The Biblical Stranger as an “Originative” Concept in the “Religion of Reason”

Towards the end of his life, Hermann Yehezkel Cohen (1842-1918)[[1]](#footnote-1) revealed the role of religion in his system of Idealistic philosophy. In his later book *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*,[[2]](#footnote-2) Cohen critiqued the Idealistic ethic that he promoted in his youth and developed in his book *The Ethic of Pure Reason*.[[3]](#footnote-3) While he did not dismiss the Idealistic ethic,[[4]](#footnote-4) he did point out its limits – limits which, in his opinion, did not apply to a “religion of reason.” While the philosophical ethic was characterized by its universality and the absolute demand that lay equally upon every man, religion addresses the individual. It is my aim in this study to argue that Cohen saw in the *ger* or “stranger” of the religion of reason an intermediate concept standing between the particular and the universal and properly reflecting the nature of the human individual. Cohen saw the Biblical stranger as the first expression in the religion of reason of the concept of a *Mitmensch* or “fellow,” as distinguishable from the ethic’s concept of a *Nebenmensch*, who was simply another human being.

From Cohen’s writings we can glean two critiques of the Idealistic ethic:

1. Conceptually speaking, the Idealistic ethic does not succeed in establishing relevant ethical distinctions between one man and another.
2. The Idealistic ethic is indifferent to the question of human suffering and the actualization of ethics in reality.

In fact, the Idealistic ethic **obstructs** the application of ethical behavior in reality. This obstruction stems not from any secondary side effects but from its most characteristic elements:

1. **Universality**, the characteristic element of every ethical action, according to Kant.
2. The ethic’s focus on **intent** and its indifference to the result.
3. The scientific **method** of the ethic, which Cohen saw as part of Kant’s method.

**Universality**

According to Kant’s first articulation of the categorical imperative, an act can be considered ethical only if it can be committed in all cases, without exception, and without creating an internal contradiction within the will of the actor.[[5]](#footnote-5) For example, if a man wished to break a promise, he must consider whether he could wish, at that moment, that all men would break their promises; he cannot have such a wish, since no one would trust his fellows’ promises. Since the theoretical universalization of breaking one’s promise creates an internal contradiction within his will, breaking his promise in this case could not be considered an ethical act.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The absolute demand for universality brooks no exceptions. It does not allow a man to see himself or others as exceptions to the rule. It requires each individual to act in an identical fashion both in relation to himself and to others. The absolute equality of all men is the foundation of the ethical act.

This being the case, the absolute demand of ethics to act from a position of universality forbids any biased act that favors any one individual as such. Cohen concludes, then, that the ethical act requires the actor to strip his fellow of all individual characteristics in order to enable him to relate to that fellow as equal to any other human being. With this required erasure of individual differences, ethics cannot recognize the unique suffering of any individual and forbids any unique relationship with him. In Cohen’s words, “What significance would this claim in general [as Thou and not as He] have for ethics, which has no regard for persons, for which each person represents the same symbol of humanity?” (*Religion of Reason*, 15). One must relate to all fellow humans with a kind of leveling that ignores all distinctions between them. This absolute equality engenders an indifference to the suffering of the individual before him, to the suffering of the “Thou.” Every human being is in the category of “He” and any individualized relationship to him runs counter to the general law.

**Intention**

An additional characteristic of the ethical act according to Kant depends on the intention behind it. For an act to be ethical, it must be initiated solely by the recognition of the general law of reason,[[7]](#footnote-7) that is, with the intent to actualize the rational principle itself and not for any ulterior motives whatsoever. A man is forbidden to act in response to his desires, emotions, or in pursuit of his own ends of any kind; in doing so he places reason at the service of external ends, acting according to a conditional command rather than the absolute categorical imperative.

A man may choose not to break a promise in order to earn the esteem of his fellows; in such a case, even though his act would be in accordance with ethical principles, it is not an ethical act, since it is motivated by nonrational factors and as a means to external ends. A man is obligated to keep his promise solely out of his understanding of the universally binding principle and out of a desire to actualize this principle in his deeds, without any consideration of their results.

For an act to be ethical, it must be “pure,” that is, motivated by the *a priori* universal law; the act must not be motivated by the *a posteriori* reality with its caprices and biases, but only by the ethical obligation at hand. In this way does a man actualize his autonomy and act freely, that is, solely based on his reason, which establishes the ethical principle.

The Idealistic ethic, in focusing on the pure intention to actualize the universal law, ignores the results and ramifications of any given ethical act. The question of whether or not a particular act will remedy an actual situation is irrelevant to it. This fact draws the following critique from Cohen: “It must not be a matter of indifference whether my morality and all men’s morality remains dutiful striving only, sufficient in itself; rather, I have to take an interest in the question of whether the ideal has life and actuality” (p. 20-21). It does not suffice a man to be faithful to an ethical law; he must act in such a way that his action benefits the world and improves the current situation.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**The Method**

In his book *The Ethic of Pure Will*, Cohen accepts the essential characteristics of Kantian ethics, while critiquing Kant for methodological laxity in *The Critique of Practical Reason*.[[9]](#footnote-9) In that book, Kant employs the methodology of “the Transcendental Deduction”; he analyzes the personal “experience” and reveals the implicit categories of cognition operating at its foundation. Cohen points out that Kant’s categories are derived from Newtonian science, that is, from a preexisting cultural institution, and not from an unmediated empirical experience.

This interpretation supports his Idealistic conceptualization that posits spontaneous reason alone as the foundation of “reality.” The “facts” are not “givens” that are presented to science outside of reason but are rather comprehended by and conditioned upon the scientific theory that establishes them.[[10]](#footnote-10) Philosophy does not clarify the mode of cognition in an unmediated way but rather through the medium of the given cultural and historic institution, which itself has already been unconsciously shaped by reason. The proper method then is to reveal the mode of cognition at play through a clarification of the fundamental assumptions that underpin the relevant cultural institutions.

Such is Kant’s method in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, but in *The Critique of Practical Reason* he posits the categorical imperative in an unmediated manner. According to Cohen, “Ethics can set up its own logic only by analogy to science” (p. 67). This being so, Kant had to arrive at the ethical command of the pure will through the transcendental decree that clarifies the fundamental ideals of the cultural institutions underlying his ethics. According to Cohen, legal theory, civil law and international agreements are the cultural institutions of ethics, and it is the role of the philosophy of ethics to clarify their fundamental assumptions.

Cohen rectifies this deficiency in his book *The Ethic of Pure Reason*, and in revealing the axioms at play in these cultural institutions it became clear to him that the ideal standing at the basis of ethics is not the universal law (as Kant reasoned it was) but rather the person as subject. Personhood is the “originative” concept of ethics. The meaning of this assertion is that the laws of morality as developed in the human consciousness and expressed through the state and its laws are not derived from physical reality and current circumstance but from the *a priori* idea of personhood deduced through reason.

**The Originative Principle**

Cohen made use of “the originative principle” that he developed in his logic to derive the ideal underpinning ethics.[[11]](#footnote-11) According to this principle, reason pursues the origin of every concept, seeking out its source in another, more fundamental concept. In keeping with Cohen’s Idealism, this origin is conceptual and cannot exist in empirical reality, since it is derived from reason alone.

The origin of every concept is found in its opposite, since it cannot exist within it. This origin cannot be found in the absolute opposite of the concept but rather in the relative opposite, which allows for continuity between the two. The originative principle allows for the overcoming of the opposition between the concept and its opposite through what Cohen refers to as “privation.” Rather than conceive of the opposition as the negation of the given concept, the ambiguity of both should be used in a constructive manner, ameliorating the opposition and viewing the opposing concept as the lack of the given concept. The shift from negation to privation converts the original statement, in which the object is negated by the subject, into an “infinite statement” that negates the object and affirms it at one and the same time.[[12]](#footnote-12)

For example, rather than seeing rest as the negation of movement (as Zeno posited), one should view it as the lack of motion (as Galileo did). Rest is not the absolute opposite of motion but rather an infinitely small motion, and so rest serves as the differential of motion. Rest is the “origin” of motion and is the pure expression of the principle of motion without being actualized. In such a way is a continuity constructed between rest and motion; rest contains motion within it as potential.[[13]](#footnote-13) The origin of every concept can similarly be found in its corresponding privation.

This process continues *ad infinitum*, since every origin requires its own origin, and every new origin establishes new “facts,” which are themselves new concepts. So does reason move continually in reverse, its path ever expanding, as it arrives at more and more primary origins, and continually forward to new facts held within its conceptual net. The originative principle expresses the continuity of reason through the continuity of concepts.

The “transcendental decree” of Idealism can be briefly described as follows. Idealism begins with the citizen, the “I” in its legal understanding as established by the state. The next step is to seek out the origin of this “I,” which is to be found in the corresponding “privation of the I,” which does not negate it (as do the categories of mineral, vegetable, and animal, which stand in absolute opposition to the personal I); rather, the privation contains the purest conception of the “I.” The “I” exists as a citizen only in relation to another citizen. The “Thou” is the origin of the “I” and is the differential that contains the “I” as citizen within it.[[14]](#footnote-14) The next step is to reveal the origin of this “other” citizen, which at once both opposes it and contains its relationship to the “I.” The origin of the other is in the group, in the self-awareness of the ethical subject that “he is an ‘I’ only to the extent that he is a ‘We’.”[[15]](#footnote-15) From here Cohen arrives at the state, which unites its citizens in contractual relationship.

Since the foundation of civil law is in this contract that unites the citizens in functional relationships with one another, each individual is defined as the differential of pure personhood stripped of its concreteness, found in functional relationships to the other differentials. These citizen subjects are stripped of all their individual characteristics and placed, as it were, behind the “veil of ignorance,” with no relation to their individual uniqueness. So reason moves from the concept of “the individual” to that of “the many,” from the abstract individual to the group, united by social contract. However, the ideal states, too, are united by international contracts, relationships that allow them to be conceived of as one unit. So reason moves from the relative “many” of the state to the complete “totality” of humanity. The totality *is* humanity, expressing the infinite unity of all individuals. We can compare, then, humanity in its abstraction to the perfect subject, in which we can distinguish abstract individuals who exist in functional relationship to one another.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Since the ethical ideal is humanity as a totality, the pure will of Idealism is the will that holds humanity as its end. Every man must act as a part of the “Kingdom of Ends,” seeing his own humanity and that of others as an end and not only a means. In this way did Cohen succeed in joining the two essential articulations of Kant’s categorical imperative, the formula of universality and the formula of man as an end. The individual man must act from his identification with humanity *en toto* – in Cohen’s words, “In ethics, the I of man becomes the I of humanity” (p. 13) – and relate identically to every man and to himself. The moral imperative demands that we see every man as an end and relate to him without any form of favoritism.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Cohen’s change in methodology created a certain differentiation within Kant’s abstract totality. Since the state by its nature is a system of legal relationships between people, it contains the person within it not as a discrete individual but rather as one citizen standing alongside another and in legal relationship to him. Even so, the Idealistic ethic recognizes only the *Nebenmensch*, “the next man,” since he has been stripped of his concrete characteristics, and not the *Mitmensch*, “the fellowman” who stands facing him in his uniqueness. Every man in the state is a citizen in the sense of a “He,” to the same extent as his fellow.[[18]](#footnote-18) Idealism does not recognize the individual person and so does not recognize the suffering of the individual, but only the abstract citizen of the Kingdom of Ends who stands at the intersection of the laws of the state. The scientific nature of Idealism does not allow it to consider the actual person, with his weaknesses and needs.[[19]](#footnote-19)

**Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism**

In his later years, Cohen applied the method of the Transcendental Deduction to “the sources of Judaism,” conceived by him to be an institution of the religion of reason.[[20]](#footnote-20) In revealing the fundamental concepts of the religion of reason that stood at the basis of these texts, Cohen took an additional step. Instead of identical subjects standing in functional relationship to one another as “He” and “He,” Cohen revealed in the religion of reason various types of subjects that could be distinguished from one another as “I,” “Thou,” and “He” or, in their proper developmental sequence, “He,” “Thou,” and “I”; “He” serves as the basis of Idealism and “Thou” is revealed in the concept of the fellowman in the religion of reason, a concept it shares with Idealism, while the “I” is unique to the religion of reason.[[21]](#footnote-21) The religion of reason succeeds in founding a morality based on the conceptualization of the distinction between “He” and “Thou,” in contrast to Idealism, which erases the uniqueness of the “Thou.”

How did the religion of reason succeed in establishing the concept of the fellowman where Idealism had failed? How did the religion of reason succeed in differentiation between various types of subjects? What is the ethical point of view unique to religion that enabled it to identify something that Idealism failed to see? Cohen was not interested in the man as perceived by the senses; such a man could not serve as the object of rational ethics. The primary question is, how did the religion of reason succeed in revealing the uniqueness of the person, despite the fact that it did so through the tools of reason?

We can identify various answers scattered throughout Cohen’s book on the differences between Idealism and religion, but I would argue that his primary argument depends on the **structural** difference between Idealism and religion stemming from their respective fundamental concepts. These concepts create a structural variation between ethics and religion; the concept of personhood found at the basis of Idealism creates a monistic structure, while religion’s concept of God creates a dualistic structure. I will first explain what is common to both Idealism and the religion of reason, then clarify how their respective axioms create differing epistemological structures, and finally show how these structures conceptualize differently the identity of the subjects in any given field.

As mentioned above, the originative concept of Idealistic ethics is that of humanity as a totality or as an absolute subject. In contradistinction to this, the originative concept of the religion of reason is the uniqueness of God. This uniqueness, expressed through the unity of God, who stands apart from the multifaceted reality of the senses, is also interpreted by Cohen as the ideal of an absolute subject. These two concepts (the concept of humanity in Idealism and the uniqueness of God in the religion of reason) are analogous, since both express the distinction between the ideal and the empirical reality and both make the demand on each person to act out of an identification with this distinction, that is, from the *a priori* principle that precedes reality. In both cases, this principle is expressed in the demand for action stemming from universality. Idealism obligates a man to adopt the “I of humanity” in his actions towards others, while the religion of reason obligates a man to strive to be like God and walk in his ways.

Cohen locates this characteristic of God (as a discrete subject) in the story of God’s revelation at the burning bush. In this story, God appears to Moses by the name “I will be what I will be” (Ex. 3:14). Cohen sees this as a foundational story of the religion of reason, attesting to its rational bases: he writes, “among all the wonders of style in the books of Moses, the greatest is perhaps the account of the *first* origin of monotheism” (p. 42).

According to Cohen’s analysis, this story reveals three features of God:

* God is a being identifiable only with himself (An “I will be” that can only be described through a repetition of the phrase “I will be”) in contradistinction to all other forms of empirical reality. As such there is a parallel between the Biblical God and the transcendental ideal of reality.
* The God of the Bible is universal despite his relationship with Israel. God’s nature is unchanging and will remain unchanged in the future. His name “I will be,” conjugated in the future tense, is “forever, [his] appellation for eternity” (Ex. 3:15). Therefore, although he is the God of Israel in the present, he remains the God of humanity (p. 43).
* God is revealed as the God of ethics and not the God of nature. He is a being of an I, and not of a substance (p. 46), and as such is analogous to the subject of ethics and not the object of science.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Cohen points out that, although God stands in contradistinction to reality, that is, being, he is the “origin” of being. In this sense God is referred to as “Creator” in the religion of reason. As a subject he is the origin of human action, and so is conceived of as commanding. Let me clarify these two claims. First, we must do away with the pantheistic idea that combines God and the world. In calling God “Creator,” the intent is not that God is actually involved in the world, and in claiming that he gives commands the intent is not that he is involved in human action.[[23]](#footnote-23) Such an idea would contradict God’s separateness and enter the realm of pantheism, which is contrary to Idealism. According to Idealism, which Cohen upheld, ideals logically precede empirical reality and enable their existence. They are distinct from empirical reality and take no part in it. As such they are “pure” in the critical sense of Kantian philosophy. This being the case, we must understand these two descriptors of God in a non-literal way. God is the creator in that his being is the logical precondition that enables causal being, that is, the existence of the world of objects, and God gives commands in that God, as an “I,” is the logical precondition that enables functional being, that is, the human intentional act in its precise meaning, an ethical deed.

The characteristics of God as one who commands finds concrete expression, according to Cohen, in the Torah’s demand, “Be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). God’s holiness marks his separateness from the world. He is parallel to an ethical ideal in that in his holiness he obligates a man to sanctify himself. Cohen interprets this obligation to mean a man is required to imitate God’s separateness,[[24]](#footnote-24) acting not from within the *a posteriori* realm of biases and benefits operative in the material world, but from the pure *a priori* foundation of ethics. The transcendence of God as subject places the obligation upon man to imitate God and so to divest himself from the material world and to identify with the proper ideal, that is, the universality of humanity as subject.

As such, it would seem that the demands of Idealism and religion are the same. What, then, actually distinguishes them? How, despite the similarity between Idealism and the religion of reason, did the latter succeed in relating to the “Thou” using ethical tools?

As mentioned above, the profound difference between them is reflected in their fundamental concepts and their deep structures. While Idealism demands that a man identify with the universal and act exclusively from that identification, religion does not demand **identification** with God but rather **approximation** to him. Idealism’s demand to identify with the ideal of humanity creates a monistic structure in which the individual must be swallowed up within the universal, while the demand of religion to **draw close** to God, with no pretense of becoming one with him, creates a dualistic and correlative structure that preserves the distinction between man and God and prevents his absorption into the divine.

Since Idealism posits the ideal of humanity and each individual is a human, every man must hold to the absolute demand to identify fully with his own humanity. His own “I” must become the “I” of humanity. As such, he is not permitted to act in any way that acknowledges the uniqueness of another person; he must relate in identical fashion to every other person. Idealism’s strict observance of this absolute demand disallows the possibility of partiality towards another person.

In contrast, since the ideal of the religion of reason is God, and since man is human and not divine, the individual is obligated to act according to the demand to draw closer to God’s holiness; he is not required, since he is not able, to identify with this holiness. Only God is **holy**, while man is commanded only to **be holy**, that is, to act in a way that brings one closer to God’s holiness. Only God can represent the fulfillment of the universal demand; man can only **draw closer** to it but never fully realize it. This being the case, the religion of reason allows a person to relate to the suffering of a particular individual and be partial to him. The absolute God, who relates to all humanity in the same way, makes the concession, out of his **goodness**, to the limited human to relate to particular individuals outside of the totality of humanity. In Cohen’s words, “The latter [action], however, can never be completed; it can only persist in the elevating of the task” (p. 111).[[25]](#footnote-25)

Cohen finds this approach in the expression “holy spirit,” which Psalm 51 attributes to a person and not to God (in contrast to the Christian concept that attributes the holy spirit to God and in so doing approximates the pantheistic conception). The holy spirit is the spirit of a man when it is directed towards the holiness of God. It is the “practical reason” of religion, as opposed to the “pure reason” of ethical idealism. In contrast to pure reason, which allows no room for compromise and brooks no biased act, the holy spirit allows for bias, *on the condition that it is directed towards absolute holiness*. This necessary condition prevents the human act from straying beyond partiality into arbitrariness and ethical failure. In order to understand this condition, we must first clarify Cohen’s interpretation of the relationship between God and the world.

The relationship between God and the world, which earns God the title of Creator, serves as a paradigm for the understanding of the relationship between God and man as well. This is not the place to analyze Cohen’s interpretation of the concept of Biblical creation, but I will point out a number of relevant points. As mentioned above, Cohen rejects the pantheistic conceptualization that posits an actual continuity between God and the world; such a concept does not recognize the separateness of God and can slide into mythology. Cohen identifies the world as a form of being that stands over against the perfect existence of God. The world as being contains within it a privation,[[26]](#footnote-26) since it is not a complete existence, and so we must look for its origin in its opposite, that is, in the perfect existence of God. So, according to Cohen’s originative principle, existence is the origin of being, and a way must be found to bridge the distinction. To this end, Cohen uses his innovation regarding “the infinite statement,” which negates according to its form and affirms according to its content. God as existence serves as the origin of being through the infinite negation of its privation; that is to say, the existence of God serves as the origin of the eternal being of the world through the eternal negation of its privation.

The profound significance of this claim is that the ideal of God (existence) serves as a logical basis for the advance of science (being). The ideal of the object stands at the base of the scientific process. Science subverts the understanding of the world as a perfect object containing all of its parts as a unity of causal relationships. Science is the real world, since it reflects the rational world and thereby finds confirmation of its existence, in contrast to the pre-scientific empirical world, the existence of which is shrouded in darkness, given that it is irrational.[[27]](#footnote-27) This is how Cohen interprets the assertion that God “in his goodness renews the works of Creation every day, continuously.” The perfect existence of God confirms the gradations of being that are constantly being renewed in creation. The language of religion refers to the corroboration of the intermediate gradations of being as “providence.” Divine providence is the guarantee of the advancement of the world.

The correct understanding of the relationship between the perfect existence of God and the eternal being of the world provides a paradigm for all types of relationships between God and the other institutions of reason. This being so, the absolute existence of God also corroborates the partial sanctification of man vis-à-vis the holiness of God. God answers, as it were, man’s request, “Fashion a pure heart for me, O God; create in me a steadfast spirit” (Ps. 51:12) (*Religion of Reason*, 139), and he affirms the renewed spirit of man despite its remaining deficiencies on the condition that it is directed toward absolute holiness. Here too the existence of God must be understood as a logical precondition of the renewal of the ethical man and the development of human institutions such as law and the state. The ideal of God as subject serves as a foundation for this ethical advancement, and by the same token affirms its intermediate stages; that is, it permits a person’s imperfectly ethical act.

In order to avoid the devolution of an imperfectly ethical act into caprice and corruption, a man must attune his spirit to the universality of holiness. The religion of reason recognizes the incomplete nature of the human act and affirms it, so long as it is constantly renewed and does not sanctify its own incompleteness. An act towards a fellowman is not made in contradistinction to the totality of humanity but in anticipation of it. Since a man cannot address the suffering of all humanity, he is permitted to focus his ethical efforts on the suffering of the individual and the group that stand before him. He is forbidden, however, to see the individual in contradistinction to the rest of humanity; rather, he must see him as preceding and expressing it, for God is the God of humanity. Focusing one’s efforts on one individual allows for a deepening of those efforts, and enables ethical action on the way to addressing the suffering of all humanity.

Descriptions of divine action express the tension between partiality and universality. Holiness as a positive attribute can only be attributed to God, in that it expresses his separateness, but descriptors of divine action are not descriptors of the divine essence, “but rather conceptually determined models for the action of man” (p. 95). These descriptors are interpreted by Cohen as practical norms that **man** derives **through his own reason**, through the holiness of God, as practical principles of action derived through autonomous reason in the light of divine holiness. God’s holiness is an ideal that cannot be imitated but which serves as an ideal for human action (p. 162). This being so, there is but one ethic, but there are many virtues (p. 400). The thirteen attributes of mercy that are derived from the holiness of God are models for human behavior and are divided into two primary categories: justice and compassion. Justice reflects the absolute demand of equalizing ethics while compassion reflects the demand of the second category, recognized by the incomplete nature of the human act.

Cohen finds a prime expression of this idea in the messianic vision of the prophets whose visions were of a **future** totality of humanity and by the same token acknowledged God’s choosing of Israel in the **present**. The ideal perfection of the human act will come into existence in the messianic future, in which humanity will become one, but in the actual historical process we must recognize partial distinctions within humanity, which is divided into various groups. The choice of Israel is not to the exclusion of humanity but rather anticipates the divine relationship to all of humanity as actualized in Israel. The religion of reason, therefore, allows compromised human action, provided that it looks beyond the present and directs itself towards the messianic future of all humanity. The imperfect act must be in correlation with the perfected whole, an ideal it does not yet have to have achieved.

The conceptual framework of the religion of reason, as presented above, in its meeting with reality and all of its problems, is one which establishes the stranger as an intermediary concept and exhausts its full significance in the process of historical development. Cohen, as mentioned above, refers to the stranger as an “intermediary concept,” but I would argue that we should view it as an “originative” concept, since it holds within it the future development of other concepts and because it is intended to bridge the opposition between the concepts of Jew and gentile and preserve the continuity between them. In the following sections I will show how this understanding illuminates Cohen’s words and provides much greater specificity to our understanding of them.

**Unifying Concepts**

Idealism is by nature universalist, but the religion of reason is an ethical conception located between the particular and the universal. So, the Biblical stranger, who stands between the particular and the universal, profoundly reflects its nature.

The literature of the Jews, as primary in its origin as it is, is a national literature. This characteristic of a primary origin has been and remains the common feature of Jewish literature; to the extent to which primary origin is preserved. Its primary origin, however, consists in, and is rooted in, the idea of the unique God. The words “Hear, O Israel” and “the Eternal is Unique” complement each other. The spirit of Israel is determined by the idea of the unique God. Everything that comes forth from the spirit of Israel comes forth just as much from the unique God as it does from national spirit in its primary origin and peculiarity (p. 24).

The gulf between the national character of Judaism and its universal content, founded on the idea of the unique God, demands an explanation. Therefore, in the process of advancement of the monotheistic consciousness, certain unifying concepts have been at play that were intended to bridge the gap between the division of humanity into nations in the historical present and the future ideal of the commonality of humankind. These unifying concepts express the acceptance of a partially realized reality on the one hand and the impulse towards true unity on the other (p. 115). As mentioned above, the perfect existence of God affirms the intermediary levels of human reality. At the same time, it demands of man that he not settle for the current level but rather strive constantly for its improvement.

The Biblical “stranger,” the “son of Noah” in the lexicon of the Talmud, and the Maimonidean “pious of the peoples of the world” are all unifying concepts formulated for this purpose over the course of Jewish literary history. Cohen identifies a development in these concepts; the “stranger” is a **civil** concept and the “son of Noah” an **ethical** one, while the “pious of the peoples of the world” is “the religious expression of morality” (p. 123). This development stems from the concept of the stranger that holds within it the impulse to evolve in just such a way.

The Biblical stranger is a civil concept in that it establishes the proper relationship to the non-Jew living in the “state,” that is, among the Jews in their land. The second concept, which developed out of this idea in the literature of the Talmudic sages, is that of the “son of Noah.” This is an ethical category, in that it defines the position of every human through the command to fulfill the “seven laws of the sons of Noah.” These commandments are the first revelation of the idea of “natural law” as a universal ethic.[[28]](#footnote-28) The concept of the “son of Noah” is based on the assumption that revelation did not begin at Sinai and had already occurred in the covenant with Noah, the father of humanity, though this covenant began as a universal ethic expressed solely through law. This legal-universalist ethic preceded the particularist religion of reason, which is expressed as love. Cohen stresses that the first of these seven laws, according to their Talmudic numeration, is “juridical institutes” (Gerichtsverfassung), that is, the formation of a legal-moral system, expressing the fact that ethics preceded religion. The seven Noahide laws, which were granted to all humanity as an expression of the value of law, were transformed at Sinai into the 613 commandments given to Israel as an expression of love (p. 328). Cohen alludes unmistakably to the fact that the Idealistic ethic, with its absolute demands (law), preceded the religion of reason, which is satisfied with approaching them (love).

The next concept, which was developed in Jewish legal literature from the concept of the “son of Noah” and found summary in the writings of Maimonides, is that of “the pious among the peoples of the world.” As noted above, Cohen characterized this concept as “the **religious** expression of morality.” The reason for this is implied within the relationship between “piety” and the non-Jew. Piety is different from the fulfillment of the ethical law and stems from the religious position of standing before God (p. 329). Maimonides’ assertion in the *Mishneh Torah* that “the pious of the peoples of the world have a place in the world to come” (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 3:5) summarizes the Talmudic position. Cohen interprets this assertion in accordance with his fundamentally Idealistic worldview. The immortality of the human soul is what grants the pious of the peoples of the world equal religious-moral rights. In Cohen’s opinion, Maimonides’ assertion draws from the Mishnaic statement, “Every Jew has a place in the world to come” (Sanhedrin 10:1). This is to say that the rational recognition of the basic equality of all human souls as immortal is what grants the pious of the peoples of the world equal citizenship alongside Israel in the world to come. The world to come, however, is only an idealization of this world. “By the means of immortality the concept of the soul has elevated the concept of man above the differences of peoples and even of religions” (p. 330).

This echoes Plato’s statement that “The soul is not assumed for the sake of immortality, but immortality for the sake of the soul” (p. 333). Through immortality, Plato intended “to bring out the concept of the soul as sum total of consciousness” (p. 335). Similarly, in the religion of reason, since the soul is not the scientific spirit but rather the moral spirit, that is to say, the holy spirit, immortality is intended to express the equal relationship of every human being with God (p. 335). This conceptual development stems from the practical-religious-pure reason, from the holy spirit, which unites within itself the state, morality, and religion through its understanding of the concept of man. Only the concept of man, lifted above national differences, is able to take the concepts of “stranger” and “son of Noah” and derive from them the concept of “the pious of the peoples of the world.”

**The Stranger as an “Originative” Principle**

The verse, “You shall have one law for the stranger and for the citizen, for I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 24:22) provides, in Cohen’s eyes, the rationale for equality between the stranger and the citizen. “This reasoning is quite instructive: it deduces the law pertaining to the stranger from monotheism” (p. 125). This is to say that the unity of God, which stands at the basis of the religion of reason, is what undergirds the equality of humans and what establishes legal equality between the stranger and the citizen. The Biblical stranger, however, is not part of Israel. As noted above, Cohen interprets this expression according to its contextual Scriptural meaning, referring to a non-Jewish stranger living among Jews, and not as a non-Jew who is about to convert to Judaism.

Conceptually speaking, the “stranger” can be seen as being in opposition to the Jew and to count the people of Israel among the other nations. According to this understanding, the statement “The stranger is not a Jew” is a negative one, in which the object negates the subject and indicates an opposition between them. The Biblical command to relate to the stranger as an equal, however, would indicate that underneath this statement lies a different understanding of the relationship between the Jew and the stranger. This opposition is not absolute but rather relative, negating and affirming at one and the same time. Therefore, according to Cohen’s originative principle, we should soften the opposition and understand the relationship between Jew and stranger as a statement of privation, or an infinite statement: “the stranger is the privation of a Jew.” The stranger is not an actual Jew, but he is the differential of Jewishness. He expresses Jewishness even before actualizing such an identity.

In what way can we see in the non-Jewish stranger a Jew? We must search for the appropriate privation that underlies the continuity between the concepts of “stranger” and “Jew.” The ambiguity in the term “stranger” can be instructive, highlighting the aspect of equality between him and the Jew. This ambiguity is used in the Bible in order to associate him with the economically marginalized groups; he is listed multiple times with the Levite and the Jewish orphan and widow, all of whom lack property (p. 147). This being the case, from the point of view of his economic position, the stranger is grouped with the Jewish poor and they all suffer from the same poverty. The conclusion to be drawn is that the economic condition of poverty is the common human element shared by the stranger and the Jew, establishing continuity between the concepts.

An argument could be raised against this continuity specifically in the name of religion. It would have been possible to distinguish between the stranger and the Jewish poor, since the stranger does not fulfill the commandments of the God of Judaism. The prophets of the religion of reason could have ascribed the stranger’s poverty to his sins and argued to their public that his poverty was not like that of a Jew, that it was arranged by divine providence, which pays man according to his deeds, and was in fact punishment for his sins, while the poor of Israel suffer for other reasons. The prophets, however, refrained from ascribing the stranger’s suffering to his sins. The demand of the religion of reason to relate to the stranger’s poverty and to come to his aid points to the fact that it does not see his suffering as an expression of divine justice. In this dual significance of the stranger, related to the question of whether or not to see him as a sinner or a pauper, the religion of reason chose to define him as a pauper. In this way did the religion of reason separate the suffering of the stranger from his sins, allow for continuity between him and the poor of Israel, and offer a different explanation for his poverty.

The religion of reason commands us, then, to relate to the stranger’s suffering without raising the question of his guilt. Why? Cohen offers two explanations. First, the guilt or innocence of a man is always shrouded in darkness and cannot be evaluated from the outside, and so can never truly be used as a measure of morality. Guilt is a matter of a man’s relationship with himself, and in Cohen’s thought serves as the basis for the conceptual derivation of the “I,” which I will not address at the moment (p. 129).[[29]](#footnote-29) Secondly, a direct connection between suffering and sin negates the moral distinction between good and bad; instead of being judged by their acts, people would be judged by their successes or failures. “The distinction between good and bad comes to nothing if it coincides with the distinction of well-being and ill” (p. 133). Removing the question of guilt from a case of personal suffering deepens a man’s moral judgment in the distinction between good and bad and allows him to foster the proper relationship to suffering. Removing the question of guilt from a case of a suffering man allows pity (Mitleid) to flood one’s consciousness and enables a practical response to the suffering itself.

As noted, according to the religion of reason, the suffering of the stranger is represented by his poverty. Cohen is taken by the fact that it is specifically poverty that is chosen as the representative of human suffering and analyzes its significance. First, poverty can be rationally comprehended and practically addressed, unlike metaphysical suffering (such as death and the resulting distances created between people) which is indefinable and cannot be related to rationally (p. 134).[[30]](#footnote-30) So does the rationality of the religion of reason find expression, delineating the arena of moral action as those problems which can be understood and addressed and excluding those problems that cannot be solved by man. Practical reason demands efficacious morality (p. 131).

Secondly, in establishing poverty as the representative of suffering, the religion of reason posits economic suffering as true and not as imagined suffering. Contrary to Stoa, who saw suffering as an illusion (p. 132), prophecy saw poverty as true suffering. Cohen attributes this to the fact that the prophetic religious consciousness was wrapped up in both civil and moral concerns. The relation of the prophetic consciousness to the problems of the state prevented it from seeing distinctions between good and bad as individually subjective ones. “But when well-being and ill are actualized objectively in the social differences of poor and rich, the indifference toward them becomes insecurity, frivolity, cruelty” (p. 132).

From here it is but a few steps to understanding the proper explanation of the stranger’s suffering. As mentioned, this suffering should not be seen as punishment for his sins. Cohen finds a fitting model to explain the stranger’s suffering in the prophetic idea of the “Servant of the LORD” (Isa. 53) who suffers for the sins of all. The poor man and the stranger both suffer for the sins of the entire public. Poverty is “the symptomatic sign of the sickness of the state” (p. 23), born out of the faults of society and its economic order. The stranger is not guilty for his poverty but is rather a sacrifice to the economic corruption that awaits correction (p. 265).

Most of the human race has experienced the suffering of poverty in every generation. The worst of this suffering lies not in the physical pain that accompanies it but in the social distress, which amounts to spiritual suffering. We are obligated to see this suffering and to understand it “as a prevailing reality of consciousness; it fills the entire human consciousness” (p. 135). Economic suffering, then, is one of the most profound characteristics of humanity, which every human, regardless of his station, takes some part in. “I cannot be indifferent to poverty, because it is a sign of the distress of culture” (p. 136). Ignoring the suffering of the poor is paramount to ignoring the suffering of humanity. “Thus the poor man typifies man in general” (p. 136). When a man sympathizes with this suffering, when the feeling of this fellow’s suffering fills his consciousness too, [he/it] testifies to this fundamental aspect of humanity.

Suspending the question of the stranger’s guilt allows a Jew to be open to the contemplation of his suffering and enables the feeling of sharing in his suffering to flood his consciousness. The poor man is a pure economic abstraction, and such an abstraction cannot arouse our sympathy. The stranger is the concrete representative (p. 147), and he can arouse the “primeval feeling” of compassion (p. 143). On the other hand, in the case of compassion towards the poor of Israel, there would be room to suspect that it was nothing but self-love that was extended to relatives, a sensory reflex that was no different from the emotions of the primitive brain.[[31]](#footnote-31) Therefore, in the religion of reason, compassion is first directed towards the suffering of the **tangible** and **foreign** stranger, beginning with the tangible and expanding beyond him. Only afterwards was compassion revealed in love and then broadened to include love for the fellow.

Cohen attempts to describe the stages in the development of love as a moral force in the religion of reason, speculating on it as he addresses Jewish sources, juxtaposing them to mythological ones and contrasting the place of love in each. In his opinion, love was transformed into a moral force since it grew out of the feeling of compassion towards suffering and did not develop out of sexuality, as it did in mythology. Locating love’s origin in compassion uprooted it from the semantic field of the esthetic and planted it in the field of ethics. Mythology began with sexual love and from there developed the love of the heroic and the beautiful. The religion of reason transferred love from mythology’s semantic field of the sensual love of the sexes and the esthetic love of heroes to the semantic field of moral love of the fellow, since it developed from compassion towards the suffering of the stranger (p. 144).

Cohen bases his claim on the fact that the Torah commands the **love** of the stranger: “Love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10:19). Typically, and as represented by mythology, love belongs to the sexual realm. How, then, are we to understand the phrase, “love of the stranger”? It is impossible to understand the foundation of this love, so contrary to the love of beauty we encounter in mythology, without relating emotionally to the suffering of the stranger and his poverty. The beautiful are not to be loved, but those who suffer. Since the fundamental emotional response to suffering (Leiden) is compassion, meaning joining in another’s suffering (Mitleid), the foundation of the love of the stranger is located in compassion, which evolves into love. The Torah expresses such empathy when it says, “you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 23:9). “This is an appeal to one’s own heart, for one knows the mood of the stranger. This, however, is recourse to pity” (p. 145-46). Moreover, rooting the command to love the stranger in the Jewish experience of exile in Egypt shows that the Torah succeeds in isolating the gratitude for the time spent in Egypt from the suffering caused to the Jews by their enslavement there. In a similar way does it isolate the stranger’s suffering from the question of his guilt.

The command, “Be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy,” opens Chapter 19 of Leviticus. In this very chapter appears the command to love one’s fellowman as well as to love the stranger. As noted, this command is the foundation of religious ethics in Cohen’s thought:

Verses 17 and 18 in chapter 19 of Leviticus, which reveal the so-called love for the neighbor, are elucidated by verses 33 and 34 of the same chapter, which are as follows: “and if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not do him wrong. The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the homeborn among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Eternal your God” (Ex. 22:20) (p. 127).

The commandment to “Love your fellow as yourself” does not apply only to fellow Jews, but to the poor, including the non-Jewish stranger. Moreover, according to Cohen’s claim, the commandment to love the stranger **preceded** the commandment to love one’s fellow. The verse, “Love him as yourself” (Lev. 19:34), which refers to the stranger, is the first such expression and precedes the verse “Love your fellow as yourself” (Lev. 19:18), which is more general and later. Only after love received its moral character from its origin in compassion, as conceived by the religion of reason, was it possible to expand this love and to apply it to one’s fellow as well.

Cohen interprets the debate between Ben Azzai and R. Akiva over which is the greatest principle in the Torah in keeping with his methodology.

“Love your fellow as yourself” (Lev. 19:18); R. Akiva says, “This is a great principle in the Torah.” Ben Azzai says, “‘This is the record of Adam’s line’ (Gen. 5:1); this is a greater principle.” (Jerusalem Talmud, *Nedarim* 9:4).

Ben Azzai suggests an ethical viewpoint founded upon the “totality” of humanity whereas R. Akiva promotes the ethical viewpoint of the religion of reason, which places the fellow man at its foundation. However, it is clear that, according to Cohen, R. Akiva’s position too is fundamentally based on a universalist ethic. The demand for equality expressed in the words “as yourself” proves that, prior to the limiting clause “your fellow,” Scripture sees that fellow as first and foremost a human being (p. 119-120).

The fact that the religion of reason begins with love of the stranger shows that love of one’s fellow is not limited to fellow Jews. The fact that it begins with compassion for the stranger shows that its true origin is not in the sensory-egoistic feelings of personhood but rather in the universalistic moral relationship to other humans. The stranger is the originative concept of the Jew, expressing the human suffering in which all humanity takes part. The recognition of the suffering of those outside the nation and beyond the unmediated feelings of kinship purifies this feeling of its corporeality. So the stranger becomes in the religion of reason the archetypal human.

The unique relation to the stranger expresses the liminal position of the religion of reason on the border between the particular and the universal. This is so because on the one hand the stranger belongs to a limited and discrete group, since there is no demand to love all of humanity, and because on the other hand this love expresses the transcendence of these limits for the whole, since it crosses the boundaries of national love.

Moreover, the demand to love the stranger is repeatedly explained by the fact that the Jews themselves were a nation of strangers in Egypt. Cohen groups the slave with the stranger and posits Egypt as the foundation of national memory, since in it the Jews were both slaves and strangers (p. 125). He argues that it was precisely the lowly position of Israel that establishes the idea of Israel as the Chosen People. God chose Israel because its suffering represents the human condition. “If God loves the poor, he must also love Israel, who is exposed to all kinds and gradations of suffering, while the worshipers of idols lead their proud existence” (p. 148). The choosing of Israel is the choosing of all humanity and, more precisely, the choosing of humanity for suffering a lack of perfection.

Only God can love all people equally. “Of course, all men are poor in God’s view” (p. 148). So God’s love for the stranger, the poor, and the Jews serves as a touch point in history, at the end of which “He [God] will love men as a *totality*” (p. 148). A man can only love some other men, but he is forbidden to stop there. “Love of the stranger” is a partial love leading to an eternal expansion and so becomes a marker of the religion of reason.

Love of one’s fellow is a marker of the religion of reason in contrast to the pure will of Idealism. Love is by nature a selective emotion, turning one man’s favor towards another, but the religion of reason purified love of its arbitrary corporeality by combining it with compassion and linking it to one’s fellow. As such it recognizes love as a moral force standing in correlation to the pure will despite its imperfection.[[32]](#footnote-32)

In contrast to Idealism, which sees love, compassion, and mercy as biases on which a moral act cannot be based, since they derive from subjective elements within a person and are not universal, Cohen reasons that if motivated by justice, that is, by the absolute demand of human dignity, compassion and love can be purified from personal subjectivity by the effort towards unity of consciousness, by the unification of emotion and reason with the pure will. These forces preserve, therefore, their uniqueness within the human consciousness, but they exist in correlation with one another. The man of the religion of reason is recognized by his striving to unite within himself reason, will, and emotion. It is not pure reason alone as in Idealism, nor is it pure passion as in myth. The religion of reason, which recognizes human imperfection, formulates a new conception of man, combining reason and emotion into a single conscious unity. As such it charges reason with the active forces of powerful human emotions and purifies these emotions through reason. This combination of reason and emotion expresses incompletion striving for totality.

1. The first intellectual biography of Hermann Cohen was written by Franz Rosenzweig: *Naharyaim – Selected Writings* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: ??, 1978), 109-53. For a different approach to Cohen’s biography, see Moshe Meir, “The Life of Hermann Cohen – An Intellectual Biography” (Hebrew) in *Thought in Jewish Education* (Hebrew) 5-6 (2003-4), 25-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (New York: ??, 1972). The original German version was published as *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Auflage Wiesbaden: ??, 1995). The first edition was published after his death in 1918. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hermann Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens* (Berlin: ??, 1902). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cohen’s interpreters differ over whether he broke with his thought system in his last book or simply critiqued it while continuing to work within it. In Rosenzweig’s opinion (*Naharayim*, 131-32, 134, and especially 137-41), Cohen went outside the bounds of his Idealistic system, evidenced by the new meaning of “correlation.” Shmuel Hugo Bergman continued this line of thought in his piece, “Hermann Cohen” (Hebrew), in *History of the New Philosophy: Systems in Philosophy After Kant* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: ??; 1979), 185-87. A middle position was taken by Sini Okko [sp??] and Julius Guttman. See Sini Okko, “Hermann Cohen and His Religious Teachings” (Hebrew), in *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism* (Hebrew), ed. ??, 12 (Jerusalem, 1972), and Itzhak Julius Guttman, “Hermann Cohen” (Hebrew), in *The Philosophy of Judaism* (Hebrew), ed. ??, 323, 328 (Jerusalem: ??, 1983). It seems that a growing consensus is emerging in scholarly literature that Cohen did not break with his own Idealistic system but only deepened it. See Eliezer Schweid, “The Foundations of the Religious Philosophy of Hermann Cohen” (Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2, no. 2 (Tevet, 1983): 259-61; William Kluback, “H. Cohen & Kant: A Philosophy of History from Jewish Sources,” *Idealistic Studies* 17, no. 2 (1987): 161-76; Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, trans. John Denton (Albany: State University of New York, 1997), 158-68; Moshe Meir, “Herman Cohen – Between Idealism and Existentialism” (Hebrew), *Daat* 50-52 (2003): 371-79. In the current study I join those who find continuity in Cohen’s system and rely on the conclusions drawn in my book, Eliezer Hadad, *Love of One’s Fellow in the System of Hermann Cohen: A Study in the Religion of Reason from the Sources of Judaism* (Hebrew) (Alon Shvut: ??, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?* (trans. Lewis White Beck; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1985), 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 14, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Kant seems to be following in the footsteps of Hegel here. Hegel argues that Kant’s ethical man has a “fine [pretty?] soul.” He is not ready to descend into reality for fear that he will tarnish his morals. The demand for universality does not enable a man to act in response to any particular situation, since it automatically entails an arbitrary discrimination [??]. Therefore, he is unable to act, and he must remain in the general category of intentions. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. and notes by T. M. Knox (Oxford: ??, 1949), 21-24, 35, and Yaakov Fleischman, “Hegel’s Theory of the Will” (Hebrew), *Iyyun* 7, no. 1 (1956): 12. A similar critique was leveled by Rosenzweig: “You cannot desire ‘something’ and yet desire only ‘in general’ [?? Quote should be taken from English translation]; the autonomous demand requires that a man only desire in theory, “in general” (Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. ?? (??: ??, ??), ??. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. On this critique, see Poma, *Critical Philosophy,* 109-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Amos Funkenstein, “On the Kantian and Neo-Kantian Theory of Science” (Hebrew), *Iyyun* 31, no. 4 (1983), 251-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For an illumination of this concept, see Shmuel Hugo Bergman, “The Originative Principle in the Philosophy of Hermann Cohen” (Hebrew), in *Philosophers and Believers* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: ??, 1959), 139-59. For a detailed explanation of this principle in Cohen’s thought, see Poma, *Critical Philosophy*, 85-102. Funkenstein disagrees with Bergman’s interpretation that the “originative” principle parallels the Aristotelian concept of privation, related to a certain nature [??], but is rather a methodological tool to bridge opposites (“On the Kantian and Neo-Kantian Theory of Science,” 253-6). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. On his innovations in the field of logic, Cohen developed the distinction between the negative statement and the infinite statement, seeing the latter as a fundamental expression of the “originative principle.” The “infinite statement” is at once synthetic and analytical and thus exceeds Kant’s system, which is based on the distinction between analytical and synthetic statements. See Bergman, “The Originative Principle,” 143-49; Funkenstein, “On the Kantian and Neo-Kantian Theory of Science,” 254; Poma, *The Critical Philosophy*, 100. This understanding of the process of cognition gave birth to Cohen’s concept of the “correlation.” See Schweid, “Foundations,” 270-71; Funkenstein, “On the Kantian and Neo-Kantian Theory of Science,” 251-52; Poma, *Critical Philosophy*, 82; Reinier Munk, “To Know the Place, R. Soloveitchik and Hermann Cohen on Transcendentalist Thought” (Hebrew), *Daat* 42 (1999): 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Bergman, “The Originative Principle in the Philosophy of Hermann Cohen,” 146-47; Funkenstein, “On the Kantian and Neo-Kantian Theory of Science,” 254-55. On the connection between Cohen’s “originative principle” and Salomon Maimon’s concept of the differential, see Bergman, “Salomon Maimon and Hermann Cohen” (Hebrew), in *The Philosophy of Salomon Maimon* (Hebrew), ed. ??, 187-98 (Jerusalem: ??, 1967). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cohen doubtlessly served as a foundation for the ideological concepts of Rosenzweig and Buber. See Eliezer Schweid, “Hermann Cohenn as a Biblical Interpreter” (Hebrew), *Daat* 10 (1983), 94, no. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See Bergman, “The Originative Principle,” 150; Reinier Munk, “The Self and the Other in Cohen's Ethics and Works on Religion,” in *Hermann Cohen’s Philosophy of Religion*, ed. ?? , 173 (Hildesheim, Zurich, New York:??, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Cohen had earlier developed the ideal of science and found its “origin” in the idea of the object as a totality, which includes all objects as a system of causal relationships. Analogously, the ideal of ethics is an ideal of a totality including all the subjects as a system of functional relationships. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Yaakov Kaletzkin [sp??], *Hermann Cohen* (Berlin, London: ??, 1923), 42-44; Nathan Rotenstreich, “From the Ethical Ideal to the True Being,” in *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times: From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig* (New York :‎ [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Munk argues that Cohen’s ethic succeeds in establishing the “Thou” because of the distinction it forms within the totality; in his opinion, Cohen does not critique his own ethic but only Kant’s, though as mentioned this distinction does not create a conceptual difference between “Thou” and “He” (Munk, “The Self and the Other,” 167, 179). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In *The Ethic of the Pure Will*, Cohen reasoned that religion is particularist and therefore must be assimilated into ethics. Cohen saw Christianity’s claim of universality as a fraud. See Yehoyada Amir, “‘For This Reason Was Man Created Single’: Particularism and Universalism in Hermann Cohen’s Philosophy of Religion” (Hebrew), in *The Way of Spirit: Jubilee Book in Honor of Eliezer Schweid*, (Hebrew), ed. Yehoyada Amir, 2: 650-53 (Jerusalem, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Schweid, “Hermann Cohen as a Biblical Interpreter,” 94, no. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. In the current study I will address only the formulation of the “Thou,” without relating to that of the “I”; for a discussion of the latter, see Amir, “‘For This Reason Was Man Created Single’,”664-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See note 16 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cohen rejects the idea that revelation is an interpretation of God’s word to man and even the idea that there is any transfer of content at all from God to man. In his opinion, man established the commandments of his own accord, out of an understanding of the ethical meaning of God’s separateness. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Following Kant, Cohen interprets holiness as ethical purity that does not mix personal interests and biases with the pure will (see Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 133-36; Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 30-31). However, in keeping with his methodological specificity, he tracks uses of the expression in the historical sources of the religion and points out that the “original meaning” (ihrer ursprünglicen Bedeutung) (Cohen, *Ethik*, 112) of holiness was separateness, a meaning it maintains even as the word has taken on an additional moral meaning (*Religion of Reason*, 96). Kant nevertheless gives holiness the *a priori* interpretation of “ethics” (Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 25). See also Rivkah Horowitz, “On Holiness in Modern Jewish Thought” (Hebrew), in *Offering to Sarah: Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* (Hebrew), ed. M. Idel, D. Dimant, and S. Rosenberg [sp??], 142-45 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Rivkah Horowitz, “Ethics and Existentialist Thought” (Hebrew) in *Way of Spirit*, ed. Yehoyada Amir, 2:681. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Privation is an aspect of the world and did not precede it, according to Cohen (see *Religion of Reason*, 55-56). On Cohen’s suspicion of the nothingness within the world [??], see Gabriel Motzkin, “Hermann Cohen's Integration of Science and Religion,” *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 60, no. 1 (1985): 47-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The physical and unintelligible element is the irrational “remainder” that awaits rational conceptualization and with it the assertion of real existence. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. According to Cohen, a distinction must be made within the seven Noahide laws between those commandments of a moral character befitting the idea of “natural law” and the ban on idolatry that is appended to them, which was intended to prevent error on the part of the Jews living among idolaters (p. 122-3). This being the case, a distinction must also be made between a “son of Noah” and a “resident stranger” in the lexicon of the Talmudic sages. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Cohen reasons that the legal system also refrains from decreeing the guilt of a person and only decrees his punishment; only the person himself can decide his own guilt or innocence (p. 167). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. For this reason prophecy did not address the question of life after death. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See *Religion of Reason*, 138-43, where Cohen critiques Stoa, Spinoza, and Schopenhauer for their interpretation of compassion. He offers a similar critique of the understanding of love in mythology (p. 144-45). On compassion in Cohen’s thought, see Avi Sagi, “Between an Ethic of Compassion and an Ethic of Justice” (Hebrew), in *My Justice Your Justice: Justice Among Cultures* (Hebrew), ed. Yedidyah Stern, 175-85 (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center and the Israeli Institute for Democracy, 2010). Though Sagi distinguishes between compassion and mercy, he does not address such a distinction in the writings of Cohen, who ascribes compassion (Mitleid) to a person and mercy (Erbarmen) to God (see Hadad, “??,” in *My Justice Your Justice*, 99-106). [?? You wrote “*sham*” – did you mean *Love of One’s Fellow*?] [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. On love as a fundamental force of the religion of reason, see Hadad, *Love of One’s Fellow*, 107-16. Cohen sees prayer as the central medium of the religion of reason in purifying the emotions through the unification of consciousness (see Schweid, [?? no reference in note 18], 120-21). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)