

Article

The Love of God as a Consistent Jewish Response to Modernity

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Abstract: Discussions of Jewish responses to modernity often focus on what is new or what has adapted or evolved in Judaism in the face of modernity's challenges. However, contrary to convention, this paper argues that, at least in principle, neither has the challenge nor the response changed all that much. Through an examination of several key modern Jewish thinkers, including Spinoza, Mendelssohn, Rosenzweig, and Buber, and by focusing on a traditional Jewish concept and value, the Love of God, this paper claims that the Love of God functions as the orienting principle for much of modern Jewish thought, just as it did throughout the history of Judaism. Upon demonstrating the consistent presence of the concept of the Love of God throughout the Jewish tradition, and especially in much of modern Jewish thought, this paper goes on to briefly reflect on the importance and vitality of the concept of the Love of God for both Judaism and modernity, despite and beyond the commercialization and cheapening of the concept of Love in recent times.

Keywords: love; love of god; Spinoza; Mendelssohn; Rosenzweig; Buber; immanence; modern Jewish thought; response

That love is a central concept of Judaism is almost too obvious a point to mention.¹ From Leviticus 19:18's love of neighbour to Deuteronomy's various commands to love God—most notably Deut. 6:5's "and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might"—as well as God's love of the stranger (Deut. 10:18), and even the people of Israel (Deut. 4:37, 7:8), it is a cardinal principle of Jewish scripture, law, and practice.² If we consider the Hebrew Bible's numerous more erotic, but nevertheless archetypal, loves, such as those of the Song of Songs, and the many loves of the many partners throughout the *Aggadah*, then love must also be seen as cardinal to Jewish myth, belief, and even history. Having inherited this conception of love from the *Tanakh*, the Rabbis, faced with the peculiar political predicament of exile, legally codified and thereby enshrined the Biblical Love of God and of neighbour, both in its accusative and dative meanings,³ into the very fabric of the law—that which bound Judaism together while in exile and allowed it to survive. For the Rabbis, love, is the source, motive, method, and goal of the law. Hillel, expressing the command in a negative form, aptly quipped "what is hateful to you do not do to others, the rest is commentary, go and study".⁴ Rabbi Akiva, centuries later, labeled the Biblical commandment to love your neighbour as "the great principle of the Torah".⁵ Rashi, the eleventh century French commentator, when discussing the *parashah* or weekly Torah reading portion, wherein we find Leviticus 19:18, asserts

¹ For more on the Love of God, especially in the pre-modern periods, see the excellent: (Levenson 2016).

² (Seeskin 2016), has several excellent chapters dealing with the many loves of the Bible.

³ (Mendes-Flohr 2007, pp. 11–13).

⁴ B.T. *Shabbat*, 31a.

⁵ B.T. *Shabbat*, 31a.

that it was “delivered in full assembly, since most of the fundamental rulings are derived therefrom”,⁶ recognizing its cardinal legal role. Other medievals,⁷ infused with the spirit of Greek philosophy, variously systematized the concept of love into their rational treatises. For example: Bahya Ibn Paquda’s ten gates in his *Duties of the Heart* culminate in the final gate of the Love of God, a disinterested though all consuming devotion that dialectically transcends the fear of God through knowledge and practice, leading to union with God; Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, the height of medieval Jewish rationalism, identifies love with apprehension or knowing, and that again with union and providence.⁸ It is our bond with God, to be nurtured and strengthened, and spreading this love, “to spread the doctrine of the unity of the Name in the world and to guide people to love Him, may He be exalted” is the essence of politics.⁹ Jewish mysticism is permeated throughout with love, even extending the concept into the Godhead itself.¹⁰ Judah Abarbanel’s *Dialoghi D’Amore*, a 16th Century Renaissance “best seller” across Europe, finds love at every stage in his highly Neoplatonic understanding of the circle of life turned love, in every aspect of the micro and macrocosm, as the source, bond, and goal of all of existence.¹¹ Leading up to the modern period, in every instance that I, in my admittedly non-exhaustive exposure to the Jewish tradition, have come across, God’s love is the source and end of all of God’s actions, be it of creation, revelation, or redemption—foundational concepts of Judaism. Leading up to the modern period, again, always or for the most part, God acts only in and through love. It is God’s only motive. This may in large part be due to the lack of theologically satisfying alternatives for describing God’s intentions—namely, the absurdity of God’s actions being based on some desire, since desire entails a lack or want and God is infinite and thus infinitely sufficient—as well as the logical necessity of capturing God’s infinite nature under a single term, but this does not change the fact of the matter that God, in Judaism, is a God of Love. Leading up to the modern period, and to repeat, always or for the most part, our response to this divine love is to love in return, be it God directly, God’s law, or God’s creation, but usually a combination of all three. The covenant of Judaism is entered into and sealed with love, on both sides. Accordingly, turning to the modern period, one may rightly ask, “Where’s the love?”

As Judaism became a religion in the modern protestant sense of the term, inherently a matter of private concern and thus essentially individualistic, has the cardinality of this love changed? With the rise and ascendancy of modern science, the newest instantiation of the challenge and threat of reason, has this love changed? With essentializing metaphysics bracketed out of the conversation, has the phenomenon and ethical act of love changed? As the following will show: in large part, no. The Love of God has remained cardinal to Judaism, as an orienting and axiological principle. If this proves to be true, then this consistency with tradition should allow for us to see modern Jewish thought, not as an aberration or assimilationist endeavour but as a valid, edifying, and deepening reflection on the very core of Judaism itself—the Love of God. What is more, if the argument of the paper bears the weight, it should put forth the Love of God as a central concept of study, especially in the study of Modern Judaism, and in its many sub-fields, from biblical exegesis to political theory, as a concept connecting and unifying the tradition and as against the supposed radical break from the medieval era that is introduced by modernity.

We begin with Spinoza. As a Dutch Jewish Marrano of the 17th century, Spinoza may be a curious place to start. When considering that he was excommunicated from the budding Jewish

⁶ Discussed and translated by Mendes-Flohr (2007), p. 5.

⁷ For more on the Love of God in Medieval Jewish Thought, see (Vajda 1957) and Chapter 4 in Levenson (2016).

⁸ *Guide*, III: 51.

⁹ *Guide*, III: 54, p. 624 in the Pines (Ben Maimon 1963) translation.

¹⁰ The gendered aspect of the sefirot, aspects of the Godhead, as well as their erotic interplay, is a most obvious example.

¹¹ (Ebreo 2009). The second section of this tripartite work is titled “On the Universality of Love”. The rumoured though completely nonexistent fourth section was supposedly on the end/s or telos of love.

community of Amsterdam around the age of 24 for “monstrous deeds” and “abominable heresies”,¹² and that he never sought to rejoin the faith, to find so central a Jewish value and concept not just in, but playing an important role throughout his work can come as a surprise. That being said, there is no denying and it is impossible to overstate the role his thought had in grounding the principles of the Enlightenment, and thus Western modernity, and in setting the parameters for much of the modern debates surrounding religion vis-à-vis science or reason, as well as politics. If we can find a robust concept of the Love of God in his radically immanent cum pantheist and highly mechanistic philosophy, as well as in his political works, then this bodes well for our claim regarding the rest of modern Jewish thought.

Though present in one form or another in all his works, the concept of the Love of God is formally presented and proven at the end of Bk. V of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, his main philosophical work, which was posthumously published in 1677. Though it is among the last concepts to be proven, the geometric structure of the work, beginning with definitions and axioms, only deriving what can be deduced therefrom, and building thereupon, supports the idea that the concept of the Love of God (*amor dei*) was there from the beginning, perhaps even as its implicit *telos*. To quote Deleuze, “Unlike the other two [parts of the *Ethics*], which coexist throughout the entire course, it [, the third part, EV] occupies a precise place, the final one. Nonetheless, it was there from the start as a focus, the focal point that was already at work before it appeared. Book V must be conceived as coextensive with all the others; we have the impression of arriving at it, but it was there all the time, for all time”.¹³ The concept has frustrated and befuddled centuries of scholars due to certain metaphysical difficulties, most surrounding its resulting “eternity of the mind”. Nevertheless, the role it plays in his system is quite clear and its centrality is very much in line with the Jewish tradition, as described above.

For Spinoza, on a first reading, there are two fundamental emotions, joy and sadness, of which all others are but variations of. In Bk. III of his *Ethics*, wherein Spinoza defines and proves a great many of the affects, Joy and Sadness are, respectively, defined as an increase or decrease in one’s power of acting or being. As a species of Joy, love is defined as joy along with the idea of its cause. Therefore, love, is an increase in one’s power along with the idea of the cause of said increase. Thus, the Love of God for Spinoza is called the intellectual Love of God (*amor dei intellectualis*). God’s love, the highest species of Joy, in light of EVp17, which states that “God is without passive emotions, and he is not affected with any [passive] emotion of pleasure or pain”,¹⁴ does away with the aspect of transition from a lower power of acting to a higher power of acting entirely. In turn, God’s love is an enjoyment of God’s infinite reality, truth, being, and power of acting—all synonyms for Spinoza. As EVp35 states, “God loves [God’s] self with an infinite intellectual love”. Considering Spinoza’s immanentist cum pantheistic metaphysics that were captured neatly in the phrase *Deus sive Natura*, God or Nature, this means that the objects of knowledge are but modes of the one God, of Substance, of Nature—all synonyms for Spinoza—and their causal relations. In other words, love is the affective correlate to the sound knowledge of God, existence, and the causal relations within. However, if God loves God’s self with an infinite intellectual love, and God is, on one and perhaps the only real level of understanding, all that there is, the only substance that can exist, then this Love of God for God’s self is the only real affect that exists. With all other affects being impure, mixed, or even simply false or an illusion. Being the sole real and true affect, it is also the only affect of value, because, for Spinoza, real, true, and being of value are all coextensive concepts. Only what is real is true and valuable. EVp36 states that “The mind’s intellectual love toward God is the Love of God wherewith God loves [God’s] self not insofar as [God] is infinite, but insofar as [God] can be explicated through the essence of the human mind considered under a form of eternity. That is, the mind’s intellectual love toward God is part of

¹² The text of the *cherem*, or writ of excommunication, can be found on p. 120 in Steven Nadler’s excellent biography of Spinoza, (Nadler 1999).

¹³ (Deleuze 1997, p. 30).

¹⁴ All quotations of Spinoza are from: (Spinoza 2002).

the infinite love, wherewith God loves [God's] self". Our Love of God, of both finite modes inhering in substance, and even of substance itself, just is God's Love of God's self, if but a finite part of it. In turn, this means that our Love of God is also the only affect of value. Therefore, the only standard by which we can judge anything in Spinoza is its conduciveness to and proliferation of the Love of God.

If we add to this the idea that there is nothing more helpful to a human being or increasing of one's power than a fellow rational human being, which was captured neatly in Spinoza's EIVp35C1, "There is no individual thing in the universe more advantageous to [a hu]man than a [hu]man who lives by the guidance of reason", then we can see Leviticus 19:18 at work. For, in loving our neighbour we recognize their positive impact on us.

Turning to Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise (TTP)*, we may once gain think that this is a curious place to look for, let alone find, traditional Jewish concepts discussed favourably. A founding document of liberal democracy, with its forceful arguments for religious tolerance, free speech, and the separation of Church and State, Spinoza's *TTP* fundamentally helped to shape the Enlightenment, and thus modern secularism. It provided the methodology for modern biblical, historical, and literary criticism, and it is often regarded as the foil of Rabbinic or even classical Judaism,¹⁵ having established the threat of modern reason in undermining the validity of the biblical concepts of, *inter alia*, prophecy, miracles, Mosaic authorship, and God's will. Nevertheless, and despite misconceptions as to Spinoza's Jewishness, even the Law, although reduced of its political chafe, has love as its core and a love of God as its ideal goal. In chapter 4 of the *TTP*, in discussing the term law so as to define Divine Law, the goal of the chapter, we find God's love as the source and goal of the law. "This, then, is the sum of our supreme good and blessedness: to wit, the knowledge and Love of God. So the rules for living a life that has regard to this end can fitly be called the Divine Law".¹⁶ In chapter 7, wherein he critiques the methodology of medieval exegesis and lays out his own radically naturalist and historical hermeneutic, only puts forth love as a valid interpretation of scripture, only actions and affects of love are to be deemed to be valid. In chapter 12, God's word is once again identified with love, or rather anything that leads to an increase of love. The divine necessity in the laws of the cosmos as well as the laws and intention of true and right religion are love. When combining the metaphysics of the *Ethics* with the politics of the *TTP*, we find that the Love of God even undergirds the more modern liberal notions of democracy, free speech, and religious toleration, as argued for in the *TTP*, insofar as it is the only affect that properly exists and thus has any value. Spinoza, allows for a similarly infinite variety of expressions of love, ever aware of the infinite varieties and experiences of life.

Embroided in several deeply personal public controversies, Mendelssohn was far too anxiety ridden to develop and write down a full-fledged philosophy. Nevertheless, in the one who brought the Enlightenment to Judaism, we find the concept of the Love of God very much at the core.

In *Morning Hours*, Mendelssohn's lectures defend the late Lessing against the charge, brought on by Jacobi, of Spinozism, which at the time just meant atheism. Especially in the later ones, namely Lectures XIII–XVI, we find Mendelssohn praising Lessing's modified pantheism, a panentheism, as a philosophy most capable of loving God, of bringing the Love of God to the fore, as a philosophy not worthy of censure, but of praise. Summarizing the more acceptable parts of Lessing's modified pantheism, Mendelssohn states that, "I, a human being, a thought of the Godhead, will never cease to remain a thought of the Godhead, and I will be in the infinite unfolding of time blissful or miserable according to the degree that I recognize Him, my Thinker, and to the degree that I love Him".¹⁷ In fact, Mendelssohn's chief issue with the rationalist position in these lectures, as symbolically represented by Spinoza, is that the necessity of existence does not and indeed cannot preclude the idea of divine will, the locus of divine transcendence. Under the weighty influence of Kant, this question is beyond finite

¹⁵ H. A. Wolfson, as fine a representative of the *Wissenschaft* movement as can be found, bookended rabbinic Judaism with Spinoza.

¹⁶ Spinoza (2002), p. 428.

¹⁷ *Morning Hours*, Lecture XIV, in (Mendelssohn 2012, p. 109).

human reason. That the necessity of existence is an expression of divine love, if not also of the divine will, however, is never once questioned.

Turning to Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, we find the Love of God arising just as expected, as the source of creation, of revelation, and as the true motivation for right conduct. "One can no longer hesitate to regard love as being at least as sublime a preeminence as power . . . and to recognize the God of might also as the God of Love". Moreover, much like with Spinoza, love is also understood to be an axiomatic political principle. For, when the duties of the state are deemed to contradict one's own personal religious duties, such tension is to be understood as a misunderstanding of the Love of God. To put it differently, when both the state and religion have the Love of God as their aim, there can be no contradiction between the rights and duties of a citizen versus the rights and duties of a religious practitioner or Jew. In fact, for Mendelssohn, the difference between Church and State concerns the object of our duties, with our duties to God being the purview of religion, and our duties to our fellow humans being the purview of the state.¹⁸ "In the system of human duties, those toward God form, in reality, no special division. Rather, all of men's duties are obligations toward God. Some of them concern ourselves, others our fellow men".¹⁹ However, it is important to note that Mendelssohn here immediately turns to the Love of God as underlying both the state and religion, in saying that, "We ought, from Love of God, to love ourselves in a rational manner, to love his creatures; just as we are bound, from a rational love of ourselves, to love our fellow men". As such, love, as it always has been in Judaism, guides the community, or state in this case, and religion, the communal, and the personal, as well as being the source and goal of all our duties and right action.

In the end, echoing Spinoza, Mendelssohn offers the following explicit discussion of love:

"No love, no friendship can exist without the benign reproduction of itself. Love is a readiness to take pleasure in someone else's happiness. That means, if one reduces the concepts of happiness and pleasure to their elements, that love is the readiness to regard another's progress to a higher level of perfection as an increase in our own perfection".²⁰

Picking up after Jewish thought takes its existentialist turn, we unsurprisingly find the concept of the Love of God in the thought of Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, leading representatives of 20th century Jewish Thought.

Flush with undefined and unreferenced recondite terms, phrases, and quotations, some apparently drawn from conversations with his interlocutors, yet often tweaked from their original meaning if just a little, Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* notoriously occludes ready understanding, even by the initiated. Be it an unmarked quotation from Goethe, a Rabbinic Midrash, or an allusion to a Kantian notion, Rosenzweig's *Star* requires a North Star of its own for successful navigation through its conceptual by-ways. He did after-all write an introductory work to his *Star* after its publication, in part to make it more accessible and explain its internal logic and the general plan of the work.²¹ That being said, and lucky for us, Rosenzweig's concept of love is at least *prima facie* rather simple and certainly ubiquitous.²² To the extent that Rosenzweig philosophy is a conscious rehabilitation of the concept of revelation and that "Rosenzweig's theory of revelation is a theory of *eros*",²³ then it is logical to conclude that Rosenzweig's philosophy is one of love. "In this respect, revelation is love and, as such, is analogous to and homologous with mundane love, the love of one human being for another . . . love is utterly in the present".²⁴

¹⁸ (Mendelssohn 1983, p. 41).

¹⁹ (Mendelssohn 1983, p. 58).

²⁰ "Rhapsody or additions to the Letters on Sentiments" in (Mendelssohn 1997, p. 152).

²¹ (Rosenzweig 1999).

²² What follows is based largely on a reading of pp. 156–215 of (Rosenzweig 1985).

²³ Samuel Moyn, quoted and in part agreed with by (Mendes-Flohr 2009).

²⁴ (Mendes-Flohr 2009, p. 315).

Quoting the Song of Songs 8:6, Rosenzweig begins Book two of Part Two of his *Star*, titled, “Revelation or The Ever-Renewed Birth of the Soul” with “Love is strong as death” and what follows is essentially a meditation on that passage. Despite the radically personal and subject focused basis of his New Thinking, that it takes the agent, a specific person with a particular first and last name, to be the primary locus for the achievement of his totalizing system, love for Rosenzweig, once again displays the same characteristics that we have come to expect. The *Star* presents us with three fundamental points of being or facts: God, the world, and humankind. This short list exhausts existence. God, in an initial revelation, creates the world. In a second equally necessary revelation (due to the majestic brilliance of creation that obscures its creator), God directly reveals God’s self to humankind in a moment of relation. Humankind, in turn, answers to these revelations by redeeming the world through ethical acts. However, on closer inspection, we find that this divine drama is entirely a story of love, and we are pivotal actors in it. God creates through love, as an expression of God’s infinite love. Revealed in that act, but immediately concealed by its brilliant majesty and in the subtle workings of God’s creation, by its own infinite goodness and being, God reveals God’s self once more to us in and through love. Thus, this places the subject in a position to assent to the historical fact of God’s revelation and to God’s eternal, immediate, though often unrequited loving relation to us—the very point of the system intended by Rosenzweig’s *Star*. This is dialogue for Rosenzweig: hearing and responding to God’s love with love, in loving creation and neighbour in the name of God’s love, and as a representative of God’s love. Infinite in scope and ultimately beyond the present, redemption depends on our love of the created world and on love of our neighbour—on ethics. In short, the Love of God, just as it has been for all of Jewish history, is a major orienting principle and concept in the *Star of Redemption*. What is more, it is grounded in a surprisingly immanent world view. For, how does Rosenzweig finish his opus, but with a brief meditation of walking humbly with God, i.e. in “faith, hope, and love”, and with the phrase, written in all capitalized letters, “INTO LIFE”.²⁵

Buber is quite explicit about his disdain for an understanding of religion as any kind of feeling. Concerned with revitalizing what he understood to be a stagnant even calcified Judaism, relegating it to the sphere of emotions was too easily deniable and thus far too ineffective a solution for him. Perhaps, and even ironically, showing his Kantian colours, Buber ultimately finds room for love in his dialogical thought. Despite not saying too much about love, or the Love of God, for fear of being held to his definition of a concept and thus precluding the lived openness that each subject requires in manifesting it,²⁶ he nevertheless gives it a classically central role. For Buber, the content of revelation is equally dependent on the subject that is receiving or adequately attuned to God’s eternal dialogic and loving presence. Unsusceptible to analysis in itself, a genuine encounter can only be discussed, categorized, or understood in its effects in the world, in one’s I-It encounters afterward. Unable to be, but changed as the result of a genuine movement in the world, the reorientation of one’s self, of one’s values, which occurs as a result of such an encounter are the contents of revelation. In other words, the contents of revelation are the effects of an I-Thou moment or genuine encounter manifested in the world of the I-It, in the world of ethical action. The responsibility one comes to understand, one’s heightened awareness of one’s ethical duties, are, for Buber, love. As he says, “Love is responsibility of an I for a You: in this consists what cannot consist in any feeling—the equality of all lovers”.²⁷ To expand, for Buber, love is relation, true relation, and even a “cosmic force”.²⁸ Therefore, “Feelings one ‘has’;

²⁵ (Rosenzweig 1985, p. 424), emphasis mine.

²⁶ Buber’s refusal to allow himself to be pinned down on any given definition of any number of terms and concepts is a deliberate strategy in line with his teaching of radical openness. A strict definition calcifies a concept into an I-It, something to be reproduced and analyzed. On the other hand, having the definition be open to at least modification in light of the varieties of human experience and adaptable to each new context and subject maximally allows for a transformative and true I-thou encounter. For an example of this disposition in action, see especially the question and answer period to his “Religion as Presence” lectures, in: (Horwitz 1988).

²⁷ (Buber 1971, p. 66).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

love occurs. Feelings dwell in man, but man dwells in his love. This is no metaphor but actuality".²⁹ When considering that all of creation is potentially available for genuine encounter, through these encounters we come to encounter the Absolute—the eternal Thou—then the individual, all of creation, and God are once again constitutive components of this love, of mutual responsibility of the all for the all, of the divine redemptive drama. Considering further that a Thou moment can only be reciprocal, then insofar as we can have a genuine encounter with the Eternal, we can also know that the Eternal loves us, provides for us, or, in more Buberian terms, is a constant dialogic partner with us (if only we were to constantly listen). In other words, love functions for Buber almost as it always has in the history of Judaism.

We have now finished with an admittedly brief survey of the concept of the Love of God in a few major and highly influential modern Jewish thinkers. There are obviously other Jewish thinkers and even schools of thought that could also be engaged. Hasidism, which is a hot button topic of late, not mentioned above, and other modern orthodox sects and thinkers were not included due to their having responded to modernity rather differently. For them, the classical rabbinic, which is legal, understanding of the Love of God still holds true, unphased, and unperturbed by the challenges of modernity. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm and zeal of the Hasidim is in large part due to the immediate immanent expectation for and expression of the Love of God. Joseph B. Soloveitchik's *The Lonely Man of Faith*, a modern orthodox diagnosis of 20th century existence, *pace* Maimonides, claims the person of faith to be "'insanely' committed to and 'madly' in love with God"³⁰ echoing the all-consuming and totalizing aspect of the Love of God expressed in Deut. 6:5, and reflected on by Maimonides in the passage that was cited by Soloveitchik in that discussion. Hermann Cohen, drawing on the classical sources of Judaism in developing his neo-Kantian ethical monotheism, would, I assume, also have a robust notion of the Love of God, provided that it is consistently drawn from and applied to the rational regulative ideal of the divine and grounded in classical Jewish texts. He did, after all, defend the universalistic reading of "neighbour" in Leviticus 19:18 against German charges of ethnocentrism late in the 19th Century,³¹ and the pride of place given to the classical sources of Judaism in his philosophy precludes any substantial gap between his thought and that core commandment of Judaism to love one's neighbour. However, this takes us too far afield of the original scope of this paper. The overly subtle details of the various instantiations of the Love of God in modern Jewish thought need not detain us here very long at all. What is of consequence here and what I am arguing for in this paper is the main and substantial at that commonality shared by the above modern Jewish thinkers in their conceptions of the Love of God, conceptions that were and continue to be influential, and in turn shared by modern Jewish thought as a whole, or at least a major section or vein of it. It is to this commonality that we now turn.

Having found the Love of God hard at work in modern Jewish thought, functioning, yet again, as a central and orienting principle underlying and motivating good and right action, including God's, as well as the proper worship of God and God's creation, one is presented with a surprisingly immanent conception of existence that thoroughly informs the understanding of the Love of God that is found in modern Jewish thought. The modern Jewish conception of the Love of God, I argue, grounded in the survey of the highly influential thinkers representative of a major vein of modern Jewish above, thinkers whom are all major figures of scholarly concern, and thus integral to and constitutive of the field, plus a few key others that were quickly added in just above, including Hasidism, a *de jure* hot-button topic, are all guided more by immanence, than by transcendence, and many, if not all, of the various particular conceptions of the Love of God all deeply reflect this worldview. With Spinoza having explicitly argued against any and all transcendence, captured neatly in his motto of immanence, *Deus sive Natura*,

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ (Soloveitchik 2006, p. 95).

³¹ See Cohen's writings on neighbourly love, gathered and published as a message of defiance during the early years of the Third Reich (Cohen 1935), also in (Cohen 1924, pp. 145–95).

God or Nature, the point is almost too obvious with him, but even with our more existentialist modern Jewish thinkers, Rosenzweig and Buber, the focus is very much on God's presence, on God as a very real and personal dialogic partner, on the immanence of God, as well as on the immediate this worldly consequences for our actions, of love or otherwise. As with Mendelssohn, Buber and Rosenzweig certainly leave room for the transcendent divine, the former via panentheism, and the latter two via not explicitly ruling it out, but for all surveyed above, the world that God created and deemed "very good" is both a source of God's love and that by which and through which we love God in return. Finally, here it should be noted that the Love of God orients the political as well, modernity's separation of church and state notwithstanding. Though the idea of the state is somewhat lacking in Rosenzweig's *Star*, the idea that the Love of God motivates and orients ethical action and undergirds social cohesion is common if not ubiquitous in modern Jewish thought as well. Thus, the Love of God in modern Jewish thought also suggests itself as a principle of political theology. Indeed, hopefully now the Love of God in Jewish thought *simpliciter*, not just modern Jewish thought, suggests itself as a central subject of study in the relatively new and budding field of Jewish political thought.

In conclusion, then, it would seem that the challenge of reason in modernity to Judaism, which is posed by positivist modern science, rather than foiling or defeating Jewish Law, has offered modern Judaism fertile soil to further develop one of its most cardinal concepts and axioms, the Love of God. Mirroring modern science's rejection of transcendence and dismissal of the divine will as a valid explanation of being, though not completely giving it up as a point of belief (Spinoza being the exception), modern Judaism's focus on immanence—on this world, on the world of science—has allowed the cardinal concept of the Love of God to not only be maintained with surprising consistency, but, at least to my mind, has been injected with a certain kind of vitality; one that reflects the immediate existential and this worldly needs of the modern Jew, and suggests itself as ripe for further study. For example, this can be seen in the many Jewish grassroots organizations and eco-focused Jewish congregations that see their mission as an expression of the Jewish ideal of *Tikkun Olam*.

True, before the modern period, the Love of God was primarily understood as the mere and complete performance of the law, love was understood far more legalistically, but, and most importantly, here, the purpose of the law was more often than not also ultimately understood in practical, ethical, and worldly terms. The consequences of the law were in large part manifested here, on earth, in this life. Law was, in large part, naturalized. It was understood as a divine training regimen—communal, once national, as a constitution even—for natural, right action; for actions done in and for love; and, as justification for redemption, itself an act of love; for all the duties and responsibilities to our neighbour, to creation, to ourselves, and to God, which life may bring. However, this picture is not very different from the one that I have been at pains to describe regarding modern Jewish thought. Therefore, modern Jewish thought, when approached from the perspective of the Love of God, a perspective that is majority immanent, can and should be seen as consistent with pre-modern Jewish thought. Therefore, in turn, not only does the Love of God assert itself as ripe for study in modern Jewish thought, but, due to its parallel grounding in immanence with pre-modern Jewish thought, suggests itself as a lens by which we may better understand divine immanence throughout Jewish thought.

Of course, some things have changed, even and especially in the modern Jewish understanding of the concept of the Love of God. As Batnitzky notes, the protestant relegation of religion to the deeply personal, private, and internal emotive faculties that so greatly affected modern Judaism similarly affected the modern Jewish conception of the Love of God. Worried about our own proper loving worship and our own ethical conduct, the communal aspect of Judaism, has been similarly shirked by modern instantiations of the Love of God in Judaism. Buber's disdain for the law, his reticence regarding Jewish practice (something I think must be seen in the shadow of Spinoza), is a prime example. However, the immanentist tendencies of these modern instantiations can be seen to provide a valid means for re-incorporating the communal or collective, perhaps even national, back into Judaism. The example of *Tikkun Olam*, as mentioned just earlier, is but one such avenue. The overt grounding of the social and, in turn, political on the concept of the Love of God in several of the

thinkers discussed is another. The role of the Love of God, if only in theory, in Zionist thought also comes to mind. These immanentist tendencies, more often than not, located in and around the concept of the Love of God, a fundamental principle of Judaism, thereby allow Judaism itself to avoid the pitfalls of essentializing metaphysics precluded by Kant. Focused on the laws of nature and their guidance for right conduct, being understood as God's providence, the question of God's essence is either marginalized, avoided, or completely naturalized, and the question of action, of ethics, expressed and understood via immanence, becomes primary.

As I have tried to show, the concept of the Love of God in modern Jewish thought is consistently grounded in an immanent worldview. Recognizing this fact should allow us to change the narrative of how Judaism has evolved or adapted in modernity and to introduce a degree of consistency into the narrative, and on so central an issue and value at that. Further, it should allow us to see modern Jewish thought as a legitimate and vital continuation of the Jewish tradition, tempering the more common motif in the narrative of a radical break. Additionally, insofar as this immanent world view is present in pre-modern Jewish expressions of the Love of God, the above suggests the Love of God as a refractive lens for understanding divine immanence through Jewish thought, *simpliciter*. Finally, though this will have to be taken up elsewhere, the question of what a modern Jewish ethic grounded in a Love of God would look like can and should also be asked.

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