IN THE NAME OF A *NARRATIVE* EDUCATION: HERMANN COHEN AND HISTORICISM RECONSIDERED*

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Introduction

A number of recent studies of American Jewry reveal striking divisions.[1] According to a 2001 study, for instance, American Jews were split almost down the middle about whether they identified as secular or religious. This study also turned up multiple and, indeed, incompatible ways of belonging to the Jewish community, with respondents clearly divided across national, cultural, religious and ethnic conceptions of Jewish life. A 2000 study of New York Jews found *seven different* patterns of Jewish living, and observed widely differing perceptions of the *importance* of being Jewish. In the New York study, the degree of interest and level of participation in community institutions, cultural affairs, and religious life varied dramatically across a number of identifiable cohorts. As one of the lead researchers in the 2001 study concluded, ideological debates may no longer rage as furiously as they once did, but the American Jewish community we find today, nevertheless, clearly bears their mark. In America, membership in the community persists in a context of conflicting values and frameworks, making sociological description complex and initiation into the community confusing. Into which community should

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[1] Egon Mayer, Barry Kosmin, and Ariela Keysar. *American Jewish Identity Survey 2001*. NY: Center for Cultural Judaism, 2003; Bethamie Horowtiz. *Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity and Renewal: A Report to the Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal UJA-Federation of New York*. NY: UJA-Federation of New York, 2003; Arnold Eisen, and Steven Cohen. *The Jew Within*. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2000.

one initiate one's self or one's children? The options are plural, their rationales are difficult to compare, and none appears the clear victor. As one of the authors of the 2001 study concluded, in the context of such pluralism, "contemporary [American] Jewish identification [is itself] . . . problematic."[2]

Value-pluralism of this sort is a particularly difficult challenge for the much-celebrated contemporary Jewish renaissance, an object of considerable human interest, energy, and financial capital. The difficulty is due in part to the character of some of the key institutions driving this renaissance. They are, in a (hyphenated) word, trans-, or post-denominational. As Steven M. Cohen has recently remarked, these are some of the most vital and creative institutions in Jewish life today.[3] But, given what they are dedicated to, they are also arguably among the most afflicted by the context this research points out. Renaissance promises growth, development; a flowering of a closed, even withered, flower. But, towards just what light should these institutions grow in the face of this prevailing confusion?

The Steinhardt Foundation, which, incidentally, is an advocate of post-denominational Jewish renaissance, and publisher of Steven Cohen's remarks, recently went so far as to offer up to ten thousand dollars to the writer who could point a way beyond this *tohu-v-vohu*, and help return Jews to some common ground. As the Director of the Foundation, Rabbi Irving Greenberg, wrote in a letter disseminated internationally to scholars and Rabbis: ". . . [We] assert the vital importance of a common narrative—of ideas, values, and root metaphors—that can bridge and link together our various Judaisms . . . Without a relevant and compelling common narrative, we risk further the dissolution of Jewish unity, the mitigation of mutual responsibility and the loss of community."[4]

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[2] Barry Kosmin. "Demography and Dimensions of Secularity Among American Jews." In David Gordis, Zachary Heller, and Avi Bernstein-Nahar, *Proceedings of the Posen Conference on Secular Jewishness* 2005. Boston: Hebrew College, 10 (forthcoming).

[3] Steven M. Cohen. "Non-Denominational and Post-Denominational: Two Tendencies in American Jewry." Contact *The Journal of the Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation* 7.4 (2005–5765): 7–8. On Cohen's list are educational institutions Pardes, Hartman Institute of Jerusalem, Hebrew College of Boston, and New York synagogues B'nai Jeshrun and Hadar.

[4] Rabbi Irving Greenberg, President, Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation in the course of official correspondence to this author, May 16, 2005. *tohu-v-vohu* is a Hebrew expression for chaos.

The lack of a common narrative is particularly acute for educators who embrace value-pluralism. They are saddled with a nearly impossible task: teaching texts and concepts with normative potential to students who have normative questions in an environment in which normative disputes are likely to seem irresolvable. Should Jews keep the Shabbat? Are Jews a nation, a people, an ethnos, or a faith group? How should they conceive of God (if, at all)? Whether the issue is behavior, belonging, or belief, the classroom norm, at least in classrooms where normative discussion is even admissible, is often disagreement or perplexity. This classroom scenario stands in the foreground of the following inquiry.[5]

In many classrooms in the academy, explicit normative discussion is not admissible, and this reality is very much in the foreground as well. It came into the public eye not long ago when Dr. Tirosh-Samuelson, a Professor of Jewish philosophy, made an impassioned plea to her colleagues in Jewish Studies to forego "the conceit of objectivity" and to charge forward in the "relentless pursuit of truth." For Tirosh-Samuelson, who made her remarks before a packed house at the 1998 meeting of the Association of Jewish Studies, the issue was the vocation of the scholar as educator, particularly vis-à-vis the Jewish community. "We must make it very clear," Tirosh-Samuelson insisted, "that the academic study of Judaism is not just about facts but also about values, it is not just about subjective opinions but about the pursuit of objective truth, and it is not just about abstract ideas but about a way of life one would lead after one leaves the university." It should be no surprise that her remarks caused a great stir, with influential figures in Jewish Studies condemning her revisionism as "inappropriate . . . [for] the university classroom."[6]

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[5] As part of my work, I direct an institute for adult learners, in which I also teach courses. For further information, see the Me'ah Graduate Institute, http://www.hebrewcollege.edu/html/adult_learning/meah_graduates.htm. I am also active in the Me'ah Program, http://www.hebrewcollege.edu/html/adult_learning/meah.htm. Hebrew College's flagship adult learning program. Teaching in these programs at Hebrew College involves a negotiation between educational values sometimes in tense relation: dedication to the welfare of the Jewish community, on the one hand, and fidelity to academic norms, on the other.

[6] Hava Tirosh-Samuelson. "The Academic Study of Judaism." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. February 26, 1999; Scott Heller. "The New Jewish Studies: Defying Tradition and Easy Characterization." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 29, 1999.

At times, Hermann Cohen (1842–1918), until 1912 Professor of Philosophy at the University of Marburg, and from that time until his death, a full time lecturer at the leading liberal Jewish seminary in Berlin, spoke in tones very similar to Tirosh-Samuelson. Writing in 1918, in support of the aspiration of his younger colleague, Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), Cohen exclaimed: "It is not enough to advance the Science of Judaism" by writing books, "it must be advanced in living people who are dedicated to this *Wissenschaft*, who apply this research to their life-task."[7] Rosenzweig, like Tirosh-Samuelson, had boldly called on the academic world to marshal its energies on behalf of a faltering Jewish public. An institute of Jewish Studies was to be founded for the express purpose of bringing the fruits of scholarship to the wider Jewish community. Rosenzweig's proposal, like Tirosh-Samuelson's, was also greeted with dismay, and his institute, though eventually founded as the Academy for Jewish Studies (1919–1934), never realized its communal purpose.[8]

What, if anything, links these waning moments of Cohen's life to our contemporary cultural moment, e.g. the Association of Jewish Studies of 1999, and the challenges of Jewish education today? Recently, in a beautifully written, wide ranging and deeply learned book, historian David N. Myers has asserted *historicism* as the critical link, a connection that weaves the ambitions of people like Tirosh-Samuelson to Cohen's, and to the ambitions of his successors (e.g. Franz Rosenzweig, Leo Strauss, and Isaac Breuer, according to Myers' book). More precisely, for Myers, Cohen and his successors represent a tradition of Jewish anti-historicism, an opposition to the intellectual agenda and quality of mind of the modern historian. The (1) drive to isolate people, events, and ideas in discrete contexts, (2) to treat them as natural phenomena, subordinate to the causal laws of nature, and (3) the impulse to create a supposedly neutral discourse, rendering judgments of value out of bounds—these are the offending elements of the historicism they commonly opposed. Atomization,

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[7] Hermann Cohen. "Zur Begründung einer Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums." In *Jüdische Schriften*. Volume II. Einleitung von Franz Rosenzweig. Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke & Sohn. 1924. 212. Hereafter items from *Jüdische Schriften*, which appeared in 3 volumes, will be cited as JS with title, volume and page number.

[8] See David N. Myers. "The Fall and Rise of Jewish Historicism: The Evolution of the Akademie Für Die Wissenschaft Des Judentums (1919–1934)." *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1994): 107–44.

naturalism, relativism—these, Myers tells us, became the prime targets of this fascinating group of German-Jewish intellectuals, dedicated to interpreting a living Judaism within a hostile academic milieu. Moreover, as Myers book, *Resisting History*, makes clear throughout, its author believes the debate between historicists and their detractors is as alive today in our present moment as they were in Europe before the *Shoah*.

Myers's grasp, both of Cohen's project and our own educational situation, is incisive, in my view, and we will take up his argument in the final section of this paper. Two aspects will concern us in the final sections of this paper. First, I will be preoccupied with his efforts to contextualize Hermann Cohen, the leading light of Jewish anti-historicism on Myers's account. Myers wants to explain Cohen's career as a "spiritual journey toward a Protestant Judaism." How much sense does this make? Second, I will take up the proposition of historicism itself. Myers, himself a leading historian at the University of California at Los Angeles, insists on its continuing merits. Does he make a compelling case, and is he correct?

Myers does not take up the challenges of contemporary Jewish education at any length, though his concern with it crops up time and again throughout the book. This concern is inevitable, perhaps, as *Resisting History* represents not only the kind of diachronic-contextual thinking about Cohen typical of the historian, but synchronic-axiological thinking about the nature of culture, and the value in its study, as well. Educational issues figure in *Resisting History* in a more obvious way also, as its subjects (Cohen, Rosenzweig, Strauss, Breuer) are all in one way or another educators. Myers's considered historicist take on the Marburg heritage, then, fits nicely within the educational discussion I am seeking to initiate in this paper. Contextualizing Cohen as well as seeking to vindicate historicism, Myers helps to stage a very worthy moment in our discussion: can philosophy come to the aid of Jewish education in the modern world?

The answer is an emphatic yes in my view. Cohen's corpus is valuable for Jewish education today because it points us to a living philosophical tradition that can emancipate us educators and students alike from historicism. This *practical* tradition, linking Cohen backwards to Plato, Aristotle, Philo, Maimonides, Spinoza, Mendelssohn and Kant, and forwards to a number of present day philosophers, has become all but invisible today. On the other hand, it may not be an exaggeration to say that in modern Jewish studies historicism

has achieved something akin to the status of common sense. Mark Lila, in a recent issue of *The New York Review of Books*, for example, puzzled over how any serious person today could read Rosenzweig with *philosophical* interest, since his philosophy is "dead."[9] Myers, in effect, struggles with the same question about Cohen, and reaches the very same conclusion. Cohen and Rosenzweig, I concede, are low hanging fruit, if your impulse is to consign philosophical reflection to the ashbin of history. As participants in a trans-historical conversation their moments have indeed passed. But the conversation is alive! And, it cannot be joined without reconstructing its past, a reconstruction that must be alive to the ratio that lives within it. This paper represents a first pass at such a purposive reconstruction of Cohen's prescription for Jewish education.

In the concluding section of this paper, I will develop a brief portrait of one of Cohen's successors, Charles Taylor, a figure whose arguments are not so easily dismissed by historically-minded scholars. Over a long and distinguished career, Taylor has developed a historical-philosophical perspective on modern identity. While Taylor has hardly been alone in extending the lines of practical philosophy beyond the Marburg school, his example alone should be sufficient to demonstrate the advantages of foregrounding contemporary philosophy for understanding Cohen and ourselves.

Given the complexity of my undertaking, I should acknowledge the burden I am placing on my readers. I ask you to follow me into the heart of Cohen's analysis of practical reason, and to understand enough of its detail to see the lines of a genuine tradition, dynamic lines of continuity and discontinuity, conflict and conformity with predecessors and successors. This will require considerable patience, but the prize at our destination is also considerable. Jewish Studies has yet to find anything like a successor to Hermann Cohen. Without one (even to consider), we are left stammering in the face of a myriad of important challenges, including the pluralistic Jewish classroom, Tirosh-Samuelson's dispute with her more "scientific" colleagues, and, indeed, as readers of Myers' book. In order to be able to even imagine what a successor to Cohen might look like, we need to get a better grasp of the tradition of reasoning about values and the self that he once represented.

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[9] Mark Lilla. "A Battle for Religion (Franz Rosenzweig)." *New York Review of Books* 49.19 (2002): 60.

Any effort to excite interest in Cohen today rightly faces an uphill climb. By far the majority of scholars trained in modern Jewish thought would agree that Cohen was preoccupied with "purely intellectual matters . . ."[10] Reading Cohen, one can surely see how easily readers are propelled to this conclusion. My own disagreement, which will become evident below, is partial and qualified. I have no secret ambition to rehabilitate Marburg neo Kantianism.

Cohen's tradition as a whole, however, is urgently in need of rehabilitation. This tradition—call it practical reasoning about the self—is hardly an exclusively "intellectual matter." Whether in Kant, or Cohen, or Taylor, it is an effort to find one's bearings in an uncertain world. Cohen was no stranger to this condition; indeed, in the course of his long career as an "activist in German-Jewish defense work," for German-Jewish symbiosis, and for liberal Judaism, he often put himself in the midst of cultural-political upheaval and in need of finding solid ground.[11]

At the age of sixteen, Cohen found himself at a nodal point in one of the most contentious circuits of intra-mural Jewish controversy, at the Jewish Theological Seminary at Breslau. Zecharias Frankel (1801–1875), founder of the positive historical school, later associated with the denominational movement, Conservative Judaism, led this Seminary from its inception, and his tenure was not unmarked by dispute. In 1861, not yet twenty years old, Cohen sought to intervene in an attack on Frankel by Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888), an outspoken orthodox critic of the historical treatment of Judaism characteristic of Breslau scholars like Frankel and Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891). When in 1880 Graetz was attacked by the Prussian historian and nationalist, Heinrich Treitschke, amidst a rise in anti-Jewish agitation in Germany, Cohen once again entered the fray, this time possessed of considerably more status, as a self-described "representative of philosophy in a German university and a confessor of Israelite monotheism."[12]

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[10] Eugene Borowitz. *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought*. NY: Behrman House, 1983. 39. Emil Fackenheim, "Hermann Cohen—After Fifty Years," *The Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture*. 12 (1969). 5. Cf. Martin Buber, "The Love of God and the Idea of Deity: On Hermann Cohen," in ed. Will Herberg. *The Writings of Martin Buber*. NY: New American Library, 1974. 101.

[11] David N. Myers, "Hermann Cohen and the Quest for Protestant Judaism." *Leo Baeck Institute* XLVI (2001): 205. I am indebted to Myers for his rich description of these controversies.

[12] Cohen, "Ein Bekenntniss in der Judenfrage", in JS. II. 74, as quoted in David

While against Hirsch Cohen had pressed the rights of enlightened historical inquiry into Judaism, against Treitschke Cohen insisted on the cultural contribution of Germany's Jews, a population that the German nationalist had named "our misfortune." To the dismay of some of his Jewish teachers and colleagues, he also conceded to Treitschke that an excess of "Palestinianism" had characterized Graetz's popular Jewish books, apparently Cohen's term of opprobrium for Jewish particularism and irreverence for the German *Vaterland*. Finally, toward the end of his life, in 1916, Cohen assumed the public stage once more, attacking a formidable younger figure, Martin Buber, a Zionist, in a fiery exchange about the legitimacy and promise of Zionism and the Jewish diaspora.[13]

These controversies point not only to Cohen's inclination for public activism, but also to the profound cultural and political schisms at play in his world. In the Jewish community, Cohen was at loggerheads with Hirsch's counter-enlightenment stance toward academic Jewish studies; and Cohen was at odds with the national feeling evident in Graetz's *History of the Jews*, and with Buber's brand of renaissance politics as well. In political terms, he was pitted against nationalists like Treitschke on his right and liberals like Enrst Troeltsch and Julius Wellhausen on his left. Protestant scholars, Troelsch and Wellhausen shared many common social values with Cohen, but remained stubbornly supercessionist where Judaism was concerned. Finally, the historical materialism of Marxist oriented socialists was anathema to Cohen, who specifically aimed to present an alternative socialism.[14]

In the face of this *kulturkampf*, I want to point to Cohen's philosophy as *practical* in the ordinary meaning of the word, as a means of coping with—hopefully resolving—a deeply felt "predicament."[15]

N. Myers, *Resisting History Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University, 2003. 52.

[13] See *Resisting History*. 54–55. Cohen was also involved in a noteworthy defense of the Talmud's disposition toward non-Jews involving two notorious figures: Otto Bückel, one-time librarian at the University of Marburg, and "the first openly antisemitic candidate elected to the *Reichstag*" in 1887, and Göttingen orientalist, Paul de Lagarde. See Myers. "Quest for Protestant Judaism." 205–6.

[14] Steven S. Schwarzschild. "The Democratic Socialism of Hermann Cohen." *Hermann Cohen*. ed. Helmut Holzhey. Frankfurt am Maine: Peter Lang, 1994. 204–27.

[15] The term "predicament" belongs to Myers, "Quest for Protestant Judaism," 214; *Resisting History*, 40.

In the next section I will argue that Cohen's *Ethik* (1904), without a doubt an "intellectual" undertaking of the highest order, was also a book intended to help lost souls, to provide a moral orientation for readers who, in Cohen's view, had no earthly idea who they were.[16]

I

Cohen's *Ethik* sought to provide a new anchor for the values of his generation, and ultimately to "overturn" their reality, providing them with an utterly new sense of self. In the most general terms, Cohen sought to establish a clear picture of the virtues proper to the human being, and to describe an approach to education that could legitimately shape the individual in their image. The virtues were truthfulness, humility, courage, faith, and justice. In the rest of this section, I will describe his argumentative strategy toward this end in the terms he adopted in the *Ethik* itself. I will also describe the concrete steps he took to bring it to fruition.

A

Cohen began his *Ethik* by asking his readers from where they should take their moral bearings. His unequivocal answer was the law of the German state. In the first stage of his argument, he attempted to explain how to arrive at a picture of human virtue through an examination of the law, or what he called jurisprudential science (*Rechtswissenschaft*). This was the "deductive" stage of Cohen's thinking.[17]

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[16] Hermann Cohen. *Ethik des Reinen Willens*. Einleitung von Peter Schmid. 6 ed. Hildesheim, New York: Olms, 1981. Afterwards cited as ErW with page numbers. "das Mensch ist nicht das, was er in seinem sinnlichen Selbstgefüehle zu sein glaubt. ErW, 79. cf. "das physische Einzelwesen kein echtes Selbstbewusstsein besitzt . . ." ErW, 248.

[17] The two seminal moments in Cohen's argument are deductive and productive. See Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, translated by John Denton (Albany: SUNY, 1997), 94–96. Cf. Geert Edel, "Kantianismus oder Platonismus," *il cannocchiale*, n. 1/2 (gennaio-agosto 1991), 60–71. In Kantian terms, stage one is the theoretical element determining the nature of the self, and stage two is the practical element which instructs the reader in how to realize the self in the world. For purposes of simplicity, I will ignore this terminological distinction and characterize the argument as a whole as practical, but I will bring out the relevant contrast with more "practical" arguments in the final section of the paper.

According to Cohen, jurisprudence (logically) presupposed an ideal self for the sake of its own validity, because—on Cohen's reception of it in any case—this tradition aimed at the formation of a body politic. The law, then, with its concepts of corporate personality, of personal responsibility, and of the duty of sacrifice, was a repository of norms from which the philosopher could deduce values and ends for the individual. The law contained the paradigm of the I (*das Ich*), the person (*dei Person*), the human (*der Mensch*), Cohen insisted in thoroughly Platonic rhetoric.[18] In the closing six chapters of both *Ethik* and *Religion of Reason* (1919), his posthumously published rejoinder to Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), Cohen detailed the results of this deduction. It was Cohen's claim—and it was probably only slightly less implausible to most of his contemporaries than it is for us today—that the template for the ethical subject was the idealized *Rechtsstaat*, portrayed in both *Ethik* and *Religion* as the *truthful, humble, courageous, faithful, and just servant of God.*[19]

Why would Cohen have turned to the law to understand himself and his generation? Cohen developed his system of philosophy as a critique of the pioneering work of Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, and positioned his *Ethik* as an application of Kant's transcendental method.[20] Kant set out to put an end, once and for all,

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[18] "So lange er in einer Mehrheit schwebt, welche aus Einwirkungen auf ihn und Gegenwirkungen, die von der Mehrheit, die in ihm gelagert ist ausgehen, ist *sein Selbst* noch gar nicht vorhanden. Erst die Einheit [der Rechtsbegriffe] kann es *ihm* geben; kann ihn zum sittlichen Wesen machen." ErW, p. 81. ". . . sie vielmehr . . . *das Ich* von der Einheit des Rechtssubjekts ableiten könnte." "Diese rechtswissenschaftliche Darstellung und Begründung *der idealen Person* im Rechtssubjekte ist lehrreicher . . . etc." ErW, p. 235. "Ist es etwa nicht *der Mensch*, der Begriff des Menschen, der über das ganze Gebiet [der Rechtswissenschaft] hin die durchgreifende Voraussetzung bildet?" ErW, p. 71. (my italics above)

[19] Cohen's version of the thesis that the state is the self is extreme, to be sure, but one hears a distant echo of the social contract theory of Moses Mendelssohn, who wrote "The state, or whoever represents the state, is viewed as a moral person [eine moralische Person] who has the power to dispose of [alienable] rights." Mendelssohn, Moses. *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism.* 1783. trans. Allan Arkush. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983. 57. Hartwig Wiedebach has suggested that "Man kann die nationale Selbstinterpretation Cohens als einen kritischen Kommentar zu Mendelssohn lesen." See *Die Bedeuntung der Nationalität für Hermann Cohen.* Hildesheim: Olms, 1997. 51, note 108.

[20] Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason.* translated by Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's, 1965, especially A 96–B187. In explicating Cohen's method I have especially relied on Edel, 60–70; Edel, Geert. "Cohen und die Analytische Philosophie der Gegenwart." *Philosophisches Denken—Politisches Wirken Hermann—Cohen-*

to what he saw as interminable disputes about the nature of reality—"all hitherto metaphysics." Famously, he proposed to do so by means of a kind of reasoning that would arrive at the inescapable features of the knowing subject.

Cohen's deduction of discrete virtues from the law clearly stands in the transcendental tradition, but it is important to recognize its departures from Kant's philosophy itself. In point of fact, Cohen's chief concern in the *Ethik* was not the knowing subject at all, but the acting one, the subject pursuing ethical tasks in the world. Moreover, Cohen built his position upon the foundation of his *Logik der reinen Erkentniss,* an earlier work in which he had taken up and revised Kant's approach to the knowing subject directly. Cohen's fundamental break with Kant and the epistemological subject concerns the "theorem of the dual lineage," found in the *First Critique*. According to this theorem, our knowledge is dependent on both sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) and understanding (*Verstand*), or, in other words, on both sense data given in experience, and concepts supplied for experience by human understanding.[21] The understanding supplies the knowing subject with the concepts of substance, quantity, and cause, for instance. With the aid of these concepts, the understanding confers coherence on the discrete and fleeting data of sense, a weave that presents itself to the human being as consciousness. Without concepts like substance, quantity and cause, our experience would be a blooming, buzzing confusion, Kant insisted. Objects would not persist for us (lacking substance), and we would be able neither to count them (absent quantity), nor to perceive their effects (lacking cause). In an effort to account for the character of our actual experience, experience that does in fact include *objects with discernable effects* that we can count and so on, Kant developed his theorem.

Kant's "theorem of the dual lineage" was a product of transcendental argumentation found in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. In Kant's view, all normally functioning human beings could arrive at the abstract notion of an object, or in Kant's language, an "object-in-general," after reflection upon their experience of the concrete world.[22]

Kolloquium Marburg 1992. ed. Reinhard Brandt and Franz Orlik. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1992. 179–203.

[21] Edel, "Kantianismus oder Platonismus." 60.

[22] Edel, "Kantianismus oder Platonismus." 63 and note 5. The "experience" upon which this notion is based is "vorwissenschaftliche," according to Edel.

Kant's argument was, famously, an effort to identify "conditions for the possibility" of the very idea of an "object". This argument, with its reliance on a claim about "conditions for the possibility" of an X, has become the hallmark of transcendental argument in all subsequent philosophical tradition. In Kant's own particular version, the faculties of sensibility and understanding along with the concepts, including substance, quantity, and cause, are identified as "transcendental conditions," conditions for the very possibility of an object in consciousness.

This kind of argument structures Cohen's *Ethik*, to be sure. Nevertheless, in accord with his own earlier work on the *First Critique*, Cohen took exception to Kant's version, the notion that sense data could be "given" in experience at all. To be specific, Cohen found the very notion of a "given" illusory. As Geert Edel has pointed out, Cohen's objection should be familiar to the contemporary philosophical reader, since a version of it is now a commonplace today. Like 20th century American philosophers, Wilfred Sellars and Richard Rorty and a host of others, Cohen insisted that our perception of data, ostensibly given in our experience, is never in fact determined by the data itself in any meaningful way.[23] On the contrary, if we would just examine the descriptions that we normally offer of our experience, urged Cohen, what appears to Kant to have been "given" to experience, from the world itself, would in fact be revealed as our own construction, a determination of thought by the knowing subject.[24]

Cohen's critique of Kant amounted to a rejection of what has become known in this philosophical tradition as "the thing-itself" (*Ding-an-sich*), Kant's picture of the world as an ingredient of human experience.[25] As a result, Cohen reached a very different conclusion from Kant based on his scrutiny of human cognition: inescapable

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[23] See Wilfred Sellers. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. ed. Robert Brandom. Cambridge: Harvard University, 1997; Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University, 1979.

[24] Or as Paul Natorp, Cohen's colleague at Marburg, once summed up Cohen's approach: "what we would express always as perception of something given is, as an affirmative content, necessarily [for Cohen] a determination of thinking." Quoted in Edel, "Cohen und die analytische Philosophie." 201.

Quoted in Edel, "Cohen und die analytische Philosophie." 201. For an influential version of this direction, see Charles Taylor. "Overcoming Epistemology." *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge: Harvard University, 1995. 1–19.

[25] Edel, "Kantianismus oder Platonismus." 64–65.

features of *human knowing* were beyond the determination of any transcendental method. We simply do not have access to the givens of experience, Cohen argued, so an argument like Kant's could never really get off the ground. In Cohen's view, however, Kant's failure to ground an epistemological subject did not exhaust the possibilities in transcendental method. A philosopher could proceed transcendentally without recourse to experience, and that is precisely what Cohen set out to do in his *Ethik*.

Where Kant anchored his deduction in the given objects of experience, Cohen began his deduction in a point of law, the legal definition of a person. In beginning with a point of actual law, Cohen hoped to capture the attention of a readership utterly divided on cultural, moral and political grounds. In a peculiar sense, Cohen sought to base himself in an example where self-knowledge was *actual*; an instance in which the state, through its jurisprudential tradition, had laid out in rigorous—Cohen would say—scientific terms, the criteria for autonomous personality.[26]

More details about how Cohen's deduction "worked" are not important for our purposes and, in any case, are not easily discerned amidst the "unsystematic" presentation of this part of the argument.[27] My aim here and below is only to convey enough of the Kantian form of Cohen's undertaking for us to begin to see it as part of an on-going tradition; and, to describe enough of its contents for us to see that Cohen aimed to be practical, to show a way through a confusion of values and culture of conflict. These ill-fated efforts were

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[26] Edel. "Cohen und die analytische Philosophie." 194–5. In this respect Cohen's project in *Ethik* and in his *Logik* are analagous, one seeking a valid conception of the self, the other of nature.. "Dagegen soll uns der Staat, als die Aufgabe des Selbstbewusstseins . . . die Verfassung der sittlichen Subjekte darstellen. Und diese Verfassung des Selbstbewusstseins des Staates ist das Analagon zur Einheit der Natur . . ." ErW, 245–6. It is misleading to see Cohen's project as more preoccupied with "epistemology" than "ontology," since his transcendental argument in *Ethik* aims at ontological transformation. Cf. Myers, "Quest for Protestant Judaism." 195.

[27] Poma, 119, explains that *Ethik* is even more difficult to read than Cohen's normally difficult writing:

> unfamiliar terminology, complex style, unsystematic discourse development, repeated infiltration of psychological themes; and contingent political, religious, juridical, and social controversies . . . [and an] additional, more radical difficulty, consisting in the simultaneous presence of . . . [a threefold meaning of the relationship between being and what ought to be, whose branches] . . . though being distinct, are interwoven in a complex network that is not always well amalgamated and harmonious.

especially evident in the second stage of his argument, its "productive" phase, where he tried to imagine how the world around him could be "overturned" in the image of the ideal self. [28] Cohen's efforts to overturn Jewish reality in the period between the publication of his *Ethik* and his death were legion, and came almost completely to naught. If we want to understand what Cohen stood for as an educator, his efforts to "apply" the transcendental deduction and "overturn" the meaning of ordinary experience are without a doubt the place to begin.

B

Cohen's attempts to develop hermeneutical practices for reading Jewish sources is perhaps the most well known of his educational activities; his *Religion of Reason* clearly exemplified his commitment to Jewish sources read through the lens of *Ethik*. It did other work dear to Cohen as well. As a rejoinder to Kant, Cohen's *Religion* was a no-holds-barred attack on Christian supercessionism in general, and Kant's invidious distinction between Judaic legalism and Protestant morality in particular. Cohen's *Ethik* had staged this point brilliantly, and his *Religion* brought it home, aiming at the heart of Lutheran anti-Judaism. Law is not the opposite of morality, but its transcendental condition, Cohen had argued in his *Ethik*. In his *Religion,* Cohen brought this rejoinder to Kant to full boil. The human self, he maintained, is constituted by the Law's most important rite, Yom Kippur, in accordance with the commandments of *Tefillah*-Prayer and *Tschuwah*-Repentence, established by the rabbinic sages of the Talmud. Thus, Cohen wrote, "The entire idea of monotheism is contained in this watchword of [Rabbi] Akiba's . . . Oh Israel . . . before whom do you purify yourselves . . . It is your father in heaven (*Yoma* 85b);" and, Cohen continued,

> It is the most unfounded reproach . . . that Jewish piety is self-righteous or that the meticulous observance of the law promotes self-righteousness. For the most meticulous observance of the law, every hour of the day, can never render repentance superfluous. Rather the whole purport of all particular laws and the entire concern for legality is nothing but guidance to repentance, to the turning into the correlation with God.

[28] ErW, 391.

What the *Rechtsstaat* was in the *Ethik*, Israel becomes in the *Religion*, a moral exemplar constituted by adherence to the Law (as Cohen interprets it).[29]

Already in his *Ethik*, Cohen went to work to develop strategies for reading religious sources in the name of narrative education, or what he called "historical consciousness" (*die Bildung des geschichtlichen Bewusstseins*). The human qualities religious sources hold up for admiration should be "learned, studied, tested and, therefore, indeed here and there internalized."[30] But he was tentative and suspicious about this enterprise as well, since religious texts were often used to erode human self-responsibility. "This is the meaning of God—he appears, he is revealed [in texts]. The compulsion of *heteronomy* does not yet lie in this fact itself . . . It has become more and more evident that heteronomy's spear head is not directed toward the idea of God . . . fundamentalism [not the idea of God itself] is the old irreconcilable enemy of religious rationalism.[31] God should count as "author of morality" only from within the framework of his philosophical ethics and its distinctive methods.[32]

The issue for Cohen was preeminently hermeneutical: taking the extant religious culture as a given—an empirical given in Kantian terms—how should the meanings of its literary documents, and the purposes of its customary practices, be determined? Who will be their authorized interpreters and what interests will govern their activity of interpretation? Cohen's affirmation of monotheistic religious traditions per se was resounding in the *Ethik*; but his repudiation of their authorized interpretive practices was equally clear.

Religion, as an all-embracing structure and as a community, can never entirely replace the nation state in which the health and truthfulness of religion's ethical practices must be tested. Piety brings exuberance into the character and excitability into the individual. It can take on the altogether too dangerous appearance of the true self in complete contradiction to the principle of autonomy—we should legislate for ourselves.[33]

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[29] *Religion of Reason*, 224; cf. 234; See Schmid. ErW, 14ff.

[30] ErW, 337–38.

[31] ErW, 333 & 336. I have wedded two texts dealing with the same theme [not the idea of God itself].

[32] ErW, 335.

[33] ErW, 338. The text reads:
Die Religion, als Gesamtheit und als Gemeinde, kann niemals gänzlich des Staates entraten, in dem doch nun einmal die Probe auf die Gesundheit und Wahrhaftigkeit der religiösen Sittlichkeit gemacht werden muss. Der Pietismus

Why did the state garner more confidence from Cohen than religious authorities? Cohen pointed to the state's capacity to deliver education. To Cohen's detriment, however, his argument that it would do so properly turns out to presuppose what it sets out to prove, namely, that the state apparatus can somehow transform its citizens, delivering effectively what Cohen, throughout the period in question, called "theoretical education."

Cohen's hermeneutics were circular, because he presupposed a reader who had already been constituted—or educated—according to the norms of the *Ethik*. The Marburg school called this *Erzeugungslogik des Begriffs des Menschen*, translated (something like) the creation-logic of the human-concept. More commonplace, and by no means misleading, language for this term of art would be *education*, *formation* (*Bildung*) or what, with explicit reference to its religious overtones, Cohen sometimes calls raising (*Erziehung*), as in "raising" a child.[34] Since the lion's share of Cohen's *Erzeugungslogik* was contained in the second half of his *Ethik* (i.e. Chapters Eight through Sixteen), it is no surprise to find him introducing the second half of *Ethik* with a comment on the religion of reason, what would become his educational project *par excellence*. The purpose of *Ethik*, he wrote, was to reconcile pure ethics with a "deeper religious sensibility" (*eine tiefere religiosität*) and to deliver the individual into its grasp. In order to reach this historical plateau, Cohen avered, "theoretical education" must be extended to every person without exception. No "moral life" was possible without a theoretical education.[35]

In fact, Cohen's contemporaries did not have to await his posthumously published *Religion of Reason* to encounter his efforts to implement this educational plan. Indeed Cohen began to agitate for it in the Jewish community the very same year that its governing logic

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. . . bringt . . . einen Überschwang in das Gemüt und eine Überspanntheit in das Individuum, welche nur den allzu gefährlichen Schein des Selbst annimmt; welche jedoch der Selbstgesetzgebung durchaus widerpricht.

On Cohen's opposition to authorized interpretive practices in Jewish tradition, see his strong statement in "Die Errichtung von Lehrstühlen für Ethik und Religionsphilosophie an den jüdisch-theologischen Lehranstalten," JS II, 122. I have explained this statement in my essay, "Hermann Cohen's Teaching Concerning Modern Jewish Identity (1904–1918). *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 1998: 26–32.

[34] ErW, 388.

[35] ErW, 387. The text reads: "Die Selbsterhaltung bedeutet . . . die Erstreckung der theoretischen Bildung ausnahmslos auf alle Menschen . . . Keine Sittlichkeit im Sinne der Kultur . . . ohne . . . Anteilnahme an der theoretischen Kultur."

appeared. As I have suggested in some detail elsewhere, Cohen's 1904 essay on the future of institutes of Jewish Studies, published in the inaugural volume of *The Society for Jewish Studies'* premier scholarly journal, was all that one would expect on the basis of our analysis thus far. A call for the establishment of chairs in Jewish philosophy at the major institutions of higher Jewish learning, this essay was also a companion piece to the *Ethik*, a call to fellow academics to help deliver the deracinated German Jew into the grip of a deep religious sensibility, "reconciled" with pure ethics. It contained a shockingly self-referential proposal on behalf of ethical monotheism. Concluding the essay, Cohen writes, ". . . the independent, professional advocacy of ethics and philosophy of religion must form the focus of our teaching system . . ."[36] From context, it is clear that he intends here to underline the *Jewish* significance of not only philosophy in general, but his very own system of philosophy. At stake, Cohen tells us, is "a new renaissance of religious thinking and life in Judaism."[37]

What did this form of Jewish education offer? Cohen promises an enormous amount in his *Monatsschrift* essay, which reads like a manifesto for a new era: Jewish study and the performance of commandments would be reinvigorated. The German state and its culture would become the moral beneficiary of a people professing ethical idealism; and the emancipation project—the integration of Jews into European civic life—would be advanced with the acknowledgement of "the Jewish teaching with respect to belief." German culture and Jewish culture alike would be infused with a "theoretical" spirit. Cohen envisioned the Jewish community as a catalyzing force for a wave of German state sponsored activity reflecting state responsibility, as he says in the *Ethik*, for the sake of "the health and truth of religious morality."[38] As he said in a public lecture, he gave at least twice in his final years,

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[36] "Errichtung," JS II. 125. The text reads: "die selbständige, fachmännische Vertretung der Ethik und Religionsphilosophie muss den Mittelpunkt allen unseren Lehrwesens bilden."

[37] "Errichtung," 124.

[38] "Errichtung," 123–25. The text includes the tropes like "die theoretischen Kultur", and "eine Vergeistigung, eine Verinnerlichung" as well "die Gesundheit und Wahrhaftigkeit der religiösen Sittlichkeit". These tropes are ubiquitous in Cohen's *Ethik* as well as in his *Jüdische Schriften*.

> School and state should both demand as part of a social doctrine that instruction in *Wissenschaft* be made accessible to the entire people. The objective—but not less so also the pedagogical—foundation of all higher instruction claiming to be scientific in character was, is and always will be philosophy—the philosophy which in joining logic and ethics alone grounds idealism.[39]

Cohen was at his most explicit here, calling on the state to teach his philosophy to its citizens, Jew and non-Jew alike.

C

The circularity of Cohen's transcendental argument has been the subject of discussion from the time of its publication. In perhaps the most conspicuous moment of this discussion, in 1924, Rosenzweig conjectured that in Cohen's late work, he had broken out of the "magic circle" of his idealism, and had found a way to write about the concrete life of the faithful individual in the existing community of Israel.[40] But what could this have meant, given that Cohen's ambitions to address the Jewish community were well-known, even before he published *Religion*? The "magic circle" that Rosenzweig alluded to, was, in fact, the shape of his transcendental method, with its prescription for movement back and forth between the ideal and the real, the deductive and productive moments in *Ethik*.[41]

The circularity of Cohen's argument, as well as the pride of place he reserved for theoretical education, are simply the corollaries of the position he took about Kant's knowing subject. For Cohen believed, as we have seen, that nothing is given in experience. Human

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[39] "Das soziale Ideal in Platon und den Propheten." JS I. 330, given January 7, 1918, the last lecture which Cohen presented before his death. The text reads:

> Es muss zur einheitlichen Forderung der Soziallehre fuer die Schule und für den Staat errungen werden, dass der wissenschaftliche Unterricht dem gesamten Volke erschlossen wird. Das sachliche, wie nicht minder aber auch pädagogische Fundament alles höheren wissenschaftlichen Unterrichts war, ist und wird sein die Philosophie, die in der Verbindung von Logik und Ethik allein den Idealismus begründet.

[40] Rosenzweig. *Einleitung*, JS. XLIX. See also Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*. translated by John Denton Albany: SUNY, 1997, 114–19.

[41] Rosenzweig, XLVIII. Compare Alexander Altmann thoroughly argued opposing view in Alexander Altmann, "Hermann Cohens Begriff der Korrelation," in *In Zwei Welten—Bishnay Olamot: On S. Moser's 75th Birthday*. Tel-Aviv: Bitaon Verlag, 1962. 377–99.

experience, then, had to be constructed, or, as Cohen preferred, theorized, *before* it could be instructive. The meaning of human experience, like the meaning of Jewish texts, was not open for interpretation in the course of ordinary life. On the contrary, Cohen implied that the contents of experience were determinable only on the basis of the right education.

We can see the circularity of Cohen's approach more clearly, if we try to imagine how Cohen might have taught his perspective as a Jewish educator in a classroom, and put him at the podium, as it were. How would Cohen have tried to persuade his students to take up the ethical monotheism he propounded? Would he have appealed to students' experience of a local churchman's anti-Semitism, or a Wilhelmine official's inequity, in order to evoke the call of justice? Would he have appealed to their experience of a *Gymnasium* instructor's presumptuous dismissal of Jewish texts, in order to evoke the call of humility? Strictly speaking, he could not have, for the very ground of *Ethik* is the *turning away* from personal experience.

If Cohen had taught Isaiah 58:7 in the classroom, for instance, he would have aimed to fix the verses' meaning in accord with the interpretive demands of *Ethik*. "Is this not rather the fast that I have chosen? . . . When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thy own flesh [*mibsarcha*] . . ."[42] For Cohen, this last verse had a clear and unambiguous meaning, despite the ambiguity of the metaphoric speech (e.g. thy own flesh). Its meaning was correlated with the prescription that society is an ethical *body* politic, a living political entity whose micro-networks of families and communities must be continually shaped by law and education according to the state's ideal. If an authoritative rabbinic commentator understood this verse as "do not hide thyself from thy own kinsman [*mikrovecha*]", this was entirely beside the point for Cohen, except as the negative example. Indeed, the meaning that *Rashi*, the author of this comment, found in this verse, stands as a perfect example of what Cohen's classroom would have excluded. Networks of kin oriented primarily to one another undermine the ethical republic as Cohen envisioned it. His teaching would have aimed to overturn (*Umwendung*) the experience of living in kinship networks in so far as they engendered Rashi's sensibility. Cohen

[42] Isaiah 58:6–8, translated in *Torah Neviim Ketuvim*. Jerusalem: Koren, 1963.

would have read Isaiah 58:7, and any text for that matter, as an instrument toward that end.

In teaching Isaiah 58:7 *with this end in mind*, Cohen's only real recourse was to move students by appeal to something beyond their experience of the text or its rabbinic commentaries. At his disposal was an interlocking circle of concepts, ethically and theologically charged, developed in *Ethik*. We are ill served if we imagine this as an arid or "academic" process. Cohen would have sought to draw his students into his own sort of logical mania, to bring them into the "kingdom," to move them toward "undivided surrender" to God. The closest analogue for coming under the influence of his philosophy, Cohen hinted in more than one place, was prophecy.[43]

It is critical to note that Cohen would not have seen this kind of circularity as a failing; indeed, his position in the tradition of practical reasoning running from Plato to McDowell is distinguished by just this kind of circularity. Historians of philosophy have acknowledged this curious quality of Cohen's system in referring to it as panlogicism, an interlocking network of concepts with no seeming input from the world. In this context, Cohen's system has also been referred to as an "idealism without a subject," to indicate that the network of concepts in Cohen's system does not appear to assume a spatial-temporal location in any human being.[44]

Far from being a liability, for Cohen, this kind of circularity, or network of co-related concepts, was in fact a solution to problems that had been the undoing of great philosophers like Aristotle and Kant. Long passages in his *Ethik* marked his distance from Aristotle, for instance, against whose concept of *phronesis* he spared no vitriol. Cohen's circular argumentation should also remind us of the lengths to which he went to reject the "myth" of the given in Kant. Finally,

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[43] I have dealt with this topic at length in my 1998 dissertation, "Accounting for Modern Jewish Identity: Hermann Cohen and the Ethics of Self-Responsibility." Stanford, 1998. Chapter Four. See also Eliezer Schweid. "The Philosophical Prophecy of Hermann Cohen (Hebrew)." *Daat* 35 (1995): 67–85. "We do not exaggerate," writes Schweid (75), "if we claim that Ezekiel Hermann Cohen's book [Religion of Reason] was created in order to raise prophecy itself to the philosophical level of his time. The book itself is in the grip of prophecy, a prophecy which is spoken amidst the religious philosopher's consciousness of himself as a bearer of a prophetic vocation." Schweid, however, understates just the link between Cohen's transcendental method and his pedagogy that I assert here.

[44] Nicolai Hartmann. *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965. 160–3, quoted in Poma, 62.

this circle of concepts, hovering as they do above experience, should suggest Cohen's affinity with his archrival, Spinoza. Like Spinoza, Cohen identified the end of the self with an extraordinary scientific world-view at a great remove from ordinary life, and achievable by virtually no one.

This elitism should put us in mind of Maimonides as well, who may have imagined that he alone could reach the "inner chamber" in the human quest to find God, as he hints in his parable of the palace.[45] Cohen sought to portray himself as Maimonides successor, as a guide, like Maimonides, for the perplexed of his day. Rhetorically, however, Cohen was a spiritual democrat, in marked contrast to his medieval predecessor. 'Would that all the people were prophets', he indicated in his late lectures on the prophets and the Platonic tradition. But in his actual pedagogy, he was in fact quite divided, shaped as much by his Spinozist commitments as by Maimonidean ones. For Cohen saw individuals, not yet formed by his curriculum, as caught in the matrix of nature, a matrix of cause and effect from which they could not extricate themselves by ordinary means. It is Cohen's place in this tradition that makes his extra-ordinary approach to education intelligible.[46]

What did Cohen have to offer his students, "natural" individuals all? As we have already seen, his most obvious recourse would have been to philosophical persuasion. But, this was a means that the larger Jewish community and the rising generation of Jewish intellectuals at the turn-of-the-century, by and large, rejected out of hand. He could have pursued a second option as well, as the thought experiment with the Isaiah text suggested. The second option would be subterfuge, the teaching of cultural sources according to the (unexplicated) methods of his critical philosophy. In his effort to craft an image of himself as a potent successor to Maimonides, he did, in fact, just that.[47]

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[45] See Moses Maimonides. *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963.

[46] For Cohen's use of this language, see, for example, his ErW, 246, 256, 390, 518.

[47] The key source for Cohen's Maimonides interpretation is "Charakteristik der Ethik Maimuni, JS III, 221–89. Another notorious example of this kind of subterfuge is Cohen's commentary on Germany's role in World War One. See "Deutschtum und Judentum." JS II. 237ff. I have also dealt with this topic in "Accounting," Chapter Four.

D

Cohen's Maimonides commentary was what he called a memorial-in-thought (*Denkmal*) for an epoch making figure. Memorials-in-thought were ubiquitous in *Ethik* itself. Ranging widely over the history of philosophy, eulogizing some figures, such as Nicholas of Cusa and condemning others, such as Spinoza, Cohen linked their value in the history of thought to the way in which they did or did not anticipate his own system of philosophy.[48]

On the basis of *Ethik*, we should expect Cohen's testimonies to epoch-making figures in the history of philosophy to include both stages of transcendental method, deduction and production and their corollaries in Cohen's hermeneutics, recognition of a moral ideal and exegesis of a cultural text. When Cohen was driven in his many popular discourses to insist on the primacy of his method, he was simply paying homage to the indispensability of *both* stages of thinking. Indeed, the ability to distinguish a particular datum or text from a concept or hermeneutical interest, and the inclination to allow the second pair to control the first, seem to cover a great deal of what Cohen meant by "participation in theoretical culture."

In point of fact, Cohen was much craftier in the course of his major statement on Maimonides. Cohen painted the portrait of a Maimonides very much like himself, a philosopher and jurist entirely committed to explaining Judaism as a kind Platonic-Prophetic social practice, and conceiving Israel as an ethical-political republic and an exemplar of the perfected state. To substantiate such a reading, he had to ignore the substantial weight the *Guide*'s author gave to intellectual virtues and the powerful ideal of solitary contemplation to which they pointed. While presenting himself as an ordinary exegete throughout most of the essay, Cohen was in fact prepared—intentionally—to obscure antithetical texts in the Maimonidean corpus.[49]

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[48] Cohen lists memorial-making, as well as institutional building and the development of a philosophical hermeneutics as his key religious duties and "historical" tasks. "Was als Pietaet der geschichtlichen Kultur zu denken und zu pflegen ist, das bezieht sich vornehmlich auf die Hütung und Deutung der religioesen Quellen, Denkmaeler und Institute." *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie*. Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1915. 112. Cf. Edel's "Kantianismus." 60, where he calls these "memorials" "*Vorarbeiten* or *Vorstufen*."

[49] ". . . alle Quellen der Kultur . . . enthalten fremde Aufnahmen. Diese sind jedoch von ihrer einzigartigen Ursprünglichkeit bewältigt und aufgesogen." "Soziale Ideal." JS I. 306.

Only the echo of a hint remained in Cohen's Maimonides interpretation to point toward the ocean from which his tributary actually flowed.[50] In a single paragraph, Cohen conceded that his Maimonides appeared to stretch the limits of historical objectivity. Take comfort, as I do, he wrote, that the entire history of philosophy is saddled with this danger. The historian's independent interests (*selbständiges Interesse der Spekulation*) have always threatened to overpower and distort history and its texts. Trust that I intend to rely on the fundamental methods of my philosophical system in order to cope with this danger. There is only one means to combat the distortion that texts can suffer at the hands of their philosophical interpreters: the thorough investigation of the literary sources and the exacting distinction of the "hypotheses and the facts" (*die Hypothese und die Tatsache*).

Not surprisingly, Cohen's terms, hypotheses and the facts, refer us back to *Ethik*; and, we should acknowledge that the reader who knew Cohen's System well would have understood that *this* Maimonides was a rational reconstruction on extra-historical and extra-philological grounds—grounds that were articulated in *Ethik*. But, having alerted the exceptional reader to his approach, Cohen's exegetical arguments were otherwise unencumbered by his critical philosophy. It is easy to see why, by the essay's close, some of Cohen's most sophisticated readers would have had no idea what kind of game he was really playing.[51] His "hypothetical Maimonides" becomes in the midst of this tour de force "the genuine Maimonides" (*der echte Maimuni*), a memorial-in-thought masquerading as a historical portrait.

It is possible to argue that Cohen operated legitimately, if atypically, within the parameters of *Ethik* in presenting this Maimonides to his readers, even without his offering a more explicit explanation of his method. In the backward sweep of transcendental reflection, students were inducted into a hermeneutical circle operating *in its productive phase*. On this model, and on this model alone, Cohen supposed, empirical reality could be instructive, if introduced by a teacher in touch with the full power of transcendental reflection, even in the

[50] JS, 256. Cohen's prose here is in the first person. Cf. *Ethics of Maimonides*. Trans. Almut Sh. Bruckstein. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2004. 101.

[51] E.g. Alfred Ivry. "Hermann Cohen's Neo-Maimonideanism," a paper presented at the 1999 Meeting of the Association of Jewish Studies, Chicago.

face of students who were not. At the end of the day, it seems, the sage from Marburg was willing to "trick" the philosophically naïve into adopting true belief, though not *justified* true belief, about historical tradition.[52]

This strange mix of analytic and synthetic discourse was soundly rejected by most of Cohen's immediate successors, including (in the Jewish world) Martin Buber, Alexander Altmann, and (in the larger world) Martin Heidegger and his many students. We should reject it as well. When we try to specify Cohen's deduction analytically, we fail to follow it, since we identify with elements in our own experience. The attributes of Cohen's transcendental subject can have no traction for us, unless we have already taken some sort of (groundless) leap of identification in the first place. When Cohen's argument is presented synthetically, as a (predetermined) aspect of our Jewish experience, it seems no more persuasive.

But Cohen's failure is not the failure of his tradition. It is not the failure of practical reasoning itself.[53]

II

Charles Taylor (1931–), former Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford University and one of the world's most influential living philosophers, has a share in practical philosophy as well, and, indeed, an affinity with some of the leading features of Marburg Neo Kantianism. But he also departs in ways that will make his version of this tradition far more compelling today, and a more worthy exponent of anti-historicism than the discredited Cohen. The affinities are manifold. Taylor is deeply indebted to the

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[52] I owe the "tricky" formulation to Leora Batnitzky. On the esotericism in this method, see Steven Schwarzchild. "'Germanism and Judaism'—Herman Cohen's Normative Paradigm of the German-Jewish Symbiosis" in *Jews and Germans From 1860 to 1933: The Problematic Symbiosis* ed. David Bronsen. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1979. 156. Spinoza also allows true belief as a *species of knowledge*, even when it does not rise to the level of *justified* true belief. See *Spinoza Ethics*. Ed/trans. G. H. R. Parkinson. Oxford: Oxford University, 2000. 32–33.

[53] This tradition is out of fashion not only among historians, but in the halls of contemporary Jewish philosophy itself. See, e.g., Eugene Borowitz. *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought*. NY: Behrman House, 1983; Nancy Levene's introduction in Nancy Levene and Peter Ochs. *Textual Reasonings*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002; and Arnold Eisen, *Taking Hold of Torah*. Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1997, 29.

philosophical tradition of Kant and Hegel. He is a theist. He is politically engaged, with a long history of involvement in socialist and left-liberal causes and a record of activity in the debate over the place of Quebec in the Canadian Federation. He is an advocate for a synoptic conception of the human sciences, a vitriolic critic of naturalism, the view of the human being as an organism controlled primarily by external causes and internal drives. And, he is an important critic of historicism, with the transcendental tradition as his levy, built up against what seems to him a rising tide.

While there are many instructive differences between Cohen and Taylor as well, it would not be an exaggeration to say that each represents a moment in a shared philosophical tradition. The seminal commonality is this: for both Cohen and Taylor philosophy is an activity of reason accounting for itself, and ethics the branch of philosophy where we offer a rational account of *ourselves*. This Platonic-Aristotelian conception of philosophy has been hard pressed by naturalism since the time of Descartes and Spinoza. In the anthropology of naturalism, there is no mechanism for what the ancients understood as rational-accounting-for-self. By the end of the 18th century, anyone seeking to defend this conception of philosophy was on the defensive. The transcendental arguments I am discussing here, whether Cohen's or Taylor's, are moments in a late modern defense of an embattled tradition.[54]

As Cohen scholarship has boomed of late, so scholarship on Taylor has experienced a dramatic surge in recent years as well; though the indefatigable Taylor continues his writing unabated.[55] Taylor's transcendental method, like Cohen's before it, is complex and ramified, and a detailed examination need not delay us here. Our aim, for which a summary and illustration of Taylor's perspective must suffice, is to show enough of the native human interest and intellectual merit of Taylor's line of thinking to discourage a triumphant historicism, a far more tempting attitude for the historian when only Marburg is in his line of vision.

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[54] See, e.g. Taylor, Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Harvard, 1989. section 6.2. esp. 121 on the central place of Plato's *logon didonai*. On the notion of self-responsible reason, see the early essay, "Responsibility for Self," in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson. Oxford: Oxford University, 1982.

[55] See especially the lucid scholarship of Nicholas H. Smith in *Charles Taylor Meaning Morals and Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity, 2002; and his "Charles Taylor." ed. Ruth Abbey. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004. 29–51.

Before launching into this exposition, however, a further note of contrast with Cohen is important. Taylor is poised to leap over the obstacle that stymied Cohen in the eyes of his readers, and, famously, of the Weimar generation. Taylor's reflection begins with experience. Indeed, it would not be an overstatement to say that his philosophical anthropology is a technology for the exploration and clarification of personal experience. On this point, Taylor could not be more different from the Marburg school, and gets his bearings instead from the existential revolution inspired by Martin Heidegger. Other differences, which largely flow from this decisive one, will become apparent.

Crucial differences aside, Taylor's arguments are structurally similar to the two stages that we identified in Cohen's *Ethik*. In stage one, Taylor reasons deductively, in search of a chain of logical entailments that will illuminate the nature of the self. Whereas Cohen deduced virtue-concepts from the idea of the *Rechtsstaat,* Taylor deduces his value-categories from personal experience. Cohen had insisted that someone who (properly) identified with the *Rechtsstaat* would see that they must (logically) become the *truthful, humble, courageous, faithful, and just* servant of God. Taylor argues that someone who carefully attends to his experience will see that she must (logically) value some things strongly, and that her strong values are themselves embedded in narrative frameworks and moral concepts to which she is also (logically) committed. Stage two is Taylor's *Erzeugungslogik*.[56] Whereas Cohen was decisively committed to reading the ideal of the suffering servant out of Jewish texts, Taylor is committed to facilitating a kind of reasoning about values designed to deepen each individual's sense of self. He observes this kind of reasoning, which he calls practical, in both the everyday interactions of people and the conventional practices of historians and social scientists. This claim, to discover a form of reason, operative in the everyday world of household and academy, and connecting us to the "feelings and opinions that are" our very own, is Taylor's decisive difference with Cohen, his Aristotelian rejoinder to Cohen's Platonism.[57]

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[56] The term is Cohen's, meaning logic of (self)-creation. See Section II-B, above. Contra Smith, I am suggesting that narrative frameworks are a prima facie plausible element in a Taylor-made transcendental argument. See *Meaning Morals and Modernity* 88, 97–102, 134; *Charles Taylor* 44–45.

[57] "Slavery in Freedom," in Asher Ginzberg. *Selected Essays by Ahad Ha'Am*. trans. Leon Simon. Philadelphia: JPS, 1936. *The Guide for the Perplexed*. III 54, 635.

A

Taylor begins with what he takes to be an inescapable feature of human experience: people have reactions to the world thick with convictions about value, feelings like admiration and contempt, honor and shame, courage and remorse. Moreover, these are not mere preferences about what we desire *now*. They reflect on our vision of how we want to be in the future. As such, my admiration of a person who "is able to stand his ground" includes a judgment about what is higher and lower; it contains standards by which I will want to *assess* my preferences as I go forward. Do I prefer to avoid confrontation, even when important issues are at stake? All things being equal, I ought not.

This sort of deductive reasoning, as prosaic as it seems, embodies Taylor's method of transcendental regression to values from the facts of personal experience. In the course of his argument, the axiological categories he articulates become more rich (and less prosaic). Proceeding in this manner, Taylor tries to show that at work inside us are not only standards of self-assessment, but also *moral sources, final ends, and narrative configurations*. Moral sources are springs of energy and vision, signposts pointing toward what is good and gasoline to get us there. These are, Taylor cautions, embedded in our cultures and civilizations, and, therefore, they will be different for different people. He focuses on three sources: nature, God, and reason, as elaborated in cultural debates since the seventeenth century. Moral sources, in Taylor's sense, are closely related to final ends, i.e. purposes that nature, God, or reason have in store for us. Sources are also embedded in history, in what Taylor calls narrative frameworks. Taylor identifies three narrative frameworks, corresponding to these sources: Romanticism, the Protestant Reformation, and the European Enlightenment.

Taylor believes that if we dig for our moral sources, our final ends and the narratives in which they are embedded will become apparent as well. But, we cannot get very far in understanding this view, it seems to me, without a more concrete illustration. Let us try a second thought experiment, in the spirit of the one we have already completed. Bracketing disbelief, imagine Charles Taylor as a Jewish educator, facing a diverse classroom of adult students. Furthermore, let us suppose that these students are willing to travel the distance that stage one of Taylor's transcendental argument requires.

Allow that they see themselves as thick with convictions about value, and duty bound to struggle with conflicts and tensions. What would be the next move in this Jewish education, Taylor-made?

The classroom is composed of students with a range of sensibilities, holding strikingly different values and roles in the Jewish community. For the sake of this illustration, let us boil the differences down to three. What would Taylor do, if thrown together with members of a modern orthodox congregation, Zionists (not yet) living in Israel, and a handful of middle class urban Jews, unchurched and unapologetic, but with a hankering for Jewish study, nevertheless? What would he want to do with them as an educator?

Taylor would in fact turn to history and cultural texts as the medium for an *Erzeugungslogik*, and as the material for practical reasoning. His objective would be to weave a discourse that was both faithful to historical context *and* exemplary of purposes that Jews have pursued under modern conditions. I propose an example of this discourse below, though I want to stress that I have concocted it myself to illustrate Taylor's version of practical philosophy. I call this the discourse of *faith keepers, renaissance seekers*, and *ethical returnees*. I add *Enlightenment and Romantic Departures* as well, for reasons that will become apparent. While these brief examples are *no substitute* for richer historical descriptions and much more elaboration on the purposes suggested in them, they should provide a sense of what is implied in Taylor's notion of narrative frameworks.

Faith Keepers carry on as Jews in the modern period in the synagogue, as faithful members of a covenantal community and loyal servants of God. In a liberal version of this story, the medieval *kehillah*, a kind of Jewish polity, was destroyed during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the rise of powerful states. On the heels of this development, the social and political basis for rabbinic Jewish life disappeared. Over time, Jews joined civil society, the political and associational life of the new states, on an equal basis with other individuals. In due course, Judaism was transformed from a juridical association, a total and segregated way of life, into a religion, principally a faith in the one God, guarantor of individual happiness and collective flourishing. This story was first parleyed by Saul Ascher in his *Leviathan* (1792) and plays a central role in the controversial letter by David Friendländer to Wilhelm Teller (1799). The Pittsburg Platform of 1885, a public declaration of the Reform

movement in America, is an icon of this approach as well. A more conservative version of this orientation was expressed by Samson Raphael Hirsch, father to a modern orthodox stance to Jewish religion in the Diaspora. Hirsch offered a version of this modernization tale that included a commanding God and collective norms.

Ethical Returnees are Jews who have been sold on the Enlightenment project, the effort to construct a moral-political world of far reaching human solidarity and universal human rights; for them, Judaism is a complement to the Enlightenment project, or in the most radical version of this narrative, Judaism is this project's corrective. In either version, Jewish practice becomes a vital element in this larger—and quintessentially modern—undertaking. The narrative of ethical returnees accentuates the power of Jewish practice and texts to motivate human solidarity, and the horrific history of the modern West in the absence of these bonds. Elements of this story are reminiscent of the work of 19th century writers like Moritz Lazarus and Hermann Cohen, but without the pathos engendered by the tragedies of the 20th century. After the Shoah, Joseph Soloveitchik's *The Lonely Man of Faith* reflected this story in the mood of religious orthodoxy. More recently, this sensibility found a place in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, and his student, French critic, Alain Finkielkraut.

Renaissance Seekers are critics of the Diaspora as fertile ground for a healthy Jewish existence. Various regimes of thought and practice, including the massive expansion of the logic of capitalism into every corner of existence, and the rising prestige of the natural sciences, have dissuaded many Jews from carrying on as participants in Jewish life. Vicious racial anti-Semitism threatened Jewish safety and fermented Jewish self-hatred. Beginning in the 1880s with the emergence of Zionism and cultural nationalism, Jews began to seize control of their political destiny, defend their dignity, and protect and renew Jewish life. The emergence of this particular story is integrally related to the pogroms of 1881–1919 and has been enshrined in Jewish memory in the writings of Ahad Ha'am, Martin Buber, Abraham Isaac Kook, and David Hartman, among others.

Enlightenment and Romantic Departures exemplify paths taken *out* of the Jewish community. The epoch making events alluded to

in the previous paragraphs encouraged some Jews to leave Jewish affiliation and identification, and often their reasons were bound up with these events. The Enlightenment-based individualism of Benedict Spinoza and Solomon Maimon, and the expressive individualism of salonières like Rahel Varnhagen and Henriette Herz, help to mark a boundary between inside and outside Jewish self-hood, and indicate configurations of meaning that led, and can still lead, beyond Jewish history altogether.

Exposing his students to historical configurations like these, Taylor would aim to evoke a considered view from them. Do any of these narratives resonate? Do they represent a gain in self-understanding? To the extent that one of these narratives is attractive, have its poets, belletristic writers and philosophers managed to articulate *moral sources* and *worthy ends* that resonate as well? In the examples mentioned, these sources and ends could be as different as Torah and inwardness (Faithkeepers), *Tschuwah*/repentence and social justice (Ethical Returnees), the People Israel and settlement of the land (Renaissance Seekers) and scientific reason and an illusion-free grasp of the world (Enlightenment Departures). A Taylor-made approach to narration, then, is inductive and hermeneutical, not deductive and ideological; it narrates modern Jewish history from multiple and incompatible perspectives; as such, it is an interpretation of ways of understanding the Jewish world and living in it (or beyond it).

In contrast, Cohen's *Erzeugungslogik*, to its considerable detriment, was a set of logical entailments, relentlessly applied by the willing, to whatever cultural text arose. In this sense, we could say that Cohen's pedagogy was indeed ideological, with the temptations to duplicity we have already recorded. By contrast, the parallel moment in Taylor's pedagogy is open, interpretive, groping, and provisional. Steven K. White has conjectured that Taylor's brand of inescapability is meant to press up against the limits of our ability to imagine alternatives to our way of being at any given moment in time.[58] Cohen's approach, by contrast, was disturbingly mono-logical. He was as little interested in alternatives in Jewish life as he was in the

[58] Stephen K. White. *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University, 2000. 42–74. See also Taylor, "Comparison, History, Truth." *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge: Harvard University, 1995, and, more recently, his "Gadamer on the Human Sciences," *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert J. Dostal. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002. 126–42.

experience of those who lived them. Cohen's law of consciousness drove the particular and the plural—Jews, their texts, their practices, and their culture, in the relevant case—always relentlessly toward a singular and decidedly universal signification. In his ethical universe, only one Jewish narrative remained standing at the end of the lesson, the narrative of Israel as suffering servant of God.[59]

Despite throwing off the mono-logical impulse, however, Taylor's version remains *critical* philosophy. In this respect, it is crucial to see that Taylor's pedagogy is not only a quest for eventual self-affirmation, but also, and preeminently, an ambitious effort at self-interrogation. The actual practices that Taylor sometimes commends to his readers—theistic religion and a brand of politics he calls civic republicanism—can only be viewed, in the context of his commitment to the individual's responsibility for him/her self, as examples—reasoned conclusions, to be sure, but conclusions linked to a form of *accounting for self* that is ultimately his alone.[60]

As a critical philosopher, Taylor's most cherished target is complacency, and the overly confining bounds of common sense. He takes aim at a false sense of necessity, the conviction that history and biography are always running their course, as they should, or, what amounts to the same thing, as they must. This naiveté, or perhaps despair, Taylor tells us time and time again, always involves a kind of "forgetting." Taylor's narrative approach to philosophy, then, is an effort to reinstate in academic tradition and the broader culture, a cast of mind at risk, the ancient tradition of practical reason, or, as we have referred to it above, rational accounting for the self.[61]

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[59] What the state is in *Ethik*, the People Israel is in *Religion*. On the State as suffering servant in the *Ethik*, see Introduction-C above. This christological innovation comes by the pen of the acknowledged master of rabbinic exegesis, not by Hermann Cohen. "by polemicizing against Christian theology . . . Rashi absorbed one of its cardinal tenets—namely the dogma of vicarious suffering as a means of salvation; Israel takes here the role of Christ. Who could say whether Rashi's view is more Jewish or more Christian . . ." Funkenstein, Amos. "The Dialectics of Assimilation." *Jewish Social Studies* 1.2 (1995): 9.

[60] For Taylor there is something true about the moral relativism that is widespread in modern culture and the contemporary human sciences, though it often is a degenerate simulacrum of the relativism he would advocate. For an insightful discussion of this issue, see Stephen Mulhall. *Sources of the Self's Senses of Itself: A Theistic Reading of Modernity*. In *Can Religion be Explained Away*. Ed. D. Z. Phillips. NY: St. Martin's Press. 1996. 131–60.

[61] See especially "Overcoming Epistemology" in *Philosophical Arguments*. 14–15, and "Philosophy and Its History." *Philosophy in History* eds. Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984. 17–30, esp. 24.

What kind of reasoning is this in Taylor's iteration? What would there be for Taylor to do in a classroom? From the point of view of Taylor's *Erzeugungslogik*, historical narration is essential. For Cohen reason operated *only* in the sciences; as a result, as we have seen, his ethics curriculum relied on schooling in jurisprudence, understood as a science. The accounting Cohen gave of the self is *in terms of* jurisprudence. For Taylor, despite his affinities with Cohen, sciences embody practical reason but are not its exclusive reserve. Taylor is prepared to say that reason operates *in* history, and that history itself must form part of the ethics curriculum. A Taylor-made curriculum is designed to encourage students to develop an account of themselves that is historically textured, emotionally resonant, and that can be identified with a set of cultural texts and their on-going discussion. It is our cultural texts, if not only they, that can evoke self-recognition and self-critique.

B

For Taylor, history and the other human sciences are elaborately developed instances of the practical reasoning that we do everyday, though we often neglect their ethical potential.[62] The salient features of any practical reasoning, human sciences included, are two fold for Taylor:

1. **An ad hominem argument is made**. On this level, we map out our alternative as a more worthy competitor to an ostensibly inferior interpretation or realization of a *common* object (e.g. the purposes of Jewish life under certain conditions). Practical reasoning for Taylor is always comparative and dialogical in form.
2. **A claim of asymmetrical relations is developed regarding two competitors**. On this level, we try to vindicate our claims by pointing to the fact that our view integrates the assets of some competitive alternative, while side-stepping its liabilities.

[62] The key source for this view is "Explanation and Practical Reason" in *Philosophical Arguments*. 34–60. The link between practical reason and the human sciences in Taylor's philosophy is insightfully discussed in Smith. *Charles Taylor Meaning Morals and Modernity*. 120–38.

From our point of view, so we argue, the other guy is driven *by his own commitments* to come over to our way of seeing a contested proposition q. But in order to make this transition perspicuously, he will also have to give up other elements of his position. The *ad hominem* argument seeks to reveal that our version of q is a necessary condition of commitments that our adversary holds at T_1. If we can bring him to see this at T_2, then he will be driven toward our view, or at the very least, a revision of his own, that puts his view in better order at T_3.

Now, this description, as I said, purports to be a lucid account of the way people actually reason with each other in ordinary domains, and especially characteristic of the human sciences. Students enrolled in a Taylor-made curriculum would be encouraged to emulate this mode in relation to the narrative frameworks outlined above. If one most resonates with the position of faith keeper, for instance, then the task of practical reasoning is to try to imagine possible transitions to renaissance seeker, ethical returnee, and/or Enlightenment and Romantic Departures. Put differently, when students entertain one of the narrative frames they *do not* identify with, and try to imagine themselves driven to it by their very own lights, they are reasoning practically for Taylor. In this educational situation, then, the dialogue between positions is *not* between two parties. In Taylor-made Jewish education, the dialogic form takes place in the inner life of the students themselves.

C

But, is this in fact the way we reason in the human sciences, and the way we ought to? We have a particularly rich and suggestive opportunity to test this out, given the concerns of my inquiry. In recent years, as I noted at the outset, David N. Myers has proffered an interpretation of Hermann Cohen at odds with the one advanced here. Moreover, he has done so under the banner of historicism. I should repeat that Myers's book is a remarkable piece of scholarship, generous with historical subjects and contemporary authors alike. Myers eschews polemic, even when entering into the most contested terrain. Remarkably, he holds the line on this commitment, even in the course of his extended argument that Cohen is, somehow, a "Protestant Jew." He distances himself from those who see Cohen as traitorous, for instance, and prods and cajoles his readers

to see Cohen's philosophy empathetically, as a "unique blend of Kantian and Jewish ideals . . . assiduously cultivated."[63]

What is Myers's purpose, then, in tarring Cohen with the feathers of the West's great antinomian movement, and with recourse to a term ("Protestant Jew") that, despite Myers's protestations, does in fact sound like self-mutilation, if not treachery? What is at stake, I want to suggest, is a remarkable effort to occupy new ground as a historicist concerned with culture, not influence. Renouncing a version of historicism obsessed with influence, Myers pioneers an approach he calls the "cultural history of ideas," whose aspiration is to "move beyond winners and losers in. . . [a] game of historical influence . . ." [and] "to see history as a series of lateral, and not merely vertical, movements." Regarding the historical relations between Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity, for instance, Myers admires metaphors that trade in interactive systems: the familial metaphor of competitive siblings, rather than overbearing parent and rebellious child, and the biological metaphor of a "'single circulatory system within which discursive elements could move'" back and forth between Christians and Jews. As he says emphatically, he is looking to mark out a historical space for inquiry "beyond influence."[64]

It is in this context that Myers wants to make "Protestant Jew" conspicuous in naming his narrative about Cohen. For Myers, Cohen's activity marks out a thin membrane between German and Jewish history, precisely the space "beyond influence" that Myers wants to explore. Myers explains Cohen's putative Protestant attribute in at least three ways. Quite naturally, he makes the least out of the first, an etiological explanation that highlights influence. Cohen's upbringing in Coswig, Anahalt-Bernburg, his schooling in Dessau, and his career in Marburg, had put him in proximity to a powerful *Protestant* milieu. His father, a traditional *melamed*, had collegial relations with Protestant teachers and amicable ones with Protestant neighbors in the town. The *Herzogliches Gymnasium* in Dessau was a thoroughly Protestant environment; and the University of Marburg, where he arrived as a *Privatdozent* in 1873 and remained until 1912, was a Protestant university and home to some of the most celebrated Protestant

[63] Myers, "Quest," 197; *Resisting*, 161.

[64] Myers, *Resisting*, 167. In the case of Cohen, he is interested in the way Cohen's *jüdischer Kultureprotestantismus* signaled "discrete boundaries around . . . Jewish group allegiance." "Quest," 198.

theologians and historians in all of Germany, many of whom Cohen counted as friends.

Second, Myers sees an affinity between Cohen and a group of liberal Protestants who organized themselves more or less contemporaneously with him. This movement, which others have termed *Kulturprotestantismus*, emphasized, like Cohen, the preeminence of the ethical in the religious life; the compatibility of modernity with ethical religion; and the vocation of the German state as a *Rechtstaat*, whose purpose was to unify nation-states into a confederation, and (ultimately) bring world-history toward messianic fulfillment in a state of justice and peace.

Neither the influence described nor the affinity observed here are controversial; but neither do they begin to explain why Myers would call Cohen a *goy*.[65] The picture becomes clearer, however, with the third set of reasons. Myers holds that Cohen gave ethical values in Judaism priority *over* the law, and neglected rabbinic sources in favor of the Bible, especially the Prophets. When Cohen did consult sources beyond the biblical text, they "tended not to be rabbis but philosophers, not all of whom were Jewish."[66]

Now, there is something right about this last characterization, as our own analysis of Cohen's "memorial" to Maimonides has shown. Cohen did have a marked preference for prophets and philosophers, and he did offer tendentious readings of both. Moreover, it is true beyond a shadow of a doubt that Cohen was anti-clerical, denied rabbinic authority, accorded inwardness high value and framed Judaism in ethical terms. However, Myers goes too far. To suggest that Cohen inclined toward a Protestant ideal of *sola scriptura* and neglected rabbinic sources is a gross distortion; to leave the impression that Cohen's philosophy was antinomian (in the Protestant style) is simply wrong.[67]

This is not the place to explore the depths of Cohen's engagement with rabbinic sources. But, I have already presented enough

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[65] Goy is a pejorative Jewish term for Christian.

[66] Myers, "Quest," 209. Myers also argues on the basis of things Cohen said about the identity or affinity of Judaism and Protestantism in the midst of polemic or controversy. He also reaches for psychological explanations when Cohen idealizes German culture. "Quest," 211. Given the programmatic subterfuge of Cohen's *Erzeugungslogik*, this is perilous historical reasoning. See Section II-D and note 51 above.

[67] Myers, "Quest," 206, 208–9. *Resisting*, 47, 48, 59.

of the damning evidence from *Ethik* and *Religion of Reason* to make clear how little Myers' more extreme characterizations should apply. At the heart of Cohen's project was the impulse to respond to the charge that the centrality of law in Judaism was in any way at odds with the admirable Enlightenment project. His response was in point of fact to assert the opposite. Adherence to law was the very heart of the moral enterprise. In *Ethik*, Cohen's rejoinder shows up in the transcendental logic, where the subject is constituted by law. In *Religion*, it shows up, in parallel fashion, as the fulcrum of the entire book, in the rite of Yom Kippur.

Despite his thoughtful critique of his colleagues' obsessions with influence, Myers confesses that his treatment of Cohen is written from "an unmistakably historicist perspective." This is a fair concession, since the book is, in fact, written from start to finish, as if historicism were true. But what does this imply, especially after Myers' repudiation of a portion of the historicist legacy focused on influence.

What Myers remains committed to, surprisingly enough, is nihilism, or what amounts to the same thing, the total impotence of practical reason. Historicism, Myers implies in his parting words, is a nihilistic doctrine. Despite what we might yearn for, no "experience or belief system defies historical gravity." Having contextualized Cohen and three of his successors, Myers comes full circle to the theme with which he began the book, the *fin de siècle* experience of crisis. We cannot shield our faith in Judaism any more than 19th century Christians could shield theirs from threatening inquiries into the historicity of Jesus. Moreover, the only palliative for what ails us is study of the crisis itself. In this, Myers seems to say, we at least become a community of struggle and noble defeat. ". . . we have not been alone in our despair."[68]

Now, this is a very cryptic coda to a modern historical book, but it is by no means the most interesting voice in the closing chapter. Another voice not only refuses despair, but moves boldly into the future with conviction. To uncover the deeper ground under Myers' missteps, this is the voice we must bring out.

[68] *History*, 172.

D

By his own estimation Myers's interpretation of Cohen aims to make sense of Cohen's predicament as a Jew "for whom assimilation was deemed a noble path."[69] And, the explanation comes as a beautifully written, chronologically sensitive, rich description of Cohen in interaction with Jews, and Christians, especially academic colleagues. But, what is the importance of Cohen's "predicament" for us? What does Myers think the study of it might offer his readers? And what makes rich description of the contexts in which Cohen lived, or what Myers"s calls the cultural history of ideas, well-suited to this task?

Myers, it seems to me, has written a book with a "second language."[70] In his native tongue, he is resigned to narrate the constant passing away of all values and commitments. In his second (in which he is considerably less articulate), he urges his readers to consider that assimilation, pursued with integrity, can be a blessing for the Jews. Cultural spaces, so the argument goes, do open up in the modern Diaspora, just as they have in the past. A counter-trend in 20th century historiography, first pursued by Simon Rawidowicz (1896–1957), Gerson Cohen (1924–1991), and Amos Funkenstein (1937–1995), demonstrates as much. In our generation, Daniel Boyarin and Peter Schäfer have portrayed the relations between Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity in this fashion, but the greater controversy surrounds the history of Jews in the modern period. Here Myers rightly takes aim at Zionist historians, and their well-known predilection to negate the creativity of the Diaspora. Myers offers his treatment of Cohen as a modest reply to this Zionist analysis. What he gives us, paradoxically, is a snapshot of cultural creativity that *resists history*, if history means historical negation, or, what amounts to the same, reduction of the exilic past to an epiphenomenon of gentile history.

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[69] *Resisting History*, 40.

[70] The strategy I adopt here, to identify a "second language" at war with Myers' native tongue, is also part of the tradition of practical reasoning to which Cohen and Taylor belong. See, for example, Robert Bellah. *Habits of the Heart.* Berkeley: University of California, 1985. Jeffrey Stout. *Ethics After Babel The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents.* Boston: Beacon, 1988. But cf. Eisen and Cohen, *The Jew Within.* 7–8, and the insightful review by Michael Meyer. "Will the Center Hold Conservative Judaism Re-Examined." *Conservative Judaism* 54.1 (2001): 5–16. The stark contrast that both Eisen/Cohen and Meyer draw between "personalism" and a Judaism of obligation is drawn into question by Taylor's view, a view of the human person that includes practical reasoning as well as the drive toward self-fullfillment.

But trying to speak two languages at once proves confusing for Myers, and cuts as much against his principle stance as his neglect of the finer points of Cohen's philosophy. The very act of naming Cohen's cultural space Protestant testifies to the confusion here. Myer's innuendo that Cohen had, somehow, overstepped a boundary, usually honored by self-affirming Jews, is bolstered by Myer's first language, the stuff of German Jewish history, but upset, and fatally so, by his entanglement in the second, a normative language rooted in the tradition of practical reasoning.

Myers cannot have it both ways, making axiological arguments when it suits him, declaring anti-historicism dead when it does not. When anti-historicism is dead, historians are free to name the past without regard for history as a moral science. Cohen can be named Protestant, innocently, because of his milieu. But Myers and other historians should know that anti-historicism is not an exclusively Neo Kantian affair. As a challenge to historicism, it is as powerful an alternative as the tradition of practical philosophy can provide at any given moment. At the present time, there are in fact a number of well-articulated positions, including Charles Laramore, Martha Nussbaum, Robert Brandom, Alasdair MacIntyre, John McDowell, and, of course, Charles Taylor's.

Naming Cohen is hardly an innocent affair. In the narrative framework I developed, Cohen appears as an *ethical returnee*. This comports not only with his biography, having become more involved in Jewish affairs from 1904, but also, more profoundly, with a teleology he articulated, one that shines through much of what he wrote in his later work. Judaism, in Cohen's framing, is a corrective and a complement to the Enlightenment Project of Immanuel Kant. My intention, it should be clear, is not to vindicate the framework of ethical return. Whatever the Hegelian background of this position, Taylor's dialectical reasoning explicitly rejects a search for an absolute standpoint. The narrative frame that shows up in Cohen's life will have to continue to compete with others, named (e.g. Faith Keeper, Renaissance Seeker) and yet unnamed. But to call Cohen Protestant is to prejudice the educational enterprise before it has hardly begun. Myers wisely does not totally seek to repress his commitment to the value of Jewish cultural spaces outside of the land of Israel, but he would do well to articulate and defend it, or, if this cuts too strongly against the grain of training and temperament, to support other colleagues in the human sciences who are inclined and equipped to do so.

Historicists and anti-historicists have indeed been involved in a tug-o-war in the last 150 years. Although one would never know it from reading *Resisting History,* this struggle has not always seemed to its participants a game of winner-take-all. Under the influence of Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel (1770–1831), scholars like Cohen sometimes believed that history, philosophy, and the social sciences could co-relate in the enterprise of explaining the human condition. There are champions of this view today as well, though they are certainly overpowered by the fragmentation of the disciplines. The brief example I have given of Jewish education, Taylor-made, takes up once again the Marburg position on the unity of the human sciences. Historical thinking, now of a kind more akin to Myers, combines with practical reasoning, *ad hominem* style, in an effort to help students locate themselves historically in a (nevertheless) trans-historical conversation about the Jewish narrative going forward.

Historians need not take up the mantle of practical reasoning. But, they also should not needlessly conspire in eradicating it from the classroom. To continue this part of the legacy of historicism is indeed cause for despair, and, as Tirosh-Samuelson has implied, to abandon one's post as educator.