

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

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Toward the end of his life, Hermann Cohen (1842-1918)<sup>1</sup> discovered the role of religion in his system of Idealistic philosophy. In his late book, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*,<sup>2</sup> Cohen critiqued the Idealistic ethics that he had promoted in his youth and developed in his book *The Ethics of Pure Will*.<sup>3</sup> Though he did not reject Idealistic ethics,<sup>4</sup> he did point out its limits – limits which, in his

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<sup>1</sup> The first intellectual biography of Hermann Cohen was written by Franz Rosenzweig: *Naharyaim – Selected Writings (Naharayim - Mivhar Ma'amarim, Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1978), 109-53. For a different approach to Cohen's biography, see Moshe Meir, "The Life of Hermann Cohen – An Intellectual Biography" (*Toldot Hayav shel Herman Cohen - biyografya 'inteleqtualit, Hebrew*), in *Thought in Jewish Education (Hagut BaHinukh Hayehudi, Hebrew)* 5-6 (2003-4), 25-51; and Frederick C. Beiser, *Hermann Cohen: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (New York: F. Ungar, 1972). The original German version was published as *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Auflage Wiesbaden: Fourier, 1995). The first edition was published after his death in 1918.

<sup>3</sup> Hermann Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens* (Berlin: B. Cassirer, 1904).

<sup>4</sup> 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 (Toldot HaFilosofya HaHadasha: Shitot BaFilosofya SheLe'aHar Kant, Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: Bialik; 1979), 185-87. A middle position was taken by Sinai Ucko and Julius Guttman. See Sinai Ucko, "Hermann Cohen and His Religious Teachings" (*Herman Cohen VuMishnato HaDatit, Hebrew*), in *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism (Dat HaTvuna MiMeqorot HaYahadut, Hebrew)*, eds. Shmuel Hugo Bergman and Nathan Rotenstreich, 12 (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1972), and Itzhak Julius Guttman, "Hermann Cohen" (Hebrew), in *The Philosophy of Judaism (HaFilosofya shel HaYahadut, Hebrew)*, ed. Zvi Woyslawski, 323, 328 (Jerusalem: Bialik, 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

opinion, did not apply to a “religion of reason.” While philosophical ethics was characterized by its universality and the absolute demands that it makes of every person equally, religion unveiled the face of the individual. Cohen saw the Biblical stranger as the first expression in the religion of reason of the concept of a *Mitmensch* or “fellowman,” as distinguishable from the ethical concept of a *Nebenmensch*, who was simply another human being.

Cohen regards the concept of the stranger developed by the religion of reason as “a unifying concept” that bridges the gap between the particular and the universal while possessing a unique nature. In my opinion, Cohen’s own conceptual framework—his Idealistic method, and especially his use of “infinite judgment”—points the way to regarding the stranger as “an originative concept.” This treatment of the stranger as an “originative concept” reveals the continuity of the Idealistic methodology with the religion of reason. This article should therefore be seen as a corrective, critical reading of Cohen himself.

I will first present Cohen’s remarks regarding the stranger as a unifying concept. I will then clarify the role of “infinite judgment” as establishing the principle of the originative in Cohen’s logic and its expression in ethics. Finally, I will suggest regarding the concept of the stranger as an originative concept and demonstrate the fruitfulness of this approach.

### ***The Stranger as a Unifying Concept (Verbindungsbegriff)***

According to Cohen, idealism is by nature universal, but the religion of reason is an ethical conception located between the particular and the universal.<sup>5</sup>

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Philosophy of Hermann Cohen” (*Yesodot HaFilosofya Hadatit shel Herman 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” (*Herman Cohen – Bein 'idealism Le'eqsistentzializm*, Hebrew), *Daat* 50-52 (2003): 371-79; Adelman Dieter, und Görg K. Hasselhoff, “*Reinige Dein Denken*”: über den Jüdischen Hintergrund der Philosophie Von Hermann Cohen (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010), 277-94; Beiser, *Hermann Cohen*, 363-66. In the current study I join those who find continuity in Cohen’s system.

<sup>5</sup> See Daniel H. Weiss, *Paradox and the Prophets: Hermann Cohen and the Indirect Communication of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). In his view, the uniqueness of religion according to Cohen derives from its paradoxical style. See also Michael Zank, *The Idea of Atonement in the Philosophy of Hermann Cohen* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown Judaic Studies, 2020): 380.

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 the national spirit in its primary origin and peculiarity (*Religion of Reason*, 24; *Religion der Vernunft*, 28).

The gulf between the national character of Judaism and its universal content, founded on the idea of the unique God, requires explanation. 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 toward true unity on the other (p. 115; 133).

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” is an **ethical** one, while the “pious of the peoples of the world” is “the religious expression of morality” (p. 123; 143).

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, the son of Noah, which developed out of this idea in the literature of the Talmudic sages, 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 instantiation of the idea of natural law as a universal ethic.<sup>6</sup> The concept of the son of Noah is based on the assumption

<sup>6</sup> 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

that revelation did not begin at Sinai, but rather had already occurred in the covenant with Noah, the father of humanity; this covenant began as a universal ethics expressed solely through law. This legal-universalist ethics preceded the particularistic religion of reason, which is expressed as love. Cohen stresses that the first of these seven laws, according to their Talmudic articulation, is “juridical institutions” (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; 381). Cohen alludes unmistakably to the fact that Idealistic ethics, with its absolute demands (law), preceded the religion of reason, which is satisfied with drawing closer to them (love).<sup>7</sup>

The next concept, which was developed in Jewish legal literature out of the concept of the son of Noah and found its fullest expression in the writings of Maimonides, is that of the pious of the peoples of the world. As noted above, Cohen characterized this concept as “the **religious** expression of morality.” It is religious because it attributes piety to 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; 383). Maimonides’ assertion in the *Mishneh Torah* that “the pious of the peoples of the world have a place in the world to come” (*Hilkhot 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’ claim draws from the Mishnaic statement, “All of Israel has a place in the world to come” (Sanhedrin 10:1). The rational recognition of the basic equality of all humans as possessors of immortal souls 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; 384).

Cohen mentions Plato’s claim that “The soul is not assumed for the sake of immortality, but immortality for the sake of the soul” (p. 333; 388). Through immortality, Plato intended “to bring out the concept of the soul as the sum total of

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be made between a “son of Noah” and a “resident stranger” in the lexicon of the Talmudic sages.

<sup>7</sup> See David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: The Idea of Noahide Law* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011): 213-224.

consciousness” (p. 335; 390). 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; 390). This conceptual development stems from practical-religious-pure reason, from the holy spirit, which unites within itself the state, morality, and religion through its understanding of the concept of a person. Only the concept of a person, lifted above national differences, can take the concepts of “stranger” and “son of Noah” and derive from them the concept of “the pious of the peoples of the world.”

Cohen argues that the opposition “between the native and the foreigner,” and “between the Israelites and the foreigner,” is “reconciled and overcome” through the concept of the stranger (pp. 115-116; 134). In this respect, the stranger is not only a unifying concept between Israel and humanity but serves, as I argue below, as an originative concept that drives a **constant** reduction of the antinomy between Israel and humanity. A unifying concept bridges contrasts, while an originative concept is not only a bridging concept but also a creative concept. The stranger is the slope of the curve that determines the location of the next high point.

### *The Originative Principle (Ursprung) and Infinite Judgment*

In his work, *The Logic of Pure Knowledge*, Cohen developed the notion of “the originative principle.” He used it (in his *Ethics of the Pure Will*) to transcendently derive the ideal upon which ethics is founded. 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 does not exist in empirical reality, since it is derived *a priori* from reason alone. The originative principle is thus a speculative ideal, from which reason develops.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Hermann Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (Berlin: B. Cassirer, 1914), 28-29. For an illumination of this concept, see Shmuel Hugo Bergman, “The Originative Principle in the Philosophy of Hermann Cohen” (*‘iqar HaReshit BaFilosofya shel Herman Cohen*, Hebrew), in *Philosophers and Believers (Hogim VuMa’aminim*, Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1959), 139-59. For a detailed explanation of this principle in Cohen’s thought, see Poma, *Critical Philosophy*, 85-102. See Amos Funkenstein, “The Persecution of Absolutes: On the Kantian and Neo-Kantian Theories of Science,” in E. Ullmann-Margalit, ed., *The Kaleidoscope of Science*, 53-58 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1986). 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. Similarly, Martin Kavka understands the “originative” as a movement of thinking that generates itself through its own action. This self-development eliminates the distinction between being and non-being. See Martin

The origin of every concept, Cohen claims, 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.” This is not the same as the Aristotelian privation associated with a particular nature, but involves, instead, utilizing the concept of privation as a methodical tool for bridging conceptual contrasts. Rather than conceiving of its opposite as the negation of a given concept, the ambiguity of both should be used constructively, ameliorating the opposition and viewing the opposing concept as the lack of the given concept.

For example, rather than seeing rest as the negation of movement (as Zeno posited), one should view it as a privation 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 this way continuity is constructed between rest and motion; rest contains motion within it as potential.<sup>9</sup> The origin of every concept can similarly be found in its corresponding privation.

The shift from negation to privation converts the original judgment, in which the object is negated by the subject, into an “infinite judgment” that negates the object and affirms it at the same time. The privation of the predicate in the infinite sentence creates an infinite expectation of its realization.<sup>10</sup> Cohen developed the distinction between negative judgment and infinite judgment from his innovations in the field of logic, seeing the latter as a fundamental expression of the originative principle. “Infinite judgment” is at once synthetic and analytic and thus transcends

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Kavka, *Jewish messianism and the history of philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University press, 2009): 101-102; Flach Werner, “Hermann Cohens Grundlegungskonzept und sein monotheistischer Gottesbegriff,” in Thomas Göller, ed., *Grundlagen der Religionskritik* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> See Bergman, “The Originative Principle in the Philosophy of Hermann Cohen,” 146-47; Funkenstein, “The Persecution of Absolutes,” 54-56. On the connection between Cohen’s “originative principle” and Salomon Maimon’s concept of the differential, see Bergman, “Salomon Maimon and Hermann Cohen” (*Shlomo Maymon VeHerman Cohen*, Hebrew), in *The Philosophy of Salomon Maimon (HaFilosofya shel Shlomo Maymon*, Hebrew), 187-98 (Jerusalem: Magness, 1967). See Weiss, *Paradox and the Prophets*, 190. He sees it as a paradox that includes movement and non-movement.

<sup>10</sup> Hermann Cohen, *Ethics of Maimonides*, translated with commentary by Almut Sh. Bruckstein (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004): 12-13.

Kant's system, which is based on the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments.<sup>11</sup>

Since every concept that is originative is itself in need of an originative concept, this process continues infinitely since every origin requires its own origin, and every new origin establishes new facts, which are themselves new concepts. Reason thus moves 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 deduction of ethics can be briefly described as follows. Ethics begins with the citizen, the "I" in its legal understanding (*der Rechtsperson*) 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 opposed to 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 as one that ought to be rather than one that exists. 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 a citizen within it.<sup>12</sup> 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."<sup>13</sup> From here Cohen arrives at the state, which unites its citizens in a contractual relationship.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, 83-84; 88-89. See Hugo Bergmann, "Maimon und Cohen," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, (1939), 548-61; Bergman, "The Originative Principle," 143-49; Funkenstein, "The Persecution of Absolutes," 54-55; Poma, *The Critical Philosophy*, 95, 100. This understanding of the process of cognition gave birth to Cohen's concept of the "correlation." See Schweid, "Foundations," 270-71; Funkenstein, "The Persecution of Absolutes," 51-52; Poma, *Critical Philosophy*, 82; Reinier Munk, "To Know the Place, R. Soloveitchik and Hermann Cohen on Transcendentalist Thought" (*LaDa'at et Hamaqom, Harav Soloveyčiq VeHerman Cohen 'al Maḥshava VeTranstzandentzya*, Hebrew), *Daat* 42 (1999): 99; Kavka, *Jewish messianism*, 103-104. In his opinion, the way in which the infinitesimal is based on infinity is expressed in the infinite judgment.

<sup>12</sup> See Zank, *Atonement*, 265. Cohen doubtlessly served as a foundation for the ideological concepts of Rosenzweig and Buber. See Eliezer Schweid, "Hermann Cohen as a Biblical Interpreter" (*Herman Cohen KeMefaresh Hamiqra*, Hebrew), *Daat* 10 (1983), 94, no. 3.

<sup>13</sup> See Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, 201-203; 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*, eds. Stephane Moses and Hartwig Wiedebach, 173 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1997); Hartwig Wiedebach, *The*

Since the foundation of civil law is in this contract that unites the citizens in purposeful relationships with one another, each individual is defined as the differential of pure personhood stripped of its concreteness, found in purposeful relationships to the other differentials. These citizen subjects are stripped of all their individual characteristics and placed, as it were, behind a “veil of ignorance,” with no relation to their individual uniqueness. Reason thus moves from the concept of “the individual” to that of “the many,” from the abstract individual to the group, united by the social contract. Ideal states are united by contractual relationships that allow them to be conceived of as one unit (*der Staatenbund*). 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. Humanity as an abstraction can be compared to the perfect subject, in which abstract individuals can be distinguished as possessing purposeful relationships with one another. Humanity is the infinite integral of human differentials.<sup>14</sup>

Since the ethical ideal is humanity as a totality, the pure will of idealism is the will that holds humanity as its end. Every person 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, Cohen joined the two essential articulations of Kant’s categorical imperative, the formula of universalizability and the formula of a person as an end. The individual person 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; 15) – and relate identically to every person and to himself. The moral imperative demands that we see every person as an end and relate to him without any form of favoritism.<sup>15</sup>

Cohen’s change in methodology created a certain level of 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

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*National Element in Hermann Cohen’s Philosophy and Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 92; Zank, *Atonement*, 280.

<sup>14</sup> See Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, 57, 466-470. 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 teleological relationships. It should be noted that religion, rather than the state, is what pushes for universal unity.

<sup>15</sup> Jakob Klatzkin, *Hermann Cohen* (Berlin, London: Rimon, 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: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1968), 53-54; Schweid, “Foundations,” 277-81; Poma, *Critical Philosophy*, 117-22.



individual but rather as one citizen standing alongside another and in a legal relationship with him. Even so, Idealistic ethics recognized 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 person in the state is a citizen in the sense of a “He,” to the same extent as his fellow.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

### ***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.<sup>18</sup> 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 uncovered 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.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> 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).

<sup>17</sup> 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” (*‘Lefikhakh Nivra’ ‘adam Yehidi’: Partiqularizm Ve’universalizm BeFilosofyat HaDat shel Herman Cohen*, Hebrew), in *The Way of Spirit: Jubilee Book in Honor of Eliezer Schweid*, (*Derekh HaRuah: Sefer HaYovel LeEliezer Shcweid*, Hebrew), ed. Yehoyada Amir, 2: 650-53 (Jerusalem, 2005). Regarding suffering in Cohen’s thought see Oliver Leaman, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 157-64. For suffering as an ethical means, see Lawrence Kaplan, “Suffering and Joy in the Thought of Hermann Cohen,” *Modern Judaism* 21, No. 1 (2001): 15-22.

<sup>18</sup> See Schweid, “Hermann Cohen as a Biblical Interpreter,” 94, no. 3.

<sup>19</sup> 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; Zank, *Atonement*, 196-206.

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 differentiating 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 individual empirical person as perceived by the senses; such a person 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 ethics and religion, but I believe his primary argument depends on the **structural** difference between ethics and religion stemming from their respective fundamental concepts. These concepts create a structural difference between ethics and religion; the concept of personhood found at the basis of ethics creates a monistic structure, while religion's concept of God creates a dualistic structure.

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 Idealistic ethics 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, to act based on the *a priori* principle that is logically precedent to reality. In both cases, this principle is expressed in the demand for action stemming from universality. Idealism obligates a person to adopt the I of humanity in his actions toward others, while the religion of reason obligates a person to strive to be like God and walk in His ways.

It would seem that the demands of idealism and religion are the same. What, then, 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 found in their fundamental concepts and their deep structures. While Idealistic ethics demands that a person identify with the universal and act exclusively from that identification, religion does not demand **identification** with God but rather

**approximation** to Him. The ethical 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 person and God and prevents his absorption into the divine.

Since Idealistic ethics posits the ideal of humanity and each individual is a human, every person 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 toward another person.

In contrast, since the ideal of the religion of reason is God, and since a person 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 a person is commanded only to **become 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; a person 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; 129).<sup>20</sup>

Cohen finds this approach in the expression holy spirit, which is the spirit of a person when it is directed toward 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 toward absolute holiness*. This necessary condition prevents the human act from straying beyond partiality into arbitrariness and ethical failure.

<sup>20</sup> See Francesca Albertini, *Das Verständnis des Seins bei Hermann Cohen: vom Neukantianismus zu einer jüdischen Religionsphilosophie* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 36-37; Weiss, *Paradox and the Prophets*, 184-185; Rivkah Horowitz, "Ethics and Existential Thought" (Ha'etiqa VeHaMaḥshava Ha'eqsistentzialistit, Hebrew), in *Way of Spirit*, ed. Yehoyada Amir, 2:681.

In order to avoid the devolution of an imperfectly ethical act into caprice and corruption, a person 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.<sup>21</sup> An act toward a fellowman is not made in contradistinction to the totality of humanity but in anticipation of it. Since a person 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.

### *The Stranger as an Originative Concept*

The religion of reason, as presented above, confronts empirical reality with all its particular problems. Within this conceptual framework, the concept of the stranger serves as a unifying concept that exhausts its significance in the process of historical development. Cohen refers to the stranger as a unifying concept but I would argue that Cohen's project is better served if we view it as an "originative" concept. The concept of the stranger is not only a bridge between the concepts of Jew and gentile that preserves the continuity between them; it is also a creative concept that holds within it the future development of other concepts.

Cohen used the method of infinite judgment both to clarify basic **concepts** in the religion of reason<sup>22</sup> and to interpret ancient Jewish **texts**.<sup>23</sup> In this section, I will

<sup>21</sup> By the infinitesimal moment of the action the self comes to be, and we can say that the self has an infinitesimal duration. In *Religion of Reason*, Cohen uses the term "moment," following Newton, to express the "infinitesimal." See Weiss, *Paradox and the Prophets*, 187-89, 192, 195-96.

<sup>22</sup> His interpretation of the concept of "creation" through infinite judgment became a foundation for clarifying the relationship between God and the world in the religion of reason. Cohen identifies the world as a form of becoming that stands over against the perfect being of God. The world as becoming contains within it a privation, since it is not a complete being, and so we must look for its origin in its opposite, that is, in the perfect being of God. So, according to Cohen's originative principle, being is the origin of becoming, and a way must be found to bridge the distinction. To this end, Cohen uses his innovation regarding "infinite judgment," which negates according to its form and affirms according to its content. God as being serves as the origin of becoming through the infinite negation of its privation. See Kavka, *Jewish Messianism*, 115-16. Privation is an aspect of the world and did not precede it, according to Cohen (see *Religion of Reason*, 55-56). On Cohen's fear of the nothingness within the world, see Gabriel

show how the concept of the stranger can serve as originative and how the method of infinite judgment can also be used to clarify the meaning of Biblical texts regarding the stranger.<sup>24</sup>

Conceptually speaking, one can see the stranger as standing in opposition to the Israelite – the stranger is a member of another nation. Cohen uses the term ‘stranger’ (*ger*) in accordance with its contextual Scriptural meaning, as referring to a non-Jewish stranger living among Jews, and not as a non-Jew who has converted to Judaism. The judgment “The stranger is not a Jew” is ostensibly one of negation, indicating that the subject is not the object. The Biblical command to relate to the stranger as an equal, however, would indicate that underneath this judgment lies a different understanding of the relationship between the Jew and the stranger. 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; 145). This is to say that the unity of God, which stands at the basis of the religion of reason, undergirds the striving for equality of humans and establishes legal equality between the stranger and the citizen. Therefore, the negation is not absolute but rather relative, negating and affirming at one and the same time. Following to Cohen’s originative principle, we should soften the opposition and understand the relationship between Jew and stranger as a judgment of privation, or an infinite judgment: the stranger is the privation of a Jew. The stranger is not an actual Jew, but he is the infinite privation of a Jew, he is the differential of Jewishness. He expresses infinitesimal Jewishness even before actualizing such an identity, an

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Motzkin, “Hermann Cohen's Integration of Science and Religion,” *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 60, no. 1 (1985): 47-50.

<sup>23</sup> In his article “*Charakteristik der Ethik Maimunis*” (Ethics of Maimonides), he used this judgment to interpret passages from the *Guide of the Perplexed*. He pointed out that reading “negative attributes” as the negation of privation (i.e. as an infinite judgment), makes them the primary principles underlying the action attributes. According to Cohen’s interpretation of Maimonides, the negation of privation of God makes Him the “originative” of the existence of the world. See Cohen, *Ethics of Maimonides*, 101-05. See also Almut Sh. Brukstein, “*Reshith* as Ontology and Ethics: A Hermeneutics of the Infinite Based on Hermann Cohen's Principle of Origin,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 60, vol. 2 (1993): 53-60. She suggested reading other Jewish texts in this way.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion about the stranger, see Hartwig Wiedebach, *The National Element*, 182-85.

infinitesimal Jewishness moment lying between that which already-is and that which is-not-yet.<sup>25</sup>

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 stranger in the Bible is associated with economically marginalized groups; he is listed multiple times with the Levite and the Jewish orphan and widow, all of whom lack property (p. 147; 171). 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. Moreover, the requirement to love the stranger is repeatedly explained in the Bible as stemming from 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 the Jews were both slaves and strangers there (p. 125; 145). 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; 172). The choosing of Israel is the choosing of all humanity and, more precisely, the choosing of humanity for suffering a lack of perfection. Therefore, the stranger who represents poverty is the differential of Jewishness. Poverty is the infinitesimal expression of Jewishness without the actual expression of the latter. Poverty is the originative concept of Jewishness. Jewishness in this context is interpreted as an anticipation of the human aspect of poverty and therefore also as the originative of humanity.

Cohen points out a religious argument that could be raised against this continuity between the stranger and the Jewish poor. The stranger, one might argue, is distinct from the Jewish poor, since the stranger does not fulfill the commandments of the God of Judaism and is therefore a sinner. The prophets of the religion of reason could have ascribed the stranger's poverty to his sins and argued that his poverty was not like that of a Jew, that it was decreed by divine providence, which rewards every person according to his deeds. Accordingly, the non-Jewish stranger's poverty is 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 be attentive

<sup>25</sup> See Weiss, *Paradox and the Prophets*, 198.

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. With two possible understandings of the significance of the stranger, as either a sinner or a pauper, the religion of reason chose to define him as a pauper. In this way the religion of reason separated the suffering of the stranger from his sins, allowing for continuity between him and the poor of Israel, and offered a different explanation for his poverty. If so, the logical basis for this relationship is the infinite judgment which enables continuity between the stranger and Israel despite the contrast.

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 person'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; 150).<sup>26</sup> 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; 154). Removing the question of guilt from a case of personal suffering deepens a person's moral judgment and his ability to distinguish between good and bad and allows them to foster the proper relationship to suffering. Removing the question of guilt from a case of a suffering person allows pity (*Mitleid*) to flood one's consciousness and enables a practical response to the suffering itself.<sup>27</sup>

As noted, according to the religion of reason, the suffering of the stranger is represented by his poverty. Cohen notes 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 or the differences between people that are accidents of birth) which is indefinable and cannot be related to rationally (p. 134; 155).<sup>28</sup> The rationality of the religion of reason finds expression in its delineating the arena of moral action as those problems which can be understood and

<sup>26</sup> 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). See Zank, *Atonement*, 196-206

<sup>27</sup> Zank, *Atonement*, 381-82.

<sup>28</sup> For this reason, the prophecy did not address the question of life after death.

addressed and excluding those problems that cannot be solved. Practical reason demands efficacious morality (p. 131; 153).

Secondly, in establishing poverty as representative of suffering, the religion of reason posits economic suffering as true and not imagined suffering. Contrary to the Stoics, who saw suffering as an illusion (p. 132; 152-53), the prophets conceived of poverty as true suffering. Cohen attributes this to the fact that the prophetic religious consciousness was engaged in both civil and moral concerns. The involvement of the prophetic consciousness in 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; 153). These two aspects of poverty reflect Cohen’s logical method. The ambiguous reality is determined by reason, and this conceptualization determines it as true.

From here it is but a few steps to understanding the proper explanation of the stranger’s suffering. As mentioned, this suffering must 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 suffering servant” (Isa. 53) who suffers for the sins of all. The poor person 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; 26), born out of the faults of society and its economic order. The stranger is not guilty of his poverty but is rather a victim of economic corruption that awaits correction (p. 265; 310).<sup>29</sup>

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; 157). 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; 158). Ignoring the suffering of the poor is paramount to ignoring the suffering of humanity. “Thus the poor man typifies man in general” (p. 136; 158). When a person sympathizes with this suffering, when the feeling of his fellow’s suffering fills his consciousness too, he comes to know this fundamental aspect of humanity.

<sup>29</sup> Zank, *Atonement*, 384-85.



Ignoring 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 person is an economic abstraction, and such an abstraction cannot arouse our sympathy. The stranger is the concrete representative (p. 147; 171), and he can arouse the "primeval feeling" of compassion (p. 143; 166). On the other hand, in the case of compassion toward 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.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, in the religion of reason, compassion is first directed toward the suffering of the **tangible** and **foreign** stranger, beginning with the tangible and expanding beyond him. Only afterward was compassion revealed in love and then broadened to include love for one's fellowman.

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 toward suffering and did not develop out of sexuality, as it did in mythology. Locating love's origin in compassion removed it from the semantic field of the aesthetic and set 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 aesthetic love of heroes to the semantic field of moral love of one's fellowman, since it developed from compassion toward the suffering of the stranger (p. 144; 169-70).

<sup>30</sup> See *Religion of Reason*, 138-43 (*Religion der Vernunft*, 160-66), 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 Wiedebach Hartwig, "Hermann Cohens Theorie des Mitleids," in *Hermann Cohen's Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Hartwig Wiedebach, Stéphane Mosès, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim etc., 231-44 (1997); Avi Sagi, "Between an Ethic of Compassion and an Ethic of Justice" (*Bein 'etiqa shel Hemla Le'etiqa shel Tzedeq*, Hebrew), in *My Justice Your Justice: Justice Among Cultures (Tzedeq sheli Tzedeq shelkha: Tzedeq bein Tarbuyot*, 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 (Erbarment) to God. See Eliezer Hadad, *Love of One's Fellowman in Hermann Cohen's Thought: A Study in the Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism ('ahavat Hare'a BeShitato shel Herman Cohen: 'iyun BaSefer Dat HaTvuna Mimeqorot HaYahadut, Hebrew)* (Alon Shvut: Tevunot, 2011), 99-106; Zank, *Atonement*, 384.

Cohen bases this 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 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. Suffering is the differential that defines the stranger. The partnership in suffering is the differential that defines Israel. The reciprocal relationship between them determines their redefinition. Cohen says that the interaction of fellowship establishes the “Thou” at first, and, after it, the “I” (p. 141; 165).<sup>31</sup>

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; 169). 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.

### ***Religious Ethics: A Plurality that Refers to the Totality as Infinity***

According to Cohen, the commandment, “Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2) is the foundation of religious ethics. God’s holiness marks his separateness from the world. He is parallel to an ethical ideal in that, in His holiness, He obligates a person to sanctify himself. Cohen interprets this obligation to mean a person is required to imitate God’s separateness,<sup>32</sup> acting not from within

<sup>31</sup> The “Thou” is an infinite task, so it is not an event but a process of relating to another that does not end, just as the “self” is a task. See Weiss, *Paradox and the Prophets*, 186.

<sup>32</sup> 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; Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?* [trans. Lewis White Beck; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1985], 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 ursprünglichen Bedeutung) (Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft*, 112) of holiness was separateness, a meaning it maintains even as the word has taken on an additional moral

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 a subject places the obligation upon a person 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 a subject.

The commandment, “Be holy” opens chapter 19 of Leviticus. Later in this chapter the commandment to love one’s fellowman appears, as well as the commandment to love the stranger.

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; 147).

According to Cohen, the commandment “Love your fellow as yourself” does not apply only to fellow Jews, but also to the poor, including the non-Jewish stranger. Moreover, according to Cohen, the commandment to love one’s fellow depends upon the commandment to love the stranger. “Love your fellow as yourself” (Lev. 19:18), which is general and universal is made possible by “Love him as yourself” (Lev. 19:34), referring to the stranger. Only after love received its moral character (rather than being conceptualized in aesthetic terms) from its origin in compassion toward the stranger, as conceived by the religion of reason, was it possible to expand this love and to apply it to one’s fellow as well. If the correlation between the two differentials is determined by the connection between Israel and the stranger, then the generalization of “Love your fellow as yourself” can be seen as an integral that includes all the relations between the differentials as a plural referring to totality as an infinite goal. Considering the stranger as a differential

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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” (*‘al HaQedusha BaMaḥshava HaYehudit HaḤadasha*, Hebrew), in *Offering to Sarah: Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah (Minḥa LeSara: Meḥqarim BeFilosofya Yehudit VuVeQabala*, Hebrew), ed. M. Idel, D. Dimant, and S. Rosenberg, 142-45 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994); Kavka, *Jewish messianism*, 118.

starting point makes it clear that the “fellow” does not represent humanity as a totality, but only the integral pointing toward it.

Cohen interprets the debate between Ben Azzai and R. Akiva over what 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 one’s fellowman at its foundation. However, it is clear that, according to Cohen, R. Akiva’s position is also 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; 138). Therefore, the “fellow” who is rooted in the stranger as an originaive concept is key to understanding the unique nature of religious ethics.

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 originaive 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.

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 human activity will come into existence in the messianic future, when humanity will become one, but in the actual historical process we must recognize partial distinctions within humanity. 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 toward 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.<sup>33</sup>

Only God can love all people equally. “Of course, all men are poor in God’s view” (p. 148; 171). Thus 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; 172). A person can only love some other person, 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. It was from the concept of the Biblical stranger that the concepts son of Noah and pious of the peoples of the world evolved. Therefore, the stranger is not a point in the curve but instead, its slope, and determines the location of the next high point. The stranger constitutes the asymptote directed toward the infinity of humanity.

Love of one’s fellow is a marker of the religion of reason in contrast to the pure will of Idealistic ethics. Love is by nature a selective emotion, turning one person’s favor toward 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.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to Idealistic ethics, 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 toward the unity of consciousness, by the unification of emotion and reason with the pure will. These forces thus preserve their uniqueness within human consciousness, but they exist in correlation with one another. A devotee 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 Idealistic ethics, nor is it pure passion as in myth. The religion of reason, which recognizes human imperfection, formulates a new conception of humanity, combining reason and emotion into a single conscious unity. As such it charges reason with the active forces of powerful human emotions and purifies

<sup>33</sup> See Kafka, *Jewish messianism*, 118-24.

<sup>34</sup> 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 emotions through the unification of consciousness (see Schweid, “Hermann Cohen as a Biblical Interpreter,” 120-21 and Weiss, *Paradox and the Prophets*, 199).

these emotions through reason. This combination of reason and emotion expresses incompleteness striving for totality.

The stranger, therefore, is an original concept that contains infinitesimally within itself all the characteristics of religious ethics. He represents the human suffering of poverty, a problem that can be rationally solved. He stands on the border between the national and the universal and marks the demand for constant expansion. He evokes a subjective love that is suffused with pity, with universal human dignity as an infinite goal.