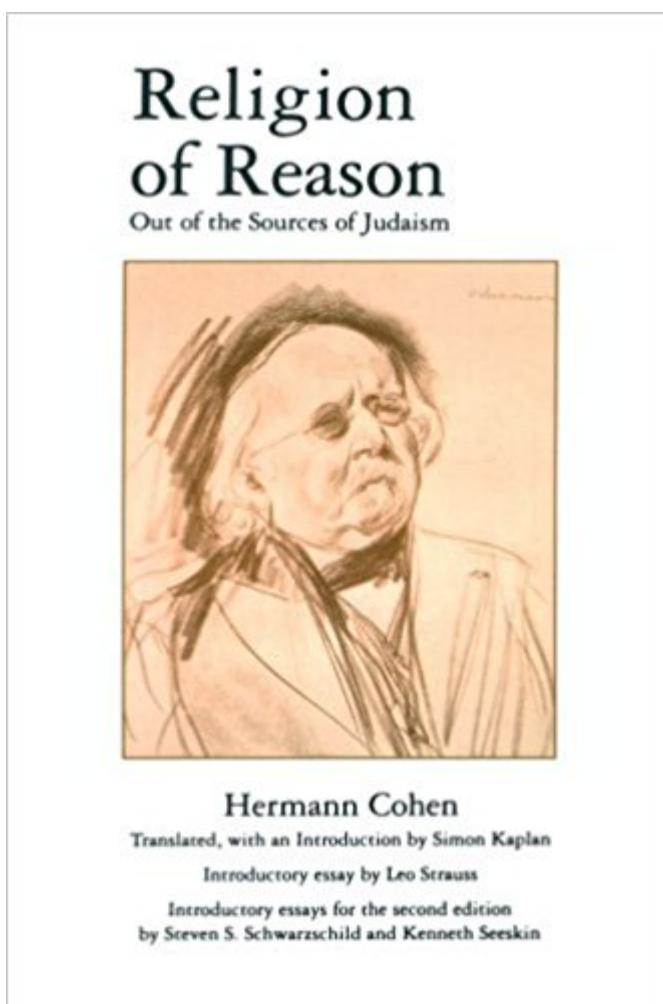


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Religion Of Reason: Out Of The Sources Of Judaism (AAR Religions In Translation)



Synopsis

Hermann Cohen's Religion of Reason, Out of the Sources of Judaism (first published in 1919) is widely taken to be the greatest work in Jewish philosophy and religious thought since Maimonides' Guide to the Perplexed. It is at once a Jewish book and a philosophical one: Jewish because it takes its material from the literary tradition that extends from the Bible to the rabbis to the great medieval philosophers; philosophical because it studies that material in order to construct a worldview that is rational in the broadest sense of the term. This edition reprints a 1972 introduction by Leo Strauss and includes an essay on the work by Steven Schwarzchild. A new introduction by Kenneth R. Seeskin situates Cohen's masterwork in the history of modern philosophical and religious thought.

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Customer Reviews

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Hermann Cohen's Religion of Reason, Out of the Sources of Judaism (first pub. 1919) is widely taken to be the greatest work in Jewish philosophy and religious thought since Maimonides' Guide to the Perplexed. It is at once a Jewish book and a philosophical one: Jewish because it takes its material from the literary tradition that extends from the Bible to the rabbis to the great medieval philosophers; philosophical, because it studies that material in order to construct a worldview that is rational in the broadest sense of the term. This edition is designed for classroom use. It reprints a

1972 introduction by Leo Strauss and includes an essay on the work by Steven Schwarzchild. A new introduction by Kenneth R. Seeskin situates Cohen's masterwork in the history of modern philosophical and religious thought.

If you know absolutely nothing about Judaism, you will not get much out of this book. The best way to understand Judaism is to read Book Five of the TORAH a number of times, allowing yourself to forget any Christian preconceptions. Why, for instance, did the Chief Rabbi of Israel rule that a disruptive child should be removed from class, while the US Government considers such disruption a disability- that one aims at the long term welfare of the Jewish people as the measure of good and the other has some other value system in mind. If you can grasp the meaning of not taking the mother bird but taking the eggs or young, then you are at a point where you may be able able to understand what Cohen is talking about. My favorite notion of Cohen's in the book is his definition of Religion, that to qualify as a Religion, as opposed to a superstition I suppose, the system must be true. His concept of true is that of a scientist, not that of a priest. It is the exact opposite of the Catholic notion that the moral teachings of the Pope are TRUTH, as if TRUTH could come out of pronouncement. Cohen recognizes that truth stands or falls on its own, not by virtue of who stated it. It is not too surprising that Cohen during his lifetime went from Judaism to Hegel and back to Judaism. If one removed the State from Hegel and substituted the long term welfare of the Jewish people, Hegel could be Jewish. People who like comic book versions of books will not enjoy Religion of Reason. Torah should be the first thing understood, then RAMBAM (Maimonides), especially M-TORAH), but Religion of Reason should be the third book or collection consulted. Maimonides says in M-Torah in the prohibition against gambling: A person (Jewish of course) should do nothing which neither increases his understanding nor contributes to the progress of civilization. To my knowledge, people who hate Jews will find no ammunition in Cohen's book. This book is for those who want really to understand, not for those who are looking for more justifications for anti-semitism. Those who are impressed by Jews' being seen either as pathetic, as in The Fixer, or as monsters, will not find their emotional longings satisfied by Cohen's masterpiece. I have only read it twice, so forgive me for missing something less casual readers may not miss. The book is a translation from German. Any college or university library worthy of the name should have a copy of Religion of Reason. It is not hard reading. You can understand Religion of Religion even if you, like me, could not grasp Critique of Pure Reason, which Cohen does not touch upon. Just as Shopenhauer said that a person could not be a man unless he had read and understood Critique of Pure Reason, in today's world a person who does not understand Judaism has only a smattering of

education. If you would understand, consult the books (or collections of books) in the order recommended and you will begin to understand the modern world. If, however, you are pre-disposed to anti-semitism, please read and understand Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" first.

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