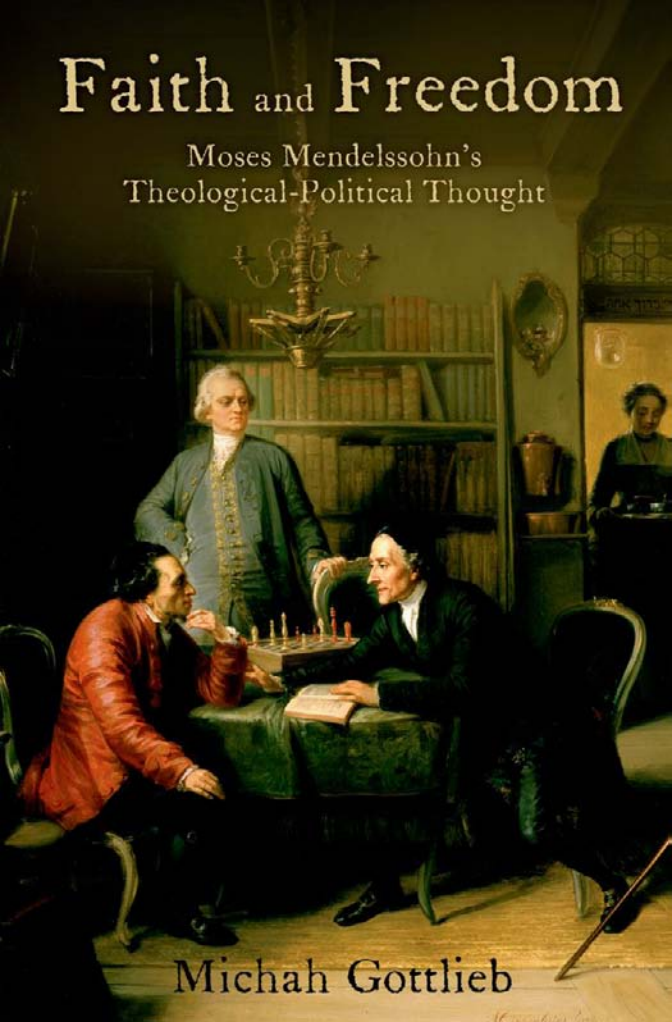
Faith and Freedom

Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought



Michah Gottlieb

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MICHAH GOTTLIEB

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For Ilana

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Preface

Dismissing Moses Mendelssohn has long been fashionable. When I began working on this project over a decade ago, three important books on Mendelssohn had recently been published, but he was still widely considered to be more superficial and boring than other modern Jewish philosophers such as Franz Rosenzweig and Emmanuel Levinas. In my view, part of the disregard for Mendelssohn has stemmed from the perception that his commitment to Judaism was too moderate, his thought too rationalist, his writing too clear. With Levinas and Rosenzweig we have dramatic stories about their rejecting the entire Western philosophical tradition to return to Judaism. This fit nicely with the turn to ethnicity that has been a dominant force since the late '60s. Mendelssohn, however, studiously tried to balance his Judaism with the "Western" ideals of the Enlightenment, an imperialist, colonialist project that aimed to erase cultural, ethnic, and religious differences. For some Jews, the tainted nature of Mendelssohn's enlightened Judaism was reflected in the fact that four of his six children converted to Christianity.

In the midst of my project, however, the zeitgeist began to change. George Bush was elected, we experienced 9/11, and America launched several wars. As the wars dragged on and the threat of Islamic terror remained, many people have experienced a growing sense that the identity politics that marked the '70s, '80s, and '90s are at a dead end. In this context, Mendelssohn's religious cosmopolitanism, which unites a deep attachment to Judaism with a

commitment to the humane ideals of the Enlightenment seems prescient and worthy of reconsideration.

That there is a renewed interest in Mendelssohn seems confirmed by a recent increase in scholarship on him. I have tried to keep up to date with the scholarship, but two books that treat Mendelssohn extensively—Robert Erlewine's *Monotheism and Tolerance* and Bruce Rosenstock's *Philosophy and the Jewish Question*—appeared too late for me to engage with in depth.

This book owes much to my teachers and colleagues. My first thanks goes to my doctoral supervisor, Frederick Beiser. His book *The Fate of Reason* first sparked my interest in Mendelssohn and classical German philosophy. I am grateful to Fred for his broad-mindedness and intellectual openness. He has an expansive vision of what it means to write about philosophy, and encouraged me to study a "minor philosopher" like Mendelssohn and adopt an eclectic methodological approach, bringing to bear whatever forms of analysis shed light on his thought. In 2006, I had the fortune of spending a year working with Zev Harvey at Hebrew University as a Yad Hanadiv fellow. During that year, much of this book took shape. Zev was extremely generous in meeting with me every week to discuss my work. His judgment was impeccable and whenever he encouraged me to look at some source or pursue some line of thought, his advice was inevitably on target. His good humor and endless intellectual curiosity are traits that I hope to embody.

I thank Lawrence Kaplan, my teacher at McGill who first introduced me to Maimonides and graciously read and commented on the entire manuscript with his usual incisiveness.

Elliot Wolfson is a mentor whom I am now privileged to have as a colleague at NYU. His interest in my undergraduate thesis on Rosenzweig and Kabbalah began a long friendship. Elliot's breaking down the boundaries between philosophy and kabbalah, and his adhering to the highest standards of scholarship while being an original philosopher have shaped my thinking in crucial ways. The spirit of *Language, Eros, Being* pervades this book.

My chair Lawrence Schiffman has been an exceptional professional mentor. I am grateful for his fostering the conditions at NYU to create a first-rate Judaic studies faculty and for his strong support of my research.

Alfred Ivry, whom I succeeded, but could never replace at NYU, has been an unfailingly gracious teacher. I appreciate his learning and friendship.

I thank my other colleagues at Skirball, Robert Chazan, Hasia Diner, David Engel, Gennady Estraikh, Yael Feldman, Daniel Fleming, Rosalie Kamelhar, Marion Kaplan, Ann Macy-Roth, Jeffrey Rubenstein, Mark Smith, and Ron Zweig.

I also thank friends, colleagues, and students including Allan Arkush, Leora Batnitzky, Daniel Birnbaum, Curtis Bowman, Eddy Breuer, Wendell Dietrich, Paul Eisenberg, Paul Franks, Gad Freudenthal, Gideon Freudenthal, Michael Friedman, Barbara Galli, Thomas Gimbel, Mark Kaplowitz, Daniel Lasker, Diana Lobel, Yitzhak Melamed, Michael Morgan, Reinier Munk, Ronnie Perelis, Elias Sacks, Bernard Septimus, Eugene Sheppard, Abe Socher, and David Weiss-Halivni.

I thank the Yad Hanadiv foundation and the director of its junior faculty fellowship, Isaiah Gafni. I also thank the FCAR fellowship fund, and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture for their financial assistance. During 2009–2010 I had privilege of being a fellow at the Humanities Initiative at NYU. I am grateful to the other fellows and to the directors Jane Tylus and Asya Berger for creating a vibrant, supportive intellectual community.

Jeremy Brown helped me with the notes and bibliography, and Martin Yaffe generously shared a draft of his excellent new translations of Strauss's writings on Mendelssohn with me.

I thank my editor at Oxford, Theo Calderara, who took a strong interest in my project at an early stage and my production editor Karen Kwak.

My parents, Laurie and Bruce Gottlieb, my sister Arielle, my mother-in-law Ellen Chazan, and the rest of my family have been a source of constant love and support.

I thank my children Gabriella, Jordanna, and the newest arrival Itai, the joys of my life who will probably never read this book.

Finally, to my wife Ilana without whom this book would not exist—I dedicate this book to you.

Hannukah, December 2009

Abbreviations

E=	Spinoza's *Ethica*. I use the following abbreviations D= definition; A= axiom, P= proposition; S= scholium; L= lemma; App= appendix. So E1P13S= Ethics, part 1, proposition 13, scholium. Page references refer to Curley's *Collected Works*
TIE=	Spinoza's *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*. Page references refer to Curley's *Collected Works*
TTP=	Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Page references refer to Shirley's *Theological-Political Treatise*
TP=	Spinoza's *Tractatus Politicus*. Page references refer to Shirley's *Complete Works*
JubA=	Mendelssohn's *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe*
PD=	Mendelssohn's *Philosophical Dialogues*
BT=	*Babylonian Talmud*
JT=	*Jerusalem Talmud*
PSR=	Principle of sufficient reason
PNC=	Principle of noncontradiction

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Introduction

By the twenty-first century, the wars between religion and reason were supposed to have subsided—instead they have been renewed. A dizzying number of new books have already appeared on the topic with more on the way and no end in sight. Given the renewal of the faith–reason debate, it is instructive to return to earlier iterations of it, which frequently occurred at a much higher level.

In the period of the Enlightenment, the debate burst onto the scene in the form of the "Pantheism Controversy" between the eighteenth-century Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) and the Christian Pietist thinker Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819). This Controversy, which has been called one of the most important intellectual events in classical German philosophy, fascinated the greatest minds in Germany and beyond.[1] Those who commented on it included Kant, Herder, Schelling, and Hegel. The fact that the debate was conducted between a Jew and Christian is significant for it brings to light some of the differences between how Jews and Christians have approached the question of the relationship between faith and reason.

The Pantheism Controversy was provoked by an apparently trifling biographical detail. In 1784, Jacobi disclosed to Mendelssohn that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), Mendelssohn's oldest friend and a fellow dean of the German Enlightenment, had secretly confessed Spinozism at the end of his life. But while Mendelssohn was surely piqued by Jacobi's implicit questioning of his bond with

Lessing, Mendelssohn realized that much more was at stake. Mendelssohn was committed to what scholars have called the "moderate enlightenment." He held that reason confirmed belief in a providential God. Lessing the enlightened Christian was widely perceived to have been Mendelssohn's fellow traveler on this path. Lessing was an especially important symbol of the moderate enlightenment given his widespread reputation for intellectual probity. In disclosing Lessing's Spinozism, Jacobi was insinuating that an honest, rational person could not be a person of faith, but rather must be an atheist.

Scholars have tended to construe the Pantheism Controversy as concerned with historical questions such as Lessing's relation to Spinoza[2] or Spinoza's relation to Pantheism,[3] or with the epistemological questions such as whether or not reason can decide God's existence.[4] I argue that the central issues debated in the Pantheism Controversy were not metaphysical and epistemological, but rather ethical and political. The Pantheism Controversy is best understood as a debate over competing visions of how best to promote human flourishing in the modern world. Does faith or reason better preserve human individuality and freedom? Does faith unite people or divide them?[5] More specifically, can members of different religious faiths truly be friends who respect one another as equals?

People of a certain era often feel a special affinity with those of a prior one. The revival of interest in Greek culture in the period of the Renaissance springs to mind. Today one finds an outpouring of scholarship on interwar Germany—the so-called Weimar period. People seem to sense a deep similarity between our current political climate and Weimar. Then as now one finds contradictory trends competing with one another—a liberalism that embraces individual freedom, rational judgment, and cosmopolitanism; a radical leftist critique that decries the decadent, unethical individualism of liberalism; and a rightist reaction that sees liberalism as superficial, nationally self-abnegating, and ultimately self-destructive.[6] We know the horrific path that German society eventually took in the 1930s. Many people today wonder where we are headed.

But just as many of us sense an affinity between our circumstances and Weimar, so many people living in Weimar sensed an affinity between their period and the twilight of the German Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century. At that time, the moderate, rationalist cosmopolitanism of enlightenment thinkers was being eclipsed by romantic emotionalism, nationalistic pride, radical left-wing politics and conservative reaction. The interest of Jewish writers in Weimar in the late eighteenth century was particularly acute since German Jews traced their modern origins to this period and increasingly felt their synthesis between Judaism and German identity under threat. So they naturally began to reflect anew on the path blazed by their founder and "patron saint" Moses Mendelssohn.[7]

The year 1929 was the two hundredth anniversary of Mendelssohn's birth. It was a year marked by a flurry of interest in Mendelssohn that involved many of the leading German-Jewish scholars and thinkers. This study is greatly indebted to the work of the scholars working at that time. To understand the perception of Mendelssohn in Weimar Germany, it is important to say something about Mendelssohn's previous reception in Germany.[8]

"From Moses to Moses there never arose one as great as Moses." This expression was originally coined to praise the great medieval Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides, but in 1761 when Mendelssohn was only thirty-two years old a Christian, Johann Jacob Rabe, first applied this expression to Mendelssohn in relation to Maimonides.[9] In the same vein, Mendelssohn's first biographer, Isaac Euchel, consistently referred to Mendelssohn using the Rabbinic acronym "Rambeman" (Rabbi Moshe ben Mendel) with its clear echo of Rambam (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, i.e., Maimonides). Connecting Mendelssohn and Maimonides sent a clear message. Mendelssohn was a modern Maimonides renowned among Gentiles as a profound philosopher and respected by the rabbis of his age for his extensive Talmudic learning.[10] While Maimonides served as a guide for perplexed Jewish believers in the face of medieval challenges to Judaism, Mendelssohn was a guide for perplexed Jews confronting the challenges to Judaism posed by modernity. Modernity inaugurated an era of increased sociability between Jews and Christians. This presented challenges never encountered by Maimonides including how to reconcile obedience to the Torah with life in a liberal state where Jews could be equal citizens. Mendelssohn showed how Judaism could meet such challenges.

While early nineteenth-century Jewish thinkers did not accept all of Mendelssohn's teachings, many Reform and Orthodox thinkers continued to see in his bridging the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds an important model for German Jewry. Thus the great Reform thinker Leopold Zunz called his generation Mendelssohn's "intellectual possession,"[11] while Samson Raphael Hirsch, the founder of German Neo-Orthodoxy, praised Mendelssohn, as "a most brilliant and respected personality whose commanding influence has dominated developments to this day."[12] By the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, Mendelssohn came under severe attack in Jewish circles from both the left and the right. Socialists assailed his bourgeois capitalism, while Zionists such as Peretz Smolenskin excoriated Mendelssohn as a traitor to the Jewish people who sold his Jewish birthright for a dangerous political illusion, namely the idea that political emancipation could solve the Jewish problem.[13] Orthodox and Reform thinkers alike increasingly blamed Mendelssohn for the widespread defection from Judaism among young Jews though for different reasons.

For many Orthodox thinkers, this defection stemmed from the rationalist nature of Mendelssohn's philosophy of Judaism, which undercut all justification for halakhic observance,[14] while for many Reform thinkers it was Mendelssohn's atavistic adherence to halakha, which alienated young Jews who turned to a more spiritually free Christianity.[15]

And yet in 1929, the two hundredth jubilee of Mendelssohn's birth, the most extensive Mendelssohn celebrations that Germany had ever witnessed took place. According to Christhard Hoffmann, "There was hardly a Jewish community in Germany that did not organize a Mendelssohn jubilee celebration."[16] In Berlin, important government officials, including the German interior minister Carl Severing and the mayor of Berlin Gustav Böß, addressed participants before Rabbi Leo Baeck delivered the keynote address.[17] These jubilee celebrations received extensive coverage in both the Jewish and non-Jewish presses.[18]

The year 1929 saw a flurry of publications on Mendelssohn including two biographies, five *Festschriften* comprising over thirty studies, and at least eighteen separate articles. Most significant was the launching of a new scholarly edition of Mendelssohn's work. Projected to comprise sixteen volumes, the so-called *Jubiläumsausgabe* (Jubilee edition) was a massive project that drew on the best talents of German and world Jewry.[19] An international board headed by Adolf von Harnack, the leading Protestant theologian in Germany, oversaw the project. Prominent members of the board included: Ernst Cassirer, the preeminent German Kant scholar of the day; Eduard Spranger, the well-known philosopher and psychologist; Claude Montefiore, a major liberal Jewish theologian in England; Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, a leading anthropologist and philosopher in France; and Cyrus Adler, then head of Dropsie College and later chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. The board likewise comprised major philanthropists including Oskar Wasserman, director of *Deutsche Bank* and president of *Keren Hayesod*, and Ludwig Vogelstein, chairman of the *American Metal Company*. Prominent scholars of Jewish studies were involved in editing the volumes. The project's supervising editors included Julius Guttmann, the leading historian of Jewish philosophy in Germany, and Ismar Elbogen, who has been called "Weimar's premier Jewish historian."[20] The editors of specific volumes included Simon Rawidowicz, later the founding chair of Judaic Studies at Brandeis University, as well as Guttmann's two young research associates—Fritz Bamberger and Leo Strauss.

Mendelssohn was seen as the spiritual ancestor of a Weimar Jewry proud of its dual German and Jewish identities.[21] The editors of the *Jubiläumsausgabe* noted that Mendelssohn had "prepared the way for the ideal of humanity of our [i.e., the German] classical era," and that Mendelssohn had guided Jews "to the

world of modern culture"[22] by promoting "the cultural renewal of Judaism."[23] In his keynote address to the 1929 Berlin Mendelssohn celebration, Baeck noted that Mendelssohn matured in eighteenth century Berlin, a cosmopolitan city of diverse populations, which Baeck called "Amerikanische Berlins."[24] It was in this context that Mendelssohn was able to achieve the groundbreaking synthesis of his Jewish and German sides. While both his Jewish and Christian contemporaries persisted in the medieval belief that joining European society required a Jew to become a Christian, it took the genius of a Mendelssohn to understand that the promise of the Enlightenment embodied in its embrace of freedom and equality was that one could be both a European and a Jew *without compromise*.[25] Baeck noted that Mendelssohn offered a humanistic vision of German national culture, whose particular achievement was its learning, openness to different perspectives, rigorous science, and beautiful language. In 1929, at a time when "Germany is struggling to rebuild its prestige,"[26] Baeck considered Mendelssohn's humanistic vision of German and Jewish identity timely and pertinent.[27]

Amid the chorus of celebration of Mendelssohn, however, voices of dissent were heard. Most profound was that of Leo Strauss, then a young Zionist attracted to Jewish Orthodoxy.[28] Strauss was a harsh critic of Weimar. He considered Weimar's democratic liberalism to be politically weak and inherently unstable in view of its factionalism, indecision, and debilitating national self-criticism and he charged that its cosmopolitanism promoted bourgeois mediocrity, which undermined German national self-respect. For Strauss, liberalism was likewise no panacea for Jews. For liberalism was premised on the idea that Jews exchange a robust Orthodox Jewish identity for a tepid, anemic form of religious moralism. But in preserving the distinction between state and society, liberalism guaranteed the right to privately hold discriminatory opinions about Jews, which, given Germans' historical antipathy for Jews, meant that Jews would never be fully accepted as Germans. As such, liberalism left Jews existentially moribund, alienated from both German and Jewish identity. Strauss later described feeling caught in what he called a "theological-political predicament."[29] The sense of existential alienation caused by liberalism attracted Strauss to myth, faith, and "authoritarian principles"—in short to religious and political orthodoxy. In "authoritarian principles" Strauss also saw the best means of eradicating anti-Semitic discrimination in both the public and private spheres.[30]

According to Strauss, liberal Jewish theologians like Hermann Cohen and Leo Baeck accepted Spinoza's critique of Orthodox religious dogma such as creation, revelation, miracles, and the binding authority of halakha. But seeking connection to Jewish tradition, these theologians sought to hold on to

traditional Jewish concepts by endowing them with an inner, metaphorical meaning. The problem was that this inner meaning ended up anthropologizing and relativizing Jewish religious beliefs, which increasingly came to be seen as human constructions. To illustrate this point, Strauss recounts how after giving a lecture explaining God as a postulate of reason, Cohen was confronted by an Orthodox Jew who asked him, "and what has become of the *Bore Olam* (Creator of the World)?" to which Cohen had no response, but to weep.[31]

But Strauss regarded the founder of modern Jewish liberal theology, Moses Mendelssohn, as an interesting case. According to Strauss, unlike his later successors Mendelssohn adhered to "Orthodox" Jewish concepts in their "external" sense claiming rational grounds for belief in creation, revelation, divine providence, and the immortality of the soul. And he strove to show how the binding authority of halakha could be reconciled with liberal political ideals. In this way, Mendelssohn seemed to offer a foundation for faith/commitment that precluded intolerance and extremism, while embracing reason.[32] But, Strauss wondered, was such a position coherent and defensible? Strauss noted that Mendelssohn faced this question in his own day, most importantly during the Pantheism Controversy with Jacobi, which Strauss interpreted as a theological-political debate.[33]

Strauss's inquiry into the Controversy ultimately led him to reject both Mendelssohn's enlightened Orthodoxy as well as Jacobi's mystical faith. On the one hand, Strauss accepted Jacobi's charge that Mendelssohn's moderate religious enlightenment lacked consistency as exemplified by Lessing's confession of Spinozism. In seeking to bridge faith and reason, authority and freedom, Strauss followed Jacobi in claiming that Mendelssohn ended up adopting a thoroughly muddled stance that was "indecisive, lukewarm, and mediocre."[34] According to Strauss, Mendelssohn's "cautious half-dogmatism" resulted both in an emasculated faith and a shallow conception of reason. In consequence, while Mendelssohn claimed to defend revelation, he ended up undermining it.[35] For the structure of reason, which proceeded by logically necessary judgments, precluded the possibility of faith, which was spontaneous and ungrounded. By making rationalism appear kosher to Jewish faith, Mendelssohn had introduced a Trojan Horse into Judaism as Spinozism, that is, atheism, was the most consistent form of rationalism.[36] Once Mendelssohn legitimated the authority of reason for religious belief, the decline in religious belief among Jews was inevitable. Strauss also accepted Jacobi's charge that in making human happiness the end of religion, Mendelssohn precipitated a turn to egoism and superficiality that was irreconcilable with obedience to God as the end of life.[37] So in the final analysis, Strauss followed Jacobi in regarding

Mendelssohn's "moderate enlightenment" as nothing more than "bourgeois, self-satisfied, self-centeredness" motivated by an attempt to make Jews into urbane German burghers by diluting Judaism.[38] The political corollary of Mendelssohn's enlightened faith was political liberalism. For Strauss, patriotism, which was essential for any stable, well-functioning state, was based on faith in founding myths. But liberalism, which privileged individual happiness and made reason the basis of political commitment, was politically dangerous as it privileged commitment to the self over commitment to the nation, and used rational criticism to unmask and critique national myths. For Strauss, the Weimar Republic, whose embrace of the ideals of rational criticism unleashed centripetal forces of self-doubt and egoism that corroded German morale and undermined the stability of the republic, exemplified liberalism's self-destructiveness.[39] So Mendelssohn's liberalism typified the ideology underlying both the political weakness of Weimar and tepid German-Judaism.

While Jacobi saw faith in God as a centering force, which lent life seriousness and nobility, Strauss thought that faith in the nation could also make these ideals possible. For like religion, the nation could demand absolute commitment and sacrifice including sacrificing one's own life, which was a mark of heroism.[40] But Strauss accepted Mendelssohn's warnings concerning the dangers of leaving faith unchecked by reason. As Mendelssohn had pointed out, faith left unsupervised could be used to justify the most intolerant doctrines. This was vividly illustrated for Strauss by his mentor Heidegger's joining the Nazi party in 1933.[41] And tempermentally Strauss was a philosopher who could not bring himself to abandon his faith in reason in favor of faith in political or theological myths.

These conclusions led Strauss to seek a third alternative, which he found in Lessing. As reported by Jacobi, Lessing was an atheist, but he concealed this fact even from his close friend Mendelssohn. Rather, Lessing presented himself as a defender of traditional Christianity and went so far as to defend Christian mysteries such as the trinity and the incarnation against rationalist critics. Strauss accepted Jacobi's understanding of Lessing. For Strauss, while as a philosopher Lessing could not believe in God, he recognized the political utility of religious belief for the masses. Without religious belief that legitimated the state's authority and demanded obedience to the sovereign, people would focus on egoistic pleasure and become politically apathetic, which would erode patriotism and undermine the stability of the state. According to Strauss, Lessing had learned this lesson from the Platonic political tradition, which received its highest expression in the work of medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophers, most notably Maimonides. In Maimonides' view, revealed truth is religious law, which is at once theological and political and so stipulates a

necessary political order. As such, the masses come to believe that obedience to the political order also constitutes obedience to God, which God will reward. But since this revealed law is also a profound divine truth, it can be said to have an inner secret meaning known to philosophers alone, which legitimates the philosophers' search for truth in the eyes of the masses.

While the medieval Platonic political philosophers accepted the reigning political order, their early modern successors, most notably Spinoza, hoped to reshape the political order.[42] They could do this by becoming confidants of political leaders, instructing them how to give religious texts a political meaning that preserved freedom of thought and promoted tolerance while bolstering patriotism and social cohesion. The emphasis on religious tolerance became important in the early modern period when new forms of trade and the spread of enlightened absolutism led to increased sociability between different ethnic and religious groups. For Strauss, this was the true meaning of Lessing's Spinozism. For while Lessing defended orthodox Christian beliefs, he did so in the service of religious tolerance as seen by his greatest play, *Nathan the Wise*.[43]

While in the medieval and early modern periods the chief threat to philosophy was from religious orthodoxy, in contemporary times Strauss saw the chief threat to philosophy as coming from historicism and relativism, which questioned the possibility of uncovering eternal truths. In this climate, an alliance between religious orthodoxy and philosophy was all the more desirable since both opposed relativism and upheld claims to absolute truth. And in light of the suffering and destruction made possible by relativistic nihilism as exemplified by the Holocaust, absolute truth was especially needed to underwrite universal moral norms.[44]

There are two major interpretations of Mendelssohn's achievement that have recently attained prominence. In *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (1994), Allan Arkush claims that Mendelssohn is, at heart, a Deist who understands that enlightened theism undermines the authority of traditional Judaism. But Arkush claims that Mendelssohn seeks to "construct a version of Judaism suitable for a time when Jews would take their places as citizens alongside their Gentile neighbors in a fully liberal polity."[45] To this end, he seeks to reshape Judaism in a liberal mold. But, according to Arkush, Mendelssohn is conscious of the need "to retain his credentials as a faithful Jew," and so he disingenuously offers flawed arguments defending Judaism that are "more rhetorical than real."[46]

In *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* (1996), David Sorkin presents an opposite interpretation casting Mendelssohn as a Jewish traditionalist who uses the language of enlightened German philosophy to bolster his

essentially premodern faith. For Sorkin, Mendelssohn is able to achieve this synthesis because he adheres to a medieval tradition of Jewish thought that, following Bernard Septimus, Sorkin calls "Andalusian."[47] On Sorkin's rendering, the Andalusian tradition, which includes figures such as Saadya Gaon, Judah Halevi, and Nahmanides, embraces reason, but at the same time establishes boundaries to it, "subordinating [philosophy] to piety and observance." It promotes a "broad curriculum" that includes the study of "philosophy and biblical exegesis, Hebrew language, and rabbinical literature," and it is an exoteric tradition, rejecting "the search for ultimate truths or secret wisdom."[48] For Sorkin, this tradition fit seamlessly with the eighteenth century Religious Enlightenment which holds that reason can establish the truths of natural religion, promotes a broad educational ideal emphasizing the cultivation of intellectual as well as aesthetic perfection, considers the practice of universal ethics the central aim of religion, and is animated by an egalitarian impulse that eschews esotericism in the belief that all human beings (not just elite philosophers) can know metaphysical truth.[49]

In this book, I stake out a middle position between Arkush and Sorkin. I argue that Mendelssohn defends Jewish religious concepts sincerely, but in doing so gives them a humanistic valence appropriate to life in an enlightened society where Jews could potentially be citizens. I agree with Sorkin that Mendelssohn sees his philosophical and Jewish commitments as compatible. But I do not agree that Mendelssohn inherits an "Andalusian" tradition that fits seamlessly with the thought of the Religious Enlightenment. I agree with Arkush that Mendelssohn seeks to shape a concept of Judaism that is appropriate to the new social and political circumstances in which he finds himself. But unlike Arkush, I do not think that Mendelssohn sees himself as a disingenuous innovator. Rather, taking as my starting point Mendelssohn's invoking of the medieval adage that "truth cannot conflict with truth," I argue that Mendelssohn is so firmly convinced of the truth of both Judaism and of the German Enlightenment that he simply cannot imagine a contradiction between them. To bridge any apparent gaps between the two, Mendelssohn does what all theologians do; namely, he adopts a selective attitude toward the Jewish tradition, drawing on sources that reflect his deep-seated commitments and ignoring or marginalizing contrary perspectives. To substantiate this reading, I treat the Pantheism Controversy as part of a broader assessment of Mendelssohn's theological-political philosophy, which I frame in terms of Mendelssohn's relation to his two greatest Jewish philosophical predecessors, Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) and Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677).[50]

While Mendelssohn's relation to Maimonides and Spinoza has been discussed sporadically, mine is the first book-length treatment of the subject.[51]

The connection is particularly instructive as both Maimonides and Spinoza wrote major theological-political treatises and espoused forms of enlightenment different than Mendelssohn. Maimonides was an exponent of so-called medieval enlightenment, while Spinoza was the classic example of radical enlightenment. Not surprisingly, Mendelssohn is deeply ambivalent about both of these figures. On the one hand, Mendelssohn reveres Maimonides for what he sees as his synthesis of Judaism with secular knowledge. But Mendelssohn is deeply disturbed by Maimonides' elitism, his equivocation regarding many of the tenets of theism, his espousing religious coercion, his intolerant view of Gentiles, and his slavish acceptance of Aristotelian philosophy. As for Spinoza, Mendelssohn respects him as a model for how a Jew could fruitfully contribute to science and philosophy and as a model of ethical rectitude. But Spinoza's atheism, his advocacy of state religion, his debunking of Jewish chosenness, and his rejection of the authority of halakha are all anathema to Mendelssohn.

This book will have four chapters. In the first chapter, I explore Mendelssohn's early enlightened theism. I begin by setting the context of Jews living in Frederick the Great's enlightened Prussia. While Frederick's enlightened absolutism in theory should have presented Jews with opportunities for social advancement and equal rights, this was thwarted by Frederick's adherence to medieval stereotypes of Jews as superstitious and unethical. Addressing Jewish contemporaries, Mendelssohn uses Maimonides' authority to legitimate cultural pursuits outside the purview of Judaism. But Mendelssohn is disturbed by Maimonides' ambivalent attitude toward theistic concepts such as divine providence and the immortality of the soul. Mendelssohn is even more disturbed by Spinoza's atheism. But before his Christian contemporaries Mendelssohn defends Spinoza as a model of Jewish cultural attainment and moral rectitude. He defends Spinoza's intellectual achievement by claiming that while in error, Spinoza made critical contributions to the enlightened German theism of Gottfried Leibniz and Christian Wolff. This is significant because Mendelssohn sees Leibniz and Wolff as setting providential theism on a firm basis by philosophically grounding the Bible's fundamental insight into God's goodness, an insight that was lost to both Maimonides and Spinoza. God's goodness forms the foundation of Mendelssohn's belief that the aim of true religion is individual perfection and happiness.

In the second chapter, I explore Mendelssohn's philosophy of Judaism. I show how Mendelssohn's stance on central tenets of Judaism such as Jewish election, the authority of halakha, and the nature of prophecy as well as his approach to moral and political questions such as state authority, political esotericism, and ethical obligation can be profitably read as an adaptation and

critique of Spinoza and Maimonides. Central to my analysis is Mendelssohn's rejection of Maimonides' and Spinoza's intellectual elitism and their endorsement of state religion. In contrast, Mendelssohn defends a more egalitarian view of humanity and justifies religious diversity, which he sees as a traditional Jewish position. Mendelssohn conceives Jewish chosenness not as innate superiority but as responsibility to promote the perfection of society as a whole. In this way, Mendelssohn presents the practice of Judaism as compatible with life in a diverse, enlightened society.

In the third chapter, I undertake an analysis of Jacobi's critique of Mendelssohn's moderate religious enlightenment. This critique has both a political and theological aspect, which are grounded in Jacobi's concept of reason. For Jacobi, the very structure of reason is inimical to freedom and undermines individuality since reason operates by means of logically necessary, universal judgments. Jacobi notes that Mendelssohn's rationalism underwrites his defense of Frederick the Great's enlightened absolutist state. But enlightened absolutism is antihumanistic since it levels the differences between all citizens and demands uncompromising obedience to the sovereign by placing everyone under the despotic dominion of a single, absolute law. Furthermore, the intolerance of Mendelssohn's rationalism is expressed by his advocating censorship of opinions such as atheism and what he calls "religious fanaticism" that contradict his enlightened theism. Theologically, Jacobi argues that Spinoza's antihumanistic philosophy is the culmination of enlightenment reasoning as expressed by Lessing's confession of Spinozism. Spinoza constructed his worldview by applying with ruthless consistency the principle of sufficient reason, which stipulates that nothing comes from nothing. This leads Spinoza to espouse fatalism, which denies human free choice; pantheism, which denies the substantiality of the individual ego; and atheism. For Jacobi, when it comes to theological matters, one must rely on personal faith, which rescues human individuality and freedom. Faith is an enemy of despotism for in making God's revelation to the individual the overriding determining principle of action, it gives the believer an Archimedean point from which to resist despotic rule.

In chapter 4, I explore Mendelssohn's response to Jacobi. Mendelssohn sees Jacobi's opposition to monarchical rule in favor of republicanism as a rhetorical subterfuge aimed at promoting religious despotism. For Mendelssohn, Jacobi's rejection of the authority of reason in metaphysics leads to religious oppression. For once irrational faith is made the basis of belief, the only way to get others to accept one's faith is through manipulation. Mendelssohn argues that we are most free when obeying the demands of reason since reason is the deepest stratum of ourselves and gives us a standard for critiquing those who

would impose their beliefs on us. Mendelssohn also holds that reason confirms the existence of a providential, good God and secures human individuality. Spinoza's error stems from his understanding the principle of sufficient reason as stipulating that nothing comes from nothing, whereas a more adequate understanding of the principle asserts that there is a sufficient reason for everything, which exists. This latter principle grounds creation and divine goodness. Mendelssohn interprets Lessing's Spinozism as an innocuous type that preserves divine goodness and providence, which is grounded in an attempt to give rational sense to Christian mysteries. Mendelssohn contrasts what he sees as his Jewish concept of faith with Jacobi's Christian faith. For Mendelssohn, Judaism seeks to unite faith and reason, while Jacobi's dichotomy between the two reflects a Christian approach founded in his confession of Christian mysteries of faith. But unlike Strauss who sees Mendelssohn as attempting to defend theological concepts such as God's existence in an "external sense," I see Mendelssohn moving toward religious idealism, which is grounded in a form of pragmatism. For Mendelssohn, truth is not a matter of correspondence between our minds and reality in itself, but rather a function of how we must conceive of the world based on agreement, which we are justified in acting upon because it promotes our happiness and perfection. In the same vein, Mendelssohn regards belief in a providential, good God and in an immortal soul as especially useful in promoting human flourishing.

I

God is Good

The Harmony between Judaism and Enlightenment Philosophy

Moses Mendelssohn was born Moshe ben Mendel on September 6, 1729, in the rural hamlet of Dessau in the duchy of Anhalt-Dessau. Though his biography is well known, it is useful to survey some of its major features. His father Mendel Heymann was a Torah scribe, teacher, and custodian in the local synagogue. These were not lucrative occupations and put him at the bottom of the social hierarchy of the Jewish community. His mother Bela Rachel Sarah was of illustrious lineage. She was a direct descendent of Moses Isserles (1520–1572), the author of the glosses on the most important codification of Jewish law, the *Shulhan Arukh* (literally "set table"). These glosses, called the *Mapa* (literally "table cloth") constituted the authoritative guide to Ashkenazic Jewish practice. Isserles likewise was interested in science, especially astronomy, something unusual for his day.[1] Another relative of Mendelssohn's mother was Moses Benjamin Wulff, a court Jew who founded many of the Jewish institutions in Dessau. Moshe ben Mendel was born a few days after Moses Wulff passed away and was named after his two eminent ancestors.[2]

At an early age, Moses began to live up to his noble ancestry. According to his biographer Isaac Euchel, at age six Moses began studying the typical Jewish curriculum, which consisted of the Talmud and its commentaries.[3] At the time, study of the Bible and Hebrew grammar was largely ignored in traditional Ashkenazic circles, but Moses thought that to gain a proper understanding of the

Talmud he needed a firm grounding in these subjects, which he taught himself. He learned the entire Bible by heart, and not only did he learn Hebrew grammar, he even tried his hand at composing Hebrew poetry and prose.[4] By age eleven, he was selected to be part of an elite group of students who studied at the home of the local rabbi, David Fränkel. The curriculum included portions of the Talmud and in-depth analysis of its legal implications as reflected in the *Shulhan Arukh*.[5]

Fränkel was an esteemed scholar who was famous for his commentary on the Palestinian Talmud called *Korban Ha'eda* (literally "offering of the community"), which is one of the standard commentaries still used today. He was a broad-minded man who in 1739 had undertaken the reprinting of Maimonides' great legal compendium *Mishne Torah* at the local Wulffian Press. The Wulffian Press also produced many texts that had been neglected by earlier generations and which linked Judaism to wider intellectual horizons. These included works in medieval Jewish philosophy, Hebrew grammar, as well as scientific works. And in 1742 the press published Samuel Ibn Tibbon's medieval translation of Maimonides' philosophical magnum opus, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, with Fränkel's tacit approval.[6]

In 1743, Fränkel received a post in Berlin and the fourteen-year-old Mendelssohn followed him there. In Berlin, Mendelssohn spent most of his time studying in the Talmudic *Beit Midrash* ("House of Study") established by Fränkel, but he was soon opening up to wider intellectual vistas. At the time, enlightened Berlin was an exciting cultural center flourishing under the rule of Frederick the Great, who had ascended to the Prussian throne in 1740. Frederick was a patron of culture and an amateur philosophe. He revived the Berlin Academy of the Arts, which drew scientists, philosophers, and poets from all over Europe to Berlin. As a result, Berlin became a cosmopolitan city where Frenchmen, Dutchmen, and Saxons discussed metaphysics, and Lutherans, Calvinists, and Catholics debated the latest scientific discoveries.[7]

Berlin Jews did not live in a ghetto. The area where they lived was near many churches and a few years later Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and the poet Karl Ramler moved there.[8] For a youth from a rural town who was brought up within the strict confines of Judaism, Berlin must have been exciting. The intellectual and cultural expansiveness of Berlin seemed to have spawned in Mendelssohn an optimism and worldliness that he maintained throughout his life. This is reflected in an early piece that he composed for his coreligionists in Hebrew. In *Kohelet Mussar*, Mendelssohn praises the possibilities for worldly pleasure. Commenting on the rabbinic commandment to utter a blessing of praise when seeing trees first bloom in the spring,[9] Mendelssohn describes the pleasure in admiring worldly beauty: "The buds and field flowers give joy and

pure, innocent pleasure [*ta'anug tam v'naki*] to the hearts of all who see them. The eye cannot receive its fill from seeing their beauty. For as long as a person gazes on them, his soul will add satisfaction in their goodness and will never regret this joy in his heart. His face will glow as if with oil. He will go back and forth between the rows of fragrant flowers with strength of spirit and his eyes will see the goodness and blessing which God has blessed him with."[10]

The access key to cultural and social life in Berlin was learning, which required knowledge of languages. So while during the day he studied Talmud in yeshiva, in the evenings Mendelssohn acquired secular knowledge.[11] His first language being Yiddish, he was fortunate to have been befriended by young Jewish intellectuals who helped him acquire the necessary languages. Abraham Kisch gave Mendelssohn lessons in Latin, which allowed him to sit in on a course in philosophy given at a local Gymnanisum, and Aron Emmerich Gumpertz, about whom we will have more to say later, helped him learn French and English.[12] But the most important preparation for Mendelssohn's encounter with philosophy was his study of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, about which Alexander Altmann writes that "its influence on Mendelssohn's intellectual development cannot be highly estimated enough."[13]

Mendelssohn apparently began to study the *Guide* on his own during his last year in Dessau.[14] But his study of it in Berlin was decisive. A short time after arriving in Berlin, Mendelssohn met Israel Samocz. Samocz was a Jew deeply learned in mathematics, science, and medieval Jewish philosophy. He wrote a commentary on Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* called "*Otzar Nehmad*" (literally "wonderful treasure") and a commentary on Bahya ibn Pakuda's *Duties of the Heart* called "*Tov Halevanon*" (literally "good of Lebanon").[15] Samocz first taught Mendelssohn Euclid's *Elements* and then guided him through the complexities of the *Guide*.[16]

From a relatively young age, Mendelssohn sought to encourage his fellow Jews to extend their knowledge beyond the confines of biblical and Talmudic literature.[17] This was tied to Mendelssohn's acute awareness of popular stereotypes that cast Jews as culturally backward, and clannish.[18] Mendelssohn recognized that his coreligionists generally viewed the study of philosophy with indifference if not downright hostility. So to establish the legitimacy of studying secular subjects in the eyes of his fellow Jews, Mendelssohn invoked the authority of a Jewish rabbi of impeccable credentials—Maimonides.[19]

In his 1763 commentary on Maimonides' *Logical Terms*, Mendelssohn takes note of contemporary Jewish opposition to the study of philosophy. He considers that an opponent might claim that, "this whole art [i.e., logic] was created by Aristotle the Greek" and so ask "what have I to do with the son of Nicomachus [*ben Nikomakus*] that I should hang at his gate to hear the way and

paths of wisdom [*orah hahaskalah v'drakheha*]?"[20] The traditionalist is so skeptical of the study of philosophy that he thinks that even "if something true is found in [Aristotle's] works, it will almost be annulled in light of the errors and mistakes found in them."[21]

In response, Mendelssohn assures his reader that he is not, God forbid, "inciting him to read Aristotle the Greek," but rather to understand "words of wisdom from the Prince of Torah [*Sar Hatorah*] our master Moses bar Maimon (may his righteous memory be for blessing) who collected and gathered food from waste and acted with this Greek as Rabbi Meir acted with *Aher* [i.e., Elisha ben Avuya]. He ate the fruit and discarded the rind."[22] Mendelssohn here appeals to a trope found in the Talmudic story of Rabbi Meir's relationship to his teacher Elisha ben Avuya, who became a heretic.[23] When Rabbi Meir was asked how he could continue to study with Elisha after the latter's fall into heresy, he replied that he took the fruit and rejected the rind. In the same way, Mendelssohn claims that reading Aristotle through the lens of Maimonides guarantees that Aristotle's teachings are kosher.[24]

But while Maimonides was a great inspiration for Mendelssohn the aspiring philosopher, for Mendelssohn the faithful Jew, many of Maimonides' teachings were deeply disconcerting. This may be hinted at in an anecdote attributed to Mendelssohn, recorded by both Euchel and Kayserling. Referring to the fact that he had a hunchback, Mendelssohn reportedly remarked: "I consider Maimonides the sole cause of the fact that I have such a deformed body. Nevertheless, I love him for this man has sweetened many troubled hours of my life, and so has repaid me ten-fold for the damage that he had wrought on my body."[25]

At one level, Mendelssohn is simply commenting on the fact that he spent many hours studying Maimonides. But he also spent many hours studying Talmud, which he never blames for his deformity. Despite Mendelssohn's obvious reverence for Maimonides, the tongue in cheek comment about his deformity may reflect a certain displeasure with Maimonides's teachings since in the *Guide,* Maimonides evinces a deep ascetic strain that is inimical to Mendelssohn's embrace of worldly happiness. No less than four times in the *Guide*, Maimonides cites approvingly a passage from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which he interprets to mean that for Aristotle the sense of touch is a disgrace.[26] Indeed, Maimonides claims that "renunciation and contempt for bodily pleasures" are marks of the philosopher and a fortiori of the prophet.[27] Discomfort with this asceticism may be hinted at in Mendelssohn's reference to the damage that Maimonides wrought on his body.[28]

More significantly, while Maimonides is a model for engagement with philosophy, those with an accurate understanding of his teachings understood

that there were good reasons why his philosophy aroused such opposition. Careful study of the *Guide* showed that Maimonides' relation to central Jewish theological concepts was ambiguous at best. Creation was widely understood to involve creation of all reality ex nihilo by the divine will alone. Maimonides makes clear that he does not think that reason can definitively establish whether the world is eternal or created ex nihilo. While in general Maimonides grants reason the authority to interpret the Bible allegorically where its ostensible meaning contradicts reason, Maimonides claims that in light of reason's inability to definitively decide the question of the eternity of the world, creation ex nihilo should be accepted insofar as it is the plain sense of the Bible. But many commentators and critics suspected that Maimonides was not being fully forthright.[29] Human beings were generally thought by Jewish thinkers to be the crowning purpose of creation. But Maimonides offers a strikingly nonanthropocentric account of the purpose of creation where angels are much more important in the cosmic scheme than human beings.[30] Providence was widely understood to refer to God's guidance of every individual life. For Maimonides, however, providence extends only to the general species of human beings and to elite philosophers. In his famous phrase, "providence is consequent upon the intellect."[31] And whether even this providence amounts to something significant is questionable.[32] Immortality of the soul was widely understood as something that all Jews would attain unless they were among the small class of individuals who were excluded on account of heresy.[33] One's place in heaven was a function of the extent to which one observed halakha. For Maimonides, however, only the intellect survives the body thereby implying that those who do not develop their intellects will perish with their bodies even if they observe halakha punctiliously.[34] Furthermore, it is unclear whether Maimonides accepts individual immortality, affirms the Averroist position of unification of the soul with the active intellect after death, or denies immortality completely.[35] Miracles occupied a central place in the popular imagination figuring prominently in the Bible, Talmud, and Jewish folk tales. But Maimonides' stance on miracles is deeply ambiguous.[36] Finally, Maimonides' conception of God seems to be at odds with the popular conception. While the popular imagination conceives God as an all-powerful, all-knowing, personal being who made a covenant with the Jewish people, answers prayers, and loves, cares for, and chastises His people, Maimonides' God is a dispassionate intellect whose greatest good is contemplating His own perfection.[37] And Maimonides' negative theology seems to render this God completely unknowable.[38]

We have confirmation that Mendelssohn was disturbed by possible heterodox tendencies in Maimonides in an important, though largely overlooked, handwritten gloss in Mendelssohn's personal copy of the *Guide*. In part III,

chapter 43 of the *Guide*, Maimonides comments on the relationship between God, halakha, and nature writing that "nature is not endowed with thought and understanding whereas the law is the measure and the governance of the deity who grants intellect to all of its possessors."[39] Maimonides' medieval commentators Efodi and Shem Tov note that in this statement Maimonides implies that human beings are not guided to perfection through God's intervention in nature but only through their observance of the divine law, which facilitates acquisition of intellectual perfection.[40] Mendelssohn is deeply disturbed by the implied naturalism of Maimonides' statement and in a gloss writes that "[Maimonides'] words require much explanation." He castigates "the commentators [who] did not descend deeply enough into Maimonides' words and regarded nature as if it were something existing independently of the divine will."[41] The implication that Maimonides may have held that God does not guide nature directly is deeply troubling to Mendelssohn. He does not wish to accept that this is Maimonides' view, though he cannot remain oblivious to this possibility.

The first non-Hebrew philosophical text that Mendelssohn read was Gustav Reinbeck's *Observations on the Augsburg Confession*, which he found in a fellow Jew's house.[42] This work, by an enlightened Christian theologian, made a striking impression on Mendelssohn, and led him to intensively study the three great lights of enlightened Christian philosophy, John Locke, Gottfried Leibniz, and Christian Wolff. Mendelssohn was enthralled. In *Phädon*, he expresses his gratitude to the modern enlightened philosophers remarking that "one must be very begrudging [*sehr niedisch*] towards the merit of one's contemporaries if one does not wish to concede a great preference to modern philosophy." And Mendelssohn testifies that he could never "compare Plato with the new philosophers and both with the cloudy minds of the medievals without thanking providence for letting him be born in this happy time."[43]

The attractiveness of enlightenment philosophy for Mendelssohn consists in its putting key elements of Jewish metaphysics on a firm philosophical basis. This occurs in two ways. First, Mendelssohn notes that "modern metaphysics" is able to demonstrate key doctrines of natural religion including God's existence, individual divine providence, creation, the immortality of the soul, and the obligatory nature of ethics.[44] In what is generally understood to be an autobiographical passage, Mendelssohn alludes to his own youthful religious doubts, noting that "cruel doubts about providence tortured me" and that "there were doubts about the existence of God and the blessedness of virtue." Mendelssohn then gratefully acknowledges his "true guides who guided me back to true knowledge of virtue." Thanking Locke, Wolff, and the "immortal Leibniz," he waxes, "without your help I would have been lost forever."[45]

This superiority of modern metaphysics over Maimonides' medieval metaphysics is illustrated by a passage from Mendelssohn's commentary on Maimonides' *Logical Terms*. In chapter 9 of the *Logical Terms*, which treats Aristotle's four causes, Maimonides refers to God as the "agent" cause of human beings, because God creates form in matter. Mendelssohn is troubled by this comment because of its implication that God only creates form, but not matter itself. In other words, through a glaring omission, Maimonides seems to implicitly deny creation ex nihilo. While Mendelssohn tries weakly to exculpate Maimonides by claiming that Maimonides is only speaking according to the opinion of Plato (why Maimonides would do so is not explained), Mendelssohn notes that Plato's opinion is neither founded on the principles of the Torah, nor on the principles of "true inquiry" as "the latest philosophers" [*hahokrim ha'aharonim*] have shown. These "latest philosophers" refer to Leibniz and Wolff who have been able to philosophically establish a doctrine that Maimonides, as he himself admitted, could not conclusively decide on philosophical grounds.[46]

The second advance of modern enlightenment philosophy is in its stressing God's goodness as His preeminent attribute. In making this assertion, enlightenment philosophy attains a fundamental insight that biblical and rabbinic Judaism first asserted against paganism. According to Mendelssohn, in ancient times "heathen priests" preyed on people's ignorance by ascribing unusual or terrifying events such as loud thunder or terrible storms to a higher power, seeing such natural occurrences as evidence of divine wrath. The reason that people came to view God as an angry, punishing king is that the "common man looks upon goodness and proneness to reconciliation as weakness."[47] Part of Judaism's protest against paganism involves the recognition that implacability and cruelty are weaknesses born of fear, while true power is expressed through love and forgiveness. God's goodness and love is thus the greatest expression of His power. In support of this, Mendelssohn quotes Exodus 33:18–19 where Moses asks God to reveal His glory to him and God replies that He "will let His goodness" pass before Moses. Mendelssohn comments: "What a great thought! You want to behold all of my glory, I will let my goodness pass before you."[48]

The Bible, however, is not a philosophical work and hence it expresses this fundamental insight into the divine without a scientific understanding of nature. In consequence, when the medieval philosophers inherited Greek science there was a tendency to explain events in the world solely in terms of natural cause and effect, which is why miracles and individual providence, which apparently involve God's disrupting the natural order, were problematic for Maimonides. It was up to the modern enlightened philosophers, most

notably Leibniz, to reconcile the Bible's insight into God's providential goodness with a scientific understanding of nature. Leibniz does this through his theory of preestablished harmony. As we will see in greater detail in chapter 4, Leibniz claims that the principle of sufficient reason demands a reason for the existence of this world as a totality. Leibniz locates this reason in God's goodness, which led God to choose to create this world as the best of all possible worlds. For Leibniz, this is perfectly compatible with events in the world being explicable according to natural causes, for in creating this world God ordains a harmony between efficient and final causes.[49]

But while Leibniz is correct in stressing God's goodness as the preeminent expression of His power, Mendelssohn claims that Leibniz does not fully appreciate this point on account of his commitment to Christian dogma.[50] As a Christian, Leibniz feels bound to justify the doctrine of eternal punishment. This doctrine, however, appears to be irreconcilable with God's goodness for according to traditional Christian teaching, the vast majority of humankind are doomed to eternal suffering. To resolve this problem, Leibniz offers several possible solutions. First, Leibniz writes that while God's goodness seeks the greatest perfection, perfection is not just a function of human happiness, but is also a function of the beauty and order of the universe. This beauty and order includes the moral order of the universe, which demands "satisfaction for the expiation of an evil action."[51] Certain sins are so grave, however, that they demand eternal punishment.[52] In such cases, punishment "gives satisfaction . . . to the wise who see it; even as a beautiful piece of music, or again a good piece of architecture, satisfies cultivated minds."[53] Lloyd Strickland calls this the doctrine of "abominable fancy."[54] Second, Leibniz interprets God's goodness as requiring that God choose the *best possible* universe, not a perfect universe without suffering, which is impossible. The relative goodness of the universe is a function of the ratio between the number of beings who suffer and the number who enjoy blessedness. Leibniz proposes that while on earth the majority of people are destined to suffer eternally, there may be countless inhabitants of other planets who enjoy eternal beatitude. Hence despite the fact that most of humanity will suffer eternally, the amount of suffering in our universe may be relatively small.[55]

For Mendelssohn, Judaism's fundamental insight is that God's goodness involves God's concern for the happiness and perfection of every individual.[56] While Leibniz labels this view "a remnant of the old and somewhat discredited maxim, that all is made solely for man,"[57] Mendelssohn upholds this "discredited maxim" in an extreme way claiming that God's goodness implies that God treats every individual human being as an end in themselves of infinite value whose happiness and perfection can never be sacrificed for the benefit of

others.[58] For Mendelssohn, the only purpose of suffering is corrective, namely as a spur to the individual's own improvement, hence God will only let an individual suffer as long as it helps her improve. To this end, Mendelssohn cites the medieval Bible commentator Ibn Ezra who notes that punishment itself is also "a quality of God's infinite love."[59] Eternal punishment is unacceptable as a person suffering eternally cannot reach a higher level of perfection. For perfection involves happiness, which requires the cessation of suffering.[60]

Mendelssohn harshly criticizes Leibniz's various attempts to defend eternal punishment. Mendelssohn's view that God deems the happiness of every individual an end in itself leads him to reject Leibniz's doctrine that a wicked person could be made to suffer for the enjoyment of the righteous.[61] For Mendelssohn, Leibniz's claim that there exist infinite numbers of other beings whose blessedness outweighs the suffering of the majority of mankind is a deus ex machina dreamed up in order to defend a Christian theological dogma that contains "insoluble difficulties."[62] Similarly, the notion that certain very grave sins merit eternal punishment is incoherent. For Mendelssohn, eternal punishment could only be appropriate where sin is infinite. Sin can be infinite in two ways either in terms of its quantity, that is, the number of sins committed, or in terms of quality, that is, the degree of honor of the offended party.[63] Given that human beings are finite, the number of their sins can only be finite,[64] and since God is perfectly self-sufficient, His honor can never be offended by human sin.[65] God's being offended by human actions is as ridiculous as a mother feeling affronted because her baby bites her breast while seeking nourishment.[66] God needs nothing from us—His purpose in creating the world is to promote human happiness and perfection.[67]

For Mendelssohn, a proper understanding of God leads to a recognition of the intimate connection between religion and happiness. While the classical Epicurean criticizes religion for threatening human happiness by putting people in constant fear of arbitrary divine retribution, Mendelssohn's emphasis on divine goodness and his attack on eternal punishment clears the way for religious conviction to be a means for people to enjoy happiness in this world.[68] Since an omnipotent, all-good God seeks our happiness and the development of our faculties, belief in divine providence instills confidence that no matter how bad things seem, things are happening for our benefit. This frees us from fear and allows us to feel at home in the world.[69] Furthermore, Mendelssohn claims that one of the greatest obstacles to happiness is the fear of death whose thought can "poison the enjoyment of life"[70] unless one goes through life in a "stupor [*Betäubung*]," never contemplating death.[71] Once eternal punishment is rejected, belief in the immortality of the soul allows us to live in constant awareness of our mortality while avoiding the despair that necessarily accompanies

the thought of the perpetual possibility of death.[72] For this reason, Mendelssohn calls his religious views, "quite Epicurean."[73]

For Mendelssohn, it is not just modern enlightened metaphysics, which is beneficial, but also enlightened politics. As an enlightened absolutist monarch, Frederick the Great saw as his chief task promoting the happiness of his subjects by centralizing and rationalizing power. Previously, Prussian society had been organized into semiautonomous estates each with its own set of rights and responsibilities. Frederick sought to codify a single set of laws under which every citizen would stand as an equal.

This orientation had major potential consequences for Prussian Jewry. At the turn of the eighteenth century, Prussian Jews lived as an estate with a sui generis set of laws that in practice involved almost all of the duties and none of the benefits of citizenship.[74] Their right to settlement was severely limited; they were excluded from townsmen trades and from holding public office; and they were required to pay various "extraordinary" taxes.[75] Under Frederick's enlightened absolutism, the autonomous structure of Jewish communal authority was gradually weakening as the Prussian authorities increasingly infringed on Jewish communal affairs.[76] In theory, this decline in Jewish communal authority should have been replaced with an amelioration of the Jews' social and political standing in Prussia with them being placed on an increasingly even plane with Christians. Under Frederick, however, this did not happen. Not only was there was no relief from the "Jew" policies of his predecessors, under Frederick these laws became more oppressive. In 1748, Frederick passed an ordinance prohibiting Jews from shaving their beards, and in 1750 he issued the "General-Privilegium," in which he reaffirmed and expanded medieval restrictions on Jews such as prohibiting Jews from engaging in manual trades.[77]

While these Jew policies contradicted Frederick's commitment to a universal law code, Frederick justified excluding Jews from civil equality by recourse to prevalent anti-Jewish prejudices. An influential expression of these prejudices was found in Johann Eisenmenger's widely read 1711 calumny *Judaism Unmasked* (*Entdecktes Judenthum*).[78] Eisenmenger quoted rabbinic law to show that Jews were immoral people whose laws permitted them to rob, cheat, and even kill Christians and he quoted a number of fantastic Talmudic stories to show that the Jews were a backward, uncultured, and superstitious people.[79] Relying on such stereotypes, Frederick reasoned that extending civil equality to Jews would hinder his task of securing the happiness of his subjects. Given the Jews' stubborn adherence to their irrational traditions and lack of openness to enlightened culture they would never fully integrate into Prussian society and be loyal to the state. Extending civil equality would encourage

greater interactions between Jews and Christians, which would result in giving Jews more opportunity to spread their superstitions and harm their Christian neighbors.[80]

Still, there were pockets of more positive Jewish feeling in Prussia. In 1746, Christian Gellert published his play *Swedish Countess*, which presented a positive view of a Polish Jew, and in 1749 Gotthold Lessing published *The Jews* (*Die Juden*), which challenged prevailing stereotypes by depicting a Jewish protagonist who was a man of noble virtue while the Christian protagonist was a rogue and bigot.[81]

From early in his career, Mendelssohn sought to promote a positive public perception of Jews among Christians. When in 1754 Johann David Michaelis, a great Orientalist and professor at Göttingen, wrote a scathing review of Lessing's *The Jews* deriding the improbability of its Jewish hero,[82] Mendelssohn wrote an open letter to Gumpertz in which he complained about the effrontery of one who would deny that an entire nation could produce even a single "noble, sublime spirit."[83] Mendelssohn pointed to the addressee of his letter, Gumpertz himself, as a counter-example, noting that "whoever knows you better, dearest friend, and knows how to appreciate your talents, can lack no example of how easily happy spirits, without model and education, soar aloft, perfect their invaluable talents, better heart and mind, and can rise to the ranks of the greatest men."[84]

From recent work by Gad Freudenthal, it appears that Gumpertz's importance for Mendelssohn exceeded his being a model of Jewish virtue. While some scholars see Christian Dohm's 1780 treatise "On the Civil Improvement of the Jews" as the first call for improving Jewish civil rights in Prussia,[85] Freudenthal has shown that Gumpertz actually deserves this honor.[86] In his anonymous 1753 treatise, *Writing of a Jew to a Philosopher with a Response (Schreiben eines Juden an einen Philosophen nebst der Antwort*), Gumpertz discussed many of the reasons commonly given for hating the Jews including their cultural backwardness, parochialism, and bad morals. Opposing Frederick's view that these traits were innate to Jews, Gumpertz argued that Jews and Christians "possess…the same capacities of body and mind."[87] The source of these negative traits was Christian oppression, which imbued Jews with hatred for Christians and made them suspicious of German culture thereby inclining them to parochialism and superstition. For Gumpertz, the proper reaction to Jewish moral and cultural failings was not to exclude Jews from civil rights, which only entrenched the Jews' negative traits, but rather extending toleration to them. Only in this way would these negative traits disappear.[88]

Mendelssohn's first German work, *The Philosophical Dialogues* (henceforth: *PD*), was published a year after the appearance of Gumpertz's treatise. While

PD does not discuss the political condition of the Jews overtly, I would suggest that this was a major subtext of the work. As in the letter to Gumpertz, Mendelssohn seeks a model of a virtuous, educated Jew, but this time he seeks one better known than Gumpertz. Mendelssohn makes a surprising choice—Baruch Spinoza.

If Maimonides' *Guide* was the greatest work by a medieval Jewish philosopher, Spinoza's *Ethics* was the greatest work by a modern Jewish philosopher. Having learned Latin, Mendelssohn was able to engage this difficult work and by 1753 had studied it intensively.[89] We do not know what expectations Mendelssohn brought to this study, but he was clearly attracted to Spinoza. Part of the reason was surely that Spinoza was much more famous among Christians than Maimonides. Indeed, Leibniz had visited Spinoza twice and vigorously sought to obtain a copy of the then unpublished *Ethics*. But Spinoza's metaphysics presented a much deeper challenge to Mendelssohn's religious beliefs than Maimonides' metaphysics ever did. While Maimonides' position on providential theism was ambivalent, Spinoza's position was openly hostile. Maimonides hedged about creation, but Spinoza openly denied it.[90] Maimonides affirmed general providence and individual providence for those with intellect, but Spinoza argued that providence was an imaginative fantasy.[91] While Maimonides' equivocated about miracles, not only did Spinoza openly deny the possibility of miracles, he had the audacity to claim that this was the Bible's position as well.[92] While Maimonides preserved divine transcendence, Spinoza rejected it identifying God with nature.[93] And Spinoza's affirmation of the immortality of the individual soul was even more doubtful than Maimonides'.[94] In light of this, it is not surprising that Lessing remarked that Mendelssohn sought "to be a second Spinoza, but without his errors."[95]

Spinoza's heterodoxy was well known within the Jewish community on account of the famous excommunication writ [*Herem*] that had been promulgated against him. But it was likewise ingrained in the popular Christian perception of Spinoza in Mendelssohn's time. In his *Freydenker-Lexicon* of 1759, J. A. Trinius listed 159 popular refutations of Spinoza.[96] Christian Kortholt's widely read and quoted *On the Three Great Traitors* (1701) is typical of the venom with which Spinoza was attacked:

> May the last named [i.e., Spinoza] be attacked by itch! But who is he? It is *Benedictus* [literally "the blessed"] *Spinoza*, who should rather be called *Maledictus* [literally "the cursed"], because the earth, which by divine curse is filled with thorns (latin- *spinosa*), has produced no more accursed man, no man more thorny in his works. He was at first a Jew, but was then expelled from the synagogue because of the

> monstrous opinions, which he uttered concerning Judaism, and finally he has confessed himself to belong to the Christians, I know not through what artifices and deceptions . . . One can see here the extremely infamous teachings of the wicked man- teachings that deserve the flames of hell . . . And yet this accursed hypocrite is so shameless, so audacious, that he dares assert that he has taught nothing which can injure piety, good morals, and the orthodox training of youth.[97]

Spinoza was routinely cast as the "arch-atheist" who was ushering in a new period of unbelief.[98] Writers who could see even Thomas Hobbes and Herbert of Cherbury as theists portrayed Spinoza as a malicious, deceptive atheist. The centrality of God in Spinoza's metaphysics was routinely viewed as a way Spinoza sought to dupe people into thinking he was a believer.[99] Popular German refutations included Christoph Wittich's *Anti-Spinoza* (1690) and Friedrich Ernst Kettner's *Concerning the Two Imposters Benedict Spinoza and Balthasar Bekkero* (1694).

There was, however, another important voice, which while rejecting Spinoza's philosophical views, defended his personal moral character. As late as 1787, Johann Gottfried Herder noted that, "the conception, which is now held of him [i.e. Spinoza] was established for the mass of people by Pierre Bayle."[100] Bayle's article on Spinoza appeared in his *Historical and Critical Dictionary,* which ran to five editions during the eighteenth century, was translated into German between 1741 and 1744, and was standard reading for students in German universities.[101] Bayle had no use for Spinoza's philosophical views calling the *Ethics*, "the most monstrous hypothesis that could be imagined, the most absurd, and the most diametrically opposed to the most evident notions of our mind."[102] But following Spinoza's biographer Jean Maximilien Lucas, Bayle defended Spinoza's moral character noting that he was "a great enemy of dissimulation." According to Bayle, those who knew Spinoza, "all agree that he was sociable, affable, honest, obliging, and of a well-ordered morality."[103] Spinoza was no voluptuary, seeking to indulge his passions. Rather, he was a modest, temperate person so committed to truth that he renounced worldliness to better carry out that search.[104]

Reflecting on his early career, Mendelssohn notes that he had avoided *explicitly* defending Jews out of fear that this kind of advocacy would lead to religious polemics, which he found distasteful and useless.[105] Rather, he sought to build a bridge between Jews and Christians by "discussing truths which are equally important to all religions."[106] But Mendelssohn notes that there was one way in which he sought to "counter the scornful attitude that was

[commonly] held of Jews" namely by showing the Jews' capacity for virtue.[107] In Mendelssohn's discussion of Spinoza in *PD*, we see both elements of Mendelssohn's strategy at work.

According to an anecdote recounted by Mendelssohn's son Joseph, Lessing had *PD* published without Mendelssohn's knowledge.[108] In 1753, Gumpertz had introduced Mendelssohn to Lessing.[109] Despite their vastly different backgrounds they immediately struck up a friendship largely centered on their mutual embrace of enlightened theology and principles of religious toleration.[110] In 1754, Lessing showed Mendelssohn *The Moralists, or a Philosophical Rhapsody* (1709) by the Third Earl of Shaftesbury. When Mendelssohn returned the book to Lessing, Lessing asked him how he liked it. Mendelssohn responded that while he liked it, he could have written that sort of book himself. Lessing challenged Mendelssohn to do so and Mendelssohn obliged producing *PD*, which stylistically is clearly modeled on *The Moralists*. Several months later, Mendelssohn asked Lessing if he had read his essay and to his astonishment, Lessing presented Mendelssohn with a printed copy of *PD*.[111] Of the four dialogues in *PD*, the first two center on Spinoza. Neophil urges a reappraisal of Spinoza, while Philopon is skeptical.

Mendelssohn's treatment of Spinoza in *PD* is also related to another important subtext of the work, namely German patriotism. Historians have noted that by the middle of the eighteenth century, there was a crisis of national identity in the German principalities. This was in part due to the fact that in contrast to England and France, which had strong centralized governments which provided a sense of unified national identity, Germany was divided into some 300 principalities. It was said that at the time German-speakers would use the term "*Vaterland*" to refer to their particular dutchy while referring to everywhere else (including other German principates) as "*Ausland*."[112]

The crisis of national identity was particularly acute in Prussia, where Friedrich disdained German language and culture and instead sought to spread French influence. Thus in reestablishing the Berlin Academy of Sciences, Frederick appointed a French Newtonian, Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, to head the academy, and sought to limit the prominence of German Leibnizians.[113] In a poignant anecdote mentioned by the French Professor of Literature Dieudonné Thiébault who had been invited by Frederick to serve in the Berlin Academy, Thiébault recalls a conversation with Frederick upon his arrival in Berlin. When asked whether he knew German, Thiébault replied that while he did not, he hoped to master it in short time, Frederick reportedly replied, "You are fortunate in your ignorance. Give me your word that you will not learn our language."[114]

Mendelssohn was outraged by Frederick's disdain for German language and culture. While generally respectful of the king, in a review of Frederick's *Poésies Diverses*, Mendelssohn scolded Frederick decrying "the damage to our mother tongue that has been wrought by the prince's having made French so prevalent."[115] In numerous belletristic writings, Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Friedrich Nicolai sought to reinvigorate the German language, and in *PD* Mendelssohn presents a vision of German national identity.[116] It is a cosmopolitan, inclusive vision, whose models are the German metaphysicians Leibniz and Wolff. Leibniz and Wolff's fair-mindedness is reflected in their taking seriously Spinoza's ideas, which influenced them greatly.[117]

In the first dialogue, Mendelssohn notes that in the past metaphysics has been "much beloved" among Germans, "a people that treasures accurate thinking more than freethinking."[118] But according to Mendelssohn, Germany's august national tradition has recently come under attack. Even in Germany, "the philosophical dilettante has gotten the upper hand,"[119] and metaphysics, "the former queen of the sciences . . . has sunk so low in the present day."[120] The reason for this is the German "slavish aping" of the French who "made the stylishness of manners [*Artigkeit der Sitten*] its sole concern and made a practice of heaping the most biting sarcasm [*spöttichen Witz*] on those who indulged in profound meditations."[121] In a word, Germans have lost all self respect and are gladly willing to "give away half their intellect if the French would only concede to them that they know how to live."[122]

In a key text in the second dialogue, Neophil praises "Leibniz, Wolff, and their various successors" for their advances in philosophy. But Neophil cautions, "not to claim more for oneself than is right" for "someone other than a German" indeed, "someone other than a Christian, namely Spinoza participated immensely in the bettering of philosophy." To be sure, Spinoza espoused doctrines, which could be used to justify moral depravity, but this was not because Spinoza sought to indulge perverse desires. For following Bayle, Mendelssohn claims that Spinoza personally lived according to highest ethical standards. Spinoza's errors were purely intellectual—"in the labyrinth of his meditations he went astray."[123] But these errors served an important function as a necessary step along the path to truth. Most notably, Spinoza made possible the transition from mistaken Cartesianism to Leibnizianism by giving Leibniz the critical insights necessary for developing one of his most important doctrines, preestablished harmony. In doing so, however, Spinoza "plunge[d] into the monstrous abyss [*ungeheuren Abgrund*] between [Descartes and Leibniz]," and so became "a sacrifice [*Opfer*] for the human intellect, but one that deserves to be decorated with flowers"[124]

For Mendelssohn, while Leibniz is a model of accurate Germanic thinking, which he executes in a humanistic, cosmopolitan spirit even Leibniz was not above distancing himself from Spinoza. Leibniz is famous for his "grand manner of philosophizing" in which he seeks to discover the element of truth underlying the most diverse theological and philosophical systems.[125] But pointedly, in a 1698 letter to Bayle where Leibniz describes how his doctrine of preestablished harmony comprises elements of Pythagoras, Plato, Parmenides, Plotinus, Stoicism, Aristotle, Scholasticism, Democritus and Kabbalah, and where he laments that "our greatest failure has been the sectarian spirit [*esprit de secte*], which imposes limits upon itself by spurning others" not only does Leibniz not acknowledge his debt to Spinoza, he specifically denies that Spinoza contributed to preestablished harmony.[126] In *PD*, Mendelssohn claims that Leibniz's reason for not acknowledging his debt to Spinoza was caution at being associated with the heretic Spinoza for Leibniz "was not merely the most greatest, but also the most careful philosopher."[127]

In light of this slight, Mendelssohn remarks how "unjust is the irreconcilable hatred of scholars towards someone so unfortunate" and how "[Spinoza's] fate is to be pitied." But in making this complaint, I would suggest that it is not just Spinoza that Mendelssohn is concerned for, but that Spinoza stands as a symbol for the way that Christians generally malign Jews as being incapable of rational inquiry. In pointing to Spinoza's importance for the development of Leibnizian philosophy, Mendelssohn seeks to correct these prejudices and demonstrate the Jews' capacity for participating in the collaborative effort of developing scientific and cultural knowledge.[128] In these ways, Jews can contribute to Frederick's goal of promoting the happiness and perfection of his subjects, which justifies their eligibility to be full members of enlightened Prussian society. In Mendelssohn's tolerant, cosmopolitan vision of German national identity, Jews have a natural place.

While for Mendelssohn Spinoza contributed to Leibnizianism in a number of ways, I will focus on Mendelssohn's most important claim namely Spinoza's contribution to Leibniz's doctrine of preestablished harmony.[129] As conceived by Mendelssohn, preestablished harmony can be understood as Leibniz's solution to the mind-body problem as formulated by René Descartes, but not adequately resolved by him. For Descartes, the mind and body are such different substances that it is difficult to understand how they interact. Descartes' solution to this problem ("the way of influence" as Leibniz calls it) is to claim that there is a point of contact between the two substances in a special part of the brain. This solution was, however, widely regarded as highly unsatisfactory and some of Descartes' students sought to resolve the problem differently. One of the most famous solutions was Nicolas Malebranche's occasionalism.[130] For

Malebranche, God continually creates anew the mind and body in such a way that mind and body appear to interact, although this is not actually the case. Leibniz, however, cannot accept this solution, as it seems to do away with natural causality. His own novel solution is preestablished harmony, which he outlines in his famous analogy of the two clocks. Imagine an individual's mind and body as two clocks that each operate according to their own discrete set of causes, but which appear to interact because the clockmaker sets them up such that act in harmony with one another.[131] In this way, Leibniz is able to preserve natural causality while rejecting the idea that there can be a causal relationship between such different substances as mind and body.

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza offers his own solution to the mind-body problem, which is sometimes called "psycho-physical parallelism."[132] God or substance has (at least) two distinct attributes, thought and extension. The modes of each attribute can only be understood through the causal action of other modes of the same attribute. In other words, modes of extension are explained causally through other modes of extension and modes of thought are explained causally through other modes of thought. As regards human beings, the modes of an individual's mind (i.e. ideas) are explained through the causal action of ideas, while the modes of an individual's body are explained through the causal action of bodies. Hence any interaction between mind and body is only apparent.[133]

According to Mendelssohn, Leibniz appropriated Spinoza's idea that mind and body each unfold according to a discrete set of causes and only *appear* to interact. Leibniz, however, corrected Spinoza's errors in three ways. First, while Spinoza denied final causality and so saw the mind as unfolding according to efficient mental causes, Leibniz recognized that the mind operates according to final causes, striving for perfection.[134] Second, while Spinoza was a monist who denied that the individual human being is a substance, Leibniz was a pluralist who argued for the existence of individual substances, which he called "monads."[135] Finally, while Spinoza's psycho-physical parallelism roots the relation between finite minds and bodies in metaphysical necessity, according to Leibniz, God freely chooses to ordain the coincidence between finite minds and bodies according to final causes, selecting this world as the best possible world.[136]

In a letter from April 17, 1763, Lessing challenges Mendelssohn's claim of Spinoza's influence on Leibniz. Lessing argues that it is incorrect for Mendelssohn to ascribe a doctrine of harmony between mind and body to Spinoza since for Spinoza there is only a single substance. Lessing pointedly asks, "what kind of harmony can occur in a single substance? At most that which a thing has with itself." But since Leibniz wishes to solve the puzzle of how two *distinct* things, mind and body, are related, Spinoza could provide him

no guidance.[137] In his response of May 1763, Mendelssohn argues that Spinoza's monism is not relevant since Spinoza claims that the modes of thought and the modes of extension cannot be understood causally in terms of one another.[138] To clarify his point, Mendelssohn enumerates four features of Spinoza's psycho-physical parallelism that Leibniz appropriated for preestablished harmony: (a) extension and thought are conceptually distinct from one another; (b) thoughts can never be causes of changes in extended things and extended things can never be causes of changes in thought; (c) modes of thought always change through other modes of thought and modes of extension always change through modes of extension; (d) the series of extended things and the series of thinking things harmonize with one another.[139] Mendelssohn stresses that he never sought to claim that psycho-physical parallelism was *identical* with preestablished harmony. Recalling his argument that Spinoza, while in error, made possible the transition from Cartesianism to Leibnizianism, Mendelssohn notes that his claim was merely that "Leibniz brought this hypothesis [i.e. psycho-physical parallelism] into his system" which means that "he made use of all the advantages that this system afforded him."[140]

But Mendelssohn now presses the connection between Spinoza and Leibniz further than he had in *PD*. While Lessing claims that one cannot truly speak of "harmony" between mind and body for Spinoza since Spinoza considers mind and body as modes of the same substance, Mendelssohn notes that Leibniz himself regarded mind and body as identical substances. For according to Leibniz, bodies are well-founded phenomena, mere appearances of the monads, which are mental entities.[141] To be sure, there is an important difference between Spinoza and Leibniz insofar as Spinoza is a metaphysical monist and Leibniz is a metaphysical pluralist. But since a particular body is merely the appearance of a particular mind for Leibniz, there is no great difference between Leibniz's account of the harmony between mind and body and Spinoza's.[142]

While in *PD*, Mendelssohn uses a Jew alienated from Judaism to demonstrate the Jews' capacity to fully participate in enlightened Prussian society, this leaves open the possible claim that the only way for a Jew to attain enlightenment and culture is to estrange himself from the practice of Judaism. Later in his career Mendelssohn addresses this point, which is the subject of the next chapter.

2

Philosophy and Law

Shaping Judaism for the Modern World

Mendelssohn's *PD* was a youthful work concerned with specific problems in Leibnizian philosophy, and as such its readership was rather limited. It was only in the 1760s that Mendelssohn wrote essays that reached a larger audience and propelled him to international fame. Mendelssohn's celebrity in the Republic of Letters was largely due to two publications. The first was his 1763 essay written in response to the Berlin Academy's question whether or not one could attain the same certainty in metaphysics and ethics as in mathematics. Mendelssohn's submission entitled "Treatise on Evidence in the Metaphysical Sciences" won first prize, while Immanuel Kant's entry placed second. For our purposes, this essay is significant because in it Mendelssohn sets forth key elements of his rational theology including proofs for God's existence.

In the third part of the essay, Mendelssohn treats the ontological and teleological proofs for God's existence. He argues that the most philosophically sound proofs for God's existence are the ontological proofs.[1] But while less philosophically convincing, the teleological proofs are no less important to Mendelssohn. For while the ontological proofs are highly abstract and theoretical, the teleological proofs are vivid and have the ability to move people emotionally. This is significant as Mendelssohn thinks that knowledge of metaphysical truth is needed not only to perfect the intellect, but also to help people achieve ethical and aesthetic perfection. As such, this knowledge should not just be known abstractly, but should also be experienced in a lived, emotionally stirring way.[2]

While the so-called "Prize Essay" introduced Mendelssohn to the wider reading public, his renown was firmly established by his 1767 *Phädon*, which was a reworking of Plato's *Phaedo*. While in the "Prize Essay" Mendelssohn defends rational knowledge of God, *Phädon* contains another component of Mendelssohn's defense of natural religion, namely his proofs for the immortality of the soul. The book was an international best seller running into four editions and within a decade it was translated into six languages—French (two different translations), English, Italian, Dutch, Danish, and Russian.[3] Mendelssohn became a philosophical star and earned the epithet the "German Socrates." At the same time as he was achieving international fame for his German philosophical and literary works, Mendelssohn was emerging as a respected figure in elite rabbinic circles. He corresponded with leading rabbis of his day including Jacob Emden (1697–1776) and Jonathan Eibeschütz (1690–1764) who regarded him as a junior colleague. Following a visit to Eibeschütz in 1761, Eibeschütz praised Mendelssohn as one "complete in knowledge of Torah, Gemara, and Talmudic reasoning (*Sevara*)."[4]

Mendelssohn's "Prize Essay" aroused the attention of the Swiss deacon Johann Caspar Lavater. Lavater was a mixture of contradictory tendencies not uncommon at the time. He was both a religious enthusiast inclined to mysticism and attracted to enlightened rational theology. In 1763, Lavater paid Mendelssohn a visit in the silk factory where Mendelssohn worked. In course of their conversation, Lavater sought the Jewish philosopher's opinion of Christianity. Mendelssohn was disinclined to speak about Christianity to avoid giving offense to either Jews or Christians and so he tried to change the subject. But pressed by Lavater Mendelssohn told Lavater that he admired Jesus' moral character, though this respect depended on Jesus not having considered himself as divine.[5] Writing to a friend after the visit, Lavater praised Mendelssohn as a "brilliant metaphysician" and a "radiant soul."[6] But in line with Christian prejudices about Jews, Lavater's high opinion of Mendelssohn led him to conclude that such an intelligent, ethical person could not truly be a Jew, but rather must be a Christian at heart. The fact that Mendelssohn expressed a positive view of Jesus led Lavater to believe that Mendelssohn was well-disposed to the idea of converting to Christianity. This idea eventually took on cosmic proportions with Lavater concocting the chiliastic fantasy that if Mendelssohn could be persuaded to convert, this would precipitate a wide-scale conversion of Jews, which would herald the second coming of Christ. In 1769, having read *Palingenesis*, a defense of Christianity by the Swiss scientist and philosopher Charles Bonnet, Lavater decided to take action. He translated parts of the work into German and dedicated it to Mendelssohn. Recounting Mendelssohn's admiration for the moral character of Jesus, Lavater challenged Mendelssohn to publicly refute Bonnet's

arguments or "do what prudence, love of truth, and honesty command—what *Socrates* would have done if he had read this work and found it irrefutable," that is, convert. Mendelssohn's response was his famous open Letter to Lavater in which for the first time Mendelssohn explained his reasons for adhering to Judaism rather than to Christianity. The controversy with Lavater proved extremely taxing to Mendelssohn. Toward the end of it, he developed the first signs of a "strange" nervous ailment, which plagued him for the rest of his life.[7] This caused him to curtail his philosophical pursuits, and he turned his energies to the Bible, which culminated in his German translation of the Psalms and his landmark German translation and Hebrew commentary on the Pentateuch formally titled *Sefer Netivot Hashalom* (literally "Book of the Paths of Peace"), but informally known as the *Bi'ur* (literally "Elucidation").[8]

In his influential essay "Mendelssohn's Concept of Judaism," Fritz Bamberger argues that Mendelssohn only developed his "Jewish position" from polemical considerations, the first impetus being Lavater's challenge.[9] This claim must be qualified. Mendelssohn wrote extensively in Hebrew prior to 1769. These early writings include his 1763 commentary on Maimonides' *Logical Terms*; *Kohelet Mussar*, a moral weekly that among other things calls for a renewal of the study of Hebrew (1754); and Mendelssohn's commentary on *Ecclesiastes* a large part of which is devoted to discussing divine providence and the immortality of the soul (1768).[10]

In these early writings Mendelssohn seeks to renew Jewish culture by cultivating study of the Hebrew language and stressing universal metaphysical ideas in Hebrew idiom. This effort comes in response to what Mendelssohn perceives as the Jews' neglect of classical Hebrew culture, which he laments as "the discarding of the crown and pride of their glory."[11] Mendelssohn describes Hebrew as "the most perfect of all languages," the language through which God spoke to the prophets and formed the world. In contrast to other languages which are the product of human agreement and whose words do not conform to the nature of things but are merely used conventionally, Hebrew is a divine language created by God whose words conform to the very nature of the object signified.[12] Mendelssohn's attempt to stimulate appreciation of classical Hebrew culture parallels his attempts to define and strengthen German culture. For as we have seen, in light of the Germans' neglect of their national culture, Mendelssohn seeks to renew German culture by praising the German language, and celebrating German rationalist metaphysics.[13]

This shows that Mendelssohn developed a "Jewish position" prior to the Lavater controversy. Furthermore, while it is true that in his early Hebrew writings Mendelssohn did not present the grounds for his commitment to Judaism, he had long reflected about this. The only reason that he did not

publicly explain his adherence to Judaism was that this would have required presenting his reasons for preferring Judaism over Christianity and, as a tolerated Jew, Mendelssohn sought to avoid religious polemics.[14] So in claiming that Mendelssohn did not articulate a Jewish position prior to the Lavater controversy, Bamberger is correct only in the limited sense that Lavater's challenge first induced Mendelssohn to *publicly* state the reasons for his preferring Judaism to Christianity. While Lavater's challenge was the first impetus for Mendelssohn openly philosophizing about Judaism, Mendelssohn's fullest account and defense of Judaism occurs in his 1783 *Jerusalem*.

Jerusalem emerged out of Mendelssohn's efforts to promote Jewish civil rights. In 1781, on reports of a vicious hate campaign being waged against the Jews of Alsace, Mendelssohn asked the civil servant Christian Wilhelm Dohm to write a tract in defense of the Alsatian Jews. Dohm obliged and in September 1781 published his *On the Improvement of the Civil Status of the Jews* in which he called for full citizenship and equality for Jews.[15] Dohm's book sparked a vehement debate in which many otherwise enlightened thinkers rejected Dohm's call for Jewish equality.[16] Mendelssohn entered the fray by publishing a translation of Menassah ben Israel's 1656 *Vindication of the Jews*, which Menasseh had written to convince Oliver Cromwell to revoke the 1290 edict expelling the Jews from England. Mendelssohn wrote a preface to the translation in which he criticized Christian anti-Jewish prejudice. At the same time, Mendelssohn lamented all forms of religious coercion including the use of excommunication whether by Christians or Jews.[17]

In 1783, Mendelssohn received an anonymous letter that scholars have determined was written by the journalist August Friedrich Cranz, which approved of Mendelssohn's disavowal of coercive religious power. But Cranz saw this disavowal as contradicting Mendelssohn's public profession of Judaism. For Cranz, Mendelssohn's enlightened view of religion seemed closer to Christianity than to Judaism and so Cranz challenged Mendelssohn to explain his reasons for adhering to Judaism. While Cranz's letter was the primary impetus for Mendelssohn's writing *Jerusalem*,[18] scholars have noted that much of *Jerusalem* is carried out in implicit conversation with a Spinozistic analysis of Judaism.[19] As Spinoza's interpretation of Judaism draws heavily on Maimonides' teachings, which Mendelssohn knew so well, it is useful to compare Mendelssohn's concept of Judaism with both Maimonides' and Spinoza's.[20] Putting Mendelssohn in conversation with Maimonides and Spinoza will also help me clarify my differences with Arkush and Sorkin.

Maimonides

For Maimonides, the authority of halakha is never in serious doubt.[21] Rather than seeking to justify the authority of halakha for one who does not feel bound

to it, Maimonides generally addresses the Jew who accepts its authority, but is perplexed by the apparent contradiction between the view that the goal of life is to worship God by obeying halakha and the Aristotelian view that cultivating intellectual perfection constitutes the ultimate purpose of life. One of Maimonides' aims in the *Guide* is to show how these two perspectives can be reconciled.[22]

Maimonides accepts the Aristotelian view that intellectual perfection is the final goal of life, and he accepts Aristotle's virtue ethics according to which moral virtues are character traits that are in the mean between two extremes both of which are vices. For example, while the extremes of licentiousness and insensitivity to pleasure are vices, temperance is a virtue. On a social-political level, moral virtue helps sustain a stable polity as vice presents a danger to the social order—for Maimonides greed is not good. On an individual level, moral virtue gives one the inner emotional peace needed for contemplation while the vices impede contemplation.[23] So, for example, both the gluttonous person who is obsessed with food and the ascetic who is focused on self-denial are distracted from contemplation. In contrast, the person with temperate desires has the psychological freedom to pursue philosophical knowledge of God. But while morality plays a critical role in achieving the ultimate aim of life, it cannot be the final good itself as it is not part of intellectual perfection.[24] For the moral law is not a categorical demand of reason, but rather a convention (*mefursam*), which individuals and societies adhere to as a hypothetical imperative, that is, because of its usefulness in achieving other ends.[25]

Maimonides reconciles obedience to halakha with the goal of achieving intellectual perfection by claiming that halakha is the most perfect law enabling individuals to achieve knowledge of God, which is the highest form of intellectual perfection and the ultimate expression of divine worship. Maimonides claims that a human law seeks solely to promote political well-being while a divine law seeks to promote both political well-being and intellectual perfection.[26] Thus, Greco-Roman laws (*nomoi*), which are only focused on political stability are human laws, while halakha is a divine law insofar as it promotes social order, bodily health, and proper metaphysical beliefs in recognition that these must precede intellectual knowledge of God.[27] To this end, halakha includes both civil and ritual laws. Civil laws such as prohibitions on murder and theft promote political stability, while the ritual laws serve multiple functions. First, ritual laws promote social order by fostering a sense of unity and patriotism among the people. Maimonides notes that people naturally have different temperaments. Left to their natural selves they would be alienated from one another. Halakhic rituals promote a sense of fraternity as inhabitants identify with one another through their obedience to common rituals particular to their polity. Second, many rituals promote physical health. For example, Maimonides

claims that one reason that halakha forbids eating pork is because it is an unhealthy food.[28] Third, rituals help instill correct beliefs about God by opposing the practices of idolaters. Thus Maimonides surmises that the reason for the biblical prohibition of cooking a kid in its mother's milk is that this was a common pagan practice in biblical times.[29] By opposing pagan practices, halakha helps distance one from mistaken metaphysical beliefs. Fourth, rituals inculcate moral virtue. For example, by prohibiting eating certain foods the laws of kashrut help the individual tame their natural passions, which generally tend toward gluttony.[30] Given that halakha is the most perfect law creating the conditions for the cultivation of knowledge of God, it can never be superseded, and it is in virtue of having this law code that the Jews are chosen above other nations.[31]

There is an important tension in Maimonides' approach to the value of nonphilosophical metaphysical beliefs. On the one hand, Maimonides sees nonphilosophical beliefs as helping prepare one to acquire intellectual virtue by orienting the individual to accurate metaphysical beliefs, which can then be confirmed through reason. But Maimonides also recognizes that achieving true beliefs may first require imparting false ones. For example, Maimonides notes that people under the sway of the imagination cannot conceive of the existence of something incorporeal. For this reason, the Bible at times attributes physical organs to God. This is an educational tool aimed at instilling a sense of God's existence to those under the sway of the imagination. Once the existence of God has become firmly ingrained in mind of the individual, he is then instructed that God does not actually have a body and that the descriptions in the Bible that seem to indicate this are not to be taken literally. For ascribing corporeal characteristics to God constitutes a terrible form of idolatry.[32]

So, for example, in the Bible the Hebrew term "*ayin*" can mean both a physical eye as well as intellectual apprehension. When the simple person reads a description of God as having an "*ayin*" he will take this to refer to God having a physical eye. This helps establish God's existence in his mind as well as the idea that God is watching over all his actions. A person however, who has progressed in her understanding will understand the term as referring to God's intellectual apprehension.[33] At a still higher level, the philosopher will understand that even attributing intellect to God is misleading since God's understanding is so different than ours. For Maimonides, the deeper philosophical levels of interpretation are esoteric and are for the elite alone.[34] For, as we saw in the previous chapter, philosophical theology calls into question the popular understanding of theological concepts such as divine providence and the immortality of the soul.

Maimonides also notes that false beliefs are at times useful for maintaining social order. While the philosopher will act morally out of recognition that

such actions are most in accordance with a life devoted to reason,[35] the masses who do not value the *vita contemplativa* but rather live under the sway of their unruly passions will seek to evade their moral obligations whenever this will lead to sensual gratification. Fear of civil punishment serves as an important curb on immorality but given that no state can monitor its citizens all of the time, it is very useful if the citizens believe that there is an all-seeing God who exacts harsh punishment for disobedience. The most effective way to convey this is by portraying God as an angry, jealous, vengeful king despite this portrayal being false from the perspective of reason.[36]

Given that the Torah is a law that addresses both simple people and philosophers (as well as those in between), Maimonides suggests that it has several layers of meaning. The prophet's task is to lead people who are under the sway of imagination to intellectual perfection so the prophet must possess not only a perfected intellect but a perfected imagination as well.[37] Hence Maimonides understands prophetic visions such as Ezekiel's vision of the chariot or Isaiah's description of God sitting on a throne as allegorical presentations of metaphysical truths. The differences between various prophetic visions do not reflect different conceptions of God, but rather the particular imaginations of the prophets, which dispose them to represent identical metaphysical truths in different ways. The quintessential prophet is the prophetic legislator, a philosopher-king who not only presents metaphysical truth in imaginative form, but also lays down a system of law that creates a society, which enables the maximum number of individuals to attain knowledge of God.[38] As halakha is the ideal such law, the author of the law, Moses, must have been the most perfect prophet.

For Maimonides, the purpose of the state flows from our telos as human beings. As Maimonides deems intellectual perfection the highest human good, the purpose of the state is to provide a safe, stable environment in which people can cultivate intellectual perfection and happiness in various degrees. State religion is legitimate inasmuch as it helps preserve civil order and helps guide people to true metaphysical beliefs.

Maimonides thinks that knowledge of philosophical truth can only be attained as the result of free intellectual inquiry.[39] But given the political importance of belief in God and the fact that most people are not philosophers, Maimonides lays out thirteen roots of faith, which include minimally accurate beliefs about God that help orient individuals to truths about God as well as beliefs about Mosaic prophecy, and reward and punishment that are needed by most people in order to accept the authority of halakha.[40] Maimonides does not believe in freedom of expression. He considers the propagation of beliefs that undermine the authority of halakha to be dangerous to the community as

people are easily influenced by what others say. As such, Maimonides deems a person who denies any of the thirteen roots a heretic whom one is commanded to kill.[41] Similarly, since Jewish election is a function of Jews having the ideal code of law, a Jew who rejects any of the thirteen roots is no longer considered to be an Israelite.[42]

Given Maimonides' view that intellectual perfection constitutes the highest form of divine worship and that both Jews and Gentiles can perfect their intellects, it would seem that in an important respect, Maimonides puts Jews and Gentiles on equal religious footing. But Maimonides' legal writings present a different picture.[43] His "Laws of Kings" contain one of his most famous statements on the moral and religious standing of Gentiles. There is a Talmudic tradition of seven so-called Noahide laws obedience to which merits a Gentile immortality and the appellation, "Pious of the Nations of the World" (*Hasidei Umot Ha'olam*).[44] Commenting on this concept, Maimonides notes that a Gentile is only considered a "Pious of the Nations of the World" if she obeys the seven laws by acknowledging their grounding in Mosaic revelation, though if she obeys the laws without acknowledging their Mosaic source the individual still merits the appellation, "Wise of the Nations of the World." Another version of Maimonides' text reads that if a Gentile obeys the Noahide laws without accepting their grounding in Mosaic revelation, she is not even accounted among the "Wise of the Nations of the World." This version of the text was the one possessed by Spinoza and Mendelssohn and, as we will see, was a source of great concern to them.[45]

Spinoza

Maimonides provides an excellent context against which to understand Spinoza's approach to Judaism. Spinoza agrees with Maimonides, *mutatis mutandi*, that true human perfection is intellectual perfection, which involves knowledge of God.[46] And he agrees with Maimonides that few people will ever perfect their intellects.[47] But unlike Maimonides, Spinoza does not think that halakha aims to create a society in which individuals will attain proper knowledge of God in various degrees. Rather, for Spinoza the entire aim of halakha is political stability.[48]

Spinoza seeks to undermine Maimonides' view that the Torah prepares people for intellectual perfection through a historical-critical analysis of the Bible that focuses on its literal meaning based on a knowledge of Hebrew grammar and historical context. Spinoza concludes that the prophets were not philosophers who taught identical conceptions of God using different imagery,

but rather soothsayers with overactive imaginations who held widely divergent views of God that were often quite primitive.[49] So, for example, Moses, whom Maimonides considered the most perfect philosopher, had a crude conception of God conceiving Him as a jealous, corporeal being who dwells in the heavens, while Isaiah believed God to be a physical being who sits on a heavenly throne.[50] Not only does Spinoza regard Maimonides' attribution of philosophical truths to the Bible as historically naïve, he regards it as pernicious inasmuch as it constitutes an infringement on the authority of reason. Maimonides had allowed revelation to decide cases that reason could not such as whether or not the world was eternal.[51] For Spinoza, however, intellectual conviction can only come through free, rational inquiry. Given that the prophets did not have perfected intellects, it makes no sense to trust revelation to decide philosophical or scientific questions. Furthermore, while Maimonides accords reason the authority to reinterpret the Bible if biblical teachings contradict reason, Spinoza deems this an unnecessary burden. So, for example, the fact that the age of the world as determined by science contradicts the apparent meaning of the Bible should neither influence our thinking on scientific questions, nor trouble us in the least.[52]

Yet while the Bible does not aim to promote philosophical knowledge, lessons can be drawn from it for creating a society in which philosophy can flourish. For unlike Maimonides, who considers the ideal polity for philosophy one which promotes true belief, Spinoza believes that the ideal polity for philosophy is one that ensures political stability while leaving thought free. For Maimonides, philosophical knowledge is most easily achieved if we are oriented to true belief through tradition, which can then be confirmed through reason. Spinoza, however, is very distrustful of tradition, so the best way to know truth is by beginning with the contents of one's own mind.[53] While Spinoza rejects Maimonides' view concerning the metaphysical truth of the Bible, he follows Maimonides in stressing the moral-political teachings of the Bible. For Spinoza, these teachings made the Bible effective at ensuring a stable polity while leaving thought free.

Like Maimonides, Spinoza does not regard morality as an apodictic demand of reason.[54] And Spinoza follows Maimonides' understanding of the different ways that elite philosophers and the masses relate to moral obligation. Philosophers understand the conventional status of morality and so they embrace moral action as most consistent with a life lived according to reason while the masses who are dominated by their passions are tempted to evade moral obligations wherever this will allow them to better indulge their passions.[55] Since teachings such as that God commands the moral law and punishes those who disobey it are necessary for the masses to be good citizens, like

Maimonides, Spinoza regards certain minimal theological beliefs as of instrumental value in promoting moral obedience.[56] But since Spinoza rejects Maimonides' view that the Bible seeks to inculcate knowledge of metaphysical truth, Spinoza experiences no tension regarding whether or not the Bible's metaphysical teachings are true.[57]

This similarity and difference between Spinoza and Maimonides helps explain their different approaches to religious dogma. As we have seen, Maimonides presents thirteen roots of *Judaism*, which include both true teachings about God as well as beliefs needed to undergird the authority of halakha, which cannot be demonstrated. In contrast, Spinoza presents seven *universal* dogmas of faith that *all societies* must teach to ensure that the masses act morally but which have no necessary connection to truth and some of which Spinoza likely regarded as false.[58] These seven dogmas comprise Spinoza's natural theology. Unlike Maimonides, however, Spinoza holds that people must be free to hold and propagate their beliefs cannot be legitimately commanded.[59] So while Maimonides claims that a Jew who does not accept the thirteen principles is not an Israelite and can be killed, for Spinoza the dogmas of faith must be voluntarily accepted (though not necessarily for rational reasons) and the state has no right to coerce belief in them. Furthermore, as Spinoza holds that the prophets had widely different conceptions of God, he infers that every individual has the right to interpret the seven dogmas in whatever way will best move her to ethical obedience.[60]

Spinoza's understanding of the purpose of halakha informs his conception of prophecy. While Spinoza accepts Maimonides' view that the prophets had vivid imaginations and were ethical,[61] Spinoza's understanding of what these characteristics amounted to differs from Maimonides. For Maimonides, the prophets' perfected imagination means that they were able to express rational ideas in imaginative form. Spinoza, however, denies that the prophets were generally able to "keep their imagination under . . . control and restraint."[62] Similarly, while for Maimonides ethical virtue is a character trait in the mean, which prepares the individual for philosophical contemplation, Spinoza views the prophets as men of strong passions, who did not have moral virtue in Maimonides' sense and hence were generally not fitted for philosophical knowledge. Rather, prophetic morality consisted in their seeking to persuade people to obey to the moral law.

Spinoza's theory of political legitimation is based on the idea of the social contract. According to Spinoza, the social contract exists solely for the sake of "peace and security of life" which is needed in order for people to "develop their mental and physical faculties in safety." As Spinoza puts it, "the purpose of the state is in reality freedom."[63] For the masses, the purpose of moral obedience is

to promote social stability, and a good way of fostering moral obedience is through state religion. Spinoza emphasizes the need for a unique state religion as he is very concerned by the political fragmentation that threatens society if different forms of religious practice are tolerated as equal under the law.[64] Hence Spinoza argues that the sovereign must have control of the religious rituals practiced in the state, although it has no right to control religious belief. So while the state may and is indeed advised to impose a state religion, people are free to inwardly worship God and conceive God as they see fit.[65]

Spinoza's understanding of prophecy also informs his approach to biblical interpretation.[66] Since the prophets were generally not philosophers but merely moral and political leaders who only addressed the masses, Spinoza does not view the Bible as aiming at multiple audiences. Hence Spinoza rejects Maimonides' view that the Bible has an exoteric and esoteric meaning.[67] Spinoza is especially wary of any attempt to attribute secondary, nonliteral meanings to the Bible, which he thinks theologians exploit in order to control the people. For theologians claim that the Bible is filled with mysterious teachings about God that only they have access to. The people are then instructed to unquestioningly obey these theologians inasmuch as knowing these mysteries gives them privileged knowledge of the divine will. But this creates a great danger to the state as it sets up a competing locus of power that is independent of the sovereign.

But Spinoza's emphasis on the univocal meaning of the Bible does not mean that he discards esotericism altogether. Since he preserves Maimonides' sharp dichotomy between the masses and the philosophers and recognizes that the beliefs needed by the masses to act morally may be philosophically false, he holds that it is important for the elite philosophers not to disturb popular prejudices. Indeed, while most of the prophets were not philosophers and so did not have any reason to hide their true views, Spinoza does consider the Apostles (especially Paul) and Solomon to have been philosophically acute thinkers. For Spinoza, the Apostles sometimes accommodated their teachings to their audiences while hiding their true views.[68] The difference is that while for Maimonides the prophets encoded philosophical truths in their popular works by using equivocal terms, for Spinoza biblical works do not have multiple layers of meaning.

Spinoza's severing of politics from truth in his treatment of Judaism is reflected in his approach to what he calls the Jewish "ceremonies" (*caeremoniae*). As we have seen, for Maimonides, the ritual law has both the political purpose of fostering a sense of social unity and patriotism, as well as the epistemological function of promoting true metaphysical belief by extirpating idolatry. Spinoza, however, regards the "ceremonies" solely as a civil religion. The

prophet-legislator Moses promulgated Jewish ceremonial law with an acute understanding of the psychology of the ancient Hebrews. Recognizing that he led a people who had just left slavery and who were therefore used to having every action regulated, Moses presented the people with a law binding them to a new king, namely God who regulated almost every aspect of their lives through extensive ritual obligations.[69] In historicizing the ceremonial law, Spinoza echoes Maimonides' methodological approach. But while Maimonides continues to affirm the validity of the law even where its original context has been lost (e.g., where idolaters no longer flourish), Spinoza concludes that since the ritual laws were specific to the ancient Hebrew state, with the fall of this state these practices are now obsolete.[70] And adapting Maimonides' idea that many of the ceremonial laws were ordained to oppose idolaters, Spinoza claims that the only reason that the Jews persist in observing halakha is to oppose the Christians.[71] The significance of halakha is only in the political lessons that can be learned from it.

Like Maimonides, Spinoza considers Jewish chosenness to be a function of halakha. As we have seen, Maimonides views halakha as a timeless law, which creates the perfect conditions in which Jews can achieve intellectual perfection even without a state, and as such halakha remains binding and Jews who accept its authority continue to be chosen. In contrast, for Spinoza who holds that halakha aims at political flourishing alone, Jewish chosenness is a function of the fact that halakha once helped the Jews maintain a viable state.[72] In consequence, once the Jews lost their state, they ceased to be chosen.[73]

Not surprisingly, Spinoza strongly criticizes Maimonides' attitude to Gentiles. He derisively quotes Maimonides' statement that a Gentile is neither a "Pious of the Nations of the World" nor a "Wise of the Nations of the World" unless she observes the seven Noahide laws by acknowledging their grounding in Mosaic revelation. For Spinoza, morality is something required for every society and as such he calls it a "divine law" knowable to all independently of revelation. And he claims that obedience to the moral law merits one salvation.[74] Calling Maimonides' position the "authoritative" Jewish position, Spinoza cites Maimonides' position in order to mock Jewish parochialism.[75] Spinoza contrasts Judaism with the teachings of Christianity, which teaches salvation through the practice of universal ethics.[76]

Mendelssohn

While Mendelssohn accepts many concepts from Spinoza and Maimonides, his problems are unique and in consequence he makes selective use of their

thought, at times adapting their ideas and at times rejecting them. The social-political context in which Mendelssohn writes is decisive. As we have seen, under Frederick the Great, Mendelssohn saw the opportunity for greater political freedom for Jews and argued that Jews should not be legally determined by their religious affiliation, but rather by their humanity. Mendelssohn recognized, however, that the enlightened absolutist state was increasingly encroaching on the authority of the Jewish community over its members.[77] So whereas Maimonides' theological-political philosophy assumes the authority of halakha and attempts to show how obedience to halakha harmonizes with the Aristotelian concept of perfection, Mendelssohn understands that the authority of halakha is in question and attempts to uphold its authority by showing how obedience to halakha coheres with the ideals of political liberty, religious tolerance, and increased sociability between Jews and Gentiles.

Mendelssohn's approach to these problems is not purely defensive. Rather than considering the Enlightenment's emphasis on tolerance and freedom as a threat to Judaism, which must be parried, Mendelssohn embraces these ideals as creating a reality in which Judaism can be practiced more perfectly. He argues that free adherence to religion is the true mark of piety and that all forms of religious coercion, however subtle, are religiously defective and morally unjustified.[78] The only proper basis for religious adherence is rational conviction. Religious actions without conviction are of no religious value.[79] Mendelssohn deploys this argument both against attempts by the Prussian authorities to link civil privileges with particular religious convictions as well as against rabbinical attempts to impose religious conformity through the use of *Herem* (excommunication).[80] But Mendelssohn goes further seeking to show that Judaism itself embraces the enlightened ideals of freedom and tolerance.

For Mendelssohn, Judaism comprises three elements: (a) universal, eternal truths of natural religion which include God's existence, divine providence, and the immortality of the soul; (b) historical records concerning the Jewish people especially as recounted in the Bible; (c) halakha commanded by God to the Jewish people.[81] As we saw in the first chapter, Mendelssohn's God is a God of love whose supreme goodness involves His seeking to promote the perfection of every individual and never sacrificing the individual's good for the sake of the whole. While casting perfection as the ultimate end of human life sounds very much like Spinoza and Maimonides, Mendelssohn breaks from his predecessors' emphasis on the preeminent importance of intellectual perfection. His reasoning is partly theological. If it is true that intellectual perfection is the sole perfection and the majority of people will never perfect their intellects, then God has, in effect, condemned most people to never achieving perfection.[82] This, however, contradicts God's supreme benevolence.

Unlike Maimonides and Spinoza, Mendelssohn posits a more balanced, nonhierarchical account of human happiness and perfection. Perfection involves having a healthy body as well as the free development of all of the individual's faculties. These include what Mendelssohn calls the "cognitive capacity" (*Erkentnissvermögen*), the "approval capacity" (*Billigungsvermögen*), and the "capacity for desire" (*Begehrungsvermögen*).[83] The term "*Bildung*" (formation) describes the process of perfecting one's faculties in general, but each faculty has its own distinct perfection. Perfecting the cognitive capacity involves knowing the true, and the process of achieving this is called "enlightenment" (*Aufklärung*);[84] perfecting the capacity for approval entails aesthetic and ethical perfection, which involves feeling the good and the beautiful; perfecting the capacity for desire involves seeking to actualize the good and create beauty in the world. The process of perfecting the capacities for approval and desire is called "culture" (*Kultur*).[85] Each of these perfections is of independent, noninstrumental value. *Pace* Maimonides, there are no lower perfections that serve higher ones. Mendelssohn summarizes his ideal of perfection in his favorite motto: "Man's destiny: to seek truth; love beauty; will the good, and do the best."[86]

Mendelssohn's emphasis on aesthetic perfection adds an important humanistic dimension to his philosophy. When it comes to perfecting our intellects, Mendelssohn draws a distinction between divine and human knowledge. While God knows truth immediately through intellectual intuition, human beings must rely on the testimony of sense perception for knowledge and as such only achieve intellectual perfection in an attenuated way.[87] The appreciation of beauty, which is a form of aesthetic perfection, depends on our sense perceptions. Characteristic of beauty is the sensation of perfection, which involves perceiving unity in multiplicity. This involves a cooperation between sensation and intellect. Through sensation we perceive an object obscurely as a whole, while our intellect discerns the parts of the object.[88] Given the element of obscurity in the appreciation of beauty, Mendelssohn notes that aesthetic perfection "rests upon limitation, inability."[89] Since God does not possess sense perceptions and knows truth with absolute clarity, the perception of beauty is unavailable to God—it is a distinctively human perfection. So for Mendelssohn human finitude enables human beings to achieve a unique perfection not shared by God.

Still, while intellectual perfection is not the highest perfection for Mendelssohn, it is a perfection and Mendelssohn recognizes that most people will not perfect their intellects by becoming philosophers. God's goodness, however, precludes the possibility that rational knowledge of metaphysical truth is out of the reach of most people. The problem of metaphysical knowledge

for nonphilosophers appears in another way as well. Maimonides claims that the prophets were philosophers and so knew metaphysical truth through reason. Spinoza, however, asserts that a historical reading of the Bible shows that the prophets were not philosophers. Mendelssohn's critical sense leads him to accept Spinoza's critique of Maimonides' account of biblical prophecy. But given his reverence for biblical authority, Mendelssohn cannot accept Spinoza's conclusion that many of the prophets' metaphysical teachings were not true.

To resolve these difficulties, Mendelssohn introduces his doctrine of common sense. Reason can operate in two ways. When operating discursively, reason is methodical, carefully defining terms, and constructing syllogisms. But there is also a quick, intuitive operation of reason, where reason makes snap judgments. Mendelssohn calls this "common sense" (*Bon-sens, Gesunde Menschenverstand,* or *Gemeinsinn*) in relation to metaphysical truths and "conscience" (*Gewissen*) in relation to ethical truths.[90] In his final book, *To Lessing's Friends*, Mendelssohn offers a famous description of common sense:

> Now it seems to me that the evidence of natural religion is as clear and obvious, as irrefutably certain to uncorrupted common sense that has not been misled, as is any theorem in geometry. At any station of life, at any level of enlightenment, one has enough information and ability, enough opportunity and power, to convince himself of the truths of rational religion. The reasoning of the Greenlander who, as he was walking on the ice with a missionary one beautiful morning, saw the dawn streaming forth between the icebergs and said to the Moravian: *"Behold, brother, the new day! How beautiful must be he who made this!"* This reasoning, which was so convincing to the Greenlander before the Moravian misled his understanding, is still convincing to me.[91]

In the continuation of this passage, Mendelssohn compares the Greenlander's common sense apprehension of God to "the simple, artless reasoning of the Psalmist" who in describing God's knowledge of human affairs writes: "He who planted the ear, must He not hear; He who formed the eye, must He not see? . . . The Eternal also knows the thoughts of man (Psalms 94:9,11)."[92] So the prophets knew God through common sense. This doctrine allows Mendelssohn to accept Spinoza's claim that the prophets were not philosophers while preserving the rationality of the Bible's metaphysical doctrines.[93] And given that common sense is an operation of reason, knowing metaphysical truth through common sense constitutes a way of perfecting one's intellect that is available to all.

Common sense serves a third function for Mendelssohn. As we have seen, early in his life Mendelssohn was already well aware of the widespread Christian charge that Jews were intolerant sectarians who looked down on Gentiles and hated them. The doctrine of common sense helps Mendelssohn rebut the charge that Judaism is intolerant. Mendelssohn notes that according to "concepts of true Judaism" any individual can achieve salvation independently of Judaism through the practice of universal ethics.[94] In this respect, his teaching concerning morality and salvation seems similar to Spinoza's. But while Spinoza contrasts this view with Judaism by citing Maimonides' account of the Noahide laws, Mendelssohn identifies this view with Judaism by identifying the Noahide laws with natural law morality.[95] Furthermore, whereas Spinoza casts Christianity as a universal religion of reason,[96] for Mendelssohn, it is Judaism which is the universal religion of reason through its acceptance of the fact that one need not be Jewish or even have heard of Judaism to attain salvation, but that it is sufficient to obey rational ethics. Mendelssohn contrasts this with Christianity, which is exclusivistic in its demand that one confess irrational religious dogma such as the trinity, the incarnation, the passion, and vicarious atonement for salvation.[97]

Mendelssohn's identification of the Noahide laws with natural law morality forces him to confront Maimonides.[98] In his letter to Lavater, Mendelssohn notes that while Maimonides limits the appellation of "Pious of the Nations of the World" to those who observe the Noahide laws because of the laws having been revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai, the classic commentator Rabbi Joseph Karo already noted that this was Maimonides' personal view with no Talmudic basis.[99] However, in line with Mendelssohn's general reluctance to publicly criticize Maimonides, Mendelssohn then cites Maimonides' epistle to Hasdai Halevi that seems to do away with the requirement that Gentiles accept the seven laws through the authority of Mosaic revelation in order to attain salvation. In this way, Mendelssohn casts doubt as to whether the opinion expressed in the "Laws of Kings" reflects Maimonides' considered position.[100]

Mendelssohn, however, remains sufficiently disturbed by Maimonides' position that in a 1773 letter to Rabbi Jacob Emden he returns to the problem. Mendelssohn expects that Emden will be sympathetic to his concerns as he understands Emden to hold that Gentiles who obey the Noahide laws will attain immortality regardless of whether they accept these laws on the basis of Mosaic revelation.[101] In this private correspondence Mendelssohn assumes a more antagonistic stance toward Maimonides complaining that Maimonides' words "are harder for me than flint [*tzur halamish*]." Mendelssohn asks, "Must all the inhabitants of the world except for us [i.e., the Jews—MG] from the east where the sun rises to the west where it sets descend to a pit of annihilation [*be'er*

shahat] and be an abhorrence [*dera'on*] for all flesh[102] if they do not believe in the Torah given as an inheritance to the Congregation of Jacob alone?"[103] Maimonides' view is especially troubling for Mendelssohn as the seven Noahide laws are not even found explicitly in the Bible, but rather depend on recondite biblical exegesis.[104] In his letter to Emden, Mendelssohn locates the source of Maimonides' view in his opinion that ethical laws are conventional laws whose authority is grounded in the will rather than in the intellect. As such, obeying these laws only merits one the title "pious" if one recognizes their grounding in God's revealed will. And the conventionality of morality explains why, according to the version of the "Laws of Kings" used by Mendelssohn, for Maimonides one who observes the Noahide laws from rational considerations cannot be accounted "wise."

Mendelssohn then notes that he sharply disagrees with Maimonides on this point. As he had established in his "Prize Essay," ethical laws are not conventional, but rational, universal laws that follow from our nature as beings with intellect and which all know through common sense.[105] The fundamental law of ethics, which can be derived from our universal drive for perfection, is to "make your intrinsic and extrinsic condition and that of your fellow human being in the proper proportion as perfect as possible."[106] Our extrinsic condition refers to our body, while our intrinsic condition refers to our soul. Our obligation to seek the perfection of others derives from our desire for our own perfection. Since our perfection is a function of our representations of perfection, we seek to create a world in which we represent others as attaining perfection as well.[107]

For Mendelssohn, however, while human beings can know their ethical obligations through reason alone, morality requires knowledge of the teachings of natural religion for two reasons. First, Mendelssohn argues that without belief in the immortality of the soul, the rational ethical law can become contradictory. He begins his argument by accepting Aristotle's definition of human beings as *Zoon Politikon*, that is, political animals. Mendelssohn interprets this to mean that without society a person can achieve neither safety nor perfection as perfection includes both culture and enlightenment, which cannot be achieved in the state of nature.[108] But for a society to be able to protect itself, it must have a moral right to demand that its citizens sacrifice their lives if the state requires this for its continued existence. According to Mendelssohn, without belief in the immortality of the soul one's life on earth becomes the "highest good."[109] But if the highest law of morality is to seek perfection and this world is the only place in which perfection can be achieved, one has an "exactly opposite right" (*ein gerade entgegensetzte rechte*) to preserve one's own life and so to refuse any request to lay down one's life for the state. Indeed,

Mendelssohn goes so far as to claim that if one does not believe in the immortality of the soul, then one is within one's right and perhaps even obligated to "to cause the destruction of the entire world if this can help prolong one's life."[110] But if one recognizes in this circumstance contradictory moral demands, this calls the rationality of morality into question.[111] Hence moral reason demands that we posit the immortality of the soul.[112]

Second, theological beliefs are needed in order to be motivated to act ethically. Mendelssohn notes that while people generally recognize that morality is binding, they often notice the suffering of the righteous and the prospering of the wicked, which can cause them to despair of morality. For it often seems that righteousness is an impediment to prosperity as the wicked person who takes moral shortcuts is able to get ahead faster.[113] As such, benevolence can come to be seen as "a foppery into which we seek to lure one another so that the simpleton will toil while the clever man enjoys himself and has a good laugh at the other's expense."[114] While in truth benevolence is a crucial component of perfection and hence is its own reward, in actual fact people often experience benevolence as a sacrifice (*Verlust*) that demands compensation.[115] Since people do not see this compensation in this world, they require the belief that this injustice is rectified in the next world to be motivated to act ethically.[116]

So like Spinoza, Mendelssohn holds that the tenets of natural religion are needed for morality, but his understanding of why this is the case diverges from Spinoza. For Spinoza, the tenets of natural religion are imaginative doctrines, which the ignorant masses who are dominated by their passions need to be taught in order to keep them obedient. Elite philosophers, however, do not require these doctrines to act morally as they recognize moral action as being most in accord with a life of reason. For Mendelssohn, however, the tenets of natural religion are rational doctrines needed by both the masses and the elite to actualize their natural drives for perfection.[117] So while Spinoza's dogmas of faith are imaginative principles of obedience, Mendelssohn's tenets of natutral religion are rational principles of freedom.[118] Mendelssohn claims that Judaism embodies this view. While Judaism knows of "revealed legislation" in the form of the commandments of the Torah which must be obeyed, it knows of no "revealed religion" in the sense of revealed dogmas whose confession is required for salvation. Rather, in Judaism the eternal truths needed for salvation are available to all through reason and must be accepted freely on the basis of rational conviction. As evidence of the fact that Judaism has no salvational revealed truths, Mendelssohn notes that while Maimonides outlined thirteen roots of Judaism, later Jewish philosophers disagreed with him on this point. So, for example, while the fourteenth-century Jewish philosopher Joseph Albo claimed that there were only three roots of Judaism, "no one . . . ever branded Albo a heretic."[119]

Natural religion's usefulness in promoting perfection helps explain Mendelssohn's approach to the imaginative, seemingly irrational portrayals of God in the Bible.[120] As we have seen, while Maimonides sees the imaginative descriptions of God as educational tools employed by the prophets to help prepare individuals for knowledge of God, Spinoza claims that the prophets literally believed that God was as they imagined him. For Mendelssohn, the mistake of both Spinoza and Maimonides is that they do not appreciate the literary, aesthetic features of the Bible. As we have seen, for Mendelssohn the aesthetic imagination is a distinct sphere of validity with its own criteria for perfection. Mendelssohn thinks that imaginative descriptions of God are best understood as a form of religious poetry, whose appreciation constitutes a perfection in itself (of the faculty of approval) as well as a propadeutic for achieving ethical perfection inasmuch as they present theological truths needed to motivate one to act ethically in vivid, moving ways. As such, they form a counterpart to the teleological proofs for God's existence by making knowledge of the truths of natural religion effective knowledge.[121]

For these reasons Mendelssohn rejects Maimonides and Spinoza's approaches to the problem of esotericism. Like Spinoza, Mendelssohn rejects Maimonides' view that the Bible esoterically teaches philosophical truths to those at a higher level of intellectual development, but for different reasons. While Spinoza rejects Maimonides' position because Spinoza thinks that the Bible teaches almost no philosophical truths, Mendelssohn rejects Maimonides' position because he thinks that both the masses and the philosophers require imaginative presentations of metaphysical truth to act ethically.[122]

Mendelssohn's approach to the perennial problem of the relation between religion and state also forms an important contrast with Maimonides and Spinoza. While many scholars claim that Mendelssohn upholds a separation of church and state, this is not precise.[123] Rather, Mendelssohn holds that the state and religion have common goals and, ideally, act in concert with one another. What Mendelssohn opposes is state religion.

For Mendelssohn, political legitimacy depends on ethics. We have ethical duties, which we know in the state of nature. As mentioned, these ethical obligations are universal, rational laws, which are grounded in our nature as beings who desire perfection.[124] The purpose of the social contract is to help people acquire perfection and happiness.[125] Since ethics is an essential part of perfection, a main reason that people enter the social contract is to help them exercise their moral rights and observe their moral duties.[126] As our moral rights comprise our authority to use goods that help us develop our capacities as long as this does not infringe others' ability to develop their own capacities,[127] a central function of the state is to ensure that its citizens uphold their responsibility not

to infringe the rights of others. Ethical duties involve two aspects—actions and convictions. Actions involve doing what duty demands, while conviction involves doing it from the proper motive.[128] So, for instance, if my duty requires that I not rob another, the moral action involves refraining from robbing, while the moral conviction involves doing this because I am convinced that robbing another contravenes my vocation as a human being who desires perfection. Given that the state aims to help people attain perfection, and that convictions must be held freely to have moral value, ideally the state will promote morality through education.[129] But as the state is also responsible for ensuring a stable environment in which people can develop their capacities, it will resort to coercion if necessary.[130] This, however, applies only to *actions* that infringe on another's rights since, following Spinoza, Mendelssohn holds that convictions can never be coerced.[131] For this reason, Mendelssohn endorses Frederick's the Great's enlightened despotism whose watchword is "argue as you like about whatever you like, but obey!"[132] And Mendelssohn has a broad view of coercion considering linking civil "income, offices of honor, and privilege" with particular religious beliefs as inadmissible forms of coercion.[133] So like Spinoza and against Maimonides, Mendelssohn does not think that coercing true belief is a good means of promoting knowledge of truth, but like Maimonides and against Spinoza, Mendelssohn thinks that knowledge of philosophical truth is aided if the masses are oriented to true metaphysical beliefs. Here is where religion enters.

Mendelssohn's concept of God determines his view of the aim of religion and dissolves any potential conflict between religion and state. As we saw in chapter 1, for Mendelssohn God only desires that we promote our perfection and the perfection of others, and pursuing these aims constitutes true service of God. Since the state also exists to promote the perfection of its citizens, the aims of religion and state, properly understood, are identical and so can never conflict.[134] So Mendelssohn's solution to problem of church and state is not to separate their ends, as Locke suggests, but rather to identify their ends. For Mendelssohn, the difference between church and state refers to the means employed to achieve their identical goals.[135] For while the state is interested in correct actions even if they are performed without correct convictions, religion cannot dispense with correct convictions since "religious actions without religious thoughts are mere puppetry [*Puppenspiel*], not service of God."[136] As convictions cannot be forced, religion's only legitimate tool is education.[137] Similarly, since God is a God of love, religion only acts through persuasion and inclusion, never by force or exclusion.[138] Mendelssohn sees this as a Jewish position citing I Kings 8:41–43 where Solomon invites foreigners, whom Mendelssohn takes to include idolaters, to worship in the Temple. Mendelssohn also cites *BT, Hullin,* 5a, which he interprets as saying that sacrificial offerings

from Jewish sinners can be accepted in the Temple so that the sinners may find "the occasion and opportunity for improvement."[139]

Like Maimonides, Mendelssohn thinks that that the state's function is to promote human perfection and like Spinoza Mendelssohn thinks that the state exists to promote freedom. For Mendelssohn, since cultivating perfection presupposes freedom, a person must be granted the maximal freedom of both thought and action, which includes the right to practice religion as one sees fit. But this religious toleration depends on the fact that one's religious practices do not contravene the state's aim of promoting its inhabitants' perfection.

Mendelssohn's opposition to state religion is clearly connected with his concern with securing the place of Jews in an enlightened society.[140] But since Mendelssohn closely identifies Judaism with the practice of halakha, it is not enough for him to reject state religion in general, he must defend the specific right of Jews to practice halakha. To this end, he must show that the practice of halakha does not impede the acquisition of perfection on the part of the citizens of the state. Here Mendelssohn encounters a number of challenges. First, Cranz contends that halakha is a coercive religious practice that stifles human freedom.[141] Second, Mendelssohn is aware of the charge that practicing halakha alienates Jews' loyalty to the state, which implicitly relies on the Spinozistic doctrine that halakha is the civil religion of a foreign state, namely the ancient Jewish state.[142] In any case, if halakha is the civil religion of the ancient Hebrew state, it is no longer binding since the Hebrew state no longer exists.[143]

In light of these challenges, Mendelssohn adopts a two-pronged strategy. Following Spinoza, Mendelssohn explains the coercive elements found in the Bible (such as the stoning of one who desecrates the Sabbath) as reflecting the fact that in the ancient Hebrew state God was the sovereign of Israel and the ritual laws constituted civil religion. For this reason, the violation of these laws was punishable since it represented an act of rebellion against the sovereign.[144] Mendelssohn's basis for this claim is a Talmudic tradition that about the time of the destruction of the Temple, Jewish courts ceased to try cases.[145] But for Mendelssohn, this does not mean that the rituals themselves became obsolete. For following Maimonides, Mendelssohn maintains that the ritual laws always had a second, religious purpose involving maintaining proper metaphysical and moral beliefs by opposing idolatry. For Mendelssohn, however, this religious purpose was not based on coercion but rather on the free acceptance of halakha and of the universal metaphysical truths to which it directs one's contemplation since there is no value in religious rituals *qua* religious acts being practiced without conviction.[146]

Despite deviating from Maimonides on the question of religious coercion, Mendelssohn's account of the religious purpose of halakha draws on Maimonides'

account of idolatry.[147] We noted above that for Maimonides, believing that God has a body even if one does so by taking literally the Torah's corporeal descriptions of God constitutes a terrible form of idolatry that Halbertal and Margalit call "metaphysical error."[148] In his *Mishne Torah*, Maimonides describes a second form of idolatry that Halbertal and Margalit call "substitution."[149] Discussing the origins of idolatry, Maimonides notes that idolatry began as star worship. The ancients believed that the stars were living beings whose movements impacted events on earth.[150] The stars were seen as God's regents whom God deemed worthy of worship. But while the stars were originally worshipped as a way of honoring God, they came to be worshipped as substitutes for God.[151] For false prophets arose who claimed that God or the stars had spoken to them and commanded them to create physical representations so that the stars could be worshipped more easily, and the people became so preoccupied with the worship of these physical idols that they forgot about God completely.[152] This type of idolatry was deeply tied to superstition. For false prophets and priests told the people that by worshipping the stars through the performance of ritual acts, they could bring about propitious events such as rainfall, fertility, the prolongation of life, and protection from calamity.[153] For example, pagan priests commanded their faithful to have a beautiful girl graft the bough of one tree to a tree of a different species while a man had intercourse with her in order to increase the trees' fertility.[154]

People were drawn to idolatry because they felt weak and sought the means to control their fates.[155] Priests and prophets took advantage of the people, and induced them to follow the priests' and prophets' dictates through fear of punishment and hope for reward, which was said to accompany the performance (or failure to perform) pagan rituals. In general, the pagan prophets' warnings would not materialize—there was no connection between performing pagan rituals and receiving benefit. But on occasion, due to pure chance, the prophets' warnings would be borne out, and the performance of a pagan ritual would be followed by a beneficial event, or the failure to perform a pagan ritual would be followed by a calamity. Being very prone to superstition, the people would latch on to these chance occurrences and completely ignore the vast majority of cases in which the prophetic promises and warnings did not come to pass. In this way, people came to believe that performing pagan rituals allowed them to control nature.[156] On this understanding, idolatry involves conceiving religion as a means of fulfilling human desires. Halakha aims to stamp out idolatry by forbidding practices connected with idolatry, or by co-opting these practices and directing them to the worship of the one God. So, for example, the Torah forbids grafting trees of two different species.[157]

In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn develops an elaborate theory of signs to explain the origin of idolatry.[158] For Mendelssohn, language serves a critical function in

thinking. Linguistic signs are needed to distinguish the characteristics or "marks" [*Merkmale*] that compose concepts and are needed to retain, recall, and communicate concepts.[159] Mendelssohn distinguishes between two types of signs, essential signs and arbitrary signs. Essential signs share an essence with what one wishes to represent. So for example, a physical cup is an essential sign of the empirical concept "cup." Arbitrary signs have no essential similarity with the object designated, but rather signify conventionally. For example, the word "cup" is an arbitrary sign designating the concept "cup"[160]

Mendelssohn traces the progress from essential to arbitrary written signs. While originally physical objects were used as signs, subsequently pictorial representations of physical objects were used. Thus a picture of a cup would be used to represent the concept cup. Eventually, hieroglyphic signs were used which looked less like the concept represented but were easier to reproduce. For Mendelssohn, pictures and hieroglyphics are intermediary between essential and arbitrary signs. The final transition was to alphabetic signs, which are arbitrary signs.[161]

As we have seen, according to Mendelssohn all people naturally have knowledge of God and the divine attributes through common sense. But since God is nonsensible and beyond full human comprehension, any signs used to represent God must always be arbitrary and inadequate.[162] At first, animals were used as arbitrary signs depicting the divine attributes. So the lion signified divine power, and the owl divine wisdom. Using these sensible signs to depict God had an important educational function as they helped make God's attributes vivid and so helped turn knowledge of them into effective, living knowledge. The problem was that this way of depicting the divine easily slipped into idolatry as people came to see these signs as essential and so regard them as incarnations of God's attributes that were divine in themselves.[163] This led to magic and superstition as it was thought that through these signs (or images of them such as idols) one could prophecy or magically manipulate the divine and drawn down blessings for oneself. Christians continued the idolatrous impulse by considering Jesus the incarnation of God or of God's *logos* (that is His word or wisdom). But they combined this with Jewish monotheism by deeming Jesus the only incarnation of God and hence the only adequate means to worship Him and attain salvation. Mendelssohn's account of idolatry thus combines elements of both of Maimonides' accounts of idolatry. For Mendelssohn, idolatry involves "metaphysical error" since people assume that God can have a sensible form and "substitution" as people ascribed divinity to something other than God Himself.[164]

Like Maimonides, Mendelssohn conceives of Jewish chosenness as a function of the Jews' adherence to halakha, which helps them avoid idolatrous

belief.[165] But Mendelssohn does not accept Maimonides' historical explanation of this as involving halakha opposing pagan practices. For Mendelssohn, halakha directs one to contemplate the metaphysical, moral, or historical truths of Judaism.[166] As idolatry involves taking the signs used to represent God to be divine in themselves, halakha helps avoid idolatry since ritual practice is nonsensible and transitory, and as such, is not an object that can be seen as an incarnation of the divine and worshipped.[167] While Maimonides' account of Jewish chosenness centers on the benefits Jews derive from halakhic observance with little regard for how this impacts society around them, Mendelssohn's conception of chosenness focuses on the way halakhic observance benefits society as a whole.[168] For Jewish chosenness involves God assigning Jews the responsibility for being a model community preserving pure monotheism and, as we have seen, proper metaphysical belief is crucial for attaining perfection.

Given this universal function of halakha, the state should not merely tolerate the observance of halakha, but celebrate it as a patriotric act, which helps the state accomplish its task of promoting the perfection and happiness of its citizenry.[169] In defending the idea that loyalty to Judaism complements loyalty to the Prussian state, Mendelssohn implicitly defends religious pluralism. But Mendelssohn's defense of religious pluralism is much broader than this. For, as he makes clear at the end of *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn considers the very fact of religious diversity a way of promoting individual perfection.[170] In opposing state religion and defending the value of multiple forms of religious practice in a single state, Mendelssohn stakes out a position opposed to both Maimonides and Spinoza.

Since Mendelssohn thinks that all people can know metaphysical truth through common sense, it is not surprising that he holds that many beliefs commonly derided as false are actually appropriate ways of signifying the divine. For example, the Ark of the Covenant, a gold box holding the Ten Commandments that according to rabbinic tradition had two cherubs embracing over it and the Hindu myth that the world is balanced on the head of a snake both signify divine providence according to Mendelssohn.[171] One reason that people come to mistake the signs used to represent the divine for the divine itself is that they mistakenly regard the signs as essential rather than arbitrary signs of the divine. In tolerating religious diversity the state promotes perfection in three ways. First, since people come from different religious traditions, allowing them to use the signs from their own tradition helps knowledge of universal religious truths remain powerful and effective. Second, by not establishing a state religion, the state forgoes the assault on liberty of conscience that can occur from forcing people to confess belief in formulas that do not reflect their thinking about religious questions. Third, addressing Christians

Mendelssohn argues that in promoting the idea that there are many ways of signifying the divine, religious pluralism helps preserve proper knowledge of God and mitigate the Christian tendency to religious persecution by making clear that any signs used to designate the divine are arbitrary and inadequate.[172]

I will conclude the chapter by situating my interpretation of Mendelssohn's philosophy of Judaism in relation to the recent interpretations of Sorkin and Arkush.[173] As I mentioned in the introduction, Sorkin reads Mendelssohn as following the medieval "Andalusian tradition" whose main representatives included Saadya, Halevi, and Nahmanides, but not Maimonides.[174] For Sorkin, Mendelssohn was able to achieve a seamless synthesis between his commitments to Judaism and to Enlightenment because the "Andalusian tradition" fit seamlessly with the ideals of the eighteenth-century "Religious Enlightenment." Emphasizing Mendelssohn's place within the "Andalusian tradition," Sorkin claims that "on the most fundamental issues Mendelssohn differed with [Maimonides]."[175]

It is indisputable that Mendelssohn draws heavily on the medieval Hispano-Jewish tradition. In this tradition's appreciation of philosophy, Hebrew grammar, and poetry, Mendelssohn finds a congenial precedent for himself. But identifying Mendelssohn straightforwardly with a medieval "Andalusian" tradition is problematic. Sorkin notes that one feature of the Andalusian tradition was that it "kept philosophy subordinate to piety and observance."[176] As we have seen, Mendelssohn understands Judaism as comprising natural religion, which includes universal tenets that are knowable by all people in virtue of being human. In addition to this, Mendelssohn holds that the Jews received the ceremonial law whose observance promotes accurate, living knowledge of natural religious truth, which helps motivate people to achieve perfection and act ethically. Mendelssohn's understanding of ethical practice and its relation to ritual observance cannot, however, be simply identified with the emphasis on "piety and observance" in the Andalusian tradition. For example, a main representative of the Andalusian tradition, Judah Halevi, views the relationship between ethical action and ritual practice in the exact opposite way as Mendelssohn does casting moral action as a preparation for ritual practice.[177] For Halevi, Jews are a separate species superior to other human beings who alone are capable of achieving special knowledge of the divine.[178] Mendelssohn's claim that promoting perfection is the aim of halakha is precisely the type of view that Halevi attributes to the philosophers and which he sees as undermining halakhic observance. For this view opens the door to the possibility that one can dispense with halakhic observance if perfection can be attained through other means.[179] Indeed, this is precisely the conclusion drawn by Mendelssohn's

younger colleagues Salomon Maimon and David Friedländer. In making perfection the end of halakha, Mendelssohn is much closer to Maimonides, whom we have seen Mendelssohn draws upon in many important respects.[180]

The fact that the Andalusian tradition could not harmonize unproblematically with the eighteenth century Religious Enlightenment should not be surprising. For all the cosmopolitanism of medieval Spain, the idea of political emancipation was never an option, and it would have been almost inconceivable for a medieval Jewish thinker to espouse theories of religious universalism and tolerance of the type found in Mendelssohn. So for all of his reliance on prior authorities, Mendelssohn confronts problems never encountered by medieval Jewish thinkers and in response outlines an original conception of Judaism.[181]

Arkush states his guiding question in the introduction to his *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*. He asks, "Did Mendelssohn construct a coherent synthesis of rationalist philosophy and Jewish religion or was his theory of Judaism not only an ephemeral solution, but an unstable one as well?"[182] Arkush notes that while "many scholars have . . . identified weaknesses and inconsistencies in Mendelssohn's interpretation of Judaism . . . what has not been understood is . . . that Mendelssohn himself was entirely aware of this failure and much of what he says is aimed at disguising it."[183] Arkush presents a number of arguments for this claim, but I will focus on two. First, he presents what I would call the "doctrinal problem." Arkush notes that critics such as Reimarus and Lessing argue that the Bible's teachings do not always conform to the tenets of enlightened theism. For example, while the immortality of the soul is a central tenet of enlightened theism, these critics claim that this doctrine is not found in the Old Testament.[184] According to Arkush, Mendelssohn knows that these critics are correct, which calls the authority of the Bible into question for him. But Mendelssohn seeks to "propagate a version of Judaism suitable to modern times," which requires "retaining his credentials as a faithful Jew."[185] So Mendelssohn sidesteps the problem by claiming that according to Judaism God reveals only laws (i.e., revealed legislation), but never doctrines (i.e., revealed religion). Arkush notes, however, that in several places Mendelssohn himself acknowledges that the Bible contains metaphysical teachings. Arkush concludes that Mendelssohn's claim that the Bible does not contain revealed religion is a ploy meant to divert attention away from the discrepancies between the teachings of natural religion and those of the Bible.[186]

Arkush also presents what I call a "liberal problem" claiming that there is a contradiction between Mendelssohn's commitment to religious freedom and his adherence to Judaism. While Mendelssohn asserts that religious coercion (whether of belief or action) is never legitimate, this manifestly contradicts the

Bible's stipulation of punishments for religious disobedience. As we have seen, Mendelssohn tries to square this circle by claiming that when the Israelites had a state, God was their sovereign and the ceremonial law was also a civil law. With the fall of the Temple, the Jews lost their statehood and the ceremonial lost thus its civil function, which is why punishments for violations of the ceremonial law did not cease. Arkush sees this argument as inadequate for two reasons. First, with the fall of the Temple, punishments for violations of the ceremonial did not cease. In the Middle Ages, Jewish courts continued to mete out punishments including excommunication, which Mendelssohn could not have been unaware of. Second, on Mendelssohn's principles it would be preferable to separate civil and religious authority so that religion could be practiced freely. As such, the fall of the Temple seems to be a desirable event. As a traditional Jew, however, Mendelssohn must regard the biblical polity as the ideal constitution.[187] So Arkush concludes that Mendelssohn's defense of Judaism is disingenuous.

Arkush's burden of proof is very high. To establish his thesis, he needs to prove three distinct claims: (1) Mendelssohn's defense of Judaism fails; (2) Mendelssohn is aware of this failure; (3) Mendelssohn seeks to disguise it. In contrast to a thinker like Maimonides, however, Mendelssohn never states that he writes esoterically about Judaism, which makes Arkush's task all the more difficult.[188] I believe that the problems identified by Arkush permit a different explanation.

Regarding the "doctrinal problem," it is true that Mendelssohn sometimes appears to claim that no eternal truths are revealed in Judaism. I have shown, however, that the idea that the Bible contains tenets of natural religion in poetic form is critical for Mendelssohn. Indeed, in his commentary on Ecclesiastes Mendelssohn writes that one of the main purposes of this text is to defend the immortality of the soul.[189] That the Bible contains truths of natural religion should not be surprising given Mendelssohn's conviction that all people know the truths of enlightened theism through common sense. Rather than concluding that Mendelssohn purposefully contradicts himself to divert attention from his conviction that the Bible does not really teach truths of natural religion, I would argue that Mendelssohn expresses himself more precisely when he writes that Judaism knows of no "*exclusive* revelation of eternal truths" (emphasis Mendelssohn's).[190] Mendelssohn holds that eternal truths can be revealed, but he denies that that they are necessarily revealed to one people alone or that they can *only* be known through revelation. I follow Lawrence Kaplan in seeing the significance of Mendelssohn's claim that the Bible does not reveal religion as involving the fact "there are no revealed Scriptural doctrines . . . that Jews are *commanded* to believe." As Kaplan points out, however,

Mendelssohn holds that there are "revealed religious doctrines in the sense that Scripture contains rational religious truths, 'presented to our understanding,' that is religious truths *commended* to our understanding."[191] In claiming that Judaism knows of no "revealed religion," Mendelssohn's concern is to contrast tolerant Judaism with intolerant Christianity, which makes salvation dependent on confessing irrational revealed dogmas.[192]

Turning to the "liberal problem," Arkush is correct in noting that Jewish courts did not cease meting out punishments with the fall of the Temple. Yet as Arkush himself observes, in the postexilic period the nature of juridical autonomy changed being no longer "universal nor . . . without limitations."[193] So, in claiming that the status of Jewish law had changed, Mendelssohn is picking up on something real. Mendelssohn is, of course, well-aware that religious coercion is still being exercised by Rabbis even in his own time. In his preface to Menasseh ben Israel, he refers to the recent case of "a renowned Rabbi" (Rabbi Raphael Cohen of Altona) who in 1781 was reported to having excommunicated a wayward member of his community in order to coerce him into religious observance. For Mendelssohn, however, the fact that Rabbis resort to religious coercion does not make this legitimate according to the true concepts of Judaism. Indeed, after mentioning the report of Rabbi Cohen's actions, Mendelssohn writes that he "trust[s] that the most enlightened and most pious among the Rabbis and elders of my nation will gladly . . . renounce all church and synagogue discipline, and will allow their brethren to enjoy the same love and tolerance for which they have been yearning so much."

Furthermore, it is crucial to remember that Mendelssohn writes as a theologian, not as a historian. The nature of theology is to emphasize certain elements of a religious tradition and to ignore or marginalize others. This is not necessarily done in a premeditated way but as a matter of course because the theologian simply cannot imagine that his faith tradition does not cohere with his other deeply held beliefs. While the historian often sees the theologian as reshaping tradition, the theologian sees himself as uncovering the deep truth of his received tradition.[194] So I see Mendelssohn's attempt to reconcile Judaism with Enlightenment philosophy as a sincere theological enterprise guided by his conviction that "truth cannot conflict with truth,"[195] rather than as an intentional act of obfuscation and deceit.[196]

3

Either/Or

Jacobi's Attack on the Moderate Enlightenment

On February 15, 1781, Lessing died. During the previous decade, his reputation had grown enormously in part due to his involvement in several high-profile controversies. Two of these controversies are important for our purposes. In 1772, the enlightened German philosopher Johann August Eberhard published his *New Apology for Socrates*.[1] In this work, Eberhard opposed the orthodox Christian doctrine of eternal punishment claiming that it was irrational and could not be reconciled with divine goodness. Eberhard claimed that while Leibniz had defended this doctrine, this was an exoteric position designed to strengthen the faith of those already disposed to believe in the doctrine, but not actually believed by Leibniz himself. In 1773, Lessing published a response to Eberhard entitled "Leibniz on Eternal Punishments" in which he claimed that Leibniz had been sincere in his defense of eternal punishment having given this teaching an inner philosophical interpretation.[2] A year later, Lessing continued his defense of Christian dogma by defending the sincerity of Leibniz's refutation of Socinian attacks on the trinity in his piece "Andreas Wissowatius' Objections to the Trinity."[3] And in his final work, *The Education of the Human Race* (1781), Lessing defended not only the trinity but original sin and vicarious atonement as well.[4] In these writings Lessing appeared as a defender of Christian dogma, albeit an idiosyncratic one.

The second major controversy was the so-called Fragmentist Controversy. In 1770, Lessing became the head librarian at the Ducal

Library at Wolffenbüttel. With one of the best collections in all of Europe at his disposal, he began publishing rare texts and editions that he found in the library. In 1774, Lessing published a radical Deist attack on Scripture under the title *Fragments from an Unnamed Author*. Pretending that the fragments were from an anonymous book that he had discovered in the library, Lessing appended a series of responses to the *Fragments*, which he called "Counter-propositions" (*Gegensätze*). In fact, the *Fragments* were taken from an unpublished work by the recently deceased professor of Hebrew and Oriental languages Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) whose children, Johann August and Elise, Lessing had befriended at the end of the 1760s.[5] The *Fragments* included one that questioned the historicity of the Israelites' crossing at the Red Sea and another that disputed Jesus' resurrection.[6] These claims shocked the public and sparked a major outcry. The harshest attack came from the orthodox Lutheran pastor Johann Melchior Goeze who criticized not the Fragmentist but Lessing for publishing the *Fragments* and offering what Goeze saw as a half-hearted response in his *Gegensätze*. Goeze was also appalled by Lessing's introduction to his *Gegensätze* in which he ostensibly sought to neutralize the Fragmentist's critique of Christianity by claiming that "objections to the letter (*Buchstabe*) and to the Bible are not objections to the spirit (*Geist*) and to religion."[7] For Goeze, Lessing was playing a dangerous game using the Pauline distinction between letter and spirit to undermine the New Testament. Lessing responded to Goeze with a series of rhetorically brilliant responses, the most famous of which was the eleven-installment *Anti-Goeze* in which he satirized Goeze's orthodoxy.[8]

Mendelssohn was greatly distressed by the death of his oldest friend. His sense of loss was compounded by the fact that during the last decade of Lessing's life, Mendelssohn had rarely seen him. Upon hearing of Lessing's death, Mendelssohn wrote to his brother Karl of his "sense of regret at not having made sufficient use of [Lessing's] guidance; at not having been covetous enough of his inspiring company; at having missed many an hour in which I might have held conversation with him."[9] Within five days of Lessing's death, Mendelssohn resolved to write a memorial to Lessing "describing his character to the world."[10] Mendelssohn complained that his "moral character" had been "entirely misjudged by many."[11] By overtly defending Christian dogma while appearing sympathetic with radical Deism, Lessing's own theological views were not entirely clear, but he seemed to have abandoned the moderate religious enlightenment that he and Mendelssohn had shared in their youth. Mendelssohn sought to redeem Lessing's reputation by showing that to the end he remained committed to the moderate enlightenment.[12] Mendelssohn's intentions were, however, frustrated by the sensational revelations of a profound critic of the German Enlightenment, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi.

Jacobi was born in Düsseldorf in 1743. His philosophical education began in 1759 when he studied in Geneva under the renowned scientist Georges Louis Le Sage.[13] In Geneva, Jacobi also encountered the work of Bonnet, whose psychological sensualism introduced him to empirical science.[14] But from his earliest youth, it was religious questions that most interested him. Speaking biographically in a 1783 letter to Mendelssohn, he wrote: "I was still wearing a child-frock when I began to worry about things of another world. I was eight or nine years old when my childish depth of sense (*Tiefsinn*) led me to certain remarkable visions (*Ansichten*) that still stick with me to this day.... My yearning to attain certainty regarding the higher expectations of man grew with the years and it became the leading thread on which all my fortunes were to hang."[15]

Initially Jacobi tried to unite his quest for religious certainty with his commitment to scientific reason and was attracted to Mendelssohn. Reading the *Phädon* in 1767, he was so enamored with this "masterpiece" that he sought to translate it into French himself.[16] But Jacobi gradually became disenchanted with Mendelssohn's enlightened theism and renewed his youthful interest in mysticism. His conversations with Lessing solidified his sense that Mendelssohn's moderate enlightenment was a dead end.

In the summer of 1780, Jacobi visited Lessing and they had extended conversations. In the course of these conversations, Jacobi became convinced that Lessing had moved away from Mendelssohn's moderate enlightenment and had become a Spinozist, that is, an atheist. Hearing from Elise Reimarus of Mendelssohn's intention to write a memorial to Lessing, Jacobi correctly surmised that Mendelssohn aimed to rescue Lessing for the moderate enlightenment.[17] This gave Jacobi the perfect opportunity to use his final conversations with Lessing as a way of attacking the moderate enlightenment. Writing to Elise, Jacobi feigned ignorance. He said that he had heard that Mendelssohn was writing a biography of Lessing and asked whether Mendelssohn was aware that Lessing had confessed Spinozism at the end of his life. Mendelssohn took the bait and asked what this Spinozism amounted to. Jacobi replied by sending Mendelssohn a thirty-six page report describing his Spinoza conversations with Lessing that ignited the Pantheism Controversy.[18]

The Spinoza conversations were the culmination of a critique of the moderate enlightenment that Jacobi had begun years earlier in a series of political writings that first brought him into conflict with Mendelssohn. As with the later Spinoza conversations, in these early writings Lessing played an important role.

I divide Jacobi's critique of Mendelssohn into two. I begin with Jacobi's critique of Mendelssohn's politics. Jacobi charges that Mendelssohn's politics

are muddled and favor despotism over political freedom. For Jacobi, it was Lessing who first alerted him to the despotic tendencies of the moderate enlightenment. I then turn to Jacobi's critique of Mendelssohn's metaphysics. Jacobi argues that Mendelssohn's metaphysics undermine freedom and individual dignity. For Jacobi, were Mendelssohn to be fully consistent he would follow Lessing in embracing Spinozism.[19] But Mendelssohn is too shallow to recognize these conclusions. For his part, Jacobi does not accept Spinozism. After treating Jacobi's critique of Mendelssohn's metaphysics, I will explore his defense of mystical faith.

Jacobi's Critique of Mendelssohn's Politics

In 1782, Jacobi published an important essay entitled "Something Lessing Said." The essay begins with the claim that Jacobi once heard Lessing say that "the statements of Febronius and his followers were a shameless flattery of princes, for all their arguments against the privileges of the pope were either groundless or applied with double and triple force to the princes themselves."[20] "Febronius" was the pseudonym of Johann Nicolaus von Hontheim, an auxillary bishop at Trier. In his 1763 *On the Authority of the Church and the Legitimate Power of the Roman Pontiff*, Febronius had argued that papal power should be curtailed. In enlightened Protestant Prussia with its deep fear of Catholicism, Febronius's arguments were generally regarded sympathetically. But Jacobi quoted Lessing as making the shocking claim that Febronius's arguments applied doubly to enlightened absolutist rulers, such as Frederick the Great.[21] With this disclosure, Jacobi in effect shot across the bow at the moderate German enlightenment, which generally was quite cozy with enlightened princes. While Jacobi did not mention Mendelssohn explicitly in "Something Lessing Said," as a defender of Frederick's enlightened absolutism and a close friend of Lessing's, Mendelssohn felt directly attacked. So it is not surprising that upon reading Jacobi's piece, Mendelssohn drafted critical comments on it, which he sent to Jacobi.[22]

As we have seen, for Mendelssohn the state exists to promote the happiness and perfection of its citizens. Mendelssohn praises Frederick the Great for seeking to promote his subjects' happiness by disseminating popular enlightenment, encouraging the free exchange of ideas, and protecting people's rights in matters of faith.[23] Jacobi questions Mendelssohn's affinity for Frederick's enlightened despotism on two counts. First, Jacobi claims that the enlightened despot's paternalistic concern with making his citizens happy undermines the citizens' freedom. Second, Jacobi claims that rather than promoting tolerance

and intellectual freedom, the Enlightenment concept of reason lends itself to intolerance and to the stifling of intellectual freedom.

For Jacobi, despotism is not primarily a question of a particular form of government, but rather of the degree of people's participation in government. Jacobi conceives freedom as ruling oneself, while oppression involves being ruled by forces outside oneself.[24] As such, a free state is one in which the people rule themselves, while a despotic state is one in which the people are politically disempowered. Despotism is not identical with a particular regime. A democracy can be despotic if the people are politically apathetic and do not actively participate in government.[25] For Jacobi, whether a regime is free or despotic will generally depend on the morals of its populace. If the citizens are free men who seek to rule themselves according to the demands of morality, then it is likely that they will be politically free. If, however, the citizens are slaves who value personal pleasure above all else, then they are very susceptible to being ruled despotically.[26]

Jacobi notes that "happiness" is the watchword of despots. The best means for the despot to solidify his power is by encouraging citizens to value the pursuit of comfort and pleasure above all else. This occurs in three ways. First, since maximizing pleasure is an egoistic pursuit, encouraging people to pursue comfort and pleasure leads them to focus on private concerns and fosters political apathy, which makes it easier for despots to hold the reigns of power.[27] Second, the pursuit of pleasure keeps the populace in a childlike state of needing a guardian since indulging the passions naturally leads people into conflict thereby necessitating a strong government to regulate their interactions.[28] Third, since achieving pleasure generally depends on forces outside oneself, those seeking pleasure naturally come to look to others for their happiness and so are more susceptible to being ruled by despots. In contrast, the free man who seeks to rule himself according to the demands of virtue will generally seek to govern himself through political participation.[29]

In defending enlightened despotism, Mendelssohn claims that freedom is compatible with paternalistic rule. But since the ultimate justification of political rule is that it promotes the happiness of its citizens, Jacobi claims that Mendelssohn regards freedom as of instrumental value. The primacy of happiness over freedom for Mendelssohn is seen in his treatment of conflicts between the two. In a famous passage in *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn notes that the state should monitor religious fanaticism and atheism making sure that neither "takes root and spreads."[30] Mendelssohn's reasoning is that atheism threatens happiness by stripping a crucial restraint on immorality, that is, divine retribution, while fanaticism undermines happiness by fostering hatred of those of different faiths.[31] For Mendelssohn, the state has two tools to control the propagation of

atheism and fanaticism. It can use "hard" repression whereby pernicious beliefs are monitored and censored, or it can use "soft" repression where the state encourages social disapproval and mockery of those beliefs, which it sees as undermining happiness. Jacobi notes how enlightened philosophers like Mendelssohn employ this second approach by derisively labeling their religious opponents "*Schwärmer*" (religious fanatics).[32] To be sure, Mendelssohn also makes statements that oppose censorship. As we have seen, Mendelssohn notes the impossibility of coercing belief since the only legitimate ground for holding a belief is rational conviction. And in certain places Mendelssohn rejects even "soft censorship" claiming that it results in the promotion of "sham enlightenment (*Afteraufklärung*)" for when faced with the prospect of mockery, prejudiced individuals will simply hide their prejudices.[33] Similarly, in the very place in *Jerusalem* where Mendelssohn advocates that the state control the spread of atheism and fanaticism he softens his position by noting that the state should only monitor the spread of these teachings "from a distance" and that "only with wise moderation (*weiser Mäßigung*) should it favor even those doctrines upon which true felicity is based.[34] Jacobi sneers at Mendelssohn's "moderate" commitment to political freedom, which Jacobi sees as symptomatic of Mendelssohn's liberalism—it is half-hearted and confused.[35]

While Mendelssohn presents reason as a capacity that promotes tolerance of different viewpoints, Jacobi argues that Mendelssohn's conception of reason is a tool of intolerance. Jacobi notes that the nature of logical reasoning is that conclusions follow from premises with necessity. The necessity of logical reasoning implies that if someone does not accept the conclusions of reason, he or she is simply wrong.[36] So, for example, Mendelssohn is convinced that reason can establish the existence of God. But many mystics and atheists think that reason disproves God's existence.[37] For Jacobi, while Mendelssohn disdains Papists for stifling freedom of thought, Mendelssohn himself stifles freedom of thought in ways that closely resemble the Papists. The difference is that rather than appealing to papal authority to condemn heretics, Mendelssohn appeals to reason to condemn enthusiasm and atheism without seriously engaging these positions.[38] This amounts to a secularized form of religious intolerance where reason replaces the Pope as the supreme authority whose defiance (whether real or imagined) justifies high-handed condemnation and persecution.[39] While Mendelssohn pretends to be intellectually open, Jacobi calls him a "philosophical Papist" and a "grand-inquisitor" (*Groß-Inquisitor*) of the Enlightenment who seeks to convert others to his dogmatic metaphysical beliefs with missionizing zeal.[40] For Jacobi, Mendelssohn has a very naïve understanding of reason. In conceiving reason as a capacity that allows one to attain the objectively true picture of reality, Mendelssohn fails to understand

that all knowledge is mediated by the thinker's social circumstances and way of life. As Jacobi puts it, "One ought not to derive the actions of men from their philosophy, but rather their philosophy from their actions. Their history does not originate from their way of thinking (*Denkungsart*), but rather their way of thinking (*Denkungsart*) from their history."[41]

Jacobi thinks that Mendelssohn's conception of God can be traced to three sources: (1) his fawning admiration for Frederick the Great's enlightened despotism; (2) his valuing living a secure, comfortable life above all else, and (3) his rationalism. Jacobi notes that Mendelssohn's God is a wise monarch who does not command belief, but demands that His people (the Jews) show absolute obedience to halakha because of His paternalistic concern with promoting human comfort and happiness. But whom does this God remind one of if not Frederick the Great who justifies his rule by his paternalistic concern for his citizens' security and happiness and whose watchword is "argue as much as you like, but obey?"[42] Furthermore, Mendelssohn's egoistic valuing of happiness leads him to conceive of God as a being whose primary concern is with furthering our comfort. And since God is a rational idea whose function is to help us live a comfortable life, it is not surprising that Mendelssohn's God is an abstract, mechanical concept rather than a living being with whom one enters into a lived relationship.[43] For Jacobi, Mendelssohn's theology is nothing short of idolatrous since Mendelssohn conceives God's main function as helping promote human happiness.[44] The bankruptcy of Mendelssohn's theology is clear from the provisional commitment to God implicit in it. Since God's purpose is to help us be happy, if we can find a way of being happy without God, the concept of God can be dispensed with.[45] In contrast, Jacobi holds that a person who rather than seeking security and comfort is open to the unpredictability of a lived encounter with God will conceive God as a living, vital being with whom one can enter into a personal relationship. And one who privileges moral freedom above all else will conceive God as a free moral being who demands absolute obedience to His holy will.[46] Such a person will understand that human beings exist to serve God, not vice versa.[47] For Jacobi, it is this willingness to sacrifice one's life for a higher cause that makes it possible to live a noble, heroic life. As he puts it, "Complete submission to a superior authority: strict, holy obedience (*heiliger Gehorsam*)—that has been the spirit of every age that has brought forth an abundance of great deeds, great sentiments (*große Gesinnungen*), great men."[48] In privileging personal comfort and happiness, Mendelssohn's bourgeois philosophy effectively reduces our humanity and makes us small, petty, ignoble men. At best we can live interesting lives with a multitude of pleasures and amusements, but we no longer live great lives, which involves the willingness to sacrifice our lives for the sake of duty.

Jacobi has much more hatred for Mendelssohn's enlightened theism than for the Epicurean atheist. While the Epicurean is consistent in his egoistic atheism, Mendelssohn confusedly tries to unite egoism with religious belief thereby distorting religious truth.[49] Similarly, Jacobi disdains Mendelssohn's enlightened despotic politics much more than open defenders of despotism such as Hobbes. While Hobbes consistently defends despotism by denying the possibility of moral freedom, Mendelssohn inconsistently defends despotism by claiming that despotism is compatible with moral freedom.[50] For Jacobi, Mendelssohn's enlightenment liberalism is a half-baked philosophy of compromise whose superficiality and baseness Lessing unmasked.

Jacobi claims that just as Mendelssohn's politics equivocate between moral freedom and despotism, so his metaphysics equivocate between metaphysical freedom and fatalism. And just as Jacobi prefers the consistency of Hobbes's forthright defense of despotism over Mendelssohn's indecisive enlightened despotism, so he prefers Spinoza's forthright defense of fatalism and atheism over Mendelssohn's shallow theism that halfheartedly affirms metaphysical freedom.

Jacobi's Spinozistic Critique of Mendelssohn's Metaphysics

In 1763, Jacobi returned to Germany from his studies in Geneva. His return coincided with the announcement of the Berlin Academy's prize competition. The academy asked whether it was possible to achieve the same "evidence" in metaphysics as in mathematics. Jacobi was fascinated by the question. As he put it, "No question could have attracted my attention more. I awaited the publication of the essays anxiously."[51] But Jacobi recalls that Mendelssohn's prize-winning essay "did not fulfill the expectations that the name of the author already a well known philosopher, had aroused in me."[52] In his "Prize Essay," Mendelssohn defended the ontological proof of God's existence. Jacobi concluded that not only did Mendelssohn's ontological proof fail to prove the existence of a theistic God, but if applied properly it proved Spinozism.

At the beginning of his Spinoza conversations, Jacobi recounts that Lessing urged him to go to Berlin to meet Mendelssohn personally. Jacobi was unenthusiastic about this prospect and told Lessing of his amazement that Mendelssohn had defended the ontological proof of God's existence.[53] Lessing tried to deflect the point, but Jacobi pressed him, asking whether Lessing had ever declared his true religious beliefs to Mendelssohn. Lessing confessed that he had not.[54] This was Jacobi's first clear indication that Lessing had moved away from enlightened theism.

Jacobi's assessment of Mendelssohn's "Prize Essay" was not his only reason for judging Spinoza's metaphysics superior to Mendelssohn's. Mendelssohn's *PD* had taught Jacobi to appreciate the proximity between Spinoza and Leibniz.[55] But while Mendelssohn cast Leibnizianism as perfecting Spinoza's metaphysics, Jacobi reversed this relation by portraying Mendelssohn's Leibnizian theism as a cowardly retreat from Spinoza's consistent atheism.[56]

Before turning to Jacobi's arguments, a word is in order about Mendelssohn and Jacobi's concepts of pantheism, atheism, and Spinozism. Jacobi and Mendelssohn agree that any doctrine that denies the existence of a transcendent deity is atheism. Both see Spinoza as a pantheist who identifies God with the totality of nature. While later thinkers beginning with Herder distinguish atheism from pantheism, for Jacobi and Mendelssohn Spinoza's pantheism is synonymous with atheism. Jacobi also sees Spinoza as a fatalist who denies the reality of all final causes.

My discussion of Jacobi's critique of enlightened theism will have three parts. I will begin by discussing why Jacobi thinks that rationalism pursued consistently leads to Spinoza's dehumanizing fatalism. Next, I will discuss why Jacobi thinks that Spinoza's atheism is the most perfect system of rationalism. Finally, I will discuss Jacobi's mystical alternative to enlightenment rationalism.

Fatalism

Jacobi notes that the keystone of rationalism is the principle of sufficient reason (henceforth: PSR). The PSR is grounded in the axiom that from nothing, nothing can come (*ex nihilo nihil fit*). For Jacobi, "what distinguishes Spinoza's philosophy from all the others, what constitutes its soul is that it maintains and applies with the strictest rigor the [PSR]."[57] Once this principle is applied fully consistently, Spinoza's conclusions are ineluctable and irrefutable.[58]

Jacobi regards Mendelssohn's defense of freedom as a rhetorical slight of hand. In a number of places, Mendelssohn explicitly embraces determinism.[59] His determinism is grounded in his recognition that the idea of actions not determined by antecedent causes violates the PSR.[60] Mendelssohn tries to square freedom with the PSR by adopting a compatibilist view of freedom. We are free if we consciously will actions in accordance with the demands of moral reason. If not, we are unfree.[61] Jacobi notes that Mendelssohn's conception of freedom violates the common understanding of freedom, which involves the ability to spontaneously choose between two alternatives without being

determined by antecedent causes. According to Jacobi, Mendelssohn is sensitive to the fact that *belief* in human freedom is necessary for society. Without belief in free will it is impossible to hold people accountable for their actions, and the belief that one has the ability to choose virtue over vice is critical in order for people to have the motivation to act morally. On account of this, Mendelssohn claims to uphold human freedom. But inasmuch as Mendelssohn denies the possibility of spontaneous free choice, Jacobi considers his defense of human freedom empty. Mendelssohn thus ends up espousing a "fatalism that either does not know itself for what it is or does not profess it honestly: the fatalism that mixes necessity and freedom (*Nothwendigkeit und Freiheit*) providence and fate together into one thing…—miraculous mongrel (*wunderbare Mischling*) that it is."[62]

Jacobi has much more respect for Spinoza whom he sees as "not hesitating to reject the concept of freedom as irrational." Jacobi describes Spinoza as espousing "a straightforward, *undisguised* fatalism [*geraden unverhüllten Fatalismus*]."[63] Like Mendelssohn, Spinoza denies arbitrary free choice. But Spinoza goes further denying compatibilism as well because it assumes the existence of a separate will that can be determined according to the demands of moral reason.[64] Spinoza, however, is a nominalist who denies the reality of capacities existing outside of particular acts. The capacity of will is an *ens rationis,* a figment of the imagination—only particular acts of willing are real.[65] Furthermore, while Mendelssohn's compatibilism is based on the assumption that people are capable of determining their wills by aligning them with particular ends, Jacobi claims that Spinoza denies that human actions can be determined by the thought of acting for a particular purpose. For Spinoza, while people feel themselves acting for the sake of purposes this is an illusion. In fact, all human actions are determined by their antecedent efficient causes. As Jacobi puts it, for Spinoza "reflection is only the continuation of action, we know what we do and no more."[66]

For Jacobi, there is a difference between Mendelssohn and Leibniz's approaches to human freedom. While Jacobi thinks that Mendelssohn sincerely (albeit confusedly) believes that compatibilism preserves freedom, Jacobi suggests that Leibniz's affirmation of compatibilism is exoteric and that Leibniz realizes that Spinoza's fatalistic denial of free will is correct.[67] Leibniz exoterically defends freedom to avoid censure and because he recognizes the masses' need for this belief. For this reason, Jacobi regards Leibniz as a much more profound philosopher than Mendelssohn. While Leibniz uses rhetoric defending free will, Mendelssohn actually believes the rhetoric. Lessing appreciated this aspect of Leibniz's thought, which is why he told Jacobi that Leibniz "was a Spinozist at heart."[68]

Jacobi sees Spinoza's rationalism as undermining individual human dignity. According to Jacobi, Spinoza conceives reality as an infinite series of efficient causes and effects with no overarching goal. Human beings are finite parts of this series whose acts are determined and whose lives are without any cosmic purpose. Speaking biographically, Jacobi recalls how in his youth he used to contemplate an "endless duration (*endloser Fortdauer*), independent of any religious concept." This thought "seized [him] with such violence" that he "gave out a loud cry and fell into a kind of swoon . . . the result of which was a state of unspeakable despair (*Verzweiflung*)." Jacobi goes on to identify the source of the despair as "the thought of annihilation (*Vernichtigung*) which has always been dreadful (*gräßlich*) [but which] now became even more dreadful (*gräßlicher*)."[69] In contemporary terms, we might say that Jacobi experienced "existential angst" at the thought of the meaninglessness of his death in the context of the infinite duration of the universe. What made this most disturbing to Jacobi was that he saw this existential dread as the logical consequence of a rationalist/scientific approach to understanding reality.

For Jacobi, Spinoza's undermining of human dignity is compounded by his mechanistic view of human beings. According to Jacobi, Spinoza reduces human beings to primary forces and affects. This is a natural consequence of rationalism, which is a leveling tendency that undermines individuality by seeking "what is common to all things, not paying attention to diversity."[70] Jacobi claims that viewing human actions as the necessary outcome of a concatenation of primary forces undermines our ability to feel respect, gratitude, and love. According to Spinoza people are not much different than machines. But, asks Jacobi, could I respect a machine? Could I feel gratitude toward a machine? Could I love a machine? Any feelings of respect, gratitude, or love that I might feel in relation to a machine would only be for the machine's intelligent designer.[71] But given Spinoza's denial of final causes, there is not even a designer whom I could love. In his 1799 letter to Fichte, Jacobi coined a term for this antihumanistic perspective—nihilism.[72]

Atheism as the Logical Conclusion of Rationalism

I mentioned above that Jacobi claims that Mendelssohn's ontological argument cannot prove the existence of a theistic God, but can only prove Spinozism. It is worthwhile considering Jacobi's reasoning. In the "Prize Essay", Mendelssohn offers a Wolffian/Leibnizian version of the Cartesian ontological proof. Mendelssohn begins his proof by considering the conditions of nonexistence. He notes two ways in which a thing can be nonexistent. First, a thing can be

nonexistent because its properties are contradictory. So for example, a dog, which is both dead and alive at the same time cannot exist. Second, a thing can be nonexistent because while possible, the conditions that would make the thing actual do not pertain. So, for example, a rainbow colored swan is possible, but the conditions rendering it actual do not pertain in our world and so it does not actually exist here. Mendelssohn notes that for these second types of beings (which he calls "contingent"), existence is not part of their essence. As the existence of contingent beings is a possibility the actuality of which depends on the actuality of other beings, Mendelssohn calls contingent beings "dependent" (*abhängig*).

Mendelssohn then turns to the problem of God's existence. He notes that a contradictory concept is one which both affirms the reality and posits the deficiency of a certain attribute. Since, however, God is the most perfect being He cannot contain any deficiencies and so the concept of God cannot be contradictory. God, however, cannot be a contingent being for God's perfection means that God cannot be dependent on other beings for His existence. Existence is therefore part of God's essence so He must exist.[73]

For Jacobi, Mendelssohn's fundamental error is his flawed understanding of being (*Seyn*).[74] For Jacobi, "being" is the concept we use to designate that which bears all attributes.[75] All finite things must be thought of as modes (*Beschaffenheiten*) of the fundamental reality (i.e., of being). Jacobi notes that the concept God is composed from of our representations of finite things (i.e., of modes). There are two ways of understanding the concept of God. Spinozism identifies God with reality itself, while theism construes God as a thing whose attributes are the highest perfection of finite things but which exists separate from existing things. If God is understood Spinozistically, God must exist since God is identical with reality itself. If, however, God is understood theistically, then He is an ideal abstraction from finite things whose existence cannot be proven.[76]

Jacobi also argues that Spinoza's consistent application of PSR leads to his denying a creator God. Since PSR stipulates that *ex nihilo nihil fit*, this clearly makes the notion of creation *ex nihilo* unintelligible. One might think, however, that one could still affirm an emanationist view of creation according to which God emanates the world from Himself in an eternal act of creation. On this view, while the world exists within God, God exceeds the world and in this sense is transcendent to it.[77] But again Spinoza notes that this view violates the PSR. A central tenet of emanationism is that prior to creation, God is an absolute unity, containing fullness of being.[78] Our world, however, is differentiated. So given that the world which emanates from God is differentiated, emanation involves negation since it introduces a break into God's absolutely simple

being.[79] Just as the PSR stipulates that from nothing something cannot emerge so it follows that from pure being, it is impossible for nothing to emerge. As any transition from the infinite to the finite involves passing from pure being to nothing, rationalism cannot comprehend how the transition from God to the universe is possible and so cannot conceive God as a creator even in the emanationist sense.[80]

While Mendelssohn casts himself as a defender of providential theism, Jacobi argues that Mendelssohn's rationalism undermines divine providence. Mendelssohn's preestablished harmony accepts that extended physical reality can be explained through efficient causes. Mendelssohn attempts to preserve divine providence by claiming that these efficient causes harmonize with God's choice of the world as the best of all possible ones. But Jacobi claims that by introducing the idea that the natural world can be understood through efficient causes without reference to final causes, divine providence becomes a superfluous explanatory principle that should be dispensed with according to Ockham's razor.[81]

Jacobi portrays Mendelssohn's religious rationalism as a Trojan gift for the faithful. By presenting himself as a rabbi who can establish theism rationally, Mendelssohn appears as a defender of religion. But by legitimating rationalism for the faithful, Mendelssohn prepares the ground for overthrowing theism since rationalism applied consistently culminates in Spinozism.[82]

Jacobi's Defense of Mystical Faith

In his conversations with Lessing, Jacobi makes clear that while he considers Spinozism to be the most logically consistent form of rationalism, he is not a Spinozist. Rather, recognizing the limitations of rationalism, Jacobi turns his back on rationalism and instead takes a "mortal leap" (*salto mortale*) into faith.[83] For Jacobi, the problem with rationalism is its unjustified assumption that "whatever does not conform to [its] restricted mode of representation . . . is *absolutely impossible* [*überhaupt nicht denkbar*]."[84] Jacobi distinguishes between two faculties involved in knowledge. Reason is a discursive faculty that judges relations between things according to the principle of identity.[85] Because reason is a formal principle, its conclusions seem to have great certainty. But reason can never yield knowledge of actual existence. Sense perception, on the other hand, is a passive faculty that intuits existence immediately through which we can know the existence of things outside of us. But while rationalism's conclusions are necessary within its own parameters, Jacobi denies that we can ever be certain of the reliability of our sense perceptions. The Idealist's claim that our sense

perceptions merely express the contents of our own minds can never be excluded. For this reason, Jacobi follows David Hume in labeling all knowledge based on sense perception "faith."[86]

On the basis of these considerations, Jacobi concludes that rationalism cannot reveal God's existence. Since reason only judge relations analytically,[87] when it contemplates actual existence, reason reaches its limits and is only able to point at what Jacobi calls "a dark ground" lying beyond its reach.[88] For Jacobi, just as our knowledge of the external world requires perception, so our knowledge of God requires perception. But while both God and the external world are known through perception, there are important differences between these perceptions. First, while the external world is always given for us to perceive, we only know God when He chooses to reveal Himself to us. Second, while we know the external world through our five senses, we know God through a mystical sixth sense.[89] For Jacobi, it is not only God who is known through mystical perception. Through this mystical sense we also come to know metaphysical entities such as our immortal soul.[90]

Jacobi recounts an anecdote, which illustrates the conviction afforded by mystical perception. Once a friend who was "inconsolable over the loss of his precious wife" visited Jacobi. The man was a committed atheist who was certain that individual souls were not immortal. Jacobi asked the man whether he would believe in life after death if his deceased wife were to appear to him in a waking vision saying, "Be consoled. I live happier than here on earth and we shall meet again." The man responded that even if he experienced such a vision, it would not change his convictions about life after death. Rather, he would account the experience a delusion arising from his extreme state of grief. Jacobi conceded to the man that all other people, Jacobi included, would concur that if the man had such a vision, it should be considered an hallucination. But Jacobi contended that at the moment when the man saw the vision, he would be unable to deny the reality of an afterlife since the power of direct witness overwhelms all reasoning.[91] Jacobi's point is that conviction ultimately depends on feeling. The mathematician who knows the truth of the Pythagorean theorem is convinced of it because he feels the truth of the geometrical reasoning. In a similar manner, in the moment when we directly witness the presence of something external to us, we are convinced of its existence because we feel its reality. Doubt is not an option.[92]

While rationalism undermines freedom and individuality, "faith" rescues these things. For Jacobi, I am free to the extent that I rise above the mechanical natural order and determine my own purposes.[93] While rationalism teaches that my actions are determined by my place within the necessary causal order, through my mystical sense I feel myself to be a free individual who is able to

defy mechanical causality and determine myself according to final causes. For Jacobi, the idea that I could both be part of the mechanical natural order and freely choose my actions according to final causes is "an incomprehensible fact," a "miracle and mystery akin to creation."[94] He also argues that my mystical perception of God and of my individual soul mutually reinforce one another. When I experience myself as an individual who can spontaneously choose virtue over inclination, I open myself to the possibility that there exists a God who spontaneously creates the world and governs it for the best.[95] And when I feel the eternal, infinite God of love speaking to me, I am summoned from the impersonal natural order and become a dignified individual.[96]

Jacobi draws a number of conclusions from his account of faith and reason. First, given that rationalism cannot lead us to knowledge of God, the consistent rationalist must be an atheist.[97] Second, since God cannot be known through reason, God's nature is fundamentally mysterious to us. As Jacobi puts it, "A God who could be *known* would be no God at all."[98] Third, Jacobi notes that while reason can prove all sorts of things once its authority is accepted, it is impossible for reason to establish its own authority. Hence Jacobi concludes that the authority of reason also depends on faith. I trust its authority because I *feel* that its conclusions are true. Since reason presupposes faith, but faith does not presuppose reason, Jacobi concludes that faith has epistemological priority over reason.[99]

Jacobi casts his account of faith as Christian, which he contrasts with Mendelssohn's rationalistic Jewish teachings.[100] The different means of knowing God used by Christianity and Judaism lead to different conceptions of God. Since Christianity is a religion of faith, grounded in God's revelation of Himself to human beings, it conceives God as a vital, loving, free, mysterious being. God's mystery is expressed by the Christian affirmation of irrational teachings about God such as the incarnation, the trinity and vicarious atonement. In contrast, since Judaism is a religion of reason, it conceives God as an abstract, lifeless, inert, intellectual concept.[101] Jacobi sees Mendelssohn's religious rationalism as reflecting a Jewish commitment to the clarity and certainty of the "letter," while Jacobi's mystical faith reflects Christianity's emphasis on the miraculous mystery of the "spirit."[102] For Jacobi, Judaism's attachment to rationalism makes it idolatrous. Reason is not a supra-linguistic faculty that knows truth independently of language. Rather, all reasoning presupposes linguistic concepts—without language we could not reason.[103] Since reason exists within human language, conceiving God through reason involves casting God in our own image. Worshipping the rationalist's God thus amounts to worshipping a human idol.[104]

According to Jacobi's report, Lessing agreed that rationalism applied consistently led to Spinozism and he respected Jacobi's leap into faith although he

could not take this step himself citing his "old legs and heavy head."[105] Still, according to Jacobi, Lessing had much more respect for sincerely held faith than for half-orthodoxies like Mendelssohn's, which claimed to unite faith and reason. In support of this, Jacobi quotes Lessing's statement at the end of his third *Gegensätz* that "it is not simple orthodoxy that is so loathsome, but a certain cross-eyed (*schielende*) and inconsistent (*ungleiche*) orthodoxy!"[106] But despite Lessing's Spinozism, he was careful not reveal his true opinions. This was not just out of concern for his own reputation, but because Lessing followed Leibniz in recognizing the importance of theistic belief for popular happiness. This was reflected in Lessing's hiding his true views from Mendelssohn since Lessing realized that Mendelssohn drew great comfort from his religious beliefs.[107]

Mendelssohn responded to Jacobi in his final two works *Morning Hours* (1785) and *To Lessing's Friends* (1786). Central to Mendelssohn's response is a reengagement with Spinoza, whom Mendelssohn had not treated in detail for thirty years.

4

Enlightenment Reoriented

Mendelssohn's Pragmatic Religious Idealism

Despite his protestations to the contrary, Mendelssohn was clearly very upset by Jacobi's account of his Spinoza conversations with Lessing.[1] In *Morning Hours*, Mendelssohn sought to neutralize Jacobi's dramatic revelation. *Morning Hours* is a defense of rational proofs for God's existence in the face of idealist, skeptical, materialist, and pantheistic challenges. While in private correspondence Mendelssohn promised that he would not discuss Jacobi's Spinoza conversations, in *Morning Hours* Mendelssohn held to the letter of this promise but not to its spirit.[2] In *Morning Hours,* Mendelssohn does not explicitly mention the Spinoza conversations, but the work contains one lecture that refutes Spinozistic atheism and two that explain away Lessing's Spinozism. Mendelssohn's intent is clearly to defuse Jacobi's bombshell.

Hearing that Mendelssohn planned to publish *Morning Hours* through their mutual friend Elise Reimarus, Jacobi was rightly suspicious of Mendelssohn's intentions. So Jacobi hastily assembled his *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*, beating Mendelssohn to press by about a month. Jacobi's book contained not only his conversations with Lessing but also Jacobi's private correspondence with Mendelssohn. Enraged at having been outmaneuvered by Jacobi and by the fact that Jacobi published their private correspondence without his consent, Mendelssohn quickly penned *To Lessing's Friends*, which presented his own interpretation of the Spinoza conversations.[3]

Why did Jacobi's revelation of Lessing's Spinozism disturb Mendelssohn so profoundly? Some scholars have suggested that Mendelssohn was upset because he saw Jacobi as calling his friendship with Lessing into question. The idea that Lessing chose to tell Jacobi his most deeply held convictions about religion while withholding these views from Mendelssohn was a slight that Mendelssohn could not ignore.[4] Other scholars have suggested that what really disturbed Mendelssohn was Jacobi's challenging the rational theism of the German Enlightenment, which Mendelssohn had devoted his entire life to defending.[5]

While these interpretations are no doubt correct, in my view they point to a deeper concern on Mendelssohn's part. As discussed in chapter 1, Mendelssohn saw in rational theism a basis for Jewish-Christian tolerance and mutual respect. Rejecting rational theism, Jacobi presented a version of Christianity grounded in individual, mystical faith. For Mendelssohn, this effectively undercut the common basis of Judaism and Christianity and undermined the best foundation for improving relations between Jews and Christians. This fact along with Jacobi's disparaging statements about Judaism in the *Spinoza Letters* led Mendelssohn to suspect that Jacobi's disclosure had a hidden agenda—to convert Mendelssohn to Christianity. Mendelssohn saw this confirmed by the fact that Jacobi had concluded the *Spinoza Letters* with a long quote from the "pious pure lips" of "the honest Lavater."[6] As Mendelssohn put it shortly before his death, "It is certain . . . that Jacobi and Lavater are engaged in a common plot."[7]

For his part, Mendelssohn's understanding of Lessing's final theological position was guided by his understanding of a late work of Lessing's that Jacobi completely ignored in the *Spinoza Letters*. In 1779, Lessing published what many consider to be his greatest play, *Nathan the Wise*. Because of the importance of this work for Mendelssohn's interpretation of Lessing, it is worthwhile summarizing its complex plot. Set in Jerusalem at the time of the Third Crusade (1192), the play opens with the main protagonist Nathan returning home to Jerusalem after a trip abroad collecting debts. Upon his return, Nathan discovers that a German Templar knight had just saved his only child Recha from a fire. This knight had himself just been spared from execution by the Muslim sultan of Jerusalem, Saladin, because of the knight's resemblance to the sultan's deceased brother, Assad. Nathan offers the Templar his gratitude and friendship but the Templar spurns Nathan because he is a Jew. After several more entreaties, which culminate in Nathan's famous line, "Are Jew and Christian sooner Jew and Christian than men?" Nathan wins the Templar over and the two become friends. The Templar then visits Nathan's house where he meets Recha with whom he immediately falls in love. Meanwhile, the sultan

needs a loan and summons Nathan. But before asking for the loan, the sultan is impressed by Nathan's wisdom and so asks Nathan which is the true religion. In response, Nathan offers his famous parable of the rings.

The parable, based on a passage in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*,[8] opens by telling of a man who possessed a magic ring, which gave the wearer the power to secure the love of God and men and which made the wearer the head of the family household. When the man died, he left the ring to his favorite son, who in turn left it to his favorite son. Eventually the ring passed to a man with three dutiful sons all of whom he loved equally. In his frailty, the man promised the ring to each. As his death approached, the father could not bear to disappoint any of his sons so he had two identical rings made and gave a ring to each son before he died. After the father's death, the sons quarreled among themselves as to who possessed the true ring, each adducing facts in support of their claim. But the copies were so good that it proved impossible to settle the question. Eventually the sons brought their case before a judge. The judge noted that since the ring was supposed to make its wearer beloved to men, apparently the true ring had been lost as the sons were embroiled in strife. However, the judge held open the possibility that one of them might possess the true ring. The only way for this to be seen, however, would be for the person possessing the true ring to act in such a way as to merit the love of God and men.

When Nathan returns from his visit with Saladin, the Templar asks for Recha's hand in marriage, but Nathan demurs. The Templar is enraged and Recha's devout nanny Daya, who wishes to see Recha a Christian, informs the Templar that Recha is not Nathan's biological daughter, but rather a Christian whom Nathan adopted as a child. The Templar goes to Saladin and tells him of Recha's being a Christian whom Nathan raised as a Jew. The sultan agrees that Nathan must give her up and summons Nathan. In the final scene Nathan reveals that Recha's biological father was a Persian who sent Recha to be raised by his friend Nathan right before his death. Recha also had a brother who was raised by relatives in Europe. As it turns out, Recha and the Templar are brother and sister and their father was the sultan's deceased brother Assad. So Recha and the Templar are Nathan's children and the sultan's niece and nephew, and Nathan and the sultan now consider each other brothers.

Mendelssohn interprets *Nathan the Wise* as a "paean in praise of providence" (*Lobgedicht auf die Vorsehung*) whose rational theism grounds religious tolerance.[9] Without the Templar being saved because of his resemblance to the sultan's brother, Recha would have died, and if not for the fact that the Templar and Recha are brother and sister, Nathan might have been killed for raising Recha as a Jew. As Mendelssohn understands it, Lessing is teaching that divine providence binds Jew, Christian, and Muslim together, and ever the good

Leibnizian, Lessing teaches how providence works through natural means. In support of his understanding of *Nathan*, Mendelssohn claims that before composing the work Lessing had intended to write a sequel to Voltaire's *Candide*, which would show how all the terrible things that Voltaire describes in *Candide* eventually turn out to be for the best. However, because of Voltaire's literary skill, Lessing found it impossible to complete this book. Instead, Lessing penned *Nathan the Wise* as his anti-Candide.[10]

Nathan the Wise provides the framework for Mendelssohn's interpretation of the Fragmentist Controversy. Mendelssohn accepts the widespread perception that in publishing the Fragmentist, Lessing was expressing sympathy with his views. But Mendelssohn points out that the Fragmentist was no atheist, but rather a providential theist. Instead of seeing the Fragmentist's critique of revealed religion as reflecting an antipathy toward religion in general, Mendelssohn claims that Lessing saw the Fragmentist as one whose "devotion to natural religion was so great that . . . he would allow no revealed religion to stand beside it." So Lessing's sympathy with the Fragmentist involved their common belief in rational theism.[11]

How then does Mendelssohn understand Jacobi's Spinoza conversations with Lessing? Somewhat surprisingly, Mendelssohn never questions the accuracy of Jacobi's report of the conversations, but rather interprets Lessing's part in the conversations far differently than Jacobi. Mendelssohn notes that at the very beginning of their conversations, Lessing confessed an attraction to Spinozism, which Mendelssohn surmises surprised Jacobi. Jacobi, however, did not believe that this was Lessing's true belief, but rather took Lessing to be "a man of unsound principles who had a talent for asserting with the same quick wittedness first one thing, then another, today theism, tomorrow a cheap kind of atheism." Jacobi thought that if Lessing could be moved from his intellectual flippancy and converted to Pietistic Christianity, this would be a great coup for the faithful. To accomplish this, Jacobi hit upon the strategy of "risk[ing] first aggravating illness to be able to cure it more effectively."[12] This reflects Mendelssohn's concern that Jacobi was adopting Crypto-Jesuit tactics.[13]

The fear of Crypto-Jesuitism was rampant in enlightened Protestant lands in the 1780s. In brief, many members of the German Enlightenment worried that that the Jesuits were scheming to destroy the Enlightenment. Recognizing that the old tactics of hurling abuse and charges of heresy were insufficient, these Jesuits hit upon another strategy. Adopting the banner of the Enlightenment, they sought to press rationalism in radical directions toward atheism, fatalism, amoralism, and anarchism. In this way, people would come to see the danger of the Enlightenment and be primed to return

to the bosom of Christian faith. As one opponent of Jesuitism put it: "In the nations which are still subject to Rome the Jesuits continue to foster superstition and seek desperately to prevent the introduction of Enlightenment, while in 'enlightened' nations they vigorously promote Enlightenment with the deliberate purpose of blinding the people through an excess of light."[14]

On Mendelssohn's reconstruction of the events, by "lead[ing] Lessing deeper and deeper into the labyrinths of Spinozism" Jacobi hoped that Lessing would recognize that the Enlightenment was undermining people's most cherished moral and religious beliefs and follow Jacobi in taking a "mortal leap" into faith.[15] As Jacobi's conversations with Lessing progressed, Jacobi's eagerness mounted as he found Lessing first expressing sympathy with his account of Spinozism and then seeming receptive to Jacobi's account of faith. Jacobi was elated as converting the greatest of German Enlightenment philosophers to orthodox [*rechtgläubige*] Christian faith would no doubt precipitate a mass return to Christianity. But just as Jacobi was ready to celebrate Christianity's victory over the godless Enlightenment, Lessing shocked Jacobi by announcing that while he appreciated Jacobi's "mortal leap" into faith, he could not undertake such a leap himself because of his "old legs and heavy head." Jacobi was crestfallen, but he quickly realized that all was not lost. After all, Lessing had agreed with Jacobi's reasoning, only complaining that his "old legs" prevented him from following Jacobi's leap into faith. Lessing's example could be used to help convert others. Immediately, Mendelssohn came to mind. As a prominent German Enlightenment philosopher, a friend of Lessing, and a Jew to boot, Mendelssohn was a natural, irresistible target.[16]

For Mendelssohn, however, Jacobi seriously misinterpreted Lessing's reactions. Mendelssohn notes that throughout his life Lessing preferred to hear an incorrect doctrine defended skillfully rather than hear a truth defended with shallow reasoning.[17] Enjoying Jacobi's skillful presentation of Spinozism and his doctrine of faith, Lessing gave Jacobi encouragement by appearing to agree with him. Lessing's statement that his legs were too old and his head too heavy was not, however, an admission of weakness, but rather an example of Lessing's famous irony. Lessing was saying that while he had enjoyed the skillfulness of Jacobi's arguments, they had not convinced him.

Still, Mendelssohn cannot ignore the fact that at the beginning of their conversation Lessing had declared sympathy for Spinoza's views. In light of Mendelssohn's belief in Lessing's honesty, Mendelssohn thinks that Lessing's confession of Spinozism must have been sincere. But Mendelssohn gives Lessing's Spinozism a far different interpretation than Jacobi. As I will show in detail, Mendelssohn claims that Lessing's Spinozism was a "refined" type that preserved divine providence and morality. This "refined Spinozism" fit with

Lessing's commitment to an enlightened form of Christianity as it was a way of giving rational sense to the Christian dogmas of the trinity and the incarnation. Mendelssohn agrees with Jacobi that Spinoza's metaphysics constitute a serious threat to human flourishing, but Mendelssohn does not see Jacobi's mysticism as a way of rescuing human dignity, but rather as itself a serious threat to it, which must be opposed. Mendelssohn remains convinced that exercising rational, critical judgment is the best way to uphold our humanity and to promote our flourishing.

I will begin with a discussion of Mendelssohn's critique of Jacobi's politics and his defense of political rationalism. I will then turn to Mendelssohn's metaphysics beginning with his theory of truth and his refutation of Spinoza. From there I will explore Mendelssohn's account of Lessing's "refined Spinozism" and his reasons for rejecting it. Finally, I will examine Mendelssohn's attack on Jacobi's mysticism, paying particular attention to its Jewish-Christian polemical dimensions.

Mendelssohn's Critique of Jacobi's Politics

Mendelssohn's suspicion that Jacobi employed crypto-Jesuit tactics goes back to "Something Lessing Said." In his response to this piece, Mendelssohn notes that Jacobi begins his essay with the claim that "all the arguments against the privileges of the pope are either groundless or apply with double and triple force to the princes themselves."[18] But while Jacobi announces that he will treat papal versus princely rule, in fact he only treats princely versus popular rule. Mendelssohn finds this suspicious, asking whether Jacobi was "unable or *unwilling* to keep to the first idea"?[19] Furthermore, Mendelssohn deems Jacobi's arguments for popular rule "rather exaggerated" (*ziemlich ubertrieben*) and impractical and he thinks that Jacobi must have been aware of this. Mendelssohn suggests that Jacobi's defense of popular rule is insincere and that by defending popular rule in absurd ways, he seeks to dispose the reader to accepting despotic religious authority.[20]

For Mendelssohn, Jacobi's sympathy with religious despotism is connected with his being what Mendelssohn calls a "*Schwärmer*." The English term generally used to translate "*Schwärmer*" is "enthusiast," but this does not capture the full sense of the German term. Mendelssohn defines "*Schwärmer*" in three ways. First, he uses the term for mystics who believe that God is known intuitively through a special sense organ.[21] *Schwärmers* call this mystical perception of the divine "revelation." Second, *Schwärmers* are fanatics who think that one should subordinate all of one's thoughts and actions to a single purpose.[22] This purpose

can be intellectual, involving cultivation of knowledge; ethical, involving the pursuit of justice; or political, involving patriotism; but frequently it is religious, involving absolute devotion to service of God.[23] Third, *Schwärmers* are people whose individual, subjective representations overwhelm their sense of objective reality. For Mendelssohn, ideas are connected subjectively when the connection between them comes from our associating them according to our individual imagination. Ideas are connected objectively when they represent things as causally connected according to universal laws of nature.[24] *Schwärmers* are so attuned to their subjective, individual ways of connecting ideas that they become removed from the common world. In the most extreme cases, *Schwärmerei* is a form of madness (*Verrückung*).[25]

These characteristics of the *Schwärmer* explain why Mendelssohn deems Jacobi one. Jacobi's faith is based on his individual, mystical perception of God, which Jacobi explicitly contrasts with the universal, rational laws of nature. Jacobi deems devotion to God the highest goal of life to which all other ends should be subordinated, and he denigrates as superficial and egoistic Mendelssohn's concern with cultivating happiness and perfection. Furthermore, Mendelssohn thinks that Jacobi's enthusiasm leads him to be deceptive and manipulative. Jacobi is fully convinced of the truth of his mystical perception of God, which he thinks establishes life's purpose for all people. But given the supra-rational nature of Jacobi's religious faith, Jacobi cannot establish the truth of his views through rational arguments, and thus he adopts crypto-Jesuit tactics, trying to manipulate people into accepting them by stoking fear of reason and enlightenment.

Mendelssohn sees Jacobi's religious enthusiasm as disposing him to sympathize with religious despotism with frightening potential consequences. Since Jacobi deems faith in God the highest goal of life, he approves of religious despots who would ensure that people confess the proper faith and persecute those who fail to do so. Mendelssohn considers Jacobi's overt pronouncements in favor of giving wide berth to personal political liberty insincere. For Jacobi's defense of individual liberty is so "exaggerated" that it naturally culminates in anarchy, thereby leading the reader to question the viability of popular rule and disposing her to appreciate the benefits of despotism. By recognizing the advantage of despotism over popular rule, the reader would then recall Lessing's statement that all the arguments against the privileges of the pope are groundless or apply doubly or triply to the princes and so be disposed to accept religious despotism.[26]

Mendelssohn finds Jacobi's faith especially terrifying since it casts God as beyond rational categories which means that one cannot use reason to judge the morality of God's dictates. For Mendelssohn, even were the bourgeois life

superficial and egoistic (which Mendelssohn does not concede), it would be preferable to the threat of religious oppression, inherent in Jacobi's religious enthusiasm.

Mendelssohn's Defense of Political Rationalism

While Jacobi charges that Mendelssohn's defense of enlightened despotism reflects a half-hearted commitment to political liberty, Mendelssohn sees reason as providing the best foundation for upholding individual dignity and freedom. At the heart of Mendelssohn's political thought is his theory of right. As we have seen, for Mendelssohn the state's legitimacy depends on its capacity to expand my ability to exercise my rights.[27] Duty is derivative from right. If someone has a right to certain goods, I have a duty to respect her rights.[28] Mendelssohn enumerates three goods that I have rights to: (1) my capacities; (2) the products of my industry; (3) my property.[29] He differentiates between perfect and imperfect rights. A perfect right is one in which "all the conditions under which the predicate belongs to the subject are invested in the holder of the subject."[30] In other words, in the case of a perfect right my right to my goods depends solely on my will. A right is imperfect if "part of the conditions under which the right applies is dependent on the knowledge and conscience of the person who bears the duty."[31] For example, if a person needs money to buy food, he has a right to this money from all people who can spare it. Similarly, anyone who has surplus money has a duty to distribute it since beneficence forms an essential part of perfection. But the needy person's right to this money is imperfect since there are many poor people who legitimately have a right to beneficence and the rich person cannot aid them all. Mendelssohn calls such cases instances of a "collision" of duties.[32] Here it is up to the rich person to decide to whom to give money. Perfect rights may be safeguarded through coercive force, but exercising imperfect rights depends on the discretion of the person petitioned.[33] For Mendelssohn, I have the ability to alienate my perfect rights to many of my goods and I can be coerced if I seek to go back on my word.[34] However, Mendelssohn claims, my rights to certain goods are inalienable. Chief among these is my right to my convictions. Since my beliefs depend on rational conviction, it is impossible for me to transfer my right to my beliefs to another. Coercion can cause me to *say* that I have changed my beliefs, but it can never cause me to actually change my beliefs.[35]

Mendelssohn denies the church the right to any of the individual's goods.[36] Since my perfect right to my convictions is inalienable and religion is solely concerned with people's convictions, the church can never have the right to

coerce my beliefs even if I agree to transfer this right to the church.[37] But Mendelssohn goes further claiming that my rights are so sacrosanct that even God is bound to uphold them. Indeed, God can demand less of me than can another person. While my rights can be limited when they "collide" with another person's rights, since God is all-powerful and absolutely self-sufficient, God has no need for any goods and so my rights can never collide with God's.[38] For Mendelssohn, God is an all-powerful, benevolent being who only desires my perfection and happiness, so the only duty that I can speak of in relation to God is my responsibility to promote my own perfection and the perfection of others.[39]

In contrast to Jacobi's faith which is individual, Mendelssohn's reason is a universal capacity whose authority all people can recognize in virtue of being human. Mendelssohn sees reason as a capacity, which promotes tolerance. Since we can all recognize the authority of reason, we can adjudicate our disagreements through reasoned debate rather than seeking to compel others to accept our views by force or deception. Since reason is a deep part of ourselves, we are most free when we evaluate our convictions according to the standards of reason. And as I have shown in chapter 2, Mendelssohn sees rational theism as promoting religious diversity rather than stifling it.

As previously noted, Jacobi attacks Mendelssohn's commitment to political freedom as half-hearted claiming that Mendelssohn defends enlightened despotism and certain forms of censorship. In fact, Mendelssohn has a very positive view of republican government. For Mendelssohn, however, republicanism is not just about the people choosing their political leaders. Rather, it requires that the people be committed to a political process that values the enlightened principles of reasoned debate, equality under the law, and individual liberty. Otherwise an elected government could rule despotically, stripping people of their freedoms and oppressing minorities by appealing to irrational prejudices and superstitions.[40] Mendelssohn therefore thinks that before a republic can be established, the people must be educated to cherish enlightened values. The process of moving from political despotism to full political liberty is a long one that requires a gradual approach. For this reason, when asked about the ideal regime, Mendelssohn writes: "if the people are wise, the republican, if not the monarchical."[41] Mendelssohn thinks that in his own day, most people in Prussia have not yet fully internalized enlightened values. His defense of Frederick the Great's enlightened absolutism is then not because he sees it as the ideal form of government. Rather, Mendelssohn sees Frederick as preparing the ground for Prussians to eventually govern themselves by creating a single set of laws that govern all citizens, promoting the arts and sciences, and encouraging people to argue freely and think for themselves.[42]

Turning to the question of censorship, we have seen that for Mendelssohn political coercion is legitimate if exercising my rights harms another. But it is not only my actions that can harm another. My disseminating hateful superstitions or my espousing atheism could lead people to harm one another.[43] For this reason, the state has the right to censor the dissemination of harmful beliefs such as atheism, which undermines the authority of morality, and fanatical religious beliefs, which promote hatred of members of other faiths. But Mendelssohn recognizes that censorship of any kind presents problems. While the slavish person sees freedom merely as a means of achieving happiness, the wise person realizes that freedom itself is constitutive of happiness.[44] As Mendelssohn puts it, "Life without liberty is hardly tolerable."[45] Since the state's legitimacy is predicated on its ability to promote the perfection of each of its citizens, censorship seems to run counter to the mission of the state. Furthermore, censorship is very tricky because any time the state is granted the authority to limit people's freedom of expression, there is a risk that the state will abuse this authority and censor speech inappropriately.[46] While Jacobi interprets Mendelssohn's statements on censorship as reflecting ambivalence between valuing freedom and being attracted to despotism, Mendelssohn sees himself as offering a nuanced approach to a complex problem. The danger of propagating fanatical and atheistic beliefs, which promote intolerance and immorality, must be weighed against the damage caused by stripping people of their freedom of expression. This is why Mendelssohn seeks a compromise claiming that the propagation of pernicious ideas such as fanaticism and atheism should be monitored "from a distance." However, Mendelssohn only argues for this limited form of censorship in *Jerusalem*, a work that expresses sympathy with enlightened despotism. For Mendelssohn thinks that once people internalize enlightened values, the damage wrought by censorship increases while its utility diminishes. Since enlightened people value freedom as an end in itself, limiting their freedom to express their beliefs does more harm than good. And since enlightened individuals value reasoned debate, they can be more trusted to critically analyze and ultimately reject hateful or asocial teachings. Thus Mendelssohn writes that in a republic "the spirit of contradiction is . . . a wholesome underpinning of freedom and general well being." While not every republican is a great thinker, "it is better for such an individual to judge in accordance with his meager insights than to recognize and blindly follow some philosophical pope (*philosophischen Pabst*) wherever the latter wants to lead him. Anyone who complains about this freedom cultivates despotic intentions (*despotische Absichten*) and is a dangerous citizen in the republic of philosophy."[47]

Mendelssohn's Defense of Rational Theism: Preliminary Considerations

In his final correspondence, Mendelssohn writes that the purpose of philosophy is to "make me happier than I would be without it."[48] For Mendelssohn, trusting in the principles of natural theology is central to his happiness. As he puts it in *Morning Hours*, "Without God, providence, and immortality, all of life's goods appear as of contemptible value in my eyes and life on this earth . . . is like peregrination in wind and storm without the comfort of finding shelter in the evening."[49] For Mendelssohn, life is full of challenges and setbacks. In difficult times, I am at risk of losing all hope and sinking into depression, and even in good times, I cannot fully enjoy life because of my awareness of how short life is. For Mendelssohn, the only way that I can enjoy life and live it to the fullest is to believe that a benevolent God is guiding my life for the best and that I possess an immortal soul.[50]

But for Mendelssohn, our interest in natural theology provides no basis for accepting the truth of its tenets. Mendelssohn criticizes the educator Johann Bernhard Basedow who claims that we have a duty to believe in religious concepts because we have a duty to promote our happiness.[51] For Mendelssohn, the idea that we must accept certain doctrines as true because they make us happy involves a confusion between our faculties of approval and reason. Our faculty of approval moves us to make external objects correspond to our sense of the good and the beautiful, while our faculty of reason seeks to make our minds correspond to external objects.[52] Since our faculty of approval is related to desire and action, we can have duties in relation to this faculty such as the duty to act ethically. In relation to our faculty of cognition, however, the only moral duty we can speak of is the duty to seek knowledge since knowledge is part of our perfection. There can, however, be no moral necessity to accept the truth of particular doctrines. The only necessity I have to accept a particular doctrine is what Mendelssohn calls a "physical necessity," which derives from my being convinced of its truth on rational grounds.[53]

Mendelssohn acknowledges, however, that since the tenets of natural theology are crucial for our happiness, it is difficult to maintain the cold objectivity required for a successful rational examination of them.[54] As he puts it: "With each doubt, our peace (*Ruhe*) disappears, our entire system of felicity undermined. Who can, with a calm eye, see the pan [of the scales] swinging when it is swaying between life or death? Who is willing to undertake a critical examination of his religious beliefs when this creates the possibility that this inquiry will deem them false and so overthrow his happiness?"[55]

These considerations guide Mendelssohn's approach to atheists like Spinoza. For Mendelssohn, those who critique and deny natural religion are actually agents of providence who help preserve pure knowledge of this truth. As Mendelssohn puts it, atheists "strain their powers to raise doubts, which cost them their inner peace in order to raise criticisms against accepted propositions criticism of which may embitter their entire life on earth."[56] In denying divine providence and the immortality of the individual soul, Spinoza undermines his own happiness. His criticisms of natural theology, however, ultimately promote human perfection and happiness.[57] For when one does not test the reasons for accepting the truth of religious doctrines, these doctrines can easily degenerate into prejudices, superstitions, and blind faith, which are even more of a threat to happiness than atheism.[58] Since the theist is reluctant to question his religious beliefs for fear of undermining his happiness, the doubting atheist serves a critical role in promoting human perfection.[59] In consequence, Mendelssohn concludes that "we must listen to each doubt raised to us with tolerance and welcome each criticism even if it seems to threaten our entire system."[60]

As we saw in the previous chapter, Jacobi claims that Spinoza constructs his philosophical system by applying with complete consistency the PSR, which states that nothing comes from nothing (*ex nihilo nihil fit*). This leads Spinoza to two teachings that oppose Mendelssohn's rational theism: (a) monism, which denies the existence of a transcendent deity and human individuality including denying the existence of an individual immortal soul; and (b) the denial of final causes, which precludes divine providence and human freedom.

Mendelssohn begins his critique of Spinozism by noting that Spinozism is a "strange" (*sondbar*) doctrine that "deviates from the path of common sense."[61] We can identify three ways in which Mendelssohn thinks that Spinoza's teachings (as interpreted by Jacobi) contravene common sense. First, while Spinoza claims that all things including human beings are modes, which inhere in God, Mendelssohn thinks that we have an intuitive sense of ourselves as unique individuals who exist outside of God. Second, while Spinoza denies that we act for final causes, we experience ourselves as free beings who act for purposes. Third, while Spinoza denies that there are final causes in nature we experience the world as wisely designed.

For Mendelssohn, the fact that a doctrine deviates from common sense renders it suspect, though not necessarily false. Mendelssohn explains the relationship between common sense and philosophical ratiocination in an allegorical dream, which is worth reviewing.[62] In the dream Mendelssohn and some friends are traveling in the Alps. The travelers have two guides—a man and a

woman. The man is "a young, coarse Swiss of strong limbs, but not of the keenest understanding," while the woman is "long and thin, serious, with a sunken expression, of enthusiastic physiognomy and dressed fantastically." She also has what seem to be wings behind her head. The travelers follow the two guides along the path until they reach a fork in the road. At this point, the guides diverge, taking different paths. The man rushes ahead to the right, while the woman flutters to the left, leaving the travelers at the fork confused, not knowing whom to follow. An old matron appears who approaches with slow, careful steps. She calms the travelers and explains to them that they will soon know which path to take. The male guide is "common sense" (*Gemeinsinn*) and the female guide is "contemplation" (*Beschauung*). Most of the time they walk in step. Occasionally they diverge, but eventually return to their point of divergence to have their discord decided by the matron. Common sense is usually correct and contemplation allows herself to be instructed. Occasionally, however, contemplation is correct and when this happens common sense fails to submit to the matron's judgment. One of the travelers then asks the matron her name. She says that on earth her name is "reason" and in heaven—but before she can finish, a fanatical crowd gathers around contemplation, and resolves to expel her along with common sense and reason.[63]

Mendelssohn immediately offers an interpretation of the dream. Traveling in the Alps is an allegory for metaphysical investigation. In the course of speculation (*Spekulation*) Mendelssohn claims that he often is not conscious of the relation of his investigations to common sense. To confirm the accuracy of his speculation, he orients himself by comparing the results of his speculation with common sense. When there is a divergence, he returns to the point of separation and uses reason to determine whether speculation or common sense is correct. Mendelssohn concludes by citing the doctrines of idealism, egoism (i.e., solipsism) and skepticism as examples of speculations, which contradict common sense, and must be corrected by reason. We can presumably add Spinozism as well.[64]

To better understand Mendelssohn's conception of common sense and speculation and their relation to one another, we must review his concept of truth. At the beginning of *Morning Hours*, Mendelssohn considers the standard correspondence theory of truth. According to the standard theory, truth involves agreement between things (*Sachen*), thoughts (*Gedanken*), and words (*Worten*), where the concept (thought) contains "no more and no less" than the thing it represents and words "correctly signify" the true concept.[65] While Mendelssohn considers this definition "not incorrect" (*nicht unrichtig*), he deems it "unfruitful" (*nicht fruchtbar*). Mendelssohn notes that if truth is agreement (*Übereinstimmung*), then falsity is disagreement (*Mißtimmung*). But how does one recognize

whether or not there is agreement or disagreement between thoughts and things? Since we have no access to things outside of our representations of them, how can we ever verify whether our thoughts correctly represent things in themselves?[66]

To address this problem, Mendelssohn outlines criteria for delineating the truth or falsity of thoughts. He disagrees with Jacobi that the highest principle of reason is the PSR, which states that from nothing, nothing comes. Rather, Mendelssohn sees the keystone of reason as the principle of noncontradiction (PNC) and he holds that PSR can be derived from PNC.[67] Mendelssohn divides concepts into two major divisions. Thoughts may refer to possible or impossible things or they may refer to actual or not-actual things. Every actual thing is possible, and every impossible thing is not actual but not every possible thing is actual and every not-actual thing may or may not be possible.[68]

Mendelssohn considers the distinction between possible and impossible thoughts. He notes that possible thoughts can be divided into three types: (a) concepts; (b) judgments; and (c) inferences. Concepts are comprised of characteristics that Mendelssohn calls "marks" (*Merkmale*). Judgments are propositions where something is predicated of a subject.[69] A concept is impossible if its marks are contradictory, and a judgment is impossible if something is predicated of a subject, which contradicts the marks of the subject.[70] Otherwise, the concept and judgment are possible. So, for example, the concept of a triangle with four sides is impossible since having three sides is an essential "mark" of all triangles. Similarly, the judgment that "the triangle has four sides" is impossible. In contrast, the concept of a triangle whose sides are twenty-four inches long is possible and the proposition "the triangle has sides which are twenty-four inches long" is a possible judgment.[71]

Inferences involve the correct analysis of concepts. Human knowledge is organized like a tree. Individual things are the leaves, which are grouped into different kinds (*Arten*). These kinds are the outermost branches, which are grouped into species (*Geschlechter*). These species are the next outer branches, which are grouped into classes (*Classen*). These classes are inner branches, which are united into root concepts (*Stammbegriffe*), which are the trunk of the tree.[72] Every essential mark, which pertains to the inner group pertains to the outer groups, but not all essential marks of the outer group pertain to the inner group. So for example, all the essential marks of quadrilaterals pertain to squares, but not every essential mark of squares pertains to all quadrilaterals (e.g., a square's having four equal sides).[73]

We can render judgments about the possibility or impossibility of concepts based on the principle of noncontradiction alone. With concepts that designate actual or not-actual things, matters are more complicated. Mendelssohn claims

that there are certain concepts that I know for certain designate actual things. Following Descartes, Mendelssohn holds that I know for certain that my own thoughts exist and I can therefore conclude that I exist.[74] But how can I know that my thoughts of objects actually existing outside myself designate real things? With the exception of the concept of God, Mendelssohn thinks that I must rely on my sense perceptions.[75]

But in light of the fact that I can never compare my thoughts with things in themselves, how can I be certain that my thoughts of things that actually exist outside of myself are true? Rather than succumbing to skepticism, Mendelssohn offers a definition of truth that departs from the conventional correspondence theory. Mendelssohn continues to affirm that truth involves agreement (*Übereinstimmung*), but he redefines what this agreement consists in. Rather than understanding truth as the agreement between thoughts and the things themselves, Mendelssohn defines truth as agreement between the various representations of our different sense perceptions as well as agreement between the representations of different subjects, human and animal alike.

For example, take the famous case of Descartes' stick that looks broken in water. For Mendelssohn, the reason that we incorrectly take the stick to be broken is not because my visual perception of the stick is mistaken, but rather because I make an incorrect inference based on a single visual perception. In general, the testimony of my visual sense from a particular angle agrees with the testimony of my visual sense from other angles and in general the testimony of my visual sense agrees with the testimony of my other senses. I err, however, when I assume that because this agreement *often* pertains, that it therefore *always* pertains. This is a logical error, which involves drawing a universally quantified conclusion from an existentially quantified premise. To achieve greater certainty concerning my judgment about the stick, I must perceive the stick from different angles, through different mediums (e.g., in air, through a magnifying glass), and using different senses (e.g., my sense of touch). I then compare my perceptions of the stick with other people's perceptions as well as with animals' perceptions of it. For example, assuming that the unbroken stick is long enough for a bird to use it to build a nest, but the broken stick is too short, will the bird use the stick to make her nest? Through these observations, I soon realize that my rendering a judgment about the stick after only viewing with it with one sense, at one angle, through one medium was too hasty.[76]

This view of truth yields important consequences concerning our knowledge of external objects. First, our knowledge of the external world is at best probable. The more agreement I find, the more certainty I have, but it is always possible that even if I find agreement among my senses after five tests,

I will find disagreement when I test the next six times.[77] Second, our knowledge of external objects involves how I must think them rather than a correspondence between thoughts and things in themselves. Given that things in themselves lie outside of concepts, when considering things in themselves, Mendelssohn notes that we "stand at the limits of knowledge and every step forward that we wish to take is a step into the void (*ein Schritt ins Leere*)."[78] Mendelssohn concludes that "when we say that a thing is extended and moves, these words have no other meaning than this: a thing has such an attribute that it must be thought of as extended and moving. Saying that A is or that A [must be] thought of [in a certain way]…is the same thing." [79]

In this way, Mendelssohn claims that his disagreement with idealism is almost negligible. Both he and the idealist agree that we perceive objects of outer experience. The question is whether there is an independently existing "archetype" (*Urbild*) grounding these experiences of external objects or whether our experience of external objects is the creation of our minds. But since for Mendelssohn the difference between saying that we must *think* objects as existing externally to us and saying that they *actually* exist externally to us is unimportant, he sees his dispute with the idealist as a "mere feud over words (*bloße Wortfehde*)."[80]

As I mentioned above, Mendelssohn thinks that while we generally must rely on sense perception for our knowledge of external reality there is one thing whose existence can be deduced from its concept alone, namely God. Kant famously criticizes the *a priori* ontological proof of God's existence, and in *Morning Hours*, Mendelssohn defends this proof against Kant's criticism.[81] At the heart of the ontological proof is the claim that since the most perfect being contains all the marks of perfection, and existence is a perfection, existence must be predicated of the most perfect being and so the most perfect being must exist.[82] Kant argues that this proof is based on a basic confusion, namely conceiving of existence as a predicate. In his famous example, Kant argues that if you take the concept of one hundred thalers (dollars) and add the predicate of existence to the concept, you do not thereby expand the concept or render it more perfect, you merely attribute actuality to it. Mendelssohn paraphrases Kant's position as follows: "Existence is no mere attribute, no expansion [of a concept], but rather is the positing of all attributes and marks of a thing…"[83]

Mendelssohn is willing to grant Kant that existence is not a predicate but rather the positing of attributes in a real thing, but he does not think that Kant thereby deals a fatal blow to the ontological proof. Mendelssohn notes that contingent things may or may not exist—I can think of contingent things without positing their real existence. God, however, is not just the most perfect being, but is also a necessary being. Hence it is impossible for me to think God without

positing God's existence since the concept of a necessary being, which does not exist is contradictory. Mendelssohn considers how "an opponent" (*Gegner*) might respond to this. The opponent asks: "The necessary being must actually exist because human beings can not think otherwise… What guarantees that what *we must think as actual, actually exists* (emphasis Mendelssohn's)?"[84] In light of Mendelssohn's concept of truth, we have the answer. As Mendelssohn puts it: "What all rational beings must think so and not otherwise is true so and not otherwise. Whoever demands more than this conviction seeks something that… he can never attain a concept of…"[85] Or as Mendelssohn puts in his memoranda to Jacobi, "My credo is: what I cannot think to be true, does not trouble me with doubt."[86]

Regarding knowledge of the external world, Mendelssohn therefore distinguishes between two types of truth. First, there is what we might call "infinite truth," which involves full agreement between the mind and things in themselves.[87] This truth is God's alone. Second, there is a distinctly human concept of truth that we might call "finite truth," which involves agreement among finite subjects.[88] With finite truth we can make a further distinction between "probable" and "certain" truth. When our knowledge depends on *a posteriori* sense perceptions, the most we can attain is probable truth. Analytic propositions of pure mathematics and logic are certain but do not tell us about actual existence.[89] In the unique case of God's existence it is possible to attain certain truth of actual existence through *a priori* concepts alone.[90] In sum, for Mendelssohn I attain finite truth when my representations agree with others' representations thereby forming a common world. When, however, my representations are idiosyncratic, not agreeing with the representations of others, I do not have truth.

While Mendelssohn thinks that it is impossible to refute the skeptic, trusting in "finite truth" is absolutely necessary for lived existence. Indeed, he notes that even "doubters nevertheless act in common life just like the great majority of human beings do who regard themselves as fully convinced of a considerable number of eternal truths (*ewiger Wahrheiten*)."[91] If we did not believe in the existence of an external world we could never act, and without belief in God we could not be happy and would lack a crucial incentive to act morally. The pragmatic necessities of life supply us the motivation to act on ideas that we accept to be true on the basis of probability and/or the "essential constitution" of our minds.[92] Put together, this constitutes what I call Mendelssohn's "pragmatic idealism."[93]

Having sketched Mendelssohn's concept of truth, we are now in a better position to understand his account of common sense and speculation. Common sense involves intuitive, snap judgments rendered on sense perception. The "common" aspect refers to the fact that they are judgments that people will

commonly arrive at. So, for example, Mendelssohn accounts the teleological proof of God's existence a judgment of common sense. Observing order in the universe people naturally conclude that there must be a superior being who orders the universe.[94] In contrast, speculation involves judgments that begin with *a priori* concepts not derived from sense perception and arrives at conclusions through logical deduction. The ontological proof, which deduces God's existence from the concept of God, is an example of speculation. So for Mendelssohn, both common sense and speculation are operations of reason.[95]

Mendelssohn notes that both common sense and speculation can err, though experience has taught him that more often than not common sense is correct. As such, his *modus operandi* is that he follows common sense, unless reason can show him precisely how common sense has gone astray.[96] Common sense judgments can err if they are based on drawing false inferences from perceptions. For example, common sense tells me that the earth is flat. However, when I mount a spaceship and view the earth from outer space, I realize that this is an incorrect inference based on incomplete information.[97] Speculation can err if its *a priori* concepts are incorrect or if it makes incorrect inferences. We will see an example of how speculation can err in Mendelssohn's discussion of Spinozism. Mendelssohn also notes that language can lead speculation astray. Put briefly, since the word-signs that we use to designate metaphysical concepts are arbitrary, we can easily lose sight of how words are being used to designate concepts.[98] The arbitrary nature of the signs used to designate metaphysical concepts is especially problematic given that words are "rigid forms," but can have multiple meanings which can change over time.[99] This leads Mendelssohn to suspect that not all metaphysical disputes are substantial but that many are merely "verbal disputes" (*Worterstreitkeiten*). We have seen an example of this in Mendelssohn's discussion of idealism, and we will encounter another example of it in his discussion of Spinoza.

In Battle with Spinoza

We can now return to Mendelssohn's treatment of Spinoza. For Mendelssohn, Spinozism is the quintessential example of a speculative doctrine. He begins by defining Spinozism:

> The Spinozists claim: "We ourselves and the sensible world outside us are nothing existing in themselves, but rather mere modifications of infinite substance. No thought of the Infinite could attain reality outside of the Infinite and isolated from its being. There is only a

> single substance of infinite power of thought and infinite extension. God, says the Spinozist, is the only necessary and only possible substance. Everything lives, moves, and is nothing outside of God.[100] Rather, everything is a modification of the divine being. *One is all and all is one* [*Eins ist Alles und Alles ist Eins*]."[101]

Spinozists are monists who believe that only one substance is possible and actual. This substance is the necessary existent, which is given the honorific "God." God has two attributes, infinite thought and infinite extension, and finite human beings exist as modifications of the unique, infinite substance. A little later Mendelssohn explains what he means by "all is one and one is all":

> This cosmos, continues the Spinozist, consists of bodies and minds i.e. according to the doctrine of Descartes, which the Spinozist accepts, there is extension and thought—being which is extended and being which thinks. The Spinozist therefore assigns to his single, infinite substance two infinite attributes—infinite extension and infinite thought. This is his *one is all*. Or rather he says that the collective totality (*gesammte Inbegriff*) of infinitely many finite bodies and infinitely many finite thoughts compose a *one* infinite in extension and infinite in thinking: *all is one*.[102]

There are two sides to Spinozistic pantheism. One side begins with the unique infinite substance and shows how the many derive from it. Absolutely infinite substance has two attributes, infinite extension and infinite thought, and all finite entities are modes of the ontologically primary attributes. This is Spinoza's *one is all*. The second side begins with the many and demonstrates that the totality of finite bodies and minds compose a unique being infinite in both extension and thought. This is Spinoza's *all is one*. In *To Lessing's Friends*, Mendelssohn adds that Jacobi presents Spinoza as a mechanical materialist who denies final causes and human freedom.[103]

Mendelssohn sees Spinoza's monism and his denial of final causes as violating our common sense intuition of ourselves as free individuals and of the world as the wise creation of a benevolent deity. Following the method of orientation, he seeks to find the place where Spinoza departs from common sense. Mendelssohn thinks that Spinozism and common sense are united in accepting the following proposition: "The necessary being thinks itself as absolutely necessary; thinks contingent beings as resolvable into an infinite series; as beings which, according to their nature, assume for their existence an infinite series moving backwards and promote the actuality of an infinite series moving forwards."[104]

Mendelssohn's point is that the Spinozist and theist agree that there is a necessary being who knows all of reality according to its causes. At this point of agreement, there is nothing to preclude divine creation, human freedom, or human individuality. Where does Spinozism diverge from theism and why? Before turning to Spinoza's substantive errors, Mendelssohn offers a surprising genealogical analysis of Spinoza's thought. He claims that it was Spinoza's exposure to kabbalah that first inclined him to pantheism/atheism. As Mendelssohn puts it, "Spinozism has its origin in kabbalistic enthusiasm (*der kabbalischen Schwärmerey*) and is entirely built on this foundation."[105] Mendelssohn does not spell this point out, but he cites Johann Georg Wachter's 1699 *Spinozism in Judaism or Contemporary Judaism and Its Secret Kabbalistic, Deified World*.[106] In this work, Wachter, a Christian who studied kabbalah in Amsterdam with a Christian convert to Judaism named Moses Germano, argues that Spinoza drew the main tenets of his philosophy from his study of kabbalah. As Wachter regards Spinozism as atheism, he concludes that the kabbalah is also atheism.[107] One finds a little more information on Mendelssohn's view of Spinoza's relationship to kabbalah in a recollection mentioned by Mendelssohn's close friend and associate Friedrich Nicolai. It is worth citing Nicolai's recollection in full:

> And then I heard from Mendelssohn his excellent ideas concerning the kabbalistic philosophy of the Hebrews. He explained that the strange appearance and obscurity of the propositions of this oriental philosophy originated in the poverty of the Hebrew language in expressing philosophical concepts, combined with the use of vulgar imagery so characteristic of uncultivated languages. Mendelssohn further demonstrated that stripped from both layers of covering kabbalistic propositions had a very consistent meaning. However, when the allegorical imagery was explained according to the literal meaning of the images and was elaborated into new, equally imaginative commentaries, the grossest nonsense and enthusiasm (*Schwärmerey*) was produced. . . . Thereupon my friend demonstrated very clearly how Spinoza, also a Jew, by combining the kabbalistic philosophy he inherited as a youth with the propositions of Descartes, must have naturally come to represent God to himself as the unique and all-encompassing substance of which the world was only a modification.[108]

According to Nicolai, Mendelssohn claimed that since Hebrew does not have an adequate philosophical lexicon, kabbalists were unable to signify metaphysical concepts precisely and so used "vulgar imagery" to designate the divine

attributes.[109] Later kabbalists did not, however, recognize that the imagery used by the earlier kabbalists was metaphorical, and instead interpreted the imagery used by the earlier kabbalists literally, which led to the "grossest nonsense" and "absurdities," namely pantheism. Reading these later "kabbalistic commentaries" inclined Spinoza to pantheism, which he grounded philosophically by connecting it with Cartesianism.[110]

Mendelssohn does not go into detail about what he means by the original kabbalah versus the latter "imaginative commentaries," nor does he specify the precise errors of later kabbalah. I will not speculate on these questions here, but I would note that the line of reasoning that Mendelssohn uses in explaining the origins of kabbalistic pantheism is remarkably similar to his account of the origins of idolatry. In both cases seemingly nonrational, primitive presentations of the divine are said to originally be metaphorical presentations of rational religious truth, and corruption stems from individuals not recognizing the metaphorical nature of signs used to signify divine attributes, instead taking them to be essential signs of the divine being.

I now turn to Mendelssohn's substantive criticisms of Spinoza, which center on three issues: the world as divine creation, human freedom, and the problem of human individuality.

The World as Divine Creation

In addressing the problem of divine creation, Mendelssohn focuses on the question of whether or not nature exhibits purposes.[111] For Mendelssohn, common sense teaches that there are such purposes, noting that "we need but open our eyes, and consider nature with any minimum of attention to be utterly convinced of it."[112] Our experience of the order in nature leads to the idea of a supreme being who designs and governs it. Of course, the Spinozist does not rate this common sense experience very highly and offers an alternative explanation for this order, which anticipates modern theories of evolution. For the Spinozist, the apparent order in nature does not reflect intelligent design, but rather natural selection. As the Epicurean materialist puts it, ducks do not have webbed feet so they can swim, they swim because they have webbed feet.[113]

For Mendelssohn, the Spinozist's error is grounded in his mistaken understanding of the PSR. While the Spinozist sees the PSR as teaching that nothing can come from nothing, Mendelssohn claims that this is too narrow a definition. The PSR demands a reason not just for every particular event but also for the entire series of events. For this reason, Mendelssohn accepts the Leibnizian understanding of the PSR which Mendelssohn renders as stating that "[for] everything actual . . . it must be possible to conceptualize and to

explain rationally why it is actual and why it became actual in this way rather than in another way."[114]

Mendelssohn notes that since many worlds are possible we need a sufficient reason for the actual existence of our world. While each individual thing within our world can be explained by reference to its proximate finite causes, even were one to extend this to infinity, we would still require an explanation for why this entire series became actual rather than another series.[115] Since many worlds are possible, it is impossible to determine this sufficient reason by material criteria and so we must appeal to moral criteria. The sufficient reason for this world is that it is the best and therefore God approved it and brought it into existence.[116]

Mendelssohn's understanding of the PSR therefore provides important support for a central tenet of his rational theology. In the first two chapters, we saw how Mendelssohn emphasizes God's goodness above all the others divine attributes. Proving God's existence through the Leibnizian PSR shows that divine goodness is not just as a moral, religious, or political desideratum but also a demand of reason. We must assume the existence of a beneficent God in order to explain the existence of the world. Jacobi's response to Mendelssohn is that Spinoza holds that the actual world is the only possible world.[117] For Mendelssohn, this shows that the Spinozist cannot be deemed the most consistent exponent of rationalism since he must regard our universe as an inexplicable, brute fact.[118]

Mendelssohn's proof that the world is a divine creation does not, however, prove that the world has a beginning since the world could be created eternally.[119] Mendelssohn therefore seeks to supplement his defense of creation with a proof that he probably knew from his medieval Jewish predecessor Saadya Gaon.[120] Mendelssohn argues that if the world is eternal, in addition to being sustained by God every event must be preceded by an infinite series of finite causes. But present events could not have been preceded by an infinite series of finite causes because an infinite series can never be actually traversed. Present events can only be preceded by a finite series of causes so the world must have a beginning.[121]

Human Freedom

As we have seen, Jacobi interprets Spinoza as a fatalist who denies that we act for final causes. If this is Spinoza's view, Mendelssohn disagrees with it as he thinks that it is undeniable that we experience ourselves acting for final causes.[122] Mendelssohn is a compatibilist who distinguishes between blind "physical" necessity, which involves being determined by efficient causes

outside of ourselves and which is rightly called fatalism, and "moral" necessity, which involves a person making a decision based on internal rational considerations and which should be accounted freedom.[123] He agrees that Spinoza at times denies human freedom, but Mendelssohn does not consider Spinoza a fatalist. According to Mendelssohn, Spinoza only denies human freedom when he is speaking according to the popular understanding of freedom as arbitrary choice or what Mendelssohn calls "the system of perfect equilibrium" (*das system des vollkommenen Gleichgewichts*).[124] Affirming the absolute validity of the PSR, Spinoza denies that people can choose for no reason at all and so he denies this account of freedom. But Mendelssohn doubts that Spinoza denies that people act for final causes. Rather, Spinoza affirms a compatibilist view of freedom that is identical to Mendelssohn's.[125]

As we have seen, Jacobi does not accept the compatibilistic view of freedom because he thinks that true freedom involves arbitrary choice. For this reason, he sees no substantial difference between compatibilistic determinism and fatalism. Mendelssohn says that he has no objection if Jacobi wishes to conflate moral and physical necessity and call both "fatalism." But in this case, Mendelssohn sees this as a dispute over words rather than as a substantive dispute over things.[126]

Human Individuality

Mendelssohn devotes the bulk of his attack on Spinoza to refuting Spinoza's monism, which denies that human beings exist as substantial beings outside God. To this end, he employs four arguments, which I will consider in turn. The first argument addresses the one is all side of Spinozism, while the last three address the all is one side of Spinozism.

ARGUMENT (1): SPINOZA'S ARBITRARY DEFINITION OF SUBSTANCE Attacking the one-is-all side of Spinozism, Mendelssohn claims that while Spinoza deduces his monism from his definition of substance, this fails because his definition of substance is arbitrary.[127] Mendelssohn paraphrases Spinoza's definition of substance as something that "must exist for itself (*für sich bestehen*), requiring no other beings for its existence and so must be independent."[128] In other words, for Spinoza a substance is something, which exists on its own, not being causally dependent on anything outside of itself for its existence. But no finite being is causally independent hence no finite being is a substance. The only thing that satisfies Spinoza's definition of substance is an infinite, necessary being. Since the universe as a whole contains everything in its limitlessness, it exists on its own requiring no other beings for its existence. It is therefore the one and only

substance, which Spinoza calls "God." For Spinoza, anything that is not a substance is a mode that inheres in substance. Since God is the only substance, all finite things including all human beings inhere in God.[129]

Mendelssohn agrees with Spinoza that a necessary being cannot exist within something else, for if it exists within something else, it is dependent on that other thing for its existence and so cannot be a necessary existent. Mendelssohn also agrees that no finite being *qua* finite can be a necessary existent.[130] For Mendelssohn, Spinoza's mistake is that he identifies existing on one's own with causal independence. In fact, a thing can exist on its own without being causally independent. For example, while a baby depends on his parents for his existence, he exists outside of his parents. In the same way, while human beings require God for their existence, they exist outside of God. For this reason, Mendelssohn thinks that Spinoza's definition of substance is arbitrary and inadequate.[131]

For his part, Mendelssohn defines "substance" as that which exists outside other beings whether or not that thing depends on other things for its existence. Hence Mendelssohn thinks that finite beings, including human individuals, can be considered substances.[132] He notes that Spinoza may wish to reserve his definition of substance for things that are causally independent. Mendelssohn has no problem with that but as with the case of human freedom he then sees his disagreement with Spinoza as dispute over words and not things. From the definition of substance alone, Spinoza surely cannot prove that human beings inhere in God.[133]

ARGUMENT (2): SPINOZA'S INABILITY TO EXPLAIN THE TRANSITION FROM THE ONE TO THE MANY After attacking the one-is-all side of Spinozism, Mendelssohn turns to its all-is-one side. He begins by noting that finite existents possess both matter and form. "Matter" refers to the general attributes of the subject while the specific determinations of the subject are its "form." Since their relations with other finite things in part determine finite beings, understanding the form of finite things requires explaining the causal relations among them.[134] Mendelssohn argues that while Spinoza can successfully explain the derivation of the matter of finite beings from the infinite attributes, he cannot adequately explain the derivation of their form. He applies this objection in detail to both of Spinoza's attributes—extension and thought. Since the objection as applied to extension is both simpler and explained in greater detail, I will focus on it.

"Bodies" are the finite modes of the attribute of extension. Their "matter" consists of extension and impenetrability, which are contained analytically within the infinite attribute of extension.[135] For infinite extension to be particularized into specific "forms," the introduction of movement is required. This is

because bodies are determined through efficient causal relations with other bodies. Spinoza assents to all of this. That is why Spinoza posits what he calls the "immediate infinite mode" of movement and rest between particular bodies and the attribute of extension. For Spinoza, this infinite mode follows directly from the attribute of extension.[136]

Mendelssohn, however, does not think that Spinoza can adequately explain how the infinite mode of movement and rest derives from infinite extension. Since "the totality has no movement," extension considered *qua* attribute, is infinite, inert, and undetermined.[137] Through our immediate knowledge of our own mind we know that we exist as finite individuals and given the parallelism between thought and extension, we must have individual bodies as well. But given the fact that movement and rest cannot be deduced from the attributes, we cannot exist within God and so Spinoza's monism cannot be correct.[138]

ARGUMENT (3): SPINOZA'S CONFUSION OF INTENSIVE AND EXTENSIVE MAGNITUDES

Mendelssohn's third argument also attacks the all-is-one side of Spinoza. For Mendelssohn, Spinoza's claim that the totality of finite particulars compose the necessary being rests on a fallacy—namely the confusion of intensive and extensive magnitudes. Originally found in Wolff's refutation of Spinoza,[139] this argument is Mendelssohn's favorite and he mentions it no less than six times.[140] In the "Memoranda," Mendelssohn describes the argument as "the greatest difficulty I find in Spinoza's system . . . [an objection to which] no defender of Spinoza has yet given any answer."[141]

According to Mendelssohn, Spinoza reached the conclusion that the totality of the cosmos composes a necessary being through the following argument:

a. Something is independent/self-caused if and only if it is an infinite cause.
b. The universe as a whole is composed of an infinity of finite causes.
c. An infinity of finite causes composes an infinite cause.

The universe considered as a whole is thus independent/self-caused.

Spinoza regards the infinite number of finite particulars as components of the infinite whole, which he calls "God." The problem with this argument, according to Mendelssohn, is that the term "infinite" is equivocal. Spinoza confuses "extensive infinity" with "intensive infinity." Mendelssohn distinguishes between "extendedness" (*Ausbreitung*) and "strength" (*Stärke*) or to use technical language, "extensive" and "intensive" magnitudes. By adding more of the same kind of thing, one increases the quality of extendedness, but not the quality of strength. For example, if one adds lukewarm water to lukewarm water, one gets more lukewarm water, but the water does not get any hotter. Mendelssohn

claims that the universe does indeed contain infinite causality, but this is an extensive infinity composed of an infinite number of finite causes. Independent existence, on the other hand, requires an intensive infinity or infinite power.[142]

In the *Spinoza Letters*, Jacobi claims that Mendelssohn's objection reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of Spinoza for it ignores Spinoza's distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. Spinoza defines *natura naturans* as "what is in itself and is conceived in itself . . . that is God insofar as he is considered a free cause," while *natura naturata* is "whatever follows from any of God's attributes, that is, all the modes of God's attributes."[143] In other words, *natura naturans* is God considered *qua* self-caused being, while *natura naturata* is what follows from the free cause conceived in itself, that is, the modes. Jacobi uses Kant's account of space and time as a model for understanding this relation:

> We can represent to ourselves only one space; and if we speak of diverse spaces, we mean thereby only parts of one and the same unique space . . . these parts cannot precede the one all-embracing space, as being, as it were, constituents out of which it can be composed; on the contrary, they can be thought only as *in* it. Space is essentially one; the manifold in it, and therefore the general concept of spaces, depends solely on the [introduction of] limitations.[144]

So the whole has ontological precedence, while the parts are modifications of the whole. Spinoza does not derive the whole, that is, substance by adding finite individuals together. As Jacobi puts it in his letter to François Hemsterhuis, for Spinoza "the sum is not an absurd combination (*ungereimte Zusammensetzung*) of finite things, together constituting an infinite, but a whole in the strictest sense, whose parts can only be thought within it and according to it."[145]

In response, Mendelssohn complains that Jacobi's attack on his understanding of Spinoza is disingenuous. Mendelssohn notes that Jacobi himself recognizes that Spinoza at times seems to conceive of finite individuals as what are ontologically primary and conceives the whole as composed out of the infinite number of finite individuals. Mendelssohn quotes a passage from the *Spinoza Letters* in which Jacobi declares that according to Spinoza, the divinity, "considered *merely* in its transcendental unity . . . must do without actuality whatever, for actuality can only be found in determinate individuals."[146] Commenting on this passage, Mendelssohn writes that "if I understand you rightly, only determinate individual beings are actually existing things: the infinite, on the other hand, or the principle of actuality, is based only on the ensemble, sum-concept, of all these individualities. So it is a mere *collectivum*

quid and lacks all substantiality apart from its constituent members."[147] The issue therefore turns on whether there is any basis to Mendelssohn's claim that one way in which Spinoza establishes his monism is by claiming that the infinite number of finite particulars together compose the necessary being.

ARGUMENT (4): SPINOZA'S ERRANT BELIEF IN UNIVERSALS Mendelssohn's final argument is also directed against the all-is-one side of Spinozism. Mendelssohn claims that Spinoza's conceiving the totality of finite particulars as composing an infinite substance is grounded in his mistaken belief in the reality of universals.[148] Spinoza believes in the absolute intelligibility of the universe, which he thinks requires viewing the universe as a complete, systematic whole.[149] For Spinoza, substance grounds the systematicity and uniformity of the universe, specifically the infinite attributes of extension and thought of which all finite particulars including all human beings are modes.[150] Mendelssohn agrees with Spinoza that reason demands that the universe be regarded as an intelligible whole and that the systematicity and uniformity of nature are what render it intelligible. But for Mendelssohn, Spinoza's mistake is his assuming that the finite particulars compose a real unity, a continuous whole, which Spinoza calls "substance." In reality, according to Mendelssohn, finite particulars only compose an aggregate, that is, a discontinuous whole consisting of discrete parts, which Mendelssohn calls a "totality" (*Inbegriff*).[151] The only unity among these finite particulars is ideal—infinite extension and thought are mere *entia rationis*.[152] As Mendelssohn puts it, "Without thinking beings, the world of bodies would be no world, it would compose no whole. Rather, at most it would consist of isolated unities [*Einheiten*]."[153] So according to Mendelssohn, Spinoza errs in not realizing that his notion of a unique substance is ideal rather than real.

Lessing's Refined Spinozism

After critiquing Spinoza, Mendelssohn seeks to explain Lessing's confession of Spinozism. In lecture fifteen of *Morning Hours,* Mendelssohn considers the possibility that Lessing never truly believed in Spinozism, but that he was merely being playful with Jacobi. Mendelssohn ultimately rejects this interpretation of Lessing's Spinozism since he thinks that Lessing's intellectual integrity precluded him from professing a belief that he did not sincerely hold.[154] Instead, Mendelssohn seeks to explain Lessing's Spinozism as a "refined" type, which Mendelssohn says he first encountered in an essay that Lessing showed him "at the very beginning of our relationship" and which Mendelssohn found

repeated in Lessing's final published writing, *The Education of the Human Race*.[155] According to Mendelssohn, Lessing espoused refined Spinozism because he saw it as meeting certain problems in enlightened theism while at the same time providing the means for defending the Christian dogmas of the trinity and the incarnation.[156] While Mendelssohn cannot accept Lessing's Spinozism for theological and philosophical reasons, he acknowledges that it is consistent with morality and positive religion.

In presenting his interpretation of Lessing's Spinozism, Mendelssohn creates a fictional dialogue between himself and the deceased Lessing. Mendelssohn imagines Lessing being present at his lecture refuting Spinoza. The imagined Lessing is not impressed. He informs Mendelssohn that "even if all the observations that you brought against Spinoza were correct, in the end you would have merely refuted Spinozists, but not Spinozism."[157] The imagined Lessing concedes that Mendelssohn may have uncovered some "defects and holes (*Mängel und Lücken*)" in Spinoza's system, but, he asks, could not a later adherent of Spinoza's system "fill in its holes and amend its defects (*die Lücken auszufüllen und die Mängel zu ergänzen*)?"[158]

The imagined Lessing focuses on Mendelssohn's second and third objections to Spinoza. Addressing Mendelssohn's second objection, which claims that Spinoza can derive the *matter* but not the *form* of the finite modes from the infinite attributes, Lessing turns the table on Mendelssohn by claiming that the theist has no better explanation of the form of finite particulars than does Spinoza. Taking the example of motion, Lessing notes that according to the theist extension in itself is inert, and it is God who imparts motion to extension. But, claims Lessing, God's will is not an adequate explanation for motion for as Spinoza declares in the appendix to part I of the *Ethics*, appealing to God's will has no explanatory value, but amounts to "taking refuge . . . in the sanctuary of ignorance."[159] How extension receives motion is a mystery and theism should not be preferred to Spinozism on account of this problem.[160]

Turning to Mendelssohn's third objection, namely that Spinoza confuses intensive and extensive magnitudes, Lessing concedes the validity of this objection. God cannot be composed out of infinitely many finite things—the all-is-one side of Spinozism is not valid. Like the theist, Lessing conceives God as a necessary being of infinite power and he upholds the theistic view that God contemplates many possible worlds and creates the best one possible.[161] The difference between the theist and Lessing concerns the question whether or not the actual world exists outside of God. For Lessing, the theistic affirmation of the existence of a world outside of God fails to appreciate the full implications of God's infinite knowledge.

Lessing notes that there is an intentional difference between thoughts, the thinking subject, and the object thought (*Gedanken, das Denkende, das Gedachte*).[162] As long as these three elements are in *potentia* they are distinct, but when the subject actualizes its capacity of thinking, the three elements come into the "closest connection" (*innigste Verbindung*). Beings consist of a sequence of marks or characteristics. While thought exists in the thinking subject's mind as a modification of its mental being, when a thought is an accurate representation of the object thought, the thought contains the identical marks as the object thought. Since God is perfect, God's mind is always active and God's thoughts always represent the world perfectly. What then, asks Lessing, could distinguish the actual world from the representation of it in the divine mind? One might claim that the actual world has the predicate "existence" added to it. But, answers Lessing, since God's knowledge of the world is perfect, God's knowledge of the world must include knowledge of this predicate as well. As such, God's representation of the actual world is indistinguishable from the actual world and so by the identity of indiscernibles, they must be the same thing. Lessing therefore concludes that the actual world has no existence outside of the divine mind. This constitutes his "refined Spinozism."[163]

In his treatment of Lessing's Spinozism, Mendelssohn notes an aspect of it not mentioned by Jacobi—namely its Christian elements. Mendelssohn points out that in "The Christianity of Reason," Lessing explicitly defends the trinity by claiming that it has a rational inner meaning. The inner meaning of the trinity is that the three elements God the thinking subject (the father), God's perfect thought of Himself (the son), and the harmony between God and His perfect thought of Himself (the Holy Spirit) are one.[164] The inner meaning of the incarnation is that God's thought of His perfections (i.e., the "son") is identical with God's self.[165] Mendelssohn finds similar reasoning in section 73 of *The Education of the Human Race*, a text that, as we saw, Jacobi pointed to as evidence of Lessing's atheistic Spinozism. The text explicitly takes as its subject "the doctrine of the Trinity" and attempts to explicate it along the lines set forth in "The Christianity of Reason."[166]

Mendelssohn sees Lessing's Spinozism as of a piece with his defenses of other Christian dogmas such as eternal punishment, original sin, and vicarious atonement. As we have seen, in "Leibniz on Eternal Punishment" Lessing argues that Leibniz was sincere in his defense of this doctrine having given it an inner philosophical interpretation. Similarly, in sections 74 and 75 of *The Education of the Human Race* Lessing presents a rational explication of original sin and vicarious atonement.[167] In section 76 of *The Education of the Human Race,* Lessing explains what motivates him to rationally explicate Christian dogmas. He writes that the Christian dogmas were accounted mysteries not

because they are irrational but because when revealed, humanity was not sufficiently mature to understand them. Lessing compares this to a mathematics teacher who announces the solution to a problem to his students in advance despite their not understanding it "in order to give his students some idea of what they are working towards." For Lessing, the human race is progressively becoming more rationally aware, and explicating the inner philosophical sense of the Christian mysteries is part of this process.[168]

While at times Mendelssohn stresses the relative innocuousness of Lessing's refined Spinozism noting that Lessing's Spinozism is only distinguished from theism by a "subtlety," at other times Mendelssohn is much more forceful in his opposition to Lessing's refined Spinozism.[169] Before turning to Mendelssohn's arguments against Lessing's Spinozism, it is worth noting that as with Spinoza himself, Mendelssohn sees Lessing's Spinozism as grounded in a misunderstanding of kabbalistic principles.[170] In a letter to Lessing addressing his Spinozistic account of the trinity, Mendelssohn notes that "our kabbalah also has the principle of that which is emanated, the emanating subject, and the emanation." At the end of his letter to Lessing, Mendelssohn satirizes Lessing's Christian adaptation of kabbalistic principles through a humorous anecdote. There was once a Christian who tried to prove the truth of the trinity to a Jew. The Jew owed the Christian three ducats but only paid him one. When the Christian complained, the Jew showed him the head of the coin, then its tail, and finally its side and said: "just as your three principles [of the knower, the known, and the knowledge] are equivalent to the three persons of God, so this one coin is as good as three ducats."[171]

Mendelssohn opposes Lessing's refined Spinozism because he sees it as containing antihumanistic elements in two ways. First, as we have seen, Lessing's philosophical defense of Christian mysteries is connected with his theory of the progressive education of humanity. Mendelssohn considers this theory antihumanistic as it implies that individuals living in later generations are more capable of achieving perfection than those living in earlier generations. This amounts to injustice toward those who have the misfortune of being born in an earlier age, which contradicts God's goodness. For Mendelssohn, "progress is for the individual" alone.[172]

Second, by claiming that human beings exist within God, Lessing's Spinozism annihilates human individuality. Mendelssohn seeks to uphold human individuality by refuting Lessing's argument for refined Spinozism. Mendelssohn targets Lessing's claim that since God has perfect knowledge of finite beings, these beings are indistinguishable from God's thoughts of them. Mendelssohn notes that while God knows all finite beings, there must be something that distinguishes finite beings from God's infinite knowledge of

them. Otherwise, God would contain these finite beings within His own self and so possess imperfections. Mendelssohn explains this by reflecting on himself. While Mendelssohn is part of an infinite series of causes and effects, he is only cognizant of a small part of this series. God knows Mendelssohn as a being who possesses limited knowledge. But unlike the real Moses Mendelssohn, God is not actually limited in His knowledge. So the actual Moses Mendelssohn must be different from God's knowledge of him and so must exist outside of God. Mendelssohn concludes that human beings' limited consciousness is "the most eloquent proof of extra-deical substance."[173]

Mendelssohn elaborates on this point by noting that for a subject to know an object the subject must share something in common with the object that it seeks to know. This is possible in two ways. Either the subject can share a quality with the object in the same degree or it can share a quality in a different degree. In the former case, the cognizing subject intuits the object immediately as all that is required for the knower to know the object is to think itself. In the latter case, the subject knows the object by abstracting from the quality that the subject possesses itself. But, claims Mendelssohn, knowing a subject in this way does not allow complete knowledge since "no creature can completely divest itself of its own degree of reality." For example, to understand what it is to be blind I try to imagine what it would be like to be deprived of sight. I can close my eyes, sit in the dark, and imagine what it would be like were this experience to encompass my entire experience. But since I do in fact possess sight, I can never fully understand what it is to actually be blind. In the same way, when God thinks of human beings He thinks of His own infinite perfections in a limited way. But since God is actually perfect, He can never fully understand what it is to be imperfect. God's knowledge of finite beings can never be identical with finite beings themselves, and so finite beings exist outside of God.[174]

This objection expresses what Mendelssohn finds problematic in Lessing's Spinozistic defense of Christian mysteries. For Lessing, the inner meaning of the trinity and the incarnation is that God can contain finite beings within Himself while remaining an infinite being. In a word, for Lessing God can be a person. Mendelssohn rejects this since on his view God's infinity precludes His containing finitude within Himself. In upholding the substantiality of finite human beings outside of God, Mendelssohn sees himself as articulating a Jewish position that defends human individuality against Christian pantheism.[175]

Mendelssohn deploys his critique of Lessing's Spinozism to generate a new proof for God's existence.[176] He begins his proof by noting that along with my immediate sensation of my own existence, I am aware that more pertains

to my existence than I can understand consciously. Mendelssohn then makes two claims about possibility and actuality. First, he claims that possibility is ideal—in order for something to be possible, it must be actually thought as a possibility. Whatever we might think of this claim, Mendelssohn does not take it to be controversial.[177] Next, Mendelssohn makes what he acknowledges to be a controversial claim, namely that it is not just possibility that must be actually thought, actuality must also be actually thought. While Mendelssohn acknowledges that this may seem counter-intuitive, he notes that the difference between possibility and actuality is not as great as is commonly assumed since in some cases possibilities are actual properties of things. For example, when we speak of a person's "capacities" [*Fahigkeiten*] we are speaking of possibilities that actually belong to the subject. Once these premises are granted, however, Mendelssohn claims that we can easily demonstrate that a perfect knower must exist. Given my complexity and the complexity of the universe, not only can I never have perfect knowledge of myself and all my capacities, neither can all finite minds combined. Since, however, all actualities require an actual knower and I actually exist, there must be an infinite knower who knows me.[178] Reflecting on how a proper appreciation of human finitude leads to recognition of the infinite divine, Mendelssohn concludes:

> It is then no immodest arrogance on the part of the son of the earth when he dares to conclude from the finitude of his existence to the existence of the infinite, from his limitation to the actuality of the all-perfect. It is well-becoming to the immortal spirit of men (*unsterblichen Geistes des Menschen*) that they believe themselves so related to the divine that from each of their thoughts, they find a path to God.[179]

Mendelssohn's Critique of Jacobi's Mysticism

As we have seen, Jacobi claims that reason is a formal capacity that cannot yield knowledge of actual existence. The only way to know actual existents is through perception and we have a special faculty of mystical perception through which we can perceive God. For Jacobi, reason is an antihumanistic faculty that annihilates human individuality and freedom. God's revelation to me restores my awareness of myself as a free individual.

Mendelssohn rejects Jacobi's appeal to individual mystical experience. As we have seen, Mendelssohn notes that our representations of reality are based on the testimony of our sense perceptions. Since we cannot get outside of our

subjective representations, we have no way of confirming whether or not the object of our representations in itself conforms to our representation of it or indeed if the object in itself exists at all. In light of these skeptical doubts, Mendelssohn espouses a notion of truth whereby truth depends on intersubjective agreement and on agreement among our various senses. Jacobi's mystical perception of God does not meet Mendelssohn's standard of truth as it is individual and idiosyncratic. Indeed, when it comes to knowledge of external existents, relying on individual, idiosyncratic perceptions—which fail to conform to intersubjective standards of truth—approaches madness.

Mendelssohn rejects Jacobi's making mystical devotion the highest aim of life to which all other ends must be subordinated. Rather, Mendelssohn considers cultivation of individual perfection and happiness in its numerous spheres (intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, and physical) as the proper aim of life. While Jacobi dismisses Mendelssohn's notion of multiple ends of life as bourgeois superficiality, Mendelssohn regards it as leading to a more balanced, richer life. Jacobi attacks Mendelssohn's emphasis on individual happiness as an egoistic ideal that turns people into slaves of pleasure and comfort. Mendelssohn rejects this as the wise person realizes that benevolence is a crucial component of happiness and that acting in accordance with rational moral principles is freedom.[180]

Jewish-Christian polemics figure even more prominently in Mendelssohn's critique of Jacobi than in his critique of Lessing. At the beginning of *To Lessing's Friends*, Mendelssohn tries to deflect Jacobi's claim that he was unnerved by Jacobi's disclosure of Lessing's Spinozism. Mendelssohn notes the proximity between Spinoza and Judaism, and makes the astonishing claim that "irrespective of his speculative doctrine [Spinoza] could have remained an orthodox Jew [*ein orthodoxer Jude*] were it not that in other writings he had called genuine Judaism into question and in so doing stepped outside the law."[181] Given Mendelssohn's critique of Spinoza's metaphysics, this claim seems somewhat hyperbolic since Mendelssohn regards the truths of natural theology, that is, God's existence, divine providence, and the immortality of the individual soul as foundational doctrines of Judaism.[182] Still, given Spinoza's rationalism, Mendelssohn has grounds for claiming that "Spinoza's doctrine [comes] closer to Judaism than does the orthodox [*orthodoxe*] doctrine of the Christians" which espouses irrational mysteries of faith.[183] If Mendelssohn regards Spinoza's doctrines as closer to Judaism than to orthodox, Athanasian Christianity this is all the more the case with Lessing's Spinozism, which only departs from Judaism on the question of whether or not a world becomes actual outside of God. Hence Mendelssohn concludes that "if I was able to love Lessing and be loved in return when he was still a strict follower of Athanasius (or at least considered

so by me) then why not all the more so where he approximated Judaism, and where I saw him as an adherent of the *Jew*, Baruch Spinoza."[184]

Mendelssohn sees Jacobi's conception of the relationship between faith and reason as growing out of the historical emphasis on mysteries of faith in Christianity. For Mendelssohn, because of the centrality of religious mysteries many orthodox Christians including Jacobi hold that faith and reason are opposed and that the temptation to subject religious tenets to rational criticism must be resisted. Mendelssohn rejects this conception of faith as oppressive telling Jacobi that "it is totally in the spirit of your religion to impose on you the duty of suppressing doubt through faith."[185] Jacobi's lack of confidence in human beings' ability to know God through their rational powers and his view that reason pursued to its logical conclusion culminates in atheism, reflects the Christian teaching of original sin, which claims that, left to their own devices, human beings are depraved and godless. And just as Christianity teaches that the only way for human beings to escape the taint of their godless depravity is by accepting God's grace, so Jacobi teaches that the only way to know God is by accepting God's mystical revelation.

In contrast, by casting Judaism as a religion of reason (*Vernunftreligion*) Mendelssohn sees himself as espousing a classic Jewish position, which sees truth as one and which therefore embraces the authority of reason in matters of religious belief.[186] On this view, every human individual has intrinsic dignity and can know God and truth through her native powers. If something is offensive to reason, it cannot be true of God as the laws of logic even bind God Himself.[187] To be sure, Mendelssohn affirms that since we have finite intellects we can never fully comprehend God, but God does not lie outside the realm of reason.[188] Mendelssohn notes that Judaism conceives faith entirely differently than Christianity. In Hebrew the word generally translated as "faith" (*Glaube*) is "*emunah*," which means "trust" (*Vertrauen*) or "confidence" (*Zuversicht*).[189] So for Jews faith involves an emotional disposition of trust in God and His goodness rather than confessing belief in theoretical theological doctrines.[190]

Mendelssohn establishes the concordance between Judaism and reason in two directions: (a) he confirms the truths central to Judaism through philosophical reasoning and (b) he establishes the legitimacy of philosophical reasoning within Judaism. As regards (a), we have seen that Mendelssohn seeks to philosophically prove the validity of the three principles of natural religion, which are foundational teachings within Judaism.[191] Mendelssohn also provides reasons for accepting the authority of the Torah by arguing that one is justified in trusting the testimony of witnesses who received the revealed law and by showing how adherence to *halakha* promotes human perfection.[192]

As regards the second direction, we have seen that Mendelssohn is well aware that many of his traditionalist Jewish contemporaries regard philosophical reasoning with suspicion.[193] In his Hebrew commentary on Maimonides' *Logical Terms*, Mendelssohn attempts to convince traditionalists that Judaism regards logical reasoning as a central religious imperative. Following Maimonides, Mendelssohn interprets Adam's being created in God's image as referring to God having endowed human beings with a rational capacity.[194] Given the fact that it is through our intellect that we most resemble God, Mendelssohn concludes that our intellect is a holy faculty that helps us connect to God. Citing the medieval Jewish philosopher Bahya ibn Pakuda, Mendelssohn notes that through our intellect we can "understand and contemplate the great, infinite wonders of creation and . . . thank God for the great good that he renders at every moment with his creatures."[195] To be sure, Mendelssohn acknowledges that "if a person relies on the spirit of his own wisdom alone without the help and protection of the Torah and tradition, he will grope like a blind man in the darkness and the paths of logic will not be sufficient to protect him from confusion and ensnarement as happened to many noble philosophers (*l'hokrim rabim v'nikhbadim*) upon whom the light of God's Torah never shined or whose pride led them to kick God's Torah and say 'my wisdom is sufficient.' "[196] But Mendelssohn notes that even one who "chooses God's Torah and believes in the words of his prophets and sages truly and completely" must know how to reason logically since the authoritative interpretation of the Bible is contained in the Talmud especially in its legal discussions, which employ subtle, logical reasoning.[197] Furthermore, since the Bible is written in Hebrew, proper understanding of the Bible requires learning Hebrew grammar, which is built on logical principles.[198] To buttress his case with the traditionalist, Mendelssohn cites great rabbinic authorities who embraced the study of logic including Maimonides, Rabbi Solomon ibn Aderet (Rashba), Abraham ibn Ezra, Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi (1455–1526), and Rabbi Abraham ibn Haim of Fez (d. 1632).[199]

In chapter 9 of his commentary of Maimonides' *Logical Terms*, Mendelssohn chides Maimonides for being insufficiently committed to rational criticism. Mendelssohn notes with approval Maimonides' questioning of Aristotle's knowledge of astronomy and his doubting the validity of Aristotle's proofs for creation.[200] But he claims that Maimonides does not go far enough in criticizing Aristotle as he only criticizes Aristotle's teachings that undermine central tenets of Judaism, most notably creation. Otherwise, Maimonides accepts Aristotle's teachings uncritically "even though Aristotle brought no proof" for many of these teachings.[201] Mendelssohn claims that like other philosophers of his time, Maimonides follows Aristotle slavishly seeing

opposing Aristotle as "arrogance . . . as if God only gave Aristotle eyes to see."[202] For Mendelssohn, a Jew's commitment to rational criticism must exceed Maimonides'.

The Final Chapter

In September 1785, about a month before the appearance of *Morning Hours*, Jacobi published his *Spinoza Letters*.[203] Mendelssohn was enraged and hastened to pen his interpretation of the Spinoza conversations. He completed *To Lessing's Friends* Friday, December 30, right before the Sabbath, but as an observant Jew he had to wait until the end of the Sabbath to deliver the manuscript to his publisher. Saturday December 31, 1785, was a bitterly cold day in Berlin. But Mendelssohn was so anxious to have his response to Jacobi published that at the immediate end of the Sabbath he rushed to deliver the manuscript to his publisher, Christian Voss, on foot, not waiting to call a carriage. His wife Fromet begged Mendelssohn to put on a coat, but he was in such a hurry that he refused. When he returned home, he complained of feeling ill. On Tuesday January 3, 1786, Mendelssohn's doctor, Marcus Herz, visited him. Herz reported finding Mendelssohn wrapped in a fur coat, sitting on a sofa under a bust of Lessing. Mendelssohn complained of a having a severe cough and of being unable to eat or sleep. The next day when Herz visited Mendelssohn, he was shocked by Mendelssohn's appearance reporting that "his eyes no longer had their penetrating radiance. His face was sunken and pale."[204] Herz left the room to tell Fromet about her husband's condition and then heard some noise coming from Mendelssohn's sofa. Herz rushed in and found Mendelssohn lying prone under the bust of Lessing with no breath or pulse. Mendelssohn was dead. The news of his death shocked Berlin. The Jewish community ordained that all Jewish shops and business be closed until after Mendelssohn's funeral. The next day he was laid to rest in the presence of hundreds of people, Jews and Christians alike.[205]

The philosopher Karl Philippe Moritz blamed "fanatical" Christians for Mendelssohn's death writing that "[Mendelssohn] became a victim of his friendship with Lessing and died as a martyr defending the suppressed prerogatives of reason against fanaticism and superstition. Lavater's importunity dealt his life the first blow. Jacobi completed the work."[206] For Moritz, Mendelssohn's friendship with Lessing symbolized Mendelssohn's having sought a basis for Jewish-Christian friendship in enlightened theism. But fanatical Christians, such as Lavater and Jacobi, could not abide Jews and Christians respecting one

another as equals. To this end, they continuously sought to undermine enlightened theism and convert Mendelssohn to Christianity.

On May 9, 1786, five hundred people gathered in the theater in Königsberg to hear a new cantata entitled *Sulamith and Eusebia*. The Christian poet Karl Ramler wrote the words and the Jewish composer Carl Bernhard Wessely set it to music. In the piece, Sulamith and Eusebia representing Judaism and Christianity take turns lamenting Mendelssohn. At the end of the performance, contributions were collected for Jewish and Christian orphans. In the audience was none other than Kant, who had not been to the theater in eighteen years. When asked why he made a point of being there he answered that he could not "forgo attending an evening honoring his close friend Moses Mendelssohn."[207]

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Conclusion

Through a rereading of the Pantheism Controversy, I have sought to broaden our understanding of the faith–reason debate and question some standard notions about the differences between proponents and opponents of the Enlightenment. Scholars have tended to interpret the Pantheism Controversy as primarily about metaphysical and epistemological questions such as whether or not one can prove God's existence through reason. I have argued that the heart of the debate is about ethical and political issues concerning the best means of promoting human dignity and freedom in modern society.

Mendelssohn and Jacobi may be interpreted as archetypal representatives of the German Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment. They do not, however, disagree as to whether individual human dignity and freedom are values to be promoted. Rather, their debate concerns whether rationalism or mystical faith are the best means of furthering these ends. Mendelssohn sees Jacobi's faith as supporting oppression and religious intolerance, while Jacobi sees Mendelssohn's reason as an oppressive, intolerant force. Central questions that emerge from their debate include: Am I most human when I seek to advance my happiness and perfection or when I feel duty bound to sacrifice my happiness for the sake of devotion to God? Does acting in accordance with reason constitute being true to myself or obeying an abstract, general principle that erases my individuality? Am I most an individual when I mystically encounter God or is faith a way of suppressing my individual personality?

I have also tried to show how labeling Mendelssohn and Jacobi's competing visions "secular" versus "religious" is misleading at best.[1] Both Mendelssohn and Jacobi see themselves in important respects as religious thinkers. It is tempting to see Mendelssohn as originating a transition from religiosity to secularism. Jacobi claims that Mendelssohn's enlightened theism prepares the ground for atheism by casting God as a means to my worldly happiness, thereby moving God from the center to the periphery of one's life and making it a short step to discarding God as a superfluous hypothesis altogether. For Jacobi, this is exemplified by Lessing's turn from enlightened theism to Spinozism. For his part, Mendelssohn regards religion and religious truth as crucial for human flourishing. Without belief in a benevolent deity and an immortal soul, we live in constant anxiety about an unpredictable future; the moral law can become contradictory; we lack a crucial impetus to acting ethically; and our ability to fully enjoy life is poisoned by the consciousness of our impending death. Mendelssohn regards Jacobi's view of God as demanding confession of irrational dogma under threat of eternal punishment as opening the door to political oppression. By making devotion to irrational religious demands the supreme end of life to which all other ends must be subordinated, Jacobi lays the groundwork for power-hungry religious despots to argue that the state should serve as the enforcer of religious norms, which cannot be criticized.

While Jewish and Christian thinkers have historically taken various positions on the faith–reason debate, my analysis shows how the historical traditions of Judaism and Christianity play an important role in Mendelssohn's religious rationalism and in Jacobi's mystical faith. The Talmudic tradition of legal reasoning, medieval Jewish tendencies to subject religious tenets to rational evaluation, and the rabbinic notion that eternal salvation can be attained outside of Judaism give Mendelssohn a strong basis for presenting Judaism as a tolerant, religion of reason (*Vernunftreligion*). For his part, Jacobi regards the tradition of Christian mysteries as expressing a much deeper insight into the structure of reason and its distinction from faith, which avoids the temptation to incoherently meld the two in a way that disfigures both. For Jacobi, Christian faith is a personal act that affirms my individual uniqueness while the Jewish embrace of religious rationalism is a leveling tendency that extinguishes true faith.

As evidenced by the great interest in Mendelssohn and the Pantheism Controversy during the Weimar period, the faith–reason debate can be translated politically. For many Weimar Jewish intellectuals, Mendelssohn represents a bourgeois ideal, which affirms multiple affiliations, encourages the cultivation of a well-rounded personality, and sees tolerance and rational criti-

cism as the primary political virtues. In contrast, for Strauss Jacobi's defense of faith can be translated into the notion that single-minded devotion to one's nation is what lends life nobility and constitutes the primary political virtue. This view of faith denigrates as decadent the desire to cultivate multiple spheres of life and rejects rational criticism as a centripetal force that undermines national unity and ultimately threatens the survival of the state.

I have aimed to revise and deepen our understanding of Mendelssohn in several ways. First, by exploring Mendelssohn's relationship to Maimonides and highlighting how he grounds his enlightened concept of Judaism in biblical, rabbinic, and medieval Jewish sources, I have staked a position on the Sorkin-Arkush debate about the unity of Mendelssohn's thought. While Sorkin argues that Mendelssohn achieves a seamless synthesis between the medieval "Andalusian" Jewish tradition and the "Religious Enlightenment," I argue that no such synthesis is possible because as an eighteenth-century thinker, Mendelssohn encounters problems never faced by his medieval Jewish predecessors including how to reconcile Judaism with life in an enlightened state where Jews and Christians have increasing opportunities for encountering one another as equals. Arkush stresses the gaps between Judaism and enlightened principles, seeing Mendelssohn's presentation of the concordance between the two as insincere. I argue that in his treatment of Judaism, Mendelssohn writes as a theologian, not as an historian. To address the apparent contradictions between Judaism and Enlightenment, Mendelssohn adopts a selective attitude to Jewish tradition, amplifying elements that can fit with enlightened values and downplaying and explaining away elements that seem discordant. This is not done in a premeditated way, but rather because Mendelssohn is so committed to the truth of Judaism on the one hand and of enlightened values on the other hand, that he simply cannot imagine a contradiction between the two.[2]

Second, I have explored Mendelssohn's complex relationship to Spinoza. In his early work, Mendelssohn uses Spinoza as a model for Jewish participation in Prussian society, countering Christian stereotypes of Jews as parochial, hateful, and backward people ineligible for being citizens in an enlightened state. Mendelssohn is deeply sympathetic with Spinoza's defense of liberty of thought, and he regards Spinoza's commitment to reason in matters of religion as an exemplary expression of the Jewish commitment to reason. But for Mendelssohn Spinoza reasons incorrectly, which leads him to espouse an anti-humanistic position that undermines human individuality and divine providence, two ideas that are crucial for human flourishing. While Jacobi sees Lessing as a Spinozistic atheist who hid his true beliefs from Mendelssohn so as not to disturb Mendelssohn's naïve faith, Mendelssohn interprets Lessing's Spinozism as a refined type that is closer to his own enlightened theism than

to atheism. But Mendelssohn ultimately rejects Lessing's Spinozism (which he also calls "purified pantheism") because he sees it as involving a philosophical defense of Christian mysteries that erases human individuality.

Third, I have argued that Mendelssohn affirms what I call "pragmatic religious idealism" in his final writings. Strauss follows Karl Barth, Rudolf Otto, and other Christian theologians in criticizing religious idealists like Cohen for interiorizing religious concepts. One reason that Strauss is attracted to Mendelssohn in the 1930s is because of Mendelssohn's embracing the authority of reason while affirming the truth of doctrines like God's existence, creation, and divine providence in the sense of objective truths that are real independently of our consciousness of them. I argue, however, that in his final writings Mendelssohn moves toward religious idealism. In response to critiques of reason put forward by Kant and Jacobi, Mendelssohn concludes that it is not possible to know reality in itself and he reorients his religious rationalism, endorsing a notion of "finite truth," which involves intersubjective agreement. Because of the important role played by the principles of natural religion in promoting our perfection, Mendelssohn thinks that we are justified in living in accordance with this finite truth despite our being unable to demonstrate that reality in itself conforms to it.

While it has long been fashionable to follow the Jacobi-Strauss line of dismissing Mendelssohn's religious humanism as a tepid, superficial, halfway house to secular humanism, I think that Mendelssohn's thought remains an option worthy of consideration.[3] His view that religious conviction promotes ethical, intellectual, and aesthetic perfection promotes a holistic concept of the human individual that is threatened by our increasingly specialized, profit-driven society. Mendelssohn's religious rationalism avoids the tendency to create compartmentalized selves where there is no intersection between one's scientific understanding of the world and one's religious beliefs and practices. At the same time, Mendelssohn unites rationalism with religious awe and mystery by denying our ability to fully comprehend God and by stressing the aesthetic qualities of the religion. Mendelssohn's upholding of the universality of religious truth, which he thinks does not belong to one religious tradition alone, makes religion into a force that can bind people from diverse religious traditions together. His defense of religious pluralism and his view that one need not accept the revealed truths of a particular religious tradition to achieve salvation is appropriate to life in a cosmopolitan, diverse society. Mendelssohn's upholding the need to test religious ideas rationally and his view that religious acts undertaken without conviction lack religious worth are well suited to contemporary culture, which prizes individual freedom and sees religious affiliation as voluntary. His deeming religious coercion illegitimate on theological

grounds provides an important *religious* justification for opposing those seeking to use religion to control others. His view that the proper aim of religion is to promote individual flourishing and his emphasis on how religious beliefs serve this end gives religion an important place in a society that highly values the pursuit of happiness. And Mendelssohn's skill in showing how an enlightened, tolerant concept of Judaism can be drawn from Jewish sources provides an important model for how a premodern religious tradition can be brought into harmony with modern humanistic principles.

This is not to say that Mendelssohn's enlightened concept of Judaism is unproblematic. Many of Jacobi's criticisms remain potent. Jacobi's idea that one's religious commitments should trump all other aspects of life and that through religion one defines oneself by situating oneself in a particular faith community that opposes others remains a potent, seductive idea. My hope is to contribute to the renewed consideration of humanistic religion as a serious option today by furthering our understanding of what is at stake in its rejection or acceptance.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 44.

2. Hettner, *Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur*, 1:761; Scholz, *Die Hauptschriften*, lxiii–lxxv.

3. See Scholz, *Die Hauptschriften*, xii–xvii.

4. See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 47–48.

5. Beiser seems to recognize some of the axiological dimensions of the debate when he notes that central to the debate was whether "the authority of reason [could] replace the authority of tradition and revelation . . . as a more effective sanction for all moral, religious and common sense beliefs." See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 46. What Beiser misses is that the question is not just about whether faith or reason better grounds accepted conceptions of morality and religion but that it is also over competing views of what constitutes freedom and human dignity.

6. The recent financial crisis further cements the sense of the affinity between our time and the Weimar period.

7. See Altmann, "Moses Mendelssohn as the Archetypal German Jew," 18.

8. Recent discussions of Mendelssohn's reception in Germany include: Miron, "The Emancipation 'Pantheon of Heroes,' "; idem, "Between History and a Useful Image of the Past," 309–313; Hoffmann, "Constructing Jewish Modernity"; Gottlieb, "Publishing the Moses Mendelssohn *Jubiläumsausgabe*"; Katz, "Moses Mendelssohns Schwankendes Bild"; Rawidowicz, *Hebrew Studies*, II:4; Brenner, "The Construction and Deconstruction of a Jewish Hero"; Bourel, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 11–43; Hildesheimer, "Moses Mendelssohn in Nineteenth Century Rabbinic Literature."

9. The first Jew to apply the statement to Mendelssohn was Abraham Meldola in 1785. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 197, 758. In *Ulysses* James Joyce uses a variation of the expression that makes Mendelssohn's significance even greater: "Three seekers of the pure truth. Moses of Egypt, Moses Maimonides author of *More Nebukhim* (Guide of the Perplexed) and Moses Mendelssohn of such eminence that from Moses (of Egypt) to Moses (Mendelssohn) there arose none like Moses (Maimonides)." See Joyce, *Ulysses*, 640.

10. Writing for the Hebrew journal *Hatequfah* in 1929, Simon Rawidowicz noted Mendelssohn's uniqueness among German-Jewish thinkers. For Rawidowicz, Mendelssohn's uniqueness consisted in the fact that he was both a halakhically observant, accomplished Talmudist recognized as a peer by leading rabbis as well as a major figure in the German Enlightenment admired by important Christian philosophers. According to Rawidowicz, while among later German-Jewish thinkers one finds respected rabbinic authorities and distinguished figures in German culture and learning, never again did a Jew like Mendelssohn appear "whose traditional Judaism does not compete with his creative Germanness, who is at once both *totally* a 'ghetto' Jew and *totally* a creative German." Rawidowicz, "Moshe Mendelssohn," 499–500.

11. See Zunz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2:102 quoted in Katz, "Moses Mendelssohns Schwankendes," 353.

12. Hirsch, *The Nineteen Letters*, 268. To be sure, Hirsch is also highly critical of Mendelssohn (as he is of Maimonides as well). On Hirsch's Neo-Orthodoxy as a Mendelssohnian project, see Sorkin, *The Transformation*, 156–171. For a different view of Hirsch's relation to Mendelssohn, see Joseph Elias's notes in Hirsch, *Nineteen Letters*, 296–299.

13. Smolenskin similarly saw the conversion of four of Mendelssohn's six children as evidence of his having undermined Jewish national consciousness. See Bourel, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 31.

14. See Rawidowicz, *Hebrew Studies* II:4; Hoffmann, "Constructing Jewish Modernity," 45. Other Orthodox thinkers distinguished Mendelssohn's own philosophy from how it was (mis)interpreted by his followers. See Rawidowicz, *Hebrew Studies* II:4.

15. See Hoffmann, "Constructing Jewish Modernity," 47.

16. See Hoffmann, "Constructing Jewish Modernity," 48.

17. See "Protokoll Der Vorstandssitzung der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* (henceforth: *MGWJ*) 73.6 (1929), 424; "Feieren um Mendelssohn," *C.V. –Zeitung*, 8 (1929), 497; Hoffmann, "Constructing Jewish Modernity," 48.

18. Ibid.

19. For a detailed discussion of the publication of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*, see Gottlieb, "Publishing the Moses Mendelssohn *Jubiläumsausgabe*," 57–75. My discussion here draws on this article.

20. See Schorsch, *From Text to Context*, 166.

21. I take this felicitous expression from the title of Paul Mendes-Flohr's book *German Jews: A Dual Identity*.

22. See Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe* (henceforth: JubA), 1:ix: "Die Welt der deutschen Bildung feiert an diesem Tage den philosophen, der in seinem Werk und in seiner Persönlichkeit die edelste Kräfte der deutschen Aufklärung verkörpert und die Humanitätsidee unseres klassischen Zeitalters vorbereitet hat. Das Judentum aller Länder ehrt in ihm den Führer, der ihm auf dem Wege in die moderne Kulturwelt vorangegangen ist, mit dem eine neue Periode jüdischer Geschichte beginnt."

23. "Geschäftsbericht für das Jahr 1928," *MGWJ* 73.3 (1929), 172.

24. Baeck, *Mendelssohn Gedenkfeier*, 8.

25. Ibid., 17–18.

26. Ibid., 20.

27. Ibid., 22.

28. On other critics of Mendelssohn in 1929, see Brenner, "The Construction," 278–286.

29. See Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, 137–144.

30. In his famous 1933 letter to Karl Löwith, Strauss states that "just because Germany has turned to the Right and expelled us it simply does not follow that the principles of the Right are to be rejected. On the contrary only on the basis of the principles of the right, on the basis of fascist, authoritarian, *imperial* principles is it possible in a dignified manner without the ridiculous, pitiful appeal to the 'inalienable rights of man' to protest against the nasty abomination [i.e., Nazism]… there is no reason to prostrate oneself before crosses including the cross of liberalism." For discussion of this passage see Sheppard, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile*, 60–67; Lazier, *God Interrupted*, 116–117.

31. See Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, 155–173; idem, *Philosophy and Law*, 21–39, 46–52. Strauss recounts that he told Rosenzweig this anecdote and that Rosenzweig included it in his book of Judah Halevi. See ibid., 50, 139, n.6. Steven Schwarzschild calls the anecdote into question. See Schwarzschild, "Franz Rosenzweig's Anecdotes," notes 10, 13 cited in Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, 76, note 84. Sinai Oko accepts the authenticity of the anecdote, but interprets Cohen's tears as confirming his commitment to religious idealism. See Oko, "Hermann Cohen's Religious Teachings," 17. Lazier situates Strauss's opposition to liberal, anthropologizing theology in relation to the rise of crisis theologians such as Barth and Gogarten as well as the work of Otto. See Lazier, *God Interrupted*, 93–110. Also see Rosenzweig's 1914 essay "Atheistic Theology" in Rosenzweig, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 10–24.

32. Indeed in *Philosophy and Law*, Strauss claims that "the need for an enlightened Judaism is urgent." See Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 38.

33. In 1921, Strauss wrote his doctoral dissertation on Jacobi under the supervision of Ernst Cassirer, who would later serve on the editorial board of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*. In 1925, Julius Guttmann, one of the supervising editors of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*, approached Strauss about editing some of the volumes including volume 3.2, which included Mendelssohn's contributions to the "Pantheism Controversy." The results of Strauss's renewed research into the "Pantheism

Controversy" are contained primarily in three places: his 1930 study of Spinoza's critique of religion, his 1935 *Philosophy and Law*, and his lengthy introduction to volume 3.2 of the Mendelssohn *Jubiläumsausgabe*, which he completed in 1937, but which was first published only in 1974. For a discussion of Strauss's treatment of the "Pantheism Controversy" that emphasizes different elements than are mentioned here, see Jansenns, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 77–90.

34. See Strauss, "Einleitung," xxv.

35. Ibid.

36. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 33.

37. For Mendelssohn happiness involves cultivating different aspects of oneself. Jacobi's critique of Mendelssohn is reflected in Strauss's attack on his mentor Julius Guttmann whom Strauss criticizes for adopting the liberal view that life involves cultivating different spheres of life with religion merely being one "domain of consciousness." See Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 41–60.

38. Strauss, "Einleitung," xxv–xxvi.

39. See Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2:244–248; Sheppard, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile*, 22–25.

40. The figure mediating Strauss's turn to the political is Carl Schmitt. In reading Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*, Strauss came to realize that politics could serve as an antidote to bourgeois mediocrity since in times of emergency politics overwhelms all other spheres of life including the intellectual, the ethical, the economic, the aesthetic, and the religious, which it enlists for its ends. See Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 25–27, 37–38; Strauss, "Notes on Schmitt," 85–88. For his part, Schmitt had a very negative view of Mendelssohn whom he saw as a quintessentially Jewish thinker who espoused liberalism to try to limit state power in order to protect Jewish rights. In his 1938 *The Leviathan*, Schmitt wrote: "Moses Mendelssohn in his *Jerusalem*, validated the distinction between inner and outer, morality and right, inner disposition and outer performance and demanded of the state freedom of thought. He was no great mind, intellectually not comparable to Spinoza, but endowed with the unerring instinct for undermining state power that served to paralyze the alien and to emancipate his own Jewish folk." See Schmitt, *The Leviathan*, 60, cited in Bourel, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 33–34.

41. At the end of his 1965 preface to his book *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, Strauss writes that "the victory of orthodoxy through the self-destruction of rational philosophy was not an unmitigated blessing for it was a victory not of Jewish orthodoxy but of any orthodoxy... Other observations and experiences confirmed the suspicion that it would be unwise to say farewell to reason." See Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy*, 172–173. Similarly, in *Natural Right and History* Strauss notes that insofar as the modern concept of reason leads to historicism and relativism, it promotes nihilism whose "inescapable practical consequence...is fanatical obscurantism." See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 6. In these passages Strauss seems to have in mind Heidegger's turn to Nazism.

42. Of course Maimonides looks forward to a time when the Jewish political order will be revived, but he does not seek to actively change existing political regimes.

43. In a piece titled, "Plan of a Book Tentatively Entitled Philosophy and Law" Strauss claims that Maimonides (not Mendelssohn as commonly assumed) was Lessing's model for *Nathan the Wise*, which Strauss calls, "the outstanding poetic monument erected in honor of Jewish medieval philosophy." See Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, 470. Also see ibid., 462; *JubA*, 3.2, viii; Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 51–59. I discuss *Nathan the Wise* in chapter 4 below.

44. See the preface to *Natural Right and History* where Strauss writes that "the harsh experience" that relativistic nihilism leads to fanatical obscurantism, "has led to a renewed general interest in natural right." Strauss warns, however, that, "the aversion to fanatical obscurantism must not lead us to embrace natural right in a spirit of fanatical obscurantism." Rather natural right must be investigated through "a detached, theoretical impartial discussion." See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 6–7.

45. Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 291–292.

46. Ibid., xiv–xv. In a recent article, Arkush seems to have softened his position somewhat conceding the possibility that, "Mendelssohn was at bottom . . . [not] a liberal deviously masquerading as a believer. He may simply have been of two minds, attracted by two theoretically incompatible ways of understanding the world and incapable of choosing between them." Arkush, "The Liberalism of Moses Mendelssohn," 46.

47. See Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, xxii. In speaking of the "Andalusian" tradition of medieval Jewish thought, Sorkin refers to the work of Bernard Septimus. See Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture*; idem, "Open Rebuke," 11–34.

48. Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn*, xxii. Edward Breuer likewise stresses the medieval Jewish roots of Mendelssohn's thought, though he does not specifically speak of Mendelssohn's reliance on the "Andalusian tradition." See Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment*, 227.

49. See Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn*, xx–xxi; idem, *The Religious Enlightenment*, 1–22; Breuer, "Rabbinic Law and Spirituality," 301–302. The slight differences between the titles of Arkush and Sorkin's books are then highly significant. Arkush's *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* casts Mendelssohn as an exponent of radical deistic enlightenment thereby claiming that his defense of Judaism is disingenuous, while Sorkin's *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* casts Mendelssohn as an exponent of moderate religious enlightenment and claims that Mendelssohn's defense of Judaism fully coheres with his commitment to Enlightenment. For a more detailed review of recent scholarship on Mendelssohn, see Gottlieb, "Between Judaism and German Enlightenment."

50. Throughout the book, I will indicate Jewish sources that Mendelssohn draws upon in adumbrating his theological and political commitments. It would be very useful to engage in a comprehensive analysis of Mendelssohn's relation to his premodern Jewish sources both philosophical and nonphilosophical alike, but such an analysis is beyond the scope of this work.

51. Treatments of Mendelssohn's relation to Spinoza include: Guttmann, "Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*"; Morgan, "History and Modern Jewish Thought"; Levy,

Baruch Spinoza, 21–72; Goldenbaum, "Mendelssohns Schwierige Beziehung"; Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 133–166; Bourel, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 98–109, 391–450; Schonfeld, "Forgetting the Voice"; Niewöhner, "Es hat nicht jeder das Zeug"; Sutcliffe, "Quarreling over Spinoza"; Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 638–711; idem, *Studies in Religious Thought*, 246–274; idem, *Frühschriften*, 5–38; Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity*, 85–182; Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 92–108; Zac, *Spinoza en Allemagne*. Mendelssohn's relationship to Maimonides has received far less attention. Treatments include: Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn"; idem, "Supplementary Notes"; Eisen, "Divine Legislation," 251–256; Harvey, "Mendelssohn and Maimon"; Rawidowicz, "Mendelssohns handschriftliche"; Schwartzschild, *The Pursuit of the Ideal*, 29–60.

CHAPTER 1

1. See Kayserling, *Moses Mendelssohn sein Leben und Wirken*, 3; Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 69–76; Langermann, "The Astronomy of Moses Isserles," 83–98.

2. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 5–8.

3. See Euchel, *Toldot*, 6; Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 10.

4. See Euchel, *Toldot*, 6. Mendelssohn's interest in Hebrew grammar continued throughout his life. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:3–5; 249–267.

5. Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 12–13.

6. Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, 3–4.

7. Berlin was organized as a set of what Rawidowicz calls "colonies," i.e., different ethnic and religious groups which lived together in an atmosphere of relative tolerance. See Rawidowicz, *Hebrew Studies in Jewish Thought*, 31; Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans*, 21–22. As mentioned in the introduction, Baeck also comments on this feature of Berlin calling it the "American Berlin." See Baeck, *Mendelssohn Gedenkfeier*, 3–4.

8. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 18.

9. See Babylonian Talmud (henceforth, BT), *Brakhot*, 43b.

10. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:2. There is a comparable passage in Mendelssohn's German work "On Sentiments," which he wrote the same year. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:244–245; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 15–17.

11. See Euchel, *Toldot*, 8. See Elon, *The Pity of It All*, 34.

12. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 22–23. Recently, Gad Freudenthal has written illuminating articles on Gumpertz. See Freudenthal, "New Light"; idem, "Aaron Solomon Gumpetz," 320–330. Of course Mendelssohn also had to learn German and he acquired good knowledge of Greek as well. While his tutors helped him, most of the effort was done on his own by reading easy texts with a dictionary. As Mendelssohn later testified about himself, "I never attended a university nor have I ever in my life listened to a university lecture. It was one of the greatest difficulties that I took upon myself to achieve everything by the force of strenuous effort and industry." See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 22–24.

13. Altmann, "Moses Mendelssohns Kindheit in Dessau," 260.

14. Altmann, "Moses Mendelssohn Kindheit," 261. Although, as mentioned, the *Guide* was reprinted in 1742, Mendelssohn used the 1553 Sabionetta edition. See Rawidowicz, "Mendelssohn Handschriftliche Glossen," 195.

15. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 21–22.

16. See Euchel, *Toldot Rabbeinu*, 10.

17. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:1–3.

18. On the acute sense of cultural inferiority among early maskilim see Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, 21–35.

19. Euchel portrays Mendelssohn as secretly studying secular "wisdom" at night fearful to reveal to anyone what he was studying. See Euchel, *Toldot*, 8–10. Kayserling likewise claims that on account of the influence of Polish rabbis many of the community elders of Berlin considered "knowledge of German synonymous with heresy." Kayserling recounts an anecdote from Samuel Bleichröder who knew the young Mendelssohn in Berlin and was two years his junior. Mendelssohn had befriended Bleichröder, instructed him in reading and writing, and shared his food with him. In gratitude, Bleichröder put himself at Mendelssohn's service. One day, Mendelssohn asked Bleichröder to fetch a German book for him. In bringing the book to Mendelssohn, however, an official of the Jewish community stopped Bleichröder and upon finding the book had Bleichröder expelled from the city. Mendelssohn tried to get Bleichröder reinstated, but to no avail. See Kayserling, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 9–10. The anecdote was originally published in Mendelssohn (ed.), *Moses Mendelssohns Gesammelte Schriften*, 1:9 as cited in Freudenthal, "Aaron Solomon Gumpertz," 323–324, n. 89. See Elon, *The Pity of It All*, 35.

20. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:29.

21. Ibid. Mendelssohn apparently did not completely change the attitude of his contemporaries. Salomon Maimon reports that when he arrived at the gates of Berlin in 1780, a Jew interrogated him. The interrogator flew into a rage when he saw that Maimon had a copy of Mendelssohn's commentary on Maimonides' *Logical Terms* with him. See Maimon, *Lebensgeschichte*, 150. Of course, as Abraham Socher has pointed out, we must take Maimon's anecdotes with a grain of salt so it is hard to know how much stock to put in such an anecdote. See Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment*, 21–51.

22. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:29.

23. See B.T., *Hagigah*, 15b.

24. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:29. Mendelssohn's ancestor Moses Isserles uses a remarkably similar strategy to defend his astronomical studies. See Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 74–75.

25. See Kayserling, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 5. Euchel's version is slightly different: "Maimonides was the cause of my deformed appearance. He darkened my flesh and I became weakened on account of it. Nevertheless, I love him with a powerful love, for he transformed many hours of my youth from sadness to joy. And if he unknowingly did evil with me by weakening my body, he repaid me sevenfold by healing my soul through his exalted teachings." See Euchel, *Toldot*, 7.

26. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II:36, 371; II:40, 384; III:8, 432; III:49, 608. The passage is from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, iii.10.1118b2.

27. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II:40, 384. Also see ibid., II:36, 369–373; III:8, 433–435; III:33, 532; III:48, 600–601; III:51, 620–621; idem, *Mishne Torah*, "Laws Concerning Study of the Torah", 3:12; "Marriage Laws," 15:3. Scholars have noted that Maimonides appears to evince a less ascetic perspective in his introduction to *Mishna Avot* known as the "Eight Chapters" and in some other sections of the *Guide*. See Maimonides, *Ethical Writings*, 34–35, 67–74; idem, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II:39, 380; III:27, 510–512; and III:39, 554. For discussion of how these two perspectives fit together see Kreisel, "Asceticism in the Thought of Bahya and Maimonides," xiii–xxii; idem, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, 175–188; Davidson, "The Middle Way"; Schwarzschild, "Moral Radicalness"; Parens, "Maimonides' Asceticism Revisited"; Twersky, *Introduction to the Code*, 459–468.

28. As mentioned in footnote 25 above, the Kayserling version of the anecdote refers to Maimonides doing "evil" to Mendelssohn by "weakening" his "body."

29. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II:13–25, 281–330. In *Guide*, II:13, Maimonides' famously outlines three positions on creation. Aristotle's view is that the world is eternal; Plato's view is that matter was eternal and the world is formed from this matter in time; and the view of "all those who believe in the Law of Moses" is that the world is created ex nihilo. Maimonides' medieval commentators as well as modern commentators are divided on Maimonides' true position on creation. The medieval commentator Joseph Caspi holds that Maimonides esoterically affirms Aristotelian eternity. See Caspi, *Amudei Kesef*, 98–100. Among modern commentators, Zev Harvey and Abraham Nuriel also affirm this view. See Harvey, "A Third Approach to Maimonides' Cosmogony-Prophetology Puzzle"; Nuriel, "The Question of a Created or Primordial World in the Philosophy of Maimonides." Alfred Ivry and Norbert Samuelson claim that Maimonides inclines to Plato's view that the world is created from eternal matter. See Ivry, "Maimonides on Creation"; Samuelson, "Maimonides' Doctrine of Creation." Kenneth Seeskin and William Dunphy think that Maimonides defends creation ex nihilo. See Seeskin, *Maimonides on the Origin of the World*; Dunphy, "Maimonides' Not-So-Secret Position of Creation." Herbert Davidson is unsure if Maimonides holds Plato's position or creation ex nihilo. See Davidson, "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation." Sara Klein-Braslavy maintains that Maimonides' final position is skeptical, i.e., "he abstained from judging a matter that he was unable to decide logically or philosophically." See Klein-Braslavy, "The Creation of the World and Maimonides," 65.

30. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III:10–13, 438–456; Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, 113–120; Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza," 163–164; Goodman, "Maimonides' Naturalism," 164–167.

31. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III:17, 474; III:51, 624.

32. The medieval commentators Caspi and Shem Tov claim that Maimonides follows the Aristotelian view that completely denies individual providence. See Caspi, *Amudei Kesef*, 125–129; Shem Tov, *More Nevukhim*, III:18, 27b–28a. The thirteenth-century scholars Kolonymus, Isaac ibn Latif, and Shem Tov ibn Falaquera interpret Maimonides to mean that God miraculously helps all individuals avoid suffering, but the extent of that help is proportionate to the degree they have perfected themselves, while Maimonides' Hebrew translator Samuel ibn Tibbon interprets him to mean that

a person who has perfected his intellect will not be disturbed by misfortunes that may befall him. See Schwartz, "The Debate over the Maimonidean Theory," 185–196. Among modern commentators, Abraham Nuriel inclines to the position of Samuel ibn Tibbon. See Nuriel, "Providence and Governance in *Moreh Nevukhim*," 346–355. Charles Touati argues that for Maimonides the majority of people enjoy no providence, while the small few that perfect their intellect become united with the active intellect such that they are not disturbed by bodily evil that may befall them. See Touati, "Les Deux Théories de Maïmonide sur la Providence." Alvin Reines gives a naturalistic interpretation to Maimonides' account of providence claiming that a person who has attained knowledge of science is able to control her circumstances and so avoid injurious natural events such as sickness. In addition, such a person will embrace moral virtue and thereby avoid petty social conflicts, and finally will attain union with the active intellect so that he is unperturbed by otherwise uncontrollable physical or psychological harm. See Reines, "Maimonides's Concept of Providence and Theodicy," 177, 187, 193–194.

33. See Mishna Sanhedrin, 10:1.

34. See Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah" 4:8–9; "Laws of Repentance," 8:11; idem, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.68:163–166; I.70:173–174; III.51:628. For discussion, see Blumberg, "The Problem of Immortality in Avicenna, Maimonides, and St. Thomas Aquinas," 38–43. Dov Schwartz and Arthur Hyman claim that the first five of Maimonides' thirteen principles of faith provide the minimal intellectual truths, which allow every Jew to attain a measure of immortality. See Schwartz, "Avicenna and Maimonides on Immortality," 196, note 31; Hyman, "Maimonides' Thirteen Principles," esp. 141–142. In my view, given that Maimonides holds that only the acquired intellect survives death and that intellectual knowledge requires being able to give demonstrative reasons for one's beliefs, the idea that according to Maimonides the masses of Jews could attain immortality seems highly doubtful. See *Guide*, I.50:111–112; I.68:163–166. Also see Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, 36.

35. The medieval commentator Shem Tov and the modern commentators Shlomo Pines and Alvin Reines deny that Maimonides believes in individual immortality of the soul but rather argue that he defends the Averroist position (sometimes attributed to Ibn Bajja). A key passage in this respect is *Guide*, I.74: 220–221. See Shem Tov, *Commentary to the Guide*, I:70, 105a–b; Pines, "Translator's Introduction," ciii–civ; Reines, "Maimonides' Concept of Providence and Theodicy," 191, note 90. In a later piece, Pines claims that Maimonides is "agnostic" on the question of whether immortality of the soul is possible due the problematic nature of metaphysical knowledge. See Pines, "The Limitations of Knowledge," esp. 95–97. Pines' interpretation is anticipated by Zev Harvey's account of one of Hasdai Crescas' critiques of Maimonides' doctrine of the acquired intellect. See Harvey, *Hasdai Crescas' Critique of the Theory of the Acquired Intellect*, 28–63, esp. 60–63. Alexander Altmann takes the view that while immortality is consequent upon intellect, given that there are many degrees of knowledge of God for Maimonides (see *Guide of the Perplexed*, I:18, 45), Maimonides can preserve individual immortality. See Altmann, *Von der Mittelalterlichen*, esp. 85–91.

36. For some recent approaches to Maimonides' complex position on miracles, see Langermann, "Maimonides and Miracles"; Kasher, "Biblical Miracles."

37. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.68, 163–166. Of course, God is also the cause of all existence (see Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.69, 166–171), but as mentioned human beings are not of particular concern to God in creating the world.

38. The major exception to this would seem to be the so-called attributes of action, but these attributes do not tell us anything about the divine nature—they are human projections. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.54:123–128; III.13:448–456; III.32:525. There is a major debate among modern scholars about whether any positive knowledge of God's essence is possible. Those who deny this possibility, the so-called skeptical interpreters of Maimonides, include Shlomo Pines, Josef Stern, and Kenneth Seeskin. See Pines, "The Limitations of Knowledge"; Stern, "Maimonides on Language"; idem, "Maimonides' Demonstrations"; idem, "Maimonides on the Growth of Knowledge"; Seeskin, *Searching for a Distant God*. Those who defend the possibility of knowledge of God, the so-called dogmatic interpretation of Maimonides, include: Alexander Altmann, Herbert Davidson, Alfred Ivry, and Charles Manekin. See Altmann, *Von der Mittelalterlichen*, 60–129; Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge"; Ivry, "The Logical and Scientific Premises"; Manekin, "Belief, Certainty."

39. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III:43, 571.

40. See Shem Tov and Efodi's comments ad. loc. These commentators are found in the Sabionetta edition of the *Guide* used by Mendelssohn.

41. See Rawidowicz, "Mendelssohns Handschriftliche," 200–201.

42. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 35–36; Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, 7–9.

43. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.1:150–151; 3.2:128; 2:269–270; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 253–254. See Altmann, *Von der Mittelalterlichen*, 243.

44. See Guttmann, "Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* and Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*," 373; Altmann, *Von der Mittelalterlichen*, 243–244.

45. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:64–65; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 27. Mendelssohn's theological difficulties were not just engendered by his encounter with Maimonides, but likewise by his exposure to English and French free thinking. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2: 235–236; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 7–8. See Strauss, "Einleitung zu *Phädon*", xvii.

46. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:80–81.

47. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8: 186; idem, *Jerusalem*, 120–121; *JubA*, 3.2, 127–128.

48. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:186; idem, *Jerusalem*, 120–121; Mendelssohn, letter to Winkopp, March 24, 1780, *JubA*, *JubA*, 12.2:185; Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:318; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 297–298. Mendelssohn also quotes Psalm 103 as evidence of the centrality of God's goodness and mercy. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:190–191; idem, *Jerusalem*, 125. Hasdai Crescas may also be a source for Mendelssohn's stressing the centrality of divine goodness. Harry Wolfson notes that Crescas opposes Maimonides for casting divine intelligence as what unifies all the divine attributes. Crescas maintains that it is divine goodness that unifies all the attributes. See Wolfson, "Crescas on Divine Attributes," 205–206. Kreisel argues that

Maimonides considers the creation of the world as an expression of divine goodness, but only in the sense that existence is better than nonexistence. Mercy and concern for human beings are not components of divine goodness. See Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, 113–120; Pines, "Truth and Falsehood," 141, note 131.

49. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:95–103, 234, 238–240; *JubA*, 7:72–73; Mendelssohn, letter to Winkopp, March 24, 1780, 12.2:185. I will discuss Leibniz's preestablished harmony in greater detail later in this chapter.

50. Scholars debate whether Leibniz sincerely believed in eternal punishment. For a recent account of the debate including a strong defense of the sincerity of Leibniz's belief in eternal punishment, see Strickland, "Leibniz on Eternal Punishment." Lessing famously defends the sincerity of Leibniz's belief in this doctrine and Mendelssohn apparently accepts Leibniz's sincerity, though Mendelssohn does not engage with Lessing's interpretation of what Leibniz meant. For Lessing's interpretation of Leibniz's reasoning, see Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 7:472–501; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 37–60.

51. Leibniz, *Theodicy*, #73, 161.

52. Ibid., #73, 161–162; #78, 164–165.

53. Ibid., #73, 161–162.

54. Strickland, "Leibniz on Eternal Punishments," 322. See Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 19.

55. See Leibniz, *Theodicy*, #19, 134–135; idem, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, 6: 447; idem, *Monadology and Other Philosophical Essays*, #57–59, 125–127.

56. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2, 249–250; 7:71–73; 8:189–190; idem, *Jerusalem*, 124; idem, commentary to Genesis 3:19, *JubA*, 15.2:36–37. But compare idem, commentary to Exodus 14:4, *JubA*, 16:115–116.

57. See Leibniz, *Theodicy*, #118, 188–189.

58. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:71–73; 8:189–190; idem, *Jerusalem*, 124; *JubA*, 14: 143–144. See Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 49–52.

59. See Ibn Ezra's comments to Exodus 34:7. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:188; idem, *Jerusalem*, 123. Also see Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14: 143.

60. Eternal punishment was a hotly debated issue within the Jewish community. Maimonides implicitly denied it claiming that souls who did not merit eternal bliss would be annihilated, while Nahmanides seemed to affirm eternal punishment. See Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishna, Tractate Sanhedrin*, chs. 9 and 10; idem, *Mishne Torah*, "Laws of Repentance" 8:1; 8:5; Nahmanides, *Writings and Discourses*, 473–504. For discussion, see Schwartz, "Avicenna and Maimonides on Immortality," 189–192. In the seventeenth century, this debate was renewed in Amsterdam on a different basis with Saul Levi Morteira defending eternal punishment and Isaac Aboab attacking it, a position that Aboab ascribes to Nahmanides. For a fascinating discussion of this debate, see Altmann, *Von der Mittelalterlichen*, 206–248. Mendelssohn rejects Maimonides' position in favor of Nahmanides' following Aboab in interpreting Nahmanides as affirming the immortal souls of sinners, while denying their eternal punishment. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:96; letter to Hartwig Wessely, August-September 1768, *JubA*, 19:119.

61. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:73.

62. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2, #60, 240. Mendelssohn likewise claims that the idea of other worlds containing beings that enjoy eternal bliss actually increases the suffering of the damned who would inevitably feel envy for those who enjoy this bliss. See Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 53.

63. This distinction goes back to the sixteenth-century Socinian Ernst Soner. See Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 7:479–481; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 41–42.

64. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2, #77, 250. In his 1672–1673 *Philosopher's Confession* and in several other places, Leibniz seems to affirm the possibility of infinite sin by claiming that sinners continue to sin forever even after death. Strickland sees this as Leibniz's main argument for eternal punishment. For discussion, including an attempt to provide a naturalistic account of Leibniz's reasoning, see Strickland, "Leibniz on Eternal Punishment." For Mendelssohn, the idea of sinning after death is incoherent since Mendelssohn holds that sin requires actions while the disembodied soul does not act.

65. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:73, 96; 8:126–127; idem, *Jerusalem*, 57–59.

66. See Mendelssohn, letter to Winkopp, March 24, 1780, *JubA*, 12.2:185; 14:143.

67. On God not needing any service from human beings because of God's self-sufficiency and perfection, see Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:126–128; idem, *Jerusalem*, 57–60. In a number of places Mendelssohn writes that since God only desires our perfection, promoting our perfection and the perfection of others are our only (natural) duties toward God. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:318–320; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 298–300; *JubA*, 8:125–126; idem, *Jerusalem*, 57–59. In support of his view that God does not need human service, Mendelssohn cites Psalms 40:7 "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, my ears You have opened." Altmann adds Job 35:6–7 as indicating this doctrine: "If you sin, what do you give to Him . . . If you are righteous, what do you give to Him?" and he cites Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13:334 where Mendelssohn describes prayer as a human rather than divine need. See Altmann's note in Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, 184. Altmann notes that Wolff also claims that God does not need human service, and that the English Deist Matthew Tindal stresses that God only desires that we seek our own happiness. See Altmann's note in Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, 182–184. Mendelssohn's view of God's purpose in creation seems quite close to the tenth-century Jewish philosopher Saadya Gaon who notes that God's creation of the world was an act of "goodness and lovingkindess" (*tova v'hesed*) intended so that people could attain "perfect happiness and goodness" (*ha'osher hamushlam v'hatova hashleima*). See Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 3.Exordium, 137; 1.4, 86. Crescas similarly notes that God's only motive for creating the world is love (*ahavah*) and the promotion of human happiness. But unlike Mendelssohn for whom human happiness comes through development of one's faculties by participation in the world, for Crescas true happiness comes from "cleaving" to the divine. See Crescas, *The Light of the Lord*, 2.62.2, 251–264. This is also the view of Mendelssohn's contemporary Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto.See Luzzatto, *The Way of the Lord*, 1.2, 36–42. Lawrence Kaplan notes that Maimonides may have been a source for Mendelssohn as in the *Guide*

Maimonides writes that God does not require any service from human beings since God is perfect. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III.13, 451. Similarly, Maimonides writes that a commandment which "only concerns the individual himself and his becoming more perfect is called [by the Talmudic sages] [a commandment] between man and God." See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III.35, 538; Kaplan, "Supplementary Notes," 340. In my view, however, there are crucial differences between Maimonides and Mendelssohn's perspectives. While it is true that both hold that God cannot be rendered more perfect by human actions, for Mendelssohn this reflects divine perfection, but not indifference as God creates the world in order to promote the perfection and happiness of every individual human being. In contrast, for Maimonides divine perfection involves God being largely indifferent to the fate of individual human beings who in any case are not very important in the cosmic schema. In terms of duties to God, while Mendelssohn's terminology is similar to Maimonides' its content is different. Mendelssohn speaks of *any means* of promoting our perfection as a *duty to God*. In contrast, when Maimonides speaks about commandments between man and God he is referring to a certain part of the *Mosaic law*. In addition, for Mendelssohn our duties toward God are called such because of their *origin* since God desires our perfection. In contrast, for Maimonides commandments between man and God are so called, because of their *object* since all human perfections are means of helping us achieve the highest perfection, i.e., cleaving to God through knowledge of God.

68. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8, 127; idem, *Jerusalem*, 59.

69. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:68.

70. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.1:115; 3.2, #52, 235. "Whoever complains about evil suffered without comfort, regards his present life as his entire duration."

71. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.1:80, 115–116.

72. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:102.

73. See Mendelssohn, letter to Sophie Becker December 27, 1785, *JubA*, 13: 332–334. Mendelssohn there states his guiding maxim that philosophy "should make me happier than I would be without it." As long as philosophy makes him happier, Mendelssohn chooses to remain with her, but as soon as she makes "supercilious, frosty or sour faces, and gets into a bad mood" he leaves her aside and plays with his children. I cite the translation from Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 718–719. Also see Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 5.1:191 "In our time can one still say that the concept of a future life makes death terrifying for us? That in order not to fear death one must leave aside this prejudice? Or does not the most rational part of ourselves rather make the future the most consoling representations…?" Strauss cites this passage. See Strauss, "Einleitung zu *Morgenstunden*," lxi. Compare Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:255; *Philosophical Writings*, 26.

74. See Meyer, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, 1:147.

75. Meyer, *German-Jewish History*, 1:136; Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community*, 13.

76. Meyer, *German-Jewish History*, 1:251–260.

77. See Reinharz and Mendes-Flohr, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 22–27.

78. Mendelssohn was well aware of Eisenmenger's work, which is found in his library. See Meyer, *Verzeichniss der Auserlesenen Buschersammlung das seeligen Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*, # 301. Mendelssohn mentions Eisenmenger's diatribes against the Talmud in a letter to Johann Balthasar Kölbele. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:54.

79. See Eisenmenger, *Entdecktes Judenthum*, 2:397–400 discussed in Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, 13–22. Eisenmenger's critical view of the Jews' moral qualities and religious beliefs was of a piece with critiques coming from the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English Deists. Matthew Tindal, Thomas Chubb, and Viscount Bollingbroke all mounted harsh critiques of the Hebrew Bible criticizing the ancient Israelites' immoral behavior as expressed in their despoiling the Egyptians in their Exodus; Joshua's genocide of the local inhabitants of the land; and David's adultery with Bathsheba. Similarly, the miracles recounted in the Bible and the religious ceremonies demanded by the Old Testament were held up as examples of Israelite primitive superstition. While some Deists such as Thomas Woolston and Peter Annet used these criticisms of the Old Testament as a means of attacking Christianity, others such as Tindal and Thomas Morgan saw Judaism as a corruption of an original natural religion that Jesus Christ recovered. See Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, 27–30; Manuel, *The Broken Staff*, 189–190.

80. Thus in his 1752 *Political Testament* Frederick wrote that the Jews were the most dangerous sect, because they injured the business of Christians. For discussion, see Gooch, *Frederick the Great*, 280.

81. For accounts of this play, its review by Michaelis, and Mendelssohn's reaction to this review, see Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 40–43; Meyer, *German-Jewish History*, 1:334–336.

82. Michaelis charged that a noble soul could scarcely be expected to emerge from a people, "with such principles, way of life, and education—a nation that must truly feel great animosity toward the Christians," and that even a "middling measure of virtue and honesty are seldom found among this people." See Johann David Michaelis, "Review of Lessing," 621. For a recent discussion of Michaelis's attitude toward Jews and Judaism, see Hess, *Jews, Germans and the Claims of Modernity*, 51–90.

83. Mendelssohn *JubA*, 11:12 cited in Meyer, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, 1:336; Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 41.

84. See Mendelssohn *JubA*, 11:12 cited in Meyer, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, 1:336. On Gumpertz as Mendelssohn's early model of Jews' capacity for virtue, see Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew*, 27.

85. See Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry*, 23.

86. See Freudenthal, "Aaron Solomon Gumpertz." This treatise was noticed by previous scholars though they did not recognize Gumpertz as its author nor ascribe to it the importance that Freudenthal does. See Katz, *Emancipation and Assimilation*, 30–31; Toury, "Eine Vergessene Frühschrift zur Emanzipation der Juden in Deutschland," 253–281 cited in Freudenthal, "Aaron Solomon Gumpertz," 300, note 5.

87. Freudenthal, "Aaron Solomon Gumpertz," 303.

88. While Freudenthal suggests that Mendelssohn did not know of this treatise, the close relationship between Mendelssohn, Gumpertz, and Lessing makes it seem

highly unlikely that Mendelssohn was not familiar with its contents. All of Freudenthal's arguments for Mendelssohn not knowing the treatise are *ex silentio*. See Freudenthal, "Aaron Solomon Gumpertz," 320, note 69.

89. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 33.

90. See Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 1, Proposition 8, Scholium 2, 412–416. In citing the *Ethics* I will use "E" for *Ethics*, "P" for proposition, "S" for scholium and "C" for corollary, "L" for lemma, "App" for appendix. Pages numbers refer to Curley's translation, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. See Wolfson, *Religious Philosophy*, 243–244, 250–252; idem, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 1:96–111; Zac, "On the Idea of Creation."

91. See most famously Spinoza, E1App, 439–446.

92. See Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, ch. 6. I will cite this work using the acronym *TTP* and give chapter and page numbers according to the Shirley translation.

93. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 6: 72–73; idem, E1P14, E1P18, E1P29S, 420–425, 428, 434. But compare Spinoza, Letter 73, 942. In citing Spinoza's letters, I will use Shirley's translation in *The Complete Works*. There is a scholarly debate as to whether Spinoza identifies God with nature only insofar as nature is considered qua substance ("*Natura Naturata*") or whether he also identifies God with nature considered qua modes as well ("*Natura Naturans*"). Curley takes the first position, while Melamed has most recently argued the latter position, persuasively in my view. See Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*; Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance." For a good summary of the debate, see Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 58–69.

94. Spinoza's views on the immortality of the soul (what Spinoza calls the "eternity of the mind") are notoriously difficulty to discern. The main positions as summarized by Nadler are: (a) Spinoza affirmed the eternity of the individual mind (Donagan, Rudavsky, Wolfson); (b) Spinoza affirmed the eternity of mind but not of the individual mind (Hampshire, Curley, Morrison, Yovel, Nadler). See Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy*, 105–131. Most recently Della Rocca seems to be moving toward an acosmic reading of Spinoza according to which all finite things are illusory and only God is real. See Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 254–273.

95. Lessing wrote this in a letter to Michaelis dated October 16, 1754, quoted in Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 34.

96. See Bell, *Spinoza in Germany*, 1.

97. Kortholt, *De Tribus Impostoribus Magnis liber*, 75 quoted in Freudental, "On the History of Spinozism," 40.

98. Otto, *Studien zur Spinozarezeption in Deutschland*, 36–37.

99. Ibid., 38.

100. See Herder, *God, Some Conversations*, 78.

101. Bell, *Spinoza in Germany*, 3.

102. Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, 296–297. For an interesting recent discussion of Bayle's criticisms of Spinoza and possible responses, see Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance."

103. Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, 295. See Lucas's portrait contained in Wolf, "The Oldest Biography of Spinoza," 41–75.

104. Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, 294.

105. Mendelssohn portrays his distaste for religious polemics as stemming from three sources: (a) Judaism's rejection of proselytizing; (b) Mendelssohn's general philosophical orientation which was focused on the search for universal truth; and (c) his precarious social standing as a Jew in Christian Prussia. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:10, 14–15.

106. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:10.

107. Ibid.

108. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 38.

109. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 22–25.

110. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 37. Lessing was born to a wealthy liberal Protestant family and received the best Protestant education. He had extensive training in languages, learned the method of historical inquiry, and had access to the best libraries. We have discussed Mendelssohn's upbringing. On the differences between Mendelssohn and Lessing's backgrounds, see Cassirer, *Gesammelte Werke*, 4:94–95.

111. Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 38; idem, *Frühschriften*, 1.

112. See Bruford, *Germany in the Eighteenth Century*, 45.

113. See Beeson, *Maupertuis: An Intellectual Biography*, 438; Barber, *Leibniz in France*, 144.

114. Thiébault, *Mes Souvenirs de Vingt Ans aus Séjour à Berlin* quoted in Gooch, *Frederick the Great*, 133.

115. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 5.1: 188, quoted in Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 71–72.

116. See Rawidowicz, *Hebrew Studies in Jewish Thought*, 6, 19.

117. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:349; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 106.

118. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:348; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 105; Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1: 235; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 7.

119. Mendelssohn, *JubA* 1:235; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 7.

120. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:348; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 105.

121. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:348–349; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 105–106. In the preface to Kant's 1781 edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant makes reference to this criticism but denies that "rigorousness" is not in fashion in view of the great successes of mathematics and physics. The pervasive doubt and indifference to metaphysics is a product of the fact that metaphysics has not established itself on firm principles, which *The Critique* will rectify. See Kant, *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, Axi; idem, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 100.

122. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:349; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 106. Compare Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 6.1: 140–141.

123. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:349; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 106. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 5.1:46–47; 3.2:113.

124. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:349; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 106. Altmann thinks the 'martyr' image is meant to carry christological overtones. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohns Frühschriften zur Metaphysik*, 7. Some eighty years later, Heine invoked the same image of Spinoza as martyr and explicitly linked Spinoza to Jesus. See Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, 51: "It has been

established that Spinoza's life was free of all blemishes, as pure and immaculate as the life of his divine cousin [*göttlichen Vetters*], Jesus Christ. Like Jesus, he suffered for his teachings and wore a crown of thorns [*Dornenkrone*]. Everywhere a great spirit expresses its thought in Golgotha." While for Mendelssohn Spinoza's martyrdom refers to Spinoza's falling into philosophical error, for Heine Spinoza's martyrdom refers to his persecution at the hands of benighted Jewish orthodoxy. Mendelssohn and Heine's different religious and philosophical outlooks are clearly manifest. In his later "Counter-reflexions" to Bonnet Mendelssohn extends this image of the martyr to truth to all Jews. Mendelssohn identifies Judaism as a religion of reason and notes that throughout history Jews have allowed themselves to be killed rather than profess a belief (i.e., Christianity), which they thought to be contrary to reason. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 7:103.

125. See Lessing's description of Leibniz's method in Lessing, *Werke und Briefe,* 7:482–483; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 46.

126. Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, 4:523–524; idem, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 496.

127. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:347; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 104.

128. See Gottlieb, *The Fragility of Reason*, chs. 1–2; Sutcliffe, "Quarreling over Spinoza," 171–175.

129. Other areas in which Mendelssohn thinks that Spinoza contributed to Leibnizianism include Spinoza's doctrine of contingency and his account of the relationship between the infinite and the finite. See Gottlieb, *The Fragility of Reason*, ch. 2.

130. Recent scholars have demonstrated that Malebranche's motivations for putting forward occasionalism are far more complex than seeking a solution to the mind-body problem. See Pyle, *Malebranche*, 96–130; Nadler, "Malebranche on Causation."

131. See Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, 4:498–499; idem, *Philosophical Essays,* 148.

132. Some consider this expression imprecise since Spinoza allows more than two attributes to God. Still, I retain the expression as the most convenient expression of Spinoza's view.

133. The *locus classicus* for parallelism is E2P7. For an excellent recent discussion of parallelism see Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance and Thought*, chs. 1–2; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 103–104.

134. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:339; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 98. There is an important debate about whether Spinoza thinks that human beings can act for final causes. See Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics,* 216–226; idem, "Spinoza and Teleology"; Curley, "On Bennett's Spinoza." For an account of the debate see Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," 252–257.

135. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1: 352–353; idem, *Philosophical Writings,* 109–110. On Leibniz's criticism of Spinoza's monism, see Leibniz,*Philosophical Essays,* 272–281.

136. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:343–344; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 101–102. In 1736, the Pietist theologian Joachim Lange charged Wolff with Spinozism claiming that Wolff espoused a fatalistic (i.e., Spinozistic) picture of reality. Mendelssohn's

interpretation of Leibniz's relationship to Spinoza, reflects a reversal of Lange's charge. For greater discussion of this background see, Gottlieb, *The Fragility of Reason*, chs. 1–2; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 541–552; Altmann, *Mendelssohns Frühschriften zur Metaphysik*, 10–12; idem, *Die Trostvolle Aufklärung*, 35–37. There is an important recent debate concerning whether Spinoza in fact espouses metaphysical necessitarianism. Garrett and Della Rocca see Spinoza as defending metaphysical necessitarianism while Curley and Walski do not. See Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism"; Della Rocca, "A Rationalist Manifesto"; idem, *Spinoza*, 69–78; Curley and Walski, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism Reconsidered." I will discuss this issue more fully in chapter 4.

137. See Lessing's letter to Mendelssohn, April 17, 1763 in Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 12.1:6–7; Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 32–34. For discussion, see Allison, "Lessing's Spinozistic Exercises."

138. Mendelssohn quotes E2P6 in support of this claim.

139. Mendelssohn, letter to Lessing, May 1763, *JubA*, 12.1:12–13; 5.1: 45-47.

140. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:344; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 102.

141. Mendelssohn, letter to Lessing, May 1763, *JubA*, 12.1:13–14. For Leibniz's account of the ideal nature of motion and extension see Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 583–584; Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, 262–284.

142. Mendelssohn, letter to Lessing, May 1763, *JubA*, 12.1:9–14. For further discussion of this correspondence see Altmann, *Die Trostvolle Aufklärung*, 42–44; Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment*, 66–69.

CHAPTER 2

1. I leave detailed discussion of Mendelssohn's treatment of the ontological proof to the next two chapters as it is a critical impetus for Jacobi developing his critique of Mendelssohn and the Berlin Enlightenment.

2. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:311–312; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 291–292. Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn*; Beiser, *Diotima's Children*, ch. 7; Gottlieb, "Aesthetics and the Infinite."

3. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 148–149.

4. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 19:2; Feiner, *Mosheh Mendelssohn*, 21–22. On Mendelssohn's complex relationship with Emden, see Schacter, *Rabbi Jacob Emden*, ch. 7.

5. For a more detailed account of Mendelssohn's view of Jesus, see Hess, *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity*, 91–136.

6. Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 201.

7. It was Mendelssohn's friend Nicolai who called the illness "strange." See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 270. Mendelssohn's nervous illness was marked by periodic attacks. Altmann hypothesizes that he suffered from paroxysmal auricular tachycardia. Altmann notes that after 1777 Mendelssohn was still ill, but the attacks "settled down to a more tolerable pattern." See ibid., 271.

8. Mendelssohn's *Bi'ur* appeared from 1780 to 1783. His German translation of the Psalms also appeared in 1783.

9. See Bamberger, "Mendelssohn's Concept of Judaism," 345–348, 358.

10. These texts can be found in Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14: 1–120, 145–208. Mendelssohn also originally intended to write the *Phädon* in Hebrew using as his basis rabbinic teachings. See Mendelssohn, letter to Hartwig Wessely, August-September 1768, *JubA*, 19:119. A version of this work was published posthumously by David Friedländer as "*Sefer Hanefesh*" (*Book on the Soul*). See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:120-144.

11. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:3.

12. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:3–4. In making this claim, Mendelssohn cites Halevi's *Kuzari*, which he quotes extensively and comments on. See Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4.25:228–239. For his part, Maimonides thinks that Hebrew is a conventional language that does not designate essentially although it has certain moral advantages. See Stern, "Maimonides on Language," 177.

13. While Mendelssohn regards Hebrew as a good medium for conveying metaphysical truth in poetic, moving ways, he regards German as better for expressing concepts with philosophical precision. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:349; idem, *Philosophical Dialogues*, 106.

14. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:8–9.

15. See Hess, *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity*, 25–50.

16. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 459–463.

17. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:1–25.

18. The other immediate impetus for *Jerusalem* was a letter by the military chaplain David Ernst Mörschel accusing Mendelssohn of secretly being a radical Deist. For the text of Mörschel's letter, see Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:91–92.

19. Most scholars assume that Mendelssohn read Spinoza's *TTP* carefully. See Guttmann, "Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* and Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*"; Morgan, "History and Modern Jewish Thought"; Altmann, "Introduction to *Jerusalem*"; Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 133–147; Levy, *Baruch Spinoza—Seine Aufnahme durch die Jüdischen Denker in Deutschland*, 31–58. Friedrich Niewöhner, however, challenges this assumption claiming that Mendelssohn had no first-hand knowledge of the *TTP*. See Niewöhner, "'Es Hat Nicht Jeder das Zeug." Goldenbaum finds Niewöhner's arguments "warrantless." See Goldenbaum, "Mendelssohns Schwierige," 291–293. Whether or not Mendelssohn knew the *TTP* directly, in *Jerusalem* he is clearly engaged with a Spinozistic analysis of Judaism, though he may have found this analysis in other sources. For example, Mendelssohn engages Spinoza's idea that the Old Testament reveals law rather than religion, which he encountered in Hermann Samuel Reimarus's Wolffenbüttel Fragments. Reimarus drew the idea from William Warburton who drew it from Spinoza through the English deist Thomas Morgan. See Guttmann, *Religion and Science*, 224, note 3. Mendelssohn engages with the Spinozistic idea that Mosaic law was originally a political law, which is found in Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 12 and 35, and in Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. See Locke, *The Works of John Locke*, 6:37. Unlike Hobbes and Locke, however, Spinoza claims that with the fall of the Jewish state halakha is obsolete, a conclusion that Mendelssohn tackles head on. Similarly, Mendelssohn is very familiar with treatments

of Spinoza that explicitly discuss the *TTP*, including Wolff's refutation of Spinoza at the end of his *Theologia Naturalis* and Bayle's critique in the *Historical and Critical Dictionary*.

20. This is by no means meant to imply that Maimonides and Spinoza are Mendelssohn's primary targets in *Jerusalem*, but I believe that setting *Jerusalem* in relation to them sheds important light on Mendelssohn's theological-political thought.

21. See Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 81. To be sure, at times Maimonides defends halakhic authority in a polemical context especially against Islam. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II.40, 381–385; idem, *Commentary on the Mishneh, Sanhedrin*, ch. 10; idem, *Mishne Torah*, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," chs. 8–9.

22. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II.40, 381–385; III. 25–54, 502–538; idem, *Ethical Writings*, 78–80. Of course in the introduction to the *Guide*, Maimonides describes his purpose as "explain[ing] the meanings of certain terms occurring in the books of prophecy" and explaining "very obscure parables occurring in the books of the prophets." See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, introduction, 6–7.

23. Maimonides also holds that contemplation of truth yields inner peace. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III.13, 456.

24. Maimonides, *Guide*, III.27, 510–511; III.54, 634–636; idem, *Ethical Writings*, 75–78. While Maimonides attributes to Aristotle the view that intellectual perfection is the highest perfection to which all other perfections are subordinated, scholars tend not to see this as Aristotle's view. See Lobel, *The Quest for God and the Good*, ch. 6.

25. See Harvey, "Maimonides and Spinoza"; idem, "Ethics and Metaethics." Kreisel argues that Maimonides thinks that the practical intellect yields knowledge of morality, although Maimonides does not say so explicitly. Kreisel presents his main difference with Harvey as over whether "goodness" (in the sense of a "noble end") is a subjective category or not. But Kreisel agrees with Harvey that moral norms are not categorical demands of reason but rather instrumental means to promote the true good, i.e., intellectual perfection. See Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, 63–124. At the end of the *Guide*, Maimonides speaks of ethics not just as a preparation for contemplation but also as the consequence of contemplation. Without entering into the complex debate about this passage, I follow Kreisel's interpretation according to which, having attained intellectual perfection, philosophers will act ethically in imitation of God's governance of the world. Morality is then not a categorical command of reason, but rather an expression of a life lived in accordance with reason. See Kreisel, "Maimonides' View of Prophecy;" idem, *Maimonides Political Thought*, 125–158.

26. Maimonides, *Guide*, II.40, 381–384.

27. See ibid. Of course, this still leaves Islam which includes both civil and religious law as a possible divine law. Maimonides' response is that a divine law must be given by a prophet known for his chastity. This excludes Mohammad who was known to have many wives. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II.40, 384–385. For a trenchant discussion of how halakhic practice leads to perfection for Maimonides, see Kaplan, "I Sleep but my Heart Waketh."

28. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III.48, 598.

29. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III.48, 599.

30. See Maimonides, *Ethical Writings*, 71–72.

31. My understanding of Maimonides' account of Jewish election follows Lawrence Kaplan and Menachem Kellner. See Kaplan, "Maimonides on the Singularity of the Jewish People"; Kellner, "Chosenness, Not Chauvenism"; idem, *Maimonides on Judaism and the Jewish People*, 81–95.

32. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.26,56–57; I.46,98–102; I.47, 104–106; I.49,108–110; I.60,147; Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, 195–196. Halbertal and Margalit call this form of idolatry "metaphysical error." See Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry*, 238–239.

33. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.44, 95. At a higher level, the philosopher learns that even apprehension cannot be predicated of God because God's knowledge is so different than ours, and any positive attribute predicated of God is to be glossed as the negation of a privation. So the true meaning of God's having an "*ayin*" is that God is not ignorant. While the Bible could have explicitly expressed God's knowledge through the use of negative terms, it chose a term suggesting a physical eye because the idea of God having a physical eye helps impart a sense of God's existence to those under the sway of the imagination as well as providing an impetus to people to obey God by making God seem like an all-seeing being who notices every transgression. See Gottlieb, "Mysticism and Philosophy," 142–147.

34. There is an important scholarly dispute regarding Maimonides' understanding of biblical esotericism. See Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 38–94; idem, *Philosophy and Law*, 110; Lorberbaum, "The Seventh Reason."

35. See above note 25. Compare Halevi, *Kuzari*, I.3, 39.

36. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II.48, 411; III.28, 514; Strauss, "The Place of the Doctrine of Providence."

37. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II.36, 369–373. Prophets also require most of the moral virtues (especially courageousness) as well as the faculty of intuition. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III.38, 376–377; idem, *Ethical Writings*, 80–83.

38. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II.40.

39. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.50, 110; Manekin, "Belief, Certainty, and the Divine Attributes."

40. Hyman divides the principles into three major divisions, which serve different functions. For Hyman, the first five roots of faith are meant "to convey correct conceptual knowledge about God . . . to make immortality possible for all." The first five principles include: (1) God's existence; (2) God's unity; (3) God's incorporeality; (4) God's eternity; (5) the prohibition of worshipping beings other than God. Hyman claims that the next four principles "guarantee the existence of Divine law in general and he Law of Moses in particular." These principles include: (6) the existence of prophecy; (7) the superiority of Mosaic prophecy; (8) the divine origin of the Torah; (9) the eternity of the Torah. Hyman notes that the last four principles are "required for instilling obedience to the Law." These principles include: (10) God's knowledge of human deeds; (11) reward and punishment; (12) the days of the messiah;

(13) the resurrection of the dead. See Hyman, "Maimonides' Thirteen Principles," 128, 141–143. Kellner correctly criticizes Hyman's account of the function of the first five principles because for Maimonides merely affirming correct opinions about God without intellectual comprehension cannot guarantee immortality for Maimonides. For Kellner's part, he claims that Maimonides' goal in laying out his principles is "perfected halakhic obedience," which is "dependent upon holding correct opinions." See Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, 37–39.

41. See Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishna*, *Sanhedrin*, introduction to ch. 10, end; idem, *Mishne Torah*, "Laws of Idolaters," 2: 8–9; "Laws of Rebels", 3:1; "Laws of Murder" 4:10.

42. See Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishna*, *Tractate Sanhedrin*, introduction to ch. 10, end. See Kellner, "Chosenness, Not Chauvenism," 62–63; idem, "Maimonides on Judaism and the Jewish People," 59–60; Hyman, "Maimonides' Thirteen Principles," 119–128.

43. See Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, "Laws of Murder," 4:16, 2:10; "Laws of Theft and Lost Objects," 11:4.

44. While this is the authoritative Talmudic position, there is another position, which holds the Gentiles cannot achieve salvation in the afterlife. See *BT, Sanhedrin* 56a. The Noahide laws include: (1) the prohibition of idolatry; (2) the prohibition of blaspheming God's name; (3) the prohibition of murder; (4) the prohibition of sexual misconduct; (5) the prohibition of theft; (6) the injunction to establish courts of justice; (7) the prohibition of tearing a limb from a live animal.

45. See Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, "Laws of Kings," 8:11. Scholars dispute which is the correct version. The literature on this is too vast to cite here. For an account of some of the different positions through 1987, see Dienstag, "Natural Law in Maimonidean Thought and Scholarship." More recently Michael Nehorai defends the authenticity of the version possessed by Spinoza and Mendelssohn. See Nehorai, "Righteous Gentiles," 485, note 44. Marvin Fox does not try to settle the question of the original text, but he argues that the version possessed by Spinoza and Mendelssohn is perfectly consistent with Maimonides' thought. See Fox, *Interpreting Maimonides*, 132–151. Recent defenses of the other version include: Korn, "Gentiles, the World to Come, and Judaism," 273; Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew*, 288–290; Twersky, *Introduction to the Code*, 455; Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism*, 241–250. The classic discussion of this passage and its later repercussions is Schwarzschild, *The Pursuit of the Ideal*, 29–60.

46. See Spinoza, *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, 10–11 "The supreme good is . . . the knowledge of the union which the mind has with all of nature." I will henceforth cite this work as "*TIE*" using Curley's translation in *The Collected Works*. See Spinoza, E4A, 588: "In life, therefore, it is especially useful to perfect as far as we can our intellect, *or* reason. In this one thing consists man's highest happiness *or blessedness*. Indeed, blessedness is nothing but that satisfaction of mind, which stems from the intuitive knowledge of God. But perfecting the intellect is nothing but understanding God, his attributes and his action, which follow from the necessity of his nature"; idem, *TTP*, 3:35 ". . . a man's true happiness and blessedness consists

solely in wisdom and knowledge of truth"; idem, *TTP*, 4:49–50 "since our intellect forms the better part of us . . . in its perfection must consist our supreme good (*summum bonum*)." Harvey stresses the similarities between Maimonides' and Spinoza's views of perfection. See Harvey, "A Portrait," 161–162. Strauss notes that while Spinoza "attempts to restore the traditional conception of contemplation" he does so "on the basis of modern philosophy or science, a new understanding of 'nature.'" Rather than seeing the highest knowledge as knowledge of "universal, abstract" substance, the highest knowledge is of "concrete individual" things or events. In this way, "the end is higher than the origin." See Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, 154–155. Guttmann sees Spinoza's difference with Maimonides as follows: Maimonides recognizes perfections other than intellectual perfection, but deems intellectual perfection the highest perfection. Spinoza, however, "does not admit to the manifold forms of psychological activity." Rather, "consciousness is a purely intellectual process" hence "intellectual perfection is necessarily the sole perfection of man." See Guttmann, *The Philosophy of Judaism*, 315–316.

47. For example, see Spinoza, *TTP*, 5:66–67. See Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza," 168–169. In the *Ethics* Spinoza appears to present a different perspective writing that "God's infinite essence and his eternity are known to all." But Spinoza goes on to explain that "men do not have so clear a knowledge of God . . . [because] they cannot imagine God as they can bodies and they have joined the name God to the images of things which they are used to seeing." So for Spinoza, while God's infinite essence is inscribed in the human mind, most people are confused about it because they are under the sway of their imaginations. See E2P47S, 482–483. Compare Spinoza, *TTP*, 12:145.

48. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 5:59–65; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 325–330.

49. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 1–2:9–34, 7:86–104. Recent treatments of Spinoza's relation to Maimonides' view of prophecy include, Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 544–586; Ravven, "Some Thoughts."

50. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 2:21–34; 5:60.

51. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II.25, 327–330.

52. Compare Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 132–133.

53. Spinoza, E2P47S, 482–483; *TTP*, 12:145. This view of tradition may also underlie the fact that Spinoza's philosophical magnum opus is composed *more geometrico* with few references to previous thinkers. It should be noted, however, that while in general Spinoza claims that the prophets were primitive thinkers and that theology should be separated from philosophy, there are a number of places where he attributes philosophical teachings to the Bible such as in the case of miracles, the meaning of the Tetragrammaton, Adam's sin, the biblical term "glory", etc. See Harvey, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Hebraism"; idem, "The Biblical Term 'glory'"; idem, "A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean"; Gottlieb, "Spinoza's Method(s) of Biblical Interpretation Reconsidered," 302–305, note 79.

54. See Spinoza, E1App, 444; E3P9S, 500; E4, preface, 543–546; E4D1, D2, D8, 546–547; E4A#8, 589; E4P37S2, 566–568; *TTP*, 16:173–184; *Political Treatise*, 2:683. In citing Spinoza's *Political Treatise*, I will use Shirley's translation in the *Complete*

Works, which I will abbreviate as "*TP*." On Spinoza's view of good and evil, see Curley, "Kissinger, Spinoza and Genghis Khan"; Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory," 272–274, 285–290; Della Rocca, *Spinoza,* 175–183. For a comparison between Maimonides and Spinoza on this point, see Pines, "On Spinoza's Conception of Human Freedom"; Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza;" 155–161; idem, "Spinoza and Maimonides." There is at least one place where Spinoza does seem to speak of a categorical moral obligation, namely in the case of lying. See E4P72, 586–587. For recent approaches trying to square this passage with the rest of Spinoza's ethical theory, see Garrett, "A Free Man"; Della Rocca, *Spinoza,* 199–203.

55. See Spinoza, *TTP,* 16:174–175; *TP,* 2:683–684; E5P41, 615–616.

56. For example, see Spinoza, E5P41S, 615–616; *TTP,* 14:162.

57. For some examples where Spinoza attributes philosophical teachings to the Bible, see above, note 53.

58. Spinoza's dogmas or "tenets" of faith are: (1) God exists and is supremely just and merciful; (2) God is one; (3) God is omnipresent and omniscient; (4) God has the supreme right and dominion over all things; (5) worship of God and obedience to him consist solely in justice and charity; (6) all who obey God and those alone are saved; (7) God forgives repentant sinners. See Spinoza, *TTP,* 14:162. Spinoza notes that these seven dogma are needed in order for "all men without exception" to obey God. Arthur Hyman thinks that Spinoza's seven dogmas draw on Maimonides in important ways. See Hyman, "Spinoza's Dogmas." Spinoza implies that these dogmas are not necessarily philosophically true when he writes that "faith requires not so much true dogmas as pious dogmas that move the heart to obedience." See Spinoza, *TTP,* 14:161. The seventh dogma, which teaches that God accepts repentance, explicitly contradicts Spinoza's teaching about the value of repentance in the *Ethics.* See Spinoza, E4P54, 576. Similarly, the first dogma's notion that God is just and merciful contradicts Spinoza's conviction to the contrary as expressed in Spinoza, *TTP,* 4:53. The sixth dogma's notion that God only saves those who practice justice and charity apparently contradicts Spinoza's intellectualist concept of the eternity of the mind as adumbrated at the end of the *Ethics.* See Cook, "Did Spinoza Lie to His Landlady?"; Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing,* 196.

59. Spinoza's general argument is that since right is coextensive with power, no power can coerce beliefs, and people naturally say what they think, there is no right to coerce beliefs or their expression. See Spinoza, *TTP,* 20:229; *TP,* 3:692. However, in certain places Spinoza seems more open to the possibility of coercing belief, writing that "minds are to some degree under the control of sovereign power who has many means of inducing the great majority to believe, love, and hate whatever he wills." And Spinoza writes that "there is no absurdity in conceiving men whose beliefs, love, hatred, contempt and every single emotion is under the sole control of the governing power." See Spinoza, *TTP,* 17:186. For discussion, see Della Rocca, *Spinoza,* 215–221.

60. Spinoza, *TTP,* preface, 6; 14:163.

61. See Spinoza, *TTP,* 2:23. While Spinoza and the English Deists concur in considering the prophets as individuals who held primitive superstitious ideas, they differ insofar as Spinoza views the prophets as moral, while many English Deists see

the Old Testament as a litany of immorality sanctioned by prophets. See Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 138–151.

62. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 2:21.

63. See Spinoza, *TP*, 5:699; *TTP*, 20: 223.

64. See Spinoza, *TTP*, preface, 5; 7:86–87; 16:182–183; 19:212–221. See Gottlieb, "Spinoza's Method(s) of Biblical Interpretation Reconsidered," 291–294. In his *Political Treatise* Spinoza writes that "those who are attached to another [i.e. non-state religion--MG] are to be allowed to build as many churches as they wish," but he stipulates that "these are to be small, of fixed dimensions and some distance apart" while "churches dedicated to national religion should be large and costly." See Spinoza, *TP*, 8:740.

65. See Spinoza, *TTP*, preface, 6; 7:103; 14:163; 19:212; *TP*, 3:393.

66. Spinoza's approach to biblical interpretation is circular. His view of the proper method of biblical interpretation determines his understanding of the prophets and his view of his prophets determines his approach to biblical interpretation. See Gottlieb, "Spinoza's Method(s) of Biblical Interpretation," 307–316.

67. Leo Strauss is the most famous proponent of the view that according to Spinoza the Bible has an esoteric meaning. See Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 176–187. Strauss claims that Spinoza signals to the astute reader that there are contradictions in Scripture, which point to an esoteric teaching. I see no evidence that this is the case. The fact that the Bible is aimed for one audience alone, the masses, obviates the need for an esoteric biblical teaching. For more detailed discussion of this issue, see Gottlieb, "Spinoza's Method(s) of Biblical Interpretation," 316, note 130.

68. According to Spinoza, the Apostles often adapted their teachings to the prejudices of masses when addressing ignorant Jews. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 2:32; 3:44; 4:55; 6:77–78; 11:138–144. At other times, the Apostles expressed their philosophical views openly. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 2:32; 3:43–44; 4:49, 55, 57–58; 5:70; 11:138–144; 13:154; 15:172; 16:174. For Spinoza, Solomon generally expresses his philosophical views openly. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 1:16; 2:21, 31; 4:49, 56–58; 6:77; 15:168; 19–215. On Spinoza's treatment of Solomon, Christ and Paul, see Zac, *Spinoza et L'interprétation de L'écriture*, 63–167, 190–198; Hunter, *Radical Protestantism*, 51–66. The most extensive discussion of Spinoza's treatment of Christ is Matheron, *Le Christ et le Salut*.

69. Spinoza, *TTP*, 5:64–65.

70. Spinoza, *TTP*, 5:62. For Spinoza, even the ethical teachings in the Bible are presented not as universal ethics, but rather as a political law. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 5:60.

71. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 5:62.

72. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 3:35–47; Rosenthal, "Why Spinoza Chose the Hebrews."

73. Spinoza, *TTP*, 5:61–62.

74. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 14:162; 15:172. See note 59 above.

75. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 5:68–70.

76. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 4:54–55; 5:60; 7:91–92; 11:141–143; 12:149–150. For discussion of Spinoza's contrast between Judaism and Christianity, see Matheron, *Le Christ et le Salut*, 7–84; Hunter, *Radical Protestantism*, 51–66; Strauss, *Persecution and*

the Art of Writing, 171–176; Curley, "Homo Audax"; Lasker, "Baruch Spinoza and the Jewish-Christian Debate."

77. See Abramsky, "The Crisis of Authority"; Meyer, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, 1:251–260.

78. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:103–104, 129–137; idem, *Jerusalem*, 34, 61–69.

79. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:113: idem, *Jerusalem*, 44; *JubA*, 14: 25. See *BT*, *Sanhedrin*, 106b; Albo, *Sefer Ha'Ikkarim*, 3.27.

80. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:21–25, 138, 140–141; idem, *Jerusalem*, 70, 73–74. See Altmann, *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History*, 171–189.

81. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:191–193; idem, *Jerusalem*, 126–127.

82. Maimonides embraced this implication explicitly. In his famous interpretation of the rabbinic dictum that God only has four cubits of halakha (see *BT*, *Brakhot*, 8a), Maimonides offered a teleological explanation of human activity according to which numerous people exist solely in order that the unique individual can perfect his intellect. See Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, introduction.

83. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:59–66, 69–71. Beginning in 1763, Mendelssohn speaks of three basic capacities, though his terminology changes. In his 1763 "Prize Essay," he distinguishes between reason (*Vernunft*), sense and imagination (*Sinne und Einbildungskraft*), and inclination and desire (*Neigungen und Leidenschaften*). See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:326. In a short piece from 1776, Mendelssohn divides the soul into the capacity to know (*Erkenntnisvermögen*), the capacity to feel (*Empfindungsvermögen*), and the capacity to desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*). See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.1:276–277. For a trenchant analysis of Mendelssohn's so-called three-faculty theory of the soul, see Beiser, *Diotima's Children*, ch. 7. Also see, Gottlieb, "Aesthetics and the Infinite."

84. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 6.1:115; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 313–314.

85. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 6.1:115; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 313.

86. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2, 66; 15.2: 23–24. See Altmann, "Mendelssohn on Education and the Image of Man," 399. On Mendelssohn's rejection of intellectual perfection as the highest aim of life, see, Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:163.

87. I discuss Mendelssohn's epistemological theory in greater detail in chapter 4.

88. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:242–245; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 14–17.

89. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:246–259; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 23–24.

90. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:325; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 303.

91. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:197–198.

92. Ibid.

93. See Strauss, "Einleitung zu Morgenstunden," lxvi–lxvii.

94. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:161–162; idem, *Jerusalem*, 94–95. Mendelssohn deploys common sense in a fourth way as a way of responding to Jacobi's critique of rational theology. I leave discussion of this in chapter 4.

95. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:10–11. In the seventeeth century, Hugo Grotius and John Selden identified the Noahide laws with natural law morality. Grotius put forward the notion in his 1625 *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* [*The Rights of War and Peace*],

which Selden elaborated in his 1640 *De Jure Naturali et Gentium Juxta Disciplinam Ebraeorum* [*Natural Right and the Nations according to the Teaching of the Hebrews*]. See Rosenblatt, *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi*, 135–141; Carlebach, "The Status of the Talmud," 86–87; Bourel, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 238. This identification is found in the Jewish philosophical tradition, having been advanced by Saadya Gaon in the tenth century. See Saadya, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 9.2, 327. For critical analyses of the identification of the Noahide laws with natural law morality, see Fox, "Law and Ethics in Modern Jewish Philosophy," 7; Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment,* 200–204.

96. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 1:13–14; 4:53–55.

97. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 7:89–92, 300–305.

98. Mendelssohn has the same version of Maimonides' text as Spinoza according to which a Gentile who observes the Noahide laws from rational considerations is not even deemed a "Wise of the Nations."

99. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:11, note c. But while Mendelssohn rejects Maimonides' opinion, Karo himself nevertheless still endorsed it. See Karo, *Kesef Mishne* on Maimonides, *Mishne Torah,* "Laws of Kings," 8:11.

100. A translation of the letter is found in Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader*, 477–478. Twersky assumes that the letter is authentic. See ibid., 474. Shilat, however, considers Maimonides' authorship of the letter doubtful. See Shilat, *Igrot,* 683. Mendelssohn also cites Menasseh ben Israel's *Nishmat Hayyim* which, "cites conclusive passages from the Talmud, the Zohar, and other texts" that prove that Gentiles who act morally from rational considerations will attain salvation. Mendelssohn is referring to Menasseh ben Israel, *Nishmat Hayyim*, II:7. Mendelssohn also cites Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* (See, Halevi, *Kuzari*, 1.111, 78) and "various writings" of "Rabbi Jacob Hirschel" in support of this view. Rabbi Jacob Hirschel is a reference to Rabbi Jacob Emden and while Mendelssohn does not identify the works of Emden that he is referring to, Schacter suggests that he is referring to Emden's *She'elat Yavetz,* 1:41; *Sefer Shimush,* 24a, and *Luah Eresh*, 1:33a–b. See Schacter, *Rabbi Jacob Emden*, 700–702.

101. Schacter denies that this is a correct interpretation of Emden's position. See Schacter, *Rabbi Jacob Emden*, 703–706.

102. Isaiah 66:24.

103. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 19:178. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:73–74; 8: 161–162; idem, *Jerusalem*, 94–95.

104. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 19:178; *BT, Sanhedrin*, 56a–57a. To Mendelssohn's apparent surprise, Emden vigorously justifies Maimonides' reasoning. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 19:179–183; Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 294–295. See Schwarzschild, *The Pursuit of the Ideal*, 34–39; Schacter, *Rabbi Jacob Emden*, 710–716; Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew*, 369–374.

105. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 19:178–179; commentary to Genesis 2:18, s.v. "*lo tov*," 15.2:26; Harvey, "Mendelssohn and Maimon on the Tree of Knowledge." Strauss accepts Mendelssohn's interpretation of Maimonides's reasoning as does Fox. See Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, 164–165; Fox, "Law and Ethics,"

8–11. Kreisel and Novak do not accept this interpretation of Maimonides. See Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, 63–124; Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew*, 290–300.

106. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:316; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 296.

107. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:405–408; 2:316–317; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 151–154, 296–297.

108. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:109, 116; idem, *Jerusalem*, 40, 47; Mendelssohn, commentary to Genesis 2:18, s.v. "*lo tov*," *JubA*, 15.2:26.

109. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.1:116.

110. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.1:117; 1:295–296; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 61–63.

111. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.1:117; 8:115; idem, *Jerusalem*, 46.

112. See Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 58–60. In the introduction to the *Phädon*, Mendelssohn notes that this argument for the immortality of the soul is completely original. But while Mendelssohn claims that the argument can be elaborated by means of the strictest logic, he admits that in the *Phädon*, he presents it in a more popular, less rigorous way. In particular, Mendelssohn does not explain the philosophical basis of our moral obligations. He also does not philosophically deduce the state's right to demand that we sacrifice our lives in times of danger. A number of questions arise from Mendelssohn's presentation. For example, assuming that one does not believe in the immortality of the soul and that one's life in this world is the highest good, is there a moral obligation to enter society given its right to demand that one sacrifice one's life?

113. See Mendelssohn, commentary to Ecclesiastes 9:10, *JubA*, 14:193.

114. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:131; idem, *Jerusalem*, 63; commentary to Ecclesiastes 9:10, *JubA*, 14:193.

115. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:236–240. On the idea of benevolence as its own reward see *JubA*, 8: 111,116; idem, *Jerusalem*, 41, 47; Mendelssohn, *JubA* 6.1:38, 47; 1:405–408; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 151–154; Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 52.

116. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:236–240.

117. At the end of the "Prize Essay," Mendelssohn notes that there are rare "fortunate geniuses" (*glückliche Genie*) who can be motivated to act morally on the basis of knowledge of their moral duties alone. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:328–329. For some reason Dahlstrom does not translate this passage.

118. See Guttmann, "Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*," 373–374.

119. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8: 167–168; idem, *Jerusalem*, 100–101; *JubA*, 13: 70–71. For Albo, these three principles are the existence of God, reward and punishment, and the revealed Torah. See Albo, *Sefer Ha'Ikkarim*, 1.26, 199; Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, 140–150. In his "Counterreflexions" to Bonnet, Mendelssohn accepts Albo's account of the principles of Judaism. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:95.

120. What follows is an abbreviated discussion of Mendelssohn's biblical aesthetics that appears in Gottlieb, "Aesthetics and the Infinite."

121."See Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment;* Gottlieb, "Between Judaism and German Enlightenment," 9–10; Beiser, *Diotima's Children*, ch.

7. But see Kaplan's critique of Sorkin's use of this concept in Kaplan, "Review of *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*." instead of "See Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*. But see Kaplan's critique of Sorkin's use of this concept in Kaplan, "Review of *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*," Gottlieb, "Between Judaism and German Enlightenment," 9–10; Beiser, *Diotima's Children*, ch. 7."

122. In his introduction to Ecclesiastes, Mendelssohn mentions an esoteric level of biblical exegesis (*sod*), but as far as I can tell he never employs it. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:151. Breuer correctly notes that "in contrast with medieval kabbalistic usage, where the allusive and esoteric modes of interpretation...stood at the apex of biblical hermeneutics [for Mendelssohn] these exegetical modes were functionally subordinate to *derash*, the rabbinic-homiletic approach."

123. See Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity*, 159.

124. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:316; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 296.

125. See Mendelssohnn, *JubA*, 6.1:53; Altmann, "The Quest for Liberty," 47; idem, *Die Trostvolle Aufklärung*, 199.

126. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:109; idem, *Jerusalem*, 40; *JubA*, 16:405–407.

127. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:114; idem, *Jerusalem*, 45–46. More precisely, Mendelssohn writes that we have the right to develop our capacities as long as this right does not contradict the laws of wisdom and goodness.

128. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:109–110; idem, *Jerusalem*, 40.

129. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:112; idem, *Jerusalem*, 43.

130. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:110–114, 139–140; idem, *Jerusalem*, 41–45, 72.

131. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:112, 114, 129, 137; idem, *Jerusalem*, 43, 45, 61, 70, 126. Mendelssohn's position on the problem of coercing belief has a complex relationship to Spinoza and Maimonides. Mendelssohn follows Spinoza in holding that belief cannot be coerced even for the masses. But he follows Maimonides in thinking that the reason for this is that belief must be held from rational considerations. Mendelssohn's difference with Maimonides is that he attributes to the masses the power of reasoning through common sense. Regarding the question of the state's authority to coerce belief, Spinoza rejects this because he considers right as coextensive with power. Since no power in the world can coerce belief, the state has no right to coerce it. Since Mendelssohn regards right as consequent on one's authority to exercise one's capacities, he formulates the problem differently. A perfect right to one of my goods can only be created where I freely alienate my goods to another. Since, however, I can never believe something simply because another wishes me to, I can never assign the right over my beliefs to someone else. I discuss this in more detail in chapter 4.

132. See Kant, *Political Writings*, 59; Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:146; idem, *Jerusalem*, 78.

133. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:138; idem, *Jerusalem*, 70–71. In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn finesses Frederick's civil discrimination against Jews, noting that Frederick, "certainly left intact with wise moderation, the privileges of external religion he found installed." Of course Mendelssohn hopes that these privileges (and

the Jews' concomitant disabilities) will be dismantled, but he notes that "it will perhaps still take centuries of culture and preparation before men understand that privileges on account of religion are neither lawful nor actually useful and that it will be a veritable boon to totally abolish all civil discrimination on account of religion." Nevertheless, Mendelssohn sees an advance of civil rights under Frederick's reign since "coercion, excommunication, and the right of expulsion in matters of faith have, at least ceased to be popular concepts." See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:146–147; idem, *Jerusalem*, 78–80.

134. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:126–127; idem, *Jerusalem*, 57–59.

135. Mendelssohn explicitly criticizes Locke's attempt to separate religion and state by assigning them different spheres, the state to the temporal sphere and religion to the eternal sphere. Mendelssohn objects that since religion generally considers eternal felicity to be more important than temporal felicity and since it thinks that one's place in eternal life is grounded in one's actions in this life, religion can easily make the argument that it should have the right to control politics. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:107–109; idem, *Jerusalem*, 38–40.

136. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:113,128; idem, *Jerusalem*, 44, 60. See above, note 79.

137. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:164, 166–167; idem, *Jerusalem*, 97–100; *JubA*, 16: 185–188.

138. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:114, 140–142; idem, *Jerusalem*, 44–45, 73–75. Mendelssohn's account of the inadmissibility of coercion given the mandate of religion raises important questions. Since punishment is a spur to perfection why cannot religion use punishment as a means of improving people?

139. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:22.

140. See Altmann, *Essays In Jewish Intellectual History*, 154–169.

141. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:86.

142. For an example of this argument, see Johann David Michaelis's comments in Dohm, *Über die Burgliche Verbesserung der Juden*, 2:33–51; Reinharz and Mendes-Flohr, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 42–45.

143. Spinoza, *TTP*, 5:62.

144. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:193–195; idem, *Jerusalem*, 128–130; Harvey, "Mendelssohn's Heavenly Politics."

145. See Mendelssohn, *JubA* 8:194; idem, *Jerusalem*, 130; *JubA*, 7:115. The Talmud states that forty years before the fall of the Temple, the Jewish high court (Sanhedrin) was exiled and ceased trying cases. See *BT*, *Avodah Zarah*, 8b; *Sanhedrin* 41a; Jerusalem Talmud (henceforth: *JT*), *Sanhedrin* 1b. Mendelssohn does not explicitly mention his Talmudic source, and I thank Professor Bernard Septimus for directing my attention to it.

146. This does not mean that Mendelssohn thinks that one must understand the precise reason for every ritual. Indeed, in his Pentateuch commentary he criticizes commentators who attempted to explain the reason for every commandment. For Mendelssohn, one should trust that the rituals are commanded by God and promote one's perfection even if one does not know exactly how this happens. See

Mendelssohn, commentary to Exodus 23:19, s.v. "*gedi*", *JubA*, 16: 226, cited in Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, 60. In his Hebrew commentary to Exodus 20:2 s.v. "*anokhi*", Mendelssohn offers a slightly different approach to the question of halakhic obligation basing it on the fact that when God took the Israelites out of Egypt, He became their sovereign. In this passage Mendelssohn seems to speak of God's sovereignty over Israel as independent of whether or not a Hebrew state exists. Hence this reasoning seems to justify halakhic obligation even in the exile. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 16: 187-188. This reasoning does not appear in his German works, as far I can tell. Mendelssohn's understanding of why halakha is obligatory is indebted to Ibn Ezra who in his commentary on Exodus 20:2 gives three reasons for this: (a) Because the Israelites were slaves to Pharoah and God did them the great benefit of releasing them from slavery; (b) because of the worldly flourishing that accrues from performing God's commandments; (c) in order to merit reward in the next world.

147. In his personal copy of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Mendelssohn double underlines a passage in *Guide*, III.29 where Maimonides writes that the primary aim of the Torah is to eradicate idolatry. See Rawidowicz, "Mendelssohns handschriftliche," 201–202. My account of Mendelssohn's adaptation of Maimonides' views on idolatry draws heavily on Lawrence Kaplan's excellent article. See Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn on the Origins of Idolatry." For an incisive account of Maimonides' account of the origin of idolatry also see Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, 29–35.

148. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.26:56–57; Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry*, 238–239.

149. See Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry*, 42–44.

150. See Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, "Laws concerning Idolatry," 1:1–2.

151. See ibid, Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.36, 82–85.

152. See Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, "Laws concerning Idolatry" 1:2; Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry*, 42–45.

153. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III.30, 522–523; III.37, 540–550; idem, *Mishne Torah*, "Laws concerning Idolatry" 1:2.

154. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III.37, 548.

155. In his "Letter on Astrology," Maimonides casts idolatry as a futile way of trying to control the future. He explains the rabbinic claim that the first Temple was destroyed because of the sin of idolatry as referring to the fact that the Israelites lost their state because they wasted their time seeking help from idols and stars instead of learning the art of war. See Lerner, *Maimonides' Empire of Light*, 179–180; Septimus, "Biblical Religion and Political Rationality," 407–408.

156. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III.37, 540–550, especially, 545–547; idem, Langermann, "Maimonides' Repudiation of Astrology," 145.

157. Other examples include Maimonides' surmise that because idolaters cooked kids in their mother's milk, the Torah forbids this, and that because idolaters sacrificed to their deities in all different places, the Torah ordains sacrificing in

Jerusalem alone. See Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish history*, 131–155; Stern, *Problems and Parables of Law*, 33–36.

158. Recent discussions of Mendelssohn's account of idolatry include Eisen, "Divine Legislation"; Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn"; Hilfrich, *Lebendige Schrift;* idem, "Making Writing Readable." What follows is an overview of Mendelssohn's view of the relationship between semiotics and idolatry. More remains to be done on the subject and I greatly look forward to Gideon Freudenthal's forthcoming work on it.

159. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 6.2:17; *JubA*, 8:173; idem, *Jerusalem*, 107. Signs can also lead to new ways of conceiving reality. For example, using the word "nature" to describe a series of events in the physical world leads to seeing the world as operating according the fixed laws rather than according to an arbitrary divine will. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:162; idem, *Jerusalem*, 95. In his commentary on Maimonides' *Logical Terms*, Mendelssohn claims that language is needed to contemplate concepts abstracted from the sensible things they designate. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:26.

160. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:171; *Jerusalem*, 105; *JubA*, 2:280–281; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 264–265. In his unpublished 1756 essay "Über die Sprache" [On Language], Mendelssohn makes a threefold distinction between natural (*natürliche*), mimetic (*nachahmende*), and arbitrary (*willkürliche*) signs. Here natural signs are those which stand in a causal relationship with the signified such that observing the sign leads the observer to intuitively grasp the signified. For example, seeing a person stomp up and down is a natural sign of anger. A mimetic sign is a sign that bears a similarity to the signified—for example a drawing of a tree. An arbitrary sign has no objective connection with the signified. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 6.2:10-16.

161. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:173–175; idem, *Jerusalem*, 107–109.

162. On God's being beyond full human comprehension see Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:465; 2: 310–311; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 202, 291; *JubA*, 3.2, 118–121; 16:27–28, commentary on Exodus 33:23, 328.

163. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:176–179; idem, *Jerusalem*, 110–113.

164. Compare Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn," 431–432. In comparing Mendelssohn's view of idolatry to Maimonides', I am not claiming that Maimonides is Mendelssohn's only or even most important influence. It is worth noting that in describing the biblical prohibition of idolatry Spinoza also draws on Maimonides' "substitution" account of idolatry while disagreeing with it in fundamental ways. According to Spinoza, Moses did not conceive of God as incorporeal, but he thought that God was unlike any created thing. The reason for the second commandment, which prohibits ascribing any sensible image of God or worshipping any sensible image, is that Moses feared that any image fashioned to worship God would inevitably be drawn from people's experience with created things. Moses was concerned that in worshipping God by means of these images, people would come to view the created things used to designate God as divine and thus forget about God. This is what happened with the sin of the golden calf where the people came to regard calves as the true deities. See Spinoza, *TTP*, 1:12.

165. See Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn," 434–436.

166. Morgan and Eisen debate how exactly this occurs. See Morgan, "History and Modern Jewish Thought," 476; Eisen, "Divine Legislation," 253–255. For a nice discussion of the debate see, Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 212–218.

167. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:184; idem, *Jerusalem*, 118–119.

168. Kaplan notes that Mendelssohn drew this view from the sixteenth-century Italian exegete Obadiah Seforno's commentary to Exodus 19:6 as Mendelssohn makes clear in his commentary to this passage. See Mendelssohn, commentary to Exodus 19:6 s.v. "*v'atem tihyu li*," *JubA*, 16, 177. See Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn," 435; idem, "Supplementary notes," 341. Kaplan also points out that in his commentary on Exodus, Abraham Maimonides attributes the view that the Jews serve an educational role for the entire human race to his father Moses. See Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn," 435–436.

169. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13:134.

170. See Mendelssohn, *JubA* 8:202; idem, *Jerusalem*, 138. My discussion here draws on my article, Gottlieb, "Mendelssohn's Metaphysical Defense of Religious Pluralism."

171. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:180; idem, *Jerusalem*, 114–115. In claiming that the cherubs represent divine providence, Mendelssohn relies on a rabbinic tradition which states: "'the [cherubs] shall face one another (Exodus, 25:20)'…but isn't it written, 'the cherubs stand on their feet and face the Sanctuary of the Temple [*ufneihem labayit*]' (II Chronicles, 3:13)? This is not a difficulty [*lo kashia*]. The first verse refers to when Israel performs the will of God [*retzono shel makom*], while the second verse refers to when Israel does not perform the will of God [*retzono shel makom*]." See *BT, Baba Batra*, 99a.

172. While both the practice of halakha and religious diversity are bulwarks against idolatry, Mendelssohn does not regard them as infallible. Halakhic practices can be fetishized and understood as ways of manipulating divine forces as taught in certain kabbalistic schools, and one can interpret various ways of signifying God as different divine incarnations. For Mendelssohn, Gentiles are not prohibited from worshipping idols as long as they do not ascribe divinity to them. See Mendelssohn, commentary to Exodus 20:3, *JubA*, 16:186. For discussion, see Gottlieb, "Mendelssohn's Metaphysical Defense," 220 note 48.

173. My discussion here draws on Gottlieb, "Between Judaism and German Enlightenment."

174. See Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, xxii.

175. Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, xxii. In Sorkin's most recent work, he seems to have softened his earlier insistence on Mendelssohn's opposition to Maimonides somewhat, noting that Mendelssohn "drew on the medieval Andalusian tradition of practical philosophy and piety (Nahmanides, Judah Halevi), yet also on Maimonides." See Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*, 168.

176. Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, xxii.

177. See Halevi, *The Kuzari*, II.48, 111; III.23, 161–164.

178. See ibid., I.25–27, 46–47; I.109, 75–77; I.115, 79; II.10–14, 143–151; II.34, 107–108; III.7, 141–142; III.11, 147: III.23, 161–164.

179. Ibid., III.65, 190; IV.19, 224–225. On this as a possible problem in Maimonides' thought, see Hirsch, *Neunzehn Briefe über Judenthum*, 5–9; idem, *Nineteen Letters*, 13–16; Stern, *Problems and Parables*; Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, 35–41.

180. See Maimon, *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, 93; idem, *Solomon Maimon: an Autobiography*, 147. For discussion of the centrality of Maimonides' notion of intellectual perfection for Maimon, see Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Solomon Maimon*, 82–84, 127–142. On Friedländer's use of this reasoning, see Crouter and Klassen, *A Debate on Jewish Emancipation*, 41–78. For other points of divergence between Mendelssohn and Halevi and affinity between Mendelssohn and Maimonides, see Kaplan, "Review of *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*," 303–304; idem, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn."

181. Bernard Septimus speaks of a "Geonic-Andalusian" tradition. Scholars have debated Halevi's influence on Mendelssohn. For a balanced, though not exhaustive account of the issues at stake, see Shear, *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity*, 230–235. In my view, of all the representatives of the "Geonic-Andalusian" tradition the figure that Mendelssohn is closest to is Saadya. In an article on Saadya's conception of law, Altmann speaks of Saadya's "basic attitude of enlightenment" and of his having embodied as much as "Moses Mendelssohn a moderate enlightenment which tried to harmonise the claims of reason and revelation." See Altmann, "Saadya's Conception of Law," 338–339. I find at least ten similarities between Saadya and Mendelssohn: (1) Both stand at the beginning of traditions of Jewish philosophy, Saadya of medieval Jewish philosophy, Mendelssohn of modern Jewish philosophy. (See Jospe, "Saadiah Gaon and Moses Mendelssohn," 37); (2) Both have wide ranging intellectual interests including philosophy, biblical translation and exegesis, grammatical work, poetry and religious polemics. (See Harvey, "Saadiah, Mendelssohn," 60); (3) Both write philosophy in a popular vein seeking to enlighten the masses and elite alike; (4) Both are philosophical eclectics who do not adhere to a single school of philosophy; (5) Both are epistemological optimists who think that reason can establish the basic principles of morality and metaphysics and that reason and revelation are in fundamental harmony with one another. (See Harvey, "Saadiah, Mendelssohn," 60; Altmann, "Saadya's Conception of Law," 338–339; Guttmann, "Religion and Science," 297); (6) Both see God's creation of the world as expressing His goodness and both adopt an anthropocentric view which makes human happiness/perfection the purpose of creation; (7) Both are "eudamonic pluralists" who see cultivation of intellect as a component of perfection, but not the exclusive or even the highest form of perfection; (8) Both have a halakhic-centered concept of Judaism with Saadya writing that Jews are a nation by virtue of their laws (*shariah*) and Mendelssohn describing what distinguishes Judaism as "revealed legislation." (See Harvey, "Saadiah, Mendelssohn," 60); (9) Both think that reason alone is insufficient to stir one to action, which is why the Bible employs parables and striking imagery. (See Altmann, "Saadya's Conception of Law," 326); (10) Both see the public nature of biblical miracles as evidence of the superior reliability of Judaism over other faith traditions (See Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 170–174).

There are, of course, notable differences between the two such as Saadya's claiming that while moral and religious truth are knowable by reason in principle, in practice it would take a long time to work these teachings out which is why revelation is needed (see Altmann, "Saadya's Conception of Law," 330–331), and Saadya's affirming eternal punishment. Mendelssohn rejects these views as incompatible with divine goodness. I leave a more detailed comparison of Saadya and Mendelssohn to another occasion.

182. Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, xiii.

183. Ibid., xiv.

184. See ibid., 151–158.

185. Ibid., xv.

186. Ibid., 186–199.

187. See ibid., 222–229; Arkush, "The Liberalism of Moses Mendelssohn," 44; idem, "The Questionable Judaism of Moses Mendelssohn," 37.

188. Arkush cites several passages in which Mendelssohn writes of the philosopher's responsibility not to disturb ingrained prejudices of the masses as long as these prejudices do not lead to immorality. See Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 257–260. But in these passages Mendelssohn never mentions Judaism. Furthermore, he only advocates refraining from criticizing prejudices—he never advocates espousing them.

189. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:152–155.

190. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:164: idem, *Jerusalem*, 97.

191. See Kaplan, "Maimonides and Mendelssohn," 451, note 31. Arkush has responded to Kaplan, claiming that he does not see Kaplan's reading as sufficiently grounded textually. See Arkush, "The Questionable Judaism of Moses Mendelssohn," 34, note 8. I do not agree.

192. I find further support for Kaplan's/my own understanding of Mendelssohn in Mendelssohn's last work, *To Lessing's Friends*. In describing his concept of Judaism, Mendelssohn writes, "Neither is Judaism a revelation of doctrinal statements and eternal truths, *belief in which is commanded* (emphasis mine)." So in denying that Judaism contains revealed religion, Mendelssohn is emphasizing the fact that in Judaism belief in eternal truths is not commanded, not that Judaism contains no eternal truths in its sacred writings. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:197; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 137.

193. See Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 227. See Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 5:3–81.

194. In this respect, I concur with Jeremy Dauber and Adam Shear's assessments of Mendelssohn. See Dauber, *Antonio's Devils*, 129; Shear, *The Kuzari and the Shaping*, 230–235.

195. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:195; idem, *Jerusalem*, 130.

196. Arkush also notes another major problem, which he calls the "historical challenge." This challenge stems from radical critics such as Spinoza who question the veracity, unity, and textual integrity of the Bible. Arkush claims that Mendelssohn has no adequate response to these critics. But rather than admit this, Mendelssohn tries to hide this failure by appealing to outdated medieval arguments for the Bible's

authenticity. Adapting arguments from Saadya and Halevi, Mendelssohn claims that in contrast to Christianity, which is based on private miracles performed by Jesus, Judaism rests on God's public miraculous revelation of the Torah to the Israelites at Sinai. While private miracles can be falsified, public miracles cannot and hence the Torah should be deemed trustworthy. For Arkush, even by the standards of eighteenth-century historical scholarship, these arguments are clearly inadequate and Mendelssohn knew it. See Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 133–180. In my view, the context in which Mendelssohn pens these arguments is crucial and shows that he never intended them as a response to radical critics. The arguments are found in polemical tracts addressed to Christian critics who accept the Old Testament but validate their belief that the New Testament had superseded the Old Testament by appealing to Jesus' miracles (Bonnet and Lavater). Mendelssohn invokes the medieval arguments to claim that the public miracles in the Old Testament should carry more weight than the private miracles found in the New Testament. As such, a Jew is on firm ground in accepting the Old Testament, but not the New Testament. I think that Mendelssohn does have a response to the radical critics, which I plan to lay out on another occasion. I do agree with Arkush that if pressed Mendelssohn probably would have conceded that the separation of civil and religious law in the modern state was preferable to their unification in the ancient Israelite state. Nevertheless, I do not think that Mendelssohn is disingenuous in his treatment of the Mosaic state. While there are various aspects of the Mosaic state that Mendelssohn praises, I do not find any place where he praises the unification of civil and religious law in it. In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn simply seeks to show that he can explain the punishments for disobedience of the ceremonial law on the basis of his liberal principles. He does not claim that this is the ideal state of affairs. Moreover, as Mendelssohn thinks that the Mosaic constitution is *sui generis* and that Jews are prohibited from actively working to reestablish their state (See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 12.1:211-212 citing *BT, Ketubot*, 110b–111a), the unification of civil and religious law in the Mosaic constitution is of no practical significance for him. See Mendelssohn, *Moses Mendelssohn Gesammelte Schriften*, 3:365–367; Reinharz and Mendes-Flohr, *The Jew in the Modern* World, 48–49; Harvey, "Moses Mendelssohn on the Land of Israel." In a short paper written in 1784 that addresses the question of the best constitution, Mendelssohn does not present the Mosaic constitution as ideal. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 6.1:127–136. For a view that Mendelssohn does regard the Mosaic constitution as ideal, see Harvey, "Mendelssohn's Heavenly Politics," 403–412.

CHAPTER 3

1. Eberhard, *Neue Apologie des Sokrates*.

2. See Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 7:472–501; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 37–60. According to Lessing, Leibniz's reasoning was as follows: Since everything in the world is connected, nothing in the world is without consequences, indeed eternal consequences. The punishment for sin is the "harm which is said to attach to us from every act of sin." But given that actions have eternal consequences,

the imperfection that one causes by sinning is eternal and the harm that attaches to us must also be eternal. So the punishment for sin is eternal.

3. See Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 7:548–581. This followed Lessing's own rationalization of the trinity in his 1753 fragment "The Christianity of Reason." See Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 2:403–407; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 25–29.

4. See Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 10:73–74; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 234–236. For discussion of Christian attempts to rationally defend the trinity prior to Lessing as well as an account of Lessing's different approaches to this problem throughout his career, see Nisbet, "The Rationalization of the Holy Trinity," 65–76. Also see Gottlieb, *The Fragility of Reason*, 199, note 398. "Vicarious atonement" refers to the doctrine that human beings had their sins forgiven through the suffering of Christ.

5. The complete version of this work was first published in 1972. See Reimarus, *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die Vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*.

6. See Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 8:115–311.

7. See Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 8:312; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 63.

8. For a recent account of the Lessing-Goeze controversy see Yasukata, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion*, 41–55.

9. See Mendelssohn, letter to Karl Lessing, February, 1781, *JubA*, 13:6 quoted in Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 582.

10. See Mendelssohn, letter to Karl Wilhelm von Braunschweig, February 20, 1781,*JubA*, 13:5 quoted in Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 586.

11. Mendelssohn, letter to Hennings, May 8, 1781, *JubA*, 13:16 quoted in Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 587.

12. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 587–588.

13. Le Sage was known for his invention of the electric telegraph and for his mechanical theory of gravitation. See Di Giovanni, "Introduction," 5.

14. Ibid.

15. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:13; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 183.

16. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 594–595.

17. Elise Reimarus originally introduced Jacobi to Lessing. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:7; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 181.

18. The course of events leading up to the Pantheism Controversy are described in Strauss, "Einleitung zu Morgenstunden," xiv-lix; Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 603–712; Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 61–74.

19. When treating Jacobi's critique of enlightened theism, I will draw on Jacobi's later works as relevant. My discussion will not involve a comprehensive account of Jacobi's critique of rationalism or his analysis of Spinoza. I will discuss these themes only as they are relevant for understanding Mendelssohn's defense of enlightened theism and his treatment of Spinoza in his final works. Jacobi often does not specify whom his precise target is when critiquing German Enlightenment thought. As my interest is in Mendelssohn, I will frame the discussion in terms of Mendelssohn

unless there are reasons not to. For an alternative interpretation that reads Jacobi's *Spinoza Letters* primarily as a critique of Kant, see Franks, *All or Nothing*, 87–108; 154–174. Given that Mendelssohn is the direct addressee of the *Spinoza Letters* it is reasonable to assume that he is Jacobi's main target. Indeed in Jacobi's 1787 *David Hume*, which he composed after Mendelssohn's death, Mendelssohn's moderate enlightenment is still Jacobi's primary target. As Jacobi put it in his 1819 Preface to *David Hume*, when composing the *Spinoza Letters*, he stood "somewhere between the still predominant system of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school *to whose followers it* [*i.e., David Hume*]*was primarily directed* (emphasis mine) and the *new* doctrine of Kant which was growing fast." See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:375; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 538.

20. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 4.1:304; idem, "Something Lessing Said," 191.

21. See ibid. Beiser surmises that the immediate context for "Something Lessing Said" was the 1781 Josephine reforms. See Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 145–147.

22. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 6.1:103–108. In adumbrating Jacobi's critique of enlightened absolutist politics, I will also draw on two later pieces by Jacobi, his 1786 *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen Betreffend die Briefe über die Lehre des Spinoza* ("Against Mendelssohn's Accusations Concerning the *Letters on the Doctrine of Spinoza*") in Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:271–341, and his 1788 *Einige Betrachtungen über den Frommen Betrug und über eine Vernunft welche nicht die Vernunft ist* ("Some Observations on Pious Fraud and on a Reason Which is Not Reason") in Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 5.1:105–134.

23. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:146–147; idem, *Jerusalem*, 78–80. In a letter to Iselin, Mendelssohn praises the freedom of thought in Frederick's Prussia, though he laments that Jews do not fully share in it. See Mendelssohn, , letter to Iselin, May 30, 1762, *JubA*, 11;338, cited in Altmann, "The Quest for Liberty," 43.

24. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 4.1:307, 319; idem, "Something Lessing Said," 193, 201. Jacobi's arguments show Rousseau's profound influence.

25. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 4.1:318–319; idem, "Something Lessing Said," 200–201.

26. To be sure, Jacobi recognizes that a free regime is an ideal construct that does not exist in reality. As he puts it, "Despotism…can be found in *every* constitution to a greater or lesser extent." See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 4.1:318; idem, "Something Lessing Said," 200.

27. Ibid.

28. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 4.1:313–315, 327–328; idem, "Something Lessing Said," 198–199, 208. This reflects a Hobbesian perspective.

29. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 4.1:319; idem, "Something Lessing Said," 201.

30. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:130–131; idem, *Jerusalem*, 62–63.

31. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:104; idem, *Jerusalem*, 35 where Mendelssohn notes the destruction wrought by "fanaticism" (*Fanatismus*) in Hobbes's time. Also see ibid., *JubA*, 8:131, 201; idem, *Jerusalem*, 63, 136.

32. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 5.1:130.

33. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 6.1:139–141.

34. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:130–131; idem, *Jerusalem*, 62–63. For discussion of Mendelssohn's view of censorship, see Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 116–122.

35. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 5.1:110. Note that in an unpublished essay Mendelssohn defends hard censorship without qualification. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 6.1:123–124.

36. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:2: idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 174.

37. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 5.1:125, 127.

38. On Mendelssohn's dismissive attitude to religious enthusiasm, see Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:131, 201; idem, *Jerusalem*, 63, 136. In the "Prize Essay," Mendelssohn calls atheism, "absurdist disbelief" (*allerungereimtesten Unglauben*). See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:314; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 294. Mendelssohn shows a similarly dismissive attitude to atheism in *PD*, where Mendelssohn does not argue for the superiority of Leibnizian theism over Spinoza's atheism, but simply assumes it.

39. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 5.1, 122–127; 1.1:328–330; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 159–160.

40. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:319, 328; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 155; *Werke und Briefe*, 5.1:125. Jacobi is alluding to the enlightened fear of "crypto-Papism" which I will discuss in the next chapter.

41. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:132–133; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 239–241.

42. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:117, 132–135; 141–142; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 231, 239–241, 246. Also see, Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 174.

43. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:136–139; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 242–244. Compare Halevi, *Kuzari*, 5.12, 265–266. See Gottlieb, "Mysticism and Philosophy," 125–127.

44. Jacobi writes: "…to wish a God only so that He may protect our treasures and keep our house in order provide us with a comfortable life is the godless way of the idolater (*Götzendienst*)." See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 5.1:216–217; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 521. Compare Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III.30, 522–523; III.37, 547–549.

45. Jacobi writes: "If we could ever manage to secure our social relations…without the use of God's name…then away with this inconvenient piece of furniture that only takes up space without being in itself of any use." See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 5.1:216–217; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 521. Compare Halevi, *Kuzari*, 3.65, 190; 4.19, 224–225. See Gottlieb, "Mysticism and Philosophy," 130–131.

46. Jacobi writes: "The idea of a virtuous being originates in the enjoyment of virtue; the idea of a free being in the enjoyment of freedom; the idea of a living being in the enjoyment of life…" See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:138; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 243. Compare Halevi, *The Kuzari*, 4.5, 213–214; 4.16, 223; Gottlieb, "Mysticism and philosophy," 135.

47. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:116–118, 133–139; 2.1:100 idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 231–232, 240–244, 330. Compare, Halevi, *The Kuzari*, 4.17, 223; Gottlieb, "Mysticism and Philosophy," 136.

48. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:139; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 244.

49. As mentioned in chapter 1, Mendelssohn himself describes his philosophy as "rather Epicurean." See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13:332–334.

50. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 4.1:327–329; idem, "Something Lessing Said," 207–208.

51. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:42; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 281.

52. Ibid.

53. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:9; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 181–182.

54. Ibid.

55. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:24–27; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 191–193.

56. The idea that Spinoza is more logically consistent than Leibniz continued to be accepted by some philosophers well into the twentieth century, most notably by Bertrand Russell. See Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, vii cited in Franks, *All or Nothing*, 84. While in the *Spinoza Letters* Jacobi casts Spinoza as the culmination of philosophical reasoning, in his 1799 letter to Fichte, Jacobi changes his position instead casting Fichtean thought as "the most perfect system of philosophy." See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:200–201; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 507.

57. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:57; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 205.

58. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:123; 2.1:236; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 234, 531. Recently, Michael Della Rocca has adopted Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza seeing the consistent application of the PSR as the driving force behind Spinoza's philosophy. Della Rocca mentions Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza as anticipating his own though Della Rocca's interpretation is much more detailed than Jacobi's. See Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 283–284.

59. Mendelssohn, *JubA* 2:304–306; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 285–287; *JubA*, 1:162–164; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 247–250; idem, *JubA*, 3.1:346–350.

60. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:305–306; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 286–287; *JubA*, 1:163–164; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 249–250; idem, *JubA*, 3.1:346–348.

61. Mendelssohn, *JubA* 2:305–306; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 286–287.

62. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:429–430; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 586–587.

63. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:429–430, 236; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 586–587, 531. See Spinoza, E1App, 439–441; E2P35S, 473; E2P48, 483–484; E3P9S, 500; E4, preface, 543–546; idem, Letter 58, 909.

64. Jacobi claims that Spinoza saw the compatibilist view of freedom as more absurd than the view of freedom as arbitrary choice. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:25, 75; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 192, note 5, 211 citing Spinoza, E1P33S2, 438.

65. As Jacobi puts it, for Spinoza, "there is no force that does not work and that is not effective at every instant." See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:73–74; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 210. See Spinoza, E2P48–49, 483–491; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 123–127; Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, 187–188.

66. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:84; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 213. See idem, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:20–21; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 189. Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza's approach to human teleology seems closest to Bennett's. See Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 215–226. Jacobi does note that in a number of places Spinoza affirms human freedom, though not free will. In these places Spinoza defines freedom as acting in accordance with the laws of one's own being. Human freedom is a matter of degree—human beings can never be fully free since as finite beings they are always determined in part by things outside of themselves. Only God, the necessary, infinite being, is fully free. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:78–79; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 212. Della Rocca and Nadler accept this basic interpretation of freedom for Spinoza. See Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, 230–238; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 187–189. Of course, given Jacobi's view that true human freedom involves arbitrary free choice, Spinoza's account of freedom is empty. In Spinoza's espousing this notion of human freedom, Jacobi sees Spinoza as attempting to disguise his fatalism. As Jacobi puts it, "Spinoza had to wriggle quite a bit to hide his fatalism when he turned to human conduct especially in the fourth and fifth parts of the *Ethics* where I could say that he degrades himself to a sophist here and there." See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:28–29; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 194. It is not clear to me how this fits with Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza as the most honest philosopher.

67. In support of his contention that Leibniz was at bottom a fatalist, Jacobi notes that in the *Theodicy* Leibniz calls human beings "spiritual automatons." See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:24–26, 126; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 191–192, 234. The passage referred to is Leibniz, *Theodicy*, #52, 151. Jacobi notes that the expression "spiritual automatons" is remarkably close to Spinoza's language in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. See Spinoza, *TIE*, 37.

68. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:23; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 190.

69. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:218; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 362.

70. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:29, 258–259; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 194, 374.

71. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:234–236; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 530–532.

72. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:215, 425; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 519, 583.

73. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:300–301; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 281–283.

74. Beiser reads Jacobi's argument that the ontological proof can only prove Spinozism in relation to Kant's essay "The Only Possible Proof of God's Existence." See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 55. The context of Jacobi's discussion of the proof shows that he clearly has Mendelssohn's "*Prize Essay*" in mind. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:42–44; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 280–282:

75. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:44; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 282: "Being (*Das Seyn*) is no attribute (*Eigenschaft*) but what bears all attributes (*Eigenschaften*)." I have modified Di Giovanni's translation.

76. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:44–45; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 282–283.

77. This view is sometimes called "panentheism."

78. In speaking of God's being "prior to creation" I do not refer to temporal priority since emanation can be conceived as an eternal process. Rather, I refer to ontological priority.

79. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:22, 100; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 190 note 3, 219–220. Jacobi cites Spinoza's Letter 50 where Spinoza writes that "determination is negation." See Spinoza, Letter 50, 892.

80. See Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 91–92.

81. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:24–27, 240–246; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 191–193, 369; *Werke und Briefe*, 117–120. See Sandkaulen, *Grund und Ursache*, 93–102.

82. On Mendelssohn's intentions, see Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 5.1:111: "you are certain that from clear or complete concepts of reason and their application in observing the world you are able to prove the existence of a rational, free cause of the world, providence, and the personal persistence of the soul after death and so render a clear and perfect conviction that can be transmitted to others so that faith is superfluous and will be destroyed from human language so that certainty can take its place." On rationalism as a Trojan Horse for the faithful, see Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:100; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 587; idem, *Werke und Briefe*, 5.1, 108–109.

83. Jacobi's use of the term "*salto mortale*" to describe his profession of faith is not entirely clear. Di Giovanni describes it as a somersault. See Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 189. The intention seems to be that rather than seeking to understand the divine through intellect, one should instead rely on sense perception.

84. See *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:22, 100; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 327.

85. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:115–116, 251–262; 2.1, 201; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 230, 370–378, 507. According to Jacobi, Spinoza reduces all rational knowledge to analytic statements of identity because he conflates ground (*Grund*) and cause (*Ursache*). "Ground" is an *a priori*, abstract, analytic judgment, which is timeless and whose basic principle is that the whole is prior to the parts (*totum parte prius esse necessare est*). An example of this is that the three lines enclosing a space are the *ground* of the three angles of a triangle. In contrast, "cause" is an *a posteriori*, synthetic judgment that involves succession in time. An example of this is the idea that planting apple seeds is the *cause* of the growth of an apple tree. Spinoza, however, conflates ground and cause through the general principle that "everything conditional must have a condition." Spinoza is the purest rationalist because he gives priority to ground over cause, which, according to Jacobi, leads him to regard perception as unnecessary for knowledge, to regard time as an illusion, and to find no

place for final causes. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:19, 256–258; 2.1, 49–54; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 188, 371–373, 287–291. For further discussion of this point, see Sandkaulen, *Grund und Ursache*, 64–76, 171–229.

86. In calling all knowledge based on immediate perception "faith," Jacobi relies on Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, 47–53. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:27–31; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 270–271. Jacobi's use of Hume depends on his rendering Hume's term "belief" as "*Glaube*." For discussion of the problematic aspects of this, see Di Giovanni, "Introduction," 90. In both the *Spinoza Letters* and *David Hume*, Jacobi contrasts faith with reason defining faith as "every assent to truth not derived from rational grounds." Jacobi identifies faith with immediate sense perception and takes the term "revelation" to be synonymous with the term "faith." See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:115–117, 125; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 230–231, 234; Berlin, "Hume and the Sources of German Anti-Rationalism," 182–185. While in the *Spinoza Letters* and *David Hume* Jacobi uses the term "reason" for the capacity of judging abstractly according the principle of identity, in his 1799 Open Letter to Fichte, Jacobi revises his terminology now defining "the essence of reason" in a more Kantian sense as a faculty which "desires cognition" of truth. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:208; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 513–514. In his 1819 introduction to *David Hume* Jacobi alters his terminology again and even more dramatically. Whereas previously Jacobi had not used different terms to distinguish between the immediate perception of sensible objects and the immediate perception of supersensible beings, he now reserves the term "reason" (*Vernunft*) for the faculty which intuits supersensible beings. That which Jacobi previously called "reason" he now calls "understanding" (*Verstand*). See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:377–381; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 538–543. See Franks, "All of Nothing," 99.

87. I use "reason" in the sense of the term in the *Spinoza Letters*.

88. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:28–29; 2.1, 430; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 194, 587–588.

89. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1, 97–99; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 328–329. Compare Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4.3, 205-212.

90. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:106–108; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 224–225. There is obviously a difference between perceptions of God and of soul, for unlike God, the soul does not have to reveal itself to be perceived.

91. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:97; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 327.

92. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:97, 425–426; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 327, 583.

93. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:232–235; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 529–530.

94. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:234–245; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 530. See also, Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:20–21, 28, 163–165; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 189, 194, 345–346.

95. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:135–146, 395–399; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 242–251, 556–559.

96. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:54–55, 395; 1.1:117–118; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 329, 556, 231.

97. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:16–18, 120, 258; 2.1:409–410; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 187, 233, 373, 569–570. Compare Jacobi's comments in his open letter to Fichte: "But a *merely artificial faith* in Him is also *impossible as faith* for insofar as it *only wants to be artificial*, i.e., simply scientific or *purely* rational it abolishes natural faith and with that, itself *as* faith as well; hence theism is abolished as a whole." See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1: 192; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 500. While Jacobi refers to Reinhold's letter to Fichte, it seems to express Jacobi's attitude to Mendelssohn's rationalism as well. Isaiah Berlin has noted how Jacobi's thinking reflects his Pietist background. Thus in 1758 the Pietist Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf wrote that, "whoever seeks to conceive God in his head becomes an atheist." This quote is cited in Berlin, "Hume and the German Sources," 170.

98. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:192; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 500. Compare Halevi, *Kuzari*, 5.21:291.

99. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:115–116; 2.1:21–22; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 230, 265.

100. At times, however, Jacobi casts Mendelssohn as betraying Judaism. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1: 141–144; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 246–248.

101. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:117–118; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 231. See Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4.15–16:222–223.

102. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:404–405, 196; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 564–566, 503.

103. In Greek "logos" means both reason and word.

104. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:222; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 525.

105. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:30; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 195.

106. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 2.1:430; 5.110, 8–109; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 587, 108–109. See Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 8:328; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 75.

107. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:7–9; 308–309; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 181–182; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 152.

CHAPTER 4

1. In the *Spinoza Letters*, Jacobi had written that Mendelssohn was "astounded (*erstaunte*)" when he heard through Elise Reimarus of Jacobi's report that Lessing had confessed Spinozism. See Jacobi, *Werke*, 1.1:10; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 182. In *To Lessing's Friends*, Mendelssohn disputes Jacobi's characterization of his response writing that "the news of my astonishment is in no way a narrating of the facts.... My conviction as to the untruth of Spinozism can absolutely not be shaken, neither by Lessing's repute nor by that of any mortal. Neither could this report have the least effect on my friendship with Lessing: nor by the same token could my opinion of Lessing's genius and character be the lesser because of it. *Lessing a follower of Spinoza*? Good Lord! What

have a person's speculative views to do with the person himself? Who could not be delighted to have had Lessing as a friend no matter how great his Spinozism? And who would refuse to give Spinoza's genius and excellent character their due? . . . If I was able indeed to love Lessing when he was a strict follower of Athanasius . . . then why not all the more when he approximated Judaism, and where I saw him as an adherent of the Jew, *Baruch Spinoza*?" See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:188; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 129–130. Jacobi presses his claim about Mendelssohn's astonishment in *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen*. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:289–292.

2. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13:281; Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 71.

3. This brief account of the events leading up to the Pantheism Controversy is based on Altmann and Beiser. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 603–653; Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 61–75.

4. See Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 21; Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:190–191; idem, *To Lessing's Friends*, 132; Mendelssohn, letter to Kant October 16, 1785, *JubA*, 13:313. One might add that Mendelssohn was also upset because of Jacobi's portrayal of him as a naïve, religious simpleton. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:193 where Mendelssohn writes with obvious ironic pathos: "So then: Lessing was tolerant of my weakness: he excused my fervor for the *a priori* metaphysical argument [for God's existence], concealed his true system from me—his most esteemed friend—apparently in order not to rob me of a conviction that he saw made me so calm, so happy. . . . If all these events occurred exactly as they appear to have occurred, then I ask: Who has more practical religion (*thätige Religion*), truer piety- the atheist who is unwilling to rob his friend of his conviction in natural religion, a conviction which he sees makes him happy or the orthodox [*rechtgläubige*] Christian who, so to speak, without mercy knocks from the cripple's hands the crutches with which he barely manages to drive himself along?"

5. See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 77.

6. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:194–196; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 135–136. Jacobi's citation of Lavater is found at Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:145–146; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 250–251.

7. See Mendelssohn's conversation with Reichardt cited in Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 733. Also see Sophie Becker's diary entry of October 10, 1785, cited by Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 721.

8. Lessing himself acknowledged that his parable is based on Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Altmann notes that Lessing's version also reflects elements found in Solomon ibn Verga's sixteenth-century rendering of the parable found in his *Shevet Yehuda*. For discussion, see Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 569–577.

9. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:130; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 71.

10. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:125–131; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 66–72. Jacobi rejects this interpretation of *Nathan the Wise*. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:309–315.

11. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:125; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 66–67. For Jacobi's response, see Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:307–309.

12. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:191–196; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 133–136.

13. On Mendelssohn's fear of Crypto-Jesuitism in another context see, Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:139; idem, *Jerusalem*, 72; letter to Homberg, September 22, 1783, *JubA*, 13, 344. Jacobi recognized that he was being charged with Crypto-Jesuitism. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1; 319; 2.1: 8; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 157; Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 263. While Jacobi was a Pietist, many members of the German Enlightenment feared that the Pietists and Jesuits were in league promoting religious despotism and the suppression of critical thinking. See Di Giovanni, "Hegel, Jacobi," 55.

14. August Anton Göchhausen, *Enthüllung des Systems der Weltbürger-Republik* (1786) [*Exposure of the Cosmopolitan System*], quoted in Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism*, 99. On Crypto-Jesuitism, see Di Giovanni, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 607–608, note 15; idem, "Hegel, Jacobi"; Epstein, *The Genesis*, 98–100, 506–517.

15. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:191; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 135.

16. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:191–197; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 133–137.

17. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:132; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 73. During the Fragmentist Controversy, Lessing had famously remarked: "If God held fast in his right hand the whole truth and in his left hand the ever-active quest for truth, albeit with the proviso that I should constantly and eternally err, and said to me: 'Choose,' I would humbly fall upon the left and say: 'Father, give! For pure truth is for you alone.' " See Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 98.

18. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 4.1:304; idem, "Something Lessing Said," 191.

19. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 6.1; 108. The emphasis is mine.

20. Ibid. In his response to Mendelssohn, Jacobi claims that Mendelssohn misunderstands him. He is not defending popular rule *per se* for even democracy can be despotic. Rather, Jacobi claims that he is defending political freedom. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 601. Strauss understands the argument of "Something Lessing Said" as being that Lessing preferred ecclesiastical despotism, which controls the masses by fostering superstition to secular despotism, which controls the masses by harsh punishment. See Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," 58–59.

21. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:4–5.

22. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.1:316.

23. See ibid. In *Phädon*, Mendelssohn recounts Aulus Gellius's anecdote that Socrates at times stood in a single place for a whole day thinking about a philosophical problem "as if his spirit was absent from his body." Mendelssohn calls this a "disposition to enthusiasm" (*Anlage zur Schwärmerey*) on Socrates' part. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.1:17; idem, *Phädon*, 48. Given Maimonides' emphasis on knowledge of God as the proper aim of all of one's actions (as expressed, for example, in chapter five of the "Eight Chapters"—see Maimonides, *Ethical Writings*, 75–78), Mendelssohn would have likely considered him disposed to *Schwärmerei* as well.

24. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:46. For Mendelssohn, the distinction between subjectively connected ideas and objectively connected ideas provides a basic way of differentiating between waking and dreaming states. Mendelssohn quotes with approval Democritus's statement that "in dreaming each of us has our own world,

while in waking we all pass into a common world." See ibid., 53. Of course, the distinction between waking and dreaming is much more complex for Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn notes that rational thought is possible when dreaming such as when people dream the solution to scientific problems. Similarly, he would not want to label as a dreaming state every time we associate ideas based on our individual imagination.

25. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2:46–47.

26. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 6.1:108.

27. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 6.1:128–129; 16:405–407; 8:109; idem, *Jerusalem*, 40.

28. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:115; idem, *Jerusalem,* 46.

29. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8: 116; idem, *Jerusalem,* 47. Mendelssohn adopts Locke's theory according to which I acquire property by mixing my labor with natural goods.

30. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:115; idem, *Jerusalem*, 46.

31. Ibid.

32. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:117–118; idem, *Jerusalem*, 48–49.

33. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:117, 120–121; idem, *Jerusalem*, 48, 52–53.

34. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:120–121; idem, *Jerusalem*, 53–54.

35. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:129–130, 137, 164–165; idem, *Jerusalem,* 61–62, 70, 97–98.

36. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:113, 128; idem, *Jerusalem*, 44, 60.

37. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:125–126, 129–130, 140–141; idem, *Jerusalem*, 57–59, 61–62, 73–74.

38. See chapter 1.

39. Ibid. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 2:318–320; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 298–300.

40. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 6.1:134.

41. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 6.1:132.

42. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:146–147; idem, *Jerusalem*, 78–79. The provisional nature of Mendelssohn's support of enlightened absolutism is evident in *Jerusalem* itself where he writes that it is impossible to decide absolutely which form of government is best. It depends on the nature of the people. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 8:110–112; idem, *Jerusalem*, 41–43.

43. Mendelssohn writes: "He who publicly publishes a dangerous opinion damages others immediately. Therefore the law can be used to stop him." See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 6.1:124.

44. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 6.1, 134.

45. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 2:99 cited in Altmann, "The Quest for Liberty," 43.

46. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 6.1:133.

47. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 2:296–297; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 278.

48. See Mendelssohn, letter to Sophie Becker, December 27, 1785, *JubA,* 13:332–334, cited in Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 718–719.

49. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2:68.

50. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 2:102; 3.1:80, 115–116; 3.2:238–240, 249–250. See chapter 1 above.

51. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2:69.

52. Mendelssohn, *JubA* 3.2:63, 69.

53. Ibid., 69–70.

54. Ibid., 71. See Mendelssohn's "Prize Essay" where he contrasts the ease of attaining impartiality in mathematics with the difficulty of attaining it in philosophy, ethics, and politics where doctrines "have such an immediate influence on our way of life, happiness, and opinions that each individual takes a side from the outset and on the basis of preconceived opinions builds his own system that is compatible with his weaknesses (*Schwachheiten*)." See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:295; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 276–278. Compare Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.31, 67.

55. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:71.

56. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:71.

57. This recalls Mendelssohn's discussion of Spinoza in *PD*, where he wrote that "Before the transition from the Cartesian to the Leibnizain philosophy could occur, it was necessary for someone to take the plunge into the monstrous abyss [*ungeheuren Abgrund*] lying between them. This unhappy lot fell to Spinoza. How his fate is to be pitied. He was a sacrifice [*Opfer*] for the human intellect, but one that deserves to be decorated with flowers. Without him philosophy would never have been able to extend its borders so far." Similarly, at the end of the second dialogue, Mendelssohn wrote that "Spinoza's dangerous errors must have contributed to the priority of truth." See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:349, 353; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 106, 111.

58. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:71–72.

59. Compare Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:161–162; idem, *Jerusalem*, 94–95.

60. Ibid.

61. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:104.

62. See Beiser *The Fate of Reason*, 98–102.

63. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:81–82.

64. Ibid., 82.

65. See Mendelssohn, *JubA* 3.2:10. Mendelssohn also calls things "*Urbilder*" or "*Vorbilder*" (archetypes), he also calls thoughts, "*Abbilder*" (images) and he also calls words, "*Schattenrisse*" (silhouettes).

66. Ibid. I use the phrase "thing in itself" (*Ding an sich*) made famous by Kant, even though Mendelssohn does not use this phrase himself.

67. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:304; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 285.

68. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:11.

69. Ibid. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:499; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 235.

70. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:11; 2:273; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 257.

71. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:11.

72. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:11–12.

73. Ibid., 11, 54–55.

74. On Mendelssohn's acceptance of Descartes' *cogito*, see Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:44–45; 2:294, 309–310; *Philosophical Writings*, 275, 289–290; Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness*, 26–27.

75. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:60.

76. See Mendelssohn, *JubA* 3.2:15–17.

77. Mendelssohn, *JubA* 3.2:15. Mendelssohn likewise applies the theory of probability to our knowledge of universal laws of nature such as gravitation or universal judgments such as that all people die. See Mendelssohn, *JubA* 3.2; 21, 24–26. Compare Mendelssohn's early attempt to specify how one determines degrees of probability. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:497–515; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 235–247.

78. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:61.

79. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:57. See ibid., 87–88. Compare Mendelssohn's "Prize Essay" where he seeks to meet the skeptical challenge by distinguishing between "constant and variable (*beständige und verändliche*)" appearances. There he notes that constant appearances have their source in "the intrinsic essential constitution of our senses (*inner wesentlichen Beschaffenheit unserer Sinne*)," while inconstant appearances derive from "the incorrect position (*unrechten Standorte*) from which we regard objects." See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:284–286; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 266–268; Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness*, 23–24.

80. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:55–61.

81. See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 106–107.

82. For Mendelssohn's early formulations of this proof, see Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:300–301; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 281–283; *JubA*, 12.2:117–119. See Altmann, *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History*, 129–133.

83. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:152. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A592/B620-A602-B630.

84. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:154. See Altmann, *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History*, 133–137.

85. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:155.

86. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:203; Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 353. One might argue that since we can doubt whether or not God exists it is not the case that we must think of God as existing. Mendelssohn's answer is that since when I am reasoning *correctly*, I must think that God exists, the only way to think God as not existing is to ignore this proof or to reason incorrectly. My doubting God's existence because I am unaware or fail to understand the ontological proof is no more valid than my doubting that a triangle's angles add up to 180 degree because I am ignorant of or fail to understand basic geometry. One could argue that there is a difference between recognizing that God's existence is a demand of reason and knowing that God, in fact, exists. Mendelssohn does not consider this difference to be significant. Indeed for Mendelssohn I am even more justified in trusting in the existence of God than in trusting in the existence of this computer, which I perceive myself to be typing on. For my trust in the existence of the computer is based on agreement and hence probability while the ontological proof is a logical *a priori* proof, which is not subject to doubt. The only reason that the computer seems more real is because my sensible perception of it is more vivid than my logical reasoning about God's existence. This vividness, however, has nothing to do with grounds for accepting something as true.

87. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:511–512; 2:306–307; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 247, 287–288.

88. I would situate Mendelssohn within an epistemological trend in late eighteenth-century philosophy described by Ernst Cassirer that moves toward valuing human knowledge *qua* finite. As Cassirer puts it: "A change becomes increasingly apparent in the relation between human and divine understanding, between 'ectypal mind' (*intellectus ectypus*) and 'archetypal mind' (*intellectus archetypus*). It is no longer a matter, as it had been in the great metaphysical systems of the seventeenth century- for instance in Malebranche and Spinoza- of resolving the finite into the infinite and thus, so to speak, of eliminating it. What is required is that the finite assert itself in its own character even in the presence of the highest standard; that it preserve its specific nature even when it recognizes this nature as finite." See Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 353.

89. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:499; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 235.

90. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:301: idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 281.

91. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:497; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 233.

92. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:285–286; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 267–268.

93. I was first led to think about Mendelssohn as a pragmatist by reading an essay by Cassirer on Mendelssohn. See Cassirer, "Die Philosophie Moses Mendelssohns."

94. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:197–198; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 138–139.

95. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:33, 51.

96. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:82.

97. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:29.

98. This contrasts with geometry, which for Mendelssohn uses "essential" signs that are isomorphic with the object designated. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:171; idem, *Jerusalem*, 105. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:280–281; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 264–265. On the dangers posed by language for metaphysical inquiry, see Mendelssohn's discussion of language in the "Prize Essay": "…the soul must constantly fix its attention on the arbitrary combination of signs (*willkürliche Verbindung der Zeichen*) and what is designated, a combination established at some point in the past. For this reason the slightest inattentiveness makes it possible for thought to lose sight of the subject matter, leaving behind merely empty signs (*leeren Zeichen*) in which case, of course, the most cogent philosopher must appear to be merely playing with words." Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:290; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 272.

99. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:160; idem, *Jerusalem*, 102. For a more extensive discussion of this issue, see Gottlieb, "Mendelssohn's Metaphysical Defense," 208–212.

100. See Spinoza, letter 73, 942.

101. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:104.

102. Ibid., 105–106.

103. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:211–212; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 142–144. In *Morning Hours*, Mendelssohn directs his arguments against materialism at contemporary Epicureans like Julien Offray de La Mettrie. But given Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza, these arguments would also apply to Spinozists as well, which is how I will interpret them.

104. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:105.

105. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:104.

106. Wachter, *Der Spinozismus im Jüdenthumb*.

107. Germano, whose pre-conversion name was Johann Peter Speeth, came to Judaism through his interest in Christian kabbalah. From Christian kabbalah, Speeth decided to study Jewish kabbalah and moved to Amsterdam to study with a rabbi there. Through these studies Speeth decided that truth lay with Judaism and he converted to Judaism, changing his name to Moses Germano. Germano eventually became a rabbi who served in a Spanish-Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam. The young Wachter traveled to Amsterdam to visit Germano and together they studied the Christian kabbalist Knorr von Rosenroth's recently published Latin translation of important kabbalistic works entitled *Kabbalah Denudata*. Following criticism of Wachter's *Spinozism in Judaism*, in 1706 Wachter published *Elucidarius Cabalisticus* in which he conceded his imperfect knowledge of kabbalah and now claimed that while Spinoza indeed had taken his ideas from kabbalah, neither kabbalah nor Spinozism should be considered atheism. On Wachter's treatment of Spinoza, see Scholem, "Die Wachtersche Kontroverse"; Popkin, "Spinoza, Neoplatonic Kabbalist?"; Israel, *The Radical Enlightenment*, 645–651; Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment*, 155–164; Gottlieb, *The Fragility of Reason*, 166–171.Wachter's books were of central importance in shaping the perception of Spinoza in eighteenth-century Germany. In his 1787 dialogue entitled *God, Some Conversations*, Herder makes vivid just how widespread the connection between Spinoza and kabbalah was in the public eye:

> Philolaus: . . . and yet Spinoza himself is charged with borrowing his system from the Kabbalah of the Jews.
> Theophron: Who put that idea into your head, Philolaus?
> Philolaus: It is a very usual view, which Spinoza himself provokes and above all Wachter made current.

See Herder, *God, Some Conversations*, 155.

108. This text is quoted in full in Meyer, *Moses Mendelssohn Bibliographie*, 113.

109. In a 1688 letter to Gerhard Molanus, Leibniz makes a similar claim noting that "it appears that the kabbalah of the Jews is a kind of lofty metaphysic, which divested of its covering words, reveals certain splendid matters although some less valuable notions are interspersed." Leibniz does not, however, discuss the nature of Hebrew. The letter is quoted in Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, 48.

110. Leibniz also makes the claim that Spinozism derives from a mixture of kabbalah and Cartesianism in a 1707 letter to Bourguet quoted in Friedmann, *Leibniz et Spinoza*, 155; Coudert, *Leibniz and Kabbalah*, 77. Leibniz, however, claims that Spinoza "corrupted" kabbalistic doctrine.

111. For his part, Mendelssohn is so convinced of the reality of final causes that he finds it hard to believe that Spinoza could have denied them. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:211–212; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 142–143. But Mendelssohn recognizes that the claim that Spinoza denies final causes is at the heart of Jacobi's

interpretation of Spinoza and therefore he thinks that it is important to address this claim head on.

112. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:212; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 144.

113. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:90–91.

114. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:95.

115. See ibid.

116. Ibid., 96–97.

117. Mendelssohn accepts that this is Spinoza's view, noting that according to Spinoza, "what does not actually occur is not possible, not thinkable." See Mendelssohn, "Memoranda," 352.

118. Mendelssohn also cites Leibniz's objection to Spinoza's necessitarianism in the *Theodicy*, where Leibniz charges that Spinoza's view is absurd since according to it, "all the fabrications of Ariosto [a sixteenth-century Italian epic poet--MG] must be accepted as actual events." See Mendelssohn, "Memoranda," 352 citing Leibniz, *Theodicy*, #173, 235–235. As mentioned in chapter 2, Garrett and Della Rocca accept Mendelssohn's understanding of Spinoza's necessitarianism. For Della Rocca's part, he concedes that Spinoza's necessitarianism is "extremely implausible" but notes that Spinoza would claim that our view of possibility is an illusion, which derives from our finite understanding of reality. See Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 76–78.

119. At the end of the third dialogue of the *PD*, Mendelssohn notes the difficulty of establishing that the world is created in time. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:364–365; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 119–120.

120. The proof is generally traced back to the fifth-century Christian philosopher John Philoponus. Strauss claims that Mendelssohn knew this proof from Halevi and Maimonides citing Halevi, *The Kuzari*, 5.18 and Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.73, 11th proposition; I.74 (end). See Strauss's note at Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:290–291. Careful inspection of Mendelssohn's version of this proof shows that it is much closer to Saadya's account of it than to Halevi and Maimonides' versions of it. For Saadya's version of the proof, see Saadiah, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 1.1, 44–45. Altmann suggests that Mendelssohn drew the proof from Reimarus who knew it from Wollaston. See Altmann, *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History*, 122–123.

121. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:91–93. Mendelssohn acknowledges a possible objection to this view for while we cannot imagine an end to an infinite series *a parte post*, this does not necessarily mean that an infinite series could not have elapsed in the past. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:93; Altmann, *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History*, 123. This proof is directed against the view that God sustains the world eternally, but that there is an infinite succession of causes and effects. It does not address the occasionalist's claim that the world is eternally being created from nothing and that efficient causality is an illusion. Similarly, this proof cannot establish that the world is created *ex nihilo*. In the "Prize Essay," Mendelssohn considers the Platonic position that God creates the world by ordering an eternal, preexistent chaos. He notes that "these objections can be answered, but not with the triumphant force with which one can defend a genuine demonstration." He does not, however, present these responses.

See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 2:312; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 292. In his Hebrew commentary on Maimonides' *Logical Terms*, Mendelssohn strikes a more confident pose, claiming that the view that God created the world from preexistent matter is "neither built upon the foundations of the Torah nor on the foundations of true inquiry as the latest philosophers [*hahokrim ha'aharonim*] have shown in detail." The basic problem that Mendelssohn finds with this view is that it assumes the existence of matter without form, which Mendelssohn deems impossible. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:80–81. But even if one accepts the view that matter without form is impossible, Mendelssohn ignores the possibility that preexistent matter is a chaotic mixture of form and matter that God ordered.

122. As Mendelssohn puts it, "no fact it seems to me can be more incontrovertible than the fact that in the visible world around us and in the world within us *final causes* as aimed at and *intentions* are carried out." See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:212; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations,* 143–144.

123. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:109.

124. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:109; *JubA*, 1:354–355; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 110–111.

125. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:109, 212; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 143–144. On the recent scholarly debate over whether Spinoza thinks that human beings can act for final causes, see chapter 1, note 135.

126. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:97–98.

127. Mendelssohn notes that "nearly all the refuters of Spinoza have reprimanded him with" an arbitrary definition of substance. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:106. Wolff deploys the argument in his refutation of Spinoza. See Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, 15: section 684. More recently, Strauss also deploys this argument against Spinoza. See Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity,* 169.

128. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2:105.

129. Ibid., 105–106.

130. Ibid., 106.

131. Ibid., 107. At first glance, Mendelssohn seems to speak at cross-purposes with Spinoza, since Spinoza has a different definition of "substance" than the one that Mendelssohn attributes to him. Spinoza defines "substance" as "what is in itself and conceived through itself." See Spinoza, E1D3, 408. Being "in itself" may be glossed as ontological independence while being "conceived through itself" means conceptual independence. While Spinoza seems to make these two distinct, necessary criteria for substance, Curley has shown that conceptual independence actually follows from ontological independence once a few axioms from *Ethics* part 1 are added. See Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 14–20. Spinoza defines "mode" as "the affections of substance, *or* that which is in another through which it is also conceived." See Spinoza, E1D5, 409. So while substances are ontologically and conceptually independent, modes are ontologically and conceptually dependent. Spinoza makes clear that a thing is either a substance or a mode for he states that "whatever is, is either in itself or in another." See Spinoza, E1A1, 410. So Spinoza divides being quite strictly into what is

independent, and what is dependent. If something is ontologically dependent, and so a mode, then it is an "affection of substance."

132. Ibid., 106–107.

133. Ibid., 107.

134. See Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 14:75, 80. Compare Kant, *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft,* A266–268/B322–324; idem, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 369–370. It would be instructive to compare Kant and Mendelssohn's use of the distinction between matter and form, but I leave that to another occasion.

135. Compare Kant, *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft,* A618/B646; idem, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 576–577.

136. See Spinoza, E2P13L7S, 461–462; idem, Letter 64, 919.

137. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2:108.

138. Ibid. Tschirnhaus put this objection to Spinoza in Spinoza's lifetime, but unfortunately, Spinoza never provided an adequate answer. See Spinoza, Letters 82–83, 956–958.

139. See Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke,* 15: section 706.

140. See Mendelssohn,*JubA,* 1:351, 363; idem, *Philosophical Writings,* 108, 118; *JubA,* 3.2:206–207; idem, "Memoranda," 356; *JubA,* 3.2:106, 110–111.

141. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2:206–207; idem, "Memoranda," 356.

142. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2:110.

143. Spinoza, E1P29S, 434.

144. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe,* 1.1:96; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings,* 218. See Kant, *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft,* A25/B39; idem, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 158–159.

145. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe,* 1.1:95–96; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings,* 218.

146. Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe,* 1.1:39; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings,* 199.

147. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2:206; idem, "Memoranda," 355.

148. At first blush, it seems absurd to charge Spinoza with a belief in universals since he is often accounted a strict nominalist. An oft-cited passage unmistakably nominalist in tone is E2P40S1 where Spinoza writes that "these notions they call *Universal* like Man, Horse, Dog, and the like, have arisen…because so many images (e.g., of men) are formed at one time in the human body that they surpass the power of imagining." See Spinoza, E2P40S1, 477. But despite the nominalist sound of this passage, many commentators do not consider Spinoza a thoroughgoing nominalist. For E2P40S1 suggests that Spinoza's nominalism is limited to empirical concepts that are constructed by comparing and abstracting common marks from experience. As such, these universals are products of the imagination and therefore inadequate ideas. Spinoza thinks, however, that through reason "we have common [or universal] notions and adequate ideas of the properties." See Spinoza, E2P40S2, 478. Haserot has argued that while Spinoza rejects sense-based universality, he affirms "rational universality." In particular, Spinoza thinks that the attributes are real universals. See Haserot, "Spinoza and the Status of Universals."

149. On the link between systematicity and intelligibility see Franks, *All or Nothing.*

150. Mendelssohn, *JubA,* 3.2:111.

151. Compare Kant, *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft,* B201–202; idem, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 285–287.

152. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:111.

153. Ibid.

154. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:132–133; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 72–73.

155. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:133; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 73–74.

156. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:114.

157. Ibid.

158. Ibid.

159. See Spinoza E1App, 443.

160. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:115–116. It is not clear that this is a good response to Mendelssohn. It is true that theists such as Descartes and Wolff see motion as something real, which derives from God. For Descartes' view of motion see Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings*, 1:240. For Wolff's view of motion, see Wolff, "*Ausführliche Beantwortung*," 63. Leibniz, however, has an entirely different explanation of motion seeing motion as a well-founded phenomenon. Motion is a phenomenal expression of the relation between the forces of different monads. Mendelssohn follows Leibniz on this point. See Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 537; Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:135–136.

161. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:115.

162. Ibid., 116.

163. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:116–117. Mendelssohn's reconstruction of Lessing's argument derives from his reading of two short fragments of Lessing's, namely "The Christianity of Reason" (1753), and "On the Reality of Things Outside God" (1763). See Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 5.1:401–405; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 25–31. For discussion of Lessing's argument, see Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment*, 69; Allison, "Lessing's Spinozistic Exercises." Some writers have seen this argument as originating in Spinoza's own writings, which they have interpreted as a radical extension of Maimonides' teachings. The two main texts are: Spinoza, *Ethics*, E2P7; Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I, 68. For a contemporary reconstruction of the argument see most recently Carlos Frankel, "Maimonides' God and Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*." In *PD*, Mendelssohn speaks of a "form under which Spinoza's system can exist with reason and religion." He then presents an idealistic, panentheistic interpretation of Spinoza, which is quite similar to "refined Spinozism." But in *PD*, Mendelssohn blurs this system with Spinoza's own views and does not attribute it to Lessing. Part of the reason for this is that *PD* is a defense of Spinoza so Mendelssohn seeks to mitigate Spinoza's atheism. For discussion, see Gottlieb, *The Fragility of Reason*, ch. 2. Similarly, in a 1759 a review of a recent work by Adam Widder who had sought to identify Spinoza's views with those of the ancient Greek atheist Strato, Mendelssohn stresses numerous differences between Spinoza and Strato's teachings. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 5.1:45–47. For a discussion of attempts to link Spinoza with Strato in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 444–457.

164. Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 2:403–404; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 25–27.

165. Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 2:403; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 26.

166. Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 10:93; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 234–235. The attempt to defend the trinity by appealing to the distinction between God as intellect, intellectually cognizing subject, and intellectually cognizing object, has a long history. It was used by Eastern Christians beginning with the tenth-century theologian Yahya ben Adi, and was adopted by Western Christians beginning with the thirteenth-century theologian Raymond Lull. See Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 77–78. Spinoza himself calls Christ "the eternal son of God," which he identifies with "God's eternal wisdom." See Spinoza, Letter 73, 943; *TTP*, 1:14.

167. Lessing explains that the inner meaning of original sin is that human beings at the "first and lowest stage of humanity" are "not sufficiently in control of [their] actions to be able to follow the moral law." He explains the inner sense of vicarious atonement as being that "despite that original incapacity of man [to follow moral laws, God] nevertheless chose to give man moral laws and forgive him all transgressions in virtue of God's *son*, i.e., in consideration of the independently existing sum of God's own perfections in comparison with which . . . every imperfection of individual disappears." See Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 10:94; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 235.

168. Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, 10:94–97; idem, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 236–238.

169. Mendelssohn notes that the theist and Lessing agree on at least three points: (a) finite beings cannot exist without the infinite; (b) the existence of the infinite without the clearest knowledge of all finite beings is impossible, and (c) God creates the best possible world. Mendelssohn also notes that Lessing's refined Spinozism preserves a system of ethics that is very similar to his own. The "subtlety" that distinguishes Lessing's refined Spinozism from theism is whether the best possible world becomes actual outside of God. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:121–124, 188; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 65, 130. For a discussion of Lessing's ethics, see Nisbet, "Lessing's Ethics."

170. In the *Spinoza Letters*, Jacobi also stresses that Lessing's Spinozism is indebted to kabbalah. See Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:31; idem, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 195–196. Altmann confirms that Lessing was familiar with Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala Denudata*, and also most probably knew Wachter's work and the writings of the Christian kabbalist Francis Mercury Von Helmont. See Altmann, *Die Trostvolle Aufklärung*, 54–56.

171. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 12.2:40–41. The claim that the doctrine of the trinity derived from a misinterpretation of Kabbalah is an old one. It is found in Profiat Duran's polemical treatise of 1397, *The Shame of the Nations (Klimat Hagoyim)*. Duran writes that "Jesus and his disciples were kabbalists, but their kabbalah was full of mistakes." Duran sees the trinity as originating from a misinterpretation of the three supernal lights which, according to Kabbalah, form a unity in God: "The doctrine of the trinity, which they erroneously attributed to the deity, arose among them as a result of their missteps in this science of [the kabbalah] which established the primordial light [*Or Kadmon*], the radiant light [*Or Zah*] and the transparent light [*Or Mezuhzah*]." See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 354.

172. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:162–163; idem, *Jerusalem*, 95–96. See Cassirer, "Die Idee der Religion bei Lessing und Mendelssohn."

173. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:117.

174. See ibid., 118–120. Mendelssohn also runs this argument in the other direction claiming that one with finite knowledge can never know what it is to have infinite knowledge and thus human beings can never fully know God. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1:465; 2:310–311; idem, *Philosophical Writings*, 291; *JubA*, 16:27–28, 348.

175. Historically Jews argued against the incarnation by focusing on its being incompatible with God's nature and dignity. See Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Arguments*, 105–134; Berger, *The Jewish-Christian debate*, 350–354, 366–369. Mendelssohn adopts a novel approach in emphasizing the danger that the incarnation poses to human dignity.

176. In a 1785 letter to C. G. Schütz, Kant praises the "extremely penetrating pursuit of our chain of concepts" in this proof. See Kant, *Correspondence*, 237–238. Kant, however, does not accept this as a valid proof of God's existence. See Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, 11. For discussion of this proof, see Altmann, *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History*, 127–129.

177. Throughout *Morning Hours*, Mendelssohn uses the term "*denkbar*" (thinkable) to refer to the possible.

178. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:143.

179. Ibid., 156.

180. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:111, 116; idem, *Jerusalem*, 41, 47; *JubA*, 6.1:47.

181. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:188; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 130.

182. See Jacobi's response to Mendelssohn in Jacobi, *Werke und Briefe*, 1.1:289–292.

183. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:188; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 130. Indeed, even though Spinoza often appears sympathetic with Christian mysteries, he clearly does not take them literally. Thus in the *TTP* after writing that "the wisdom of God . . . took on human nature in Christ" (an obvious allusion to John 1:14), Spinoza writes, "but I must here ask it be noted that I am certainly not alluding to the doctrines held by some churches about Christ nor am I denying them for I freely confess that I do not understand them." See Spinoza, *TTP*, 1:14. Spinoza is more blunt in a letter to Oldenberg where he writes that "as to the additional teaching of certain churches that God took upon himself human nature, I have expressly indicated that I do not understand what they say. Indeed, to tell the truth, they seem to me to speak no less absurdly than one who might tell me that a circle has taken on the nature of a square." See Spinoza, Letter 73, 943. In another letter to Oldenberg, Spinoza writes that he interprets Christ's resurrection allegorically noting that the Evangelists "could have been deceived." See Spinoza, Letter 78, 953. And in a letter to a young convert to Catholicism Spinoza mocks the Eucharist, upbraiding the young man with the condescending admonishment "O youth deprived of understanding, who has bewitched you into believing that you eat, and hold in your intestines that which is supreme and eternal?" See Spinoza, Letter 76, 948. For discussion, see Lasker,

"Baruch Spinoza and the Jewish-Christian Debate"; idem, "Jewish Anti-Christian Polemics," 477–484.

184. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:188; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 130. In his "Counter-reflexions" to Bonnet's *Palingenesis*, Mendelssohn makes a similar point claiming that Unitarian Christianity is closer to Judaism than it is to Athanasian Christianity. As Mendelssohn puts it: "I may be exempted from the effort of comparing the doctrines of the Unitarians with the doctrines of the Athanasians. It is obvious that on the most essential points of religion—the doctrines of God and His attributes, original sin, mediation, atonement, the eternity of infernal punishment, etc.—they deviate as much from each other as any two entirely different religions can deviate from one another.... If a Unitarian challenged me to debate points of religion with him, I would whisper in his ear: 'Friend, I am not the one you seek! Since you have so obviously approached the most essential points of the faith of my fathers, let us not make a fuss over minor points, a fuss that would only amuse spectators. I have no calling whatsoever for disputing religious matters. But if you believe that this is your duty, then seek out a more important opponent who deviates from you in the chief principles of his faith. Try to lead him away from his baseless opinions or let yourself be converted. If religious errors could bring about damnation—and if I am not mistaken, this is the opinion about which the two of you are most in agreement—then the duty to convert each other by means of the true faith is that much more pressing. According to my religion, both of you can become children of eternal salvation if you observe the holy laws of virtue. In particular, we must almost regard the Unitarians as fellow-believers; and we have that much less right to damn them in our hearts, even if the spirit of damnation were proper to our religion. If you are just, then the points that are still disputed between us can remain undecided forever. Neither virtue nor truth can lose thereby. Why, therefore, do we need to argue?" See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:106.

185. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:205; idem, "Memoranda," 355. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:217–218; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 148: "...let Jacobi return to the faith of his fathers, submit restive reason to the triumphant authority of faith [and] crush rising doubts with authoritative and mighty dicta..."

186. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:97–99; idem, *Jerusalem*, 164–166; Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2:196–197; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 137; Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3.2; 205: idem, "Memoranda," 355; Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7:301. On some of Mendelssohn's medieval Jewish predecessors who distinguish Judaism and Christianity in this respect see Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 25–28; Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, 59–60.

187. The Jewish philosophers Maimonides, Crescas (fourteenth century), Albo (sixteenth century), Elijah Delmedigo (fifteenth century) and Leone de Modena (seventeenth century) all hold this position. See Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 28–43; idem, "Baruch Spinoza and the Jewish-Christian Debate," 384–385.

188. See note 174 above.

189. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8:159–160, 166–167, 192–193; idem, *Jerusalem*, 93, 100, 127; *JubA*, 3.2, 218; Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 149; Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:71–72. See Mendelssohn, commentary to Genesis 15:6, *JubA*, 15.2:32 where he

follows Rashi's understanding of "*emunah*" as trust. Also see Mendelssohn's translation of Deuteronomy 9:23 where he translates "*velo he'emantem lo*" as "*traute ihm nicht*." See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 18:368. Also see Mendelssohn's translation and commentary to Deuteronomy, 32:4 in Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 18:513.

190. Mendelssohn's contrast of Jewish and Christian notions of faith anticipates Buber's famous discussion. See Buber, *Two Types of Faith*; Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* 11–25.

191. In the "Prize Essay" and *Morning Hours* Mendelssohn attempts to prove the existence of God; in *Sache Gottes*, he seeks to defend divine providence, and the *Phädon* is devoted to proving the immortality of the soul.

192. On Mendelssohn's reasons for trusting in the revelation of the Torah at Sinai, see Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 7: 86–88; 8:164–167; idem, *Jerusalem*, 97–100; Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:71–72. Arkush harshly criticizes Mendelssohn's reasoning. See Arkush, *Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*, 167–180. For my response to Arkush, see Gottlieb, "Between Judaism and German Enlightenment," 8.

193. In the introduction to his commentary on Maimonides' *Logical Terms*, Mendelssohn addresses a traditionalist who thinks that one who relies on reason alone "will grope blindly like a blind person in the darkness . . ." This traditionalist sees studying logic as at best a vain pursuit, and at worst as a path to heresy. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:28, 30.

194. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:30; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.1, 21–23.

195. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:28. See Ibn Pakuda, *The Book of Direction*, 150–175; Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue*, 117–145. Compare Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," 4:19.

196. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:28.

197. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:28–29.

198. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:249–267.

199. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:30.

200. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II.15, 289–293; II.19, 302–312; II.24, 322–327. Maimonides famously claims that while Aristotle's knowledge of physics was certain, his knowledge of astronomy was uncertain. Maimonides knows that Aristotelian and Ptolemaic astronomy cannot adequately explain the movement of the heavenly bodies, which Maimonides calls "the true perplexity." There is a huge literature on this issue. Recently the journal *Aleph* published a forum devoted to discussing it. See *Aleph*, 8 (2008), 151–339.

201. To be fair, Mendelssohn claims that had Maimonides witnessed the developments of modern science he would not have accepted Aristotle's physics. But Mendelssohn thinks that even before the advent of modern science Aristotle's lack of evidence for his physics should have led Maimonides to adopt a more critical attitude to him. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 14:83–84.

202. Ibid., 84.

203. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 72.

204. Quoted in Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 740.

205. Ibid., 739–741.

206. Quoted in Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 745.
207. See Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, 219.

CONCLUSION

1. I use the term "secular" in the sense of rejecting religious practice and belief. Of course the meaning of secularism is hotly debated. Recently Charles Taylor has defined "secularity" as "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others." On this definition, one could argue that both Jacobi and Mendelssohn should be considered "secular" thinkers. See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

2. Compare Altmann, *Von der Mittelalterlichen*, 244, 248; idem, "The God of Religion."

3. Most recently, Charles Taylor follows the Jacobi-Strauss line of thinking. In seeking to account for the rise of what he calls "exclusive humanism," Taylor discusses an "intermediate form" of humanism that he calls "providential deism." Taylor sees the passages from "providential deism" to "exclusive humanism" as inevitable as he considers the idea that God only desires our happiness "pre-shrunk religion." While Taylor does not mention Mendelssohn explicitly, his description of "providential deism" closely resembles Mendelssohn's theological stance. See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 18–22, 221–226. It is worth considering the role that Taylor's Catholicism plays in his harsh assessment of providential deism.

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