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The Religion of Reason Revisited: Monotheism and Tolerance in Moses Mendelssohn, Immanuel Kant, and Hermann Cohen

by

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ABSTRACT

The Religion of Reason Revisited: Monotheism and Tolerance in Moses Mendelssohn, Immanuel Kant, and Hermann Cohen

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This study brings the work of three thinkers of the Enlightenment—particularly the German-Jewish Enlightenment: Moses Mendelssohn, Immanuel Kant, and Hermann Cohen (as heir to the Enlightenment)—to bear on recent discussions about the structural intolerance inherent in the worldview largely shared by the Abrahamic monotheisms. I use recent scholarship on monotheism to highlight the inadequacies of the philosophical accounts of tolerance and pluralism by the thinkers Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard, which pay insufficient attention to the unique challenges posed to these principles by monotheistic religions. I argue that the problems inherent in monotheistic intolerance are better addressed by the earlier philosophical ruminations of Mendelssohn, Kant, and Cohen.

These three Enlightenment thinkers are able to preserve the tense dialectic inherent in the monotheistic worldview while mitigating the violence of its agonistic tendencies by synthesizing the logic operative in monotheistic religions, what I have termed ‘scriptural universalism’ with a very different logic, what I have termed ‘rational universalism.’ The exclusivist structures of scriptural universalism such as election,
idolatry, and historical mission engender an agonistic relationship with those outside of
the monotheistic community. Rational universalism however is more broadly inclusive in
that it appeals to all human beings by virtue of their capacity to reason. By synthesizing
scriptural universalism with rational universalism, these thinkers reconfigure the basic
structures of the monotheistic worldview, appealing to the faculty of reason intrinsic in
all human beings rather than relying solely on revelation via a particular set of Scriptures.
As a result, with varying degrees of success, Mendelssohn, Kant, and Cohen are able to
ameliorate the violence bound up with monotheistic intolerance while nevertheless
preserving monotheism's basic structures, a feat contemporary, secular thinkers of
tolerance are unable to accomplish. While Mendelssohn and Kant contribute substantially
to the development of this trajectory of thought, ultimately Cohen presents not only the
most cogent conception of a monotheistic worldview freed of violence and hostility
towards the Other, but one that remains viable in the contemporary intellectual climate.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

The nearly universally lauded principles of tolerance and pluralism pose serious difficulties for religion and the religious person. If one cedes too much to these principles then one has compromised the very foundations of one’s own religious tradition, leaving oneself with something that looks very different from the grand tradition that was inherited or adopted. Yet the dangers of not giving enough recognition to these principles, as the news attests to daily, leads to endless violence and misery. Our current world-situation would suggest that the intolerance of monotheistic religions, particularly their structural antagonism and hostility towards the Other,\(^1\) cannot stand unchallenged if we seek to live in a peaceful society. However, calls for tolerance and pluralism which fail to respect the basic contours of the Abrahamic religions either fall on deaf ears or only further exacerbate the problem.

If tolerance as a virtue (pluralism probably not being feasible) is to develop more thoroughly in monotheistic religions, or if monotheistic intolerance is to be denuded of its violent character, then such transformations must find their inspiration from within these traditions themselves. One attempt, or rather a particular religious-philosophical tradition of such attempts, to ameliorate the violent intolerance of monotheistic religions, can be found in the work of Moses Mendelssohn, Immanuel Kant, and Hermann Cohen. Their thought, which comprises what I term the ‘religion of reason trajectory,’ reconfigures the structural moments constitutive of monotheistic religions, and by means of this proposes to ameliorate the hostility, or at least violence directed towards the Other, inherent in
monotheistic intolerance. It attempts this reconstruction from within these traditions, albeit from their philosophical borders rather than their theological mainstreams. In this time of crisis, where monotheistic violence is rampant, such pioneering attempts, whether or not they are successful, have much to teach us.

We will begin this chapter by formulating our basic problem, which is the tension between monotheism and the principles of pluralism and tolerance. We will first turn to analytic, or Anglo-American, philosophy, in order to form rudimentary definitions of the terms 'tolerance' and 'pluralism.' Next, we will define monotheism by synthesizing several pieces of contemporary scholarship on the monotheistic worldview. This will make it possible to explore the contours of this problem by elucidating the nature of this tension. After we have elucidated the problem, we will discuss the work of two preeminent thinkers in contemporary Continental philosophy concerning the principles of tolerance and pluralism, Jean-François Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas. By investigating the respective philosophies of these two thinkers, which are largely representative of secular solutions to the issues involved in our problem, we will uncover a problem with such approaches, namely, that they inevitably diminish or dissolve monotheistic religions in order to preserve the principles of tolerance and pluralism. Finally, we will introduce the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory and examine why their respective solutions to this problem are more promising.

Section 1: Tolerance and Pluralism

The terms 'tolerance' and 'pluralism' are objects of significant praise in our current intellectual climate, although what they actually entail, especially their difficulty
and costs, are often not considered in much depth. However, if we are to genuinely appreciate why tolerance and pluralism are problematic for the monotheistic worldview, rather than offer glib trivializations, we must consider these principles with some care. Fortunately, a rich discourse on the issues of tolerance or toleration\(^2\) and its neighbor/rival pluralism has developed in analytic philosophy over the past two decades or so. These discussions are extremely helpful in making clear what these principles precisely entail, and will enable us to formulate rudimentary definitions of them.

Tolerance is an odd principle, in that it requires one to censor oneself, to not act upon one’s moral convictions, in regard to the actions, practices, or beliefs of an Other, when one finds something morally problematic in them.\(^3\) Thomas Scanlon explains, “[t]olerance requires us to accept people and permit their practices even when we strongly disapprove of them. Tolerance thus involves an attitude that is intermediate between wholehearted acceptance and unrestrained opposition.”\(^4\) Tolerance has an intermediate status, in that unlike straightforward moral injunctions such as ‘love one’s neighbor,’ there is an implied limit to tolerance.\(^5\) That is, it is not morally or prudentially sound to tolerate certain actions of the Other, such as murder.\(^6\) However, such obvious examples aside, it is notoriously difficult to demarcate this limit of what is and what is not to be tolerated. A major source of this difficulty lies with a paradox that seems inevitably bound up with tolerance.\(^7\) The paradox is that tolerance, a moral principle or virtue, consists in censoring one’s own inclination to act on one’s sense of moral disapproval at the beliefs, actions, or practices of the Other. That is, if it is a moral virtue, tolerance is one that can only be practiced by suppressing other moral convictions that one has.
Those who reject the validity of tolerance as a principle, including many, self-consciously traditional and fundamentalist religious groups—often belonging to monotheistic religious traditions, simply dissolve the paradox by arguing that toleration is not a good in and of itself. That is, they argue that the normative framework provided by their worldview is decisive and indisputably correct, and those that deviate from it are in error. Tolerance simply has no place in such a system, which admits only two possibilities, either one is in accord with this framework or one is in error, which is tantamount to sin. If the Other is in error and sin, then tolerating her is also error and sin. In this view, then, there is simply no way to justify tolerating the beliefs, actions, or practices of the Other if they differ from one's own, at least on a substantial level.\(^8\)

Those who advocate tolerance, in contrast, must find a way to vindicate it in spite of the paradox of toleration. There are conceivably sound, prudential reasons according to which a group might advocate a position of tolerance, such as that it might enable a minority group to earn the toleration of the majority group.\(^9\) However, our concern is not with such pragmatic forms of tolerance. Our interest is with those positions that value tolerance as a moral virtue in and of itself, even though, as Thomas Scanlon points out, it "involves costs and dangers for all of us."\(^10\) Such a position argues that respect for the Other demand that we allow the Other to have the freedom believe, act, and practice as she sees fit, so long as these beliefs, actions, and practices do not harm or obstruct the legitimate interests of oneself, one's community, or other Others. In short, tolerance is an intermediate attitude in that it lies between the acceptance and exclusion of the Other, where one does not approve of, but neither does one act upon one's sense of moral disapproval of, the Other's beliefs, actions, or practices. Thus, tolerance involves
recognition of the Other, but it implies that on some level there is a disapproval of her beliefs, actions, and/or practices, in that one finds them inferior to one’s own.\textsuperscript{11}

The pluralist position, however, rejects the hierarchies implicit in tolerance, arguing that human beings are radically finite, historically and culturally-situated beings, lacking any capacity to climb above their own contingency in regard to truths and values. Maria Baghramian and Attracta Ingram explain: “The pluralist picture of the world enjoins us to recognize that there can be many diverse and incompatible conceptual and moral frameworks, many belief systems and ultimate values, without there being any overarching criterion to decide between them as to ‘truth’.\textsuperscript{12}

However, the position of the ‘pluralist’ is not that of the relativist, but rather fits more with the position spelled out by David O. Wong in chapter 12 of his book \textit{Moral Relativity}.\textsuperscript{13} As we understand it, the pluralist is not a relativist, if that is to be understood as simply a meta-ethical position. Rather, the pluralist fuses “moral relativism” with “one or more ethical premises.”\textsuperscript{14} From such a perspective, the pluralist, presuming that morality is in some sense rational, argues that a position of equal respect can be justified for diverse positions given that no one position can be definitively vindicated by reason. Moreover, this theoretical apparatus provides pluralists with the tools to critique and even interfere with others outside their worldview if they exhibit actions and practices that might compromise this equal respect.\textsuperscript{15}

Tolerance and pluralism are principles which involve a profound recognition of intersubjectivity, as they involve curtailing either the ramifications of one’s beliefs (tolerance), or acknowledging the limits of one’s entire worldview (pluralism), before the Other. Intolerance, then, is the unwillingness to acknowledge limits to one’s worldview
to make room for the possible legitimacy of that of the Other’s, coupled with the refusal to suffer the beliefs, practices, and actions of the Other, for whatever reason. While tolerance and pluralism are perhaps worthy of the praise they so often receive in our current political and intellectual climate, they are by no means easily achieved. In everyday existence, especially in this increasingly globalized world, tolerance and pluralism are increasingly called upon as individuals enmeshed in disparate, incompatible, and often mutually antagonistic, worldviews are regularly brought into contact with each other. And yet, despite all the highly politicized discussions about tolerance and pluralism, it is far from clear how entrenched worldviews, like those of the Abrahamic monotheisms, which offer a comprehensive vision of the universe and human existence, can reconcile themselves with these principles.

Section 2: Monotheism

Now that we have rudimentary definitions for the principles of tolerance and pluralism, we can formulate our definition of monotheism, which will consist of elucidating basic structural moments more or less shared by the Abrahamic religions. In his article, “One God, One Revelation, One People: on the Symbolic Structure of Elective Monotheism,” Martin S. Jaffee not only provides a schematic account of what he terms the “discursive structure” common to the elective monotheistic religions, but he also explains why this structure itself is inimical to tolerance and pluralism.16 Many if not most sects and groups within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam possess these structural moments, and therefore conflict with the principles of tolerance and pluralism. Since Jaffee’s model reflects the Deuteronomistic-History of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, I will term those movements within the traditions of the elective monotheistic religions
which fit into this model as ‘Deuteronomic-monotheisms.’ This project is exclusively concerned with Deuteronomic-monotheisms.\textsuperscript{17}

The discursive structure shared by Deuteronomic-monotheisms consists of four schematic points or moments.\textsuperscript{18} The first moment is when the universal and transcendent Creator God reveals himself\textsuperscript{19} to a particular human community in an act of revelation. Second, this particular community which has been chosen, or elected, by God, in turn, gives itself over in obedience to the Creator’s love and will. The Creator’s love is bestowed at the price of a collective endeavor, which this community embraces. The third moment, which constitutes the ‘lived time’ of history, is the gap between the original revelatory event and the community’s successful completion of the task, for which God unified the community in the first place. And finally, there is the eschatological conclusion, where the community fulfills its mission, which brings about “reconciliation of the human order with the divine love and will.”\textsuperscript{20} This structure is shared by all Deuteronomic-monotheisms, although, of course, this basic schema will vary idiomatically, and there will be differing emphases in the numerous strands and sects of each particular elective monotheistic tradition.\textsuperscript{21} I will now unpack this structure using additional sources and my own ruminations in order to further elucidate it.

The first moment in Jaffee’s account of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheism is revelation, where God reveals himself to a particular community. Though only implicit in Jaffee’s work, this is a pivotal moment for understanding the tension between the monotheistic worldview and the principles of pluralism and tolerance. Jan Assmann in particular has written extensively on the intolerant nature of revelation in monotheism. Assmann has famously characterized monotheistic religions as ‘counter-
religions’ [Gegenreligionen], in that simultaneous with their claims to truth, they reveal “a counterpart [ein Gegenüber], that they oppose [das sie bekämpfen.]”22 That is, monotheistic religions have “an emphatic notion of truth [emphatischer Wahrheitsbegriff]. They all rest on a distinction [Unterscheidung] between true and false religion, and proclaim on this basis a truth which is not compatible with other truths, but rather relegate all other traditional or concurring truths to the category of the false [Bereich des Falschen].”23 And, Assmann argues, ultimately, revelation is the source from which monotheistic religions draw this antagonistic energy.24 However, Assmann’s insights leave some unanswered questions. What is the nature of this notion of ‘truth’ operative in revelation?25 And why does revelation of this truth in and of itself generate antagonistic energy? To be sure, the event of the universal God of creation revealing himself and giving information to a particular community would qualitatively distinguish and privilege this community above all others. But would this qualitative distinction, or election, by itself be sufficient to entail the violent antagonism Assmann speaks of? Why would it not merely privilege the group in question? Why must it also entail hostility towards those outside the community? I mean to suggest that Assmann’s account is not sufficiently foundational to understand the origins of this antagonism towards the Other. To understand this we must go beyond any particular structural moment of Jaffee’s schematism, and approach the metaphysical paradigm that underpins the monotheistic worldview as a whole.

The antagonistic energy around revelation in the monotheistic worldview, of which Assmann speaks, is ultimately rooted in a condition prior to revelation and the other structural moments of Deuteronomic-monotheism. This prior condition is, in fact, a
metaphysical foundation, a conception of reality and human nature, which anchors all the moments of Jaffee's discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheism. It is this particular metaphysical conception of reality, this 'truth' which is manifested in revelation but also what makes revelation itself necessary, that requires the formation of a particular monotheistic community which sets itself in opposition to all Others. It is also what necessitates the community's historical mission, which will conclude in the eschatological fulfillment of this mission. It is important to extend beyond both the research of Jaffee and Assmann in order to explore the metaphysical paradigm which both situates the discursive structure of elective monotheisms, and serves as the ultimate ground of their antagonistic exclusivism. Although not accounted for in precisely these terms, this foundational aspect of the monotheistic Weltanschauung has been carefully explored by Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, in their book *Idolatry*.\textsuperscript{26}

As Halbertal and Margalit point out, the metaphysical paradigm operative in the monotheistic worldview is fundamentally teleological; God created the world and everything in it, including human beings with an express purpose in mind. In order to understand God's purpose for human beings, however, it is important to bear in mind that the word 'purpose' itself is significantly ambiguous when it comes to human existence. On the one hand, there are defined purposes, which correlate roughly to the roles a person might play in life such as father or mother, doctor or lawyer, and are specific in nature, and more or less assessable in terms of success or failure. An example of a defined purpose might be 'to become a wealthy attorney.' There are fairly clear criteria by which one can assess whether someone has succeeded or not in this regard. Undefined purposes, which pertain to that which underlies all the specific roles that a person might play, the
attribute of the human as such, are much harder to assess. They generally involve judgments of value where the criteria are more personally or culturally specific. Undefined purposes involve questions of lifestyle, such as ‘to live a good life,’ where what constitutes success and failure is harder to ascertain than defined ones, in that the criteria appears to be more relative.27

Deuteronomic-monotheisms are premised upon the belief that undefined purposes, or the underlying attribute of the human, which is considered by monotheistic religions to be unquestionably more significant than that of defined purposes, are actually metaphysically or ontologically determinate or defined, even if this is not readily apparent without the aid of revelation. Monotheistic religions view revelation as the event of God providing the community in question the means with which to both discern what this underlying, metaphysical telos is, and more importantly, to harmonize themselves with it.

Now it is possible to see whence the antagonistic energy of revelation derives. With revelation, the giving of holy texts filled with laws, doctrines, and commandments, monotheistic religions seek to provide an account of the definitive, paradigmatic way that human beings ought to live their lives. Any way of life outside of this is in error with the metaphysical order of the cosmos, such that it would render a human individual out of kilter with his or her own “dominant purpose,” his or her own inherent telos, as a human being.28

However, this antagonistic energy carries over from revelation into the next structural moment of Jaffee’s schematic, the formation of the community by means of the mission entrusted to it by God. Bearing in mind the metaphysical doctrine of the
universal human telos underlying the structural moments of monotheism, it is a mistake to think of the elected (monotheistic) community as either purely particularistic or purely universal. Literary critic, Regina Schwartz, highlights this ambiguity when she writes, "[m]onotheism is a myth that grounds particular identity in universal transcendence."\textsuperscript{29} That is, the doctrine of the metaphysical telos of humanity has been disclosed to a particular community by the universal God of creation in the form of revelation, and thus, only members of this specific community, as opposed to all others, can realize this telos. This dialectic of particularity and universality is of great significance for this investigation and we will return to it returned to frequently.

Recent advocates of monotheism, such as Lenn Goodman,\textsuperscript{30} Erich Zenger,\textsuperscript{31} and Jürgen Werbick,\textsuperscript{32} highlight the universality of the monotheistic God, that this is the God of the universe and consequently all human beings. However, they fail to take note of the important point which Jaffee has shown, that "[e]lective monotheism...is not primarily about God as he is in himself or in relationship to the created order of nature. It is much more about God as he is in relationship to historical human communities—a relationship characterized by the opposition of love and hate."\textsuperscript{33} To be sure, the transcendent God as the creator of the universe is the God of all human beings, and as such is a universal figure. However, in and of itself, this does not entail that the principle of equality characterizes God’s relationships with humanity. In fact, the identity that this God demands the elected community constitute is not inclusive but rather, as Jaffee and Schwartz point out, agonistic in nature.\textsuperscript{34} While the mission which has been entrusted to the community by God carries universal significance, as the very fate of the world may hang in the balance, there is by no means an inclusive attitude towards those outside the
community. The mission entrusted to the community consists in bringing the human world back into accordance with the way God wants it to be, i.e. life according to the laws and statutes in the revealed texts which alone bring one into accord with the universal human telos. Those who do not recognize the holy canon, therefore, are not only out of sync with the metaphysical order of the cosmos (error), but are not living according to God’s will (sin, evil). Since Deuteronomic-monotheisms link the metaphysical conception of the human telos with God’s will, as Avishai Margalit points out, for these religions “error and evil should not be distinguished.” In short, the Other, she who stands outside the elected community, is not only alienated from her telos, but is also an obstruction to God’s plan. She is God’s enemy, worthy of hatred.

Now that the community has been “galvanized” by its reception of revelation, it engages in a “redemptive historical career, a struggle to make manifest throughout the human world the reality of the Creator’s self-disclosure and to transform the human order in correspondence to the Creator’s love and will.” However, in order to bring about this eschatological redemption, as Assmann’s research in particular has shown, all other conceptions of the human telos, the divine, and the nature of existence, must be radically negated. In other words, other cultures and religions must be shown to consist of nothing but falsehood and lies, and thus to be negated and opposed. That is, Deuteronomic-monotheism, which is predicated upon this radical distinction between true and false religion, is permeated with moral and political significance. Or, in the words of Assmann, “[m]onotheism is in its core political theology.”

This brings us to the third moment in Jaffee’s schematic account of the discursive structure of elective monotheisms, namely, history. History, or the ‘lived time’ in which
members of the community actually encounter Others, is the time in which this conflict with the Other is carried out. As Jaffee puts it:

History is the stage of the community's struggle to be worthy of its call. First, it struggles with its own internal resistance to the Creator's call, seeking to purge itself of flaws that it shares with humanity as a whole. This is the struggle to embody obedience and faith both individually and collectively. Second, but no less important, it struggles against the resistance to its mandate of the humanity beyond the community.40

This quote by Jaffee reveals that in the phase of history, the community's identity is constructed by the community defining itself against Others who stand both inside and outside of it. This struggle for identity has great importance for the Deuteronomic-monotheistic worldview during the time in which the world remains unredeemed. It is this elected community alone that serves as the vital link between the human world and God, and thus, it is of the utmost importance that the community be worthy of its God-given task. Making the situation even more volatile is the fact that, as Jaffee points out, "[w]ithin historical time, the Creator's presence and love are coterminous with the borders of the recipient community, nurturing it in its battle against the Other, the negation of the recipient community, and the enemy of the Creator."41 In this passage, the word 'battle' can be a bit misleading, in that the mission of the elected community is to simultaneously preserve the purity of the divine message against the Other as well as to bring the message to the Other. However, 'battle' is ultimately appropriate, because in the monotheistic worldview there will always be resistance to the message by the Other, or at least some Others, within history, and thus struggle with the Other in some form or another is inevitable.

In order to understand the significance of the structural moment of history, the moment in which the actual mission or task of the elected community is carried out, the
‘lived time’ as it were, in which monotheistic communities encounter the Other, it is necessary to recapitulate the first three moments of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms in the idiom of the dialectic of particularity and universality that we mentioned earlier. Monotheistic intolerance towards the Other involves a tense and dynamic relationship between particularism and universalism. In revelation, the one true God of the universe, i.e. the universal God, reveals himself and a set of doctrines containing universal significance to a particular community. These doctrines contain universal significance in that they reveal the universal telos normative for all of humanity. The implication of this act of revelation is that a particular community alone grasps, and thus can fulfill, the universal human telos, which is ordained by the universal God. All other peoples and communities, as a result of their lack of access to this revealed knowledge, fail to live in accordance with this universal telos, and thus are estranged from the universal God. That is, according to Deuteronomic-monotheisms, a particular people is elected, and thus imbued with universal significance, through being entrusted with a task to bring the knowledge of universal significance that was revealed to it in its particularity to the rest of the world. Until that happens, however, there is a tense relationship between those inside the elected community and those outside of it. Those outside the community are not simply the ones who need to receive the doctrine of revelation but also the ones who oppose God by not living according to God’s will.

The manner or modality in which the elected community is to promulgate this revealed knowledge to the rest of the world differs according to the religious tradition as well as theological and historical factors. There are three major modalities in which monotheistic religions historically have envisioned the means to accomplish this task.
They are bearing witness, proselytizing, and conquest accompanied by forced conversion. The modality of bearing witness is the least intrusive of the three. According to this modality, the monotheistic community testifies to God, serving as a veritable “light to the nations” (Isaiah 44:9) by means of the conduct and way of life of the members of the community. In short, the members of the community are to embody monotheism such that the way they live their lives is to somehow point out to Others the truth of monotheism.

Proselytizing, the second modality, can take place in two different forms, peaceful or aggressive. Peaceful proselytizing, which primarily takes place in nations that secure religious liberty, such as the United States, is when religious groups advertise themselves to the Other without there being any sort of power differential involved. Peaceful proselytizing will not concern us in this dissertation. Proselytizing is ‘aggressive,’ however, when it is accompanied by differentials of power and wealth, such as when it accompanies imperialism. That is, proselytizing is aggressive when social, political, and economic, incentives encourage conversion.

The third modality of promulgation is conquest. Conquest can be accompanied by forced conversion as with the spread of Christianity throughout Europe, what Emil Fackenheim has termed ‘Constantinian Christianity.’ Or, conquest can support the promulgation of a religion more subtly as tended to take place with Islam. With Islam conversions usually lagged considerably behind conquest, but were at least in part a result of heavy proselytizing, and heavy incentives such as lower taxes and social prestige. To be sure, in certain areas, Islam also utilized forced conversion in the wake of conquest, but it was not as common.42
In history, then, interactions with the Other, at least ideally (concrete political circumstances can frustrate these ideals, if only temporarily) between monotheistic communities and the Other are mediated through some form of one or more of these modalities of promulgation. Different religions have naturally gravitated towards different methods of promulgation. Christianity and Islam, affiliated with state power for much of their history, primarily make use of the latter two modalities of promulgating their monotheistic messages. Judaism, on the other hand, is unique in this respect, most likely as a result of the fact that rabbinic Judaism only really begins with the loss of all political power. Thus, bearing witness, which does not require power, becomes its primary strategy.\(^{43}\) In fact, Judaism’s form of bearing witness often takes forms explicitly antithetical to political power, such as martyrdom. However, the modality of bearing witness is also manifest in setting one’s community apart through distinct forms of praxis.

The final moment of the discursive structure of Deuteronomistic-monotheism, regardless of the modality by which a particular tradition seeks to promulgate the message of revelation, is the resolution to this process, the *eschaton*. Here, the intolerant foundations of the monotheistic worldview can be seen in perfect clarity. The struggle between the elected human community, the recipients of God’s revelation, and all other human communities, ends, and the gap between human beings and God is healed. However, this reconciliation between God and humanity means one of two things, neither of which is savory from a tolerant or pluralist perspective. Either the Other is incorporated into the elected community, throwing off her old, corrupt and idolatrous ways, converting to the true way of life, and serving the universal God of creation
properly. Or, the Other is simply annihilated physically and spiritually. Either way, the Other as such ceases to exist.

The monotheistic worldview, in its metaphysical underpinnings and structural moments, as elucidated by Jaffee, Assmann, Halbertal, Margalit, and Schwartz, manifests decisive opposition to contemporary notions of tolerance and pluralism. It respects neither the Other, nor her beliefs, actions, or practices, to any degree. The reason for this structural intolerance is that for common Deuteronomic-monotheisms it is God alone who bestows value upon human beings, and those who do not recognize God’s revelation or who prevent it from being spread oppose God’s will and thus have no value. Their religions, their practices, and their beliefs, not only have no worth in themselves, but moreover they should be obliterated. Monotheism, it seems, can only envision an antagonistic relationship between the elected community and all Others, which finally resolves itself only when these Others are either utterly destroyed or completely converted. Or perhaps better, the agonistic energy of monotheistic religions is not directed at the Other qua human being, but rather at the otherness of the Other, at the religious and cultural difference that separates that human being from the true community and proper way of life. However, the Other qua human and the cultural and religious otherness that makes a human being Other are usually inextricably fused, this distinction is largely moot, at least historically speaking. As a result, the Deuteronomic-monotheistic worldview considered abstractly (practical necessity, of course, has a way of forcing compromises, at least for periods of time), the conception of identity is quite agonistic, and therefore distinctly at odds with the principles of pluralism and tolerance, which are predicated upon recognition of the Other. In traditional Deuteronomic-monotheistic
worldviews, God not the Other deserves primary recognition, and thus tolerance and pluralism are simply principles that have no grounding.

Section 3: Lyotard and Habermas

We have now laid bare the basic problem with which this project struggles, namely, that Deuteronomic-monotheisms generate hostile notions of the Other that are not only inimical to the principles of tolerance and pluralism but also lend themselves to violence. We will now turn to two of the most preeminent thinkers in regard to the issues of tolerance and pluralism in contemporary Continental philosophy, Jean-François Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas, who maintain positions that are quite at odds with one another, in order to see how they would solve this problem. Lyotard and Habermas are not only rather remarkable in and of themselves, offering rigorous and highly influential answers to the emergent questions concerning pluralism and tolerance, but they also serve as landmarks in regard to thought about these principles in the ‘post-metaphysical’ era.

The positions Lyotard and Habermas take vis-à-vis the problem of Deuteronomic-monotheisms and intolerance are highly indicative of the secularist, or what I term ‘externalist,’ approach to this problem in general. I use the term ‘externalist’ because these strategies not only approach the problem of monotheism and intolerance from a vantage point external to the religions themselves, but also seek to bring about their solutions from a position that is external to these traditions, and which is then applied to these traditions from the outside. Such approaches can only envision a solution to the problem by seriously diminishing, if not altogether destroying, the monotheistic religions themselves. That is, the solutions proffered by Lyotard and Habermas not only repudiate
the metaphysical foundations on which the moments of the discursive structure of monotheism rest, but they undermine the integrity of most of, if not all, the structural moments constitutive of monotheistic religions (revelation, election, history/historical mission, and the eschaton). Simply put, monotheistic religions cannot survive in fact the externalist solutions provided by thinkers such as Lyotard and Habermas. If such an approach is adopted, one arrives at either a greatly diminished monotheistic tradition, one alienated from its own traditional self-understanding, or monotheism itself is ultimately utterly dissolved.

Jean-François Lyotard, most well known in the United States for his work The Postmodern Condition, maintains a position that clearly falls in the pluralist camp. He sees the contemporary world, particularly the West, as standing at a moment of profound transition, as the ‘great narratives,’ or “metanarratives” of modernity, those narratives that legitimate social and political institutions, laws, ethics, etc., have ceased to be credible. In the wake of the collapse of the grand narratives of modernity, there is only a plurality of differing narratives, as well as different phrase regimes such as denotative, prescriptive, technical, etc., with no meta-language by which to harmonize them. However, Lyotard is not satisfied with the relativism, which would seem to be implied in his account of the collapse of all world-structuring meta-orders.

In The Differend and in many of his later essays, Lyotard develops a pluralism entrenched in a philosophy of language (which is quite far reaching, as reality, for Lyotard, is thoroughly linguistically structured.) A differend [différend] is a central concept in Lyotard’s work, and designates a clash between language games in which a conflict emerges between two parties that cannot be resolved, as there are no criteria for
judging that could be appropriate for both parties. However, it is inevitable that differends will arise, in that there is a paradoxical necessity of contingency that rests in the heart of language. The danger with the preeminence of any language game or meta-narrative is that it tends to efface the contingency of language, the multiplicity of ways to respond to and interpret events of language which occur, all of which are more or less equally valid. Differends are effaced when the contingency in the heart of language is concealed, and one narrative order, claiming itself alone to be ‘necessary’ and true, is imposed upon the phrase event. The task of the philosopher is to bear witness to the contingency present in the heart of language, and to recognize the differends that are suppressed by the dominant language games and to attempt to find idioms by which to express them. In an earlier work, *Just Gaming*, Lyotard ascribes an even more activist position to philosophy, claiming that the political task par excellence for philosophy is to protect the integrity of all the many extant language games (as well as those that will come into being), in order to prevent any one game from overstepping its bounds and eclipsing others through the threat of violence.

Habermas, an avowed heir of the Enlightenment tradition, attempts to rehabilitate the notion of rationality for contemporary thought. He argues that reason must be grounded in the rationality incipient in the process of human communication, what he terms ‘communicative rationality.’ Communicative rationality develops teleologically towards a rationalizing of the lifeworld, towards a society driven more and more by rationally achieved consensus, by mutual understanding—agreement based on reasons—rather than various forms of coercion or unquestioned authority. However, this process of the teleological development of communicative rationality and its hold on human
beings and society is a historical-developmental process. This developmental process proceeds teleologically towards forms of society premised around achieving a consensus freely reached by all the members of society who participate equally in this process of mutual understanding. Reasons must be given, and the participants must be un-coerced in their acceptance or rejection of these reasons. As Habermas puts it, "Every consensus rests on an intersubjective recognition of criticizable validity claims." That is, consensuses depend on the productive power of argumentation, of the giving of reasons, and of "mutual criticism." The consensus-reaching force of argumentation, of reason-giving, is not limited to people within a culture, but can, with great care and dedication, take place across cultures, fostering an international, inter-cultural community.

Habermas takes a position that finds itself somewhere between tolerance and pluralism, as we have defined them. Habermas propounds a "procedural notion of rationality," premised on the belief that there is the possibility for genuine dialogue across traditions and 'language games,' and that a mutually agreed upon 'truth' or understanding can be reached between very different parties. Thus, Habermas is largely dissatisfied with traditional accounts of tolerance and pluralism, in that they imply a distinction and separation between the self and Other, such that there can be no discussion with the hopes of reaching some sort of legitimate resolution about morality, legality, science, etc. Habermas' notion of tolerance and pluralism is premised upon his belief in the possibility of a "noncoercively unifying, consensus-building force of a discourse in which the participants overcome their at first subjectively biased views in favor of a rationally motivated agreement." However, when it comes to views of the lifeworld as a whole, metaphysics, Habermas is convinced that there is no possibility for
rational consensus, and thus the pluralism is necessary.55

In regard to our specific problem, the tension and hostility between monotheism and tolerance, Lyotard’s specific suggestion would be that we ought to embrace our postmodern moment, and proceed in an “antimythologizing manner.” That is, we should acknowledge that master-narratives, a category to which Deuteronomic-monotheisms56 belong, are simply no longer tenable and people should face ‘the necessity of contingency’ that the postmodern situation has revealed with full sobriety.57 At best, such a religion could be preserved as a shadow of what it once was, one narrative amidst other equally valid narratives, but under such circumstances the discursive structure, with its constitutive moments, would be vitiated.

In contrast to Lyotard, in the last few decades, Habermas has begun to take religion more seriously in his writings and thought, and even acknowledges it as an important aspect of contemporary existence. It can provide consolation in the face of existential crises that regularly beset human beings and for which philosophy, now deprived of any metaphysical claims, can no longer serve as a surrogate.58 Recently, his thought has been especially concerned with the possibility of religious tolerance within the context of liberal constitutional democracies.59 The conditions for the possibility of religious tolerance are intimately bound up with what Habermas terms ‘the epistemic conditions of modernity,’ especially differentiation, reflexivity, and decentration.60 Differentiation is the separating out of three distinct spheres of value, namely science, morality, and art, which are all fused together in traditional religious-metaphysical worldviews. With this separation, each sphere now develops freely according to its own inner logic, and each operates with its own special sort of validity claim (truth, rightness
and truthfulness.) Reflexivity is the capacity to investigate validity claims without the coercion or constraints of dogmatism. And finally, decentration is a process of becoming less chauvinistic or self-centered in focus by moving towards more and more universalistic and inclusivistic positions. These conditions make possible a particular sort of self-critical posture in contemporary forms of religion, or what Habermas calls ‘modern faith.’ This posture allows these forms of religion “to stabilize the inclusive attitude that it assumes within a universe of discourse delimited by secular knowledge and shared with other religions.” In short, Habermas’ can only conceive of religions existing as productive members of modern, pluralist democratic societies, if they severely curtail their prior status and dramatically revise the sorts of claims they make.

Habermas’ account of so-called ‘modern faith’ exists in contrast to what he has termed the ‘religious-metaphysical worldview,’ which Habermas largely equates with the pre-modern monotheisms. In Habermas’ paradigm of the evolution of communicative rationality, the religious-metaphysical worldview is an important midpoint between the mythic stage and modernity. While these monotheistic religions characterize a systematic advance over myth for Habermas, they are deficient in all three of the ‘epistemological conditions of modernity,’ in that their ultimate principles are not exposed to doubt or criticism, they lack differentiation in regard to validity realms, and they are ‘centered’ vis-à-vis the Other as a result of being “immunized against dissonant experiences.”

The historical stage of the ‘religious-metaphysical worldview’ is supposed to be sublated, aufgehoben (in a nonmetaphysical sense) in modernity in a process that Habermas refers to as the ‘linguistification of the sacred.’ By the term ‘linguistification of the sacred,’ Habermas means “the transfer of cultural reproduction, social integration,
and socialization from sacred foundations over to linguistic communication and action oriented to mutual understanding."64 In modernity, traditional religions are supposed to lose their binding power. "In modern societies these [traditional and religious] forms of life....have been subordinated to the universalism of law and morality."65 The subordination of religion is possible, at least in part, because of the epoch-making collapse of metaphysics. The public, universal claims of religion are predicated upon theology, which is a metaphysical discourse that can no longer remain valid in this post-metaphysical era. As a result, religion is largely limited to the private realm, where Habermas allows it room to serve its existentially useful function of consolation; rationally it is indefeasible and therefore has no place in the public sphere.66

Lyotard and Habermas each propose solutions to the problematic incompatibility between monotheism and the principles of tolerance and pluralism by vitiating the authority of the monotheistic worldview. Lyotard argues that language (or, more broadly speaking, reality) is inherently contingent, and that no narrative can offer a comprehensive and necessary account of its unfolding. Rather, there are a plurality of contradictory narratives and language games, each with equally legitimate frameworks for making sense of this unfolding. These narratives and language games must be kept from violently impinging upon and colonizing one another. Monotheistic religions are invalid because they are simply one more master-narrative that inevitably suppresses other narratives, traditions, and language games, in addition to effacing differends, thus doing violence to the very nature of language (reality) itself. Habermas, on the other hand, wants to relativize the claims of monotheistic religions, domesticating them into private concerns of individuals, perhaps useful for certain particular needs, but of no
genuine public, moral or rational, concern. In short, both thinkers approach monotheism from a point of view external to it, and from this external position force monotheistic religions to open themselves to the principles of pluralism and tolerance, without concern for whether or not the structure of Deuteronomic-monotheism can sustain these principles and remain in tact.

Perhaps it is this inevitable damage to the basic structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms which arises from the externalist approach to this problem, and to which many so-called ‘modern faiths’ bear witness, which can help explain, at least in part, the surge in fundamentalism among monotheistic religions in recent years. Habermas provides a useful account of fundamentalism throughout his recent writings, explaining that fundamentalist movements arise concomitant with the modern forms of faith. Fundamentalism, in its various forms, attempts to reclaim the all encompassing power of the exclusive religious-metaphysical worldview by simply ignoring those “modern conditions … [whereby] … an exclusive claim to truth by one faith can no longer be naively maintained.”67 As a result of its insufficient rigor, Habermas finds fundamentalism to constitute a “false answer to the epistemological situation” of the present, which calls for reflexivity and tolerance above all else.68

While Habermas is correct to critique fundamentalist movements for their lack of theoretical sophistication, he misses the larger point to which these movements, at least in part, seem to be responding. Positions such as those proffered by Lyotard and Habermas, which are also representative of much of the current zeitgeist,69 leave adherents of monotheistic religions with a dilemma: either they can accept the principles of tolerance and pluralism, which the postmodern situation or the epistemological conditions of
modernity would warrant, or they can affirm a robust account of their religions. However, the religion of reason trajectory proposes another way, a way which avoids this dilemma.

Section 4: Religion of Reason

The thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory, Moses Mendelssohn, Immanuel Kant, and Hermann Cohen, propose to ameliorate the tension between the monotheistic worldview and the principles of tolerance and pluralism in a manner quite distinct from externalist solutions such as those of Lyotard and Habermas. Mendelssohn, Kant, and Cohen, in their attempts to reconcile Deuteronomic-monotheisms with tolerance, or perhaps better, to ameliorate the violence bound up with the intolerance inherent in monotheistic religions, take recourse to reason. Reason, they argue, presents a different sort of universalism than is presented by common Deuteronomic-monotheistic religions which are predicated upon revelation. For expediency, we will term the universalism of reason ‘rational universalism,’ and the universalism of common Deuteronomic-monotheisms ‘scriptural universalism.’ Let us describe each universalism, in turn, before we discuss the daring experiment undertaken by the religion of reason trajectory.

The exemplar of rational universalism is mathematics, in that it not only claims something to be unequivocally true, but it can demonstrate the necessity of why a particular ruling is this way and not another way. Empirical sciences lack the necessity of mathematics in that they can only tell us that something is a particular way but cannot tell us why it must be this way and not otherwise. Thus, rational universalisms possess necessity (i.e. they can demonstrate why something has to be a certain way and cannot be otherwise) in addition to a universal scope. Mathematics is paradigmatic of reason for the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory, in that they think other aspects of rationality,
such as metaphysics and ethics possess a necessity that is, if not exactly analogous, then similar in kind. Now, what precisely is entailed or contained by reason differs according to each thinker. Mendelssohn is committed to neo-Scholastic metaphysics, Kant initiates a turn towards a post-metaphysical philosophy, and Cohen moves even further in this direction. Also, these thinkers do not all agree about the capacities of human beings regarding human reason. Mendelssohn and Cohen are a bit more skeptical than Kant of the human capacity to grasp and prove these truths of the higher order, hence Mendelssohn’s conservative view towards culture and Cohen’s future-oriented notion of philosophical reason. Nevertheless all of the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory believe matters of reason, however difficult, possess necessity. Thus, for these thinkers, reason, human reason, can ascertain certain primordial truths and demonstrate them to other human beings through universal rules of argumentation and discourse.

At this point, red flags are probably emerging in the reader’s mind in that the recourse these thinkers take to rational universalism seems hopelessly antiquated given current beliefs in philosophy and the humanities in general. An obvious objection arises concerning the possible thickness of any such rational universalism considering how Habermas has characterized, accurately I think, our present circumstances as a globalized, pluralistic world without any “substantive background consensus on the underlying moral norms.”\textsuperscript{70} We must leave aside this objection for now, although as we will see, the eclipse of metaphysics as well as the loss of a shared world/moral order proves to be a significant challenge that perpetually haunts the contemporary appropriation of the works of the thinkers of religion of reason trajectory.
In contrast to rational universalisms, scriptural universalisms lack necessity as a feature. Scriptural universalisms are rooted in a set of holy texts believed to be revealed by the universal God to a particular people. These texts give the authoritative account of how all human beings are to live their lives if they want to live in accordance with God's will. They are universal in scope in that they claim to be applicable to, i.e. to have relevance for, all human beings. However, like empirical sciences, scriptural universalisms fail to offer any rational necessity; they are not self-evident, penetrable in their foundations, to human reason. Instead they require the authority of God, the creator of the universe and humanity, to bestow upon them their universality and authority. Without the sanction of the divine, the rulings of these texts are not recognizably authoritative; there is no recognizable reason one should follow them as opposed to some other system of beliefs and praxis. This does not mean there is not some reason behind these rules, statutes, and norms, but that they are motivated by God's reason, which is qualitatively different from the reason of human beings. Hence, these rulings and teachings must be disclosed, at least in part, in a historical event rather than emerging entirely through a process of gradual discovery, like mathematics.71 Thus, it should not be surprising that in common Deuteronomic-monotheisms (medieval Scholasticism is already a departure from this, and in this sense it is a precursor to the religion of reason trajectory) the radical dichotomy between God and human beings is stressed, such that God remains utterly unfathomable except for what is revealed through revelation. And the divine always trumps the human.

Aside from the fact that mathematics is not typically seen as a sphere of human culture that provides truths that people are willing to stake either their lives or the lives of
others. Others upon, such recourse to violence is unnecessary. Human reason is, generally speaking, everywhere capable of recognizing the basic truths of mathematics, in that they can be transmitted through argumentation and recourse to rules and axioms, whose necessity can be verified by virtually everyone. That is, human reason is sufficient for discerning their validity, merit, and usefulness. On the other hand, scriptural universalisms lack rational necessity to their claims, and thus cannot be demonstrated through argumentation alone. God’s authority is so important with these religious traditions because not only is God the ultimate guarantor and arbiter of the good and the right, but the authority of the universality of these religions derives from the universality and absoluteness of God. However, this authority can be contested, insofar as many traditions claim God’s authority for their own specific teachings, and thus different scriptural universalisms clash with one another, in addition to clashing with communities that are not terribly preoccupied with universality. Hence these religions are promulgated not through rational argumentation and scholarly interchange, but rather through persuasion, coercion, and violence.

Historically speaking, for Deuteronomic-monotheisms and their ‘scriptural universalisms’ on a generic level, what is most important at least ultimately (in terms of the eschaton) is not so much how this universalism is realized, but that it is realized. Thus, violence, conquest, and forced conversions, are not seen as terribly problematic, in that they further God’s will, which is all that matters. Others are incorporated into the one true faith, and the universal plan of God is enacted upon the earth. There is little concern with respecting the autonomy or inherent worth of the cultures and individuals outside the monotheistic community that they seek to incorporate, because as they are
now, they lack any worth, as God alone bestows value. That is, quite simply, according to traditional Deuteronomic-monotheistic traditions and their scriptural universalisms, it is God and the proper knowledge of God which bestows all value and worth, and thus the monotheistic culture is being 'ethical' even when it takes recourse to violence. God's will is the only thing of value. Of course, this is not to suggest that there are not counter-voices within these traditions that speak of respecting the stranger and recognizing their humanity (these voices also take recourse to God's authority). Nevertheless, the voices of conquest or exclusion of the Other are substantial within these traditions, and historically have often been dominant.

Now, we are in a position to appreciate the daring project of the religion of reason trajectory. This group of thinkers attempts nothing less than to combine, each in a different way, the order of rational universalism with that of scriptural universalism. By doing this, they hope to ameliorate the violence inherent in the intolerance of monotheistic religions. That is, they preserve the universalism inherent in the monotheistic worldview, but by making it rational rather than scriptural, they make its promulgation open to argumentation and demonstration rather than requiring coercion and violence. A dramatic implication of this movement is that to the degree that scriptural universalism is replaced with rational universalism, a rationalistic conception of God must replace the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism. That is, if reason is to be the operative mechanism in monotheism, then God's reason cannot differ in principle from human reason.

It is useful at this juncture to juxtapose the endeavors of the religion of reason trajectory with those of Lyotard and Habermas. Both the thinkers of the religion of reason
trajectory and secularists like Lyotard and Habermas take issue with the claims of scriptural universalisms regarding the exclusivity of the particular, elected community's capacity to grasp the universal human telos. However, the methods through which the externalists combat this tendency could not differ more substantially from those of the religion of reason trajectory. In order to combat the exclusivism of monotheistic religions, the externalist position essentially requires the dissolution of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms altogether, including and especially, the notion of a universal human telos. The religion of reason trajectory, however preserves this notion of a universal human telos, although one derived from reason rather than revelation. In this manner, the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory are able to navigate a course between Scylla of violent exclusivism and the Charybdis of the immolation of the basic structure of monotheistic religions.

We can achieve further insight into the distinctions between the approaches of Mendelssohn, Kant and Cohen over against Lyotard and Habermas in this regard if we turn to G. E. M. Anscombe's famous essay, "Modern Moral Philosophy." In this essay Anscombe differentiates three essentially incommensurable domains in the history of philosophy in regard to ethics: ancient, scholastic, and modern. Anscombe argues that the moral sense of 'ought' should be jettisoned from contemporary moral philosophy, in that it is merely a survival from a divine command conception of ethics, which is not relevant for the modern era. Of particular importance for us is that Anscombe points out, in terms reminiscent to those of Halbertal and Margalit, that in divine command conceptions of ethics the 'ought' pertains to laws and commands such that failure to meet them is a mark of being bad qua human being, rather than bad in a particular role.
Unlike Lyotard and Habermas, whom she would classify as modern according to this typology, Anscombe would have a significantly harder time classifying Mendelssohn, Kant, and Cohen.\textsuperscript{74} The difficulty for Anscombe would arise in the fact that these thinkers retain the notion of a divinely ordained human telos, and this telos provides a connection between the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory and Deuteronomic-monotheism that is entirely absent in thinkers like Lyotard and Habermas. In fact, it is the preservation of this telos which enables the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory to operate \textit{within} a Deuteronomic-monotheistic framework, even if they do so with either a limited version of scriptural universalism in play, or none at all.

Retaining this notion of a divinely ordained human telos also enables the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory to take a partisan approach to the issue of religion, claiming that some religions or instantiations of religious traditions are better, or more ‘rational,’ than others. That is, insofar as a particular religious group furthers the development of individuals toward this telos, it is better and more rational (as for these thinkers the human telos involves rationality, particularly practical, i.e. moral, reason) than those that do not. This valuation of the religion of reason trajectory is by no means limited to the respective religious traditions in which they operate: Judaism for Mendelssohn and Cohen, and Christianity for Kant. Rather, the thinkers of this trajectory operate with a category, the ‘religion of reason,’\textsuperscript{75} which is characterized differently by each respective thinker, but nonetheless represents for all three a potential within other extant religions that is yet to be realized, or no longer is realized but could be realized again, but which nevertheless serves as an ideal which guides and orients (or should orient) other existing religions. And, concomitantly, for each thinker of the trajectory,
there is a notion of a ‘worse’ sort of religion, or, what I will term, idolatry. These are religious sects or groups that have priorities and practices which conflict with, and actively inhibit, the development towards the ‘religion of reason.’ However, just as the specifics of what constitutes the ‘religion of reason’ varies with each respective thinker, so too does its counterpart, the notion of idolatry.

With the notion of the ‘religion of reason,’ the positions of Mendelssohn, Kant, and Cohen, both run parallel to, and distinguish themselves from, those of Lyotard and Habermas. That is, like Lyotard and Habermas, these thinkers are able to provide certain universal criteria for discussing and assessing religions in general. However, unlike Lyotard and Habermas, because the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory maintain a notion of the divinely ordained human telos, their valuations of religion are infused with a wider range of significance. Whereas externalist thinkers like Lyotard and Habermas, who lack this notion of a divinely ordained human telos, can at most provide prohibitions and limits for existing religions in order to insure that they do not lead to social conflict, there is little room for religions to possess genuinely positive functions in such accounts. To be sure, a thinker like Habermas allows religion to provide ancillary functions, like offering comfort in the existential crises involved with daily life for which post-metaphysical philosophy is of little help. However, such a notion of religion cannot provide anything of moral or rational value. With the religion of reason trajectory, on the contrary, religion possesses rational and moral significance, and therefore it carries great urgency, both for the individual’s own life and for the social realm as a whole.

What separates these thinkers most dramatically from externalists like Lyotard and Habermas is that outside this universalistic framework for addressing all religions,
these thinkers elaborate specific visions for their monotheistic community. Since the structural moments of Deuteronomic-monotheisms require the election of a specific community and a world-historic mission for this community, a paradigm which treats all religions as categorically the same is incommensurable with these religions’ own self-understandings. The religion of reason trajectory, however, is able to provide continuity with monotheistic traditions by preserving the basic moments of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms (revelation, election, history/historical mission, and eschaton) albeit in a somewhat reconfigured form. And through this reconfiguration it seeks to purge the violence intertwined with the intolerance of a particular monotheistic tradition (these thinkers only account for the particular tradition of which they belong).

Moses Mendelssohn

We begin with Moses Mendelssohn because he was, historically, the first of the three thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory to attempt to ameliorate monotheistic intolerance through rational universalism, and his works concerning this matter (or, at least some of them) were read by the other thinkers in this trajectory. Mendelssohn attempts to eradicate the conditions responsible for monotheistic intolerance by putting forward an inclusivist natural theology, his notion of rational universalism, to replace the more exclusivist metaphysical underpinnings of common Deuteronomic-monotheisms. By means of this natural theology, Mendelssohn hopes to sanitize the intolerant exclusivism of the logic of scriptural universalism, if not eliminate it altogether. However, Mendelssohn never quite succeeds in domesticating the logic of scriptural universalism, although the introduction of rational universalism does enable Mendelssohn to re-construct the moments of the discursive structure of Judaism in such a way that its
conception of the Other is configured predominantly in terms of uncertainty rather than error and sin. For all its virtues, Mendelssohn's thought proves highly problematic and even finally incoherent, in that he never satisfactorily reconciles the logics of rational and scriptural universalism, leaving his thought plagued by a sort of schizophrenia. While Mendelssohn will ultimately privilege the logic of scriptural universalism, it remains unclear how this can be reconciled with the natural theological framework of his rational universalism.

Despite Mendelssohn's ultimate affinity for scriptural universalism, his thought presents itself as subscribing to rational universalism through and through. His 'religion of reason' consists of the basic metaphysical scheme of the neo-Leibnizian framework for which he was a famous advocate in his day. Mendelssohn substitutes the natural theology of his 'religion of reason' for the metaphysical foundation of the moments of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheism. This enables Mendelssohn to preserve a notion of the universal human telos, while, in radical contrast to common monotheisms, also providing universal access to it among human beings. Mendelssohn's conception of the 'religion of reason' develops through polemics against Christianity, the richest of which are the lesser known and un-translated, Gegenbetrachtungen über Bonnets Palingenesie76 and Sache Gottes.77 In these works, Mendelssohn offers extended critiques of Christian monotheism by means of his 'religion of reason.' In sharp contrast to what he perceives as Christianity's exclusivism, Mendelssohn claims to deduce from the principle of God's perfection that all rational beings, human beings included, contain infinite worth. From this infinite worth, he argues that all human beings (qua rational beings) have eternal felicity, which he equates with the doctrine of salvation, as their
ultimate telos whose fulfillment is inevitable. Mendelssohn believes that one cannot
fulfill one's telos without a grasp on certain metaphysical truths essential for a sound
human existence, what Mendelssohn refers to as the eternal truths: namely, the existence
of God, providence, and immortality of the soul. Therefore he argues these truths must be
inherent in all religions, and claims that his account of natural religion, or the 'religion of
reason' is a rational archetype underlying all existing religions.

Mendelssohn critiques Christianity, which represents for him the common
Deuteronomistic-monotheistic worldview, from the vantage point of the natural theology
constitutive of his notion of the 'religion of reason.' In fact, Christianity, for
Mendelssohn, becomes emblematic of the problems with the logic of naked scriptural
universalism, i.e. scriptural universalism that is not supplemented and re-configured
along inclusivist, natural theological lines. Using his 'religion of reason' as a measuring
stick, Mendelssohn faults Christianity for what he considers to be its exclusivist notion of
salvation, as well as the conception of God, upon which he thinks it is based.

Mendelssohn considers Christianity’s notion of salvation to be illegitimately exclusivist
as a result of what he sees as its stress on the possession of 'correct' doctrinal content as a
necessary condition for salvation. Those who lack such 'correct' doctrinal positions are
considered idolaters worthy of eternal punishment unless they somehow manage to gain
access to these 'correct' doctrinal 'truths' and convert. Such a position, Mendelssohn
charges, requires basing matters of human salvation, which he claims is inextricably
bound up with the inherent worth of human beings, to the access one has to revelation.
However, access to revelation depends entirely on factors of history such as the spread of
missionaries and the conquests of Christian nations. These historical factors lack
necessity and universality, as, for example, entire generations of peoples exist without contact with Christian missionaries. Mendelssohn argues that matters of salvation, being universal in nature, pertaining to the teloi of all human beings everywhere, cannot therefore find their fulfillment with a solution mired in historical circumstances, filled as they are with contingencies and particularities rather than necessity and universality.

However, while Mendelssohn would like to construct his notion of Judaism purely from the natural theology inherent in his account of the ‘religion of reason,’ and in fact claims to do so, he nevertheless finds the predominance of universality in his natural theology inhospitable for the moments of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-Judaism. As a result, Mendelssohn is forced to introduce a heterogeneous element derived from the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms, idolatry, into his account of the ‘religion of reason.’ This notion of idolatry is supposed to exist in tandem with the ‘religion of reason,’ characterizing any form of religiosity out of kilter, if not in direct conflict, with the ‘religion of reason’ archetype. However, idolatry, which represents the precariousness of the human grasp on the eternal truths constitutive of natural religion, is not simply or even primarily the counterpoint to the ‘religion of reason.’ Idolatry is a heterogeneous element that Mendelssohn finds himself forced to introduce, at least in part, in order to inject particularity into the purely inclusivistic and universalistic assumptions of his natural theology. The discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms requires a dialectical interplay between particularity and universality, which Mendelssohn’s natural theology, at least taken by itself, simply cannot accommodate, given that it is so heavily weighted towards universality. While idolatry exists in a latent form in Mendelssohn’s work on natural theology, it becomes
centrally significant in his explicitly Jewish work, Jerusalem: or on Religious Power and Judaism. In Jerusalem, Mendelssohn treats idolatry as a historical phenomenon, which arises as a result of abuses related to writing. And while several commentators rightly point out the weakness of his arguments in this regard, this should not blind us to the structural significance of idolatry for Mendelssohn’s thought. This creates problems for Mendelssohn, because he insists on maintaining the natural theological form of his rational universalism and thus is forced to import elements from scriptural universalism such as the notion of an unfathomable God in order to help cope with the heterogeneity of idolatry and the subsequent particularisms that it entails.

These notions, the ‘religion of reason’ and idolatry, however incongruous are nevertheless pivotal for Mendelssohn’s thought in that they form the foundation upon which Mendelssohn constructs his re-configuration of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-Judaism. Mendelssohn’s account of Judaism emerges primarily in Jerusalem, as well as in Gegenbetrachtungen. In these works, Mendelssohn configures Judaism such that it retains the notion of the election of the community and its divinely appointed task, but it does so in a way that is far less unilateral than the common monotheistic account. Judaism, Mendelssohn argues, finds that all human beings have access to bringing themselves into accord with their teloi through reason. Moreover, Mendelssohn argues that Jewish revelation contains no specific truths that are not also available to natural human reason. Rather it is a revealed legislation which pertains to Jews alone, and is designed to help them preserve these eternal truths available to all human beings in the face of the inevitable degradations of idolatry that sweep the world. Jewish election, Mendelssohn claims, arises as a response of the divine to idolatry. To be
sure, Jews are not exempt from idolatry, as they too can be lead astray by superstition and other facets of idolatry. Mendelssohn simply thinks that Jews possess a better defense against idolatry than non-Jews, in that Jews possess the divinely revealed Halakhah. In fact, Mendelssohn claims, the purpose for which the Jews were given the Halakhah, or the revealed law, is to serve as living witnesses of the eternal truths to humanity at large. And, at some distant eschatological endpoint, about which Mendelssohn does not often speculate, all of humanity will have proper knowledge of the eternal truths and there will no longer be a necessity for the Jews to observe the Halakhah. Thus, Mendelssohn frames the language of bearing witness in terms of rational universalism but its logic is that of scriptural universalism. While Mendelssohn tries to give a rational accounting of the election of the Jews everything ultimately turns on the plans of an unfathomable God.

Despite the election of the Jews, Mendelssohn does manage to render the status of the Other ambiguous in regard to the eternal truths, rather than as taking the common Deuteronomistic-monotheistic position where the Other is seen to lack them outright. This ambiguity is of decisive importance for Mendelssohn’s thought. To be sure, it is a source of problems for Mendelssohn, as well as a major source of dispute in Mendelssohn scholarship. Mendelssohn’s conception of Judaism, as scholarship has been quick to point out, is torn between two competing agendas, the desire for a sort of cultural egalitarianism, and the desire to preserve Jewish election, which qualitatively distinguishes and privileges Judaism from other religions. The dominant scholarly position insists that this conflict in Mendelssohn’s thought plagues his position with incoherence, claiming that these two thrusts are self-contradictory. Even those scholars who wish to salvage Mendelssohn’s thought take it for granted that these two poles
cannot coexist, and therefore seek to distance themselves from the legacy of his Jewish apologetics, at least where they contain elements of chauvinism. However, these two agendas, the election of the Jews and cultural egalitarianism, are not as incompatible as they initially appear, if we bear in mind his position concerning the fruitful ambiguity in regard to the Other.

Mendelssohn does qualitatively privilege Judaism over other religions, arguing that its adherents possess a unique relationship with God, that they are God's special servants. However, Mendelssohn separates this notion of the qualitative distinction of Judaism from Christian exclusivism by distinguishing their respective metaphysical foundations. Finding the exclusivism of Christian monotheism to be a result of faulty metaphysics, Mendelssohn re-configures the moments of the discursive structure of Judaism upon what he believes to be a more sound metaphysical foundation. As a result, the relationship with the Other is not characterized by agonism and hostility, but rather by uncertainty and ambiguity. The Other has the capacity to possess knowledge of the eternal truths, to be an adherent of the 'religion of reason,' but it is difficult to discern her status in regard to these matters. The divine mission of the Jews, which is to bear witness to the eternal truths, does not require that all Others lack the truth, and thus that all Others be in special need of the Jews. In fact, the divine mission of the Jews, which Mendelssohn thinks is clearly spelled out by God at Sinai, is merely to remain steadfast to the commandments entrusted to them by God, regardless of the status of the Other, at least until God publicly reveals otherwise. This conception of testimony, while it both preserves the Jews and bears witness to the Others, does not enact any sort of direct
confrontation or critique of the Other. It permits the Other to be Other, and even allows for the possibility that the Other may have the truth, in part or whole.

To be sure, the universal mission of the Jews in Mendelssohn’s thought requires that some Others are idolatrous, because if everyone had correct notions of the eternal truths then the messianic era would have arrived. That is, Mendelssohn’s thought involves an implicit distinction between the particular Other before me and humanity in general. While Mendelssohn concedes that much of humanity remains mired in idolatry, the status of the particular Other before me remains ambiguous and uncertain. That is, in regard to the particular Other before me, one is never sure of the truth status of what she believes, because she speaks an entirely different language filled with foreign concepts and symbols, and which attaches different meanings to concepts that appear similar. In regard to the religion to which this Other belongs, it is also very difficult for the outsider to know when a language (symbols, concepts etc) of a foreign religion has been degraded, i.e. when it uses the same symbols and concepts it always has, but these signs no longer refer to the eternal truths in the minds of its speakers, but idolatrous errors instead. Moreover, even if one is able to discern that a religious language has become corrupted by idolatry, this does not conclusively reveal anything about its particular members. That is, since Mendelssohn has shorn truth and the universal human telos from their connection to specifically revealed doctrines pertaining to a particular community, insisting on the contrary that they are universally attainable to all rational beings, it is no longer tenable to simply identify an entire people or community as idolatrous. Rather, individuals within a religious community may differ significantly in regard to their recognition of the eternal truths. As a result of these ambiguities, Mendelssohn contends
that intellectual honesty compels us to acknowledge that the particular Other before me could be affirming the truths of the ‘religion of reason,’ but she also might not.

While Mendelssohn’s thought is far richer than is often recognized, it is not ultimately successful in solving the problem of Deuteronomic-monotheism and intolerance. Mendelssohn’s thought is unsuccessful for at least two major reasons. First, his account of rational universalism, his natural theology, is predicated upon a homogeneity and equality between different religions. Given his natural theology, in order to be rational, all religions must affirm the same basic truths about the universe and everyone must have the same basic capacity to grasp and acknowledge these truths. Such a position is not conducive for the moments of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-Judaism. As such, he is forced to introduce and then ultimately privilege the logic of scriptural universalism, even as he insists upon maintaining the criteria of rational universalism, his ‘religion of reason.’ This brings us to the second reason for his failure. His metaphysical foundation is such that he is forced to have recourse to scriptural universalism, but the logic of scriptural universalism is utterly incompatible with his natural theology, and thus his thought dissolves into incoherence. It is absolutely essential to the ultimate success of the religion of reason trajectory that Mendelssohn’s successors break from Mendelssohn in regards to both metaphysics and the relationship to scriptural universalism. That is, Kant and Cohen shift away from Mendelssohn’s metaphysical account of religion to an ethical one, and both will, although to differing degrees, privilege rational over scriptural universalism.
Immanuel Kant

The second thinker that we will consider, Immanuel Kant, is the least successful member of the religion of reason trajectory, although he nevertheless provides innovations that prove essential for the ultimate success of the trajectory's endeavor. Kant is a peculiar figure and locating him within this trajectory of thinkers is a bit questionable, given that at many points his thought appears to have more in common with an externalist thinker such as Habermas than with either Mendelssohn or Cohen. Like Habermas, Kant begins with a philosophy external to any specific religious tradition in order to think through the conditions for the possibility of peace between religions. Then, he proceeds to insist all religions accept and internalize these conditions, bring themselves into accord with his thoroughly moral notion of the 'religion of reason,' in order to accomplish this. However, it is nevertheless essential to include Kant with Mendelssohn and Cohen in the religion of reason trajectory, not only because he makes significant contributions in the critique of scriptural universalism, but also because his innovations concerning the ethical turn in regard to religion and the subordination of scriptural universalism to rational universalism are essential ingredients for the consummation of this trajectory, the thought of Hermann Cohen.

The first significant contribution that Kant makes to the religion of reason trajectory is that contrary to Mendelssohn's emphasis on metaphysical doctrines in his natural theological conception of religion, Kant renders the metaphysical aspects of religion derivative and supplemental to morality. Whereas Mendelssohn merely replaces the metaphysical paradigm that underlies the traditional conception of monotheism with another—albeit more inclusive—one, Kant undercuts the metaphysical enterprise as a
whole. To be sure, Kant has rightfully earned his place in the canon of the history of philosophy for dismantling the traditional conception of the metaphysical enterprise through rigorously articulating an account of the limits of human knowledge. However, Kant's distrust of metaphysics stems not only from his convictions about its illegitimate claims to knowledge, but also as a result of his beliefs that it fosters religious intolerance and violence. Kant hopes to shift the emphasis in religious matters from theoretical metaphysical concerns to moral ones. By restricting questions of the divine to practical questions, to moral concerns, which Kant thinks arise universally for all human beings in a fundamentally similar manner, he claims to have found the method for escaping the bloody wars fought over the mutually exclusive metaphysical positions of different religious groups. This aspect of Kant's thought is particularly effective in diagnosing the limits of communication and consensus-reaching implicit in the logic of scriptural universalism, in whatever specific form it takes.

However, as it appears in Kant's thought, this innovation is ultimately unsuccessful for solving the problem of the violence related to monotheistic intolerance. Despite Kant's claims to the contrary, his account of morality and the 'religion of reason' fail to genuinely constitute a rational universalism, and thus Kant fatally overestimates the capacity of his morality and 'religion of reason' to be shared and agreed upon by people in different religious, cultural, and historical contexts. As Hegel and many others have shown, Kant smuggles many culturally and historically specific assumptions into these notions, and thus they are far from possessing genuine universality and necessity, the conditions for rational universalism.
The second divergence from Mendelssohn's religious thought that Kant innovates is the subordination of the logic of scriptural universalism to that of rational universalism. To be sure, Mendelssohn attempts to sustain his account of rational universalism, but in the end, he privileges the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism, and his account of idolatry and election are incomprehensible to human reason. With Kant on the other hand, there is no interaction or even really coexistence between rational universalism and scriptural universalism, in that Kant sets about radically undermining the logic of scriptural universalism through thoroughly rationalizing God and purging the pole of particularity of all significance. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant uses his transcendental method to reconstruct the conditions for the possibility of moral consciousness. The postulate of God is one such presupposed or transcendental condition. While we cannot prove God's existence theoretically, it is reasonable to assume it, given the eminent rationality of morality, which presupposes it. In *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, Kant uses this postulate-notion to license the domestication of the theological conception of God. Since it is morality alone that justifies reason in accepting the existence of God, God must be conceived strictly according to the needs of morality. Kant's God-postulate is merely a principle for the intelligibility of the moral enterprise. In the 'Kingdom of Ends' it is not God who is king but reason.

Despite the firm limits Kant places on human knowledge vis-à-vis the divine, and despite his historically unprecedented movement toward post-metaphysical thought, he nevertheless preserves a notion of the universal human telos. This conception of the human telos is not rooted in metaphysics, but rather in moral philosophy. The telos lies in
becoming a moral agent, a self-legislating member of the ‘Kingdom of Ends.’\(^9\) Kant’s notion of the ‘religion of reason’ derives from this telos, as it is an ideal consisting of the basic set of beliefs or postulates about God, freedom and immortality, as well as a this-worldly future, that he believes to be implied in, and necessary for, the coherence of, the moral enterprise.\(^9\)

Kant constructs the ‘religion of reason’ as an ideal of religion, consisting of the basic set of beliefs about God, freedom, immortality, as well as a future ethical commonwealth, in addition to laws and sense of duty, that he believes to be implied in the very nature of morality itself. Since it is derivative from, and supplemental to, morality, Kant’s account of the ‘religion of reason’ lies a priori in the rationality of all human beings; it only needs to be elicited through critical thought. In stark contrast to the universality and necessity of the ‘religion of reason,’ existing historical religions are particular and contingent in nature, rooted in particular communities and specific traditions. In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant argues that what is uncovered about God through an investigation into the transcendental conditions of the moral law, provides us with the only necessary and universal *truths* (they are practical postulates not theoretical knowledge) that we can possess about the divine. From the necessity and universality of the moral law, i.e. that it appears (or ought to appear) as valid and binding to all men at all times, Kant argues, that the moral notion of God is superior to all the conflicting notions of the divine operative in the numerous, divergent, and often mutually antagonistic accounts of concretely existing, historical religions throughout the world. Kant does not rule out the possibility of miracles and revelation, phenomenon constitutive of actually existing historical religions (as opposed to the ideal
of the ‘religion of reason,’) but he subordinates their importance. That is, given that such events are necessarily contingent and particular in nature, occurring in specific times and places, they are of little worth when compared to morality and the ‘religion of reason,’ which necessarily and universally apply to all human beings at all times.\footnote{\protectcite{91}} Kant argues that, in fact, historical religions, with their specific beliefs, rituals and practices only have value insofar as they aid in the spread and inculcation of the moral religion. According to Kant, these historical religions are only temporarily necessary, in that at present human beings are too immature to accept the austerity of the moral religion in all its purity.

In addition to the dyad of ‘religion of reason’ and historical religions, there is a third element, idolatry, which enters Kant’s account of religion. Idolatry is confusion about the proper (moral) conception of God, which results in erroneous conceptions of religion and morality among particular instantiations of historical religions. Kant zealously tries to empty God of any significance other than moral. Since the only valid morality requires a specific conception of human autonomy for Kant, if one subordinates morality to God’s will, then one vitiates morality entirely. Not only does this idolatrous error lead to the violation of the purity of morality, but it also leads to a superstitious emphasis in historical religions. That is, when one subordinates morality to the will of God, it is a small step easily and frequently taken to claim that specific practices of worship, particular doctrines of belief, etc, are equally if not more important than morality in the service of God.\footnote{\protectcite{92}} Kant regards such service as mere superstition, as illegitimately attempting to elicit personal salvation through non-moral means. Kant attributes this error to the fact that it is easier (though less wholesome) for people to conceive of God in an anthropomorphic manner, as a mighty being that can be assuaged
through prayers and rituals designed to flatter and show obeisance, rather than a rational one that requires only the eminently difficult process of living morally.

However, idolatry is not only problematic because it detracts from the hard work of morality, but it can also undermine the very possibility for inter-religious peace and human communality on a large scale. In disagreement with Mendelssohn, Kant finds the diversity of different existing religions to pose a great danger for any sort of international peace and accord, as disparate metaphysical commitments and the modes of worshipping they engender are often mutually exclusive, and incommensurable with one another. Diverse religions present mutually exclusive and often radically contradictory pictures of the universal human telos. Thus, if morality is displaced as the true aim of religion (and becoming a self-legislatiting member of the ‘Kingdom of Ends’ is displaced as the true telos of the human being), then disputes between different religious communities do not allow for the possibility of any mutually recognized framework or values through which the conflict can be mediated. This prevents any possibility of agreement or commonality, as the only possible common ground that can arise is if one party converts to that of the Other. However, in such a situation all parties are equally contingent and particular in nature, oriented by religious fanaticism not rational morality. Thus, for Kant, conversion can bring no real progress toward a genuine, rational peace.

Kant is not so much concerned with reconciling monotheistic religions with tolerance or pluralism, but rather he seeks to undermine the conditions which produce intolerance in monotheistic religions, indeed, in all religions. His proposed solution to this problem is, by means of his far reaching critiques concerning the transcendental conditions for human reason, to establish a clear predominance of rational universalism
over scriptural universalism. This will enable a deep homogeneity built upon universal morality and the shared ‘religion of reason’ rooted in this universal morality to arise between different religions, thus extirpating those conditions that create intolerance and violence. To be sure, these are the same conditions that might also generate tolerance and pluralism, since intolerance and tolerance/pluralism are different ways of responding to substantial difference in the Other that confronts the self. Kant’s solution is to eradicate this difference, at least at its deepest level, so that while different religious traditions may still exist, they will be but empty husks in the service to the same true religion, the ‘religion of reason,’ which unites rather than divides people. In this sense, it is curious to note how much of the logic of monotheistic intolerance that Kant retains in his own thought, even as he seeks to extirpate it. Kant’s ‘religion of reason’ cannot tolerate Otherness, but demands that everyone accept its account of rationality. Just as the monotheistic religions before him, Kant envisions an eschaton where all otherness is destroyed and a harmonious society of autonomous, rational beings rule themselves in an ethical commonwealth.

Kant differs from the other thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory in that when he reconstructs the moments of the discursive structure of a Deuteronomistic-monotheism he does not do so specifically from within that community, but rather does so for the sake of a new religion, the ‘religion of reason.’ Christianity is only an example of the ‘religion of reason’ for him, it enjoys no qualitative distinctness. Christianity’s only distinction is quantitative, as Kant claims that it most perfectly embodies the ideal of the ‘religion of reason,’ and thus, when properly understood, it exists least in conflict with the ‘religion of reason.’ Kant’s stress on rational universalism prevents any
particular monotheistic community from being elected to a special divine mission. Christianity, for Kant, like all other particular, historical religions (scriptural universalism is not a genuine universalism because it lacks rational necessity and thus does not possess genuine universality), is charged with the task of the formation of the ethical commonwealth, which brings together all rational beings in a community run by autonomous virtue and rationality rather than political power and religious superstition. The stage of history, then, is not a struggle between the Christian community in particular to bring about a reconciliation between God’s will and the human order, but rather the struggle among the rational of all religious communities in order to bring about the ethical commonwealth. Similarly, the eschatological endpoint is conceived entirely in terms of the ‘religion of reason,’ not in terms of anything specific to Christianity.

Although Kant’s thought has characteristics of both the religion of reason trajectory and the externalist approach, it proves to be the most direct inheritor of the legacy of monotheistic intolerance. Kant’s morality and ‘religion of reason’ cannot constitute a genuine rational universalism, and thus end up excluding significant amounts of people as irrational. That is, for Kant’s thought the Other is always irrational, because if one has reason, according to Kant’s very specific definition of what constitutes reason, then one is not genuinely Other. Thus, there is no room for genuine difference in his ‘religion of reason,’ and in this sense, his thought is a step backwards from Mendelssohn’s who at least allows mystery and uncertainty to permeate the Other. Kant’s overly robust account of reason, in its rush to overthrow Deuteronomic-monotheisms and the logic scriptural universalism ends up appropriating many of its most problematic features, when one bears in mind that his notion of reason is not a genuine rational
universalism. Thus, just as much as the monotheistic religions that his thought seeks to replace, there is no room for those who disagree with his universalist agenda (although one cannot claim it is rationally universal), and the Other is one who is not only ensconced in error and idolatry but is also destined to disappear.

_Hermann Cohen_

Hermann Cohen, writing almost a century later than Mendelssohn and Kant, is the culmination of the religion of reason trajectory, in that his thought utilizes elements of the work of both of his predecessors coupled with strikingly original innovations of his own, in order to present the most successful solution to the violence inherent in monotheistic intolerance. There are two major reasons why Cohen succeeds where his predecessors do not. First, Cohen understands that monotheistic religions are intrinsically intolerant, and thus unlike Mendelssohn and Kant, he does not try to extirpate those conditions which produce intolerance. As a result, whereas Mendelssohn and Kant are compelled to import heterogeneous elements into the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms in the attempt to undermine the conditions which produce intolerance, Cohen is able to use sources indigenous to Judaism to show that monotheistic religions possess resources by which to render their innate intolerance ethical. Cohen thus breaks with his predecessors in that he does not try to extirpate the conditions that produce intolerance, but rather shows that monotheistic religions, or at least Judaism, possess resources by which to transform this intolerance into an ethically productive force. And second, while Cohen ultimately privileges rational universalism, with the exception of its notion of an unfathomable God, he not only preserves the logic of scriptural universalism, with its dynamic interplay between particularism and universalism, he also brings it into the
service of rational universalism. That is, Cohen is able to not merely allow rational universalism to coexist with scriptural universalism, but he renders their relationship productive. Through these means, Cohen’s religious thought presents a tenable rationalist reconstruction of Deuteronomic-monotheism, or at least Deuteronomic-Judaism, that successfully transfigures the intolerance of monotheistic religions in an ethical manner, thus solving the problem of monotheistic violence.

Whereas Mendelssohn and Kant attempt to eradicate those conditions in monotheism which create intolerance, Cohen has a more modest task, to render monotheistic intolerance ethical. Mendelssohn and Kant import heterogeneous, ‘rationally universal’ elements into the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms in order to either reconcile monotheistic religions with tolerance (Mendelssohn) or to overcome intolerance altogether through eradicating difference and particularity by means of the radical homogeneity of a robust rational universalism (Kant). In both cases, the imported elements of rational universalism prove problematic, either being irreconcilable with the monotheistic worldview (Mendelssohn), or appropriating the characteristics of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms and thus inheriting their intolerance (Kant). In both cases their projects founder.

In contrast to Mendelssohn and Kant, Cohen argues that the intolerance of Deuteronomic-Judaism is not rooted in hatred or antagonism for the Other but rather in ethical responsibility. In order to accomplish this, Cohen establishes a hermeneutic for reading the Jewish sources in an ethical rationalist light. Cohen is adamant that the literary sources of Judaism have different levels of interpretation and thus rationality.
While Cohen considers morality to be the highest stage of reasoning, it is often obstructed, in both religion and philosophy, by what Cohen refers to as ‘myth’ or ‘mythical’ thought. Throughout his writings, both secular-philosophical, such as his voluminous work on ethics, Ethik des reinen Willens,94 and his explicitly Jewish writings, Ethics of Maimonides,95 Religion und Sittlichkeit,96 and his magisterial posthumous work, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism,97 Cohen finds true monotheism to be rooted in the radical opposition to myth. Myth, according to Cohen, is thought fixated upon metaphysical questions of essence, substance, and origin. Cohen considers the mythical to be a stage of religiosity and thought prior to religion and (critical) reason. Mythical (metaphysical) concerns, Cohen believes, not only distract or obstruct people from clearly perceiving practical, moral issues, which are of paramount importance, but can lead to violence against the Other.98 Cohen reads Judaism as the monotheistic tradition par excellence, in that it excels in perpetually rationalizing itself, in continually shifting from mythical/metaphysical interests and interpretations to the direction of ethical and moral ones. Thus, Cohen’s account of Judaism transfigures all mythical and metaphysical aspects of the Jewish tradition through demythologizing interpretations that focus on ethics. In this vein, Cohen maintains a notion of the divinely ordained, universal human telos through transforming this once metaphysical notion into an infinite ethical task, to become an ethical self, a sort of regulative ideal towards which one must infinitely strive.

Cohen understands the election of the Jews in terms of their mission to disclose to the world the idea of the unique God, an idea of universal significance to which their particular, national literature gave birth. The idea of the Unique God, the founding idea of
the national literature of the Jews, is, in fact, the ultimate foundation of morality and
generates the ideal of humanity. Unfortunately, the idea of the unique God and its
corollaries, morality and the idea of humanity do not exist unopposed. The world as it is
remains dominated by the logic of power and greed, which Cohen equates with
polytheism and idolatry. The Jew must not tolerate idolatry, but must work tirelessly to
promote the acceptance of the idea of the unique God, and this means rejecting the beliefs
and practices of the Other.

However, since monotheism is inherently bound up with morality and the ideal of
humanity, the rejection of polytheism and idolatry cannot involve any sort of physical
violence against the Other or even any sort of failure to recognize her humanity. Cohen is
able to preserve the elected community's intolerance against the Other while removing
violence from it by means of the bearing witness modality of promulgation, in fact taking
it insofar as martyrdom. The Jews, historically, have existed as stateless and powerless,
as martyrs bearing witness to the ideal of God and morality, suffering nearly constant
persecution by the Other. Their very stateless existence coupled with their unwillingness
to resort to force testifies to an order other than that of history, morality. It testifies that
the moral ideal has not yet been realized, and that redemption is yet to come. The Jew
becomes the willing victim of violence as a means of protest against the state of the
world, the present, this idolatrous, barbarous world where might makes right. The Jew
testifies to another order, the future, ruled by moral reason rather than eudemonism,
power and greed. However, in testifying the Jew does not fail to recognize the humanity
of the Other, but rather testifies for the Other, to show the Other the reality of this other
order. Since the idea of the unique God is an idea of reason, and Cohen has reconstructed
Deuteronomic-Judaism upon a foundation of rational universalism, the Other is capable of comprehending that about which the Jew bears witness, and, in fact, the Other can join the Jew, as one of the 'righteous of the nations' in testifying to God's order upon this earth.

The second manner in which Cohen's divergence from his predecessors proves vital to his success lies with the way in which he is able to subordinate scriptural universalism to rational universalism. Whereas Kant's unilateral stress on universality eviscerates scriptural universalism since it requires a dialectical interplay of particularity and universality, Cohen manages to not only preserve scriptural universalism (except for its notion of God), but to bring it into service of rational universalism. That is, Cohen's rationalizing hermeneutical approach to the Jewish literary tradition accounts for the gradual emergence of the logic of rational universalism out of the early texts dominated by the logic of scriptural universalism. Gradually, the logic of rational universalism comes to dominate, although Cohen always preserves a tense dialectic between particularity and universality, in that the particular national literature of the Jews gives birth to the universal idea of the unique God, and the particular people of the Jews are to bear witness to the universal ideas of the unique God and the ideal of the united humanity in history.

Demythologization, Cohen argues, makes Judaism more concerned with ethical matters than metaphysical ones. Like Mendelssohn and Kant, Cohen argues that erroneous conceptions of God are the primary source of religious violence and moral offenses. Cohen argues that Judaism, at least in its ideal form, stresses God's radical unknowability. Judaism, Cohen avers, is uninterested with abstract metaphysical
speculations about God, such as the nature of God’s essence, etc., but rather finds itself concerned exclusively with ethical meanings of God. In fact, God is understood only in correlation with human beings, only as the logical foundation to morality. That is, Judaism, Cohen argues, is primarily concerned with God as the postulated ultimate ground for the coherence of the right and the good (not to be manifest until the infinitely deferred Messianic future), and God as the moral exemplar through the command of *Imitatio Dei*, conceived in purely ethical terms. With *Imitatio Dei*, God serves as the ultimate exemplar of the moral ideal, for which the human being, as ethical agent, will forever strive to exemplify. In ‘Religion und Sittlichkeit,’ an important but often overlooked ‘Jewish essay,’ Cohen fruitfully juxtaposes his account of the Jewish notion of God against other monotheistic conceptions in order to expose how mythic conceptions of God lead to the exclusion of, and violence against, the Other. Cohen claims, in a rather innovative style of reading, that from the prophets through Maimonides and beyond, Jewish thinkers have demythologized God in order to thrust inter-human relationships to the center of religion. That is, the pre-eminent religious issue ceases to be ‘superstitious’ concerns about appeasing God, as if God were some magical person, and becomes instead the responsibility for the Other in her suffering.

Cohen succeeds where Mendelssohn and Kant fail, in that he is able to render the ethical reconfiguration of monotheistic intolerance as a natural development of the literary tradition of Judaism; it does not require the importation of foreign material. In addition, unlike Mendelssohn and Kant, he preserves a productive interaction between the logics of rational and scriptural universalism rather than bringing them into outright contradiction with one another or sacrificing one to the other. Cohen’s thought is very
much the culmination of the religion of reason trajectory, presenting a compelling case for thinking through the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheistic religions upon rationalist grounds. As such, his thought merits reconsideration not only in the context of Modern Jewish Thought but for contemporary religious thought in all three Deuteronomic-monotheistic traditions.

1 I employ the term ‘Other’ to denote a person who is different from oneself in some way that merits a response involving toleration and/or pluralism. Given the specific nature of this project, this involves cultural, and, especially religious, difference.

2 While some scholars such as Nick Fotion and Gerard Elffstrom, in their book, Toleration, (Tuscaloosa: The U of Alabama P, 1992) 10, subtly differentiate between ‘tolerance’ and ‘toleration,’ it is also common to use these terms interchangeably, as is the case in the edited collection, David Heyd, ed., Toleration: An Elusive Virtue (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996) 17, n.1. In this project, we will use these terms interchangeably. Fortunately, those scholars, such as Fotion and Elffstrom, who do employ a differentiation between ‘tolerance’ and ‘toleration’ tend to make this differentiation so nuanced as to be essentially irrelevant for our more broad concerns, which do not require such high levels of precision in this regard.

3 To be sure, we are talking about what philosophers would call cases of ‘strong’ toleration, where moral disapproval is involved. This is opposed to cases of ‘weak’ toleration, where concerns involve matters of cultural etiquette or subjective preferences rather than issues possessing moral overtones. For the purposes of this project only cases of strong toleration are relevant, and therefore when we say ‘tolerance,’ strong toleration is implied.


5 See Fotion and Elffstrom, Toleraton, 9, 13.


8 For a detailed account of this rationale in monotheistic religions, see Avishai Margalit, “The Ring: or on Religious Pluralism,” Toleraton: An Elusive Virtue, 147-157.

9 Fotion and Engstrom title this rationale for toleration, “tactical-empirical,” Toleraton, 36.


11 See Fotion and Elffstrom, Toleraton, p.61; Jay Newman in Foundations of Religious Toleraton, (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1989) 8-9, argues that it is especially true in religious toleration, that the subject tolerates the Other but does not suffer her beliefs and practices. That is, with toleration, the subject still considers her own position as primary, as superior. In other words, the beliefs and practices of the Other are respected because they pertain to the Other. To do otherwise would be to disrespect the Other, which is not acceptable. In and of themselves, however, these beliefs and practices are not given the same regard as the subject’s own.


14 Wong, Moral Relativity, 180

15 Wong, Moral Relativity, 189-190

16 Martin S. Jaffee “One God, One Revelation, One People: on the Symbolic Structure of Elective Monotheism,” Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 69 (December 2001) 753-775; Jaffee’s concern in this essay, like our own in this project, is with monotheistic religions that are rooted in the
Hebraic Scriptures in some form or another. Jaffee refers to these religions as ‘elective monotheisms’ in order to differentiate them from other religions or philosophies that stress the one-ness of God.  
17 Given that the Deuteronomic model of monotheism is our exclusive concern here, I will use the terms ‘Deuteronomic-monotheism’ and ‘monotheism’ interchangeably with each other. Both of these terms are, in turn, interchangeable with Jaffee’s term ‘elective monotheism.’

18 Jaffee actually configures these moments into two intersecting planes, one vertical and one linear. While this is quite valuable in the context of his essay, as it demonstrates how this generic structure (761) manifests itself in Judaism, Christianity and Islam respectively (763), for our purposes it is not necessary.

19 Traditionally conceived, God is almost always conceived as male, although there may be feminine sides or aspects of God, as in the Shechinah in Judaism.


23 Assmann, Die Mosaische Unterscheidung, 13-14.

24 Assmann, Die Mosaische Unterscheidung, 14.

25 Assmann offers some insights into the nature of this truth, such that it is grounded in transcendence as opposed to immanence, but he mostly remains on a historical-cultural level in his investigations. However, these are not sufficient for our purposes.


27 Halbertal and Margalit, Idolatry, 171.

28 Halbertal and Margalit, Idolatry, 171; Actually, here Halbertal and Margalit do not limit this claim to monotheistic religions. They claim that all religions, or religion as such, make this attempt to transform an undefined purpose into a defined one. However, the research of cultural-historians such as Assmann suggest that this tendency is particularly strong in monotheistic religions.


33 Jaffee, “One God, One Revelation, One People” 774.

34 In the emerging debate over monotheism and tolerance, the critics of monotheism, many of whom I am using in this section, are as guilty of not respecting the ambiguity of monotheism’s relationship to universality and particularity as the advocates. If the advocates fail to appreciate the significance of the particularist nature of monotheistic religions, the critics fail to appreciate the resources within monotheistic religions themselves for ameliorating this antagonistic energy through recourse to the universality of God. To be sure, however, religious fundamentalists are perhaps even guiltier than the critics of monotheism in failing to recognize the capacity within monotheistic religions to ameliorate the antagonistic energy through recourse to God’s universality.

35 There are some features of traditional monotheistic religions which mitigate, or at least can potentially mitigate the hostility of the exclusivity of such notions of identity. We can see a prime example of this in regard to a certain feature of the purity codes in the Hebrew Bible, a corpus shared in some form or other by all three Deuteronomic-monotheistic traditions. In regard to the purity codes of the Hebrew Bible, there are specific priestly rites that pertain to purity codes that must be respected in regard to the temple in general, and specific places within the Temple (the holy of holies which is only for the high priest) that other Israelites need not obey. Although, to be sure, if a lay-Israelite does become impure he or she must obey the rules to become pure, so that his or her impurity does not affect the temple (Jacob Milgrom, “Priestly (P) Sourc,” The Anchor Bible Dictionary. V.5, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 455). However, what is promising, from a perspective of tolerance, is that there are also certain ritual laws of purity, less stringent of course, that apply to humanity as a whole, which are contained under the universal prohibition
to shed blood in Genesis 9" (Milgrom, "Priestly ('P') Source, 456-457). At least in this instance, then, one can make a case for the Israelites offering a form of tolerance for Others, in that the Other is accepted as Other (at least to some degree), as not being subject to the same codes and rules as the monotheistic community.

36 Margalit, "The Ring: or on Religious Pluralism," Tolerance: An Elusive Virtue, 156.
37 Assmann, Die Mosaische Unterscheidung, 29.
38 Jaffé, "One God, One Revelation, One People," 762.
40 Jaffé, "One God, One Revelation, One People," 760-761.
41 Jaffé, "One God, One Revelation, One People," 773.
42 I would like to thank Professor David Cook for providing me with this information concerning Islam.
43 These three modalities of promulgation of the monotheistic message are ideal types and I do not mean to suggest that only Jews ‘bear witness,’ and that all Christians and all Muslims take part in the latter two modalities exclusively. Similarly, I am not claiming that in empirical reality these modalities exist in their ideal purity, as they very well may exist intermingled with one another. Nevertheless it is useful to consider them as ideal types.
44 Jaffé, "One God, One Revelation, One People," 768-769
47 Lyotard, The Differend, 138 (#190), 141 (#199).
50 The notion of telos operative in Habermas’ thought is collective, pertaining the development of the communicative capacities of human beings on a societal level, whereas the notion of telos operative in the Deuteronomic-monotheisms and the religion of reason trajectory pertains to individual human beings.
54 Habermas, The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity, 315.
56 While Lyotard’s specific discussions of Judaism and Christianity are interesting in their own right in terms of the history of philosophy, they are not appropriate for this particular discussion. Lyotard’s readings of Judaism are highly stylized and heavily influenced by Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, who present intellectually stimulating, but often idiosyncratic, accounts of the religious tradition. However, Lyotard reads them as if they are reliable historians of religion, when in fact they are philosophers attempting to get at the essence, or presenting an ideal (though they would object vigorously to terms such as ‘ideal’ and ‘essence’) of what they believe Judaism to be about. In fact, Lyotard rarely mentions Judaism without quoting either Levinas or Buber. As for Christianity, Lyotard essentially (though not completely) subsumes it under the category of the modern, because of its universal impetus. That is, he is quick to point out how the metanarrative of Christianity and its teaching of love is denuded of its revelatory status, but its universalistic form remains in the metanarratives of modernity. Lyotard, The Differend, 160-161 (#235).


60 The epistemic conditions of modernity apply to all modern entities, and do not apply simply to the institution of religion. For a helpful discussion of the epistemic conditions of modernity see Donald Jay Rothberg, “Rationality and Religion in Habermas’ Recent Work: Some Remarks Between Critical Theory and the Phenomenology of Religion,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, V11, (Summer 1986,) 222-223.


66 Habermas, “Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World,” *Religion and Rationality*, 76.


69 However, this zeitgeist is rapidly changing before our eyes, to an often highly uncritical embrace of religion. For better or worse, Habermas’ thesis concerning the ‘linguistification of the sacred,’ put forward only a few decades ago, is looking more and more anachronistic in recent years.


71 The ongoing notion of revelation operative in rabbinic Judaism is nevertheless rooted in the event of Sinai.


74 Actually, Anscombe considers Kant a characteristically modern thinker. However, I think she considerably underestimates his theistic commitments.

75 In order to facilitate clarity, I will use scare quotes to distinguish between the religion of reason trajectory (no scare quotes) that these thinkers apply to religion in general, the ‘religion of reason’ (scare quotes).


78 Moses Mendelsohn, *Jerusalem: Or on Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. Allan Arkush (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1983). Henceforth we will refer to this work as simply *Jerusalem*.

79 Even Alexander Altmann, one of Mendelsohn’s most sympathetic critics, describes Mendelsohn’s hypothesis about the origins of idolatry in writing to be “the least substantiated of all the theories he ever advanced.” (*Moses Mendelsohn: A Biographical Study*. [London: Vallentine Mitchell & Co. Ltd., 1973.] 546.)


81 The classical expressions of this argument in Mendelsohn scholarship can be seen in Alexander Altmann’s *Moses Mendelsohn: A Biographical Study*, 546-547; Fritz Bamberger’s Mendelsohn’s


85 Moral experience is not dealt with in the third *Critique* to the degree to which it is in the first two. Obviously, morality is the major theme of the second *Critique*. However, moral experience is also a major theme in the “Dialectic” of the First *Critique*.


90 Kant’s most extended discussion of the moral postulates take place in the “Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason,” in *Critique of Practical Reason*, 137-184.

91 Emil Fackenheim argues that implicit in Kant’s notion of religion is the premise that the moral law in fact makes irrelevant any notion of direct encounter with the divine Presence. Fackenheim, “Kant and Judaism,” *Commentary*, V.36, (December 1963), 465.

92 Such practices only have value for Kant if they help inculcate morality.

93 The positions of Kant and Mendelssohn are not, however, as distinct as might initially appear. Whereas Mendelssohn thinks that all religions which are not idolatrous maintain a grasp on the same eternal, metaphysical truths requisite for morality, Kant thinks all religions that are not idolatrous privilege the moral notion of religion, which hold a post-metaphysical version of these truths — they are held as postulates not through metaphysical arguments. The difference, then, largely pertains to Mendelssohn and Kant’s respective positions towards metaphysics. Thus, both Mendelssohn and Kant see difference as only cultural and linguistic but that the same truths are essentially affirmed. Genuine difference, for both, implies that degeneration and a loss of reason has occurred, and thus is problematic and immoral.


Chapter 2

Mendelssohn, Monotheism, and the Indiscernible Other

In his major new study on the intersection of Judaism with pluralism and democracy, *The Jewish Social Contract: an Essay in Political Theology*, traditionalist Jew, David Novak, devotes a sustained examination to the thought of Moses Mendelssohn. As opposed to the legacy of Jewish thinkers “from the talmudic Rabbis to Abravanel,” which Novak thinks should be “retrieved” and appropriated by contemporary Jewish social thought, Novak concludes that “Jews need to overcome Mendelssohn rather than retrieve him.” Novak finds Mendelssohn’s thought (as opposed to his exemplary traditionalist Jewish life) to be highly influential in subsequent Jewish dealings with modernity, and to be guilty of ceding too much to the secular state, leaving insufficient space for a robust account of Judaism and Jewish life.

Whereas Novak stresses the “great influence” of Mendelssohn upon subsequent Jewish life and thought, one which he considers to be deleterious in nature, I argue the contrary, that Mendelssohn has not been heeded sufficiently, either in subsequent Jewish thought or philosophy of religion in general. And more importantly, whereas Novak concludes that Mendelssohn is to be overcome rather than retrieved, I argue the contrary that our current world situation warrants that Mendelssohn’s project, if not in all its details at least in its spirit, should be retrieved rather than overcome, and not just by adherents of Judaism, but by all three Deuteronomic-monotheistic traditions. As the founder of the religion of reason trajectory, his writings on religion, particularly the ‘religion of reason’ (or natural religion) and its relationship to Judaism and Christianity
have much to contribute to our contemporary concerns about the tension between the
monotheistic worldview and the principles of tolerance and pluralism. Mendelssohn’s
particular strategy for dissolving, or at least relieving, the tension between monotheism
and tolerance consists in re-configuring the moments of the discursive structure of
Deuteronomic-monotheism upon a new, more inclusive metaphysical foundation. This
move in turn replaces the elected (monotheistic) community’s antagonistic conception of
the Other with a more ambiguous and uncertain one. Rather than conceiving of the Other
as one mired in error and evil along the lines of common Deuteronomic-monotheisms,
Mendelssohn’s re-configuration of Judaism enables the Other to be conceived as
something of an enigma, as one who might also possess the truth, albeit in a foreign
linguistic and symbolic idiom. However, despite his important inaugural contributions to
the religion of reason trajectory, there are certain indelible difficulties in his position
which require further developments in this school of thought, namely the subsequent
innovations of Kant and finally Cohen.

As I mentioned, Mendelssohn’s solution to the fateful connection of monotheism
and intolerance, is to reconfigure the monotheistic religion of Judaism such that its
primary conception of the Other ceases to be as one ensconced in sin and error, and
instead becomes one shrouded in ambiguity and uncertainty. And yet, in Mendelssohn
scholarship, by and large this ambiguity in regard to the Other has not been an area of
much concern. This is not to say that Mendelssohn’s conception of the Other is not an
important topic of scholarship: in fact, there are a diversity of opinions in regard to this
matter. The question of the Other surfaces in Mendelssohn’s thought in regard to his
discussions about the status of the election of the Jews and cultural egalitarianism, themes
which innately bear upon relations with the Other. In fact, there is an important
disagreement about these themes in Mendelssohn scholarship. One important school of
thought suggests that the election of the Jews and cultural egalitarianism are two
conflicting agendas in Mendelssohn’s thought. Scholars who hold this position argue that
these two tendencies are basically irreconcilable, as the election of the Jews entails a
qualitative distinction, indeed elevation, of the Jews over the Other, which is
incommensurable with Mendelssohn’s cultural egalitarian agenda. The disjunction
between these directions appears especially entrenched, these scholars claim, when one
considers that for Mendelssohn the election of the Jews emerges in regard to the
‘historical phenomenon’ of idolatry, which undermines the hold of other peoples on the
eternal truths. As a result, so this school of thought concludes, Mendelssohn’s position
collapses from self-contradiction.⁸

And yet, a significant strand of contemporary scholarship has been relatively
unconcerned with this apparent incommensurability between the election of the Jews and
cultural egalitarianism in Mendelssohn’s thought. For example, a recent, fairly
exhaustive examination of Mendelssohn’s work considers this apparent tension to be a
relatively insignificant matter, and one not particularly problematic for Mendelssohn’s
rationalist position.⁹ Other scholarly works, in contrast to the more traditional position
sketched above, minimize Mendelssohn’s arguments concerning Jewish election,
claiming, or more often, implying through omission, that the center of gravity of his
thought concerning the Other, is the thrust towards cultural egalitarianism. For these
scholars, Mendelssohn’s Jewish apologetics is secondary to other concerns such as
constructing a space for multiple religions to peacefully and productively flourish within
a shared civil society\textsuperscript{10} or elucidating a general philosophy of religious ritual through an examination of Jewish Halakhic practices.\textsuperscript{11} Implicit in such arguments is the claim that the apologetic aspects of Mendelssohn’s writings concerning the election of the Jews, rather than being seen as his central concern, should be understood primarily as a response to the historical circumstances under which Mendelssohn is compelled to write, i.e. defending himself and other Jews from Christian demands to convert.\textsuperscript{12}

While these two schools of thought among scholars offer much that is compelling in their readings of Mendelssohn’s texts, both are nevertheless insufficient. Neither of them can coherently link both tendencies of Mendelssohn’s thought—election and cultural egalitarianism—together. What these readings miss is precisely what makes his conception of Judaism of major importance for our investigation, not to mention modern Jewish thought and philosophy of religion in general. Mendelssohn, in fact, manages to retain both the notion of Jewish election \textit{and} openness to the Other in the form of a limited version of cultural egalitarianism.

In this chapter we will investigate this complex and seemingly paradoxical position which secures Mendelssohn’s importance for our discussion. Of particular value in discerning this different, more productive view of Mendelssohn’s thought, is to supplement his most well known and widely discussed text, \textit{Jerusalem: or on Religious Power and Judaism},\textsuperscript{13} with two lesser known and un-translated works, \textit{Gegenbetrachtungen über Bonnets Palingenesie}\textsuperscript{14} and especially, \textit{Sache Gottes},\textsuperscript{15} in addition to some of his letters and his early work on natural theology, \textit{Phaedon: or the Death of Socrates}.\textsuperscript{16} We will begin by discussing Mendelssohn’s natural theology, which serves as the rational universalism constitutive of the basis of his ‘religion of reason.’
First we will discuss how Mendelssohn uses this 'religion of reason' rooted in a natural theology which he takes to be rationally universal as an alternative to both the metaphysical scheme and the scriptural universalism inherent in common Deuteronomic-monotheisms. We will then discuss the polemical fashion by which Mendelssohn uses the 'religion of reason' to highlight the problem of the exclusive reign of the logic of scriptural universalism within Christianity. Next, we will discuss Mendelssohn’s account of Judaism, which is constructed along the lines of this new scheme of rationally universal natural theology. We will then discuss how this reconfiguration of Judaism allows a less intolerant re-conceptualization of the Other. Finally, we will discuss certain indelible problems with Mendelssohn’s endeavor as a whole which render it untenable despite its considerable virtues.

*The ‘Religion of Reason’ and the New Metaphysical Foundation of Monotheism*

Mendelssohn, more than the other thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory, is concerned with the exclusivistic aspects of monotheistic intolerance, that Deuteronomic-monotheisms ascribe exclusive access to the means for fulfilling the universal human telos to a particular religious community. Given the reliance of these religions upon scriptural universalism, which allows for the promulgation of their revealed truths only through non-rational (and often coercive) processes taking place in history, numerous people are deprived of access to their universal human telos. This is simply unacceptable for Mendelssohn, who finds such circumstances incommensurable with a perfect God and the best possible world, beliefs central in the natural theology that comprises the rational universalism fundamental to Mendelssohn’s reconfiguration of monotheism.

Mendelssohn seeks to counteract the exclusivistic proclivity of Deuteronomic-
monotheisms by means of providing a new metaphysical paradigm, one supplied by his work in natural theology, to underpin the moments of their discursive structures.

Throughout his writings, Mendelssohn avers that there is a rational archetype underlying and providing a normative measure for all extant religions, which he terms ‘natural religion’ or the ‘religion of reason.’ That is, Mendelssohn provides this ‘religion of reason’ as a form of rational universalism in order to serve as a supplement to scriptural universalism, although, as we will see, not only is he unwilling to purge Deuteronomic-monotheisms of scriptural universalism altogether but its logic and its God ultimately remain dominant in his religious thought. Mendelssohn’s rational universalism, although different in kind from scriptural universalism, remains intertwined with many of the same matters as the latter albeit in a very different form. The ‘religion of reason’ consists in knowledge of the basic eternal, metaphysical truths about God, Providence, and immortality of the soul. Mendelssohn insists that human beings must possess knowledge of these truths on an abstract, theoretical level at least in some capacity, i.e. must possess the ‘religion of reason’ in some capacity, if they are to have a fully human existence.

A central principle in Mendelssohn’s enterprise of integrating a rational universalism with scriptural universalism is the task of transforming the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism into a God that is comprehensible, or at least commensurate with reason. Mendelssohn attempts to accomplish this by means of the principle of God’s perfection, which is rooted in the Leibnizian-Wolffian school of natural theology. This principle is supposed to pervade every aspect of Mendelssohn’s notion of God, from necessitating God’s existence to securing a moral foundation to
God’s creation. In *Phaedon*, his early work on the immortality of the soul which earned him international acclaim, Mendelssohn reveals an important methodological procedure for acquiring knowledge about God that he more or less retains throughout his writings. This procedure is so important because, in keeping with the methodology of rational universalism, it allows Mendelssohn to render God essentially transparent to (human) reason. Socrates, Mendelssohn’s mouthpiece in this dialogue, states, “We must look to [God’s] supreme perfection… and endeavor to investigate what contradicts or accords with it. When we are convinced that any thing is incompatible with it, we may reject and deem it impossible, as if it were contrary to the nature and being of the things in consideration.”¹⁹ Since perfection belongs to God’s essence, a principle which Mendelssohn believes natural theology demonstrates to be true, then any action or characteristic ascribed to God by a religious tradition, theologian, or anyone else that would indicate anything less than perfection must be erroneous.

This notion of divine perfection is elaborated further in regard to creation, and more particularly, the human realm, in Mendelssohn’s work devoted to the issue of divine providence, *Sache Gottes*. In this work, Mendelssohn stresses that to properly understand divine providence it is essential that one correctly understand certain attributes of the divine. Mendelssohn criticizes the various schools of philosophy which err by privileging either the goodness [*Güte*] or the greatness [*Größe*] of God at the expense of the other. To privilege one attribute over the other leads to error, either to divine tyranny or divine powerlessness: both of which are indicative of an imperfection in God. However, Mendelssohn points out, “[t]he true religion of reason [*Religion der Vernunft*] considers them both in unity [*Verbindung*].”²⁰ These attributes are
equiprimordial, and all other attributes of God pertaining to providence such as wisdom and might are derived equally from them. From this equiprimordiality of God’s goodness and greatness, Mendelssohn argues that God not only wills the best possible world, but necessarily brings it about. To be sure, this does not mean that evils, i.e. unfortunate events and imperfections, do not exist. It means, rather, that these evil instances are by-products unavoidably bound up with the best possible state of affairs. That is, if God were to eliminate these particular, less than perfect instances it would entail bringing about a less than optimal state of affairs, which would be morally impossible for God to do, given God’s perfection. In other words, Mendelssohn is claiming that God’s nature thoroughly accords with the nature of human reason, such that God is rendered translucent to human inquiry.

Of great significance for Mendelssohn’s re-conceptualization of monotheism is his argument linking the inherent connection of God’s goodness and greatness to the unique place that rational beings enjoy in the created universe. That is, the rational universalism which Mendelssohn imports into Deuteronomic-monotheism, in contradistinction to scriptural universalism, imposes certain moral limits upon God in order to elevate the inherent worth of human beings. In Mendelssohn’s natural theology, rational beings, a category in which human beings belong, are different from all other beings in creation. Mendelssohn explains, “[rational beings] are their own genus,” because their rational nature gives them “their own independence [sein eigene Selbständigkeit].” That is, through their own means, rational beings inevitably strive after and achieve, however minimally, “an increase in inner perfection [eine Zuwachs an innerer Vollkommenheit].” What Mendelssohn means here is that human beings as
rational beings have an ideal of human perfection, towards which they unceasingly strive. As a result of their rational faculties human beings inevitably progress towards this goal, even if some people progress at a more rapid pace than others.

This independent, unceasing progress towards their own ideal distinguishes human beings, and any other rational beings that may exist, from animals and plants and all other creatures. Mendelssohn concludes from this that each individual rational being constitutes “equally his own small world [seine eigene kleine Welte].” This means that each individual is of infinite worth in and of herself, such that it would contradict God’s own perfection for God to sacrifice rational beings for the greater good of the whole, as each rational being represents an irreplaceable whole in and of itself. The best possible world means, then, according to Mendelssohn, that God is concerned not only with that state of affairs which offers the greatest preponderance of good/perfection over evil, but also that which does not sacrifice rational beings, i.e. terminate the progress towards their ideal of perfection, in its unfolding. From this Mendelssohn argues that eternal felicity [Glückseligkeit], which consists in the perpetual increase of human perfection ad infinitum that continues on even after bodily death, belongs to all human beings qua rational beings. Mendelssohn boldly states, “No single individual [Kein einziges Individuum] that is capable of felicity is [destined for] damnation, no citizen in the state of God is chosen for eternal misery.”

Mendelssohn substitutes this idea of the human being as a selbständige, rational being, who inherently progresses step by step towards her own eternal perfection, for the account of the universal human telos operative in common notions of monotheism, with staggering implications. It will be quite helpful to briefly juxtapose Mendelssohn’s
account of the human telos with the common monotheistic one, especially in light of other features of their respective metaphysical paradigms, such as God. As we discussed in chapter 1, common Deuteronomic-monotheisms maintain a tense dynamic between universalism and particularism. The universal God not only reveals himself to a particular community, but from this encounter a set of doctrines emerges with universal significance, in that it provides the decisive normative account of how all human beings are to live. However, this account of the universal human telos is given to a particular community alone, and thus all those outside this community are, unbeknownst to them, estranged from God and thus ensconced in error and sin. It becomes the historical task of the particular community that is elected by virtue of being recipients of the revelatory encounter with the universal God to spread the revealed teachings of this God to the rest of the world in some form or another. However, until that happens, tension runs strong between those who are inside the community and those who are outside of it.

By injecting a rationally universal natural theology into this dialectical interchange between particularism and universalism, Mendelssohn radically reconfigures it. In contradistinction to the scriptural universalism of Deuteronomic-monotheism discussed above, Mendelssohn argues that all human beings as rational beings are capable of reaching their teloi, the infinite striving after perfection, on their own, without revelation.⁵⁹ Mendelssohn finds divine revelation, i.e. the logic of scriptural universalism, to be deficiently universal, in that its salvific message is inevitably limited to a particular community, at least for long historical periods. Since exclusion of large numbers of human beings from fulfilling their telos is irreconcilable with the perfect God
of his theology, Mendelssohn argues that as a medium, revelation is unsuitable for providing human beings with access to their universal teloi.

Rather than accepting the non-self-evident religious laws or doctrines of the scriptural universalisms of the Deuteronomic-monotheisms, according to Mendelssohn, all that is needed to be able to accord with one’s telos is a rudimentary grasp on what he terms the ‘eternal truths.’ The eternal truths are the metaphysical truths constitutive of the ‘religion of reason’ and which bolster morality. Mendelssohn claims that the eternal truths “without which man cannot be enlightened and happy,” are provided by the “Supreme Being...to all rational creatures...inscrib[ing] them in the soul.” In marked contrast to the common Deuteronomic-monotheisms, Mendelssohn explains, “[s]ince all men must have been destined by their Creator to attain eternal bliss, no particular religion can have an exclusive claim to truth.” Since Mendelssohn identifies eternal felicity with the human telos, we see that Mendelssohn’s natural theology effects nothing short of an utter reversal of the investment of the particular community with the exclusive possession of access to the universal human telos, a position lying at the heart of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms. That is, the universal God provides all human beings with access to their universal human telos through the universal human capacity of reason. Particularity is essentially minimized, in that all human beings qua rational beings must be capable of grasping the eternal truths and thus more or less securing the fulfillment of their telos. Particularity only emerges on a surface level, in regard to the particular linguistic and symbolic differences, in which different cultures clothe these universal eternal truths.
However, this position, with its clear predominance of universality over particularity, cannot be reconciled with Deuteronomic-monotheisms, in that their discursive structure becomes meaningless without the tense dialectical interplay of universality and particularity. This forces Mendelssohn to inject a heavy dose of particularity into his rationally universal natural theology, in order to remain within the ambit of the Deuteronomic-monotheistic worldview. He does this by retrieving the notion of idolatry from common Deuteronomic-monotheisms, and uses it as a counterpoint to the ‘religion of reason.’\textsuperscript{32} In fact, as we will see, the notion of idolatry, which he attempts to recalibrate in such a way as to fit with his natural theology, nevertheless enables Mendelssohn to inject a sufficient degree of particularity back into his ‘religion of reason’ so as to preserve the moments constitutive of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms. In short, the significance of idolatry for Mendelssohn’s thought can hardly be overestimated; it is at once the primary locus of his greatest ingenuity, and as we will see, the site of his greatest weakness.\textsuperscript{33} Without it, Mendelssohn would have to forfeit any genuine connection with Deuteronomic-monotheism. However, being a heterogeneous element, idolatry poses significant challenges for the stability of his rationally universal natural theology.

Idolatry, for Mendelssohn, highlights the tenuous nature of the human grasp upon the eternal truths. It characterizes that sad aspect of human existence whereby the eternal truths, despite being of the utmost importance for morality and attaining human felicity in this life, are extraordinarily difficult to preserve. Idolatry manifests itself as those tendencies in religious or philosophical movements which, as degradations of reason, deflect from and interfere with the normative status of the ‘religion of reason.’ Examples
of this can be seen in superstition, anthropomorphism, and the conflation of political and economic desires with the religious sphere. Mendelssohn, contrasting his views with Christianity, adamantly insists that even idolaters, who, as a result of their deficient understandings of the eternal truths, i.e. their idolatries, are to some degree out of kilter with their teloi, are not damned by God to eternal punishment. Mendelssohn thinks eternal punishment would indicate a less than perfect God, as these human beings are still capable, and in fact, still moving, albeit in a stunted manner, towards their own teleological perfection. To be sure, Mendelssohn does think such individuals will be ‘punished’ by God in the afterlife, but this punishment is not eternal damnation. Rather, the divine punishment in the afterlife is temporary, as Mendelssohn considers this punishment to be “a wise goodness [Güte],” in that it is for the education of the sinner, to set the sinner right in regard to her own teleological development.\textsuperscript{34}

While the philosophical idiom in which Mendelssohn develops his natural theology and his notion of the ‘religion of reason’ is clearly a European, Christian one, often relying more heavily on thinkers such as Leibniz and Wolff than Maimonides,\textsuperscript{35} Mendelssohn nevertheless finds the Christian religion problematic on natural theological grounds. Despite the nearly universal view among his gentile contemporaries that Christianity was more rational than Judaism, if not the true ‘religion of reason’ in and of itself, Mendelssohn feels compelled to argue the contrary, and not simply as a defensive gesture. Rather, Mendelssohn presents Christianity to be not only emblematic of the intolerant nature of Deuteronomic-monotheisms in general, but also incompatible with the ‘religion of reason’ in that its own logic of scriptural universalism is irreconcilable with natural theology.
Christianity: The Living Anachronism

Christianity serves as the foil through which Mendelssohn problematizes scriptural universalism, at least when it exists without any supplementation by rational universalism, and illuminates his re-configuration of the structural moments of the monotheistic worldview. To be sure, there are certainly urgent political and social reasons for Mendelssohn to engage in polemics against Christianity, irrespective of his attempts to re-conceive Judaism. However, over and above the considerable obstacles, traumas, and challenges which motivate Mendelssohn to polemicize against Christianity for the sake of defending a beleaguered and besieged Judaism, there is much that is theoretically productive in these accounts. Mendelssohn’s vision of Christianity provides him with a prime example of the incompatibility of the logic of naked scriptural universalism (i.e. a scriptural universalism without the supplementation of rational universalism), with tolerance. Unlike his notion of Judaism which is rooted both in the metaphysical natural theology inherent in the ‘religion of reason’ and a domesticated form of scriptural universalism, Mendelssohn’s account of Christianity is moored solely in the logic of scriptural universalism more or less in common to Deuteronomistic monotheisms that we discussed in chapter 1. Through recourse to natural theology, Mendelssohn points out what he considers to be the irrational, and therefore immoral, aspects of Christianity such as exclusivism, a failure to recognize the self-worth of human beings, and a tyrannical notion of God. On the historical level, we see that this allows Mendelssohn to defend the dignity of Judaism by retaliating against its would-be theological attackers, those claiming to demonstrate not merely the theological, but also the rational and moral superiority of Christianity. On a theoretical level, which is of
particular significance for our investigation, we see that Mendelssohn’s discussion of Christianity allows him to reveal the insufficiencies of the logic of scriptural universalism underpinning the discursive structure of the common Deuteronomistic-monotheistic worldview. Moreover, it allows him to elucidate what can be gained by substituting a more ‘enlightened’ paradigm underlying the structural moments of Deuteronomistic-monotheisms.

According to Mendelssohn’s account, at the core of Christianity lies an exclusivist notion of salvation predicated upon the privileged role of revealed doctrine. Mendelssohn focuses his argument around a claim he takes to be central to all forms of Christianity, the tenet that belief in Jesus’ messianic status is a necessary condition for the salvation, or eternal felicity, of human beings. In our terms, this suggests that Christianity is an exemplar of unadulterated scriptural universalism, in that it attaches ultimate significance, in terms of the universal human telos, upon the content of a revealed doctrine. That is, while revealed doctrines possess universality in scope, they lack any rational necessity and universality, which means without exposure to these teachings, not to mention some form of (non-rational) persuasion in their regard one is barred from fulfilling the universal human telos. Mendelssohn claims that Christianity believes that the human being as such cannot live morally or attain eternal salvation without access to and acceptance of confession of proper revelation. Without the proper doctrines of faith, human beings are doomed to misery, corruption and even eternal damnation. As in the common monotheistic worldview, in Mendelssohn’s account of Christianity the human being is incapable of bringing herself into accordance with her telos (which pertains to all of humanity), without access to revelation (which belongs to the elected—Christian—
community alone). Such a position clearly manifests monotheistic intolerance, in that only the members of a particular community possess the means by which to bring themselves into accordance with the universal human telos, and, as a result, all other human beings are in error and sin. This predisposes Christianity, in Mendelssohn’s view, to an innate hostility towards the Other.

In order to understand the roots of Christianity’s intolerant exclusivism, Mendelssohn examines its metaphysical underpinnings. Mendelssohn argues that lurking beneath Christianity’s exclusivism is an erroneous notion of both God and human beings. At its deepest levels, Mendelssohn argues that Christianity clearly ascribes more importance to God’s greatness than God’s goodness, as opposed to the ‘religion of reason,’ which requires, as we mentioned, that the goodness and the greatness of God be equiprimordial. In Sache Gottes, Mendelssohn explains that this error not only “makes God into a tyrant” and reeks of “theological despotism.” But he also implies that such a position results in the diminishment of the human telos as such, degrading the inherent worth of human beings. In other words, Mendelssohn is calling attention to the radical disparity that exists between the relationship between God and human beings in scriptural universalisms and his rational one.

In Mendelssohn’s account of natural religion the primary relationship between human beings and God is one of emulation and dependence. Human beings strive to emulate God, as the ultimate actualization of perfection, through their perpetual quest to increase their own innate perfection step by step ad infinitum. And furthermore, God provides coherence and meaning to the lives of rational beings by insuring that this is the best possible world, a hospitable environment suitable for carrying out their own
struggles for perfection. In short, in the ‘religion of reason,’ God’s relationship to human beings is an ennobling one. That is, it nurtures the infinite process of human beings perfecting themselves by bringing themselves into accord with their telos.

In Christianity, according to Mendelssohn, God’s relationship to humanity degrades rather than ennobles. It is not simply that God, as an infinite and all perfect being is superior to human beings, as finite creatures, but rather, Mendelssohn claims an antagonism between God and humanity lies at the root of Christianity. Rather than the ‘rational’ teleology of imminent approach to the infinite goal of human perfection, Mendelssohn finds the primary metaphysical basis of Christianity in the theological notion of original sin. With original sin, Mendelssohn argues, God is by and large placed in an antagonistic relationship with human beings. Such a notion, which Mendelssohn thinks clearly violates reason, “places the creator in a sort of duel [Zweikampf] with his creature: man has offended, provoked, and insulted [God].” According to such a position, human beings are incapable of any good on their own, they have no access (or, at least, no longer have access) to the metaphysical telos that God ordained for them in Creation, and as a result they are rendered innately evil and depraved. The only way for human beings to escape this vile condition, to be brought back into accord with their telos, is through God’s intervention, through an act of divine grace. Whereas the ‘religion of reason,’ according to Mendelssohn, holds that all human beings are of inherent even infinite worth and therefore destined for eternal felicity, Christianity, he thinks, is content to allow the majority of humanity to be damned for eternity. Those who do not receive God’s grace are bound for eternal punishment. They have, as
Mendelssohn characterizes those destined for damnation in what he sees as Leibniz's characteristically Christian theodicy, "virtually no worth [fast von keinem Werth.]"\textsuperscript{45}

However, Mendelssohn perceives this same lack of intrinsic worth in those who are to be saved in Christianity as well. In a letter to a Christian theologian written in 1771, Mendelssohn warns that Christ, as the returning Messiah, "would, in fact, be the end of both man's freedom and all his noble endeavors to develop and cultivate his innate gifts and thus come closer to salvation. Only if man were to divest himself of his very nature would such a Messianic reign serve the best interests of mankind."\textsuperscript{46} Mendelssohn is claiming, then, that this account of salvation, which predicates salvific agency to God alone, divests even those who are saved of any inherent worth. That is, those being saved remain valueless in and of themselves, as only God's grace can bestow worth upon human beings. According to Mendelssohn, this degradation of human beings in Christianity is a direct result of an erroneous notion of God which privileges God's greatness over God's goodness. Mendelssohn thinks that the implication of this subordination of God's goodness to God's greatness, for Christians, is that God is rendered all powerful and all important, the inevitable corollary of which is the inherently valueless human being. And since the contrary, the inviolable and inherent dignity of all human beings is a central feature of Mendelssohn's natural theology this is quite problematic for the (rational) tenability of Christianity.

Christianity, Mendelssohn suggests, veers from the path of reason by placing God's greatness, rather than the conjunction of God's goodness and greatness (with the corollary of the inherent worth of human beings) at the center of importance for human beings. Since Christianity's scriptural universalism requires 'correct' doctrinal content
for salvation, Mendelssohn argues that it condemns the "greater part of the human race without true revelation [bold mine-R.E.]" to "depravity and misery." According to Mendelssohn, Jesus' sacrifice is only a blessing if God's chief priority in regard to human beings is to insure that they recognize, respect and revere God's infinite majesty. According to this logic, God is justified in damning all human beings who lack grace because human beings are innately worthless, finite beings who transgress the infinite majesty of God simply by existing in their fallen states. Since God's majesty is infinite in nature, God is justified in punishing the transgressions of sinners infinitely. Of course, by this logic all human beings without grace, which is, at the very least, all non-Christians (all Others), have offended this God and are therefore doomed to perdition. The only escape from damnation for the Other is conversion, whereby the Other divests itself of otherness.

The irrationalities of the Christian position clearly emerge, Mendelssohn argues, when one sees that the attempts of Christian philosophers, including Leibniz, to justify providence through theodicy inevitably encounter "the greatest difficulties." Mendelssohn, who otherwise considers Leibniz the consummate authority in all things philosophical, finds his defense of providence to be highly problematic. Mendelssohn argues that as a result of his Christian presuppositions, Leibniz maintains the exclusivist belief that only Christians can attain eternal felicity, salvation. As a result, Mendelssohn concludes that Leibniz can defend providence, which pertains to all of creation and not just Christians, only by making it essentially irrelevant to human beings in general. That is, Mendelssohn charges Leibniz with abandoning any real attempt to validate providence for human beings, since he justifies God's goodness through recourse to infinite varieties
of angels and to inhabitants of other planets whom he claims both greatly outnumber the inhabitants of the earth, and to be necessarily bound for felicity.\textsuperscript{50} Such a position offers, Mendelssohn wryly notes, “[m]iserable comfort for us poor earth creatures who are to be simply [pre]determined for suffering [\textit{bloss zum Leiden bestimmt sein sollen.}]	extsuperscript{51} Even worse in Mendelssohn’s eyes, is the fact that such attempts to reconcile this exclusivism with God’s perfection, “makes God into an awful and misanthropic tyrant \textit{[macht...Gott zum ärgsten und menschenfeinlichsten Tyrrannen.]}\textsuperscript{52} Through Leibniz’s example, Mendelssohn indicates a failure to incorporate rational universalism into the logic of scriptural universalism in Christianity.

Mendelssohn hints that the logic of scriptural universalism underlying Christian monotheism supports a euro-centric view of the world which justifies imperialism by rendering the positions of all Others to be utterly spurious through equating them with idolatry.\textsuperscript{53} Mendelssohn challenges this view through references to God’s mercy and to the universality of reason. Mendelssohn asks the following vitriolic questions in order to draw attention to what he sees as the irrationality of the Christian position in regard to the Other.

If, therefore, mankind must be corrupt and miserable without revelation, why has the far greater part of mankind lived without true revelation from time immemorial? Why must the two Indies wait until it pleases the Europeans to send them a few comforters to bring them a message without which they can, according to this opinion, live neither virtuously nor happily? To bring them a message which, in their circumstances and state of knowledge, they can neither rightly comprehend nor properly utilize?\textsuperscript{54}

The vision of the Other engendered by Christianity is inimical to the value of tolerance. A central tenet in Mendelssohn’s argument against Christian exclusivism is that a perfect God would not, indeed could not (according to the logic of this God’s own
perfection), be willing to permit "the greater part of the human race [der grösste Theil des menschlichen Geschlechts]" to live without the necessary means for a moral existence, and without access to attaining eternal felicity. And yet, Mendelssohn claims, these are precisely the terms in which Christianity views the Other, as a result of its subscribing to a scriptural universalism without supplementation by natural theology, by rational universalism. According to Mendelssohn, without the proper access to revelation, the New Testament and the teachings of the Church, Christianity sees human beings as "necessarily depraved and miserable" without access to either "virtue or felicity."

Instead, there is only the looming prospect of "eternal damnation." Offering some credence to Mendelssohn's depictions of Christianity, at least in his time and place, one need only look to the disputes in which he becomes embroiled, to see how pervasive the belief is among Mendelssohn's contemporaries that non-Christians are incapable of meeting even the minimal requirements for being decent persons in terms of outward behavior.

Ultimately, for Mendelssohn, the problem with Christianity is that its scripturally universal foundational concepts, God and humanity, and their interaction in salvation, form a tightly knit unit which is utterly impenetrable by, and irreconcilable with, any rationally universal natural theology. Christianity, therefore, even when defended by philosophers of the class of Leibniz, remains, at least in its core, a creature of revelation, giving precedence to revealed or scriptural brands of theology rather than philosophical, i.e. rational and universal natural theologies. As a result, Mendelssohn concludes that Christianity is not only intolerant, but it is ultimately irrational as well.

*Judaism, the Emissary of Reason*
Mendelssohn offers an innovative and not uncontroversial account of Judaism, which attempts to permeate the scriptural universalism of Judaism with the rational universalism of his natural theology. In obvious contrast to his account of Christianity, Mendelssohn’s account of Judaism rejects the notion of exclusivism in regard to eternal felicity, the universal human telos. Mendelssohn elides this problem by re-configuring the moments of Judaism’s discursive structure upon the rationally universal natural theology of the ‘religion of reason.’ The scripturally universal element of Mendelssohn’s notion of Judaism is apparent in that Judaism is not simply one more religion that has the ‘religion of reason’ as its archetype, which would make it, in principle, interchangeable with all other ‘rational’ religions, which also share this metaphysical framework. Rather, the Jews, as God’s elected community, are commanded to keep the Halakhah, or revealed legislation, which renders the Jews emissaries of reason, of the eternal truths of the ‘religion of reason,’ in a world ruled by idolatry, superstition and prejudice. That is, according to Mendelssohn, the Jews are the instrument by which those religions that are degraded by idolatry can come to be lead to the ‘religion of reason,’ although this transformation will not fully take place until an eschatological or messianic conclusion of history. In short, Mendelssohn attempts to thoroughly synthesize the discursive structure of Judaism, including its scriptural universalism, with his natural theology.

With revelation, the first moment of the discursive structure of Deuteronomistic monotheisms, and the foundation of the logic of scriptural universalism, Mendelssohn plays a dangerous game. On the one hand, Mendelssohn attempts to uphold his thoroughgoing rational universalism by insisting that revelation, i.e. specific doctrines provided by the divine to a particular community, is in no way a prerequisite for human
beings in general to bring themselves into accord with their telos. "Is revelation therefore unnecessary?" Mendelssohn asks. It is, he answers, at least, "[f]or all people who do not have it."\textsuperscript{59} According to Mendelssohn, God has entered into a revelatory relationship only with the Jews. As we will see, this relationship requires special acts and duties on the part of the Jews over and above what is required by the Other to bring itself into accord with its telos. Thus, Mendelssohn develops an odd sort of scriptural universalism, in that God reveals himself to the Jews, providing laws and statutes, but Mendelssohn insists that these are strictly limited to the Jews themselves. It would seem, then, at least at first blush, that this scriptural universalism is not genuinely universal. In other words, for all non-Jews (i.e. Others) knowledge of the eternal truths accessible to reason is sufficient for bringing oneself into accord with one's telos.\textsuperscript{60} However, as we will see shortly, the scripturally universal aspects of revelation cannot remain contained, and they challenge and eventually undermine the trajectory of rational universalism constituted by Mendelssohn’s natural theology.

Nevertheless, Mendelssohn attempts to uphold his rational universalism by making radical innovations in the context of Jewish theology, despite his claims to be doing nothing of the sort. The Noahide laws, which are the seven laws developed in the Talmud concerning the status of non-Jews, focus around the issues of worshipping idols, violence, theft, eating the flesh of a still living animal, and injunctions to courts of law.\textsuperscript{61} According to then dominant reading of a section of Maimonides’ commentary in the \textit{Mishneh Torah} since rendered controversial, gentiles who observe these basic, minimal laws, and observe them because they are revealed by God, are considered to belong to the category of ‘the pious of the nations,’ and therefore have a share in the world to come.\textsuperscript{62}
However, Mendelssohn makes an important innovation from this then dominant interpretation of Maimonides’ authoritative position. He conflates the Noahide laws with universal human morality, which he thinks follows inherently from knowledge of the eternal truths. In addition, Mendelssohn rejects those stipulations of the Noahide laws requiring that these laws be observed on the basis of their being commanded by God (conceived in accordance with Jewish conceptions) in order to provide the observer with the status of ‘the pious of the nations.’\(^{63}\) With this bold maneuver, as David Novak explains, Mendelssohn makes the theologically unprecedented move of privileging universal reason in the form of the Noahide laws over the particular teachings of the revelation at Sinai.\(^{64}\) That is, Mendelssohn roots the Noahide laws in rational universalism, not scriptural universalism.

It is important for Mendelssohn to undermine the traditional reliance on revelation in the Noahide laws for two reasons. First, Mendelssohn believes that there is universal access to the eternal truths of the ‘religion of reason’ among human beings. However, these truths are mediated in different linguistic and cultural mediums, such that they take very different conceptual and symbolic forms, which often vary greatly in sophistication and appearance. It is this diversity of religious mediums which Mendelssohn is pointing to when he states that while “all the inhabitants of the earth are destined to felicity,” we must nevertheless bear in mind that “the means of attaining it are as widespread as mankind itself.”\(^{65}\) Thus, what appears to be idolatry to an outsider might merely be the symbols through which a religious group represents the eternal truths.\(^{66}\) Second, revelation, for Mendelssohn, is inherently limited in its reach, and therefore cannot possibly be a prerequisite for the fulfillment of the universal human telos. Thus, the
rabbinic-'Maimonidean' insistence that the Noahide laws must be performed along the lines of Halakhic commandments, which require one to have the proper intention for one's act (i.e. that it is performed because it is a commandment of God), in order to secure salvation, is, in principle, no different from the Christian claim that only through specific doctrinal beliefs about Jesus can one be saved. Implicit in both is that the intentional content of revelation is a necessary condition for salvation. Such claims adhere to a thorough-going logic of scriptural universalism, one which refuses to recognize the very possibility of rational universalism.

Mendelssohn attempts to uphold a balance between his thoroughgoing universalism and revelation, without slipping into full-blown scriptural universalism, by insisting that while God is quite content to allow all other peoples to reach felicity through their reason, the Jews nevertheless require revelation. Mendelssohn insists that the notion of revelation in play in Judaism is quite distinct from what he considers to be the one operative in Christianity. Mendelssohn writes, that for the Jews, "the Creator, for very special reasons [ganz besonderen Absichten] has found it good to reveal this special law according to which they live, are governed, and attain felicity." Two key elements of scriptural universalism emerge in Mendelssohn's thought and coexist uneasily with his rational universalism at this point, namely, the dynamic interchange between particularity and universality and the notion of a God unfathomable to human reason. We will address this second element first. The God who reveals himself to the Jews is no longer the deistic God of Mendelssohn's natural theology, but rather, shows itself to be the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism in that this God has recourse to 'very special reasons,' i.e. reasons knowable to God but not ascertainable to human reason.
This revelation to the Jews subsequently entails an election, which in turn creates the tense dynamic between particularity and universality, vital elements of scriptural universalisms we mentioned above. To be sure, Mendelssohn attempts to ameliorate the qualitative distinction between Judaism and all other religions, thus mitigating the dynamic interchange between particularism and universalism as much as possible. Mendelssohn argues that the notion of revelation operative in Judaism is not doctrinal like Christianity, but rather consists solely in laws and statutes. Thus, he is able to claim that Judaism is founded on the truths of the ‘religion of reason,’ and only possesses a “revealed legislation” over and above these salvific truths. That is, Mendelssohn attempts to escape the problem of exclusivism by arguing that in contrast to Christianity (or at least Mendelssohn’s account thereof), “Judaism boasts of no exclusive revelation of eternal truths that are indispensable to salvation, of no revealed religion in the sense in which that term is usually understood.”

Mendelssohn claims that the ordinances commanded by God to the Jewish people at Sinai maintain a special relationship with the eternal truths of natural religion. Mendelssohn explains that within the Jewish Scriptures is contained “an inexhaustible treasure of rational truths and religious doctrines” and that these remain “so intimately connected with the laws that they form but one entity. All laws refer to, or are based upon, eternal truths of reason, or remind us of them, and rouse us to ponder them.” That is, these laws, which are largely ceremonial in nature, are intimately bound up with the eternal truths, such that their repetition inspires Jews to perpetually contemplate and recall these truths. Thus, the laws are to be followed by the Jews in order that these truths never become lost to them. Unlike Christianity’s holy mysteries, in Mendelssohn’s
account of Judaism’s revealed legislation, “there is no conflict [Kampf] between religion and reason, no revolt [Aufruhr] of our natural knowledge against the oppressive violence of faith [die unterdrückende Gewalt des Glaubens].”71 Rather, Halakhah serves as an aid to reason, to remembering and pondering the eternal truths. Despite Mendelssohn’s efforts to contain the dynamic movement between particularity and universality, it is nevertheless quite clear that his entire account of Judaism—particularly revelation and election—is predicated upon it.

Mendelssohn’s account of the election of the Jews is founded upon his notion of Halakhah and its capacity to stave off the degeneration of the human understanding of the eternal truths of the ‘religion of reason.’ This notion of election goes hand in hand with the increasing ambiguity of the Jewish conception of the Other, specifically the Other’s status in regard to the eternal truths, and in fact, is unintelligible without it. On the one hand, Mendelssohn argues that diverse religions are (or can be) in accord with the truths of the ‘religion of reason,’ although they express these truths in different linguistic and symbolic idioms. With this in mind, Mendelssohn is prone to accept the validity of other religions, including their accounts of miracles, provided of course they do not possess teachings which violate the eternal truths of reason.72 However, the logic underlying this openness to other traditions and their claims is purely pragmatic in nature, which can be discerned in the following statement by Mendelssohn. “[W]hat is of utmost importance is not the historical truth of a [religious] mission but the logical truth of a [religious] precept.”73

Simultaneous with this openness to the truth of Other’s traditions, however, are the doubts which Mendelssohn begins to introduce concerning the Other, specifically the
Other’s capacity to maintain these eternal truths. In short, as soon as Mendelssohn discusses the Other, idolatry comes into play. In Gegenbetrachtungen, Mendelssohn reveals that the Jews, bolstered by Halakhah, are qualitatively privileged over other peoples in maintaining their grasp on the eternal truths. As a result of the inherent difficulties in sustaining philosophical truths, and apparently because they lack any equivalent to Halakhah to aid in this effort, Mendelssohn laments that “most of these [other] peoples” have turned away from the eternal truths, “harboring incorrect opinions about God and his reign [von Gott und seiner Regeierung irrige Meinungen hegen.]”

In Jerusalem, Mendelssohn expands this line of thought into a full-blown historical account of idolatry, finding its origins in abuses of the art of writing. Idolatry, he argues, afflicts the entire world, such that “[t]he history of mankind actually went through a period of many centuries during which real idolatry became the dominant religion in nearly every part of the globe.” And while Mendelssohn has been heavily criticized for the dubious nature of his ‘historical’ argument about the origins of idolatry, this notion of idolatry provides the conditions for which the election of the Jews can take place.

The election of the Jews, Mendelssohn indicates, is a response of divine providence to this outbreak of idolatry. The election of the Jews, for Mendelssohn, is inextricably bound up with Halakhah, or the revealed legislation, as the latter’s precise purpose, or at least one of its main purposes, is to maintain these eternal truths among the Jews. As opposed to the idolatries that result from the written word, the Halakhah, composed mostly of ceremonies and rituals, is “a kind of living script, rousing the mind and heart, full of meaning, never ceasing to inspire contemplation.” The Jews, then, as
the observers of Halakhah, are to serve as the preservers of these truths for all of
humanity. Mendelssohn argues that:

[the] descendants [of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] were chosen by Providence to
be a *priestly* nation; that is, a nation which, through its establishment and
constitution, through its laws, actions, vicissitudes, and changes was continually
to call attention to sound and unadulterated ideas of God and his attributes. It was
incessantly to teach, to proclaim, and to endeavor to preserve these ideas among
the nations, by means of its mere existence, as it were.  

This rather straightforward quote would suggest that the Jews are to serve as God’s, or
perhaps better, reason’s emissaries to a world in the mire of idolatry, to serve as a
veritable “light to the nations”(Isaiah 49:6). The Halakhah preserves the Jews and their
grasp on the truth through the historical epochs of idolatry, in order for the Jews to testify
to these eternal truths for the benefit of the Other, although as we will see, the Others will
not recognize these truths en masse until the *eschaton*. Thus, Mendelssohn attempts to
cast the historical mission of the Jews, as well as their adherence to the Halakhah, both
elements of Judaism rooted in scriptural universalism, now in rationally universalistic
terms. The Halakhah, which preserves the knowledge of the eternal truths for the Jews,
allows them, in turn, to preserve and give occasion to ponder the eternal truths among
those non-Jews who have lost touch with these truths. The Jews, then, do/will not provide
new knowledge to the Other, but rather restore old, forgotten and degraded knowledge.

However, the Jews also suffer the corruption of idolatry soon after the experience
of revelation, falling from their pristine state. Nevertheless, Mendelssohn is adamant the
Halakhah is strong enough to preserve the Jews even in exile, to maintain their distinction
from the Other, and to continue to offer a privileged access to truth even in the face of the
degradations of history. In a famous letter that Mendelssohn writes to his friend Herz
Homberg shortly after the publication of *Jerusalem*, he explains that Jews must not
abandon the Halakhah, must not convert and assimilate, as the age of idolatry is by no means over, and neither, we can infer, is the divine mission entrusted exclusively to the Jews. Mendelssohn explains that Jews are obligated to observe the Halakhah at least “as long as polytheism, anthropomorphism and usurpation of [political] power by religions reign upon the earth.” For it is the Halakhah, Mendelssohn claims, which unites “the true theists [die ächten Theists],” i.e. the Jews. To be sure, Mendelssohn believes that Judaism has also suffered historical degradation and idolatrous corruptions, but unlike other nations, the Halakhah prevents the Jews from being decimated by “these plagues [Plagegeister] of reason.”81 While this letter is somewhat vague, it is reasonable to presume that what Mendelssohn is attempting to elucidate is that because of the Halakhah, the truths constitutive of the ‘religion of reason’ cannot be fully eclipsed in Judaism as they can be in other religions. Given what else we know of Mendelssohn’s thought, we can also piece together that because the Halakhah is explicitly recognized by the Jews as revealed legislation, the mission of the Jews to lead the other nations to the ‘religion of reason’ cannot be lost from their memory.

At the structural moment of the eschaton, Mendelssohn seems to be committed to a model of conversion. However, this model of conversion is not one which demands that the Other become Jewish. This follows from the fact that the revelation of the Jews was never a fundamentally new form of truth, as in naked scriptural universalisms, but rather only the means by which to preserve the eternal truths that all human beings universally recognized, highlighting Mendelssohn’s continued commitment to rational universalism. Thus, it is quite consistent for Mendelssohn to claim that in Judaism there is the “hope that the differences of religions will not be of an eternal duration [dass die
Verschiedenheit der Religionen nicht von ewiger Dauer seyn wird].” Rather, the hope is that the Jews will shepherd the nations mired in idolatry to the true knowledge of God, and at such a time, “the divine wisdom [die göttliche Weisheit]” will end the separation of the Jews by publicly declaring the termination of the “the special ceremonial law [besondere Zeremonialgesetze].” Then, Jews and the nations (i.e. the Others) will no longer be separate communities, and “the knowledge of the true God will fill the earth, like the water [in] the sea.” In short, both the religions of the Other and the Jew will become something new, presumably something involving the ‘religion of reason’ broadly conceived. Due to its deferred nature, Mendelssohn does not devote much attention to the eschaton, and rarely mentions it explicitly. However, it is safe to say that in the eschaton we see that Mendelssohn never succumbs to the full, intolerant implications of full-blown scriptural universalism.

The tensions between the rational universalism and scriptural universalism in regard to the foundation of the discursive structure of Judaism manifest themselves in Mendelssohn’s reconstruction of Judaism in the pull between cultural egalitarianism and the election of the Jews, which does not appear resolved. The most obvious indicator of this tension is in the lack of any equivalent to the Halakhah for the Other, in order to help preserve the Other’s access to the eternal truths. Unless we follow the strategy of some recent scholars and marginalize Mendelssohn’s discussions of the election of Judaism in general, dismissing them as merely a result of his social and political situation, we seem compelled to recognize a deep, perhaps irresolvable tension in his thought between scriptural and rational universalism, cultural egalitarianism and election.
In light of this tension, Mendelssohn’s notion of the Other appears to be deeply problematic. It is far from clear how we are to reconcile his notion of Halakhah with his egalitarian insistence that “no particular religion can have an exclusive claim to truth.”\textsuperscript{84} His accounts of natural theology and his Judaism appear to be incommensurable. Even if Mendelssohn grants non-Jews the same cognitive abilities to discern the eternal truths constitutive of the ‘religion of reason,’ because these adherents of other religions lack any equivalent to Halakhah, they cannot preserve these truths once they have reached them.\textsuperscript{85} If this is the case, then Mendelssohn is presented with a formidable problem. As Alexander Altmann points out, “[t]he same moral considerations that caused Mendelssohn to deny the revealed character of eternal verities should have suggested the need for a universal revealed legislation.”\textsuperscript{86} Or, to phrase Altmann’s criticism in the language of our chapter, Mendelssohn’s account of Judaism does not differ sufficiently from his account of Christianity, it too is plagued with an exclusivism that is simply inconsistent with rational universalism; Judaism, no less than Christianity, conceives of only one particular community having the capacity to live in such a way as to fulfill the universal human telos, whereas all others exist in error. The only difference would be the means of exclusion, Halakhah instead of faith in Christ. The core of Judaism, it would seem, and not just Christianity, is impenetrable to the rational universalism of natural theology, instead, remaining ultimately bound to the logic of a scriptural universalism. There is no ultimate reason discernable to human understanding why Judaism is privileged and elected to serve as the guardian of reason.\textsuperscript{87} However, Mendelssohn is not unaware of this problem, and provides a subtle attempt to extricate himself from it and in fact, achieves a limited success in this venture.
Judaism and the Other, a Second Look

There is more to Mendelssohn’s conception of the Other, in particular the relationship of the Other to the election of the Jews, than has previously been recognized. Mendelssohn makes two claims, which if born in mind in this context, suggest that his thought regarding the relationship between election and cultural egalitarianism, or the relationship between the Jew and the Other, in fact, succeeds in reconciling election and cultural egalitarianism, at least to a limited degree. These claims also challenge the ultimate predominance of scriptural universalism over rational universalism in his thought. The two claims that Mendelssohn makes are (1) that diversity is the plan of providence, and (2) that there is an uncertain relationship between the individual and the collective. Rather than viewing these claims as simply in conflict with the election of the Jews as commentators such as Altmann and many others do, it is more suitable to view them as successful attempts to make the conception of the Other more subtle. These two claims help resolve tensions between the tendencies of cultural egalitarianism and election of the Jews which emerge in Mendelssohn’s integration of rationally universalistic natural theology into the structural moments of Deuteronomic-Judaism. However, whether the success Mendelssohn achieves with this nuancing of the Other is sufficient to extricate himself from the bind between scriptural and rational universalism that coexist simultaneously in his reconfiguration of Judaism, each exerting a powerful pull, remains an open question.

Mendelssohn’s claim that “diversity is evidently the plan and purpose of Providence,” is a corollary of his beliefs that human beings are all destined for eternal felicity, and that this is the best possible world. Recognition of this divinely ordained
diversity, Mendelssohn thinks, should bring about a sense of humility when examining foreign cultures and religions. He sharply rebukes Christian Europeans who claim that other cultures and religions are idolatrous, when, in fact, they are not familiar enough with them to be able to make such a judgment. Mendelssohn states, “In judging the religious ideas of a nation that is otherwise still unknown, one must...take care not to regard everything from one’s own parochial point of view, lest one should call idolatry what, in reality, is perhaps only script.”\textsuperscript{89} In exploring the religion of a different culture it is not readily apparent to the outsider if something is a sign or symbol pointing beyond itself to a formulation of the eternal truths, or if it is, in fact, idolatrous such that this sign or symbol detracts from knowledge of the eternal truths requisite to morality and felicity.

The Other’s religion is ambiguous, as its mysterious and foreign symbols could contain correct accounts of the eternal truth, but they might also be debased by idolatry. Its status is often unclear. Mendelssohn’s own discussion of the religions of India, which he poses as a counter-point to the dominant Christian accounts of his day, beautifully demonstrates this ambiguity. On the one hand, Mendelssohn reprimands the arrogance of the Christian missionaries for their pat dismissal of the religions of India as idolatrous monstrosities, but then himself goes on to claim Hindu symbols exemplify “how easily such symbols and hieroglyphs can lead one into error.”\textsuperscript{90} He never says that they do lead one into error, but only that it is likely that symbols such as these would.

Although Mendelssohn does not offer clear criteria by which to ascertain who is or who is not idolatrous, and in fact renders this distinction more difficult to determine, he nevertheless believes it is one that with great care can be legitimately discerned. In Jerusalem, Mendelssohn explains, “[Travelers] must acquaint themselves very intimately
with the thoughts and opinions of a nation before they can say with certainty whether its images still have the character of script, or whether they have already degenerated into idolatry.” How intimately must a traveler be acquainted in order to make such a judgment? That appears to be a question left open by Mendelssohn. However, it seems clear that Mendelssohn felt sufficiently comfortable with the doctrines of the Christian religion as well as the speculative theologies of Christian philosophers such as Leibniz and Wolff among others, to make judgments about them. Unfortunately, however, Mendelssohn never explains how he is able to do this with any precision.

The second claim of Mendelssohn’s which nuances the relationship between election and cultural egalitarianism is the uncertain relationship between the individual Other and the society or religion to which she belongs. Since access to the human telos is now universally available, no longer allotted on a communal basis, Mendelssohn opens a gap for individuals to be distinguished from the communities in which they belong. That is, according to the logic of Mendelssohn’s position, we can only really speak of access to, and fulfillment of, the human telos on an individual, not collective, level. In fact, Mendelssohn stresses that progress in regard to the fulfillment of the human telos only takes place on an individual level, but in regard to humanity as a whole, the level of living in accordance with the human teloi is always about the same.

We are now in a position to reconcile the apparent contradiction in Mendelssohn’s account of the Other, i.e. the apparent incommensurability in the respective notions of the Other in his accounts of cultural egalitarianism and the election of the Jews. Mendelssohn’s arguments that diversity is the plan of providence and that there is an uncertain relationship between the individual and the collective enable him to nuance the
notion of the Other, which in turn enables there to be a reconciliation between election
and a version of cultural egalitarianism. However, in order to function, Mendelssohn’s
notion of election requires that a significant number of Others are idolatrous, otherwise
there would not be sufficient grounds for providence to warrant the election of Jews in
the first place. Here the conflict is not so much between scriptural universalism and
rational universalism, as these pertain to the means by which monotheism’s message is
spread and the grounds on which it is comprehended. Rather, the conflict here is between
the rational universalism of natural theology and the discursive structure of
Deuteronomic-monotheism itself. Simply put, Mendelssohn cannot allow a full-blown
cultural egalitarianism to emerge until the *eschaton*, until the messianic age, because
idolatry, this element of agonistic particularism appropriated from the Deuteronomic-
monotheistic worldview, is the only foundation Mendelssohn has for the election of the
Jews.

Mendelssohn’s solution, then, is to soften the intolerance bound up with idolatry,
by making it more difficult to discern who is and who is not an idolater. Given the
arguments about diversity and the possible disparity between the status of the individual
and the collective of which she is a member, Mendelssohn makes it necessary to draw a
distinction within the category of the Other. One can no longer consider all Others to be
idolaters, or even to possess less truth than the Jews.94 To be sure, humanity-in-general,
which characterizes the majority of human beings, is, for all intents and purposes,
idolatrous. However, at any particular time it is never clear who specifically comprises
this humanity at large. Rather, humanity-in-general, as a division within the broader
rubric of the Other, represents the background of Others with whom we are not presently
concerned. As for the particular Other (which can be an individual or a particular cultural or social group) before me or before one, his/her/their status is always, at least at first, uncertain. While the Jews may consider themselves to have a better grasp on the truth than humanity-in-general, it is much harder to be in the position to determine such a hierarchal status in regard to the particular Other before them. Rational universalism is still in play to the degree that the Other may possess the eternal truths, albeit in a cultural-linguistic form different from that of the Jews.

The notion of the Other, split between humanity-in-general and the particular Other before me/one, however, remains a site of anxiety in regard to the status of its (their) possession of the eternal truths. That is, the Other’s relationship to the eternal truths cannot be a matter of indifference to the Jew, or any adherent of the ‘religion of reason’ for that matter, as these truths have important practical implications. In *Phaedon*, Mendelssohn explains that moral existence is predicated upon a proper conception of these eternal truths. Without a belief in the afterlife, the perfection of God and providence, morality is simply not rationally coherent. And in *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn explains how incorrect conceptions of God lead to religious “violence and persecution” as well as all the other “evils which from time immemorial have been perpetrated under the cloak of religion.” Given these concerns, it is helpful to ask three questions. First, how should a non-Jewish adherent of the ‘religion of reason’ approach a particular Other before her who she has good reason to suspect has a deficient understanding of the eternal truths? Second, how should a Jew approach this same Other? Third, are these two approaches different, and if so, why?
In regard to the first question, the adherent of the ‘religion of reason’ should proceed with great caution in approaching the particular Other before her even though she is fairly secure in her knowledge that the particular Other before her has idolatrous religious beliefs as a result of a deficient understanding of the eternal truths. In a remarkable letter written to the Swiss Christian-theologian Johann Caspar Lavater, Mendelssohn offers important insights into why this caution is required.\(^97\) The context of this letter is a dispute which emerged in August of 1769, when Lavater, aware of Mendelssohn’s fame as a philosopher, challenged him to publicly refute a recent philosophical justification of Christianity by the well-known scientist and philosopher, Charles Bonnet, or convert.\(^98\) Instead of accepting Lavater’s challenge openly, over the next few years a flurry of letters were exchanged between the two, and unfortunately, thenceforth, Mendelssohn, who had always striven to avoid religious controversy found himself in the center of it.\(^99\) To be sure, Mendelssohn explains, certain religious and philosophical positions are wholly detrimental to humanity and should not be tolerated if held by the Other. Such idolatrous beliefs, Mendelssohn thinks, produce a “harmful effect on all ethical conduct that is so obvious they cannot be expected to yield even some incidental good.” Examples of such idolatrous beliefs for Mendelssohn are religious fanaticism, which produces the willingness and desire to persecute one’s fellow human beings, an obvious jab at Lavater, as well as “sybaritic opulence, and amoral atheism which bespeak man’s waywardness.”\(^100\) These two extremes, Mendelssohn thinks, can lead to positions dangerous to humanity as a whole.

Nonetheless, Mendelssohn is quite adamant that in general the religious beliefs of the Other, even if they are erroneous, are not harmful to society as a whole and therefore
must not only be tolerated, but, in fact, should not even be subject to criticism, but must be accepted like differences in taste. In fact, even idolatrous, superstitious systems often serve as pillars of the social order, the destruction of which would do more harm than good. As Mendelssohn had already explained in *Phaedon*, “[t]here is no system of religion so corrupt as not to give certain sanction to some duties of humanity, which every friend to mankind holds sacred.”¹⁰¹ In addition, Mendelssohn explains to Lavater, there are many sorts of erroneous beliefs that ought to be tolerated by all without criticism so long as they are not directly detrimental to morality. In answer to Lavater’s challenge, that he either publicly repudiate Christianity or convert, Mendelssohn explains that “some of my fellow men’s convictions, though erroneous in my eyes, belong to a category of higher theoretical principles so far removed from life’s practical concerns that their harmful errors are not immediately felt.”¹⁰² He goes on to explain that because the beliefs of Christianity serve as the bedrock of the social order, their theoretically erroneous doctrines should not be undermined, lest one inadvertently undermine the social order as well. Mendelssohn explains:

Anyone interested more in mankind’s welfare than in his own public image will refrain from making his personal thoughts about such matters public. *In fact, he will avoid an outright attack on another’s religious beliefs and proceed with the greatest caution, so as not to cause the overthrowing of an ethical principle* (my italics R.E.)—suspect though it may seem to him—before his fellow men are ready to replace it with one he himself regards as true.¹⁰³

Mendelssohn acknowledges that his position in this regard is largely a result of pragmatic realism. He concedes to Lavater, that “[s]uch [erroneous] notions or beliefs” can only be conducive to the welfare of humanity “incidentally,” and that because “wrongly motivated,” actions motivated by such beliefs “hardly deserve to be called moral” in the proper or full sense. That is, such beliefs motivate proper actions for the
wrong reasons, such as fear of punishment, rather than ‘correct’ ones such as the love for oneself and the Other, and the desire to better both. Mendelssohn even acknowledges further, that “it would be far better and safer to base the promotion of the good on truth – wherever it is recognized – than on error and prejudice.” People who have adequate knowledge of the eternal truths, Mendelssohn believes, are more consistently moral than those who behave properly out of superstition and prejudice. However, Mendelssohn is profoundly pessimistic about the knowledge of these eternal truths ever being widely disseminated sufficiently during history “to have as great an impact upon the masses as their long-standing prejudices.” Popular culture, with all its superstitions and errors, is nevertheless more stable and secure a foundation for society, Mendelssohn believes, than the innovations of reformers, however well intentioned, and even rational they may be. As a result, Mendelssohn concludes that not only must “these prejudices” not be interfered with, but they “must be almost sacred to anyone who cherishes virtue.” Thus, a position of cautious conservatism is to be preferred to that of radical reform. Mendelssohn may ultimately affirm much concerning the doctrine of rational universalism, but he is not optimistic regarding the capacity of human beings and culture to render themselves commensurable with it.

Mendelssohn’s discussion of the power of the state and religious freedom reflects both this ambiguity towards the Other, and a pessimism in regard to a secular answer to idolatry. On the one hand, he explains that the state can legitimately “trouble itself” with religions or organizations that call into question the proper understanding of the eternal truths of reason, “those fundamental principles on which all religions agree, and without which felicity is but a dream, and virtue itself ceases to be virtue.” How precisely, we
might ask, will the state ‘trouble itself’ in this matter? Mendelssohn is unfortunately extremely vague in his answer to this question. He explains that the state “is to see to it from afar that no doctrines are propagated which are inconsistent with public welfare; doctrines, which like atheism and Epicureanism, undermine the foundation on which the felicity of social life is based.” However, it is not clear what this ‘from afar’ actually means, especially given the strictures Mendelssohn puts on the power of the state in terms of influencing the beliefs and thoughts of its citizens. Nevertheless, Mendelssohn’s vagueness in this regard clearly highlights the difficulties involved with intervening with the Other, even when the Other shows signs of idolatry.

We will now turn to the second question, how is the Jew to approach the particular Other before her who she has good reason to believe possesses an insufficient understanding of the eternal truths? The Jewish approach is to remain distinct, a community apart, through observance of the Halakhah. Judaism, according to its discursive structure, understands its election as the bringing of a ‘light unto the nations.’ Mendelssohn transfigures this doctrine to accord with his natural theology by casting the Jews as the emissaries of reason in a world that is ruled by prejudice and superstition. The Jews, despite their esteemed function, are, practically speaking, a relatively powerless lot, lacking political positions, and influence, as well as any military might, in the larger societies in which they live. In addition, given Mendelssohn’s understanding of history and idolatry, there is not room for significant progress in regard to human beings bringing themselves into accord with their teloi on anything but the individual level; it is simply not feasible to expect any major conversion of humanity as a whole to the ‘religion of reason’ in any particular era or generation. Thus, the mission of the Jews
cannot be conceived in terms of bringing the truth to the Other in any immediate sense. Rather, Mendelssohn conceives of the mission of the Jews to consist, practically speaking, in nothing more than remaining distinct from the Other throughout history by means of the observance of Halakhah.

Although Mendelssohn attempts to frame the mission of the Jews in terms of his rational universalism, it nevertheless becomes apparent that scriptural universalism is the dominant operating logic here. It is no coincidence that Mendelssohn never adequately accounts for precisely how the Halakhah can preserve the eternal truths for the Jews much less how the Jew’s observance of Halakhah can affect the Other beneficially. Commentator Fritz Bamberger highlights the incomprehensibility of Mendelssohn’s position, asserting that “[t]he Concept of mission – that the Israelites have been called to proclaim divine truths – is completely obviated by the exclusively legislative character of the revelation. The purpose of the Law is limited to one nation alone, even and indeed especially as far as universal truths are concerned.”108 Mendelssohn uses the well-known ability of Halakhah to keep the Jews separate and distinct in the societies in which they live as the basis of a vague and thoroughly inadequate argument about the nature of bearing witness. Mendelssohn claims that somehow this separation draws more attention to the Jews, so that the nations lost in the mire of idolatry will somehow be more disposed to watch as the Jews bear witness to the truths of the ‘religion of reason’ through their rituals and ceremonies.109

Ultimately, Mendelssohn’s failure in argumentation here stems not so much from any weakness inherent in the bearing witness modality, to which he takes recourse, as from the fact that his thought is, at this point, more thoroughly rooted in scriptural
universalism with its unfathomable God, than rational universalism. That is, having covertly switched to the logic of scriptural universalism, Mendelssohn finds himself unable to make viable arguments as he is now dealing with an essentially unfathomable God. All Mendelssohn can do is to reiterate traditional arguments of trust in and loyalty to God. There must be some rationale for the Halakhah, and a benevolent God cannot allow the majority of humanity to suffer idolatry forever. However, given that he is no longer dealing with natural theology, Mendelssohn is no longer able to work his prize winning metaphysical arguments about God and the relationship of God to humanity. In fact, to the contrary, Mendelssohn, the thinker who defeated Kant in an essay writing contest about metaphysics, can only state:

"God liberated them [the Jews] from this state of slavery by extraordinary miracles; He became the Redeemer, Leader, King, Lawgiver, and Judge of this nation that He himself had fashioned and He designed its entire constitution in the manner that accorded with the wise purposes of his providence. Weak and shortsighted is the eye of man! Who can say: I have entered into God's sanctuary, looked over the whole of his plan, and am able to determine the measure, goal, and limits of his purposes?" He can only urge trust in God and the mission of the Jews as attested in revelation. In this sense, while Mendelssohn has blurred the lines between scriptural and rational universalism, there is no question that the status of the pristine metaphysical argumentation for which he was famous has been significantly diminished, its authority replaced by the logic of scriptural universalism.

At this point, as well, the relationship between the Jew and the Other becomes mediated by God. There is a curious disinterest in regard to the Other that emerges in Mendelssohn's thought in regard to bearing witness. The bearing witness performed by the Jews becomes something primarily between the Jews and God, and only indirectly between the Jews and the Other. To be sure, in this way Mendelssohn can escape any
hostility, ethically or politically speaking, against the Other or her way of life, in his account of bearing witness (although, of course, Nietzsche would claim *resentiment* is in play here), as there is no need or even expectation that the Other will pay any special heed to the Jews. The Other’s attitude toward the Jews, and, even toward the eternal truths, is a matter of concern for the Other alone, not for the Jews. The Jews’ sole task is to remain steadfast to the commandments entrusted to them by God, regardless of the consequences. Only at the *eschaton* will there be any dramatic interaction between the Jew and the Others, and this will not concern all Others, but only idolatrous ones, and besides, this is deferred for the foreseeable future. The benefit of this method of conceiving of bearing witness is that it not only preserves the Jews while bearing witness to the Other, but it also avoids the inevitable agonism that emerges with direct confrontations or critiques of the Other. It not only permits the Other to be other within the limits imposed as I’ve stated above, but it also allows for the possibility that the Other may have the truth, in part or whole, and therefore to be in no special need of the Jews. However, the cost is a relative disinterest in regard to the Other and her plight.

In regard to the third question, which concerns the differences between the adherent of the ‘religion of reason’ broadly conceived and the Jew’s approach to the particular Other (conceived as individual or group) before them who appears to have erroneous conceptions of the eternal truths, the answer involves the specific religious mission of the Jews. That is, Mendelssohn seems to have little confidence that human beings can achieve a genuine solution to idolatry on a large scale with only the aid of reason. While the ‘religion of reason’ remains the archetype of all existing religions for Mendelssohn, he is skeptical of it ever concretely manifesting beyond a small elite within
any given culture. Fortunately, the dominant social order is generally bearable, 
Mendelssohn believes, in that even though it is founded upon prejudices and 
superstitions, it is stable and presents livable conditions, often with values that resemble 
genuinely moral ones though they are deficient in certain respects (for example, urging 
people not to do immoral actions for the wrong reasons). Mendelssohn considers reform 
efforts based on reason alone to be rather dangerous, as they uproot this established order, 
and inevitably accrue more damage than any possible benefits. As for the Jews, they, not 
reformers amongst the adherents of the ‘religion of reason’ broadly speaking, are to be 
the ultimate instrument bringing about humanity in general to embrace the ‘religion of 
reason’ and to abandon idolatry. It is the Jews, as the keepers of Halakhah, who bear 
witness to the eternal truths through their very lives, who will serve as the emissaries of 
reason in their isolated status from other peoples. The election of the Jews, however, is 
rooted ultimately in the unfathomable will of God, not in any sort of rationally universal 
natural theology. Thus, for Mendelssohn, it is ultimately the unfathomable will of the 
God of scriptural universalism which determines the direction of religious history, not the 
deistic God of rational universalism, whose will, incidentally, can be fathomed by human 
beings. \(^{113}\) At the eschaton, Mendelssohn, interpreting traditional doctrine in light of his 
thought, believes, the ‘religion of reason’ will emerge as universal among human beings, 
but not before.

Has Mendelssohn succeeded then in reconciling election with cultural 
egalitarianism, scriptural with rational universalism? Has his account of Judaism, unlike 
Christianity, allowed itself to be thoroughly permeated with natural theology, with 
rational universalism? While Mendelssohn’s innovations are impressive, we must
conclude that ultimately he cannot sufficiently escape the problem for which he finds fault in Christianity. His notion of the relationship between the Jew and the Other is fraught with the tension between Athens and Jerusalem, between scriptural and rational universalism. And thus, to the degree that he is unable to resolve this tension he is unable to resolve the tension between cultural egalitarianism and election.

Let us approach the difficult issue of the relationship of natural theology and election in Mendelssohn’s thought one final time. The Deuteronomic-monotheistic conception of Judaism, particularly its sense of election, is predicated upon separation from the Other, and is thus more or less satisfied by Mendelssohn’s position. However, while Mendelssohn fulfills the requirements of Deuteronomic-monotheisms, in that it provides a robust conception of election, it fails to satisfy the demands of the rational universalism of his natural theology, that all human beings inherently possess infinite worth, and therefore should have equal access to the eternal truths. Mendelssohn seems caught in an impassible bind, because natural theology, at least as he conceives of it, attempts to dissolve the agonism inherent in monotheistic religions. It does this through making the eternal truths and the universal human telos accessible to all human beings through reason. And yet, Mendelssohn must at the same time undermine the very egalitarian core of his natural theology in order to account for the election of the Jews. He introduces idolatry, truly a foreign concept, into natural theology, which sufficiently generates the particularism (and thus dynamic of particularism and universalism) necessary to sustain Jewish election. However, to the degree idolatry sustains Jewish election, it creates anew the agonism that the rational universalism of his natural theology was designed to dissolve. The best Mendelssohn can do is to soften the intolerance
endemic in monotheisms by breaking the automatic identity of the Other and the idolater, making the Other’s relationship to the idolater more difficult to discern, in addition to reducing any structural hostility towards the Other to a sort of indifference. While this is clearly a tremendous advance in regard to our project of ameliorating the violent intolerance of Deuteronomic-monotheisms, one cannot avoid the incoherence that arises with regard to the unfulfilled egalitarian needs of his own version of natural theology. The election of Judaism will always remain a heterogenous element in Mendelssohn’s natural theology, which undermines his very endeavor to establish Judaism as compatible with rationality, with natural theology.

Conclusion: Where Mendelssohn Fails

Mendelssohn attempts to overcome the intolerance inherent in Deuteronomic-monotheisms by replacing the traditional metaphysical foundation with that of his neo-Leibnizian natural theology, and thus supplementing the logic of scriptural universalism with rational universalism. However, as we saw, Mendelssohn’s endeavors in this direction enabled a softening of intolerance, it enabled a coexistence of election with a limited version of cultural egalitarianism, but it could not fully reconcile these two different trajectories. As a result, the urgent question facing us after this discussion is whether the difficulties encountered by Mendelssohn’s thought suggest that we should accept Leo Strauss’s famous claim that there is no genuine “possibility which transcends the conflict between philosophy and theology, or pretends to be the synthesis of both.” That is, should we accept that “[n]o one can be both a philosopher and a theologian.”

Mendelssohn’s failure, I submit, lies not so much in his commitment to synthesizing the rational universalism of natural theology with the scriptural universalism
regnant in Deuteronomic-monotheism (i.e. Judaism) in general, but rather in the specific manner in which he seeks to bring this about. His natural theology is problematic from the beginning, in that its metaphysics is premised upon a radical equality and deep homogeneity across apparent diversity which is incompatible with the discursive structure of Judaism itself. Thus, Mendelssohn’s enlightenment commitments present him with an ‘Athens’ that is incommensurable with his ‘Jerusalem,’ but this does not mean that we must accept the position of so much twentieth century Jewish thought, that (rationalist) philosophy and theology are in principle, at least in their deepest foundations, incommensurable.\textsuperscript{115}

The metaphysics of Mendelssohn’s natural theology is problematic from multiple vantage points from our perspective. Most obviously, his natural theology is tied to a conception of metaphysics, which as an enterprise has become rather suspect in philosophy. In both Continental and Analytic discourses, as well as their precursors in 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century philosophy, including the epoch-making thought of Mendelssohn’s contemporary and friend, Immanuel Kant, there has been a rigorous and steady assault on the metaphysical enterprise as a whole. To be sure, natural theology, Mendelssohn’s chosen medium of rational universalism, is by no means a dead enterprise in today’s world. However, its form has changed significantly, becoming more cautious in the wake of Kant, Heidegger, and so many other thinkers, not to mention, the dramatic impact of modern science. Mendelssohn’s robust neo-Leibnizian framework takes for obvious many assumptions about the capacities of human reason that subsequent philosophy has significantly problematized. All of Mendelssohn’s eternal truths, the existence of God, providence, and immortality of the soul, (although some more than others) have been
rendered highly questionable if not outright indefensible in light of subsequent philosophical developments. Mendelssohn’s notion of the ‘religion of reason,’ premised entirely around the metaphysical, eternal truths, is too hopelessly anachronistic to maintain any useful function today.

However, even more importantly for our purposes, the specific metaphysical assumptions implicit in Mendelssohn’s natural theology insist upon a radical homogeneity of truth across cultures and religions,116 which has two implications that are ultimately disastrous for Mendelssohn’s enterprise. The first implication is that his metaphysics forces him to inevitably do violence against the Other. Mendelssohn’s metaphysics consists in his insistence on the existence of the eternal truths, which are absolute and universal, metaphysical truths concerning the existence of God, providence, and immortality of the soul. While these truths have, ironically, a particularly Christian character to them, arising as they do from the neo-Scholastic philosophies of thinkers like Leibniz and Wolff, Mendelssohn insists that these truths belong to all rational religions, although they are figured in the diverse symbolic and linguistic frameworks of their respective religions. While Mendelssohn’s claim in this regard is, in fact, aimed at counteracting the more chauvinistic views of his contemporaries who tended to regard adherents of non-Christian religions as irrational, Mendelssohn nevertheless configures the Other and the Other’s religion in terms foreign to themselves. That is, because Mendelssohn believes that rationality necessarily involves belief in these metaphysical truths, he is compelled to render the Other as one who believes the same truths as oneself. As a result, the only legitimate differences between cultures insofar as they are rational, are the differing linguistic and cultural configurations in which these same eternal truths
are clothed. And while Mendelssohn zealously defends maintaining these cultural
differences, the differences themselves are rather insignificant. The great exception to
this minor differentiation between religions is Judaism, which Mendelssohn clearly
distinguishes by means of its elected status, Halakhah, and divine mission as the emissary
of reason.

The second problem related to the metaphysics constitutive of Mendelssohn’s
natural religion is that it is incompatible with Judaism. The very requirement of sameness
and equality essentially precludes the doctrine of election which stands at the very core of
Jewish self-understanding. To be sure, Mendelssohn is able to sustain a notion of Jewish
election, but it is only by introducing a heterogeneous element, idolatry, into the rational
universalism of his natural theology, which ultimately undermines it. Judaism, and
Deuteronomic-monotheism more generally, cannot coexist with a metaphysics predicated
upon equality and deep homogeneity between cultures. Rather it requires asymmetry in
some form or other, and Mendelssohn is only able to provide this by introducing
heterogeneous elements that contradict his natural theological foundation.

On the other hand, Mendelssohn is a far more subtle thinker than is often
recognized, and his innovations regarding the Other and idolatry are of tremendous
importance for both modern Jewish thought and the philosophy of religion.

Mendelssohn, as the first thinker in the religion of reason trajectory, discloses new ways
of thinking about monotheism, of combining rational and scriptural universalisms, even if
his synthesis of these two logics is not perfect. The difficulties and failures of his thought
also reveals the direction that subsequent thinkers of this trajectory, Kant and Cohen are
forced to take. In order to escape the intractable problems that reliance upon metaphysics
poses for tolerance, it is imperative that we look elsewhere for solutions to this problem.

Though on the whole Kant is even less successful in this venture than Mendelssohn, he makes two innovations contrary to Mendelssohn’s position that prove essential to the success that Cohen will ultimately achieve: he privileges rational universalism over scriptural universalism, and he shifts religion’s focus from metaphysical truths to ethical ones. It is these two innovations, which, when perfected by Cohen, lead to the elimination of violence in the intolerance of monotheistic religions, or at least in Judaism.

2 Novak has repudiated Conservative Judaism, and now refers to himself as a ‘traditionalist Jew.’
6 For two different attempts to account for Mendelssohn’s relative lack of influence on subsequent conceptions of Judaism, see Fritz Bamberger, “Mendelssohn’s Concept of Judaism,” *Studies In Jewish Thought: An Anthology of German Jewish Scholarship*, ed. Alfred Josen (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1981) 343-360; and David Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996), 147-155; As for his lack of influence in subsequent discussions in philosophy of religion, one only needs to look to a letter from Kant to Christian Gottfried Schütze in November, 1785. In this letter, Kant evaluates Mendelssohn’s final work of philosophy, *Morgenstunde* in the following manner. “Although the work of the worthy M[endelssohn] is to be considered in the main as a masterpiece of the self-deception of our reason...it is [nevertheless] an excellent work...One may also regard this final bequest of dogmatizing metaphysics as its most perfect product.” Cited in Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, 684-685 (note that Altmann actually cites the date incorrectly for this letter claiming it to be from 1786. I owe this correction to Prof. H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. [Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Hrsg. Von der Königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaft, V. X, 428-429]).
7 In recent years, the only scholar who considers it worth noting is Arnold Eisen, who mentions it in his important essay, “Divine Legislation as ‘Ceremonial Script’: Mendelssohn on the Commandments,” 247, 255, 256. However, since the primary purpose of Eisen’s article lies with Mendelssohn’s account of Halakhah, the ambiguous status of the Other is not extensively thematized in this essay.
10 This is a major theme in Willi Goetschel’s account of Mendelssohn in Spinoza’s Modernity: *Mendelssohn, Lessing,Heine*.
11 Steven D. Kepnes, “Moses Mendelssohn’s Philosophy of Jewish Liturgy: A Post-Liberal Assessment.”
This view is explicitly elucidated by Allan Arkush in *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 167-239, but if pushed, the other scholars who stress Mendelssohn’s cultural egalitarianism would have to take recourse to such a position. There is much in Mendelssohn’s writing that would support such a claim, as his discussions of the election of the Jews arise, at least ostensibly, to refute Christian calls for Jewish conversion. For good discussions of the context in which Mendelssohn writes his polemical Jewish works, see Almam, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, 194-263, 638-759, and Jeffrey S. Librett, *The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue: Jews and Germans* from Moses Mendelssohn to Richard Wagner and Beyond. (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2000) 44-99.

Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem: Or on Religious Power and Judaism*. Henceforth we will refer to this work simply as *Jerusalem*.

Moses Mendelssohn, “Gegenbetrachtungen über Bonncts Palingenesie.” Henceforth we will refer to this work as *Gegenbetrachtungen*.

Moses Mendelssohn. “Sache Gottes.” Henceforth referred to as *Sache Gottes*.


While Mendelssohn himself uses the designation ‘natural religion’ more frequently than ‘religion of reason,’ we will use the latter designation more frequently for the purposes of continuity with the other thinkers.

Obviously, the neo-Leibnizian metaphysical presuppositions about the world that Mendelssohn takes for granted as truths of rational universalism are highly problematic from a contemporary vantage point. Indeed, his contemporary and friend, Immanuel Kant, already begins the process towards their utter dissolution. Nevertheless, however far-fetched it may seem by contemporary standards, these truths are taken by Mendelssohn to be rationally universal.


Mendelssohn, *Sache Gottes*, ad passim.

It might be helpful to clarify Mendelssohn’s account of ‘inner-perfection’ from Kant’s better known ‘regulative ideal,’ to which it bears a remarkable similarity, at least on certain levels. In fact, the difference between Mendelssohn’s doctrine of ‘inner perfection’ and Kant’s ‘regulative ideals of morality’ are in regard to form rather than content. That is, Mendelssohn believes he can demonstrate the necessity of the doctrine of inner perfection using metaphysical argumentation such that it can be known with theoretical, metaphysical certitude. While Kant also believes human perfection to be an infinite process requiring immortality, he argues that the immortality of the soul cannot be known theoretically. Rather, it is one that human beings must postulate in terms of practical reason. In other words, for morality to have rational coherence, human beings must assume that there is an after life where our ‘selves’ continue and keep progressing towards higher levels of virtue. Kant believes this postulate is warranted inductively on the grounds of the moral law’s status as a fact of reason. Nevertheless, for Kant this knowledge always remains a postulate, a qualified hypothesis, not a metaphysical or scientific fact.

Mendelssohn, *Sache Gottes*, 251, §78.

Mendelssohn, *Sache Gottes*, 255 §81; To be sure, Mendelssohn explains, this ban on sacrificing rational beings for the greater good is meant in a long-term sense. That is, in the temporal world there is injustice and degradation suffered by rational beings that cannot be justified. This is precisely where Mendelssohn finds the rational necessity for the immortality of the soul. If we take immortality of the soul into account, then God is vindicated, because all that happens can then be understood to both be in the best interest of the universe as a whole and the individual, even if what happens is not in the individual’s best interest in terms of this lifetime.

Mendelssohn frequently uses felicity and eternal felicity, ‘Glückseligkeit’ and ‘ewige Glückseligkeit’ interchangeably.

Mendelssohn, *Sache Gottes*, 251, §78.


To be sure, the human telos for Mendelssohn is the infinite striving after human perfection, so strictly speaking one never actually reaches or fulfills it. However, the telos itself consists in the infinite striving, not in reaching the goal.

Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, 126

32 Actually, as we will see, it is not the concept of idolatry alone that enables Mendelssohn to remain within the sphere of Deuteronomic-monotheisms, but the connection between idolatry and election—for Mendelssohn, the election of the Jews would not be possible without idolatry.

33 Arnold Eisen perspicaciously notes that however problematic Mendelssohn’s account of idolatry is, it nevertheless remains the very cornerstone of his account of Judaism. “Divine Legislation as ‘Ceremonial Script’: Mendelssohn on the Commandments,” 248.

34 Mendelssohn, Gegenbetrachtungen, 96.

35 For discussions of Mendelssohn’s interaction with the philosophy and philosophical theologies prevalent in the Berlin of his day, see Altmann, Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study, 25-194, and Arkush, Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment, 37-67.

36 For the definitive account of Mendelssohn’s life, including the numerous controversies in which he became embroiled as a result of his historically unprecedented status as both a public intellectual and a Jew in the Europe of his day, see Altmann’s magisterial and voluminous, Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study. For an excellent recent discussion of the conceptual anti-Judaism with which Mendelssohn struggled, see Librett, The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue: Jews and Germans from Moses Mendelssohn to Richard Wagner and Beyond, pp.44-99.

37 This is not to claim that Mendelssohn’s discussions of Christianity are fair and balanced. My argument is merely that his discussions of Christianity are productive for understanding his re-configuration of the moments of the discursive structure of Judaism.

38 Actually, it is fairly difficult to define whether Mendelssohn advocates pluralism or tolerance. Since Mendelssohn considers there to be eternal truths of a metaphysical variety available to all human beings, pluralism as we have seems to be not really an option. However, he does allow for the plurality of the different cultural and linguistic forms these truths take. Ultimately, it is better to cast Mendelssohn’s thought in terms of tolerance, because, as we will see, once idolatry sets in, he puts forward a position of relative non-interference with the Other, even when one is convinced of the erroneous nature of the beliefs and practices of the Other.

39 Mendelssohn is not the first Jewish thinker to argue that Judaism is more rational than Christianity, and to present a vision of Judaism rooted in natural theology over against a Christianity which is viewed to possess an erroneous metaphysical scheme. Maimonides can be seen as an important forerunner of this.

40 Mendelssohn, Gegenbetrachtungen, 76,90,91

41 Mendelssohn, Sache Gottes, 221, §2.


43 Mendelssohn, Sache Gottes, ad passim.

44 Mendelssohn, Sache Gottes, 259, §84.

45 Mendelssohn, Sache Gottes, 250, §77.


47 Mendelssohn, Gegenbetrachtungen, 73.

48 Mendelssohn, Sache Gottes, 259 §84, and Gegenbetrachtungen, p.96.

49 Mendelssohn, Sache Gottes, 240 §60.

50 Mendelssohn, Sache Gottes, 240 §60.

51 Mendelssohn Sache Gottes, 250 §77.

52 Mendelssohn, Sache Gottes, p.250 §77.

53 See Goetschel, Spinoza’s Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine, 126.

54 Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 94; there is a remarkably similar passage in the earlier work, Gegenbetrachtungen, p.73.

55 Mendelssohn, Gegenbetrachtungen, 73.

56 Mendelssohn, Gegenbetrachtungen, p.73.

57 See for example, Mendelssohn’s letter to “a Jewish friend,” that is later quoted by Lessing in his reply to Michaelis, in September 1754, included in Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings, 93-94.

Mendelssohn, *Gegenbetrachtungen*, p.75.


These laws are developed primarily in the Babylonian Talmud, in the tractate Avodah Tzarah. For an extended treatment of these laws and their historical reception and development in Jewish thought, see Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahite Laws*.

Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, chapter 8: Book 14 Judges; included in *A Maimonides Reader*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Springfield, NJ: Behram House Inc, 1972) 221; See Eugene Korn’s excellent article, “Gentiles, the World to Come, and Judaism: the Odyssey of a Rabbinic Text,” *Modern Judaism*, V. 14, (Oct. 1994) 265-287, for a sustained discussion of the long and ambiguous reception history of this text by Maimonides. Korn explores not only the problems relating to variant editions with very different wording, but also how this text, in its important reception history, has been used to justify both pluralism and Jewish exclusivism. In Mendelssohn’s day, this authoritative text was seen by Halakhic authorities to be indicative of the exclusivist position. I would like to thank Professor Kenneth Seeskin for bringing this article to my attention.

See Guttmann, “Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem* and Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise*,” 367-368; Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 199-203 offers a recent discussion of this matter, and includes a helpful history of the scholarly disputes regarding this matter.

See Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism*, 376; However, if Korn’s thesis is correct in “Gentiles, the World to Come, and Judaism” then Mendelssohn’s position, in fact, is potentially not all that different from that of Maimonides.

Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, 94.


Mendelssohn, *Gegenbetrachtungen*, 75.


Mendelssohn’s account of the Halakhah has been an area of some interest to scholars. Important recent accounts of this aspect of Mendelssohn’s thought can be seen in Arnold Eisen’s “Divine Legislation as ‘Ceremonial Script’: Mendelssohn on the Commandments,” and Michael Morgan’s “History and Modern Jewish Thought: Spinoza and Mendelssohn on the Ritual Law,” *Judaism* 30 (1981), 467-478. For an important critique of Eisen’s position, that it does not sufficiently take into account the importance of adequate knowledge of the eternal truths advocated in Mendelssohn’s writings in natural theology, see Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 212-219. See also the classical position of Altman, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, 539-552.

Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, 100

Mendelssohn, *Gegenbetrachtungen*, 95.


Mendelssohn, Letter to Karl-Wilhelm, hereditary prince of Braunschweig-Wolfenbuttel, exact date unknown, letter after 1770, provided in *Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings*, 118.

Mendelssohn, *Gegenbetrachtungen*, 98.

Altman has described Mendelssohn’s ‘surmise’ about the origins of idolatry in abuses related to writing to be “the least substantiated of all theories he ever advanced” (*Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, 546).

Eisen, in his essay, “Divine Legislation as ‘Ceremonial Script’: Mendelssohn on the Commandments,” 248, also stresses the weaknesses of this argument, but importantly, 240 n.33, he nevertheless acknowledges that Mendelssohn’s account of idolatry is the cornerstone of Mendelssohn’s account of Judaism in *Jerusalem*.


Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, 118.

This clear sense of mission, present and future, which pervades Mendelssohn’s thought about the Jews and the enduring relevance of Halakha, is altogether lacking in Novak’s account of Mendelssohn in *The Jewish Social Contract*, where for example he makes such claims as “[y]et for Mendelssohn, it would seem, the keeping of the commandments of the Torah is a matter of gratitude for what God did as ‘[p]atron and Friend by covenant of their ancestors’” (181).
Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, p.120.


For a brief discussion of the messianic dimension to Mendelssohn’s account of the Halakhah, see Altmann, “Moses Mendelssohn’s Concept of Judaism Reexamined,” 246-247.

Mendelssohn, Gegenbetrachtungen, 98.

Mendelssohn, letter to Carl-Wilhelm, hereditary prince of Braunschweig-Wolfenbuettel, exact date unknown, letter after 1770, provided in Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings, 118.

Arkush is apparently satisfied with this response as a tenable position, Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment, 218-219.

Altmann, Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographic Study, 547.


Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 138.

Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 113.

Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 115.

Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 114.

Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 97; However, it is important to point out this room for individuals in Mendelssohn’s thought is different from Kant’s famous account of Enlightenment which rejects all “self-incurred immaturity,” “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment,” Perpetual Peace and Other Essays, trans. and ed. Ted Humphreys (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company: 1983) 41. For Mendelssohn independence of the individual does not require a complete break with culture, radical autonomy, but rather more and less refined relationships to tradition.

Since Mendelssohn argues that one only requires a modest knowledge of the eternal truths to be in accordance with one’s telos, he is not impressed with claims about the development or increased complexity of reason with the procession of history. Mendelssohn, in fact, has an ingenious reply to arguments about ‘rational’ development of human beings. His retort is that at each level of thought new conceptual problems emerge. While the religious beliefs of “the man who lives simply” are not as sophisticated, and perhaps not as conceptually adequate to the full complexity of the eternal truths, to his benefit the simple man “has not yet devised the objections which so greatly confuse the sophist,” not to mention the more complex problems raised by skeptics like Hume (Jerusalem, 95). In short, greater sophistication is not necessarily to be identified with religious or moral progress.

Here it is very important to keep our terms straight. It is important to remember that ‘idolater’ for Mendelssohn is one who has a deficient understanding of the eternal truths, and thus is not an adherent of the ‘religion of reason.’ His notion of an idolater is anyone who is lacking in truth. Thus, in traditional Judaism, according to the Noahide laws, a non-Jew might not be an idolater, but Mendelssohn would still understand this conception of the Other qua Noahide as qualifying as an idolater in some sense, in that this Noahide lacks the full sense of the truth in lacking access to Torah. For Mendelssohn, however, the non-Jew might possess knowledge of the truths constitutive of the ‘religion of reason’ to the same degree as a Jew.


Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 58.

Mendelssohn, letter to Lavater, Berlin, December 12, 1769, from Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings, 132-139.

Incidentally, this is where the source which I quote frequently, Gegenbetrachtungen, whose entire title, Gegenbetrachtungen über Bonnets Palingenesie, arises. Mendelssohn however wisely decides neither to publish this work nor share it with Lavater.


Mendelssohn, letter to Lavater, Berlin, December 12, 1769, from Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings, 136.

Mendelssohn, Phaedon, vii.

Mendelssohn, letter to Lavater, Berlin, December 12, 1769, from Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings, 137.

Mendelssohn, letter to Lavater, Berlin, December 12, 1769, from Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings, 137.
Mendelssohn, letter to Lavater, Berlin, December 12, 1769, from Moses Mendelssohn: Selections from his Writings, 137.

Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 63.

Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 62-63; Notice that Mendelssohn neglects to mention religious fanaticism in this passage. This omission does not indicate, however, that it is no longer a concern. Rather, Mendelssohn addresses this issue, in terms of an erroneous conception of God, elsewhere in Jerusalem.

For an excellent article which reads Mendelssohn's ambiguity in regard to state power vis-à-vis religion in terms of the issues surrounding imperfect and perfect rights, the state of nature and civil society, see Nathan Rotenstreich's, "On Mendelssohn's Political Philosophy," Essays in Jewish Philosophy in the Modern Era, ed. Reiner Munk (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1994) 70-85.


Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 117-118.

See, for example, Mendelssohn, Gegenbetrachtungen, 75.

Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 118.

Mendelssohn, Gegenbetrachtungen, 73.


Incidentally, in this respect, Mendelssohn's view of religion is very much a creature of his time, as the ultimate correspondence of religions as regards to teachings and ultimate beliefs was a common assumption of Enlightenment philosophy of religion. See Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1951) 165-166.

Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, 134-139.
Chapter 3

Kant’s Polytheistic Monotheism

The next thinker of the religion of reason trajectory that we will explore is Immanuel Kant. Kant is rather peculiar in this group of thinkers that we are exploring in that his allegiance to the agenda of the religion of reason trajectory is, in fact, somewhat questionable. For one thing, despite the recent upsurge in interest in his thought among Christian philosophers and theologians, he views Christianity as only a means to a new religion, his version of the ‘religion of reason.’ This new religion, centered solely upon practical reason, he believes will unite and transform the entire world in its image. Unlike Mendelssohn and Cohen who strive to preserve the integrity of the discursive structure of the Deuteronomistic-monotheistic religion to which they are adherents—Judaism, Kant’s concern is with the new religion, the ‘religion of reason,’ that emerges from his philosophy and he sees all religions as potential means to this end. Kant’s methodological point of origin lies with philosophical considerations external to any particular religious tradition, and in this sense he resembles externalists such as Habermas and Lyotard more than Mendelssohn or Cohen. It is from this external vantage point which he then proceeds to interpret Christianity, and presumably all other religious traditions, with the possible exception of Judaism, (which is most likely beyond hope for Kant).

While Kant’s endeavor is aimed at ending religious violence it really has very little to do with the principle of tolerance as we understand it, and nothing at all to do with pluralism. Above all, religious tolerance and pluralism require an acceptance of genuine difference between religions. Kant’s account of rational universalism and the
notion of the ‘religion of reason’ that derives from it, however, efface all essential
differences between religions. Rather than tolerance, which requires difference, Kant
wants to establish a peace predicated upon a relative homogeneity rooted in a universal
notion of ethics. It is the ethical homogeneity that the ‘religion of reason’ is to provide,
which according to Kant, will undermine the conditions which generate religious
violence.

Kant’s religious thought vigorously diagnoses the problems of religious
intolerance and violence as they have historically existed. It is particularly effective in
highlighting the difficulties which obstruct communication and agreement across
religions and even across sects as a result of mutually exclusive dogmatic/metaphysical
schemes and mutually exclusive forms of worship. He thoroughly discloses the problems
that are bound up with revelation, its tendency to inhibit discourse with those outside
one’s community. In other words, his thought radically problematizes scriptural
universalism for its lack of necessity and universality, the traits of rational universalism
that are requisite characteristics for sustaining unbreakable rational agreements for human
beings from very different religious and cultural contexts.

Whatever the incongruities between Kant’s position and those of the other
thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory, it is nevertheless imperative that we include
him in this group of thinkers. Although Kant’s thought regarding monotheism and
intolerance is, in many respects, less successful than Mendelssohn’s, he nevertheless
introduces two crucial innovations into this trajectory of thought, in addition to his more
thorough problematizing of scriptural universalism, that are essential to the ultimate
success of the project of the religion of reason trajectory. In sharp contrast to
Mendelssohn, who preserves the God of scriptural universalism and thus ultimately sustains its logic, Kant reduces God to a principle of reason, and in doing so he subordinates scriptural universalism to rational universalism. And where Mendelssohn remains committed to a metaphysical conception of religion, Kant shifts to an ethical conception of religion, even if he does not entirely break free from metaphysics. While these changes are ultimately essential for the success of the endeavor of the religion of reason trajectory as a whole (when they are appropriated and perfected by Hermann Cohen), Kant’s philosophy of religion is ultimately unsuccessful in solving the problem of monotheistic intolerance largely due to its one-sided, over-zealous subordination of the logic of scriptural universalism to rational universalism.

The Achilles heel of Kant’s entire endeavor is that despite his important innovations regarding rational universalism and the post-metaphysical, ethical turn, he nevertheless fatally overestimates the trans-temporality, the necessity and universality, and thus the very rationality, of his own account of reason. As Hegel was quick to point out, Kant fails to recognize and take account of the influence his own historical context exerts upon his thought. Kant’s entire foundation for religious tolerance and critique of historical religions is predicated upon a robust notion of rational universalism, which includes his ‘religion of reason.’ However, this thorough-going rational-universalism is, in truth, a bit of a sham, in that while being quite effective in highlighting the contingency and arbitrariness of the historical religions, it is itself a ‘rational universalism’ in name only. That is, Kant smuggles all sorts of contingent cultural, religious, and historical assumptions into its content, and thus in all truth, it is far from being a genuine ‘rational universalism.’ As a result, Kant’s ‘religion of reason,’ rather
than bringing unity, merely reproduces a new method of distinction, one based on the priority of humanity, human dignity, morality (deontology) and other aspects of reason as opposed to the divine will.

In fact, while Kant is the thinker of the religion of reason trajectory who most radically repudiates the logic of scriptural universalism in the name of rational universalism, in the end, it is his account of the ‘religion of reason’ that retains the most problematic features of the common Deuteronomistic-monotheistic traditions, the very traditions he sets out to overcome. In short, though he aims to essentially replace Deuteronomistic-monotheistic religions (along with all others) with his ‘religion of reason,’ thus solving the problem of their violent exclusivism, his thought is, in a very real sense, the most uncritical inheritor and appropriator of these traditions. Just like common Deuteronomistic-monotheistic religions, Kant’s ‘religion of reason’ establishes a single universal human telos (whose claims to rational universality remain problematic), a standard which it uses to judge all others. And it too cannot tolerate particularity, genuine difference, genuine otherness. In fact, in Kant’s teleological vision of the development of humanity, any claim that does not subscribe to his specific account of rational universalism lacks reason as Kant defines it, and is both deficient and necessitated to whither away and ultimately vanish. Kant does not so much domesticate monotheism and its proclivity to intolerance through rational universalism as replicate it and provide a new form for it, the supposedly rationally universal ‘religion of reason.’

In considering Kant’s approach to the ‘religion of reason’ it is important that we traduce, if only briefly, much of the spectrum of his thought. We must first discuss the familiar difference between theoretical and practical reason in order to understand not
only that these different modalities of reason encounter the world differently, but in fact, engender conflicting notions of the human subject, the sensible and the moral self. The disparate ‘selves’ produced by the competing rationalities in turn serve as the foundation for very different sorts of religiosity. The sensible self, which is rooted in theoretical reason, is the foundation of historical religions, which Kant thinks subscribe to the logic of scriptural universalism. The moral self, in contrast, embedded in practical reason, grounds the ‘religion of reason,’ and embraces rational universalism wholeheartedly. Kant elucidates the distinctions between the selves implicit in theoretical and practical reason, historical religions and the ‘religion of reason,’ and the logics of scriptural and rational universalism, in his juxtaposition of Judaism and Christianity, where Judaism is a cipher for the constellation of the former elements and Christianity for the latter in each juxtaposition.

In this chapter we will examine Kant’s attempt to think through the conditions for peace between different religious communities. We will begin by examining the model of peace operative in Kant’s thought, which appears in its simplest and most basic form in “The Discipline of Pure Reason” in the Critique of Pure Reason. Next, we will explore Kant’s strategy for enacting a similar process of securing peace in religion through dichotomizing religions based upon the fissure between the sensible and the moral self. After this we will explore Kant’s notion of the ‘religion of reason’ in greater depth, particularly his claims asserting that it alone, in radical contrast to all historical religions, possesses the capacity for securing peace. We will then flesh out Kant’s notion of the ‘religion of reason,’ which I argue, is actually a new form of monotheism, by juxtaposing Kant’s account of Christianity, which has been thoroughly transfigured in light of the
‘religion of reason,’ with a notion of Judaism that is emblematic of common Deuteronomic-monotheistic religions. Finally, we will conclude with a discussion of Kant’s position vis-à-vis the other thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory as well as externalist thinkers such as Habermas.

*Kant and the Secure Foundation of Reason*

In order to understand Kant’s strategy for reconciling monotheism and tolerance, or perhaps better, subjugating Deuteronomic-monotheisms to the universal ‘religion of reason,’ which eliminates those conditions that generate inter-religious hatred and violence, it is helpful to understand Kant’s basic universalizing strategy of conflict resolution. Kant uses this strategy in a variety of ways throughout his oeuvre, in regard to theoretical reason, politics, as well as religion. It is most apparent and clear, and thus easiest to comprehend, in regard to theoretical reason, where it is spelled out in particular in the section entitled, ‘The Discipline of Pure Reason,’ in his epoch-making work, *Critique of Pure Reason*. In this section of the first *Critique*, Kant elucidates the requisite conditions for philosophy, and ultimately, culture, to establish themselves upon a new, more secure, foundation, the “rights of human reason.” This is a foundation which, according to Kant, “recognizes no other judge than that of human reason in which everyone has its say.”2

In order for this new foundation of reason to emerge, its limits must be carefully critiqued in order to bring reason into accordance with itself. What this means, as Kant explains in the ‘Preface to the First Edition,’ is that reason must reach a stage of “matured judgment” such that it attains “self-knowledge,”3 freeing itself of misunderstandings whereby it “comes into conflict with itself.”4 Reason comes into conflict with itself,
according to Kant, when it makes claims and rulings that fail to adhere to “its own eternal and unalterable laws.” However, despite the fact that he believes that there is a universal and eternal essence to reason, which all human beings possess, in the ‘The Discipline of Pure Reason,’ Kant explains that bringing reason to ‘self-knowledge’ is a long and arduous process filled with conflict and strife. Kant uses the terminology of the state of nature, war, and legal order, to characterize the processes of reason being brought, or better, bringing itself, to a state of self-knowledge.

The Critique of Pure Reason is Kant’s monumental effort to enact this process of bringing reason to self-knowledge, at least in regard to theoretical reason, particularly in regard to the interminable disputes involved in metaphysics. His solution is to carefully explore the limits of human knowledge, which he does by ‘discovering’ its grounds and limits in synthetic a priori judgments which roughly equate to truth claims about the empirical world, or more specifically, about the world of phenomena. In doing so Kant critiques the entire metaphysical enterprise that has gone on before him, by demonstrating that the warring parties are motivated by premises that clearly exceed the bounds of the possibility of human knowledge. By transgressing the boundaries of legitimate human knowledge, these arguments use reason against itself in that they make arguments that are incommensurable with the eternal laws and character of reason. Thus, the arguments presented by the different parties in metaphysical disputes misuse reason, and this misuse is precisely why metaphysical disputes are interminable in nature. Since it is his Critique that ‘discovers’ the limits of reason, and thus elucidates the eternal and unchangeable nature of reason itself, Kant claims, “in the absence of this critique, reason is, as it were, in the state of nature, and can establish and secure its assertions and claims
only through war." War, as the polar opposite of reason at harmony with itself, cannot
genuinely establish and secure any assertions, in that it is indicative of a lack of any
mutually acceptable way to ascertain legitimacy of any position over against any other.
Thus, in metaphysical matters, war discloses that there is no mutually acceptable way to
ascertain which side, if any, is correct.

Since metaphysical disputes in this state of nature in which Kant finds himself
misuse reason by presenting arguments which exceed the bounds of the possibility of
human knowledge (at least in its theoretical capacity) there are no grounds by which to
reach legitimate consensus or agreement. That is, since metaphysical speculation
transcends the epistemological framework of understanding that is shared by all human
beings, all metaphysical arguments lack the necessity and universality required to
generate agreement and even coherence. For example, in the ‘Antinomies of Pure
Reason,’ Kant explains how, if one is not cognizant of the specific limits of synthetic a
priori judgments, one can make arguments that are equally sound that the world both
began in time and that the world has always existed and has no beginning. That is, the
arguments of both sides of this dispute about the origin of the world appear equally
compelling, in that they are utilizing legitimate or ‘logically sound’ maneuvers of
thought. However, the rules of logic and reason to which these arguments appeal are only
compelling within the empirical world of phenomena and do not extend beyond it. Thus,
both sides of the dispute are in fact utilizing specious arguments in that they are
appealing to rules that only apply to the empirical world of phenomena in regard to
matters that transcend this sphere.
If both sides of a dispute have recourse to equally sound logical arguments, then in such matters, there can be no such verification or justification of one side over against another. As a result, Kant argues that inevitably all metaphysical “disputes are ended by a victory to which both sides lay claim, and which is generally followed by a merely temporary armistice.” That is, if reason is not brought onto sound foundations by recognizing its own limits, which is what Kant attempts with the *Critique*, there will never be any final arbiter in such disputes to decide which side, if any, is correct: it will always be merely one side against another.

Of absolutely paramount significance for Kant’s solution to such perpetual conflict is to juxtapose a particular notion of reason to this account of war. Kant’s account of reason, unlike the various accounts put forward by past metaphysicians as well as his contemporaries, examines the nature and limits of reason itself and, as a result, Kant believes, discovers the true nature of reason itself. Thus, rather than misusing reason, Kant thinks his philosophy alone creates the conditions by which reason can be properly employed, and as such, can come to possess universality and necessity, which enables it to demonstrate its validity for all parties. That is, reason, when properly employed, is a source of intersubjective unity and agreement. In fact, the source of reason’s power for Kant is that it is universally possessed by all human beings, and when sufficiently explored and critiqued, its character and therefore its findings are identical for all human beings regardless of ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender and other contingencies. Or at least, this is what Kant claims. However, we will see, that his notion of reason smuggles in certain cultural assumptions that fall short of necessity and universality. Nevertheless, according to Kant’s account of reason, disputes can now be
satisfactorily resolved because all parties will, by virtue of reason, agree which arguments are valid and which are not.

Kant’s notion of reason is radically opposed to the interminable opposition that characterizes the state of nature and war. For Kant, reason, which is possessed by all human beings, brings harmony and unanimity, as its validity has to be recognized by virtue of its universality and its necessity. Only ‘critical’ reason (reason brought onto solid foundations via Kant’s Critique) supplies legislation that arrives “at all its decisions in the light of fundamental principles of its own institution, the authority of which no one can question.” In other words, Kant claims that critical reason engenders a legislation which alone “secures us the peace of a legal order.”¹⁰ This legislation is the result of nothing else than reason instituting its own critique, delimiting and demarcating its own capacities and boundaries, in order to provide a secure foundation that lies beyond question in order to end all arguments and bring ‘the peace of a legal order’ upon the warring parties in metaphysical disputations. And this rational order enjoys a legality which is recognized by all as legitimate as a result of its indisputable necessity and universality. Such a status qualitatively distinguishes this rational order from all states of affairs that have come before.

In the process of securing this firm foundation, this legal order, of reason the Critique of Pure Reason undermines the traditional understanding of metaphysics virtually en toto. Theoretical reason, Kant argues, is limited to knowledge concerning the empirical world, whereas metaphysics is concerned with flights of fancy that transcend the limits of the human capacity to gather knowledge. This decisive limitation of traditional metaphysics opens the path for a new form of reason, practical reason,
pertaining primarily to morality, which in turn, as we will see, serves as a basis for politics and religion. In the spheres of politics and, what concerns us primarily, religion, Kant, ever the systematic thinker, envisions a parallel process beginning with the state of nature, where the perpetual conflict of disparate parties generates conditions conducive for the emergence of a rational, legal order, this time founded upon the eternal and changeless moral order, to found a lasting peace. However, this is a bit more complicated in that this peace is refracted through the 'Third Antinomy.'

*Dichotomized Religions and Fractured Selves*

The *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone* is very much a repetition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*’s enactment of a ‘lasting peace’ in metaphysical disputes, albeit now the stakes and terms of this peace are within the practical realm of religion rather than speculative metaphysics. No longer does Kant confine his task to securing the basis for a peace and agreement among quibbling metaphysicians, but rather he attempts to find in practical reason, morality, the means with which to end the perpetual wars of the mutually exclusive, and mutually antagonistic, metaphysical positions of different religious groups, a move which has serious social and political ramifications. That is, moral reason, and the ‘religion of reason’ which Kant believes to be implicit in it, does not so much generate conditions by which different religions can now tolerate one another, but rather, it effaces their essential differences so that only superficial ones of no consequence and thus not really matters of tolerance or intolerance, remain. Kant wants peace established on a basis of homogeneity rather than tolerance, which can only exist on the basis of difference. Nevertheless, like the other thinkers of the religion of reason
trajectory, it is of great concern for Kant, to eliminate the conditions which generate the violence bound up with monotheistic intolerance.

The primary movement in Kant's method for securing religious peace, and thus the elimination of the violence of monotheistic intolerance, lies in an act of dichotomizing religions, radically separating those ultimately rooted in revelation from those ultimately rooted in (practical) reason.12 It is not insignificant that rather than finding the fundamental point of division between religions in matters pertaining to conceptions of the divine such as the plurality or singularity of gods,13 Kant finds that that which characterizes a religion one way or the other is its notion of the human.14 Kant explains, "[a]ll religions...can be divided into those which are endeavors to win favor (mere worship) and moral religions, i.e., religions of good life conduct."15 What then separates religions of 'mere worship' from 'moral religions'? The difference between religions of mere worship and moral religions, i.e. instantiations of the 'religion of reason,' lies ultimately in Kant's philosophical anthropology, and this difference could not be more fundamental for his thought.

The dichotomy within Kant's philosophical anthropology, more primordial than that between religions of worship and the religion of reason, has its origins in the Critique of Pure Reason. Of decisive importance for Kant's entire post-critical oeuvre is the 'Third Antinomy' which first appears in the Critique of Pure Reason. In the Third Antinomy Kant finds himself faced with two mutually contradictory but equally basic 'facts' of human existence, freedom of the will and determinism.16 This split arises in response to Kant's insistence that the understanding of human beings, given its sensible, temporal, and discursive,17 nature, is constituted in such a way that causal determinism is
a general universal condition of experience as such. Such a view, which provides the necessary conditions for Newtonian science, nevertheless altogether excludes the possibility of freedom, which Kant takes to be an equally basic ‘fact’ of human existence. In order to accommodate these apparently irreconcilable orders of causality and thus resolve the antinomy, Kant fractures reality into phenomenal and a noumenal level, and concomitantly, reason itself splits into theoretical and practical components. The result of this (in)famous solution of the fissuring of reason, is that a chasm opens up in the heart of human identity, in the heart of the self. Two largely incommensurable notions of the self arise, each nested in divergent spheres which emerge in Kant's crucial bifurcation of knowledge. The human being, for Kant, is now both a moral agent, and as such, a member of the intelligible world of the noumena, as well as a creature of sensibility and thus a member of the sensible world of phenomena.¹⁸

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant only lays out the bare possibility of these divergent causalities and thus secures the possibility for two separate rationalities, and thus (at least) two separate conceptions of the human being to simultaneously coexist. In his later works he refines the relationship between these two conceptions of the human being and the two worlds in which it dwells. Kant writes, “[t]he sensible nature of rational beings in general is their existence under empirically conditioned laws, and hence is, for [practical] reason, heteronomy. The suprasensible nature of the same beings, on the other hand, is their existence according to laws that are independent of any empirical condition and that hence belong to the autonomy of pure reason.”¹⁹ We will designate that part of the human being or human self which dwells in the sensible world as the ‘sensible self’ in order to distinguish it from its moral counterpart, that part of the
human self dwelling in the intelligible world, possessing autonomy, which we will term the ‘moral self.’

Kant makes this fracture between the sensible self and the moral self even sharper in the famous first paragraph of the ‘Conclusion’ of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, where he states: “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more frequently and persistently one’s meditation deals with them: the starry sky above me and the moral law within me.” That is, these two ‘things’ are each emblems of the different rationalities and concomitant worlds in which the (fractured) human being dwells, and each speaks decisively to the status of the human being. As for the ‘starry sky above me,’ the sight of “a countless multitude of worlds...annihilates, as it were, my importance as an animal creature that, after having for a short time been provided (one knows not how) with vital force, must give back again to the planet (a mere dot in the universe) the matter from which it came.” In short, from the vantage point of theoretical reason and the sensible world, human beings (qua sensible selves) are merely one of a myriad species on a planet that is one of countless other planets in an endless universe. Human beings qua sensible selves are but natural creatures, mere animals, governed by the same laws of nature as beavers and ants, without anything genuinely distinctive or significant about them, at least in any absolute sense.

The human being qua sensible self, like any animal, is driven by the rhythms and laws of nature encoded in its very being through instincts and drives, which Kant terms ‘inclinations.’ These inclinations derive from the finitude of the beings themselves, and are bound up with the desire to compensate for and satisfy what is inherently lacking in them. This desired compensation and satisfaction of needs and wants, Kant argues,
derives from a foundational desire for happiness, or prolonged “agreeableness of life,” present in all finite, and therefore sensible, discursive, and temporal, beings such as humans. While all human beings qua sensible selves innately possess the desire for happiness, it is not an intersubjective source of unity and harmony like reason, in that it is inextricably bound up with the finite nature of the sensible self, of the inherently particular, even individual, nature of the sensible self’s physiological constitution. As opposed to reason, the desire for happiness is only problematically universal in that although happiness is desired by all human beings, or rather all finite rational beings, its particular content varies significantly from case to case. As a result, there is no basis for consensus in regard to predilections and tastes, and thus the ‘universal’ desire for happiness becomes a source of discord and tension not harmony.  

Human beings qua sensible selves, although driven by individual notions of happiness, are also intrinsically social beings, and these two aspects of their personality are not complementary. Kant felicitously terms this tension humanity’s “unsocial sociability,” a turn of phrase which hints at the dynamic tension between the innately human needs of sociability and happiness. That is, human beings are inherently social in nature, desiring equality and respect from their fellows, and yet it is precisely this social nature that forces them to make compromises with their own individual pursuit of happiness, as the two propensities often exist at cross purposes with one another. Thus, social life is one filled with tension and antagonism, much like the world of politics. To use the language of ‘The Discipline of Pure Reason,’ the sensible self is enmeshed in the state of nature and war, incapable of finding a legal order to establish a lasting peace.
However, the perception of the human being shifts dramatically when we examine the second ‘thing’ which fills the mind with admiration and awe, the moral law within us. The moral law, in contradistinction to the starry skies, “elevates infinitely my worth as that of an intelligence by my personality, in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even the entire world of sense...a determination that is not restricted to conditions and boundaries of this life but proceeds to infinity.” Kant claims that the moral law, as part of the human sphere, reveals that human beings (qua moral selves), in addition to being mere animals thoroughly determined by the laws of nature, are also simultaneously free beings independent of the ‘entire world of sense.’ This means that human beings are simultaneously autonomous agents that can unconditionally motivate themselves to obey a law of reason, and can thus break with the chain of causal determinism which informs reality as it is construed by theoretical reason. That is, rather than having their will thoroughly informed and structured by nature, human beings are capable of conceiving, and of acting in accordance with, this conception of nature not as it is, but as it ought to be, i.e. in accordance with the moral law. In other words, rather than being wholly shaped and defined by nature, human beings qua moral selves, can, on the contrary, shape and define nature according to their reason. As a result, human beings are imbued with an absolute dignity that is incommensurable with animals and creatures of the world of sense.

The moral self operates in the intelligible world of morality, not in the empirical order of sensuous existence. This intelligible order operates according to a set of rules and practices independent from those governing the natural order of sensuous reality, and as a result, the human being has a very different status and is called to play a very
different role. Kant thinks that human beings, as bearers of practical reason, inhabit the
moral world, where intersubjectivity is experienced not as the clash of individuals
engaged in a struggle of wills each pursuing its individual happiness, but as a
harmonious, universal commonwealth or kingdom of autonomous beings organized
around the moral law. It is in the intelligible realm of autonomous individuals where Kant
believes the resources for the achievement of a legitimate legal order that will secure
peace are to be found.

Kant claims that human beings naturally possess practical reason, and thus,
naturally possess moral selves. As a result, human beings recognize that they have certain
duties towards which they ought to bring their behavior and actions into accord as much
as possible. These duties are rooted in the moral law, in the basic recognition that a
certain behavior or action is warranted in a particular situation, and that the human being
qua moral self is obligated to perform this behavior or action by the simple fact that it
possesses reason. That is, the reason of the human being itself, regardless of all
inclinations, and often in the face of them, makes certain demands upon her qua moral
self such that it demands that she recognize the moral law and act accordingly, even when
it conflicts with her own innate desire for happiness. Kant insists further that human
beings possess this capacity to recognize the moral law, to bring their own will into
accord with it for no other reason than that it is rational and moral, such that one wills the
moral law for oneself. In other words, Kant claims that human beings possess the capacity
for 'autonomy.' It is only autonomy that can allow human beings to overcome nature's
determinism regarding the inclinations.
However, we must understand that the moral law is not simply a feature of the intelligible world, but rather it is the very foundation of it. Recognition of the moral imperative discloses that human beings possess autonomy, or at least the capacity for autonomy, and thus that human beings qua moral selves are independent on a foundational level from the order of nature. It is precisely this capacity to adhere to the moral law, which makes the humanity in the human being an end in itself, and which makes each individual human being an end in itself, because each human being possesses this capacity to be a moral agent.27

Just as theoretical reason, once critiqued, becomes a source of harmony in the intersubjective realm, disclosing a shared framework for truth claims, so too does rational morality reveal such a harmonizing tendency. Autonomy, as the self-willed subjection to the lawful rulings of rational morality itself, is part of an intersubjective unity, in that the moral imperative is shared by all rational beings. However, Kant is adamant that when one proceeds in self-willed subjection to the rulings of morality, one is not heteronomously subjecting oneself to the will of another, or even to the will of the whole, but rather to the dictates of one’s own practical reason, which happens to be shared by all other rational beings. Kant states, “we can think of a whole of all ends in systematic connection, a whole of rational beings as ends in themselves as well as a whole of particular purposes which each may set for himself...Thus there arises a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws.”28 Kant terms this intersubjective moral order inextricably bound up with the autonomy of the moral self as the ‘Kingdom of Ends.’ The Kingdom of Ends, at first only an ideal, becomes the promise of a
legitimate, perpetual peace, a purely moral community that enjoys the reign of an indisputable, valid, legal order.

Thus, the distinction that Kant makes between religions of mere worship and the ‘religion of reason’ distinguishes between religions in terms of which ‘self’ (and thus also, which ‘world’—sensible or intelligible) they prioritize. The ‘religion of reason’ is not one concrete religion, but rather it is an ideal that should be held by all religions. It is an ideal whose content consists in the rationalizing of all particular rituals and dogmas of a religion such that this religion no longer privileges the sensible self but rather elevates and supports the moral self and its notion of the ‘Kingdom of Ends.’ To be sure, the ‘religion of reason’ does not completely efface the sensible self of human beings but rather gives decisive predominance to the moral self. The religions of ‘mere’ worship, on the other hand, which according to Kant, constitute all historical religions, prioritize the sensible self and subordinate the moral self (often drastically, stifling its realization). Kant acknowledges that these religions have some rational and thus moral content, but this content remains latent, buried beneath rituals and dogmas designed to accommodate the sensible self. At present, the world is dominated by these historical religions and their prioritization of the sensible self. Kant claims that it is precisely this prioritization of the sensible self that is the root of inter-religious discord and violence.

*Historical Religions*

If Kant reformulates the account offered in ‘The Discipline of Pure Reason’ regarding the process of founding a secure and legal peace in *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone* in terms of the wars of religion, then historical religions, religions of ‘mere worship,’ correspond to the roles of state of nature and war in the former account.
In his discussions of historical religions, Kant finds the source of their deficiency to lie in their privileging of the sensible over the moral self. In addition, Kant radically problematizes scriptural universalism, which for Kant is the operating logic for these religions. On a methodological level, Kant never really distinguishes between monotheisms and other religions, but rather treats all religions as if they share the same logic and structure as monotheisms. Not only are the sensible self and scriptural universalism inextricably linked in Kant’s account, but the two share the same fatal deficiency: they lack the fundamental conditions of rational universalism, necessity and genuine universality. As a result, though such religions have universal pretensions to peace and harmony, they can only engender endless conflict and strife. Historical religions, Kant insists, are not governed by autonomy and practical reason, but, in fact, the contrary, the forces of sensibility, motivations of fear of punishment and desire for reward—all of which boil down to the desire for happiness—rule unfettered in these traditions. In short, these religions remain firmly within the ambit of the sensible self. That is, their ultimate motivation comes from self-love, when the desire for happiness is privileged above moral duty, in one’s maxim.

In a rather radical move, Kant claims that the forms of worship inherent in religions of ‘mere worship’ systematically prevent the human being from fulfilling the demands of the moral law and the entire realm of morality by privileging God above the moral law. By elevating God above the moral law, such that God can aid human beings in bypassing it, the absoluteness of the moral law is degraded and rendered relative. Such a notion of God and worship are aimed at the inclinations, either negatively or positively, either towards quelling the fear of God or hoping to influence God in order to bring about
the satisfaction of one's inclinations. This notion of God and these forms of worship are incompatible with the recognition of the rational necessity of moral duties.

Religions of 'mere worship' enjoy enormous power over the human mind because of the innate constitution of the human subject, especially its sensible components. Kant recognizes that the vast majority of human beings seem to be simply incapable of accepting that the abstract nature of the 'religion of reason,' which as we will see, demands only that one be moral in order to be pleasing to God. Kant believes that the root of this error lies, at least in part it seems, in the tendency of human beings to conceive of God anthropomorphically, such that God is understood to be an essentially infinitely powerful human lord. As a result of this mistake, people feel that just like "each great worldly lord stands in special need of being honored by his subjects and glorified through protestations of submissiveness" so too God, only on a grander scale. Thus, human beings enjoy a particular sort of satisfaction in devoting actions and rituals to God, believing they show obeisance and win favor. However, since this anthropomorphized notion of God is not rooted in the universality and necessity of reason, there can be no consensus in either the nature of this God, His personality as it were, or how He wants to be worshipped. As Kant puts it, if one goes beyond the strict morality implied by the 'religion of reason,' and thinks that other statutory practices are required to serve God, then "everything...is arbitrary." Thus, it is not surprising that a diversity of mutually exclusive religions emerge, religions which not only conceive of God differently, but which employ contradictory methods for honoring, glorifying, and generally worshipping the divine.
This diversity and incompatibility of both methods and objects of worship among historical religions is a result, Kant believes of the deficient universalism of what we have termed scriptural universalism. In *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, Kant radically problematizes scriptural universalism. For Kant the only legitimate form of universalism is rational universalism, because it not only maintains universality but also possesses rational necessity. Kant, who as we will see, believes that his system of morality—and therefore also the ‘religion of reason’ implicit in it—is rooted in rational universalism, juxtaposes this to historical religions based on revelation, or in our language, religions operating according to the logic of scriptural universalisms. Kant claims that every religion craves universal domination, or in his words, “cherishes the proud pretensions of becoming a church universal.” However, unless such a religion is fully in accord with the ‘religion of reason,’ such a desire will go unrealized, because it’s content, i.e. theology and modes of worship, merely possess a universal scope, they do not possess genuine universality because they lack any necessity.

Kant argues that religions that are not fully rationalized remain beholden to revelation as their sources of authority, and their forms of worship are rooted in the contents of their accounts of revelation. Revelation, by its nature is contingent and historical. The deficiencies of historical faiths in regard to universality and necessity, Kant explains, are bound up with their being “grounded solely on facts,” that they “can extend [their] influence no further than tidings of it can reach,” that they are “subject to circumstances of time and place,” and that they are “dependent upon the capacity [of human beings] to judge the credibility of such tidings.” Accounts of revelation take place, supposedly, at particular times and places, affecting particular peoples. Thus, in
contradistinction to the moral law and the 'religion of reason' parasitic upon it, though their scope is universal in that they make claims which assert relevance to all human beings, their specific claims are not in fact genuinely universal to all human beings in all times and places because they possess no rational necessity. Rather, a teaching of revelation "like all empirical knowledge...carries with it the consciousness not that the object believed in must be so and not otherwise, but merely that it is so; hence it involves the consciousness of its contingency." In short, because historical religions are rooted in revelation rather than reason, one must have had access to the teachings of the religion, which is only possible if one lives in areas where they have been promulgated.

In addition, as Kant mentioned in the passage cited above, not only are teachings of revelation limited geographically and historically, but the spreading of a particular teaching of revelation also depends upon 'the capacity of men to judge the credibility of such tidings.' However, Kant argues, human beings are incapable of legitimately ascertaining the validity of one set of claims proffered by a specific religious tradition's account of revelation as opposed to those of another. One should note the resonance with the endless metaphysical disputes of dogmatic reason that Kant discusses in the first Critique. As with the metaphysical systems Kant so famously critiqued, the claims of any particular scriptural universalism by their very nature utterly transcend the very capacities of rational judgment, for ascertaining truth and falsity according to universal laws of human reasoning. Kant writes:

[a] church dispenses with the most important mark of truth, namely, a rightful claim to universality, when it bases itself upon a revealed faith. For such a faith, being historical (even though it be far more widely disseminated and more completely secured for remotest posterity through the agency of Scripture) can never be universally communicated.
Thus, when rival religious traditions put forward contradictory claims based on incommensurable accounts of revelation, there is no possibility of resolving the dispute through rational discourse and argumentation, because the claims exceed human methods for ascertaining verifiable knowledge. As a result, the only possibility for solving such disputes is war. However, unlike the situation with metaphysicians, the sort of war in place here, though structurally parallel, involves a great deal more physical violence. In fact, according to Kant, the long history of religious persecution and conflict is the result of this failure to satisfactorily bring religion into the realm of rational discourse, i.e. to establish the limits of reason and thus the legitimate conditions for discourse and argumentation between religions.

Despite the universal pretensions of the scriptural universalisms of historical religions, such religions are unable to secure any genuine universality because they are ultimately rooted in the sensible selves. The sensible self, which privileges inclination, the desire to be happy, rather than moral duty, lacks any capacity for genuine necessity and thus, as a result, any universality to which it aspires is clearly deficient in Kant’s eyes. Inclinations and the desire to be happy are a perpetual source of discord not harmony, unlike the universal and necessary content of moral duty, which Kant believes is shared by all rational beings. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant explains that the terms good and evil pertain precisely to “the determination of the will,” whether one has the desire for happiness as the subjective basis for determination of one’s maxim, or whether it is moral duty. Evil is when the desire for happiness trumps duty in one’s maxim.\(^{42}\) Thus, these historical religions, as opposed to the ‘religion of reason,’ are evil, in that they are rooted in the inclinations rather than moral duty. In *Religion Within the
*Bounds of Reason Alone*, Kant points out, “[t]he intrinsic characteristic of moral evil is that its aims (especially in relation to other like-minded persons) are self-contradictory and self-destructive.” These religions are unable to lead to a comprehensive order, but rather inevitably lead to a multitude of fractured religious groups in competition and combat with one another. And this is precisely what history has been, a series of interminable wars between mutually exclusive historical religions.

*Kant’s ‘Religion of Reason’*

Over against the religions of mere worship, or historical religions, Kant advocates the ‘religion of reason.’ The ‘religion of reason,’ as I mentioned before is rooted in the primacy of the moral self over the sensible self. The moral self, tied as it is to the intelligible order of rational morality, is inextricably bound up with the intersubjective, harmonious unity of the Kingdom of Ends. Thus, the ‘religion of reason’ is predicated upon the belief that reason, especially practical reason, alone provides a primordial unity that has sufficient resources to reconcile and harmonize the divergent religions and cultures of humanity. That is, the ‘religion of reason’ alone can bring the secure and lasting peace of a rational legal order. Kant seeks to demonstrate this unique capacity of reason by contrasting the ‘religion of reason’ with historical religions, highlighting the superiority of the rational universalism, the universality and necessity, of the former over against the latter’s problematic operating logic, scriptural universalism.

Kant equates legitimacy with rational universalism, with universality and necessity. This foundational assumption, if accepted, radically undermines the authority of historical religions, which, according to Kant, operate along the lines of the logic of scriptural universalisms, founded as they are on the revealed word of an unfathomable
God. Therefore, if God is to play a role in the ‘religion of reason,’ and as we will see Kant still requires an idea of God, it is necessary to qualitatively change the idea of God, to render the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism fathomable to human reason.\(^{44}\)

This is a point of major contrast between Mendelssohn and Kant, in that Mendelssohn does not merely vacillate between a God of rational universalism (his metaphysical God of natural theology) and a version of the unfathomable God of Judaism’s scriptural universalism, but he ultimately settles on the latter. Not only is there no similar vacillation in Kant, but the God of scriptural universalism is decisively rejected in favor of the God of rational universalism. In order to be salvageable for Kant, the notion of God must be rendered transparent in terms of universality and necessity.

Kant radically transfigures the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism by means of a methodological privileging of morality. Morality which serves as the basis of the universality and necessity for the ‘religion of reason,’ also serves as the agent responsible for the radical domestication and transfiguration of God. In *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, Kant explains that it is not God who invests morality with legitimacy, but the contrary, it is morality which invests the idea of God with rational legitimacy.\(^{45}\) In short, Kant dramatically reverses the traditional theistic conception of the Divine law by claiming that it is morality that gives us access to God, it is morality which “leads ineluctably to religion;”\(^{46}\) rather than it being God who founds or provides access to morality. With this move, Kant disqualifies revelation axiomatically by means of the audacious claim that reason is the sole legitimate access to God. And since metaphysical speculation about God transcends the limits of reason strictly laid out in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant claims that one is only rationally justified in speaking about matters
of God insofar as such matters pertain to the moral law, which is a fact of reason. Thus, the idea of God is only rational and thus only legitimate to the degree that it is a necessary presupposition for the moral law, which is a fact of reason.

There are two dramatic implications for religion regarding Kant’s foundational privileging of reason as the sole legitimate access to God, namely, revelation is marginalized, and the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism is rendered fathomable, translucent to human reason. The first implication is that revelation is rendered superfluous. For Kant it is morality not revelation that genuinely manifests rational universalism, because its universalism is rooted in rational necessity, or at least this is what Kant claims. Revelation, therefore, only has a deficient universalism (it is universal in that its scope claims to be universally relevant to all human beings), and only leads to conflict and insoluble disagreements. Therefore, by claiming that reason is the sole legitimate access to God, Kant radically undermines revelation, the notion that human beings can directly encounter God, rendering it essentially irrelevant. In this manner, Kant seeks to categorically cripple the foundations of historical religions, although this is done not so much through an argumentative engagement with historical religious traditions as by categorically ruling out their legitimacy from the start.

Kant uses morality in order to secure revelation’s irrelevance by insisting that “every man creates a God for himself, nay, must make himself such a God according to moral concepts.” Such a moralizing idealization of God is not only for Kant not blasphemous, but it is that which protects human beings from blasphemy and idolatry. It is this conception of ‘God according to moral concepts,’ that allows human beings to critically engage all accounts of revelation. This moral ideal of God serves as a
touchstone that human beings juxtapose to any account or representation of God “in order to judge whether he is entitled to regard it and honor it as divinity.” Thus, according to Kant, one can recognize certain accounts which violate morality, even ones in the Bible, such as the Binding of Isaac, as utterly specious and perhaps even demonic, and thus anything but divine.\(^{49}\) Morality, for Kant, is primary to such an extent that it completely determines all possible legitimate manifestations and all proper, non-idolatrous ways of conceiving God. Idolatry now becomes synonymous with any form of religion which does not have the moral law as its deepest and most authoritative ground.

The second implication is that Kant, in contrast to Mendelssohn, uses morality as the means by which to render God thoroughly permeable to human reason. For Kant, all rational beings exist as fully legislating members of the Kingdom of Ends. Kant not only retains a notion of the divine but includes God along with human beings as partners in the Kingdom of Ends. To be sure, Kant takes care to distinguish human beings from God within the Kingdom of Ends. He writes, “We [human beings] are indeed legislating \([\text{gesetzgebend}]\) members of a kingdom of morals possible through freedom and presented to us by practical reason for our respect; but we are at the same time subjects of this kingdom, not its sovereign.”\(^{50}\) God, not human beings, is depicted as the sovereign of the Kingdom of Ends. This difference of position within the Kingdom of Ends is itself predicated upon two differences between God and human beings: difference in stature and difference in role. First, in regard to stature, human beings are finite creatures, composed of moral and sensible selves, whereas God is perfectly moral.\(^{51}\) And secondly, as we will see, God secures the deep coherence and rationality of the moral endeavor itself, whereas human beings are agents performing moral actions. Nevertheless, despite
these disparities, it cannot be said that this gulf that Kant establishes between human beings and God here is truly radical.

Rather than there being a radical divergence between God and human beings, as it is understood in common Deuteronomic monotheistic traditions, and which underlies the logic of scriptural universalism, Kant establishes a unity between God and human beings in that both are unified through practical reason and a common partnership in the Kingdom of Ends. In sharp contrast to the unfathomable God of scriptural universalisms, the God who demands to be obeyed simply on the basis of His divinity (which is radically distinct from anything human or indeed finite), Kant argues that the "principle of morality" which lies at the foundation of the Kingdom of Ends, "does not restrict itself to human beings only....and indeed includes even the infinite being as supreme intelligence [i.e. God]."\(^5^2\) For Kant, practical reason not only belongs to all members of the Kingdom of Ends, i.e. it is shared by both human beings and God. Emil Fackenheim, highlights the radical contrast between the relationship of God and human beings operative in Judaism (but one can expand this more or less to the logic of scriptural universalism in common Deuteronomic monotheisms) with the one operative in Kant’s philosophy. He writes, "[f]or Kant, the oneness of the human with the divine will is assured once virtue is achieved. For prophets and rabbis, such oneness is very far from assured even for the virtuous man, and indeed, in one sense, for him least of all. For in the minds of the prophets and rabbis, there is an endless gulf between God who is God and man who is only human."\(^5^3\)

If the transcendent conditions for morality are unearthed, Kant claims that God is essential for providing the deep coherence between the right and the good, without
which morality would be virtually unintelligible, or at least, no longer rational. In fact, the notion of God implicit in the moral law, the only valid one for Kant, lacks any sort of agency of its own, but rather is nothing but a principle of reason. This God-principle enables Kant to overcome the dichotomy he created between the sensible self and the moral self, such that morality need not involve the complete destruction or negation of the sensible self. Rather, the God-principle provides the possibility for bringing the two selves into harmony. That is, God serves as a foundational support for the notion of the highest good, which Kant claims is the object of the moral law. The highest good enables Kant to subordinate the sensible self to the moral self, while providing conditions for the satisfaction for meeting its need for happiness. Such a doctrine is particularly important, Kant believes, because the necessary and proportionate connection between the intelligible order of morality that prioritizes duty and the sensible order that prioritizes happiness are often experienced as being in conflict with one another in empirical reality. In order to overcome this apparent conflict between the two notions of selves and to justify the moral self over the sensible self, Kant insists that morality requires some sort of reconciliation between the moral self's demands of rectitude and the sensible self's desire for happiness, lest a radical cleft emerge between prudential rationality and moral reasoning tearing the human subject asunder.

Throughout his mature thought, the highest good plays a significant role as Kant struggles with the question of how the concerns of these two selves, virtue and happiness, are to be reconciled. While the highest good goes through various permutations, the God-principle nevertheless remains of essential significance for all of them. It will be helpful to briefly trace the evolution of Kant's notion of the highest good, in order to
understand his position in Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone. In the account of
the Third Antinomy in the first Critique, Kant makes it appear as if the sensible world of
experiential reality and the intelligible order of the moral world do not intersect at all—
they are suspended, parallel worlds that never overlap. In the political writings it often
appears as if the sensible self is somehow historically prior to the moral self, a
propaedeutic to it, as it were. However, in the second and third Critiques and Religion
Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, Kant presents a more nuanced picture of the two
selves simultaneously coexisting, often in tension.\footnote{54}

In the Critique of Practical Reason Kant introduces his account of the highest
good in opposition to the accounts provided by the Greek schools of the Epicureans and
the Stoics. Despite their polar differences, neither the Epicureans nor the Stoics perceive
there to be any discord between virtue and happiness in lived reality. Thus, for the
Epicurean true happiness entails virtue, and for the Stoic, true virtue entails happiness.\footnote{55}
Kant however sees a tension between virtue and happiness, that their connection is
“entirely heterogeneous,” so that in our phenomenal world it is all too often the case that
the respective pursuits of happiness and virtue “very much restrict and impair each other
in the same subject.”\footnote{56} As a result of their error, Kant believes the Greek schools were not
only unable to see the duality of human nature, but they were also incapable of
understanding the rational necessity of the notion of God. It is precisely the outright
tension that Kant sees between virtue and happiness, between the pursuits of the moral
and sensible selves that serves as his justification for recourse to God.\footnote{57} Of course, the
fact that such powerful minds prior to Kant completely failed to consider this distinction
and subsequent notion of God should make us question the necessity and universality inherent in this idea of God.

In the Critique of Practical Reason Kant argues that the highest good is not something that can be attained in the sensible world; it cannot be attained in the lives of empirical individuals. Kant holds this despite claiming that, "the impossibility of the highest good must also prove the falsity of the moral law." In order to establish the conditions for the possibility of the highest good and therefore secure the moral law, Kant then must have recourse to that which transcends the world of possible experience. He does this through what he terms 'the postulates' of practical reason, which among other things, offer a certain notion of God that proves to be indispensable for Kant. A postulate, as defined by Kant, is a peculiar sort of theoretical proposition. It differs from an ordinary proposition of theoretical knowledge in at least two respects. First, its content, though theoretical in nature, can never be such that it will be in a position to be proved or disproved. And second, it is inseparably attached to a priori practical laws, i.e. the moral law. Thus, the postulates maintain a liminal position in that they assert content pertinent to theoretical knowledge, but their claims are such that they only have practical importance and, in fact, lie beyond the powers of theoretical reason to ascertain their validity one way or another.

Kant justifies his recourse to the postulates in that the rational integrity of the moral law, the deep coherence and intelligibility of the moral order itself, requires recourse to them, especially the moral notion of God. The postulates are not illicit metaphysical arguments of theoretical reason, according to Kant, because he believes to have uncovered them as transcendental conditions of the moral law, a fact of practical
reason. God plays a vital role in ensuring the rational structure and coherence of morality in a world that exceeds the powers of the finite moral agent.¹⁶⁰ Belief in God, then, insofar as the moral proof is concerned, is by no means a matter of disinterested speculation, but rather in the words of Allen W. Wood, it is a practically necessary “response to the dialectical perplexities which threaten practical reason.”¹⁶¹ That is, the moral law appears as a fact of reason, whose manifestation demands that we act according to the moral law. That we recognize the authority of the moral law implies that we acknowledge, at least tacitly, the coherence of morality, which in turn rests upon belief in God. In this manner, Kant establishes the necessity of belief in God without arguing in a metaphysically speculative manner (i.e., in the manner of the metaphysicians of old) that God exists. According to Kant, there will never be enough evidence to support a claim regarding the existential status of God one way or the other, as God’s existence transcends the empirical network that constitutes the conditions for the possibility of theoretical knowledge. The moral proofs only provide us with “moral certainty,”¹⁶² but nothing concretely demonstrable.

The postulates of practical reason, especially immortality of the soul and God,¹⁶³ in the Critique of Practical Reason, enable Kant to posit the highest good, as the reconciliation between the moral and the sensible selves a domain beyond the empirical world. Kant insists that our experience in the empirical world offers no evidence of any necessary, much less proportionate, connection between virtue and happiness, which is precisely what the highest good requires. Thus, the postulates enable Kant to claim that the empirical world is not the sole arena in which the moral agent operates, which opens up the possibility that a moral agent may rationally posit, on practical not theoretical
grounds, a future world in which the highest good, the reconciliation of happiness with virtue, is attainable for individuals, or at least is increasingly approximated ad infinitum. In the second *Critique*, Kant solves problem of highest good, reconciling the sensible and the moral, through a divinely ordered afterlife which rectifies any imbalances between virtue and happiness on an individual basis.\(^{64}\)

However, in Kant’s later works, such as *Critique of Judgment* and *Religion Within the Bounds of Pure Reason*, the emphasis of the highest good shifts from the otherworldly to a this-worldly future. Yirmiahu Yovel’s groundbreaking book, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, explores this shift in Kant’s thought with considerable ingenuity and rigor. Yovel correctly observes that with the *Critique of Judgment* Kant’s position in regard to the highest good fundamentally shifts from a personal/otherworldly emphasis to that of a collective/this-worldly one. According to Yovel’s account, for Kant one’s concern with the highest good ceases to be with one’s “personal final end,” moving instead to incorporate “an ultimate design for the entire moral universe.”\(^{65}\) Or, as Kant puts it, the highest good now consists “in the combination of universal happiness, i.e. the greatest welfare of the rational beings of the world, with the supreme condition of their being good, namely that they be moral in maximal conformity with the moral law.”\(^{66}\) According to Yovel, this shift of emphasis leads to a higher level of integration and universalization than what is achieved by formal morality alone. That is, the newly conceived highest good goes further than the idea of a universal moral order alone. Whereas the Kingdom of Ends concerns only the rational will of every individual, the highest good concerns every individual in their empirical particularity as well. In short, it incorporates happiness into the common end of all moral endeavors.\(^{67}\) Thus, this highest
good requires that a harmony be sought, in fact, that a harmony be created, between nature and morality, so that moral activity can be embodied and externalized in nature itself, thus uniting and reconciling the two disparate worlds. However, while human beings become the agents enacting the highest good in this latter version, the postulate of God (though not immortality) remains essential to ensure that nature is receptive to morality, that it can be transfigured and made over in light of morality.

Despite Kant’s turn away from metaphysics to ethics, the postulates maintain a metaphysical valence, in that Kant claims a universality and necessity for them, even if these are reached through practical not theoretical reason. In fact, one could argue that the postulates present the same problems Kant ascribes to the metaphysical conundrums raised by the dogmatic commitments of historical religions, at least in terms of intolerance. It is helpful if we briefly contrast Kant’s position in this regard with Mendelssohn’s. If we recall, Mendelssohn is regrettably compelled to homogenize the differences between religions in order to defend the rationality of non-Europeans such as Hindus. Kant, despite initiating the turn away from metaphysics, does not escape this problem in the slightest. He too must homogenize all differences, at least if the Other is to be considered rational, and to the same degree as Mendelssohn. The only difference is that the homogenization takes place on a metaphysics rooted in the necessities of practical reason rather than theoretical speculation. Kant can only escape the charge of intolerance if his notion of morality, as heavily determined and robust as it is, genuinely qualifies as rationally universal. This is a highly problematic assumption, especially given our present circumstances, which, according to Habermas, consists of living in a “modern, pluralistic society” where despite the fact that people “still argue with reasons
about moral judgments and beliefs," nevertheless is such that the "substantive background consensus on the underlying moral norms has been shattered."70

Be that as it may, once Kant believes he has firmly secured the rational notion of God in his account of morality, he then sets about demonstrating the capacity of the rational universalism of the 'religion of reason' to bring a secure and 'legal' peace to the world bitterly divided between historical religions. Kant's 'religion of reason' uses practical reason to provide an alternative to religious incommensurability and antagonism. He insists that attention must shift away from the metaphysical claims that pertain to the dogmatic, theoretical core of each religious tradition, which illegitimately transcend the limits of human reason, and instead focus on the practical side, toward its ability to promote rational ethics. As a result, the divisive and irresolvable metaphysical/dogmatic disputes become of marginal importance. In other words, Kant employs his skepticism regarding theoretical knowledge concerning the divine in conjunction with practical reason's postulate of God, in order to claim that only those accounts of revelation that accord with this moral notion of God are legitimate. And since morality trumps revelation for Kant, the theoretical legitimacy, the metaphysical dimensions as it were, of one particular religion over against another is irrelevant, as long as the accounts in question support morality.

Kant insists that his 'religion of reason' alone provides a basis for bringing coherence and communicability across religions with disparate metaphysical and theological conceptions of God, themselves, and the universe, as well as highly diverse forms of worship. In fact, Kant thinks that the 'religion of reason' 'alone can found a universal church; for only [such] a rational faith can be believed in and shared by
everyone." Kant claims that the 'religion of reason,' "a pure practical idea of reason," is an idea, "which despite its inexhaustible fruitfulness, presupposes so very little capacity for theoretical reason that one can convince every man of it sufficiently for practical purposes." He makes this claim, despite the fact that his position is not only unknown prior to him, it is also not uncontroversial in his own time. And certainly, subsequent generations have by no means found it irresistibly convincing. Kant's confidence stems from his faith (and I use this term deliberately) in both the superiority of rational universalism over against scriptural universalism, and that his robust account of reason is a genuine rational universalism.

Kant's faith lies in his deep conviction about the salubrious (even salvific) power imbued in the rational universality of practical reason, morality, which entails the 'religion of reason.' This rational universality, Kant believes, provides the key to ending religious violence in that it provides resources for dissolving religious conflicts based on disputes about both the object and method of worship. If one accepts Kant's philosophical strictures regarding insight and speculation concerning the divine, then there are no longer grounds for dispute over the nature of God. Quite simply, there can no longer be genuinely divergent conceptions of the divine, since we can only conceive of God according to what the transcendental conditions of morality will allow. As we discussed earlier, Kant claims to have rendered God completely fathomable to human reason through being subordinated, or better, made a mere condition of, the universality and necessity of morality. However, as Joseph Runzo points out, Kant's position regarding God is highly troubling and philosophically dubious from a contemporary (twentieth or twenty-first century) perspective. Runzo writes:
Kant assumes that there is a universally valid basic conception of God which is trans-historically and cross-culturally comprehensible by anyone who honestly pursues rational thought. This seems highly doubtful, especially for us in the twentieth [or twenty-first] century with our pluralist understanding of the great world religions as well as the recognition of the enormous variety of world-views in general, nonreligious as well as religious. If anything, we have better grounds for supposing that not all rational people will come to hold the same pure concept of the divine.\textsuperscript{74}

Just as Kant renders God universal and necessary, he secures universality and necessity for the form of praxis associated with the ‘religion of reason’ by rooting it in morality. In fact, the only religious praxis of the ‘religion of reason’ is performing one’s moral duty. Kant explains, “[t]here are no special duties to God in a universal religion, for God can receive nothing from us; we cannot act for Him, nor yet upon Him.”\textsuperscript{75} One serves God by performing one’s moral duty, which is universally known as it is an a priori aspect of practical reason. Thus Kant provides the conditions, at least in theory, for the elimination of religious conflicts over the methods of worship as morality is everywhere the same. Thus, by eliminating the possibility for differences concerning both objects and methods of worship, Kant thinks there are simply no more remaining grounds for religious conflict. In fact, once rational universalism replaces scriptural universalism, Kant thinks that we will come to understand that historical religions in and of themselves are worthless, as they only possess instrumental value as vehicles to promote morality and the ‘religion of reason.’\textsuperscript{76}

Kant does not simply stress the superiority of the ‘religion of reason,’ but asserts that it is an inherent potentiality within all existing religions. Obviously, there is much in all existent religions that flatly contradict the austerity of Kant’s ‘religion of reason.’ However, because Kant is unwilling to allow the bifurcation of the human self to be absolute, the historical religions, despite being primarily the domain of the sensible self,
cannot remain untouched by the moral self and the intelligible order. Thus, Kant claims, "[y]et in part at least every religion, even if revealed, must contain certain principles of the natural religion."\textsuperscript{77} Since every religion is infused with human thought to some degree, in some capacity, every religion has the fundamentals of rationality, of morality. As a result, the seeds for the moral religion, the ‘religion of reason,’ are present in all extant religious traditions; they only need to be nurtured and harvested. Therefore, the ‘religion of reason’ is not to be identified with any single religion, but rather is a potentiality within all extant religions. Or, as Kant puts it, "We can say...that even in the various churches, severed from one another by reason of the diversity of their modes of belief [and worship – my addition, R.E.], one and the same true religion can yet be found."\textsuperscript{78} As a universal potentiality within all existent religions, the ‘religion of reason’ alone can found a true universal church, which is the confluence of all the rationalized forms of different religions.

It is precisely here where Kant’s account of religion intersects with his theory of history, in particular, his account of the Enlightenment. Kant understands himself to be living in an "age of enlightenment," although, to be sure, not an "enlightened age."\textsuperscript{79} What this means is that human beings do not yet use their reason autonomously, but rather remain in "self-imposed immaturity,"\textsuperscript{80} i.e. they look to external authorities to make their decisions rather than thinking for themselves, particularly in regard to issues relating to religion. However, Kant believes his own age, as an ‘age of enlightenment’ is distinct, in that many of the impediments to the free thinking of individuals, especially the domination of ecclesiastical religious authorities over the hearts and minds of the masses, are beginning to wane. This diminishing power of clerical authorities opens up
the possibility for free thought and the possibility of a new world order, one based on autonomous reason, to emerge.

The Enlightenment, while primarily a European phenomenon, is understood by Kant to have world-historical implications. All human beings, as possessors of practical reason, are aware, at least on some level, of the obligation to bring their religion more and more into accord with the ‘religion of reason.’ While it is incumbent upon all religions to do this, Kant makes no secret about the fact that he considers Christianity to be the most accomplished of all extant religions in achieving this concordance with the ‘religion of reason.’ The conditions necessary for fulfilling this transition, Kant believes, are emerging in this ‘age of Enlightenment,’ when people (needless to say, primarily in Christian Europe) are beginning to think for themselves rather than submitting to ‘self-incurred immaturity’ by letting ecclesiastical religious authorities think and decide for them. Kant explains, “[i]f now one asks, What period in the entire known history of the church up to now is the best? I have no scruple in answering, the present. And this, because, if the seed of the true religious faith [i.e. the ‘religion of reason’], as it is now being publicly sown in Christendom, though only by a few, is allowed more and more to grow unhindered.” Thus, in this age of Enlightenment, Christianity is increasingly purging the dogmatic dregs that have prevented it from realizing the rational ideal. This will allow Christianity serve as a spearhead in bringing other religious traditions into accordance with the ‘religion of reason,’ by means of its example.

However, unlike the other thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory, Kant’s thought exhibits a serious one-sidedness regarding rational universalism and the Deuteronomic-monotheistic tradition of which he is a part. That is, rather than seeking to
integrate rational universalism in such a way that preserves the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheism, Kant is far more concerned with subjugating all religions to his rational universalism. Christianity is only important as a vehicle to the spread of the 'religion of reason,' which is a new monotheism of which Kant is the great prophet. However, in order to see how this takes place, we must first examine Kant's juxtaposition of two venerable monotheistic traditions, Judaism and Christianity.

*Kant's New Monotheism*

The juxtaposition of Judaism and Christianity plays two significant roles for Kant's promulgation of the 'religion of reason.' First, Judaism serves as a cipher for common Deuteronomic-monotheistic worldview that is to be overcome by the 'religion of reason,' which is represented in the guise of a Christianity depicted as being wholly commensurate with the 'religion of reason.' The juxtaposition on this level enables Kant to elucidate a new account for the means by which the immanent notion of the highest good is to be realized, the 'ethical commonwealth.' On this level, Kant, from a vantage point rooted in his notion of the Enlightenment, argues that the 'religion of reason' and its social dimension, the ethical commonwealth, is the goal towards which history is leading humanity. Judaism, on the other hand, is an anachronism, an emblem of the traditionalist Deuteronomic-monotheistic worldview that must be discarded if humanity is to progress towards its rational destiny. Second, Judaism plays a remarkably similar role for Kant's thought as Christianity plays for that of Moses Mendelssohn, as a straw-man against which the features of the 'religion of reason' are highlighted. This juxtaposition gives Kant's arguments for the reform of Christianity rhetorical force, in that he can link those elements of Christianity that are incommensurable with the 'religion of reason' with the
'backward' and 'anachronistic' religion of Judaism (and there is significant resonance here considering the rampant anti-Semitism of Kant's time). By juxtaposing Judaism and Christianity, on this second level, Kant is able to dichotomize Christianity into its rational components and into the dogmatic and the irrational chaff that is to be discarded.

In regard to the first role the juxtaposition of Judaism and Christianity, Judaism is emblematic of the common Deuteronomic-monotheistic worldview that is to be overcome by the 'religion of reason.' While Kant never explicitly denies the historical involvement of God with the Jews (although whether he actually believes in it is highly doubtful) he finds the form of religiosity present in Judaism to be deficient. Thus, regardless of the Jewish community's historical connection with God and Heilsgeschichte more broadly through Christianity (Kant clearly takes a triumphalist position) Kant presents Judaism as deficient in rationality and morality, and therefore as falling short of the 'religion of reason.'

Judaism, according to Kant's understanding of it, is predicated upon a domineering God, who issues legal commands, and a subservient religious community, the Jews, who obey these commands in order to enjoy temporal successes and avoid worldly punishments. In Judaism, Kant finds embodied the problem of legalism, which is a problem that haunts Kant's notion of morality and his 'religion of reason.' In fact, Judaism becomes emblematic of legalism, as a cipher for it, in that Kant thinks it demonstrates most clearly those religions where the divine legislation of God present in revelation precludes the possibility of morality from taking root. While there are subtle distinctions between legalism and what we have termed scriptural universalism, these terms significantly overlap. Since the differences between legalism and scriptural
universalism are largely irrelevant in regard to their similarities, especially in regard to
heteronomy as opposed to the autonomy involved in the rational universalism of
morality, we will essentially conflate the two terms in this section.85

Judaism, according to Kant, succumbs to legalism/scriptural universalism, and
thus falls short of the ‘religion of reason,’ because it fails to elevate morality to central
significance. For Kant, if we recall, genuine religiosity is predicated upon genuine
morality. An action is to be considered moral only if it is done from duty, from pure
rational motives; the effects of the action are, morally speaking, unimportant. One
autonomously wills the moral law for oneself; one does not obey its commands to escape
punishment or to accrue a benefit. Legalism, on the contrary, is when one acts in a way
such that it outwardly resembles moral actions, except that the proper, moral purity of
intention is lacking. That is, it is when one acts in such a way that it appears as if one is
being moral, but the action is done from heteronomous rather than purely moral, i.e.
autonomous, motives. Since Kant links autonomy with Christianity, that when
juxtaposing actions done from autonomous motives as opposed to heteronomous ones,
Kant frequently uses Pauline language, characterizing the difference as one between the
letter and the spirit of the law.86 For Kant, Judaism never reaches the level of morality
(and thus rationality), being wholly subsumed with heteronomous concerns about
rewards and punishments in regard to the law commanded by God. Moreover, Kant,
exhibiting no regard for (or knowledge of) rabbinic Judaism, claims that the positive,
external laws of Judaism do not even necessarily resemble moral duties, alleging that its
ceremonial laws are primarily concerned with the political realm, with sustaining the
Israelite nation.87 The very principles of organization and practice of this political regime,
Kant claims, beli all the shortcomings of a politics that lacks grounding in universal morality.

Over against Judaism’s legalism/scriptural universalism and exclusivism, Kant posits a thoroughly rationalized Christianity that is to serve as a model of the ‘religion of reason.’ The relationship between God and human beings differs significantly in Kant’s respective accounts of Judaism and Christianity. Whereas in Judaism, God serves as a purely legal figure, a lawgiver, in Christianity, God is the foundation and cornerstone of the moral order. In Judaism, God’s authority derives from his infinite power, whereas in Christianity, the authority surrounding God does not actually derive from God but rather from the inherent legitimacy of the moral order itself.

However, in order to understand the full significance of the juxtaposition of Judaism and Christianity in Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, we must understand that in this work Kant unveils a further account or iteration of the means by which the immanent notion of the highest good is to be realized. In this work, Kant argues the highest good will be realized by means of what he terms, the ‘ethical commonwealth.’ In the juxtaposition of Christianity and Judaism, Kant claims that whereas exclusivist and purely political Judaism stifles rational universality and therefore precludes morality, Christianity promotes the universal and purely ethical society, the ethical commonwealth. Judaism is essential for Kant as a rhetorical device, a straw man, in terms of the ethical commonwealth not only because its political regime is depicted as exclusivist, immoral, and irrational, and thus everything that the ethical commonwealth is not. But it is also useful because Kant needs to exploit the anti-Semitic prejudices of his readers in order to justify the deprivation of the Christian church of its authority in the
in the ethical commonwealth. Kant’s strategy to justify the anti-clerical posture of the ethical commonwealth requires, on a rhetorical level, that the largely anti-Semitic Christian audience of his day link all ecclesiastical authorities and institutions to heteronomy and therefore Judaism on the one hand, and on the other hand to link autonomy with ‘true’ Christianity. In short, Kant wants to taint the ecclesiastical authorities and institutions of the Christian church by associating them with Judaism.

Kant attempts to ground the ethical commonwealth in morality and the ‘religion of reason’ by making the striking claim that it is not ethically legitimate for moral individuals to remain isolated, arguing that they must form an ethical union, i.e. the ethical commonwealth, with other human beings. This ethical commonwealth, it is postulated, will gradually grow until it encompasses all of humanity. In fact, Kant claims, in contrast to his earlier, more individualistic focus regarding the highest good, that “the highest moral good cannot be achieved merely by the exertions of the single individual towards his own moral perfection, but requires rather a union of such individuals into a whole toward the same goal—into a system of well-disposed men in which and through whose unity alone the highest moral good can come to pass.” This community, in contrast to some sort of universal political regime, is in fact a “universal republic based on laws of virtue.”88 By means of rejecting all sectarian exclusivism, this community embraces “all right thinking men” as “servants of this church.”89

While this imperative to join the ethical commonwealth is a moral duty for Kant, it is nevertheless quite a peculiar one. Kant explains that this duty is “sui generis, not of men toward men, but of the human race toward itself.”90 In light of its odd nature, and since it is posited as a means for realizing the immanent notion of the highest good, Kant
insists that God is absolutely essential to this notion. This is where Kant’s account of the scriptural universalism of Judaism serves as a foil to highlight the superiority of the rational universalism of his rationalized Christianity. In contrast to the legalistic God of Judaism whose character precludes the moral law, the God-postulate of Christianity (or at least of Christianity rendered commensurate with the ‘religion of reason,’ which is what Kant means by ‘Christianity’ here) creates the conditions by which the moral law becomes possible through securing the possibility of the highest good itself. Kant’s Christianity, or more precisely, the ‘religion of reason,’ requires the postulate of God in order to shore up the gaps that emerge as a result of the finitude of the moral self as well as ensuring coherence and intelligibility to the moral endeavor as a whole. In addition, given the peculiarly collective nature of the ethical commonwealth, the God-postulate provides a new condition for the possibility of this moral duty. That is, the God-postulate now also provides a “universal dispensation [by which] the forces of separate individuals, insufficient of themselves, are united for a common end.”

The ‘Christian’ God plays other, more readily apparent, unifying functions in the ethical commonwealth that, unlike the Jewish God, supports morality. Kant stipulates that this ethical commonwealth, in which the individual participates, requires public legislation. Yet, no human being, or collection of human beings, can provide public legislation without that legislation becoming heteronomous in nature and thus undercutting the morality that is to serve as the very basis of the ethical commonwealth. In order to solve this difficulty, Kant has recourse to God. Kant carefully intersperses traditional religious language with his radically re-envisioned notion of God. For instance, Kant speaks of God as the “highest law-giver” and the “concept of God as
moral ruler of the world." Kant’s moral God can serve as the public ‘law giver,’ because this God does not violate human autonomy in the slightest. Kant is able to preserve the notion of divine commands, if we understand this notion in a non-heteronomous sense, i.e. in a sense other than human beings obeying arbitrary precepts simply because God commands them. Rather, Kant claims that God can be seen as the locus of divine commands in the sense that God can see into the innermost recesses of the individual’s heart thus divining his or her true motivations, and as the one who secures the very coherence and intelligibility of the moral endeavor itself by securing the possibility of the highest good. These traits of God, Kant claims, enable us to regard God as the supreme law giver which brings a public face to the ethical commonwealth while preserving the autonomy among the individuals that constitute it.

The second role that the juxtaposition of Judaism and Christianity plays for Kant’s advocacy of the ‘religion of reason’ is that it serves as a rhetorical tool helping Kant to ‘demonstrate’ the Christian authenticity of his ‘religion of reason’ and its notion of the ethical commonwealth. It is unquestionable that the ‘moral God’ that Kant employs is problematic to common Deuteronomic-Christianities on numerous levels. Kant can only conceive of rational universalism in such a way that eradicates the sovereignty and agency of the divine, a position to which he is committed because he thinks it alone enables the retention of (human) autonomy. Such an elevation of humanity at the expense of the divine, which is subsequently degraded or neutralized, is a position clearly at odds with the discursive structure inherent in common forms of Deuteronomic-monotheisms, including Christianity. Thus, Kant must make no small effort in order to make his approach appear Christian, to attempt to legitimize its authenticity. Kant’s strategy, at
least in part, consists in arguing that autonomy is a fundamentally Christian notion, whereas heteronomy remains a thoroughly Jewish one. Kant is eager to link Christianity with the ethical commonwealth, and in fact he frequently uses language of the New Testament in describing it. Kant writes, “an ethical commonwealth can be thought of only as a people under divine commands, i.e., as a people of God, and indeed under the laws of virtue.” A paragraph later, Kant explains that the ethical commonwealth is “an institution whose laws are purely inward—a republic under laws of virtue, i.e., a people of God ‘zealous of good works.'”

In contradistinction to the ethical commonwealth/Christianity, Kant posits a thinly veiled reference to the political dimension of Judaism. Kant describes this rival community as “a people of God under statutory laws, under such laws that obedience to them would concern not the morality but merely the legality of acts.” It is apparent that Kant returns to his familiar refrain of using Judaism as the symbol of the problem of legalism, which—as we are by now familiar—Kant thinks can only establish a political government but cannot establish genuine morality. Kant explains that this ‘Jewish’ community “would be a juridical commonwealth, of which, indeed, God would be the lawgiver.” However, such a government, “whose existence and form rest wholly on an historical basis, cannot settle the problem of the morally-legislative reason, the solution of which alone we are to effect.” Even though God was its lawgiver, as a result of its lack of morality, Judaism’s political establishment lacked necessity and universality. In short, by demonstrating the radical lack of continuity between Judaism and Christianity in everything but history, and by linking Judaism with heteronomy, Kant hopes to sway
Christians to accept autonomy and his account of the ‘religion of reason’ as in accord with the spirit of Christianity.

Kant differentiates Judaism and Christianity further by claiming that Judaism, as a result of its deficiencies regarding morality, lacks traits essential for participation in the ‘religion of reason.’ That is, Judaism, as a result of its foundational assumptions concerning the relationship between God and human beings, lacks traits that inhere in all genuine religions, traits necessary for a religion to be capable of taking part in the ‘religion of reason’ in some capacity or another: namely, autonomy and belief in immortality. These deficiencies in Judaism, Kant believes, stem entirely from its being primarily a political code without genuine moral concerns. As a result of Judaism’s exclusion from the ambit of the ‘religion of reason’ because of its lacks and deficiencies, Kant concludes that “Judaism...is not a religious faith at all.”

Kant pushes this argument further, arguing that the lack of a foundation in morality skews Judaism such that it completely fails to constitute universality. Kant explains, “Judaism fell so short of constituting an era suited to the requirements of the church universal, or of setting up this universal church itself during its time, as actually to exclude from its communion the entire human race, on the ground that it was a special people chosen by God for Himself.” Kant believes this movement of election to be one of irrational exclusiveness, “which showed enmity toward all other peoples” which ultimately results in anti-Semitism. On the one hand, the critique in this passage by Kant is problematic because it makes use of all sorts of timeworn and highly troubling anti-Judaic polemics. For example, as the above passage demonstrates, Kant unquestionably accepts that Judaism is identical with the religion of the Hebrew Bible
(and even then, he omits any material that would challenge his portrayal of Judaism, which is more of a caricature than anything else) and this completely fails to take any rabbinic sources into account. He also simply assumes that Judaism's 'time' came to an end with the birth of Christianity, and that its contemporary existence is sheer anachronism. These chauvinistic claims by Kant are simply indefensible. However, his larger claim in this passage, which also utilizes a traditional anti-Judaic argument, i.e. that Judaism is a chauvinistic religion while Christianity is universal, cannot be so easily dismissed. To be sure, if it is intended as a historical argument, then Christianity is at least equally susceptible (and given its history, probably more so) to charges of chauvinism as is Judaism, and to this degree Kant's claim here is specious. However, insofar as Kant is using Judaism as a cipher for the problematic intolerance and exclusivism in common Deuteronomistic-monotheistic religions as a result of their reliance upon the logic of scriptural universalism (and not merely legalism), his critique has more power. Kant sees his 'religion of reason,' here embodied in Christianity, as the solution for the tendency in all three monotheistic religions to elevate an incomprehensible God and legislation revealed by this God—which fails to meet the standards of rational universalism, necessity and universality—above morality, which accords with rational universalism.

Kant takes aim at Judaism's notion of God, which he locates as the source of its errors. He argues that, "we should not rate too highly the fact that this people set up, as universal Ruler of the world, a one and only God who could be represented through no visible image." That is, for Kant, the notion of the one-ness of God is not what is truly important for morality, for human autonomy. Kant continues, "For a God who desires
merely obedience to commands for which absolutely no improved moral disposition is
requisite is, after all, not really the moral Being, the concept of whom we need for a
religion [i.e. ‘religion of reason’].”\cite{107} The Jewish God, according to Kant, subverts
morality, in that this God demands obedience to His laws from fear and desire for reward.
These are heteronomous motives which keep human beings imprisoned in their sensible
selves. Nothing here leads people to grasp their own inherent dignity as moral selves, as
members of the Kingdom of Ends. Kant continues, explaining that the ‘religion of reason:

would be more likely to arise from a belief in many mighty invisible beings…
provided a people conceived of these agreeing, amid their ‘departmental’
differences, to bestow their good pleasure only upon the man who cherishes virtue
with all his heart—more likely I say, than when faith is bestowed upon but one
Being, who, however, attaches prime importance with mechanical worship.\cite{108}

This claim is rather remarkable for two reasons. First, like Mendelssohn before him, Kant
is creating a tremendous gap between his revised monotheism (which we will discuss
momentarily) and a rival monotheism which serves as a symbol for the common
Deuteronomic monotheistic worldview. In fact, Kant claims that the ‘religion of reason,’
which is best exemplified, as we will see, by his revision of Christianity, is more different
from Judaism than virtually any other religion. Here Kant is saying polytheistic religions,
the religions against which all three Deuteronomic monotheistic traditions have
traditionally polemicized against at great lengths, are potentially more in tune with the
‘religion of reason’ than is Judaism. The similarities between Judaism and Christianity in
terms of worldview, shared Scriptures, and so on, do nothing to alter the tremendous gap
that separate them regarding practical reason, which, for Kant, is all important. Again,
this move parallels Mendelssohn’s critique of Christianity, where Christianity alone
seems to innately differ from the ‘religion of reason’ in its core theology. Whereas
Mendelssohn radically problematizes Christianity from the vantage point of natural theology as a way to both defend Judaism against its would-be theological and philosophical despisers, and as a rhetorical tool to convince his fellow Jews that cultural egalitarianism is compatible with their tradition, Kant uses Judaism as a rhetorical tool to justify a radical purgation of all that is particular and irrational in Christianity. In this way, as we will see, Kant essentially sacrifices the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-Christianity, in order to found the monotheism of the ‘religion of reason’ upon its ashes.

The second reason that Kant’s claim in the above cited passage is remarkable is that while it may appear at first blush that Kant’s account of monotheism and polytheism is disingenuous, it is in fact not only sound (according to the tenets of his thought) but also enormously significant to his endeavor. What makes Kant’s position appear disingenuous is that it seems as if Kant fails to recognize that monotheism involves the process described by philosopher Lenn Goodman as the “integration of the idea of divinity”\textsuperscript{109} which involves a concomitant “integration of all values.”\textsuperscript{110} That is, monotheism is not simply about belief in one God, but rather involves a belief in the deep coherence of morality itself, such that there is one authoritative notion of the human telos as well as an ultimate harmony between values. Polytheism, on the other hand, is precisely the ontological plurality of values and visions of human teloi, and this value pluralism is ontologically embodied in the existence of rival deities.\textsuperscript{111} Thus, by saying that morality could ‘arise from a belief in many mighty invisible beings...provided a people conceived of these agreeing, amid their ‘departmental’ differences, to bestow their good pleasure only upon the man who cherishes virtue with all his heart’ Kant is essentially only saying that morality could easily arise from polytheism that is
monotheistic in everything but the number of gods. That is, Kant is saying polytheism is acceptable as long as it meets all of what he considers to be the essential background conditions of monotheism, i.e. the integration of all values and the singularizing of the human telos. Thus, Kant only renders the question of number in regard to God unimportant; he is unwilling to sacrifice any other aspects of monotheism.

However, if we probe beneath this apparent ‘disingenuousness’ we reach an intriguing insight into the heart of Kant’s thought. Kant has claimed that all religions, which would include polytheistic ones, possess a rational component, a moral core, and therefore have a capacity to be rationalized. In addition, we know that Kant repudiates the human capacity for any theoretical knowledge about the divine, and thus only the practical implications of notions of the divine contain significance. Thus, questions about the number of gods are entirely moot so long as the practical dimension, the only legitimate one, is stressed. Also, and more importantly, in regard to traditional monotheisms, to the degree they are not based on universal reason but rather on claims to revelation—claims which Kant asserts are historical and therefore contingent and particular in nature—these traditions are unable to provide any genuine necessity and universality and thus their gesture towards the integration of values is deceptive. Therefore in a very real sense, for Kant, to the degree that the Deuteronomic-monotheistic religions do not cohere to the ‘religion of reason’ they are not genuinely monotheistic because they lead to exclusivism rather than universalism and enmity and war rather than peace and harmony. That is, by subscribing to the logic of scriptural universalism rather than the rational universalism of the ‘religion of reason,’ the Deuteronomic-monotheisms inhibit and obstruct the realization of what Kant sees as the
most important aspects of monotheism, i.e. the harmonization of values and the
singularization of the human telos. Scriptural universalism, lacking necessity and
sufficient universality, lacks the necessary resources for such a world-historical task.
Such a task, Kant believes, requires nothing less than the rational universalism of the
‘religion of reason.’ Judaism, for Kant, is only the most egregious example of the ironic
paganism of Deuteronomic-monotheisms. Christianity can be quite ‘Jewish’ in this
regard as well. As Kant points out, Christian history tells:

how, with a hierarchy forcing itself upon free men, the dreadful voice of orthodoxy
was raised, out of the mouths of presumptuous, exclusively ‘called,’ scriptural
expositors, and divided the Christian world into embittered parties over creedal
opinions of faith (upon which absolutely no general agreement can be reached
without appeal to pure reason as the expositor.)

In short, Deuteronomic-monotheisms, at least insofar as they rely upon the logic of
scriptural universalism, remain far short of the universality of the Kingdom of Ends. If
exclusivism and reliance upon revelation render Deuteronomic-monotheisms idolatrous,
then only the ‘religion of reason’ is genuinely monotheistic. The ‘religion of reason’
alone fulfills the conditions of the monotheistic worldview, the harmony of all values, the
singularization of the human telos, and a deep universalism, and these conditions are far
more significant for Kant’s understanding of the one true religion than theoretical claims
about the number or nature of divinity.

Kant seeks to bring Christianity into accord with the ‘religion of reason’ by
rendering it rational and thus genuinely universal, which for Kant requires the purgation
all dogmatic and sectarian aspects. Like Mendelssohn’s conception of Judaism, Kant
understands Christianity as an amalgamation of a historical, revealed religion and a
universal, rational religion. However, whereas Mendelssohn sees these two elements as
ultimately symbiotic, Kant sees them in profound tension with one another. Thus, in sharp contrast to Mendelssohn, Kant sees his task as one of purifying Christianity of all that is tied to revelation and by doing this, giving supremacy to its rational side. To be sure, Kant tries to make it appear as if he believes that the actual ‘revealed elements’ themselves do not, in fact, contradict morality. However, their form is such that it is still arbitrary and mythical rather than universal and necessary.\textsuperscript{113} Thus, Kant rationalizes the various stories and dogmas of Christianity, hoping to make them “divested of [their] mystical veil,” making manifest that their “spirit and rational meaning have been valid and binding for the whole world and for all time.”\textsuperscript{114} A primary means of rationalizing Christianity, i.e. bringing it into accord with morality, for Kant is by emphasizing Jesus as an archetype of reason, and thereby taking concern squarely off any discussion of his divinity.\textsuperscript{115}

As a result of Kant’s ultimate allegiance to the rational universalism of the ‘religion of reason,’ the position of Christianity within his thought is rather complex. On the one hand, Kant clearly privileges Christianity with statements about the rational perfection of the Christian Bible and Jesus’ teachings. However, Kant insists that all religions are called upon to embrace it as an ideal. Nevertheless, \textit{Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone} is clearly focused on Christianity, and sets as its task to show that Christianity can embrace the ‘religion of reason’ without accepting heterogeneous elements, but rather by privileging the elements incipient in its own rational foundation. In this sense, Kant seems to believe that Christianity is superior to other religions, but it is a superiority that consists in the fact that Christianity has simply realized more of its rational potential than other traditions.\textsuperscript{116} Thus, other religions and other peoples are
called upon to follow suit in bringing their religions into accord with reason. Christianity is merely the vanguard spearheading the transition from the present age into the ethical commonwealth.

While Kant’s position may appear more tolerant than Mendelssohn’s at first blush, in that the process of rationalization rejects any qualitative privilege for Christianity in regard to truth, it is actually more troubling from a pluralist, multicultural vantage point. Whereas Mendelssohn’s thought allows some room for difference (even if it is ultimately insufficient) or at least mystery regarding the Other, Kant’s thought demonstrates no similar capacity. It is useful to consider the differences between their positions that account for this discrepancy regarding the Other. There are two significant differences between Mendelssohn and Kant that contribute to this discrepancy: differences regarding their respective notions of God, and the degree of transparency of their respective notions of the ‘religion of reason.’ In regard to the first difference, Mendelssohn retains a notion of the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism which prevents him from knowing with any certainty the time frame for the process of the ‘religion of reason’ becoming a reality for universal humanity. Rather, as a result of revelation, he remains secure in the doctrine of election and the special duty of the Jews to bear witness to the eternal truths. As for the rest, it remains a mystery, beyond the grasp of reason. Kant, on the other hand, has rendered God into a principle of reason, as a helper for human beings in their realization of the fruits of the ‘religion of reason’ and thus there is no room for mystery or anything unfathomable in God or God’s relationship to a specific community. As a result, it becomes the paramount task of humanity, all of humanity, to take steps to implement the realization of the ‘religion of
reason' immediately. This is revealed through reason, disclosed through principles that Kant thinks are rationally universal.

The second ground of difference, the degree of transparency regarding Mendelssohn and Kant’s respective notions of the ‘religion of reason,’ is inextricably bound up with the first. Just as God remains mysterious for Mendelssohn, so too does the Other. To be sure, Mendelssohn runs into trouble from a pluralist, multicultural perspective as a result of his metaphysical commitments. These force him to claim that all religions, insofar as they are rational, ultimately accept the same metaphysical truths for their content. Nevertheless, Mendelssohn is able to introduce a significant level of particularity and difference as a result of his notion of idolatry and his insistence that the religions of the Other are ensconced in foreign linguistic and symbolic systems which make them opaque to those who are outside of them. In addition, Mendelssohn severs the connection of the individual and the collective regarding idolatry, thus making the particular Other before one more or less mysterious and indiscernible. As a result, it is very difficult to discern whether the Other before one is an adherent of the ‘religion of reason’ or not. The best approach, Mendelssohn believes, is for the Jews to bear witness to the eternal truths until the Messianic age arrives, that is, to keep faith with the plan of the divine made manifest in revelation, even if this plan is ultimately unfathomable to reason. The Other will always remain beyond one’s theoretical grasp (at least until the Messianic era arrives), therefore it is best for one to keep to one’s divinely revealed responsibilities.

Kant, on the other hand, not only thoroughly equates his account of morality and the ‘religion of reason’ with rational universalism, but he develops no mechanism along
the lines of Mendelssohn's in order to ameliorate judgments regarding the Other. Since
God has been rendered utterly transparent to reason, as a principle necessary for universal
morality, and the 'religion of reason' itself is a necessary and universal outgrowth of a
priori morality, there is little room for question regarding whether the Other possesses
correct knowledge of the 'religion of reason' or not. Thus, Kant, as so many of his
writings demonstrate, bears little trepidation constituting the Other in advance by means
of his beliefs about rationality. Either the Other is rational, and thus not genuinely Other,
or the notion of rationality will provide necessary and universal criteria by which to judge
the Other to be deficient. And Kant would sooner judge the Other deficient than qualify
the universality and necessity of his rational universalism.

Conclusion

To be sure, it is a legitimate question, one whose answer remains open, whether
Kant belongs in the religion of reason trajectory or not. Kant's position remains on the
border between the religion of reason trajectory and the externalist camp of thinkers,
being especially close to Habermas. It is neither fully one nor the other. However, oddly
enough, as a result of being on the margins of both camps, Kant's thought winds up being
the most direct inheritor of the legacy of Deuteronomic-monotheistic intolerance. That is,
Kant does not consider the problem of monotheistic intolerance as deeply as either the
other thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory or the externalists, and thus his thought
retains the very structures of intolerance of common Deuteronomic-monotheism even as
it tries overcomes them.

The other thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory, Moses Mendelssohn and
Hermann Cohen, take stock of the conditions within Deuteronomic-monotheisms that
generate intolerance. They recognize that intolerance is generated not simply as a result of scriptural universalism as opposed to rational universalism, but that the very claim to universalism, regardless of whether it is scriptural or rational, marginalizes and threatens to dehumanize the Other. To be sure, neither Mendelssohn nor Cohen is willing to sacrifice universality, but both take steps to ameliorate this violent tendency in the universalisms of monotheisms. Kant remains too beholden to the power of rational universalism to be able to harness its power to bring peace to the world of religious conflict. Kant is convinced that his notion of morality and therefore the ‘religion of reason’ which is entailed therein are rationally universal, necessary and universal, possessed by all fully functioning human beings everywhere. As such, there is simply no room for difference, for otherness in the sense of that which disagrees with his account of morality and the ‘religion of reason.’ Kant would rather dehumanize the Other, even going so far as to find numerous peoples and cultures rationally deficient, than qualify his notion of rational universalism.

Kant resembles the externalist camp insofar as his philosophy, which generates his notion of rational universalism, lies outside all religious traditions and critiques and demands reform on all religions from without. That is, Kant’s ‘religion of reason’ as a universal ideal generated by rational universalism is an outgrowth of his philosophical methodology, of rational universalism, not a specific tradition such as Christianity or Judaism. While Kant shares this externalist methodology with Habermas, his robust notion of rational universalism renders him less sensitive to the problems of intolerance than Habermas. Habermas, writing after Adorno and Horkheimer and alongside the French Postmoderns, is sensitive to the insoluble differences and disagreements between
worldviews and systems of thought, and his anti-foundationalist communicative rationality is far more modest than Kant’s own account of reason. To be sure, in thinking through the conditions necessary for religions to be ‘rational’ in (post)modernity and thus capable of legitimately participating in the public sphere, Habermas creates conditions inhospitable for monotheistic religion. Habermas’s notion of the ‘epistemological condition of modernity’ radically reduces the scope and nature of reason itself so that metaphysical questions are altogether eliminated from it. In a sense, Habermas’s notion of reason shares the same continuum with Kant’s, although his thought stands on the minimalist end whereas Kant’s stands closer to the maximalist extreme. Habermas’ thought is so respectful of the Other that it reduces what is allowed in public reason to such a degree that if monotheistic religions are to survive, they must sacrifice crucial elements of their discursive structure, especially their claims to election and being entrusted with a historical mission regarding the Other. Kant’s notion of reason, however, is so robust that it swallows many of the moments of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheism and appropriates them for itself, transfiguring them into a new, purely rationally universal monotheism, the ‘religion of reason.’

That Kant is the inheritor of the Deuteronomic-monotheistic worldview is evident by the points in common that he shares with them. First, Kant preserves a strong universalist perspective, complete with an ‘integration of all values,’ such that there is neither room for a genuine plurality of worldviews nor for any irreconcilable conflict in values. There is one universal morality, and this morality is rationally universal to all human beings. Second, concomitant with this rational universalism, Kant retains from the monotheistic worldview a notion of the universal human telos. And Kant no less than
the Deuteronomic-monotheistic traditions finds the Other, those who do not share his
notion of reason, his account of morality and the single human telos, to be deficient and
in error.

It will be helpful to juxtapose Kant’s position with that of the traditional
Deuteronomic-monotheisms that we elucidated in chapter 1, section 2. If we recall, the
four moments of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms are revelation,
election, history (historical mission), and the eschaton. These moments are all rooted in a
metaphysical foundation, that of a divinely ordained, universal human telos. However,
this telos, while universal in its applicability to all human beings, is revealed in a
particular manner, only in the Scriptures given to a particular religious community,
leaving the rest of the world in error and sin.

While Kant vigorously objects to the logic of scriptural universalism regnant in
common Deuteronomic-monotheisms, his position retains a great deal in common with
these traditions. Let us first take into account the common Deuteronomic-monotheistic
notions of the universal human telos, the metaphysical foundation of the Deuteronomic-
monotheistic worldview, and the first structural moment, revelation. If we recall, the
moment of revelation, which bears forth the content of the metaphysical foundation,
contains a valence that is at once simultaneously particular and universal. On the one
hand, revelation is entrusted to one particular community alone and no others, giving
them a special access to divine truth. It is simultaneously universal in that the divine
truth, which both necessitates the act of revelation and is contained within it, concerns the
definitive account of the universal human telos, pertaining to all human beings and not
simply those within the community which has received the revelation. As a result, the
privileged knowledge of this telos and how to bring oneself into accord with it, which is requisite for all human beings to be valuable in the eyes of God, belongs to one particular human community. Thus, all who are outside this community, all who lack access to the truth disclosed in revelation, are vitally lacking before God.

While Kant does accept that there is a universal human telos, to become a member of the Kingdom of Ends, he objects to the structural moment of revelation, which begets the logic of scriptural universalism. In radical contradistinction to the Deuteronomic-monotheistic traditions, Kant’s universal human telos is revealed to all human beings on an a priori level, i.e. it is universally apparent to all human beings insofar as they possess practical reason. Again, we must bear in mind in this regard that various forms of historical religions can obscure and inhibit the development of the practical reason innate in individuals, not to mention, that Kant would rather sacrifice the rationality of the Other than question the necessity and universality, and thus the rational universalism, of his account of reason. For Kant, the disclosure of the moral self renders a universal destiny for all human beings, disclosing that all human beings possess an inherent dignity that is inviolable as possessors of practical reason, as beings capable of moral autonomy. In fact, the moral self is inherently intertwined with a universal community, a Kingdom of Ends, whose borders are determined by the possession of rationality, not by communal barriers determined by contingent historical factors such as ethnicity and geographical location which limit exposure to revelation. All rational beings innately possess this truth. As a result, for Kant’s vision no antagonistic energy can erupt between communities, at least to the degree that people are rational.
Since the universality of the moral self and the Kingdom of Ends undermines any communal particularity, the second structural moment of Deuteronomic-monotheisms, i.e. election, is drained of its significance. In common Deuteronomic-monotheisms, if we recall, election is the result of the universal human telos being disclosed to a particular human community by the universal God of creation. It is a result of the tension and interplay between universality and particularity, such that the particular community comes to embody universal significance. This particular community is entrusted with the universal mission of bringing the rest of the world, through some means or other (whether bearing witness, proselytizing, conquest, etc.) into accordance with this universal human telos. However, Kant has eliminated the particular from this equation, leaving only the pole of universality. Thus, if election is to have any meaning, it cannot be limited to a specific religious community, but rather to everyone throughout the world. The task of election is no longer the preservation or expansion of an ethnic/historical community, but rather the expansion of the ethical commonwealth, creating bridges, joining the rational of all communities together, and guiding others through gradual reform towards their own rational maturity.

Kant does seem to believe that Christianity has a special role to play in this endeavor. However, its special role is contingent rather than necessary and universal, i.e. rational. That is, Christianity’s unique role pertains to the fact that it is the religion operative in the European countries where the world-historic event of the Enlightenment, where reason, and thus human beings, are becoming mature and autonomous. If there is anything unique about Christianity for Kant, it is that it remains quantitatively more advanced over other traditions in that it has, at least in certain forms, brought itself more
into accord with the ‘religion of reason’ than any other tradition. Or to put it bluntly, it has come closest to rendering itself obsolete or at least essentially irrelevant, ready to be supplanted by the austerity of the ‘religion of reason’ (not that Kant thinks humanity will ever be capable of fully embracing such a religion). Thus, Christianity is poised to serve as the vanguard of this march towards the ‘religion of reason.’

In regard to history, the third moment of the discursive structure, Kant’s ‘religion of reason’ begins to come closer to the position of common Deuteronomic-monotheisms. History for traditional Deuteronomic-monotheisms is the time of struggle, where the elected community both attempts to purge itself of internal resistance to God’s mission, as well as engage in an agonistic relationship with the other communities in regard to this mission. Whether it attempts to maintain itself in the face of persecution, holding fast to its laws in all their purity, or it attempts to expand its empire through warfare or proselytizing, history is a time of intense struggle against those who are outside of the community. Similarly, in Kant’s religious thought, history is the time of perpetual conflict between antagonistic and mutually exclusive historical religions. It is during this time where the conditions are generated for the ‘religion of reason’ to emerge, and through its social dimension, the ‘ethical commonwealth,’ slowly transfigure the world in light of its own image. Thus, Kant’s thought bears strong resemblance to those (non-Jewish) Deuteronomic-monotheistic modalities of promulgation (proselytizing, and conquest and forced conversion) where history is characterized by actively spreading the message of the religion to the rest of the world. However, Kant’s thought also resembles the modality of bearing witness in that it presumes that rationality is inherently universal and that people can, at least to some degree, learn from the example of other people.
The most striking parallel between Kant’s thought and Deuteronomic-monotheisms pertains to the final moment of the latter’s discursive structure, the *eschaton*. Again, according to common monotheisms, in the *eschaton* the struggle between the elected human community and all others is resolved and the gap between God and humanity is healed. The reconciliation between the elected community and the Other, however, involves either the utter annihilation of the Other, or the complete conversion of the Other. In either case, the otherness of the Other is eradicated. For Kant, the equivalent to the *eschaton* is the realization of the highest good. This means that the ethical commonwealth has been established throughout the world and that the ‘religion of reason’ reigns. For this to occur, all particularity from religions, cultures, and nations have to have been purged almost entirely, such that the universality of morality, of the Kingdom of Ends, dominates completely. To be sure, different historical religions and nations can still exist, but they are empty husks deprived of all real difference, as total priority is given to what they share, which is practical reason, which forms the basis of the union of all of humanity.

Kant’s ‘religion of reason’ does not so much resolve the problem of the intolerance of Deuteronomic-monotheisms as to replicate it anew in a different form. From a contemporary vantage point, one must conclude that Kant fatally overestimates the trans-temporality, the necessity and universality, and thus the very rationality, of his own account of reason. Thus, Kant’s ‘religion of reason’ appears as contingent and dogmatic as any Deuteronomic-monotheism operating according to the logic of scriptural universalism. And like the Deuteronomic-monotheisms before him, Kant’s position establishes one universal human telos, a standard which it uses to judge all Others. And
like the monotheistic religions it critiques, Kant’s ‘religion of reason’ cannot tolerate genuine difference, genuine Otherness. In fact, Kant’s ‘religion of reason’ does not bring unity to humanity but rather merely reproduces the exclusiveness characteristic of monotheism (Assmann’s ‘Mosaic Distinction’) on a new level. To be sure, it is a peculiar monotheism, where God has been reduced to a functionary of reason, and where a community of reasoning beings is elevated to the heavenly throne. It is a monotheism that resembles Kant’s polytheistic monotheism which emerged in his critique of Judaism, where the numerical difference of the community is cancelled by the overriding homogeneity provided by reason itself. However, too many individuals and cultures are excluded from this community of reasoning beings that have usurped the heavenly throne to consider it any more legitimate, any more rationally universal than the monotheisms it seeks to replace.

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1 For example, the last few years have seen two important edited collections on Kant and religion, by Christian philosophers, Philip J. Rossi and Michael J. Wreen, eds., Kant’s Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991); and most recently Chris L. Firestone and Stephen R. Palmquist, eds., Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2006).
2 Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 602, A7752/B780
3 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 9 Axi
4 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 10 Axi
5 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 9 Axi
6 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 601-605, A751-757 / B779-785
7 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 601, A751/B779
8 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 396-401, A426-434/B454-462
9 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 601, A751/B779
10 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 601, A751/B779
11 A note of clarification is needed here. While in some sense it has taken the history of philosophy to reach the genuine morality Kant expounds, Kant also thinks his moral philosophy is present on a transcendental level for all rational beings. Thus, it is somewhat excepted from this process, at least if we conceive of morality on an individual level. However, as we will see, starting with the Critique of Judgment, morality becomes ensoened in the social, and thus the processes involving state of nature, war, and legal order, is very much in play with morality as well, at least insofar as its emergence.
12 Immanuel Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 143.
13 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 117.
14 In his essay, Stephen Palmquist writes that Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone “ought to be viewed as itself a kind of transcendental Critique of Religion – i.e., as an attempt to delineate the boundary between true religion and false religion by setting forth the necessary conditions for the possibility of religious experience.” Palmquist, “Does Kant Reduce Religion to Morality?” Kant-Studien 83 (1992): 740.
15 Immanuel Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 47.

The term ‘discursive’ is, of course, a technical one. It is an adjective used to articulate that human understanding is such that it combines sensible data independent to itself that it finds given. Taking into account the nature of our forthcoming argument it is important to distinguish this term from terms relating to discourse and argumentation.


Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 62.

Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 203.

Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 34.


Due to a lack of space I cannot enter into a discussion of the dialectic of nature that emerges in Kant’s discussion of the sensible self in the *Critique of Judgment*, and essays such as “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent,” and “Perpetual Peace,” whereby the conditions necessary for reason itself emerge. A paradox of sorts emerges in Kant’s political writings in that the conditions which are necessary to generate reason are interminable conflict and war, conditions absolutely incommensurable with reason itself. On this point, see Allen W. Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge UP, 1999) 294.

Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 203.

See for instance, Immanuel Kant, *Foundations in the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1997) 48, where Kant states, “The will is not only subject to the law, but subject in such a way that it must be conceived also as itself prescribing the law, of which reason alone can hold itself to be the author; it is on this ground alone that the will is regarded as subject to the law.”


We will explore the coexistence of the moral self and the sensible self, and the subordination of the latter to the former, in the notion of the highest good shortly.

See pp. 123-128 above.

However, as Allen W. Wood reminds us, we should not think of these religions as simply ‘aids’ individuals knowingly employ to evade the duties of their conscience, but rather that “ecclesiastical faiths have devised highly effective means of inculcating ‘pious terror’ into people and powerful means of playing on the human propensity to a ‘servile faith in divine worship’” (Wood, “Kant’s Deism,” *Kant’s Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, 6). Regardless, fear like lust is an inclination, and thus is categorically different than duty. Therefore however different fear may be from inclinations like lust, they both nevertheless pertain to the sensible and not the moral self.

Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, 94.

Yirmiahu Yovel helpfully points out that Kant also considers human beings to have an innate religiosity or “religious consciousness” which if not properly brought under the guidance of reason, will lead them astray by predisposing them to superstitious religions. However, as Yovel points out, Kant thinks that this same religiosity, if nurtured by reason, can serve as a powerful instrument to support and buttress morality (Kant and the Philosophy of History, 210).

I am purposefully using the masculine pronoun to highlight the anthropomorphic tendencies of the notion of God in historical religions. This will contrast with the gender neutral notion of God in Kant’s ‘religion of reason.’

Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, 160.

Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, 114 fn.

Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, 94.

Allen W. Wood points out that Kant’s argument here is seriously flawed. Wood speculates that Kant claims that historical faiths are restricted to one people and can’t comprise a world religion most likely because they are not rational. Wood charges Kant with being swayed here by the logic of his own system rather than the empirical events of history. Whereas his ‘religion of reason,’ supposedly accessible to all men and thus capable of genuine universality at best only had a tiny following, religions predicated upon
revelation like Islam and Christianity are genuinely international ("Kant's Deism," pp.13-14). However, while Wood is certainly correct to critique Kant here, one must not lose sight of the merits of Kant's vision, even if history failed to live up to it. Kant's argument is about the conditions for rational discourse and the problems of communication associated with religions premised upon scriptural universalism. These insights remain profoundly important, even if Kant's 'religion of reason' proves not to be truly rationally universal.

59 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 105.
60 There is also a parallel from Kant's political writings, of the inability of one nation to achieve a rational legitimacy in its military victory over another that would end the cycle of perpetual war. It is parallel in that contingent powers are attempting to assert universality, but they lack any sort of necessity to them, and thus cannot carry out these assertions.

41 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 100.
42 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 86-87.
43 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 134.

44 As Joseph Runzo helpfully explains, "in Kant's view, God comes to us through reason" rather than "revelation." Runzo, "Kant on Reason and Justified Belief in God," Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered, 24.

45 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 3.
46 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 5.

47 Emil Fackenheim forcefully elucidates Kant's rendering of revelation obsolete when he argues, "Kant holds that moral law, in mediating between man and God, rules out or renders irrelevant an immediate divine commanding Presence [...] Kant's hidden premise, then, is that moral law is a barrier between man and its divine lawgiver" (Fackenheim, "Kant and Judaism," 465).

48 As Leo Strauss stresses in his many works concerning the Enlightenment critiques of religion beginning with Spinoza, philosophy cannot refute revealed religion through rational argumentation. This refrain is echoed by Yovel in regard to Kant's tactics in Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone. Since Kant (as an Aufklärer) does not share premises with traditional religious believers, in that for them, no account of reason can refute or render revelation outmoded, his method is one of persuasion rather than rigorous argumentation. Yovel, Kant and the Philosophy of History, 211.

49 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 175.
50 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 107.
51 Kant frequently juxtaposes the different relationship to the moral law that human beings and God have as a result of the former's finitude and latter's infinitude. It is too frequent to cite all the instances. Some characteristic examples, however, can be found in Critique of Practical Reason, 47, 48, 104, and 107.

52 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 107.
54 For a careful investigation of the developments in Kant's thought regarding the relationship of freedom and necessity, morality and sensibility, in terms of the highest good see Philip J. Rossi's excellent article, "The Final End of All Things: The Highest Good as the Unity of Nature and Freedom," Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered, 132-164.

55 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 142.
56 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 144.
57 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 160.
58 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 114.
59 Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 155.
60 Thus, I disagree with Lewis White Beck when he argues that the necessity of the possibility of the highest good and therefore the rational acceptability of the postulates that Kant derives from it are based on a mistake. They are spurious, Beck maintains, in that they are concessions to human weakness rather than genuine needs of practical reason as such, and therefore their supposition is without any rational necessity. Lewis White Beck, A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1960) 244-246. Paul Guyer rather ingeniously attempts to salvage Kant's position while preserving the naturalistic sensibilities motivating Beck's criticism. Guyer claims that for Kant, the postulates really are "not about reason itself" but rather concern "the limits of human sensibility" (Guyer, Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness [New York: Cambridge UP, 2000] 366). That is, the postulates are really about "human
psychology" and not reason, because all that reason requires is that the highest good be theoretically non-contradictory. However, the postulates in fact require much more, which is not warranted by reason. Thus, Guyer argues that the real intent of the postulates for Kant is that they serve as a means of overcoming the duality of sensibility and reason. That is, these ideas are successful in motivating the entirety of the human being as they marshal the sensible self into line with the demands of the moral self, but have no "real" content (Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness*, 367). Both Guyer and Beck, however, fail to account for the need for coherence between the right and the good, which, in Kant's system, only the postulate of God (and to a lesser degree, immortality) can provide. This reconciliation of the right and the good, of virtue and happiness, exceeds any naturalistic interpretation and requires a genuine metaphysical component, albeit one that can only be thought along practical grounds rather than known through theoretical ones.

63 While Kant includes freedom as a postulate, he stresses that it is quite different in nature from the other postulates in that it is a necessary condition for even the possibility of the moral law itself, rather than being derived from the moral law, as the other postulates are.
64 Jacqueline Mariña, in her essay "Making Sense of Kant's Highest Good," *Kant-Studien* 91 (2000), 329-355, tries to salvage the transcendent version of the highest good put forward in the second *Critique*, though she acknowledges that it contains serious problems.
65 Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, 64-65.
67 Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, 64-65; This is an important point, because with this move Kant solves a problem that had been haunting his ethics when conceived individualistically. Alisdair MacIntyre points to this problem in Kant's (individualistic) ethics (MacIntyre never discusses the turn towards collectivity post third *Critique*) in *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age of the Twentieth Century*, MacIntyre, when discussing the individualistic notion of the highest good, trenchantly points out, "[t]he odd thing is that if happiness is as indeterminate a notion as [Kant] suggests elsewhere—and as he suggests rightly elsewhere, for the Kantian notion of happiness has been detached from any notion of socially established ends and the satisfaction to be gained from achieving them—he can scarcely be consistent here in introducing happiness as the reward of virtue." MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edition (Indiana: U of Notre Dame P, 1998) 196.; Cf. Paul Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness*, 340, and Philip J. Rossi "The Final End of All Things: The Highest Good as the Unity of Nature and Freedom," *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, 147.
68 Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, pp.70-71.
69 On the irrelevance and thus rejection of the postulate of immortality in the highest good that emerges in Kant's later thought, see Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness*, 351-352; Michalson "God and Kant’s Ethical Commonwealth" 79; and Rossi "The Final End of All Things: The Highest Good as the Unity of Nature and Freedom," 151.
71 Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, 94.
72 Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, 145.
73 For an in depth discussion of 'object of worship' and 'method of worship' as respective sources of religious dispute in monotheism, see Moshe Halbertal and Avishar Margalit’s *Idolatry*, 163-179 and 180-213.
74 Runzo, "Kant on Reason and Justified Belief in God," 34.
75 Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, 142.
76 Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, 97, 98, 102, 106.
77 Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, 144.
78 Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, 98.
79 Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, 44.
80 Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" 45.
See Wood, "Kant’s Deism," 6, and especially Yovel, Kant and the Philosophy of History, 153-154. Yovel convincingly argues that for Kant the Enlightenment is a moment of world-historic importance in that it is a dialectical turning point in history.

Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” 44-45.

Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 122.

I make this comparison only on a philosophical and rhetorical level. Socially speaking, the positions of Kant and Mendelssohn and their respective uses of Judaism and Christianity as foils for the religions they seek to reform are rather incomparable. If Mendelssohn indulges in polemic against Christianity, he is coming from a precarious position as a defender of a persecuted minority ridiculed and despised not only on a social and political level, but also in the theology and scholarship of the majority population in which he lives. Kant, on the other hand, is part of this majority position. Kant knows next to nothing about rabbinic Judaism except what he has heard through biased and anti-Semitic or at least anti-Judaic tracts, and unquestioningly takes part in this tradition of slander against the Jews. However, Kant is also one of the greatest thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition, and therefore his comments about Judaism, as distasteful as they may be, especially in light of subsequent history, must be seriously considered in terms of his systematic thought.

Legalism and scriptural universalism differ in that Kant stresses that legalism’s heteronomy derives primarily from concerns about temporal rewards and punishments administered by an all-powerful God, whereas scriptural universalism is more preoccupied with the mission entrusted to it by an all-powerful God. However, legalism resembles scriptural universalism, as both are rooted in the revelation of an all-powerful God. That is, for both legalism and scriptural universalism the revelation of this all-powerful God determines the actions of adherents of these different ‘logics’ rather than autonomous moral reason. In addition, because heteronomy comes in many forms, and in all its forms it lacks necessity and universality, I argue that Judaism can be read as emblematic of what we have termed scriptural universalism in addition to legalism in Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone.

See for example, Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, 95.

Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 115-117.

Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 89.

Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 140.

Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 89.

Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 89; Sharon Anderson-Gold argues that the God functioning in Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, “is not derived from the function of a World Designer, not even from the function of a Judge. Rather it is closer to the function attributed in Christian theology to the sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit, incarnate in the living social organization of the Church.” Gold, “God and Community: An Inquiry into the Religious Implications of the Highest Good,” Kant’s Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered, 129; Incidentally some scholars contest the legitimacy of the postulate of God in this version of the highest good. Michelson regards it as a “camouflaged appeal to a traditional notion of grace in order to preserve the integrity of his conception of autonomy” (Michelson, “God and Kant’s Ethical Commonwealth,” 77); and Yovel contends that this God-postulate is utterly redundant, with no real function. Yovel, Kant and the Philosophy of History, 111-112.

Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 90.

Michelson correctly argues that this use of God provides no new information about Kant’s conception of God, and in fact, does not really concern God at all. “Kant’s invocation of God’s name in the course of speaking of the law-giver of the ethical commonwealth simply turns out to be a way of distinguishing between ‘public’ and ‘inner’ laws.” Michelson, “God and Kant’s Ethical Commonwealth” 82. God here is merely a device for solving Kant’s problems concerning autonomy and the public realm.

Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 90.

Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 91.

Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 91.

Obviously Kant does not think only Jews or the institutions of Judaism demonstrate heteronomy. Rather, Judaism, as a symbol for the Deuteronomic-monotheisms, serves equally as a symbol for heteronomy. Similarly, Christianity should not be seen as being identical with the ‘religion of reason’ but rather as symbolizing it. However, rhetorically, Kant often blurs the lines between cipher and actuality in regard to Christianity and the ‘religion of reason.’
98 Here as Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson point out Kant is invoking 1 Peter 2:10 (Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 91).
99 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 91.
100 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 91; Greene and Hudson again point out an allusion to the New Testament in this passage, this time, Titus 2:14.
101 Again, Kant reduces Judaism to that of the Old Testament (and I deliberately use this denomination.)
102 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 91.
103 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 117.
104 Notice how Kant takes it for granted that Judaism is an anachronism that should have ended with the birth of Christianity.
105 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 117.
106 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 117.
107 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 117-118.
108 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 118.
112 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 121.
113 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 145-155; Wood, argues that Kant lists the contingency and lack of necessity of revelation as his primary objection “for the sake of tact” (Wood, “Kant’s Deism,”14). That is, Wood suspects Kant in fact finds the content of revelation more problematic, but he hides his concern beneath this critique of revelation’s historicity. While Wood is doubtlessly correct that there is much regarding revealed religions, including Christianity, that Kant finds highly problematic, I think one cannot stress the Kant’s concerns about the lack of necessity and universality (i.e. contingency, particularity, and historicity) enough. That is, the problems Kant has with the content of revealed religions are inextricably bound up with the lack of necessity and universality in these religions; the two are inseparable.
114 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 78.
115 Kant presents a practical argument for this moral interpretation of Christianity. Kant claims, from the perspective of practical reason, Jesus’ divinity should be rejected because if Jesus is divine, then human beings cannot see him as a regulative ideal of morality (Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 110, 148, 149). Similarly, issues concerning miracles (Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 79, 82, 83, 89, 90,) and other doctrinal matters are rendered essentially insignificant. In all matters relating to the supernatural, Kant never disputes the possibility of their historical truth. Rather, he undermines the value of historical events altogether, regardless of whether they possess miraculous qualities or not, stressing their inherent contingency and particularity. In comparison to the limitations (no necessity or universality) of contingent and particular historical events surrounding Jesus, however wondrous, the rational teachings of Jesus are universally and necessarily true, and thus far more significant
116 Thus I am skeptical of the confidence in Stephen Palmquist’s assertion that Kant sees Christianity as essentially identical with the ‘religion of reason.’ Palmquist, “The Kingdom of God is At Hand!” (Did Kant Really Say That?) History of Philosophy Quarterly 11.4 (October, 1994): 426-427. I think Kant’s position in regard to Christianity’s place in the ‘religion of reason’ is more like a vanguard; it is not one of identity.
117 The reduction of God to a helper of human beings in their historical transformation of the world is a dominant theme in both Yovel’s Kant and the Philosophy of History and Michalosn’s Kant and the Problem of God.
118 Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, 117.
Chapter 4
Cohen and the Humane Intolerance of Ethical Monotheism

Hermann Cohen is the third and most successful member of the religion of reason trajectory. Cohen’s success is due in large part to the difference of his approach from the respective approaches of Mendelssohn and Kant to the problematic violence inherent in the intolerance of Deuteronomic-monotheisms. To recall, Mendelssohn and Kant both attempt to dissolve this violence by eradicating the conditions that generate this intolerance by introducing heterogeneous elements into the discursive structure of monotheisms. Mendelssohn replaces the metaphysical foundation of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheism with a more inclusive, rationalist one. Kant, on the other hand, dissolves the metaphysical foundation and the discursive structure of monotheistic religions altogether, replacing them with a ‘religion of reason’ derived from ethics and therefore supposedly universally accessible to all rational beings. In this vein, Kant hopes that Deuteronomic-monotheisms (with the exception of Judaism, which is to be abandoned) can be brought into accord with the ideal standard of the ‘religion of reason.’ In short, both thinkers import external material into their revised accounts of monotheisms, and thus hope that by integrating this imported material with the monotheistic worldview they can eliminate intolerance. In both cases this integration remains problematic and untenable, contributing significantly to the failure of their respective endeavors.

A crucial reason for Cohen’s success is that he avoids trying to dismantle the conditions which produce intolerance in Deuteronomic-monotheisms, as intolerance is an
inherent feature of their inner logic. What he does, rather, is to argue that the moments of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms can produce, or develop from within, a form of intolerance that is ethical, and thus non-violent. This modality of intolerance is thus at once both fully compatible with the discursive structure of monotheisms and with the basic conditions for existence within a pluralistic society. That is, Cohen’s account of Judaism can sustain the priorities of the scriptural universalism inherent in common Deuteronomic-monotheisms (although it breaks with the notion of an unfathomable God) while still recognizing the inherent humanity and dignity of the Other, conditions absolutely essential for a pluralistic, multicultural society. By transfiguring the task of eliminating the intolerance inherent in Deuteronomic-monotheism to the more feasible one of rendering monotheistic intolerance ethical, Cohen, unlike the other members of the religion of reason trajectory, has no need to import heterogeneous elements that undermine the moments of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms. Rather, using the structural moments of Deuteronomic-monotheism themselves, read through a rationalizing hermeneutic, Cohen harnesses the moral resources within Judaism to not only domesticate and sanitize monotheistic intolerance, but more importantly to render it of fundamental ethical significance.

It is also helpful to view the difference between Cohen’s endeavor and those of his predecessors in light of their different approaches to scriptural universalism and rational universalism. If we recall, Mendelssohn and Kant attempt to ameliorate the intolerance inherent in monotheistic religions by introducing a form of rational universalism to supplement or replace the logic of scriptural universalism of common Deuteronomic-monotheisms. However, given the artificiality of this
supplementation/substitution, both thinkers are forced to take recourse to elements that are irreconcilable with rational universalism in general, and which thus cause their respective enterprises to fail. In order to sustain the meaningfulness of the particularity of the election of Jews and their reception of revelation, Mendelssohn is forced to introduce heterogeneous elements, the traditional Deuteronomic-monotheistic notions of idolatry, revelation, and election. However, these foreign elements disrupt and ultimately undermine the rational universalism that he set out to establish with his natural theological account of the ‘religion of reason’ in the first place. Kant, on the other hand, eliminates scriptural universalism altogether, offering in its stead an overly robust account of reason, one complete with a system of morality and a ‘religion of reason.’ However, Kant’s reason is able to be so pervasive and encompassing only because it is not a genuine rational universalism, but is in fact predicated upon all sorts of historically and culturally contingent assumptions. Thus, the degree to which the inclusiveness of this universality has surpassed that of scriptural universalism, indeed, if it has at all, remains an open question.

Cohen, following Mendelssohn but in contrast to Kant, does not set up a dichotomy between scriptural universalism and rational universalism. However, Cohen is more successful than Mendelssohn in bringing these two universalisms together into a fruitful and dynamic relationship. Cohen argues that rational universalism, which begins as only a seed inherent in scriptural universalism, emerges and unfolds through the development of the scriptural literary tradition until it becomes the dominant member in the relationship. The ultimate subordination of scriptural to rational universalism becomes evident when Cohen, like Kant, reduces the unfathomable God of
Deuteronomic-monotheisms to a principle of reason. Nevertheless, although Cohen follows Kant in reducing God to a principle of reason, unlike his predecessor he is able to sustain a vigorous relationship between these two universalisms despite this reduction. And it is precisely Cohen’s ability to subordinate scriptural universalism to rational universalism while nevertheless preserving a viable relationship between the two that enables him to conceive of Deuteronomic-monotheisms in a totally new light, where dyads like ‘universality and particularity’ and ‘reason and revelation’ cease to be cast in opposition to one another. This shift proves essential in the ethical transfiguration of monotheistic intolerance.

Despite these successes, Cohen’s philosophy of religion has been largely overshadowed in the twentieth century, for two major reasons. First of all, the critical idealism of his Marburg Neo-Kantianism was linked with German Idealism in general, whose totalizing tendencies have been the great bugbear of so much of twentieth century thought. However, Cohen’s thought is, in fact, radically distinct from, and quite critical of, these other idealisms, and not susceptible to the same critiques.¹ Second, even before the Holocaust, within Jewish thought there was a movement towards embracing particularism over universalism, and downplaying the rationalist approach in favor of existentialist and irrationalist trends in Judaism that better lent themselves to these new priorities.² However, the current state of the world political situation coupled with the urgency of the recent critiques of monotheism which decry its tendency to promote violence and intolerance make manifest the need to reassess Cohen’s important legacy. It is my contention that Cohen’s conception of monotheism provides a more responsible foundation for modern Jewish thought, especially in regard to the concerns of our time,
than that of either his forerunners or his successors. As such, it bears considerable
significance not only for Judaism but for all three Deuteronomistic-monotheistic traditions,
in that it offers powerful resources for mitigating the violence inherent in monotheistic
intolerance while preserving the integrity of their discursive structures.

*Cohen’s Methodology*

In order to understand Cohen’s rationalist recasting of Judaism, it is essential to
appreciate his Neo-Kantian methodology. Cohen, the founder of Marburg Neo-
Kantianism, was no slavish follower of Kant, feeling free to both innovate ways of
interpreting Kant in order to solve certain problems with Kant’s philosophical legacy as
well as to break with the master when he felt necessary. Cohen frequently utilizes
elements in Kant’s philosophy, often in original and unorthodox ways, to establish his
own philosophical position, which profoundly opposes the Romantic turn in German
idealism. Methodologically speaking, of particular importance for Cohen is Kant’s notion
of the regulative ideal, where reason presents ideals that human knowledge strives to
approximate but can never reach given that they exhibit a level of completeness
impossible for the finite nature of human knowledge.³ The regulative ideal is a
methodological procedure that precludes metaphysics as a matter of course, although as
we will see this does not necessarily allow Cohen to elide some of the problems of
metaphysics which beset Mendelssohn and continue to plague Kant. The regulative ideal
manifests itself in two essential respects in Cohen’s methodology, the futural, task-
oriented account of knowledge, and the notion of correlation. These two aspects of
Cohen’s methodology are of significant importance not only in Cohen’s systematic
philosophical works, but they are also in play in Cohen’s religious thought.
First, most obviously, Cohen’s theory of knowledge makes heavy use of Kant’s notion of the regulative idea, insofar as it is rooted in knowledge as a future-oriented, perpetual task, ever approximating but never reaching its goal. Cohen argues that knowledge is not a passive process, but rather constitutes an activity of the mind. And, along the lines of scientific thought, knowledge is an ongoing activity, a process which perpetually corrects itself. Thus, rather than being the simple grasping of a datum, or of reaching a conclusion once and for all about the world as it is, knowledge constitutes an ideal for Cohen. And, in the words of Dieter Adelmann, “the ‘Ideal’…does not constitute some form of the facts of the case in themselves [Sachverhalt für sich] against which one would oppose the thinking of ‘reality’, rather it is much more the task to idealize ‘reality’[sondern vielmehr die Aufgabe, die <<Wirklichkeit>> zu idealisieren.]” For Cohen, the present lacks stability and reality, whereas the future alone possesses genuine being. Thus, knowing is an active process initiated by the mind, and knowledge is a perpetual task oriented towards the future, not the present. The specific term Cohen uses for his theory of knowledge is Ursprüngslogik, which refers back to the active nature of the mind, the task-natured view of reason.

The second respect in which the Kantian regulative ideal manifests itself in Cohen’s own methodology is with his notion of ‘correlation.’ The relationship between correlation and the Kantian regulative ideal is not as immediately apparent, but is no less foundational. Correlation as a methodological term first emerges in Cohen’s Logik der reinen Erkenntnis and becomes a decisive concept for the rest of his system of philosophy and his religious thought. Cohen explains that the correlation is: “Not an exchange [Wechsel], but rather a preservation [Erhaltung] simultaneously of distinction
[Sonderung] and unity [Vereinigung]. In the distinction unity is preserved, and in the unity distinction is preserved [In der Sonderung erhält sich die Vereinigung, und in der Vereinigung erhält sich die Sonderung].”⁵ That is, in a correlation two different terms are related, unified and yet held distinct. They remain isolated and distinct from one another, and yet, at the same time, they are not left unaffected by the other party. Each party of the correlation is changed and influenced by the other in the process of being held in orbit with it, even though each term remains distinct from the other. Martin Kavka trenchantly remarks that it is precisely the unattainable, infinite quality of the (regulative) ideal that Cohen has made central to his own methodology that prevents the Cohenian correlation from becoming a Hegelian Aufhebung. Kavka writes that with the correlation, “Cohen never uses the Hegelian language of sublating and dissolution (aufheben), but stays on its perimeter in his use of the verb heben. In this movement of elevation towards the ideal, opposites flow into each other and interpenetrate, without dissolving and producing something new.”⁶ That is, since each term of the correlation (or at least one, when the correlation involves God), stands in an independent relation to a transcendent ideal, Cohen is able to preserve the significant difference between each term.⁷

The concept of correlation plays a significant role in the entire gamut of Cohen’s system, and beyond, in his writings on religion. In order to understand the three correlations in play in Cohen’s writings on religion, which will be of central concern to us in this chapter, we must first understand a more basic correlation at the heart of Cohen’s system of philosophy. That is, we must examine the correlation between ethics and logic that emerges in Cohen’s earlier work, Ethik des reinen Willens. In this work Cohen firmly establishes that although ethics remains the ‘center of gravity’ of his
system, logic (conceived of as *Ursprüngslogik*) remains ‘first philosophy,’ in that it is a necessary methodological presupposition for ethics if ethics is to be immune from any charge of relativism. And to have ethics “removed from any relativism” is a major priority for Cohen. This correlation between logic and ethics enables Cohen to preserve the priority of ethics, to enable human beings to remain the primary concern and center of the system, while simultaneously securing the system by grounding it upon a secure and non-relativist foundation. Since the foundation of the relationship between logic and ethics is a correlation, each party affects and enriches the other. Logic both serves as a transcendental condition of ethics, and in turn, is enriched by ethics. Ethics, which rests on the distinction between ‘is’ and ‘ought,’ being and what ought to be, transforms the open-endedness of the *Ursprung* of logic from a hypothesis-foundation into an infinite task, the ethical ideal.

In *Ethik des reinen Willens*, as truth transforms from hypothesis to ethical ideal, the idea of God emerges, and secures truth for Cohen’s entire system. God ensures truth by securing the possibility of harmony (not identity) between ethics and nature. As commentator Andrea Poma puts it, “God guarantees complete harmony between being and what ought to be, but is and can be so for reason, only as idea. This does not mean...that this idea is not effective in reality, but that harmony can never be considered to be fulfilled and immanent in the world.” This means that while the ethical ideal, what ought to be, will always be an infinite task it will nevertheless have an influence on reality, on nature, due to the fact that God secures the primordial harmony between ethics and nature. In other words, God secures the ideality of reality, that reality is permeated with this possibility for transformation to the ‘ought,’ that the ‘ought’ has grounds in
actuality, that the ‘ought’ can be realized (or at least approximated), ensuring that it becomes a perpetual, infinite task. God’s very transcendence then, secures the correlation between nature and morality, such that the two are not mutually antagonistic or utterly incommensurable elements but that morality can transform nature.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{The Correlation of Particularity and Universality in Judaism}

In Cohen’s posthumously published magnum opus of Jewish thought, \textit{Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism}, the methodology of correlation plays a central role. From the sources of Judaism, Cohen discerns three interwoven correlations, the result of which is the extirpation of the violence towards the Other inherent in monotheistic intolerance. The most prominent, and in a sense, most basic, of the three correlations is the one between God and human beings. Parasitic upon the correlation between God and human beings, is the correlation between human beings themselves. And finally, there is the correlation that is tied to the peculiar status of the people of Israel, the Jews. This is a correlation between particularity and universality. It is this \textit{particular} people with their \textit{particular} history that is to bear \textit{universal} significance by bequeathing to the world the previous two correlations, as well as serving as a permanent witness to them. That is, in the particular history of this people, or at least of their literary sources, Cohen argues that the emergence of these other two correlations is to be found. And it is in these correlations, which shape and are shaped by the history of the Jews, that Cohen makes progress over both Mendelssohn and Kant in terms of solving the problem concerning the violence of monotheistic intolerance.

Cohen’s idealism emerges immediately, in the manner of defining the topic of study in regard to Judaism, i.e. its literary sources. That is, rather than finding race,
ethnicity, or even the actual history of the empirical Jewish people to be the essential foundation for his study, Cohen argues that it is the literary sources of Judaism that constitute the historical point of origin, the germ, which brings forth into the world the correlation between God and human beings, as well as the concomitant correlation between human beings themselves. Cohen reads these texts not as a historian, and thus his method of proceeding diverges sharply from scholars of rabbinic or Biblical literature. Similarly, inasmuch as reason is privileged over the doctrines and teachings of the specific texts themselves, his method of approach is also unlike that of the rabbinic tradition or of theological exegesis in general.¹⁴

Cohen’s hermeneutical method is a procedure of ‘idealizing’ the sources. What this means, methodologically, is that Cohen aims at reading these sources in a rationalizing manner. That is, he views them in terms of their highest possibilities according to reason rather than conceiving them to possess merely historical or dogmatic value.¹⁵ Nevertheless, history still plays a vital role in that “history, literary history, is the factor by virtue of which the actuality of Judaism comes to realization.”¹⁶ That is, Cohen traces the development of concepts within Judaism, as they evolve and become more sophisticated and rational through the development of Jewish literary history.

The correlation which Cohen claims animates the form of Jewish literary sources is between particularity, the particularity of the Jewish people, and universality, the universality of reason. That is, while these “literary sources are the immediate workings of a [particular] national spirit,”¹⁷ the universality of reason is nevertheless “able to wrestle its way into the history of the particular people.”¹⁸ It is this correlation, which often takes the difficult form of conceptual ‘wrestling,’ that plays out and finally resolves
itself in the literary history of Judaism. This correlation emerges quite early on in the Jewish literary sources themselves. The correlation consists in the particularity of Judaism, its national literature, being rooted in a universal idea, the unique God, monotheism. In fact, the idea of the unique God is the primary origin, or Ursprung, of the national literature of the Jewish people. As a result, “[e]verything that comes forth from the spirit of Israel comes forth just as much from the unique God as it does from the national spirit in its primary origin and peculiarity.”\textsuperscript{19} Significantly, the two other correlations, that between God and the human being and that between human beings themselves, emerge in the process of this dialectical interplay taking place within the correlation of particularity and universality within Jewish literature. In sharp contrast to Mendelssohn’s thought, which is undone by the antagonism between particularism and universalism, Cohen’s account of monotheism derives vitality and power from it. With it, Cohen is able to preserve the dynamism of scriptural universalism and the discursive structure of common Deuteronomic-monotheisms even as he makes significant alterations to them.

The correlation between God and human beings emerges with the notion of revelation, which is also the first moment of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms. By casting revelation in terms of correlation, and this correlation in terms of rationality, Cohen lays the groundwork for ameliorating the violence inherent in the intolerance of monotheism. In common Deuteronomic-monotheisms, what Cohen refers to as the mythic level of monotheism, (if we recall from chapter 1) there is an event where there is an unmediated encounter with God which results in writings that are held sacred, and treated as normative for the community and indeed for all of humanity.
However, these teachings are only available to human beings through exposure to the revelation which the community itself possesses; human reason is insufficient to reach them on its own. Thus, God has elected this community, bestows these teachings upon them, in order that they will in turn promulgate these teachings to the rest of the world. As a result of this exclusive possession of knowledge concerning the universal human telos there is a fracturing of the human community such that an agonistic relationship emerges between the elected community and all Others. Those who have not received this revealed knowledge live in error and sin, and until they receive it they remain in some sense not only enemies of the community but also enemies of God as they inhibit God’s plans.

Cohen ultimately roots scriptural universalism in rational universalism, but avoids doing so in such a way that effaces the particularities of the scriptural universalism a la Kant. Rather, these particularities are not only not impediments to rational universality, but also they play an essential role in the disclosure and unveiling of rational universality itself. For example, in Scripture, and through its interpretation, including subsequent scriptural works which interpret earlier works, the notion of revelation is harnessed in an ethical direction. According to Cohen, the primary idea of revelation is the unique God, which in turn, entails the election of a particular community to promulgate this idea to the world as its historical mission, which when complete will establish universal harmony throughout humanity. Thus Cohen recognizes and validates all four moments of the discursive structure of traditional Deuteronomic-monotheism. However, these structural moments serve as conditions for, and are put in service to, the emergence of rational universalism.
Since he is privileging reason and rational universalism in his readings of scriptural texts, Cohen is able to trace out and secure ethical advancements within these documents, rather than reading them as if they are all of one piece, the typical manner of scriptural universalism. The idea of the unique God, which is disclosed in revelation, already contains the germs of the other moments, including the final moment, the eschaton, which in Cohen's rationalized reading consists in the universal harmony among all human beings. The universal harmony of humanity, Cohen claims, involves recognition of the inherent value of all human beings and turns humanity itself into an ethical ideal. This ideal, however, conflicts with other moments, such as the elevation of a particular community over others in election, even if this elevation is only for the promulgation of the ideas of God and humanity to the rest of the world. Thus, a dialectical process takes place, in which a harmony must be achieved between the ethical content contained within the idea of God and the means by which this idea is to be brought to and established among the rest of the world. In short, the very moments of the discursive structure already contain the rational and ethical content in a latent form. The contradictions, in turn, serve as the impetus or catalyst that drives these rational and ethical elements to the surface and establishes their primacy.

Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism along with Cohen's other Jewish works are Cohen's attempt to work out this harmony. Let us explore this process in more depth. The first moment is revelation. Although a particular people is required for the promulgation of the teachings of revelation, the actual content of revelation, once purified of its mythic dross, is a purely universal notion of God, one inextricably bound to morality and the universal idea of humanity. Revelation, then, is thoroughly rational,
universal, even though it initially appears in the national literature in mythological forms of miraculous encounters with the divine. Cohen reveals here that rational universalism, not scriptural universalism, is foundational. In this way, in sharp contrast to Mendelssohn’s account of bearing witness that is rooted in the logic of scriptural universalism—a logic ultimately unfathomable to human reason, Cohen creates the conditions through which bearing witness becomes comprehensible as a mode of promulgating the divine message. If revelation is ultimately rational, and thoroughly so at that, then even if its point of origin is with the people of Israel, all human beings, through their reason, will be able to recognize its validity. Thus, bearing witness for Cohen unlike Mendelssohn is not an enterprise that ultimately defies human understanding because not only is the Other capable of recognizing the validity of the contents of revelation, but also there is no unfathomable mystery regarding the source of the mission to bear witness in the first place.

Cohen argues that it is the Biblical authors themselves, as early as Deuteronomy, who begin the long tradition within the literary sources of Judaism of transfiguring scriptural universalism into rational universalism, by subtly undermining mythical understandings of God, revelation, and the election of Israel, in favor of more rationalist ones. According to Deuteronomy, or at least Cohen’s reading of it, the miraculous and otherworldly aspects of revelation are to be sloughed off in favor of a view that holds that true revelation “is not in the heavens” (Deut 30:12), but rather “the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it” (Deuteronomy 30:14). The author of Deuteronomy claims that it is these laws and statutes “that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say, Surely, that
is a wise and discerning people”(Deut 4:6). Cohen frequently leans on these passages as proof texts that the laws and statutes of revelation appeal to reason as such, so that all human beings and not just Jews can recognize them. The basis of the laws and statutes commanded by revelation is not a divine knowledge that is simply beyond the ken of human beings, but rather despite their particular origin and locus in the people of Israel, their validity, is universally evident to human beings on the basis of reason.

The ‘laws and statutes’ that the people of Israel embody bear witness to the unique God, or, more specifically, to the correlation of this unique God with human beings. The correlation between God and human beings establishes a version of ethical idealism compatible with the ‘scientific-idealistic’ account of ethics Cohen gives in Ethik des reinen Willens, where logic and ethics are correlated. In Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, God’s correlation with human beings establishes the ideality of reality, the gap between the ‘is’ and the ‘ought.’ In Ethik des reinen Willens, God’s role is that of a foundation of the harmony between logic and ethics. In Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism this role is not cancelled, but it becomes more directly and urgently related to human beings. The correlation between God and human beings becomes the religious instantiation of ethics. 23

With the correlation of God and human beings, God takes a direct role in rendering human beings themselves into infinite ethical tasks. The correlation, which in the case of human beings and God involves a “reciprocal dependence,” is rooted entirely in reason. Thus, like Kant and to some degree like Mendelssohn, for Cohen reason is a concept in “common to God and man.”24 And like Kant, Cohen sacrifices the unfathomable God of traditional Deuteronomistic-monotheistic religions for a God
commensurable with reason. However, unlike Kant, Cohen’s rationalizing of God is cast as coming from within the Jewish tradition, citing biblical, rabbinic and medieval Jewish philosophical precedents, rather than making arguments from a philosophical position purely external to any specific Deuteronomic-monotheistic tradition. While Cohen does subordinate scriptural universalism to rational universalism in this matter, the logic of scriptural universalism is by no means rendered superfluous.

The correlation between God and human beings thrusts the task-centered relationship between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ upon human beings. Human beings, as rational, ethical beings, are the “focal point” of creation, of existence, and are thus distinct from all other extant creatures. Cohen helpfully elucidates upon this with the idea of spirit, explaining that both God and man are spirit, however, not in such a way that their relationship is one of identity. When Cohen states, “spirit unites both members of the correlation,” he means that human beings, as part of the process of becoming, receive their ‘spirit’ from God, who is being, the foundation of becoming. This derivation of spirit, however, is not a metaphysical relationship predicated upon some form of causality, but rather is rooted in teleology, in the purpose of human beings; the link is ethical.

Cohen considers empirical human beings, human beings as they are ‘given,’ as unformed and amoral, as corresponding to the ‘is’ in the relationship of ‘is’ and ‘ought.’ We see this when Cohen extends the notion of the correlation, ‘spirit,’ to ‘holy spirit.’ Holiness, like spirit, binds God and human beings together, and yet it is distinct for each. Holiness is ineluctably tied to morality, and God’s holiness exists solely for the sake of human beings. God’s holiness is nothing other than the unity of the Maimonidean
‘attributes of action,’ which enables God to serve as an ethical model for the creation of the human Self.\textsuperscript{28} Rather than being content with the given self of the “empirical individual,” God serves as the archetype for the Self which is “an ideal concept in ethics, defining a task assigned to man—a task which man has to commit himself inasmuch as he strives for self-perfection in his effort to become an ethical person.”\textsuperscript{29} God, as the moral archetype of the self, is an infinite ethical task for human beings.

If, in this correlation, human beings are enjoined to perpetually emulate God, God, in turn, is conceived in strictly human terms, or to be more precise, God is conceived solely along the lines of human morality, which is the only sort of morality there is. This is what Cohen means in an earlier work, when he explains, “[t]he essence of God is and remains the essence of human morality [Das Wesen Gottes ist und bleibt das Wesen der menschlichen Sittlichkeit].”\textsuperscript{30} However, rather than completely reducing God to a functionary of ethics in the manner of Kant, Cohen at least attempts to remain within the horizons of scriptural universalism by crafting his account of God in language of unknowability. “\textit{Outside of this interest in morality, the essence of God is unfathomable, that is, it is not an object of philosophical interest much less religious faith [Ausserhalb dieses Interesses an der Sittlichkeit ist das Wesen Gottes unerforschlich, d.h. nicht Gegenstand des philosophischen Interesses und ebensowenig des religiösen Glaubens.].}”\textsuperscript{31} God is perhaps not entirely reducible to morality, but as human beings, we cannot know God through anything but morality.

The result of this correlation is that morality and holiness, God and humanity, are thickly interwoven to such an extent that they are virtually inseparable even though they do not constitute an identity.\textsuperscript{32} God’s holiness exists for humanity as a task, and thus
human beings are the medium in which God's holiness becomes manifest. "God accomplishes his holiness in man."\textsuperscript{33} God's holiness is accomplished by means of human beings constructing (moral) Selves modeled upon God's moral attributes, which takes place through ethical action in the world.\textsuperscript{34} God's holiness, at least as it exists among human beings, is always a task, always the moral ideal. Thus, "Man, in the infinity of his moral tasks, in the infinitely distant view of his horizon, man in his moral absoluteness, detached from all the relativity of nature and history, this absolute man becomes the carrier and guarantor of the holy spirit."\textsuperscript{35} In short, holiness is an ideal that demands to be realized, and yet, given the very fact that it is an ideal, it will never be realized fully. By means of this correlation with human beings, God and the moral order become synonymous, as God is the transcendental foundation of this moral order.\textsuperscript{36} And human beings, as the partner in correlation with God, are the agents who are to bring about the realization of this order.

Cohen's account of God, in the correlation between God and human beings, is much closer to Kant than Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn remains indecisive about God, beholden to both a deistic God of natural religion, which is a form of rational universalism (albeit defunct by contemporary standards), as well as a version of the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism. Ultimately, Mendelssohn chooses the latter. Kant, on the other hand, subordinates God to the 'universal' morality of human beings (or better, of all finite rational beings) in such a way as to unilaterally subordinate the logic of scriptural universalism to what he takes to be that of rational universalism. God for Cohen is an idea, not a personality, but a concept inextricably bound up with human beings, particularly essential for their morality. Thus, the correlation between God and
the human being, with the holy spirit as its manifestation, must be understood as purely formal. It cannot be isolated in one party or another. It is merely "a function which signifies the correlation." This logical function unifies God and human beings abstractly, such that God provides the grounds of human beings qua ethical beings, who exist as more than their givenness, who can construct themselves, i.e. who have their Selves as infinite tasks. In short, the correlation is the following. God is the transcendental foundation of human beings as moral beings who are more than givenness, and human beings provide the conditions whereby God is made manifest in the empirical world. Where Cohen fruitfully distinguishes himself from Kant, is that he is not only able to reconcile this rationalized, domesticated notion of God with a specific Deuteronomic-monotheistic tradition (Judaism), but also he is able to bring the universality of the God-idea into correlation with the particularity of the community in such a way that preserves the momentum of the discursive structure of the monotheistic tradition, even as it alters its trajectory. That is, Cohen does not disembowel scriptural universalism in the process of rooting it in rational universalism, but rather lets it serve as an essential supplement and partner to rational universalism.

*Judaism and the Intolerance of the Moral Order*

Cohen is adamant that Israel’s significance is not limited to giving birth to the idea of the unique God. Rather, the people of Israel, in all of their particularity, are to serve as the exemplar, the witness, to the universal idea of the unique God. This bearing witness constitutes at once the election and historical mission of the Jews. The Jews are elected insofar as they symbolize the universal idea of the unique God, and their mission consists in bearing witness to it. Thus, the correlation between particularity and
universality in Israel continues. Cohen writes, "[w]ith regard to other peoples, therefore, Israel is not simply a people among a plurality of peoples. Because of its calling to profess the unique God and also to accomplish the historical work of the universal recognition of the unique God, Israel itself is distinguished as a unique people."39 The universal vocation of Israel secures its particularity.

However, this dialectical correlation between particularity and universality becomes complicated and contradictory in that "[o]nly knowledge of [the unique] God establishes a unified community of men."40 This claim raises two difficulties, one being highly significant. The less significant difficulty is that if the idea of the unique God translates into the idea of humanity as such, a united humanity with no divisions, then how can the Jews legitimately preserve their own distinct particularity? Is it not a contradiction for a particular people to embody universal humanity and yet remain distinct from all others? Cohen deftly resolves this contradiction, because the world as it is remains so fraught with difference, humanity remains only an ideal that has certainly not yet been accomplished. Thus, the particularity of the Jews is able to symbolize the universality of humanity because this humanity is not yet, but remains a future goal, and the Jews are to serve as the witnesses in the present to a universal humanity that is to come.41 Thus, this difficulty is solved by Cohen’s use of correlation.

The second difficulty, however, gets at the heart of Cohen’s enterprise. By arguing that ‘only knowledge of the unique God,’ of which the Jews are symbols, generates the ideal of humanity, an ideal essential to ‘scientific-critical’ ethics, Cohen decisively enters into the intolerant orbit of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms. The difference between Cohen on the one hand, and Kant and even
Mendelssohn here, could not be sharper. Both Kant and Mendelssohn argue that universal morality is more or less self-evident as a result of the inherent rationality of human beings. To be sure, Mendelssohn is more sceptical of the capacity of human beings to preserve this rationality, and his conception of idolatry warrants a conservative view towards culture. Still, neither thinker makes a Deuteronomic-monotheistic tradition essential for the achievement of morality. However, it is precisely in this sense that Mendelssohn and Kant fail to do justice to the self-understandings of Deuteronomic-monotheisms. Deuteronomic-monotheisms understand themselves as not only entrusted with a task of world-historical importance, and thus being universally necessary for all of humanity without exception (even if this necessity will not be recognized until the eschaton), but also as possessing some sort of privileged knowledge that other traditions lack. That is, there is an inherent religio-centrism within the self-conceptions of monotheistic religions, and thus, given their universal scope, intolerance towards the cultural and religious views of the Other is inevitable.

Cohen recognizes this intolerance intrinsic to monotheistic religions and nuances it by rendering it in terms of a contradiction which arises between the Jews and the idea of humanity that needs to be worked out. On the one hand, with their idea of the unique God, the Jews bequeath to the world the correlation between God and human beings, which is inextricably linked to genuine morality, where the difference between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ is preserved, in contrast to merely empirical or eudemonistic ethics. And the most significant fruit of this idea of the unique God in correlation with human beings is the universal idea of humanity, through which the inherent dignity of all human beings is recognized. And since the correlation between God and human beings is an ideal task,
and the Jews are the historical origin of this idea, and their task as this particular origin is
to firmly embed this idea in history. To use the language of Deuteronomistic-monotheisms,
the Jews are elected in giving birth to this idea, and are entrusted with the historical
mission to bear witness to it. On the other hand, to embed this idea in history, Jews must
radically oppose and negate other conceptions of the divine as idolatry, and must work
towards eliminating them.

The contradiction is that the mission of the Jews, to spread monotheism, seems to
implicitly involve a conflict with the fruit of the idea of the unique God, morality, in that
monotheism demands the absolute destruction of polytheism, and thus the destruction of
idolaters. Quite simply, monotheism absolutely “cannot permit any tolerance of
polytheism. Idolatry has to be destroyed absolutely.”42 The deepest reason for this, Cohen
argues, is that monotheism is firmly bound to the moral order, to the ideality of reality
and especially, the ideal of humanity, whereas polytheism is bound up with empiricism,
with existence as such, celebrating might and power, and thus inhibiting morality on its
most profound level. This contradiction emerges initially, and in its most troubling form,
in those passages in the Hebrew Bible where the people of Israel are commanded by God
to root out and destroy (i.e. kill) idolaters in one’s midst, whether Jews or foreign
peoples.43

However, Cohen claims that within the Jewish literary sources it is soon
recognized that the radical opposition to idolatry and polytheism, i.e. the historical
mission of Judaism, is inconsistent with the idea of the unique God, which secures
morality and generates the ideal of humanity, if it is construed as a call to violence
against idolaters, especially foreigners. Cohen argues that it is no coincidence that in the
face of the demand to destroy idolatrous peoples, subsequent texts postulate contrary claims commanding love for the “Edomite” and even the “Egyptian.” These texts insist upon the recognition that the Edomite and Egyptian are just as human as the Jew, that idolatry does not inexorably taint them or diminish their humanity.44 The significance of this recognition can hardly be overestimated, as it thoroughly permeates Cohen’s thought on Judaism. It is through this contradiction, Cohen claims, that the literary history demonstrates that Judaism is able “to correct its own teaching with respect to the strict commandment to destroy idol worship and idolatrous peoples.”45 In short, violence against the idolater becomes absolutely prohibited as a solution to the problem of polytheism.

As a result, while the Jews must remain true to the logic implicit in monotheism, that “[t]he unique God ‘should be called Lord over all the earth,’ and all men and all peoples should know and worship him,” they absolutely cannot embrace violence in carrying out the implications of this idea. Unlike Mendelssohn, who attempts to circumvent this problem by denying the very existence of polytheism, claiming that it is just culturally-coded monotheism, or monotheism in a degraded form, Cohen continues to insist that since polytheism is utterly contradictory to the unique God, “[t]he plurality of gods should absolutely disappear from the earth.”46 Cohen remains true to the logic of monotheism, by insisting that one cannot escape the monotheistic demand to expunge all polytheism.

Cohen’s importance does not merely consist in his willingness to face the full implications of monotheism, but also in his elevation of those elements in the Jewish sources that render violence absolutely forbidden in the effort to root out and destroy
polytheism. That is, Cohen argues that the very superiority of monotheism over polytheism consists in morality and the ideal of humanity. The use of violence would undermine precisely what elevates monotheism over polytheism and thus would contradict the inner logic of monotheism itself. Cohen highlights those tendencies in the Jewish tradition which call the biblical command to destroy idolatrous peoples into question, and he justifies these trends with arguments that they are rationally motivated because such commands violate the very order of morality and the very ideal of humanity that the unique God is to secure. In doing so Cohen reaches his great achievement, freeing Jewish monotheism from the violence that has previously plagued monotheistic intolerance.

To understand the ingenuity of Cohen’s argument, it will be helpful if we look at this contradiction that Cohen raises in light of recent discussions of monotheism and intolerance. Hans Zirker succinctly explains that the primary meaning of monotheism is that “divine might should not be in conflict with distinct regions of rulership. There should not be the disunion of an unconquerable dualism of light and dark, of good and bad, and finally there should not be a plural, antagonistic self-assertion [Selbstbehauptung] of peoples.” As we know from Jaffee’s account of the shared discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms, each religious community sees itself as possessing the proper understanding of this divine foundation, and as serving a vital role in establishing this universal harmony among human beings, and more importantly, a harmony between human beings and God. As a result, the true theoretical core of monotheism is a unity or wholeness of the cosmos and especially the human world, and that all conflicts are to be reconciled by this one true God who founds one morality and
dignifies all human life. However, on the other hand, while this may be the theoretical foundation of monotheism, as scholars such as Jaffee, Assmann, and Schwartz have pointed out, the historical mission of these communities requires an agonistic relationship with the Other such that the means by which this vision is to be enacted on a practical, concrete level, seems to require some combination of exclusion, denunciation, colonization, and/or destruction/murder of the Other because she does not maintain the same practices of worshipping as oneself, nor does she accept one’s truth claims concerning this God of all humankind—facts, which surely contribute to the fragmentation and brokenness of the world. It seems that although this God supposedly offers a foundation for harmony between human beings, all too often that ‘harmony’ obscures recognition of the humanity of the Other and serves as a pretext for violence.

Cohen, having already recognized this problem, provides the means by which to avoid the violence inherent in the intolerance of monotheism. Since Cohen finds the center of gravity of the correlation between God and human beings to take place in human ethics, any failure to recognize the humanity of the Other, any sort of hatred or violence would be a contradiction with this correlation, it would violate monotheism. Thus, according to Cohen, the resolution to this contradiction requires that a way be found that Jews can oppose idolatry without violating ethics, without failing to recognize the humanity of the Other, even if she worships idols. The major question then is not whether or not to abandon the opposition to idolatry, since monotheism cannot abandon its demand for the destruction of idolatry. Rather, the new question that Cohen poses is how are Jews to fulfill their historical mission without violence? That is, how, without violence, without dehumanizing the Other, are Jews to promulgate the ethical teachings
of the unique God in the face of idolatrous ideologies which celebrate power and do not hesitate to use violence themselves? The answer to this question is to be found, Cohen argues, in a new correlation, one parasitic upon the correlation upon God and human beings, the correlation between human beings themselves.

*Judaism, Christianity, and Myth*

In order to understand how the correlation between human beings affects the correlation between particularity and universality in Israel, it is first necessary to explore the correlation between human beings. Since Cohen argues that the correlation between human beings derives from the correlation between God and the human being, it will be helpful to ask how the correlation between God and the human being engenders the correlation between human beings themselves. However, in order to understand this, one more step backwards is required, in that it is first necessary to understand what the ethical transfiguration of the idea of God that takes place in Cohen’s correlation is itself competing with and replacing in its development. Myth is the primal layer, even in monotheistic religions, which must be overcome in order for the ethical transfiguration of the idea of God, and subsequently, the correlation between human beings, to emerge. And Cohen follows the practice common to Mendelssohn and Kant of employing a rival Deuteronomic-monotheism, Christianity or Judaism respectively, as a straw man for rhetorical and heuristic purposes, namely to reinforce and legitimize his own rationalized innovations. That is, by ‘illustrating’ how Christianity fails to overcome myth, and thus maintains a violent intolerance, Cohen is better able to elucidate how his version of Judaism overcomes myth and thus uproots the violence implicit in monotheism, thus enabling him to justify the innovations to tradition that he advocates.
The most primordial and fundamental point of distinction between Judaism and Christianity regarding violence, according to Cohen, lies in their relationship to myth. Cohen claims that while Judaism decisively breaks with myth by means of the correlation between God and human beings, Christianity remains beholden to myth, at least in certain capacities. A central defining feature of myth, according to Cohen, is that it maintains "an unmediated relationship between the human being and God [unmittelbares Verhältnis zwischen Mensch und Gott]." In myth, God, exists as a person, as someone to whom one relates in an intersubjective mode. In one sense, then, God is a person to whom one relates in a manner like any other. And yet, at the same time, God is a person like no other, in that God is all-powerful and all-knowing, such that His will constitutes the good and the right. As a result, in mythic-worldviews, indeed even mythic-monotheisms, one always encounters Others mediated through one's personal relationship with the divine. This limits one to a tribal or communal chauvinism insofar as the Other's recognition of the divine or lack thereof is all important in how one is to respond to her. In such a system, maintaining good relations with the divine is far more important than maintaining ethical responsibility for the Other. It is God-the-person who arbitrates what is right and wrong, and the Other is either actively helping to realize God's plan or actively thwarting it, there is no in-between. God's honor and dignity is all consuming, and thus human beings have no worth of their own except insofar as God bestows it upon them. As a result, sharp dichotomies divide communities, leading Cohen to conclude, "[w]ith the concept of humanity, myth has nothing in common."50

Cohen does not argue that Christianity is straightforwardly mythic, but that unlike Judaism, Christianity has not entirely broken with myth. In short, aspects of myth live on
in Christianity. The most striking mythical inheritance in Christianity can be found in its notion of God. Unlike Judaism’s (Cohen’s Judaism) reduction of God to purely ethical significance, to the ethical archetype of human beings, for Christianity “The God, who at the same time is man [Der Gott, der zugleich Mensch ist], is not only and not exclusively the archetype of human beings [nicht nur und nicht ausschliesslich das Vorbild des Menschen]. Therefore it is here the essence of God [Wesen Gottes] constitutes the peculiar content of faith [Inhalt des Glaubens].”\textsuperscript{51} That is, in sharp contrast to Cohen’s Maimonidean inflected Judaism that has no concern for God outside of God’s ethical significance this ‘content of faith’ pertains to an “extra-moral sphere [aussersittliche Sphäre],” and requires dogmatic teachings over and above pure morality.\textsuperscript{52} This reliance upon dogma highlights that Christianity is unable to subordinate scriptural universalism to rational universalism. In fact, the contrary is the case, for Christianity rational universalism is subordinate to scriptural universalism, in that ethics, which is a sphere of human reason, is insufficient, and thus elements of faith and dogma, which transcend the bounds of human reason, are ultimate.

The dominance of scriptural universalism over rational universalism plays itself out in two hierarchies, the individual/community over humanity as a whole and God over human beings. The first hierarchy is apparent in the Christian notion of the messiah. Judaism understands the Messiah as the “\textit{Redeemer of humanity [Erlöser der Menschheit]},”\textsuperscript{53} whose redemption takes place in terms of this world, not the next life.\textsuperscript{54} Christianity, on the other hand, translates “the Messiah through Christ [des Messias durch Christus]” and thereby transfigures, or rather, ‘distorts’ the proper understanding of the Messiah. The content of the mistranslation is that “Christ is the Redeemer of individuals
"[Christus ist der Erlöser des Individuums]" and only by saving all individuals, can Christ save all human beings.\textsuperscript{55} This focus on the individual, Cohen argues, weakens Christianity's ability to recognize the ideal of humanity. That is, since scriptural universalism trumps rational universalism, and the 'extra-moral sphere' of faith trumps pure human morality, morality itself is now recast in terms of theological, doctrinal and dogmatic knowledge.

In privileging faith over morality and scriptural universalism over rational universalism, Christianity does not merely posit a radical cleft between the divine and the human, it also posits the radical superiority of the divine over the human. This, according to Cohen, has disastrous consequences for morality and intra-religious civility. Cohen writes:

>This knowledge of divine essence, and ...[this] determinate form and this unalterable content of knowledge of God is henceforth elevated to the fundamental condition of human morality [zur Grundbedingung der menschlichen Sittlichkeit erhoben]. And the more this knowledge of God feels itself to be at the same time love of God [Gottesliebe], unfortunately, the more this becomes a war of faith [Glaubenskampf], the battle for the knowledge and love of God. There is therefore a curtailment of love for human beings [Menschenliebe], for humanity [Menschentums überhaupt] in general... for in no other way is morality conceived, much less realized, than as this way of knowledge of God, of faith in the essence of God and of divine salvation.\textsuperscript{56}

That is, this hierarchy of the individual/community over humanity is itself rooted in the other hierarchy, that of God over human beings. From this perspective, the Christian's antagonism with the Other is not a result of the need to assert her power over the Other, or even simply as a desire to secure her own salvation. Rather, as nineteenth-century philosopher and theorist of religion, Ludwig Feuerbach points out, for the Christian, in this conflict nothing less is at stake than the "honour of God."\textsuperscript{57} As Feuerbach claims, and here Cohen would be in complete agreement, the Christian qua mythical-monotheist finds
herself forced to choose between her duty to God and her duty to other human beings. Which duties are more important? The answer is clear. According to Feuerbach, "[b]y how much God is higher than man, by so much higher are duties to God than duties toward man."58 As both Cohen and Feuerbach elucidate, in such worldviews duties to God almost always conflict with duties to other human beings (especially Others), mainly because the Other simply cannot be recognized ethically without this being simultaneously a failure to recognize God. That is, Cohen thinks that insofar as God’s essence transcends human morality, God is conceived of as a personality. And this person must enter the system of morality, must, in fact, become the dominant center of morality, and all Others only find their place in the moral world vis-à-vis God. If the Other fails to recognize God, then the Other commits an offense against God, and therefore the mythical-monotheist is morally obligated to take action. In other words, Cohen uses Christianity as a means by which to demonstrate the cycle of violence traditionally associated with Deuteronomic-monotheistic intolerance.

In contrast to the mythical-monotheistic notion, the correlation between God and the human being, which determines God strictly in terms of human ethics, allows an entirely new and direct relationship to emerge between human beings. In "Religion und Sittlichkeit," Cohen argues that for the prophets, whom he claims are the true creators of genuine monotheism (i.e. Judaism, and reformed—i.e. Judaized—Christianity and Islam) and thus the God-human correlation, rather than mediating all relationships, “God stepped back [trat zurück]” in order to purify the “relation between human being and human being [Verhältnis zwischen Mensch und Mensch].” That is, ‘God stepped back’ in order to make the concern for the other person more “urgent [dringlicher].”59 If God
remained some infinitely important person to whom we relate directly, as in myth, our relationships to everything else including other human beings, would be drastically subordinated. Such a move would undermine the purity of ethics, which prioritizes autonomous obligations to human beings.\textsuperscript{60}

The correlation between human beings is an expansion and direct result of the correlation between God and human beings. The ethical transfiguration of God wrought by the prophets, which stands at the root of the correlation between God and human beings, opens the way for a new relationship between human beings. In order to understand the significance of this correlation we must briefly return to Cohen’s discussions of myth. Mythic thought, which can only conceive of God as a person, is concerned with questions of causality, metaphysics and cosmology. Thus, when confronted with the Other, particularly the suffering of the Other, it asks questions of theodicy, and in order to justify God, it links this suffering inextricably to guilt, whether personal or inherited.\textsuperscript{61} At best, the suffering of the Other is a theoretical problem, one that can be ‘solved’ through recourse to abstractions. One never encounters the Other in any sort of immediacy, particularly in regard to her suffering, but rather there is always room for ideological and conceptual frameworks to predispose one to indifference or hostility.\textsuperscript{62}

Again, Christianity and Judaism differ in regard to their relationship with myth. Christianity finds the suffering of human beings to be rooted in guilt, and the release from suffering is tied the Christological release from guilt. Since God has not been denuded of extra-moral essence, the relationship between the individual and God remains primary, and thus the pure interpersonal relationship between human beings does not develop.\textsuperscript{63}
As a result of this individualistic focus, the suffering of the Other, can never become one’s pure focus. In addition, Cohen argues that Christianity takes recourse to the mythical balms of the otherworld to ease the burden that the view of degradation and suffering imposes upon one’s conscience. Thus, as a result of its ties to myth, Cohen argues that Christianity serves as an obstacle to the correlation between human beings rather than a resource that supports it.

Judaism, on the contrary, having broken thoroughly with myth, is conducive to the correlation between human beings themselves. As a result, for Judaism the suffering of the Other is not a theoretical question where one looks to God for justification. Rather, since human beings are the site of the correlation between God and human beings, one looks to humanity not God in the face of the question of human suffering. The suffering of the Other, particularly as it is objectively manifested in poverty, serves as a searing indictment of the failure to actualize the ideals of ethics. Those who suffer do not do so from their own guilt, nor do they suffer from death or other aspects pertaining to human finitude (which are ultimately metaphysical and individual in nature), but rather they suffer from the concrete failings of human beings to manifest ethical ideals. All of culture is indicted in poverty.

It is precisely by means of taking the suffering of the Other seriously that the conditions emerge for the correlation between human beings. Poverty, the suffering of the Other, not only reveals that our culture has failed to bring about what ought to be from what is, but moreover, it indicates one’s own involvement in the culture’s inhumanity, highlighting one’s own failure to achieve one’s own ideal Self. In this non-reciprocal and asymmetrical responsibility for the Other that emerges in the face of social suffering,
the correlation with the Other is established. In light of this correlation, one approaches the Other not in light of theoretical questions about the Other’s possible guilt and theodicy, but rather with a responsibility that is accompanied by the affects of both pity for the Other and personal guilt for one’s own failures and for the failings of culture in which one is implicated. Pity for Cohen, is not a mere passive reaction, but rather is an active spur to moral responsibility, and it transforms the Other from a mere Nebenmensch (next-person), a He or She, to a Mitmensch (fellow-person), a Thou who faces one. The Mitmensch is the core to the correlation between human beings; it is the condition for community in that it prevents all indifference to the Other and demands a responsibility for the Other. It is the Thou, for whom one’s relationship, one’s responsibility, is rendered ‘urgent.’ Cohen exclaims, “This is the new insight that true monotheism brings about: the poor man is your own flesh. You do not consist of your own body, nor is your wife, the object of your sexual love, the only flesh that is your flesh, but the poor man is also your flesh.” A sentence later, Cohen continues, “And the [Mitmensch] as the poor man brings God’s love for man into the true light and the true understanding.” The poor person/Mitmensch reveals that the moral order, what ought to be, remains to be enacted. God is the one who secures this moral order, and in the doctrine of Messianism, God serves as an assurance that morality will prevail in history. However, God is not therefore primarily to be taken as a comfort, but rather as the conditions for the ethical pursuit in general, and more directly, as the ideal. God’s meaning is found in the ever-present demand to actualize one’s ideal ethical Self.

Cohen, therefore, utilizes a generic and overly simplistic notion of Christianity in order to highlight the ethical ramifications of metaphysical and mythical ways of
conceiving of common Deuteronomistic-monotheistic conceptions of religion. By setting up Christianity as a straw man, Cohen exposes the radical danger of anthropomorphism, which not only inevitably disrupts one's ethical obligations to the Other, but also turns the Other into an enemy of God. It is only by thoroughly intertwining God with human ethics that Cohen can secure the grounds for an ethics that recognizes the inherent dignity of all human beings regardless of their religious beliefs.

_Bearing Witness and Reason_

The correlation between human beings, which Judaism enables to emerge, in fact, also affects the correlation between the particularity and universality of Israel. It affects this correlation regarding Israel in two interconnected ways, which enriches its complexity and further secures the extirpation of the violence implicit in monotheistic intolerance. The first way concerns laws pertaining to an idealized Jewish homeland, while the second bears upon the role of the Jews in history. Together, these two interconnected influences of the correlation between human beings themselves informs the historical mission of the Jews in bearing witness to the unique God of monotheism. In fact, the correlation between human beings is borne out particularly in the bearing-witness modality of monotheistic promulgation in which Cohen privileges rational over scriptural universalism.

The first level in which the correlation between human beings influences the correlation between particularity and universality in Israel can be seen in the commands we discussed previously, to love the Edomite and the Egyptian. From the foundational notion of the unique God and its universality, Jewish literary works, particularly legal ones, extrapolate that it would be inconsistent for the universal God to love and care
solely for the Jews, and thus, these works insist the contrary, that God must evince similar concerns and affections for all of humanity. Cohen reaches these positions by examining biblical laws about the Jewish homeland, and subsequent rabbinical laws which operate according to the ideal of a Jewish homeland. In these laws the Other is a foreigner, a stranger, which in biblical and rabbinic thought is inextricably bound up with the poor person. As a result, the Other is conceptually aligned with the poor person. Thus, rather than hatred or a feeling of supremacy, the Other is approached with pity, again understood as a lever to moral responsibility. As a result, the Other’s rights are steadfastly maintained, as the ideal of humanity dominates, even if she does not recognize the unique God, the Other benefits from its conceptual fruits. Thus, a rigorous universalism is preserved within the particularity of the Jewish homeland.

However, it is with the other side of the correlation that Cohen’s real solution to the violence of monotheistic intolerance within the historical mission of Judaism becomes apparent. Whereas on the one hand, in Jewish law and its ideal notion of the Jewish state, the humanity of the Other is recognized, on the other side, in empirical history, Jews are the powerless ones whose rights and humanity are often not recognized. In their stateless existence the Other, in fact, has great power over the Jews. Cohen insists that the agony of statelessness, with the persecutions and endless sufferings that accompany it, are a necessary condition for Israel to play a universal role in world history.\textsuperscript{72} That is, on the opposite side of the correlation, Judaism as a particularity demonstrates its universality, by serving as a symbol for the suffering of humanity, as the “prototype of human suffering in general” as the “social analogue of poverty.”\textsuperscript{73} Israel’s election is for the sake of highlighting the crisis of culture, that what ought to be has not
been realized. The election of Israel, as a particular people, is not a triumphant nation
that conquers the Other, even if it is to bring them the truth, but rather Israel suffers to
draw attention to the unresolved social suffering of the world.\textsuperscript{74} Social suffering, again, is
the sign that the ideal of humanity has not yet been realized. Thus, "God does not love
Israel more or differently from his love for men in general, nor needless to say, could
God’s love for Israel limit and impair his love for the human race. In Israel, God loves
nothing other than the human race."\textsuperscript{75}

Rather than taking an aggressive posture of conquest or aggressive proselytizing,
which leads to a hostile relationship with the Other, which the recent scholarship on
monotheism highlights, but again which Cohen clearly foresees almost a century earlier,
the mission of the Jews manifests itself in the posture of bearing witness. In the split
between those within the community and those outside of it, the humanity of the Other is
never effaced. In fact, only by willingly taking suffering upon oneself, by serving as a
"sacrificial victim who exposes himself to suffering because of his knowledge of the
irreplaceable value of this suffering for the historical welfare of mankind,"\textsuperscript{76} can the Jew
oppose the idolatry of the Other without effacing the Other’s humanity. The violent
posture which can be discerned in conquest and forced conversion as well as aggressive
proselytizing causes suffering in the Other and thus is part and parcel of the order of
history, of how the world has always been. The Jew, as the suffering servant, as the
‘sacrificial victim,’ who willingly reverses the trajectory of suffering in order to testify to
the unique God, opens up the dimension of the future, an order radically different from
all that has hitherto existed. By willingly accepting suffering, the Jew discloses an order
higher than eudaemonism, that order which Cohen thinks has reigned throughout history,
testifying to the "ethical conception of history" that refuses to recognize the equation of might with right.77

In proceeding in this manner Cohen elides the problem that philosopher Charles Taylor terms the "self-righteous reconstitution of the categorizations of violence," in his remarkable essay, "Notes on the Sources of Violence: Perennial and Modern."78 Taylor explains this paradoxical state as follows. "The goodness that inhabits our goal, or our vision of order, is somehow undone when it comes to struggling to realize it." As a paradigmatic example of this paradoxical violence, Taylor cites "Robespierre's [vision of creating a] republic without a death penalty [which] somehow energizes a program of escalating butchery."79 Another example are the monotheistic religions founded upon the notion of a cosmic harmony that includes a recognition of the inherent dignity of human beings as created in God's image, which nevertheless requires the conquest and destruction of all those who fail to recognize this harmonious order, thus becoming impediments to its realization. However, by making bearing witness, as a modality of promulgation, correspond fully to the content of monotheism, i.e. morality and the idea of humanity, Cohen successfully elides the conditions that generate the self-righteous violence that Taylor speaks of so eloquently in his essay.

At this juncture, it will be helpful to contrast Cohen's account of bearing witness with that of Mendelssohn. The differences in regard to their notions of bearing witness are rooted in their respective conceptions of God, and the universalism, scriptural or rational, which they subsequently privilege as a result. The modality of bearing witness in Mendelssohn's thought rests upon notions of election and idolatry, which are in turn rooted in the ultimate supremacy of the logic of scriptural over rational universalism in
his thought. That is, while Mendelssohn maintains a rational universalism in terms of natural theology, ultimately his notions of idolatry and election require recourse to the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism. Consequently, not merely the election of the Jews but also their mission to bear witness, what it means and how it works, remain mysteries to human reason. Cohen, in sharp contrast, roots scriptural universalism in rational universalism and the God of scriptural universalism gives way to the God of rational universalism in Cohen's account of the development of Jewish literary history. Thus, the election of the Jews derives from the consequences of the idea of the unique God, which is an idea of reason that emerges within their national thought. Thus, their revelation and election contains nothing outside of the bounds of human reason, it consists solely in following through on the logical implications of this epoch-making idea.

The notion of God and the sort of universalism concomitant with it subsequently determines how Mendelssohn and Cohen conceive of the relationship of bearing witness to the Other. Mendelssohn's notion of God is ultimately the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism. Not only is God, the election of the Jews, and their mission, beyond the ken of human reason, but the world of human affairs, history itself, is rendered more or less mysterious and impenetrable to human understanding, much less improvement by human action. To be sure, individuals and perhaps even certain cultures may be 'enlightened,' but contrary to his friend Lessing, Mendelssohn is adamant that the level of human progress on a collective level remains always about the same throughout history. That is, as a result of his notion of God, Mendelssohn is deeply suspicious of all human efforts to achieve large scale rational reformation, believing that idolatry will rule
throughout the world until God determines otherwise, and God's hand cannot be forced. These beliefs determine how the notion of bearing witness is to function within Mendelssohn's thought.

For Mendelssohn, the ultimate concern in bearing witness lays not so much in responsibility for the Other as with an obligation to God. In fact, despite the fact that Mendelssohn makes great strides in freeing the Other from preconceptions of sin and error, his thought exhibits a certain indifference in regard to the Other. For one thing, Mendelssohn's gains regarding the Other pertain only to the specific Other who stands before one, as the election of the Jews is premised upon idolatry and therefore requires that a large number of Others, the majority of humanity perhaps, be idolatrous. To be sure, he does ameliorate this by rendering the determination of the identity of these idolatrous Others extraordinarily difficult to discern as the requisite idolaters are always in the background so that the Other before one is always more or less a mystery. Nevertheless, the idolatrousness of the majority of human beings, Mendelssohn believes, is simply part of the nature of world that we live in, and he does not seem overly troubled by this situation. In addition, since Mendelssohn does not consider collective progress towards recovering the 'religion of reason' among the masses a viable possibility within history, but rather as an event limited to the eschaton, the obligation to the Other in bearing witness must be indirect in nature. That is, the Jews are obligated directly to God, they are duty bound to God and must therefore keep their covenantal obligations, and it is only this covenant with God which happens to link them to the Other (although Mendelssohn never sufficiently explains how this linkage occurs.)
This indifference to the Other is further illuminated if we consider that the eschatological event of mass conversion to the 'religion of reason' will be the result of an act of God. To be sure, the Jews have a central role to play in that they preserve these eternal truths in the face of idolatry. Nevertheless, while the Halakhah is tied into the eternal truths of reason, Mendelssohn never really explains how the Jews can serve as a 'light to nations,' i.e. how the Other benefits from the isolation of the Jews through Halakhah. Perhaps the reason for this is that ultimately, although the content of the revelation is tied into rational universalism on a certain level, as the ceremonial law causes one to think about and ponder the eternal truths, the logic of this bearing witness is rooted in divine mystery. Perhaps, human reason simply cannot fathom why God wants the Jews to observe the Halakhah and why it is important for the world. Revelation only tells us that it is important. Regardless, even according to Mendelssohn's own halting explanations that connect the Jews to the Other, when the Jews keep Halakhah, they are not necessarily doing this out of love for the Other, at least not directly, but rather out of trust in and loyalty to God.

Bearing witness, for Cohen, however, revolves entirely around responsibility for the Other. Or perhaps better, the love of the Other is a necessary result of the idea of the unique God, the idea to which the Jews bear witness. Cohen maintains a rational universalism which inextricably links God to morality. As a result, according to Cohen, God is manifested through the actions of human beings, and thus, Cohen's thought requires more of an activist approach to bearing witness. However, since the idea of the unique God entails morality and the ideal of humanity, violence against the Other in the name of this God is ruled out as self-contradictory. Thus, Cohen envisions an activist
account of bearing witness that eschews inflicting violence upon the Other. Instead, because Cohen’s thought is not predicated upon an unfathomable God in whose hands the decisive measures are to lay, the task of eradicating polytheism and idolatry, which are tantamount to immorality, is incumbent upon the Jews. This requires that the Jews forsake certain worldly advantages such as a homeland of their own and the security that affords as well as the comforts of assimilation. On the contrary, the Jews are to stand out as suffering servants, and as such they bear witness to the ideal of morality, to the new order of existence that the idea of the unique God entails. However, in contrast to Mendelssohn, Cohen’s position is predicated upon the comprehensibility of bearing witness to human reason. The idea of the unique God is an idea of reason, in fact, it is the ultimate idea of reason. In addition, for Cohen, being obligated to God directly entails being responsible for the Other, such that there is no tension or divergence possible between these two roots of obligation. Thus, one serves God directly by bearing witness out of responsibility for the Other.

In order to further elucidate the differences between Mendelssohn’s and Cohen’s accounts of bearing witness, and to highlight the superiority of Cohen’s position, it will be helpful to contrast their accounts with the critique of monotheistic martyrdom by the pre-eminent critic of monotheistic violence, Jan Assmann. While Cohen directly advocates martyrdom, Mendelssohn also acknowledges that persecution by the Other and social inequality is an inevitable result of their charge, the observance of Halakhah, which keeps them distinct and inassimilable in any society. In Die Mosaische Unterscheidung, Assmann repudiates the ethical potential of martyrdom, claiming that monotheistic martyrdom is part and parcel of the same violent intolerance that leads to
murder and persecution of the Other. He asserts that martyrdom, “as a refusal
Wiegerung], where one would rather die [lieber zu sterben] than accept false avowed
forms of religion [falsch erkannte Religionsform zu akzeptieren]” is fundamentally tied
to the problem of “>>monotheism and violence<<.” According to Assmann, martyrdom
is motivated by the same hatred of the Other as religious persecution. “It stands just as
much with that hatred [of the Other] [Ebenso steht es mit dem Hass].” That is, for
Assmann, martyrdom is not so much about bearing witness to the truth for the sake of the
Other as it is about refusal and rejection of the religion and culture (i.e., the otherness) of
the Other at all costs, even if that means one’s own life. Thus, since hatred of the Other
permeates and motivates martyrdom, according to Assman, it is really only a question of
a differential of power whether one is to “go from the suffering to the execution of
violence [das Erleiden wie um das Ausüben von Gewalt geht].” To shift from suffering
to persecution in the name of religion, then, requires no qualitative change, just an
alteration of the direction of violence. The fundamental point of distinction between
Assmann on the one hand and Mendelssohn and Cohen on the other concerning
martyrdom lies in their more fundamental disagreement concerning revelation, whether
or not it contains any rational content. Since Assmann claims that there is no rationality
implicit in revelation, stressing instead its transcendent, i.e. non-human, source, he finds
only hatred of the Other in martyrdom.

Mendelssohn escapes the challenge of Assmann’s critique insofar as he can claim
that his account of election is rooted in rational universalism, that his notion of revelation
offers no special truths to the Jews and therefore does not offer any privilege for them
over against other peoples. However, Mendelssohn’s notion of bearing witness is tied to
both the logic of rational universalism and the logic of scriptural universalism, and the latter is in fact privileged over the former. As is well known, Mendelssohn attempts to sustain his rational universalism by trying to limit Halakhah to a sort of ceremonial law that only helps one remember the truths and to rationally account for the election of the Jews. However, both arguments betray that his commitment to rational universalism is only half-hearted, and that ultimately his allegiance lies with scriptural universalism. As a result, for Mendelssohn there is no reason comprehensible to human understanding why God elected the Jews and gave them the Halakhah, thus enabling them to preserve the eternal truths while other peoples must do without an equivalent aid. Therefore Mendelssohn must concede that according to his account the Jews are willing to suffer rather than convert and assimilate, at least in part, because they have special access to the truth that the Other does not have, and they are unwilling to relinquish their privileged inheritance. While Mendelssohn’s innovations regarding the Other would certainly make it hard to allege that his account of revelation is rooted in hatred of the Other, it is nevertheless far from clear how the exclusion of the Other in his thought is not ultimately bound up with at least an indifference to the Other that is ethically problematic. Thus, ultimately Mendelssohn cannot escape Assmann’s charge unscathed.

In sharp contrast, Cohen’s account of bearing witness and martyrdom is immune to Assmann’s critique. Essential to Cohen’s success is not simply his subordination of scriptural universalism to rational universalism but also his insistence upon both universal rationality and the rational core of revelation as preconditions to the modality of bearing witness. Otherwise, it is difficult to see how the martyrdom of the Jews is not different in kind from other forms of monotheistic intolerance—a refusal to accept the
otherness of the Other. As we have mentioned, bearing witness as a modality of promulgation for Cohen is predicated upon the assumption that the Other has some capacity to recognize the validity of the correlations between God and human beings and between human beings themselves, as well as the moral order and the ideal of humanity parasitic upon them. Thus one suffers not because one has a privileged truth that the Other lacks and one seeks to preserve one’s ‘spiritual’ advantage over the Other, but rather one suffers in order to draw the Other’s attention to this truth, as she too can comprehend it and benefit from it.

Cohen secures the grounds for possibility of bearing witness as a viable modality of the promulgation in his very approach to Deuteronomic-monotheisms, and one free from violence towards, and hatred of, the Other. Recall that Cohen’s approach to Deuteronomic-monotheisms is to place the scriptural universalism at their basis in a dynamic relationship with rational universalism, whereby he ultimately subordinates the former to the latter. This subordination is most evident in the reduction of the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism to a principle of reason. By bringing God, and thus God’s reason (and therefore God’s ethics) into accord with human reason (and human ethics), Cohen secures the conditions for rational universalism. This step is essential as divine logic, traditionally (mythically) understood, transcends human ken, and thus can only be embraced and obeyed by human beings. Therefore it undermines rational universalism, in that one can only obey revelation, one cannot understand its necessity. If such a divine logic is in play, then the modality of bearing witness seems closer to martyrdom for the sake of hatred of the Other rather than to bring truth to the Other, in that those not within the elected community would not possess the resources by
which to recognize the divine in one’s testimony. Thus, martyrdom would be about refusing to accept the practices and beliefs of the Other rather than as an attempt to appeal to the reason of the Other. This problem is one that even Mendelssohn cannot fully escape insofar as he is unable to explain why it is necessary that the Jews remain a people apart, to bear witness, when he can conceive of no progress of humanity as a whole within history. If there can be no progress for humanity during history, this would imply that during the course of history humanity is by and large simply incapable of heeding the testimony of the Jews. To be sure, Mendelssohn’s account avoids violence and perhaps even hatred of the Other on the part of Jewish monotheism, but it cannot escape indifference towards the Other. However, since Cohen follows Kant by rationalizing God in order to prevent divine reason from eclipsing human reason, he ensures the ethical foundations of witnessing by securing its rational foundations.

If Cohen follows Kant regarding the rationalization of God, he nevertheless distinguishes himself sharply from him regarding the relationship that this notion of God entails to a specific community. Kant can see no room in his rational universalism for a particular community to play a necessary role. For Kant, Christianity is only more advanced than other traditions in terms of rationalization, but it is not qualitatively different. Cohen, however, takes a very different route. While Cohen no less than Kant accepts the primacy of rational universalism over scriptural universalism, he nevertheless secures a necessary and universal role for the particularity of Israel. That is, the rational necessity and universal significance of the particularity of Israel is secured in that Israel is ultimately “nothing other than the mere symbol for the desired unity of mankind,”82 a unity whose fruition will not be achieved in actuality until the messianic era. By
preserving this dynamic interchange between particularism and universalism, Cohen, unlike Kant, retains the integrity of scriptural universalism. Thus, in order to preserve this universal goal in all of its purity, Israel must preserve its radical particularity. In this light we can see the soundness of the increase of ritual law, or Halakhah, under the rabbis, the ‘building a fence around the Torah,’ as this serves to isolate the Jews and thus preserve the purity of the idea of the unique God throughout the vicissitudes of history.\(^{83}\)

However, this one-sided particularity of the Jews for the sake of universality is not absolute. Ultimately, national limitations themselves are rendered superfluous, ‘and the ‘people of Israel’ becomes the ‘remnant of Israel.’’\(^{84}\) With this move, Cohen fulfills the logic of his task-oriented ethics and notion of religion. That is, rather than being privileged on the basis of belonging to a particular community and possessing salvific revelation that not only changes one’s own status in relation to God, but also gives oneself superiority over the Other, Cohen’s account of Judaism presents this election as a perpetual task of infinite responsibility for the Other. In addition, not only are not all members of the empirical community part of this ideal ‘remnant,’ but those who are not empirically Jewish can belong to it. Judaism has long recognized the ‘pious of the nations of the world,’ as possessing religious status in Judaism, as ‘honorary Jews,’ and thus they too “have their fully entitled share in this messianic suffering.”\(^{85}\)

*Judaism and the ‘Religion of Reason’*

In pursuing the relationship of the three correlations, particularly of the correlation between particularity and universality within Judaism we have neglected a very important component of Cohen’s thought not to mention our own investigation, namely, the ‘religion of reason.’ Cohen’s thought concerning the ‘religion of reason,’ as a
result of the nature of his rationalization of God, i.e. its purely formal, ethical character, clears away the obstacles to privileging the concerns of (human) reason in its ethical capacity not merely from scriptural universalism but also from metaphysical pursuits as well. Metaphysical commitments have not only been precluded by means of Cohen’s transcendental Neo-Kantian methodology, but the very approach thwarts metaphysical agendas. For rationalists of the stamp of Kant and Cohen, the most pressing concern for reason is not metaphysical codifications but ethics, whose primary concern is human beings. As Cohen puts it, “[r]eligion...is concerned more with man than with God.”86 Or, putting religion in explicit proximity to ethics, Cohen asserts that, “[s]ince religion has been defined as religion of reason, man is established as its sphere as well as its content.”87 And the concern with the human being is not with the nature of human beings as an object of speculative inquiry, but rather with the question of how to render them ethical. It is a practical endeavor not a theoretical one. This raises two questions that warrant further investigation. First, since ethics also has the human being as its sphere of concern, what is the relationship between ethics and religion (the ‘religion of reason’) in Cohen’s thought?88 And second, does Cohen’s post-metaphysical methodology of transcendental reason avoid the problems that Mendelssohn’s and Kant’s thought face from the perspective of a pluralist, multicultural perspective?

However, before we can answer these questions, we must inquire into the nature of the ‘religion of reason’ for Cohen? For Cohen, religion is an aspect of human culture which is ultimately rooted in reason. As such, it too has an Ursprung that develops according to a principle of lawfulness. This means that “the religion of reason” is an ideal which is “represented in the consciousness of different peoples.” Cohen continues by
claiming that “in no particular people’s consciousness is the religion of reason exhausted.” As for Kant, the ‘religion of reason,’ is an ideal rather than a concrete, empirical religion. It is the result of the idealization of a religion, when the mythical/metaphysical components are cast off, and its doctrines are cast in an ethical light. To be sure, unlike Kant, Cohen allows the sphere of religion new insights, and new capacities that are closed to ethics, such as the correlation between God and the human being, the correlation between human beings themselves, the I and Thou encounter, and the recognition of the suffering of the Other, which is closed to ethics. However, while Cohen believes these innovations are all rooted in the Jewish literary tradition, he nevertheless argues that all religions presumably would have to come to these same insights to the degree that they become rationalized. Cohen is quite straightforward about his monotheistic bias and, in fact, he openly admits that the capacity for rationalizing one’s religion is limited to adherents of the Deuteronomic-monotheistic traditions, in that he thinks they are ultimately derivative of Judaism and thus possess the capacity for rationalization. In addition, from Cohen’s decidedly Jewish perspective, those who have brought their religions into accord with the ‘religion of reason,’ become members of the ‘pious of the nations’ and thus honorary Jews.

In regard to the first question, for Cohen the relationship between ethics and the ‘religion of reason’ is peculiar, inasmuch as both have the human being as their subject matter, and yet, in very different ways. As Kenneth Seeskin explains, “[t]here is only one law and one goal; what differences there are between ethics and religion have to do with the method we use to articulate them.” For Cohen, ethics means ‘scientific’ or ‘critical’ ethics, which means not revelation, but the “scientific method” ["wissenschaftlicher
Methode"], i.e. his transcendental method of reconstruction, is central. That is, through this rigorous method Cohen thinks knowledge can be secured according to which "any man should be enabled to reason and to account about right and wrong, about good and bad, as much as about true and false [eines jeglichen Menschen soll befähigt werden zur Begründung und zur Rechenschaft über Recht und Unrecht, über gut und schlecht, ebenso wie über wahr und falsch.]"\(^92\) In short, Cohen believes there is truth in ethical matters, just as there is truth in scientific matters. However, Cohen claims that just as scientific truth is always a task to be accomplished, always futural, so too is ethical truth a perpetual process. That is, it is a task and not an achievement.

Ethics, given its rigorous, 'scientific' methodology, approaches the human being in a fundamentally different manner than religion, even the 'religion of reason.' Thus, a strict line of demarcation must be drawn between ethics and religion regarding its methodology and understanding of the human being. Ethics is rooted in the Greek methodology of 'science,' in prioritizing universality and necessity above all else. Thus, it does not grant authority to holy literary books ['heilige Bücher'] but only critical reason.\(^93\) In addition, ethics is concerned solely with the human, with the relationship between human beings,\(^94\) and this only on the level of universality. Ethics cannot recognize the individual, nor can it recognize or respond to individual suffering.\(^95\) Its pre- eminent concern is its formality, the rigorous execution of its universal laws, not so much with their actualization.

Cohen stresses the formality and universality of ethics, as well as its futural, task-oriented nature, not only in order to make room for the particular function of religion, as is often noted, and perhaps in the vain hope that it can serve as a common ground
between different religions and cultures. That is, Cohen insists that although ethics and religion differ methodologically in their approach to the human being, "[t]here cannot be two kinds of reason with regard to the doctrine of man." Thus, like Kant, Cohen hopes to establish universal ethics as a sphere in common between the divergent religions. Ethics, given its unified, ‘scientific’ character, is not open to plurality, but religion, however, at least to some degree, is. Cohen’s thinking is such that if ethics remains a constant, then the plurality of divergent religions is contained, since religions must remain compatible, at least on a very basic level, in regard to ethics. However, Cohen’s attempt to reconcile the plurality of religions with the unity of ethics fails, and his thought exhibits a Euro-centrism that is problematic from a pluralistic, multiculturalist standpoint.

Thus, we now see the full force of the second question. Does Cohen’s shift away from metaphysics actually gain him any ground in regard to a pluralist, multicultural perspective, or does it merely replicate the problem, albeit from the vantage point of practical reason, as happens with Kant? In that Cohen’s transcendental method of ethics no less than metaphysics necessitates one privileged moral system, it is not clear to what degree, if at all, it avoids the objections from a pluralist, multicultural account of philosophy that beset Kant’s postulates or even Mendelssohn’s neo-Leibnizian position.

The most egregious problem regarding Cohen’s ethics is that it is clearly premised on a monotheistic framework, which renders all claims to neutrality and as serving as a basis for a common ground problematic. As we mentioned earlier, in his voluminous work on ethics, Ethik des reinen Willens, Cohen establishes a correlation between ethics and logic (conceived of as Ursprünsgslogik), in order to render ethics immune to the dangers of relativism. This correlation, however, is itself rooted in the idea of God, which
emerges as the ultimate foundation of Cohen’s entire system, in that it secures the possibility of the harmony (not identity) between ethics and nature. While Cohen argues that this notion of God is rooted in the a priori foundations of human reason rather than metaphysical arguments a la Mendelssohn, it asserts the rational legitimacy of a monotheistic understanding. That is, in a manner similar to Kant, God for Cohen, serves as the ultimate guarantor of the ethical project, that the ‘ought’ can develop forth from the ‘is.’ Thus, the monotheistic concept of God stands at the very center of Cohen’s ‘scientific’ account of ethics. This raises serious problems from a contemporary standpoint, when philosophy is struggling to elucidate a framework free of religious and cultural presuppositions in which members of different cultures can equally participate. Cohen’s system is unabashedly monotheistic, which greatly limits its capacity to serve as a mediator between different cultures.

Thus, it is apparent from the start that the dialectical interplay between Cohen’s ‘scientific’ or universal ethics and the different ‘religions of reason’ is bound to fail, even if the issue of metaphysics is altogether avoided, in that it is not does not allow sufficient neutrality or plurality in an age of multiculturalism to warrant being accepted as a viable ‘philosophy’ (with all the secularity and neutrality that term now implies). The major problem at least from a pluralist, multicultural philosophical position with Cohen’s ‘religion of reason’ is its blatant prejudice in favor of monotheisms. In fact, one could argue further, Cohen’s thought is not even simply a case of monotheism-centrism, but rather is Judaeo-centric. Cohen, however, is more aware of his prejudices than Kant and the slew of Christian thinkers before and after him who simply take Christianity to be universal. This is a great strength of Cohen’s thought, especially when we consider that
he, unlike Mendelssohn and Kant, never attempts to elide the agonism inherent in monotheistic religions. In fact, one feature of Cohen’s thought that insures his continued relevance from a contemporary point of view is that he is unwilling to soften the demands of his Jewish monotheism in the vain attempt to secure philosophical neutrality. While this may make his thought hard to appropriate from a pluralist, multicultural standpoint of philosophy, to claim it as a sort of Habermasian philosophy-as-mediator, it makes it easier to appropriate as a specifically Jewish or even specifically monotheistic vision. For monotheistic religions, the unique God is essential for morality.

What is perhaps more troubling than Cohen’s exclusivist account of the ‘religion of reason’ is his stress on the ‘scientific’ nature of morality and his insistence on universality. If ethics is to serve as a neutral realm binding upon all human beings, then it is highly problematic that Cohen only takes into account Jewish, Christian and Greek sources. However, as we have seen above, it is clear that for Cohen, ethics is not a merely secular endeavor, but one deeply rooted in monotheism. Thus, Cohen’s insistence on systematicity and objectivity in regard to ethics, at least from a contemporary vantage point, are more of a burden to his position than an advantage. Beginning with a Deuteronomic-monotheistic, indeed, a Jewish, commitment, should not be counted against him. In fact, it is what provides his thought with vitality in regard to the issue of religious tolerance over against the externalist approach exemplified in a thinker like Jürgen Habermas.

Habermas, if we recall, lamenting the dramatic worldwide rise in religious fundamentalism, approaches the conditions for religious tolerance through notions of communicative rationality, democracy and public reason in general. However, these
notions are foreign to Deuteronomic-monotheisms, and are ultimately in conflict with the
deep structure of their worldviews. In order to accept these externally imposed
conditions, Deuteronomic-monotheims must essentially eviscerate their discursive
structure. 99 Habermas argues that modernity imposes these strictures upon monotheistic
religions, indeed all religions. But we might add that it imposes them without concern to
whether the basic structure of these religions can sustain them. In truth, monotheistic
religions cannot sustain these strictures—at least not in the form that Habermas has
elucidated them, because they undermine the priority of God, uproot the metaphysical
worldview, and fragment the discursive structure (revelation, election, historical mission,
eschaton) constitutive of monotheistic religions.

While Cohen’s account of ethics and the ‘religion of reason’ might, from a
contemporary vantage point, be viewed as no longer belonging within the realm of strict
philosophy, with these notions he nevertheless accomplishes something quite urgent.
Unlike Habermas, Cohen does not produce an abstract, universal notion of tolerance that
he then attempts to foist on all religions equally. Rather, Cohen operates within Judaism
and seeks to develop tolerance from within this tradition. Moreover, rather than taking
Habermas’ route of applying a notion of tolerance that does violence both to the
metaphysical foundation of the monotheistic worldview as well as its basic discursive
structure, or like the other members of the religion of reason trajectory, introducing
heterogenous elements into the monotheistic worldview to eliminate intolerance, Cohen
embraces the intolerance of monotheism. That is, Cohen seeks to show how the moments
of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms are capable of producing an
ethically responsible intolerance that is fully capable of peacefully coexisting with a
pluralistic state, even if it is ultimately opposed to many of the beliefs and practices of its fellow citizens. Cohen’s idealization is a program for reform from within Judaism, one that is derived from Jewish sources and thus possesses a clear continuity with the religion it seeks to reform, as opposed to Habermas’ position which forces a chasm between modern and pre-modern forms of a religious tradition.

Conclusion

Cohen, unlike the other thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory, successfully reconstitutes Deuteronomic-monotheisms, or at least Judaism, in such a way that he extirpates the violence implicit in their structural intolerance. Unlike Mendelssohn, given Cohen’s consistent rationalization and ethical transfiguration of God, his notion of bearing witness is both comprehensible to human reason and ethically responsible towards the Other. In contrast to Kant, Cohen is able to secure the vitality of a particular Deuteronomic-monotheistic tradition, preserving the vitality of scriptural universalism, preserving its dynamic interchange of universality and particularity, even as he roots it ultimately in a rational universalism. Kant’s thought, however, was not simply problematic in its extirpation of the logic of scriptural universalism. Perhaps more problematic regarding Kant’s thought are his attempts to overcome the violence of intolerance and secure peace by means of an overly robust account of rational universalism. As a result, Kant’s rational universalism proves at least equally problematic from the vantage point of tolerance, in that his ‘rational universalism’ proves just as exclusivist and intolerant as the monotheisms he was trying to correct. Cohen’s ethical intolerance, in contrast to Kant’s rationalist intolerance, however, never loses sight of the humanity of the Other, and thus always remains ethically responsible in regard to the
Other. That is, Cohen succeeds in fundamentally altering the trajectory of monotheistic intolerance, making it thoroughly ethical and responsible. It is not an intolerance that denies the humanity of the Other, but rather recognizes the humanity of the Other to such a degree that the monotheist is willing to suffer to show the Other the truth, even as the Other persecutes and does violence against her.


2 See the concluding chapter of Kenneth Seeskin’s Jewish Philosophy in a Secular Age, titled "Universality and Particularity," 213-226, which discusses the tensions between these two tendencies in Jewish thought throughout its history, and laments the current predominance of particularism. See especially 217, 222.

3 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. 485 (A567-568/B595-596).


7 Kavka, Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy. p.105

8 In his article "Ursprüngliche Differenz: Zwischen Einzigkeit und Einheit im Denken von Hermann Cohen," Dieter Adelmann helpfully elucidates the difference between philosophical and religious thought, two related but distinct sorts of 'Denken.' Philosophy is concerned with "Einheit", which presupposes the "Umwandlbarkeit von allem ...; nämlich indem vorausgesetzt wird, dass es <vom Denken in eine Einheit verwandelt>> werden kann: d.i. die Instabilität von <allem> bildet die elementare Voraussetzung der Philosophie"(27) Hence, its preoccupation with the 'Ideal,' and the need of the future in its epistemological methodology. However, the "<<Sein des Einzigen>>; oder eben <<das einzige Sein>>> i.e., God, exists in radical contrast to the 'All' in that it is fundamentally unchangeable (28). Thus, the full complexity of thinking involves "Denken zwischen Philosophie und Religion" (30).

9 See Kavka, Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy, 106.

10 Hermann Cohen, Ethics of Maimonides, 11-12.


13 These last two paragraphs owe a significant debt to Andrea Poma’s The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen, 128-129.

14 However, rabbinic notions of interpretation have clearly influenced Cohen’s notion of reason. This can be seen in the infinite, on-going nature of reason as a perpetual, interpretive enterprise similar to that of rabbinic understandings of the study of revealed texts. On this point see, Almust Sh. Bruckstein’s “On Jewish Hermeneutics: Maimonides and Bahaqa as Vectors in Cohen’s Philosophy of Origin,” Hermann Cohen’s Philosophy of Religion, 36, 41, 43. Nevertheless, despite the important similarities between rabbinic methods of exegesis and Cohenian reason, methodologically, there remain considerable
differences, in that ultimately, for Cohen critical reason is privileged over any dogmatic claims to authoritative status of divine revelation.

15 Hermann Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 3-5.
16 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 3.
17 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 24.
18 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 8.
19 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 24.
20 See for example, Daniel Boyarin’s, Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994) 15-16.
22 For example, in Ethik des reinen Willens, 55, Cohen chides his contemporaries for their fascination with the biographies of the prophets themselves. In particular, Cohen is distressed by his contemporaries’ preoccupation with the accounts of the prophets’ encounters with the divine, their becoming inhabited or possessed by the ‘word of the Lord.’ Cohen argues that the authors of these books are merely using the “device” of revelation, and in fact, the literal level of revelation, garnering such attention from his contemporaries, is, in fact, merely “a mythological concept.” Cohen argues that if these books are read with sufficient rigor, the mythic and anthropomorphic device of revelation soon “shatters itself insofar as the reason of human beings is unified and reconciled [with the reason of God].”
23 As we will see, Cohen thinks ethics proper is an autonomous sphere. Nevertheless, given that the Israelites lacked science, they were able to reach and innovate a great deal of moral (i.e. non-‘scientific’ ethical) thought by means of this rational religious insight. As Kenneth Seeskin points out, “There is only one law and one goal; what differences there are between ethics and religion have to do with the method we use to articulate them” (Autonomy and Jewish Philosophy, 159). While Cohen stresses the universal and ‘scientific’ nature of his ethics, I will argue later that his ethics is ultimately problematic if viewed in this light, at least if we understand this in a secular sense. However, if viewed as religiously rooted, a claim which has some validity as we will see, these objections cease to be troubling.
24 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 88.
25 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 84.
26 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 89.
27 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 96.
28 While Cohen addresses this theme in both “Religion und Sittlichkeit” and Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism he addresses this most explicitly in his work, Ethics of Maimonides.
29 Cohen, Ethics of Maimonides, 148.
30 Hermann Cohen, “Religion und Sittlichkeit,” Hermann Cohens Jüdisches Schriften, 134; Note, because of Cohen’s frequent use of italics, I will refrain from italicizing German words unless Cohen italicizes them.
32 In Autonomy and Jewish Philosophy, 170, Kenneth Seeskin explains that, “[a]s God is our creator, in Cohen’s opinion, we, as it were, are God’s discoverer. This does not mean that God is contingent but that given Cohen’s idealism, the only way we can understand God is as a being in relation.”
33 Cohen, Hermann. Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 103.
34 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 98, 103.
35 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 107.
36 Although the terminology is distinct, methodologically Cohen’s position in Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism is not substantially different from his ‘system of philosophy,’ encapsulated in such works as Ethik des reinen Willens. Thus I clearly favor the interpretation of scholars such as Altmann, Schwarzschild, Holzhey, Seeskin, Wiedebach and Poma, over against Rosenzweig’s influential interpretation of Cohen in the “Einleitung” of his Jüdisches Schriften, which proclaims that Cohen breaks with his neo-Kantian formalism in his posthumous work and becomes the forerunner of Jewish existentialism.
38 On Hermann Cohen’s conception of the self see Steven S. Schwarzschild’s “The Tenability of Herman(sic) Cohen’s Construction of the Self,” Journal of the History of Philosophy (July, 1975) 361-384,


40 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 254.


42 Cohen, Hermann. Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 52.

43 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 74.

44 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 120-121.

45 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 121.

46 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 243.


48 As Michael Zank points out, "Since the content of the Jewish idea of God is human morality, modifications of the idea of God have to be understood as modifications to the idea of human morality."


49 Cohen, "Religion und Sittlichkeit," 134.

50 Cohen, "Religion und Sittlichkeit," 139.


52 Cohen, "Religion und Sittlichkeit," 137.

53 Cohen, "Religion und Sittlichkeit," 143.

54 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 173.

55 Cohen, "Religion und Sittlichkeit," 142.

56 Cohen, "Religion und Sittlichkeit," 139.


58 Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, 260.


60 Notice here that Cohen differs from Mendelsohn and Kant. Whereas the other two thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory still maintain a notion of there being a zero-sum game between God and human beings, such that if one if one side is elevated in dignity or value, the other side must be diminished. However, as Kenneth Seeskin points out, in terms of the issue of autonomy, "Cohen’s achievement rests on his ability to discuss the problem of autonomy in a way that rejects the idea that God and man are locked in a test of wills where one party’s gain is another party’s loss. Rather than a way of establishing independence from God…human autonomy…is the spiritual glue that binds man and God together" (Seeskin, Autonomy and Jewish Philosophy, p.179). Seeskin’s point here can be extended beyond autonomy to refer to the general relationship between the human being and God in general, in that Cohen removes any sort of antagonism between the two parties, although he preserves their difference.

61 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 132-133.

62 By ‘immediacy’ I do not mean to suggest some sort of Levinasian encounter with the face, but rather, that the Other ceases to be an object of indifference and her suffering can be recognized for what it is, an offensive blight indicating the failure of culture and oneself for one’s involvement in culture.

63 Cohen, “Religion und Sittlichkeit,” 142-144.

64 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 214-215, 264.

65 Kenneth Seeskin points out, “God’s perfection is not self-contained. If God must reach out to us, then, Cohen argues, we must reach out to others if we are to have any hope of imitating God” (Seeskin, Autonomy and Jewish Philosophy, 172).


67 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 135.

68 Due to the limits of space, I am not able to go into the important contrast between Cohen’s account of the notion of atonement in Judaism, which is thoroughly ethical and in accord with human autonomy as opposed to his account of the Christian notion. For a thorough account of the notion of atonement in Hermann Cohen’s thought see Michael Zank, The Idea of Atonement in the Philosophy of Hermann Cohen.

69 Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 138, 141.
For an excellent treatment of the notion of the suffering servant motif in Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism through the lens of the notion of the tragic hero in Cohen’s Aesthetik des reinen Gefühl, see Hartwig Wiedebach’s, “Hermann Cohens Theorie des Mitleids,” 231-244.  

Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 148.  

Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 252-253.  

Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 149.  


Assmann, Die Mosaische Unterscheidung, 35.  


Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 253.  

Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 258.  

Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 260.  

Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 268.  

Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 138.  

Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 11.  

In some sense the question of the relationship between ethics and religion has been a major preoccupation of Cohen scholarship as a result of Rosenzweig’s misreading of Cohen. However, as interesting as this dispute is, it is not pertinent to our discussion at hand, except insofar as it may be necessary to say, as we did earlier, that we agree with those who argue that Cohen’s position never substantially changed in his later works.  

Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 7.  

See Steven Schwarzschild’s “The Title of Herman Cohen’s ‘Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism,’” reprinted in Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 8, 10-11.  

Seeskin, Autonomy and Jewish Philosophy, 159.  


Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 13-23.  

Cohen, Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism, 13.  

For the important differences between Cohen and Kant’s respective notions of God, see Helmut Holzhey’s “Gott und Seele: zum Verhältnis von Metaphysikkritik und Religionsphilosophie bei Hermann Cohen,” esp. 85-93.  

Here I am using ‘philosophy’ in an explicitly Habermasian sense. Habermas’s discourse-oriented philosophy is, far more than Cohen’s thought, earnestly trying to cope with “the predicament in which the members of any moral community find themselves when, in making the transition to a modern, pluralistic society, they find themselves faced with the dilemma that though they still argue with reasons about moral judgments and beliefs, their substantive background consensus on the underlying moral norms has been shattered. They find themselves embroiled in global and domestic practical conflicts in need of regulation that they continue to regard as moral, and hence as rationally resolvable, conflicts: but their shared ethos has disintegrated.”(Habermas, “A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality,” The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory, 39). To be sure, one could make a case for the relevance and tenability of Cohen’s philosophy in light of its reliance upon regulative ideals and its rootedness in intersubjectivity, such that it is not so different from a Habermasian position. However, to make such a case, as viable as it may be, would undermine the explicitly Jewish use towards which I am trying to put Cohen’s thought.
See my presentation, "Revealed Truths and Fissured Societies: Habermas and the Problem of Monotheism" given for the Philosophy of Religion Section, at the national American Academy of Religion convention, Philadelphia, Tuesday, November 22, 2005.
Conclusion

It should not be surprising at this particular world-historical moment that religious tensions are erupting at such a tremendous rate given that the boundaries that have traditionally separated cultures are growing thinner, even dissolving before our very eyes. Tension is inevitable when religious traditions with incommensurable worldviews are brought into increased contact with one another. In this environment not only do old conflicts take on renewed vitality, but wholly new ones emerge as well. While global capitalism drives these worldviews to collide like never before, it is nevertheless far from clear that this economic engine and its geo-political apparatus provides sufficient resources for how these traditions are to deal with one another, especially on a conceptual level, now that they are in such close contact.

As children of secular, multicultural democracies, it is quite natural for us to assume that the principles of pluralism and tolerance must be the essential ingredients to solving the problems of cultural, and especially religious, conflict emerging all over the globe. In both the academy and the popular culture at large it is simply presumed that recourse to these principles constitutes the appropriate answer to religious conflict, at least insofar as we are willing to grant that such conflicts are genuinely religious in nature and not really political and economic and thus only masquerading under the cover of religion. It is certainly correct that insofar as such conflicts are rooted in religion, the ultimate source of discord lies in intolerance, in the unwillingness of groups to suffer the differences of one another. What is not as certain is whether our natural response to this
problem, the simple exportation of the principles of tolerance and pluralism, is the most beneficial one.

A major difficulty surrounding the principles of pluralism and tolerance is that although they are often bandied about and uncritically championed, their specificity and presuppositions are often forgotten, as if they are simply timeless principles whose value is self-evident. It is essential that we bear in mind that tolerance and pluralism are modern, Western values, emerging not only from the religious wars of Europe, but Europe’s specific intellectual and cultural climate as well. To be sure, we do not want to commit the genetic fallacy, as if pointing out the genealogy of these principles somehow invalidates them. However, this genealogy should make us aware that these principles do not exist in a vacuum, and they cannot simply be incorporated into every worldview without problem. In fact, these principles are not easily assimilated into the foundations of many different religious traditions and cultural Weltanschauungs, even Western ones, such as common forms of Judaism and Christianity. However, it is not uncommon to hear tolerance and pluralism put forward in political speeches, the media, and other such venues, as the great and obvious solution to religious conflict, without any thought given to the costs and implications that the adoption of these principles entails.

In this regard, it is particularly useful to consider Habermas’s arguments concerning religious tolerance and pluralism because to his credit the problems endemic to his approach are a result of his recognition of the specificity of the conditions which enable tolerance and pluralism to effectively function. Habermas claims that if religions are to accept the principles of pluralism and tolerance then they must accept the value, structure and forms of rationality intrinsic to modernity. Indeed, his very approach to the
problem of religious intolerance consists in championing the superiority of the ‘epistemological condition of modernity’ over the processes of thinking in traditional religious worldviews. To be sure, Habermas’s thought leaves room for ‘modern faiths,’ or religious denominations that willingly shed their traditional forms of thought in order to bring themselves into accord with the processes of communication and reasoning intrinsic to modernity, which include a privileging of elements of both tolerance and pluralism.

The primary failing of such a position is that it does not sufficiently consider the costs of tolerance and pluralism for the religious traditions that are to incorporate them. Habermas fails to acknowledge that these principles are enormously difficult to assimilate into entrenched worldviews such as the Deuteronomic-monotheisms which have strong beliefs about the ways human beings are to practice, believe, and generally live, and maintain structures that do not lend themselves to compromise. In addition, in his attempts to elucidate the conditions for the possibility of religious tolerance in a pluralist society, Habermas fails to adequately appreciate the philosophical/theological commitments implicit in the Deuteronomic-monotheistic worldview. For instance, his notion of communicative rationality and deliberative democracy are incompatible with the discursive structure of common Deuteronomic-monotheistic religions which are predicated upon the logic of scriptural universalism. Scriptural universalism and revelation in general, as sources of authority, are not open to procedures of mutual criticism, and thus the processes of communicative rationality are not applicable to them. Hence, the only viable solution for Habermas is if religions shed their traditional belief
systems and accept the communicative and discursive processes of modernity and
democratic society.

As the calls for tolerance and pluralism grow stronger in the public arena, one
cannot help but notice the growing backlash against them. The dramatic spread of
fundamentalism is not simply a foreign development but one taking place in the U.S. as
well. While I certainly do not wish to claim that fundamentalism is solely a negative
reaction to the pressure to incorporate the principles of tolerance and pluralism, it strikes
me as by no means coincidental that this phenomenon is taking place precisely when
these principles are becoming increasingly visible in the public sphere. There is certainly
a link between tolerance and pluralism becoming assumed as a matter of course in civil
society and the strong reaffirmations of the truth and authority of revelation by more and
more religious movements, the result of which is almost inevitably the outright rejection
of the validity these principles.

In our present situation of colliding worldviews, monotheistic religions seem to be
demonstrating a particular proclivity for intolerance and violence, which should not be
surprising given their foundation in the logic of scriptural universalism. This scriptural
universalism, being rooted in the authority of revelation, not only does not naturally lend
itself to aspects of Habermas’s communicative rationality such as mutual criticism, but it
is also structurally incompatible with the principles of tolerance and pluralism. Tolerance
and pluralism, as we demonstrated in chapter 1, require a profound respect for the Other.
However, in common Deuteronomistic-monotheisms where the logic of scriptural
universalism reigns, respect is systematically denied to the Other.¹ It is God alone who
bestows value, and those who are not living according to God’s will, which is disclosed
in revelation, have lesser or no value. To be sure, the particular community that possesses these revealed texts has a responsibility to God to reconcile the human world with God’s will by bringing the message of (a particular tradition of) monotheism to the rest of humanity. However, until the Other receives this message, she remains in error and sin, an enemy of the community and even of God, in that she is an obstruction to God’s plan for a reconciled world. Thus, monotheistic religions are tied not only to an elevation of a particular community over all Others, but also to the negation of all Others. For Deuteronomic monotheisms, at least when they are rooted in the logic of scriptural universalism, what matters ultimately is that the Other is eliminated, which means either that all Others are converted and thus divested of their otherness, or that the Other is literally annihilated. It is not necessarily important which tactic is employed so long as the requisite destruction of otherness takes place.

However, the problem of religious intolerance, especially in regard to monotheistic religions, is not new. Fortunately, the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory have thought through this problem in great depth, and their work provides important resources for current discussions of monotheistic intolerance. These thinkers are not simply concerned with justifying the participation in pluralistic societies for adherents of monotheistic religions, but also and more importantly, they seek to change the way that the notion of the Other is constructed in these religions. The religion of reason trajectory, at least when it is successful, and it does find success in Cohen, steers the course between the Scylla of undermining the discursive structure of Deuteronomic monotheisms of the externalist approach and the Charybdis of the violence of monotheistic intolerance.
In order to understand the power of the strategies of the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory we need to examine scriptural universalism and its dialectic of particularism and universalism once more. It is not simply that a universal God reveals the universal human telos to a particular community thereby imbuing it with universal significance in that it is to bring information to the rest of the world through one of the modalities of promulgation. Martin S. Jaffee points out that a core presupposition of monotheistic religions is that God is profoundly dissatisfied with the human realm. The very point of the election of a particular community and its revelatory encounter with God, Jaffee claims, is that this community will heal the gap between humanity and God. Healing this gap between where humans are and where God wants them to be is a struggle that will last the duration of history, and the particular community must oppose the Other at every step. If we couple Jaffee’s insights with those of Jan Assmann, we see that this gap can only be closed through the radical negation of the Other, through rejecting the culture and the religion of the Other as heretical, idolatrous, and/or pagan.

According to Assmann, it is quite significant that for monotheistic religions, truth now comes in the form of revealed texts, as these religions are scriptural in nature, “book religions [Buchreligionen].” As such, they possess notions of truth deriving from a transcendent God that operates beyond what is humanly accessible. This is important because monotheistic religions believe there is only one God who reveals himself to this one particular community. Therefore, the beliefs and holy books of all other religious/cultural communities are rendered utterly inferior, as nothing but insidious and idolatrous lies because they distract and lead people astray from the revealed truth of God. Hence, Assmann argues further that as a result of their transcendent, non-human
source of revelation, monotheistic religions operate according to “an emphatic notion of truth [ein emphatischer Wahrheitsbegriff]” which, is radically opposed to all “other traditional or concurring truths,” declaring them to be nothing but error, lies, idolatry. Although the truths of revelation have universal validity according to the logic of scriptural universalism, they are nevertheless a key source of monotheism’s intolerance and negation of the Other. The reason for this is that the content of revelation cannot possibly be discerned or grasped by the Other unless the Other converts to the particular community in possession of revelation, abandoning her otherness.

The thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory circumvent the problem of monotheistic intolerance, particularly the violence that is bound up with it, by addressing the limits of scriptural universalism. They do this through recourse to rational universalism, by either supplementing the logic of scriptural universalism with rational universalism or replacing the former with the latter entirely, while nevertheless preserving (or at least making the attempt to preserve) the moments of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheisms in tact. This allows them extirpate those conditions which generate violence against the Other without undermining the monotheistic worldview itself.

The thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory, Mendelssohn, Kant, and Cohen, each present different understandings of rational universalism, but all three thinkers agree that rational universalism is bound up with morality in some form or another. Mendelssohn’s rational universalism consists of a neo-Leibnizian natural theology, where metaphysical truths are essential for correct moral functioning. The ‘eternal truths’ constitutive of the framework of his natural theology are readily apparent to universal
human reason. As a result, human beings can be moral without direct access to divine, i.e. scriptural revelation. Kant rejects Mendelssohn's metaphysical presuppositions but similarly argues that the foundations of morality belong to universal human reason not divine revelation, claiming that the moral law is present in human reason on an a priori level. Cohen agrees with Mendelssohn and Kant that all human beings naturally have the capacity for moral reasoning, although he finds actual moral reasoning to be something that is achieved in a developmental process of human thought rather than something that is innately part of reason. For Cohen, ethics is the highest level of reason, where theoretical problems and questions give way to practical concerns and obligations in the intersubjective sphere. While all human beings possess the capacity to reach ethical reason, many religious traditions thwart this development because mythic modes of thought predominate. Myth focuses on matters of origins and metaphysical questions rather than interpersonal relations.

However, more is at stake in the linkage of rational universalism to morality than simply escaping the chauvinism inherent in the logic of scriptural universalisms, which are often unwilling to concede the capacity to be moral to those without access to revelation. In establishing the innate ability of all human beings to possess morality, these thinkers are simultaneously establishing the fundamental dignity of all human life. Mendelssohn, Kant, and Cohen, are radically opposing that tendency that Assmann highlights, where scriptural texts become the locus of antagonistic energy towards the Other because they possess information from a transcendent source that contradicts all cultural productions and reasoning by the Other. That is, according to the logic of scriptural universalism, God is the source of all value and human beings only possess
value according to whether or not they sufficiently recognize God. God only bestows value upon those who are living in accordance with the laws and statutes and other demands of God’s revelation. However, it is important to separate Cohen from Mendelssohn and Kant on this point as he approaches the matter rather distinctly. By claiming that all human beings possess an inherent capacity for moral reason, Mendelssohn and Kant are not simply asserting that on a profane level, human beings can rationally discern certain regulations for getting along with other human beings. Rather, by stipulating that human beings possess an innate capacity for morality, which for these thinkers is loaded with religious significance such as being the necessary and sufficient conditions for eternal felicity and the highest good, they are claiming that human reason can comprehend what scriptural universalism claimed to be solely accessible through revelation. That is, these thinkers are challenging the very exclusivity and authority of revelation itself. They are claiming that it is not access to revelation that bestows value upon a human being, but rather that person’s capacity to reason which renders them innately valuable. In short, by shifting emphasis away from revelation to universal human reason, Mendelssohn and Kant ascribe inherent dignity to all human beings.

Cohen takes a different approach to undercutting scriptural universalism’s antagonism to the Other. Whereas Mendelssohn and Kant set up an opposition between revelation and reason, and thus revelation and universal human dignity, Cohen makes revelation an essential step in the process of developing reason and achieving the recognition of universal human dignity; he dissolves any opposition. For Cohen, morality and its ‘scientific’ form, ethics, is not timeless, but rather develops through the continued interpretation of historical, literary sources. The sources of revelation, the literary sources
of Judaism, while initially harboring some antagonism to the Other, nevertheless present
the foundational idea for ethics and the universal ideal of humanity. These ideas are
universally valid to reason; their legitimacy does not derive from their revealed status. In
addition, when the texts containing these ideas are properly understood, i.e. when
demythologized, they lead not to antagonism but rather to an ethical recognition of and
responsibility for the Other. Rather than leading to hostility towards the Other, in its
proper, demythologized form, revelation is what creates the conditions for ethical
recognition of the Other in the first place.

The thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory integrate their respective accounts
of rational universalism with scriptural universalism in different ways, with very different
results. Mendelssohn presents his ‘religion of reason,’ predicated upon its neo-Leibnizian
natural theology as the new metaphysical foundation for the discursive structure of
Deuteronomic-Judaism. However, Mendelssohn cannot accept the full implications of his
rational universalism, since it is inhospitable not only to scriptural universalism but also
to the discursive structure of Judaism. It cannot provide any reason for the election of the
Jews. Therefore Mendelssohn is forced to depart from the logic of his rational
universalism, although he retains its terminology, in order to provide grounds for the
election of the Jews, taking recourse to the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism.
The end result is that Mendelssohn’s thought remains an uneasy, even incoherent, mix of
the logics of scriptural universalism and rational universalism. While his overall position
may be somewhat incoherent, in that it remains very difficult to explain how the plans of
an unfathomable God of scriptural universalism can coexist with the rational
universalism of his natural theology, Mendelssohn nevertheless manages to utilize this
combination of logics to radically reconfigure how the Other is to be perceived by Judaism.

If Mendelssohn’s incoherent recourse to divergent logics can be explained by the innate ambivalence of revelation itself, being linked to both particularity and universality, Kant avoids incoherence by divesting the pole of particularity of all significance. In this manner, Kant undermines revelation and scriptural universalism altogether, offering them no place in his system. For Kant, not only is revelation not necessary for giving an account of how human beings are to behave, but it is a major error to privilege the laws and statutes of revelation over the authority of moral reason. Kant axiomatically privileges universality over particularity. Since the universality of revelation and thus scriptural universalism is tainted with particularity, being inextricably bound up with it in its manifestation and promulgation, it is thus necessarily deficient. In contrast, Kant posits the rationally necessary universality of morality and the ‘religion of reason’ which, unlike revelation appears, or so Kant claims, as self-evident to human beings everywhere. Using the rational universalism of his morality and ‘religion of reason,’ Kant seeks to purge all particularities of genuine significance, leaving all historical religious traditions as empty husks enslaved to the ‘religion of reason.’ Kant is able to purge particularity in such a zealous manner because he presents an extremely robust notion of rational universalism in his ‘religion of reason’ and morality. That is, the thickness of his rational universalism affords him the luxury of purging all essential particularity in specific religious traditions. However, as subsequent commentators have disclosed, despite Kant’s claims to the contrary, his thought contains all sorts of contingent, historical, cultural and religious assumptions. Thus, his thought is not genuinely rationally universal, and
without this thick account of reason, Kant’s zealous purgation of the particular becomes highly problematic.

Cohen elides the antagonism between scriptural universalism and rational universalism posited by his predecessors by claiming that rational universalism grows forth from the development of the sources of scriptural universalism. That is, bringing a sense of historical development to the literary tradition of Judaism, Cohen argues that in the Jewish religious sources the logic of scriptural universalism gives birth to the logic of rational universalism. While Cohen argues that the logic of rational universalism comes to rule in the Jewish tradition, such a development by no means entails the abrogation of the logic of scriptural universalism. Only in one respect is the logic of scriptural universalism effaced: its unfathomable God is rendered essentially fathomable by having its significance confined to morality. However, unlike Kant, and without Mendelssohn’s incoherence, Cohen sustains the productive relationship between scriptural and rational universalism, in that the former is the means by which the latter is expressed and realized. That is, the rationally universal idea of God which founds morality and the ideal of humanity is both produced and born witness to through the dialectic of particularism and universalism inherent in scriptural universalism.

By means of re-envisioning scriptural universalism and revelation, especially in regard to the dialectic between particularity and universality, the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory are able to reconfigure the moments of the discursive structure of Deuteronomic-monotheism in such a way that enables a new manner of constructing the Other. In common forms of Deuteronomic-monotheistic religions, the Other is conceived as both lesser and as a threat. The Other’s inferior religion and culture, mired in error and
sin, obstructs the community’s task to fulfill God’s plan. However, even though the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory, or at least Mendelssohn and Cohen, manage to retain the moments of the discursive structure of Deuternomic-monotheisms (revelation, election, history/historical mission, eschaton), they re-configure their foundations such that the Other can be envisioned in a new way. Kant, however, is less successful in creating the conditions that allow for a re-envisioning of the Other.

Mendelssohn’s reconfiguration of Judaism regarding the Other is rather complex and not entirely without problems because it leaps back and forth between the logic of scriptural and rational universalism. All human beings possess reason and thus have the capacity to determine the eternal metaphysical truths that constitute the ‘religion of reason.’ However, different religions encode these truths in different linguistic and symbolic systems that are fairly opaque to the outsider. To this rationally universal dimension, Mendelssohn introduces the problem of idolatry, that human beings have an extremely difficult time retaining their grasp on these truths, which are essential for morality and eternal felicity. This in turn necessitates the election of the Jews and their divinely revealed law, the Halakhah. This law does not teach them any truths over and above the eternal truths readily available to all human beings. However, it does help in preserving these truths in the face of idolatry. Mendelssohn, taking recourse to the unfathomable God of scriptural universalism, is unable to articulate why God introduces idolatry, though he can fall back on the traditional argument that the revelation given to the Jews is for the purposes of fulfilling their historical mission, of serving as a “light to the nations.”
However, because the elements of rational universalism have not completely been effaced with this introduction of common Deuteronomistic monotheistic and scripturally universal elements, the Other remains mysterious in Mendelssohn's thought. Mendelssohn's picture never claims that all Others are idolatrous, and in fact, he criticizes Christian missionaries for assuming that foreign peoples are such, when the Other's linguistic and symbolic systems are opaque to the unfamiliar eye. In addition, given that each individual possesses the capacity to reason, a culture might be degraded by idolatry, but an individual within it might nevertheless possess the 'religion of reason.' Thus, Mendelssohn's system requires that there be sufficiently large numbers of idolatrous Others, but the precise identity of these idolatrous Others always remains indeterminate. A Jew can never assume that the Other before her is or is not idolatrous. Thus, although Mendelssohn's position still requires a large number, perhaps even the majority, of Others to be idolatrous, the particular Others one encounters are always ensconced in mystery and uncertainty; their status regarding idolatry is essentially indiscernible.

Although Kant is the most ardent of the three thinkers in rooting out revelation and the logic of scriptural universalism, he is not sufficiently attentive to the dynamic by which it produces hostile notions of the Other. In the end, Kant's own religious thought, though intended to be utterly contrary to the logic of scriptural universalism, nevertheless reproduces the conditions in which the Other is viewed with hostility, or at least as deficient. Kant's strategy to undermine the violence endemic in common forms of scriptural universalisms consists in eliminating the antagonisms generated by knowledge predicated upon revelation. By limiting God to a principle of reason, Kant secures the
inherent value for all human beings qua possessors of moral reason. In this manner, Kant’s thought extirpates those conditions for demeaning the Other based on religious difference. However, unlike Mendelssohn, Kant offers no strategy for acknowledging the difference of the Other, and as a result he simply reinstates monotheistic intolerance although now with its basis in reason rather than revelation. Kant’s notion of reason, which he believes is rationally universal, becomes the new standard by which someone is rendered worthy or deficient. If one does not manifest signs of this reason sufficiently, if they do not accord with Kant’s notion of morality and the ‘religion of reason,’ they are rendered an Other. And just as monotheistic religions see the Other rooted in error and sin, destined to disappear in the eschaton, Kant sees the Other, irrational and heteronomous, destined to vanish before the ethical commonwealth.

Cohen’s thought is quite radical in regard to the religion of reason trajectory in that it not only self-consciously retains the moments of the discursive structure and the common Deuteronomic-monotheistic worldview but it also knowingly retains its intolerance. That is, Cohen accepts that Judaism (and perhaps other monotheisms insofar as they are rationalized and thus resemble Judaism) is the true religion, and that all other religions are false. Cohen does not flinch from the intolerance of this position and that it renders the Other in a position of error. Whereas the intolerance in Kant’s position is unintentional, a failure to escape the horizons of that which it sought to transcend, Cohen deliberately retains the formal structure of Deuteronomic-Judaism, including its intolerance. In deliberately retaining its structural moments, the changes Cohen does effect allow him to alter the trajectory of the monotheistic intolerance instead of merely replicating it as Kant does. For Cohen, the revelation of the Jews does not teach that the
Other is evil, but rather that the order of reality in which the Other is ensconced is erroneous and wrong. As such, it is bad for the Other even as she perpetuates it. The Jew, then, is to bear witness to this new order for the sake of the Other, to bring about a new order which will liberate the Other from the horrors of history as it has been.

It is the rendering of the foundation of the moment of revelation in Judaism rationally universal, making the idea of the unique God and the ideal of humanity its essential contents, that enables Cohen to create a new dynamic with the Other. As we saw with Mendelssohn, with the logic of scriptural universalism bearing witness involves a primary loyalty to God and only indirectly does it bear a recognition and responsibility for the Other. Furthermore, because of the involvement of an unfathomable God, it never becomes clear to human reason how the modality of bearing witness would function, as the contents of revelation would not be recognizably more legitimate or ‘true’ than any other teachings for the Other. Presumably, only an act of God could render the Other more disposed to accept it. However, Cohen roots revelation in reason, such that the validity of its content is ascertainable and assessable to human reason. Therefore, the Other is capable of grasping the validity of these ideas if she is exposed to them. It thus becomes the preeminent religious duty of the Jews to bear witness to these truths, to bring them to the Other.

Cohen’s intolerance is founded in responsibility for the Other, in the willingness to eschew all security, to stand apart, to suffer and even die for the Other. The ideas of revelation, according to Cohen, pertain not to individual salvation but to the absoluteness of ethics and the inherent dignity of all human beings. Despite their rationality, these truths radically contrast with the order of history, governed as it is by power politics and
violence, and thus engender disbelief on the part of the Other. The religious task of the Jew entails the willingness to stand apart and even be martyred in order to testify to this radically new, ethical order that eschews the violence and eudemonism that characterizes the order of existence hitherto. Like Cohen, Kant’s intolerance, is rooted in the belief that one possesses truths that the Other does not. However, for Kant, this intolerance does not entail any special responsibility to the Other, no supererogation of duty. Kant’s system is somewhat indifferent to the Other in her deficient rationality, as one is obligated to the laws of reason not to the Other. For Cohen, however, reason ultimately obligates one directly to the Other, insofar as the Other is equated with the poor, which engenders an infinite responsibility in the self. The religion of the Jew consists in bringing rationality to the Other even if means suffering and death at the hands of the Other. Indifference is the worst sin.

If we examine the religion of reason trajectory as a whole, and apart from the specific philosophical idioms in which the different thinkers write, we can glean some important insights for the contemporary crisis regarding monotheistic violence. First, it is not productive to simply oppose intolerance, the refusal to passively suffer the beliefs and practices of the Other, when they conflict with what one considers to be the absolute truth, pure and simple. The attempt to maintain a fundamentally monotheistic position, as both Mendelssohn and Kant do, and yet to oppose intolerance, only creates more problems than it solves. The problem is that monotheists cannot compromise with the truths that they believe are absolute. Thus, in order to overcome intolerance, they must take recourse to a position that essentially predicates the truths of monotheism to all other religions, thus eradicating difference on any essential level. We see this in Mendelssohn’s
thought when he ascribes his monotheistic, neo-Leibnizian natural theology to all religions, although he is subtle enough to incorporate diverse symbolic and linguistic frameworks that allow for some, albeit insufficient, difference. Not only does this do a profound violence to the difference between religions, but Mendelssohn is then forced to introduce a sort of hierarchy through idolatry to account for the election of the Jews. Kant is a monotheist in regard to everything but his unconcern for the number of the divine. Like Mendelssohn he insists there is one true religion for all human beings, this time an ethical monotheism, which he claims, is implicit in all historical religions. Again, this does violence to the different historical religions that exist in the present, claiming to understand them better than they do themselves even though he has no genuine knowledge of them. For both Mendelssohn and Kant the Other is not entitled to be Other. While it may be uncomfortable for us, children of multicultural democracies, Cohen’s position of embracing the intolerance implicit in claims of the superiority of Jewish monotheism, actually does the least violence to other religious traditions, at least insofar as it allows them to be different.

Second, at least when it comes to morality, scriptural universalism should not be brought into opposition with rational universalism, but the two should be brought into a symbiotic and complementary relationship. Again, Mendelssohn and Kant fall short of Cohen in this regard. Both Mendelssohn and Kant set up an antagonism between revelation and scriptural universalism on the one hand and rational universalism on the other. Although Mendelssohn tries to figure out a way to justify the election of the Jews in regard to responsibility for the Other, at best the connection is only indirect. Most immediately, revelation and the election of the Jews is concomitant with a degradation of
the Other, with the Other's problematic relationship to the eternal truths necessary for eternal felicity. Kant negates scriptural universalism and revelation altogether, rendering religious traditions of mere instrumental value. Such a position eliminates room for any difference, and deprives religious traditions of any intrinsic value. Such a position is quite problematic for tradition-minded adherents of monotheistic traditions. By joining rationality and revelation, and reading revelation as a particular source of rationality, Cohen is able to purify monotheistic religions, ridding them of their violent proclivities. By rendering the notion of God rational and making it the foundation of morality, Cohen is able to not only justify morality on monotheistic grounds, but he can argue for the rational incompatibility of violence and monotheism. Cohen's hermeneutic, stressing the rational development within the literary sources themselves, also allows for more freedom for the interpreters of traditions, allowing them to present their tradition in the most humane and ethically sound light, rather than being bound by the straightforward logic of the texts themselves.

Finally, the third insight we gain is that the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory, or at least Mendelssohn and Cohen, make a strong case for the promise of the bearing witness modality of promulgation for contemporary multicultural societies. To be sure, this logic has by and large been traditionally associated with Judaism, but never exclusively so. What is particularly promising about this modality of promulgation is that it is a peaceful form of intolerance. That is, in bearing witness, one is not passively suffering the practices, beliefs, and actions of the Other that one disapproves of. However, in bearing witness one does not violently impinge upon the rights of the Other. The agency of the Other remains unfettered, as there is no compulsion to accept the
‘truths’ to which one is bearing witness. In this way, the monotheist can be true to the intolerant orbit of the discursive structure of their religion, while nevertheless refraining from trampling upon the rights and agency of the Other.

At this time of crisis regarding religious violence, particularly concerning monotheistic religions, there must be a willingness to acknowledge the intellectual structures and dimensions that constitute these religious traditions. It is not sufficient to demand that they import the principles of tolerance and pluralism, especially when these principles are incompatible with their foundations. An effort must be made to study how violence emerges in the philosophical and theological dynamics of these religions, and how these conditions conducive to violence can be mitigated without destroying the key structures at play in the religion. In this vein, the thinkers of the religion of reason trajectory are an invaluable resource to our contemporary struggle with the crisis of monotheistic violence.

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1 To be sure, I am over simplifying here, as there are counter-trends within these traditions that advocate respect for the Other, but often these are not the loudest voices.
2 Jaffee, “One God, One Revelation, One People,” 760.
3 Assmann, Die Mosaïsche Unterscheidung, 13.
4 Assmann, Die Mosaïsche Unterscheidung, 14.
5 To be sure, for Mendelssohn it is not just morality but also adequate possession of the eternal truths that is necessary for the fulfillment of the universal human telos, eternal felicity. However, I think it is safe to conflate morality and possession of the eternal truths, since morality is impossible according to Mendelssohn without adequate possession of the eternal truths.
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