

## *The Impact of Deism on the Hebrew Literature of the Enlightenment in Germany\**

THE European Enlightenment was not in essence atheistic,<sup>1</sup> nor was it irreligious,<sup>2</sup> though manifestations of free-thought, atheism, and materialism were an integral part of it. Its most characteristic religious expression is deism, considered by some scholars to be "the religion of the Enlightenment."<sup>3</sup> It was deism that developed and crystallised the idea of natural religion, whose architects had been John Selden (1584–1654) and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). Deism attached a new, universal dimension to religion, and was one of the decisive factors in the weakening of orthodox religious values in Europe as well as in the weakening of the Christian church. A study of the deistic movement in England, France, and Germany reveals that it is not to be regarded as having one, unified, homogeneous *Weltanschauung*. Nevertheless, one has to resort to generalisation in order to present the attitude of the Enlightenment toward religion—religion in general, and the Christian religion in particular—as expressed in one of the most influential and most notable movements in European thought during the latter part of the seventeenth century and in the eighteenth century. The impact of this movement on the Hebrew Enlightenment in Germany is noticed only in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries.

Unlike the Renaissance, which attempted to understand religious dogma and interpret it in a humanistic fashion, European Enlightenment treated religion in general sceptically and critically.<sup>4</sup> The methods of objective criticism were transferred from the realms of philosophy and the sciences to theological thought as well as to the study of history and the examination of the sources of religion, the sacred Scriptures. Comparative study of the oriental religions and the three major Western ones developed; and with the discovery of parallel aspects in their basic beliefs and worship, Christianity appeared less original than previously thought. Theological reasoning changed. A critical approach was adopted to all religious matters: the Scriptures and their authenticity, the dogmas and their truth, the ways of worship and their origins. Thus European Enlightenment in the seventeenth and the eighteenth

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<sup>1</sup> Paul HAZARD, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1963), p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest CASSIRER, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Boston, 1965), pp. 135–6. Of the same opinion is Herbert DIECKMANN in "Themes and Structure of the Enlightenment," *Essays in Comparative Literature* (St. Louis, 1961), pp. 67 ff.

<sup>3</sup> John HIBBEN, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (New York, 1910), p. 272. See also Arthur O. LOVEJOY, "The Parallel of Deism and Classicism," *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore, 1948), p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CASSIRER, pp. 137–8.

centuries made critical-skeptical reason the criterion for all the phenomena of life. The proper study of mankind, as Alexander Pope remarked,<sup>5</sup> was man in his attitude toward reality, past and present, and his attitude toward society and God.

Generally speaking, the Enlightenment did believe in the existence of a transcendental being, supreme in his power, goodness and wisdom, who had set up a world order, but who in no way is able to change it, or to exercise providence over any person;<sup>6</sup> his existence can be proved by human reason<sup>7</sup> (the watch testifies to the existence of its maker), which is also the discoverer of natural religion and natural law. This world is the best possible, a fact which, however, does not preclude an after-life. The Enlightenment further maintained that every individual may think freely in matters of religion, independent of any scriptural or ecclesiastical authority; the only basis for human thought must be natural phenomena explained in a natural, scientific way. By the same token, religious truths, too, are arrived at through man's own experience without any divine or authoritative interference.

The theology of the Enlightenment is then a natural theology, as opposed to the theology of revelation. Doing away with the latter, which is based on scriptural accounts of miracles and prophecies, and of specific events that happened to historical figures, the Enlightenment left only general revelation, that universal sense of God which is independent of historical events or people.

In addition, the Enlightenment and deism deprived Christianity of its claim to be the source of morality and made it their own, after waging an aggressive war on both Christianity and Judaism. In their attack, the deists expressed their strong belief that morality has not always been practised by the Christian church, that Jewish morality is rather dubious, and most important, that true morality is not necessarily dependent on any religion.

From the contention that Christianity has no exclusive rights over true religion, deists moved on to demand religious tolerance;<sup>8</sup> they looked for

<sup>5</sup> *An Essay on Man* II, 1-2: "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan! The proper study of mankind is man." Cf. the London, 1736, edition for the original reading.

<sup>6</sup> S. G. HEFELBOWER is of the opinion that most deists did believe in divine providence. See *The Relation of John Locke to English Deism* (Chicago, 1918), p. 92. This view is surely right with regard to the first deists.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Hugo BERGMAN, in *Hogim Uma'aminim* [Thinkers and Believers] (Tel Aviv, 1959), p. 10, explains why deism ignored one of the most important aspects of religious life—religious experience. In its desire to form a natural religion, a religion of reason, deism intentionally gave up any encounter with the divine (which they called revelation). Roland N. STROMBERG, too, criticises deism for its lack of understanding of the need of the (religious) man for emotional satisfaction, or an "inward spiritual experience," in *Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1954), p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> BERGMAN, *Hogim*, pp. 23-4, is right in attributing the inclination toward religious tolerance to the estrangement from religion that took place in the Enlightenment period. There were instances among some of the latter deists such as Rousseau and Lessing, however, of arriving at religious tolerance as a result of its adherence to the principles of justice and brotherhood believed to be the tenets of religion.

new religious values and some even envisioned the coming of a new religion altogether.<sup>9</sup>

In order to prove that natural religion preceded all other positive religions, and that it was and is the true, original form of worshipping God, the deists waged an all-out campaign against the revealed religions. They started with Judaism and anticipated as a result the automatic downfall of Christianity, which is dependent on Judaism. Hobbes is already skeptical about the divine revelation, the scriptural miracles, and the authorship and unity of the five books of Moses.<sup>10</sup> He thus preceded Spinoza in his biblical criticism and probably also influenced him.<sup>11</sup>

Among the first to examine Jewish customs and ceremonies and compare them with Egyptian laws was John Spencer. His objective was to prove the pagan nature of Judaism and hence its falsehood.<sup>12</sup> Many deists, such as Blount, Tindal, and Shaftesbury, elaborated on this theme.<sup>13</sup> Blount and later Collins attempted to take away from Judaism its claim of original authorship of the monotheistic idea, in order to demonstrate the truth and the antiquity of natural religion.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Gotthold Ephraim LESSING is believed to have envisaged the coming of a new religion in his *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (Berlin, 1785 [facsimile, Jerusalem, 1967]), pp. 80–1, #86: "Sie wird gewiss kommen, die Zeit eines neuen ewigen Evangeliums, die uns selbst in den Elementarbüchern des Neuen Bundes versprochen wird." Gottfried FITTBOGEN discusses this view in his book *Die Religion Lessings* (Leipzig, 1923), p. 79, while Edward S. FLAJOLA, "Lessing's Attitude in the Lavater-Mendelssohn Controversy", *PMLA*, 63 (1958), pp. 208–9, holds the opposite view. Lessing's letter to Mendelssohn of January 9, 1771, in which the former encouraged the Jewish philosopher to reply openly to Lavater, seems to support the view that Lessing indeed wished to bring about the downfall of Christianity. See LESSING, *Sämtliche Schriften* (Leipzig, 1904), XVII, pp. 364 ff., and Moses MENDELSSOHN, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig, 1844), V, p. 189.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas HOBBS, *Leviathan* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 244, 247 ff., 285–6.

<sup>11</sup> See Joseph KLAUSNER, *Philosophim Vehogei De'ot* [Philosophers and Thinkers] (Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 75–6, and John ORR, *English Deism: Its Roots and Its Fruits* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1934), p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> Paul HAZARD, *The European Mind (1680–1715)* (New York, 1964), p. 45, puts John Marsham (1602–1685) ahead of Spencer as the writer who started this trend, but he acknowledges Spencer's more scientific form. Samuel ETTINGER, too, puts Marsham first in chronological order, but emphasises his traditional tendencies; cf. "Jews and Judaism in the Eyes of the English Deists in the Eighteenth Century," *Zion*, 29 (1964), pp. 185–6 [Hebrew]. It is worth mentioning that chronologically, Herbert of Cherbury preceded both Marsham and Spencer in discussing the influence of the Egyptian religion on the Jewish religion; his treatment of the subject was not as comprehensive as that of the other two writers. Herbert's *De Religion Gentilium* was first published in Amsterdam in 1663; see Edward, Lord HERBERT OF CHERBURY, *The Antient Religion of the Gentiles* (London, 1705), p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> See Charles BLOUNT, *The Oracles of Reason* (London, 1693), p. 134; *idem.*, *Religio Laici* (London, 1683), p. 54. Several passages in the latter source were taken verbatim from HERBERT OF CHERBURY, *A Dialogue between a Tutor and his Pupil* (London, 1768), p. 68, a custom often practised by Blount. See also Matthew TINDAL, *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (London, 1730) I, p. 90. (There are two 1730 editions with different pagination; for this paper I have used the edition which contains 432 pages). Anthony, Earl of SHAFTESBURY, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (Indianapolis & New York, 1964) II, pp. 180–90.

<sup>14</sup> BLOUNT, *The Oracles of Reason*, p. 135; Anthony COLLINS, *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (London, 1737), pp. 124–5.

Toward the end of the seventeenth century John Toland openly stated that those Christian doctrines which appear to be mysterious, that is to say contrary to reason, are not true.<sup>15</sup> Miracles in the Old and New Testaments can be explained according to the laws of nature;<sup>16</sup> those that contradict nature are false and the result of superstition. Thus he concludes that the Virgin Birth is fictitious.<sup>17</sup> He further shows that Catholicism cannot prove itself to be the true religion, since all its claims—such as its antiquity, its continuity, its miracles and prophecies—are made by other religions as well, and each one maintains that it alone is the true religion and that all the others are false.<sup>18</sup> Later, in the eighteenth century, Rousseau was to express the same idea.<sup>19</sup> Lessing, too, has it as the main theme of his *Nathan the Wise*.

Anthony Collins is more blatant, attacking the church by noting the existence of controversies within it concerning doctrines and customs. Evidently these doctrines and customs cannot all be true.<sup>20</sup> Matthew Tindal abolished completely the positive law of all positive religions,<sup>21</sup> and started the trend, of which Voltaire is the outstanding representative, of attacking the clerics, both Jewish and Christian, for corrupting their respective religions.<sup>22</sup> He cites a song, widespread in his day, which sums up briefly and clearly the deistic view:

Natural Religion was easy first, and plain;  
Tales made it Mystery, Offerings made it Gain;  
Sacrifices and Shews were at length prepar'd,  
The Priests eat roast Meat, and the People star'd.<sup>23</sup>

He further accused the Jews of offering human sacrifices, an accusation which Voltaire was later to develop.<sup>24</sup>

Thomas Chubb, who argues that the doctrine of the Trinity reduces Christianity to a status lower than that of paganism, is among the deists who stress that the true religion is the moral religion.<sup>25</sup> Thomas Morgan developed

<sup>15</sup> JOHN TOLAND, *Christianity Not Mysterious* (London, 1699); see the title page.

<sup>16</sup> TOLAND, *Tetradymus* (London, 1720), pp. 1–60.

<sup>17</sup> TOLAND, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, p. 152.

<sup>18</sup> TOLAND, "The Primitive Constitution of the Christian Church", *A Collection of Several Pieces* (London, 1726) II, pp. 171, 172, 174.

<sup>19</sup> J. J. ROUSSEAU, *The Creed of A Priest of Savoy* (New York, 1957), pp. 54–5.

<sup>20</sup> ANTHONY COLLINS, *A Discourse of Free-Thinking* (London, 1713), pp. 61–76.

<sup>21</sup> TINDAL, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, pp. 13, 64.

<sup>22</sup> TINDAL, *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted* (London, 1707), pp. 141–2, 144. Conyers Middleton, himself a critic of the Catholic Church, feels that Tindal aims to show that "Christianity ought to be abolished" ("A Letter to Dr. Waterland", *The Miscellaneous Works of Conyers Middleton* [London, 1755] III, p. 49).

<sup>23</sup> TINDAL, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, p. 92. It had been published previously in John TOLAND's *Letters to Serena* (London, 1704), p. 130, with slight spelling variations.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95–7. Cf. VOLTAIRE, "A Philosophical Dictionary", *The Works of Voltaire* (New York, 1901–1903), V, 2, pp. 285–6.

<sup>25</sup> THOMAS CHUBB, "The Author's Farewell", *The Posthumous Works* (London, 1748) I, pp. 178–9; *idem.*, *The Previous Question with regard to Religion* (London, 1725), pp. 6–7.

the balanced, comparative, historical study of religions,<sup>26</sup> while Conyers Middleton gave a pungent exposition of Roman Catholicism, showing its direct borrowing from pre-Christian Roman paganism.<sup>27</sup> Similarly effective techniques are to be found in the writings of the French Bayle and Voltaire.

The deistic movement in France was, in general, more aggressive and more destructive than its counterpart in England. Differences between the relatively moderate Anglican Church and strict, ossified French Catholicism may account for this phenomenon. It should be noted that in England the best intellects were on the side of orthodoxy, whereas in France atheism was dominant among the Enlighteners, and undoubtedly influenced deistic thought.<sup>28</sup> For some, such as Diderot, deism was but a stage of his development and progress toward ultimate atheism. The strong social emphasis in French criticism of religion is another factor in the aggressiveness of French deism.<sup>29</sup>

Richard Simon and his criticism of the biblical texts and of various religious customs and laws with a pagan origin paved the way toward deism in France.<sup>30</sup> The skeptic Pierre Bayle in his monumental *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* exerted great influence over the French critics of religion, the Encyclopedists, as well as over the German deists.<sup>31</sup> There was hardly a subject raised by later deists that Bayle had not treated very effectively. He dealt with miracles,<sup>32</sup> and the pagan origins of Christian customs.<sup>33</sup> He maintained that religions are the cause of terrible wars,<sup>34</sup> and criticised biblical figures.<sup>35</sup> He further asserted that the Scriptures and biblical laws are false,<sup>36</sup> and held all religious dogmas to be fictitious when conflicting either with reason or with moral principles.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, he believed that divine

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Leslie STEPHEN, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1962) I, pp. 141–2.

<sup>27</sup> Conyers MIDDLETON, *Dr. Middleton's Letter from Rome showing an exact conformity between Popery & Paganism; or: The Religion of the Present Romans derived from that of their Heathen ancestors* (New York, 1847); *idem.*, *Exact Conformity of Popery & Paganism* (New York, 1836).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. STEPHEN, *History of English Thought* I, pp. 74–5.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Clifford Mortimer CRIST, *The Dictionnaire Philosophique . . . and the Early French Deists* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1934), p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> Richard SIMON, *A Critical History of the Text of the New Testament* (London, 1689); *idem.*, *A Critical History of the Old Testament* (London, 1682); *idem.*, *The Ceremonies and Religious Customs of the Various Nations of the Known World* (London, 1733–9). See also Paul HAZARD, *The European Mind (1680–1715)*, pp. 180–97.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Pierre COURTINES, "Notes et Documents: Some Notes on the Dissemination of Bayle's Thought in Europe", *Revue de Littérature Comparée* 17 (1937), pp. 700–2.

<sup>32</sup> BAYLE, *The Dictionary Historical and Critical* (London, 1734–38) I, p. 87, note H. Cf. Léo Pierre COURTINES, *Bayle's Relations with England and the English* (New York, 1938), p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> BAYLE, *The Dictionary* III, p. 744; *ibid.*, I, p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6–8, note H, 23, 44–6.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* II, pp. 156, 829.

<sup>37</sup> BAYLE, "Commentaire Philosophique", *Oeuvres Diverses* (La Haye, 1737) II, 1, pp. 367–70.

revelation cannot be proven,<sup>38</sup> that religious coercion is contrary to the principles of religion, and that religious tolerance is to be practised.<sup>39</sup> It is only natural that the French Encyclopedists borrowed unhesitatingly from Bayle's dictionary, ironically dubbed "the Bible of the eighteenth century."<sup>40</sup>

Similar in scope, but more bitter in tone, is Voltaire's work. His whip mercilessly lashes Judaism and Christianity, priests and rabbis alike. Religious tolerance is advocated,<sup>41</sup> and those guilty of intolerance—the priests—are condemned. Religious superstitions are laughed at: for instance the belief that the foreskin of Jesus may be seen in the church at the Puy-en-Velay, and that a letter written by Jesus was deposited by him, in 1771, in the church of Paimpole.<sup>42</sup> Superstition, fathered by paganism and adopted by Judaism according to Voltaire, distorted and changed the church in ancient times.<sup>43</sup> He was highly critical of Jewish tradition, maintaining that its laws are cannibalistic,<sup>44</sup> that ancient Jews offered human sacrifices, and worshipped the ass. He also accused their women of bestiality.<sup>45</sup>

Jean-Jacques Rousseau distinguishes, like Lessing and Herder, between the true worship of God, which is the same in all religions, in all places, at all times, and the ceremonial, external part of each individual religion, which varies with its followers. "It is a stupid nonsense to imagine", he writes, "that God takes special interest in the form of the priest's clothes, in the order of the words in which he prays or the gestures which he does by the altar."<sup>46</sup> Of course, he rejects also the doctrine of the fall of man.<sup>47</sup>

The extreme deistic stand, bringing deism close to atheism, is represented by Diderot.<sup>48</sup> The *Encyclopédie*, of which he was one of the editors, played an important role in spreading the seeds of scepticism in Europe, and in weakening the exclusive authority of the church.<sup>49</sup>

In Germany, birthplace of the Hebrew *Haskalah* (Enlightenment), deism

<sup>38</sup> See HAZARD, *The European Mind*, p. 110.

<sup>39</sup> "Commentaire philosophique sur les paroles de Jésus-Christ," *Oeuvres Diverses* (1737) II, pp. 354 ff. The controversy is over the interpretation of *Luke* 14:23 "And the Lord said to the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." See also "Réflexions sur la tolérance des livres hérétiques," *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres, Oeuvres Diverses* (1727) I, Juillet, 1685, article ix, pp. 335-6.

<sup>40</sup> Howard ROBINSON, "Bayle's Profanation of Sacred History," *Essays in Intellectual History* (New York, 1929), p. 147, citing Emile Faguet.

<sup>41</sup> VOLTAIRE, "Dictionnaire Philosophique," *Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire* (Paris, 1878-79), ed. Garnier, IV (XX), pp. 523-4; "A Philosophical Dictionary," *The Works of Voltaire* (New York, 1901-3) VII, 2, pp. 108-9, article on Toleration.

<sup>42</sup> *A Philosophical Dictionary*, VII, 2, pp. 17-24.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 1, p. 86, article on Laws.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* V, 2, pp. 284-6.

<sup>46</sup> ROUSSEAU, *The Creed of a Priest of Savoy*, p. 53.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. CASSIRER, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 156.

<sup>48</sup> DIDEROT, *De l'interprétation de la nature* (1754), marks his adoption of atheism.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. HAZARD, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 212-14.

received its inspiration more from English deism than from its French counterpart. Influenced by pietism at home, and not having to fight an orthodoxy such as French Roman Catholicism, German deism lacks sarcasm and aggressiveness which typify the writings of Voltaire and Diderot. In addition, it is dominated by the principles of Leibniz (the doctrine of harmony) and of Christian Wolff (similarity between revelation and reason).<sup>50</sup> It might appear as though deism in Germany was intended to preserve the Christian religion and revivify it, to make peace with it rather than to destroy it.<sup>51</sup> German Enlightenment indeed developed a scientific school of biblical criticism whose intentions were serious and constructive. However, both deism and biblical criticism achieved in their way what English and French deism achieved in theirs.

German deism may be said to begin with an attack on superstition by the Dutch Balthasar Bekker,<sup>52</sup> followed by a similar attack by Christian Thomasius, and his subsequent campaign against religious intolerance on the part of the Christian church.<sup>53</sup> Although German critics of the Bible such as Arnold, Edelmann, Baumgarten, and Michaelis defend the Scriptures from the interpretations of the English and French deists,<sup>54</sup> they insist on a scientific study of the documents according to three criteria: authenticity of the text, and philological and historical analysis. On these bases, Michaelis reached the scholarly conclusion, which is identical with the deistic view, that we may doubt the divine inspiration of some of the New Testament books. Only so long as the authenticity of the text is beyond doubt, can the

<sup>50</sup> See CASSIRER, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, pp. 175–6; Otto PFLEIDERER, *The Philosophy of Religion* (London, 1886–8) I, p. 103. Karl HILLEBRAND (*German Thought from the Seven Years' War to Goethe's Death* [New York, 1880], pp. 62–3), explains the basic difference between German theological thought and that of the English and the French as resulting from different philosophies dominant in the respective countries. The French and the English “arrived by the application of the law of causality in the outer world (*i.e.* by reasoning and mechanical explanation) at the First Cause or Deity. The German Theists started from conscience and tried to prove the Deity by the inward revelation of the moral law as it speaks in the bosom of men; and they invoked the authority of Cartesianism as developed by Leibnitz, and set forth and commented upon by Wolff, which appealed to the innate idea of a Deity as the strongest proof of its existence . . .”

<sup>51</sup> Heinrich HEINE summarises these tendencies as follows: “From the moment that a religion solicits the aid of philosophy its ruin is inevitable . . . German scholars, besides the providing of new garments have made all sorts of experiments with her. They conceived the idea of bestowing on her a new youth . . . An endeavour was made to empty Christianity of all historical content, and thus leave nothing but morality. By this process Christianity was reduced to pure deism” (*Religion and Philosophy in Germany* [Boston, 1959], p. 88).

<sup>52</sup> Balthasar BEKKER, *De Betroerde Weereld* (Amsterdam, 1691); *The World Bewitched* (London, 1695) I, ch. xix; pp. 182 ff.; ch. xx, pp. 197 ff.; ch. xxiv, pp. 244 ff.

<sup>53</sup> See Andrew Dickson WHITE, *Seven Great Statesmen in the Warfare of Humanity with Unreason* (New York, 1912), pp. 137–8, 155 ff.; HAZARD, *The European Mind*, pp. 172–6.

<sup>54</sup> Gottfried ARNOLD, *Historie und Beschreibung der mystischen Theologie, oder Geheimen Gottes Gelehrtheit wie auch derer alten und neuen Mysticorum* (Frankfurt, 1703); Siegmund Jakob BAUMGARTEN, “Appendix Being an Examination of the Several Opinions of Those Who Pretend, that Abraham’s Posterity Reigned in Egypt”, *A Supplement to the English Universal History* (London, 1760) I, p. 328; *ibid.*, “Remarks on the Universal History” II; HAZARD, *European Thought*, pp. 58, 66–8.

New Testament as well as the Christian religion be held true.<sup>55</sup> It is a far cry from the traditionally unique and divine truth professed by the Church.

Semler found biblical law to be a local law of a local religion, limited to its time. Christianity and Judaism erred in that they transferred this law far beyond its temporal and geographical limitations. Thus the true spirit of religion was stifled by an abundance of rules, injunctions, and ceremonies. The Hebrew Bible, according to Semler, is the peculiar book of the Jewish people, and their God is a national God, not the God of Nature. It stands to reason—Semler here repeats Voltaire—that since the Jews did not believe in the immortality of the soul, as there is no direct mention of it in the Bible, the Hebrew Scriptures cannot be identified with the truth.<sup>56</sup>

Reimarus was the deist *par excellence* of the German *Aufklärung*. He was the first to relinquish the Leibnizian belief in the harmony between divine revelation and reason, and to side with Bayle. Since the natural origin of revelation can be discerned, it is not the result of supernatural forces. Furthermore, divine revelation as handed down is only a human testimony to a divine revelation, which should be tested by the usual criteria, namely the trustworthiness of the witnesses, their moral character, as well as by the logical and ethical aspects of their testimony. From this it follows that the Hebrew Bible is not of divine origin, nor is the New Testament. Both Protestantism and Catholicism are human inventions and their laws are a distortion of the natural law. Reimarus concludes, therefore, that every man should return to the pure, universal, natural religion.<sup>57</sup>

Lessing should be mentioned especially in connection with his plea for religious tolerance in *Nathan the Wise* and with his vision of a forthcoming divine revelation which will supersede Christianity and the New Testament.<sup>58</sup>

The deistic attack on Judaism had a dual purpose: namely, (a) to point out the weakness of the foundation upon which Christianity is based, and thus do away with the Christian doctrines founded on the Bible and on divine revelation; (b) to combat the notion of positive religion, the symbol of religious isolation.

Even though this systematic and concentrated attack had no immediate effect on the great majority of Jews, for it did not reach them, in Germany the Hebrew and Jewish Enlightenment was substantially affected by it. Perhaps it might be useful to consider some factors explaining this phenomenon. For

<sup>55</sup> HAZARD, *European Thought*, pp. 69–70.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71–3.

<sup>57</sup> See PFLEIDERER, *The Philosophy of Religion* I, pp. 101–4; Theodore M. GREENE, "The Historical Context and Religious Significance of Kant's Religion." Introduction to *Kant's Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York, 1960), pp. xvii–xviii; Karl BARTH, *From Rousseau to Ritschl*, being a translation of eleven chapters of *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert* (London, 1959), p. 122.

<sup>58</sup> See above, note 9.



one, deism utilised concepts which were somehow related to the spirit of Judaism. The deistic unity of God and objection to the Trinity are typical Jewish ideas. Rejection of the doctrine of original sin and of any soteriology based on it as well as the proclamation of free will familiar to Jewish Enlighteners. In addition, there were some deists who identified natural religion with the laws of the Torah—the Ten Commandments and the Seven Noachic Laws<sup>59</sup>—to the great liking of the Maskilim<sup>60</sup> (both Jewish and Hebrew Enlighteners). The fact that deism, unlike atheism, functioned somehow within the boundaries of religion may explain the readiness of the Maskilim to absorb some of its views. Affiliated in one way or another to Jewish tradition—this applies especially to the Hebrew Enlighteners—they considered deism as a new movement aiming at a revival rather than the destruction of religion.<sup>61</sup> They saw in it religion coming to terms with the demands of the new era of the European Enlightenment, based on reason and science, and dedicated to tolerance.<sup>62</sup>

We shall now consider the effect that deism had on the literature of the Hebrew Enlightenment in Germany during the latter part of the eighteenth, and the first two decades of the nineteenth century. It is appropriate to begin with Moses Mendelssohn, who is considered to be the “father” of the Jewish Enlightenment. Despite the contention of some writers to the contrary,<sup>63</sup> it

<sup>59</sup> Some allusion to the effect that certain parts of the Mosaic Law are obligatory to everyone is to be found in JOHN LOCKE, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, The Sacred Classics* (London, 1836) XXV, p. 19, and in BLOUNT, *The Oracles of Reason*, p. 147.

<sup>60</sup> MOSES MENDELSSOHN, “Schreiben an den Herrn Diaconus Lavater”, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1930), Jubiläumsausgabe VII, p. 11; “Letter to Johann Caspar Lavater”, *Jerusalem and Other Jewish Writings* (New York, 1969), tr. and ed. Alfred Jospe, p. 117.

<sup>61</sup> See MENDELSSOHN’S positive attitude toward the deists in his letter to Karl-Wilhelm, Hereditary Prince of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, *Jerusalem and Other Jewish Writings*, p. 124.

<sup>62</sup> One of the Hebrew Maskilim, Mendel BRESLAU, wrote an article in the first Hebrew literary journal, *Hame’asef* [The Collector], in 1790, in which he invited rabbis and spiritual leaders to assemble and reform the Jewish religion as well as religious education. Breslau encouraged his readers to follow the footsteps of the enlightened peoples of Europe who seek the truth, worship God, and pursue tolerance. He further mentions an unnamed English writer who, among others, “called us for peace” (*Hame’asef* VI, [1790], pp. 310–14). This allusion probably refers to Joseph PRIESTLY, who addressed the Jews as follows: “Your whole nation is to be the head of all the nations. . . . We will receive and honour you as our elder brethren. . . . Your nation is the great object towards which our eyes are directed” (*Letters to the Jews* [New York, 1794], p. 47; first edition, 1787).

<sup>63</sup> Heinrich HEINE, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, p. 96: “Moses Mendelssohn saw in pure Mosaism an institution that might serve as a last intrenchment of deism; for deism was his inmost faith, his most profound conviction.” JOHN ORR refers to some of Mendelssohn’s views as deistic; however, he points out the difference between the English deists and the Jewish philosopher in their attitude toward Judaism and the Hebrew Bible (*English Deism*, pp. 193–4). JOHN M. ROBERTSON calls Mendelssohn a deist but adds: “He was popular chiefly as a constructive theist” (*A Short History of Freethought* [New York, 1960] II, p. 281). OTTO PFLEIDERER (*The Philosophy of Religion* I, pp. 107–8) implies that Mendelssohn was a deist. Some Jewish scholars also write in the same vein: ISAAC JULIUS GUTTMANN, *Dat Umada* [Religion and Knowledge] (Jerusalem, 1955), p. 203; LOUIS J. KOPLAND, “The Friendship of Lessing and Mendelssohn in Relation to the Good-will Movement Between Christian and Jew”, *Central Conference of American Rabbis* 39 (1929), p. 370. Other

is my firm conviction, after a study of the whole relevant literature, that Mendelssohn was not a deist.<sup>64</sup> Though he was influenced, as will be shown, by the deistic movement and shared some of its views, he was hardly part of it. His philosophy of Judaism, though a product of the European Enlightenment, rejects some of the fundamental doctrines of deism. His concept of God contradicts that of the deists.<sup>65</sup> Mendelssohn's idea of revelation in Judaism, manifested by the giving of the Torah, a sort of revelation of law, is directly opposed to the deistic concepts of both revelation and law.<sup>66</sup> His unequivocal belief in a certain, unique, positive religion,<sup>67</sup> too, disqualifies him as a deist.

Mendelssohn "Judaised" a few deistic principles and rejected many others. He absorbed the preaching of European Enlightenment regarding natural, universal religion, religious tolerance and morality, and the emphasis on reason and a historical-critical approach to accepted religious beliefs and customs. However, this *Maskil* was bound to Jewish tradition, and—unlike some of his followers—he was unable to break away from it. Torn as a person between two worlds and two cultures—the old and the new world: the Jewish world and the recently accessible European culture—Mendelssohn's hesitation is discernible in his rationalisation of the original, orthodox, traditional Judaism.

Mendelssohn attempted to build a bridge between the Jewish culture,

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Jewish scholars regard Mendelssohn's deism as unquestionable: J. Zvi ZEHAVI, *Tenu'at Hahitbolelut be-Yisra'el* [The Assimilationist Movement in Israel] (Tel Aviv, 1943), p. 20; Max L. MARGOLIS, *The Theological Aspect of Reformed Judaism* (Baltimore, 1904), p. 107; Walter ROTHMAN, "Mendelssohn's Character and Philosophy," *CCAR* 39 (1929), p. 323; Felix A. LEVY, "Moses Mendelssohn's Ideals of Religion and Their Relation to Reform Judaism," *CCAR*, 39 (1929), pp. 353, 355. Some of Mendelssohn's contemporaries refer to this subject: Johann Balthasar Kölbele accused Mendelssohn of being a deist (MENDELSSOHN, *Gesammelte Schriften* VII [1930] p. 51), an accusation which is rejected by Mendelssohn (*ibid.*; see also his denial expressed in a letter written in Yiddish-German to Elkan Herz—*Gesammelte Schriften* XVI (1929), pp. 150–1). Aaron WOLFSOHN, a Hebrew *Maskil*, is of the opinion that Mendelssohn introduced natural religion among the Jews (*Jeschurun* [Breslau, 1804] p. 115). Citing this source, Isaac EISENSTEIN-BARZILAY wrongly asserts that Wolfssohn "regarded Mendelssohn as the founder of deism among the Jews" ("The Treatment of the Jewish Religion in the Literature of the Berlin Haskalah", *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 24 (1955), p. 55). Some other writers carelessly use the term "deistic" in their discussion of Mendelssohn's writings which are a far cry from deism; see David RUDAVSKY, *Emancipation and Adjustment* (New York, 1967), p. 70. It is unfortunate that Rudavsky neglected to name the original author of the description of Mendelssohn, Joseph KLAUSNER, *Historia Shel Hasifrut Ha'ivrit Ha'dashah* [History of Modern Hebrew Literature] (Jerusalem,<sup>3</sup> 1960) I, p. 52.

<sup>64</sup> I have developed this theme in my book, *Moshe Mendelssohn: Bekavlei Masoret* [Moses Mendelssohn: Bonds of Tradition] (Tel Aviv, 1972). Michael A. MEYER, too, is of the opinion that Mendelssohn was not a deist; see *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture 1749–1824* (Detroit, 1967), p. 38.

<sup>65</sup> Mendelssohn depicts God as an active agent in the world in general, and in the history of the Jewish people in particular. See *Jerusalem*, pp. 62 ff. See also, p. 154, "The Principles of Judaism—A Credo".

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61 ff.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89 ff.

which seemed to be declining in Germany, and the powerful, influential, and tempting general culture of the time, the latter being a decisive factor in the eclipse of the former. It was a two-way bridge: he endeavoured, on the one hand, to bring his Jewish contemporaries closer to the new, enlightened ideas, and, on the other hand, he sought to represent true Judaism to the enlightened outside world. True Judaism was a far cry from the distorted image of a corrupted Mosaic religion, presented by deist and atheist critics as well as by Christian theologians, a caricature resulting either from bias or from ignorance. Nor was it the Judaism practised by Rabbi Raphael Hacoen, the ultra-orthodox contemporary of Moshe ben Menaḥem (Mendelssohn), considered by the Maskilim as the symbol of that ossified Judaism; thus they regarded Rabbi Hacoen as their arch-enemy.<sup>68</sup>

Some deistic ideas were given by Mendelssohn a Jewish colouring in order to make them attractive to the Jews, and emphasise his fundamental conviction concerning the enlightened character of Judaism. In an obvious allusion to the deistic rejection of the Christian idea of revelation, he paraphrases a famous biblical verse: "The voice that was heard at Sinai on that great day did not proclaim, 'I am the Eternal, your God, the necessary autonomous Being, omnipotent and omniscient who rewards men in a future life according to their deeds.'" <sup>69</sup> In its original context, Mendelssohn claims, the revelation at Sinai was not intended to announce eternal truths of faith—these are attainable by reason alone, and not by miracles—but rather a historical truth and laws. Similarly, the ideas of the early English deist, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, concerning the relativity of both history and tradition—one of the basic doctrines of deism—find their way into Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* in the form of paraphrases in a biblical style.<sup>70</sup>

The deistic disclaimer of the proof of faith from miracles, expressed by Hobbes, Blount, Tindal, and others,<sup>71</sup> are said by Mendelssohn to be familiar to Judaism. In Mendelssohn's Judaism, no miracle can either prove or contradict a truth of reason. He supports his view from the biblical injunction against a prophet, who produces miracles and other signs whilst preaching idolatry: he must not be followed but put to death.<sup>72</sup> Further, Mendelssohn accepts the deistic criticism of the authority of prophecies<sup>73</sup> and considers it as consonant

<sup>68</sup> See my article "Some Notes on the Nature of Saul Berlin's Writings", *Journal of Hebraic Studies* I, 2 (1970), pp. 53–7.

<sup>69</sup> *Jerusalem*, p. 69.

<sup>70</sup> Lord HERBERT OF CHERBURY, "Religio Laici", *De Causis Errorum* (London, 1645 [facsimile edition, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1966]), p. 127; cf. KLAUSNER, *Philosophim Vehogei De'ot*, p. 75. See MENDELSSOHN, *Jerusalem*, p. 70.

<sup>71</sup> HOBBS, *Leviathan*, pp. 285–6; BLOUNT, *The Oracles of Reason*, pp. 9–10; TINDAL, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, p. 192; TOLAND, "The Primitive Constitution of the Christian Church", *A Collection of Several Pieces* (London, 1726) II, p. 174.

<sup>72</sup> *Jerusalem*, pp. 70–1.

<sup>73</sup> John SPENCER, *A Discourse Concerning Vulgar Prophecies* (London, 1665), p. 110; HOBBS, *Leviathan*, p. 244; BLOUNT, *Religio Laici* (London, 1683), pp. 45–6; TINDAL, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, p. 258–9.

with Judaism. Accordingly, he maintains that the Talmudic law modifies and limits the biblical law concerning prophecies: the duty to follow a prophet and his prophecies is a positive law; it does not stem from the fulfilment of the prophecies but rather from the will of the legislator, i.e., God. An analogous case is that of two witnesses on whose testimony the court's decision depends, but which is not necessarily the truth. Mendelssohn absolutely insists that, according to the Torah, miracles do not necessarily prove that a mission is from God.<sup>74</sup> This is undoubtedly a deistic position.

In his effort to present Judaism to the non-Jewish Enlighteners in their own terminology, Mendelssohn argues that eudaemonism—that is, happiness on earth and in the after-life seen by the deists as the principal characteristic of true religion<sup>75</sup>—is part and parcel of genuine Judaism. Unlike Christianity which denies happiness to non-believers—thus causing the deists to doubt in its authenticity, for God is unlikely to damn the great majority of the human race—Judaism allots the whole of mankind a share of happiness.<sup>76</sup>

Mendelssohn also endeavours to correct some misconceptions which are contained in deistic literature. Spencer, Blount, Morgan and others developed a theory, first advanced by Herodotus, that the Mosaic laws are borrowed from the Egyptians, and that God permitted the Jews to practice these borrowed laws because of their ignorance and corruption. To keep them under strict discipline—the deists asserted—he burdened them with very strict laws, with the Torah, their worst punishment.<sup>77</sup> Such a situation indicates the low status of the Jews among the nations. Against this background, Mendelssohn stresses that there are reasonable and humane explanations for the Mosaic laws and that Judaism has a universal mission, the teaching of the true concepts of God and his attributes among the nations.<sup>78</sup>

A careful study of Mendelssohn's writings reveals some direct borrowing from deism. There is one striking parallel between John Toland and the Jewish philosopher. The deist Toland writes: "*Jesus* did not, as tis universally believ'd, abolish the Law of *Moses* (Sacrifices excepted) neither in whole nor

<sup>74</sup> *Gesammelte Schriften* VII (1929), pp. 43–4.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, A. W., "Of Natural Religion, as Opposed to Divine Revelation", *The Oracles of Reason*, p. 198: "The Rule which is necessary to our future Happiness, ought to be generally made known to all men. But no Rule of Revealed Religion was, or ever could be made known to all men. Therefore no Revealed Religion is necessary to future Happiness."

<sup>76</sup> *Jerusalem*, pp. 65–6.

<sup>77</sup> See HERODOTUS, *The Histories* (Baltimore, 1960), p. 116; HERBERT OF CHERBURY, *The Antient Religion of the Gentiles*, p. 23; *idem.*, *A Dialogue Between A Tutor and His Pupil*, p. 233; SPENCER, *A Discourse Concerning Prodigies*, p. 8 [my pagination]; BLOUNT, *Religio Laici*, p. 54; *idem.*, *Oracles of Reason*, p. 134; SHAFTESBURY, *Characteristics* II, pp. 181–90; TINDAL, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, p. 90; THOMAS MORGAN, *The Moral Philosopher* (London, 1738) I, pp. 247–60, 268–71. Cf. ETTINGER, "Jews and Judaism", p. 186; KLAUSNER, *Philosophim*, p. 85.

<sup>78</sup> *Jerusalem*, pp. 89–90, 104–5.

in part, not in the letter no more than in the spirit.”<sup>79</sup> And “the Jews, tho associating with the converted Gentiles . . . were still to observe their own Law thro-out all generations.”<sup>80</sup> An almost identical phrasing is to be found in Mendelssohn’s writings: “The founder of the Christian religion never stated explicitly that he wanted to abolish the Mosaic law or exempt the Jews from it. . . . I cannot find in the New Testament any grounds permitting the dispensation of the Jews from the Mosaic law, even if they embrace Christianity.”<sup>81</sup>

Parallels can also be found between Mendelssohn and Matthew Tindal’s *Christianity as Old as the Creation*. Both identify Jewish religious law with Jewish civil law,<sup>82</sup> and restrict the obligatory adherence to the Mosaic law to Jews alone.<sup>83</sup> They also assert that compulsion in religious matters is contrary to the true spirit of religion,<sup>84</sup> and both preach religious tolerance.<sup>85</sup> Mendelssohn was unquestionably influenced by deistic thought: he mentions Herbert of Cherbury and his principles of deism, Pierre Bayle, and Toland, and he alludes to the deists in general.<sup>86</sup> It is not surprising that Mendelssohn’s library included some of the writings of Toland, Bayle, Diderot, Voltaire, and other Enlighteners—not to mention the works of such German deists as Reimarus.<sup>87</sup>

In this study, emphasis is laid on Mendelssohn, for he was the spiritual leader of the Hebrew Enlighteners in Germany. He was referred to as “the Socrates of our time” and compared to his two outstanding namesakes, Moses and Maimonides.<sup>88</sup> Their esteem for Mendelssohn was expressed in a

<sup>79</sup> John TOLAND, *Nazarenus: or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity* (London, 1718), p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. iv.

<sup>81</sup> *Jerusalem*, p. 125–6.

<sup>82</sup> Matthew TINDAL, “An Essay Concerning the Power of the Magistrate, and the Rights of Mankind, in Matters of Religion”, *Four Discourses* (London, 1709), p. 185; see also *idem.*, *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted*, pp. 149 ff. Compare MENDELSSOHN, *Jerusalem*, p. 99. The same view had been expressed earlier by HOBBS, *Leviathan*, who may have inspired both, ed. A. R. WALLER (Cambridge, 1904), p. 259.

<sup>83</sup> TINDAL, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, pp. 196–7; see also, *idem.*, *The Power of the Magistrate*, pp. 147, 184; cf. MENDELSSOHN, *Jerusalem*, pp. 98, 116–17.

<sup>84</sup> *The Power of the Magistrate*, pp. 133, 152, 190–1; *The Rights of the Christian Church*, pp. 38–43, 90. Cf. *Jerusalem*, pp. 22–3, 34–5, 46–7.

<sup>85</sup> *The Power of the Magistrate*, pp. 241–2; *Jerusalem*, pp. 106–7, 117, 145–7.

<sup>86</sup> *Jerusalem*, pp. 72, 37, 124. Concerning the reference to Toland, see Mendelssohn’s preface to the German translation of MENASHE BEN ISRAEL, *Vindiciae Judaeorum* (the Hebrew edition of *Jerusalem* and other writings published in Tel Aviv, 1947, p. 150).

<sup>87</sup> *Verzeichniss der auserlesenen Büchersammlung des Seeligen Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Berlin, 1786 [facsimile edition, Leipzig, 1926]).

<sup>88</sup> See HEINE, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, p. 94; *Hame’asef* II (1785), p. 81: “From Moses to Moses there was no one wise like Moses.” A similar epigram had been applied to other great scholars by the name of Moses, especially to Maimonides. I have dwelt on this theme in my paper, “The Image of Moses Mendelssohn as Reflected in the early German Hebrew Haskalah Literature (*Hame’asef*, 1783–1797)”, *The Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1972) III, pp. 269–82.

paraphrase of Pope's epigram on Newton:<sup>89</sup> "Truth and Religion lay hid in darkness for many a generation/Till God said let there be Moses! and there was light."

קֶשֶׁט נִדְתָּ צְרוּרָה בְּאוֹפֵל מִנִּי דוֹר דוֹר

עַדֵּי אָמַד אֱלֵהִים: יְהִי מֹשֶׁה! יְהִי אוֹר.<sup>90</sup>

A contemporary of Mendelssohn, the Hebrew writer and poet Naphtali Herz Wessely, is considered by some scholars to be the literary personality who marks the beginning of the Hebrew Enlightenment.<sup>91</sup> However, a careful and critical study of the whole of Wessely's work leads to a different conclusion. Not only did he represent right-wing orthodoxy among German Maskilim, advocating conservation rather than reform of Judaism; he also completely rejected the deistic trends.<sup>92</sup> Wessely opposed the foremost principle of the Enlightenment—reliance on human reason.<sup>93</sup> Aware of this writer's anti-Enlightenment views, Mendelssohn hesitated to send him his book, *Phaedon*, a treatise on the immortality of the soul based on inquiry and reason.<sup>94</sup> Wessely also attacked the deists, whom he considered more dangerous than the atheists. Worst of them all are the Jewish deists "who truly know that the Torah was given by God, may his name be blessed, and who stubbornly dismiss it because of their reliance on their own wisdom and reason".<sup>95</sup> It was only after his move from Amsterdam to Berlin, centre of Hebrew *Haskalah* at that time, his acquaintance with the Maskilim and his collaboration with Mendelssohn, that Wessely produced his pro-*Haskalah* declaration,<sup>96</sup> advocating modern education for Jewish children. Apart from this, Wessely's only inclination towards the Enlightenment is indicated by placing, both in order of importance and chronologically, the law of man (*Torat ha-Adam*) before the law of God.<sup>97</sup> Almost all scholars<sup>98</sup> maintain that Wessely applied this term only to the teaching of secular subjects to Jewish children. Shapira, by contrast, equates Wessely's *Torat ha'Adam* with Mendelssohn's "eternal truths".<sup>99</sup> (Mendelssohn's influence on Wessely is assumed here, even though *Jerusalem* was published a year after *Divrei Shalom*

<sup>89</sup> *The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope* (New York, 1896), p. 475: "Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night. God said, Let Newton be! and all was light."

<sup>90</sup> *Hame'asef III* (Tamuz, 1786), p. 161 [pages wrongly numbered; should be 177].

<sup>91</sup> KLAUSNER, *Historia Shel Hasifrut Ha'ivrit Hahadasah I*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>92</sup> Naphtali Herz Wessely, *Levanon* [Lebanon] (Vienna, 1829), pp. 44b–45a.

<sup>93</sup> *Levanon*, p. 8a (introduction).

<sup>94</sup> MENDELSSOHN, *Gesammelte Schriften XVI* (1929), p. 118; see also Wessely's reply, *ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>95</sup> *Levanon I*, p. 48b.

<sup>96</sup> Wessely, *Divrei Shalom Ve'emet* [Words of Peace and Truth] (Berlin, 1782–5).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2a (my pagination).

<sup>98</sup> KLAUSNER, ZINBERG, LAHOVER, ASAF, SCHARFSTEIN, KAUFMAN.

<sup>99</sup> H. N. SHAPIRA, *Toldot Hasifrut Ha'ivrit Hahadashah* [The History of Modern Hebrew Literature] (Tel Aviv, 1939 [reprint, 1967]), pp. 196 ff.

*Ve'emet*, for Mendelssohn's views had been well-known to the Maskilim even before the publication of his book.) Another writer, Eliav, identifies *Torat ha'Adam* with "natural education", similar to that preached by the school of Pedagogic Philanthropinism in Germany.<sup>100</sup> They all fail to note that Wessely himself identified *Torat ha'Adam* with the seven Noachic Laws, i.e. with natural religion.<sup>101</sup> This statement is extremely important, for it clearly indicates that the deistic views were so influential that they gained ground even among the traditional elements of the Hebrew Maskilim. Other deistic ideas, too, found their way into *Divrei Shalom Ve'emet*: religious tolerance, a common ground for all, or most, religions, leading to a relationship and understanding among them (to Wessely, that common ground is the Mosaic Law, or the Bible).<sup>102</sup> Paradoxically, none of Wessely's subsequent writings reveals any inclination towards deism or towards the Enlightenment.<sup>103</sup> Discussion of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>104</sup>

Under the influence of the Enlightenment in general and deism in particular, and with their minds set on achieving emancipation for the Jews, the Maskilim of Berlin advocated, preached, and fought for, a modernisation of the Jewish religion, culture or civilisation and Jewish way of life.<sup>105</sup> It is necessary for our purpose to distinguish between two basic divisions among these Maskilim. There were the extremists who wrote mainly in German and the moderates who expressed themselves in Hebrew.<sup>106</sup> The difference in language, as well as the difference in position, implies two widely different kinds of audience. The German-Jewish Maskilim catered mainly for the non-Hebraic Jewish readers, the non-observant enlightened Jews, the assimilationists, and for the Christian public at large. The Hebrew Maskilim aimed at their fellow Maskilim, who had stronger ties with the Jewish tradition than did the German Maskilim, and at the enlightened conservatives as well as at their opponents—the orthodox rabbis. This, however, does not preclude extremists who published in Hebrew; their position differed entirely from that held by German-Jewish Enlighteners.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Mordekhai ELIAV, *Hahinukh Hayehudi Begermania* [Jewish Education in Germany] (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 41. Eliav follows E. SIMON's article "The Pedagogic Philanthropinism and Jewish Education". *Kaplan's Jubilee Book* (New York, 1953), p. 172 [Hebrew].

<sup>101</sup> *Divrei Shalom Ve'emet*, p. 2a.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13b.

<sup>103</sup> Editorial advice published in *Nahal Habsor*. [The brook "Besor," or: good tidings] (1783); *Sefer Hamidot* [Book of Ethics] (1785); *Ma'amar Hikur Hadin* [An Essay (on) Search (or investigation) of Justice], (1788); *Shirei Tif'eret* [Songs of Glory] (1789-).

<sup>104</sup> This subject, as well as others pertaining to the writings of Wessely, are discussed in my paper, "Naphtali Herz Wessely's Attitude toward the Jewish Religion as a Mirror of a Generation in Transition", read at the 1970 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion.

<sup>105</sup> See my article, "Intimations of Religious Reform in the German Hebrew Haskalah Literature", *Jewish Social Studies* 32, 1 (January, 1970), pp. 3-13.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. BARZILAY, *The Treatment of the Jewish Religion*, p. 40; *idem.*, "National and Anti-National Trends in the Berlin Haskalah", *Jewish Social Studies*, 21 (July, 1959), pp. 167-8.

<sup>107</sup> Such as Saul BERLIN; see below.

Although such Maskilim as Saul Ascher, David Friedländer, Solomon Maimon, and Lazarus Bendavid—who used German as their principal language—expressed distinctly deistic views and were responsible for the formation of the Jewish deistic thought in both German and Hebrew, this paper will concentrate only on their colleagues who wrote mainly in Hebrew. Typically, the first Hebrew Maskilim in the last decades of the eighteenth century did not begin their activities with an outright criticism of Judaism and its authority, or with a campaign for religious reform. Allowing for variations, their career is somewhat analogous to that of the early deists. When we note that all of the first generation Hebrew Maskilim—unlike the German-Jewish ones—came from a traditional background, a transitional period is to be expected. It usually started as a moderate Enlightenment emphasising wisdom and reason in matters religious, followed by attempts to reconcile Judaism and Enlightenment, and to show that their religion was compatible with their philosophy. Thus a Maskil, Isaac Satanow, writes: “Torah and wisdom are twin sisters”,<sup>108</sup> and “There is no belief or knowledge in the Mosaic religion which is contrary to reason.”<sup>109</sup> Subsequently, in order to prove these statements, the Maskilim had to resort to a discussion of what is known in Hebrew as *Ta’amei Hamitzvot*, that is, a rational explanation of the commandments in the *Halakhah*. Insofar as they did so, they followed Mendelssohn. However, the result went beyond the expectation or the wish of their master. For once reasoning—or ratiocinating—about the divine law became permissible, its temporal aspect was immediately made apparent. Thus the Hebrew Enlighteners came close to some of the deistic views on the Christian, as well as Jewish, law.

Already in 1771 a first demand was published to change Jewish law according to the conditions dictated by time and place. Its author, whom I consider to be the first religious reformer of the *Haskalah* literature, was Mordekhai Schnaber, an enlightened physician and a contemporary of Mendelssohn.<sup>110</sup>

A distinction should be made at the outset between the method employed by the deists and that of the early Hebrew reformers. Unlike the deists, the latter thought it inconceivable to attack biblical miracles and prophecies which they considered fundamental to both Judaism and the Bible. They never wanted to destroy Judaism and revered the Bible—if not as divine and holy Scripture—at least as the source of Hebrew civilisation: of its original, uncorrupted religion, its culture and literature, its history and law. I have found only one instance in German *Haskalah* literature written in Hebrew

<sup>108</sup> Isaac SATANOW, *Mishlei ’Asaf* [Proverbs of Asaf] (Berlin, 1792) II, p. 70a.

<sup>109</sup> SATANOW, *Holekh Tamim* [He Who Walks Upright] (Berlin, 1795), p. 6b.

<sup>110</sup> Mordekhai Gumpel SCHNABER [George Levison], *Ma’amar Hatorah Vehaḥochmah* [An Essay on the Torah and Wisdom] (London, 1771), p. 2.



where miracles are questioned—not the divine miracles attested in the Bible, but those said to have been performed by great rabbis: e.g. the bringing down of beer from heaven by Rabbi Levi through the utterance of the divine name, or the miraculous production of the *Golem*—a legendary creature that saved the Jews—by a sixteenth-century rabbi of Prague. The author of this critique of miracles was Rabbi Saul Berlin, a unique phenomenon in Hebrew literature.<sup>111</sup>

The Hebrew critics of religion, like the deists, functioned within the framework of their religion: accordingly, their arguments were based on the *Halakhah*, on legal precedent and authoritative opinions. Arguments from reason alone would not have reached the traditional Jews inclined toward the Enlightenment or traditional rabbis.

The attempt to persuade individual rabbis should be considered in light of the difference between the religious systems of Christianity and Judaism. Among Jews, generally speaking, it is up to an individual rabbi, or to a small group of rabbis from one locality, to decide on religious matters, enact new decrees or abolish former ones, without the need for any hierarchical or ecclesiastical intervention. This is legally permissible if the rabbi or rabbis can support their non-heretical decision by a rabbinic authority, or a precedent, or prove its derivation from one of the authoritative *Halakhic* codes. Indeed, in 1818, in connection with religious innovations instituted in the newly established reform temples of Berlin and Hamburg, their approval by rabbinic sympathisers is known to have been actually sought.<sup>112</sup>

This dissimilarity between European deism and its Hebrew equivalent is self-explanatory. There are, however, in the *Haskalah* literature a number of techniques traceable to the deists. One of these is the repetitive claim by Hebrew Enlighteners that original Judaism had been distorted throughout the ages up to their time, and that it was their duty to restore it to its pure form.<sup>113</sup> Even the conservative Mendelssohn took part in this, and admitted openly that the Judaism of his day contained “excesses and abuses” created by men.<sup>114</sup> He was even engaged in a public battle against the orthodox authorities, and sought to outlaw the practices of excommunication and of the early, or immediate burial of the dead, demanding the restoration of the correct, original customs.<sup>115</sup> The two issues became test-cases and, in the opinion of the Maskilim, Mendelssohn, in practice, triumphed over the

<sup>111</sup> Saul BERLIN, *Ketav Yosher* [An Epistle of Righteousness] (Berlin, 1795), p. 3b.

<sup>112</sup> See my article “The Methodology employed by the Hebrew Reformers in the First Reform Temple Controversy (1818–1819)”, *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History, and Literature in Honor of I. Edward Kiev* (New York, 1971), pp. 381–97.

<sup>113</sup> See *Hame'asef* II (1785), pp. 88, 152, 154 [by an anonymous writer]; “Discussion of Two Friends” V (1789), p. 270 [believed to have been written by Saul Berlin].

<sup>114</sup> *Jerusalem*, p. 115.

<sup>115</sup> MENDELSSOHN, *Gesammelte Schriften* XVI (1929), pp. 154 ff.; *Hame'asef* II (1785), pp. 169–74, 178–87; *Jerusalem*, pp. 34–5, 143–4.

rabbis. Fight against excommunication and immediate interment became for the Maskilim symbols of a struggle for Enlightenment, and the issues were discussed continuously for almost three decades in the literature of the German *Haskalah*.<sup>116</sup>

Their historical-critical approach to Judaism allowed the Hebrew Enlighteners to perceive that Judaism had always been flexible and ready for change, and that it had actually undergone changes. The *Torah Shebe'al Peh* of the orthodox rabbis, the oral law containing an elaboration of *Torah Shebikhtav*, the written law—both traditionally thought to have been revealed to Moses at Sinai—was considered by the Enlighteners as indicative of a development, or even a reform of the original Mosaic religion. If a change of this sort could be proven to be legitimate in Jewish *Halakhah*, the road would be open, the Maskilim thought, to changes in their own day and age.<sup>117</sup>

Their efforts were continuous and varied and may be divided like deism<sup>118</sup> into constructive and destructive varieties. Constructively, they tried to argue with the orthodox rabbis on their own ground and in their own language. Citations from rabbinic responsa literature were widely quoted by Schnaber, Berlin, Isaac Satanow, and others at the end of the eighteenth, and by Eliezer Liebermann, Meir Bresselau, and Rabbi Aharon Chorin in the first part of the nineteenth century. Also of a constructive nature was Mendel Breslau's appeal, published in 1790 in *Hame'asef*, the organ of the Hebrew Enlightenment, to convene an assembly of rabbis for the sole purpose of alleviating the burden of Judaism.<sup>119</sup>

As this appeal went unheeded, in their frustration, the Maskilim had to resort to more effective measures. Just before the beginning of the last decade of the eighteenth century, the situation was ripe for a change. By then some of the Hebrew writers—e.g. Schnaber and Satanow—had published their first books, advocating a mild Enlightenment and covertly alluding to deistic views; *Hame'asef* and its writers were by then ignoring their promise announced after Mendelssohn's death in 1786 that they would follow him in accordance with the Torah,<sup>120</sup> and they began to publish parables and poems which heralded the new destructive trends.<sup>121</sup> They were criticised for these by Wessely in 1788.<sup>122</sup>

By then, Rabbi Saul Berlin, who was ahead of his time both in his views

<sup>116</sup> For details, see my article "Intimations . . .", *Jewish Social Studies* 32 (1970), notes 30-1.

<sup>117</sup> SCHNABER, *Ma'amar Hatorah Vehahochmah*, p. 2; SAUL BERLIN, *Besamim Rosh* [Incense of Spices] (Berlin, 1793), #251, p. 77a: the Torah itself is subject to change, and so are the principles of Judaism (p. 76b) and the oral law (p. 71a).

<sup>118</sup> Cf. LESLIE STEPHEN, *History of English Thought* I, p. 76.

<sup>119</sup> MENDEL BRESLAU, "Mikhtavim Shonim" [Various Articles], *Hame'asef* VI (1790), pp. 301, 310.

<sup>120</sup> *Hame'asef* III (1786), p. 212.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, V (1789), pp. 194, 226, 312.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, IV (1788), p. 165.

and in his methods, had circulated the manuscript of his satire, *Ketav Yosher*, among the Maskilim. This very talented but largely unrecognised Hebrew writer, forerunner of Joseph Perl, Isaac Erter, and Judah Leib Gordon by half a century, is reminiscent of an English deist, Conyers Middleton, and of Voltaire. His sharp pen was directed against the many, meaningless and ridiculous religious rules and superstitions, against the Talmud as studied by the rabbis and the Kabbalah. Moreover, turning upside down the typical deistic argument concerning Jewish concepts being borrowed by Christianity, he blamed Judaism for absorbing Christian ideas.<sup>123</sup>

In 1789, Rabbi Saul Berlin, disguised as a representative of orthodoxy,—for which he was never forgiven by either the traditional rabbis of his own day or by later scholars, neither of whom could understand his predicament of being the son of the revered rabbi of Berlin,—marked a new stage in the Hebrew Enlightenment. He launched a personal attack against the symbol of rabbinic authority of the time, Rabbi Rephael Hacoheh of Hamburg. His diatribe was freely modelled on the deistic attacks against Christian clerics: it was Voltaire's *Écrasez l'infâme* in Hebrew attire.<sup>124</sup> Although he published his attack under a pseudonym, his identity was known to all but his father. Saul Berlin had to pay dearly for his temerity: he was excommunicated by the religious court of Hamburg and deprived from his post as rabbi of the Frankfurt community. He vehemently resisted the excommunication, supported by his father and the enlightened Jewish leaders of Berlin, and fought on against Rabbi Hacoheh, in the form of a devastating book review.

At the same time Saul Berlin was preparing his swan song: a reformed *Shulhan Arukh*, which he ironically attributed to a fourteenth-century authority, Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel, known as *Rosh*. All his talents, satire, irony, sarcasm, and great rabbinic erudition are included in this book which appeared in 1793. As an orthodox rabbi of the time observed in anguish, there was hardly a religious transgression which he did not sanction. In the final analysis, it looked as though the *Rosh*, that strictly traditionalist teacher, was advocating changes and reforms not only in the Oral Law but also in the Written Law—the Torah. It was inferred, for example, that even such principles of Judaism, as the Temple worship and the belief in the Messiah had undergone changes or had not always belonged to Judaism. A detailed analysis of this work, entitled *Basamim Rosh*, is beyond the limits of the present paper.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>123</sup> *Ketav Yosher*, p. 16b, concerning the connection between the coming of the Messiah and Adam's sin (i.e., original sin) in the Jewish and Christian religions. Cf. *Hame'asef* VI (1790), p. 45.

<sup>124</sup> [Saul BERLIN], *Mitzpeh Yokte'el* [Watchtower of Yokte'el] (Berlin, 1789). It should be noted that this was not the first rabbinic dispute, either personal or public.

<sup>125</sup> See my article, "The Religious Reforms of 'Traditionalist' Rabbi Saul Berlin (A Chapter in the History of the Struggle of Hebrew Haskalah in Germany for the Revival of Judaism)", *Hebrew Union College Annual* 42 (1971) [Hebrew].

Significantly, Rabbi Berlin not only reiterates in his book the position of his Enlightenment colleagues with regard to religious coercion, excommunication, burial, prayer in German, the exclusion of the *Piyuṭim* and *Seliḥot* from the prayer book, etc., but for the first time discusses detailed reforms, instead of issuing the customary demand for the alleviation of the burden off the Jews or for a few changes in a religious custom.

As I have noted, the last decade of the eighteenth century marks the onset of destructive trends in the deistic and semi-deistic writings of the Hebrew Enlightenment in Germany. The development of religious reform ideology was nurtured both by European deism and by German-Jewish deistic writings. It should be remembered that Saul Ascher's theory of Jewish reform, and his attempt to destroy the legal system of Judaism appeared in 1792 in his *Leviathan*. In the same year, Solomon Maimon published his autobiography with its deistic theology and its critical attitudes towards Jewish customs. A year later, in 1793, Lazarus Bendavid issued his deistic exposition of Jews and Judaism, and, at about the same time, David Friedländer also began his deistic activities, which culminated in 1799 in his, from a Jewish point of view, infamous letter to Teller, head of the Berlin Protestant Church, expressing his willingness, and that of some of his followers, to embrace Christianity under certain conditions.

In the three decades that followed, the demands for change expressed in Hebrew literature were not as concealed as before. Religion was blamed by Isaac Satanow for spreading hatred in the world,<sup>126</sup> and as a result, religious tolerance was preached even among the Jews. Both are deistic ideas. Superstitious beliefs and customs were deplored in Voltaire's manner, and the multitude of religious laws, encompassing every minute of the Jew's life were attacked. Finally, Jewish religious authority—that of the rabbi—was sharply criticised, especially by Saul Berlin and, some twenty years later, by such reformers as Liebermann, Bresselau and David Caro.

Simultaneously, however, the Maskilim stressed the importance of morality in Judaism so as to demonstrate its compatibility with deism and the Enlightenment. The writings of these Hebrew authors shaped under the impact of European deism, played an important role in the establishment and development of the Jewish religious reform movement in Germany, and heralded such Hebrew reformers as Judah Leib Gordon and Lilienblum, in the second half of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>126</sup> SATANOW, *Mishlei 'Asaf* II, pp. 55a–b, ch. 31:10; p. 77a, ch. 42:15.