YEARNING FOR FORM AND OTHER ESSAYS ON HERMANN COHEN'S THOUGHT

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VOLUME 5

YEARNING FOR FORM AND OTHER ESSAYS ON HERMANN COHEN'S THOUGHT

by

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following is a list of abbreviations of Hermann Cohen's Works with explanations and some essential bibliographical references.

- W Werke, hg. vom Hermann-Cohen-Archiv am Philosophischen Seminar der Universität Zürich unter der Leitung von Helmut Holzhey (later: im Auftrag des Hermann-Cohen-Archivs am Philosophischen Seminar der Universität Zürich und des Moses-Mendelssohn-Zentrums für europäisch-jüdische Studien Universität Potsdam, hg. von Helmut Holzhey, Julius H. Schoeps, Christian Schulte), Georg Olms, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York, 1977 ff.
- *S* Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte, 2 Bde, hg. von Albert Görland und Ernst Cassirer, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1928.
- J Jüdische Schriften, 3 Bde, hg. von Bruno Strauß, mit einer Einleitung von Franz Rosenzweig, Schwetschke, Berlin 1924.
- *KTE Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, Dümmler, Berlin 1871, 1885^2 ; Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1918³; repr. in *W 1/1-111*. Quotations normally come from the third edition. When it is necessary to specify the edition, the abbreviation will be accompanied by a superscript.
- *KBE Kants Begründung der Ethik*, Dümmler, Berlin 1877; Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1910², from which quotations are taken.
- *KBA Kants Begründung der Ästhetik*, Dümmler, Berlin 1889.

ABBREVIATIONS

- PIM Das Princip der Infinitesimal-Methode und seineGeschichte. Ein Kapitel zur Grundlegung der Erkenntnisskritik, Dümmler, Berlin 1883; repr. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1968; repr. in S 2 1-170 and in W 5/1, from which quotations are taken.
- *E* Einleitung mit kritischem Nachtrag zu F. A. Langes Geschichte des Materialismus, Baedeker, Leipzig 1896, 1902^2 ; Brandstetter, Leipzig 1914³. The last of the three editions, published with the ninth edition of the Lange's work, was reprinted in *S* 2 171-302 and in *W* 5/ π (with variations from other editions), from which quotations are taken.
- *LRE* System der Philosophie. Erster Teil: Logik der reinen *Erkenntnis*, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1902, 1914²; the latter edition was reprinted in W 6 (with variations from the first edition), from which quotations are taken.
- *ERW* System der Philosophie. Zweiter Teil: Ethik des reinen Willens, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1904, 1907^2 ; the latter edition was reprinted in W 7 (with variations from the first edition), from which quotations are taken.
- *ÄRG* System der Philosophie. Dritter Teil: Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls, 2 Bde, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1912; repr. in W 8/9, from which quotations are taken.
- *BR Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie*, Töpelmann, Gießen 1915; repr. in *W*10, from which quotations are taken.
- RV Die Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums, hg. von Benzion Kellermann, Fock, Leipzig 1919; Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums, hg. von Bruno Strauß, J. Kaufmann, Frankfurt a. M. 1929; repr. J. Melzer, Köln 1959, from which quotations are taken; English translation, with an introduction by Simon Kaplan, introductory essay by Leo Strauss, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., New York 1972.

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INTRODUCTION

HERMANN COHEN: A PHILOSOPHY CLASSIC?

Hermann Cohen's philosophy has now, finally, received the Recognition it deserves. His *Ethik des reinen Willens* has recently been included among the classic works of philosophy.¹ This recognition is certainly an act of justice and truth, not only towards Cohen, but also to the history of philosophy, and it is all the more to be appreciated since it was not necessarily obvious, not so much for the value of Cohen's thought in itself, as for the somewhat problematic history of his reception. As soon as he left Marburg in 1912, where he had taught for thirty six years at the city's university, which he had made famous to the extent of turning it, in the words of Thomas Nipperdey, into the «Mecca of continental philosophy»,² all traces and recollecttion of the philosophy of Cohen and his school soon disappeared, as a result of historical events and the arrival on the scene of new perspectives and new stars in the philosophical firmament, in the first place Martin Heidegger, who, in 1923, began teaching at Marburg.

During the years following Cohen's death, his thought and work were seriously neglected and only in the late 1960s, with the thesis by Dieter Adelmann,³ did new interest for them slowly develop. In the following years, with the setting up of the *Cohen-Archiv* at the University of Zurich and the beginning of the new edition of Cohen's

¹ Cf. Klassische Werke der Philosophie. Von Aristoteles bis Habermas, hg. von R. Brandt und Th. Sturm, Reclam, Leipzig 2002; the chapter on Cohen, *Hermann Cohen: Ethik* des reinen Willens, was written by Helmut Holzhey.

² CF. TH. NIPPERDEY, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866-1918*, Bd. 1, C. H. Beck, München 1990, p. 681.

³ D. ADELMANN, Einheit des Bewußtseins als Grundproblem der Philosophie Hermann Cohens, Diss., Heidelberg 1968.

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Werke,⁴ both the result of the work of Helmut Holzhey, also the author of the fundamental study *Cohen und Natorp*,⁵ research on Cohen took a decisive turn. A small, but seriously engaged group of researchers, in constant, fruitful contact with the *Cohen-Archiv*, arrived at many stimulating results in re-publication, translation, analysis and Interpretation of his works. Cohen's output was again brought to the attention of readers of philosophy. More recently Cohen has attracted attention and research as a front rank protagonist of Jewish thought.⁶

It is thus understandable that this limited group of researchers, who have been working so hard together, over the years, on the rediscovery and representation of Cohen's philosophy, should see the present, rightful recognition of its value, with a sense of satisfaction. Cohen's thought undoubtedly has all the characteristics of a classic. It faced the great problems of philosophical tradition, with full critical awareness and, at the same time, with the capacity to open up new, original routes. It represents one of the last expressions of great systematic thought. Cohen's system is not so only in name, which was actually more due to publishers' needs than a deep rooted intention of Cohen himself. The systematic character does not even come out in the architectural structure, which, as a matter of fact, has several weak, problematic points. It is thus not a question of a philosophical system as a solid, complete doctrinal construction, in the traditional scholastic sense, nor as an all embracing, totalitarian procedure of thought, in which a sense of security and infallible method reduces all otherness to itself, in Hegel's sense. We are dealing with systematic thought, rather than a completed construction, with philosophical procedure, whose method is a system because it is critical, i.e. because it moves

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⁴ The publication of *Kleinere Schriften* in this edition has been edited up to the present by Hartwig Wiedebach.

⁵ H. HOLZHEY, *Cohen und Natorp*, 2 Bde, Schwabe & Co. AG Verlag, Basel/Stuttgart 1986.

⁶ I have attempted to provide a somewhat more detailed survey of contemporary research on Cohen in my essay entitled *Hermann Cohen: Judaism and Critical Idealism*, which has not been included in this book, since it is awaiting publication in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy*, ed. by M. L. Morgan and P.E. Gordon. See also U. SIEG, *Aufstieg und Niedergang des Marburger Neukantianismus. Die Geschichte einer philosophischen Schulgemeinschaft*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 1994, pp. 11-24.

incessantly in the direction of a system, in the awareness of never being able to possess it, incessantly putting it up for discussion. This thought is profoundly systematic because it rejects all grounds, all stable structures and fulfilment in the name of the most radically systematic requirements of foundation, method and task.

Nevertheless, Cohen was also able to consider the philosophical system from an external perspective, and reflect on the system with its unity as his starting point. His works on the philosophy of religion are not only philosophical interpretation of the contents of religion, of Jewish monotheism, but also consideration, by means of the «method» of monotheism, as it were, of the contents of philosophical thought, starting off from the systematic unity that critical philosophy must always have before it as a regulative idea, but can never take up as a constitutive concept, since it must rigorously remain in the sphere of the methodological distinction between logic and ethics imposed by the scientific method.

At the same time, Cohen's works on the philosophy of religion are such a wide ranging, detailed reflection on all the most important themes of religious tradition in the light of Jewish monotheism, that he can be rightly included among the greatest interpreters, not only of Judaism, but also of monotheist religion in general.

Like all great classics, he was also able to reconcile the abstract nature of the system with concrete intellectual engagement in the historical, political, social and religious context of his own time. His considerable, uninterrupted activity as an essayist is evidence of this close tie between his systematic research and active participation in his historical situation.

There is, however, another characteristic, shared by great classics, which needs foregrounding in Cohen's thought, i.e. the fruitful nature of his weak points. On the whole, his philosophy is anything but complete and entirely satisfactory. A number of examples of incoherence, inconsistency, problems and difficulties can be, and have been pointed out. Despite this, however, I believe it is fair to say that, owing to a paradox common to great classics (such as Plato, Leibniz and Kant), these problematic aspects not only do not undermine the overall value of Cohen's philosophy, but that they are actually often its most lasting, fruitful aspects, since they «provoke thought», re-launch philosophical thought beyond the very results achieved by Cohen. The

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most «classic» trait of a philosopher, and Cohen saw this in both Plato and Kant, does not lie in the solutions he proposed, but in the ability to pose questions, set up problems, open up horizons, where philosophical research will always be able to find the room to move on.

Since I have also been working, in close, cordial contact with other scholars, on the analysis and interpretation of Cohen's philosophy, for the last twenty years (my first essay on the subject having come out in 1983), I hope that I can be included among those who, nowadays, are satisfied with this new general interest. However small my contribution may be, I think that some useful purpose can be served in collecting selected papers in one volume in English (with the exception of my book on The Critical Philosophy of Hermann *Cohen*⁷ and a few other essays). The papers collected together in the present volume deal with different aspects of Cohen's thought, especially ethical, political, aesthetic and religious ones. But I have almost always attempted to follow the ubiquitous presence of certain important themes in Cohen, their capacity for containing meanings that cannot be limited to a single philosophical sphere: themes that are keys to reading unity of inspiration in his thought, which is more deeply imbedded than the exterior architectural unity of his work.

In my view, the search for the fundamental themes behind Cohen is an important task, if, nowadays, we wish to see this philosopher as a present day vital point of reference, and not only as a monument of the past. Recognising Cohen as a philosophy classic, as I have already mentioned, is an element of historical justice and scientific truthfulness and reason for public satisfaction. Now I should like to add that it could be a misleading, counterproductive result. If seeing Cohen as a philosophy classic means distancing him from present day debate, only to canonise him on a far off altar, turning him into a mere object of respectful homage, then his heritage will have been totally lost. There is a monumental, museum like way of seeing classics, only leading to historical research, and, at worst, a devout scholastic attitude towards them. This way of turning a classic into a corpse to be honoured is an obvious betrayal, especially in the case of someone,

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⁷ A. POMA, *La filosofia critica di Hermann Cohen*, Mursia, Milano 1988; Eng. trans. by J. Denton, State University of New York Press, Albany (New York) 1997.

like Cohen, whose greatest achievement lies in the critical, challenging character of his thought. So as to avoid this risk, in the last essay in the book, I have attempted an initial reflection on the present relevance of Cohen's philosophy. I am certainly not pretending that Cohen can be seen as a postmodern philosopher, but that important themes for the inspiration of philosophical reflection in contemporary culture are to be found in him. If this inspiration were to be taken up, interesting routes could be opened up for understanding and elaborating our present condition. This is why this last essay provides the title for the whole volume, since, by recognising the classic nature of Cohen's thought, precisely in the name of his critical teaching, we shall not pause even for a second over sterile celebration, but refer to him so as to continue to research and think.

I should like to thank Prof. Reinier Munk for accepting this book in the series *Studies in German Idealism* he edits and Springer for publishing it. I would also like to thank Dr. Luca Bertolino for his role in preparing this book for publication.

> Turin, February 2005 Andrea Poma

HERMANN COHEN'S RESPONSE TO ANTI-JUDAISM

1. The Controversy with Treitschke

In November 1879 Heinrich von Treitschke, a leading historian and professor at Berlin University, published an article entitled *Unsere Aussichten* in «Preußische Jahrbücher», the review he edited. In it he added the prestige and authority of his name to the anti-Jewish campaign which had been revived at the time in Germany. This article gave rise to a lively controversy involving several prominent members of the German Jewish community and which lasted until the end of 1880. Treitschke also wrote a series of answers to his critics and reinforced his views on the matter.

Admittedly, Treitschke was anxious to distinguish his arguments «from the filth and ignorance»¹ characteristic of contemporary anti-Jewish writings. He was making no claims for «Christianity», like Adolf Stoecker, or the purity of the German race, like Wilhelm Warr, as a justification for not including the Jews in German society. Actually, his declared aim was to speed up their assimilation. This was why he invited the Jews to give up their arrogant separatism and aspirations to supremacy and power. Their sincere objective should be «to become Germans» as soon as possible, putting aside the specificity of their culture and adhering to the customs and traditions of German culture. In Treitschke's view, it was only this kind of option that would have overcome the obstacle represented by the Jewish presence in Germany at the time with regard to the consolidation of German national unity. Once these necessary

¹ H. v. TREITSCHKE, *Unsere Aussichten*, in «Preußische Jahrbücher» (November 1879); repr. in *Der Berliner Antisemitismusstreit*, hg. von W. Boehlich, Insel Verlag, Frankfurt a. M. 1965 [= BA], p. 7.

distinctions have been made, objectively speaking, Treitschke's arguments actually reinforced the anti-Jewish movement. Although he never sank to the level of verbal violence and ignorance shown by other exponents of the movement, he did accept many of their religious, nationalist and racial arguments, to the extent that the most fanatical anti-Jewish faction had no difficulty in considering him a prestigious supporter and exploiting his fame in favour of their cause.²

As has already been mentioned, Jewish responses were many and various. They ranged from personal opposition by the historian Heinrich Graetz (who had been singled out with particular vehemence), to point by point rejection of Treitschke's specific accusations and more wide ranging historical and theoretical contributions (like the ones by Harry Bresslau and Moritz Lazarus respectively).³

Among those who came to the defence of Judaism there was also «a Jewish colleague from a small university». This is how Treitschke himself described Hermann Cohen, who had been full professor at Marburg University since 1876. In December 1879 Cohen wrote Treitschke two letters, in which, though making no secret of his critical stance, he was particularly insistent over the possibility of and need for conciliation and mutual understanding. Cohen's decision to make his first approach to Treitschke in private is clear enough evidence of his conciliatory intentions. He ended his letter of 13 December 1879 with an invitation to Treitschke to publish it in his «Preußische Jahrbücher» «or else – something that would please me even more! – that you might change your mind after a benevolent

² See, for example, W. ENDNER, Zur Judenfrage. Offene Antwort auf das offene Sendschreiben des Herrn Dr. Harry Bresslau an Herrn von Treitschke, Berlin 1880; repr. in BA 96-124; H. Naudh (= H. G. NORDMANN), Professoren über Israel, von Treitschke und Bresslau, Berlin 1880; repr. in BA 180-204. Zöllner's and Förster's anti-Jewish petition requires mention here. It led to an argument between Treitschke and Mommsen in the context of the more general controversy (cf. BA).

³ Der Berliner Antisemitismusstreit, cit., a collection of most contributions to the controversy, provides details. See also: H.-J. v. BORRIES, *Deutschtum und Judentum. Studium zum Selbstverständnis des deutschen Judentums 1879/80*, Diss., Druckerei R. Himmelheber & Co., Hamburg 1971 and M. A. MEYER, *Great Debate on Anti-semitism. Jewish Reaction to New Hostility in Germany 1879/81*, in «Leo Baeck Institute Year Book» 11 (1966), pp. 137-170.

perusal of it»,⁴ Cohen being so convinced that his views could be reconciled with those of Treitschke! Nothing actually came of either alternative. In fact, in January 1880, Treitschke published an even more radically hostile piece than the previous ones.⁵ As a result, Cohen decided to return to and develop the views expressed in his letters, thus publicly entering the controversy with *Ein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage*.⁶

«We are again obliged to bear witness».⁷ These were the words Cohen used to begin not only his 1880 essay, but also his active profession and defence of Judaism, which was to last uninterruptedly throughout his life. In his reply to Treitschke, Cohen put aside all the specific features of the controversy, the technical and statistical arguments over the number of German Jews, the extent of Jewish influence on the press, quarrels over interpretations of Tacitus and countless other points brought up by those taking part. His aim was to identify the core of the Jewish question and anti-Judaism. Right from the start, he affirmed that, in its essence, the Jewish question was a religious one and that the political and racial aspects, together with their solutions, were but a consequence of the religious aspect. This conviction was to remain unchanged as the unitary motif of his nearly forty year long profession of Judaism.

However, the religious question between Christians and Jews in Germany should not be posed in terms of conflict: «I am unable to recognise any difference between Israelite monotheism and protestant Christianity *in the scientific concept of religion*».⁸ Jewish monotheism is characterised by the two ideas of the spirituality of God and the messianic promise, while Christianity, in its acceptance of Greek culture, undertakes a process of the humanisation of religion,

⁴ Cohen's two letters have been published and commented on by H. HOLZHEY, *Zwei* Briefe Hermann Cohens an Heinrich von Treitschke, in «Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts» 12 (1969), pp. 183-204; quotation p. 197.

⁵ H. v. TREITSCHKE, *Noch einige Bemerkungen zur Judenfrage*, in «Preußische Jahrbücher» (Januar 1880); repr. in *BA* 77-90.

⁶ H. COHEN, *Ein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage*, Berlin 1880; repr. in *BA* 124-149 and in *J* 2 73-94.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 75.

expressed in the dogma of the humanity of God. Without this Christian contribution the ethical conception of the autonomy of reason would be impossible, as would the consequent ethical foundation of idealism. «This kind of Christianity - wrote Cohen belongs to all us modern Israelites, whether we are aware of the fact or not».9 Actually, the acceptance by modern Judaism of the Christian message of the humanisation of religion (which is nothing more than an explicit rendering of a trend already present in the Jewish tradition) in no way implies acceptance of the dogma of the humanity of God, since Judaism contrasts this with faith in the idea of the spirituality of God, which should also be proper to Christianity: «We know that together with every necessary humanisation of the moral sphere, a core of the ancient God of the prophets must be preserved and this is inaccessible to anthropomorphic reduction: "With whom do you wish to compare me, that I resemble him?" In this eternal core of faith in God, which is not merely cosmological, all Christians are Israelites».¹⁰ Thus German Jews can, or rather must share in the German people's religious unity, as was the case in the past. Their duty is to profess the monotheist idea as the message and specific task kept alive by them in the development of the German spirit, up to the point when the realisation of a «purer form of Christianity» will allow common profession by all monotheists. Treitschke had already dealt with this «purer form of Christianity», but in the light of the ideal of a future reunification of the various Christian denominations. He foregrounded the exclusion of Judaism, while Cohen extended its meaning, making it the ideal of complete unification of Christianity and Judaism, as a consequence of a total retrieval of the monotheist idea by both Christians and Jews.¹¹ Thus Cohen rejected Lazarus' view of the absence of the religious identity of German culture, and acknowledged its Christian character, as claimed by Treitschke. However, he argued that German Christians and Jews (and all modern Judaism) both equally shared in this «Christian» character. Therefore it could neither

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Cf. H. v. TREITSCHKE, *Noch einige Bemerkungen zur Judenfrage*, cit., *BA* 87 and H. COHEN, *Ein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage*, cit., *J 2* 87.

be an obstacle to religious unity nor a reason for seeing Judaism as «the national religion of a race, in origin, alien to us», as Treitschke had put it.¹² On the contrary, Cohen saw Judaism as one religious denomination among many, a «mode of faith» (*Glaubensart* is the Kantian term he used),¹³ within the single religion of the one and only God.

Professing monotheism is, then, in Cohen's view, the only true task of Jews, both in Germany and the rest of the world. In all other respects, their aim should be assimilation in the German nation and loyal co-operation in building its unity. This is why he was unable to accept either Graetz's Jewish nationalism (which he strongly rejected) or the position of Lazarus, who tended to undervalue all aspects (be they religious, cultural or racial) of national unity, in the belief that accepting it was merely a matter of subjective, individual choice, implying no kind of objective unity. Cohen, on the other hand, was convinced of the importance of national unity, not only from the religious viewpoint, as already stated, but also from the political and cultural ones. German Jews should be ready to give up a national spirit and feeling and become devoted, sincere German patriots.

He also believed that Treitschke's concept of racial identity was not in itself a barbaric instinct, but rather a natural orientation of possible psychological and emotional usefulness in the building of national unity. This is why he thought that the assimilation of the German Jews should also mean gradual reduction of racial characteristics. If this had still not fully taken place, it was only a question of time and generations. In any case, the Jews should not have anything against it in principle. Claims to racial identity only degenerate into negative barbarism when, for some supporters of anti-Judaism, not including Treitschke, the empirical fact of race is arbitrarily turned into an ethical norm, on the basis of which individuals are accepted or excluded by a nation. The nation is an ethical fact and belonging to it is measured by actual, individual co-operation in the building of the national ideal, not on the presence

¹² H. v. TREITSCHKE, Noch einige Bemerkungen zur Judenfrage, cit., BA 86.

¹³ I. KANT, Zum ewigen Frieden, Akademie Ausgabe, Bd. 8, p. 367; H. COHEN, Ein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage, cit., J 2 75.

or absence of specific natural characteristics, which can be useful for national unity but cannot constitute founding norms.

Nevertheless, Cohen did also criticise Treitschke in this context. The latter's real intentions did actually come out of his writings. When he invited the Jews to accept assimilation and become Germans, he was really expecting them to convert to Christianity. He was repeating the previous blackmail of the edict on emancipation, which required conversion to Christianity or the risk of not being considered real Germans. In Treitschke's view a state was free to adopt the laws it wanted, in contrast with a presumed natural right of all to participate in running it.¹⁴ Cohen's reply was that it was not so much a question of natural law establishing Jews' rights as that of ethical law of the state itself. Any state giving up its freedom, accepting the subjection of its sovereignty to a particular religious denomination would not only be falling short of its duty to its citizens, but, above all, its duty to itself: it would be betraying the very idea of State.

The essay closes with an appeal to orthodox and reformed Jews. To the former Cohen points out that no one can be a loyal citizen of a nation only in a superficial sense, while keeping to their different traditions and customs. Faith in the state cannot be contrasted with faith in religion, since service to the state is just as sacred as service to God. To the latter, who held that they had to give up Judaism in order to become Germans, he recalls the message of Jewish monotheism: if they were better acquainted with the essence of their religion, they could feel fully in agreement with the so-called «spirit of Christianity» while still remaining faithful to their Judaism. Religious unity, he concludes, is a crucial element in national unity. It is the objective criterion of the reality of a people and individual belonging to it, which allows this reality to be separated from the subjective realism to which Lazarus had reduced it and the false naturalist objectivity of race. This common religious ground between German Christians and Jews «exists, even though obstinate, hostile people may not acknowledge it».¹⁵

¹⁴ Cf. H. v. TREITSCHKE, Noch einige Bemerkungen zur Judenfrage, cit., BA 79.

¹⁵ H. COHEN, Ein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage, cit., J 2 94.

2. Germanism and Judaism

Cohen's piece gave rise to lively reactions in Jewish circles,¹⁶ including his friend and former fellow seminarist Rabbi Adolf Moses, in the USA.¹⁷ In a strongly worded reply, Moses accused Cohen of betraying loyalty to Judaism and taking sides with the enemy. He had given in to the moloch of nationalism and expected the German Jews to convert to Protestantism, in exchange for their emancipation and assimilation. Cohen's reply was entitled Zur Verteidigung.¹⁸ In it he distinguished between his own profession of Judaism as a historical faith and recognition of Christianity as a cultural value, foregrounding the meaning of his proposed encounter between Christianity and Judaism, repeating his conviction that loyalty to Judaism consisted in profession of monotheism with all its ethical and social implications rather than attachment to a nationalist tradition: «We must be Jews in spirit and mind, but not in the flesh and instinct!»¹⁹ To back up his views, the following year (1881), he published a lecture held in Berlin in 1869 on the origins and meaning of the Jewish Sabbath, once again in «Zeitgeist», the review edited by Adolf Moses.²⁰ In a Nachwort he stated his willingness to identify the Jewish Sabbath with a «national Sabbath», i.e. Sunday, which would coincide with the assimilation in national customs and traditions he believed in. This would not be a violation of the religious substance of Judaism, but rather the bearer of its message in the world. Cohen's analysis of the religious aspect of the Jewish question to be found in these writings is of crucial importance for understanding his overall position. We shall return to this later on. Lastly, Zur Verteidigung states that Judaism cannot be an alternative to patriotism and that German patriotism can only exist

¹⁶ Cf. F. ROSENZWEIG, *Einleitung*, in J 1 xxx.

¹⁷ A. MOSES, Prof. Dr. Hermann Cohen in Marburg und sein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage. Eine Reminiszenz und Kritik, Milwaukee (Wisconsin) 1880.

¹⁸ H. COHEN, Zur Verteidigung, in «Der Zeitgeist», Milwaukee (Wisconsin), (5 August 1880), pp. 256-257; repr. in J 2 95-100.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁰ H. COHEN, *Der Sabbat in seiner kulturgeschichtlichen Bedeutung*, in S. A. des «Zeitgeist», Milwaukee (Wisconsin), (1881); repr. in *J 2* 45-72.

through respect for the Christian religion. Above all, Cohen insists on his desire for conciliation and his rejection of polemical, gut opposition: «On one side the Jew, on the other, the Christian! Let's see who's right!»:²¹ such an inflexible attitude would exclude any hope of conciliation and would be, above all, a defeat for reason.

Over the following years, though the idea of and hope for conciliation had not died out as a principle, the serious problem of persecution was in the forefront of Cohen's mind. He became ever more conscious of the fact that it was a question, for the Jews, of a struggle for survival against their «enemies»²² whose aim was their religious annihilation, especially by means of conversion (and, given its premises, religious annihilation for Cohen meant total annihilation of Judaism). He thus took up a more rigid stance. He now placed more emphasis on the need for defence of the specificity of Judaism in its preservation,²³ alerted readers over the damage caused by conversions,²⁴ underlined the differences between Judaism and Christianity,²⁵ condemned the immorality and absence of scientific

²¹ H. COHEN, Zur Verteidigung, cit., J 2 97.

²² H. COHEN, Über die literarische Behandlung unserer Gegner, in «Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums» (29. August 1902), pp. 412-414; repr. in J 2 360-368 (especially 360).
²³ Cf., for example, H. COHEN, Gedanken über Jugendlektüre, in «Wegweiser für die

²⁵ Cf., for example, H. COHEN, *Gedanken über Jugendlektüre*, in «Wegweiser für die Jugendliteratur», hg. von Grossloge für Deutschland VIII U.O.B.B., 13 (September 1906), pp. 49-51; repr. in *J 2* 126-132; ID., *Zwei Vorschläge zur Sicherung unseres Fortbestandes*, in «Bericht der Grossloge für Deutschland U.O.B.B.», Fest-Ausgabe, 2 (März 1907), pp. 9-12; repr. in *J 2* 133-141; ID., *Religiöse Postulate*, Berlin 1907; (in an expanded edition) in «Ost und West» (1909), coll. 70-82; repr. in *J 1* 1-17; ID., *Die Liebe zur Religion*, in «Gemeindeblatt der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin» (10. Februar 1911), coll. 1-4; repr. in *J 2* 142-148.

²⁴ Cf., for example, H. COHEN, Der Religionswechsel in der neuen Ära des Antisemitismus, in «Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums» (2. Oktober 1890), pp. 489-490; repr. in J 2 342-345; ID., Unsere Ehrenpflicht gegen Dreyfus, in «Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums» (9. Juni 1899), pp. 268-270; repr. in J 2 346-351; ID., Die Zugehörigkeit zur Gemeinde, in «Gemeindeblatt der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin» (6. Oktober 1916), pp. 115-116; in J 2 156-161/W 17 279-286.

²⁵ Cf., for example, H. COHEN, *Die Errichtung von Lehrstühlen für Ethik und Religionsphilosophie an den jüdisch-Theologischen Lehranstalten, in* «Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums» 48 (1904), pp. 2-21; repr. (in an expanded edition) in J 2 108-125; ID., *Gedanken über Jugendlektüre*, cit.; ID., *Die*

credibility of the persecutors of Judaism,²⁶ demanded full civic and political equality for Jews as a right not a concession²⁷ and warned the state that this equality is its ethical duty, failure to observe it draining the state itself of its meaning.²⁸ The main cause for concern shown by these writings was, however, the accusation of immorality made against Judaism (by de Lagarde, for example).²⁹ Thus they are frequent demonstrations, not only of the profound ethical value of Judaism, but also of the origins in Judaism of Western ethical consciousness.³⁰

Events in 1914, with the outbreak of the war, opened up a new chapter, as it were, in the development of Cohen's Jewish thought. He did not set aside the Jewish cause to engage in German nationalist propaganda, nor was he solely concerned with anti-Jewish persecution at a time when the whole of Germany was suffering in the war, as his friend and associate Paul Natorp accused him of being.³¹ During this period Cohen fought doggedly, both on behalf of Judaism, and Germany. He, actually, managed to balance these two tasks admirably, developing to the full all the implications of his previous stances. This is a fundamental point in fully understanding the theme dealt with here.

religiösen Bewegungen der Gegenwart, Leipzig 1914, repr. in J 1 36-65/W 16 123-162.

²⁶ Cf., for example, H. COHEN, Über die literarische Behandlung unserer Gegner, cit.
 ²⁷ Cf., for example, H. COHEN, Der geschichtliche Sinn des Abschlusses der Dreyfus-Affäre, in «Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums» (27. Juli 1906), pp. 352-355; repr. in J 2 352-359 (especially 358).

²⁸ Cf., for example, H. COHEN, *Emanzipation. Zur Hundertjahrfeier des Staatsbürgertums der preußischen Juden* (11. März 1912), in «Israelitisches Familienblatt» (7. März 1912), pp. 1-3; repr. in *J* 2 220-228.

²⁹ For further details see Bruno Strauß's note to H. COHEN, *Die Nächstenliebe im Talmud*, in *J 1* 338.

³⁰ The following is of particular importance in this context: H. COHEN, *Religion und Sittlichkeit. Eine Betrachtung zur Grundlegung der Religionsphilosophie*, in «Jahrbücher für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur» 10 (1907), pp. 98-171; expanded reprint in book form, Berlin 1907; repr. in J 3 98-168. Many other important titles could be added. It is worth mentioning here the publication in 1904 of the second volume of Cohen's system: *Ethik des reinen Willens*, Berlin 1904.

³¹ Cf. the letters exchanged between Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp in November 1916, in H. HOLZHEY, *Cohen und Natorp*, 2 Bde, Schwabe & Co. AG Verlag, Basel/Stuttgart 1986, Bd. 2, pp. 454-466.

Especially in the highly lucid 1915 essay entitled Deutschtum und Judentum³² as well as in other contemporary writings,³³ Cohen dealt with the profound, inseparable union of German and Jewish culture, highlighting idealism as the essence, message and task of both. He reaffirmed his loyalty to the German nation, in opposition to Zionism and defended the value of the German spirit in the face of international Judaism. Cohen now hoped that Germany, under the burden of criticism and suffering, would become aware of its close links with Judaism, both because being under great pressure inevitably brought it closer to the condition of the persecuted Jews, and also because self reflection, made necessary by these historical circumstances, the search for its foundations and meaning of its suffering, would enable it to rediscover idealism and humanism, as the very essence of its culture and the task it was fighting for. In this way, it would be united with Judaism in an effort to achieve a common mission. This awareness on the part of Germany could only reveal the real meaning of anti-Judaism to it: an attempt to annihilate, not only Judaism, but also Germanism and humanism in general.

This brief, anything but exhaustive discussion of the main themes of Cohen's response to anti-Judaism still requires an analysis (albeit a

³² H. COHEN, Deutschtum und Judentum. Mit grundlegenden Betrachtungen über Staat und Internationalismus, Gießen 1915 (2nd expanded edition 1916: note 33 below); repr. in J 2 237-301/W 16 469-560.

³³ Cf., for example, H. COHEN, «Du sollst nicht einhergehen als ein Verleumder». Ein Appell an die Juden Amerikas, in «Israelitisches Familienblatt» (24. Juni 1915), pp. 9-10; repr. in J 2 229-236/W 16 301-310; ID., Deutschtum und Judentum, in Vom inneren Frieden des deutschen Volkes, hg. von F. Thimme, Leipzig 1916, pp. 541-562; repr. in J 2 302-318/W 17 111-132; ID., Zionismus und Religion. Ein Wort an meine Kommilitonen jüdischen Glaubens, in «K.-C. Blätter» 11 (Mai-Juni 1916), pp. 643-646; repr. in J 2 319-327/W 17 211-221; ID., Antwort auf das offene Schreiben des Herrn Dr. Martin Buber an Hermann Cohen, in «K.-C. Blätter» 12 (Juli-August 1916), pp. 683-688; repr. in J 2 328-340/W 17 243-260; ID., Was einigt die Konfessionen? Vortrag, gehalten in der Freien Wissenschaftlichen Vereinigung zu Berlin am 9. Juni 1917, in «Protestantenblatt», Supplement, 28 (14. Juli 1917) and 29 (21. Juli 1917), coll. 441-445 and 457-464; repr. in J 1 66-86/W 17 455-486; ID., Der Jude in der christlichen Kultur, in «Neue Jüdische Monatshefte» 10 (25. Februar 1917), pp. 291-294, 11 (10. März 1917), pp. 322-325, 13 (10. April 1917), pp. 387-389 and 17 (10. Juni 1917), 509-514; repr. in J 2 193-209/W 17 419-446.

brief one, for reasons of space) of the fundamental concepts underlying it, so as to foreground the meaning and coherence of his arguments.

Firstly, Cohen's idealist conception of history must be constantly kept in mind. He was frequently accused of lack of realism, of not considering the real historical circumstances and seeking refuge in an abstract world of ideas. As early as 1916 Martin Buber had entitled his reply to Cohen over the Zionist controversy, Begriffe und Wirklichkeit, alluding to opposition (developed later in the piece) between the abstract world of Cohen's concepts and the factual reality of Judaism and its historical condition. Cohen is still the object of such accusations. Walter Boehlich, for example, when commenting on his arguments against Treitschke, blamed him for dissolving «all the juridical, social and political problems in the abstract heavens of Neo-Kantianism».³⁴ But, as noted by Steven Schwarzschild,³⁵ Cohen's reiterated, convinced affirmation of the unity and harmony between Germanism and Judaism in no way implies that he did not or could not see the real, serious historical and cultural conditions contributing to the conflict between the two sides. Schwarzschild clearly highlighted Cohen's idealist perspective. The latter did not view history as a mere chain of empirical facts, but as a phenomenon endowed with profound ideal, ethical meaning. Understanding history cannot be restricted to recording events, but involves being able to identify the realisation of an idea in the chain of facts. It is the idea, transformed into ethical law, that constitutes the truth of history, and truth is the supreme criterion for understanding and judging reality. Cohen did not see history in terms of Hegel's identity of idea and reality or in the irreconcilable separation and opposition between the ideal and the real. History is, in the Kantian sense, the inexhaustible task of the realisation of the idea. The inexhaustible nature of this task does not mean illusion or utopia. The essence of ethical idealism consists in the complementary character of the two aspects: the engagement of free will in its infinite task and faith in the power of the

³⁴ W. BOEHLICH, Nachwort, in BA 250.

³⁵ Cf. S. SCHWARZSCHILD, «Germanism and Judaism». Hermann Cohen's Normative Paradigm of the German-Jewish Symbiosis, in Jews and Germans from 1860 to 1933: The Problematic Symbiosis, ed. by D. Bronsen, Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg 1979, p. 138.

realisation of the good. For Cohen, the profound identity of idealism and monotheism emerges from this double aspect.

When Cohen affirms the profound unity of Germanism and Judaism or Christianity and Judaism, he is not simply considering mere factual reality, but rather sees this reality in the light of the idea constituting its meaning and truth. This position is foregrounded with a number of different expressions in his writings: for example, «Germany is only true in its idealism».³⁶ For Cohen Germany is the «originative land of Humaneness (Humanität)»,37 the «nation of Kant»,³⁸ thus Christianity for Cohen is a «purer form of Christianity»,³⁹ or «Christianity thought in a historical spirit».⁴⁰ Judaism is also seen as that «in spirit and mind», not «in the flesh and instinct»,⁴¹ it is Judaism «in the spirit of the prophets».⁴² Many more examples could be provided. What needs to be pointed out is the normative meaning of Cohen's statements of unity between Germanism and Judaism and Christianity and Judaism. This normative meaning does not have anti-historical intentions, since, on the contrary, in an idealist conception of history, like Cohen's, idea is truth, and truth is the only reality at which historical action must aim.

3. Nation and State

This idealist conception should also be kept in mind for understanding concepts like that of nation. Admittedly, in *Ein Bekenntnis in der*

³⁶ E 121.

³⁷ H. COHEN, *«Du sollst nicht einhergehen als ein Verleumder». Ein Appell an die Juden Amerikas*, cit., *J 2 236/W 16 310*. The German word «Humanität» is so rich and peculiar in meaning as to defy adequate translation into English. Here, and elsewhere in this book, it was decided to translate it by «Humaneness», because it seems to me to be the most satisfactory option and because it allows the reader to recognise all references to the term throughout and distinguish it from «Menschheit», which has been translated by «humanity» or «mankind».

³⁸ H. COHEN, Ein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage, cit., J 2 73.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁴¹ H. COHEN, Zur Verteidigung, cit., J 2 98.

⁴² H. COHEN, Der Sabbat in seiner kulturgeschichtlichen Bedeutung, cit., J 2 72.

Judenfrage, Cohen made rather vague use of concepts such as «nation», «nationality», «people», «race» and «stock». He enlarged on these concepts later on, but the definition of their meaning and mutual relations still remains a complex problem. Schwarzschild suggests a pattern, albeit with reservations: «individual, i.e. "natural man" \rightarrow "nationality" \rightarrow Volk (territory) \rightarrow state (from "power state" to "legal state" = from "community" to "society", i.e. socialism) \rightarrow federation of states \rightarrow humanity».⁴³ I cannot deal thoroughly with this analysis here, since it would require a separate study. I will restrict myself to some remarks of use for the subject under consideration. We have already seen how, in 1880, Cohen kept his distance from Lazarus' idea of nation. He would not accept the relativism of someone who held that «the people, each person decides on it subjectively, and includes himself in it».⁴⁴ Cohen stood at an even greater distance from naturalist conceptions of nationality, grounded in «objective», anthropological or biological identification such as race or stock. At the very end of his life he strenuously opposed the position of Bruno Bauch,⁴⁵ who saw the historical and cultural aspects of national identity only as the expression and realisation of a naturalistically determined «national character». Bauch defined a nation as a «natural community grounded in common descent, which, under the restraint of a common history, goes through a process of continual elaboration of cultural identity».

In the not always coherent development of the concepts dealt with above, Cohen appears to have defined «people» and «nationality» in naturalistic terms and «nation» and «state» in purely ethical ones. The conclusion of this development appears to be the scheme in accordance with which the plurality of nationalities makes up the ethical unity of a nation by means of the setting up of a state. There are, in fact, many references in his writings to «nationality» and «people» as a

⁴³ S. SCHWARZSCHILD, «Germanism and Judaism». Hermann Cohen's Normative Paradigm of the German-Jewish Symbiosis, cit., p. 149.

⁴ M. LAZARUS, Was heißt national? Ein Vortrag, Dümmler, Berlin 1880, p. 13.

⁴⁵ On this position see B. BAUCH, Vom Begriff der Nation (Ein Kapitel zur Geschichtsphilosophie), in «Kant-Studien» 31 (1917), pp. 135-162.

⁴⁶*Ibid*., p. 157.

natural entity,47 but when Buber blamed him for seeing «a mere "fact of nature"» in nationality and treating «nationality» and «stock» or «descent» «as synonyms», arguing that «nationality should not be defined with the concept of fact of nature. It is a historical reality and ethical task»,⁴⁸ Cohen's reaction was a strong one: «So it is somewhat strange when Buber is shocked because I claimed that nationality is a fact of nature and tries to instruct me, as though I were not a well known opponent of the materialist conception of history, even in social democracy. Thus, when I say that Jewish nationality needs to be preserved in the name of the subsistence of religion, I am elevating it to the level of an undeniably valuable historical factor. In the new edition of my Deutschtum und Judentum, I even argue for reform of international law to safeguard nationality in the event of naturalisation. Such is my boundless respect for the ethical character of nationality, even in the face of the problem of a new state, that it is freely chosen».⁴⁹ He then elaborated on the meaning of his distinction between «nation» and «nationality»: «This immediately allows identification of the general reason behind my attempt to define the difference between nation and nationality as follows: admittedly nationality remains a fact of nature with moral characteristics (eine sittliche Naturtatsache), while it is only through the state that a nation is set up by a pure act of political morality».⁵⁰ The expression «sittliche Naturtatsache», used here to define nationality, reveals Cohen's true thought. It is not a question of classifying certain concepts as naturalistic, and others as ethical, but of distinguishing between a naturalistic conception of history and an ethical, idealist one. In the latter, as has already been mentioned, the idea is the *a priori* of the fact, truth the *a priori* of reality, the universal the *a priori* of the particular.

⁴⁷ Cf., for example, H. COHEN, Deutschtum und Judentum. Mit grundlegenden Betrachtungen über Staat und Internationalismus, cit., J 2 273/W 16 521 f.; ID., Zionismus und Religion. Ein Wort an meine Kommilitonen jüdischen Glaubens, cit.,

J 2 322/*W* 17 214 f.; *ERW* 33 f., 80, 240, 251, 589, 629. ⁴⁸ M. BUBER, *Begriffe und Wirklichkeit. Brief an Herrn Geb. Regierungsrat Prof. Dr.* Hermann Cohen, in «Der Jude» 5 (August 1916), pp. 281-289/W 17 223-240.

⁹ H. COHEN, Antwort auf das offene Schreiben des Herrn Dr. Martin Buber an *Hermann Cohen*, cit., *J 2 329/W 17 245*. ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 330/246.

In such a perspective the empirical, «natural» elements, such as «race» and «stock», which belong to nationality, are not removed, but rather idealised. They become the means for setting up an ethical reality: «ideal moments» are already part of the biological and anthropological meaning of «nature»,⁵¹ an idealised nationality takes on a new meaning in the light of its ethical task: setting up a national state. Thus nationality becomes an «inalienable willingness towards all degrees of ethicisation».⁵² In the specific case of the Jews, preserving nationality is only relevant to loyalty to their religious identity, the profession of monotheism, and cannot, therefore, be the foundation of nationalist isolation inside or outside the German national state, but, on the contrary, the foundation of universalism, coherent with the messianic meaning of monotheism, which cannot be realised outside the ethical objectivity of the state, and of the German state in particular: «There can be no doubt that nationality can stand in relation only to religion. The concept of the nation has already been deprived of its anthropological, or ethnic, element, and its idealization was realized only in the state. The tribe, with its physical basis, was not thereby depreciated; although it is true that one no longer recognized ideality in the tribe itself, the possibility of its being idealized by the highest human ideal - by the state - was acknowledged. The idealization of nationality follows the same method. Nationality is in no way irrelevant or inferior, although the ideal does not lie in nationality; rather, it is elevated to the ideal insofar ad it serves as a means to the establishment and continuation of religion. For the establishment of religion the people of Israel was necessary. That is what it means for Israel to be the chosen people».⁵³

A naturalist, materialist conception of history, on the other hand, reduces the ethical aspects of political reality to the natural ones. Metaphorically speaking, one could say that it places the past of empirical nature, not the universal future of the idea at the base of reality. This is why it cannot overcome the limits of exclusive, and thus anti-humanist

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 329/pp. 244 f.

⁵² H. COHEN, Deutschtum und Judentum. Mit grundlegenden Betrachtungen über Staat und Internationalismus, cit., J 2 274/W 16 523.

³*RV* 422; Eng. trans. cit., p. 363.

particularism. Nationalism, whether it be German or Zionist, is nothing more than naturalism, rejection of the ethical value of political reality, and, therefore, also a rejection of the state: «The concept of the state is the ethical concept of civilisation. It represents the final aim of historical development. The national concept is useful and acceptable as a means to this end. It is unnecessary to reject this means owing to mistaken suspicion of naturalism. However, as soon as the concept of people becomes independent and absolute, it becomes barbaric. There is certain evidence for recognition that this judgement is not illegitimate and unjust. It consists and continually reappears in the contradiction that nationalism constitutes and raises against the idea of the state. Nationalism turns into anarchism. The latter consists, as we have seen, in abandoning the concept of the state as a principle of ethical self-consciousness. Nationalism also neglects this principle. It presents itself as a means to an end, while the people is the only means for the state».54

Therefore, anti-Judaism, in its racial and nationalist aspects, is not only a violation of individual rights and those of the Jewish minority, but also of the state and humanity.

4. Judaism, Christianity and Idealism

The state is undoubtedly the main, essential element in the setting up and maintenance of unity and mutual tolerance among different nationalities and religious denominations. Cohen, nevertheless, also acknowledged cultural, religious, even racial unity with a view to national unity, these conditions also being realised in the case of Judaism and Germanism. Even from the racial viewpoint, he believed in an undeniable affinity between the two. The Jews had settled in Germany many centuries before, and they had been continuously present, been assimilated and had adopted the German language and customs. Cultural and religious unity was much more important to him than racial unity.

⁵⁴ ERW 255.

Let us return, for a moment, to the 1880 controversy involving Treitschke and Adolf Moses' criticisms of Cohen. Moses had blamed Cohen for expecting German Jews to convert to Christianity as a condition for emancipation in the German nation.⁵⁵ In Zur Verteidigung, Cohen had answered, making a distinction between his profession of Judaism and «historical-cultural» acknowledgement of the «historical trend of Protestantism».⁵⁶ What did he mean by this expression, that he also used elsewhere? In his view Lutheran Protestantism is not so much characterised by Christological dogma, which had become of only marginal interest,⁵⁷ as by other characteristics and trends which I shall attempt to list rapidly here. Firstly, the critical method of truth as a hypothesis and faith as a rational test of it: this is the essence of idealism, which German Protestantism took from Greek culture, Plato in particular. It can thus be claimed that «the historical spirit of Protestantism has been independent since the Wittenberg Reform»,⁵⁸ its origins lying in a previous period. The idealist trend in Protestantism is also characterised by the distinction between science and faith, where the latter is not abandoned to scepticism, but turned into moral teaching. The idea of universal priesthood, together with the great ideal of humanism gave rise to the socialist idea in Protestant culture. Furthermore, it was Protestantism that took the step from the universal Christian state to the national, non-religious dominated state, not as an obstacle, but as a condition for the political realisation of humanist universalism, in accordance with the great Kantian idea of the federation of states and perpetual peace.

In Cohen's view these trends of German Protestantism are in profound harmony and have a real historical relationship with the great themes of Jewish monotheism: the uniqueness and spirituality of

⁵⁵ A. MOSES, *Prof. Dr. Hermann Cohen in Marburg und sein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage. Eine Reminiszenz und Kritik*, cit., pp. 5 ff.

⁵⁶ H. COHEN, Zur Verteidigung, cit., J 2 95 ff.

⁵⁷ Cf., for example, H. COHEN, *Gedanken über Jugendlektüre*, cit., J 2 127; ID., Der Jude in der christlichen Kultur, cit., J 2 204 ff./W 17 436 ff.; ID., Religion und Sittlichkeit, cit., J 3 156.

⁵⁸ H. COHEN, Deutschtum und Judentum. Mit grundlegenden Betrachtungen über Staat und Internationalismus, cit., J 2 242/W 16 476.