

Hermann Cohen's Teaching Concerning Modern Jewish Identity (1904–1918)

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Two recent developments suggest that the time has arrived to begin a reappraisal of the Jewish writings of Hermann Cohen.¹ The first concerns Cohen the philosopher. Beginning in the early 1980s with the publication of Alasdair MacIntyre's *tour de force*, *After Virtue*,² a new and broad interest has begun to develop within academia in just the kind of philosophical project in which Hermann Cohen was engaged.³ For Cohen, as well as for MacIntyre and a growing number of contemporary philosophers and theologians, modern philosophy's most urgent task is the revival of a "moral psychology" which can be applied to issues of contemp-

¹ "[T]he unique heart of the subject/matter/cause." Hermann Cohen, 'Die Errichtung von Lehrstühlen für Ethik und Religionsphilosophie an den jüdisch-theologischen Lehranstalten', in *Jüdische Schriften*, ed. by Franz Rosenzweig, 3 vols., Berlin 1924, vol. I, p. 122; In Cohen's context, this term resonates with the sense of the human subject, *der Mensch*, as well as the divine subject, the prime moral cause which, according to Cohen's teaching concerning divine attributes, reflects the true subjectivity of *der Mensch*. See Alexander Altmann, 'The Divine Attributes', in *Judaism*, 15 (1966), pp. 40–60. Cohen identifies the term *Herz* with the Hebrew word *Lev*, and the notion of character, the seat of the virtues and the locus of control in *der Mensch*. See especially Cohen, 'Innere Beziehungen der Kantischen Philosophie zum Judentum', in *Jüdische Schriften I*, pp. 284–306 and 'Gesinnung', in *Jüdische Schriften I*, pp. 196–211. This article is limited to a consideration of Cohen's systematic teaching concerning Jewish identity. The latter commences only in 1904 in connection with the publication of Cohen's general philosophical anthropology, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, Hildesheim 1981 (1st edn., Berlin 1907, hereafter *Ethik*). Cf. note 8. I would like to thank Professor Arnold Eisen of Stanford University for commenting on an earlier version of this essay. I would also like to thank the following institutions for their support during the research and writing of this essay: the Lady Davis Fellowship Trust, the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

² Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame 1984.

³ Cf. Cohen's own description of his work: "Die systematische Philosophie ist die Lehre von der Einheit des Menschen in seinen Erzeugungsweisen der Kultur", in *Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie*, Giessen 1915, p. 136 (hereafter *Begriff*); On the view of Cohen's project as moral psychology, see Gerd Wolandt, 'Einleitung', in Hermann Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Hildesheim 1982 (1st edn., Berlin 1912), pp. VII, XVI, note 2; Ernst Cassirer, 'Hermann Cohen. Worte gesprochen an seinem Grabe am 7. April 1918', in Helmut Holzhey, *Hermann Cohen*, Frankfurt am Main 1994, pp. 67–74; Steven Schwarzschild, 'The Title of Hermann Cohen's *Religion of Reason*', in Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, Atlanta 1995, p. 18, note 40 (hereafter *Religion*).

ary ethical and religious concern.⁴ Foremost among the latter for the mature Cohen stands the question of German-Jewish identity.

The second consideration concerns Jewish studies in the university as we approach the end of the twentieth century. Hermann Cohen, after a hiatus of over fifty years, is again being given a modest hearing in the academic world.⁵ Jewish studies programmes are now for the first time commonplace in the finest American universities, and many include both modern Jewish philosophy and Hermann Cohen in their curriculum. Moreover, an English translation of Cohen's *magnum opus*, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, which was out of print for many years, has just been reissued, making Cohen more easily accessible to the scholarly community. In short, the man once regarded as the intellectual leader of German Jewry is again being heard in the halls of academe, and a reconsideration of his work is a pressing task.

In this paper I focus on Cohen's mature Jewish writings. In my view, these represent Cohen's most successful effort to apply his moral psychology to the question of German-Jewish identity. Over the course of his last thirteen years, Cohen developed a subtle explanation of modern German-Jewish identity whose most basic terms (*social type, literary tradition, narrative, community, virtue*) are drawn from that psychology. An examination of these writings will show just how preoccupied Cohen was with the basic issues of modern identity that continue to concern both modern Jews and the broader academic community even today.

INTRODUCTION

In 1915, in the twilight of his career, Hermann Cohen published a short monograph on religion. The work's stated aim was entirely conventional. It would carve out space for yet another concept within the Marburg philosopher's systematic thought. Its closing pages, however, represent a genuine departure from the everyday business of writing philosophy. Here Cohen reflected on the significance of his conception of religion for "the naive consciousness of people in so far as it has not ripened into systematic philosophy".⁶

Cohen's contention represents a noteworthy moment of reflection for an intellectual as committed as Cohen was to the professional practice of philosophy. Though his own audience consisted mainly of professional philosophers and theologians, Cohen cast his glance in a different direction. True, his chosen medium

⁴Cohen's moral psychology is outlined most prominently in *Ethik* (throughout), *Begriff*, pp. 108–140, and *Religion*, pp. 400–462. Alasdair MacIntyre emphasises the urgency of reviving moral psychology in 'Moral Philosophy. What Next?', in *Revisions*, Notre Dame 1983, especially p. 9. Continuing interest in MacIntyre's project is reflected in John Horton and Susan Mendus (eds.), *After MacIntyre*, Cambridge 1994.

⁵Eugene Borowitz dates the beginning of the declining interest in Cohen's Marburg Neo-Kantianism from the end of the First World War. See Borowitz, 'Reason', in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, New York 1987, p. 751.

⁶*Begriff*, p. 137.

was philosophical, but the religious crisis which concerned him in 1915 required a different literary style and a different audience.

"If the thought is admissible that humanity's education into the knowledge of systematic philosophy is the problem of a not very close future, then for this reason a nearer task may not be put off . . . the concept of the unique God in its logical and ethical clarity is to be secured as the main focus and essence of religious instruction inside the education of the nation. Just this concentration of the religious doctrine of monotheism and of the religious instruction in the elementary school . . . will in the first place truly establish ethical culture as part of interaction and intercommunication amongst the people."⁷

At the apex of his career as a philosopher, Cohen's most passionate call is reserved not for new disciples to carry on his philosophical legacy but for a new God-centred doctrine and a cadre of teachers to disseminate it.

Yet Cohen's remarks should not be understood as a renunciation of the philosophical muse, nor even as a call for others to take up a doctrinal task to which he was unsuited. The opposite is demonstrably the case. No doctrine could be acceptable to Cohen which did not follow from his systematic thought, as *Begriff der Religion* itself tries to argue. Furthermore, Cohen had already been engaged for some time in precisely the task for which he now solicited support. Indeed, between 1904 and 1917, in the scholarly and semi-popular Jewish press, Cohen wrote numerous articles promoting a particular self-understanding for the modern Jew. It is this doctrine which has captured our attention as Cohen's teaching concerning Jewish identity.

In the inaugural article of the revived *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* of 1904, Cohen launched the opening salvo of his new campaign. On the face of it, 'Die Errichtung von Lehrstühlen für Ethik und Religionsphilosophie an den jüdisch-theologischen Lehranstalten'⁸ embodies a modest partisan proposal for organisational reform. A devotee of philosophy urges the scholarly community of Jews to restore the philosopher to a leading position within the Jewish seminary. If we examine the details of Cohen's article, however, we uncover ambitions far grander than those inscribed in the title. Indeed, in 'Errichtung von Lehrstühlen' we find a scholarly programme for the reconstruction of the modern Jew. This programme would remain a beacon for Cohen's work in the Jewish community from this time onwards.

The general argument of 'Errichtung von Lehrstühlen' is easy to recapitulate. If rightly conceived, Judaism is well-suited to contribute to the *Kultur* of the modern state, and to inform the ethical commitments (*Sittlichkeit*) of its citizens. However, Judaism's potential contribution has been eclipsed in the modern period by the inadequate training of Jewish theologians. They are accustomed

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 138–139.

⁸The article, 'Die Errichtung von Lehrstühlen für Ethik und Religionsphilosophie an den jüdisch-theologischen Lehranstalten', appears in *Jüdische Schriften II*, pp. 108–125. It is worth noting that this article appears in 1904, also the date in which Cohen's *Ethik* makes its first appearance. As the latter is the *locus classicus* of his moral psychology, it can be no coincidence that Cohen offers his most programmatic statement for the reconstruction of German-Jewish identity in the very same year.

to weighing Judaism's significance for the general *Kultur* exclusively in terms of the superficial details of its ethical teachings. For Cohen, however,

"If only the external content of its ethical teaching is heeded, Judaism cannot be fully appreciated according to the significance which it has and maintains for culture; if the link of its ethical teaching with its idea of God is pushed into the background. . . ethical Judaism loses its main focus and the foundation upon which the specific character of its ethical teaching is based."⁹

Only the establishment of chairs for ethics and philosophy of religion at Jewish seminaries can provide what remains lacking in the seminary curriculum. Only a new sort of Jewish scholar-philosopher can re-focus Jewry's attention on the true source of its *Kultur*, its God.

According to Cohen, Jewish institutions of higher learning stand at an historical turning point. Modern *Kultur* forces an unprecedented division of labour upon the framework of Jewish life, destroying the institutional arrangements which have enabled Judaism's sophisticated articulation and dissemination in the past. In a previous epoch, Jewish communities did not need to provide a special institutional base for *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The confession (*das Bekenntnis*) of Judaism and its *Wissenschaft* were one and the same. A community needed only to concern itself with the service of God to ensure that this relation between religion and *Wissenschaft* was maintained. Such service would always in principle have included "the widespread and profound study of the Torah". Furthermore, the rabbinate functioned as "the central office for the teaching of the sciences of religion. . . The rabbi was the scholar of the Science of Judaism [*Wissenschaft des Judentums*]"¹⁰

This delicate balance of teaching and life has now been thoroughly destroyed, according to Cohen. New demands have impinged upon rabbis and *wissenschaftlich* methods of research have become more specialised. The rabbi is no longer likely to be a "universal personality", able to master practical and theoretical challenges alike. At this historical moment, then, the Jewish community faces a new task. It must establish new institutions that are equipped to restore Judaism's equilibrium with *Wissenschaft*. In this context the question must be faced squarely: why have not chairs in ethics and philosophy been established in Jewish theological seminaries to this end?¹¹

The question becomes all the more urgent, say, if we consider the specific demands made on religion by *Wissenschaft* in the modern period. Religion studied under the aegis of *die Geisteswissenschaften* must submit to the systematic test of ethics.

"The conviction inflames the confessor of Judaism – that his teaching concerning belief is his teaching concerning ethics and his teaching concerning ethics is his teaching concerning belief. The ceremonies do not form a counter to this; they

⁹Cohen, 'Errichtung von Lehrstühlen', p. 109.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹¹*Ibid.*

belong to the applied ethical teaching; they are supposed to be of use for the fortification of the ethical life. This is the meaning and purpose of all divine services."¹²

With the new demand of *Wissenschaft* on the Jew so very clear, how could Jewish communities have refrained for so long from placing those scholars with expertise in ethics into leading roles in their educational institutions?

The *jüdische Aufklärung* has cast up the real obstacle to restoring *Wissenschaft* to its former place in the Jewish community, according to Cohen. "One only need consider the well-known, typical phrase, which the Jewish Enlightenment made into a household word, [namely] that we have no doctrines at all."¹³ Of course doctrinal argument was never entirely absent from the Jewish community of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Given the presuppositions of the *Aufklärung*, however, the philosophical articulation of doctrine could not take root, and the philosophically inclined were confined to the periphery of Jewish life.

The *jüdische Aufklärung* misunderstood the importance of doctrine. Consequently, it obscured the proper role of Jewish sources and their exposition in the modern Jewish community. Since, for modern Judaism, "the fundamental teachings of belief and of ethics hang together", doctrines must in fact become ethical "concepts for teaching" Jewish belief. In order to propagate a modern Judaism and a modern Jewish identity, Jewish sources must be studied with the intention of developing such doctrines. Moreover, for both the formulation of doctrine and the reading of sources we require the philosopher's guidance: "the progressive development and continued existence of Judaism is conditioned by its philosophical grounding."¹⁵

Such is Cohen's general case for philosophy's leadership role in the Jewish theological seminary. But 'Errichtung von Lehrstühlen' goes one step further. Cohen also paints a picture of the Jew who would be shaped by education in the new mould. Indeed, the definition of this new type, "the Modernist, the scientific character [*der Neue, die wissenschaftliche Gesinnung*]", is at the heart of this educational proposal. While an idea of God is the *foundation* of Jewish doctrine for Cohen, and its *exposition* falls within the domain of "the pure scientific ethics [*die reine wissenschaftliche Ethik*]",¹⁶ the principle *subject* of Jewish doctrine is not God, but *der Mensch*. The task that Cohen envisions for the Jewish philosopher is "the determination of the individual human", the construction of a doctrine concerning Jewish identity.¹⁷

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Cohen mentions Ludwig Salomon Steinheim, Samuel Hirsch and Salomon Formstecher.

¹⁵Cohen, 'Errichtung von Lehrstühlen', pp. 114–115.

¹⁶"Wenn wir der jüdischen Glaubenslehre ein erneutes, verjüngtes Studium zuwenden werden, so wird sich die Überzeugung erwecken lassen, daß die jüdische Gottesidee in einem lebendigen Zusammenhang mit der reinen wissenschaftlichen Ethik steht; daß die Ethik eine Torso bleibt, wenn der Gottesbegriff von ihr abgetrennt wird. Diese Einsicht zu begründen ist Sache der Philosophie, der philosophischen Ethik", *ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁷"[D]ie Bestimmung des Menschen", *ibid.*, p. 115. The extended discussion of doctrine, the teaching concerning Jewish identity, begins on p. 122 ("unsere Anregung"). There Cohen locates his

In the final pages of 'Errichtung von Lehrstühlen' Cohen brings his proposal to its climax with a description of the exemplary modern Jew. These pages contain passages by Cohen as passionate as his writing is elsewhere arid and plodding.¹⁸ Since their language is at the very heart of my argument, I will quote from them at length. Cohen here assumes the vocation to which he continued to call his academic fellows, Jew and non-Jew alike, as late as 1915: a pedagogy of identity based on belief in a unique God.

"To be a Jew means to avow, as the foundation of existence, as the anchor of the world, the God who is uniquely one. This is the kernel of the matter [*Sache*]; it is also the unique heart of the subject [*das einzige Herz der Sache*]."

"One should not deceive oneself as to whether the Jewish subject [*Sache*] may or could have or would have yet another centre of gravity [*Herzpunkt*]. Here any comparison of hypotheses or evaluation of motives is bad. Israel's claim to historical existence stands and falls with its God who is uniquely one. Whosoever is not illuminated with this fundamental thought can possess both ethically and spiritually a great deal of the Jewish style; but his being lacks its grounding [*Schwerpunkt*]."

"Thus the existence of the Jew will become ambiguous, unstable, anchorless, whenever this guiding light does not shine forth from all of his thinking, feeling and action; [namely] that he believes with his entire soul in the God of history, as revealed by the prophets. The God of Israel has been revealed in the messianic idea; he is the God of world history. This is the root of our belief; and it is the source of our ethics."¹⁹

To be such a Jew – a believer in the God of history, faithful to the messianic idea – would require distinctive characteristics and particular forms of community, in Cohen's view. However, the greatest share of responsibility for such a revolution in Jewish life would depend on the quality of leadership emanating from the seminary of the new century and the scholarship that it would support. The crucial role would be played by a new kind of Jewish philosopher, master of systematic and historical philosophy.

"This illumination and grounding of the idea of God, however, requires an independent, complete man as the advocate of his speciality [*Vertreter seines Fachs*]. To that end exhaustive studies of the sources of the history of philosophy are required; and at the same time a professional mastery of systematic philosophy; for ethics [a product of historical philosophy] must be grounded in logic [a product of systematic philosophy]."²⁰

Upon the post-*Aufklärung* Jewish philosopher would devolve a scholarly agenda whose aim is the service of God. There should be no doubt whom Cohen has in mind to lead this movement of a Jewish *avant-garde*. The description of "God's

proposal in the tradition of Maimonides's *Attributenlehre*. On this point, compare Cohen's essay 'Charakteristik der Ethik Maimunis', in *Jüdische Schriften III*, pp. 221–289.

¹⁸The editor of *Haschiloah*, justifying the decision to publish a full Hebrew translation of Cohen's lecture, upon which 'Errichtung' is based, comments: "... We feel an obligation to ourselves to translate it in full because there is great merit not only in its content, but also in its wonderful and sublime style." (My translation—A. B.-N.). See *Haschiloah*, vol. XIII (1904), p. 356.

¹⁹Cohen, 'Errichtung von Lehrstühlen', pp. 122–123.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 123.

advocate [*der Mann*]" is neatly tailored to suit its author. Cohen's writing is simultaneously systematic and historical. His systematic philosophy founds ethics upon logic. 'Errichtung von Lehrstühlen', the architecture for his teaching concerning Jewish identity, establishes the mode in which Cohen will construct much of his *Jüdische Schriften* from this point forward. Self-presentation and the doctrine of Jewish identity are combined.

Guided by the new scholarship, the modern Jew should approach Jewish sources with the conviction that their study in a *wissenschaftlich* mode is imperative for "a new renaissance of religious thinking and life in Judaism". Cohen singles out medieval Jewish philosophy as a particularly important well-spring for this renewal of Jewish religious life. In these sources, "the statutes are secondary to the ideas [i.e. of God's attributes]". With the aid of philosophical study, the modern Jew can come to see the observance of rabbinic commands as an opportunity for self-improvement, the emulation of God's attributes. Furthermore, the sermon can serve just as well as the scholarly paper for the dissemination of this approach within the community.²¹

This renewed appreciation for Jewish sources, and reinvigorated commitment to Jewish practice, would yield fruit both within and beyond the Jewish community. Within the community, new bonds would arise between "die Alten . . . und die Neuen", Jews still living in the orbit of rabbinic law and modern Jews who had outgrown it.²² Devotion to Jewish literary sources and performance of divine commands would unite them, according to Cohen, however much their understandings of the same might diverge.

"And if this scientific enthusiasm will speak out from the works and deeds of the moderns, then at the same time this scientific disposition [*Gesinnung*] will show itself as the truly religious one. Before such seriousness of conviction of belief in the ideas [i.e. of God] the most prejudiced ancient will feel respect; and this respect will bind the ancients and the moderns among us more truthfully, powerfully, intimately than the emotion of common suffering, or even the illusion of a racial community, which is an alien drop of blood in the prophetic bloodstream of the messianic Jew."²³

Amidst discord, Jews of differing commitments had always shared a common text. Modernity need not rob them of it now, if the modern Jew would be willing "to extend a hand in the advancement of the literary good".²⁴

The emergence of a modern religious Jew with a *wissenschaftlich* constitution would also pay dividends in the world beyond the Jewish community, according to Cohen. A modern Judaism, steered by *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, would command the recognition and respect of the surrounding culture. "Then no more forbearance for our separateness would be needed; tolerance will become a

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 124–125.

²²"Die Alten hüten und pflegen das rabbinische Schrifttum, dessen innerem Leben die Neuen entwachsen sind." Cohen, 'Errichtung von Lehrstühlen', p. 124.

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 125.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 124: "Mögen sie [die Neuen] daher in der Förderung des literarischen Gutes den Alten die Hand reichen; daß die Kenntnis und das Studium, das ganze innerliche Studium des rabbinischen Schrifttums nicht aufhöre in Israel; daß die Quellen nicht versiegen, aus denen sich in der ganzen bisherigen Geschichte stets von neuem das jüdische Leben und Denken gekräftigt, gerüstet, beseelt hat."

consequence of the academic culture [*theoretische Kultur*].”²⁵ Jewish particularity could be robustly affirmed by the non-Jew and disaffected Jew alike.

In the penultimate paragraph of his proposal, Cohen raises hopes for *die Neuen* to their absolute zenith. Might the new scholar-Jew be a prophet, who could lead his people back to the promised land?²⁶ Cohen has already told his readers that, in making his proposal, he stands on the shoulders of Maimonides. Might Cohen himself be yet another link in the chain which extends from Maimonides, through the biblical prophets, back to Moses? Might another modern Jew achieve such a status with the assistance of Cohen’s instruction? These questions are left for the reader to answer.

All the achievements Cohen envisions for the modern Jew depend on the progress of a single institution, *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Moreover, its success depends on the leadership of a new sort of Jew, one whose constitution Cohen describes at length in the years that followed the publication of ‘Errichtung von Lehrstühlen’. Cohen gives the centrality of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and the Jewish philosopher the emphasis of his final words.

“Therefore, the independent, professional advocacy of ethics and philosophy of religion must form the focus of our teaching system [*Lehrwesens*]; as it must also be the central point for all our efforts for the progress of the Science of Judaism.”²⁷

I. SOCIAL TYPE²⁸

In May 1914, Cohen toured Eastern Europe, stopping to lecture in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Riga, Vilna and Warsaw²⁹. If Cohen’s recollections of this time are to be trusted, however, his principal agenda was first and foremost not the dissemination of his philosophical system, but the export of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* from its native home in Germany. Cohen’s recollections are contained in an article of 1916 entitled ‘Der polnische Jude’. With German politicians considering a blockade of their border to prevent Jewish immigration from the East, Cohen speaks out in favour of a renewed commitment to an East-West interchange, but only – it might seem – for the good of the unfortunate Polish Jew. In Arthur Cohen’s estimation, the Polish Jew in this essay is portrayed for

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125. Cohen asks: “Konnte doch sogar das Wort entstehen, welches Maimonides mit dem Unvergleichlichen, mit Mose, verknüpft. So tief hat man die Erneuerung gewürdigt, welche der ‘Führer der Verirrten’ dem Judentum geschaffen hat.” The “expression” at issue here is not only a philosophical work, i.e. *Guide for the Perplexed*, but also prophecy. Cohen implies here that Maimonides, like Moses, was a prophet.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Cohen makes plentiful use of typological language. See e.g., note 97 below and Cohen, ‘Der polnische Jude’, in *Jüdische Schriften II*, pp. 166–167: “Das ist das große Beispiel, die vorbildliche Bedeutung, die der deutsche Jude für die Zukunft des Judentums, und zwar des Judentums der ganzen Welt in seiner religiösen Entwicklung darstellt.” The use of social types in reflection on modern identity is also associated with the revival of “moral psychology” today. See, for example, MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 27–35; Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, New York 1985.

²⁹ Cohen, ‘Der polnische Jude’, p. 167.

the reader "as somehow a stunted flower. . . to be rescued by the higher *Kultur* of German Jewry".³⁰

If in reading 'Der polnische Jude', however, we pay special attention to the paradigmatic social type of Jew that Cohen champions, Cohen's cultural politics are cast in a somewhat different light. Moreover, this social type is an important *locus* for Cohen's teaching concerning Jewish identity. According to this teaching, the Jew of the future will take shape as a result of East-West reciprocity.³¹ It is true, of course, that German *Wissenschaft des Judentums* will play the formative role in the education of this modern person. Nevertheless, both the *deutscher Jude* and the *Ostjude* will give shape to the social type to be enshrined in the developing *Kultur* of European Judaism. Both are essential, according to Cohen's teaching.

The *Kultur* of the *Ostjude* forms a special problem for Cohen. In a word, the *Ostjude* lacks a model for "a religiously truthful/authentic life".³² Such a life, whatever else it might entail for a Jew, must include exacting ideals for ethical and political conduct, fulfilment of some (though not all) of the "ritual" obligations of rabbinic Judaism, and immersion in the study of the Jewish literary tradition.³³ To become acquainted with such a Jew, contends Cohen, the *Ostjude* can only look towards German-Jewry's institutions of *Wissenschaft* and the ideology of religious liberalism.

"This is the great example, the pattern of significance, which the German Jew represents for the future of Judaism, and indeed of the Judaism of the whole world in its religious development . . . We have managed to harmonise the conception of our history, as well as the progress of our rituals [*Kultus*] with the most central driving forces of our religious tradition and at the same time with those of the common culture. No insightful person can doubt that our independent piety [*freie Religiosität*] is a deep source [*Herzkraft*] for our concept of culture [*Kulturgesinnung*] and especially also for our general politics."³⁴

The Eastern Jew has lacked the opportunity to acquire a truly modern Jewish spirituality. Cohen does not doubt, however, that this Jew possesses the means for such development, if given the proper education. Indeed, the primary impetus for his lecture tour, reports Cohen, was to assist in the institutionalisation of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in the places of contemporary Jewish learning and

³⁰ Arthur Cohen, *The Jew*, Alabama 1980, p. 52. Cf. Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers. The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923*, Madison 1982, p. 177: "German Judaism [for Cohen in 'Der polnische Jude'] remained the historical ideal – an ideal worth emulating by Eastern Jews. . . Once again it became apparent that Eastern Jews had to be remade in German Jewry's spiritual image."

³¹ "Aller Segen im Kulturleben aber beruht auf Wechselwirkung." Cohen, 'Der polnische Jude', p. 170.

³² "Wahrhaftes Leben der Religiosität muß bei dem Kulturmenschen bedingt sein durch den lebendigen Zusammenhang mit religiöser Wissenschaft und religiöser Bildung." *Ibid.*, p. 167. On the translation of *Wahrhaftigkeit*, cf. Jacques Derrida, 'Interpretations at War. Kant, the Jew, the German', in *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), pp. 63–64.

³³ On ethical conduct, cf. sections II & III of this article. On ritual, see Cohen, 'Der polnische Jude', pp. 166–167. On the study of the literary tradition, see *ibid.*, p. 164 and section II.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 166–167.

scholarship. No Jew, whether from East or West, could achieve a truthful life of piety without *Wissenschaft* and self-cultivation (*Bildung*).³⁵

If his essay had drawn to a close with these remarks, perhaps we would have been impelled towards the conclusion that Cohen was a German-Jewish chauvinist, unable to see beyond the perceived merits of his own social type in order to recognise the merits of another. In fact the paragraphs which follow on the heels of these remarks take Cohen's argument in a very different direction. The *freier Jude*, the social type which Cohen so prizes, represents not an empirical achievement of the current generation of German Jews but rather an ideal which – according to Cohen's description – they have embraced, and an end towards which they should strive. Progress in embodying this ideal, however, cannot be assured. Indeed, Cohen intimates that the German Jew is ill-equipped to realise his goal.

Redemption may be forthcoming from the East, however. "We need not altogether despair about it," Cohen insists. "The Eastern Jew himself will bring us salvation if henceforth, and perhaps in greater numbers than before, they were to go on immigrating to our provinces. . . ." If the German Jew requires the *Ostjude* in his midst in order to flourish, it is because only a symbiosis of the two might result in a new Jew, a closer approximation to the ideal, the *freier Jude*.³⁶ "Indeed, all blessings in cultural life are based upon reciprocity."³⁷

The German Jew, for his part, must instruct his Eastern compatriot in the ways of the *freier Jude*, in ethics and politics, and in rituals, as well as in *Wissenschaft*. As a result the *Ostjude* will learn to comport himself according to rigorous standards of personal behaviour and will merit (if not receive) political emancipation. Furthermore, he will come to understand his religion, both its ritual and its doctrines, according to the strictest standards of *wissenschaftlich* philosophy.³⁸ The new free and independent self-awareness which such education would bring in its train would shine as the crowning achievement of Jewish emancipation.³⁹

The *Ostjude*, however, must also shape the future character of Western Jewry. Indeed, he is the very prerequisite for the possibility of the *freier Jude*.⁴⁰ Without

³⁵ *Ibid.* The language of these paragraphs is significant for my argument. Categories such as *Einheit*, *Herzkraft*, *Gesinnung*, and *Sache* all point to Cohen's teaching concerning Jewish identity.

³⁶ I assume that Cohen, being politic, chooses not to be quite so explicit as I am here.

³⁷ Cohen, 'Der polnische Jude', p. 170.

³⁸ It should not be lost on the reader that this philosophy, i.e. of the unique God, is Cohen's. "Er soll einsehen lernen, daß die wahre, die wissenschaftliche Philosophie, die nicht den Dilettantismus der Phantasie hegt, sondern mit den Wissenschaften methodisch verwachsen ist, den Glauben an den einzigen Gott zu rechtfertigen vermag", *ibid.* For some suggested religious reforms, see p. 171. It would be a mistake to see an uncomplicated cultural imperialism in this instruction, even leaving aside the reciprocity that Cohen demands in terms of cross-cultural exchange. Cohen here suggests that the Polish Jew learn from the German one "für sein eigenes persönliches, wie für das Gemeinleben, in *Selbständigkeit und nach seiner Eigenart* anzubauen." (Italics mine—A. B.-N.). For a related point, see p. 168.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 171: "... die Vollendung des geschichtlichen Sinnes aller Judenemanzipation ist es, welche sonach im Selbstbewußtsein des Juden zur Reife kommen würde."

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 168, 171. For an explanation of Cohen's use of the logical category *Ursprung* (origin) in terms of *Ermöglichungsbedingungen* (enabling conditions), see Helmut Holzhey, 'Einleitung des Her-

his number being replenished from the East, the German Jew cannot withstand the assimilatory pressures of his environment. The moral resources required to be a good Jew are readily available in the Jewish tradition, as they have always been. However, assimilation into the cultural mainstream has undone the German Jew's ability to be nourished and refreshed by the Jewish tradition, its rituals and literary sources. In this historical moment, only an influx of Eastern Jewry can provide the necessary medicine: the powers and capacities *native* to the *freier Jude*.⁴¹ The power most fundamental to this ideal type of Jew, in Cohen's estimation, is command of the Jewish literary tradition.⁴²

If the German Jew is to regain his bearings, it will be due to a reorientation to the literary sources inspired by the Jew from the East.⁴³ These literary sources are the ultimate root of the modern Jew's intellectual and ethical power.⁴⁴ For the *freier Jude*, the ideal social type which Cohen imagines for the German Jew, Judaism's literary sources are a constituent of his very being, and a force at work throughout his life. "The spiritual energy of the Jews has its ultimate source in the literary treasures of the Jewish religion."⁴⁵

II. LITERARY TRADITION⁴⁶

Cohen, we have seen, envisions a modern Jew dedicated to the study of literary sources, e.g. the Hebrew Bible, rabbinic literature, and medieval Jewish philosophy. In a short article first appearing in the *Gemeindeblatt der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu*

ausgebers', in Hermann Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, Hildesheim 1977, (1st edn. of *Logik*, Berlin 1902) p. IX.

⁴¹Der polnische Jude', p. 171. Cohen uses the term *Autochthonie* to commend what is called here the native powers and capacities of the Eastern Jew. The native powers of the autochthon from Eastern Europe are necessary but not sufficient for the *Neuer*, the *freier Jude*.

⁴²On the character of the *Ostjude*, see especially *ibid.*, p. 169: "Mit seiner schier übermenschlichen Dulderkraft, die er erprobt hat, wird er unserer idealen Sittlichkeit, unserer Opferfreudigkeit für übersinnliche Aufgaben einen neuen Schwung geben"; and p. 171: "Ihr Leiden hat den Ostjuden ein geschichtliches Vorrecht zuertheilt. Es hat ihnen mit dem Witz und dem Humor eine Ursprünglichkeit bewahrt, die eine Art von Autochthonie ist." In Cohen's teaching, this capacity for suffering is constituted in the Jew in at least two ways: in the constitutive narrative considered in section. III; and through the virtues (cf. section V).

⁴³*Ibid.*, pp. 169–170. (Compare section II on Jewish literary tradition.)

⁴⁴"Die jüdische Intelligenz, wie die Sittlichkeit der Juden, wurzelt aber nicht allein in Mose und den Propheten nebst den Psalmen, sondern nicht minder auch in der mündlichen Lehre, in Talmud und Midrasch, wie endlich auch in den Religionsphilosophen des Mittelalters." *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 164. Social types other than the *freier Jude* also make appearances in Cohen's Jewish writings. For examples, see the apostate-philosopher in 'Gedanken über Jugendlektüre', *ibid.*, p. 127 and in 'Mahnung des Alters an die Jugend', *ibid.*, pp. 177–180; the apostate-scholar in 'Errichtung von Lehrstühlen', *ibid.*, pp. 120–121; and the Jewish dissident in 'Eine Pflicht der Selbstachtung', *ibid.*, pp. 173–174. Significantly, these types can all be understood as deformations of Cohen's exemplar, the *freier Jude*.

⁴⁶Cohen most often uses the phrase "literarische Quellen" in connection with the subject matter discussed here. This phrase, whose precise connotation cannot be taken up in the confines of this essay, has significant affinities with the English "literary tradition", as it is discussed in contemporary moral psychology. Cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 204–226.

Berlin in February 1911, he offers a concise expression of the grounds for such commitment. The essay is entitled 'Die Liebe zur Religion' and Cohen suggests the fundamental reason for studying Jewish sources is love.⁴⁷

That a Jew might be commanded to love God is relatively uncontroversial. Cohen need only allude to the commandment of Deuteronomy VI:5: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." The character of this love, however, its source and its object, is a good deal less straightforward. This problem provides the pretext for Cohen's essay.

'Die Liebe' is an important *locus* for Cohen's teaching. The modern observance of Deuteronomy VI:5, according to 'Die Liebe', requires the cultivation of a particular Jewish identity, a "historico-ethical personality". Love of God, Cohen argues, is knowledge of God, appropriately mediated by the Jewish literary tradition. Moreover, the character of this literary mediation is the critical element for the Jew's loving-knowledge of God. For Cohen, the literary sources conspire to provide a knowledge of God's attributes (*Eigenschaften Gottes*), not God's essence (*seines Wesen*). In turn, God's attributes provide the model for ethical behaviour. In Cohen's view, therefore, loving-knowledge of God points the modern Jew to his particular vocation as an ethical person. Ultimately, then, loving-knowledge of God constitutes self-knowledge, knowledge of one's own personality and of the kind of Jew one should be.

It is easy to be misled by Cohen's choice of words in this appeal. The command in Deuteronomy is to love "God". Why, then, does Cohen insist on the love of "religion" and in what could such "love" consist? Moreover, his ostensible subject is love of "religion" rather than of "Judaism". Will the love of any (monotheistic) religion do? Finally, in the context in which Cohen is writing, love is *prima facie* a passion. Why, then, does Cohen understand it primarily as a cognitive relation, even if between lover and beloved? Does any element of passion in the relationship remain?

The command to study Torah immediately follows Deuteronomy's command to love God, Cohen points out:

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

In the spirit of this literary connection, claims Cohen, Judaism has forged an enduring link between the love of God and the knowledge of Torah. Moreover, Torah is an important Jewish expression of religion.⁴⁸ For a Jew, in a significant respect, to love religion is to know Torah.

Deuteronomy makes no mention of Judaism, nor of religion, however. Might the modern Jew properly love God while renouncing "religion" altogether? Could Cohen's contemporaries make a principled decision to study primarily

⁴⁷ Cohen, 'Die Liebe zur Religion', p. 142.

⁴⁸ "Die Liebe zu Gott ist die Liebe zur Religion, die Gottes Schöpfung in der Geschichte und in der Vernunft der Menschen ist", *ibid*.

literature beyond the bounds of Jewish tradition, even with the intention of observing the commandment to love "the Lord thy God"? Neither of these choices would be desirable for his readership, urges Cohen.

No one, neither Jew nor non-Jew, can renounce religion, he claims.⁴⁹ Religion, and especially the literature found within it, stands as a constitutive element in the make-up of the modern person. Not only what we study but how we study it makes a crucial difference to who we are. Refraining from outward acts of religious behaviour cannot disentangle a person from the *problem* of religion.⁵⁰ Accordingly, failure to engage in the sophisticated study of the literary sources does not divest the Jew of a relation to them. On the contrary, such a lack of commitment makes the Jew's relation to "literary sources" all the more problematic, conferring upon the religiously illiterate Jew a retrograde *ersatz* religion as a result.⁵¹

Furthermore, German Jews have a particular need to steel themselves with the study of the Jewish literary tradition. German Jews, argues Cohen, live in a state of political siege, constantly attacked on account of their "confession". If they try to observe their religion without a "vital love" for it, they will inevitably fail. Moreover, the source of the failure will be readily identifiable: a conspicuous flaw in the German-Jewish character. Indeed, without a thorough grounding in the literary sources, German Jews will eventually abdicate their historical vocation entirely. Ultimately, claims Cohen, they will sacrifice their very right to existence as Jews.⁵²

But in what does love's "vitality" consist, if not in a flame of human passion? For Cohen, love is a fit description for the appropriate relation of the Jew to God and to Torah, but only in a highly specific sense. As we have noted, the proper love of God is, for Cohen, a kind of knowledge, not a conventional emotion. "*Love is knowledge*. Affective states cannot be trusted, not even that of love."⁵³ An affective state rightly animates the *freier Jude* in relation to God, but a *concept*, not a passion, is its cause.

The concept of *Ehre*,⁵⁴ not the passion of Eros, stands behind the Jew's loving-attachment to God.⁵⁵ Cohen did not explain this point at any length in 'Die

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 142–143: "Jeder Kulturmensch hat seine eigene Religion. Er hat sie von seiner eigenen sozialen und persönlichen Entwicklung empfangen, und er kann sich ihrer gar nicht entledigen. Er kann sie verleugnen und äußerlich verlassen, aber sie bleibt ein wie immer latentes Moment in seiner seelischen und geistigen Verfassung."

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the Jew who tries to deny the "problem of religion", see Cohen's discussion of the "dissident" in 'Eine Pflicht der Selbstachtung', *Jüdische Schriften II*, pp. 172–175.

⁵¹ Cohen, 'Die Liebe zur Religion', pp. 142–143.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 143–144.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145: "*Liebe ist Erkenntnis*. Auf die Affekte ist kein Verlaß, auch auf den der Liebe nicht." Italics in the original.

⁵⁴ *Die Ehre* is the disposition to act honourably towards others as well as to be deserving of honour. It is both activity and goal. Cohen, *Ethik*, p. 490.

⁵⁵ Cohen, 'Die Liebe zur Religion', p. 145. Cohen does not mention Eros explicitly as the competing motivation for love, here understood as cognition. Rather, in 'Die Liebe zur Religion', Cohen calls the competing motive "die Pietät . . . eine starke Kraft". However, Eros is for Cohen an unnamed concern here in relation to the love that his religion commends. It is the force in human consciousness in opposition to which he offers the notion of love as cognition. See, e.g., *Ethik*, pp. 480–481.

Liebe', but he had already addressed it in significant detail in his *Ethik* in 1904. The Jew who leads an authentic religious life must successfully cultivate certain affective states, foremost among them being honour.⁵⁶ To be honourable in this regard is inseparable from an ethical and political vision of enormous significance to Cohen: to respect the equality of all persons, to promote their full inclusion in the nation-state and, finally, to advocate a federation of nation-states of *Kultur* in pursuit of peace.⁵⁷

The Jew's vocation in the pursuit of this new horizon is to draw near to God by pursuing the truth. This vocation is founded on the affinity of a God who is spirit, a truth which is spiritual, and a knowing spirit who is the *freier Jude*. Cohen makes no effort to plumb the depths of these affinities in the course of 'Die Liebe'. He does note here, however, the prerequisite for any realisation of such a vocation, namely, self-cultivation through the study of Jewish sources.⁵⁸ A knowing spirit is hardly a natural property of the Jew; on the contrary, the intellectual power of the Jew, the capacity to draw near to the divine, is utterly dependent on the disciplined development of such a spirit in one's self. Accordingly, no trend among modern Jewry more undermines its historical vocation than Jewry's increasing unfamiliarity with its literary sources, and with the sophisticated means for their study.

"We cannot be so very injured by political and social oppression and, indeed, not so badly by defection [from the Jewish community] as when we no longer apply our intellectual power to our religious sources in academic research and in education for self-cultivation. No amount of historical pride, of love for one's own tribe, can replace the power which alone acquaintance with the sources of religion forms for the living confession . . .

Not all Jews have to become scholars of Judaism. This profound fundamental demand of ancient Judaism can perhaps not continue to be maintained. The modern world, however, distinguishes education for personal self-cultivation from science. Education for one's own self-cultivation is the adhesive which binds academic research and the commercial vocations. Such an education in the literature and history of our religion must become a common good, a religious, a cultural obligation of our co-religionists."⁵⁹

Cohen makes no effort in these pages to elaborate further on the character of the required study. For greater detail the reader must turn to Cohen's more philosophical writings, 'Charakteristik der Ethik Maimuni' and *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*.⁶⁰ To one familiar with these works, however, the character of study to which Cohen alludes in 'Die Liebe' is apparent. If the modern

⁵⁶Contemporary moral psychology has revived the issue that Cohen takes up here, the relation of passions to affective states. See MacIntyre, 'Moral Philosophy', p. 9; Peter Berger, 'On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor', in *Revisions*, pp. 172–181; Lee Yearley, *Menscius and Aquinas*, Albany 1990, pp. 95–113.

⁵⁷*Ethik*, pp. 490–497. The origin of Cohen's concept of honour appears to be *Kavod*, an attribute of God found in the Hebrew Bible. See *Ethik*, p. 491.

⁵⁸"Die geschichtliche Ehre ist ein hoher Begriff, aber er muß seinen klaren, unerschöpflichen Quell haben in der wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis, oder wenigstens in der Einsicht von den literarischen Werten unserer Religion." Cohen, 'Die Liebe zur Religion', p. 145.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁶⁰Cited in notes 3 and 17 above.

student of the Jewish literary tradition takes the venerable approach of a seeker of God's attributes, the sources will reward him or her with a paradigm for the human self.⁶¹ "The love for our religion is the love for our historico-ethical personality." Love of religion, love of the literary sources, is knowledge of them. Truly to know these sources is to know oneself.⁶²

III. NARRATIVE⁶³

For Cohen, however, Jewish literary sources point not only to God's attributes but also to a *narrative* of Jewish existence and, with this, to the very constitution of the modern Jew.⁶⁴ Cohen makes this case in 1915 in the closing pages of his *Begriff der Religion*. A proper understanding of the narrative inscribed in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, Cohen suggests, provides us with knowledge of the Jewish people, both individually and as a collective. In this source Israel is revealed as the "Servant of God".⁶⁵

The text of Isaiah LIII which concerns Cohen here reads as follows:

"He had no form nor comeliness, that we should look upon him, nor beauty that we should delight in him . . . But he was wounded because of our transgressions, he was crushed because of our iniquities; the chastisement of our welfare was upon him . . . Yet it pleased the Eternal to crush him by disease; to see if his soul would offer itself as a guilt offering . . . Of the travail of his soul he shall see to the full, even My servant, who by his knowledge did justify the Righteous One to the many, and their iniquities did he bear."⁶⁶

According to Cohen, these verses illuminate the condition of the Jew by clarifying the nature of the human person. Indeed, on Cohen's reading, the modern Jew, properly moulded by Isaiah's prophetic outlook, is the human person, a representative of the ends towards which all persons should strive. Jewish particularity is not undone in the Jews' embodiment of a human narrative, however. Throughout his exegesis Cohen maintains the ambivalence of Israel's significance. Israel's vocation is always at once to inhabit its own story in particular and to represent the human narrative in general.⁶⁷

⁶¹See Altmann, pp. 40–60.

⁶²Cohen, 'Die Liebe zur Religion', p. 147: "Die Liebe zu ihr [unsere Religion] ist die Liebe zu unserer geschichtlich-sittlichen Persönlichkeit."

⁶³This is my rendering of "die Geschichte" in this context, i.e. in *Begriff*, pp. 131–133. Narrative is a basic term in the discussion of contemporary moral psychology. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 187–203; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, Cambridge, MA 1989, pp. 25–53; Jerome Bruner, 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', in *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (Autumn 1991), pp. 1–21.

⁶⁴*Begriff*, p. 131. The distinction between God's attributes and the Jews' narrative is useful here, but the categories are not mutually exclusive. The Messiah, which serves as a *telos* for the *Mensch* in accord with this narrative, is itself an attribute of God. See 'Die Bedeutung des Judentums für den religiösen Fortschritt der Menschheit', *Jüdische Schriften I*, p. 31.

⁶⁵*Begriff*, pp. 126–133; see also *Religion*, pp. 308–313 and pp. 328–335.

⁶⁶The translation is Simon Kaplan's. *Religion*, pp. 283–285. Cohen goes to great lengths to argue that the servant's "guilt-offering" in no way absolves anyone of personal responsibility for sin. See *Begriff*, p. 130 and *Religion*, pp. 332–334.

⁶⁷This ambivalence is particularly prominent in *Religion*, pp. 311–313.

“Suffering,” Cohen argues, “belongs to the essence of the human person”.⁶⁸ Israel, portrayed by Isaiah as the suffering servant of God, stands in opposition to every effort to establish an *exclusively* aesthetic, ethical or cognitive human ideal. The *Mensch* was intended to be neither (first and foremost) beautiful, nor pleased, but to suffer in the pursuit of God’s ends. Neither intellectual virtue nor personal integrity, in themselves desirable, can supplant suffering as a feature of the fully flourishing person. Only in suffering does Man begin to internalise his true identity. “Indeed, now it comes to light that the greatest deficiency and weakness in the person is rather his greatest wealth and his most powerful source for life, and that only by means of this supposed blemish does he in truth become an integrated whole [*Einheit*].”⁶⁹

In this context, we must remember, personal identity is not a quality given to an individual by nature. On the contrary, it is an achievement of individual consciousness and collective *Kultur*. Cohen’s language is characteristically precise. *Einheit* – identity – signifies a person’s success at incorporating diverse capacities and interests, and becoming an integrated “unit”.⁷⁰ Such success is primarily a function of individual ability to act reflexively to cultivate the self, integrating it into a whole whose parts function well and harmoniously. In this effort, personal suffering is invaluable. Suffering is a school for self-possession and self-control, potentially increasing one’s powers to strive towards the good, and to persevere in the face of opposition.⁷¹ In this context, the image of Israel as the suffering servant in Isaiah LIII is distinguished as a valuable cultural resource.⁷²

Ultimately, Israel’s mission is to disseminate a teaching concerning identity to all Jews and to all peoples. *Kultur*, collective cognitive, ethical, aesthetic and religious advancement, is the mission of all nations both to their members and to one another.⁷³ In this effort the Jew must conceive his personal and collective history to be a tale of suffering in the service of God. Suffering, Cohen cautions, is never an end in itself, however. On the contrary, consciousness of the lachrymose character of Jewish existence plays its legitimate role only as a yeast for the rise of an identity proper to the modern Jew.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ *Begriff*, p. 126: “. . . das Leiden gehört zum Wesen des Menschen.”

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 131. Cohen’s mention of “seine Einheit in Wahrheit” may allude to the role of *die Wahrheit*, truthfulness and authenticity, in the development of Jewish identity.

⁷⁰ “Unit” captures the mathematical-logical connotation of *Einheit* for Cohen. Terms such as *Einheit*, *Mehrheit*, and *Totalität*, whose logical connotations are developed by Cohen in his *Ethik*, serve for him as building blocks for a logic of identity.

⁷¹ *Begriff*, p. 132.

⁷² Cohen notes the traditional identification of the servant with Israel, *ibid.*, p. 126, and in *Religion*, pp. 305, 311.

⁷³ *Begriff*, pp. 131–132.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133: “. . . kann das Leiden nimmermehr Selbstzweck, sondern nur Mittel der Einheit des Bewusstseins sein. . . .” The conception of Jewish history in Isaiah LIII is not the only constitutive narrative of Jewish existence. A person finds his or her *telos* not only in the image of a suffering Messiah, but also in that of a labouring Faust, *ibid.*, pp. 132–133.

IV. COMMUNITY⁷⁵

The individual, we noted above, achieves an identity by virtue of individual striving and communal membership. In his 1916 article 'Die Zugehörigkeit zur Gemeinde', Cohen elaborates on the role of the latter in the constitution of the individual Jew.⁷⁶ Responsibility for one's Jewish identity requires membership in the community. Even dissenters from established forms of religious belief and expression can and should find a place within it.

Cohen's essay is directed to the growing number of German Jews who were exercising their option to leave the community. In 'Zugehörigkeit' he searches for an adequate ideological *explanation* for this developing crisis in communal allegiance. Cohen rejects the suggestion that an economic motive, avoidance of the communal tax, might sufficiently explain the crisis. A social phenomenon such as this separation, insists Cohen, has its basis in ideas. Behind the phenomenon of attrition from the community stand Jewish assertions of individual freedom and claims concerning the demands of conscience and conviction.

These ideas do not pass muster with Cohen.⁷⁷ To be sure, freedom of conscience and sincerity of conviction do deserve a priority within the life of the modern Jew. Their preservation would never require departure from the community, however. "With such arguments," suggests Cohen, a person "avoids the difficulty which is raised in all questions of political, societal, and historical existence for the individual in relation to totalities, from which the individual has emerged and in which alone his individuality can be maintained". The Jewish community, which Cohen refers to here as a "totality",⁷⁸ is the very condition that makes possible the Jewish individual. Cohen makes a point of logic designed to disarm the Romantic individualist, who sees himself beholden to no group for personal identity. He insists that one could not even distinguish an individual *as Jewish* who did not belong (in a logical sense) to a Jewish community. The individualist can try to "avoid" the difficulties raised by his (logical) membership in a community by withdrawing his (official) membership. He cannot, however, truly leave the Jewish community without ceasing to be a Jew.⁷⁹

Cohen's partisanship is obvious in this analysis. He skilfully shifted his discussion from rights to responsibilities, from freedom's privileges to its obligations.

⁷⁵This is my rendering of "Gemeinde". Until 1876, affiliation with the *Gemeinde* was compulsory, and all its members were subject to taxation. Only in that year did resignation, without the implication of apostasy, become possible. Cf. note 78. "Community" is a basic term in the contemporary discussion of moral psychology. See Taylor, *Sources*, pp. 35–40; Charles Taylor, 'Introduction', in *Human Agency and Language*, Cambridge 1985, p. 8; *idem*, 'What is human agency?', and 'Self-interpreting animals', in *ibid.*, pp. 28–50; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 194.

⁷⁶Cohen, 'Die Zugehörigkeit zur Gemeinde', *Jüdische Schriften II*, pp. 156–161.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁷⁸The Jewish *Gemeinde* is for Cohen a "relative totality [*relative Gesamtheit*]" since only the human community can be the absolute totality for an individual, *ibid.* Nevertheless, a religious community like the *Gemeinde* is distinguished from other communities (for example, Socialist collectives, fraternal organisations) for containing within it "all cultural totalities", i.e. logic, ethics, and aesthetics, *ibid.*, p. 161.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 158–159.

Did Cohen step beyond partisanship and into polemic? At first glance, one might be inclined to read 'Zugehörigkeit' that way. Cohen should have been aiming quite specifically to persuade his readers of their obligations to the *Gemeinde*, but he appears to have taken aim at a more general target that was suspiciously easy to hit. Jews must belong to a Jewish community (*Gemeinschaft*)⁸⁰ in order to remain Jews, urged Cohen. Are we to assume that he was naive as to other existing forms of Jewish community? Why did Cohen think that Jews had an obligation to remain affiliated specifically with the *Gemeinde*?

Cohen's line of argument is in fact a product neither of naïveté nor of polemic. For Cohen, the *Gemeinde* has a unique claim to the status of Jewish community, even in the face of conscientious dissent. It "stands behind" the individual to a degree which sets it apart from any other.⁸¹ The *Gemeinde*, as a product of mishnaic legislation and the heritage of the medieval *Kehillah*, is an enduring agent in Jewish history, a living, corporate personality.⁸² Just as the modern Jew must be responsible for his own identity, so he must be responsible for the identity of the *Gemeinde*. Indeed, for Cohen, responsibility for the *Gemeinde* is a form of responsibility for the Jewish self.

Cultivation of the self and activism in the community are expressions of the very same impulse to self-responsibility.⁸³ We have already noted that, for Cohen, the *Mensch* serves as a *telos* for Jewish identity. What follows from this is made explicit in 'Zugehörigkeit'. *Menschlichkeit* cannot be realised by the individual acting alone. It is achieved by individuals only in concert, acting together as an organised corporate unit.⁸⁴ In the context of this teaching, Cohen affirms that the *Gemeinde* is "the living, the unique corporate unit of the Jewish religion. . . which again forms one of the most important agents of his [the Jew's] particular sociological existence".⁸⁵ The community is an expression of the individual's Jewish self. The Jew who ceases to labour to shape it has "debased himself" for a very low price.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Cohen could appear to be engaging in a polemical sleight of hand in shifting from the terms *Gemeinde* to *Gemeinschaft* just as he makes his logical claim. See *ibid.*, p. 158. As suggested below, however, I take Cohen's argument here to carry the full weight of his conviction.

⁸¹ "... Gemeinschaft . . . die vor allem andern – auf seinen Beistand angewiesen ist", *ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 159. Cohen states, for instance, (p. 159) that the *Gemeinde* "die lebendige, die einzige Einheit der jüdischen Religion ist . . .". And Cohen refers (p. 160) to the *Gemeinde* as an "Organ der Geschichte".

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 159. Cohen asks, for instance: "Oder wäre die Verantwortlichkeit der Gesamtheit gegenüber etwa nur ein äußeres Band, und gehörte sie nicht vielmehr als eine intime Schuld in das Soll und Haben der persönlichen Freiheit?"

⁸⁴ Cf. *Begriff*, p. 127: "Am Individuum läßt sich überhaupt der Begriff des Menschen nicht erkennen." For Cohen there is an analogy between the individual as a corporate unit and the community as such. Hence the term *Einheit* is applied to the identity of both. A description of the identity of such a community, namely, how it functions as a harmonious and integrated unit, can be found in the opening paragraphs of Cohen, 'Die Zugehörigkeit zur Gemeinde', pp. 156–157. In the closing paragraphs, Cohen asserts that the *Gemeinde* "alone bears the responsibility for the progress of the fundamental ethical ideas of Jewish religion". Hence the *Gemeinde*, as a collective Jewish subject, is ultimately responsible for cultivating God's attributes, which serve as the model for "the fundamental ethical ideas of Jewish religion". (Cf. section II).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159, "die lebendige, die einzige Einheit der jüdischen Religion. . . die hinwiederum eines der wichtigsten Medien seines eigenen soziologischen Daseins bildet".

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* "Zu dieser Freiheit erniedrigt er sich. . ."

For mere "subjective freedom"⁸⁷ he has forsaken a path to genuine, responsible freedom, one among his most important avenues for self-cultivation as a Jew.⁸⁸

Communal responsibility does not require collective conformity, however. In concluding 'Zugehörigkeit', Cohen directly addresses "those Jews who do not want to feel, to know and to confess their ethical connection with Judaism".⁸⁹ Emulate those millions of Protestants, pleads Cohen, who refuse to give up identification with the Church, their corporate identity, even when they dissent from official Church doctrine.⁹⁰ They contest that doctrine, and construct one more adequate to their beliefs while remaining firmly within the Church. Many Jews who contemplate departure from the *Gemeinde* could exhibit similar tenacity, and with integrity, intimates Cohen. Indeed, the road has already been paved.⁹¹

No responsible Jew would leave the community without a vigorous inquiry into those modes of identification which might continue to sustain him there, in Cohen's view. But, precisely this sort of inquiry has been lacking. "You are not familiar with this religion of the prophets!"⁹² According to Cohen, the "religion of the prophets" promises a conception of Jewish belief and practice likely to appeal to many Jews who leave the *Gemeinde*. Their failure to discover it is tragic; indeed, their ignorance undermines the very values that they claim to cherish most. Conscience cannot be exercised without broad knowledge of the tradition at which one ostensibly takes offence. Spiritual convictions cannot truly be tested without a vision of the full range of spiritual alternatives within one's community of origin.

Leaving the community is an unnecessary and avoidable self-mutilation, according to Cohen. Modernity offers no substitute for the kind of agency afforded by the *Gemeinde*. What other organ stands ready to shape the collective energies of the German-Jewish population into a useful whole? For Cohen, the destruction of the *Gemeinde* to which continued exodus contributes would eviscerate the German-Jewish self.⁹³

V. EXPLAINING MODERN JEWISH IDENTITY: VIRTUE AND SELF-RESPONSIBILITY⁹⁴

In an address published just months before his death,⁹⁵ Cohen finally grapples directly with a pre-eminent question of the period we have been reviewing: why

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁸⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 160: "... an der Gemeinde hängt unser religiöses Selbstbewußtsein."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, "jene Juden, die ihren sittlichen Zusammenhang mit dem Judentum nicht bekennen, nicht erkennen und fühlen wollen".

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, "Sie wollten die ideale Einheit ihres religiösen Fundamentes nicht aufgeben".

⁹¹ Here, as elsewhere, Cohen's teaching is both doctrine and self-presentation.

⁹² Cohen, 'Die Zugehörigkeit zur Gemeinde', p. 160: "Ihr kennt sie nicht, diese Religion der Propheten!"

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Here *Tugend* is rendered as "virtue". Virtue is a basic term in the contemporary discussion concerning moral psychology. See Charles Taylor, 'Justice After Virtue', in Horton and Mendus, pp. 16–43; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 53–111; *idem*, 'Neutrality in Political Science', in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 58–90, especially pp. 81–90; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

⁹⁵ 'Mahnung des Alters an die Jugend' was published in December 1917.

is the Jewish community afflicted with so severe a crisis of identity? Typically, Cohen gauges the state of the community in relation to the self-understanding of its potential educational leadership: Jewish philosophers. The rate with which they are disaffiliating from Judaism provides Cohen with the occasion for his remarks about the challenge facing his contemporaries generally. In order to restore the proper self-conception to contemporary Jews, its educational leadership must find its way back to a truthful piety (*wahrhaftige Religiosität*). Moreover, to such a piety there is only one mode of recourse: the path mapped out by the virtues of truthfulness and modesty (*Wahrhaftigkeit und Bescheidenheit*).

According to Cohen, the comment of a professor of philosophy of Jewish extraction is “characteristic” for a large portion of modern Jewry: only Christianity is a modern religion; “already for hundreds of years Judaism has been lifeless and fossilised”.⁹⁶ Moreover, this view is reflected more generally in the behaviour of Jews in the philosophy profession in Germany as a whole.⁹⁷ By Cohen’s estimation, the number of persons of Jewish origin on philosophy faculties at German universities who had converted to Christianity is so large that they form the general rule.⁹⁸

This sociological “fact” – the identification of a characteristic or type among contemporary Jewish philosophers – frames a problem of *explanation* for Cohen in ‘Mahnung’, and drives its logic as a whole.⁹⁹ How is it, asks Cohen, that “our religious education and tradition in the family, in the synagogue and the school, possess so little power to attract in comparison with the driving forces of the public sphere?”¹⁰⁰ To a certain extent cultural context provides the sought-after explanation.¹⁰¹ The revival of Hegel and Romanticism have extended credibility to specious forms of Christian theosophy, lending respectability to the claim that conversion is a matter of philosophical conviction. A truly satisfying explanation of this phenomenon, however, requires attention to factors beyond the external context of contemporary Jewish existence. Without invoking our own contemporary religious constitution and way of life as explanatory factors, claims Cohen, “this terrible fact cannot be explained”.¹⁰²

Consequently, Cohen develops an *internalist* explanation to supplement the *externalist* one to which he is prepared to concede only circumscribed authority.

⁹⁶ Cohen, ‘Mahnung des Alters’, p. 177.

⁹⁷ Cohen refers to the “Spezialgeschichte der philosophischen Professur”, *ibid.*, p. 179. This term, together with “charakteristisch”, “statistische Tatsache” and “statistische Bedeutung”, signifies Cohen’s typological thinking. See *ibid.*, pp. 177, 178, 180.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 177–178. Whether Cohen means the rule among the set of persons of Jewish parentage or among the set of philosophy professors is not clear from the context.

⁹⁹ “Erwägen wir den Sinn und die Ursache dieser statistischen Tatsache,” *ibid.*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

¹⁰¹ “In diesem Zusammenhange der Zeitgeschichte, dem allgemeinen Zuge zur Romantik gewinnen wir einigermaßen eine Verständnis für die traurige Tatsache in der Spezialgeschichte der philosophischen Professur”, *ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 180: “Wahrlich, wir können uns darüber nicht hinwegtäuschen, daß nicht allein die Zeitlage uns so schlecht gemacht haben kann, sondern daß auch in unserer dermaligen religiösen Verfassung und Lebensführung sehr schwere Fehler begangen worden sein müssen, ohne die jene furchtbare Tatsache nicht erklärlich wird.”

Truly powerful cultural forces do impinge on the Jewish individual and community from the outside, as it were, and contribute to the present crisis. However, the internal, cognitive life of the Jew also has a share in the dominant popular self-understanding which has emerged, as do educational institutions within the Jewish community. These factors also need to be counted in any adequate explanation of contemporary self-understanding.

The crisis of German-Jewish identity is in large part a product of educational breakdown, a failure to appreciate the link between a philosophical education and attachment to the Jewish community.¹⁰³ In the modern period, Jews will only remain loyal to their tradition if they are convinced of its cultural value, claims Cohen. In elaborating on this point we can distil a syllogism that expresses the fundamental argument of his entire internalist explanation of Jewish identity: modern Jewish identity depends on a conviction of the cultural value of Judaism. Conviction of the cultural value of Judaism depends on an understanding of the Jewish belief in the unique God (*der einzige Gott*). *Ergo*, modern Jewish identity depends on a philosophical education with respect to the truth of belief in the unique God.¹⁰⁴

Cohen does not describe the educational curriculum required to instil the necessary conviction of Judaism's cultural value (a subject we have encountered in any case above). Instead, he describes the sort of Jew who would probably exemplify such a conviction. He is the truthful and modest Jew – the Jew who, for instance, can subscribe with true understanding and without presumption to the proposition that God is unique (*Gott ist Einzig*). The truthful Jew understands the nature of God and what God demands. The truthful Jew also understands the enormity of the gap that exists between himself and the God whom he has come to know. The distinction between truthfulness and modesty, then, is only apparent according to Cohen's conception. A genuine appreciation of God, open to the truthful person, would necessarily include a sense of the fragility and fallibility of this cognitive achievement, an expression of modesty as well.¹⁰⁵

Cohen's explanation of modern Jewish identity in terms of the virtues supplements his appeal to the force of historical context. The virtues, Cohen intimates, are explanatory tools in one's *geisteswissenschaftlich* tool kit. Analysis in terms of the virtues brings the Jew's religious constitution and way of life to light. Moreover, it serves to capture that measure of responsibility which the German Jew truly bears for himself. When used *in conjunction* with appeal to *external* factors, according to Cohen, the virtues are adequate to explain the crisis of German-Jewish identity, and the potential remedial force of his reconstructive programme.

In 1917, after thirteen years of pursuing the programme he first outlined in 'Errichtung' for the education of the modern Jew, Cohen still finds German

¹⁰³For instance, "die natürliche psychische Brücke zwischen dem theoretischen Bewußtsein . . . und der gesamten Gefühlsgruppe. . .", *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 181–182.

¹⁰⁵I have drawn on *Religion*, pp. 424–425, in exploring the link between the virtues, truthfulness and modesty, and Cohen's explanation of Jewish identity.

Jewry standing at a very great remove from the promise of the new *Wissenschaft*. The faults which Cohen finds are many. German Jewry is without sufficient interest in the literary sources which could nourish them, especially the prophetic tradition; they are unwilling to play their role as suffering servant for the sake of a higher good; and they are quick to abandon the *Gemeinde*, the agent of their collective subjectivity. While Cohen does acknowledge the role of unfavourable forces operating upon the modern Jew, the bulk of his energies are devoted to placing responsibility for the Jews' condition on the Jew himself. In Cohen's estimation the crisis of Jewish identity afflicting his community stems from institutional shortfall: the failure of the organs of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* – its seminaries, its professors, its journals, and its educated elite – to find new ways to educate towards fulfilment of the Jews' ancient obligation to imitate God.

The end of Cohen's life did not bring anything like the realisation of his programme. His efforts did help place another coherent vision in circulation as modern Jewry turned the corner to the new century, however. Writing in December 1917, Cohen did not falter in his conviction. God, the unique exemplar of human subjectivity, remained at "the very heart of the subject [*das einzige Herz der Sache*]". Moreover, the modern Jew could draw ever nearer to the exemplar if only he or she were schooled in the virtues proper to a truthful and modest life. From the perspective of Cohen's *Wissenschaft*, then, virtue was also at the heart of the subject – the authentic modern German-Jewish identity.