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*AJS Review*, Vol. 4. (1979), pp. 111-124.

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*AJS Review* is currently published by Cambridge University Press.

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# HERMANN COHEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF SPINOZA: A REAPPRAISAL

by

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The audacious goal of Hermann Cohen's philosophy of religion is to reconcile Judaism and modern culture. Interest in Cohen's Jewish writings, especially his posthumous *Religion der Vernunft*,<sup>1</sup> both on the part of Jewish scholars and the English and Israeli reading public, bears witness to its lasting significance. For the contemporary reader, the value of Cohen's project is, it appears, not canceled even by the historic fact that the Holocaust proved Cohen's messianic dream tragically—even obscenely—out of phase with the grim reality of modern Germany. As Ernst Simon pointed out, Cohen was not the only sage to follow "a false prophet"; Maimonides, for example, found nothing wrong with Rabbi Akiba's fateful allegiance to Bar Kochba.<sup>2</sup>

The best scholarship on Cohen has therefore rightly concerned itself with the nature of Cohen's achievement as a philosopher of Judaism rather

1. *Die Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Leipzig, 1919); hereafter cited as *Religion*.

2. Ernst Simon, "Zu Hermann Cohens Spinoza Auffassung," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 79 (1935): 181–94; reprinted in *Brücken* (Heidelberg, 1965), pp. 205–14, esp. pp. 213–14.

than with his stature as prophet, German patriot, or antizionist. Especially prominent in the discussion of Cohen's achievement has been the question whether Cohen's philosophy of Judaism as articulated in *Religion der Vernunft* was consistent with the New Kantian premises of his philosophical system or whether it was based on logical, metaphysical, ethical or religious presuppositions inconsistent with it. Put more boldly, was Cohen's thought seen as a whole internally consistent or might Cohen the New Kantian philosopher be distinguished from Cohen the Jew?<sup>3</sup>

The scholarship of S. H. Bergman, Nathan Rotenstreich, Leo Strauss and Alexander Altmann on Cohen was in fact an in depth response to the existentialist interpretation, persuasively put forward by Franz Rosenzweig in 1924<sup>4</sup> and refined by Ernst Simon in 1933,<sup>5</sup> that a conversion, homecoming to Judaism or existential moment occurred during the last phase of Cohen's career sometime between 1907 and 1915. Still widely accepted by most students of Cohen, this thesis has contributed to the subordination and neglect of all of Cohen's systematic philosophical writings including his *magnum opus*, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, published in 1904;<sup>6</sup> *Religion der Vernunft*, published posthumously in 1919 is, in fact, Cohen's only major work translated into English or Hebrew.<sup>7</sup> And though Rosenzweig certainly intended to enhance our appreciation of Cohen's human stature, an inescapable consequence of his interpretation is some suspicion regarding the rigorousness of Cohen's philosophizing and the validity of his basic philosophical ideas.

In their best known books, *Contemporary Thinkers*<sup>8</sup> and *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times*,<sup>9</sup> Bergman and Rotenstreich developed and embel-

3. According to Julius Guttman in *Philosophies of Judaism* (New York, 1973), pp. 400–15, Cohen, because of his neo-Kantian premises, could not fully express his experience of Judaism, an opinion shared by Joseph Ben Schlomo in "The Philosophy of Religion and the Perception of Judaism of Cohen" [Hebrew] in Hermann Cohen, *Dat ha-tevunah mi-meqorot ha-yahadut*, trans. Zvi Voyeslavski (Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 481–511.

4. See "Einleitung" to *Hermann Cohens Jüdische Schriften*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1924; henceforth cited as *J.S.*), 1: xiii–lxiv.

5. Simon, "Auffassung."

6. Berlin, 1904; 2d rev. ed., Berlin, 1907 (hereafter referred to as *Ethik*).

7. *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (New York, 1972) and *Dat ha-tevunah mi-meqorot ha-yahadut*, trans. Zvi Wislovski (Jerusalem, 1971). Some of Cohen's major essays on Judaism and Judaica are collected in Hermann Cohen, *Iyyunim ba-yahadut u-vi-ve'ayot ha-dor*, trans. Zvi Voyeslavski (Jerusalem, 1977).

8. S. H. Bergman, *Hogei ha-dor*, 3d ed. (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 219–43. Very similar is Bergman's English essay, "Hermann Cohen" in *Between East and West: Essays Dedicated to the Memory of Bela Horowitz* (London, 1958), pp. 22–47.

9. *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times* (New York, 1968), pp. 52–105.

lished Rosenzweig's thesis. In two learned articles, however, "Hypothesis in the Philosophy of Hermann Cohen"<sup>10</sup> and "Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone and Religion of Reason,"<sup>11</sup> unfortunately less familiar to the general public, Bergman and Rotenstreich argued for a high degree of continuity and logical consistency in Cohen's philosophical development, as did also Alexander Altmann in his essay, "Hermann Cohens Begriff der Korrelation."<sup>12</sup> In the following, this "revisionist" argument for the systematic unity of Cohen's thought, based on research into the development of his philosophical concepts, will be supported by a reinterpretation of Cohen's critique of Spinoza, seen by Rosenzweig and Simon as conclusive evidence for the bifurcation of philosophy and Judaism in Cohen's late thought. A close study of the organic development of Cohen's argument for the basic opposition between ethical idealism and Spinozean pantheism from 1877 onward leads us to question the view that Cohen's critique of Spinoza in his lecture of 1910, "Spinozas Verhältnis zum Judentum,"<sup>13</sup> and his essay of 1915, "Spinoza über Staat, Religion, Judentum and Christentum,"<sup>14</sup> is evidence of existential crisis and intellectual discontinuity. This suspicion is strengthened by the fact that alternative data to that of Rosenzweig and Simon can be brought forward to explain the unprecedented violence of Cohen's attack on Spinoza from 1910 onwards.

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In the "Preface" to *Reden über das Judentum*, published in 1923, Martin Buber mentioned that Cohen in his "last and most significant book," *Religion der Vernunft*, had mistakenly inferred that God could have no reality from the fact that the notion "reality" implied the relationship between knowledge and sensation. Against this Buber argued not only that God *should* become real, i.e., enter the world of sensation, but also that Cohen had wrongly made the distinction between feeling and thinking absolute.<sup>15</sup> While Buber was correct in thinking that Cohen maintained that God can

10. S. H. Bergman, "Iqqar ha-rishon ba-filosofiyah shel Hermann Cohen," *Hogim u-maminim* (Tel Aviv, 1959), pp. 139–59.

11. In *Publications of the Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 17 (1972): 179–87.

12. *Zwei Welten: Siegfried Moses Festschrift* (Tel Aviv, 1962), pp. 377–99. Emil Fackenheim pays tribute to Altmann's achievement in "Hermann Cohen after Fifty Years," The Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture XII, New York, 1969, esp. pp. 21–22.

13. Printed in *Festgabe zum zehnjährigen Bestehen der Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 43–68.

14. Reprinted in *J.S.*, 3: 290–372.

15. Martin Buber, *Reden über das Judentum*, 2d ed. (Berlin, 1932), pp. xvi–xvii.

not enjoy reality (*Wirklichkeit*) because *Wirklichkeit* implies a relationship between knowledge and the senses, he failed to inform us that in the passage referred to God is real (*real*) in another way as it is the function of an idea to be a norm for *Wirklichkeit*, to be in some kind of relationship to the world of the senses without implying such a relationship definitionally.<sup>16</sup> Nor did he mention Cohen's underlying argument that religious love is unthinkable as sensual love but only as "love of the idea," the only appropriate object of such "love."<sup>17</sup> God as the ethical idea cannot have reality (*Wirklichkeit*) not only because this would imply that love toward him would not be ethical idealism, love of the normative idea, but pantheism, love of the existing world of sense. This irreconcilable opposition between ethical idealism and pantheism was moreover not unique to *Religion der Vernunft*, as Buber suggested, but a persistent theme which Cohen flatly called in *Ethik des reinen Willens* the difference between "truth and error" (*Richtigkeit und Falschheit*).<sup>18</sup>

This incisive judgment underlay Cohen's critique of Spinoza, the most profound and influential of all modern pantheists. Spinoza's basic equation, "God or Nature" (*Deus sive natura*) is diametrically opposed to Cohen's starting point in all of his ethical writings, beginning with the first edition of *Kants Begründung der Ethik*,<sup>19</sup> published in 1877: a clear-cut distinction between the "Being" of nature and the "Should" of Ethics. Already in this work, Cohen's first attempt to formulate a Neo-Kantian ethical theory, Spinoza's *Ethics* were interpreted as a "false beginning" which obscured the basic distinction between the "Ought" and the "Is," between the "supersensual" ethical idea and other transcendental ideas.

This question, however, is not raised. Whether just as the material world appears in the forms of human interaction, so also the Ethical is a thing in itself, has a Being which also only appears in human willing, in Action as in Passivity. Still, however much one may resist the thought for "enlightened reasons," this is the ethical question: the possibility of *another* kind of validity for a Supersensual. In conceiving of this problem in this way, the *founder* of transcendental ideas stands next to the *creator* of the theory of Ideas. Since

16. *Religion*, p. 187.

17. *Religion*, pp. 187–88.

18. *Ethik*, p. 435.

19. Berlin, 1877 (henceforth cited as *KBE,A*) not to be confused with the considerably revised and expanded second edition, Berlin, 1910 (henceforth cited as *KBE,B*).

Plato, Kant was the first to determine the task of ethics. Ethics must teach, according to Kant, what should be.<sup>20</sup>

This motif, the contrast between ethical idealism as conceived of by Plato and Kant and Spinoza's pantheism, was embellished in *Ethik des reinen Willens*, Cohen's ethical masterwork, published in 1904, where Spinoza's naturalistic analogy between human emotions and behavior and geometric points and lines was portrayed as the reason for Kant's antipathy to Spinoza.

Kant's obvious antipathy to Spinoza, more than to any other philosopher, stems from a factual difference of principle. Spinoza enchants his reader by his tranquility and sublimity regarding prejudice and dominant opinion. He takes on the appearance of antique nakedness as he puts human passions and actions on the level of mathematical figures. Such an attitude deserves respect when one is dealing with prejudices in the battle of opinions and parties. It contradicts however the possibility of ethics as created by Plato.<sup>21</sup>

This counterpositioning of Spinoza and Kant is however only part of the story. A clue to Cohen's most serious opinion can be found in his contention that Spinoza was responsible for the pantheistic leanings of the post-Kantian Idealists, especially Schelling and Hegel.<sup>22</sup> If, however, Kant had refuted dogmatic metaphysics once and for all, how can the vogue of Spinozistic ideas among the post-Kantians be understood?<sup>23</sup> Cohen's explanations for this are not altogether convincing. For according to Cohen such a reversion to pre-Kantian thought structures could only be *partially* explained by either the romantic openness of the Idealists to history<sup>24</sup> or by their reaccommodation to a Christian theological tradition itself profoundly affected by pantheism.<sup>25</sup>

20. *KBEA*, p. 4.

21. *Ethik*, p. 15.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45, esp. pp. 461–63.

23. This is not a valid question for the historian of ideas who may safely conclude that Kant criticized dogmatic metaphysicians, including Spinoza and Mendelssohn for trying to *prove* what is only a rational "orientation." It is a great difficulty for Cohen who devoted much of his time to the project of showing that Kant at his best rejected not only the dogmatic claims of the metaphysicians but also the substance of their discourse.

24. *Ethik*, pp. 306–7.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 305–9.

The pantheistic roots of classical idealism must lie deeper, perhaps in Kant's philosophical thought. And if we follow Cohen's most illustrious student, Ernst Cassirer, in insisting that belief in a "thing in itself" underlying both phenomena and moral action was an incontestable component of Kant's philosophical thought, we may conclude with some safety that Cohen held Spinoza responsible for this residual pantheism in Kant's thought.<sup>26</sup> Though Cohen preferred to interpret away Kant's concept of a "thing in itself" rather than take it seriously,<sup>27</sup> the historical connection between it and classical idealism would explain the curious fact that at the apex of his argument in *Ethik des reinen Willens*, Cohen forwent his usual contrast of Spinoza and Kant. Instead, Spinoza's equation of God and Nature was contrasted to the God Idea of true monotheism which, transcendent to both Nature and the Ethical Will, unites both. Following this line of reasoning in which logic rather than content unites ethics and science, Spinoza's pantheism based on an identity of God and Nature was distinguished from Ethical idealism where God "correlates" to both Man and Nature.<sup>28</sup>

Though this veiled critique of Kant only came to the fore at an advanced stage of Cohen's ethical thought, remarkable nonetheless is the unchanging framework of Cohen's critique of Spinoza's pantheism from 1877 until his death. Often implicit in the first edition of *Kants Begründung der Ethik*, embellished and polished in *Ethik des reinen Willens* (1904) and *Religion der Vernunft* (1919), the four major points of this critique can already be found in the first edition of *Kants Begründung der Ethik* (1877). First, Spinoza's formula, *Deus sive natura*, preempts the possibility of philosophical ethics by precluding the being of the Ought.<sup>29</sup> Second, Spinoza's view of human behavior as akin to points and lines is incompatible with the methodology of ethics.<sup>30</sup> Third, philosophical ethics requires the notion of a God Idea, transcendent to both nature and private ethics and

26. "In fact, every purely historical reproducer of Kant's system must realize that Kant on the matter did not succeed in distinguishing clearly between the methodological and the ontological problem," Ernst Cassirer, "Hermann Cohen und die Erneuerung der Kantischen Philosophie," *Kant-Studien* 17 (1912): 252–73; esp. p. 268.

27. This "explaining away" of Kant's concept of a "thing in itself" is already a major theme in *KBE,A* and *Ethik*; in *KBE,B*, Cohen points out that he is devoting even more space to this "Grenzbegriff," p. x.

28. *Ethik*, pp. 459–70.

29. *KBE,A*, p. 4; *Ethik*, p. 46.

30. *KBE,A*, p. 167; *Ethik*, pp. 15–16.

reconciling both "from outside."<sup>31</sup> Spinoza's God, however, is immanent and not transcendent. Fourth, Spinoza's key concept *affectus* is mistaken insofar as Spinoza supposed that affects are either to be subject to the external discipline of reason (*Kants Begründung der Ethik* [A])<sup>32</sup> or suppressed entirely (*Ethik*).<sup>33</sup> Affect is, however, a motor which receives its form from reason.<sup>34</sup> The only novelty in *Ethik* was Cohen's charge that Spinoza's pantheism was ethically and politically barren because he, comparing "compassion" to envy, overlooked its pivotal importance as the source of love of one's fellow man.<sup>35</sup> The absence of this charge in *Kants Begründung der Ethik* (A) is not surprising inasmuch as Cohen believed that compassion and brotherly love pertained not to ethics but to religion,<sup>36</sup> the ethical importance of which he himself played down before 1900.<sup>37</sup>

Highly critical of Spinoza's metaphysical ideas, Cohen until 1910 nonetheless paid tribute on a variety of occasions to Spinoza's historical achievement. He acknowledged that Spinoza was a great Jew who had contributed to enlightenment in religion and politics,<sup>38</sup> that his philosophy completed the course of medieval philosophy initiated by Philo,<sup>39</sup> and that his notion of "affect" while philosophically misleading was in keeping with the normative Jewish tradition.<sup>40</sup> Only after 1910 does one find in Cohen's writings a personal attack on Spinoza as an elitist, blind to the potential of the "Menge" for enlightenment,<sup>41</sup> to the Messianism of the prophets,<sup>42</sup> and to the Jewish monotheistic idea.<sup>43</sup> This blindness leads to defamation of Maimonides,<sup>44</sup>

31. *KBE,A*, pp. 323–25; *Ethik*, p. 466.

32. *KBE,A*, p. 177.

33. *Ethik*, p. 123.

34. *Ethik*, pp. 201, 480.

35. *Ethik*, pp. 217–20, 314.

36. *Religion*, pp. 188–89.

37. So, for example, even in "Das Problem der jüdischer Sittenlehre" (1899); *J.S.*, 3: 17–19, where ethics based on autonomy is seen as philosophically independent of religion based on the God Idea. Cf. *Ethik*, p. 62.

38. So especially during the "Antisemitismus Streit" with Treitschke; see "Zur Verteidigung" (1880); *J.S.*, 2: 95–100 and "Letter to Rabbi Moses of Mobile, Alabama" (1880); *ibid.*, p. 472. Cf. *Ethik*, p. 463.

39. So even in *Begriff der Religion* (Giessen, 1915), p. 14.

40. "Autonomie and Freiheit" (1900), *J.S.*, 3: 39.

41. *Religion*, p. 163.

42. "Spinoza über Staat, Religion, Judenthum und Christentum" (1915), *J.S.*, 3: 368, 371.

43. *J.S.*, 3: 372; *Religion*, p. 429.

44. *J.S.*, 3: 346–50; *Religion*, p. 391.



hatred of Judaism,<sup>45</sup> and antisemitism,<sup>46</sup> and, in short, renders him a renegade from and an enemy of Judaism and the Jewish people.<sup>47</sup>

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To what extent can Cohen's vituperative attack on Spinoza's personality and his religious ideas—which can be found only in his writings from 1910 onwards—be dissociated from his critique of his philosophical ideas, which, as we have seen, is a constant in his philosophical development from 1877? Can the former be dissociated from changes in Cohen's thought taken as a whole? Cohen himself on occasion, after 1910, associated Spinoza's pantheism with modern antisemitism of which Spinoza was, Cohen believed, a major literary source, especially effective and malignant, since Spinoza was considered by such giants as Kant to be an expert on Jewish matters.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps Cohen's philosophical critique of Spinoza and his personal attack on him are not only intertwined but inseparable. Perhaps Cohen's unprecedented animosity toward Spinoza in his lecture of 1910, "Das Verhältnis Spinozas zum Judenthum,"<sup>49</sup> and in his essay of 1915, "Spinoza über Staat und Religion, Judenthum und Christentum,"<sup>50</sup> was the consequence of a crucial change in Cohen's underlying philosophical position. Both Franz Rosenzweig and Ernst Simon eloquently argued that a revolution in Cohen's outlook was in fact the underlying cause of Cohen's polemic against Spinoza in his writings from 1910 onwards. Upon close scrutiny, however, their arguments do not appear to be altogether convincing.

Rosenzweig, in his "Einleitung" to *Hermann Cohens Jüdische Schriften*, published in 1924, interpreted the final phase of Cohen's thought as a "homecoming to Judaism" as a religion of reason with its own hypotheses and subject matter.<sup>51</sup> According to this interpretation Cohen in his old age could be considered to be a precursor of the "New Thinking" which Rosenzweig himself expounded in *Stern der Erlösung*. Though Rosenzweig did not make this explicit in "Über den Vortrag Hermann Cohens' Das Verhältnis Spinozas zum Judenthum," it is clear that he considered the biting attack on

45. *J.S.*, 3: 366.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 363.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 371.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 363, 371.

49. Printed in *Festgabe zum zehnjährigen Bestehen der Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 43–68.

50. Reprinted in *J.S.*, 3: 290–372.

51. *J.S.*, 1: xlv–lvii.

Spinoza's apostasy in Cohen's lecture of 1910 and his essay of 1915 as documentary evidence of such a homecoming.<sup>52</sup> The flaw in this argument is that none of Cohen's other writings of 1910–14, especially the second edition of *Kants Begründung der Ethik* in which Cohen's new approach to Spinoza first came to the fore, indicate that a major change had taken place either in Cohen's philosophical notions or in his appraisal of Judaism.<sup>53</sup> The new phase in Cohen's philosophizing—which in my opinion follows coherently from his earlier thought—can be dated back only to the publication of *Begriff der Religion* published in 1915.<sup>54</sup> Cohen's lecture of 1910 on Spinoza contained *in nuce*, as Rosenzweig himself pointed out, Cohen's ultimate appraisal of Spinoza, five years before any change can be noted regarding other substantive philosophical or religious issues.<sup>55</sup> If so, we are thrown on the alternative argument of Ernst Simon, Rosenzweig's most illustrious disciple, in his essay "Zu Hermann Cohens Spinoza Auffassung."<sup>56</sup> According to Simon, the second edition of *Ethik des reinen Willens*, published in 1907, did not charge Spinoza with being a renegade to his people and his religion, while the second edition of *Kants Begründung der Ethik* published in 1910 did, though both were highly critical of Spinoza's philosophical ideas. To explain this sudden change, Simon argues that sometime between 1907 and 1910, Cohen felt called upon to forgo his philosophical impartiality and think through his own existence as a Jew committed to his ancestral tradition.<sup>57</sup> To support his argument, Simon referred to remarks by Cohen which do not relate directly to Spinoza, a remark in a letter written in 1907 that he had "sacrificed his sentimentality to his philosophy."<sup>58</sup> The second, a remark made also in 1907, praised Spinoza for loyalty to his Sephardic tradition as expressed in his reading only Spanish literature.<sup>59</sup>

52. Franz Rosenzweig, *Kleinere Schriften* (Berlin, 1937), pp. 351–53; this is made explicit however only in "Einleitung," *J.S.*, 1: lv–lvi.

53. Cohen, in fact, in 1910, in *KBE.B*, not only rejects unambiguously the possibility of a philosophically based religion of reason—the project of *Begriff der Religion* (1915) and *Religion der Vernunft* (1919), but also rejects religion's compatibility with philosophy: "Ethics is philosophy. Religion however cannot be absorbed by philosophy." *KBE.B*, p. 497.

54. *J.S.*, 1: xl.

55. "Auch sonst ist die Behandlung Spinozas im Vortrag zwar keine Spur weniger deutlich als in der Abhandlung, aber doch weniger erböst"; *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 352.

56. See above, n. 2.

57. Simon, "Auffassung," p. 211.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 210; Letter to Dr. Leo Munk, 1907, Hermann Cohen, *Briefe*, ed. Bruno and Bertha Strauss (Berlin, 1939), pp. 76–77.

59. *Brücken*, p. 210; "Religiöse Postulate" (1907), *J.S.*, 1, 2.

Presumably Cohen in 1910 had decided not to sacrifice his sentimentality after all and would no longer admire Spinoza for reading romances in Spanish rather than Dutch. I am not convinced. No reader of Cohen's posthumous *Religion of Reason* can in justice claim that Cohen had decided to forgo reason. The best evidence for both Rosenzweig's and Simon's theses can be found not in extraneous material but in Cohen's essay on Spinoza itself. (To be fair to Simon, he did not explicitly deny this.) Leo Strauss in his early article "Cohens Analyse der Bibelwissenschaft Spinozas" in *Der Jude* convincingly argued that Spinoza's *Tractatus* is interpretable within the context of the climate of opinion in which it was written and within the context of Spinoza's entire philosophy without ascribing to him any untoward malevolence to Judaism.<sup>60</sup> Cohen's charge that Spinoza had liberated himself not only from the Jewish community but from the monotheistic God Idea and that he was motivated by a need for revenge for the excommunication levied against him by the elders of the Amsterdam community is technically unfair and unjust, though understandable in light of Cohen's strong sense of Jewish identity.<sup>61</sup> Strauss then agreed with Simon that Cohen's attack was provoked less by philosophical issues than by religious and national feeling.

Rosenzweig and Simon, exponents of "a new thinking," saw a precursor in Cohen in his final phase. Cohen the classical philosopher of Liberal Judaism had to be distinguished from Cohen the existential theologian by a conversion, be it between 1907 and 1910 with a "Mitdenken der eigenen Existenz"<sup>62</sup> or in 1915 in the exposition of Judaism as a religion of reason.<sup>63</sup> To support such an interpretation, Cohen's attack on Spinoza from 1910 onward was brought forward as evidence.

My explanation of Cohen's animosity to Spinoza from 1910 onwards, on the other hand, is less speculative and more empirical than that of Rosenzweig or Simon, though compatible with what Leo Strauss had to say. Until 1904, Cohen was concerned exclusively with Spinoza's philosophical ideas as articulated in *Ethics*. There is, in fact, only slight evidence to suggest that he had even looked at any of Spinoza's political writings.<sup>64</sup> In 1904, he re-

60. *Der Jude* 8: 295–314; esp. pp. 299, 314.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

62. Simon, *Brücken*, p. 211.

63. Rosenzweig, "Einleitung," *J.S.*, 1: xlv.

64. The only two allusions to Spinoza's political writings which I have found in Cohen's writings before 1910 are to Spinoza's remark that the Jewish theocracy was a democracy in "Der Sabbat in seiner Kulturgeschichtlichen Bedeutung" (1869), *J.S.*, 2: 57 and to Spinoza's

viewed the first volume of J. Freudenthal's *Spinoza, sein Leben und seine Lehre* for the *Literarische Zentralblatt*.<sup>65</sup> From Freudenthal, Cohen became acquainted with the complexity of the personal motives which prompted Spinoza to write the *Tractatus theologicus politicus*, though there is no evidence that he bothered to reread it carefully. During the same year, in *Ethik des reinen Willens*, obviously thinking of Jews, both members of a religion and displaced ethnic persons, he stressed that it was a moral duty not only to participate in the idealization of one's own religious heritage but also to maintain perpetual love and affection for one's people and one's original homeland.<sup>66</sup> In 1908, in "Charakteristik der Ethik Maimonis,"<sup>67</sup> the fruit of a close reading of part three of the *Guide for the Perplexed*, he reconsidered Spinoza's role in medieval Jewish philosophy. "Idealized," it need not be understood as a pantheistic tradition beginning with Philo and ending with Spinoza, but could be seen as reaching its peak in Maimonides, with his ethical emphasis closer to Kant than Spinoza.<sup>68</sup>

It was, however, the range of problems which came to the fore during the composition of the new "fourth part" of the second edition of *Kants Begründung der Ethik*<sup>69</sup> which decisively affected Cohen's understanding of Spinoza. In discussing Kant's philosophy of law, religion and history—the topic of the new fourth part—Cohen developed the point already made in *Ethik des reinen Willens* that Kant, in spite of some promising beginnings, had failed to ground transcendently the "Geisteswissenschaften."<sup>70</sup> More specifically, by distinguishing sharply between the metaphysical roots of law and the philosophy of religion, Kant had overlooked, for understandable reasons, the fact that both were united in "World History" where the universal messianic state integrated the law and religious value.<sup>71</sup> Instead Kant treated separately the real modern state, based on the natural law, and an

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favorable assessment of Jesus in "Zur Verteidigung" (1888), *ibid.*, p. 97. Both are allusions to commonplaces and might well be derivative, not based on a first hand exposure to Spinoza's political writings.

65. Reprinted in *Hermann Cohens Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Albert Gorland and Ernst Cassirer, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1928), 2: 501–3.

66. *Ethik*, pp. 592, 594.

67. *J.S.*, 3: 221–89.

68. *J.S.*, 3: 250.

69. See above, n. 19.

70. *KBE,B*, pp. 373–76, 386. Cohen does, however, emphasize here that Kant was right in distinguishing between the higher status of the natural sciences and the *Geisteswissenschaften*, a point not made in *Ethik*, pp. 228–30.

71. *KBE,B*, pp. 377–78.

apolitical “kingdom of God,” based on pure ethical principles.<sup>72</sup> For this, Cohen held Spinoza only partially responsible. Instead, following a pattern with which we have already become familiar, Cohen contrasted Kant’s *ethically* based theory of natural law with that of Spinoza, based on a “meta-physical” or even “mystical” definition of the natural individual as part of God.<sup>73</sup> For, according to Kant, Cohen argued, “Man should receive his right from reason and history and not as a part of God, whereby he is equally a beast.”<sup>74</sup> In addition, Kant was certainly not influenced by Spinoza’s basic contention that the equation of nature and power not only was the fundamental law of nature but also the foundation of political power. Kant also rejected Spinoza’s brutal schism between revealed religion and philosophy, on the one hand, and religious values and political philosophy, on the other.<sup>75</sup> Cohen did, however, hold Spinoza fully responsible for Kant’s condemnation of Judaism: “Kant was committed to the moral emphasis of Rousseau. Spinoza never succeeded in tearing him away from this ethical or religious ambiance. More dangerous was Spinoza’s influence—not on Kant’s concept of religion, but on his assessment of the original form of religion, biblical Judaism, where Kant was dependent on Spinoza’s research.”<sup>76</sup>

This new political and religious dimension of Cohen’s critique of Spinoza referred however, now for the first time, not to Spinoza’s *Ethics* but to his *Tractatus politicus*<sup>77</sup> and *Tractatus theologicus politicus*.<sup>78</sup> Cohen, prompted both by the specific subject matter of the “fourth part” of *Kants Begründung der Ethik* and by the appearance of a new German translation of the *Tractatus theologicus politicus* in the prestigious *Philosophische Bibliothek*,<sup>79</sup> now read these political readings in the critical Latin edition of Van Vloten and Land. Responding to this new input, Cohen contrasted Spinoza to Kant who had remained loyal to his pietistic origins.<sup>80</sup> He argued that Spinoza, full of “unconcealed hate”<sup>81</sup> of Judaism, lacked entirely the ethical

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 379–80.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 386.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 387.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 385–86.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

77. *Opera*, ed. J. Van Vloten and J. P. N. Land, 2d ed., 3 vols. (The Hague, 1895), vol. 1; reprint of 2 vol. first edition (The Hague, 1883).

78. *Ibid.*

79. Ed. Carl Gebhardt, *Theologisch-politischer Traktat*, Phil. Bib. 93 (Leipzig, 1908). Both of Spinoza’s political writings are mentioned by name for the first time in *KBE,B*, p. 387.

80. *KBE,B*, p. 466.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 388.

virtues of "piety," "gratitude," "modesty" or "fidelity."<sup>82</sup> Even more damning was the fact that Spinoza had abandoned "his Jews" even before they had excommunicated him and gone over to fanatic Christians for whom excommunication was "the highest treasure of the Church,"<sup>83</sup> unlike Kant who had managed to live at peace with his community and even win over, peaceably, preachers of revealed religion for his own conception of rational religion.<sup>84</sup>

With time, beginning with his essay, "Spinozas Verhältnis zum Judentum" of 1910,<sup>85</sup> continuing with his seminars on Spinoza at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums<sup>86</sup> and concluding with his essay, "Spinoza über Staat und Religion, Judentum and Christentum,"<sup>87</sup> Cohen's dislike of Spinoza ripened into hate. He found that the author of the *Tractatus theologicus politicus* was essentially disloyal. The first philosopher to reject his ancestral tradition,<sup>88</sup> Spinoza was a "renegade to his people,"<sup>89</sup> an "apostate" who preferred Christianity to Judaism.<sup>90</sup>

This "humanly incomprehensible betrayal"<sup>91</sup> was encouraged by philosophical premises which stressed an eternal cleavage between an elite capable of philosophical insight and the masses for whom religion was the only suitable kind of edification.<sup>92</sup> Blind to the messianic idea of the prophets, the meaning of the Jewish Sabbath, the psalms and Jewish prayer,<sup>93</sup> Spinoza's pantheism was a formalism based on the eternal contrast between knowledge for an elite and religious training for the lower classes of society for whom Spinoza had nothing but contempt.<sup>94</sup> Spinoza in short was indifferent to the central problem of modern politics: human equality.<sup>95</sup>

Even more pernicious than Spinoza's political teachings was his role as a

82. Ibid., p. 467.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid., pp. 467–68.

85. Printed in *Festgabe zum zehnjährigen Bestehen der Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 43–68.

86. For an excellent first hand account of Cohen's seminars on Spinoza at the Hochschule in Berlin, see Hans Liebeschütz, "Hermann Cohen and Spinoza," *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts*, no. 12 (December, 1960), pp. 225–38.

87. Reprinted in *J.S.*, 3: 290–372.

88. Ibid., 3: 359.

89. Ibid., p. 298.

90. Ibid., p. 360.

91. Ibid., p. 361.

92. Ibid., p. 367.

93. Ibid., pp. 371–72.

94. Ibid., p. 368.

95. Ibid., p. 370.

source of antisemitism. Spinoza not only “impeded” modern Jewish history but due to his “demonic” character was “fatefully” its evil “demon.” This “great enemy who came out of our ranks” “prosecuted” Judaism in front of the Christian world.<sup>96</sup> Through “a defect of his ethical and religious essence,”<sup>97</sup> he failed to understand Moses and the prophets and, even worse, suppressed the universalism of the Jewish theory of natural law, the “fundamental idea” of Jewish monotheism by disingenuously misinterpreting Maimonides.<sup>98</sup> Aware, however, that Spinoza’s philosophical position was already established before his excommunication from the Amsterdam Jewish community, Cohen concluded that Spinoza’s pantheism was a partial if not sufficient explanation of his political and religious thought.<sup>99</sup> Mistaken in his philosophical premises, Spinoza had “liberated” himself not only from Judaism but from the monotheistic idea.<sup>100</sup> Some kind of relationship between pantheism and the most malignant symptom of cultural crisis, antisemitism, may in fact exist.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, in his writings from 1914 onward, Cohen associated Spinoza, the renegade whom he had come to know through a reading of the two *Tractates*, with Spinoza, the philosopher whom he had always criticized incisively but without vituperation. The critique of Spinoza in *Religion der Vernunft* and in other writings of Cohen’s final period, while substantially consistent with his earlier writings, was now no longer a contest of philosophical opinions but a holy war against an enemy to whom no quarter may be given, a battle not only between truth and falsehood but between good and evil.<sup>102</sup> This was however an intrinsic response to Cohen’s experience of Spinoza in perfect consistency with the otherwise gradual evolution of his philosophical and religious ideas.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 371.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 372.

98. *J.S.*, 3: 372; cf. pp. 344–53, where Cohen attacks Spinoza’s interpretation of Maimonides at great length.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 360.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 361.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 363.

102. So for example in “Die religiöse Bewegungen der Gegenwart” (1914): Pantheism is not Atheism but “Amoralismus, Aufhebung, Nevelierung der Sittlichkeit in das Natürliche.” *J.S.*, 3: 57.