

# LOGIC OF SCIENCE VS. THEORY OF CREATION: THE “AUTHORITY OF ANNIHILATION” IN HERMANN COHEN’S LOGIC OF ORIGIN\*

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## *Abstract*

The difference between Hermann Cohen’s systematic philosophy and his philosophy of religion can be determined via the logical “Judgment of Contradiction,” viewed as an “Authority of Annihilation.” In Cohen’s *Logic of Pure Knowledge* the “Judgment of Contradiction” acts as a “means of protection” against “falsifications” that may have arisen on the pathway through the previous judgments of “origin” and “identity.” Cohen thematizes these operations in his *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, too. However, there they do not form the grounding for natural science but rather for the knowledge of nature as *creation* in a strict correlation to God’s uniqueness. Any admixture between God and nature is the falseness that must be excluded via the “Authority of Annihilation.” The Being of God places the world over against the possibility of its own radical Non-Being. Yet at the same time, a second mode of Negation, a relative Nothing providing continuity for the world’s being-there (*Dasein*), grounded in the “Logic of Origin,” retains its validity. In Cohen’s view a Creation “in the beginning” stands side by side with a continuous “renewal of the world” (*hiddush ha-’olam*).

## **Keywords**

annihilation; Cohen, Hermann; creation; logic; religion of reason; science

Since the beginning of research on Hermann Cohen, the difference between his systematic philosophy and his philosophy of religion has been a topic of much discussion. My thesis is as follows: The “Judgment of Contradiction” within Cohen’s *Logic of Pure Knowledge* (*Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, LrE),<sup>1</sup> viewed as an “Authority of Annihilation, of making into Nothing,” a *Vernichtungs-Instanz* (LrE 106–107), creates

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\* An earlier version of this essay was published in *Verneinung, Andersheit und Unendlichkeit im Neukantianismus*, ed. Pierfrancesco Fiorato (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008), 47–67.

<sup>1</sup> Cohen’s *Logic* is cited from *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (2nd ed., 1914), vol. 6 of *Werke*, ed. H. Holzhey et al. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1977–).

the logical difference between two ways of formulating the methodological springboard of Cohen's thought, the logic of "origin."<sup>2</sup> Cohen thematizes his logic of origin twice: once as a principle of *scientific* knowledge of nature, in his *Logic*, and once as the foundation of a *religious* concept of nature, i.e., of nature as the Creation of God. This latter ultimately flows into his posthumous *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism* (RoR).<sup>3</sup> I argue that via the concept of Annihilation, the difference between the two formulations can be precisely expressed in methodological terms. First I shall examine the role of this "Authority of Annihilation" in the *Logic of Pure Knowledge*. Second, I explore its significance in the framework of the philosophy of religion.

### I. *Logic of Pure Knowledge*

Let us look at the meaning of *Vernichtungs-Instanz* in the *Logic of Pure Knowledge*. On the analogy of Kant's "Synthetic Principles of Pure Understanding" within the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cohen organized his *Logic* as a twelvefold chain of "Judgments" (instead of categories<sup>4</sup>) whose coordinated interplay is meant to lay the foundation of the scientific knowledge of nature. "The Judgment of Contradiction" is the third of the three "Judgments of the Laws of Thought" at the beginning of the *Logic*. First comes the "Judgment of Origin." This concerns the disposition of what Cohen calls a "question."<sup>5</sup> Such a question arises when a context of knowledge that has become self-evident turns doubtful. This occurs when, e.g., certain "claims"

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<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth introduction to the principle of origin, see Werner Flach, "Cohen's *Ursprungsdenken*," in *Hermann Cohen's Critical Idealism*, ed. Reinier Munk (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 41–65.

<sup>3</sup> Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1972) [RoR]; idem, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt: Kauffmann, 1929) [RV].

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 86–88.

<sup>5</sup> On this complex, see Pierfrancesco Fiorato, "Il logos della domanda: Pensiero dell'Origine e problematologia," in *Unità della ragione e modi dell'esperienza. Hermann Cohen e il neokantismo*, ed. Gian Paolo Cammarota (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2009), 175–188; see esp. section 2, 177–180, on the form of question as a "kind of judgment" (LrE 83).

appear, such as a result of a sensation,<sup>6</sup> claims that cannot find a place in the canon of what was previous, i.e., claims that are not determined within its relations. That generates an occasion to reinterrogate the knowledge context. To shape such interrogation as a fundamental act of thinking is the content of the “Judgment of Origin.” As part of this process, thinking as a whole turns away from what has become self-evident, naturalized, and seemingly given, in the direction of what Cohen calls a “Nothing.”

But this Nothing, in which departure is taken from the seemingly given, is not an absolute Nothing but rather a relative one. It is relative in regard to a task that is necessarily bound up with the act of turning away, because turning away only has meaning and purpose if a new context of knowledge is looked at and constituted, something different from what was previously known.<sup>7</sup> So the turning away to a “relative Nothing” leads to a turning around from this Nothing toward a reversal, or a turning back of the turning away: an “Umkehr der Abkehr”<sup>8</sup> back in the direction toward something—not the previous something, but rather a new process of grounding. The generation of this new grounding forms the content of the thinking of Origin. The precisely observed point of turning around and reversal, toward the new context, the genesis of a further determinable beginning of thought as such, is called by Cohen “the Judgment of Origin.” For that reason, what arises is not an already formulated determined ‘A’ but rather an ‘X’ lying ‘before it.’ (LrE 83). What comes to pass in the “Judgment of Origin” is a purely determinable “X,” a something that is beginning—a *metaxy*, to use Plato’s term: a “thought in between” (LrE 104).<sup>9</sup>

Second, this Judgment is followed by the “Judgment of Identity.” Here, what previously appears to hover in pure determinability is grasped and condensed through a gesture of repetition, of reflection, into a self-referent determinate “A.” The proposition that determines and expresses this is “A is A” (LrE 95). The act of thinking that this proposition symbolizes is in the strictest sense a

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<sup>6</sup> On the “claim of sensation,” an example of a central motif in thought that “all categories tend to answer;” see LrE 434ff. and *passim*; quotation on 437.

<sup>7</sup> This leads to a purely “logical” concept of the future; see LrE 63–64.

<sup>8</sup> See Jakob Gordin, *Untersuchungen zur Theorie des unendlichen Urteils* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1929), 94–103 at 99.

<sup>9</sup> See Pierfrancesco Fiorato, *Geschichtliche Ewigkeit. Ursprung und Zeitlichkeit in der Philosophie Hermann Cohens* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1993), 60–66.

non-empty tautology, a fortifying and formation of determination via selfness (*Selbigkeit*).<sup>10</sup> Two errors in particular should be avoided here. First, one must not translate the formula “ $A = A$ ,” used *inter alia* by Fichte, into literal logic and read it as a statement of equation “ $A = (\text{equals}) A$ .” “Equality” in Cohen’s view presupposes mathematics and belongs to the logic of the object.<sup>11</sup> However, here we are still in its antechamber, and with “identity” can discuss only the first step of a determination. Therefore Cohen’s formula “ $A$  is  $A$ ” must not be mixed up with ambivalent concepts of “ $A = A$ .” Second, we have to avoid thinking that “ $A$  is  $A$ ” already conceptualizes a connection between two different determinations, such as in the sense of a predication.<sup>12</sup> What we have here is exclusively an assurance, the *affirmation* of a determination as such, though still devoid of any relation to what is distinguished as different. This second consideration is important for the subsequent thoughts.

The *affirmation* as the formation of an “ $A$ ” must be joined, as Cohen sees it, by a third act of Judgment. The “ $A$ ” requires a “means of protection” vis-à-vis “falsifications of its content.” The “Judgment of Contradiction” provides this protection in the form of an “Authority of Annihilation” (LrE 106). If the identity is understood as a *dedicatio*, a positive bestowal or ‘conferment’ of a determination—Cohen cites the Neo-Platonist Apuleius<sup>13</sup>—then negation emerges as an *abdication*, as the ‘rejection’ of a determination. He writes: “More significant than *dedicatio* is the word *abdication*. And we are probably not mistaken in supposing that the latter likely led to the former” (LrE 106). So the “Judgment of Contradiction” appears in a certain respect to precede the Judgment of Identity. At the same time, Cohen links it with strong pathos: “For thought, between  $A$  and a non-identical  $A$  there is no reconciliation. It has to become Nothing, rather to be destroyed into Nothing, so that a Judgment of its content can only be implemented in this direction. It is the vital issue of Judgment that it be able to establish this Authority in itself, the ‘*Authority of Annihilation*’” (LrE 107).<sup>14</sup> Cohen calls the establishment

<sup>10</sup> See LrE 94.

<sup>11</sup> See LrE 102 and 482–486.

<sup>12</sup> See LrE 97–100.

<sup>13</sup> See LrE 101.

<sup>14</sup> On the great “weight” that Cohen accords negation as annihilation, see the comments by Paul Natorp in his letter to Albert Görland, November 21, 1902; see Helmut Holzhey, *Cohen und Natorp*, 2 vols. (Basel: Schwabe, 1986), 2:301–302.

of this Authority itself a law: in the sense in which Identity is a “Law of Thought of truth,” Contradiction and Annihilation form a “Law of Thought of untruth” (LrE 115). This does not serve, for example, to establish knowledge of *error*: “That would be psychological.” No: “For logic there *exists* what is false” (LrE 115, my emph.). Untruth must, like truth, come to validity in a ‘positive’ form—in order to be considered destroyed.

Where does this strong emphasis derive from? What in particular does it mean here when Cohen speaks about the “Judgment of a content” that has not come about at all? For, a content in the sense of a determination according to the type of “A” is supposed to be specifically excluded by Annihilation. So basically a “Judgment of a content” cannot come to pass. For that reason, Cohen also speaks of a “Judgment before the Judgment” (LrE 106); and he calls this “Judgment before the Judgment”—in three different places, and thus very emphatically—the “activity of Judgment” (LrE 107, 108, 116). “It is the Judgment itself that denies this right and value to a content that presumes to become the content of a Judgment” (LrE 107).

But what is such a presuming content? This question leads us back to the plane of the “Judgment of Origin,” because a “content that presumes to become the content of the Judgment,” yet without achieving that, can at best be thematized ‘before’ Identity, i.e., only on the plane of the determinable that is in the process of coming into being. Correspondingly, Cohen writes: “There is no non-A, there can be no non-A that, in contrast with the Nothing of the Origin, might have a closed content” (LrE 107). To be sure, the question of the ‘non-A’ arises only after the A has become thematic—to that extent, Contradiction comes ‘after’ Identity, and the “sequence of its use must not be altered and thus confounded” (LrE 120). But the plane on which the ‘non-A’ becomes manifest as something different lies ‘before’ Identity, namely, with the Nothing of Origin. The ‘closed character’ of a content is already formed in the initial question, in that very first “kind of a Judgment,” and to refuse closedness is the Annihilation of the ‘non-A.’ We thus find ourselves on the level of the laying of the foundation of the first “Judgment of the Laws of Thought.” Helmut Holzhey correctly notes that the principle of Contradiction is “directly connected with the introduction of the principle of Origin.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Holzhey, *Cohen und Natorp*, 2:238.

From this it follows that no non-identical can be presupposed that might then be destroyed in a second step. The difference of something admissible over against the non-admissible is to be determined at the genesis of the beginning of the Judgment itself. But where does the claim of something non-admissible derive from? The question about the non-A arises, as stated, only ‘after’ Identity—even if the answer must be sought ‘before.’ But one may ask how this pointed question in Cohen can arise in the first place. Is not “Identity” sufficient to ensure the determination? We have, after all, as yet no multiplicity. All that is of concern here is the beginning of determination as such, and one would assume that an act of assurance that (and this is what “Identity” means) inaugurates *ex definitione* the validity of a substrate formulated in selfhood would be sufficient. Why is there in addition this protection via Annihilation? Falsity can threaten an act of determination in the form of contradictory predications or formations of relation, but then we are in a quite ‘later’ stage of the formation of Judgment. The principle of the excluded Contradiction was indeed generally understood to determine an already existing substrate of determination—i.e., it gives it a precise place within a conceptual system as a product of differentiating the predicate. Thus, the Identity of an A can be positively further determined by the predicates a, b, c, and so forth. At the same time, on the other hand, the A is protected from contradictions by excluding from it the predicates  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ , and so forth, if positive predication there would lead to a contradiction. To do this for all predications that come into question means forming a content: it takes on shape as a concept within a system.

Cohen also discusses this process of a determining, ultimately complete and total disjunction in his *Logic*, but not until the ninth Judgment, the “Judgment of Concept.”<sup>16</sup> There, in the so-called “Law of Thought of the system,” he is concerned once again with “truth,” but now “in relation to the content and meaning of the concepts that join together within it” (LrE 395). But it is precisely in these linkages joining together that one finds “the difference between the *system of truth* and the *truth of Identity*” (LrE 395, my emphasis): in Jakob Gordin’s words, a “non-P” determined by a predicate is “not a negation of the attempt to injure P in its identity”—that

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<sup>16</sup> See LrE 382–386, 392–396; on the “disjunctive conclusion” as a methodological principle of research, see 577–579; Gordin, *Untersuchungen*, 75–78.

would be a non-A that should be destroyed; rather, it is a “symbol of the exclusion of P.”<sup>17</sup> In this way, negation here appears as an aspect for determining the content. In comparison with the principle of Annihilation on the plane of the logic of principles, that is a concept of Contradiction that is almost weak, but in any case different. In looking at the “Judgment of Contradiction,” it would appear that Cohen was locating his identical approach A in the center of a defensive constellation—as if thought had to organize a phalanx of defense and annihilation, in whose center, indeed by means of which, the identical A establishes itself. Cohen evidently saw pure knowledge threatened by a fundamental danger already in its first beginnings. However, I doubt that this danger has an adequate exact meaning in the *Logic of Pure Knowledge*.

## II. *Philosophy of Religion*

A different picture emerges if we look at Cohen’s philosophy of religion. There, from the very beginning, what is central is the protective formation, or rather the formation facilitated by protection, of a content that only becomes thinkable at all via the Annihilation of non-A, namely the concept of God. But as will become apparent, God himself is not A, whose Identity is now to be determined. Rather here, as in Cohen’s *Logic*, the focus is on nature. However, this is a nature, and thus an A, that is thought in correlation to God, namely as his Creation. It concerns nature as something created. The A to be determined is thus, methodologically speaking, the correlation between nature and God that arises in nature. But initially, the prerequisite for this is an exact *separation* between the two correlates. So in the beginning, there is the draft or projection of an idea of God in the form of a radical non-nature, and nature as a radical non-divinity. The non-A to be destroyed is both in a unity: the concrete presumption of a God in the shape of nature, and a theomorphic nature. *God and nature commingled*—repeatedly excoriated by Cohen as “pantheism”—is the falsehood which must expressly and without surcease be termed untruth. This protection of the

<sup>17</sup> Gordin, *Untersuchungen*, 77. For a more recent approach that conceives of the principle of Contradiction in a similar sense as a “determinant of determination,” see Werner Flach, *Erkenntniskritik, Logik, Methodologie. Grundzüge der Erkenntnislehre* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1994), 275–284.

correlation A demands that the “Authority of Annihilation” have its own effect on the plane of the logic of Origin. In the philosophy of religion, we have a logic of Origin that can be successfully set in motion only through destroying a non-A.

*Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism* takes this into account already in the sequencing of its chapters. The first chapter, on “God’s uniqueness,” presents a God whom Cohen appropriates from Jewish tradition, in particular the Hebrew Bible, while giving at the same time a philosophical interpretation of that tradition. Central here is the narrative of revelation to Moses in the burning bush. The decisive phrase God uses here about himself is, in Cohen’s translation: “I am that I am.”<sup>18</sup> Through this statement, the unique God as foundational Being is introduced into the discussion of the philosophy of religion from the sources of Judaism, even if here, at the beginning of the book, this inclusion cannot yet be adequately justified; that will not be done until the discussion of sin and reconciliation. This God, as expressed by “unique,” is something incomparable vis-à-vis all else that is. Thus Cohen arrives at the strong thesis that God and *only* God has Being. Contrasted with that, the world is Non-Being; it is a “Being-there,” a “Dasein” or “Becoming.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, already here the determinable something-of-Creation emerges, the predecessor X to the correlation A, via a separation between Being and Non-Being, and via the apportioning of these aspects of contrast and antagonism to one of the two correlates.

The topic of chapter 2, “Service of Images,” is how to protect the conceptual religious-philosophical complex that is indicated by the one and only Being of God from possible falsification. The exclusion of any basis for comparability with anything at or in the world is anchored concretely in a religious manner.<sup>20</sup> Cohen quotes again from the Hebrew Bible, and in particular the prophets’ criticism of the customary practice of sacrifice, e.g., their criticism of humans’ belief that they are able to enter a relation of exchange or even of image Creation with God. This critique is the religious

<sup>18</sup> Exod 3:14; see Cohen, *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie* (1915), vol. 10 of *Werke*, 21; RoR 42 (RV 49: “Ich bin, der ich bin”).

<sup>19</sup> RoR 44–45 (RV 51–52: “Dasein”), RoR 60, 65–66 (RV 69–70, 75–76: “Werden”), and *passim*.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Kenneth Seeskin, “Hermann Cohen on Idol Worship,” in “*Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*.” *Tradition and the Concept of Origin in Hermann Cohen’s Later Work*, ed. Helmut Holzhey, Gabriel Motzkin, and Hartwig Wiedebach (Hildesheim: Olms, 2000), 107–116.



pendant to the logical “Authority of Annihilation.” It is, if you will, the religious figure or shape of the Judgment of Annihilation, the “protection” of the uniqueness from any analogy to knowledge of nature, and any admixture.

Chapter 3, “Creation,” then carries out the logic of Origin prepared in this manner as the logic of Creation. It is the actual parallel to the “Judgment of Origin” in the *Logic of Pure Knowledge*. Here the focal point is the path of thought toward A as something created. The character of being something created must already be granted to the purely determinable X that lies ‘before’ this. How then do Negation and/or Annihilation shape up here, where the correlation to nature turns thematic over and beyond mere uniqueness? What does it mean to think of Creation as a correlation of two incomparabilities? In order to illustrate this in contrast with the foundation of natural science, I go back to a form of Judgment that Cohen mentions both in the *Logic of Pure Knowledge* and in *Religion of Reason*, namely the so-called “infinite Judgment.”<sup>21</sup> I will limit myself here to a single aspect that shows how, on the one hand, this complex Judgment type serves to lay the systematic-philosophical foundation, and on the other hand, characteristically modified, the Creation-logical foundation. Initially it has to be made clear how the two modes resemble each other.

To this end, it must first be clarified in what aspects the two modes are the same. Both in the grounding of natural science and in the philosophy of religion, the infinite Judgment can be understood as a “negation of privation.” How that should be conceived will soon be apparent. The decisive difference will then lie in the respective gesture of thought through which privation is negated in one case or another. It depends on the differing ontological status that the privative element has in connection with scientific knowledge, on the one hand, and in the question of Creation on the other. Let us take as an example the problem of immortality, in Cohen’s view a subject subsumed under ethics. On first glance, that would appear to be unfavorable. He alludes to the problem of immortality in his *Ethics of Pure Will (Ethik des reinen Willens)* but does

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<sup>21</sup> LrE 87–90, passim; RoR 62–63, 66 (RV 72, 76); in addition, see Cohen, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (3rd ed., 1918), *Werke*, 1.1:790. See also Holzhey, *Cohen und Naturp*, 1:193–197; he states that in the LrE, there is “notably little” comment on the infinite Judgment; it has been “supplanted” by the “Origin of Judgment” (195).

not make it a constitutive element. His reserve springs from the fact that due to methodological reasons, a “hypothesis [...] cannot be carried out for the immortality of the individual soul” (*Ethik* 435–436).<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, and this is decisive at the moment, he treats it, following the paradigm of Kant,<sup>23</sup> as an example of the infinite Judgment, in part because the linguistic form of the concept “immortality” makes the idea of Judgment vivid.<sup>24</sup>

The first question is about the concept of the human being. Here too, following the above sketch of the Judgment of Origin, the method is to proceed from this question to a philosophically precise problem. So initially there is a turning away from the ostensible givenness of what is human to a (as we now can say) Nothing of the human being. But this only occurs in order, in a renewed reversal of course, to leave behind this Nothing as well, moving toward a determination of the human being. The determination is intended to render possible a new insight, a difference contrasting with the ostensible givenness, indeed with all givenness. The question involves the possibility of reconstructing the human being as an idea. If now human immortality is in particular the problem we proceed from, the path of a double reversal—i.e., this special kind of double negation—aims to understand the human being via the idea of his immortality. Within it, we would have the ideal determination of the human being, as related to the initial problem as point of departure; and the task of ethics, conceived as the “doctrine of the human being” (*Ethik* 1), would now be to teach the human as an immortal being, and to assess volition and action from that vantage. But mortality doesn’t disappear in this way as a feature of human life—rather, it now appears as a deficiency in a precise and positive sense vis-à-vis the idea of immortality.

It is this *positive concept of deficiency* that shapes mortality into a philosophical problem. Mortality takes on the character of a privation, in Aristotelian terms a *steresis*.<sup>25</sup> It is immaterial here whether

<sup>22</sup> See Wiedebach, “Unsterblichkeit und Auferstehung im Denken Hermann Cohens,” in “*Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*.” *Tradition and the Concept of Origin*, 431–457, here at 436.

<sup>23</sup> See Kant, *Logik* (ed. Jäsche), §22, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften [Akademie-Ausgabe] (Berlin: Reimer, 1900–), 9:103–104.

<sup>24</sup> See LrE 88–89.

<sup>25</sup> See Cohen, “Charakteristik der Ethik Maimunis” (1908), in *Kleinere Schriften* IV, vol. 15 of *Werke*, 212; in general, see Johannes Fritsche, “Privation,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Basel: Schwabe, 1989), 7:1378–1383, here at 1378–1379.

each individual case of a privation can be expressed in language through an *alpha privativum* or by the prefix ‘in-’ (Latin) or ‘un-’ (English, German). Cohen challenges that expressly in the *Religion of Reason*.<sup>26</sup> It is only a question of the logical content. Seen from that circumstance, immortality appears as the “negation of privation,” brought about by the Judgment of Origin. And we can go so far as to say: only from this negation of privation do we see deficiency, which human mortality represents, at all. Immortality itself becomes the “Origin of mortality.”<sup>27</sup> So to conceive of the latter as a problem thus presupposes that one has already entered the *metaxy*, the ‘between’ of a new approach. Because only from the vantage of this new approach does the deficiency become visible. One clearly sees that deficiency here could not (and should not) be completely negated, destroyed. It must *via negationis* flow into the idea of the human being and be recognized there. The human being then is *positively* determined and defined in two respects: on the one hand, privatively, as a mortal creature; on the other, ideally, as an immortal creature. The task of systematic foundation is to bring both sides into a unity.

That does *not* hold when it comes to the idea of God. In Cohen’s view, God lacks any privative aspect. Divine Being and Natural Being exclude each other. Consequently, to think the negation of privation, i.e., the infinite Judgment or “Judgment of Origin” in relation to the correlation of God and nature, results in a different distribution of deficiency and ideality than in connection with the knowledge of nature in the framework of systemic logic, or the knowledge of man in the framework of the *Ethik des reinen Willens*.<sup>28</sup> When Cohen, echoing Maimonides, states that God is not “inert,”<sup>29</sup> then this is likewise the negation of a privation. But the privation must not be preserved as a positive aspect of determination in the concept of God. What is exclusively involved here is the destruction of falsity. To wish to associate God in any way with the attribute “inert” would be precisely that presumed content of a Judgment

<sup>26</sup> Using an example from Maimonides; see RoR 64 (RV 73).

<sup>27</sup> Gordin, *Untersuchungen*, 123; on the difference with Kant, see 121–124.

<sup>28</sup> An example from natural philosophy is Democritus’s concept of the atom, whose ideality came into being “to defend against splitting” (LrE 87).

<sup>29</sup> RoR 64 (RV 73). Cf. Cohen, “Charakteristik der Ethik Maimunis,” *Werke*, 15:220: God is “nicht unmächtig [not lacking in might],” according to Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, part 1, chap. 58; in the French translation by Salomon Munk (3 vols.; Paris: A. Franck, 1856–1866) which Cohen used, “il n’est pas impuissant” (1:244).

against which the “Judgment of Contradiction” is directed. This act of Judgment belongs directly at the beginning of religious philosophizing and also in the preliminaries of the A that now must be generated. “When God becomes cognizable through the attribute of non-inertia, he becomes cognizable as Creator, *Creation is included in his concept*. [...] This Creation rather means the Being of God, which is the Being of Origin.”<sup>30</sup>

But as we have seen, the A is a correlation A; so here too nature, but as a created nature. Viewed from the vantage of God, A is not exclusively God himself, but rather his position in correlation to something to which he is conceived as impacting on as a uniqueness. And in this way it becomes clear how in religion deficiency and ideality can be fused into a unity in their own way. God’s “non-inertia” is the ideality before which the world as deficiency becomes problematic. To repeat: In the logic of Creation, unlike the logic of natural science, we have the sharp ontological separation between Being and Being-there, existence, between God and world. And the separation is brought about and protected to a decisive degree through the “Authority of Annihilation” of the Judgment of Contradiction. Two things relevant to the question of Nothing derive from this position when it is considered against the backdrop of the logic of Origin discussed earlier. On the one hand, the correlation A of the logic of Creation must establish itself indirectly, by a detour via a *relative* Nothing. Here too we have a question that proceeds from a world context that has become commonsensical, self-evident; it then turns from that, and returning again, provides the basis anew for the world context. The inertia ascribed to the world should be judged via the non-inertia of God, and should be integrated into a creative becoming. This relative Nothing of Origin is also the essential methodological springboard for the dynamics of Creation. And because Cohen thinks Divine uniqueness is identical with Creation, he also sees it in identity with this Nothing: the Nothing that is relative from the correlation A becomes identical with the Being of God. But precisely this Being as uniqueness demands, on the other hand, the Annihilation of all presumed content, which contaminates the determination of the correlation with false analogies and admixture. So the relative Nothing of Origin is directly accompanied by a *non-relative* Annihilation. What appears in

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<sup>30</sup> My translation, from RV 75 (cf. RoR 65).

the logic of Creation as Nothing is thus a binary: on the one hand, the relative Nothing of the logic of Origin, and on the other, a Nothing that appears in pure Annihilation, a “Non-Being that is absolutely non-existent,” as Gordin phrases it.<sup>31</sup>

So we find that corresponding to the correlation between God and the nature of Creation is a second correlation, between the relative Nothing of Origin and the absolute Nothing of separation. In the double motion of this double Nothing, as conceived in thought, the X determinable in religious term arises. It develops into the self-identical A of created nature. In this double movement of thought of Nothing, that “activity of Judgment” takes on a form that is characterized as the “Judgment of Contradiction” in the *Logic of Pure Knowledge*. In this *act*, this *activity* of Judgment, the relative Nothing of Origin coincides with the absolute Nothing. This is a *coincidentia oppositorum* of a distinctive kind, since it lies solely in “activity.” If one wished to fixate both forms of Nothing as results of this activity, i.e., as completed and ready thoughts, their unification would be inconceivable. The formation of the A of Creation occurs exclusively *in actu*; in *actuality*, the A comes into being from Nothing, namely as the placement of a content within nature (*Naturinhalt*) over against its own absolute destructedness, i.e., annihilation, in the uniqueness of God. This is the “genuine true Nothing of Not” (*das echte wahre Nichts des Nicht*), which for Cohen arises via “annulment, or better annihilation,” as formulated already in the *Logic of Pure Knowledge* (LrE 107). This Nothing in particular makes of Creation more than the methodological thought of a religiously underpinned natural science. The Being of God places the world over against the possibility of its own radical Non-Being. In religious discourse, this means: God creates from this Nothing, and in derivable contrast to it. The Annihilation at the beginning of the formation of content generates the *nihil* of a *creatio ex nihilo* in the framework of the logic of Creation. Yet at the same time, the second mode of the relative Nothing, grounded in the logic of Origin, retains its validity. Religious reflection is also under the critical Authority of justification of logical-scientific reason. And in Cohen’s view, this does not permit a something to spring forth *ex nihilo*, but rather in any case “*ab nihilo*” (LrE 84)—i.e., a new formation establishing continuity as a detour via the relative Nothing of

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<sup>31</sup> Gordin, *Untersuchungen*, 68.

Origin. Cohen even wishes to assert that the Hebrew word that “seems to correspond to Nothing (*‘ayin*)” does not at all mean “the Nothing as such, but rather the relative infinitude of privation. But this lies [...] only within the divine unique Being.”<sup>32</sup> To use concepts from religious tradition, a Creation “in the beginning” stands side by side with a continuous “renewal of the world (*hiddush ha-‘olam*).”<sup>33</sup> Both have equal weight: the statement that “In the beginning God created the heaven and earth” (Gen 1:1), and the extolling of God in the daily morning prayer as the one “Who renews in his goodness continually each day again [and again] the work of the beginning.”<sup>34</sup> The religious fusion of these two forms of Nothing via the uniqueness of God split open once again, and no discursive logic is able to bring this split into a conceptual unity. The *ab nihilo* demanded by the logic of Origin of uniqueness stands *side by side* with the *ex nihilo* induced by the function of separation and protection of the “Authority of Annihilation.”

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<sup>32</sup> My translation, from RV 76 (cf. RoR 66).

<sup>33</sup> See RoR 68 (RV 78–79); on Creation from Nothing, see RoR 63 (RV 72).

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in RoR 68 (RV 78).