appeared. See Simon Rawidowicz, *Hebrew Studies in Jewish Thought*, ed. Benjamin Ravid, (Jerusalem: 1969), x–xi. The 1929 and 1930 pieces are reprinted in the same volume, 5–69. Unfortunately they are edited in a very confusing way, as the introductions from the 1929 and 1930 articles are separated from the original articles that they were written for, and are instead placed together.

38 Rawidowicz, "Moses Mendelssohn," *Hatekufah* vol. 25 (1929): 498.

39 Ibid., 500.

was neither. He was a unique figure who on the one hand "stood with two feet within . . . traditional Judaism . . . was occupied with Torah and with the fulfillment of the commandments . . . and fraternized with the great Rabbis of his time (*hag'dolim sheberabanei z'mano*)" and who on the other hand "stood with both feet in the general culture [of his time] . . . not just as a welcome guest (*ben-bayit*) . . . but as a master (*ba'al bayit*) of German culture and as one of its creators."[40] Indeed, leading German Christians from the highest levels of society would visit him to "thirstily drink his words" (*lishtot b'tzama et d'varav*) such that a "ghetto Jew from Dessau . . . sat on the throne in the palace of German literature of his day."[41] Remarkably, Mendelssohn affirmed the German and Jewish sides of his personality equally, never "bending his Judaism to his Germanness" nor making his Germanness a "foothold for his Judaism." Mendelssohn, Rawidowicz points out, was Jewish before being German, but this precedence was merely chronological, not existential.[42]

In this respect, Mendelssohn's achievement was astonishing and unique. For 143 years after Mendelssohn's death in a German republic where Jews have achieved political freedom and civil rights one finds pious halakhic Jews, and Jews who are leading figures in German culture and literature, and yet "you don't find a single Jew like Moses Mendelssohn, a Jew whose traditional Judaism does not compete with his creative Germanness, one who is at once both *totally* a 'ghetto' Jew and *totally* a *creative* German."[43]

Rawidowicz notes that the Enlightenment philosophy of Mendelssohn's day passed with the appearance of Kant, and that Kantianism was in turn superseded by Idealism, Positivism, and Materialism as various schools of thought rose and fell. Yet by the end of the nineteenth century there was a revival of Kantianism, then of Idealism, and more recently of pre-Mendelssohnian philosophies. Therefore, Rawidowicz suggests, perhaps the time has come for a revival of Mendelssohn's philosophy.[44] But given the harsh prejudices about Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment, this requires an accurate, "objective" assessment of his life and work based on scientific research. The

40 Ibid., 499.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., 500.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 498f.

great value of the *Jubiläumsaugabe* lies in setting forth the possibility of such a reassessment by presenting a comprehensive, scholarly edition of Mendelssohn's work.[45]

The stirring addresses by Baeck and Rawidowicz reflect a self-confident Jewish community at home in their German and Jewish identities. This self-confidence is similarly evident in the appointment of major Christian thinkers to the editorial board of the *Jubiläumsausgabe* such as Adolf von Harnack and Eduard Spranger and in the participation of prominent German political figures in the Mendelssohn celebrations. The sense one gets is of a Jewish community whose time has arrived. No longer do Jews need affirmation by participating in non-Jewish academic circles. Rather, they can invite leading non-Jewish academic and political figures to participate in their own intellectual and cultural activities both in their standing within German society and confident in their Jewish identity, which they regard as fully compatible with one another.[46]

The Hebrew piece by the Eastern European Rawidowicz, however, injects a subtle note of criticism. For while Mendelssohn embodies the quintessential union of Jewishness and Germanness, Rawidowicz points out that later German Jews have always accented one side of the equation at the expense of the other. In being fully at home in the German cultural world, many German Jews have, perhaps without realizing it, lost much of their grounding within the world of authentic Jewish tradition. A similar, but harsher critique is found among certain Zionist, Orthodox and even Liberal writers who in 1929 criticized Mendelssohn for presenting an impractical synthesis that could never be fully realized by those who came after him. For most German Jews, however, the Mendelssohn celebrations of 1929 reflect a highpoint in German-Jewish self-assurance.[47]

From 1930 to 1932 four additional volumes of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*

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45 Ibid., 500f.

46 The Jewish community's inviting non-Jewish scholars to participate in their events can be seen as mirroring the way in which Moses Mendelssohn himself would invite major German thinkers and writers into his own home. The community's self-assurance is also evident in the scholarly pieces that appeared in 1929 by Cassirer and Bamberger which treat Mendelssohn as a significant figure in the history of Western thought without apology. See note 22 above.

47 For a discussion of critics of Mendelssohn in 1929, see Miron, "The Emancipation 'Pantheon of Heroes,'" 480f.; idem, "Between History," 312f.; Hoffmann, 48–50; Brenner, "The Construction and Destruction," 278-282.

were published despite a global economic crisis and hyperinflation in Germany, which caused severe economic hardship to the *Gesellschaft*.[48] Volume 7 (German writings on Judaism) came out in 1930, volume 2 (writings on philosophy and aesthetics) appeared in 1931, and in 1932 volumes 3.1 (writings on philosophy and aesthetics) and 11 (German correspondence) were published.[49] Following the Nazi rise to power in 1933, however, the *Akademie* ceased functioning for economic reasons,[50] and one year later Guttmann emigrated to Palestine where he assumed a post at the Hebrew University. The dissolution of the *Akademie* meant that the project lost its publisher as well as an important source of funding. In its report for 1933, the *Gesellschaft* informed the public that it would assume full responsibility for the project and was committing 2,448 Reichmarks to forestall the interruption of the project. Still, "uncertainty" surrounded the fate of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*.[51] But Mittwoch and Elbogen's report from 1934 shows their ardent determination to keep the project going. The Moses Mendelssohn Foundation for the Promotion of the Study of the Humanities (*Die Moses Mendelssohn-Stiftung zur Förderung der Geisteswissenschaften)* had provided a grant, and preparations were underway for the appearance of two new volumes by the 150th anniversary of Mendelssohn's death in January 1936. The 1934 report concludes with an impassioned plea: "We address our friends with the grave and urgent appeal to help the *Gesellschaft* continue its productive work. If ever Judaism needed to strengthen its spiritual powers, it is now!"[52] The 1936 deadline was not met, but this did not lead to a cessation of the project but rather to a stepped up effort to keep it going. From 1936 onward, the editors focused on producing four volumes: Rawidowicz's volume 8, which contained German writings on Judaism including Mendelssohn's magnum opus, *Jerusalem*; Leo Strauss's volume 3.2 of philosophical writings which included Mendelssohn's con-

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48 See "Geschäftsbericht über das Jahr 1931," *MGWJ* vol. 77, no. 2 (1932): 186–191. On the economic hardships faced by German Jews at the time, see Michael Meyer, ed., *German-Jewry in Modern Times,* vol. 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 38–42.

49 See Alexander Altmann's preface in Moses Mendelssohn, *JubA*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: 1971), vi; Guttmann Archive, Theodor Marcus to "Komitee," 7 July 1936; Mittwoch to M&H Marcus Verlag, 27 July 1936.

50 See Volker Dahm, *Das jüdische Buch im Dritten Reich* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1993), 337.

51 See "Geschäftsbericht über das Jahr 1933," *MGWJ* vol. 78, no. 3 (1934): 384.

52 Eugen Mittwoch and Ismar Elbogen, "Protokoll der Sitzung des Ausschusses der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums," *MGWJ* vol. 79, no. 3 (1935): 277. See also Holzboog, 280.

tributions to the Pantheism Controversy; Bruno Strauss's volume 12 of German correspondence; and Borodianski's volume 14, which included Mendelssohn's most important Hebrew writings including his famous introduction to the *Bi'ur* known as *Or Lintiva*.[53]

The editors, however, continued to face considerable problems. First, there was the issue of the publisher. As the Akademie-Verlag had ceased operating, a new publisher and distributor were needed. The *Komitee* decided to use M&H Marcus Verlag in Breslau, which had become the *Gesellschaft*'s official publisher in 1931.[54] But there were numerous difficulties in finalizing the contract including determining who had the authority to conclude the contract with M&H Marcus, the *Komitee* or the *Gesellschaft*.[55] There was also the problem of the inventory of existing volumes, of which it was agreed M&H Marcus would take possession. With the dissolution of the *Akademie*, this inventory, which had been stored at the Akademie-Verlag's bookbinder H. Sperling, was sent to the *Oranienburgerstrasse* synagogue, which agreed to store the volumes free of charge.[56] But many of the volumes were stolen from the synagogue, and in November 1935, the liquidator of the *Akademie*, Wilhelm Wolff, sold a large part of the remaining inventory to the Schocken Verlag.[57] Furthermore, when Schocken sent their agent Nordland-Verkehr to collect the books in question, they instructed them to also take possession of a large part of the inventory that had not been sold to Schocken on the (as it turned out mistaken) assumption that they would be appointed the new publisher of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*.[58] Much of this inventory was then sent to two of Schocken's commissioning agents, Friedrich Fleischer in Leipzig and Ruben Mass in Jerusalem.[59] The *Gesellschaft*, as the partners of the *Akademie*, claimed that this inventory belonged to them and should be sent to M&H Marcus. But Wilhelm Wolff contended that it was the Jewish community in Berlin, as the main creditor of the

53 See "Geschäftsbericht über das Jahr 1936," ibid., vol. 80, no. 3 (1936): 319.

54 See ibid.; Guttmann Archive, contract between *Gesellschaft* and M&H Marcus Verlag, 30 December 1931.

55 See Guttmann Archive, addition to *Vorverträge* between *Komitee* and M&H Marcus Verlag, June 18, 1936; Karger to Elbogen, 29 June 1936; Spanier to *Komitee,* 12 July 1936; Karger to *Gesellschaft*, 17 July 1936.

56 See ibid., Wilhelm Wolff to *Komitee*, 11 December 1936.

57 See ibid., *Komitee* to M&H Marcus, 27 July 1936; Wilhelm Wolff to *Komitee*, 12 August 1936; Wolff to *Komitee*, 11 December 1936.

58 Ibid., Wolff to *Komitee*, 11 December 1936.

59 See ibid., Altman to Wolff, 15 October 1936.

Akademie, who had the right to decide whether the *Gesellschaft* could take possession of the remaining inventory.[60] Furthermore, while the *Gesellschaft* claimed that they should be compensated for the stolen volumes, Wolff informed the *Komitee* that there would be no reimbursement for these volumes as they had been stored as a courtesy and in any case neither the *Komitee* nor the *Gesellschaft* had the right to the property of the Akademie-Verlag which belonged to the Berlin Jewish community.[61] Then there was the problem of honorariums. Authors had been promised regular honorariums as they worked on manuscripts, but as publication had been interrupted the honorariums had stopped and many authors did not wish to continue working until they received further payments. The *Komitee*, however, argued that the authors had continued to be paid beyond the time when the manuscripts had been expected, so the authors had no right to additional compensation.[62]

In addition, there was the serious problem of how editors escaping Nazi Germany could find the time to complete their work.[63] Rawidowicz fled to London in 1933, Leo Strauss became a researcher in Cambridge in 1935, and in June 1937 Borodianski emigrated to Palestine. An illuminating example of this problem is Leo Strauss. On 13 August 1936 the *Komitee* wrote to Strauss to inquire about the status of his volume 3.2. In this letter (which is not extant), the *Komitee* apparently reminded Strauss that in 1933 he had told Guttmann he could finish his volume in two months. Strauss responded six days later, noting that he was "very glad" that the project was continuing and expressing deep regret that he had not been able to finish his work. In fact, Strauss continued, he would not be able to finish the work before April 1937 as he was preoccupied with publishing a book "on which the continuation of my academic research absolutely depends"[64] and with the preparation of lectures he was to deliver in the United States between the beginning of October and the end of December, as part of his being considered for a

60 Ibid., Wolff to *Komitee*, 11 December 1936.

61 Ibid., Wolff to *Komitee*, 11 December 1936; *Komitee* to Wolff, 20 December 1936.

62 See ibid., *Komitee* to Bruno Strauss, 20 July 1936; Bruno Strauss to *Komitee*, July 27, 1936; Rawidowicz to *Komitee*, 15 October 1936; *Komitee* to Rawidowicz, 25 October 1936.

63 See ibid., Baeck to Kremer, 31 March 1938.

64 Apparently this refers to Strauss's book on Hobbes; see Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: its Basis and Genesis* (Oxford: University of Chicago Press, 1936). This book was Strauss's first on a topic outside Jewish philosophy.

post in the United States.[65]

In the summer of 1937, the Nazi government decreed that Jewish publishers could only sell Jewish literature that would be read exclusively by Jews,[66] and for reasons that are not completely clear M&H Marcus was replaced by Stefan Münz Jüdischer Buchverlag und Buchvertrieb as the publisher for both the *Gesellschaft* and the *Jubiläumsausgabe*.[67] At the time, the two volumes that were closest to completion were Bruno Strauss's volume 12 of German correspondence, and Borodianski's volume 14 of Hebrew writings.[68] However, by the end of 1937 the *Komitee* decided to invest its energy in the completion of Borodianski's volume of Hebrew writings and publication of volume 12 was deferred despite the fact that it was basically complete.[69] The problem was that Borodianski had already emigrated to Palestine, which made completing publication very difficult.[70] On 11 November 1937, Mittwoch wrote to Guttmann urging him to press Borodianski to finish his work. Mittwoch stressed that for "idealistic reasons (*aus ideellen Gründen*) the completion of this volume so long in abeyance is greatly to be wished for."[71] Mittwoch recognized that for someone in Borodianski's position who had entered a new "sphere of duties" (*Pflichtenkreis*), it was not easy to discharge both his new and old responsibilities, but Mittwoch asked Guttmann to make certain that Borodianski did not "try to shirk his previous duties."[72]

We here witness the great energy that was expended in trying to produce Mendelssohn's works during the Third Reich. Why was it so important to finish the project under such trying circumstances and why was so much effort expended on publishing a volume of Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings? What did Mendelssohn represent to those associated with the *Jubiläumsausgabe* during the Third Reich and how did this differ from how Mendelssohn was viewed during the Weimar period?

January 3, 1936, was the 150th anniversary of Mendelssohn's death, and both Fritz Bamberger and Simon Rawidowicz published tributes

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65 See Guttmann Archive, Leo Strauss to *Komitee*, 19 August 1936. In 1937, Strauss became a research fellow at Columbia University.

66 See Holzboog, 281; Meyer, 312; Dahm, 106–115.

67 See "Geschäftsbericht über das Jahr 1937," *MGWJ* vol. 82, no. 4 (1938): 283.

68 See Guttmann Archive, "State of the Project," 16 February 1937.

69 See ibid., *Komitee* to Moses Mendelssohn-Stiftung, 15 March 1938.

70 See ibid., *Komitee* to Wolff, 10 June 1937.

71 Ibid., Mittwoch to Guttmann, 11 November 1937.

72 Ibid.

to Mendelssohn. These tributes provide important insights into the changing perceptions of Mendelssohn among those working on the *Jubiläumsausgabe*.

Bamberger's piece, which appeared in the *C.V.-Zeitung*, begins by recalling the major Mendelssohn celebrations just six and a half years earlier. At that time, Mendelssohn was feted as a philosopher, an aesthetician, a literary critic, a leading member of the Berlin Enlightenment, and as a Bible translator and commentator. These dimensions of scholarly appreciation were well deserved. But Mendelssohn was also celebrated as a promulgator of Jewish Emancipation who ushered in a new era in Jewish history. Seen in this light, Bamberger points out, the Nuremberg Laws enacted just six years after the 1929 celebrations mark the end of the era initiated by Mendelssohn. The 150th anniversary of his death was therefore an appropriate time to rethink the path of Emancipation that Mendelssohn blazed.[73]

For Bamberger, a fresh reassessment of Mendelssohn provides a new perspective on the German-Jewish struggle for Emancipation. While liberals hailed Mendelssohn as the father of Emancipation and religious Reform, in fact this title more properly belongs to his students and followers such as David Friedländer, Abraham Geiger, and Samuel Holdheim. Unlike these writers, who actively fought for Jewish rights which they thought required abandoning traditional Jewish commitment to Halakhah, Mendelssohn was a relatively apolitical figure whose "'Arch-Judaism' (*Stockjudentum*) or, as we would now say, whose *Orthodoxy* was attested to by himself and many of his contemporaries."[74] While his followers thought that Judaism must be purified on the basis of the German ideal of *Bildung,* Mendelssohn was absolutely opposed to the idea of reforming Judaism for the sake of civil rights.[75] To be sure, Mendelssohn was concerned with the renewal of Judaism. But this was not to be achieved by judging Judaism on the basis of German educational and cultural ideals, but rather by seeking to purify Judaism on its own terms.[76]

As an example of this, Bamberger cites Mendelssohn's interest in the

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73 See Fritz Bamberger, "Moses Mendelssohn Zur 150. Wiederkehr seines Todestages," in *C.V. Zeitung*, 3 January 1936, n.p.

74 Ibid., n.p., emphasis in original.

75 See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, vol. 8, 200.

76 Bamberger, "Moses Mendelssohn Zur 150. Wiederkehr seines Todestages," n.p.

revival of the Hebrew language. Mendelssohn did not seek to establish a Modern Hebrew, which would conform to European realities and sensibilities, but rather to renew Hebrew by bringing it closer to its own authentic roots in the Pentateuch. Bamberger concludes his piece by noting that, like Mendelssohn, contemporary Jews are unemancipated. And like Mendelssohn their concern should not be with Jewish conformity to German ideas of *Bildung*, nor with political agitation, but with the apolitical cultivation of Judaism renewed on its own basis. In this way, Mendelssohn remains a crucial model for contemporary Jews.[77]

A different perspective is gleaned from two pieces that Simon Rawidowicz published in 1936. The first is an English lecture Rawidowicz delivered at a Mendelssohn celebration held by the Jewish Historical Society of England in January 1936, and the second is a Hebrew piece entitled "Moses Mendelssohn's Philosophy of Judaism" that he wrote for the London-based Hebrew newspaper, *Ha'olam*.[78] Rawidowicz opens the English lecture by noting that while Mendelssohn has been frequently criticized, he has "seldom been adequately understood."[79] Mendelssohn's Enlightenment stood for the most honorable ideals that Germany has ever known including the right and responsibility to exercise liberty of thought; the central importance of moral obligation and aesthetic taste; and the promotion of freedom, international peace, and religious tolerance.[80] In defending the German Enlightenment, Mendelssohn and his colleagues were fighting for a "*European spirit* in Germany, which would take its deserved place in the League of enlightened nations of Western Europe."[81]

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77 Ibid.

78 See Simon Rawidowicz, "Moses Mendelssohn the German and Jewish Philosopher in Connection with his 150th Jahrzeit," in *Occident and Orient: being studies in Semitic philology and literature, Jewish history and philosophy and folklore in the widest sense in honor of Haham Dr. M Gaster's 80th birthday: Gaster anniversary volume*, ed. Bruno Schindler (London: Taylor's Foreign Press 1936), 472–487. This essay is reprinted in idem, *Studies in Jewish Thought*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society 1974), 327–349. I cite the original printing of the essay, which is more accurate. For the essay in *Ha'olam*, see Simon Rawidowicz, "Mendelssohn's Philosophy of Judaism," *Ha'olam* vol. 24 (1936): 74f., 91f., 103–105, 121f., 152f., 167–169, 201f. [in Hebrew]. The essay was originally published two years earlier, but without the introduction. See Simon Rawidowicz, "The Philosophy of *Jerusalem*," in *Sefer Bialik,* ed. Jacob Fichman (Tel-Aviv: 1934), 99–140 [in Hebrew]. The version in *Ha'olam* is reprinted in Simon Rawidowicz, *Hebrew Studies in Jewish Thought,* ed. Benjamin Ravid (Jerusalem: 1969), 3–5; 70–117 [in Hebrew].

79 Rawidowicz, "Moses Mendelssohn the German and Jewish Philosopher," 472.

80 Ibid., 473.

81 Ibid. The emphasis is Rawidowicz's.

But, while pointing out the "urgent need" for a re-examination of Mendelssohn's general philosophical thought,[82] Rawidowicz returns to the problem of how Mendelssohn could be both the leading German and Jewish thinker at one and the same time. For Mendelssohn was no less German than Walter Rathenau[83] or any less strict a Jew than members of the Neo-Orthodox "Breuer Community" (*Breuer Gemeinde*). Rather, "he was 100 percent believing and orthodox Jew, 100 percent German enlightenment thinker (*Aufklärer*), and 100 percent German."[84]

In 1936, however, Rawidowicz is mostly interested in Mendelssohn's commitment to Judaism. He claims that from the time of Mendelssohn's own life, this commitment has not been properly understood. This misunderstanding was first expressed in Lavater's challenge to Mendelssohn to refute Christianity or convert. To Lavater's surprise, Mendelssohn refused to defend Judaism. Lavater provocatively wrote that Mendelssohn's refusal to convert might have reflected bias in favor of his ancestral religion. Mendelssohn replied that he could no more decide whether he was prejudiced in favor of his religion than whether he had bad breath.[85] Rawidowicz considers this statement monumentally significant. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Jewish apologists sought theoretical reasons for the persistence of the Jewish nation based on the truth, beauty, and usefulness of Judaism. In asserting that Jewishness was as much a part of him as his own breath, Mendelssohn was saying that the value of Judaism did not derive from theoretical reasons, but from the existential fact that Jews were willing to sacrifice their lives for it. This "non-defending Judaism . . . was one of the finest and proudest defenses modern Judaism has ever known."[86] Rawidowicz notes that since the nineteenth century, it has become almost a "*mitzvah*" for Jewish nationalists to criticize Mendelssohn's philosophy of Judaism as the cause of the spiritual decay that plagued German Jewry during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[87] Rawidowicz points out that this is deeply unfair and claims that had Mendelssohn witnessed what later occurred, "it would have broken his

82 Ibid., 480.

83 Rathenau was the German Foreign Minister who in his early life advocated Jewish assimilation and was assassinated by right-wing radicals in 1922.

84 Rawidowicz, "Moses Mendelssohn the German and Jewish Philosopher," 479, 481.

85 Ibid., 484. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, vol. 7, 43.

86 Ibid., 484f. How this fits with Mendelssohn's defense of Judaism in *Jerusalem* is unclear to me.

87 Ibid., 485.

heart."[88] Mendelssohn was "no prophet of destruction." At his core, he considered Jewish survival a non-negotiable value.

In Rawidowicz's view, Mendelssohn's struggle for Jewish civil rights has not been understood properly either. Unlike many Jews who came after him, Mendelssohn never pleaded for mercy. Rather, he defended Jewry by attacking the cruelty of the Jews' oppressors. His was the original *J'accuse*.[89] Through his personal example, he forced Europeans to reconsider their prejudices. Many who came after Mendelssohn believed that political emancipation was a gift that Jews must pay for by relinquishing Judaism. According to Rawidowicz, Mendelssohn realized that emancipation was a basic requirement for the emancipators as well as for the emancipated—it was not a privilege to be bought. Any society that deprived its members of political and social equality "did not deserve the name of a human society."[90] But Mendelssohn went even further. In his view not only did political emancipation not demand sacrificing Judaism, it also should be "backed and supplemented by maximum *Jewishness*, of Jewish life and thought."[91] For emancipation must not only be for the individual, but for the community as a whole. Anything less was "destructive ideology and political illusion." Rawidowicz writes in 1929 that it was Mendelssohn "the Jew who never stooped to water down his Jewishness . . . in order to make it easier to get an *Einlaßschein* (admission ticket) . . . whose bi-centenary was celebrated on such a great scale."

Turning to the present, however, it seems "as if centuries [had passed] between then and now."[92] In fact, 1929 was the year of Jubilee celebrations of both Mendelssohn and Lessing's birth and at the time a spirit of Jewish-Christian cooperation prevailed. At the official Lessing celebration the Jewish Germanist Friedrich Gundolf gave a keynote address in which he proclaimed, "What does the world need now? More Lessing?" And at the *Gesellschaft*'s celebration when Carl Severing addressed the audience in the name of the Weimar Republic and Chancellor Hindenburg, he remarked, "What does Germany, what does the world

88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 482.
90 Ibid., 486.
91 Ibid., 487.
92 Ibid.

need? More Mendelssohn! more Nathan!"[93] Tragically, just seven years later, the Nazi Wilhelm Frick occupies Severing's position. And so according to Rawidowicz, between 1929 and 1933, Mendelssohn took on a completely different significance:

> In 1929 we all thought Mendelssohn belonged to ancient history. Then came the year 1933 and showed us that the political fight of Mendelssohn was to be taken up anew from a new Jewish position, from a Jewish reality which is *toto genere* different from that of 1729, the year of his birth or 1786 the year of his death. In 1933 ancient history became the burning problem of the day.[94]

While in 1929 it was assumed that Mendelssohn's fight for Jewish emancipation was long over, by 1933 his arguments for Jewish civil rights were more relevant than ever. But 1933 represented, as Rawidowicz points out, a terrible defeat for Mendelssohn and the German Enlightenment, such that "neither will there ever be a revival of his philosophy, nor of the whole philosophy of his time."[95] Mendelssohn's German-Jewish synthesis has passed. But this does not mean that Mendelssohn has lost his significance. Rawidowicz recalls that in 1929, he had advocated an objective reassessment of Mendelssohn, "especially his Jewish philosophy and his Jewish personality."[96] If such a re-evaluation was required then, "how much more so now, three years after Hitler's revolution . . . at a time of trial for the Jewish community in Germany"? For after "the axe has been brandished over German democracy and over the communities which found shelter in its shade . . . many of our brethren who remained in their blindness for decades have begun to see how much lying and destruction for the world and

93 A reference to Lessing's protagonist in Nathan der Weise who was widely taken to be modeled on Mendelssohn.

94 Rawidowicz, "Moses Mendelssohn the German and Jewish Philosopher," 487.

95 Ibid., 472.

96 Rawidowicz, "Mendelssohn's Philosophy of Judaism," 74. Rawidowicz's account of his intentions in 1929 is not accurate. As is clear from the contents of Rawidowicz's projected book, he sought a reassessment of Mendelssohn's philosophy and personality *as a whole* and did not give priority to Mendelssohn's Jewish philosophy and personality. Rawidowicz's book was to be divided into four parts. Part one would treat Mendelssohn as a German philosopher; part two as a figure in German letters; part three would treat his Jewish personality and Jewish philosophy and part four would involve a reassessment of his biography. See Rawidowicz, "Moses Mendelssohn," 501.

for the Jews" came from the movement of Jewish assimilation begun by Mendelssohn's disciple David Friedländer, "who was not a true and loyal heir of Mendelssohn." Rawidowicz emphasizes that understanding the destructive political illusion that constitutes the doctrine of assimilationism requires an "objective" reassessment of Mendelssohn. Hence, he points out, the significance of the *Jubiläumsausgabe* had not decreased, but rather increased.[97]

Comparing the assessments from 1929 and 1936, we see that in 1929 Baeck and Rawidowicz praised Mendelssohn both as a German patriot who inaugurated the German humanist tradition and as the first German Jew equally committed to German nationalism and to Judaism. As such, Mendelssohn offered a deeply relevant vision of German and Jewish difference, where no specific difference (whether German or Jewish) needed to be compromised, but rather should be cultivated in the service of universal ideals. Baeck views this embrace of Jewish and German identity as a deep insight into the inner possibilities of Enlightenment thought in which the right to self-determination is upheld not only for individuals but for groups as well. Rawidowicz seeks a revival of Mendelssohn's enlightened German-Jewish synthesis, which provides a model of creativity in both German and authentic Jewish culture that has yet to be fully replicated. For both Baeck and Rawidowicz writing in 1929, Mendelssohn's political struggle for Jewish rights is important, but is primarily of historical interest as political equality has been achieved.

In contrast, for Bamberger and Rawidowicz writing in 1936, the ideals of Emancipation and German humanism have been defeated. There is no possibility of reviving the German Enlightenment, and participating in German nationalism is of no interest to them. Mendelssohn's merit is no longer in his affirming both his German and Jewish identities, but in his unstinting loyalty to Judaism and in his refusal to bend Judaism to German ideas. While both agree that trading Jewish identity for civil rights or seeking to justify the validity of Jewish existence before a non-Jewish tribunal is not just a misunderstanding of the inner possibilities of the Enlightenment, but a destructive political delusion, they draw opposite political lessons from this. For Bamberger, the rise of the Nazis shows the complete failure of politics for the Jews. This then requires

97 See Rawidowicz, "Mendelssohn's Philosophy of Judaism," 74.

a Jewish retreat from politics as exemplified by Mendelssohn whose unwavering commitment to Judaism was, at bottom, apolitical. In contrast, Rawidowicz seems to keep open the possibility of a political solution to the Jewish problem. But Jewish rights must not be pleaded for. As Mendelssohn taught, they must be demanded and defended without apology.

On 23 December 1938 Borodianski's manuscript of Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings was finally completed (without an introduction) and sent to the *Komitee* who forwarded it to the publisher.[98] But after being printed, the volume was seized by the Gestapo and destroyed.[99] Volume 14 of the *Jubiläumsausgabe* was one of the last Hebrew books printed in Germany before the Holocaust.[100] Nevertheless, the *Komitee*

98 See Borodianski's preface to Mendelssohn, *JubA*, vol. 14, vii.

99 See Altmann, preface in Mendelssohn, *JubA*, vol. 1, vii. Luckily, a few specimens of the volume were preserved, and in 1972 Alexander Altmann reprinted the volume from a photostat of Borodianski's personal copy. Holzboog reports that in addition to Borodianski's copy, Rawidowicz and Mittwoch had copies, and Sotheby's auctioned Mittwoch's copy in the 1950s. See Holzboog, 281, 284. The fate of volume 12 was more tragic. As Bruno Strauss fled Germany for America he passed through Holland, where he lost the volume. Holzboog reports that when the Jubilee edition was restarted, Holzboog sent representatives around the world to try to find the lost volume, but to no avail. In a 1964 letter from Bruno Strauss to Holzboog, Strauss writes that the loss of this manuscript was "a deep wound from which I still suffer, and which occasionally still causes me sleepless nights." See Holzboog, 282f.; Altmann, preface to Mendelssohn, *JubA*, vol. 1, vii; preface to Mendelssohn, *JubA*, vol. 12.1, vii.

100 A 1940 report in *Kiryat Sefer* declares the volume to be the "last Hebrew book printed in Germany." See "Hebrew literature and the Science of Judaism," *Kiryat Sefer* vol. 17 (1940): 48f. (in Hebrew); Baruch Shochetman, "The Writings of Professor Yitzhak Guttmann (1903–1950)," *Iyyun* vol. 2 (1951): 19 (in Hebrew). This declaration is apparently made on the basis of the fact that all the Jewish publishing houses were shut down at the end of 1938. See Dahm, 146–155. But while the Jewish publishing houses were shut down, the *Jüdischer Kulturbund in Deutschland* could still publish books, and Louis Finkelstein's critical edition of *Sifre on Deuteronomy* appeared on 1 October 1939. In addition, four hundred copies of David Kimhi's commentary on Psalms were published in unclear circumstances (not by the *Jüdischer Kulturbund*) in April 1939. See Henry Wasserman, *Bibliographie des Jüdischen Schrifttums in Deutschland 1933–1943* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1989), 120–127; Dahm, 498. When exactly volume 14 was actually published is a mystery. The volume has a publishing date of 1938, and Holzboog reports that Borodianski told him that the volume appeared in November 1938. See Holzboog, 280f. But this date is belied by Borodianski's own preface to the volume which is dated 23 December 1938. Given that Borodianski was living in Palestine at the time, it seems highly unlikely that the volume could have appeared before 1939. Another problem is that the publisher is listed as Stefan Münz, but in a letter from the *Komitee* to the *Jüdischer Kulturbund* dated 26 February 1939, the *Komitee* mentions sending two unbound proofs of volume 14 to the *Kulturbund* asking if it is willing to publish the volume. I have inspected one of the few extant copies of the original volume 14 at the Jewish National and University Library at the Hebrew University, and the volume is not in an original binding. Also, in the letter of 26 February 1939 from the *Komitee* to the *Jüdischer Kulturbund*, of which Guttmann received a copy, there is a handwritten postscript to Guttmann asking whether he and Borodianski have received their unbound proofs. I therefore surmise that the volume was produced unbound by

remained resolute in its determination to continue the project. By 1939, however, all the Jewish publishing houses had been shut down, and the only way to publish Jewish books was through the *Jüdischer Kulturbund in Deutschland*.[101] In a letter dated 26 February 1939, the *Komitee* contacted the *Jüdischer Kulturbund* asking if they were willing to take over publishing responsibilities for the *Jubiläumsausgabe*. The Guttmann Archive contains no reply.[102]

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the *Jubiläumsausgabe* project was ended. Thirty-two years later it was resurrected under the editorship of Alexander Altmann, professor at Brandeis University.[103] But by that time Baeck, Rawidowicz, and the supervising editors, Mittwoch, Elbogen, and Guttmann were long dead, and the project was carried out in an entirely different social and political context.[104]

Stefan Münz sometime in early 1939, but that Stefan Münz ceased operating before it could publish the volume properly. The *Komitee* then contacted the *Gesellschaft*'s new publisher, the *Jüdischer Kulturbund,* asking if they wished to assume the responsibility for publishing the volume. However, before this could be done, the Gestapo seized the unbound copies and destroyed them.

101 See Dahm, 146–155; Meyer, 312.

102 Guttmann Archive, *Komitee* to *Jüdischer Kulturbund in Deutschland E.V.*, 26 February 1939. The *Jüdischer Kulturbund* published the final issue of the *Gesellschaft*'s *MGWJ* (no. 83) in 1939.

103 Holzboog reports that the idea for restarting the *Jubiläumsausgabe* first occurred to him in 1961. The first volume (a reprint of volume 1 of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*) appeared in 1971. See Holzboog, 281.

104 On the process of publishing the *Jubiläumsausgabe* after the war, see Holzboog, 281–292.

VII. Leo Strauss on Lessing's Spinozism*

In his important essay, "Franz Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism," Paul Mendes-Flohr alerted us to the importance of historicism for understanding Rosenzweig.[1] In recent years, scholars have come to appreciate historicism's importance for understanding other seminal twentieth-century German-Jewish thinkers, including Leo Strauss.[2] Strauss's struggle to preserve the possibility of philosophizing in the face of historicism is bound up with his so-called "rediscovery" of esoteric writing.[3] While Strauss often attributes this "rediscovery" to his study of medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy,[4] in his 1970 piece entitled "A Giving of Accounts" he also notes the importance of his study of Gotthold Lessing in this regard. Speaking of his studies in the 1920s, Strauss writes:

> Lessing was always at my elbow. This meant that I learned more from him than I knew at that time. As I came to see

* I thank Allan Arkush, Leora Batnitzky, and Oded Schechter for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter. I also thank the Tikvah fund at Princeton for its support during the year in which I wrote this chapter.

1 Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Franz Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism," in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, (Hanover, NH, and London: Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1988), 138-161.

2 The secondary literature treating the importance of historicism for twentieth century German-Jewish thought is substantial. The most extensive recent discussion is David Myers, *Resisting History*: *Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

3 "Historicism" is a slippery term that is variously defined. My use of the term follows Strauss who writes: "Whereas according to the ancients, philosophizing means to leave the cave, according to our contemporaries all philosophizing essentially belongs to a 'historical world,' 'culture,' 'civilization,' 'Weltanschauung' that is what Plato had called the cave. We shall call this view 'historicism.'" Cf. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 12.

4 Cf., for example, Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), 5, 8. On the role of Maimonides in Strauss's "recovery" of esotericism as reflected in his letters to Jacob Klein from 1938-1939, cf. Laurence Lampert, "Strauss's Recovery of Esotericism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, ed. Steven B. Smith (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 63-76.

> later, Lessing had said everything I had found out about the distinction between exoteric and esoteric speech and its grounds.[5]

Lessing helped Strauss identify esotericism, though Strauss was not fully aware of it at the time.[6] Strauss also testifies to Lessing's role in shaping his thinking about the question of reason versus revelation, writing, "I would like to name the man to whom I owe, so to say, everything I have been able to discern in the labyrinth of that grave question: Lessing."[7] But despite Lessing's importance for Strauss, scholars have rarely discussed his interpretation of Lessing. This is in part because of the paucity of his writings on the German Enlightenment thinker. While Strauss published two books and at least twelve separate essays on medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy (almost all on Maimonides and Farabi), he only penned a single eight-page essay on Lessing entitled "Exoteric Teaching," which he never published.[8]

Strauss studied Lessing intensively during the 1920s and 1930s in the context of editing parts of the *Jubiläumsausgabe* (Jubilee edition) of Moses Mendelssohn's collected works.[9] Among the texts assigned to Strauss was volume 3.2 of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*, which contained Mendelssohn's contributions to the "Pantheism Controversy" between Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and Mendelssohn, which centered on Lessing's

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5 Leo Strauss, "A Giving of Accounts," in his *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 457-466, here 462. Also cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 28.

6 David Janssens writes that while "Lessing may have been the first writer from whom Strauss began to learn to read between the lines [...] whether Lessing actually guided Strauss to Maimonides's art of writing [...] cannot be determined with certainty." Cf. David Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Philosophy, Prophecy, and Politics in Leo Strauss's Early Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 126.

7 Heinrich Meier first published this lecture in 2006. Cf. Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, trans. Marcus Brainard (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 178. Strauss's appreciation of Lessing is reflected in a 1971 letter to his friend Alexander Altmann in which Strauss writes that he directs his best students to study Lessing. Cf. Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften,* Jubiläumsausgabe (henceforth: JubA), ed. Leo Strauss, vol. 3.2 (Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 1974), viii.

8 Kenneth Green first published this essay in 1986. This is not to say that Lessing is entirely absent from Strauss's published work. As Green has shown, Lessing is mentioned in at least ten other published pieces, though these references are brief and in passing. Cf. Kenneth Hart Green, *Jew and Philosopher: The Return to Maimonides in the Jewish Thought of Leo Strauss* (Albany, N.: State University of New York Press, 1993), 149-150, n. 7. Why Strauss published so little about Lessing is an important question that I will not attempt to answer in this chapter.

9 On publication history of this work, see chapter six.

alleged Spinozism. Strauss had long been interested in Jacobi. He wrote his 1921 dissertation on Jacobi's theory of knowledge under the supervision of Ernst Cassirer, and Jacobi's influence pervades Strauss's 1935 *Philosophy and Law*. While scholars have discussed Jacobi's influence on Strauss,[10] David Janssens writes that "any influence that Jacobi may have exercised over Strauss's thought is secondary to the impact of Lessing and is even conditioned and mediated by the latter."[11] In this chapter, I will explore Strauss's interpretation of Lessing's Spinozism. By locating Strauss' understanding of Lessing's Spinozism in the context of German political upheavals in the 1920s and 1930s, I will argue that Strauss was led to misunderstand Lessing by relying on Jacobi. So *pace* Janssens, I would say that any influence that Lessing may have exercised over Strauss's thought is secondary to the impact of Jacobi and is even conditioned and mediated by the latter. I will conclude by presenting Strauss' Lessing and the historical Lessing as two alternatives for thinking about the relationship between philosophy and history each with distinct political implications.

I

For Strauss, the problems afflicting modern philosophy and politics are intertwined. In *What is Political Philosophy?*, he defines philosophy as "the attempt to replace opinion about the whole with knowledge about the whole"[12] and in *Natural Right and History*, he writes that knowledge of the whole involves "the quest for the 'principles' of all things [...] or the 'first things.'"[13] Elaborating on this, he continues:

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10 Discussions of Strauss's relation to Jacobi include: Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 77-97; David Janssens, "The Problem of the Enlightenment: Strauss, Jacobi, and the Pantheism Controversy," *The Review of Metaphysics* 56 (2003): 605-632; Steven B. Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 65-83; Benjamin Lazier, *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination Between the World Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 93-99; Eugene R. Sheppard, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher* (Hanover, NH, and London: Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 2006), 22-25; William Altman, "Exotericism after Lessing: The Enduring Influence of F.H. Jacobi on Leo Strauss," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 15.1 (2007): 59-83.

11 Cf. Janssens, "The Problem of the Enlightenment," 629.

12 Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959), 11.

13 Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 82.

> The philosophic quest for the first things presupposes not merely that there are first things but that the first things which are always or are imperishable are more truly beings than the things which are not always [...] Beings that are always are of higher dignity than beings that are not always, because only the former can be the ultimate cause of the latter [...] Beings that are not always are less truly beings than beings that are always because to be perishable means to be in between being and not being.[14]

In other words, rejecting mere opinion, philosophy seeks knowledge of the eternal first principles of things, which it deems the most real and most noble beings. Strauss sees the philosophic ideal as under attack by the historicist turn in philosophy expressed most profoundly by Nietzsche and Heidegger. In his famous parable of the cave, Plato stresses the discrepancy between unstable opinion held by the masses and the philosopher who leaves the cave to glimpse eternal truth. While for Plato moving from opinion to philosophy is a difficult task that only few will attain, Strauss thinks that modernity presents a new challenge to the pursuit of philosophy by calling into question the possibility of philosophical knowledge through "historicism" which seeks to limit the validity of philosophical assertions to their social, political, economic, and epistemic contexts. Strauss describes this as a "second cave" lying beneath the first cave, which does not merely oppose the *results* of philosophical inquiry into truth but questions the viability of the entire *project* of philosophical inquiry.[15]

Strauss claims that "generous liberals" see historicism as giving liberalism a powerful theoretical justification. He defines liberalism as "that political doctrine which regards as the fundamental political fact the rights, as distinguished from the duties, of man, and identifies the function of the state with the protection or the safeguarding of those

14 Ibid., 89.

15 Cf. Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 96-108; Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften,* ed. Heinrich Meier, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996), 456; Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law: Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and His Predecessors*, trans. Eve Adler (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 136 n. 2; Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 154-157. In *Persecution and the Art of Writing,* Strauss also discusses how the modern concept of science contributes to the sense of the impossibility of philosophical inquiry.

rights."[16] Historicism is thought to support liberalism because by reducing normative moral or political claims to their historical conditions, it undermines all "absolutist" doctrines, which could be used to control the individual, and thereby justifies a "rational or natural right of every preference that is tolerant of other preferences."[17]

Strauss claims that in reality historicism undermines liberalism. He illustrates this by indicating three ways in which historicism helped cause Weimar liberalism to give way to Nazism. First, since historicism questions the validity of the truths grounding the political order, it erodes patriotic sentiment in favor of individual, egoistic pursuits. This, however, is politically destabilizing since a strong polity requires a loyal citizenry willing to sacrifice their private interests for the sake of the public good. In Weimar, historicism contributed to a turn to egoistic individualism that eroded German national self-confidence, already shaken by World War I, and led the youth to a sense of malaise and alienation.[18] These factors, combined with Germany's lack of a vibrant tradition of liberal democracy, and a strong tradition of anti-Judaism primed Germans for embracing Nazism, a form of fascist nationalism "which had no other clear principle other than murderous hatred of the Jews."[19] Second, by relativizing moral and political "worldviews" historicism puts the most humane theory of individual rights on equal epistemological footing with the most vile racist and anti-Semitic teachings.[20] For Strauss, Nietzsche's claim that all metaphysical and moral claims whether humane or racist are expressions of a will to power, goes a long way toward explaining how a great philosopher like Heidegger could embrace the philosophically absurd teachings of Nazism.[21] Third,

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16 Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 181-182.

17 Cf. ibid., 5. This is not to say that liberalism in any sense depends on historicism. For Strauss, the roots of liberalism can be found in the seventeenth century with Hobbes's emphasis on egoistic seeking of comfortable self-preservation as the basis of political commitment, and Hobbes was no historicist.

18 Cf. Leo Strauss, "German Nihilism," *Interpretation* 26.3 (1999): 353-378, here 358-360, 368-369, 371.

19 Cf. Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 137-141; Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, 244-248; Leo Strauss, "Re-education of Axis Countries Concerning the Jews," *The Review of Politics* 69.4 (2007): 530-538, here 532-535; Strauss, "German Nihilism," 359; Sheppard, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile*, 22-25.

20 Cf. Strauss, "German Nihilism," 364; Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 172.

21 Cf. Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 461; Leo Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays*, ed. Hillel Gildain (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 81-98, here 97-98.

since the logical conclusion of historicism is that liberal tolerance is one worldview among many, the liberal embrace of tolerance over intolerance amounts to a "decision" that "is akin to intolerance rather than to tolerance."[22] This, however, is fatal for liberals who see their political principles as grounded in reason. Strauss claims that when, under the impact of historicism, Weimar liberals realized that their commitment to the values of individual dignity and tolerance was rationally groundless, this weakened their resolve to fight for those values in the face of Nazism.[23] As a Jew who could not return to Germany because of the Nazi rise to power and who saw many of his fellow Jews slaughtered, Strauss was thus deeply troubled by what he saw as the disastrous political consequences of historicism.[24]

For Strauss, philosophy has a complex relationship with law and revealed religion. On the one hand, the ancient philosophers realized that the pursuit of philosophy presupposes the leisure, social interaction, and security afforded by society. A well-functioning society depends on people believing in the moral correctness of the laws constituting its political order. This obedience receives an important impetus from the belief that God demands such obedience. Thus philosophers realized that it was in their interest to defend the political order and its theological supports.[25] But for Strauss, while revealed religion claims that there are absolute binding moral norms commanded by God, and obedience to God constitutes the highest good for human life, philosophers think that truth is something that must be continually sought through human faculties and they see all moral obligations not as categorical demands of reason but as of instrumental value in facilitating the pursuit of truth, which they deem the highest human good. Thus the philosopher needs the city, but is also naturally in tension with the city.[26] While this tension is as old as philosophy itself, it was particularly acute for medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophers. For while philosophers inquire into truth and justice, Judaism and Islam claim to possess definitive

22 Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 5-6.

23 Ibid.

24 Cf. Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 172-173; Strauss, "Re-education of Axis Countries," 534-535.

25 Strauss makes this point in many places. Cf. for example, Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 463; Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 130-131.

26 Cf., for example, Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 126-127, 144, 151; Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing,* 96-98, 112-118, 134-141; Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 109-110, 463.

accounts of these notions in their revealed books.[27]

To cope with this problem, medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophers embraced exotericism. Externally they conformed to and defended revealed law, but borrowing the language of mystical streams of their traditions, they claimed that there were hidden, esoteric meanings to their Holy Books. These philosophers claimed that they had privileged access to these esoteric interpretations, which corresponded to their philosophical teachings and they conveyed these teachings in coded writings. In this way, they were able to philosophize and teach in relative peace.[28]

According to Strauss, around the mid-seventeenth century philosophers began to reconceive the relationship between religion, politics, and philosophy. While the premodern philosophers thought that "the gulf separating the 'wise' and the 'vulgar' was a basic fact of nature that could not be influenced by any progress in education," seventeenth-century philosophers "looked forward to a time when, as a result of the progress of popular education, practically complete freedom of speech would be possible." Since the purpose of these writers was "to enlighten an ever-increasing number of people who were not potential philosophers," they "concealed their views only far enough to protect themselves as well as possible from persecution."[29] Machiavelli and Hobbes inaugurated this new approach to political philosophy.[30]

For Strauss, classical political philosophy seeks the "best political order [...] as a regime most conducive to virtue or how men should live."[31] On the classical view, every being has a specific perfection, which belongs to its nature. For Plato and Aristotle, human perfection is determined by the fact that human beings are rational, social animals hence human excellence (or virtue) comprises moral and especially intellectual perfection, which involves contemplating eternal truths. Since nature supplies the standard for the good life, nature is seen as something good, and the good regime strives to control the lower so that it can serve the higher. On the level of the individual, this involves keeping sensual desires in

27 Cf. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 57-58; Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 122-123; Janssens, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 102-103, 127. Strauss does not think much of philosophical attempts, like Kant's to find a rational basis for categorical moral demands although I am not familiar with any place where he engages Kant's arguments in detail.

28 Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 20-21, 41-61.

29 Ibid., 33-34.

30 Cf. ibid., 34 n. 15.

31 Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," 84.

check so that they do not lead to moral vice and impede cultivating one's intellect. On the level of society, this involves controlling the masses of people and organizing matters so that the elite philosophers can thrive. But given the relative rarity of human beings capable of achieving perfection, establishing a good regime in large part depends on chance.[32]

According to Strauss, Machiavelli and Hobbes effect a revolution in political philosophy.[33] They see the premodern attempt to derive the ideal political order from how people ought to live as hopeless idealistic, and instead they derive the right order of society from "how men actually live."[34] This involves "a deliberate lowering of the ultimate goal" for what drives most people is not reason but desire, the most powerful being the desire for self-preservation.[35] For Strauss, this new political science receives an important impetus from changes in natural science. Beginning in the sixteenth century, a new scientific ideal emerges which eliminates final causes and chance by seeking an exact, mathematical account of nature. According to this new scientific ideal, nature is fundamentally unintelligible. The only things we know are the things we construct. Hence knowledge is no longer seen as receptive, but as creative. This helps prepare a radical transformation in what is seen as the purpose of knowledge as the premodern philosophical ideal of contemplation of nature is replaced by the view that knowledge is a technique through which human beings dominate the world and refashion it to better satisfy their desires. Since we need to control nature for it to be hospitable to us, nature is not deemed good in itself – if anything it is valenced as hostile and evil. Goodness derives from human beings' imposing their will on unruly nature.[36]

For Machiavelli and Hobbes, justice and ethics are not natural virtues, but rather political virtues grounded in our desire for self-preservation, which constitutes the only true basis for society. The state does not exist to help us perfect ourselves but rather to help us live in security and comfort.[37] Since all people seek comfortable self-preservation, the success of the state does not depend on chance but can be accomplished

32 Ibid., 84-86; Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 139.

33 For the present purposes I treat Machiavelli and Hobbes together though Strauss notes differences between them.

34 Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 178.

35 Ibid., 178, 181.

36 Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," 86-88; Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 172-178.

37 Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 181.

with the correct political constitution and the right popular education. For according to Hobbes, when reason is set against desires it is impotent, but when it is put in the service of desires, it is omnipotent. The key to political stability is not that people pursue high-minded philosophical ideals such as knowledge of truth or moral selflessness, but rather that they act from enlightened self-interest.[38] Since modern science is a way of controlling nature, it is in the interest of the state that a scientific mindset and scientific knowledge be as widely disseminated as possible.[39]

Strauss writes that contemporary scholars hold that "the only presentations of an author's views which can be accepted as true are those ultimately borne out by his own explicit statements."[40] While scholars see this approach as reflecting an historical sense which demands that "each period must be understood by itself and must not be judged by standards alien to it," he notes that this method of interpretation may itself be an historical artifact reflecting a modern view of knowledge and education, which preaches the value of openly disseminating scientific knowledge. But, claims Strauss, the fact that contemporary scholars read premodern authors with this modern assumption in mind, may prevent scholars from appreciating the esoteric writing techniques used by premodern writers. To show that the forgetting of esotericism is a distinctly contemporary phenomenon, Strauss provides evidence of premodern authors who signal that they write esoterically, and of writers through the nineteenth century who take it for granted that premodern philosophers often did not openly express their true convictions.[41] For these reasons, Strauss concludes that *historical exactness* demands that scholars take seriously the possibility of esoteric writing.[42] Furthermore, since the proper aim of what Strauss calls historical "interpretation" is to "ascertain what the speaker said and how he actually understood what he said," and many premodern philosophers see the aim of philosophy as articulating a "final account of the whole," a correct, *historical*

38 I will explore this further in section V below.

39 Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 463.

40 Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 26-27. Cf. Leo Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," *Interpretation* 14.1 (1986), 51-59, here 51.

41 Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing,* 27-29. I am uncertain why Strauss thinks that through the nineteenth century writers still discerned esoteric writing, but that they ceased doing so in the twentieth century. What changed between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?

42 Cf. Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 51-52.

interpretation of such philosophers requires that scholars be open to the possibility that premodern philosophers do in fact articulate trans-historical, eternal truths.[43] So for Strauss reading "old philosophical books" with a correct historical sense makes possible climbing out of the second cave dug by historicism.[44] Once one climbs out of this second cave, however, the old "quarrel" between the "absolutist" claims to truth put forward by revealed religion and reason must be resumed.[45]

II

According to Strauss, while the practice of exoteric writing was gradually forgotten, as late as the last third of the eighteenth century, there was at least one man, namely Lessing, who still "fully understood" its significance.[46] In "A Giving of Accounts," Strauss notes that Lessing "greatly assisted" him in his study of Spinoza.[47] Before turning to Strauss's interpretation of Lessing, it is therefore worthwhile discussing his interpretation of Spinoza.

In his 1965 preface to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion,* Strauss notes that "the great revolt against traditional thought [and] the emergence of modern philosophy or natural science was completed prior to Spinoza." But he does not see Spinoza as taking part in this "great revolt" in a straightforward way. Rather, he writes that "far from being a revolutionary thinker, Spinoza is the only heir of the modern revolt *and the medieval tradition as well* (my emphasis)."[48] On the one hand, Spinoza's philosophy looks like a throwback to the medievals. For while the "modern project [...] demands that man should become master and owner of nature" and that "philosophy should cease to be essentially theoretical," Spinoza "at-

43 Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 143. Strauss distinguishes "interpretation" from "explanation." He defines "interpretation" as "the attempt to ascertain what the speaker said and how he actually understood what he said regardless of whether he expressed that understanding explicitly or not." He defines "explanation" as "the attempt to ascertain those implications of [an author's] statements of which he was unaware." Strauss writes that "It is obvious that the interpretation has to precede the explanation" since "If the explanation is not based on an adequate interpretation, it will be an explanation, not of the statement to be explained, but of a figment of imagination of the historian."

44 Cf. Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy,* 463; Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 136 n. 2; Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 151-158.

45 Cf. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 26.

46 Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 51-52.

47 Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 462.

48 Ibid., 154.

tempts to restore the traditional conception of contemplation," which seeks knowledge on the basis of first principles. While modern philosophy sees nature as something hostile that must be conquered, Spinoza "cannot think of conquering nature [since] nature is God." Similarly, while modern science conceives knowledge as continually progressing, Spinoza believes "in the final character of his philosophy as *the* clear and distinct and therefore, *the* true account of the whole."[49] In politics, Strauss notes that Spinoza returns to "classical republicanism" and that he writes esoterically not merely to protect himself from persecution but also to signal his true teachings to potential philosophers.[50]

But according to Strauss, Spinoza cannot be considered straightforwardly medieval because while he affirms many medieval positions he does so on the basis of modern philosophical assumptions, which leads him to transform these positions. While Spinoza thinks that philosophy must begin with first principles, he does not follow the medievals in considering these "first things" as greater in nobility than what proceeds from them. This is because Spinoza departs from the medieval view that the highest knowledge is knowledge of the one eternal substance in favor of the modern view that the highest knowledge is knowledge of individuals, which for Spinoza proceeds from the one substance.[51] Similarly, while Spinoza affirms the contemplative ideal he does not do so because he follows the premoderns in regarding the contemplative life as the life most in accordance with nature. For by identifying God with nature, Spinoza conceives all human actions without exception as natural and he therefore rejects the premodern idea that human beings have natural ends. Rather, for Spinoza the contemplative ideal is "the result [...] of man's 'forming an idea of man as a model of human nature.'" In this way, he prepares the modern notion of "the ideal as a [...] human project as distinguished from an end imposed by nature."[52] Since all human actions are natural, Spinoza does not see a life of passion as against nature and his ideal polity therefore "gives the passions much greater freedom." He also breaks from the medievals by denying the existence of natural justice and in following moderns such as Hobbes who derive duty from

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49 Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 154, 156-157.

50 Ibid., 177, 186-190.

51 Strauss refers to Spinoza's "third kind of knowledge" which involves intuitive knowledge of particulars.

52 Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 156.

natural right and consider right co-extensive with power.[53]

According to Strauss, while Spinoza writes esoterically, he does so for modern ends. Living in relatively tolerant Amsterdam at a time of "weakening ecclesiastical authority in Christian Europe" and "increasing unpopularity of religious persecution," Spinoza argues for the freedom of philosophizing, something unimaginable for the medievals, but a great boon for philosophers. And while he defends republicanism, Spinoza is the first philosopher who defends liberal democracy, "a specifically modern regime" that makes the state's primary function the preservation of individual rights.[54] Similarly, while Spinoza follows the medievals in recognizing the necessity of state religion, the specific form of state religion that he defends is "neutral in regard to the differences between Judaism and Christianity." Rather, its basis is the practice universal morality grounded in "roots" of "universal faith" that are not unique to any particular religious confession. In this way, according to Strauss, Spinoza lays the groundwork for a "neutral" polity in which "Jews and Christians" can be equal members, and where religion is a means of promoting tolerance and moral obedience.[55] I now turn to Strauss's interpretation of Lessing.

III

In "Exoteric Teaching," Strauss focuses on two works by Lessing, "Leibniz on Eternal Punishments" (1773), and "Ernst and Falk" (1778-1780).[56] "Ernst and Falk" is a dialogue between Falk, a Freemason, and Ernst who expresses intermittent interest in this secret society. For Strauss, the central claim of the dialogue is that "every political constitution and even the best one is necessarily imperfect, which makes necessary the existence of [...] Freemasonry."[57] According to Strauss, Falk defines Freemasonry as a secret society, which "knows truths

53 Ibid., 157.

54 Ibid.

55 Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 90-91, 160-161.

56 Strauss also mentions Lessing's defense of the Trinity in his 1773 work "Andreas Wissowatius's Criticisms of the Trinity," but Strauss does not discuss this work.

57 Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 52-53; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. and ed. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 186, 192-193, 210.

which ought better to be concealed."[58] These hidden truths are that "all practical or political life is essentially inferior to contemplative life" and is even "superfluous"[59] in relation to the contemplative life, which is "self-sufficient."[60] The reason why every political constitution is necessarily imperfect is that "the requirements of the lower [that is, practical/political life – MG] are bound, from time to time to conflict with, and to supersede in practice the requirements of the higher [that is, the contemplative life – MG]," which "is the reason why the 'Freemason' (i.e. the wise or the men of contemplation) must conceal certain fundamental truths."[61] Strauss does not explain why the "requirements of the lower" are bound to conflict with and supersede the "higher," but he may be referring to the Platonic view that philosophers need to participate in public life although this distracts them from the ultimate good, which is contemplation.[62]

Turning to "Leibniz on Eternal Punishment," Strauss notes that the explicit purpose of the essay is to explain "the motives and reasons" that induced Leibniz to defend the orthodox Christian teaching of eternal punishment.[63] Picking up on Lessing's claim that Leibniz's defense of eternal punishment is "identical to what all ancient philosophers used to do in their external speech," and noting Lessing's claim that Leibniz "observed a prudence for which our recent philosophers have become too wise,"[64] Strauss links Leibniz's defense of eternal punishment to the "exotericism of the ancients," which Lessing thought was being abandoned by philosophers in his own time. According to Strauss, Leibniz had recognized that religious beliefs are necessary to support the political order especially "frightful"[65] beliefs like eternal punishment, which help ensure moral obedience. Noting Lessing's claim that Leibniz presented his defense of eternal punishment as a "mere possibility,"[66] Strauss takes Lessing to be claiming that while a revealed truth can never be proven

58 Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 52; Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings,* 191.

59 Cf. Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings,* 189-190, 199.

60 Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 53.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.; Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings,* 210. Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 149-153.

63 Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 53.

64 Ibid.; Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings,* 46.

65 Cf. Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings,* 53-54.

66 Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 53; Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 53, 60. Also cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 46.

philosophically, it can also never be refuted by philosophy. While this is a sufficient defense of religious doctrines for the masses who are disposed to believe in revealed truth, the philosopher who has no philosophical reasons for accepting these revealed doctrines "does not, strictly speaking believe in the truth of [them]."[67] In support of this interpretation, Strauss cites Lessing's remark at the end of the essay that "Socrates himself believed in the truth of eternal punishments quite seriously. He believed in them at least to the extent that he thought it expedient to teach them in ways that do not in any ways arouse suspicion and which are most explicit."[68]

Judging the interpretive accuracy of any literary work and especially that of an enigmatic writer like Lessing is difficult. But while I cannot definitively prove that Strauss's interpretation of Lessing is incorrect, I find it highly questionable. I agree with Strauss that a linchpin of "Ernst and Falk" is Falk's claim that "every political constitution is necessarily imperfect." And there is no doubt that for Falk Freemasons "know truths which ought better to be concealed." The question is why every constitution is imperfect and what truths should be concealed. For Strauss, the answer is the superiority of the contemplative life over the practical or political life, which puts Lessing in line with Spinoza and the premodern Platonic philosophers. I find no textual basis for this claim.

In the key second dialogue, Falk asks Ernst to imagine the most perfect constitution, one which would govern a world-state. Falk argues that even the best constitution would necessarily give rise to social divisions. Since it would be practically impossible to administer a world-state, there would need to be smaller states, which would unite peoples according to common ethnic, linguistic, and religious traits. So there would still be Germans, Frenchmen, Swedes, etc. But given that different states would have different interests, these states would inevitably come into conflict with one another and members of different states would thus still behave toward one another "not as *mere* human beings towards *mere* human beings but as *such* human beings towards *such* human beings (emphasis Lessing's)."[69] Furthermore, the nature of society is such that talents are distributed unevenly, making it inevitable that

67 Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 54. Cf. Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 121.

68 Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 54; Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings,* 59.

69 Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings,* 194.

there will still be class divisions with "higher" and "lower" ranking citizens. Even were property divided equally, the disparity of talents would result in some people being able to make better use of their property than others. So there would inevitably be an uneven distribution of wealth and of political power.

For Lessing, the fact that "people can only be united through division" is something that even the most perfect constitution cannot avoid and that is his stated reason for holding that every constitution is necessarily imperfect. But while national prejudices, patriotism, and class divisions are inevitable and indeed necessary for society, Falk notes that "It is desirable that there should be men in every state who have got beyond national prejudices and know where patriotism ceases to be a virtue [...] that there be men in every state who are not susceptible to the prejudice of their native religion [...] that there be men in every state who are not overawed by exalted rank or repelled by social inferiority."[70] These men are the Freemasons who form a society dedicated to "counteracting the unavoidable evils of the state" by uniting people on the basis of their common humanity. Since the Freemasons recognize the necessity of division for society, they outwardly remain loyal patriots of their native state while they secretly seek to mitigate its divisive effects by promoting a universal brotherhood grounded in equality. This is the meaning of Falk's statement that Freemasons aim at making "all that are *commonly* [*gemeiniglich*] described as good deeds for the most part superfluous (my emphasis)."[71] While good deeds are "commonly" linked with patriotism and fostering the good of a particular state, Freemasons work toward a time when ethical acts which benefit *humanity as a whole* will be recognized as good.[72] I find no evidence in "Ernst and Falk" that Lessing characterizes the Freemasons as philosophers who see contemplation of truth as the true end of human life.[73] Indeed, the fact that

70 Ibid., 196.

71 Ibid., 189.

72 Cf. ibid., 199.

73 To interpret Falk as claiming that the Freemasons are philosophers who regard contemplation as the proper end of human life requires an extremely strong reading of certain statements in "Ernst and Falk." The statement that I find closest to supporting Strauss's reading (and surprisingly not cited by Strauss himself) occurs in the second dialogue. After hearing Falk expound on the necessary divisions engendered by society, Ernst asks Falk if he is recommending abandoning society, to which Falk responds: "If the only benefit of civil society were that it is the sole context in which reason can be cultivated, I would bless it even if it contained far greater evils." Cf. Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings,* 195. Falk does not, however, specify what reason is. Is it

premodern philosophers divide humanity into elite philosophers and vulgar masses represents the very kind of social division that Falk sees the Freemasons as existing to counteract.

Turning to "Leibniz on Eternal Punishment," the explicit purpose of this essay is to oppose Johann August Eberhard's interpretation of Leibniz. Eberhard's interpretation of Leibniz in fact closely resembles Strauss's. For Eberhard claims that Leibniz "took the doctrine [of eternal punishment] as given and attributed a tolerable sense to it [...] without subscribing to [it] himself."[74] Lessing, however, emphatically rejects Eberhard's interpretation arguing that Leibniz's defense of eternal punishment was grounded in his deeply held conviction that popular revealed beliefs conceal inner, philosophical truths, which is how he understands exotericism.[75] As Lessing puts it in speaking of Leibniz's attitude toward revealed beliefs, "Leibniz did indeed subscribe to them, namely in the tolerable sense which he did not so much attribute to them as discover in them. *The tolerable sense was the truth and how could he not subscribe to the truth* (emphasis mine)?"[76] For Leibniz, the inner truth of eternal punishment is that since everything in the world is connected, nothing in the world is without consequences, indeed eternal consequences. The punishment for sin is the recollection of the imperfection that attaches to one on account of the negative effects that one has caused. But given that actions have eternal consequences, the punishment for sin must be eternal.[77] Lessing calls this argument Leibniz's "great esoteric truth," and he makes clear that Leibniz's exotericism had nothing to do with "noble lies" writing that, "I would certainly not wish anyone to accuse Leibniz of [...] publicly paying lip service [to the doctrine of eternal punishment] while secretly and fundamentally denying it."[78]

Lessing's interpretation of Leibniz is grounded in his appreciation of Leibniz's famous "grand manner of philosophizing." In a 1698 letter to

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contemplation or is it practical reason or scientific, technological achievement? And even if Falk does refer to contemplation, he certainly does not state that the contemplative life is "self-sufficient" and that moral/political life is of no value in relation to the true end of human life.

74 Cf. Eberhard's comments cited in Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 45.

75 Lessing's opposition to Eberhard's approach is reflected in his famous comment that Leibniz "struck fire from stones but did not conceal his fire in them." Cf. Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings,* 46.

76 Ibid.

77 Cf. Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings,* 52-53.

78 Ibid., 48-49.

Pierre Bayle, Leibniz speaks of the way in which his philosophy comprises elements of numerous previous systems including Scholasticism and Kabbalah, and he laments that, "our greatest failure has been the sectarian spirit [*esprit de secte*], which imposes limits upon itself by spurning others."[79] Scholars have seen in Lessing's appreciation of Leibniz's "grand manner of philosophizing" a shift from his earlier radical Deism.[80] They date this shift to 1771 when in a famous letter to Mendelssohn Lessing notes that, "while discarding certain prejudices (*Vorurtheile*), I may have thrown away a little too much, which I shall have to retrieve."[81] This approach is also reflected in Lessing's final theological work "The Education of the Human Race" whose underlying methodological principle is to see in "all the positive religions the process whereby the human understanding in all places can develop and will develop further still."[82] As an example of religious development, Lessing shows how the ostensibly irrational Christian dogmas of the trinity, original sin, and vicarious atonement can be shown to conceal rational truths, which point to "a new eternal gospel" that will supersede Christianity.[83] The progressive education of humankind is the theological correlate to the progressive emergence of transnational humanitarianism in politics.

IV

I can imagine how Strauss would have replied to my arguments, had he been alive to hear them. At the beginning of "Exoteric Teaching," Strauss writes:

> Lessing discussed exotericism as fully as could be done

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79 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, ed. C. I. Gerhardt, vol. 4 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1960), 523-524; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters,* ed. Leroy Loemker (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1976), 496.

80 Cf. Edward S. Flajole, "Lessing's Retrieval of Lost Truths," *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* (*PMLA*) 74.1 (1959), 52-66, here 54.

81 Cf. Mendelssohn, JubA, vol. 12.2, 1; Toshimasa Yasukata, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 24; Flajole, "Lessing's Retrieval," 52-66. In his 1753 essay "The Christianity of Reason," Lessing had attempted a rational explication of the trinity. But from a 1761 letter to Mendelssohn it seems that Mendelssohn had persuaded Lessing to abandon this project. Lessing returned to this endeavor in 1771.

82 Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 218.

83 Cf. ibid., 234-235, 238.

> by someone who still accepted exotericism not merely as a strange artifact of the past, but rather as an intelligible necessity for all times and therefore as a principle guiding his own literary activity. In short, Lessing was the last writer who revealed, while hiding them, the reasons compelling wise men to hide the truth: he wrote between the lines about the art of writing between the lines.[84]

In Strauss's view, Lessing wrote esoterically about esotericism. So Strauss would most probably claim that my interpretation of Lessing reflects my having been duped by Lessing's subterfuges. I leave aside the way in which this imagined defense of Strauss highlights the difficulties inherent in ever validating an esoteric interpretation, an objection that Strauss is aware of and tries to address.[85] In responding to Strauss, I follow the method that he uses to attack modern intellectual historians whose "forgetting" the method of esoteric writing leads them to misunderstand premodern philosophers. Strauss historicizes their methodological approach claiming that it reflects a distinctly modern view of knowledge. I will historicize Strauss's interpretation of Lessing by situating it in the German political climate of the 1920s and 1930s and in relation to his engagement with Jacobi, which led Strauss astray.[86]

Reflecting retrospectively on mid-1920s Germany, Strauss writes:

> At that time Germany was a liberal democracy. The regime was known as the Weimar republic [. . .] Weimar stood for leanings to the West, if not for the inner dependence of the Germans on the French and above all on the English.[87]

In referring to the French and English, Strauss means the ideals of the French and English Enlightenment, which he sees as forming the

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84 Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 52.

85 Cf. for example, Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 30-31 where he lays out rules for reading between the lines. Also, cf. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*?, 223-225.

86 In historicizing Strauss' thought, I follow the method used by Eugene Sheppard in his pioneering work, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher* (Hanover, N. H. and London: Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 2006).

87 Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 137.

foundation of modern civilization. In a 1941 lecture, Strauss defines modern civilization as "the conscious culture of reason" whose twin pillars are morals and science.[88] For the French and English, morals involve claiming one's rights and pursuing enlightened self-interest, which provides the basis for acting honestly ("honesty is the best policy") as well as the most effective means of increasing productivity, which enriches society. Modern science involves technological achievement whose aim is "relieving man's estate" and promoting an ethos of rational criticism and doubt.[89] While the Weimar republic was grounded in Enlightenment ideals, there quickly arose a right-wing reaction, which Strauss calls "German Nihilism." Many of the German Nihilists were "young people," who were horrified by the prospect of a triumph of modern civilization, which they saw as striving to a create an "unserious," pacified planet devoted to production, consumption, and entertainment "in which everyone would be happy and satisfied, in which everyone would have his little pleasure by day and little pleasure by night."[90] They also thought that the ethos of doubt and rational criticism embraced by Weimar promoted self-centered cowardice, which weakened the state by undermining the ideal of selfless, patriotic devotion to the German nation. Strauss notes that German opposition to modern enlightened civilization was not new. In the "heyday" of German philosophy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, German philosophers opposed the French and English modern ideal by distinguishing between morality and self-interest, and upholding courageousness, self-sacrifice, and duty as the highest values.[91] The German Nihilists hearkened back to this older German tradition, but unlike their classical predecessors who sought to reconcile these values with reason, the German Nihilists embraced an irrational decisionism and sought to give these values a "real, unmetaphoric" sense. They desired a society "which is constantly confronted with and basically directed toward the serious moment of [...] war" for they thought that "Only life in such a *tense* atmosphere, only life which is based on constant awareness of the *sacrifices* to which it owes its existence and of the necessity, the *duty* of sacrifice of life and

88 Strauss, "German Nihilism," 365.

89 Ibid., 358.

90 Ibid., 360. Cf. Leo Strauss, "Notes on Schmitt," in George Schwab, ed., *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 83-107, here 83-85, 101.

91 Strauss, "German Nihilism," 371.

all worldly goods, is truly human."[92]

From Strauss's treatment of Jacobi in his 1921 doctoral dissertation, we clearly see that he was drawn to the position of the German Nihilists at that time. Near the beginning of the dissertation, Strauss writes that Jacobi divides thinkers into two basic classes, which reflect opposing ethos. The first class is the "noble" type whose mental cast is characterized by temerity, trust, faith, courage, and hope. The second class is the "base" type whose mental cast is characterized by fear, mistrust, cowardice, lack of faith (doubt, suspicion, stinginess) and arrogance. Filled with doubt and mistrust, the second type shies away from great deeds instead focusing on individual pleasures. In contrast, the first type are the bold ones who do not look at things so closely. Trusting the "voice in the heart," they are courageous, and are willing to sacrifice themselves for their truly held beliefs. Strauss writes that Jacobi pointed out that in the period of the Enlightenment, the "base, conceited, dishonorable (*unedle dünkelhafte unredliche*)" first type became dominant and he extends Jacobi's analysis writing that with Jacobi, "for the first time a precise element of modern culture was perceived." In Jacobi's critique of Enlightenment rationalism as "base," "doubting," "egoistic," and "cowardly" in contrast to noble, courageous, faith, Strauss sees an important precedent for his own disdain for Weimar and for the possibility of renewing robust German nationalism.[93]

In addition to this political context, there is an important theological context, which shaped Strauss's thinking in the 1920s and 1930s. At the time, Strauss was attracted to religious law as a possible antidote to the crisis of modern civilization. For religious law contained absolute imperatives to obey God's revealed will, which could thereby instill a sense of duty and commitment. But under the influence of crisis theologians like Karl Barth and Friedrich Gogarten, Strauss became very skeptical about the ability of modern liberal religion to fulfill this role. In seeking to reconcile faith and reason, Strauss thought that liberal theologians came to espouse an anthropological position that "interiorized" religious ideas by reducing them to products of human experience. Furthermore, by casting religion as sphere of life to be cultivated like aesthetics, and making individual autonomy the touchstone of religious

92 Ibid. Cf. Strauss, "Notes on Schmitt," 87-88, 94-95, 100-101, 105-106.

93 Cf. Sheppard, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile*, 22-25.

obligation, liberal religion made adherence to religious law voluntary.[94] Strauss saw this approach as falsifying the original sense of religious ideas in favor of a muddled, lukewarm religious position that undercut religion's ability to ennoble. For religion could only ennoble if it was grounded in the ability to demand absolute obedience to the revealed will of an "external" commanding authority.[95]

Strauss considered the Weimar republic the political correlate of liberal religion. For Weimar "proclaimed its moderate, non-radical character" by striving to "balance dedication to the principles of 1789 and dedication to the highest German tradition." But since reconciling doubting, cowardly reason with faithful, heroic, commitment was impossible, the Weimar Republic ended up "presenting the sorry spectacle of justice without a sword or with justice unable to use the sword" and so was weak and doomed to fail.[96] In disdaining Weimar, Strauss sympathized with radical German Nihilists like Heidegger and Schmitt who eventually became Nazis.[97] But as a German Jew, he came to realize that German Nihilism was a dead-end.[98] Still, Strauss thought that the fact that Enlightenment ideals had birthed Nihilism reflected a deep crisis in modern civilization. In Jacobi's account of Lessing's Spinozism, he found a prescient diagnosis of this crisis as well as a way out.

While in his dissertation Strauss did not focus on Jacobi's treatment of Lessing's Spinozism, he had the opportunity to explore this issue in depth when he worked on editing the collected works of Moses Mendelssohn in the 1920s and 1930s. Jacobi's account of Lessing's Spinozism appears in his 1785 *On the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Mr. Moses Mendelssohn*. For Jacobi, Spinozism is equivalent to atheism and fatalism since it denies both a transcendent deity and final causes. Denying a transcendent deity and final causes means that miracles

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94 Cf. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 23-29, 41-42, 47-52, 72-73.

95 Cf. ibid; Lazier, *God Interrupted*, 93-110.

96 Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 137.

97 On Strauss' characterization of Schmitt and Heidegger as German Nihilists, cf. Strauss, "German Nihilism," 362.

98 See above, note 24. This took Strauss longer than might be expected. In his now famous 1933 letter to Karl Löwith, Strauss still expressed sympathy with "the principles of the right, that is [...] fascist, authoritarian, and imperial principles" though he sought to oppose Nazism on the basis of these principles. For discussion of this letter, cf. Sheppard, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile*, 60-67; Lazier, *God Interrupted*, 116-117. For an alternative interpretation of the letter, see Altman, "The Alpine Limits of Jewish Thought: Leo Strauss, National Socialism, and *Judentum Ohne Gott*," 17-18. I am unconvinced by Altman's reading.

are impossible, which in turn renders revelation impossible. Similarly, without final causes there can be no divine providence. In publicizing Lessing's Spinozism, Jacobi seeks to warn adherents of the moderate Enlightenment against the dangers of philosophical speculation by disabusing them of the idea that revelation is compatible with reason. He thereby hopes that enlightened religious thinkers will reconsider their uncritical embrace of rationalism and return to Christian faith.

While Jacobi publicizes Lessing's Spinozism as a way of attacking the moderate Enlightenment, he notes that Lessing himself tried to conceal the radical consequences of rationalism. Thus, Jacobi reports that although Lessing "esteemed Mendelssohn most among all his friends [den *er unter seinen Freunden am höchsten schätzte*]" he never disclosed his Spinozism to him.[99] In his posthumous response to the *Spinoza Letters* entitled *To Lessing's Friends*, Mendelssohn expresses pained irony at Jacobi's implication that Lessing was an esoteric thinker:

> Lessing then made allowances for my weakness [. . .] and hid from me, his most highly esteemed friend his true system, in order not to rob me of a conviction which allows me to contemplate life in a calm, happy way [. . .] If things truly happened as Jacobi makes them appear, then I ask: Who has more actual religion, more true piety, the atheist who does not wish to undermine his beloved friend's belief in natural religion, which he sees makes him happy, or the orthodox [*rechtgläubig*] Christian who mercilessly knocks from the hand of the lame man the crutch with which he limps along?[100]

Jacobi's significance for Strauss' interpretation of Lessing is clear from a number of places. First, in support of Strauss's contention that Lessing asserted that "all the ancient philosophers and Leibniz made use of an exoteric presentation of the truth as distinguished from its esoteric presentation," Strauss cites "a private conversation" in which *Jacobi* reports that Lessing told him that "it is often difficult to uncover his [that

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99 Cf. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. and ed. George Di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill – Queen's University Press, 1994), 181-182.

100 Cf. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, vol. 3.2, 193.

is, Leibniz's – MG] true meaning even with the greatest acumen."[101] This "private conversation" refers to Jacobi's Spinoza conversations with Lessing and is preceded by Jacobi's attributing to Lessing the words: "I am afraid that he (i. e. Leibniz) was a Spinozist at heart."[102]

Second, in his discussion of Lessing's esotericism Strauss cites Jacobi's report that Lessing once said that all the arguments against papal despotism are either no arguments at all or are two or three times more applicable against the secular despotism of princes. To understand this comment, Strauss notes that "Jacobi says elsewhere in his own name *but certainly in the spirit of Lessing* that despotism which is based 'exclusively' on superstition is less bad than secular despotism (emphasis mine)." Strauss explains this to mean that while secular despotism, which rules primarily through the threat of force can be allied with Enlightenment as in the case of Hobbes, the only way for despotism, which is based exclusively on superstition, "i. e. not at all on force" to be maintained is for the philosophical minority to "refrain from openly exposing and refuting superstitious beliefs."[103]

Third, considering the possibility that Lessing's 1771 statement regretting having discarded certain prejudices too hastily represents a turn to a more positive appreciation of the truth value of revealed religion, Strauss cites a letter from Jacobi to Hamann where Jacobi reports that, "When Lessing's *Education of the Human Race* [...] was seen by some not to be an unchristian writing, but to be almost the opposite, his annoyance over the foolishness of people rose to anger [*stieg sein Ärger über die Albernheit des Volkes bis zum Ergrimmen*]."[104]

So Jacobi is Strauss's guide in interpreting Lessing as assuming an unbridgeable divide between revelation and philosophy, which is reflected in Lessing's rejection of rational theism in favor of Spinozism. Like Jacobi, Strauss interprets Lessing's mental frame as "characterized by an innate disgust against compromises in serious i. e. theoretical matters" with Lessing accepting the same dilemma as had Jacobi namely "orthodoxy [...] or Spinoza (i. e. philosophy for there is no philosophy other than Spinoza)."[105] Like Jacobi, Strauss interprets Lessing's re-

101 Cf. Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 54 n. 16.

102 Cf. Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings,* 190.

103 Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 58-59.

104 Cf. ibid., 57.

105 Cf. Meier, *Leo Strauss,*178. Similarly, noting that "Jacobi's struggle against a moderate

trieval of discarded truths as reflecting his newfound appreciation for the political utility of revealed religion.[106] And given Strauss's account of Spinoza's upholding the contemplative ideal, one sees why he understands Lessing' as privileging theoretical speculation over ethical praxis.

While Strauss's views on Lessing's esotericism are deeply influenced by Jacobi, he does not accept Jacobi's understanding of Lessing's Spinozism completely. This does not, however, reflect a mitigating of Jacobi's influence on Strauss, but just the opposite. For where Strauss deviates from Jacobi's interpretation of Lessing, he generally attributes Jacobi's *own views* to Lessing even where Jacobi himself does not. For example, while Jacobi sees Lessing's Spinozism as involving his holding that reason can refute revelation and that intellectual probity results in atheism, Strauss ascribes to Lessing Jacobi's view that reason cannot refute revelation. In support of this, Strauss notes that a careful reading of Jacobi's *Spinoza Letters* show that Mendelssohn correctly claimed that in the Spinoza conversations Lessing "had in no way professed himself unreservedly in favor of Spinozism."[107] Strauss also attributes to Lessing the very Jacobian view that "by means of mockery" the Enlightenment attempted, "to 'laugh' orthodoxy out of a position from which it could not be dislodged [...] even by reason."[108] Strauss also follows Jacobi in arguing that not only can philosophy never refute revelation, it also cannot ground itself through reason and hence is ultimately based on "an unevident, arbitrary or blind decision" that is, on an act of faith. Strauss therefore concludes, as had Jacobi, that faith has priority over reason.[109] Rather than crediting Jacobi with this point, however, Strauss

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enlightenment that served two masters" was in the same spirit as Lessing's attack on the "rational Christianity" and "half-orthodoxy (*halbe Orthodoxie*)" Strauss concludes "that Jacobi was the most understanding follower that Lessing found among his contemporaries." Leo Strauss, "Einleitung zu Morgenstunden," JubA, vol. 3/2, xxvi.

106 Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 74-75.

107 Cf. Strauss, "Einleitung," xxxi. Noting Mendelssohn's reply to Jacobi that "Lessing himself absolutely and without qualification [*Einschränkung*] could not be understood in terms of the system of any man whatever," Strauss comments: "[This] was Mendelssohn's original argument and at the same time his strongest: it was fully confirmed by Lessing's oral statements as reported by Jacobi himself." See ibid., xc-xci.

108 Cf. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 29-30; Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 143-146. Compare Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy,* 127-131, 245-246; Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 75.

109 Cf. Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 131-132, 170-171; Strauss, *Natural Right and History,* 71-72, 75; Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 104-108.

attributes this view to Lessing.[110]

For Strauss, Lessing's Spinozism is apparently connected with his 1779 play *Nathan the Wise*. In 1946, Strauss penned an outline for a book on medieval Jewish philosophy to be titled *Philosophy and Law: Historical Essays*.[111] In the penultimate chapter called "A Controversy on Spinoza" Strauss planned to treat the Pantheism Controversy, while in the last chapter he would discuss *Nathan the Wise*, which Strauss called "the outstanding poetic monument erected in honor of medieval Jewish philosophy."[112] In his outline for this last chapter, Strauss noted that "the recollection of the man Maimonides was probably one of the motives underlying Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*."[113] This is a deliberately provocative claim on Strauss's part because Mendelssohn, not Maimonides had always been presumed to be the model for Lessing's protagonist Nathan. In his controversy with Lessing, Mendelssohn frequently cited *Nathan the Wise* against Jacobi's claim that Lessing was a covert Spinozist since in *Nathan the Wise* Lessing grounds his plea for religious tolerance in divine providence which binds together Jew, Christian, and Muslim. It is almost certain that in his chapter on *Nathan the Wise* Strauss would have rejected Mendelssohn's interpretation of *Nathan*, instead casting Lessing's defense of divine providence as exoteric. Indeed in his introduction to Mendelssohn's *Morning Hours*, Strauss wrote that *Nathan* was the work of a "philosophical poet" who "seeks a lively expression rather than deep conviction." In the same vein, Strauss had argued in "Leibniz on Eternal Punishments" that Lessing claims that Leibniz defends eternal punishment as a "mere possibility," and Strauss wrote that in *Nathan the Wise* Lessing presented divine providence poetically, since his purpose was "only for the sake of the practical consequences of the theistic doctrine of providence"—in other words, to promote political stability.[114]

In *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Strauss makes clear that Lessing's Spinozism involves his having learned the art of exoteric writing from Spinoza. Noting a passage where Spinoza supposedly attributes exoteric

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110 Cf. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 28.

111 Cf. Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 467-470. Strauss never published this book.

112 Ibid., 470.

113 Ibid.

114 Cf. Strauss, "Einleitung," lxxxvii-lxxxix. Somewhat surprisingly, Strauss attributes this interpretation of *Nathan* to Mendelssohn himself.

writing to Moses, Strauss refers to "Leibniz on Eternal Punishment" which he connects with Lessing's Spinozism writing that "practically the same expression that Spinoza applies to Moses [...] is applied to Socrates by Lessing who had studied Spinoza very closely and who stated that there is no other philosophy than that of Spinoza."[115] Similarly, it is very likely that Strauss would have interpreted the "gospel of tolerance" that appears in *Nathan* as a Spinozist ploy by means of which Lessing seeks to promote religious tolerance and freedom of thought by casting universal morality and love as the essence of religion much in the way Spinoza had in the *Theological-Political Treatise*.[116]

V

I began this chapter by discussing Strauss's view of the problem of historicism, which I then linked to his interpretation of Lessing. I will conclude by contrasting the political vision of Strauss's Lessing with that of the historical Lessing. As we have seen, Strauss is concerned that modern civilization's scientific and moral ideals undermine the possibility of living a serious, noble life. He worries that promoting an attitude of rational skepticism among the public at large, which reaches its apotheosis in the popular acceptance of a crude form of historicism and relativism, damages the state's ability to command the loyalty of its citizens and expect patriotic self-sacrifice. But Strauss also recognizes the dangers of "saying farewell to reason," which in the case of Germany, led to the rise of Nazism.[117]

Strauss sees Lessing's Spinozism as a way out of the modern impasse. For the elite seeker of wisdom, Lessing's commitment to the contemplative life lends life seriousness by defining the good life as the life devoted to searching for truth, which demands personal restraint

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115 Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 182.

116 Given Strauss's account of Lessing's Spinozism, one might have expected Strauss to consider *Nathan* a tribute to Spinoza rather than to Maimonides. There are three reasons for his not doing so. First, since *Philosophy and Law: Historical Essays* was to be an introduction to medieval Jewish philosophy, it is natural that in the book Strauss would interpret *Nathan* as a tribute to the medieval Maimonides rather than to the early modern Spinoza. Second, for all the differences between Spinoza and Maimonides, Strauss still sees Spinoza as a Platonic political philosopher who mostly followed in Maimonides' footsteps. Third, the protagonist of the play, Nathan, was a loyal Jew like Maimonides while Spinoza was not.

117 Cf. Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 173.

and self-sacrifice. But sensitive to rational criticism's capacity to undermine the political order, Lessing follows the premodern tradition of keeping philosophical pursuits an elite, esoteric activity and he exoterically defends the reigning political order as a natural order whose ideals give the common person something to be willing to die for. Lessing's Spinozism also involves his recognizing the damage which can arise from an exclusivistic political order which has no place for the Other. He therefore seeks to reshape the modern political order by defining tolerance and freedom as the key moral, political, and religious values. Strauss recognizes, however, that with the penetration of the historicist mindset into philosophy and increasingly into popular consciousness, the "horizon" of absolute truth, which makes possible both the project of philosophy as well as the moral demands of the state and of religion, is quickly disappearing.[118] Strauss seeks to reinstate this horizon by attacking historicism.

In contrast to Strauss, I see Lessing as positing a continuum between philosophers and non-philosophers. Philosophy is not a search for eternal truths in the sense of attaining an acontextual God's eye view of reality, which is impossible because human beings are finite and embodied. Rather, philosophy is a search for truth that involves understanding reality through a dialogue between different, limited perspectives. By increasing the number of perspectives incorporated, we attain an increasingly fuller understanding of the whole, although the ideal of a complete understanding of the whole is humanly unattainable. Philosophy and revelation do not represent utterly opposed perspectives but rather two ways of knowing, which benefit from conversation between one another. In this sense, society is not divided into the ignorant masses and philosophical knowers. We are all knowers although we may know using different tools. Tolerance derives not from a manipulation of the myths undergirding the political order but rather from a sincere belief that we all have much to learn from one another. The sense that we derive benefit from dialogue with many different perspectives forms a strong foundation for social cohesion in an increasingly diverse world. This conception of knowledge also has a moral component since every

118 In *Natural Right and History*, Strauss writes that "all knowledge, however, limited or 'scientific' presupposes a horizon, a comprehensive view within which knowledge is possible." Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 125.

individual has value as our potential teacher. Patriotism and loyalty to the state derive from the state's providing the social and political context in which we learn from others.

To the extent that philosophy involves seeking knowledge of the whole it seems to me that this model reflects a plausible account of the aims of philosophy. And politically I see this model as the only real hope for ensuring stability in our increasingly diverse societies.

VIII. Between Judaism and German Enlightenment: Recent Work on Moses Mendelssohn in English*

Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) is generally recognized as the first German-Jewish philosopher. Writing in 1929 on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Mendelssohn's birth, Simon Rawidowicz notes Mendelssohn's uniqueness among German-Jewish thinkers. For Rawidowicz, Mendelssohn's uniqueness consists in the fact that he was both a halakhically observant, accomplished Talmudist recognized as a peer by major rabbis of his age and a leading figure in the German Enlightenment admired by important Christian philosophers of his time.[1] According to Rawidowicz, while among later German-Jewish thinkers one finds respected rabbinic authorities and distinguished figures in German culture and learning, never again did a Jew like Mendelssohn appear, "whose traditional Judaism does not compete with his creative Germanness, who is at once both *totally* a 'ghetto' Jew and *totally* a creative German."[2]

Mendelssohn's adherence to Judaism and German Enlightenment puzzled many of his Jewish and Christian peers.[3] A steady stream scholarship over the past forty years evidences the continued fascination with him. Given the constraints of space, I cannot examine the entirety of this scholarship. Rather, I will focus on book-length interpretations of Mendelssohn in English. These works form a coherent whole as they have generally been guided by the same question that Mendelssohn's contemporaries found so nettlesome. Was Mendelssohn able to achieve a coherent synthesis between his Jewishness and Germanness, between

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* I thank Lawrence Schiffman, Hasia Diner, Bernard Septimus, and Elias Sacks for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

1 Simon Rawidowicz, "Moses Mendelssohn," *Hatequfah* 25 (1929): 499.

2 Ibid., 500. See chapter 6.

3 For example, the Christian writer Johann Caspar Lavater thought that Mendelssohn's rationality and ethical character meant that he was in reality a Christian, and the Christian writer August Friedrich Cranz thought that Mendelssohn's tolerant religious ideas compromised his Judaism. Mendelssohn's Jewish disciples Herz Homberg and David Friedländer could not understand how Mendelssohn could persist practicing Jewish ritual in light of his universal conception of religion.

his commitment to Judaism and to Enlightenment?[4] The books that I will survey are: Michael Meyer's *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany 1749–1824* (1967); Alexander Altmann's *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (1973); Allan Arkush's *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (1994); David Sorkin's *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* (1996) and Edward Breuer's *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans, and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture* (1996).

I

The most important Mendelssohn scholar of the past two centuries is Alexander Altmann. But it is sometimes forgotten that six years before Altmann published his massive biography of Mendelssohn, an important treatment of Mendelssohn appeared by a promising young scholar from Hebrew Union College. Michael Meyer's *The Origins of the Modern Jew* is a powerfully argued, devastating assessment of Mendelssohn. While Altmann produced more extensive and detailed studies, in my view, Meyer has been more influential in shaping the perception of Mendelssohn among non-specialists.

Meyer begins by providing a nice conspectus of Mendelssohn's life and thought. Raised in a traditional home in the rural hamlet of Dessau, "the young Moses . . . became acquainted with Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and developed a love for the medieval Jewish philosopher which he retained for the rest of his life."[5] This was important as "Maimonides' philosophy, though medieval in character, served Mendelssohn as a bridge from Talmudic Judaism to the religion of reason that

4 The only possible exception to this is the work of Altmann, which I discuss below. Recent monographs have also appeared in German, Hebrew, and French. These include: Steven Tree, *Moses Mendelssohn* (Reinbeck: Rohwalt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007); Shmuel Feiner, *Moshe Mendelssohn* (Jerusalem: Mercaz Zalman Shazar, 2005); Wolfgang Vogt, *Moses Mendelssohns Beschriebung der Wirklichkeit Menschlichen Erkentniss* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2005); Dominique Bourel, *Moses Mendelssohn: La Naissance du Judaïsme Moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004); Carola Hilfrich, *Lebindige Schrift: Repräsentation und Idolatrie in Moses Mendelssohns Philosophie und Exegese des Judentums* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2000). For a detailed survey of Mendelssohn scholarship from 1965–1980, see Michael Albrecht, "Moses Mendelssohn: Ein Forschungsbericht 1965–1980," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 57 (1983): 64-166. Since the original appearance of this article in 2010 several new books on Mendelssohn have appeared. See the postscript below.

5 Michael Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany 1749-1824* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967), 19.

he encountered a few years later in Berlin."[6] In this religion of reason whose most important exponent was Christian Wolff, "Mendelssohn was unable to find [anything] that seemed to him to contradict Judaism." Indeed, "enlightened Christians included the upright Jew among those who . . . were worthy of salvation." As such, "Mendelssohn was . . . able to feel that the deepest stratum of religion produced no differences between himself and his Christian friends."[7]

While embracing a universal religion of reason whose principles included God's existence, divine providence, and the immortality of the soul, Mendelssohn remained fully committed to the "continued existence of a separate Jewish community," whose "chief preserving force" was "the ceremonial law."[8] But for Meyer herein lies the weakness of Mendelssohn's thought. For Mendelssohn's commitment to the universal ideals of the Enlightenment did not truly square with his commitment to Jewish difference thereby resulting in an "ephemeral" German-Jewish synthesis.[9]

Meyer is very specific in his criticisms of Mendelssohn offering three reasons why Mendelssohn's synthesis was inherently unstable. First, as a traditional Jew, Mendelssohn affirmed Jewish election. This involved God choosing to reveal to the Jews the ceremonial law, which helped them preserve pure monotheism. In this way, the Jews served as a "light unto the nations" who continually lapsed into idolatry. But, asks Meyer, since Mendelssohn considered God to be universally benevolent how could God grant one particular people a special means to preserve monotheism? Meyer concludes: "if [Mendelssohn] were to carry his reasoning to its logical conclusion he would be a deist."[10]

Second, Meyer thinks that Mendelssohn's notion that the fundamental principles of religion can be known through reason undermined his claim that the ceremonial law was binding. The purpose of the ceremonial law was to direct one to the contemplation of rational religious truth. But since knowledge of rational religion did not require obedience to the ceremonial law, why continue to obey this law especially if it was

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6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 20.

8 Ibid., 41.

9 See ibid., 56. Chapter two of Meyer's book is entitled "An Ephemeral Solution."

10 See ibid., 37.

inconvenient and could impede one's social interactions with Gentiles?[11]

Finally, Meyer argues that Mendelssohn's rationalist metaphysics were outdated even in his own lifetime. Romantic mystics such as Jacobi and Hamann challenged the idea that religious truth was rational. Humean skepticism and Kantian criticism destroyed Mendelssohn's conviction that God can be proven through speculative metaphysics. As Meyer puts it, "it was almost pathetic how hard [Mendelssohn] tried to explain away the Critique [of Pure Reason], how he was totally unable to recognize the epochal character of the work."[12] Furthermore, by assuming a static conception of reason, Mendelssohn's religious rationalism reflected his lack of "historical sense."[13] This failure was especially evident in the fact that Mendelssohn simply "could not grasp Lessing's concept of religious progress,"[14] which Lessing sketched five years before Mendelssohn's death. For Lessing, religious consciousness was in a process of development. Judaism represented primitive conceptions of God, which were refined and replaced by Christianity, and which in turn will be replaced by a higher understanding in a future age.

These criticisms are weighty on their own. But what makes Meyer's arguments so effective is that he uses the fate of Mendelssohn's children and disciples to demonstrate the weakness of Mendelssohn's ideas. Chapter three is devoted to Mendelssohn's closest disciple David Friedländer. Meyer notes that like his master Friedländer was a religious rationalist. But unlike Mendelssohn who sought to preserve Jewish difference through the continued practice of the Jewish ceremonial law, Friedländer abandoned halakhic observance shortly after his master's death and proposed conversion to Enlightened Christianity.[15] While Friedländer's proposal was rebuffed, Mendelssohn's sons Abraham and Nathan converted to Christianity on the basis of their religious rationalism. As Abraham Mendelssohn famously wrote to his daughter Fanny, "The outward form of religion that your teacher has given you is historical, and changeable like all human ordinances. Some thousands of years ago the Jewish form was the reigning one, then the heathen form, now

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11 Ibid., 50–1. This conclusion was in practice drawn by Mendelssohn's disciple David Friedländer and by his acquaintance Solomon Maimon. I discuss this point in greater detail below.

12 Ibid., 53.

13 Ibid., 54.

14 Ibid., 55.

15 Ibid., 59.

the Christian form."[16] Meyer stresses the outdated nature of Mendelssohn's rationalist view of religion through a discussion of the fate of Mendelssohn's daughters Dorothea and Henrietta. These daughters rejected Judaism not because they viewed all religions as grounded in universal ideas of reason, but rather because they saw Mendelssohn's Judaism as comprising "dry, sterile rationality" joined with "inhibiting, meaningless law."[17] Craving a more personal, emotional spiritual experience they converted to Romantic Christianity.

Meyer drives home the point about Mendelssohn's lack of appreciation of history in a chapter devoted to Leopold Zunz, the great Jewish historian and an early exponent of Reform Judaism. Meyer notes that in his early career, Zunz was a Mendelssohnian.[18] However, Zunz moved away from this position seeing history rather than reason as the best means to understand Judaism. By viewing Judaism historically, Zunz emphasized Jewish nationhood and culture, something that Mendelssohn could not adequately ground through reason. And Zunz's historical sense led him to appreciate the fluidity of Judaism. In this way, he was able to apply a discriminating approach to Halakhah, rejecting elements of it as dependent on historical circumstances, which no longer applied. This allowed him to sketch a more up-to-date, relevant version of Judaism.[19]

It has been more than forty years since the appearance of Meyer's book. How do his conclusions hold up? Recent research calls into question whether Meyer's critiques of Mendelssohn are as conclusive as they once seemed. First, work on Mendelssohn's aesthetics and his biblical writings demonstrates that Mendelssohn did not espouse dry religious rationalism. While Mendelssohn believed in human beings' capacity to demonstrate metaphysical truths, he also emphasized the human minds' inability to fully comprehend God, thereby preserving an element of religious mystery.[20] Furthermore, Mendelssohn held that religious truth was not just to be known abstractly, but was supposed to

16 See Abraham Mendelssohn's letter to his daughter Fanny translated in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, ed., *The Jew in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 258; Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew*, 88–90.

17 Ibid., 114.

18 Ibid., 155.

19 Ibid., 158–62.

20 See Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 64–5; chapter three above.

inspire action. To this end, he emphasized the aesthetic elements of the Bible seeing it as stirring, poetic work, whose aim was to unite heart, mind, and action in promoting perfection.[21]

Second, I have argued elsewhere that Mendelssohn's defense of religious difference can be separated from his defense of Jewish election. Whether or not Mendelssohn's defense of Jewish election is convincing, his commitment to religious pluralism is central to his liberalism. For Mendelssohn, the idea that religious truth is universally knowable through reason does not lead to the conclusion that there should be only one expression of this truth. In fact, he considers the idea that there should be a single expression of metaphysical truth to be a great danger to the continued preservation of religious knowledge.[22] Furthermore, Mendelssohn holds that freedom in the sense of the right to self-determination is a right not just for individuals, but for groups as well. Hence liberalism demands toleration for Jews not just as individual human beings, but also as members of the Jewish people.[23]

Third, recent scholars have challenged the idea that Mendelssohn was a strict Wolffian who did not appreciate Kant's attack on speculative metaphysics. Frederick Beiser and others have shown that Mendelssohn's final philosophical treatise, *Morning Hours* contains a sophisticated response to many of Kant's arguments against the possibility of demonstrating God's existence.[24] Similarly, Mendelssohn's extensive debate with Romantic writers such as Lavater, Jacobi, and Hamann shows that he is well aware of these critics of Enlightenment and offers them a serious rejoinder.[25] Most recently, Gideon Freudenthal and myself have argued that in his final works Mendelssohn departed quite significantly

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21 See Alexander Altmann, *Von der Mittelalterlichen zur Modernen Aufklärung* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 242 and chapter four above. I will discuss this issue in greater detail when discussing Sorkin's work below.

22 See chapter three above.

23 See Leo Baeck, *Mendelssohn Gedenkfeier der jüdischen Gemeinde Zu Berlin am 8 September 1929* (Berlin, 1929), 21–2. Altmann has responded to Meyer's claim that Jewish election contradicts divine impartiality. See Alexander Altmann, *Von der Mittelalterlichen zur Modernen Aufklärung*, 247.

24 See Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason:German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 105–8; Michah Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought* (Now York: Oxford University Press, 2010), chapter 4

25 For Mendelssohn's debate with Jacobi, see Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 92–105. I discuss Mendelssohn's debate with Jacobi in detail in Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom*, chs. 3–4. For Mendelssohn's debate with Hamann, see Frederick Beiser, *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), chapter 7.

from Wolffian rationalism and articulated an original philosophical position that Freudenthal calls "skeptical common sense" and that I call "pragmatic idealism."[26]

Finally, recent scholarship has shown that Mendelssohn does not discount history and has a much more sophisticated philosophy of history than Meyer assumes.[27] In *Jerusalem,* Mendelssohn accounts "historical truths" about the people of Israel one of the three elements of Judaism and he notes that these truths "contain the foundation for national cohesion (*Nationalverbindung*)."[28] Philosophically, Mendelssohn espouses a cyclical view of history according to which humankind is not progressing towards perfection, but rather "oscillate[s] between periods of bloom and decay."[29] To be sure, Mendelssohn denies Lessing's theory of historical progress. But in the wake of the tragedies of the twentieth century, this makes Mendelssohn's conception of history seem *more* plausible than Lessing's.

In my view, the seductive power of Meyer's approach derives from its quasi-Hegelian philosophy of history. By using the fate of Mendelssohn's children and students to judge Mendelssohn's ideas, Meyer seems to implicitly assume that history is a proper judge of truth. But perhaps Mendelssohn's children and students did not fully understand their master's teachings. And even if Mendelssohn's teachings were not live options for the majority of German-Jews who lived immediately after him, perhaps in a different social and political context, his ideas can again become live options. Writing two hundred years after Mendelssohn's birth, Simon Rawidowicz notes that while Kantianism

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26 See Gideon Freudenthal, *No Religion Without Idolatry: Mendelssohn's Jewish Enlightenment* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2012), 21-64; Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom,* 75-111.

27 See Matt Erlin, "Reluctant Modernism: Moses Mendelssohn's Philosophy of History," *Journal for the History of Ideas* 63, no. 1 (2002): 83-92; Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (Tuscaloosa: Alabama University Press, 1973), 539-543; Hans Liebeschütz, "Mendelssohn und Lessing in ihrer Stellung zur Geschichte," in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History*, ed. Siegfried Stein and Raphael Lowe (Tuscaloosa: Alabama University Press, 1979), 68-170; Cassirer, "Die Idee der Religion bei Lessing und Mendelssohn," in *Festgabe Zum Zehnjährigen Bestehen der Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag), 22-41. For other recent treatments of Mendelssohn's conception of history, see Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, 78-87; Breuer, "Of Miracles and Events Past: Mendelssohn on History," *Jewish History* 9, no. 2 (1995): 27-52.

28 See Moses Mendelssohn, *Moses Mendelssohn Gesammelte Schriften Jubiäumsausgabe* (Stuttgart: Fromann Hoolzbook, 1971); idem, *Jerusalem,* trans. Allan Arkush *(Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1983), 127.

29 See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study,* 539.

superceded Mendelssohnianism and Absolute Idealism superceded Kantianism, by the end of the nineteenth century there was a revival of Kantianism and then of pre-Mendelssohnian philosophies. In 1929, Rawidowicz concludes that perhaps the time has come for a revival of Mendelssohn's philosophy as well.[30] I think that Mendelssohn's uniting of a defense of religious authority with a commitment to political liberalism, religious pluralism, and the authority of reason makes him a thinker of particular interest today.

II

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Alexander Altmann's work on Mendelssohn. In 1969, Altmann produced a detailed study of Mendelssohn's early aesthetic and metaphysical writings entitled *Moses Mendelssohns Frühschriften zur Metaphysik*. Four years later, he published his authoritative biography *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*. In addition to these two books, he produced some twenty five separate articles on Mendelssohn's life and thought. He collected twelve of these articles in his 1981 book *Die trostvolle Aufklärung: Studien zur Metaphysik und politischer Theorie Moses Mendelssohns*.

In addition to these studies, in 1971 Altmann restarted the Jubilee edition of Mendelssohn's collected writings, which had been halted in 1939.[31] Collecting numerous unpublished manuscripts from libraries around the world, Altmann expanded the Jubilee edition to 34 volumes.[32] Altmann personally supervised the editing of many of these volumes, most notably his masterful edition of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*.

In his Mendelssohn studies, Altmann assumes the guise of a disinterested, positivistic scholar. In the introduction to *Moses Mendelssohn,* Altmann describes his aim as presenting Mendelssohn in "strictly biographical terms." He does not seek "to assess his significance from the hindsight of historical perspective or to trace his image in subsequent generations . . ."[33] Altmann always places Mendelssohn in intellectual context, paying attention to both his predecessors and contemporaries. This context is very broad and includes Jews and Christians, rabbis,

30 See Rawidowicz, "Moses Mendelssohn," 498–9. See above, chapter six.

31 For an account of the publishing of the Jubilee edition through 1939, see chapter 6.

32 See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, xv.

33 Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, xiii.

philosophers, theologians, and political thinkers.[34] Altmann's approach is generally expository and he rarely offers explicit assessments of Mendelssohn. As such, it is very difficult to discern an overarching thesis guiding his interpretation of Mendelssohn.[35]

In a touching necrology written by Altmann's junior colleague the Harvard intellectual historian Isadore Twersky, Twersky seeks to discern what Mendelssohn meant to Altmann. Twersky writes that for Altmann, "Mendelssohn was a pivot not only from an academic-intellectual vantage point, but also existentially."[36] As Altmann was a German-Jew who inhabited both the rabbinic and philosophical worlds, he was strongly attracted to Mendelssohn. Like Mendelssohn, Altmann had trained as a rabbi under a great Talmudic master, and like Mendelssohn Altmann was a philosopher.[37] Twersky, however, goes further, claiming that, "there is much that is autobiographical in [Altmann's] writing, particularly in his essay 'Moses Mendelssohn's Concept of Judaism Re-examined.'"[38]

This is not the place to undertake a detailed analysis of Altmann's important essay, which appeared in the last year of his life. I would, however, like to offer a few remarks about Altmann's approach to Mendelssohn in this and a few other revealing pieces. Addressing the perennial question of the relationship between Mendelssohn's German and Jewish selves, Altmann writes that, "to what extent the two disparate worlds of Judaism and modern Enlightenment jostle each other in his mind and to what degree he could harmonize them are questions that admit of no

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34 See Alfred Ivry, "The Contribution of Alexander Altmann to the Study of Medieval Jewish Philosophy," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook Annual* 34 (1989): 437; Allan Arkush, "The Contribution of Alexander Altmann to the Study of Moses Mendelssohn," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook Annual* 34 (1989): 415–6.

35 See Sorkin, "The Mendelssohn Myth and its Method," *New German Critique* 77 (1999): 17; Ivry, "The Contribution of Alexander Altmann to the Study of Medieval Jewish Philosophy," 437; Arkush, "The Contribution of Alexander Altmann to the Study of Moses Mendelssohn," 416.

36 Isadore Twersky, "Alexander Altmann (1906–1987)," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 55 (1988): 3.

37 Mendelssohn's teacher was Rabbi David Fränkel, author of the classic commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud, *Korban Ha'eda*. Altmann was a disciple of Rabbi Yehiel Weinberg, author of the famous responsa *Seridei Esh*. On Weinberg, see Marc Shapiro, *Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy: The Life and Works of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, 1884–1966* (London: Littman, 2002). Mendelssohn was, of course, a world-renowned philosopher, and Altmann had graduated *summa cum laude* from Berlin University with a doctorate in philosophy. For a recent discussion of Altmann's early life, see Meyer, *Vom Ende der Emanzipation: Jüdische Philosophie und Theologie Nach 1933* (Göttingen: Vandernhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

38 Twersky, "Alexander Altmann," 7. The essay mentioned is found in Altmann, *Von der Mittelalterlichen zur Modernen Aufklärung*, 234–48.

facile answer."[39] At times, Altmann marvels at Mendelssohn's ability to synthesize the two sides of himself noting "the astonishing . . . degree of harmonization [that] he did achieve."[40] At other times, however, Altmann strikes a position reminiscent of Meyer's writing that "for all the apparent ease and elegance with which [Mendelssohn] accomplished his feat of reconciliation, his stance is dated and it could not be repeated after him. He represents a blissful moment in Jewish intellectual history but also one replete with inner tensions which surfaced in their full extent only later. . . . Neither his theory of Judaism nor his personality were as unified as might have appeared on the surface."[41]

Altmann, however, is not content just to note these tensions. Rather, he seeks to explain what drove Mendelssohn to uphold his Judaism despite its uncomfortable relation to Enlightenment. Remarking on Mendelssohn's use of hackneyed "pious phraseology" in letters to Jewish traditionalists, Altmann surmises that there are "archaic layers in [Mendelssohn's] soul, which are activated and come to the fore when he is face to face with people of the old school whom he respects."[42] At one level, Altmann sees this as a dichotomy between intellect and sentiment. Intellectually, Mendelssohn was "a citizen of the European republic of letters," while in sentiment he was "still rooted in the Ghetto."[43] But Altmann also seeks to explain this psychologically and theologically.

Psychologically, Altmann suggests that Mendelssohn had "a certain sense of guilt" in relation to "the world of [Jewish] tradition, its images, mores, and value-judgments."[44] Expressing matters theologically, Altmann surmises that Mendelssohn felt bound to what Altmann calls, "the mystery of Israel."[45] While the Enlightenment put a premium on giving reasons for all of one's commitments, Mendelssohn's felt an intense attachment to Judaism that he could never fully explain using the language of Enlightenment discourse, and which he thus "tried to live with as an ultimately inexplicable fact."[46]

I would suggest that Altmann's understanding of the relationship

39 Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, xiii.
40 Altmann, *Von der Mittelalterlichen zur Modernen Aufklärung,* 248.
41 Ibid., 244, 248.
42 Ibid., 248.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 247.
46 Ibid., 247–8.

between the two sides of Mendelssohn can be made clearer by examining an essay that Altmann published on Ludwig Wittgenstein.[47] In the essay, Altmann deploys Wittgenstein's notion of "language-games" to explain the difference between what Altmann calls "the God of religion" and the "God of metaphysics." According to Altmann, Wittgenstein's theory of language games posits that, "there are distinct systems of speech, each with its own ground rules, self contained and structured in such a way that nothing can be properly understood without reference to the whole." Each language-game "is defined by the a priori assumptions [that are] valid within the system concerned" and "has inner autonomy."[48]

Altmann argues that the "God of religion" and the "God of metaphysics" are distinct language-games. The religious language game involves personal faith in God that yields "total surrender to the will of God."[49] It is "non-falsifiable" remaining steadfast in its faith in God in the face of all seemingly contradictory evidence such as the prevalence of evil.[50] The religious language-game is pictorial, relying on "an inventory of images" through which the divine is "concretized."[51] And this faith is "conative" as it must "issue in action."[52] In contrast, the metaphysical language-game does not seek contact with a personal God, but rather seeks to understand impersonal Being theoretically.[53] To this end, metaphysical language games use proposition languages to speak *about Being*, rather than speaking *to God*.[54]

Near the end of the essay, Altmann poses the crucial question: "Can the God of religion and the God of metaphysics be reconciled?" He is very doubtful of this possibility writing that, "that the chances [of reconciliation] are rather dim seeing that they [that is, the God of religion and the God of metaphysics—MG] belong to different language-games."[55] Both Altmann's essay on Wittgenstein's language-games and the essay "Men-

47 Altmann, "The God of Religion, the God of Metaphysics and Wittgenstein's 'Language-Games,'" *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 39 (1987), 289–306.

48 Ibid., 289.

49 Ibid., 291.

50 Ibid., 292–4.

51 Ibid., 294–5.

52 Ibid., 295.

53 Ibid., 297.

54 Ibid., 303.

55 Ibid., 303.

delssohn's Concept of Judaism Re-examined" appeared in Altmann's last year of life. While in the essay on Wittgenstein Altmann does not apply Wittgenstein's insights to Mendelssohn, Altmann does so in another piece writing that Mendelssohn "was immersed in the rich world of Hebrew literature and participated in what, with Ludwig Wittgenstein, we may call the 'language game' of his native religion. . . ."[56] Altmann apparently thought that Mendelssohn was unable to successfully reconcile Judaism with Enlightenment philosophy because they were distinct language games.

III

Of Altmann's pupils, the most accomplished Mendelssohn scholar is Allan Arkush. Arkush's command of Mendelssohn's opus is very impressive. Like his mentor, Arkush is careful to present Mendelssohn in his intellectual context paying particular attention to Mendelssohn's place among his German philosophical contemporaries. But Arkush surpasses the work of his mentor in his careful attempt to unpack and assess the validity of Mendelssohn's arguments.[57]

In the introduction to his 1994 monograph, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, Arkush states his guiding question: "Did Mendelssohn construct a coherent synthesis of rationalist philosophy and Jewish religion, or was his theory of Judaism not only an ephemeral solution, but an unstable one as well?"[58] The reference to an "ephemeral solution" alludes to Meyer, but Arkush goes beyond Meyer, noting that while "many scholars have. . . identified weaknesses and inconsistencies in Mendelssohn's interpretation of Judaism . . . what has not been understood is . . . that Mendelssohn himself was entirely aware of this failure and much of what he says is aimed at disguising it."[59]

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56 Alexander Altmann, "Moses Mendelssohn as the Archetypal German Jew," in *The Jewish Response to German Culture*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1985), 22.

57 Alfred Ivry notes that Altmann's work has been criticized for "overlook[ing] the problematics of the idea being examined, the nature of its validity and coherence within a particular scheme . . ." as well as for "avoid[ing] taking sides, [and] eschew[ing] conflict and commitment, philosophically." See Ivry, "The Contribution of Alexander Altmann to the Study of Medieval Jewish Philosophy," 436–7.

58 Allan Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), xiii.

59 Ibid., xiv.

I will focus on two problems that Arkush identifies in Mendelssohn's work. The first problem, which Arkush calls the "historical challenge," stems from radical critics such as Spinoza who question the veracity, unity, and textual integrity of the Bible.[60] Arkush claims that Mendelssohn has no adequate response to these critics and he knows it. But rather than admit this, Mendelssohn tries to hide this failure by appealing to outdated medieval arguments for the Bible's authenticity. Adapting arguments from the medieval philosophers Saadya Gaon and Judah Halevi, Mendelssohn claims that in contrast to Christianity, which is based on private miracles performed by Jesus, Judaism rests on God's public miraculous revelation of the Torah to the Israelites at Sinai. While private miracles can be falsified, public miracles cannot, and hence the Torah should be deemed trustworthy. For Arkush, even by the standards of eighteenth-century historical scholarship these arguments are clearly inadequate, and Mendelssohn knows it.[61]

Second, Arkush raises what we might call a "liberal challenge." This involves the alleged contradiction between Mendelssohn's commitment to religious freedom and his adherence to Judaism. While Mendelssohn asserts that religious coercion (whether of belief or action) is never legitimate, this manifestly contradicts the Bible's stipulation of punishments for religious disobedience.[62] In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn famously tries to square this circle by claiming that when the Israelites had a state, God was their sovereign and the ceremonial law was also a civil law. Disobeying the ceremonial law was punished only because of its civil aspect, as this disobedience was tantamount to treason against the political sovereign. With the fall of the Temple, however, the Jews lost their statehood and the ceremonial lost its civil function thereby becoming a purely religious law. This explains why with the fall of the Temple, punishments for the violation of the ceremonial law ceased.

Arkush sees this argument as clearly inadequate for two reasons. First, with the fall of the Temple, punishments for violation of the ceremonial did not end. In the Middle Ages, Jewish courts continued to mete out punishments, including excommunication.[63] Second, on

60 Ibid., 133–65.

61 Ibid., 167–80.

62 Such as the stoning of the Sabbath desecrator.

63 See Ibid., 226–7; idem, "The Liberalism of Moses Mendelssohn," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Michael Morgan and Peter Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge

Mendelssohn's principles it would be preferable to separate civil and religious authority so that religion could be practiced freely. As such, the fall of the Temple seems to be a desirable event. As a traditional Jew, however, Mendelssohn must regard the Biblical polity as the ideal constitution. Hence Arkush concludes that Mendelssohn's defense of Judaism is insincere.[64]

Arkush uses political considerations to explain Mendelssohn's disingenuous defense of Judaism. For Arkush, Mendelssohn seeks to "propagate a version of Judaism suitable to modern times," but to succeed in this endeavor, he needs "to retain his credentials as a faithful Jew."[65] Arkush casts Mendelssohn as similar to other early modern political philosophers such as Spinoza, Locke, and Kant, who present their teachings as the "perfection" of revealed religion rather than as what they really are—a repudiation of revealed religion. By accommodating their teachings to the ingrained prejudices of the masses, these political philosophers think that they are more likely to succeed in influencing their contemporaries to accept liberal political ideas.[66]

University Press, 2007), 43–4; idem, "The Questionable Judaism of Moses Mendelssohn," *New German Critique* 77 (1999): 37.

64 See Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 222–9; idem, "The Liberalism of Moses Mendelssohn," 44; idem, "The Questionable Judaism of Moses Mendelssohn," 37. Arkush raises a third challenge, which we might call the "doctrinal problem." He notes that historical critics argue that the teachings of the Bible do not always to conform to the tenets of enlightened theism. For example, while the immortality of the soul is a central tenet of enlightened theism, historical critics claim that this doctrine is not found in the Bible. Insofar as Mendelssohn espouses enlightened theism, it is unclear how he can regard the Bible as authoritative. According to Arkush, Mendelssohn seeks to sidestep this problem by claiming that according to Judaism God reveals only laws, but never doctrines. In Mendelssohn's famous phrase, the Bible contains "revealed legislation" but not "revealed religion." Arkush notes, however, that in other places Mendelssohn acknowledges that the Bible contains metaphysical teachings. Arkush concludes that Mendelssohn's claim that the Bible does not contain revealed religion is a ploy meant to divert attention away from the discrepancies between the teachings of natural religion and those of the Bible. See Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 186–99. Lawrence Kaplan has replied to Arkush arguing that Mendelssohn never claims that the Bible does not contain metaphysical teachings. Rather, according to Kaplan, Mendelssohn claims that "there are no revealed Scriptural doctrines . . . that Jews are commanded to believe." There are, however, "revealed religious doctrines in the sense that Scripture contains rational religious truths, 'presented to our understanding' that is religious truths commended to our understanding." See Lawrence Kaplan, "The Origins of Idolatry, The Election of Israel and the Oral Law," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, ed. Alfred Ivry, Elliot Wolfson, and Allan Arkush (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998), 451, note 31. Arkush has responded to Kaplan, claiming that he does not see Kaplan's reading as sufficiently grounded textually. See Arkush, "The Questionable Judaism of Moses Mendelssohn," 34 note 8. I find Kaplan's arguments persuasive.

65 See Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, xv.

66 The most famous scholar who interprets Spinoza and Locke in this way is, of course, Leo Strauss.

Arkush's burden of proof is very high. To establish his thesis, he needs to prove three distinct claims: (1) Mendelssohn's defense of Judaism fails; (2) Mendelssohn is aware of this failure; (3) Mendelssohn seeks to disguise it. Unlike a thinker like Maimonides, however, Mendelssohn never states that he writes esoterically about Judaism, which makes Arkush's task all the more difficult.[67]

Comparing Arkush's treatment of other "bad" arguments that he finds in Mendelssohn highlights the difficulty of establishing Mendelssohn's insincerity on the basis of the weakness of his arguments. For example, Arkush claims that in his defense of liberty of conscience, Mendelssohn "does not convincingly substantiate the existence of a right to liberty of conscience nor is he fully consistent in his protection of it."[68] Arkush does not, however, conclude that Mendelssohn's defense of religious liberty is therefore disingenuous. Rather, he claims that "Mendelssohn's political theory seems to be a rather haphazard and makeshift effort to give expression to his commitment to the idea of religious liberty."[69] Why does Arkush not assume that Mendelssohn's defense of Judaism is likewise a "haphazard and makeshift effort to give expression to his commitment to" Judaism?

Turning to the "historical challenge," I agree with Arkush that the medieval arguments for the reliability of the Bible could not meet the challenges posed by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century historical critics. But I question whether Mendelssohn ever intended these arguments as a reply to these critics. The context in which Mendelssohn pens these arguments is crucial—they are written as a rejoinder to Charles Bonnet's defense of Christianity, which Lavater had used to try and convert Mendelssohn to Christianity.[70] I would suggest that Mendelssohn does not

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I will not venture into the debate whether or not this is a correct interpretation of Spinoza and Locke. Sorkin cites scholars who disagree with Strauss. See Sorkin, "The Mendelssohn Myth and its Method," 25, note 74. Arkush's claim that Mendelssohn defends Judaism to preserve his standing among his fellow Jews is not new. It can be found among Mendelssohn's contemporaries, including Johann Balthasar Kölbele, David Ernst Mörschel, Immanuel Kant, Salomon Maimon, David Friedländer, and Mendelssohn's own son Joseph.

67 Arkush cites several passages in which Mendelssohn writes of the philosopher's responsibility not to disturb ingrained prejudices of the masses as long as these prejudices do not lead to immorality. See Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 257–60. But Mendelssohn never applies this to Judaism. Furthermore, he only advocates refraining from criticizing prejudices. He never advocates espousing them. See below.

68 Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 290.

69 Ibid., 291.

70 Mendelssohn's arguments appear in his "Counter-Reflexions" to Bonnet as well as in a private

deploy these arguments to convince critics who question the reliability and integrity of the Bible, but rather that he directs these arguments at Christians like Lavater and Bonnet who accept the Old Testament but validate their belief that the New Testament had superceded the Old Testament by appealing to Jesus' miracles. Mendelssohn invokes the medieval arguments to claim that the public miracles in the Old Testament should carry more weight than the private miracles found in the New Testament. As such, a Jew is on firm ground in accepting the Old Testament, but not the New Testament.

Turning to the "liberal challenge," Arkush is correct in noting that Jewish courts did not cease meting out punishments with the fall of the Temple. Yet as Arkush himself notes, in the postexilic period the nature of juridical autonomy changed, being no longer "universal nor . . . without limitations."[71] So, in claiming that the status of Jewish law had changed, Mendelssohn is picking up on something real. Mendelssohn is, of course, well-aware that rabbis in his own time are still employing religious coercion. In his preface to Menasseh ben Israel, he refers to the recent case of "a renowned Rabbi" (Rabbi Raphael Cohen of Altona) who in 1781 was reported to have excommunicated a wayward member of his community in order to coerce him into religious observance. But for Mendelssohn the fact that Rabbis resort to religious coercion does not make this legitimate according to the true concepts of Judaism. Indeed, after mentioning the report of Rabbi Cohen's actions, Mendelssohn writes that he "trust[s] that the most enlightened and most pious among the Rabbis and elders of my nation will gladly . . . renounce all church and synagogue discipline, and will allow their brethren to enjoy the same love and tolerance for which they have been yearning so much."[72]

Furthermore, it is crucial to remember that Mendelssohn writes as a theologian, not as an historian. The nature of theology is to emphasize certain elements of a religious tradition and to ignore or marginalize others.[73] This is not necessarily done in a premeditated way, but as a

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letter to him.

71 See Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 227. See Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), volume 5, 3–81.

72 Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8: 24.

73 Thus in claiming that the Jewish courts lost their authority to mete out punishments Mendelssohn is following a Talmudic tradition. See Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah, 8b; Sanhedrin 41a; Jerusalem Talmud Sanhedrin 1b. The Talmud states that forty years before the fall of the Temple,

matter of course because the theologian simply cannot imagine that his faith tradition does not cohere with his other deeply held beliefs. While the historian often sees the theologian as reshaping tradition, the theologian sees himself as uncovering the deep truth of his received tradition.[74] That this is Mendelssohn's approach seems evident by the fact that in addressing apparent contradictions between philosophy and Judaism, Mendelssohn invokes the medieval adage "truth cannot conflict with truth."[75] I see Mendelssohn's defense of Judaism as a sincere theological exercise, rather than as an intentional act of obfuscation.[76]

There is very strong evidence against Arkush's claim that Mendelssohn writes things that he does not believe. In a letter from Kant to Mendelssohn dated 8 April, 1766, Kant explains that although "I often think much with the clearest conviction (*allerkläresten Überzeugung*)... that I would never have the courage to state" nevertheless, "I never say what I do not think." [77] In other words, while Kant does not say everything that he believes, he will not say things that he does not believe to be true. Unfortunately, Mendelssohn's reply to Kant's letter is lost. But in a Yiddish letter dated 22 April, 1784 to Avigdor Levi, Mendelssohn affirms the same approach as Kant writing that, "One is not always required to say the truth and to defend it, *but one is always under all*

the Jewish high court Sanhedrin) was exiled and ceased trying cases. I thank Bernard Septimus for calling my attention to this point.

74 In this respect, I concur with Jeremy Dauber's assessment of Mendelssohn. See Jeremy Dauber, *Antonio's Devils: Writers of the Jewish Enlightenment and the Birth of Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004), 129.

75 See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:195; idem, *Jerusalem,* 130.

76 This being said, I agree with Arkush that if pressed Mendelssohn probably would have conceded that the separation of civil and religious law in the modern state was preferable to their unification in the ancient Israelite state. Nevertheless, I do not think that Mendelssohn is disingenuous in his treatment of the Mosaic state. While there are various aspects of the Mosaic state that Mendelssohn praises, I do not find any place where he praises the unification of civil and religious law in the Mosaic state. In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn simply seeks to show that he can explain the punishments for disobedience of the ceremonial law on the basis of his liberal principles. He does not claim that this is the ideal state of affairs. Moreover, as Mendelssohn thinks that the Mosaic constitution is *sui generis* and that Jews are enjoined not to actively work to reestablish this state, the unification of civil and religious law in the Mosaic constitution is of no practical significance for him. Indeed, in a short paper written in 1784 that addresses the question of the best constitution, Mendelssohn does not present the Mosaic constitution as ideal. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 6.1: 127–36. For authors who claim that Mendelssohn does see the Mosaic constitution as ideal, see Warren Zev Harvey, "Mendelssohn's Heavenly Politics," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, ed. Alfred Ivry, Elliot Wolfson, and Allan Arkush (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998), 403–12; Freudenthal, *No Religion Without Idolatry*, 57-58.

77 This letter is found in Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 13: 104.

circumstances responsible for studiously not stating untruths (emphasis mine)."[78] We thus clearly see that Mendelssohn's principle is to never state anything he deems untrue.

In a recent article entitled "The Liberalism of Moses Mendelssohn" Arkush seems to have softened his position somewhat. Arkush repeats the claim that Mendelssohn is conscious of being unable to reconcile Judaism with Enlightenment. But he does not press the claim that Mendelssohn was a closet Deist instead conceding the possibility that, "Mendelssohn was at bottom . . . [not] a liberal deviously masquerading as a believer. He may simply have been of two minds, attracted by two theoretically incompatible ways of understanding the world and incapable of choosing between them."[79] So Arkush appears open to returning to his teacher's view that tensions in Mendelssohn's thought stem from Mendelssohn having felt committed to two irreconcilable positions.

IV

Two years after the appearance of Arkush's *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, the historian David Sorkin published *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*. Despite the similarity between the titles of the two books, their theses could not be more different. In the preface, Sorkin presents his book as a "serviceable introduction" in light of the fact that Altmann's biography is "so vast and vastly learned as to tax even the specialist's abilities."[80] Sorkin is, however, far too modest. His book is a major new interpretation of Mendelssohn that goes well beyond Altmann and is diametrically opposed to Arkush.

Sorkin presents his thesis as informed by bibliographical considerations. He writes of a "Mendelssohn Myth" that came about by Mendelssohn having been studied "primarily or even exclusively from his German works."[81] According to Sorkin, by focusing on Mendelssohn's German works and ignoring or marginalizing his Hebrew writings, scholars "Germanified" Mendelssohn, interpreting him primarily as an

78 Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 19: 293.

79 See Arkush, "The Liberalism of Moses Mendelssohn," 46.

80 Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, ix. Sorkin reprises many of these ideas in his book, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 165–214.

81 Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, ix.

Enlightenment philosopher and only secondarily as a Jewish thinker. Furthermore, by interpreting the Enlightenment as a fundamentally anti-religious phenomenon, they came to regard Mendelssohn's Judaism as in tension with his commitment to Enlightenment. For Sorkin, giving proper weight to Mendelssohn's Hebrew writings reveals his deep traditionalism and the harmony between his enlightened ideas and his Judaism.[82] The novelty of Sorkin's approach (even on his own understanding) is evidenced by the fact that while in the preface to *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* Sorkin presents his work as a précis of Altmann's, in a later piece Sorkin includes Altmann among those who perpetuated the "Mendelssohn Myth."[83]

For Sorkin, the key to understanding Mendelssohn's traditionalism is to situate him at the crossroads between a stream of Enlightenment thought that he calls the "Religious Enlightenment" and a medieval tradition of Judaism that he calls "Andalusian."[84] Members of the Religious Enlightenment hold that reason can establish the truths of natural religion including God's existence, divine providence, and the immortality of the soul. Miracles and divine revelation are deemed compatible with reason and the Religious Enlightenment promotes a broad educational ideal emphasizing the cultivation of intellectual as well as aesthetic perfection. The Religious Enlightenment considers the practice of universal ethics to be the central aim of religion and it is animated by an egalitarian impulse believing that all human beings (not just elite philosophers) can know metaphysical truth. As such, the Religious Enlightenment rejects the view that there are truths, which philosophers must keep hidden from the masses.[85]

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82 Ibid., x, 9.

83 See Sorkin, "The Mendelssohn Myth and its Method," 17–23.

84 See Sorkin, Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment, xxii. In speaking of the "Andalusian" tradition of medieval Jewish thought, Sorkin refers to the work of Bernard Septimus. See Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Pres, 1982); idem, "Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 11-34.

85 See Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, xx–xxi; idem, *The Religious Enlightenment*, 1–22; Breuer, "Rabbinic Law and Spirituality in Mendelssohn's 'Jerusalem,'" *Jewish Quarterly Review* 86 no. 3 (1996): 301–2. The slight differences between the titles of Arkush and Sorkin's books are then highly significant. Arkush's book *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* casts Mendelssohn as an exponent of radical Deistic Enlightenment, thereby claiming that his defense of Judaism is disingenuous, while Sorkin's *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* casts Mendelssohn as an exponent of moderate Religious Enlightenment and

Because of the Andalusian tradition's compatibility with the ideals of the Religious Enlightenment, Mendelssohn is able to achieve complete harmony between Judaism and Enlightenment. On Sorkin's rendering, the Andalusian tradition includes figures such as Saadya Gaon, Judah Halevi, and Nahmanides. It embraces reason, but at the same time establishes boundaries to it, "subordinating [philosophy] to piety and observance." The Andalusian tradition promotes a "broad curriculum" that includes the study of "philosophy and biblical exegesis, Hebrew language, and rabbinical literature," and it is an exoteric tradition, rejecting "the search for ultimate truths or secret wisdom."[86]

As one recent critic has noted, the concept of "practical wisdom" is the linchpin of Sorkin's Mendelssohn interpretation.[87] In speaking of "practical wisdom," Sorkin emphasizes the fact that for Mendelssohn contemplation is not an end in itself, but rather that knowledge is of value to the extent that it impacts lived existence. As Mendelssohn deems ethical practice central to human happiness, he prizes knowledge, which promotes ethical action. But for knowledge to impact action, it must affect the emotions—in Sorkin's words it has to be "practical." For Mendelssohn, a prime example of a text that conveys this type of knowledge is the Bible whose literary virtuosity helps inspire people to act ethically.[88]

In pointing to this dimension of Mendelssohn's thought, Sorkin has made a crucial contribution. I fully concur that the notion of "practical wisdom" is key to understanding Mendelssohn's thought.[89] I am less certain, however, that one requires his Hebrew writings to appreciate the centrality of this notion for Mendelssohn. Thus a recent scholar has noted the centrality of this concept in Mendelssohn's philosophical aesthetics without referring to any of Mendelssohn's Hebrew works.[90]

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claims that Mendelssohn's defense of Judaism coheres with his commitment to Enlightenment.

86 Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, xxii.

87 See Lawrence Kaplan, "Review of *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* by David Sorkin," *AJS Review* 23 no. 2 (1998): 301.

88 See Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, 55–65.

89 Kaplan complains that Sorkin is not consistent in his use of the term "practical knowledge" and that this term does not appear in Mendelssohn's work. See Kaplan, "Review of *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*," 301–2. Kaplan is correct, but in my view Sorkin's basic point is still on target. See the next note.

90 Frederick Beiser notes the central role of what he calls "effective" knowledge in Mendelssohn's aesthetics. Beiser's "effective knowledge" is roughly equivalent to Sorkin's notion of "practical wisdom." See Beiser, *Diotima's Children*, chapter 7. The concept of "effective knowledge" also

Sorkin is overly sanguine on the question of Mendelssohn's ability to harmonize Judaism and Enlightenment. Part of the reason for this is Sorkin's way of presenting the Andalusian tradition and his underemphasizing the unprecedented social and political circumstances in which Mendelssohn lived. That Mendelssohn draws heavily on the medieval Hispano-Jewish tradition is indisputable. In this tradition's appreciation of philosophy, Hebrew grammar, and poetry, Mendelssohn surely finds a congenial precedent for himself.[91] But identifying Mendelssohn straightforwardly with this tradition is problematic. For example, Mendelssohn sees Judaism as comprising several elements. It includes natural religion, which consists of tenets such as God's existence, divine providence, the immortality of the soul and the obligatory nature of universal ethics. Natural religion is knowable by all people in virtue of being human. Judaism also includes the ritual laws revealed by God to the Israelites at Mount Sinai.[92] The ritual laws are in service of natural religion as their function is to promote living knowledge of metaphysical truth, which helps motivate people to seek perfection the central component of which involves ethics. This understanding of ethics and ritual law cannot, however, be identified with the emphasis on "piety and observance" in the Andalusian tradition. For example, a main representative of the Andalusian tradition,

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appears in Mendelssohn's metaphysical writings where he accords a certain priority to the moving, yet philosophically less rigorous teleological proof of God's existence over the more philosophically conclusive, but abstract ontological proof. The notion of "effective knowledge" is also operative in Mendelssohn's concern with presenting philosophical defenses of truths of natural religion in elegant ways as exemplified by his defense of the immortality of the soul, in his masterpiece the *Phaedon*. On the connection between Mendelssohn's writings on the Bible and his philosophical aesthetics, see chapter 4.

91 In my view, however, Sorkin overemphasizes the centrality of this tradition for Mendelssohn. As Breuer notes, Mendelssohn's work on the Bible "revealed a deep affinity for the rabbinically oriented exegetical traditions of Northern European Jewry." Similarly, while Sorkin excludes Maimonides from the Andalusian tradition, claiming that "on the most fundamental issues Mendelssohn differed with [Maimonides]," (Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, xxiii) in my view, Mendelssohn's relation to Maimonides is much more complicated, involving a mixture of adaptation and rejection. For this perspective, see Kaplan, "The Origins of Idolatry, the Election of Israel and the Oral Law"; and Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological Political Thought*, chapter two. In Sorkin's most recent work, he seems to have softened his earlier insistence on Mendelssohn's opposition to Maimonides, noting that Mendelssohn "drew on the medieval Andalusian tradition of practical philosophy and piety (Nahmanides, Judah Halevi), *yet also on Maimonides'* (emphasis mine)." Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, 168.

92 A third element of Judaism for Mendelssohn that I mentioned above are narratives about the history of Israel. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8: 191-192; idem, *Jerusalem,* 126-127.

Judah Halevi, views the relationship between ethical action and ritual practice in the exact opposite way as does Mendelssohn casting moral action as a preparation for ritual practice.[93] For Halevi, Jews are a separate species superior to other human beings who alone are capable of achieving special knowledge of the divine.[94] Mendelssohn's claim that promoting perfection is the aim of Halakhah is precisely the type of view that Halevi attributes to the philosophers and which he sees as undermining halakhic observance. For this view opens to door to the possibility that one can dispense with halakhic observance if perfection can be attained through other means.[95] This is precisely the conclusion drawn by Mendelssohn's younger colleagues Salomon Maimon and David Friedländer, and which, as we saw in the chapter five, greatly disturbed Samson Raphael Hirsch.[96]

The fact that the Andalusian tradition could not harmonize unproblematically with the Religious Enlightenment should not be surprising. For all the cosmopolitanism of medieval Spain, the idea of political emancipation was never an option and it would have been almost inconceivable for a medieval Jewish thinker to espouse theories of religious universalism and tolerance of the type found in Mendelssohn.

V

Edward Breuer's *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture* is a groundbreaking study that ad-

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93 See Halevi, *The Kuzari*, II. 111; III. 163.

94 See Ibid., I. 25–27; I. 109, 115; II. 10–4, 34; III. 7, 11, 23.

95 Ibid., III. 65, IV. 19.

96 See Solomon Maimon, *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, ed. Zvi Batscha (Frankfurt Am Main: Jüdische Verlag, 1995), 93; and Solomon Maimon, *Solomon Maimon: An Autobiography*, ed. Moses Hadas (New York: Schocken, 1967), 147. For discussion of the centrality of Maimonides' notion of intellectual perfection for Maimon, see Abe Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Solomon Maimon* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007), 82–4, 127–42. On Friedländer's radical use of Mendelssohn, see Richard Crouter and Julie Klassen, ed. *A Debate on Jewish Emancipation and Christian Theology in Old Berlin* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 41–78. In a recent email correspondence Septimus notes that he distinguished among Spanish heirs of the "Geonic-Andalusian" tradition a more conservative and a more radical tendency. One of the distinguishing features of the conservatives was their 'balk[ing] at the tendency of the more rationalistic wing to identify the deepest teachings of the Jewish religion with [philosophy]." For Mendelssohn, however, Judaism's core metaphysical beliefs are simply the tenets of natural religion. Septimus to Gottlieb, 03/08/2009.

dresses the problem of the connection between Mendelssohn's commitment to Enlightenment and to Judaism through a detailed analysis of Mendelssohn's work on the Bible. Like Sorkin, Breuer situates Mendelssohn between the twin contexts of eighteenth-century enlightenment thought and medieval Jewish thought, and like Sorkin sees Mendelssohn as accomplishing a subtle, relatively harmonious synthesis between Judaism and Enlightenment.[97] Breuer is, however, much more open to the novel character of Mendelssohn's work within the Jewish context as well as to the limits of Mendelssohn's synthesis.

Breuer presents Mendelssohn's biblical work as having a dual purpose, namely to bring Jews closer to German culture and to instill pride in the Jewish tradition. As the Bible was "a text shared by Jews and Christians, [it] could serve to highlight a common religious and cultural heritage, a notion that reinforced grounds for economic and social integration."[98] At the same time, in emphasizing the complex literary character of the Bible, Mendelssohn was, "determined to show that the language and classical literature of Jews yielded a rich cultural tradition" which would, "enable Jews to assuage any sense of cultural inferiority by suggesting that biblical Hebrew no less than contemporary German contained lucid and refined expressions."[99]

Breuer stresses the novel aspects of Mendelssohn's biblical work in relation to then-prevailing rabbinic educational ideals. In translating the Bible into High German rather than into Yiddish, stressing the grammatical study of Hebrew, providing text-critical notes, focusing on the plain meaning of the biblical text, and privileging the study of the Bible over Talmud study, Mendelssohn's biblical work represented a "rebellion against the traditionally narrow focus on the Talmud" then dominant in Prussia.[100] At the same time, Mendelssohn's work displayed a conservative strain affirming the authority of rabbinic biblical interpretation as well as the unity and integrity of the Masoretic Bible against attacks by contemporary Christian Bible critics. Breuer, however, is sensitive to the limits of Mendelssohn's defense of the Bible noting that "Mendelssohn never sought to engage European scholarship in any serious

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97 Breuer also stresses the influence of Mendelssohn's more immediate Jewish context.

98 See Edward Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans, and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture* (Cambridge, MAL Harvard University Press 1996), 20.

99 Ibid., 26.

100 Ibid., 25.

or substantive way." Rather, "keenly aware that the presumptions of contemporary biblical scholarship were sharply at odds with the ways in which Jews handled Scripture, Mendelssohn sought to shield his coreligionists by offering them a linguistically and culturally sophisticated Bible that rooted itself firmly within Jewish textual traditions."[101] So while like Sorkin Breuer does not doubt the sincerity of Mendelssohn's traditionalism, like Arkush, Breuer notes that Mendelssohn does not address important challenges posed by Enlightenment critics.

VI

What explains the great interest in Mendelssohn? Taking a page from Michel Foucault, I would suggest that Mendelssohn has been regarded as a special kind of author who "produced not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of the formation of other texts."[102] Mendelssohn is widely regarded as the founder of German-Jewish thought. As such, part of the continued interest in him stems from the sense that shifting our understanding of Mendelssohn can reshape our understanding of German-Judaism.[103] Were German-Jews able to forge a genuine synthesis between German and Jewish identity, or was German-Judaism, at bottom, an unstable mixture doomed from the outset to lead Jews to a sense of alienation and self-doubt?

More generally, Mendelssohn is widely considered the founder of modern Jewish philosophy. How scholars interpret Mendelssohn can then affect how they regard the project of modern Jewish philosophy as a whole. Is modern Jewish philosophy a paradox inasmuch as the presumptions of modern philosophy are fundamentally at odds with

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101 Ibid., 175.

102 Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 131.

103 Altmann notes four ways in which Mendelssohn served as a model for later German-Jews: (1) his mastery of German language and culture; (2) his continued loyalty to Judaism; (3) his being a pioneer of modern Jewish thought; (4); his defense of Jewish civil rights. See Altmann, "Moses Mendelssohn as the Archetypal German Jew," 17–31. Mendelssohn's status as the "patron-saint" of German-Judaism is seen in the steady Jubilee celebrations that German Jews held in his honor through 1929. For discussion, see Christhard Hoffmann, "Constructing Jewish Modernity: Mendelssohn Jubilee Celebrations within German-Jewry, 1829–1929," in *Towards Normality? Acculturation and Modern German-Jewry*, ed. Rainer Liedtke and David Rechter (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). For a more detailed analysis of representations of Mendelssohn from 1929 through 1939, see chapter 6.

Judaism, or is a genuine synthesis between modern philosophy and Judaism possible? Is modern Jewish philosophy really just philosophy with Judaism added as window dressing or does Judaism play a substantive role in shaping the philosophical thinking of modern Jewish thinkers?

The five scholars that I have discussed have advanced our understanding of Mendelssohn immeasurably. Any serious Mendelssohn scholar must grapple with their work, and any reservations that I have raised pale in comparison with my debt to them. As a member of a new generation of Mendelssohn scholars, I hope to live up to the standards set by these important scholars and to continue working along the pathways cleared by them.

Postscript

Since the original appearance of this article two years ago, several book-length treatments of Mendelssohn have appeared in English. These include: Bruce Rosenstock, *Philosophy and the Jewish Question: Mendelssohn, Rosenzweig, and Beyond* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Shmuel Feiner, *Moses Mendelssohn: Sage of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Michah Gottlieb, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and most recently, Gideon Freudenthal, *No Religion Without Idolatry: Mendelssohn's Jewish Enlightenment* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2012). I hope to review these works in the future. In addition, a volume of essays devoted to Mendelssohn's metaphysics and aesthetics has been published, Reiner Munk (ed.) *Moses Mendelssohn's Metaphysics and Aesthetics* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011). And another collection of essays on Mendelssohn to be edited by myself and Charles Manekin is due out with University of Maryland Press. Three translations of Mendelssohn's works have also appeared: Daniel Dahlstrom and Corey Dyck (eds.) *Morning Hours: Lectures on God's Existence* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011); Bruce Rosenstock (ed.) *Moses Mendelssohn: Last Works* (Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 2012); and Michah Gottlieb (ed.) *Moses Mendelssohn: Writings on Judaism, Christianity, and the Bible* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2011). Sorkin and Breuer are also at work on a new set of translations from Mendelssohn's Hebrew works and a translation of Leo Strauss's

writings on Mendelssohn edited by Martin Yaffe appeared at the end of 2012 with the University of Chicago Press. The steady stream of Mendelssohn scholarship has become a deluge.

IX. Sincere Irony: A Review of William Egginton's *In Defense of Religious Moderation**

Two days after airplanes slammed into New York City's twin towers on September 11, 2001, Graydon Carter, the editor of *Vanity Fair*, solemnly declared, "It is the end of the age of irony." Less than a week later, with his tongue back in his cheek, Carter explained that what he had meant to say was that it was the end of the age of ironing.

The Talmud has an expression for this: "He prophesied but did not know what he prophesied." Whatever may have been going through Carter's head, his original observation was important. During the 1990s, it had been clear that irony was in. Those in the know understood that there was nothing to know. Their philosopher was Richard Rorty and Jerry Seinfeld was their comedian.

Irony was not just epistemology and entertainment, it was also public policy in the form of multiculturalism. Multiculturalists claimed that white European society had for too long been hegemonic and exclusive, assuming its cultural superiority, which it used to oppress the Other. Irony exposed the baselessness of this superiority, and sought redress. From now on, there would be no forcing the Other into the iron maiden of European culture, which was now understood to be merely one culture among many, no better and in many respects much worse than every other. Minorities would bask in the respect accorded to them by the white elites, and would be free to connect to their native traditions. This would be a stabilizing force in society, for by returning minorities to their cultural homes, they would be more rooted and hence less prone to the violence that people routinely turn to in order to assuage their sense of frustration and alienation.

On 9/11, reality crashed into irony. The falling of the towers and the deaths of thousands of people was no interpretive fiction. A flipside of multiculturalism was exposed. Minorities had learned very well how to speak the language of tolerance when addressing white cultural elites,

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* William Egginton, *In Defense of Religious Moderation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

while amongst themselves they preached the destruction of their "benefactors." Bin Laden taught that the West was a paper tiger. Not believing anything, Westerners would not only cower before his muscular faith, they would seek to join it since, in his now famous quip, "when people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature they will prefer the strong horse."

In retrospect, it is not hard to see how 9/11 led to a new appreciation for reason. Whereas for ironists religion was private, tame, and generally salutary, 9/11 highlighted the public, brutal, and destructive side of religion. The "New Atheists" took the lead attacking religion for its irrationality and immorality and conservative defenders of religion responded. The debate between faith and reason, which ironists had dismissed as a relic from a previous age, returned with a vengeance.

Now William Egginton, who studied under Rorty and teaches at Johns Hopkins University, has entered the fray with his timely book *In Defense of Religious Moderation*. Like the New Atheists, Egginton wants to fight fanaticism, but he wishes to do so without displaying the kind of closed-mindedness that he believes is no less characteristic of religion's fiercest opponents than it is of the most dangerous fundamentalists. What the opposing camps share, he argues, is the belief that it is possible to attain absolute truth through a "code of codes." By this he means, "the implicit and mostly unacknowledged belief that beyond the veil of how the world appears to us, here and now, there is a deeper reality on which our lived reality is based, and most important, this deeper reality *encodes* our own." That is, it "consists of a potentially readable set of instructions for producing the physical reality in which we live." The only difference between religious extremists and the New Atheists, Egginton claims, is the tool they use to unlock the "code of codes." While the former resort to sacred texts, the latter have recourse to science. What most distresses Egginton is the way in which the members of both camps adopt an intolerant and hostile attitude towards those who do not share their convictions.

Egginton contrasts religious fundamentalists with those he finds quite acceptable: religious moderates. What distinguishes the two, he explains, is "not *what* they believe, but *how they believe*." Devoid of the "epistemological arrogance" that characterizes fundamentalists, religious moderates believe that no "code of codes" exists and that "human knowledge is essentially incapable of grasping everything." They possess

what he calls "epistemological humility." Unsure that their convictions are truer than anyone else's, religious moderates are led by their "uncertain faith" to be tolerant of religious differences, humane, and peaceful. One might think of them as sincere ironists.

For Egginton, the quintessential religious moderate is Immanuel Kant, who denied the possibility of theoretical knowledge of metaphysical truth and posited an unknowable "thing in itself." As Kant famously wrote, he had to "deny knowledge in order to make room for faith." In Egginton's opinion, it was Kant's metaphysical agnosticism that made him a religious moderate, tolerant of the viewpoints of others.

To his credit, Egginton confesses that he is not a scholar of religion. Indeed, one often gets the feeling that Egginton wants to transcend the messiness of particular religions by speaking of religion *in general*. As he puts it, "though I defend certain kinds of religious belief on philosophical grounds, I certainly do not base that defense on the doctrine of any particular religion." It seems fair to ask what religious belief is apart from any particular religion. In this case, Egginton seems to be taking his bearings from the popular scholar Karen Armstrong.

Following Armstrong and others, Egginton notes that "most if not all religious that are practiced today" originated in the long "axial age," from 900 to 200 BCE. The foundational belief of all religions formed in this age was that "however we conceive the world, no human can ever be understood as having the final word: knowledge is an infinite process." Only when they were later institutionalized did religions develop fixed dogmas.

Egginton claims that fundamentalism is a modern phenomenon that arose as an attempt to defend religious beliefs in the "logocentric terms" laid out by modern science by taking statements in sacred texts as literal descriptions of reality. Nevertheless, despite the institutionalization of religious dogma, the original beliefs from the axial period continued to persist among select religious thinkers. Egginton points to the seventh-century Christian thinker Isidore of Seville, who taught that God "can be spoken of only by metaphor or analogy for we can know only his traces," and the twelfth-century Jewish thinker Maimonides, for whom "God is a name for a totality, for something ungraspable, for a creative force that cannot be tamed by the human intellect." If only believers would accept the ironical insight that forms

the basis of their religions, society could solve the problem of violent religious extremism.

What ought to be said in objection to this history of religion need not be said here. But it must be observed that Egginton is on very shaky ground when he links the "epistemological arrogance" of the New Atheists with intolerance and violence by pointing to "the aggression with which the [New Atheists] push their agendas." Pugnaciously arguing for atheism is nothing like suicide-bombing innocent civilians. And Egginton's converse claim that "epistemological humility" always promotes tolerance and religious moderation is likewise questionable.

Egginton correctly notes that Kant was epistemologically "humble" in denying that we could know reality in itself and that theoretical reason could prove God's existence. But there is no reason to think that Kant's commitment to respecting others as ends in themselves and his defense of freedom of thought and speech derived from this epistemological "humility." Rather, they stemmed from his affirmation of the categorical moral imperative, which was an absolute demand of reason.

The weakness of the link between "epistemological humility" and tolerance and respect for others is even more apparent when we look at Maimonides, Egginton's Jewish hero. His epistemological humility in many ways outstrips Kant's. Not only does he think that God is fundamentally unknowable, but he also denies the existence of moral norms that are categorical demands of reason. Nevertheless, his legal writings evince astonishingly intolerant statements. Maimonides writes that one who does not perfect his intellect is not truly a human being, and that a Jew without proper belief is not an Israelite but a heretic whom one is commanded to hate and even kill. If Maimonides had been less epistemologically humble, it seems, and had believed, like Kant, that reason could arrive at a categorical moral imperative, he would presumably have been less open to such extreme rulings.

If Egginton needed a Jewish religious moderate to fill out his picture, he could have picked a more recent if somewhat less famous Jewish thinker: Moses Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn embraced religious diversity as a good and acknowledged that religions other than his own provided legitimate avenues to salvation; he saw the aim of life as the attainment of happiness and perfection in this world and the next; he saw ethics as the most important religious demand; he considered freedom an essential part of human flourishing and rejected all forms of religious coercion.

The problem, however, from Egginton's point of view, is that Mendelssohn was epistemologically arrogant. Throughout his life he argued that reason could prove metaphysical and moral truths, including the existence of God, God's care and concern for the world, the immortality of the soul, and the validity of universal ethical norms. Indeed, his 1763 essay arguing for the possibility of rational metaphysics and ethics bested a competing submission by his friend Kant. It was, in fact, his very adherence to the idea that there was what Egginton disparagingly labels a "code of codes" that made him a religious moderate in the first place. Since God is perfect, he reasoned, He cannot be benefited by human service. God created the world in order to benefit its rational inhabitants by enabling them to achieve perfection and happiness. True service of God therefore involves the promotion of the perfection and happiness of ourselves and others. Since coerced religious acts have no value in the eyes of God, this service must be performed freely.

Mendelssohn and other religious rationalists, both Jewish and non-Jewish, demonstrate very clearly that what Egginton deplores as "epistemological arrogance" may prove to be the best path to religious moderation. "Epistemological humility," on the other hand, brings with it perils that Egginton leaves unexamined. People marked by "uncertain faith" may also be uncertain of their faith in tolerance. In a political environment in which it is disadvantageous or dangerous to uphold tolerance, they may prove unwilling to defend it. Indeed, history teaches us that uncertainty about one's ability to know absolute truth can be joined quite easily with intolerant, even fascist, ideologies (think of Heidegger). For one can believe in one's inability to know absolute truth, while believing at the same time that one *creates* truth by imposing one's own worldview on others.

In reality, rather than defusing religious extremism, irony and its political progeny multiculturalism have helped fuel it. By encouraging minority groups to retreat to their local communities and presenting reason as a tool for oppressing minorities, multiculturalism helped foster a derisive attitude towards Western civilization. This encouraged cultural separateness and bolstered the authority of fundamentalist religious leaders who presented themselves as the authentic bearers of non-Western faith traditions. These leaders trumpeted their muscular non-rational faith, which they contrasted with the wishy-washy beliefs of a West anchored in uncertain reason. By encouraging the self-segre-

gation and aloofness of minorities, multiculturalism diverted minorities from seeking economic and political power and prestige, which in turn further stoked feelings of resentment and hatred towards Western culture and nourished religious radicalism.

If it is doubtful that irony can lead us to universal harmony, and may very well lead us very far astray, we would do well to remember voices from the religious rationalist past. Religious rationalism provides a common language and a set of shared principles while encouraging the sense of belonging that comes from affirming a distinctive religious tradition. In the end, our religious rationalist past may prove to be the best hope for our future.

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