

Introduction

Hermann Cohen was arguably the most important figure of Jewish philosophy at the turn of the twentieth century. Not only was his philosophical description of historical Judaism as the essential foundation of an ideal “*religion of reason*” in many respects the climax of nineteenth-century liberal German-Jewish theology, Cohen was, significantly, also the authoritative reference for most of those younger twentieth-century thinkers who completely rejected his idealistic approach to Judaism and who viewed their own Jewishness in rather existentialist terms, such as Rosenzweig or Buber. Cohen’s work in Jewish philosophy summarized and systematized all that which rationalist Jewish theologians had developed starting from the Middle Ages in Spain to the heyday of Reform thought in mid-nineteenth-century Germany, as reflected in his ethical God-Idea, his collective and future-oriented Messianism, his enthusiasm for the social message of the Hebrew prophets, and his functional understanding of ritual law. All those elements of what he saw as Jewish ethical-rational monotheism he incorporated in his well-ordered system of religious thought, setting them side by side with those features of his theology that were a product of his own, original thinking about Judaism: the emphasis on divine atonement as the actual purpose of all religious activities, and the special place and the “peculiarity” (*Eigenart*) of religion as a “phenomenon of human consciousness” vis-à-vis logic, ethics, and aesthetics, that is, the classical fields of rational philosophy. Moreover, Cohen’s original theory of the “I’s discovery of the Thou,” that is, the individual *Mitmensch* (fellow human) as the foundation and justification of peculiar religious consciousness, has had a lasting influence until this day.

But Cohen, as a person, was also the archetype and, at the same time, the symbol of the self-respecting, bourgeois, highly educated, patriotic German who nonetheless was also a proudly Jewish German Jew—the type of Jew produced in ever-increasing numbers in the second half of the nineteenth century. Cohen was the first openly Jewish *ordinarius*

in the humanities at a Prussian university, and he founded and headed there an influential school of German *Kathederphilosophie*, in Germany probably one of the most prestigious of achievements. Before and still also after his turning to the intensive treatment of Jewish subjects in the last twenty years of his life, Cohen published six distinguished volumes of neo-Kantian philosophy, earning him a scholarly reputation even among those German philosophers who remained unaware of his Jewish writings.

From all we know, Cohen was actively practicing Judaism and became a relentless opponent of the new wave of anti-Semitism that hit Germany from the 1880s onward.¹ Cohen was convinced of the towering progressiveness, and thus superiority, of the Jewish religion over even the most modern form of cultured Protestantism, as it represented the commonly professed faith in the German states of his day. Cohen supported at the same time the establishment of chairs for Judaism at German universities and the victory of the German army in World War I. Cohen gave evidence before a German court of law for the overall humanism of the Talmud, and at the same time he excitedly adopted the results of Julius Wellhausen's research concerning the different layers of chronology and authorship of the Pentateuch. His Judaism was one of the future, as a source of new pride for the modern Jew, based on an awareness of what crucial ideas Judaism had to contribute to world civilization.

Probably as good as any demonstration of Cohen's intellectual authority is the fact that he was the subject of extensive contemporary criticism. He was attacked by the leaders of Jewish orthodoxy and by Zionist nationalists alike: he was accused by the orthodox thinker Isaac Breuer² of founding a sectarian group of "ethicists" within Judaism through his openly selective reading of the sources, and he was accused by Martin Buber of his failure to understand the notion of nationality as a reality of the ethos and the spirit. Cohen's overwhelming idealistic optimism as to the abilities and eventual victory of human reason over prejudice, his related belief in the unstoppable social progress of modern society, and, most of all, his identification of Germany as the most fertile ground for those developments, Cohen was easy prey for the accusation of naivety and even ignorance, especially after the Holocaust.³

But in terms of his stature as a philosopher of Judaism, the most influential and far-reaching effect on Cohen's intellectual legacy was none other than Franz Rosenzweig. It is an irony of history that put Rosenzweig in a position to not only shape the modern view of Cohen's personality and religious positions, but to even steer the majority of the academic

research done on Cohen to date, and likely far into the twenty-first century. Rosenzweig, who was disappointed about being excluded from the editing of Cohen's last work, the "*Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*," was eventually asked in 1924, six years after Cohen's death, to write the introduction to Cohen's collected essays on Judaism, a three-volume project called "Jüdische Schriften." The untimely death of Cohen's most faithful disciple, Benzion Kellermann, who was the designated author of the introduction, cleared the way for Rosenzweig, and the lengthy text that he eventually provided became, for complex reasons, the ultimate reference of what Cohen "really was"—for both the scholarly and the nonscholarly world.⁴ Rosenzweig described Cohen here, effectively using a number of anecdotes about Cohen's life, as a rationalist philosopher of religion who was deeply disturbed by and concerned with his own inability to grasp the more intuitive and more traditionalist aspects of Judaism, and was thus eventually drawn to a pious existentialism of Rosenzweig's own preference.

From this point forward—excepting some criticism of Cohen during the Weimar years and an emotional celebration of his 100th birthday by Buber and others in 1942 in Jerusalem that took place in the shadow of the unbelievable horrors unfolding in Europe at the time—Hermann Cohen's Jewish philosophy remained largely untouched by researchers until the early 1990s. However, the interim years were punctuated by some significant contributions. For example, two monographs by Jacob Klatzkin (1919) and Siegfried Ucko (1935) appeared before the Holocaust. Beyond these, Hugo Bergmann included a chapter on Cohen in his "Thinkers of the Generation" (Hebrew 1934) and Julius Guttman climaxed his *Philosophie des Judentums* from 1933 with a long discussion of Cohen's thought. In 1945, Natan Rotenstreich dedicated a detailed chapter to Cohen's Jewish philosophy in his "Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times" (English 1968), and in the 1960s, Alexander Altmann, Hans Liebeschütz, and Heinz Mosche Graupe wrote learned articles on Cohen as a neo-Kantian Jewish thinker. But all of the aforementioned were historical accounts, portraying Cohen in his time, long past now, and, under the effect of the mass murder of European Jewry, also belonging to a very distinct past. It seemed by then that Cohen's influence and importance for modern Jewish theology was bound almost exclusively to the pre-World War I era, and that for traumatized post-World War II Jewish thought, his now notorious religious optimism and his insistence on Jewish universalism had nothing substantial to say anymore.

There were a few isolated islands of scholarship, however, where Hermann Cohen was always considered highly relevant and, given their actual and eternal philosophical truth, his ideas of Judaism were believed to have the potential for a great impact even on post-Shoah Jewry. Of these islands, by far and away the most significant was Washington University, St. Louis, of all places, and it was the lifetime achievement of the American rabbi and philosopher Steven S. Schwarzschild (1924–1989), working there, to have carefully preserved the intellectual heritage of arguably the most German of all Jewish philosophers, to have intensely studied and jealously defended it against all attacks, and even to have cautiously modernized Cohen’s Jewish teachings. Over the course of more than three decades, from his first essay on Cohen in 1956 until his death in 1989, Schwarzschild managed to move the center of Cohen research, at least concerning Jewish subjects, from Europe to America, with the lion’s share of this accomplishment being completed long before the first English translation of the *Religion of Reason* appeared in 1972. As a direct consequence of Schwarzschild’s efforts, Cohen’s thought not only began to influence wider parts of American Judaism,⁵ it also entered the discussions within postwar general philosophy—discussions in which, appropriately, Schwarzschild was an active participant.⁶ And interestingly, this transatlantic influence went both ways: not only did Schwarzschild present his European take on several selected and self-translated chapters from Cohen’s Jewish writings, which he published in his own American-based journal *Judaism* during the 1960s, he also later contributed an introduction to Cohen’s neo-Kantian *Ethik des Reinen Willens* from 1904, when this volume was republished in 1981 in Europe, as part of an edition of Cohen’s “Collected Works” in the German original.

In Europe, the main island of Cohen scholarship was Zurich. Cohen’s neo-Kantian philosophy was intensely studied there by a group of philosophers that had been formed from the 1970s onward around the Cohen expert Helmut Holzhey, concentrating, as just noted, almost exclusively on Cohen’s general philosophical writings, without reference to Judaism per se.⁷ Here again it was Steven Schwarzschild who provided the transatlantic synthesis in the research of Cohen’s thought—especially with his pronounced and singular contention that essentially there is no difference between the two sides of Cohen’s works.⁸

Steven Schwarzschild was born in Frankfurt am Main, and lived in Berlin until his family fled the Nazis to America. He returned

to Germany in 1948 as a young rabbi, helping to rebuild the Jewish community of Berlin. After his return to the United States, he served as a rabbi for several congregations, until in 1963 he began his professional academic career at Brown University, before moving on to Washington University in 1965, where he taught until his untimely death in 1989.⁹ Like Cohen, he was a liberal socialist and severely criticized Zionism. Schwarzschild believed, in the wake of Cohen, that the ethical relatedness of neo-Kantianism to jurisprudence would yet provide the best possible solution for a modern but still halachic understanding of the Jewish religion, and throughout his lifetime declined to associate exclusively with any of the “denominational streams” of modern Judaism.¹⁰

We owe to Steven Schwarzschild a sustained and clear understanding of Cohen’s thinking that, if taken seriously today, could correct several decisive misunderstandings still dominating the Cohen-research of the last twenty years. Unfortunately, Schwarzschild is, if noticed at all, frequently considered to hold “exaggerated” positions in his reading of Cohen.¹¹ Interestingly, the argument underlying this claim is founded on the same methodology that denies the radicalness of Cohen’s own views and resorts to what Schwarzschild himself called (Aristotelean) “middlingness” (in his discussion of Maimonides’ ethical philosophy).¹² But philosophical truth, Schwarzschild would argue, is identical with the divine truth of religion—and God’s demands are never moderating or conciliatory, but always radical. In the same way, the Platonic-Kantian-Cohenian concept of the ideal is by definition as radical as possible, because it does not describe what *is*, but what ideally *ought* to be. Therefore, Schwarzschild is, at least methodically, much closer to Cohen compared to his critics, for Schwarzschild was radically idealizing even Cohen’s thought itself.

There are at least four larger themes where Schwarzschild’s radical interpretation of Hermann Cohen essentially clears up widespread misperceptions about Cohen’s life and work, regardless of whether one agrees with either thinkers’ views. All four themes are closely connected to one another, and are:

1. The philosophical and systematical **unity of all of Cohen’s writings**, whether “Jewish” or neo-Kantian, and thus the consequent rejection of an “existentialist turn” in Cohen’s last book, as well as the exposure of Rosenzweig’s anecdotes as unreliable;

2. The rejection of any reduction (“**de-ontologization**” as Schwarzschild called it) of Cohen’s ethical idea of God to a divine realium, emphasizing instead that, in a very real sense, ideas can be said to possess “being” more than the objects of experience;¹³
3. Cohen’s overall neo-Kantian method of “**regulative idealization**” of Judaism, especially in his intentionally selective reading of Jewish sources (first and foremost of Maimonides), that was often misunderstood as not reflecting a historical “totality” of Judaism; and finally:
4. Cohen’s conspicuous **German patriotism**,¹⁴ being nothing but a special case of a philosophical idealization of a certain culture and its values, and not to be confused with any given historical reality in the Germany of Cohen’s time (or later).

All four of these themes appear over and over in Schwarzschild’s essays on Cohen, and can thus be explicated with confidence.

Ad 1. Throughout his entire corpus of writings on Cohen, Schwarzschild almost aggressively rejected any attempt to divide Cohen’s works into “Jewish” and “philosophical” sections, or, even worse for Schwarzschild, into an earlier neo-Kantian Cohen and “the last Cohen,” represented by his posthumously published last book, which is said until today by many to be “post-neo-Kantian and proto-existentialist.” This latter claim was, of course, first made very successfully by Franz Rosenzweig in his introduction to Cohen’s Jewish Writings, and when Schwarzschild set out to refute it as a merely “dreamt up” and quite intentional misinterpretation by Rosenzweig, he had ipso facto attacked the stated opinion of a united front of an overwhelming majority of well-known scholars, including Hugo Bergmann, Natan Rotenstreich, Julius Guttmann, and Karl Löwith.¹⁵ This attack came in a twofold way: first, as early as 1970, Schwarzschild deconstructed Rosenzweig’s famous theological anecdotes about Cohen on a rather personal level, and then sixteen years later, he provided a thorough philosophical refutation of the underlying claim that Cohen had given up religious idealism, at least in part, in the last few years of his life. In the 1970 essay, Schwarzschild showed not only that Rosenzweig had never

presented any historical evidence or trustworthy witnesses for the anecdotes, but even more, that the supposedly late baal tshuva version of Cohen, falsely presented by those stories, was very much in accordance with Rosenzweig's own philosophical preferences, especially with regard to the assertion that Cohen had before his death accepted the "reality" (as opposed to ideality) of religious concepts like God and the Messiah. In other words, Rosenzweig had merely projected his philosophy on to Cohen, while ignoring the fact that "the unattainability and imperative approximability" of these concepts was the supreme feature of Cohen's lifelong religious idealism. For Schwarzschild, it was unthinkable that Cohen would compromise on such a basic claim, because if "Cohen and Kant did not stand for this, they stood for nothing." And he added sardonically: "It is philosophically no easier, therefore, to believe Rosenzweig's famous anecdotes about Cohen than to believe that Kant told a friend that yesterday on the street he had run into and said 'hello' to a noumenon."¹⁶ As textual proof for his refutation of Rosenzweig, Schwarzschild referred to a remarkable, longer passage in Cohen's early book *Kants Begründung der Ästhetik* from 1889, where indeed almost the entire alleged "novelty" of 1918, concerning the individual character of religion, as opposed to philosophical ethics, is virtually anticipated.¹⁷

Only in 1986, when Schwarzschild wrote an essay on the meaningful title of Cohen's *Religion of Reason*, did he devote a longer passage to a philosophical justification of his clear-cut opposition to Rosenzweig's widely accepted theory of an "existentialist turn" in the late Cohen. According to Schwarzschild, Cohen's last book has its tight-fitting place within his overall systematic oeuvre, and does not stand out in any way vis-à-vis novel philosophical or religious ideas. The place that *Religion of Reason* occupies in Cohen's philosophic system, Schwarzschild claims here, is precisely analogous to the place that *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone* occupies in Kant's: the respective titles of the fourth works of both philosophers turn out equally to be conceptually translatable as "Critique of Practical-Religious Reason." Thus, the overarching unity of all of Cohen's works is found precisely in their strictly idealist, transcendental approach, and this philosophical idealism is rather confirmed (and not broken) by the development of a theology built from the transcendent ideas of religion in Cohen's

Religion of Reason: the ideas of creation, revelation, redemption, and most important, the idea of God.¹⁸ Therefore,

Ad 2. No ontological claims whatsoever “about God or man or the world are made in this work,” Schwarzschild argued. To the contrary: expounding the “correlation” between God and man, Cohen is even more careful in his last book to avoid the impression that this correlation is held to be a relationship of two empirical terms; it is rather ethical man that stands in relationship with the idea of God.¹⁹ The deity always remains an idea, even in Cohen’s *Religion of Reason*. God is never “real,” but a “transcendentally necessary presupposition for man’s total ethical life.” Again and again Schwarzschild stresses Cohen’s “epigram” that while traditional religionists and realists usually say that according to his view God was “only an idea,” neo-Kantians would say that Cohen’s God “was even an idea.”²⁰ As opposed to common sense, the whole notion that an idea is somehow less real than an empirical object, than a phenomenal existent, simply makes no sense philosophically. Indeed, it is the opposite of the truth for Plato, Kant, Cohen (“most especially”), and Schwarzschild (and also for Maimonides, as the last two thinkers mentioned claim).²¹ Therefore, explains Schwarzschild, for Cohen, God is not and never was a Biblical personality, nor a sensual object, but *more than that*: God is “even” the idea (in the neo-Kantian, regulative sense) of the normative, infinite realization of the good in the world. This same realization is known in religious language as the establishment of the messianic kingdom on earth by means of *the imitation of God*. Schwarzschild’s consistent and belligerent resistance to any attempt to de-idealize, that is, to re-ontologize Cohen’s concept of God, no matter if made in Cohen’s name or against Cohen, is not only a romantic defense of a philosophical role model; an insistence on the purity of Cohen’s idealism is seen by Schwarzschild both as ultimately decisive for a correct understanding of Cohen’s entire systematic thought (which would not be systematic without it), as well as constituting Cohen’s true and most important legacy for contemporary and future philosophical debates—in and outside Judaism.

Ad 3. Inside Jewish circles, one of the main points of criticism, still during Cohen’s lifetime but more so after his death in 1918, was

his treatment of the rich literary sources of Judaism, which he extensively used to support his theological ideas. Cohen was an enthusiastic reader of the Biblical prophets, and identified strongly with particular messages about ethics and hints to universal moral concepts. And though he possessed but mediocre knowledge of the Talmud, he found support for his ideas therein as well. But he was perhaps most at home studying and indeed rediscovering the religious philosophy of Maimonides, whose *Guide for the Perplexed* became of increasing importance to his own idealistic understanding of the basic concepts of Jewish theology.²² But Cohen's reading of these sources was intentionally highly selective. He chose those passages that fit his own philosophical agenda: the messianism, the social engagement, humanistic ideal and antimystical tendencies in the Prophets, a proto-Kantian philosophy of self-contained legal duties in the Talmud, and most of all, a proto-idealism of Maimonides' famous "negative theology" from the *Guide*, where nothing absolute could be predicated of the deity, and only His actions are known, which are entirely ethical in nature according to Cohen. This reading of Maimonides seemed strikingly to anticipate Kant again, both regarding the apparently de-ontologized nature of Maimonides' God, and the epistemological nature of the method of Maimonides' argument.

The almost universal outcry of the scholars of Judaism (excluding a small circle of Cohen disciples) against this "idiosyncratic" treatment of his Jewish sources by Cohen is clearly audible until this day:²³ such a "self-serving" approach, say the critics, gives a highly "distorted" picture of the Bible and also of the Rambam, who in many other places held very different opinions from the ones Cohen preferred, and thus Maimonides in particular was presented by Cohen in a biased and lopsided manner, to say the least. Here again, Steven Schwarzschild was of great help in dispelling what he saw as a widespread misunderstanding, by expounding the neo-Kantian methodology underlying Cohen's reading of Maimonides' *Guide* and all other sources. According to this justification, it never was Cohen's intention in the first place to present an all-embracing picture of empiric Judaism, or its intellectual representatives, as it unfolded in history. As a Kantian philosopher, Cohen was interested in precisely those aspects of historical Jewish thought that supported or even confirmed his own view of

Judaism as rational, ethical monotheism, and therefore those same Jewish concepts are not so much historically true as universally true, in the philosophical sense. Other aspects, especially irrational or mystical developments, as much as they belong to empiric Jewish history of thought, can and should be philosophically neglected.²⁴ Schwarzschild thus claims that Cohen consciously *idealized* empirical reality, but not from ignorance or arrogance, but in order to carve out the rational-ethical essence of Judaism, that is, Judaism's contribution to the development of culture: "In Critical philosophy, 'idealization' not only does not mean what it generally means—glorification, enveloping grimy reality with a nimbus of ideality, etc., but, in fact, it means exactly the opposite."²⁵ Thus, Cohen himself would happily concede that historical Judaism is far from being the ethical "*Religion of Reason*" that he described and aspired to, but Cohen would insist that Jewish literary sources provided (next to many other theological doctrines) almost all the raw material for the theological components necessary for this "*Religion of Reason*." On the other hand, critical idealizing is also not the attempt "to *dissolve* existing Judaism into an abstract, philosophically-inspired *religion of reason*," as Emil Fackenheim wrote of Cohen's Jewish thought.²⁶ Here the concept of an arbitrary empirical breadth of phenomena ("Judaism"), by calling it "alive," is confused, according to Schwarzschild, with the potential human ability to act. It is mistaken, at least, for the telos of moral action, founded on the primacy of practical reason. On the contrary, only an abstract *religion of reason* makes moral human action imperative, because it logically requires us to approximate the idea of God.²⁷ Ultimately, Cohen's method in his approach to empirical reality—with empirical reality including Jewish and other literary sources—is identified by Schwarzschild with the neo-Kantian principle of "regulative idealization," as developed in Marburg.²⁸ According to Schwarzschild, this method can be outlined, following a Marburg practice, with quite mathematical formulas. He writes:

"Idealization" is the rational, conceptual construction, the postulation of a morally desirable condition (A), for the purpose of measuring against it any actually given condition (B), so as necessarily to reveal that (B) falls short of (A) [(B) = (A) - x],

and entailing the categorical challenge that the most strenuous efforts must be made to narrow this gap urgently and increasingly [so that $(B) = (A) - (x - a)$].²⁹

Ad 4. Therefore, even the probably strangest views of Cohen, his apparently naive and exaggerated German patriotism, his fervent endorsing of German arms during World War I,³⁰ can be conveniently explained using the principle of “regulative idealization.”³¹ Of course, the charge of political naivety is overshadowed by the murderous events that took place in Germany many years after Cohen’s death, events that no sane human being could anticipate. But Schwarzschild, working in modern day America, was interested less in saving Cohen’s reputation as a prophet as he was in saving Cohen’s project of a humanistic, universal idealism, as he understood it from some of the sources of Judaism. During Cohen’s era, Schwarzschild writes, “German culture held pride of place in much of the world, and, correlatively, the acculturated German-Jewish community, together with its ideals, dominated worldwide Jewry somewhat similarly to the role of American Jewry in our time.”³² Thus, the question that arises here is far more general: Could it be said that the ashes of the death camps made the very existence of the Jewish people and the vitality of its culture capable of preservation only in separation from other societies, such that, as per Schwarzschild’s own formulation, emancipation and acculturation, “the ideals to which Cohen was dedicated, would, therefore, seem to have been massively refuted by the facts of 20th-century history, if by nothing else”? It is against this still prevalent opinion that Schwarzschild argues when he defends Cohen’s “Germanism” (*Deutschtum*) and the relationship of it to his Judaism. For if it were true, this opinion would undermine also Schwarzschild’s own vision for diaspora Jewry in America and the world.

Yet even setting aside the Nazi horrors, already in Cohen’s own time religious anti-Semitism was on the rise, the project of the integration, as Jews, of German Jewry into the majority Protestant German society met more resistance than expected, and, at the latest with the Treitschke-Affair of 1880, anti-Jewish prejudices had reached even into the academic world in which Cohen was at home. But it is precisely Cohen’s awareness of these developments, and even more so his lifelong active stand against

political and religious anti-Semitism, which render the accusation of naivety baseless in Schwarzschild's view.³³ As much as Cohen was not interested in the "real" Maimonides, his true love was never empirical Germany, neither in history nor in the present. Again, his passion was rather an *idealized* Germany, the country she ought to be and the culture she was to develop, following the greatest of her minds. It is thus another widespread misunderstanding that cultured German Jews, among them Cohen, venerated Goethe and Schiller, and even Kant (whose anti-Jewish remarks the Jewish Kantians were well aware of) because they were eager to imitate those Christian authors' thinking and thus close the "education gap" with their German neighbors.³⁴ It is yet again rather the opposite that is the case: enlightened German Jewry believed that those famed writers thought essentially like good Jews ought to think. As such, Cohen's emphatic Germanism is a classical "regulative idealization." Germanism was understood by Cohen to be what he often called "the nation of Kant."³⁵ But this nation is rather cosmopolitan (*weltbürgerlich*, as Kant called it), not Teutonic. In Schwarzschild's words, it is "not the narrow and, as Cohen knew only too well from his own lifelong experiences, historically disastrous reality of Germany, but the intermediate embodiment, as he wished to see it, of the progressive development of humanistic values from Plato through Maimonides to Kant, the French Revolution, and the socialist movement, which had, by that time, achieved greater political successes in Germany than anywhere else."³⁶

While those four points may be called Schwarzschild's pioneering contributions to academic Cohen research, there was for him always also a personal level in his relation to the Marburg philosopher. "Yes, I love Cohen," wrote Schwarzschild in 1972, "for his philosophical erudition and perspicacity, for his moral grandeur, and for his Jewish profundity." And in an even more personal note he added, "I have his memorabilia in my study and his portrait, done twice by Max Liebermann, on both sides of my sitting-room, so that no visitor can avoid the look of his searching eye."³⁷ Cohen cannot be ignored philosophically and thus must not be avoided, in Schwarzschild's view. This was certainly a matter of Jewish pride; Cohen had after all "circumcised, as it were, Plato and the European tradition,"³⁸ but not only. Whoever avoided him had very

explicit reasons, whether religious, moral, or political—with the boundaries between them often blurred. On this score Schwarzschild cited Buber and Rosenzweig as examples of thinkers who, “no less tragically defeated by the history of the twentieth century than Cohen—diverged from Cohen’s path to their and our loss.”³⁹ Philosophy, but especially Jewish theology, is clearly also a matter *ad hominem* for Schwarzschild, for as an ethicist he would not accept that one’s moral behavior can be divided from one’s philosophical assumptions. Therefore, Schwarzschild called himself a lifelong follower of Hermann Cohen also on a direct, almost private stratum, in one of his last texts he wrote: “I started out with Hermann Cohen while I was still in high school, and I am still (indeed more) with him now. He has been very good company and a very good guide—Jewishly, as well as philosophically.”⁴⁰

This is an important statement because Schwarzschild is one of the very few philosophers who would ever publicly correct their own earlier views when they became aware of apparent errors. Thus, he stated in 1989 that the only “detour” from this lifelong devotion to Cohen was “to have fallen prey to the temptation of Franz Rosenzweig” during the 1950s and 1960s, but, as he added with a touch of humor, “I recovered.”⁴¹ The detour via Rosenzweig is the reason for two “substantive corrections” he later made to his positions, and in both cases it was Hermann Cohen who eventually convinced Schwarzschild that Rosenzweig was misled in his views.⁴² The first correction regards the Messiah. While Rosenzweig held that Cohen’s Messiah, *who comes only in eternity*, therefore never comes, Schwarzschild eventually returned to the view that the Messiah is an eternally approached ideal.⁴³ A Messiah who is eternally approaching is *coming* at every moment, while a Messiah that eventually arrives, as per Rosenzweig, actually never comes, because upon his arrival he would no longer be the Messiah.⁴⁴ The other correction in favor of Cohen rejects Rosenzweig’s notion that divine revelation, or “an ultimate intuition” are called for to provide “a necessary surplus of moral cognition,” but that in the sense of Cohen (and Kant) “reason alone suffices for all people to arrive ideally at the truth, and therewith also at the good.”⁴⁵

And moral good, in the end, was always practical for Cohen and Schwarzschild. The rational character of all of Cohen’s ethical optimism, Schwarzschild claims repeatedly, leads to peace, as opposed to irrationality, pessimism, and value-relativism, which only lead to fascism (as Schwarzschild believed was the case with Heidegger). Moral progress is conterminous with the belief in human rationality, and therefore

to philosophize is a religious obligation. For the Kantian thinker Hermann Cohen, “progress is, contrary to all forms of Hegelianism, not asserted because of any natural or actual inevitability, but in spite of historical irrationality. It is an *ought*, the more categorical for its empirical failures.” This is what might best be called, as Schwarzschild concluded, Hermann Cohen’s *tragic optimism*.⁴⁶

— George Y. Kohler