MODERNITY AND BEYOND:

REINTERPRETING JUDAISM FOR THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Kenneth I. Carr

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Referee, Professor Barry S. Kogan

TO MY PARENTS,

WHO FIRST TAUGHT ME

HOW TO INTERPRET

שְׁמַע בְּנִי מוּסַר אָבִיךָ

וְאַל־תִּטֹּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמֶּךָ

(משלי א:ח)

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DIGEST

Today, American Judaism is more than ever before a choice. Simply being born into a Jewish family does not guarantee that a child will identify with the Jewish religion or even the Jewish people. It is necessary to provide Jews with a reason to continue, or in more cases commence, living an actively Jewish life. Answering the question of why to be Jewish requires first an understanding of the emotional and intellectual environment that surrounds today's Jews. Then it may be possible to describe what the consequences of that society are, which Judaism may be well positioned to address.

This thesis attempts to analyze the thought of three Jewish philosophers: Hermann Cohen, Mordecai Kaplan, and Eugene Borowitz. Particular attention is paid to how each individual's ideas were shaped by the intellectual and historical milieu which surrounded him. Cohen derived the emphasis he placed on the rational and ethical aspects of Judaism from modernity, especially the thought of Immanuel Kant; Kaplan responded to what he saw as a modern crisis in Jewish life by envisioning Judaism as an evolving religious civilization; and Borowitz stresses the Covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish self as a member of the larger Jewish community as an answer to the postmodern era. In each case, the theologian highlighted aspects of Judaism which addressed the needs of his contemporary situation.

With this analysis as background, the situation of the present society is briefly described, focusing on those aspects of this time-

period which pose a challenge to Judaism, in particular an increasing individualism, which is accompanied by relativism and a search for ultimate meaning. Finally, some suggestions are made as to a Jewish ideology that may respond to this specific situation. In my opinion, ultimate meaning is located in holiness. Membership and active participation in the Jewish community can help to guide the individual Jew on that quest.

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INTRODUCTION

In Western Europe, the pre-modern era in Judaism was characterized for the most part by Jewish communities that were both religiously and culturally self-contained, and largely isolated from the influences of the outside world. This situation arose primarily as a result of governmental policies which, while granting Jews a collective communal status, denied them membership in the larger communities in which they lived. Under these circumstances, Judaism, an all-encompassing religious way of life, remained central to Jews' conception of the world and themselves.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, European Jews were being offered civic equality. The Emancipation brought more and more Jews opportunities for greater contact with the larger world outside of Judaism. Jews concerned with maintaining Judaism in this new age had to change to meet the challenges presented by modern life: exposure to new styles of worship, secular intellectual disciplines, and broader business and social possibilities. The insulated Jewish community disintegrated, due to the displacement, by the civic authorities, of the Jewish communal authority. Without the power to threaten excommunication, rabbis could no longer enforce a monolithic view of Judaism, and increasing numbers of modern Jews were not content with one. For the first time, membership and active participation in a Jewish way of life became voluntary.

During the next two hundred years, Judaism continually adapted to face modern life. Hermann Cohen, at the end of the nineteenth century in Germany, came out of a philosophical background committed to the primacy of universal human reason as a way of interpreting experience and formulating behavioral norms. His philosophy of Judaism was an outgrowth of his attempt to find a rational basis for religion. He specifically emphasized the role of Kantian universal ethics in his understanding of Judaism. Political universalism also played a major role in his society and consequently, as it affected his response to Zionism, in his thought.

Mordecai Kaplan's thought emerged from the early twentieth century in America. As in Germany, rationalism and universalism were dominant values. But Kaplan also saw the disintegration of the sense of Jewish community that had maintained Judaism in pre-modern times, as Jews increasingly made their way into American society. He worried about the future of Judaism as a distinct and evolving religious civilization if communal ties were not rethought and strengthened. His philosophy clearly attempted to reconstruct Judaism in order to preserve it.

Both Cohen and Kaplan addressed themselves to the situation of modernity. Now, at the end of the twentieth century, many of the assumptions on the basis of which modernity came into being may no longer be valid. Among the problematic consequences of modernity are an increasing individualism, the disenchantment of the world, in Max Weber's phrase, and the dominance of technology and instrumental reason, which gives rise to a loss of a sense of higher purpose and meaning. The consequent relativization of values

calls into question and often undermines one's commitment to one's values, as well as one's confidence in how important those values are. With such uncertainty about how one's way of living should be grounded, more and more Jews are questioning what role, if any, Judaism has to play in their lives. While openness to experience of the Transcendent is still desirable, for Jews and non-Jews alike, traditional forms of religion are no longer uniformly satisfactory, leading to a quest for "spirituality." For these and other reasons, many contemporary philosophers believe that the world is moving from modernity to "postmodernity." Once again, the religious, psychological, and social landscape has shifted beneath Judaism.

Eugene Borowitz attempts to respond to this new situation. He sees that reason is no longer supreme, even though technology affects our lives in a vast and increasing number of ways. He recognizes a resurgence of ethnic pride and particularism, although ethics are still claimed to be universal. The doctrine of human autonomy continues to be accepted, but God and other people seem still to have a claim on us. He tries to create a compelling rationale for Jewish life under these conditions.

This thesis addresses the question of how Judaism has adapted and might continue to adapt to meet the challenges presented by the contemporary world. The ideas of these three Jewish thinkers are examined, and their views of how Judaism should be conceived are analyzed, with particular regard to the meaning of God, Torah, and Israel. The first chapter focuses on Cohen. He emphasized Judaism as an ethical system, derived from and grounded in God, with Torah as the articulation of moral laws for Jews and the rest of the world to

follow. Kaplan, the subject of the second chapter, described Judaism as the civilization of the Jewish People. Torah acts as the constitution of this people in a cultural sense, creating and formalizing their way of life. God, meanwhile, assists all people, not just the Jews, in striving to reach their highest potential. In the third chapter, Borowitz's covenant theology is detailed. God relates to the individual Jew through the medium of God's Covenant with the larger Jewish community. Torah results from the Jewish self's participation in this Covenant with God.

The choice of thinkers from three different time periods (modern, late modern, and early postmodern) is meant to illustrate how Judaism can speak to the concerns and changing life situations of each era. It is shown how their thought reflected or responded to the contemporary situation in which they found themselves. In the final chapter, the situation at the end of the twentieth century is described, identifying the kinds of challenges Judaism faces now and for the foreseeable future. Certain important characteristics of the current situation include the communal disintegration and non-affiliation caused by individualism and the consequent loss of a sense of meaning. The central question of the contemporary Jewish world is why a Jew today should choose to live Jewishly. The suggestions of this thesis may serve as part of the ongoing discussion of how Jews might respond and adapt to these issues in order to keep Judaism relevant to their lives.

THE TRIUMPH OF RATIONAL ETHICS:

HERMANN COHEN AND ETHICAL MONOTHEISM

Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) has been called "the most important Jewish thinker in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century."[1] The impact of his ideas has certainly been felt throughout the twentieth century as well. His thought reflects the influence of modernity, whose ideals permeated the intellectual milieu at the turn of the century. He moved from an attempt to describe religion in general to a statement of the nature of Judaism specifically. This chapter will attempt to explicate Cohen's philosophy of Judaism, highlighting its congruence with modern thought.

From the beginning of his writing, Cohen exemplified the modern emphasis on universal reason. The idea of reason as the preeminent human characteristic originated during the Enlightenment; its dominance continued unabated during Cohen's lifetime. Cohen appointed himself the task of articulating the religion of reason, and specifically excluded from consideration any other possible sources of religion[2], such as emotions or faith, lest they distract him from his focus. This rational religion, based on Kantian idealism, would make "Jews and Christians aware of the 'common religious foundation' of their two traditions;"[3] Cohen, a devout German patriot, hoped that such an awareness would help reduce

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[1]Meyer, Michael A. Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.205.
[2]Cohen, Hermann. Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism. Translated by Simon Kaplan. New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1972, p.5.
[3]Meyer, p. 205.

German antisemitism. Later in Cohen's career, however, he began to emphasize a special role for Judaism, if not identical with the religion of reason, then at least as a source of the religion of reason.

Cohen's very methodology reinforced this concern with reason. His technique was purely logical, using his rational faculty to the exclusion of his emotions or faith. William Kluback highlights Cohen's systematic approach, pointing to "the unending stress and demand for totality, the strict methodological parallels"[4] in his thought. For Cohen, the simple fact of reason served as evidence for God's relationship to humanity, which underpins his whole theory of morality as humanity emulating God: "God endowed man with reason... the hallmark of divine creation. Through reason man becomes the image of God."[5] Reason also anchored Cohen's universalism. It might have been possible to argue that if some people did not possess the rational ability, they could not be expected to reach the moral and religious heights of those who could reason. But because reason is intrinsic to all humans, then "all peoples indeed participate in the religion of reason,"[6] and morality must be universal. Thus, reason, which was a pervasive element of Cohen's intellectual milieu, became a crucial factor in his philosophy.

A second modern aspect of Cohen's thought was the influence of the ideas of Immanuel Kant, particularly his emphasis on universal ethics. Michael Meyer states that Cohen, as a neo-Kantian,

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[4]Kluback, William. Hermann Cohen: The Challenge of a Religion of Reason. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984, p.25.
[5]Cohen, Hermann. Reason and Hope: Selections from the Jewish Writings of Hermann Cohen. Translated by Eva Jospe. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1993, p.132.
[6]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.7.

showed his thoughts "deriving from Kant's fundamental ideas but adjusting them to meet the new challenges of contemporary materialism and existentialism as well as the expanding natural sciences."[7] Cohen followed Kant in making morality his central focus. Eva Jospe, in her translation of Reason and Hope, notes that the importance of morality and its consequence for the unity of humanity was shared by Kant and Cohen's Judaism. She writes that the "German Enlightenment regards religion as an important means for the advancement of the 'idea of morality,' a goal common to both German Protestantism and Judaism. The notion of one mankind... is as basic to Kantian as to prophetic ethics."[8] Cohen himself was very much aware of the connection, noting that "Kant's ethics breathes the spirit of mankind... [mankind] has for Kant the universal, *cosmopolitan* meaning."[9] Cohen shared this understanding of mankind, as he shared other ideas from Kant. He noted both Kant's influence on German philosophy and Kant's similarity to Jewish thought when he wrote "we recognize in this innermost sanctum of the German spirit an innermost affinity to the spirit of Judaism."[10] Notwithstanding his hyperbolic compliment, Cohen certainly saw Kant as a "sanctum" for his own thought.

Cohen, however, grounded his morality in a religious system. Thus, in his reworking of Kant, Cohen provided for a "transition from the domination of ethics to an independent valuation of religion."[11]

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[7]Meyer, p.205.
[8]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.175.
[9]Cohen, Religon of Reason, p.241. Italics Cohen's.
[10]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.179.
[11]Meyer, p.205.

Before considering Cohen's ideas of Judaism in particular, it is worthwhile to look at his view of religion in general. For Cohen, religion was firmly planted in the human situation. Religion differentiates itself from ethics in the context of human suffering; God is the God of the individual who suffers. Morality, ultimately, will eliminate suffering, and this morality must come from God. Religion thus keeps ethics rooted in morality, and is therefore "indispensable to the advancement of ethical development."[12] Therefore, Cohen manifested a "less than sympathetic attitude toward any religious thought not fully immersed in morality."[13]

Human morality, then, emerges from religion. But the converse is not true; as central to religion as ethics are, one cannot use the human sense of what is morally right as a secure foundation for a religion. Cohen wrote that "decent morals do not, by any means, constitute sufficient grounds on which to base a religion. A religion's right to exist is derived from its concept of God."[14] Morality must have its roots in something other than human invention, or else there is no necessary moral continuity between the generations or between different cultures. The God-concept is central because it must serve as the grounding of morality. A religion with a flawed God-idea would have flawed morals as well. By the same token, in order to understand Cohen's philosophy of Judaism as it derived from Kant's emphasis on universal ethics, one must understand Cohen's conception of God.

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[12]Guttmann, Julius. Philosophies of Judaism. New York: Schocken Books, 1973, p.407.
[13]Kluback, p.33.
[14]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.45.

Cohen's emphasis on a morality grounded in religion necessitated a monotheistic God-concept. Whereas in polytheism, "every divinity has its own code of morality," a monotheistic religion "creates with the one divinity also the one morality as well."[15] Accepting many gods would imply accepting many (competing) sets of moral demands; given that there is only one moral path, there must be only one God who establishes it. Conversely, by accepting only one God, religion ensures only one moral standard. Cohen wrote: "The One and Only God alone can reveal the one and only morality. Morality therefore is indivisible. It must be one and the same for all nations and throughout all times."[16] This morality must apply consistently to everybody, everywhere, at every time. Consequently, for Cohen, "absolute monotheism ought to be the highest ideal for all religions and therefore for all nations: the ideal of pure religion."[17]

Monotheism was thus the central component of Cohen's ideas about God. But the importance of monotheism is not simply numerical; Cohen did not merely assert a belief in one God as opposed to many gods. Rather, God is One qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Cohen described God as unique: "it is God's uniqueness, rather than his oneness, that we posit as the essential content of monotheism."[18] It is in this sense that Cohen understood Deuteronomy 6:4: שמע ישראל יי אלהינו יי אחד, Hear O Israel, The Eternal Our God, The Eternal is Unique. Uniqueness makes God completely

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[15]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.130.
[16]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.101.
[17]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.220.
[18]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.35.

different from any other being. Nothing else that exists is similar to God. Cohen wrote: "It is this distinctiveness alone which imparts true spirituality to the unique being of the uniquely One God."[19] Spirituality constitutes the real importance of this idea of God, because it allowed Cohen to ground his morals in God; "the significance of the monotheistic God-concept lies in that principle of spirituality in which the moral universe-- in contradistinction to the world of nature-- as well as all ethics are grounded."[20] By "spirituality," Cohen meant God's nature as the ideal, unrealized in the world and unlike anything in the world. Because God is radically unique and therefore distinct from the world and all it contains, God can serve as the foundation of morality. Cohen eloquently summarized the importance of God's uniqueness as follows:

> The supreme distinction of God's unique Oneness does not consist in the difference between unity and plurality. Divine Oneness implies, instead, that difference between God's being and all being capable of being enumerated, which constitutes the true spirituality of our One God. Anything pertaining to the senses, and therefore also to anything human, is far removed from this God-concept, which, to us, implies the eternal, unshakeable, irreplaceable, primeval ground of the moral universe. Without this God-concept, morality might seem to us to be no more than the expression of a natural human inclination, and as such it could easily be a sweet delusion...[21]

For Cohen, monotheism meant God's uniqueness, which in turn meant that morality is not a matter of human whim, but instead is grounded in God.

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[19]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.220.
[20]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.221.
[21]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.45.

The grounding of morality in God has two implications. Cohen wrote that God "is the God of morality. That means that His significance lies wholly in His disclosure as well as His guarantee of ethics. He is the Author and the Guarantor of the moral universe."[22] First, God is the source of ethics. From God comes the human understanding of what it means to act morally. As humans seek to know and love God, they learn about God; God is, essentially, the ideal personification of morality, and God, through God's virtues, teaches humans how to live in a moral way. As Cohen put it, "God's attributes are the very epitome of what human morality should be; or, simply, they are the archetypes of human morality."[23] By learning God's attributes, humans learn how they should act in order to behave morally.

But God is not just the Author of morality; God is also the Guarantor of morality. Because morality is grounded in God, the world will ultimately subscribe to God's morals. Julius Guttmann called this idea the "true significance of the idea of God-- that genuine ethics can and must be reached."[24] This God-concept enables humans to have faith that, by God's very nature as the essence of morality, this divine morality will eventually be realized. If these ethics were to remain forever hypothetical, there would be no purpose in living by them. To put it more pessimistically, if God's moral rule were never to materialize, then those people who work to bring about morality would be doomed to futility and failure.

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[22]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.45.
[23]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.52.
[24]Guttmann, p.404.

Instead, God guarantees that these ethics will come to fruition, and so humanity should continue to strive for the moral life. Cohen put this reliance on God's guarantee even more strongly: "It is, however, only the idea of God which gives me the confidence that morality will become reality on earth. And because I cannot live without this confidence, I cannot live without God."[25] Cohen (and anyone else for whom morality is essential), when faced with a world which does not always follow these morals, needed to know that eventually the world will be run according to these ethics. Despite the fact that right now, this ideal state has not been reached, some day morality will triumph. Through God's uniqueness, God provides ethics, and guarantees (at least in faith) their ultimate success. Cohen derived this concept of God from his starting point in Kantian ethics.

But if God's uniqueness means that God is completely distinct from the world, then it must be asked how God can relate to the world. Because this spirituality enabled God to be the ground of all ethics, Cohen had to resolve the apparent paradox. Here, another aspect of modernity came to the fore in his thought. Traditional religious thought would have explained God's encounters with the world through the anthropomorphic Biblical imagery of creation, revelation, and redemption. But ever since Baruch Spinoza, modernity had challenged the idea of the supernatural God. These three rubrics could still be helpful in explaining God's interaction with matter, but they had to be divested of any irrational supernatural content.

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[25]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.46.

Regarding creation, Cohen believed that the world derived from God. God had to be the original source of everything that exists: Cohen used the word "becoming" for the material world, as distinguished from "being," which only refers to God. He writes:

> God is the prime cause of activity, God is the creator. His being can be determined in no other way than by the immanence of creation in his *uniqueness*. Creation is not a heterogeneous concept in-- or in addition-- to God's being. Instead, precisely this is the meaning of his being as uniqueness: that becoming is thought of as in him, therefore proceeding from him; it must be derived from his concept.[26]

God's existence requires the existence of the natural world as well. But even as Cohen referred to God as the creator, his emphasis was not on the initial act of creation. Rather, Cohen focused on God's role in "renewing" the world, in the words of the morning blessing. "The mystery of the world's beginning is thus transmuted into the everyday wonder of its renewal, that is, its maintenance. The creator becomes the sustainer, and God's uniqueness becomes manifest as divine providence."[27] As the source of being, God continually renews the world.

Cohen's understanding of revelation followed from his concept of creation. Through creation, God relates to the world. It is this relationship between humanity and God that Cohen called revelation. "This is the most general sense of revelation: *that God comes into relation with man.*"[28] The result of this relationship is that humanity acquires reason; the rational faculty is what God reveals to people.

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[26]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.64. Italics Cohen's.
[27]Cohen, Reason and Hope, pp. 95-96.
[28]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.71. Italics Cohen's.

"It is only by virtue of revelation that the *rational creature*, man, comes to be... *Revelation is the creation of reason.*"[29] Cohen strengthened his argument by showing that medieval Jewish philosophers made this same connection between revelation and reason: "propositions of reason are established as principles for revelation and even for the unity of God and the creation. Thus, reason is made the root of the content of revelation."[30]

Because God gives us reason, revelation may be seen as an ongoing act. Cohen pointed out that traditional Jewish sources do not use the word "Revealer of Torah" to describe God, but rather "Giver of Torah," as in the Torah blessings. This word choice is not a matter of mere semantics: "the Jewish gift for language here emphasizes not the object given, the gift, but exclusively the act of giving, that is, communication."[31] Communication does not need to be limited to Sinai, one definite place and time; in fact, we should see this "revelation" as continuous, throughout the generations. The move away from considering revelation a specific physical event is also supported by Deuteronomy 30:14, in which the commandments are located "in your mouth and in your heart." Cohen argued that this verse showed that "revelation-- and creation also-- is transfigured to a purely spiritual meaning."[32] Just as creation is really renewal, a continuous event, so too revelation is really ongoing communication through humanity's reason. The content of this connection between humanity and God is, simply, morality. Cohen wrote that "the holy

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[29]Cohen, Religion of Reason, pp.71-72. Italics Cohen's.
[30]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.82.
[31]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.99.
[32]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.82.

spirit limits that area of the spirit that connects God and man to holiness. And through this limitation and its exclusiveness, holiness becomes morality."[33] It is in this way that God "reveals" morality to people.

But God's holiness and morality are not transferred to people automatically: "It is not the holy spirit but the moral activity of man that effects holiness."[34] Even recognizing the gift of morality is not enough. In order to be ethical, one must act ethically. Cohen wrote that "the isolated self exclusively engaged in thinking cannot be an ethical self. The ethical self must be engaged in action."[35] Cohen found support for this claim in Leviticus 19:2, "You shall be holy, for I the Eternal your God am holy," which uses different tenses to describe the holiness of humanity and God. "Holiness thus means for man a task, whereas for God it designates being."[36] Humans must strive to make themselves holy, and therefore moral.

While Cohen did not believe in the supernatural God who gives people specific commandments to make them ethical, he did think that people take on themselves the obligation to act morally. This requirement emerges from the "self-given human response to God as archetype and prototype of human morality."[37] When humans follow morality, they are emulating God. "God is not so much the model that never can be reached, but rather the archetype and, therefore, the idea which, in the case of action, has the meaning of

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[33]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.106.
[34]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.108.
[35]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.218.
[36]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.96.
[37]Meyer, p.206.

the ideal."[38] Cohen called this desire to act as God acts "love of God." "One cannot love God as one loves a human being. But to love spiritually means, simply and solely, to cultivate a concern for morality."[39] The human who wishes to follow God must act morally.

Cohen believed that the Torah's sole purpose is to help humans with the modern task of living morally. Torah is not a set of obligations commanded by God, but rather the moral "law" which guides people toward ethical action. The whole Torah, according to Cohen, is only concerned with ethics: "The law is moral law, or an aid to the moral law. It means nothing else except the education and sanctification of man."[40] Even those parts of the Torah which do not seem to be concerned with morality still point in that direction; whatever "is not moral law in itself is at least thought of and expressly characterized as a means to the promotion of, and education in, the moral law."[41] Perhaps the clearest challenges to Cohen's schema, the most egregious examples of laws that do not appear connected to morality, are the rites of the sacrificial cult. Cohen noted, however, that the prophets reinforced the moral message by redirecting the people's efforts away from the literal practice of these rituals; they "[expressed] the purely moral character of monotheism... through an unrestrained fight against sacrifice"[42] which would supersede morality. For Cohen, any ritual which the Torah commanded, any action which a Jew performed, "derived

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[38]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.162.
[39]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.223.
[40]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.343.
[41]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.345.
[42]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.173.

significance only from its capacity to serve as the symbol of moral values."[43] The Torah therefore assists humans in emulating God by guiding them towards acting morally.

While every area of life may be approached ethically, certain actions seemed for Cohen to be connected especially clearly to moral development. Study of the Torah, which the Mishnah says is equivalent to all the other priceless commandments, is necessary in order for humans to know how to behave morally; thus, he says that learning is "the foundation of social morality."[44] Prayer, in its worshipful focus on God from whom we learn both moral ideals and proper actions, marks the intersection of religion and deed; it "establishes, namely, the connection between religious knowledge and religious action, and at the same time between religion and morality in general."[45] Becoming part of a community is necessary so the human may remember to focus on more than individual concerns, and to work for the welfare of the larger world; Cohen wrote: "The congregation is the indispensable preliminary step to messianic fulfillment... Man is the carrier of mankind. For this purpose he must first of all assemble into a community."[46] But for Cohen, the greatest religious and ethical institution of Judaism was the idea of the Sabbath. The Biblical connection of human rest with deliverance from Egypt, which in turn recalls slavery, Judaism's paradigmatic experience of sympathy for the oppressed, makes the Sabbath a dramatic moral statement. "Even if the Jewish religion had

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[43]Meyer, p.206.
[44]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.349.
[45]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.371.
[46]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.386.

no other merits, its institution and preservation of the Sabbath law alone would have added a new dimension to the progress of religion as such."[47] By mandating rest for rich and poor alike, for landowner and worker, for Jew and non-Jew, "it is beyond doubt that the Sabbath is meant to secure the equality of men in spite of the differences in their social standing... [thus] the Sabbath becomes the expression of morality itself."[48] While the Sabbath is the best example of the connection between religious practice and ethics, all ritual actions should lead to morality.

There will, of course, be times when a person will not act morally. Cohen did not shy away from using the word "sin" to describe such actions, but neither did he condemn the sinner to external punishment. Instead, even sin became for Cohen an opportunity to reach a higher ethical stage. In part Cohen held this belief because he knew that God would pardon the sinner: "Forgiveness of sin is the simple consequence of God's goodness... It is the essence of God to forgive the sin of man."[49] On a deeper level, though, Cohen asked sinners to punish themselves, for it is only through suffering that the sinner becomes penitent. True repentance can elevate human life to a new height of holiness by allowing the sinner to return to the moral way. Cohen wrote:

> Repentance is *self-sanctification.* Everything that can be meant by remorse, turning into the depths of the self and examining the entire way of life and finally, the turning away and the returning and creating of a new way of life, all this is brought

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[47] Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.225.
[48] Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.157.
[49] Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.213.

> together in self-sanctification. It contains the power and the direction in which repentance must employ itself for the new creation of the true I. Sanctification is the goal; self-sanctification is the only means.[50]

The sinner can turn back to an ethical way of life, but suffering is necessary to push the sinner in this direction. "Without suffering--no redemption... But there is a liberation from suffering, if the goal for self-sanctification is set in the unique God."[51] Suffering directed toward a renewal of moral action leads to redemption. This belief explains Cohen's view of the Day of Atonement. He wrote that "Jewish piety accordingly recognizes suffering as a step to redemption... The *fast* on the Day of Atonement is the symbol of this understanding of the necessary value of suffering."[52] On the Day of Atonement, Jews enact the progression from sin to morality, from suffering to redemption.

Redemption is the third way in which this modern, non-supernatural God relates to the world. In Cohen's thought, the idea of redemption took the form of messianism. But even though Cohen referred to a "Messiah," he defined the term in a way that differed from its historical meaning: "while the Messiah had originally denoted a dynastic person, the inner development of this thought resulted in the abolition of any personality cult... For the moral mankind of an historical future, and it alone, is the 'Anointed of the Lord,' the Messiah."[53] Cohen used the term "Messiah" to refer to a

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[50]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.205. Italics Cohen's.
[51]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.235.
[52]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.228. Italics Cohen's.
[53]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.121.

united humanity following universal morals. Thus there are "two tasks of the Messiah, the ideal morality and the unity of mankind."[54] Because God is unique, there can be only one morality. In God's capacity as Guarantor of morals, God ensures that morality will ultimately prevail: "the Messiah is now no longer regarded as a political emissary but rather as the guarantor of a faith which believes that divine postulates are realizable on earth."[55] For humanity, then, messianism calls people to the "task of moral improvement"[56] in order to bring about the eventual triumph of morality. This sense of progress is an additional aspect of modern thought; modernity held that technology and the universal application of reason would necessarily improve the world. Cohen incorporated the moral component of this idea into his philosophy. According to Guttmann, Cohen felt that this "continual progress toward the messianic kingdom of ethics"[57] was the essence of Judaism.

But the messianic task and its ultimate reward are not limited to the Jews. Although the Mishnah teaches that "all Israel has a share in the world to come," Cohen believed that "the whole of Israel stands here for the concept of man in general, for the whole of Israel includes messianic mankind."[58] Eventually, all humanity will join together to recognize and follow divine morality. The second component of Cohen's messianism was the unity of humanity, which

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[54]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.255.
[55]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.125.
[56]Meyer, p.207.
[57]Guttmann, p.404.
[58]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.336.

he derived from the idea of the One God. "Thus, monotheism is the immediate cause of Messianism as well as the concept of *world history*, as the history of one mankind. Without the unique God, the idea of one mankind could not arise."[59] The very essence of messianism rules out a special future for the Jews; otherwise, there must be two different sets of ethical standards, and therefore God could not be unique. Rather, given the oneness of God, "the Messianic idea offers man the consolation, confidence, and guarantee that not merely the chosen people but all nations will, at some future time, exist in harmony, as nature does today."[60] Here too, Cohen adapted a tenet of modernity for his own use. Universal reason and universal ethics have already been discussed; one of their consequences was political universalism, in the sense that all of humanity would share one future. Cohen adopted this idea for his messianic vision, in which all people would be united.

Cohen found Biblical support for his universalist messianism in Chapter 19 of Isaiah, where Egypt and Assyria are exalted along with (or even higher than) Israel. It is important to note as well that Cohen did not believe that messianism was eschatological. Rather, in accordance with the modern view of political universalism, for Cohen the Messianic Age would simply be a political time, when the different nations would be united under the one divine moral standard. Even the Bible does not claim that the Messiah will come via a supernatural event: except for Isaiah 25:8, the messianic references "indicate an earthly future... the end of days is not

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[59]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.262. Italics Cohen's.
[60]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.126.

depicted as a very remote, inconceivable future, although the exact time is left uncertain. It is simply the future..."[61] Messianism was, for Cohen, the central tenet and goal of the religious life, following logically from his belief in God and his emphasis on morality. "We therefore believe that the Messianic idea is the culmination as well as the touchstone of religion and that religious conviction means Messianic religiosity."[62] All religion points toward the unification of humanity under God's moral reign.

Clearly, messianism for Cohen was a universal phenomenon, not limited to Jews. The question therefore arose of what kind of relationship God could have with the Jewish people. Traditional Jewish thought postulated a special bond between God and Israel; the Bible uses terms such as סגולה עם ,קדוש גוי and אור לגויים to describe the Israelites as possessing a treasured place in God's plan for the universe. But for Cohen, God could not relate better to Israel than to other peoples: "Inasmuch as the One God is the God of all mankind, He cannot be the God of only one nation."[63] God is not solely the God of Israel. Modern monotheism's one ethics requires that God relate to all human beings equally well: "Because the One God is the God of morality, He exists primarily not for the individual, the family, the tribe, or the nation, but for all mankind."[64] It no longer is permissible to claim that God prefers Israel alone; God must love all people equally. Cohen therefore had to reinterpret the Biblical descriptions of God's love for Israel as metaphorical, illustrating how

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[61] Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.289.
[62] Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.127.
[63] Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.47.
[64] Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.46.

God relates to all nations: "God does not love Israel more or differently from his love for men in general, nor, needless to say, could God's love for Israel limit and impair his love for the human race. In Israel God loves nothing other than the human race... God loves Israel only as a model, a symbol of mankind..."[65] God does love Israel, but only in the way that God loves all humanity. God's love of Israel in no way excludes, and in fact represents, God's love for all the other nations.

With this understanding of the relationship between God and Israel, the concept of the chosen people had to be called into question. Traditionally, God's love for the Jewish people manifested itself in God "choosing us from among all other nations," in the words of the blessing before the Torah reading. But if God's love for Israel is merely symbolic of God's love for all nations, Israel's chosenness too must be just a metaphor. Cohen wrote that "the election of Israel has only a symbolic significance. From the very outset this higher symbolism presaged Israel's messianic call, its *elevation into one mankind*."[66] All people are chosen by God, or rather, God calls all people to unite in one moral humanity. Understanding Israel's chosenness as meaning anything other than this call to ethical unity is incorrect. In fact, the idea of the one chosen people, by threatening to divide nations into a hierarchy of classes, is potentially dangerous: "It is therefore a grave mistake to evaluate the election of Israel apart from its connection with the messianic

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[65]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.149.
[66]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.260. Italics Cohen's.

election of the human race as a whole."[67] In order to prevent this division, Cohen took his understanding of Israel's chosenness to its logical conclusion. Israel, and all people, are called to unite under God's moral rule; according to the Bible, all the nations will go up together to worship at God's holy mountain. At that messianic time, there will be no further need for people to be divided into different nations. Israel's call therefore leads to the elimination of Israel as an entity. Cohen wrote: "Chosenness means Israel's vocation to proclaim the One God as the redeemer of mankind... Israel must sacrifice its peoplehood for its God."[68]

Cohen, in explicating the modern ideal of universalism, effectively eliminated any special relationship between God and Israel by understanding Israel as symbolic of all humankind. Ultimately, Israel and the other nations will merge into one humanity, and Israel as such will cease to exist. The logical question then is what reason there is for Israel to continue to exist even now as a separate entity. Guttmann believed that the "fundamental religious doctrines of Judaism are completely identical-- at least in their conceptual formulations-- with the general ideas of monotheistic religion."[69] Cohen would have accepted this claim; he refused to state that Judaism alone was the religion of reason. It would be more accurate to say that the religion of reason is ethical monotheism, which Judaism closely follows, and which other

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[67] Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.149.
[68] Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.116.
[69] Guttmann, p.328.

religions also follow to some degree. What then is the purpose of Judaism for Cohen?

Before addressing the significance of Judaism as a separate religion, Cohen had to explain what Judaism was for him. The answer is relatively simple: Judaism is a religion which constitutes the embodiment of the system of universal ethics. Like any monotheistic religion, Judaism must be solely concerned with morality: "The ethics intrinsic to God's nature, and that alone, constitutes religion in Judaism."[70] Judaism involves discerning those morals which God discloses and guarantees, and attempting to live by them. Cohen put this equivalence between Judaism and ethics very strongly: "*There is no distinction in the Jewish consciousness between religion and morals.*"[71] The supernatural mythologies that comprise so much of traditional conceptions of religion do not comport with reason, and as such had no place in Cohen's formulation. For Cohen, religion, and Judaism in particular, should only be about morality.

The substantial overlap in Cohen's thought between Judaism and the ideal of moral religion posed a new problem. There was a danger of Judaism "becoming simply identified with the idea of monotheistic religion and thereby losing its specific content."[72] Cohen therefore needed to address how Judaism is different from any other monotheistic religion. His answer seemed to fall into two categories: Judaism differs by virtue of primacy and actualization. Primacy means that the idea of ethical monotheism originated in

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[70]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.221.
[71]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.33. Italics Cohen's.
[72]Guttmann, p.328.

Judaism, and the other religions learned about it from Judaism: "The distinctiveness of Jewish culture is limited to its ethical concept of God, a concept it has contributed to general culture."[73] It is this original sense of God as the exemplar of universal morality and the demands which that morality placed on the Jews that makes Judaism different: "Because of its calling to profess the unique God and also to accomplish the historical work of the universal recognition of the unique God, Israel itself is distinguished as a unique people."[74] If now Judaism and the other monotheistic religions are drawing closer, it is not because Judaism has watered itself down to meet them, but rather that the others have finally begun to attain the heights of Jewish morality.

Actualization, on the other hand, suggests that even if other religions try now to incorporate some version of this conception of ethics, Judaism has come closest to realizing the essence. Guttmann wrote that Cohen "sees the primal power of morality expressed in its purest and profoundest form in Jewish monotheism."[75] Judaism has moved morality from an idea to an established practice. This realization of the idea has left a widespread, unmistakably Jewish stamp on all of civilization: "no culture has any ground or foundation without a scientifically reasoned ethics. But such an ethics, in turn, must be grounded in the idea of the One God... Consequently, there is neither a European culture nor an ethics in which Judaism does not have a fundamental share..."[76] Through its original conception of the

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[73]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.49.
[74]Cohen, Religion of Reason, pp. 115-116.
[75]Guttmann, p.406.
[76]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.46.

unique God and one morality, and through putting those ideals into practice, Judaism has decisively shaped modern society.

It could be argued, though, that both primacy and actualization are justifications that belong to history. Judaism may indeed have been the historical source of the monotheistic ideal, but now that other religions too have incorporated these conceptions, there is no further need for Judaism to remain distinct. But for Cohen, the Jewish religion still had a crucial role to play in the unfolding of world history: "to preserve and propagate the monotheistic ideal."[77] Jews are the standard-bearers of monotheism, persistently holding before the world the ideal vision of humanity united under God's moral rule. This task requires the continuity of the Jewish religion: "a perpetuation of Jewish group distinction is to serve merely as a means to preserve the purity of the Jewish faith... [whose] ultimate hope and fundamental principle [is]... the concept of the Messianic future in which a united mankind will acknowledge the One and Only God."[78] The Jews will not allow humanity to settle for any vision less exalted than this one. No other people clings so tightly to this ideal. Other religions may appropriate some aspects of monotheism, but without the Jewish religion, this utopian future would never be realized. "It is therefore incumbent upon us to gain recognition in the world for this One God. This is our world-historical task... only this mission on earth justifies and explains our continued existence..."[79] The continuing raison d'etre of the Jews is to be the

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[77]Meyer, p.206.
[78]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.185.
[79]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.48.

agents who spread the knowledge of the unique God and thus bring about the unification of humanity under God's morality.

For Cohen, however, dedication to the Jews as a religious group did not require dedication to Jewish nationalism. He wrote: "It is in the domain of religion alone that we wish to preserve our distinctiveness."[80] Cohen was committed to the continuity of the Jewish religion. As a modern universalist, however, he did not accept the claims of Jewish nationalism, manifest in the Zionist movement. Judaism is purely a religion, and any nationalistic tendencies should be subsumed under that religion: "Judaism means religion. Yet, as much as this religion, as messianic religion, from its very outset intends to be the world religion, it has nevertheless been, and remains everywhere, and during the whole time of its development, the uniform expression of the Jewish *national spirit*."[81] Whatever nationalism inheres in Judaism is devoted toward making the whole world one nation under the Jewish moral religion; the "meaning of Jewish nationality is determined by religious Judaism."[82] Through actualizing the goals of the Jewish religion, the goals of Jewish nationalism, which, when properly understood, are recognized to be universal, will also be achieved.

In this way, Cohen arrived at a justification for the historical state of Jewish exile. "The One God has taken our country from us so that He might give us the concept of mankind. The One God cannot be the God of any one country or state. He can be the God only of a

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[80]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.49.
[81]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.30. Italics Cohen's.
[82]Cohen, Religion of Reason, p.31.

mankind that is united in morality."[83] The Jewish religion came to recognize its universal task through being expelled from its land. Exile was therefore necessary in order to fulfill the greater goal of the unification of humanity. This belief led Cohen to respond sharply to Zionist efforts to recreate a Jewish homeland for the protection of Judaism: "While the Zionist believes that Judaism can be preserved only by an all-encompassing Jewish nationalism, we are of the opposite view, believing that only a universal, mankind-oriented Judaism can preserve the Jewish religion,"[84] and, therefore, the Jews as well. Judaism, for Cohen, transcended any particular place, looking instead toward its purpose in history. The concern of the Jewish religion should not stop at self-preservation, but should instead focus on realizing its messianic vision. "The classical concept of our religion points towards the future of mankind, and not towards the past of an ethnic community whose holiness, rather than being tied down to a geographical location, is bound up with its world-historical idea."[85] The Zionist emphasis on a specific state for Judaism is consequently not only misguided but also narrow-minded. When Judaism fulfills its ultimate mission, it will not be limited to one area, but instead will fill the world. "We therefore see the entire historical world as the future abode of our religion. And it is this future alone which we acknowledge as our true home."[86] Not only does Judaism not need a particular geographical home; accepting one would mean stopping the work while the task is yet incomplete. In

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[83]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.48.
[84]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.169.
[85]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.170.
[86]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.170.

order to fulfill our purpose, we must be spread among the nations, to teach all of them about the One God of morality. In Cohen's opinion, then, "the establishment of a state of our own is incompatible with the Messianic concept and with Israel's mission."[87] Although Cohen's messianism was ultimately universal, he saw the special mission of Israel as catalyzing the unification of humanity under monotheistic morality by testifying to the One God.

Cohen's theoretical universalism derived from modern thought. It was reinforced in practice by his love for Germany. His warmth towards Germany arose not only from his living there, but also from what he saw as the fundamental agreement between German ideals and the tenets of Judaism. In German philosophy, Cohen saw the rebirth of Jewish ideas of morality and universalism. He stated that "the German Enlightenment does not view religion as an infamy that ought to be eradicated but rather as a means by which mankind attempted... to bring about the realization of the idea of morality."[88] German thought thus agreed with Jewish thought about the nature of the task at hand. Similarly, German and Jewish ideas shared ground concerning the unity of humanity. Cohen believed that "the German idea of mankind has its origin in the Messianism of Israel's prophets, whose spirit doubtlessly affected German humanism profoundly."[89] Judaism shaped Germany; now the Germans and the Jews would work together to bring the light of morality and universalism to the rest of the world. Cohen wrote that "we as German Jews share in a

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[87]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.48.
[88]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.177.
[89]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.180.

central cultural force destined to unite all nations in the spirit of a Messianic mankind."[90] With such optimism, it is no wonder that Cohen became "Jewishly minimalist."[91] Without a reason for him to advocate substantial Jewish distinction, with so much in common between Germany and Judaism, he could call even more strongly for universalism. His Germanophilia also contributed to his anti-Zionism; with the Jews so welcome in and integral to their host country, the idea of a homeland to serve as a sanctuary for them, already harmful for theological reasons, became unnecessary in practice as well. Cohen's perception of Germany's hospitality to Jews and to Jewish thought helped shape his philosophy.

It is in this area where Cohen's thought falters most dramatically. The flaw becomes obvious in historical hindsight; as the Holocaust rebukes Cohen's love of Germany. Cohen's inaccurate evaluation of the German spirit calls into question his optimism about the larger cause of one mankind. Borowitz suggests: "In philosophy one ought not let a mistaken historical judgment invalidate an otherwise compelling system of thought. In this case the error is so blatant and the consequences so tragic that one can hardly help doubt the rigid universalism he so enthusiastically espoused."[92] The Jews alone, according to Borowitz, must carry forward the banner of morality.

Perhaps, as Borowitz concludes, Cohen's erroneous evaluation of Germany should cast doubt on his whole program of universalism.

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[90]Cohen, Reason and Hope, p.182.
[91]Meyer, p.205.
[92]Borowitz, Eugene B. Choices in Modern Jewish Thought. New York: Behrman House, 1983, p.51.

In any case his universalism is problematic for its implications about the Jewish people. Cohen's formulation of the Jews' ongoing role as standard-bearers of monotheism does not really require Jews; monotheism pervades many religions today. One must wonder about the future of Judaism if it has no stronger claim to continued existence than its original concept of the Unique God.

Another difficulty with Cohen's thought is its lukewarm endorsement of ritual. For Cohen, a religious act should only be performed if it somehow contributes to a heightened sense of morality. Cohen himself may have been able to see the ethical relevance of some Jewish rituals, but the majority of contemporary Jews do not have such moral sensitivity. The danger exists that they will abandon Jewish practice without realizing what they are losing.

Finally, Cohen's God-concept is also problematic. The idea that God solely exists to disclose and guarantee morality is very attractive. It also comports well with reason; logically, God should function in this way. But this view of God is ultimately insufficient. Does God have no more active role in the world? Does God do no more for sufferers than provide them with the cold comfort that morality will triumph in the end? Does God not rejoice with human joy and mourn with human sorrow? Admittedly, these tasks for God fall in the realm of faith more than reason. But by rejecting from the beginning all areas of analysis outside of reason, Cohen limited God and prevented himself from articulating a God-concept that would respond to the full range of human experience.

This chapter has explained the major concepts of Hermann Cohen's religious philosophy, as they emerged from the context of modernity.

Specifically, his emphasis on universal reason, his reliance on Kantian universal ethics, his elimination of supernaturalism, his faith in moral progress, and his political universalism show the connections between Cohen's thought and his historical and intellectual milieu. But with the judgment of history and the perspective of most of a century, one can raise serious objections to his theories. While an understanding of his ideas is essential for grasping later Jewish philosophy, his theology no longer seems sufficient for contemporary Judaism.

MOVING TOWARD SALVATION:

MORDECAI KAPLAN AND TRANSNATURALISM

Hermann Cohen's philosophy of Judaism was essentially descriptive. Cohen did not try to articulate a bold new path for Judaism to follow, nor did he suggest fundamental changes in the way Jews should conduct themselves; rather, he attempted simply to describe the underlying presuppositions of Judaism as he understood it, explicating his conception of how Judaism exemplifies the religion of reason. This explanation, as has been demonstrated, reflected the impact of modernity on Cohen's thought. Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983) took a quite different approach to a philosophy of Judaism, although his ideas too were shaped by modernity. When he wrote his *magnum opus*, Judaism as a Civilization, in 1933, he understood Judaism to be in a state of crisis. This desperate situation called for a dramatic change in the general conception of Judaism, and Kaplan took it upon himself to show the way to a "Greater Judaism."[1] As a result, his Jewish philosophy was prescriptive, inasmuch as he attempted to alter the self-understanding of modern Jews and thereby save Judaism. This chapter will describe Kaplan's vision of the form of Judaism necessary for the modern world, and the forces of modernity that shaped this vision.

The first way in which the modern situation shaped Kaplan's ideas of Judaism is that the crisis which Kaplan perceived and

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[1]Kaplan, Mordecai M. The Greater Judaism in the Making: A Study of the Modern Evolution of Judaism. New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1960.

addressed resulted from modernity. Thus, in order to understand Kaplan's response to the crisis facing Judaism, one must first understand the nature of the crisis itself. Kaplan himself put it very starkly: "Before the beginning of the nineteenth century all Jews regarded Judaism as a privilege; since then most Jews have come to regard it as a burden."[2] In the eyes of modern Jews, Kaplan feared, Judaism had lost its purpose, its meaning, and its power. Whereas once Judaism had been a treasured component of a Jew's identity, now many modern Jews were happy to relinquish their connection to the Jewish community. More important to them was their acceptance in and by the Gentile social world. Kaplan's main concern did not seem to be those Jews who converted to Christianity; rather, he worried about those Jews who, while nominally remaining Jewish, found no value in maintaining Judaism any longer.

The question must therefore be what happened to Judaism to turn it from a centripetal to a centrifugal force. Kaplan traced the dividing line to the early nineteenth century. These years witnessed the beginning of the Emancipation, when, in keeping with modernity's doctrine of universal human rights, Jews started to be accepted as citizens of the countries in which they lived. Their newfound legal civic equality came with a price, however: "the surrender of Jewish social and cultural autonomy... [caused Jews to] lose their identity as a distinct people."[3] By keeping the Jews isolated from the larger society, the ghettoes had had the benefit of

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[2]Kaplan, Mordecai M. Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life. New York: Schocken Books, 1972, p.3.

[3]Kaplan, Mordecai M. "The Freedom to be Jews" (Reconstructionist Pamphlet #7). 1945, p.6.

strengthening the insular Jewish community. Under the new conditions, the community began to dissolve, as Jews no longer needed to rely exclusively on other Jews for business or social contact. Kaplan believed that these communities had kept Judaism vital and central to the life of the Jews; their dissolution sounded the death knell for traditional Judaism. The final formal blow came at the hands of "the so-called Sanhedrin, which in 1806 at the behest of Napoleon I, renounced in the name of all Jews, their Jewish nationhood."[4] Napoleon had made this renunciation a condition of Jewish equality; he had wanted to ensure that the loyalty of the Jews would belong only to the state and not to their own people. By agreeing to this statement, in Kaplan's opinion, the Jews traded away their strongest asset.

While the loss of this feeling of nationhood was, for Kaplan, the major factor in modern Judaism's weakened condition, he did not lay all the blame at the feet of the "Sanhedrin." He recognized that other aspects of the intellectual and social climate of the nineteenth century also contributed to the attenuation of the bonds of Jewish community. Another consequence of the Jews' receiving civil rights in their states of residence was a decline in the desire to see the restoration of their state of origin in Palestine. This hope and expectation had provided a focus for Jewish national unity, transcending the Jews' physical dispersal. As Jews became more comfortable in their host countries, the perceived need for a renewed

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[4]Kaplan, Mordecai M. The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence: A People in the Image of God. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971, p.3.

Jewish commonwealth decreased, which weakened the sense of Jewish peoplehood.

Another modern development that weakened the Jews' communal status was Biblical scholarship and the role of the rabbis. Previously, the community had been united in its acceptance of God's authorship of the Torah. The rabbis were seen as the authoritative interpreters of the tradition. As such, with the blessing of the secular government, they served as the legal decisors for the community, with power to judge and to punish, including, most dramatically, to excommunicate. The rabbis' power helped bind the community together under their rule. Once doubt began to grow, after Spinoza, about the divine origins of Torah, the common ground of belief started to erode, and the strength of the rabbis decreased. With Emancipation, the Jewish community came under the laws of the state, not the law of the rabbis; their uniform authority disappeared, and the communal bonds became even looser.

A fourth factor in the decline of Judaism in the modern period was the faltering fortunes of other religions. The Industrial Revolution and the rise of machines decreased people's perceived need for religion. No longer did they look to a Deity for assistance and mercy in response to the indifference or harshness of Nature. Rather, humanity began to take matters into its own hands, learning how to dominate the world through technological innovation rather than religious fervor. In Kaplan's words, the contemporary

> challenge [to Judaism] emanates from the spirit of this-worldliness, or secularism, which permeates contemporary human life. The transfer of the center of gravity of human

> existence from the other world to this world is both the cause and the effect of modern man's passionate desire to acquire mastery over the forces of nature and his growing ability to render the world he lives in more habitable.[5]

The intellectual climate of the nineteenth century in general became hostile to religion. A decline in faith accompanied the ascendancy of reason. The rise of naturalism challenged the supernatural aspects of all of the traditional religions. With other religions as well struggling to maintain piety, Judaism's battle to preserve a milieu conducive to religious feeling became more difficult. As Kaplan wrote, "the faith which Jews had... is being undermined not only directly by modern naturalism but also indirectly by the fact that their neighbors are becoming de-Christianized."[6] The general malaise afflicting the other traditional religions served to weaken Judaism too.

Judaism was also challenged by a change in the modern perception of salvation, historically defined as a good life after death. For Jews, the route to this salvation had been Judaism, and the only way to participate fully in Judaism was to participate in the life of the Jewish community. In the late eighteenth century, however, a different view of salvation came to prominence; Kaplan described Moses Mendelssohn as teaching "that the prerequisite to immortality was not conformity with any supernaturally revealed teaching, but a life based upon the highest dictates of reason."[7] Therefore, one did not have to be Jewish to attain life after death; one simply had to live the best life one knew how (although for Mendelssohn a Jew was still

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[5]Kaplan, The Greater Judaism in the Making, p.150.
[6]Kaplan, The Greater Judaism in the Making, p.viii.
[7]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, p.12.

obligated to fulfill the ceremonial law as well). With the reward for living Jewishly removed from the sole possession of the Jews, Judaism was no longer seen as valuable enough to compensate for the difficulties it caused in daily life. This shift weakened the Jewish community even further.

These developments comprise only a partial list of the reasons Kaplan gave for the modern crisis in Judaism, but they suffice to suggest the parameters of the problem. In short, before Emancipation, Judaism was essential to the life of the Jew, but once the bonds which connect Jews into communities and into one Jewish People were weakened, Judaism became endangered. If the Jewish People had remained a strong entity, Judaism would still have been thriving. In Kaplan's analogy, just as soldiers can only function as soldiers if they belong to an army which functions as an army, so Jews can only function as Jews if they belong to a Jewish People which functions as a People. But, as a result of modernity, the Jewish People has ceased to function actively; instead, the Jews became simply "a miscellany of human beings, who call themselves Jews by virtue of their being third or fourth generation descendants from Jews who were authentically such because there was then a Jewish People to which they belonged."[8] Without a functioning Jewish People, Jews cannot really be Jews. The root of the crisis, therefore, according to Kaplan, was the modern demise of the Jewish People as a vibrant, semi-autonomous community.

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[8]Kaplan, The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence, p.4.

The challenges of Kaplan's time called out for a revision of the meaning of contemporary Jewish life, to give to Jewish life a compelling and comprehensive rationale. As he put it:

> it is necessary to formulate a philosophy of Jewish life as a whole... that discerns an organic connection among the experiences and needs of Jewry, its dispersion and its diversity, its past and its future, its religious commitments, its manifold expressions, its many traits and tendencies, its need for self-adjustment and its prerogative to mold environment.[9]

In Kaplan's opinion, the Neo-Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform branches of Judaism had all attempted this task but failed. A new philosophy had to be devised in order to keep Judaism vital; he therefore devoted himself to the task of articulating it. Just as, for Kaplan, the crisis reflected the influence of modernity, so did his solution draw on modern ideas.

For Kaplan, the best way to articulate this philosophy was through describing Judaism as a civilization. He derived this idea from the modern sociology of Emile Durkheim, who analyzed the coherence of social groups. The other branches of Judaism treated Judaism as merely a religion, or a nation, or a system of ethics, but it would have been a fatal mistake to think that only one of these elements was threatened by the contemporary situation; the whole Jewish way of life was in danger. "*Judaism... is thus something far more comprehensive than Jewish religion. It includes that nexus of a history, literature, language, social organization, folk sanctions, standards of conduct, social and spiritual ideals, esthetic values,*

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[9]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, pp.84-85.

which in their totality form a civilization."[10] Only the idea of a civilization captures the full range of the life of a people; for Kaplan, only viewing Judaism as a civilization captured the full range of the life of the Jewish People.

Kaplan identified six specific components of the Jewish civilization in Judaism as a Civilization. First, the land of Israel was the historic location where the Jewish civilization was shaped, and therefore is at the base of the civilization. Second, every civilization must have a language, which enables them to develop a literature around the issues most relevant to them; for Jews, that language is Hebrew, which has connected them across time and space. Third, civilizations have rules for how people are supposed to act in a given situation, which includes moral, social, legal, and religious conduct. These behavioral expectations enable members of the civilization to distinguish between themselves and non-members: if someone behaves as they do, he is a member; if not, she belongs to another civilization. Kaplan described how important these standards are to Judaism: "Judaism functions only so long as it is co-extensive with the whole of the Jew's life. To be that, it has to consist of the entire range of social habits, from the most artless folkways to the most formal legislative decree and the most self-conscious ethical standards."[11] Fourth, these rules are undergirded by sanctions that provide a reason for the behavior that is performed, and express what the civilization holds as sacred. Kaplan maintained that in traditional Judaism the religious sanctions and national sanctions

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[10]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, p.178. Italics Kaplan's.
[11]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, p.196.

overlapped, and therefore these sanctions were stronger than in other civilizations. Fifth, the emotional rhythms of the civilization are expressed through the arts. As Kaplan wrote:

> A civilization implies a specific esthetic mood, and a unique content of sensuous and imaginative beauty. The art of a civilization is its individual interpretation of the world in color, sound, and image, and interpretation that is familiar and profoundly interesting to the people of that civilization. This art contributes a unique expressive value to each object of the spiritual life of that people.[12]

Despite the restrictions on the visual arts, the history of achievement in music, poetry, and dance in Judaism dates back at least to the Bible. Sixth, civilization requires a group of people to live together collectively, in order for these other aspects to take shape. The social structure must be able to enforce its authority, to maintain and transmit the other elements of the civilization. Within the different societies in which Jews live, Judaism must work to recreate a social structure that can allow and encourage its civilization to flourish. This type of community, which modernity had weakened, is critical to the success of the entire civilization.

For Kaplan, then, Jewish civilization is a civilization of, by, and for the Jewish People. The Jewish People play the crucial role in Kaplan's vision of Judaism. Norbert Samuelson argues that at different times, different aspects of the Jewish triad-- God, Torah, Israel-- have been emphasized by Jewish thinkers. In the Rabbinic period, Torah was at the center, while in Medieval times, the focus was on God. Beginning with the Emancipation, however, the most

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[12]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, p.205.

critical aspect of Judaism, according to Jewish philosophers, has been the people Israel.[13] Kaplan certainly provides support for Samuelson's view; for Kaplan, the People is essential for the individual to endure. In Kaplan's words, "what makes a person a Jew is his belonging to a corporate body, the existence of which is a prior condition to his being a Jew, as the existence of an army is a prior condition to one's being a soldier."[14] Kaplan also believed that the notion of the Jewish People, and the civilization which it created, helped to augment the life of the individual Jew. Membership and participation in this civilization gave Jews, according to Kaplan, "a sense of spiritual rootedness in Eretz Yisrael, a feeling of oneness with the forty-century old People of Israel, a desire to understand its language and literature, a yearning to cherish its aspirations, and an eagerness to live its way of life."[15] By providing a larger context for the individual's life, the Jewish People makes it possible for a Jew to live a more meaningful life as a Jew.

Perhaps, as David Hartman suggests, Kaplan's emphasis on the Jewish People was a pragmatic response to assimilation.[16] In order to keep Jews attached, Kaplan attempted to define Judaism functionally, in terms of its effect on and importance to Jews; the other possible rubrics, God and Torah, seemed far removed from the

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[13]Samuelson, Norbert M. "Can Democracy and Capitalism be Jewish Values? Mordecai Kaplan's Political Philosophy" (Modern Judaism, 3). May 1983, p.190.

[14]Kaplan, Mordecai M. Judaism Without Supernaturalism: The Only Alternative to Orthodoxy and Secularism. New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1958, p.133.

[15]Kaplan, The Greater Judaism in the Making, p.451.

[16]Hartman, David. The Breakdown of Tradition and the Quest for Renewal: Reflections on Three Jewish Responses to Modernity. Montreal: Congregation Shaar Hashomayim, 1980, p.20.

immediate life of the average Jew. Yet Kaplan's emphasis on peoplehood was more than reactive. If it had still been possible for the Jews to live together in one specific country, the Jewish Nation could have played the unifying and defining role that the modern situation demanded. Given, however, the unlikelihood that all Jews would make *aliyah*, Jews would probably never again all be residents of one state. Consequently, according to Kaplan, Jews had to see themselves as part of a People, who had "a cultural pattern which affords it sufficient cohesion to make those who belong to it desire to maintain some kind of unified life."[17] This vision is admittedly vague on the particulars of Jewish life, but the essential point for Kaplan was the unity of the people wherever they lived, not the specific actions which united them. To put it even more sharply, the Jews are not a nation; rather, the Jews are a "trans-national people."[18] As a single people, the focus of Judaism becomes what unites all Jews, regardless of their country of residence.

Kaplan needed to emphasize the non-national status of Jews in light of the founding of the State of Israel. Kaplan had not wavered in his Zionism. He believed that for a civilization to develop most fully, it required at least one location where it was the primary civilization. For Judaism, that land is Eretz Yisrael. In other lands, Judaism becomes an amalgam of the Jewish civilization and the civilization of the host country. Only in the land of Israel would the true Jewish civilization develop. In this perspective Kaplan showed the influence on his thought of the modern cultural Zionist, Ahad

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[17]Kaplan, The Greater Judaism in the Making, p.452.
[18]Kaplan, The Greater Judaism in the Making, p.455.

Ha'am, who believed that Israel would become the spiritual center of Judaism, even if the Jews were still dispersed among the nations: Jews in the Diaspora would draw strength and inspiration from the civilization as it developed in Israel. Zionism was therefore a necessary component of Kaplan's view of Judaism.

Despite his support for Israel, Kaplan was concerned that the existence of the State might split the Jewish People into Israelis on the one hand and Diaspora Jews on the other. Therefore, Kaplan intentionally did not deny the value of Diaspora Jewish life, nor would he have argued that Diaspora Judaism was less authentically Judaism. Rather, he articulated an important role for Jews of other lands. Diaspora Jewry could provide Israel with necessary financial and spiritual support, as well as their own creative and vibrant forms of Judaism. One special Diaspora contribution to the Jewish civilization, particularly from America, would be the idea of the separation of church and state, which would prevent Israel from becoming a theocracy, which would stifle the creativity necessary for the civilization to flourish. Diaspora Jewry and Israel Jewry would remain united through the Jewish civilization. Thus, Kaplan chose to describe the structure of the Jewish People through the suggestive analogy of a wheel:

> The part of the Jewish world community which is to be in Israel will be the hub, the segments of that world community in other countries will be the spokes, and the rim will be the three thousand-year tradition, which is to be spelled out into a sense of interdependence and mutual responsibility of all Jews wherever they reside. That tradition is not merely Jewish

religion; it is also Jewish history, Jewish law and custom, Jewish literature and music-- in short, Jewish civilization.[19]

The Jewish People, bound together by Jewish civilization regardless of where they live, is the organizing principle of Kaplan's Judaism. This idea derived from the insights of modern sociology.

Another postulate of modernity which affected Kaplan's thought was universalism and the consequent rejection of particularism. In describing the Jewish People, Kaplan consistently objected to the traditional idea of the chosen people. He believed the notion of a chosen people to be arrogant, unbecoming of a religion for the modern world. When Kaplan would rewrite *siddurim*, he would be especially vigilant about excising these references completely; Ira Eisenstein, one of his co-editors, writes that "Kaplan would not compromise on the need to eliminate the doctrine of the chosen people and considered every alternative formulation [such as that used by the Reform movement, which reinterpreted the English while maintaining the traditional Hebrew] either a misinterpretation of the essential and unacceptable meaning of chosenness or plain dishonest."[20] Kaplan's God-concept (to be discussed shortly) did not allow him to attribute to God conscious action of any sort, let alone choosing one particular people for special favor or for a unique mission. Additionally, Arnold Eisen argues that "American Jews [feared] the charge of particularism;"[21] American Jews conscious of

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[19]Kaplan, Judaism Without Supernaturalism, p.184.

[20]Eisenstein, Ira. "Kaplan as Liturgist," in Goldsmith, Emanuel S. et al. (eds.), The American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan. New York: New York University Press, 1990, pp.323-324.

[21]Eisen, Arnold. "Theology, Sociology, Ideology: Jewish Thought in America, 1925-1955" (Modern Judaism, 2). February 1982, p.98.

what their Gentile neighbors would say would be attracted to a Judaism which eliminated the idea of the chosen people and therefore focused on broader concerns, rather than parochial ones specific to the Jewish community. Thus, modern universalism helped shape Kaplan's philosophy of Judaism.

But in abolishing the idea of the chosen people, Kaplan redefined the purpose of Jewish life. If the Jews are God's chosen people, then their purpose is to make God known throughout the earth. Without the chosen people concept, however, the Jewish People need a new rationale for their continued existence. Kaplan's answer was salvation, first for individual Jews, and then for the whole world; according to Sandra Lubarsky, Kaplan believed that "it is the group itself which enables the individual to fulfill his or her potential as a human being. Salvation comes through the people itself, not through the election of the people by God."[22] For Kaplan, salvation did not mean life after death. Rather, salvation was essentially synonymous with self-fulfillment. Here again, Kaplan's ideas overlapped a modern concept; according to the Declaration of Independence, humans should strive for "the pursuit of happiness." Salvation, for Kaplan, was more than happiness, but both perspectives shared a focus on what the self required for fulfillment. Jews, however, cannot attain this salvation independently; to achieve salvation, a Jew needs the Jewish People. The Jewish People helps the individual attain salvation through the instrument of Jewish civilization: "since human beings cannot achieve authentic fulfillment

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[22]Lubarsky, Sandra B. Tolerance and Transformation: Jewish Approaches to Religious Pluralism. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1990, p.111.

except amidst a body of people, the group or civilization is the primary enabler of fulfillment. Civilization then... is itself a means of salvation; indeed it is *the* means of salvation for the individual."[23] This statement, then, provides one rationale for Judaism: Jews should therefore remain connected to and involved in the Jewish People because "their allegiance to the community enriches their lives or, to use the specifically Kaplanian terminology, contributes to their salvation."[24]

But the Jewish People, according to Kaplan, has a greater role to play in the world than simply ensuring the salvation of Jews. Once the Jewish People demonstrates its salvation by being "animated by the divine traits of moral responsibility, authenticity, loyalty or love, and creativity... [they will be a] People in the image of God,"[25] but the Messianic Age will not come until all peoples are in the image of God. In achieving its own salvation, the Jewish People can serve as a model for other nations. As Eisen writes, the Jewish civilization should "make for the enhancement not only of Jewish life but of the life of mankind, and thus help to render manifest the cosmic purpose of human life... the Jewish people, closer to this ideal [of salvation] than any other, would show the rest the way."[26] Kaplan denied that the Jews were more likely to attain this salvation due to any special knowledge or relationship with God. Rather, the Jewish People merely acted on what was already widely known. He wrote:

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[23]Lubarsky, p.105. Italics Lubarsky's.
[24]Siegel, Seymour. "Kaplan and Jewish Law" (Judaism, 30, #117). Winter 1981, p.62.
[25]Kaplan, The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence, p.296.
[26]Eisen, p.95.

"Judaism is unique not in having evolved values which were totally unknown to other peoples, but in having carried common values to pragmatic conclusions never dreamt of by other peoples."[27] Through the civilization inspired by the Torah, Judaism tried to achieve its greatest self-realization. The Jewish People, therefore, must exemplify how a nation can foster the highest possible development of its members' potential for good.

For Kaplan, then, the central element in the Jewish civilization was the Jewish People, which still had a purpose for its existence. But the modern sociologist Durkheim had placed particular emphasis on the role of religion in holding a group together. Kaplan therefore stressed that Judaism must also be a religious civilization. Religion intertwines intimately with peoplehood, because religion takes its form, its aim, and its meaning from the people who observe it. "A religion is not a philosophical doctrine originating in the mind of an individual and communicated by him to his fellows; it is a product of a people's life, the soul of its civilization."[28] Indeed, religious values only make sense in the context of the larger civilization of the people. Religion serves the people which creates it, guiding that people towards its salvation, its self-fulfillment: "the true function of religion... [is] to make of each people or nation a medium for the nurturing of the ideal human type that would be an embodiment of Divinity or the Divine aspect of the cosmos."[29] The Jewish religion is no exception to this rule; it emerges from the Jewish People in order

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[27]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, p.256.
[28]Kaplan, The Greater Judaism in the Making, p.458.
[29]Kaplan, The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence, p.312.

to assist in their development. "Jewish religion, in a word, is the conscious endeavor of the Jewish People to make its collective experience contribute to the spiritual growth and self-realization of the individual Jew, the Jewish People, and all mankind."[30] According to Kaplan, religion sprouts naturally from civilization, in order to help the civilization meet its goals.

This organic outgrowth of religion from a civilization has an important consequence for the nature of religion. Traditionally, religion was conceived as fixed, permanent, given once and for all time. God's word is eternal; if religion comes from God, therefore, the religion must maintain its original form. Kaplan reversed this understanding of religion, suggesting that religion flows not from God to people, but rather from the people towards God. Humanity must realize "that religion is rooted in human nature, and that the belief in the existence of God, and the attributes ascribed to him, must be derived from and be made to refer to the experience of the average man and woman."[31] Therefore, religion can develop as human experience of the world and of the divine increases.

This conception of religion enabled Kaplan to respond to perhaps the biggest obstacle to a modern understanding of religion: the issue of God. He wrote: "*The present predicament in religion is due mainly to the prevailing assumption that religion is inseparable from supernaturalism and theurgy.*"[32] The Biblical image of God was that of a supernatural being, anthropomorphic, doing miracles,

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[30]Kaplan, The Greater Judaism in the Making, p.463.
[31]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, p.306.
[32]Kaplan, Judaism Without Supernaturalism, p.98. Italics Kaplan's.

suspending the laws of nature. Modern people, however, did not encounter God in this way; the contemporary mood was naturalist, portraying God and humanity as inhabiting the same universe. A religion that insisted on the antiquated traditional view of God was consequently dissonant. In Kaplan's theory, however, religious ideas were allowed to evolve. He argued that in fact, religion constantly undergoes this evolution, even when tradition co-opts the changes. The Biblical idea of God emerged from the experience of the people who lived at that time; Kaplan believed that the faith the Israelites had in God derived only from their witnessing what God did for them in their lives.[33] Therefore, if modern experience is different, the God-concept can be updated.

Kaplan thus reconceived God for the modern age. He was dissatisfied with both supernaturalism, which he regarded as untenable given contemporary belief, and naturalism, which, by anchoring God and humanity to the natural world, could not account for humanity's higher strivings. He developed the idea of a "transnatural" God, which unites the different aspects of nature into a new whole. In his words, "this God, YHWH, is that aspect of the Jewish people which renders it more than the sum of its individuals, past, present, and future, and gives meaning to all its virtue, sins, successes, and failures."[34] This God enables people to look beyond their current situation to the fulfillment of their highest potential, and to strive to reach that level. "Transnaturalist religion beholds

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[33]Kaplan, Mordecai M. If Not Now, When? Toward a Reconstitution of the Jewish People: Conversations Between Mordecai M. Kaplan and Arthur A. Cohen. New York: Schocken Books, 1973, p.56.

[34]Kaplan, If Not Now, When?, p.68.

God in the fulfillment of human nature and not in the suspension of the natural order. Its function is not to help man overcome the hazards of nature, but to enable him to bring under control his inhumanity to his fellow-man."[35] God connects human actions to ultimate salvation.

Importantly, however, this God is not an agent. Theologically, "Kaplan advocate[d] that we substitute the notion of process for the notion of entity."[36] That is, rather than thinking of God as a Being who exists, people should recognize God in their striving to improve themselves. In The Greater Judaism in the Making, Kaplan derived lessons about God from the Jewish holidays. In this formulation, God is the Power that makes for salvation, for social regeneration, for the regeneration of human nature, for cooperation, for freedom, and for righteousness, and which can be seen in nature and in history.[37] But lessons about God are really lessons about how humanity should conduct itself. The idea of this God inspires people to fulfill their highest potential.

William Kaufman schematizes Kaplan's view of God by stating that God can be understood in three different ways: functionally, as a value term, and as a predicate.[38] First, a functional view of God would ask how God works; that is, how does God function in human life? Kaplan said that "the functional aspect of the term God is not that of an answer to a question of information respecting the origin

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[35]Kaplan, Judaism Without Supernaturalism, p.10.
[36]Kaufman, William E. Contemporary Jewish Philosophies. New York: Reconstructionist Press and Behrman House, Inc., 1976, p.204.
[37]Kaplan, The Greater Judaism in the Making, pp.470-474.
[38]Kaufman, p.204.

of events, but an answer to what man needs to be, to have, and to do in order to achieve his destiny as a human being or, collectively, as a family, tribe, or nation."[39] The true importance of the God-idea is not what humans think God is, but how God inspires them to act. Thus, God's traditional attributes can be reinterpreted as desiderata for human conduct: God motivates human action. Second, understanding God as a value word would identify God with humanity's highest values. These values are important to humans because they have cosmic significance: God grounds human values. Kaplan wrote that God can be understood as "that aspect of nature as a whole which makes for the maximum fulfillment of man's highest ethical and creative potentialities."[40] Third, viewing God as predicate means that God is seen in actions that live up to the best that is in people. This understanding redefines the concept of divine revelation; God appears in actions that demonstrate people's striving for salvation. Kaufman writes that the Divine "can be identified in human experience through the ethical values that are its manifestations."[41] It is more helpful to say that justice is Divine than to say that God is just. All three of these rubrics highlight the transnatural connection between God and the fulfillment of human abilities.

Clearly, Kaplan's modern God-concept has important ramifications for human conduct. When God is defined as the Power that helps humanity to reach its highest potential, it becomes the job of humanity to act in accordance with its highest potential, to become

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[39]Kaplan, If Not Now, When?, p.44.
[40]Kaplan, The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence, p.295.
[41]Kaufman, p.205.

humanity in its best sense. God's success and people's success are dependent on each other. Kaplan argued that humanity has not yet appropriately responded to the divine summons: "God's work is far from done, because man keeps on undoing it. God has not yet succeeded, because man has not yet become human."[42] The proof of God is in human action. Kaufman eloquently summarizes the connection between God and humanity. He writes that Kaplan identified God

> with the process of creativity conquering chaos, with the eternal and ongoing active tendency in the universe to bring order out of chaos. This process is unfulfilled without man. The role of man in the universe is to transform the potentiality of the creative process in the universe into actuality in his life, through such values as honesty and responsibility. God, as the power that makes for salvation or self-fulfillment, is the inexhaustible ground or potentiality that generates the process. The process is the ongoing activity of the Divine in the universe, which is actualized when man acts according to justice and law.[43]

In Kaplan's opinion, the Jews in particular must strive to live up to the divine challenge. "The Jewish People is committed *to the promulgation of that belief in God which can impel man to create a social order based on freedom, justice, peace, and love.*"[44] God, especially when understood as a process, compels ethical human action.

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[42]Kaplan, The Greater Judaism in the Making, p.509.
[43]Kaufman, p.206.
[44]Kaplan, The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence, p.313. Italics Kaplan's.

This revolutionary conception of God forces the reinterpretation of other religious ideas as well. For example, if God does not really act supernaturally, then what is the purpose of prayer? Clearly, prayer cannot be theurgic, in the sense of asking God to respond in a certain way. However, prayer can enrich the life of the worshipper. Kaufman explains that, in Kaplan's system, prayer can "open [the worshipper] to the creative process as it functions in nature and in [people]... prayer can be viewed as an expression of man's quest for self-transcendence."[45] Through prayer, the worshipper hopes to recognize the Divine presence, to identify those elements of him- or herself which represent greatest potential. In this way, prayer is also an uplifting experience, as the worshipper comes into contact with a superior plane of existence. "The function of prayer, then, could also be considered as man's quest to elevate himself-- to open himself to a higher level of reality transcending mind."[46] In addition to these functions, public worship achieves one other goal: providing identification with a community that struggles with issues of fulfillment. Worship, according to Kaplan, should be unmistakably Jewish in its symbols and language, in order to give a strong Jewish flavor to the experience. It should draw on the arts in order to be a satisfying esthetic experience. The prayers should address modern issues, not merely the past concerns of Judaism. Finally, Judaism must remain open to the personal dimension of religion, in order to address the individual's needs within the context

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[45]Kaufman, p.210.
[46]Kaufman, p.210.

of the community. Prayer, even for Kaplan, still carried significant meaning.

A second question emerging from the transnatural God-concept is the importance of Torah, if it is no longer to be perceived as divinely revealed. Kaplan understood Torah primarily as the way of life of the Jewish people. The Torah should inspire a lifestyle that reaches toward the highest values; while all humanity can strive for these heights, Jews are guided there by Judaism, whose blueprint is Torah. He wrote:

> Torah should mean to the Jew nothing less than a civilization which enables the individual to effect affirmative and creative adjustments in his living relationships with reality. Any partial conception of Torah is false to the forces that have made for Judaism's development and survival. Torah means a complete Jewish civilization.[47]

This civilization keeps the community unified in its striving toward salvation. But because Torah is not compelled by external authority, and because Diaspora Jews already live in at least one other civilization, which is usually secular, this unity cannot be enforced. Rather, Jewish people freely choose participation in the Jewish civilization. Even this civilization, enforced by communal consensus, is subject to amendment if it threatens to become irrelevant: Kaplan pointed to the Midrash, Philo, and the Zohar as examples of reinterpretation of the Torah. Whether or not the Torah is reinterpreted, it still plays the roles of "ordering our collective life as a spiritually autonomous people... a Constitution which confers upon

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[47]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, p.414.

us the status of an organic society... a way of life which is intended to make of us 'a People in the image of God'."[48] The Torah has shaped the People and the civilization. Even if it was not created through divine revelation, Torah nonetheless remained crucial to Kaplan's Judaism.

One more question about Judaism as a modern religion involves the role of *mitzvot* and specific ritual practices. A *mitzvah* traditionally implies a *m'tzaveh*, but Kaplan's transnatural God cannot fill that need. In his early writing, Kaplan called *mitzvot* "folkways." He chose this term in order to emphasize their nature as custom more than as commandment, thereby removing any vestige of their supernatural origin. Like the Torah, they acquire weight not from divinity but from humanity; specifically, their widespread practice by the Jewish People. While not immutable, they are still imperative as long as they are part of the collective life of the people. If they become irrelevant, however, they may be eliminated or changed. Kaplan left room for personal means of observance, depending on the individual's relationship with God; he believed that the purpose of *mitzvot* was to help people achieve meaning in their lives by giving them occasions to say *b'rachot*. In his later work, he no longer used the term "folkways," preferring a broader rationale that included individual meaning. He used the term "sancta," suggesting actions hallowed in their own right, without needing communal validation of their sacred status. His sole caveat was that the ritual should somehow allow the individual to connect with the larger group, lest through this personalization, the group cohesion

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[48]Kaplan, The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence, p.295.

disintegrate. He recognized that rituals "[contributed both] to Jewish group survival and to the personal self-fulfillment of the individual."[49] *Mitzvot*, too, could be reinterpreted to comport with Kaplan's view of the Jewish religion.

The preceding pages have explained Kaplan's underlying philosophy of Judaism. He created a thoroughly modern philosophy, as reflected in his response to the situation of the Jews brought on by modernity, the influence of Durkheim and Ahad Ha-am, his universalism, his emphasis on self-fulfillment, and his elimination of the supernatural God-concept. Yet Kaplan did more than theorize; he created a program of action to address the dire straits in which Judaism was mired. How did he propose to rescue Judaism from its modern crisis?

Four recommendations are prominent in his thought. First, Jewish life needed a compelling rationale. As discussed earlier, he believed that he had provided one in his understanding of the Jewish People facilitating salvation for the individual Jew and for the whole world. Second, in order to fulfill this mission, the Jewish People needed to be revitalized. To achieve this goal, Kaplan proposed an improved system of communal organization. Kaplan wrote that "when we study the quest for salvation and the conditions of its fulfillment, we note that salvation presupposes a community which treats the individual as so organic a part of itself that in promoting its life it is aware that it promotes his own."[50] The individual and the community are intimately interconnected; they must both accept

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[49]Cited in Siegel, p.63.
[50]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, p.283.

responsibility for the welfare of each other. These "organic communities... would function as the instruments of Jewish life as a whole, and that would meet all its needs, in the order of their urgency and importance."[51] Kaplan argued that the most prominent social organization, the congregation, was insufficient for these communal purposes, because it only reached a limited portion of the community. Every person born into a Jewish family should be considered a member of the Jewish community, and must be treated as such by the community. All Jewish institutions must work together to bring Jews into the community, to encourage Jewish life, and to help needy Jews. He urged that this structure be built on top of the existing federations.[52] If they were to be made representative of the community, then they could truly be active advocates for a vibrant Jewish life, which would bring salvation to the Jews and provide an example for the wider world.

Third, following this broader definition of community, Kaplan argued for reconceptualizing the synagogue. He wanted to make it more representative of the whole community, not just one congregation, and not just a religious organization either. He said:

> To live Judaism as a civilization is not only to pray as a Jew, but to work and play as a Jew, that is, to carry on, as a Jew, activities which answer to fundamental human wants. Work and play answer organic needs. The character of a civilization expresses itself through both... Emancipation and industrialism have practically made it impossible for Judaism to influence the Jew in his work. All the more imperative, therefore, has it

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[51]Kaplan, The Greater Judaism in the Making, p.456.
[52]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, p.298.

become for Judaism to influence the Jew in his leisure activities.[53]

The synagogue should become a *bet am*, creating a sense of unity and friendliness among diverse Jews by offering a variety of programming. The *bet am* should attempt to meet the spiritual, social, educational, and cultural needs of the community. All of these aspects, of course, are components of the Jewish civilization, but the non-religious ones often get short shrift in Judaism.

Fourth, Kaplan called for a rejuvenation of the Jewish religion. The first step, in his opinion, was to redefine God and religion in order to remove all traces of supernaturalism. Some of the specifics of this revision have already been discussed, but it is important to emphasize that Kaplan did not intend to weaken belief in God. God played an important role for Kaplan, in terms of responding to people's "state of perpetual tension and foreboding... [because] we have lost our way in life."[54] Belief in God should show humanity the direction in which to grow, being "capable of serving as inspiration and sanction for whatever is likely to render man more fully human."[55] Having eliminated supernaturalism, Kaplan would attempt to remove dogmatism. Since religion is a product of a civilization, and civilizations evolve, a religion that wants to stay vital must also evolve, but stubborn clinging to stagnant tradition kept Judaism from evolving. He wrote that "each religion identifies as holy or divine whatever it regards as enabling the members of the

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[53]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, p.428.
[54]Kaplan, Judaism Without Supernaturalism, p.101.
[55]Kaplan, The Greater Judaism in the Making, p.469.

group, or the group as a whole, to make the most out of life;"[56] however, these *sancta* must be reevaluated and, if necessary, reinterpreted from generation to generation in order to keep them relevant. Consequently, Kaplan called for creativity in the liturgy and the hymns recited during worship, as well as in the underlying rationale for faith and the forms of its expression. All of these steps, in Kaplan's opinion, were necessary in order to modernize and revitalize Judaism, and enable it to respond to the crisis it faced.

The modern situation influenced the ideas of both Kaplan and Cohen. While their philosophies share some foundations, the specific forms their thoughts take differ. For example, with respect to the Jewish People, as a result of their universalism, both Cohen and Kaplan abandoned the doctrine of the Jews as the people chosen for a special relationship with God. But whereas for Cohen, this idea led him to become an anti-Zionist, struggling to justify the continued existence of the Jews as a people, for Kaplan, the Jewish People retained its centrality, albeit without any inherent superiority over any other people. Both Cohen and Kaplan attempted to eliminate vestiges of supernaturalism from their concepts of God. But whereas for Cohen, God became the ground of morality, the original Author and the faithful Guarantor of rational ethics, Kaplan saw God as the Power that made for salvation, motivating humanity to strive for their own self-fulfillment. Both Cohen and Kaplan agreed that the Torah was not divinely authored. But whereas for Cohen, Torah contained a set of laws designed to guide humanity towards its highest ethical potential, Kaplan's Torah recorded the actions that the

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[56]Kaplan, The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence, pp.54-55.

Jewish People had sanctified as expressions of their civilization. Modernity planted similar seeds in both systems, but the trees bore different fruit.

Despite the influence that Kaplan's ideas have had, an impact especially visible in the founding of the Reconstructionist movement and the prominence of Jewish community centers, his philosophy has come under intense criticism on two important counts. First, his conception of the Jewish People raises serious problems. Kaplan maintained that the People is prior to the religion, the Torah, even to God: everything emerges from the life of the People. This idea places tremendous limits on the rest of Judaism; exalting the People above God particularly seems to be putting the cart before the horse. Hartman writes: "I refuse to allow for the possibility of the Jewish people's becoming the object of a modern form of idolatry... one should not sacrifice the Jewish people to God or to Torah nor should one abandon God and Torah in favor of the glorification of the Jewish people."[57] Similarly, Borowitz protests ascribing equal value to the different manifestations of Judaism. He states: "if the Jews are primarily a folk, then their secular activities are as valuable as their religion. Is folk dancing the Jewish equivalent of study of the Bible or Talmud?... To make religion only the first of many folk activities seems to delimit it unduly."[58]

The second criticism of Kaplan's Judaism concerns his God-concept. One issue is the idea that God cannot act. Such a God cannot ensure that we will ever reach the salvation for which we strive. As

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[57]Hartman, p.36.
[58]Borowitz, p.119.

Jacob Staub puts it, "we are left at most with a power or a set of powers not ourselves that can be of assistance to us in our quests. However, that falls considerably short of providing us with the confidence that our efforts will succeed in the face of an apparently indifferent universe."[59] Unlike Cohen's God-concept of the Guarantor of ethics, Kaplan's God only shows humanity the way. Borowitz also objects to Kaplan's idea of God, in that God cannot have an active relationship with humanity. To him, "a religion centered on an impersonal God seems a contradiction in terms... Why should one be utterly involved with a God who is utterly unresponsive in return?"[60] Borowitz would prefer a God who could actually communicate in some form with people, rather than being merely an example or an inspiration. Finally, Kaplan's God-concept comes under attack for its derivation from humanity. Human ethics are an insufficiently rigorous standard by which to determine ultimate value. Eliezer Berkovits writes that "when [Kaplan] 'identifies' the powers that make for these nobler impulses in man as the divine aspect of reality, far from discovering God, [he] has merely deified certain aspects of the human personality."[61] The same problem is highlighted by Hartman with respect to Kaplan's view of Torah; Hartman argues that "Torah contains standards which indicate how the Jewish people *ought* to live; it is not simply the cultural product of how Jews *in fact* live."[62] This Torah and this God are no more than

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[59]Staub, Jacob J. "Kaplan and Process Theology," in Goldsmith et al, p.288.
[60]Borowitz, pp.111-112.
[61]Berkovits, Eliezer. Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism: A Critical Evaluation. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1974, p.183.
[62]Hartman, p.36. Italics Hartman's.

human projections. Milton Steinberg succinctly stated the difficulty with Kaplan's God by saying that what Kaplan has described is "really not a theology at all but an account of the psychological and ethical consequences of having one."[63]

In my opinion, despite Kaplan's comprehensiveness, depth, and systematic strengths, the fundamental issue is still left unresolved for me. To respond to the crisis facing Judaism in his day, Kaplan needed to create a vision of Judaism that would captivate Jews who were drifting away, convincing them to decide to participate in the Jewish civilization. I do not believe that Kaplan successfully articulated what he himself admitted was necessary: "an inspiring and irresistible motive"[64] for revitalized Jewish life in the modern world. While he painted an attractive picture of the Jewish civilization, he did not specify the reasons that a Jew should choose to live that kind of life. I think that he failed to consider the perspective of those very outsiders whom he needed to convince; indeed, he failed even to recognize that the Jews whom he needed to convince would consider themselves outsiders. His philosophy presumed a pre-existing affinity toward Judaism; Lubarsky wrote that Kaplan thought Jews should live a Jewish life "because that is the civilization into which you were born."[65] He dismissed those who doubted the importance of Jewish life by saying "with this approach, the question of 'why be a Jew?' loses its relevance. If Jewish life is a unique way of experience, it needs no further justification."[66]

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[63]Cited in Eisen, p.97.
[64]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, p.84.
[65]Lubarsky, p.112.
[66]Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, p.182.

Unfortunately, in today's world where embracing Judaism is more than ever a choice that Jews feel free not to make, the question "why be a Jew?" remains extremely relevant. Judaism can no longer be inherited; instead, it must be freely chosen and adopted. Based as it is on this flawed premise, Kaplan's case, although thoughtful, provocative, and creative, ultimately does not convince.

BALANCING COMMUNITY AND AUTONOMY:

EUGENE BOROWITZ AND COVENANT THEOLOGY

Both Mordecai Kaplan and Hermann Cohen shaped their philosophies in response to their contemporary situations. Cohen believed that individuals thinking rationally would eventually arrive at a universal system of ethics, grounded in and guaranteed by the God of morality, and reinforced by Judaism. For Kaplan, humanity's progress suggested that as long as Jews remained grounded in the Jewish civilization, they would grow toward eventual salvation and self-fulfillment, assisted impersonally by God. In a similar way, the thought of Eugene Borowitz (born in 1924) reflects the conditions of his time period, but whereas Cohen and Kaplan responded to the assumptions of modernity, Borowitz believes that those assumptions have been proven false. His era, which he calls postmodernity, is substantially different from the earlier age; theology must therefore adapt to meet the new epoch.

Perhaps the central feature of modernity was its unbounded faith in reason. Through rational application of their minds, humans had the power to determine what was true and just and to act on that conception. The belief in the natural equality of all people, as expressed both in the Declaration of Independence and in the slogan of the French Revolution, grew out of this idea. The universal norms and values of this modern society no longer came from divine revelation, but rather from logical analysis; any rational person could, in principle, arrive at the same value system. Kant's

categorical imperative was based on this belief in the inevitability of rational ethics. Consequently, it came to be widely believed that the development of modernity, with its focus on rationalism, would give rise to a universal system of ethics, which would improve life wherever it took root.

The dominant mood of modernity, therefore, was optimistic and progressive. Borowitz writes: "modernization became our Messiah and we looked to it to effectuate the ideals we had for so long vainly looked to God and piety to fulfill."[1] People themselves would be improved by this process of developing universal, rational ethics; they would come to realize the right way to behave, turning away from evil to goodness. As people changed for the better, they would continually improve the world around them as well, a process which would lead eventually to the Messianic Age. This future time, however, would be attained not by divine intervention, but rather by human action, guided by values derived from human reason.

An important consequence of this modern emphasis on rationalism was the development of the belief in individual autonomy. Because each person was rational, each individual was the final locus of authority. According to Borowitz, "the Enlightenment thinkers taught that human beings ought to make their own minds and consciences the *ultimate* basis of their decisions and actions."[2] Law could no longer be imposed on people from outside; instead, people had the ability to understand it, and, as long

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[1]Borowitz, Eugene B. Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991, p.19.

[2]Borowitz, Eugene B. "The Autonomous Jewish Self" (Modern Judaism, 4). February, 1984, p.40. Italics Borowitz's.

as the law comported with their reason, they could accept it for themselves. The revolutions against European monarchies and the rise of democratic states actualized these ideals. What was true of law was also true of values; each person could rationally determine the correct code of ethics and morals. The very fact that people freely chose to submit themselves to this code gave any accepted idea great power over them; if the source of authority was one's own reason rather than external obligation, the individual was more likely to obey its dictates. Autonomous individuals, in accordance with their reason, would thus recognize what was rationally obligatory and decide for themselves how to live their lives well. The sum of these decisions would determine the shape of society. The widespread ascendance of autonomy resulted from modernity's faith in human reason.

By the middle of the twentieth century, however, the original optimism associated with the rise of rationalism was largely displaced by a cynical realism about human nature. Far from demonstrating that scientific logic would always be used for good, the Holocaust proved that human reason could be adopted to plan, execute, and justify evil with unparalleled efficiency. The freedom from authority that accompanied a belief in autonomy made it impossible to prove that any rationally derived value was less acceptable than any other one; if an individual had chosen a value autonomously, no one had the right to deny that person that choice. Thus, rather than affirming a set of universal values, rationalism opened the door for relativism. Relativism, in turn, removed the idea of a value hierarchy from the equation; if all values are equally

acceptable, then no particular value has ultimate importance. Consequently, people are under no obligation to act in a certain moral way. Borowitz writes: "Our secularized civilization thus no longer has a philosophic consensus as to why people *must* be ethical or how reason *commands* duty rather than offers counsel. Simply put, secular intellect no longer supplies a secure ground of value."[3] Without this shared ground of value, according to Borowitz, it became impossible even to argue that the Holocaust was evil. The primacy and sufficiency of autonomous reason as a basis for ethics was thereby called into question, and modernity itself was challenged.

If the consequence of modernity's emphasis on humanity's ability to determine value rationally was the loss of any universally acceptable, humanly-derived basis for value, then postmodernism attempts to restore value by removing it from the sphere of reason. As Borowitz puts it: "With the demise of the generative Kantian premise of liberal religion-- that ethics was more certain than belief-- the converse of the liberal axiom now asserted itself: If ethics rightly deserves a substance and power that rationalism can no longer provide, then faith must now once again provide its foundation and standard."[4] With rationalism having shown itself to be inadequate to the task, faith returns as the basis of ethics. By turning to faith, people are searching for some source of meaning beyond the individual self in which they could ground their values. This quest leads down many paths, among them meditation, hedonism, and nationalism. But only a religious faith, according to

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[3]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, pp.22-23. Italics Borowitz's.
[4]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, p.23.

Borowitz, can provide the sense that "a transcendent God stands over against us and our society, summoning us to moral conduct."[5] The road from rationalism beyond relativism to value returns to religion.

Borowitz believes that religious life most successfully answers the need for a secure ethical basis, yet it also clearly seems to conflict with autonomy. Religion holds that values are only secure if God commands or otherwise grounds them, but autonomy rejects the ability of any external source to command the individual. This dialectic characterizes postmodern religion, including Judaism. The key to understanding the Jewish theology of Eugene Borowitz is to view it as an attempt to balance the competing claims of divine command (as mediated by the Jewish community) and autonomy.

Borowitz, while acknowledging the importance of religion as the ground of ethics, values autonomy, consequently hesitating to accept faith uncritically. He argues that Abraham Joshua Heschel's call for sublimating that autonomy to the fact of God's commanding message is one reason that his theories were not more widely accepted. Liberal Jews are not ready to surrender their autonomy to the traditional view of God's revelation of specific immutable commandments. In Borowitz's opinion, liberal Jews reject Orthodoxy as a heteronomy which is not a theonomy; that is, law comes from other people (i.e., the rabbis), and not from God directly.[6] The implication is that if it were possible to know what God's actual sense of the law was, then that theonomy could be an acceptable

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[5]Borowitz, Eugene B. "Religion and America's Moral Crisis" (Worldview). November 1974, p.54.

[6]Borowitz, Eugene B. "The Problem of the Form of a Jewish Theology" (Hebrew Union College Annual). 1969-1970, p.405.

replacement for autonomy. But since Orthodox Judaism is mediated by other people, the liberal Jew must approach faith very carefully. Borowitz writes: "Admitting faith to our religiosity raises the danger of Orthodoxy and sets the liberal Jew in search of a principle by which to regulate the content faith may contribute to his liberal Judaism."[7] Part of that principle is autonomy.

Yet autonomy too must be limited, in order to avoid the dangers of relativism. The freedom to self-legislate is by itself insufficient ground for a religious life. Borowitz believes that "contemporary American Reform Judaism must correct early Reform's exaggerated emphasis on excessive individualism and autonomy."[8] Consequently, Borowitz tries to establish what a legitimate constraint on autonomy might be. In its earliest days, Reform Judaism accepted ethics as a boundary for autonomy. For all that the first Reformers rejected the ritual commandments, the ethical *mitzvot* retained their obligatory nature. Borowitz writes: "Liberal Judaism proclaimed that a properly autonomous self exists essentially in response to the comanding [sic] power of ethics."[9] Reform Judaism denied people the freedom to legislate for themselves violations of proper moral conduct.

Borowitz, however, sees the elevated status of ethics as a response to the historical situation of early Reform, not necessarily still sufficient as a limit for autonomy in today's world. He finds

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[7]Borowitz, Eugene B. "Faith and Method in Modern Jewish Theology" (C.C.A.R. Yearbook, 73). 1963, p.218.

[8]Ellenson, David and Krafte-Jacobs, Lori. "Eugene Borowitz," in Steven T. Katz (ed.), Interpreters of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century. Washington, D.C.: B'nai Brith Books, 1993, p.34.

[9]Borowitz, "The Autonomous Jewish Self," p.41.

what he judges to be a more relevant constraint in the wishes of the community, defined broadly as all humanity or more narrowly as the Jewish People or the local synagogue. He expresses the restraining function of community in these words:

> I am individual and unique but likewise inseparably a part of all mankind... I am therefore morally obligated to... exercise my personal autonomy in terms of them... the community may reasonably demand of me that I discipline my will so that the community can function and persevere... it can also legitimately expect some sacrifice of my conscience when its promptings conflict with central affirmations of my group.[10]

By virtue of being human, all people have obligations to humanity which supersede their autonomy. Because Borowitz places great value on the community, the desires and judgments of the self must sometimes be sublimated to preserve the community or to carry out its will. By virtue of being Jewish, Borowitz belongs not only to the general society of humanity, but also to the specific community of Jews, and so his autonomy is even further constrained:

> the Jewish self will be seriously concerned with the community which is so great a part of its selfhood. Naturally, this individual autonomy will often be channeled and fulfilled through what the Jewish people has done or now values. For the sake of communal unity, the Jewish self will often undoubtedly sacrifice the exercise of personal standards.[11]

Thus Borowitz makes room for the Jewish tradition as understood by the Jewish community as a limit on individual autonomy. These two

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[10]Borowitz, Eugene B. "The Autonomous Self and the Commanding Community" (Theological Studies, 45). March 1984, p.50.

[11]Borowitz, "The Autonomous Jewish Self," pp.45-46.

factors, autonomy and Jewish communal will, interact to shape a Jewish individual's behavior. Every aspect of Borowitz's philosophy of Judaism reflects the dialectic of these forces.

Borowitz faces this conflict in attempting to describe his conception of God. For Borowitz, God is a weak Absolute. The idea of an Absolute comes from religious orthodoxies; it refers to a God who is transcendent, distant, authoritative. In these religions, authorized leaders interpret God's will and transmit it to the rest of the people. Borowitz agrees that Judaism cannot really say authoritatively what God is; even early Reform, which placed its faith in logic, did not believe it understood God's essence. As Borowitz writes, "its respect for reason did not transcend its awe of God."[12] God must remain ultimately indescribable.

Nevertheless, Borowitz finds this conception of God as an Absolute unreflective of the biblical experience of the Israelites. Throughout the Bible, God interacts with people, speaking to them, allowing them to challenge divine decrees, revealing facets of the divine to them. In Judaism, God relates to people, and therefore is not the unknown Deity of other religious orthodoxies. Borowitz writes that "the most characteristic theological assertion of liberal Judaism is that such knowledge as men have of God is subjective, a human response to him, rather than objective human reception of his formulations."[13] Jews learn about God through their relationship with God. When necessary, God enforces God's will, but even this strictness is realized in the context of God's relationship with the

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[12]Borowitz, Eugene B. How Can a Jew Speak of Faith Today? Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969, p.19.
[13]Borowitz, How Can a Jew Speak of Faith Today?, p.62.

people. The fact of this relationship forces Borowitz to refer to God as a "weak" Absolute. He describes this "oxymoron" in the following way:

> Obviously, this Absolute, in its most primary manifestations, is relational. God creates a fully real, independent world and makes covenants with people free to accept or reject God's will, including a special Covenant with a single people, linking God's own historic destiny to that of the Jews... To the extent that biblical and rabbinic Judaism know no reality or rule equal to, much less greater than, that of God's, we may call God their Absolute. Yet this cannot be meant in its philosophic sense: a thoroughly self-contained, aloof, immovable reality... As it were, the special Jewish sense of God's absoluteness requires us to say that Judaism knows of an Absolute only in a weak, not a strong sense of that term.[14]

This explanation of God as "weak" Absolute raises two issues that must be addressed in more detail. First, how does Borowitz conceive of God's immanence and transcendence? Second, how does human autonomy play itself out in relation to his God-concept?

As the quotation above suggests, Borowitz argues that God must be both immanent and transcendent. He takes God's immanence essentially as a given. By saying that God is known through God's relationships with individuals and with the Jewish people, he can only be talking about an immanent God; in his assertion that God relates to humanity, Borowitz distinguishes himself from Kaplan. Only a God who is intimately involved with our lives can serve as the ground of our values. Yet Borowitz is concerned about the consequences of a purely immanent God; he says that "a merely immanent God cannot command for it has no

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[14]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, p.73.

status greater than anything else in nature... we cannot be satisfied with the relativism that pure immanence would impose upon us."[15] The more immanent God is, the more subjective, and therefore the less solid an ethical foundation, God becomes.

Consequently, Borowitz believes that God must be transcendent as well as immanent. Borowitz describes three facets of transcendence that help explain why this concept is so useful for him. First, transcendence implies that there is something beyond our normal mundane experience, which our religious life allows us to encounter just long enough to realize the awesome power it has. Second, the transcendent is not just beyond us, but also better, more complete, more perfect than we are, such that it can serve as a model for us. Third, due to this supremacy, transcendence has the power to command us, to ground our morals. Borowitz writes that religion can offer "a transcendent moral ground... a sense of perspective that will power and sustain man's ethical life, a knowledge of and faith in that transcendent God who demands nothing before righteousness to men, and who demands nothing less than a society holy as he is holy."[16] Only a transcendent God can imbue these ethical values with the qualities of commandment; it is this language of God commanding that distinguishes Borowitz's ethical God from Cohen's. But only an immanent God would be involved enough in our lives to be concerned with our actions. Thus, for Borowitz, God must be both immanent and transcendent.

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[15]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, pp.91, 102.
[16]Borowitz, How Can a Jew Speak of Faith Today?, p.187.

Borowitz requires a more traditional, transcendent conception of God in order to say that God commands and grounds our values, in response to the relativism of modernity. But Borowitz must balance this transcendence with a concern for human autonomy. Ultimately, Borowitz must assert that humans have the freedom to accept or reject the transcendent commands. He writes that "people play a self-determining, autonomous role; they are their own lawmakers."[17] God grounds these values for us, so we know that they are correct; rather than relying on our reason to help us determine values, we can derive them from what we believe about God. But whether we choose to accept these values as sovereign in our lives, to live by them, to incorporate them into our daily actions, is up to us.

Even so, each individual has certain areas of concern regarding which his or her behavior is not fully a matter of choice. Borowitz calls these areas (in Paul Tillich's language) our "ultimate concern," which are too important to us for us to see them as our own choices. Rather, Borowitz believes that they are imposed on us from beyond, or from within, ourselves; God, as "sovereign, and also the source of our freedom... both bestows and delimits our independence."[18] For Borowitz, this ultimate concern is the overlap of transcendence and autonomy, as we choose to make this area a fundamental element of our lives. He writes that "[the Transcendent] arouses us human animals to our unique capacity to exemplify its superlative value and thus rightfully use our freedom."[19] The fact that these concerns are

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[17]Borowitz, Eugene B. "The Chosen People Concept as it Affects Life in the Diaspora" (Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 12, #4). Fall 1975, p.566.
[18]Borowitz, "The Autonomous Self and the Commanding Community," p.49.
[19]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, p.81.

important transcends us; how that importance plays itself out in our lives is up to us. When we choose how to live by these values, we are using our autonomy properly, and we testify to their enduring worth. In this way, Borowitz's conception of God reflects a balance of the two concerns of transcendence and autonomy.

This concern for balancing a communal tradition and autonomy reappears in Borowitz's view of Judaism in its entirety. David Ellenson and Lori Krafte-Jacobs write: "Unwilling to choose between a method that subordinates our autonomy to the divine will and one that subordinates the divine will to our own, Borowitz embraces a method that seeks to give primacy to both God and humanity by emphasizing their relationship."[20] Borowitz perceives Judaism as a mutual Covenant, a sacred pact formalizing the relationship between the Jewish people and God. He distinguishes between the "covenant," which describes the relationship between God and all humanity, beginning with Noah, and the "Covenant," which describes the relationship between God and the Jewish people. Borowitz believes that "God has an ongoing, historic relationship with the Jewish people, one that Jewish practice rehearses and reinstantiates."[21] Historically, according to the Bible, the Covenant began with Abraham and continued through his children. These divine promises, however, were made with individuals; it was only at Mount Sinai, in the presence of all the Israelites, that the Covenant was broadened to cover the People of Israel as a community. At that moment, Israel became God's people, and God became Israel's God,

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[20]Ellenson and Krafte-Jacobs, p.22.
[21]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, p.71.

bound together in Covenantal relationship. The Covenant has endured throughout the ages, despite the punishment and exile that befell the Jews at various times. Jews today, in Borowitz's opinion, are just as legitimately bound to the Covenant as those who stood at the foot of the mountain.

For Borowitz, the term "Covenant" represents a more accurate description of this relationship than the traditional idea of the "chosen people." "Chosen people" implies a unidirectional action taken by God, done to Israel, minimizing what Borowitz sees as the "active human role in establishing and confirming the relationship."[22] The Covenant is mutual; both sides chose to participate. Although both Cohen and Kaplan also rejected the idea of the "chosen people," Borowitz's distinction between the Noahide covenant and the Jewish Covenant has implications of superiority, or at least qualitative difference, which they would not have accepted.

In a poignant passage, Borowitz describes the difficulty with the concept of chosenness and fleshes out his use of the relationship metaphor to describe the Covenant between God and Israel:

> The traditional language of God unilaterally choosing Israel carries conviction only to the few who still can manage utter trust in God's acts on our behalf. For most moderns that is more faith in God and less in man than they can fit in with the rest of what they believe. On the other hand, to speak as the old rationalists did of our religion as exclusively man's discovery of timeless truths, seems more faith in man and his rational capacity than is warranted by our experience... But to speak of Judaism as a Covenant, in which God and the Jewish people have an old but continuing relationship, puts much of Judaism-- and our trouble with it-- in terms quite familiar

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[22]Borowitz, "The Chosen People Concept...," p.566.

> from our personal experience. We do not always understand the other with whom we have a relationship, but we still feel regularly that the relationship is real. We cannot always be certain what we ought to do for the other, but the sense of obligation is pressing, and we know we stand under judgment if we do not act upon it. Every relationship has moments of trial and test; yet it often emerges from these stronger than it was before. Jewish faith, as Covenant, is very much like the real relationships we talk about so much these days, part knowledge, part trust, part comfort, part trial, the source of much of our worst suffering, yet also the source of our greatest joy and most lasting satisfaction.[23]

This idea of Covenant as relationship certainly comes from Martin Buber, a major influence on Borowitz's thought. In this kind of covenantal relationship, each side has obligations, responsibilities, and privileges which emerge from the relational encounter. While God and Israel are clearly not equal partners (it is only because God created us in God's own image that we can wonder about this topic at all), this description of Covenant as relationship balances human autonomy with the traditional image of a commanding God.

In order to understand Borowitz's idea of how the Covenantal relationship functions in Jewish life, it is important to understand more fully his view of the parties to the Covenant. Having already discussed his postmodern God-concept, we turn to his postmodern perception of the people Israel. Here again Borowitz tries to strike a balance between two competing claims, those of particularism and universalism. In theory, modernity was supposed to bring a time of universal equality and concern for the rights of fellow humans. A

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[23]Borowitz, Eugene B. "Covenant Theology-- Another Look" (Worldview). March 1973, p.24.

consequence of this equality was universalism; especially for Jews, a premium was placed on abandoning one's parochial membership in a small ethnic community for the rewards of participation in the greater society. As Borowitz puts it, "any theory of what constitutes the human good had to apply to all rational beings. It could not be limited to one's own nation or religion or, to move to our own time, to one's own race or gender,"[24] and neither could it rule anyone out, as the Jewish experience during the Emancipation confirmed.

But the reality fell far short of the ideal. The civil rights problem proved intractable, as prejudice continued despite attempts to resolve it through the legal system. The failure of the Equal Rights Amendment showed that the theory of men's equality did not apply to women. For Jews, the world's apathy during the Holocaust and Israel's international isolation during the Six Day War provided evidence that Jews were still not fully welcome in the world community. These unfortunate episodes demonstrated that, in practice, universalism was but an illusion. Borowitz concludes that "optimistic humanism is no longer a living option for us."[25]

Given the failure of modernity to actualize the vision of universalism, postmodernity has witnessed a return to particularism. Various ethnic pride and power movements reflected this trend, as did the nationalism which carried over from modernity. Borowitz writes that "it seemed like the height of arrogance for any one faction of society to demand that everyone else be like them. Rather, with race, religion, gender, sexual preference, folk, region, or

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[24]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, p.14.
[25]Borowitz, "The Chosen People Concept...," p.560.

nationality dominating individual style, a resurgent particularism appears."[26] This larger trend certainly impacted Jewish life as well. Many Jews in the Diaspora took great pride in Israel's victory in 1967, and continued to support Israel strongly in 1973. They became convinced that Jews had a special role to play in history, that it was important for Jewish life to continue. As a result, some Jews came to view larger issues through the particularistic lens of Jewish concern.

Yet even as postmodern Jews return to their particularistic concern for Jewish life, the dialectic with modernity reappears in their belief in universal ethics. Although universalism was a failure in regard to national and world citizenship, it still proves worthwhile as a framework for ethical action. Borowitz points to the use of the term תקון עולם as a call to repairing the world: the whole world, not just the Jewish part of it. Jews remember that it had been a belief in the universality of ethics that led to their Emancipation in the first place. From the time of Kant, and through Cohen's reinvigoration of Kant's ideas and his application of them to Judaism, liberal Jews have been concerned with living as though under a universal system of ethics.

Borowitz tries to reconcile this ongoing universal concern with the renascent particularistic sense. He believes that the reason Jews have a concern for universal ethics is that they subscribe to Jewish (i.e., particular) values: their Judaism is the very source of their humanism! Judaism asserts the universality of humanity in several ways. Judaism first states that people-- all people, not merely Jews-

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[26]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, p.25.

- were created in the divine image, and it is creation *b'tzelem elohim* that endows people with worth. Also, the Bible records that God did not wait until there were Jews in order to make a covenant with people; rather, God's covenant with Noah, which covers all humankind, including the Jews, predates the one at Sinai. Similarly, repentance is available to all people, not just Jews, as a means of restoring human dignity. Finally, even after the Jews are established as a separate people, with their own Covenant with God, they are commanded to be concerned with the rights of all people, including the (non-Jewish) stranger, working to bring a messianic time of universal divine justice. Borowitz writes that "Judaism calls men to subject their particularities to the covenanting King so as to make their group the sort through which universalism can become real in history."[27] This universal strain has always been a component of Jewish thought.

Universal ethics, therefore, do not have to be derived from the failed political universalism of modernity; instead, by following Jewish values, one learns to care for all people. As Borowitz says of himself, "I retain my strong universalism, then, because of my Jewish faith-- that is, because I am a particularist."[28] It is because of the teachings of Jewish tradition that those universal values have a claim on Jews. While some people profess a universal concern that is not rooted in the "Judeo-Christian" ethic, Borowitz argues that only through religion are these values securely grounded.

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[27]Borowitz, Eugene B. "The Dialectic of Jewish Particularity" (Journal of Ecumenical Studies). 1971, p.574.
[28]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, p.187.

Borowitz, however, unlike Cohen, believes that the necessity of Jewish existence goes beyond grounding universal ethics. Jews are called on to do more than insure a proper code of moral behavior. While the Noahide covenant set out a basic standard of conduct, "God establishes the special Covenant so that the divine rule may become manifest in history and eventually transform it. The Jews fulfill God's special purpose by living in special intensity under God's law--that is, by the observance of 613 root commandments."[29] Israel joined God in a Covenant in order to serve as God's witnesses and partners; this statement summarizes Borowitz's view of the importance of the people Israel in a postmodern world. By virtue of the Covenant relationship, Jews cannot be concerned merely with universal ethics; they have a particularistic, yet somehow larger, charge as well. This sense of mission distances Borowitz from Kaplan's limited particularism; Kaplan valued the Jews as a unique civilization, not because they had a distinct role to play in history. According to Borowitz, while God is certainly the God of all humanity, God does have a special relationship with the Jews. From the perspective of the people Israel, the Covenant is postmodern, because it requires Jewish particularism, while not abrogating the Jews' universal ethics.

Borowitz goes beyond this conception of the Covenant between God and Israel, however. God has a relationship not just with the Jewish people as a community, but also with each individual Jew as a member of that community. He writes that "commitment to the Covenant insists that a relationship to God is primary to the life of

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[29]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, p.188.

the Jewish people and the individual Jew."[30] Thus the Covenant is individual and personal as well as corporate. But this relationship is not strictly individual. Rather, God and that person have a relationship inasmuch as that person is a part of the Jewish people; as Borowitz says, "the fundamental relationship in which the Jew stands is the Covenant. However, it was made and is maintained primarily with the people of Israel and not the individual Jew."[31] The Jewish individual, then, is at one and the same time both a unique human being and a part of a larger community.

This duality allows the Jew to participate in the Covenantal relationship with God. Borowitz describes it this way: "One is commanded as a Jew when one stands in relationship to God, not just as a man-in-general but as one-of-Israel... a Jew is no longer two-layered, an individual who also finds himself as member of an ethnic group. He is Jew and man at once-- literally, existentially."[32] Borowitz uses the term "Jewish self" to refer to these autonomous individuals who choose to make Judaism central to their being in this way, and so see themselves as participating in this Covenant. Between the Biblical covenantal experiences of Abraham as an individual and the Israelites as a whole stands the postmodern Covenant, one made with individuals who identify themselves as members of the larger whole. This postmodern Covenant emerges from the exercise by these individuals of their autonomy in taking upon themselves the obligations of being part of the people Israel.

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[30]Borowitz, Eugene B. "Liberal Jewish Theology in a Time of Uncertainty: A Holistic Approach" (Presented at CCAR Conference). June 1977, p.30.
[31]Borowitz, "Liberal Jewish Theology in a Time of Uncertainty," p.30.
[32]Borowitz, "Covenant Theology-- Another Look," p.23.

We have seen how Borowitz conceptualizes the postmodern God and the postmodern people of (and person of) Israel. What remains of the classical triad is Borowitz's view of the postmodern Torah. If Borowitz's God can not issue commandments literally, and Borowitz's people are not capable of creating a sufficiently ethical system on their own, from where does obligation come? In addressing this issue, Borowitz once more must balance the traditional idea of *mitzvot* with the ideal of human autonomy.

For Borowitz, Torah emerges out of the Covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish self. Borowitz borrows from Buber to explain how God is revealed to the individual Jewish self. All that is revealed is God's presence, the fact of God's being there in relationship. Through this relationship, autonomy is preserved by virtue of the fact that obligation is not imposed on the self, but rather derives from the encounter; God does not actually command, yet a feeling of being commanded results. Borowitz writes that Torah "arises from what freely passes between two fully dignified selves, neither subordinate to the other, each making its claim on the other simply by the act of relating."[33] The Covenant relationship has the consequence of giving rise to a sense of obligation. This obligation, however, is freely chosen by us as an exercise of our autonomy, as we try to honor the relationship we have established with God. According to Borowitz, "Both partners have a share in the law. Were it not for our relationship with God, we would not have the sense of duty that now grips us. But it is we who in a given time

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[33]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, p.273.

and place must set just what the law is."[34] God and Israel together, in relationship, create the law; God provides the feeling of duty, and the Jew fills in the content of the commandment. Cohen and Kaplan would both argue with this description: Cohen would say that the content of the law must be morals, and Kaplan would hold that the sense of duty comes from the communal custom.

One might argue that this relationship is very relativistic, in that no one else can know the content of another person's revelation. However, there are two restrictions on what a Jew may determine to be the law. First, the individual must remain true to the divine partner in the relationship. Borowitz writes: "Jewish law then is essentially a human invention. But lest this be taken for humanism, it is critical to remember that it arises not out of the people's sense of self but from its recognition that it is bound to God, the one God of the universe."[35] The law must always reflect its divine source, to the degree that a person comprehends it. Individual whim does not suffice; rather, one's understanding of one's relationship with God determine what one views as law. Second, the Jewish self does not experience God in Covenantal isolation, but rather as part of the people Israel, and thus one's individual sense of obligation must be filtered through the communal lens as well. Borowitz argues that "the autonomous Jewish self derives its autonomy as part of the people of Israel's Covenant partnership with God... Such a Jew is self-legislating but only in terms of what God wants of this individual as

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[34]Borowitz, "Covenant Theology-- Another Look," p.23.
[35]Borowitz, "The Chosen People Concept...," p.566.

part of the people of Israel's historic-messianic service to God."[36] This qualification places a limit on autonomy; the Torah that the Jewish self creates and accepts must somehow fit the experience and mission of the Jewish people.

With Torah emerging from the relationship between God and the Jewish self, the commandments will doubtlessly change from time to time, from place to place, from person to person. Because the relationship shifts depending on the situation of the ones relating, the actions which that relationship demands shift as well. As Borowitz says, "where what another generation called Torah does not reflect the reality of this relationship, it needs to be changed to do so or dropped in practice if it cannot be so changed."[37] Borowitz believes that Jews have not only the right but the obligation to change the tradition when such change is necessary. He writes: "Each generation has the responsibility to see to it that the acts through which the Covenant relationship is lived are appropriate to that generation's situation."[38] Such stewardship can take the form of discarding old ceremonies that are no longer relevant, creatively inventing new rituals to mark more recent significant events, and applying valid moral norms to emerging contemporary situations. Always, however, the Jew's actions must be based in Jewish tradition, in order to guard against a misguided faith in human reason. Borowitz refers to this balance between autonomous

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[36]Borowitz, Choices in Modern Jewish Thought, p.271.
[37]Borowitz, "The Problem of the Form of a Jewish Theology," p.406.
[38]Borowitz, "The Chosen People Concept as it Affects Life in the Diaspora," p.566.

innovation and Jewish custom as an "open traditionalism,"[39] giving weight to both the past and the present.

Thus the postmodern Jew who wishes to live a Jewish life must live in Covenant with God and balance his or her individual autonomy with the Jewish community's perception of Jewish tradition. Borowitz calls the process of creating this balance the Covenantal Dialectic.[40] But it is still unclear how to arrive at this balance. There are three parties to be considered-- the individual, the larger Jewish community, and God-- whose interests may not coincide. Some factors are doubtlessly more important than others, but which ones? The question may be phrased in this way: how does an autonomous Jewish self, who lives in Covenant with God as a member of the Jewish people, decide what to do?

This question has special urgency because of the primacy Borowitz puts on autonomous deeds. Simply feeling Jewish is not enough; one's Judaism must lead to action. The Covenant is useless unless it shapes behavior. He argues that "relationship is meaningful only insofar as it results in action... Covenant without responsibility, faith without deed, is meaningless."[41] For Borowitz, one's every action should reflect one's special status as a Jew living in Covenant with God. He believes that Judaism must be the organizing principle of one's life. He wants to create a sense of obligation to Judaism strong enough to die for, if necessary, for only in that case will Judaism be significant enough to live. He writes: "We need to guide

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[39]Borowitz, Eugene B. A New Jewish Theology in the Making. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968, p.207.
[40]Borowitz, "Covenant Theology-- Another Look," p.25.
[41]Borowitz, How Can a Jew Speak of Faith Today?, p.67.

Jews in the difficult art of maintaining an intense loyalty to Jewish tradition, that is, of living by a deeply Jewish faith."[42] In Borowitz's opinion, Judaism as a faith has no meaning unless it is lived.

The responsibility for this way of life falls on the autonomous self, the locus of authority today, so the self must be existentially Jewish. The Jewish identity required for this Jewish life is truly all-encompassing:

> we must overcome the schizoid Jewishness of the-human-being who happens-to-be-a-Jew. My Jewishness is not secondary to anything but primary to my being... Instead of construing Judaism in terms of law, idea, nationality, or ethnicity, a postrationalist-- that is, a postmodern-- Judaism needs to be defined in terms of utter human being, that is, as the faith/life of a particular selfhood, the self that knows itself to be a Jewish self. Only in that way, I believe, can we specify how autonomy, normally so destructive of the particular, might be the basis of a readily identifiable Jewish life.[43]

Borowitz argues for grounding this postmodern Judaism in the self. However, his knowledge of modernity leads him to distrust the self in its secular form. Therefore, he clarifies that he is talking about a fully Jewish self, a self wholly committed to Judaism, a self that is in Covenant with God as part of the Jewish people.

In Renewing the Covenant, Borowitz lists five elements of Jewish duty for the Jewish self. These aspects are not a list of what Jews must do; rather, they are criteria which any action the Jewish self takes must meet in order to be legitimately Jewish. First, the Jewish self must be involved with God, in an ongoing Covenantal

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[42]Borowitz, Eugene B. "The Career of Jewish Existentialism" (Jewish Book Annual, 32). 1974-1975, p.49.
[43]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, p.264.

relationship. Second, the Jewish self must maintain its relationship with the larger Jewish people across space and time. Third, the Jewish self must be aware of Jewish history, reading, remembering, rehearsing. Fourth, the Jewish self must remain focused on the future, looking and working toward the Messianic Age. Fifth, the Jewish self must be an individual, making its own autonomous decisions from within the Covenant, with personal autonomy sometimes taking precedence over corporate duty if the two conflict.[44]

This list, as helpful as it is for highlighting important aspects of Borowitz's theology, still does not go very far towards creating a concrete sense of postmodern Jewish duty. Borowitz would presumably argue that because a sense of obligation must arise out of the Covenantal relationship between the individual Jewish self and God, he cannot list what anyone else must do; the most he can do is give parameters within which he believes a legitimate Jewish action must fall. But the assistance his guidelines provide is really minimal, with room for much justification or rationalization for any action that one might want to claim as Jewish. Even his apparent emphasis on autonomy as prior to responsibility to the larger Jewish community is not as clear-cut as it seems in this list. Earlier he had written that "autonomy is not self-grounding but derives from being God's Covenant partner. To me that means that, if anything, somewhat greater priority must be given to Judaism in the balance of belief

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[44]Borowitz, Renewing the Covenant, pp.289-293.

than to self-determination."[45] Still earlier, he had refused to give precedence to either tradition or autonomy:

> neither can claim priority over the other... Jewish faith increasingly cannot be the passive continuation of a social heritage which is what it essentially was in previous Jewish generations... One should choose to be Jewish... That choice... must be made autonomously to be authentic. Yet the high value attached to autonomy is no longer self-explanatory. One can explain one's seriousness about it and one's determined pursuit of it only in terms of a prior faith: for the Jew, Judaism. The tradition grounds the autonomy-- but it must be the basis of affirming the tradition-- and so endlessly.[46]

Ultimately, it is this ongoing dialectic between autonomy and communal tradition that characterizes Borowitz's theology of postmodern Judaism.

Several contemporary thinkers have criticized Borowitz's theology. The difficulty in striking a balance in the Covenantal Dialectic, as discussed above, has also been noted by Ellenson and Krafte-Jacobs. They look at Borowitz's application of his method to two similar cases: rights for homosexuals (particularly rabbis) and rights for women. In the first case, Borowitz, while welcoming and sympathizing with homosexual laypeople, clearly states that heterosexuality is preferred and does not accept rabbis who are homosexual. Regarding women, however, he is unflinching in his support for their equality. Ellenson and Krafte-Jacobs conclude: "Borowitz can legitimately be faulted for methodological inconsistency in these two instances. A clear way to mediate

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[45]Borowitz, Choices in Modern Jewish Thought, p.269.
[46]Borowitz, A New Jewish Theology in the Making, pp.212-213.

between tradition, community, and conscience remains unresolved. Given the nature of covenantal dialectic, it would appear that it must remain so."[47]

Arnold Eisen finds another inconsistency in Borowitz's thought. Eisen does not believe that it is possible to reconcile the competing ideas of autonomy and Jewish tradition. The tradition ascribes complete authority to God, whereas autonomy locates authority in the individual person. Despite the lengths to which Borowitz goes to balance the two, Eisen is not convinced; the conflict, in his opinion, is insuperable. He writes that "Borowitz's persistent search for a means of acting on divine authority while nonetheless retaining full human autonomy can only end in the contradiction with which it begins."[48]

Another critic, Lawrence Kaplan, goes beyond Eisen. He attacks the very idea that humanity is autonomous. He disputes Borowitz's assertion that autonomy is what gives humans their dignity, arguing that dignity rather comes from our self-respect and self-image. He points out that families and other social institutions exert claims on the individual, and therefore autonomy does not really exist. As soon as the Jew identifies as part of the people Israel, autonomy is compromised. Even less can a person be autonomous with respect to God; because the Covenantal relationship depends on God, a Jew cannot self-legislate alone. Finally, Kaplan notes that even if a person was autonomous, the Covenant that would result would necessarily be without content, and therefore meaningless. He asks rhetorically: "But is there any clear-cut content to this covenant? If

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[47]Ellenson and Krafte-Jacobs, p.35.
[48]Cited in Ellenson and Krafte-Jacobs, p.36.

the covenant is a bi-lateral agreement between Israel and God, what does Israel undertake to do, obligate itself to perform...? Can it undertake to do anything, can it obligate itself to perform anything, if the covenant does not validate law, if Jewish law, in principle, cannot be imposed upon a Jewish self?"[49]

In my opinion, these criticisms of Borowitz's theology are all valid. But there are two more difficulties which arise from the contemporary world which make his ideas problematic for me. The first one Borowitz himself acknowledges, when he notes the possibility that some Jews may not feel themselves to be living under the Covenant.[50] Today more than ever before, identity is a matter of choice. Without ghettoes or virulent antisemitism to keep all Jews forcibly attached to their community, Jewish identity in particular may be discarded or devalued. Recent demographic data attests to the fact of this attrition. Therefore, in my opinion, the most pressing question a theology of Judaism must answer in the contemporary situation is why a Jew should choose to live a Jewish life. Borowitz does not provide an answer to this question, and so his otherwise helpful notion of the Covenant is irrelevant to the growing number of Jews who choose to ignore it.

Second, I think that Borowitz misses a central element of today's secular world: the quest for meaning. In modern rationalism's exaltation of human reason, it seemed that there was no problem or phenomenon that could not be resolved or explained scientifically, so that our lives could be measurably improved by

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[49]Kaplan, Lawrence. Response to Eugene Borowitz "The Demands of the Autonomous Jewish Self". Montreal: McGill University, 1980, p.9.
[50]Borowitz, "Liberal Jewish Theology in a Time of Uncertainty," p.35.

technical means. Charles Taylor refers to this attitude as the "primacy of instrumental reason:"[51] the feeling that technology can do anything, that all issues can be resolved through a cost-benefit analysis. This gain in cognitive ability, however, comes with a spiritual cost. Value does not inhere only in the rational; there are other sources of meaning as well, what Taylor calls other "horizons of significance."[52] Humanity does not live merely in the mind: we have hearts and souls as well. These horizons of significance must represent communally agreed-upon areas of meaning, not open to dispute or choice. If they could truly be chosen or not chosen, then they clearly would not be of ultimate significance. Autonomy can not extend to determinations of highest value.

While Borowitz would certainly acknowledge that meaning inheres in realms other than the rational, I do not think he satisfactorily answers the need for a communal sense of meaning. In today's world, people are starting to look once again to satisfy an emotional and spiritual hunger, and Borowitz does not offer sufficient guidance on the path. Inasmuch as he addresses this issue, he believes that meaning comes from the Covenantal relationship. The Jewish self, by living in Covenant with God, is in contact with the ultimate ground of higher meaning. When a Jew freely chooses to do that which his or her relationship to God commands, that Jew touches the very source of meaning. Yet this definition of meaning remains primarily individualistic. According to this reading, two Jewish selves could have different senses of that higher meaning. But

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[51]Taylor, Charles. The Ethics of Authenticity. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991, p.5.
[52]Taylor, p.37

Judaism and the current situation require a communal as well as an individual sense of purpose, and Borowitz does not go far enough in ensuring the creation of such a consensus. He asserts that we are Jews within the community of Israel in Covenant with God. But even though a Jewish self participates in the community, the determination of the meaning to be derived from Judaism rests in the hands of the individual, not the community. The question remains how we as a people develop a sense of shared meaning in the contemporary world.

The disequilibrium that spurs this quest is eloquently described by Vaclav Havel. In a penetrating critique of the scientific world, worth quoting at length, he articulates the contemporary spiritual situation and points to the need to search for higher meaning:

> The relationship to the world that modern science fostered and shaped now appears to have exhausted its potential. It is increasingly clear that, strangely, the relationship is missing something. It fails to connect with the most intrinsic nature of reality, and with natural human experience. It is now more of a source of disintegration and doubt than a source of integration and meaning. It produces what amounts to a state of schizophrenia: Man as an observer is becoming completely alienated from himself as a being... Today for instance, we may know immeasurably more about the universe than our ancestors did, and yet, it increasingly seems they knew something more essential about it than we do, something that escapes us. The same thing is true of nature and ourselves. The more thoroughly all our organs and their functions, their internal structure and the biochemical reactions that take place within them are described, the more we seem to fail to grasp the spirit, purpose, and meaning of the system that they create together and that we experience as our unique self. And thus today we find ourselves in a paradoxical situation. We enjoy

all the achievements of modern civilization that have made our physical existence on this earth easier in so many important ways. Yet we do not know exactly what to do with ourselves, where to turn. The world of our experiences seems chaotic, disconnected, confusing. There appear to be no integrating forces, no unified meaning, no true inner understanding of phenomena in our experience of the world. Experts can explain anything in the objective world to us, yet we understand our own lives less and less. In short, we live in the post-modern world, where everything is possible and nothing is certain.[53]

I believe that Jews today are looking for that very sense of meaning that Havel and Taylor describe. They want to know what meaning Judaism would give to their lives. If the meaning that Judaism contributes could be articulated, it would provide a compelling reason for choosing to live a Jewish life. In my opinion, therefore, answering this question is the greatest challenge facing Judaism in today's world. Unfortunately, I do not think that Borowitz answers it, and therefore, his theology is ultimately unsatisfying for the contemporary situation.

[53]Havel, Vaclav. "Address of the President of the Czech Republic, His Excellency Vaclav Havel, on the Occasion of the Liberty Medal Ceremony." July 4, 1994.

RESPONDING TO "POSTMODERNITY:"

THOUGHTS FOR TODAY

Each of the three thinkers profiled created a philosophy of Judaism which he thought best responded to his contemporary situation. For Hermann Cohen, the supposed universality of ethics and utter faith in human reason led him to describe God as the ground of morality, Torah as propounding those ethical laws, and Israel as the people who both live by them most fully and advocate their wider adoption. Mordecai Kaplan was motivated by the crisis facing Judaism to identify it as the evolving comprehensive religious civilization of the People Israel, expressed in the Torah and their distinctive way of life, with a transnatural God as the Power that makes for salvation. The failure of modernity prompted Eugene Borowitz to devise a Judaism whose God, both transcendent and immanent, is a weak Absolute, with whom autonomous Jewish selves stand in Covenant relationship as part of the community of Israel, from which connection emerges Torah, guidance and instruction that develops through time and across space. These philosophies, while clearly different in their specific forms, share the attempt to portray Judaism in terms relevant for contemporary Jews and reflective of their experience.

Yet none of these thinkers quite succeeded in capturing Judaism or its situation accurately. Cohen's trust in rationalism has been shown overly optimistic; his rose-colored universalism missed

the danger of rising antisemitism and the insufficiency of human ethical reasoning. Kaplan's transnatural God-concept has proven unable to replace the desire for a God who communicates and acts; the failure of Reconstructionism to capture the hearts and minds of many American Jews testifies against it. History has yet to pass judgment on Borowitz's thought, but the last chapter suggested some ways in which his ideas too are not completely adequate. Clearly, the shifting sands of time make Jewish theology a difficult undertaking. In this final chapter, I will attempt to outline my understanding of the challenges facing Judaism today, concluding with some ideas for ways in which Judaism might position itself to meet this situation.

First, a note about labels. Borowitz, as we have seen, proposed his theology as one for the postmodern Jew. A label is useful only if there is general agreement on the meaning of the label; the question that must be answered, then, is what postmodernity is, and I have tried to identify and explicate the characteristics to which Borowitz responded. But the truth (if one may use such a term in this context) is that postmodernity is a much-debated concept. Different thinkers define it quite differently[1], and some reject the idea of postmodernity entirely. I find myself in agreement with Ernest Gellner, who writes: "Postmodernism is a contemporary movement. It is strong and fashionable. Over and above this, it is not altogether clear what the devil it is."[2] Given this lack of clarity and consensus about the meaning of postmodernity, it seems to me that the label is

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[1]See, for example, the works listed by Borgmann, Breslauer, Gellner, Green, and Smith.

[2]Gellner, Ernest. Postmodernism, Reason and Religion. London: Routledge, 1992, p.22.

more trouble than it is worth. Consequently, I will not discuss postmodernity as such, but instead seek to portray the contemporary situation without labeling it. I will begin with some observations on American society in general before describing the state of religion and Judaism in particular.

One characteristic of contemporary society is that values no longer seem to be securely grounded. It seems impossible to determine what is "right;" different moral choices appear to be equally acceptable. Robert Bellah writes that "in a world of potentially conflicting self-interests, no one can really say that one value system is better than another... [there is] no objectifiable criterion for choosing one value or course of action over another."[3] Gellner refers to the "hysteria of subjectivity"[4] that arises from such a lack of a foundation for values. Taylor notes that in The Closing of the American Mind, Bloom identified this relativism not merely as a random phenomenon, but as an actual American desideratum; out of respect for other people, one should not challenge their value systems.[5]

The preceding discussion was anticipated in the last chapter, in which rationalism led to the relativization of values. There is, however, an additional cause of contemporary ethical relativism: individualism, meaning simply the absence of social connectedness, which is a pervasive feature of life in America, and is a challenge in its own right. Bellah connects individualism to a virtue valued by

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[3]Bellah, Robert N. et al. Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985, pp.7, 75.
[4]Gellner, p.29.
[5]Taylor, p.13.

American culture, self-reliance; people should be able to take care of themselves without needing other people. Bellah's evaluation of individualism is dire: he calls it "ontological," by which he means "the idea that the individual is the only firm reality,"[6] and he worries that this feeling may have become "cancerous,"[7] infecting and destroying any sense of community and communal values.

Taylor argues that individualism derives from two facets of our society. First, America's industrial nature forces people into increased mobility as they hunt for work, thereby breaking communal ties and preventing the development of new ones. Second, although urban life brings interaction with more people, that contact is primarily not personal, and therefore paradoxically more isolating.[8] For Taylor, individualism is characterized by a freedom from older moral systems, as well as a "cosmic order"[9] which structured and gave meaning to life. The loss of this meaning is how he understands Weber's idea of the "disenchantment" of the world. Values have no solid mooring; we no longer see the larger significance or purpose of our existence.

As a result of this individualism, values come to be defined personally and subjectively. Whereas in an earlier age, morals were grounded externally, in God or some other source thought to be reliable, now the locus of morality is internal. Each individual makes his or her own decision about what constitutes moral action; Taylor relates this trend to Rousseau's idea which he calls self-determining

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[6]Bellah et al., p.276.
[7]Bellah et al., p.vii.
[8]Taylor, p.59.
[9]Taylor, p.3.

freedom, according to which the individual decides without external coercion what issues are of concern.[10] According to Bellah, individualism results in each self becoming its "own moral universe... [with] no way to reconcile conflicting claims about what is good in itself... [Thus,] the self and its feelings become our only moral guide."[11] In a sense, values become selfish, as people create a morality that addresses their situation without the broader perspective of the community.

This individual definition of value threatens to remove any objective standard of meaning. Bellah describes people making decisions "not on the basis of higher truths but according to the criterion of life-effectiveness as the individual judges it."[12] If each individual is free to choose a personal ethic, then any value that anyone chooses is equally legitimate. By this reasoning, there is no way to determine what is truly valuable; in Taylor's words, there is no "pre-existing horizon of significance, whereby some things are worthwhile and others less so, and still others not at all."[13] For any choice to have value, it must somehow be a better choice than another option. But in an individualistic world, we cannot make such a judgment. Individualism thus leads to relativism, which, "by abolishing all horizons of significance, threatens us with a loss of meaning."[14] It is for this reason that Gellner abhors relativism, which he says is the real problem with what is called postmodernity.

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[10]Taylor, p.27.
[11]Bellah et al., p.76.
[12]Bellah et al., p.47.
[13]Taylor, p.38.
[14]Taylor, p.68.

He writes: "A vision which obscures that which matters most *cannot* be sound."[15] The dominant position relativism holds in contemporary society, a status shored up by individualism, presents a challenge to all systems of value.

Related to this individualism is another observation about today's world. People keep their distance from their communities. Tocqueville, according to Taylor, worried that Americans would stop participating in their society if they became focused on their individual needs. If they are "enclosed in their own hearts,"[16] their only concern will be if their personal desires are being met. As long as the government allows them to attain private satisfaction, they will stay out of public life, as witnessed, for example, by low voter turnout on election day. This state of being is called "soft despotism,"[17] where people, through their apathy, empower their rulers to take control. Power then becomes concentrated in the hands of experts, and the people lose their connection even more, feeling it futile even to try to change. The only remedy would be active involvement in public life, but this step requires overcoming the lure of individualism.

Wilfred McClay points out that Tocqueville's main fear was that Americans would let government take away their precious freedom. This concern suggests a fourth contemporary issue: preserving people's autonomy. McClay argues that Americans have historically been both autonomous and conformist. However, social pressure seems to be waning as a force; large organizations like the country or

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[15]Gellner, p.72. Italics Gellner's.
[16]Cited in Taylor, p.9.
[17]Taylor, p.9.

the business are no longer able to serve as communities to connect people with each other. Hence, "there is no authoritative way left of talking about obligations that transcend the self, and about the prerequisites of moral community."[18] Autonomy triumphs such that "no problem is more fundamental to American social character... than the locus of authority... Equals, that is, do not take orders from equals."[19] Democracy, the equality of all, necessitates autonomy. Thus, autonomy is an integral American value.

A fifth characteristic of contemporary society may be called the quest for authenticity. This doctrine holds that people must try to become who they really are. Taylor cites Herder's belief that each person has a unique way of being human, and therefore they must discover that way in order to realize their true humanity.[20] Self-fulfillment then becomes not just desired but necessary. As Bellah puts it, "the meaning of one's life for most Americans is to become one's own person."[21] People must make decisions for themselves, choosing their own path, rather than necessarily following others. No one can define a proper life for anyone else. Like the other trends mentioned so far, the desire for authenticity also militates against the formation of communal standards. If each person must find an individual road, no two people can walk together.

Finally, crucially, the characteristic attitude of American life today is apprehension. Taylor refers to the "malaises of

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[18]McClay, Wilfred M. "The Hipster and the Organization Man" (First Things). May 1994, p.28.
[19]McClay, p.29.
[20]Taylor, p.28.
[21]Bellah et al., p.82.

modernity"[22] for this reason; people are unsure of the present and even more nervous about the future. As Bellah writes, the common theme is "a note of uncertainty, not a desire to turn back to the past but an anxiety about where we seem to be headed."[23] The search for meaning Havel described in the last chapter speaks to this concern: people no longer know what their purpose is and consequently are anxious about life itself. To quote again from Bellah:

> There is a widespread feeling that the promise of the modern era is slipping away from us... ideological fanaticism and political oppression have reached extremes unknown in previous history. Science... has given us the power to destroy all life on earth. Progress... seems less compelling when it appears that it may be progress into the abyss.[24]

What we are missing is the confidence that we are headed in a proper and meaningful direction.

Relativism, individualism, apathy, autonomy, authenticity, and anxiety seem to me to be the six strongest challenges confronting Judaism today from general American culture. Each of these traits has its specific manifestation in Judaism. A certain relativism pervades contemporary religion in the name of tolerance and interfaith cooperation; the result, however, is doubt as to the important contribution of Judaism. Bellah notes a trend of religious individualism, in which people pick and choose their own brand of religion; he calls it "appropriate in our kind of society."[25] In general, people tend to leave religion to the experts, allowing the rabbi to

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[22]Taylor, p.1.
[23]Bellah et al., p.276.
[24]Bellah et al., p.277.
[25]Bellah et al., p.247.

serve as surrogate Jew; as long as the synagogue meets whatever needs they have, they do not feel obliged to share in its broader life. The previous chapter detailed the role of autonomy in contemporary Jewish life; Arthur Hertzberg also emphasizes the voluntary nature of Judaism today,[26] in that today's Jews are not compelled to participate in the life of the community, instead choosing for themselves how they prefer to affiliate or serve. As for authenticity, people need to discover the role of Judaism in their individual lives. Finally, while Jewish life has always manifested anxiety about both the present and the future, today's form of uncertainty seems more virulent; it takes the shape of our wondering what the purpose of being Jewish is.

In addition, Judaism is affected by trends in the larger religious world. Religion in general seems to be becoming less important to people. This characteristic is the real definition of "secular," that is, granting religion less of a role in one's life. Bellah writes that "today religion represents a frame of reference for the self as conspicuous in its absence as in its presence."[27] Peter Berger puts the challenge even more starkly: "It is... reasonable to assume that a high degree of secularization is a cultural concomitant of modern industrial societies... A secularized... Judaism has to go to considerable exertion to demonstrate that the religious label... has anything special to offer."[28] As science and technology seemingly grant people more

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[26]Hertzberg, Arthur. "The Emancipation: A Reassessment after Two Centuries" (Modern Judaism, 1, #1). May 1981, p.47.
[27]Bellah et al., p.63.
[28]Berger, Peter. A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969, pp.20, 25-26.

control over the world, religion is challenged to show its continued relevance.

Ultimately, for Berger, the challenge to religion comes down to its plausibility structure. In his opinion, perceptions are accepted as true or rejected as false depending on how plausible they are in society's opinion. He argues that "the plausibility... of views of reality depends upon the social support these receive."[29] In the ghetto, for example, the Jew was surrounded by a society which reinforced the Jewish view of the world, and so Judaism was plausible. Today, however, science challenges the Jewish world-view, as does intimate contact with the prevailing secularism in public life. This exposure to other constructs of reality did tremendous damage to all religious approaches: the "pluralization of socially available worlds... I see as the most important cause of the diminishing plausibility of religious traditions."[30] Any attempt to revitalize Judaism, therefore, must seek to reconstruct its plausibility structure.

The preceding pages have attempted to describe the most serious challenges facing Judaism today. If we are to meet these challenges, we must incorporate the following factors into our response:

1) an answer to the quest for meaning and security;
2) a non-relativistic ground of values;
3) a desecularization of life;
4) a response to individualism;
5) a rebuilt plausibility structure;

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[29]Berger, p.43.
[30]Berger, p.55.

6) the continued respect for human autonomy and authenticity. It is a daunting task, but there is reason to hope that religion can be revitalized. Bellah did find Americans for whom religion plays an important role in their lives. Arthur Green's "spiritual, not religious"[31] Jew is at least searching for a higher meaning. Berger notes that 80 percent of American students claim that they have a need for religious faith, and 86 percent of western Germans say they pray.[32] He adds that religious participation is higher than it used to be, although he attributes this rise more to a desire to secure moral education for children than to a spiritual need of adults. In any case, there is still a role for religion. What might this rejuvenated Judaism look like?

There have, of course, been many attempts to answer this question.[33] My thoughts probably draw from all of them in different ways. It seems to me that the place to start is with the answer to the search for meaning, the first concern listed above. What is the purpose in being Jewish? Or perhaps a better way of phrasing the question would be: would being Jewish contribute a sense of meaning to my life, and if so, what is it? It is my contention that the sought-after sense of meaning in contemporary life is a sense of holiness. I believe that people want to know that their lives mean more than the mundane struggle for survival which preoccupies so much of their effort and energy. A sense of holiness, of eternity, of ultimate

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[31]Green, Arthur. "Judaism for the Post-Modern Era." Address delivered at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati., December 12, 1994, p.4.

[32]Berger, p.30.

[33]See, for example, review articles listed by Breslauer, Eisen, Ellenson, and Haas.

direction expressed at sacred times and in sacred spaces, would provide the deeper vision needed to bring meaning to human life.

Judaism, at its root, is a path to holiness. Holiness is the ultimate purpose and meaning of Jewish life; the central commandment, as stated in Leviticus 19:2, is "You shall be holy, for I the Eternal your God am holy." Every aspect of Judaism points in this sacred direction. The moral laws seek to bring life on earth closer to an ideal of justice and righteousness. Jewish rituals provide opportunities and actions to rehearse and concretize these highest values. The Jewish community extends across time and space to link Jews in an ongoing chain of shared purpose. In my opinion, this connection elevates one above one's own mundane life, permitting one to see from the perspective of eternity. Through living Jewishly, Jews of the present join with Jews of the past and future to work for the ultimate triumph of holiness.

In order for Jews to live by this ideal of holiness, however, the first important component is belief in the existence of such a higher plan. I see God, then, in a fashion similar to Cohen, as the guarantor of this morality. This belief is grounded not in Cohen's reason but in faith. If I could not believe that our striving would ultimately succeed in bringing about holiness, I would not be able to persist in my minuscule but necessary efforts to effect change; therefore, I must have faith that good will win. I attribute my desire to improve the world to the spark of the divine within me. In this sense, God is immanent, in that God inspires my actions which advance God's cause. God, for me, is seen and known through human activity; God can be induced from human experience, which Berger calls "inductive

faith."[34] Yet in fact I do not really see God *per se*, but only God's manifestations; ultimately, God surpasses human understanding. Berger calls these divinely-motivated human actions "signals of transcendence;"[35] these actions point towards something much greater. God cannot be known or understood by humans; we can only recognize God's fingerprints, as it were, in the world. Thus, I also connect God with the mystery and grandeur of the universe. As Havel puts it, "we must divest ourselves of our egoistical anthropocentrism, our habit of seeing ourselves as masters of the universe who can do whatever occurs to us. We must discover a new respect for what transcends us."[36] This recovery of awe seems to me to be a prerequisite for the re-enchantment of the world, an important step in the growth of our spiritual lives. This type of contemporary God-concept should address concerns two and three above.

Having discussed the existence of the plan and the Planner, I must address the topic of the people who carry out the plan. An individual can not fulfill this sacred mission alone; we have seen how individualism challenges a sense of shared meaning. By belonging to the Jewish community, the Jew defeats this threat; like Kaplan, then, I strongly emphasize participation in communal life. Bellah testifies to the ability of a group to "generate a language of the common good that could adjudicate between conflicting wants and interests"[37] of

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[34]Berger, p.96.
[35]Berger, p.65.
[36]Havel, Vaclav. Address delivered at Harvard University, Cambridge. June 8, 1995, p.7.
[37]Bellah et al., p.207.

individuals. McClay suggests that "identification with social forms intimate enough [can] bridge the gap"[38] between the amorality of individualism and the amorality of large organizations; perhaps a *chavurah* is a better model than a synagogue. This community, dedicated to a common purpose, will have a shared sense of meaning and value. The group feeling must be strong in order to resist the deterioration of its plausibility structure: Berger writes that "to fulfill its function of providing social support... the countercommunity must provide a strong sense of solidarity among its members."[39] Through Jews joining such a community, the plausibility structure of contemporary Judaism will be maintained, and the members will gain strength from each other to fulfill their divine tasks. A community like this one addresses concerns four and five above.

There remain now just the issues of autonomy and authenticity. The basic question is where authority resides. In today's world there can only be one answer: authority rests firmly within the individual. However, we have seen the dangers of unrestricted individualism. Several thinkers argue that true freedom comes from being part of the community. Taylor writes that authenticity "requires (i) openness to horizons of significance... and (ii) a self-definition in dialogue."[40] That is, one must both be part of a relationship (and therefore not strictly individual) and recognize sources of value outside the self in order to be truly human. Taylor adds that even if one believes in creating one's own way of living and expressing oneself, the ideals that one strives for should be

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[38]McClay, p.26.
[39]Berger, p.22.
[40]Taylor, p.66.

common and shared with others.[41] McClay cites D.H. Lawrence as writing that "real freedom came... from inner obedience, from belonging to 'a living, organic, *believing* community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealized, purpose.'"[42] Especially in today's world, people should recognize the benefits that accompany membership in a community, and they should freely choose to become part of one.

But I want to take this argument one step further. To gain the benefits of life in a community, one may not simply live with others. Additionally, one must be willing to share their values. This requirement necessarily constrains one's autonomy; one accepts the group's guidance in determining value. I want to argue, however, that, particularly in the contemporary world, the advantages of being part of the community are worth a small sacrifice of autonomy. McClay too makes the case for "the willingness to surrender a significant portion of oneself to a social whole."[43] As my model, I take the Kabbalistic idea of *tzimtzum*. In the beginning, there was God, but there was no room for creation. In order to make room for other existence, therefore, God freely drew inward and contracted the divine fullness. God accepted being diminished (and in fact chose to be diminished) for the sake of the greater purpose. Similarly, as it were, an autonomous individual fills himself completely, with no room for others. For the sake of the greater purpose of joining the community, he must freely contract his autonomy and agree to uphold the norms of the community.

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[41]Taylor, p.82.
[42]McClay, p.29. Italics in McClay.
[43]McClay, p.30.

Consequently, I agree with Michael Wyschograd's statement that "a significant measure of autonomy is involved in the continuing will to be a believing, practicing Jew."[44] In other words, giving up some personal autonomy for the sake of Judaism and the Jewish community is itself an affirmation of autonomy. Yet Wyschograd would surrender that autonomy to God, whereas I give it to the community. With this strengthening of the role of the community while preserving autonomy, I can now state that my view of Torah is similar to that of Borowitz's covenantal dialectic. I believe that Torah emerges from the complicated relationship between the individual Jew, the Jewish community, and God. The emphasis for me is on the community: I do not believe that God really participates in ~~the~~ relationship except as the ever-present ideal, nor do I believe that the individual can overrule the community except in extreme cases. Rather, the Jewish community is the vehicle through which the purpose of Jewish existence is realized, and so its needs must take priority over the needs of the individuals who comprise it.

In my opinion, then, a Judaism for the end of the twentieth century should acknowledge the autonomy of Jews, but encourage them to surrender a portion of it in order to live Jewishly as part of the Jewish community; such a life, in addition to strengthening the community and Judaism itself, would also assist the individual in his or her ongoing quest to find meaning in the contemporary world. I believe that this perspective addresses the six main challenges to Judaism today. I am sure that it is not a perfect system; nor, in truth, could it be perfect, for perfection implies that something is

[44]Cited in Borowitz, "The Autonomous Jewish Self," p.49.

eternally unchanging. Even if my ideas are right for today, tomorrow will bring a change in the situation of Judaism. Just as the philosophies of Cohen, Kaplan, and Borowitz responded to their times but not to ours, so a response that meets the needs of our time will require adaptation to meet the needs of a later time. It is this continuing process of change and development that has kept and will continue to keep Judaism vital and relevant.

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