

DIALOGIC MONOLOGUE: HERMANN COHEN'S PHILOSOPHY OF PRAYER

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Abstract

As a leading light of the Marburg School of Neo-kantianism, Hermann Cohen devoted much of his career as a philosopher to a recasting of the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant. A significant departure from Kantian thought can be noted, however, in his final project, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism* (*Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*). Here, Cohen diverges sharply from the sage of Königsberg on several issues, including the moral significance of public and private piety. Through a reading of *Religion der Vernunft* against discussions of parallel topics in Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (*Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*), the present paper outlines the departure of Cohen from Kantian philosophy of religion on the issues of religious language, affect, and the role of the ideal, and considers Cohen's own constructive reevaluation of the moral and political significance of prayer.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant, Hermann Cohen, religious language, religious affections, prayer, piety.

Introduction

As a discipline whose contemporary form, like "aesthetics,"¹ has historical roots in the Enlightenment, "philosophy of religion" has tended to ignore, or to treat in a dismissive way, the topic of religious practice (i.e., ritual, devotional piety, etc.). Epistemological questions, such as the relation between reason and revelation and the possibility of miracles, and metaphysical questions such as the compatibility of God's goodness with the existence of evil, have been given pride of place in the rationalistic discourse on religion that one finds in Leibniz, Hume, Descartes, and their latter-day disciples. Among those who do give attention to religious practice,

¹ As is often pointed out, our modern use of the term "aesthetics" has its roots in Alexander Baumgarten's 1750 *Aesthetica*.

only to denigrate it in caustic fashion, is Immanuel Kant, who famously characterizes much of what passes for worship (*Gottesdienst*), in churches and synagogues, as counterfeit worship (*Aferdienst*). In the area of philosophy of religion, Hermann Cohen stands as one of the most adamantly systematic and faithful followers of Kant in intellectual history. Yet he diverges from Kant most sharply on precisely this issue of practice. Historically, philosophy of religion has not included many philosophies of liturgy, but Cohen wants to raise this very issue for rationalistic discussion and thematization. His divergence from Kant on this matter, and his original method of thinking philosophically about Jewish liturgy, will be the topic of this essay. Most crucial among his discussions of liturgy are probably his chapters on atonement and *Yom Kippur*,² but no further from Cohen's heart was the matter of prayer as such (i.e. in its daily or weekly forms). The latter topic is especially important for us because it demonstrates the aesthetic sensibility of Cohen's religious thought, a characteristic present only in negative form in Kant.

1. Rational Religion and the Problem of Ritual

“So much depends, when we wish to combine two good things, on the order in which we combine them!”³ The two good things to which Kant refers in this exclamation are, on the one hand, the liturgical and devotional forms that have formed pious people and that have been handed down historically and enacted within religious communities and, on the other hand, the rational religion that interprets universal moral principles as divine commands. “True *enlightenment*,” says Kant, consists in distinguishing the two by seeing the latter as primary and relegating to the former to a merely supporting role. Reversing the order of priority results in “fetishism,” according to Kant.⁴ When he comes to a discussion of prayer, Kant wishes to replace the rituals of personal, private, verbal prayer with the “spirit of prayer” that should pervade all one's deliberations and actions.⁵ Taken as a speech act, the only kind of ritual prayer acceptable to Kant would be that which takes place in the context of a religious assembly, where it serves to

² On which see Michael Zank's admirable *The Idea of Atonement in the Philosophy of Hermann Cohen* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000).

³ Immanuel Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* in *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, bd. 6 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1907), 179. / *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* in *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 197.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 195 / 210.

unite worshippers in their striving to realize the Kingdom of God on earth.⁶ There is clearly a psychology at work in Kant's treatment of prayer: both public prayer and the spirit of prayer practiced by the individual inculcate a spirit of adoration and devotion that has parallels with his discussions of the sublime in the third *Critique*. Public prayer serves to "elevate the emotions to the point of moral exaltation;⁷ his rationalistic reinvention of private prayer has a "soul-elevating power...the enlivening of the disposition to a life-conduct well-pleasing to God."⁸ Hermann Cohen's account of prayer differs from Kant's with respect to at least three issues: language, affect, and idealization.

2. Prayer and Form

For Kant, the verbal dimension of private prayer is what renders it ritualistic and therefore unworthy of inclusion in rational religion. Verbal prayer presupposes that God is affected by human supplication, which is to say, consequently, that it operates with an antiquated view of God. Prayer might have the salutary effect of stimulating a religious disposition within the one praying, but it does this a) without the possibility of fulfilling the commandments of God and b) in such a way that it loses whatever morally praiseworthy psychological effect it might have had through habituation, by dint of the repetition of the same linguistic forms. When it comes to individual prayer, "speech," says Kant, "has here no value in itself."⁹

For all of his dependence on the sage of Königsberg (and we do not wish to minimize the great extent to which Cohen *does* depend upon Kant),¹⁰ Cohen adumbrates a break with Kant in the very conception of his life-project, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*. For, putting aside the (significant) fact that Kant forcibly excludes Judaism from the concept of religion, describing it as an exclusivist, essentially political historical phenomenon with no redeeming moral or rational value,¹¹ the very idea of a symbiotic relationship between rational religion and the historical Jewish faith, suggested by Cohen's title and thematized in the introduction to the work of that name, flies in the face of the priority of rational religion over any and every expression of historical faith that we heard Kant

⁶ Ibid., 197 / 211.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 198 / 212.

¹⁰ The most complete and systematic treatment of Cohen's appropriation of Kant's critical philosophy remains Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, trans. John Denton (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).

¹¹ *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen*, 125ff / *Religion and Rational Theology*, 154ff.

declare at the head of the previous section. One detects this tension with Kant on precisely this point regarding the place of language in prayer, inimical to Kant but absolutely crucial for Cohen.

When Cohen speaks of “prayer,” he does not mean imageless meditation, nor does he refer to the spontaneous pouring out of one’s heart before God (the latter sort of prayer—characteristic of Lutheran pietism and of “enthusiasm” more generally—was probably one of the main targets of Kant’s attacks in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*). When he comes to the subject of prayer, Cohen has in mind the particular literary *forms* taken by, for example, the liturgy of daily prayer as well as, quintessentially, the psalms. That the psalms come down to us in lyric form has great significance for Cohen, who made poetry first among the arts, the “universal instrument of all the arts,” in his earlier *Aesthetics of Pure Feeling* (*Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*), a work that scarcely touches on religion, but which nonetheless treats the psalms in its discussions of poetry.¹² In *Religion of Reason*, the aesthetic priority of poetry among other arts, posited in Cohen’s *Ästhetik*, becomes an ethico-religious superiority compared with the plastic arts.¹³ While the latter arts demonstrate the susceptibility of all visual representation to the charge of idolatry, the psalmists and the prophets (characterized by Cohen as “poet-thinkers”) adamantly struggle against this temptation.¹⁴ Their poetry conceives of God as an idea or archetype, rather than as an image or semblance. Moreover, what separates the psalms from the literary and liturgical forms of polytheistic or pantheistic religions is that they “sing neither of God alone nor of man alone.”¹⁵ To cite a theme of great importance for Cohen’s conception of the (cor)relation between God and humankind, the psalms attest to and, indeed, effect the *nearness* of God (a formulation that one can, in fact, find in Ps. 73). Their special form neither encourages nor presupposes any kind of contact or union with God, yet their particular emotional pitch could never lead one to suppose that God is absolutely remote and indifferent to the concerns of humanity. The psalms are songs of correlation. In a fine turn of phrase, Cohen calls them a “monologue in the dialogue,”¹⁶ attesting to a relation with an Other who does not appear in the sensory world but to whom it is nonetheless possible to relate.

¹² Hermann Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1912), 367.

¹³ Kalman Brand rightly situates this decision in relation to a broader tendency to denigrate the visual arts to the benefit of poetry, with its biblical precedent in the psalms, within modernist exponents of “Jewish ethical monotheism” such as Cohen, Rosenzweig, and Formstecher. *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 19.

¹⁴ Hermann Cohen, *Die Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Leipzig: Gustav Fock, 1919), 62-67 / *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 53-58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 67 / 58.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 457 / 387.

On the issue of liturgical life, then, one of Cohen's major breaks with Kant concerns the function of language. While both thinkers presuppose a communal context for prayer, Kant privileges the *spirit* of prayer whereas his early 20th century disciple celebrates the peculiar *literary* and *linguistic* qualities of the psalmody, its lyrical "*Stilform*."¹⁷ Like Kant, Cohen admires the "socializing power" of prayer, its creation of a "common language" that rich and poor, young and old can share, but Cohen does not think that communal prayer ought to "displace individual prayer," rather only that the latter not forget or replace the former.¹⁸ Cohen does not denigrate individual prayer because, unlike Kant, he does not think that the *only* function of verbal prayer is a socializing one.¹⁹ To take an example, "a language is unavoidably necessary" for the capacity to trust God or to have confidence in God, "and prayer constitutes this form of language [*Sprachform*]."²⁰ Because there is no trust in God, no sense of the *self*-nearing of God,²¹ without language, it follows that religious language does not merely serve as an "instrument of the [Kantian moral] imagination," a psychological means of bolstering the will in its ethical resolve,²² or an addendum to practical reason, but as an element of religious life with its own, intrinsic *practical* significance. In his own quiet way, Cohen explodes the theoretical/practical division of rationality, at least when applied to the question of religion. "All the thinking of this language [i.e., prayer as 'the proper language of religion']," concludes Cohen in his chapter on prayer, "would remain theoretical if prayer were not that activity of language in which the will becomes active in all the means of thought."²³ This practical dimension is by no means limited to the reinforcing of moral dispositions: "the devotion of the prayer is the will *of religion*."²⁴ In the practice of prayer, the disposition toward both God *and* the neighbor are at stake.

For Kant, religion is ultimately a matter of the relationship between disposition (i.e. moral psychology) and duty (i.e. ethics or practical reason). Cohen introduces a third term into this Kantian schema: language. By virtue of its connection to the psalms, he considers the language of prayer under the rubric of the aesthetic, highlighting the creative and expressive qualities of religious

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 458 / 388.

¹⁹ What is more, Cohen gives more attention than does Kant to the precise (dialectical) nature of individual and communal prayer. See especially Ibid., 455-56 / 384-85. For instance, "the prayer is the universal means for the connection with God. Hence, it is universal humanity, the human *Gemeinschaft* by virtue of which the individual is able to seek, and entreat for, his own connection with God."

²⁰ Ibid., 439 / 372.

²¹ Ibid., 192 / 164.

²² *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen*, 197 / *Religion and Rational Theology*, 212.

²³ *Die Religion der Vernunft*, 474 / *Religion of Reason*, 399.

²⁴ Ibid., emphasis added.

language. In particular, Cohen reads the psalms as documents of longing and of love. He does not hesitate to draw a strict connection between the lyric form and desire.²⁵ In fact, he regards these features of desire and longing as one of the unique advances of the Hebrew psalms over the style of pre-existing Babylonian hymns. In the hands of the psalmists, the hymn form undergoes a radical transformation “from the praise of God into the longing of love for God.”²⁶ Cohen’s treatment of the psalms’ desire implies a psychology, one that would be inseparable from aesthetics as a related field of inquiry into the affective dimensions of human life. To this feature of Cohen’s philosophy of prayer we now turn.

3. Moral and Liturgical Affectivity

Already in the final work of Cohen’s critical system (comprised of logic, ethics, aesthetics, and psychology, though Cohen never completed a volume on this last area), completed before he began to turn his attention to his *Religion der Vernunft* project, Cohen had made “pure feeling,” which he came to define, even in this nonreligious work, as love for the individual human, the central term of his aesthetics.²⁷ In a transitional work intended to show the place of religion within the critical system he had labored to construct, Cohen first draws a sharp distinction between aesthetic and religious love, only to eventually re-describe the latter in terms of the former with respect to feeling. The creativity of aesthetic *eros*, directed toward the *natural form* of the individual human, is incommensurable with religious neighbor love, essentially compassion, which is directed toward the debased, suffering individual. There is a move, in religion, beyond purely sensuous (*schöpfersiches*) love. Compassion for suffering humans—not love of God—is the originally religious love, but what compassion is in relation to others, is *longing* in relation to God. Chastened, so to speak, by compassion for the suffering, *feeling* returns in the form of longing in the religion of reason;²⁸ prayer gives expression to this feeling.

Now Kant’s religion of reason seeks to render any visible manifestation of religious life (e.g. liturgy and prayer) delusional insofar as it interprets itself as “*the service of God* itself.” The only purpose fulfilled by public forms of worship is the

²⁵ Ibid., 249 / 212.

²⁶ Ibid., 250 / 213.

²⁷ Hermann Cohen, “Aesthetic feeling is love for man.” *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, vol. 1, 199. What is more, already in this work Cohen was including the psalms in his discussions of lyric poetry. See *ibid.*, 370.

²⁸ For this argument, see Hermann Cohen, *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie* (Giessen: Verlag von Alfred Töpelmann, 1915), 86, 89, 98.

“making-intuitive” of what is essentially invisible: the moral duties of human beings. Public liturgy and prayer strengthen the dispositions toward duty by showing them to constitute obedience to divine commands.²⁹ As we shall see in a moment, Cohen never separates the affective dimension of prayer from morality altogether, but he nonetheless declines to reduce this dimension to a set of “merely” moral dispositions. The way in which he allays the Kantian fear of delusion and enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) in public worship is by insisting on a particular structure of desire as constituting the affective relation to God. As in Levinas’s phenomenology of desire,³⁰ the desire of which Cohen speaks is one that is in principle incapable of being satisfied or fulfilled. The most it hopes for is God’s nearness, a proximity that absolutely forbids union.³¹ Prayer’s desire (*Sehnsucht*) neither aims at nor produces any “vision” of the divine, but remains a “quest” (*Suchen*) taken as an end in itself.³² As a correlation, the praying one is related to God dialogically, but as constituted by desire in the manner described by Cohen, prayer can only ever be monological. This “dialogic monologue,” claims Cohen, “could be created only by lyric poetry, which is the original form of love in longing.”³³ Prayer is therefore an essentially aesthetic phenomenon, a phenomenon of “pure feeling,” that has been transformed and idealized by the religion of reason.

As one might imagine, in good Kantian fashion, Cohen does ascribe to prayer a moral meaning, but he departs from Kant, however slightly, in attributing to liturgical prayer an intrinsic significance. While fundamentally connected to moral affectivity, the affections proper to the psalms have a value of their own, irreducible to moral dispositions. Insofar as prayer has the function of unifying the consciousness, contributing to that “singleness of heart” that renders the praying person a unique one dedicated to the unique God,³⁴ insofar as the spirit of the psalms, preserved in the liturgies of daily and weekly prayer down to this very day, bespeak a fundamental connection with the spirit of the prophets in their common valuation of the broken and contrite heart as the appropriate sacrifice before God,³⁵

²⁹ *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen*, 192 / *Religion and Rational Theology*, 208.

³⁰ “Metaphysical desire...desires beyond everything that can simply complete it. It is like goodness--the Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 34.

³¹ *Die Religion der Vernunft*, 190 / *Religion of Reason*, 163.

³² *Ibid.*, 442 / 374.

³³ *Ibid.*, 443 / 375.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 465 / 393-94. Here prayer becomes the moral-affective link in the correlation between the human being as unique one and the Eternal as Unique One: in reference to a Talmudic discussion of the recitation of the *Shema*, Cohen writes that when “the uniqueness of God is thought of with the right feeling, man has to make himself one for the unique God, to dedicate himself to him, to surrender his entire life to him.”

³⁵ *Der Begriff der Religion*, 101.

insofar as the affections can serve as the “motor of the pure will,”³⁶ prayer has an undeniable ethical significance.³⁷ For all this, it is in his treatment of prayer that Cohen makes perhaps his most significant departure from the religion of reason as Kant defined it. For prayer reveals nothing less than the failure of “merely” ethical religion. In some very telling words, Cohen writes, “Ethics defines its God to itself as the guarantor of morality on earth, but beyond the definition, beyond postulating this idea, its means fail. The peculiar contribution of religion to the ethical idea of God is the trust in God,” which prayer effects.³⁸ Ethics must learn how to pray. The idea of God as the moral ideal, however, is utterly ineffectual without the affective religious life enacted by prayer. One might object that Kant made exactly the same point in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, where he allows for worship insofar as it makes visible and intuitive what is essentially invisible: moral duty understood as divine command and as shared by one’s fellow members of the Kingdom of God. The key point to remember in this respect is that Cohen does not say that the moral idea of God requires either a “moral disposition,” or even “respect for divine command” as a supplement, but rather trust in God, dedication to the unique God. A psychological abyss separates the affect of respect for a command and the desire for the divine (even if this desire be redefined as desire for an ideal). The latter goes beyond psychological dispositions; it is rooted in and constituted by language (specifically in and by lyric), which returns us to our analysis in the second section. Prayer endeavors to speak with God, though it acknowledges the impossibility of God’s response. In another very telling statement, Cohen uses the very un-Kantian idea of soul and the very, shall we say, un-Cohenian language of *union* to illustrate this point: “the soul unites both persons of the dialogue [i.e. prayer]; for the soul itself is given by God, and is therefore not exclusively a human soul.”³⁹ As Levinas might put it, we bear in ourselves the *trace* of the eternal,⁴⁰ present only, however, as a longing for the nearness of the Eternal. If morality does not exhaust the meaning of prayer’s desire, what meaning does Cohen’s idealization of it bear? This will be our question in the concluding section of the essay.

³⁶ *Die Religion der Vernunft*, 165 / *Religion of Reason*, 141.

³⁷ In a discussion of Cohen’s *Ethik des reinen Willens*, Sylvain Zac helpfully distinguishes between affect qua “motor of the [pure] will” and affect as “empirical interest,” which would be inadmissible to any Kantian. Sylvain Zak, *La philosophie religieuse de Hermann Cohen* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1984), 164.

³⁸ *Die Religion der Vernunft*, 470 / *Religion of Reason*, 398.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 457 / 387.

⁴⁰ Levinas would, however, restrict the presence of this trace to the phenomenon of the other person.

4. What Prayer Knows

In his phenomenological study of liturgy, Jean-Yves Lacoste contends that “prayer represent[s] a certain practice of knowledge,” but that we should not understand the latter as the conceptual knowledge demanded by theology. As praying persons, we have *connaissance* rather than *savoir*, the knowledge of familiarity with a person or a practice rather than the kind of knowledge produced by abstracting theories.⁴¹ That is to say, we receive no experiential or cognitive *confirmation* that the God to whom we pray really hears us. Throughout his chapter on prayer, Cohen also concerns himself with the question “what, if anything, does prayer *know*?” For Kant, it would seem, prayer (and worship more generally) does not know anything in itself. It serves only to reinforce, through various practices, the *true* service of God, which is to say the fulfillment of moral duty. Against Kant, Cohen theorizes prayer as a “practice of knowledge,” in a stronger sense than Lacoste does, but without reducing prayer to an intellectual exercise.

In the last section, we saw a focus on what Lacoste might call the element of *connaissance* in Cohen’s explication of prayer. Prayer effects a trust in God, a love for God, a dedication of one’s entire being to God, but these affective dispositions do not constitute the possibility for an *experience* of God’s being. Of God we can only sense a certain nearness or proximity. In the place of experiential knowledge, and as a “supplement” to the affective knowledge of the prayers, Cohen suggests that readings from the Torah and from the *haftorah* were added to prayer services (Sabbath services to be sure, but also those services marking the celebration of High Holy Days) in order to make palpable the indispensability of knowledge and or teaching to prayer: “there is no prayer without this learning.”⁴² So the “house of prayer,” which Cohen distinguishes from a “house of God,” which would misleadingly suggest the localization of God’s experiential or physical presence, could be referred to rightly as a certain kind of school (*Schule*) by German Jews of Cohen’s day.⁴³ How could one know to whom one should pray, or for what one should pray, without Torah study? Cohen posits the inseparability of learning from prayer, not only because teaching provides prayer with its theological content, but also in order to show how prayer invests one affectively in the teaching. He refuses to speak of feeling and ideas separately, noting that the “feeling for the teaching which the prayer arouses and keeps active” is made possible by the “power of language..._for the ideas grew in this language and feelings intertwined with it.”⁴⁴ We see again here the importance for Cohen of

⁴¹ Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 142.

⁴² *Die Religion der Vernunft*, 454 / *Religion of Reason*, 384.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 464 / 393.

linguistic forms in their literary specificity. Only under these particular forms will prayer bring about the proper emotional connection to revealed knowledge (the “right feeling” as Cohen says).⁴⁵

Perhaps, in the absence of experiential and cognitive contact with God in the practice of prayer, the most essential type of knowledge produced by liturgical practice, according to Cohen, is self-knowledge. When one bears in mind that the posthumously published *Religion of Reason* was discovered in draft form, it becomes less surprising to find Cohen’s most definitive statement of the kind of knowledge presupposed and produced by prayer buried in the middle of his chapter on the subject. Here we discover that, more essential than the kind of knowledge that Torah study contributes to liturgical life (in fact, the sort of knowledge that renders one receptive to Torah) is the capability to tell the truth about oneself in all one’s faults and flaws. Cohen calls “truth (*Wahrheit*) the link between the theoretical and the practical and, consequently, between ethics and religion. For the category of “the individual,” an essentially religious category according to Cohen, “truth... becomes truthfulness.”⁴⁶ Taking as an example the early morning prayer’s opening admonition to “confess the truth...in [one’s] heart,” Cohen deems this call to truthfulness “the motto of the prayer.”⁴⁷ He goes on to note, “even if all other ends of the prayer be contested, this one is beyond doubt.”⁴⁸ How does one achieve the capacity to tell the truth about oneself? Answer: through *kavanah*, “the concentration of the soul, of the entire consciousness.”⁴⁹ The resulting state of consciousness will not resemble anything mystical; quite to the contrary, it will support the carrying out of one’s ethical duties. Insofar as it serves to effect singleness of heart and unity of purpose, “the prayer must profoundly connect religion and morality.”⁵⁰

Paradoxically, prayer is both the source and the goal of religious consciousness: no purity of soul without truthfulness, no truthfulness without purity of soul, and neither truthfulness nor purity of soul without the practice of prayer. In the most famous penitential psalm, whose theme of contrition, so close to Cohen’s heart, the psalmist shares with the prophets, we find the supplication, “create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew an established spirit within me” (Ps. 51.12). The psalmist could not cry out for purity without truthfulness. The latter then becomes devotion through the penitential prayer. The complexity of the phenomenon of prayer emerges slowly in Cohen’s idealization thereof. Only after he has woven together the qualities of truthfulness, purity of soul, and the renewing

⁴⁵ Ibid., 465 / 394.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 449 / 380.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

power of prayer on the soul (the process of a “continuous new creation of the soul” that Cohen calls “the condition for man’s truthfulness”) can Cohen claim to have explicated “the chief content of the prayer.”⁵¹ In this pivotal section, we note all three features that we have contended separate Cohen from Kant on liturgical practice: an interpretation of a psalm (the centrality of language), a reminder of prayer’s role in the formation of a devoted religious consciousness (prayer’s role in fostering the affective dimension of religious life), and an excursus on truthfulness as condition for prayer (the idealization of prayer as it effects the *correlation* between God and the individual human being). Taking together his writings on the Day of Atonement (which we have not considered in this essay) with his idealization of prayer, Cohen’s treatment of liturgical practice perhaps represents his most sustained effort at moving beyond the Kantian framework of rational religion.⁵²

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⁵¹ Ibid., 450 / 381.

⁵² I owe a debt of thanks to Professor Paul Mendes-Flohr for his comments on an earlier version of this essay.