

*The Origins of Jewish Secularization
in Eighteenth-Century Europe*

JEWISH CULTURE AND CONTEXTS

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*The Origins
of Jewish Secularization
in Eighteenth-Century
Europe*

Shmuel Feiner

Translated by
Chaya Naor

PENN

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For my wife, Rivka

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.
—Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach"

How near I once came to being completely ruined. My feet wandered from the blessed path of truth. Like hellish furies, cruel doubts about providence tortured me; indeed, I can confess, without skittishness, that they were doubts about the existence of God and the blessedness of virtue. At that point, I was prepared to give rein to all vile desires. I was in danger, like someone drunk, of reeling into the wretched abyss into which the slaves of vice slide ever more deeply with every passing hour.
—Moses Mendelssohn, "On Sentiments"

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Preface

One major difference between the new world, which emerged in Europe as a reality and an image at the dawn of the modern era, and the preceding age is the dramatic change in the role of religion in human life. The philosopher Charles Taylor recently claimed that the secular age was created in the course of a change that “takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others.”¹ The modern age was marked by the growing tension between the traditional religious structure of the society and culture with the dominant, all-embracing presence of religion, in both private life and the public sphere, and the erosion of this structure by processes of secularization. As it unfolds, the historical story tells of a complex relationship between secular thought and behavior and fundamentalist religious reaction. This is one key narrative of the modernization in general and of Jewish modernization in particular.

Secularization has been one of the most significant historical processes in Jewish history from the eighteenth century until the present day. The rebellion against the religious norms and discipline demanded by the rabbinical elite, along with the skepticism and religious permissiveness of individuals and groups, may have been openly declared or kept private. In either case, it radically changed Jewish society and culture. Aspirations for liberation clashed with the anxiety of those who were faithful to tradition. It was no longer self-evident that Jewish self-definition would be based on the beliefs and practices of “Torah and commandments.” National, ethnic, cultural, and other alternatives emerged. From this moment in history, a long, circuitous course of “secular” or “religious” searches for identity began, which took on various forms and were attended by severe cultural struggles.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the distinction grew sharper between Jews of the “old world” and Jews of the “new world”. On the one hand, there was the great majority of observant Jews, elites of talmudic scholars and those who accepted the authority of the rabbinical leadership; on the other, the gradually more conspicuous minority of “freethinking” Jews. At this early stage, the boundaries of the internal split were already drawn and gave the members of the two camps a new identity. This identity marked each individual, labeled

his worldview and lifestyle according to his place on the spectrum between faith and heresy, devotion to religious practices and the rabbinical leadership, and permissiveness and indifference. This “sectarian” identity shaped the self-consciousness of the members of each group and strengthened their self-confidence in their way of life and their belief or disbelief. It also functioned as a counter-identity that raised the dividing walls and made each group adopt a position of conflict, suspicion, and even contempt toward other groups. Because secularization is such a central and influential process, the task of tracing its origins, reconstructing its course, and interpreting the furors it aroused is one of the most important tasks facing the historian of Jewish modernization.

Was there ever really a religious “sea of faith” that was “once at the full”? Is the Victorian Matthew Arnold’s 1867 lament in “Dover Beach” over the retreat of the “sea of faith” really convincing? Can we go on claiming that God has been driven out of this world, “which has neither joy, nor love, nor light” or that the world has been disenchanted and rationalized, as Max Weber suggested? How is that possible, when right before our eyes, the role of religion is actually increasing in our own time? Does not the term “secularization” itself carry an ideological charge, and is it not being exploited by secularists in order to present the liberal narrative of the inevitable victory of reason over prejudice, superstition, and the tyranny of the old world? Or was it not their purpose to impose this notion on Western culture as a hegemonic narrative? Even if there is some truth in all these claims, the author of this book joins those historians who reject the sociological and philosophical challenge to the secularization thesis. I am among those who wish to describe, understand, and interpret the historical processes that led Europe to the profound, all-embracing change in the status of religion in the life of the individual, the society, and the state, and who define this change as “secularization.”²

At the entrance to the field of secularization, said José Casanova, “there should always hang the sign ‘Proceed at your own risk.’” This book takes that risk and insists, with the few “old believers,” that “the theory of secularization still has much explanatory value in attempting to account for modern historical process.”³

Throughout this book, secularization will be used in those clear terms coined forty years ago by Peter L. Berger. These terms are very useful for those who, as he does, regard secularization as a process of vast importance in modern history that can be reconstructed: “By secularization we mean the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. . . . It affected the totality of cultural life and of ideation. . . . Moreover, it is implied here that the process of secularization has a subjective side as well. As there is a secularization of society and

culture, so is there a secularization of consciousness. Put simply, this means that the modern West has produced an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations.”⁴

In addition to these insights of Berger’s, this book is also guided by the definitions of “religion” and “secularization” recently proposed by Hugh McLeod, British social historian of secularization in Europe. These definitions are apt for a historian wishing to describe and interpret the origins of secularization among European Jewry.⁵ “Religion” means faith in a merciful, omnipotent creator of the world and that obedience to his commandments and devout worship, together with all the practices and institutions based on this faith, are the only true way of ensuring a good life for the individual and the group. “Secularization” is not a single, unidirectional path that leads outside the religion. It is, rather, a historical process that occurred in various spheres in the life of the individual, the society, and the state. The weakening of the Christian religion’s status and power and the replacement of its institutions and clergy by state institutions and officials were among the most significant manifestations of secularization in Europe. Of course, no comparable ecclesiastical hierarchy with political power existed in European Jewish society, but other aspects of the “religion-secularization” tension in Europe were also applicable in the Jewish case. The emphasis here will be on secularization in the personal and social spheres, and the key questions to be asked in the Jewish context are taken from the more general questions asked in relation to modern Europe: How, why, and to what extent did the religious worldview and the commitment to observe religious commandments decline among individuals and groups, and what was the historical meaning of secularization among eighteenth-century European Jewry?

The religious laxity, modern acculturation, and philosophical criticism of religion that marked the onset of the Jewish retreat from religion began as far back as the seventeenth century among former conversos in Western Sephardic communities (especially in Amsterdam) and among the wealthy families of Ashkenazic “court Jews” in Central Europe. In retrospect, the contribution of the eighteenth century to the historical course of Jewish secularization seems particularly significant. As I will argue in this book, in this century lie the roots of the process that shaped and furthered secularization of Jewish society in modern Europe. Research on the Haskalah has pointed to several revolutionary processes of secularization in the eighteenth century that were spearheaded by Jewish scholars, writers, and philosophers.

Two historical developments were particularly significant because of their long-term implications. One was the secularization of the personal and collective self-consciousness among the maskilim, who, in fact, invented “moder-

nity” and the modern self-identity of Jews. They created the historical narrative that explained the changes in the modern era and justified the need to invest efforts to reform the cultural, social, and even political life of Jews, and also operated a system of communication and propaganda to persuade a broad Jewish public to adopt modern consciousness, with its promise of a better future for the individual and the Jewish people.

The second development was the secularization of the intellectual elite. During the eighteenth century, an elite of writers appeared and broke the monopoly of the rabbinical elite over the culture, books, education, and guidance of the public. The conflict between the old and new elites ignited a long-enduring Kulturkampf that drew one of the many boundary lines that divided late eighteenth-century Jewry. This new elite was secular as far as its source of authority, agenda, and cultural activity were concerned. It was attentive to the European Enlightenment and its liberal, rationalist, and humanistic values.

In my book *Haskalah and History* (2002), I described the first revolution that secularized the self-consciousness of the maskilim and invented the “Jewish modern age” as a belief and an aspiration. In my second book, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (2004),⁶ I described the revolution that gave birth to the secular Jewish intellectual who broke away from the rabbinical elite and challenged it. The present book, *The Origins of Jewish Secularization*, relates the historical story of the Jewish critics of religion in the eighteenth century. They are mostly Ashkenazic Jews who did not take an active part in the cultural revival of the Haskalah, but out of open or concealed rebellion, a solid philosophical view or indifference, fashioned modes of thought and behavior that were free of the dictates of religion and rabbinical supervision. Many participated as “fashionable” Jews in the process of modern acculturation, and many adopted the deist worldview that was then widespread in Europe and rejected faith in revelation, the authority of the Scriptures, divine intervention in human life, and the obligation to observe the commandments.

As we shall see in this book, at the time quite a few Jews and non-Jews identified those individuals and groups as belonging to the “sect of epicureans.” They pointed out that Jews in various European cities were casting off the burden of religion and warned against the tendency to submit to the temptations of the city at the expense of religious commitment. Nonetheless, in the familiar historical picture, secularization is still a “white spot” on the map of eighteenth-century Jewish culture and society. One goal of this book is to highlight that spot. But beyond collecting evidence of the existence of the “sect of epicureans,” the book also will argue that in order to gain a precise, profound insight into Jewish modernization in general, as well as into the historical role of the Haskalah (which simultaneously represented a reaction to secularization and a secular revolution), it is essential to understand how

aware of secularization the members of that generation were. This understanding will enable us to correctly interpret the intensity of the “orthodox” reaction and to reconstruct the onset of the internal cultural-social split and the creation of boundary lines between religious and secular Jews.

What means are at the disposal of a historian who undertakes to expose the “sect of epicureans”? “Fashionable” Jews, freethinkers, and deists left behind hardly any texts depicting their worldview; nor did they justify their way of life in writing. To construct the scaffolding and to begin building a picture of secularization in the eighteenth century, one needs a sensitive ear open to the voices emanating from hostile witnesses, from numerous, little-known sources, and from expressions of defiance against religion and its representatives, recorded in various parts of the Jewish world. Old and new studies describing the changes that occurred in various communities in Europe are invaluable in reconstructing the roots of secularization. Two are particularly important: Azriel Shohet’s 1960 *Im hilufei tekufot* (Changing eras), which provides a plentitude of evidence of the erosion in religious discipline among German Jews; and Todd Endelman’s 1979 *The Jews of Georgian England*, which focuses on the process of modern acculturation undergone by English Jews.⁷

This book does not propose a study of the social history of secularization, nor does it provide quantitative data on the weakened hold of religion among Jews in the communities of Europe. It is also not a history of ideas that systematically traces the development of religious skepticism and criticism of religion among Jewish philosophers from Spinoza and thereafter. It would be more correct to view this book as a cultural history of secularization that combines two major dimensions of the historical process: a change in behavior and practice and a change in attitudes toward religious beliefs and demands. It strives to describe, interpret, and decipher the codes concealed in critical texts and in behavior that crosses the boundaries of what was previously considered normative in Judaism. It also seeks to measure the intensity of the social tension caused by the emergence of Jewish secularization.⁸

The cultural history of secularization pays close attention to the language and rhetoric in which the internal Jewish discourse was conducted on religious discipline, the validity of the duty to observe commandments, and the proper behavior for a Jew in an era of varied fashions, manners, and leisure activities. It tries to give voice to people who wanted to cast off the burden of religion and to be free to enjoy the many opportunities that the European city offered them. It also tries to listen to the voices of anxiety of all those who were convinced that the old world was coming to an end in a crisis of loss of faith and moral anarchy. To achieve this, the historian casts the beam of his lamp on Jewish deists, hedonists, the religiously lax, and the “guardians” of the religion. He does this while focusing mainly on the Ashkenazic society in the cities of

Western and Central Europe, particularly Altona-Hamburg, Amsterdam, London, Berlin, Breslau, and Prague. Here and there, he looks at the Jews of the largest center of that century in Poland-Lithuania.

This book attempts to open a series of windows through which to look at all shades of secularization throughout an entire century. It will relate to the fears of the rabbinical elite regarding “damned sects” of epicureans in the first half of the century, to accelerating secularization in the second half of the century, and to the sharpening of cultural and social boundaries in the 1770s and 1780s between Jews who wished to enjoy the full pleasures of the new world and those for whom this was a threatening, “upside-down” world. Finally, it will look at the conflict between the “believers” and the “freethinkers” toward the end of the eighteenth century. We will peer into a synagogue or a bedroom, observe Jews sitting in a coffeehouse or strolling on a boulevard, illuminate forgotten critics of religion from both the margins and the center of Jewish discourse, and listen to the direct and indirect dialogue that was constantly conducted between “epicureans” and “guardians of the religion.” All these will blend here into the story of the origins of secularization in eighteenth-century European Jewry.

We can only hope that in the wake of this book, other scholars will complete the picture of secularization with systematic studies that will cast light on what took place in the communal structure and organization in various communities of Europe, describe how the power of the rabbinical elite was questioned and altered, and explain how the nature of decision making by the communal mechanisms changed. They may also undertake to assign the correct weight in the process of secularization to the intervention of the modern state in the lives of the Jews and to the effects of economic and demographic changes.

Introduction

Sins and Doubts

In 1768, Moshe Lapidoth and Shlomo ben Yehoshua, two Jewish teenagers from the Nieswicz community in Lithuania, decided to take an extreme, deviant step: to stop praying. It is hard to know in this case whether it was skepticism and the crisis of faith or the irrepressible temptation to indulge in sin that induced them to cast doubt on the truth and justification of this religious commandment.¹ Although they were very young (both were born in 1753), they already had families of their own. They earned their living as *melamdim* (teachers of Torah in the poor, depressing homes of village Jews), suffered at the hands of mothers-in-law who made their lives miserable, and dreamed of a rabbinical position worthy of their abilities that would improve the quality of their lives.² Eager to escape their daily problems and the Jewish way of life that they found mournfully bleak, the two young men developed feelings of superiority and a sense of insularity. They criticized the “vanities of this world” and looked with arrogant pride and contempt upon what they regarded as the “common herd.” They began by staying away from the daily worship in the synagogue, and then only recited parts of the prayer in private, until they totally abandoned praying. They took this step in secrecy, but, for young men who were conscious of being sons of the traditional Jewish community and whose lives were constrained by religious norms, this audacious sin was a manifestation of personal autonomy, independence, and rebellion. At the same time, though, it was an initial conclusion reached through free thought and rationalist, cynical criticism of religion.

However, Moshe Lapidoth’s conscience never stopped tormenting him, and his consciousness of sin gave him no rest. He made childish and panic-stricken attempts to find scholarly strategies to justify his abandonment of prayer: perhaps there was a precedent among the talmudic rabbis permitting private prayer; perhaps all prayers regarded as compulsory are not equally such; perhaps one might hope that God in his mercy would overlook such a slight offense and would not punish them. But all these were rejected out of hand by his more worldly and realistic friend, who suffered no pangs of guilt. Lapidoth became very anxious: “My friend, what will become of us? We have stopped praying altogether!” Shlomo replied that from Maimonides’ doctrine,

he had acquired “more accurate ideas of God and our duties toward him.” He reassured his nervous friend and provided him with a philosophical explanation to retrospectively justify their transgression. Prayer, he explained, is but one way of expressing one’s knowledge of the divine perfections, and it is appropriate for the common man, who is incapable of attaining that knowledge in any other way. Philosophers, however, are more sublime than ordinary men and have no need of the practice of prayer. Their link to God through thought, meditation, and knowledge releases them from this ritual obligation: “But as we see into the end of prayer, and can attain this end directly, we can dispense altogether with prayer as something superfluous.”³

The two young men’s situation in the Jewish community was precarious, since they could not afford to lose their jobs as teachers of Torah. Consequently, they were unable to publicly demonstrate their scorn toward prayer or to reveal their freethinking critical views. In the context of traditional Jewish society in eighteenth-century Poland-Lithuania, this was an intolerable deviation from the practices required of men. To avoid arousing the suspicion and anger of their families and members of the community, the two left their homes each morning carrying their prayer shawls and phylacteries, but instead of walking to the synagogue to attend the morning service, they found a hiding place on an embankment at the edge of the town. There, surrounded by nature, far from the eyes of others, free for a while from communal supervision, the two friends had lengthy, emotionally charged conversations, during which they mocked superstition, hypocrisy, and religious fanaticism, as well as “the religious and moral faults of the common herd.”⁴

Did the two young men know that in their own generation in Christian European society a profound process of secularization was taking place? Had they heard of the rebellion in thought and practice against God and his representatives on earth? Did they regard themselves as freedom-seeking libertines who were attempting to break down boundaries and repudiate norms? Were they familiar with the fashionable code word “deism,” which, in contemporary discourse, stood for a broad spectrum of modes of denying revelation, providence, the Holy Scriptures, religious norms and practices, and the sanctity of clerics? Did they know that “more and more Sephardic Jews in northwestern Europe and a small number of Ashkenazim had adopted a primarily secular lifestyle, which was permissive as far as the observance of religious commandments was concerned”?⁵

There are no clear answers to these questions, but undoubtedly these young men’s defiant act and skeptical thinking were typical of the new world that members of their generation had then observed in contemporary Europe. From this vantage point, Moshe Lapidoth and Shlomo ben Yehoshua’s abandonment of prayer takes on historical significance. In 1768, far from the centers

of European culture and the skeptical and critical ferment of their generation, the two young Lithuanian Jews embarked on a deist rebellion against religion, of the kind then prevalent in Western and Central Europe.

One of these two young men, who retrospectively defined themselves as “cynical philosophers,” later achieved fame as the Jewish German philosopher Salomon Maimon (1753–1800),⁶ a name that Shlomo ben Yehoshua adopted to demonstrate his great admiration of Maimonides. He was particularly attracted to the twelfth-century philosophical work *Guide of the Perplexed*, which had just been returned to the Jewish library, when it was printed in Jessnitz in Anhalt-Dessau in 1742, only a decade before Maimon’s birth, after being almost absent from it for two hundred years. In the eighteenth century, in Christian Europe, atheistic and radical anticlerical texts were clandestinely disseminating the message about the great deception of the three major religions. At the same time, Maimon and other Jews were studying Maimonides as a subversive text, which helped develop their critical thinking. For Maimon, the twelfth-century rabbi’s rationalist teachings served as an anchor to which he could secure his youthful doubts. They were a starting point for formulating a deist approach tempered by the cynical criticism of the radical Enlightenment vis-à-vis the various manifestations of religion, even before he encountered the new thinking of Europe or Spinoza’s atheistic ideas, which further deepened his skepticism. Looking back nostalgically, he would recall that same initial, moving experience in Nieswiez as a subversive, courageous deviation from the norms of everyday religious behavior. It was another juncture on his journey of release from the hold of the religious Jewish Polish tradition into which he was born, toward the rational, natural religion he discovered on his own—a journey of defiance in the face of the opposition of Jewish society and its rabbis. In summing up the impression left on him by that experience, Maimon looked back upon a fond memory and recalled the anticlerical fury toward religious fanaticism and the rabbinical leadership that had incensed him throughout his life: there, in our favorite place of refuge, on the embankment, “we fortunately escaped the Jewish inquisition.”⁷

Suspicious Arise

This youthful memory of Salomon Maimon’s, which surely was edited and finally shaped only in retrospect, when he was writing his autobiography a quarter of a century later, holds no surprises. Anyone who has read his revealing autobiography—and is familiar with Maimon the adult—can better understand the story he told about himself: how he developed from an early age as a freethinker and made a name for himself in the intellectual world of

Germany in the 1790s as a philosopher with reservations about Immanuel Kant, whose place in the pantheon of eighteenth-century European philosophy is undisputed. If, however, we isolate Lapidoth and Maimon's story from the later stages of the biographical story and do not attempt to deduce its beginnings from its end, the issues that are at the center of this book immediately surface. These two young men from Lithuania were members of a traditional, organized Jewish community in the 1760s, which existed under the protection of the Polish aristocracy with tight economic links to their spacious rural estates, and was almost totally cut off from the new science and philosophy of contemporary Europe and its vibrant urban life. Did their permissive attitude toward prayer, their religious skepticism, and free thought amount to an extraordinary youthful rebellion, which would bear fruit after several years in the form of the unique, surprising intellectual development of the gifted genius from Nieswiez? Maimon underwent an extreme, remarkable metamorphosis. He began as a Jewish Polish *melamed*, teaching small children in smoky, filthy huts in a Polish village, where only the faintest murmur from the European Enlightenment culture reached his ears, and later became a brilliant philosopher, writing in German in end-of-the-century Prussia. Is he a unique case that should be discussed only in isolation? Or were Maimon and Lapidoth two instances of a broader phenomenon, albeit one relatively hidden beneath the surface, of free thinking, defiance, criticism of religion, deism, heresy, and religious laxity that manifested itself in various corners of eighteenth-century European Jewry? Did there exist then, in the words of one who observed it with great anxiety, a "sect of epicureans" that is absent from the familiar map of Jewish culture, and whose nature, aims, and significance have not yet been studied?

The suspicion that the emergence of the Haskalah in the public sphere of Ashkenazi society was preceded by religious criticism and laxity first arose during my study of the history of the Haskalah and the counterreactions encountered by its initial spokesmen. Today scholars are learning more about the origins of the Haskalah and its historical course. Even more importantly, they are finding it increasingly necessary to use a fine-tooth comb to separate the thread of the Haskalah from the thick coil of the overall processes of modernization and to define as precisely as possible the role that maskilic intellectuals played in it. At the same time, contemporary research is tracing the paths of secularization through which Jewish society and culture in Europe underwent the enormous transformation that gave rise to the "new Jews" of the modern era. As a result of these developments, it is becoming more and more apparent not only that the maskilim were not the sole "modernists" in the arena, but that they were not even the first. The secular revolution of the new, subversive

elite of the Haskalah represented only one of the paths of secularization in eighteenth-century European Jewry.

If we lend a sensitive ear to the maskilic rhetoric, we cannot help realize how much effort was exerted by the early and later maskilim, the producers of new literary forums, the new tutors and schoolteachers, writers, and modern reformers, to eradicate the stain of what they then called the “pseudo-Haskalah.” The voice of the secular revolution of the Haskalah was heard primarily when it burst into the public sphere. It is evident, for example, in the creation of the library of a new, unprecedented intellectual elite, marked by the deepening secularization of its culture, literature, and education as well as of its historical narrative and future vision of the Jews. The maskilim, however, were disturbed by the presence of Jews who had undergone different processes of secularization that they perceived as radical. The maskilim went to great lengths to voice their objections to secularization that was not self-aware and to prove that the “pseudo-maskilim,” as they defined them, were perverted in their hedonistic behavior, their lack of moral inhibitions, and their blatant contempt for faith and the commandments. They were accused of misconstruing the messages of the Haskalah and sabotaging its plans for the renewal of Jewish society and culture. But in trying to disassociate themselves from the pseudo-Haskalah, the maskilim also unintentionally documented relatively widespread manifestations of secularization in Jewish society and culture that were parallel to the development of the Haskalah in the last quarter of the century and even earlier. Moreover, they revealed an internal schism in the Haskalah itself between the attitude toward religion of conservatives such as Naphtali Herz Wessely (1725–1805) and Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), who defended Jewish practice against modern criticism, and deists like David Friedländer (1750–1834) and Lazarus Bendavid (1762–1832), who advocated the abolition of Jewish law altogether.⁸

Another source reinforces the suspicion that profound secularization processes had occurred in the same social and cultural space that gave rise to the Haskalah. It is the counter-rhetoric of the opponents of the Haskalah that was given voice in public sermons, pamphlets, unpublished and printed polemical writings, and in personal and public letters by members of the rabbinical elite.⁹ Alarms went off, for example, when in 1782, Rabbi David Tevele, of the Lissa community in western Poland, delivered his furious sermon vilifying Naphtali Herz Wessely for publishing the first ideological manifesto of the Haskalah, *Divrei shalom ve’emet* (Words of peace and truth). Wessely had composed this program for educational reform amid heightened expectations of a dramatic shift in the attitude toward the Jews, aroused by the reforms proclaimed by Joseph II, emperor of the Habsburg Empire. In his sermon, Tevele was reacting with uncompromising intensity at the very moment when

the Haskalah burst forth, established itself, and began to soar. He was also responding to the challenging call that Wessely issued in Berlin with the declared intent of mobilizing public opinion to circumvent the rabbinical elite in order to gain backing for his new educational programs. In this sense, Rabbi David Tevele's sermon was one of the most important reactions that opened the first battle in the Jewish Kulturkampf.¹⁰ Naphtali Herz Wessely, Rabbi Tevele stated, was no less than one of the *Naturalisten* (naturalists)—a term that at the time denoted not only the disciples of natural religion, who demanded rational, universally and humanistically valid evidence of the truths of the historical religions, but also served to depict deists who denied providence and revelation. It was also a term used to characterize freethinkers (*Freigeister*).¹¹

These suspicions and many additional sources, noted later in this book, can be conjoined with recent new studies, revealing various shades of religious heresy as well as nonobservant lifestyles and behavior that deviated from religious norms, in several Jewish communities in Europe. Scholars now perceive a need to examine the various testimonies attesting to the existence of religious skepticism and laxity and free thought as historical phenomena that were given scant literary expression. The various testimonies suffice to confirm the suspicion that such trends of secularization gained a foothold in the fervent and diverse Judaism of the eighteenth century. These trends are partially documented but are often hidden behind the scenes of the historical stage. They make us wonder what social and ideological meaning was assigned to them by those who lived in that century.¹²

Recent historical research has made a key contribution to a dramatic change in our view of European Jewry's modernization. The new approach reveals previously unrecognized diversity in eighteenth-century Jewry. The effort to enrich the fabric of history with more life stories of Jews is no less important to the historian. This is particularly true of those that teach us—as the social historian of English Jewry Todd Endelman put it—how much more complex the eighteenth century was than one can learn from the existing historiography.¹³ Endelman is one of the historians who have been leading the revisionist trend that attempts to break free of the dominance of the “German model” and the “Berlin Haskalah” in the story of Jewish modernization. The introduction that he wrote in 1999 to his book on English Jewry is largely a polemical essay to counter the approach represented primarily by Jacob Katz, which argues that it is the Haskalah and Mendelssohn's participation in the German scholarly elite that usher in the momentous crisis of the traditional world.¹⁴ In Endelman's opinion, the English case proves that the ideological movement of the Haskalah and the social integration of Jews into the Christian environment on the basis of the Enlightenment's values of tolerance played a

central role only in the case of German Jewry from the time of Moses Mendelssohn. Even there, he asserts, it affected relatively few people. He states that, in contrast, in most communities of Central and Western Europe, the process of secularization, expressed in acculturation, gradual social integration, and the abandonment of any commitment to religious norms, was more dominant.

As a social historian, Endelman minimizes the importance of the ideology of the Haskalah and suggests that the processes of change that occurred among the underprivileged and lower-class Jews (modernization from “below”) should be examined and that less emphasis should be placed on changes in the cultural elite and on the modernization that they consciously and deliberately tried to introduce (modernization from “above”). Endelman was preceded in this view by historians in the 1940s and 1960s who stressed the processes of secularization, even though they made scant use of the term “secularization” and were not yet familiar with the term “acculturation.” They reexamined the traditional contention in classical Jewish historiography from Heinrich Graetz in the nineteenth century to Jacob Katz in his influential book *Tradition and Crisis* (1958) that Mendelssohn’s era was the significant turning point in modern Jewish history. As far back as 1948 Jerusalem historian Benzion Dinur argued that the traditional Jewish world was undermined long before the emergence of the Haskalah. The processes of national disintegration and assimilation, which preceded the appearance of Zionism, began in the context of new economic opportunities that the modern centralized state offered to the Jewish elite:

It was the processes that undermined the Jewish world that led the Jew to be self-effacing in relation to the world at large, and prepared the generation to be more favorably impressed by the culture of the nations they lived in, to absorb more of their views and ideas and to become more adapted to their manners and lifestyles. Only after a new sense of life penetrated certain circles of the upper classes in Jewish society, only after elements of another worldview were adopted by them, did a new attitude toward religious tradition, toward the accepted way of life, come into being. Then the Haskalah as a social movement advocating rationalist criticism also emerged. This criticism, therefore, came to reform a world that was already in the process of collapsing.¹⁵

Azriel Shohet’s 1960 study presented a picture of German Jewry (a minority of only about 70,000 Jews dispersed in hundreds of towns and cities) engulfed in momentous changes in lifestyle in the first half of the eighteenth century. Community regulations, the testimonies of missionaries, and the sermons of rabbis pointed, in his view, to processes in which religious norms were being undermined long before the emergence of the Haskalah.¹⁶ Shohet showed that Jews in Germany were eager to achieve a high standard of living, to enjoy various entertainments, and to wear clothing in the latest fashion.

Some were lax in observing the commandments, sexually permissive, and disrespectful to the rabbinical elite, and they violated community discipline. At the time, Shohet found it difficult to distinguish between the various subtle differences in the trends of change. Like Dinur, he was convinced that his study had succeeded in predating the Haskalah in Germany by two generations, and, like him, he was captive to a historical narrative that presented the modern pre-Zionism history of European Jewry as a tragic tale of assimilation and the destruction of the traditional world. In their time, neither of these two scholars managed to differentiate between the Haskalah as a movement of cultural and social revival and processes of acculturation, between maskilim and religious skeptics, between aspirations for freedom and autonomy and the abandonment of Jewish identity.

In contrast to them, Todd Endelman's 1979 work on the Jews of London in the eighteenth century relegates the Haskalah to the sidelines. In his desire to present a counterweight to the historiographical tradition, he went too far in overlooking the breakthrough in the ideological sphere, the rejuvenation of Jewish culture in Europe, and the overall significance of the maskilic project of modernity. On the other hand, using the tools of social history and basing his work on extensive documentation, he describes a Jewish society that, in the context of a relatively tolerant state and within an open English society, had cut itself off from religious norms and practices without any ideological justification. He presents this as a model for the modern Jewish existence that prevails in the Western world today. His findings and conclusions also served the historian Jonathan Israel, who suggested a broad, comprehensive look at Jewish history in the early modern era and who, with a special emphasis on Sephardic communities in Western Europe, pointed to what he regarded as a trend of decline in the eighteenth century of a Jewish world that had flourished economically and culturally in previous centuries.¹⁷ The many pieces of evidence that he cites in his studies unquestionably add much weight to the claim that at the turn of the eighteenth century, secularization was a trend whose importance can no longer be minimized. Jonathan Israel alludes to the weakening of rabbinical authority and the decline in the prestige of talmudic scholars, to the spread of a fashionable, free lifestyle, laxity in observing the commandments, and sexual permissiveness. He concludes that "the whole trend of European life during the eighteenth century was toward a more secular life-style and a general weakening of ecclesiastical authority. This general tendency was fully evident, and at an early stage, within the western and central European Jewish world."¹⁸ Israel also convincingly showed that Christian eyewitnesses who came into contact with Jews on their travels in Europe and rabbis who were aggrieved by the decline in the commitment to religion were, in the first decades of the century, familiar with religious laxity, anticlericalism, and deism among contemporary

Jews in communities such as Amsterdam, Livorno, Venice, Altona-Hamburg, and London.¹⁹

The present book, which attempts to present the history of secularization in eighteenth-century European Jewry, could never have been written had it not been for that same tradition in research on Jewish modernization in Europe that regards secularization, in all its variations, as a key process, and whose outstanding representatives are Azriel Shohet, Todd Endelman, and Jonathan Israel, as well as Steven Lowenstein, the social historian of the Berlin community, and Yosef Kaplan, the leading scholar on Western Sephardic Jewry. The underlying assumption here is that secularization is a central narrative of Jewish modernization. As Jacob Katz formulated the challenge of secularization for Jews and Christians: “Somewhere in the Eighteenth Century, Christianity and Judaism, like religion in general, began to find themselves faced by an entirely new situation which forcefully affected their relationships with each other. Any proper definition of this situation will have to take into account the term secularism or secularization, a concept which implies that, in contradistinction to previous centuries, several areas of thought and action in society had now detached themselves from the control and supervision of religion and its established institutions.”

Katz suggested that this process should also be observed from the vantage point of the orthodox elites. He thus opened the door to the inclusion of the antimodernist discourse of orthodoxy in the complex historical picture of secularization: “It is not easy to appreciate, in historical retrospect, what this rebellion of the world against God, so to say, meant to the representatives of religion in that age. At times, they became apprehensive that the expectations of the more radical protagonists of secularism might indeed be realized and religion entirely superseded.”²⁰

In light of all the evidence and studies, it seems that the time has come to reconstruct the paths of Jewish secularization that existed outside of the maskilic revolution. As we shall see in later chapters, in the course of the eighteenth century, people became attentive to the promising or threatening appearance of a “new world” or an “upside-down world.” Men and women increasingly aspired to live according to fashion, to enjoy the pleasures of this world, and to express their freedom and independence as individuals. They were prepared to do so even at the expense of ignoring religious norms and the supervision of the rabbinical elite, and the voices of Jews who adhered to a deist worldview grew louder. The historian’s task is to amplify the relatively weak voice of those critics of religion and the religiously lax, the majority of whom left no written testimonies. But the pattern of behavior—adapting to the current fashion and becoming a Jewish citizen of the “new world”—was in itself a meaningful statement. Often, use of the “language” of fashion in

one's clothing, hairstyle, or visits to coffeehouses or the theater was so blatant that it was interpreted as provocative defiance and as an implied declaration of the worldview of men and women who regarded themselves as citizens of the "new world."

Although Jewish secularization was the historical course followed by the Jewish minority in various communities in Europe simultaneously with the general European secularization of Christian society, we cannot overlook several prominent features peculiar to the secularization of the Jews. Since Judaism assigns considerable weight to commandments and prohibitions that are expressed in everyday behavior, prescribes a broad scope of religious practices that Jews are required to follow in all spheres of life, and does not recognize the concept of leisure time or neutral needs that are outside of religious supervision, the religious laxity that was part of modern acculturation sometimes took on the particularly sharp meaning of rebellion by the fashionable Jews against the religion.

Peter Berger took note of the special nature of Jewish secularization—the emphasis in religious tradition on practice rather than on theory, "more precisely of halakhah than of dogma"—which resulted in secularization being expressed more in the breakdown of religious practices than in the appearance of a heterodox theory. The distinction between Judaism as a religion and the other religions is no less important, in Berger's view. Judaism is at one and the same time a religious tradition and an ethnic identity, and hence the process of secularization also entailed a "crisis of Jewish identity."²¹ Moreover, the norms (unlike the daily social, economic, and cultural interactions) that for generations divided the Jews from Christian society imbued secularization with a sense of the breakdown of the boundaries of Jewish society. In the wake of this division, even the putatively natural adoption of the external fashions that prevailed in the eighteenth century aroused fears and a sense of guilt about the abandonment of Jewish identity and assimilation. In general, in the consciousness of contemporary Jews, no distinction was drawn between, on the one hand, the various types of deists who cast doubt on the beliefs and restrictions of the religion and, on the other hand, those who rebelled against the obligations of the religion. In the eyes of the guardians of the religion, skeptics, sinners, and fashionable Jews were all lumped into one category: the new, threatening "sect of epicureans."

Religion under Attack

In the early modern age (the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), questions of religious criticism and free thought, particularly in Western Europe—England,

Holland, France, Germany—were at the epicenter of a great, ongoing stormy debate that extended into the eighteenth century as well. As a modernistic phenomenon that shook the very foundations of European culture and engendered a revision in the way people related to the world and to human life and society, it was a key issue in the intellectual, social, and even political history of the period.²² Numerous pathways led to this enormously significant process: the intensification of rational philosophy from Descartes onward; the influence of the new science from Copernicus’s cosmology to Newton’s physics as well as discoveries in chemistry and medicine; and Spinoza’s biblical criticism, which cast doubt on the Judeo-Christian narrative of sacred history and shook faith in the divine source and authority of the Holy Scriptures. The encounter of European colonialists with unknown polytheistic peoples and cultures in Asia and America; the Reformation, the religious wars, and the rationalization of Christianity; the formation of the centralized absolutist state and the beginning of an early capitalist economy—all were factors that influenced the secularization of Europe. Other very important factors included the expansion of literacy in Western and Central Europe, the print revolution, and the increase in the number of printed books that expropriated the monopoly over knowledge from the clerical elites and encouraged critical thinking. This cultural ferment gave rise to both a moderate enlightenment, which proposed an accommodation between religion and reason, and to a radical enlightenment, which declared war on religion. Freethinkers, skeptics, cynical critics of the religions of revelation, deists, Spinozists, materialists, and those indifferent to religion—the multifaceted, diverse bearers of a secular culture that challenged Christianity and the clergy—made their critical and subversive voices heard, openly or beneath the surface.²³ As Paul Hazard put it in his classic work on the European crisis of consciousness at the end of the seventeenth and the early eighteenth century, “reason” called her soldiers to the flag to join in an immense campaign for no less a purpose than “to clear out” and get rid of a gigantic mass of errors that had accumulated for centuries. The “rationalists” rallied to the call with zeal: “What a motley crowd they were, hailing from the most divergent starting points, and all uniting in a single aim. It was a concentration of force that stirred the imagination.”²⁴

In Hazard’s view, this was the greatest, most dramatic event of those years. It was as if God himself were being put on trial and all men were lifting their eyes awaiting the verdict. Does a God exist who is concerned about man’s eternal soul? Is there an immortal soul, as the Christian clergy say? While an atheistic view that completely negated the existence of God was extremely rare in the eighteenth century, the term “deism,” referring to those who believed in God but denied his revelation and the various religious doctrines, became a fashionable name for the various trends of religious criticism. In truth, deism

was not a single worldview or a well-formulated philosophy; rather, different thinkers presented their deism in various ways, ranging from soft or moderate deism (for example, that of the German author and playwright Gotthold Ephraim Lessing) to radical deism (especially that expressed in an acutely anticlerical discourse by Voltaire).²⁵ Despite the numerous brands of deism, it was an overall phenomenon of far-reaching cultural significance that created a new discourse of criticism of religion and the clergy. From the pages of books that circumvented the censor, from pamphlets and subversive critical dictionaries, and from within a network of private groups in relatively tolerant states like Holland and England, rose the voices of those who mocked the stories of miracles in the Holy Scriptures, who accused the founders of the three great religions—Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad—of being impostors and deceivers, and who scornfully rejected all the mystery and magic with which the clergy cloaked nature and natural man.²⁶

The deistic God was said to be an entity that had completed its task by creating the world and enacting the laws of nature. There was no longer any need for the great watchmaker once he had built the clock of nature with amazing precision and had wound up its springs so that all its wheels would turn according to the pattern prescribed for them in advance, without any need for any further intervention. Obviously, there was no room for miracles that violated the laws of nature. Since the Creation, nature had been running according to a stable system of laws, and from then on, God, according to a popular saying, was “a lazy monarch lolling on his throne.”²⁷ Anyone who nonetheless needed to prove God’s existence was invited to turn not to the guidance of the clergy or the holy books but rather to “the book of nature,” which testifies, like a thousand witnesses, to the existence of a “primal cause” and of a great architect who has created perfect harmonious nature and enacted never-changing laws.²⁸

In his monumental work on the radical Enlightenment, Jonathan Israel expands and intensifies the huge debate that was conducted in all of Europe from the mid-seventeenth century onward between the rationalist critics of religion and its conservative defenders. The former drew their inspiration largely from Spinoza’s daring ideas about a God identified with nature and about the human origins of the Bible. The latter were the conservatives who began to loudly ring warning bells and who turned Spinoza into the very embodiment of baneful heresy.²⁹

All these trends in the early modern era filtered into the European Enlightenment, especially as it developed beginning from the mid-eighteenth century (High Enlightenment), and were particularly evident in the more radical wing. Voltaire, for example, took his literary protagonist *Candide* (1759) to Eldorado, the homeland of the Inca, to reveal an ideal culture free of any

institutionalized religion. The religion of the inhabitants of Eldorado is universal, devoid of any rituals or clergy. How is it possible? *Candide* asks cynically, “What! You have no monks instructing and disputing, and governing and intriguing, and having everyone burned alive who is not of their opinion?”³⁰ Several years later, in an underground deist book, *The Sermon of the Fifty* (1762), Voltaire uttered one of his battle cries: “Religion must be in conformity with ethics and, like it, universal. Thus any religion whose dogmas offend against ethics is certainly false.”³¹ Under the entry “Atheism” in his subversive *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764), Voltaire accused the clergy themselves of augmenting heresy: “If there are atheists, who is to be blamed if not the mercenary tyrants of souls who, in revolting us against their swindles, compel some feeble spirits to deny the god whom these monsters dishonour?”³²

One of the most fascinating descriptions of the expansion of atheism in England highlights the fears that it raised among members of the religious and political establishment, the debate surrounding it, and the struggle to block it in the name of religion, society, and social morals. There atheism is depicted in the demonic shape of a many-headed hydra. Some people looked upon atheism with disgust, as nothing other than the unrestrained pursuit of fleshly pleasures and the gratification of passion, while others viewed atheism as a complete cohesive system of thought and worldviews underpinned by solid philosophical elements.³³ John Redwood added another important insight to the debate over atheism, which is relevant even beyond the English context. The focal points of the atheist agitation were not only newspapers, books, pamphlets, plays, and anonymous underground writings, but also erotic literature, coffeehouses, clubs, taverns, and brothels. Expressions of atheism, then, were not only intellectual and literary. Redwood suggested that this social phenomenon be defined as “practical atheism,” or as “social deism,” and he cited cases of contempt of religion and ridicule of the clergy by people who certainly did not draw their views and anticlerical positions from the rational philosophy of Descartes, Spinoza, or the British deists—Herbert of Cherbury, John Toland, and Anthony Collins.³⁴

The counterreactions were not late in coming, and Christian orthodoxy, which identified all types of freethinkers and heretics with immoral libertinism, harassed the enemies of religion and defended its ramparts as far as possible.³⁵ But the anti-atheist and anti-deist polemic had unintentional dialectic implications. The attempt made in England to come up with a version of rationalist Christianity compatible with reason and the new science ultimately revealed that, as the veils of mystery enveloping religion were removed, skepticism, rationalist thought, and secularization were all strengthened.³⁶

Darrin McMahon’s studies penetrate deeply into the forgotten world of the Catholic, anti-philosopher enemies of the Enlightenment in France.³⁷ On

the basis of an anti-philosophical “library” that contains thousands of books, sermons, pamphlets, and poems written by clergy, aristocrats, censors, members of parliament, and Catholic conservatives, McMahon reconstructed the zealous struggle, awash with anger and revulsion, against what seemed, in the second half of the eighteenth century, to be the overwhelming victory of the philosophers. Using radical, even apocalyptic, rhetoric that stressed the importance of the values of religion, history, and the family, the “enemies of the Enlightenment” warned against anarchy and loss of moral conscience that would result from the eradication of religion. The anti-philosophy discourse burst into the public sphere threatening and fighting a rearguard war: “Listen to the modern philosophers, lend an ear to their lessons, receive and practice their doctrines, and all will be overturned.”³⁸ The “enemies of the Enlightenment,” McMahon stressed, were not waging an unrelenting battle whose time had passed, nor were they a vestige of the premodern era, but rather a manifestation of a modern phenomenon. Indeed, the dramatization and demonization by the Christian “enemies of the Enlightenment” (and as this book shows, by the Jews as well) of what they regarded as an appalling crisis of religion were an inseparable part of the historical picture of the process of secularization.

In recent years, scholars have rediscovered the strong presence of religion in modern European society. In the wake of this trend, anthropologists, sociologists of religion, and historians have expressed reservations about the emphatic statements relating to the proliferation of atheism in Europe from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They are also skeptical about the “secularization thesis”—the claim and narrative that religion as a faith and an ecclesiastical establishment has been declining as an inevitable result of the processes of modernization and will disappear entirely or, at the most, will withdraw from the public sphere to the private sphere. Has religion stopped serving as the glue that holds together many human societies? And why should we overlook the movements of religious revival such as German Pietism, English Methodism, or Jewish Hasidism? And was the Enlightenment in essence a movement aimed at overthrowing religion? The contemporary approaches to these questions are far more balanced. The traditional definitions of “religion” and “secularism” are being reexamined, and the two are no longer thought of as opposites. Critical anthropologists such as Talal Asad show the ideological drive behind secularism to be a concept that shapes the modern Western state. The historical process of modern times is no longer being described as the advancing march of the secular and its victory over the religious. Nor is secular society being depicted as the final, longed-for destination of history and the domain of truth and liberty predicted by the German philosopher Hegel. Modernity is not totally identified with secularism; the new Europe has not absolutely cut itself off from its religious heritage; the process

of de-Christianization (the weakening of the Christian presence in the life of the individual, the society, education, culture, and the state) was only partial, and even in the Enlightenment itself, religion still had a very meaningful presence for many thinkers and writers.³⁹

Scholars agree that this was a complex process, one that is not universal and absolute or one-directional. José Casanova, for example, rejects the simplistic narrative that relates the history of mankind as a continuous decline of religious faith and practices and as the triumph of rationalism and science over faith and religion. But not everyone has been swept up by the post-secular trend that minimizes the value and scope of the process of secularization, and many still view the secularization of Europe as a key process in the history of religion and society in the modern era.⁴⁰ Peter Berger, fully aware of the major role that religion plays in contemporary history, suggests that we should not relinquish the thesis of secularization, even in view of the counter-process of a return to religion (“deseccularization”) but rather should understand it as a stage in a dialectical development—an understandable reaction to the unbearable insecurity of modern life and a search for a way that will ensure certainty.⁴¹ Moreover, criticism of the secularization thesis involves a considerable intellectual postmodern effort, for the purpose of casting doubt on the Western world’s narrative about itself since the Enlightenment, and to a certain extent under the impression of the horrors of the twentieth century and the growth of fundamentalism.⁴² In addition, postcolonial trends strive to cast off a universal, Western model of secularization, so—as is suggested by the title of a new collection of articles, *Secularisms*, which examine various case studies of changes in faith and religion in Christian, Muslim, and Jewish societies—perhaps it would be more correct to speak of secularization in the plural.⁴³

As a result of this awareness of the use of the term and the narrative of secularization, the questions raised today are more subtle and they carefully draw a distinction among various tracks of secularization: a change in the individual’s religious commitment and worldview, the attenuated role of the church in the state, and the dwindling use of religious terminology in the social and cultural discourse. Most studies today also reject the belief suggested by the secularization thesis that human society is moving inevitably toward the total abandonment of religion.⁴⁴ Still, these attempts to balance the historical picture and discard the simplistic narrative of the ultimate collapse of religion in modern history cannot gloss over the intensity of the processes that threatened to shatter religion, the presence of irreligion, or the enormous challenge that the freethinkers posed. These phenomena assailed religion’s world of magic and miracles, which was so antithetical to the natural and the rational. They undermined the status of the religious elite, which was denounced as corrupt by its very nature and its functions, as an element that was stultifying

free intellectual life. They proposed alternate paths to what, until then, had been accepted as the exclusive one to the truth. For many of the sons and daughters of eighteenth-century Europe, the strong, intimate bonds between God and man and the heavens and earth began to unravel.⁴⁵

Early Jewish Skepticism

Did this immense wave of intellectual ferment with its nonreligious or antireligious orientation, the rebellion against the norms of religion, and the polemic against secularization conducted by conservatives and clergy resonate significantly within the Jewish society that lived in Europe? If the answer we are looking for relates to seventeenth-century Jewry, then it is emphatically affirmative. Today, more than ever, research on the Italian Jewish communities and Spanish-Portuguese Jewry in Western Europe is being enriched. It offers a detailed picture of the struggle in Venice, for example, in the first third of the seventeenth century against “evil men and sinners against God who deny the words of sages” and challenge the Oral Law and rabbinical authority.⁴⁶ It relates to a subversive text such as the provocative *Kol sakhal*, which systematically attacked the halakhah in the name of reason and natural religion and called it a falsification of the written Torah.⁴⁷ These studies describe, most of all, the life of the large, dynamic, and well-documented community in Amsterdam and tell the dramatic story of ferment centered on polemic texts to reinforce faith, excommunications, and a few heterodox Jews. The former Portuguese converso Uriel da Costa (1585–1640), who lived in Hamburg and Amsterdam, was the tragic heretic who first denied the halakhic tradition of the Sages and later, as a deist, challenged the divine source of the Written Law, derided some of the commandments that Jews observe (phylacteries, circumcision), and denied the afterlife of the soul. As a result, he was denounced as an epicurean, ostracized, and humiliated by the community leaders and rabbis. The physician Juan de Prado, also a deist, was closely watched by the community and excommunicated because of his “evil beliefs.” One informer reported Prado’s heretic views in 1658:

What cause have we to believe in the Law of Moses more than in the teachings of the various other sects? If we believe in Moses rather than in Muhammad there must be some cause for it; but it is all imaginative. Again, after he had asked me whether there is any such thing as reward and punishment, I replied, How was it possible to prevaricate about the matter? Did he not realize that that was one of the thirteen principles of the Jewish faith? To which he rejoined, haughtily, that up till now, no one had ever come back from the other world to ask for our assistance. . . . In particular, he made fun of the statement by the Sages [of talmudic times] that the dead are rolled along

underground [passages to Palestine for resurrection]. He said that that was impossible and irreconcilable with what the intellect dictates: and consequently nothing that is stated about the resurrection is true. He likewise proclaimed that the world is uncreated, but exists in eternity.⁴⁸

The most famous of all was, of course, Baruch Spinoza (1632–77), who was excommunicated in 1656 by the leaders of the Amsterdam community because of “the words of heresy he practiced and taught” and became the personification of the powerful myth of the “first secular Jew” in Jewish history.⁴⁹ His *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670) was a revolutionary text that implied liberation from awe of the religious commandments, the Holy Scriptures, and the clergy. Reason, Spinoza argued, is free, the Scriptures are subject to a historical and rationalist examination, the mob is in the grip of superstition, and a state that desires to be prosperous must allow its subjects tolerance and freedom of religion. Insofar as the Jews are concerned, Mosaic law was the political codex of an ancient kingdom that no longer exists, and hence the validity of the laws has expired and the Jews no longer need to observe them. The historical existence of the Jews is explained not by divine providence but rather owing to their obstinate adherence to a number of customs—in particular, their strict observance of the rite of circumcision and the tense, mutually inimical, relations between them and their environment, which precluded their assimilation and the erosion of their identity.⁵⁰ In his *Ethics* (1677), he radically challenged the concept of a transcendental God (creator of the world and separate from nature) that is accepted by Jews and Christians: “For the eternal and infinite being that we call God or Nature acts by the same necessity as that whereby it exists.”⁵¹ This view, which from the early eighteenth century was known as “pantheism” and identified nature with God, was perceived from then on as the most radical form of heresy.⁵² According to the testimony of two Christians who met Prado and Spinoza in 1658, “These two persons had professed the Law of Moses, and the synagogue had expelled and isolated them because they had reached the point of atheism . . . because it seemed to them that the said law was not true and that souls died with their bodies and that there is no God except philosophically.”⁵³

Studies by Yosef Kaplan, Richard Popkin, and others have deepened and diversified the picture and have suggested a historical, philosophical, and social tapestry of the European and Jewish seventeenth century that explains those deist and atheist tendencies among members of the Spanish and Portuguese “nation” of former conversos. Kaplan, in a meticulous, careful analysis, points to the weakened hold of tradition in various spheres of life, to the relegation of religion to the confines of the synagogue, and to the distinctions drawn between the spheres of the “sacred” (synagogue) and the “profane” (commerce) in life.

These seventeenth-century developments in Amsterdam fit one of the main definitions of secularization: religion withdraws from the life of the Jews and is no longer diffuse, permeating, and present in all walks of life. However, in a summary assessment that considers the relative impact of Jewish heterodoxy, Kaplan claims that these Jewish communities were fundamentally traditional but that due to the special circumstances of new communities that originated in the Christian world, the traditional pattern that they created was unique and differed from that of contemporary Ashkenazic communities. In his view, those heretics, nonbelievers, and critics of religion, “Jews without Judaism,” failed, in the final analysis, to produce an organized movement or to develop an ideology, and since their influence at the time was marginal, it would be incorrect to attribute any crucial significance to them; certainly, it would be incorrect to base the story of the secularization of European Jewish society on them.⁵⁴ Since the families of conversos who were permitted to settle in the “lands of freedom” were fluent in the languages of European culture and were better educated than the Jews of the traditional society elsewhere, the new world of European ideas was accessible to them. These Jews, who engaged in early capitalist commerce and traded in a relatively free and cosmopolitan economic market, also had to be actively involved in society. As a result, many of them were tempted to adopt a fashionable and free lifestyle and to abjure communal affiliation, a problem that the leaders of the community were forced to deal with. In summing up these trends, Kaplan asserts that in London, for example, the relatively small Sephardic community revealed a centrifugal tendency (moving away from the core of collective Jewish life), which sometimes took the form of a weakened commitment to the observance of the commandments.⁵⁵

When we cross from the seventeenth into the eighteenth century, we find that in those communities, the struggle against all manner of heretics continued and that religious permissiveness and criticism of rabbis and religion were more and more common in them. On the verge of the eighteenth century, the Sephardic rabbi Solomon Ayllon (ca. 1655–1728) complained about Jews in London who were far from philosophical skepticism and did not even intend to cut themselves off completely from Judaism, but were lax about the commandments—they desecrated the Sabbath, did not lay phylacteries, attended synagogue only rarely, ignored the fast days, and publicly mocked the rabbis.⁵⁶ Todd Endelman describes the modernization of Sephardic Jews in England, as well as of many of the Ashkenazic immigrants, as rapid, radical assimilation, devoid of any ideological basis, that existed under relatively favorable conditions. Indifference toward religious obligations, rather than criticism of the articles of faith, was the overriding factor there.⁵⁷ Jacob Petuchowski and David Ruderman discussed the struggles—influenced by the intellectual cli-

mate of the time—waged early in the century by David Nieto (1654–1728), rabbi of the Sephardic community in London, against heresy and the denial of the Oral Law. One of Nieto’s students, Jacob de Castro Sarmento (1691–1762), a physician and former converso from Portugal, eagerly embraced Newtonian science, which, in his view, demonstrated that the world operated on the basis of the laws of nature without any divine intervention, and he became a deist.⁵⁸

The communal leaders and rabbis, who were responsible for supervising the communities of Western Europe, were probably most distressed by the contempt shown toward religion and its public desecration by Jews who were religiously lax or indifferent to religion.⁵⁹ But Kaplan has also uncovered the first signs of a real movement to purify Judaism and to offer a religious alternative—the “New Karaites” movement. This trend, which emerged in the Amsterdam community in the second decade of the eighteenth century, led an abortive attempt to establish a “new Judaism,” purged of talmudic and rabbinical Judaism, and to cast off the authority of the halakhah and the rabbis.⁶⁰ A key figure in this polemic against denial of the Oral Law was the Jerusalem rabbi Moshe Hagiz (1671–1751), who was familiar with Western Sephardic Jewry and was sensitive to the secular climate in which it lived. In her study, Elisheva Carlebach depicts Hagiz as a major figure battling against mystic (Sabbatean) and rationalistic heresies among Jews in the first half of the eighteenth century and as a proponent of rabbinical authority in the early modern era.⁶¹ Moreover, about twenty years ago, on the basis of a long list of apologetic writings in Hebrew and Spanish, written mainly in Italy and Amsterdam at the end of the seventeenth and up to the early eighteenth century against various types of heretics, Shalom Rosenberg suggested that a hidden heretic movement had existed, attested to by only a few testimonies.⁶²

All these phenomena are generally explained by the unique situation of former conversos who returned to Judaism during the seventeenth century: “Among those returning to the bosom of Judaism there were not a few who brought with them from the world of their apostasy demands for spiritual reform in Judaism. Others held skeptical, deistic or atheistic views.”⁶³ Consequently, when we shine a spotlight on the Jewish society in Europe in general, and try to trace the origins of secularization in the Ashkenazic communities, too, a serious problem arises. On the one hand, intuition, an important tool for the scholar of history, as well the direct and indirect testimonies, suggests that the great debate about disbelief in Europe also resonated in various parts of early modern Jewry. On the other hand, we do not possess the same wealth of subversive sources that the historians of non-Jewish Europe have found. In addition, the published examples of substantial heresy are nearly all found within the Sephardim, and these have no known equivalent among Polish or German Jewry, at least until the time of Salomon Maimon and the Jewish

deists of late eighteenth-century Berlin—David Friedländer, Saul Levin, and Lazarus Bendavid.

The generation of Salomon Maimon and his friend Lapidoth, in the 1760s and 1770s, more than a century after Spinoza's excommunication, was apparently disturbed by completely different problems. It is actually the presence of religion, and the rise of groups of religious revival, that is most applicable to the eighteenth century of Eastern European Jewry. At the same time when, according to Maimon's story, the two young Lithuanian Jews decided to stop laying phylacteries and praying, Hasidism was about to make its momentous appearance. In Mezhyrichi, Ukraine, the great *maggid* Dov Baer (1704–72) established the first patterns of the Hasidic court. Salomon Maimon, intrigued by this religious movement, considered joining it even after he had embarked on his personal youthful deist rebellion.⁶⁴ In the Berlin of Friedrich the Great, Moses Mendelssohn gained fame and prestige in broad circles of scholarly, enlightened Europe after the publication of *Phädon* (1767), his philosophical book in German on the immortality of the soul.⁶⁵ In northern Europe, Rabbi Jacob Emden (1697–1776) had not yet ceased pursuing his avowed enemies, the Sabbatean underground, and after the charismatic Sabbatean leader Jacob Frank was imprisoned in the Czestochowa fortress in Poland and his staunch adversary Jonathan Eybeschütz (ca. 1694–1764) had died, he invested enormous efforts to denounce his libertine Sabbatean son, Wolf Eybeschütz.⁶⁶ The libraries that Maimon and Lapidoth were able to peruse in the communities of Lithuania did not contain any of the European literature that could have inspired them intellectually to adopt a rationalist, critical attitude toward religion. They had no access to the European texts and were completely unfamiliar with the critical writings of the early Jewish heretics from the Western Sephardic communities.

But we cannot overlook the sense of threat in the face of the irreligion that affected Europe and swept up so many. Maimon and Lapidoth may not have been aware of the overall phenomenon and its manifestations in Central and Western Europe. Their personal rebellion was fueled mainly by their repulsion for life in the traditional frameworks they found so oppressive, but in the 1760s, religious doubt and sin became increasingly prevalent. In order to pick up the relatively weak vibrations emanating from the literary silence of atheists, deists, freethinkers, the religiously lax, and the Jewish libertines that were dispersed in various places in eighteenth-century Europe, we need to heighten the acuteness of those sensors capable nonetheless of identifying those vibrations. Religious skepticism and laxity among the Jews of Europe in this century did not come from the universities or the political and ecclesiastical establishment from which the Jews were excluded, nor did they emerge from societies of scholars or from the pages of subversive and popular satirical

literature or provocative street literature.⁶⁷ The Jewish critics of religion and the religiously lax came from the prayer house, from among the wandering teachers, from the houses of commerce and the court agents, from families of the grand bourgeoisie, who became deeply involved in the European elite as a result of their commercial ties, from among the servants who sought escape from their harsh lives, and the Jewish students and physicians, who were among the few who acquired a European education. Sometimes nothing more was involved than the adoption of a deist slogan, spontaneous defiance, the derision of rabbis and their authority, or indifference toward the observance of commandments. But in a communal society whose religiosity was all-embracing and whose members were subject to communal supervision, these were perceived as extremely grave digressions and through exaggerated sensitivity were denounced as all-out heresy.

Acculturation and Rebellion

Religious instructions and commandments were strongly linked to the lifestyle of the Jews, not only to beliefs and worldviews, and the communal and rabbinical policy of supervision held that its sphere of judgment and intervention also applied to intimate and private domains such as dress, beards, food, and sex, and regarded with suspicion those seeking the pleasures of life. Consequently, the modern acculturation of European Jewry became an inseparable part of a trend of waning commitment to the religion and its representatives.⁶⁸ For anyone observing modern acculturation in the eighteenth century from the standpoint of the all-inclusive demand of religion and the policy of religious supervision, every such move—by an individual, family, or group—was perceived as the crossing of boundaries and a breakdown of discipline and norms, and was thought to diminish the sacred space of life and to be implicit secularization.⁶⁹

While Jewish historiography used to relate the story of Jewish secularization in a narrative in which a crucial role was played by the ideological movements that arose in German Jewry—particularly in the Haskalah (Mendelssohn's Jewish philosophy, the innovative educational programs, and the inception of the new Hebrew literature), new trends, as we have noted earlier, challenge this narrative. One particularly decisive approach is that of Todd Endelman, which shows how in the English case, changes actually occurred in the mode of social and personal behavior—social and economic integration and modern acculturation that were the dominant paths that led to the abandonment of tradition by the Jews in London and to the disintegration of the traditional lifestyle—without any mediation by intellectuals or the Haskalah

movement, and that this took place even earlier than in the Jewish communities of Germany.⁷⁰ In a recent article, Endelman further expanded his approach beyond the boundaries of English Jewry: “It is now widely recognized that growing laxity, whether in Germany or elsewhere, preceded the heyday of the Berlin Haskalah. . . . [S]uffice it to say that recent social histories of Sephardim in the West and of Ashkenazim in urban commercial centers like London, Amsterdam, and Berlin reveal beyond any shadow of a doubt that transformations in traditional observance were well underway before the Mendelssohnian Enlightenment.”⁷¹

Indeed, the expanded boundaries of religious criticism and its link to secularization and manifestations of religious laxity argue against the interpretation of modern acculturation as a natural, unintentional, and unconscious process that is also tolerable in the traditional fabric of expectations. After all, the abandonment of the Jewish religion as a way of life and the loss of religious faith is the very core of Jewish secularization.⁷²

For the same reason, it also seems worth reconsidering the well-known, problematic, and provocative conclusion that kabbalah scholar Gershon Scholem reached more than sixty years ago, when he related to the issue of the historical, subversive power of Sabbatean mystical heresy as the cause of a crisis in the religious tradition and as a paradoxical milestone on the way to secularization.⁷³ He failed to establish a real link between Sabbateanism and the Haskalah; but for the historian of eighteenth-century Jewry, the connection Scholem made between this kabbalistic-religious movement and the spread of secularization is still significant. Beyond the search for the putative link between Sabbateanism and the Jewish Enlightenment, and beyond an investigation of the justification of the “doctrine of licentiousness” in Sabbatean theology, it is also important to observe the permissive and defiant behavior of those suspected of Sabbateanism and to interpret it in the broad context of secularization in Europe. Radical Sabbateanism, particularly Frankism, was an integral part of the broader fabric of libertinism—the views and behavior lacking in any religious, moral, or sexual inhibitions. Quite often, perhaps even usually, the anti-Sabbatean barbs were leveled against men and women who were free in their behavior, sinned in their religious consciousness, and were enthralled by the charm of “practical atheism,” which made possible the intimate life of the sect, and whose affinity to the Sabbatean theology of “redemption through sin,” was, if it existed at all, tenuous or served only as a cover. Although it had religious-kabbalistic sources of inspiration, members of the generation perceived it as part of one huge wave of heresy, one prong of a great assault on the foundations of the traditional society, on the Talmud and the commandments, and against rabbinical authority. As Matt Goldish rightly argues, in the historical context of the early modern age and against the back-

ground of the sense of a tightening siege on the rabbinical elite, Sabbateanism was part of the anti-rabbinical movement. Hence, when relating the history of secularization, one cannot ignore it.⁷⁴

Secularization Terminology

In concluding this introductory chapter, I should like to introduce some order into the repertoire of terms relating to the challenge to traditional religious faith and the waning patterns of religious practice. The yardstick for measuring the erosion of religion is faith in God's sovereignty over the life of man and the world, his providence and mercy, the obligation to observe his commandments and the prohibitions laid down by the halakhah, and the fear of sin and punishment. For example, in the early eighteenth century, Glikl bat Leib of Hameln (1645–1724) expressed her view of her “religious” world, shaped mainly by the popular *musar* literature, and wrote it in her memoirs so that it might be passed down to her children. She warned against all the “troubles and torments that a person would have to suffer” in the next world and recommended that everyone “put their ledgers in order” in this world in order to leave it with a positive balance of good deeds. The Torah is the rope that God has sent to us to keep us from drowning in transgression or submitting to the evil instincts that are part of our nature. Our obedience to the Torah and the rabbis who interpret it must be total. A divine mechanism of reward and punishment rules the world: “The poor man must immediately upon his death give an accounting before his Creator. It would be better, then, for us humans to properly make our reckoning while we are still alive.” Hence, we ought to pray fervently to God, free of any profane thoughts, and “we must be careful not to anger our father in heaven who created us and our forefathers.”⁷⁵

It was Glikl's brand of religiosity, which reflected the interpretation of the world in religious terms and the norms and practices of pre-secularization European Jewry, that was challenged during the eighteenth century. In the language of contemporary Jews, particularly in the rhetoric of the polemicists, all those transgressors in thought or in deed were labeled as *pokrim*, *epikorsim* (epicureans), *minim* (apostates), or *reshayim* (evil men). These deprecatory labels for the various types of heretics are obviously a throwback to ancient sources in the literature of the Sages and medieval rabbinical literature. It was Maimonides who systematically formulated in his *Codex Mishne torah* (Hilhot teshuva, chapter 3, based on the Talmud) a lexicon of classes of heretics, explained the difference between them, divided them into categories and sub-categories of heretics and sinners according to the different ways they deviated

from the norms and practices, and described their punishment. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the anti-Hasidic Lithuanian preacher Israel Loebel was troubled by the exaggerated and indiscriminate use of the term “epicurean,” and tried, like others of his time, to draw subtle, clear distinctions among the various types of heretics and their methods and to construct a scale of the degrees and seriousness of heresy.⁷⁶

In the European-Christian context, there was no general consensus regarding the precise use of and distinctions between terms and epithets such as atheism, deism, naturalism, free thought, disbelief, skepticism, libertinism, and the like. No dictionary of secularization terms can provide coherent definitions and clear boundaries to the profusion of terms used to describe the historical course of secularization, while it was occurring and in retrospect. Secularization is itself a broad term that refers both to the individual’s abandonment of religion and to the far-reaching changes in the state institutions and the balance of power between church and society. It spans the history of thought, sociology, anthropology, politics, and culture, and has been given numerous interpretations. In the eighteenth century, the term was still used to denote the transfer of the Church’s assets to people who do not belong to it, but in its modern usage, “secularization” first appeared in the mid-nineteenth century in England. It was coined in 1851 by George J. Holyoake so that a group of “freethinkers” could label themselves with the positive term “secularists” and cast off the appellation “atheists,” which bore the connotation of immoral behavior.⁷⁷ In the contemporary use of this term and in the discourse on the secularization thesis, emphasis is placed on three major aspects of the process of secularization: the release of areas of human activity and knowledge from religious domination; the decline of religious beliefs and practices; and privatization of the religion—the removal of religion from the public sphere to the private sphere of personal faith.⁷⁸

Here secularization will be interpreted less in its political meaning (the weakened power of religious institutions in the state or the secularized attitude toward the Jewish minority) or its sociological meaning (the weakening of religion as a force that unifies society), and more as the broad name of a manifold circuitous historical process that led the Europeans, including the Jews, to abandon the patterns of thought and practice dictated by religion via the clergy and rabbis and took them to the new world, in which humans sought independence in thought and behavior and the freedom to shape their lives in this world, and were indifferent to or deliberately rebellious toward religious supervision. A broad spectrum of phenomena, positions, views, modes of behavior, and public scandals that characterized the process of secularization will be gathered here into this broad category. The focus will be the encounter between religious criticism and the breakdown of norms and religious laxity.

By criticism, we mean all the diverse nonreligious and antireligious ideas that, either out of defiance or indifference, diverged from what was expected of a God-fearing Jew in the eighteenth century in the Torah-based religion or under rabbinical authority. In its use in this book, the term covers a very broad spectrum that ranges from doubting the authority of the Oral Law and the late (“neo-Karaite”) rabbinical rulings through the deism then in fashion, up to atheism and anti-rabbinism. The breakdown of norms and religious practices refers to all the evidence attesting to behavior perceived as nonreligious and antireligious that was attributed to the Jews of the “new world.” This includes laxity in observing the commandments—particularly the Sabbath, kashrut, and prayer; desire for a life of libertinism; ridicule of the rabbis and talmudic scholars; and modern acculturation—such as the adoption of modern dress and entertainments for the sake of personal pleasure, even when it incurred the objection of the religious authorities.

The tendency in Jewish historical research to relate to secularization from the religious or national vantage point and to assess it as a trend of crisis and destruction, loss of faith and morals, the blurring of Jewish identity and assimilation, or from an inverted perspective, as a process in which the Jews were redeemed from the life of the ghetto and the heavy burden of religion, is not present in this book. Our aim is to listen with utmost sensitivity to the voices of the contemporary discourse on criticism of the religion and religious permissiveness as they arise from different, opposite directions: from “freethinking” Jews, from anxious “orthodox,” and from liberal or conservative Christian witnesses. Secularization will be interpreted here as a development in which more and more fashionable men and women willingly took part in the life of the new world of Europe. As increasing numbers of Jews expressed in their permissive behavior an opposition to the lifestyle dictated by the religion, the rabbinical elite, which was the representative of the religion, had to significantly lower its expectations insofar as its religious supervision was concerned, and the demands and practices of the religion (the observance of the commandments and compliance with the prohibitions) also changed dramatically. *The Origins of Jewish Secularization* is therefore about “doubt” and “sin” among eighteenth-century European Jews and the polemic conducted against them, in an attempt to understand their historical significance. Its aim is to observe the historical process of secularization as a major process of change and revitalization in Jewish life that entailed schism, quarrel, and conflict, which from that time to the present has determined religious or secular identity—in all its various hues.

PART I

Liberty and Heresy, 1700–1760

Chapter 1

*Pleasures and Liberation
from Religious Supervision*

More than a generation had passed since the furor aroused by the movement of the false messiah, Shabbetai Zevi, which bore the subversive message of imminent release from the obligation to obey the halakhah, and since the critique of Baruch Spinoza's atheism had appeared in print, yet the Jewish communities of Europe were becoming more sensitive to every sign of heresy or breach of religious discipline. Growing numbers of Jews aspired to improve their standard of living and to indulge in the pleasures that contemporary European culture offered, even if this meant ignoring harsh rebukes by rabbis and preachers. On the threshold of the eighteenth century, questions of religious faith became more urgent and weighty for Jews in Central and Western Europe.

In winter 1703, Rabbi David Nieto, a native of Italy, who for two years had been serving as rabbi of the Sha'arei Shamayim community in London, came under suspicion. He was accused of having delivered a sermon in which he publicly revealed the heretic theology he believed in, which identified God with nature, as Spinoza had done in his *Ethics*: "They say I said that God Almighty and nature are one and the same." His accusers quoted from his sermon, claiming that in it, he had "spoken ill of God." Nieto, although he was quite familiar with the various trends of religious skepticism in Europe at the time, was very far from adopting the atheism of Spinoza that expunged the distinction between nature and God. However, in an atmosphere so charged with suspicion, he was compelled to deny the accusations against him. In his defense, he argued that his intention had actually been to refute the deist heresy that claims nature and not God rules the world through unvarying laws, and Nieto also gained the full support of the rabbi from Altona, Zevi Hirsch Ashkenazi (1660–1718). In 1705, Jacob Emden's father, the rabbi known as the Hakham Zevi, in a well-reasoned, defensive halakhic response, explained Nieto's religious belief and stated that he did not deny God's rule over the world: "Because the word 'nature' mentioned in it in relation to God is not one that means an independent nature that operates of necessity." Zevi Ash-

kenazi supported his colleague in the rabbinical elite, justified his position, pointed to his sources in Jewish thought, and exonerated him of the suspicion of heresy.¹

At nearly the same time, in another part of Europe, Tuviah Cohen (1652–1729), a native of Metz in Alsace, who was one of the first Jewish medical students in Prussia, a graduate of the University of Padua, a physician, and an early maskil, wrote his book on science and medicine, *Ma'aseh tuviah* (1707).² His contacts with Christian scholars and his familiarity with the Jews of his generation in Poland, Germany, and Italy gave him a deep-seated feeling of cultural inferiority and a strong desire to resolve what he regarded as a crisis: the weakness of the Jews in both scientific knowledge and the religious discourse. How could they grapple with a culture in which the new science and religious skepticism were challenging traditional belief? How would they react to the cosmology of Copernicus that seemed to be blatantly contradicting the Holy Scriptures? And how would they reply to the Gentiles “who denounce us, raising their voices without restraint, speaking haughtily with arrogance and scorn, telling us that we have no mouth to respond, nor can we raise our heads in matters of faith”? His book opened with a general warning against the heresy that was looming over Christian Europe in the early eighteenth century as well as a special warning against covert Jewish deists.³ Cohen devoted the first part of *Ma'aseh tuviah* to an effort to reinforce faith in the existence, unity, eternality, and essence of God. As a counterargument to the heretics, he wrote about divine providence, the truth and validity of the Torah, the existence of the angels, the punishment of sinners in hell, and faith in the resurrection of the dead.⁴ Tuviah Cohen viewed the outburst of the Sabbatean messianic movement as a disaster that further sullied the lowly image of the Jews, made them more vulnerable in the Christian environment, and also undermined the faith of many in promises of redemption.⁵ The Sabbatean shadow did, indeed, loom over eighteenth-century Jewry. It dealt a fatal blow to naïve faith, and one of the first lessons that the elites in charge of norms, communal discipline, and religious culture extracted from it was that they were compelled, more than ever, to remain constantly on guard to bolster their defenses against any further threat of heresy.

Anxieties of another sort distressed the popular Lithuanian preacher Zevi Hirsch Koidonover (d. 1712), who, early in the century, arrived in Germany, where he lived in the Frankfurt am Main community. Profoundly influenced by the kabbalah, which engulfed the culture of Polish Jewry in his generation, he awaited and prayed for redemption and preached the suppression of sin: “Woe to us, on the day of judgment! Woe to us on the day of admonition! Every man’s heart will know the bitterness of the soul that rebels against the Almighty.” Koidonover also witnessed modern acculturation among the fami-

lies of wealthy merchants, the agents and suppliers to the rulers of Germany, and the court Jews. In his ethical work *Kav hayashar*, which from the time of its first publication in Hebrew and Yiddish in Frankfurt in 1705, became a best-seller in the Jewish book market, Koidonover intimidated his readers and called on sinners to save their souls from horrible punishments in hell and to guard against temptation, defilement, and a materialistic mode of life.⁶

Although *Kav hayashar* continued a long tradition of *musar* literature, it also pointed to a list of modern sins: “As I have seen now within a short time, new things have emerged.” The preacher had heard only a faint echo of religious criticism, and he limited himself to a warning: “Distance yourself greatly from the study of philosophy, which is opposed to faith, for it is like a strange woman and it has been said of it, for her house leads down to death. . . . None who go to her return again.” But *Kav hayashar* was much more sensitive to fluctuations in lifestyles: it attacked women’s fashions and immodest dress (“who walk proudly, naked to the cleavage of their breasts”); men who are clean-shaven and wear wigs, drink wine, and eat nonkosher food in the company of Gentiles; and the custom prevalent among bourgeois families to teach their children foreign languages, particularly French, in order to prepare them for a life in modern commerce and finance. Koidonover cautioned against the slippery slope of ostensibly minor offenses, which could lead to more serious transgressions, and against undermining the totality of Torah study: “As the boy grows older, his father does not take care to send him to the *beit midrash* but instead makes sure he goes to a school to learn French and other tongues”; and against those Jews of the wealthy elite who reject communal supervision and try to rid themselves of those signs that identify them as Jews—a distinctly Jewish name, a beard, sidelocks, language, dress, the laws of *kashrut*. He denounced all of these in a long list of sins that, in his view, end in heavy punishments to body and soul from the Almighty.⁷

This repertoire of concerns, fears, anxieties, and threats aroused by Sabbateanism, modern acculturation, the temptation of the pleasures of life, and the hidden challenge of the criticism of faith seems to reveal some of the internal tension in Jewish life in various parts of Europe at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In this period, Jewish life in Europe was intimate, based on communal frameworks, shared lifestyles and self-consciousness, and networks of family connections. Information about controversies and new trends passed with relative speed through these networks across political boundaries. One fascinating example is the case of Nehemiah Hayon (c. 1655–1730), a kabbalist from Erets Israel who was suspected of Sabbatean heresy. During the course of this affair, particularly in the second decade of the century, hundreds of letters were sent, and numerous polemic writings, protests, bans, and handbills were printed and distributed through a dense communications network

of rabbis and scholars that connected East and West, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, as well as members of Jewish communities in Italy, Holland, the Ottoman Empire, the German states, Moravia, and England.⁸ Since the Jews were few in number and their communities were relatively small, they were able to maintain their intimacy and communal cultural-religious cohesiveness. Only a few thousand resided even in the largest communities of Europe, such as Amsterdam, Altona-Hamburg, Frankfurt, Berlin, London, Prague, and Brody. It is estimated that at the beginning of the eighteenth century, about half a million Jews lived in Europe (with the exception of Balkan Jewry) out of a little more than a million in the world, the majority in the kingdom of Poland-Lithuania (about 300,000), and fewer (about 150,000) in Western and Central Europe. The number of Jews who lived in states that would later be part of Germany is estimated as 25,000 at the beginning of the century and no more than 70,000 in the middle of the century. But this was merely the starting point of a demographic leap that would more than double their number in Europe in the course of the century.⁹

The preachers of morals may have been excessive in their bitter rhetoric; nonetheless, from early in the century, increasingly louder voices were expressing feelings of unease and concern about the lack of stability, subversive trends, and a decline in the authority of the rabbinical elite. Four chapters of this book will present both sides of this coin of anxiety and admonition in the first half of the eighteenth century. They will describe the various directions taken by secularization—the attempts to cast off the supervision of religious norms, to embrace the pleasures of life, to criticize traditional faith, to adopt a lax attitude toward the commandments—up to the 1750s. As we shall see, in the 1760s, the threat of heresy and unbelief intensified and the number of freethinking Jews grew, and this development only deepened in the last decades of the century. But in the first half of the century, we can already find in Western Europe (London, Amsterdam) and in various communities in Germany (Berlin, Altona-Hamburg) Jews living freely and thinking with relative freedom about what was demanded and expected of them by the rabbinical leadership. “The world is so upside down (*die Welt ist so verkehrt*)” that the Jews are no longer devoutly observing the commandments as they did in the past. This testimony by an anonymous Jew came from a German missionary in 1744. Perhaps this innocuous statement, if indeed it was not something the Jew had said merely to placate the Christian, reveals how attuned Jews were to the emergence of a new, pervasive secular climate in Europe. It is also a reflection of the popular justification for the growing indifference to the observance of the commandments: “The divine commandments cannot be fulfilled in full. You observe what you can; the world is so upside down, you have to follow the majority if you want to live out your life in peace.”¹⁰

Insulting the Angels of God

Zevi Hirsch Koidonover, the preacher who, at the beginning of the century, brandished the whip of supervision over the whole of Jewish life, felt threatened by the wide-open eyes of his contemporaries. To him, turning one's gaze to the earthly world was the source of all sin and threatened to drown men in a flood of abomination. The light of the sun awakens the forces of the evil spirits, and the man (almost always the Jewish male) who opens his eyes wide is exposed to temptations and pleasures, particularly sexual passion. Basing his tirade on the Zohar, Koidonover warned sinners with words that would strike terror in the hearts of God-fearing men: "After that dead person has been buried, the angel appointed to restore his soul grasps him violently, smashes his skull, pulls out his eyes, and subjects him to bitter and harsh torments."¹¹

But not all Jews accepted the guidance of preachers like Koidonover. Some did not lower their gaze, shake in fear of the final judgment, shun sin, or suppress their passions, but rather looked upon the earthly world and aspired to enjoy its pleasures. At the beginning of the century, some young Jews were enjoying a night life far removed from the ascetic world that Koidonover recommended. Although these young *bon vivants* did not leave behind detailed descriptions of their passions or their pleasures, from the admonitions hurled at them we can learn something about the culture of the tavern-goers. The bylaws of the Altona-Hamburg-Wandsbek community tried to combat the phenomenon by restricting it to weekdays to prevent the desecration of the Sabbath: "Young men and women are forbidden to go to drink in a tavern on the Sabbath or on a festival day."¹² Joseph Statthagen left a detailed testimony on the time spent in taverns in his 1705 book, *Divrei zikaron*, written in a rather literary style bordering on satire. He lived in a small town near Hanover, and his book contains many descriptions of life in the rural communities of Germany and recurring warnings against sin and excessive passions. He was adept at depicting groups of Jewish *bon vivants* sitting on long benches, drinking, smoking, playing cards, and dancing, "guzzling wine and beer, handing around full glasses and returning them empty one to another, dancing wildly, loudly clapping their hands, leaping and snapping their fingers, all this to the sound of the noisy mob, until it seems the roof will collapse." Finally, they end up by quarreling, cursing, and fighting violently, "hitting and stamping, strangling and beating with their teeth and nails, tearing and shattering arms and cheeks against the wall."¹³ In the Hebrew *musar* weekly, *Kohelet musar*, which was published in Berlin briefly in 1755 by Moses Mendelssohn and his young friend Tuvyah Bock, a letter to the editor was printed, apparently written by another group of young Jews fond of the pleasures of drinking, who describe their nighttime carousing: "A group of my friends gather at a place

we chose a night or two ago. . . . Each of us goes to the place where wine is served. . . . There we joyously imbibe until our bellies are like a swollen wine-skin. We cannot stop. We stomp on the floor, make merry, and shout loudly. The earth shakes at the sound of our voices. . . . Cheers of joy and merry with wine, so all know we have guzzled greedily and are drunk with love.” When the members of this group get hold of an issue of *Kohelet musar*, which preaches against frivolity, licentiousness, and hedonism that manifests itself in indifference toward God, they react with scorn: “You have made us laugh: We mock you all day long.”¹⁴

A book of morals by R. Zalman of Dessau printed in 1732 in Wandsbek contained a letter written by a young man supposedly confessing his sins to his father and wishing to atone for his life of debauchery. His base instincts, the flightiness of youth, and lust had led him to join the “company of rakes,” and now he was filled with a sense of regret:

I joined up with those wanton fellows and helped them plan all manner of wicked and ruinous deeds. I was like a player on a harp, dancing frenziedly to the music of many instruments. . . . They led me to the tavern where I found a sect of deists—wicked, sinning fellows, drinking fountains of wine and singing all manner of song, and anyone looking upon these four things would better never have been born. And there were violins, harps, flutes, and drums at their parties. Women sang there, and men responded in merry voices. There I became accustomed to eating without a blessing and without washing my hands, there I was caught up in vanities and the worst defilement, cards and dice, and all manner of games, all jumbled together, and on some occasions I never shut an eye for whole nights until the dawn, strolling in this company by day and spending sleepless nights. . . . On several occasions, we quarreled, and then each man would grasp his stick and would beat the other . . . and then coats would be torn and blood was spilled.¹⁵

The taverns attracted young Jews because of the numerous pleasures they offered: music, dancing, the singing and company of women, food, and games of chance.¹⁶ At first glance, it seems that Zalman of Dessau had erred and exaggerated in using the term “sect of deists,” not knowing that it referred to the natural religion of those who denied revelation as well as the involvement of God in the world and his providence over humans. But since those young men enjoying the delights of the tavern were perceived as rebels who had defied all authority, were tempted to disregard the commandments (eating and drinking without reciting the blessing), and were abandoning themselves to physical pleasure, perhaps in his mind this led to a connection between the deist view and the “deistic” freethinking behavior of those who, in effect, were denying the presence of divine providence. In the tavern, it was easy to throw off all social and religious constraints without fearing those in charge of religious supervision. Just as it was possible to speak vulgarities, so it was possible to

give vent to one's frustrations, one's secret thoughts in relation to the religion and its commandments, and rage toward its representatives. In his study on England, John Redwood terms this "practical atheism" and describes the attempt to degrade the clergy by mocking the religion and uttering popular anticlerical remarks in the taverns.¹⁷

Indeed, it seems that in the tavern, these revelers could publicly voice defiant heretic views, and that is precisely what Zalman of Dessau meant when he called this worrying phenomenon, apparently for the first time in Ashkenazic Jewry, by the fashionable name already known to his contemporaries: "a sect of deists." This guardian of religious norms saw a connection between the hedonistic nighttime pleasures of the young Jews and vulgar heresy, the desire to gratify bodily passions and the aspiration to cast off all religious supervision.

At the end of the sixteenth century, the Italian miller Menocchio of Friuli, suspected of heresy, was interrogated by the Inquisition. He had uttered anticlerical statements, such as: "The priests want us under their thumb, just to keep us quiet, while they have a good time," or "The Holy Scriptures has been invented to deceive men. . . . Who do you think makes these Gospels if not the priests and the monks who have nothing better to do? They think up these things and write them down one after another."¹⁸ In the Jewish sources, there are no texts like this one, which the historian Carlo Ginzburg used in his study of Menocchio and his world. Nevertheless, some remarks uttered by Jewish scholars or ordinary Jews in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have reached us. Spontaneous expressions of defiance, often angry and derisive, were publicly voiced in a synagogue, tavern, or at social gatherings such as fairs and markets. Such a radical, defiant remark, although certainly made in a very small forum or only in a conversation between two people, has been quoted here in the name of Juan de Prado from seventeenth-century Amsterdam: "What cause have we to believe in the Law of Moses more than in the teachings of the various other sects? . . . It is all imaginative. . . . Till now no one had ever come back from the other world to ask for our assistance."¹⁹ In 1725, Isaac Baryntes entered the *beit midrash* of the Portuguese community in London and publicly disagreed with Rabbi David Nieto's interpretation of the word "firmament" in the verse that opens the Torah and, when asked how he dared deny the truth of what Moses had written at God's command, he replied with a deistic statement that shocked all who were present: "You are deceiving yourselves in believing that God commanded it to be written." Moses, he went on to say, was a great philosopher who studied science in Egypt and wrote the Torah in order to persuade people that the world was created, but God does not speak to human beings.²⁰

David Nieto himself, in his literary debate to reinforce faith in the Oral Law, referred to "Karaite" words of effrontery: "I have heard the deniers

speaking out angrily against the Sages, saying that they have invented laws and commandments that God did not order. . . . They say that the Sages made explicit things obscure and confused clear verses so they might interpret them as they wished. . . . They contrived many things so that they may lord it over the public.”²¹ A milder comment, but one that also expresses suspicion of the Torah scholars and grows out of the puzzling statements of one of the Talmud sages, was cited by the Polish rabbi Eliakim Getz in a book printed in Berlin: “The masses speak ill of us and mock us, saying that just as the words of Rabbah bar bar Hana [known in the Talmud as a scholar given to hyperbole] are nonsense, so is the method of our Talmud.”²² In 1732, in a book that criticizes deist Jews, Benjamin Brandon of Amsterdam testifies to another insolent comment meant to deny the sanctity and truth of the teachings of talmudic sages: “I have heard . . . that they affront the angels of God [in speaking about the teachings of the Sages]. . . . They say, why should we believe them, for they are men like ourselves, and who can testify that they have spoken honestly?”²³ And Moshe Hagiz, a prominent defender of the rabbinical elite in the communities of Western Europe, repeatedly testified in Altona in 1733 to similar, but far more radical, remarks:

They began by saying to the man, what do you care about the limits and restrictions laid down by the Sages, who are flesh and blood just as you are? Do not heed their words. What you believe and observe is everything that is written in the Torah of God, and that is sufficient for you. Let me advise you, and may God be with you, not to seek or pay heed to what [the Sages] instruct you. Pay no heed to promises of reward and punishment in the next world . . . for where is the existence of that world, and who went and returned to us to announce to us all those things spoken by the Sages, which are nothing but fabrications of their heart, for they have produced them in order to threaten and intimate the people and to hold sway over them?²⁴

Around the same time, Jacob Emden, an immensely energetic rabbi who lived in the north of Germany, also had a deep-seated sense of responsibility for the condition of the religion and the society. He was particularly troubled by the dual heresy—mystic Sabbateanism and rationalist deism—and tirelessly remonstrated against it throughout his life. In a trenchant sermon to the Emden community in 1731, he repeated some of the blasphemous remarks he had heard. Those anonymous Jewish blasphemers had publicly expressed their deist worldviews. Not only had they mocked the words of the Sages but had spoken out against the belief in divine providence and uttered a saying, the very essence of deism, that denied the intervention of God in the world: “God has left the earth and does not see or watch over this world.”²⁵

From a different vantage point, that of a deeply concerned Jew who was not a rabbi, Isaac Wetzlar (1680–1751) of Celle warned that simple Jews, who

were becoming exasperated with the rabbinical leadership, were muttering subversive anticlerical protests. Greatly troubled by what he viewed as a deepening crisis in Jewish contemporary society and culture, Wetzlar in his 1749 book *Libes briv*, written in Yiddish, took upon himself to act as a critic and a preacher. On his travels throughout the various communities in Europe, caustic popular protests and invective hurled against Torah scholars had reached his ears, and he shared what he had heard with his readers: "It is a popular proverb among ordinary people that our holy Torah would be quite good, but the rascals and thieves took it over and twist it any way they want." He recorded an even more radical protest: "that scholars are the most contemptible people, committing the worst deeds."²⁶

In contrast to preachers like Rabbi Emden, Wetzlar concurred to a great extent with this criticism, and his book was intended to arouse a broad-based protest from "below" against the rabbinical elite and its flaws as well as what he regarded as the deplorable quality of religious life in the mid-eighteenth century. *Libes briv* is therefore a fascinating document that, from the vantage point of a contemporary, exposes the weakness of the religion in the European Ashkenazic society. As a man who belonged to the educated merchant class and was not a formal scholar, Wetzlar was not prepared to reconcile himself to the meager knowledge of the Jews, the folk beliefs, and the understanding of religion via popular literature in Yiddish. Although he tried to keep his criticism mild and constructive, Wetzlar was unable to conceal his fury at this elite whose level, in his view, was ridiculously low and whose attitude toward simple Jews bordered on corruption, avarice, and deception. "I do not want to spend much time in the company of rabbis in this world and even less in the next world," Wetzlar wrote in one of his anticlerical outbursts.²⁷ He wished to see the rabbis replaced by people worthy of their position, to see the religion strengthened and deepened rather than weakened. The manuscript of *Libes briv* was a scathing, subversive criticism of the rabbinical leadership, and, from the early modern perspective of a Jew aspiring to the reform and rationalization of religious life, constituted a challenge to this elite.

These hostile feelings and the outburst of criticism of talmudic scholars are linked to tensions and local power struggles and to rabbis who wrongly exploited their position, were not sensitive enough to the economic and social problems of their communities, or failed to meet the expectations of the public and the preachers of morals. For example, in her memoirs, Glikl of Hameln writes angrily about a rabbi from Lissa in Poland who deceived her and her son (who was sent to the rabbi to study Torah) and turned out to be a greedy charlatan. Glikl describes how she discovered the deception: "My son R. Yosef Segal looks at the letter, reads it, and says: What kind of a letter is this? I do not know what to say about this letter. It must have been written by my rabbi

(may he be accursed!) for the purpose of receiving a large sum of money from me, and he has already received more money from me than he deserves. He has taken all of my belongings, cut off the silver buttons from my coat, and has pawned it all. . . . I thank God that I have managed to get away from this evil man, for he has not taught me anything.”²⁸

These relatively few testimonies of the anti-rabbinical rage that sometimes was expressed as heretic defiance of the authority of the Sages and divine providence open a window through which we can learn of the popular feelings toward the rabbinical elite, which hastened to defend itself by denouncing any affront to its status. The roots of the warning against disrespect and scorn toward scholars and rabbis are deep-seated, and it is written in the Talmud that anyone contemptuous of the Sages is called an “epicurean.”²⁹ The spokesmen for the rabbinical elite in European Jewry identified this trend as dangerous and throughout the eighteenth century were very hostile toward it. Rabbi Jacob Reischer, for example, a native of Prague who served early in the century as a rabbi in several communities in Germany (including Ansbach and Worms) was asked to reply to a question sent to him by Rabbi Moshe Hagiz in Amsterdam: “Unless it is permitted to protest and rebuke anyone who despises the honor of a Talmud scholar and his teaching, the situation will be extremely grave, since, in any case in these generations, respect for talmudic scholars has dwindled.”³⁰ In his sermons to the Metz community in eastern France in the forties, the influential rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz also often rebuked those who mocked the rabbis: “If men sit together at a merry gathering drinking wine, and one should say something offending the honor of the other or his family, they will all quarrel ferociously, but if on this festive occasion someone will endlessly scoff at the sages of the generation and those who observe the commandments of the Written and Oral Law, no one will pay any heed; on the contrary, they will laugh and say that he who has mocked the talmudic scholars has spoken well.” On another occasion, he said: “To our sorrow, wealthy boors and simple folk will say about a talmudic scholar that he is a dog,” or “to diminish the Torah is to debase the Torah, for to our great regret, many are contemptuous of those who study Torah . . . and to our great sorrow the scholars are much scorned by the ignorant folk who affront the angels of God.”³¹

Physical Gratifications

These groups of hedonists came under suspicion because of what was regarded as the delimitation of a no-holds-barred area outside the boundaries of its control. But these groups were motivated less by an anti-rabbinical tendency

than by what can be depicted as a desire for gratification and the full enjoyment of the pleasures of life, which were becoming increasingly accessible in eighteenth-century Europe.

In summer 1735, a set of copper engravings, *A Rake's Progress*, the work of the artist and social critic William Hogarth, appeared in London. On the eight plates, purchasers of copies of the set could follow the stages of the physical and moral deterioration of young hedonist Tom Rakewell. As soon as his wealthy but penny-pinching father died, the immoral young man embarked on a journey of unrestrained pleasures. His main ambitions were to spend his inheritance on the pleasures of life and to climb the social ladder to high society. The first plate shows a tailor measuring Tom for a fashionable new mourning suit; in the second, he is surrounded by a musician, a composer of operas playing the piano, a French dance teacher, a fencing coach, and a coachman who is handing him a silver cup that he won in the races. Awaiting his attention are a wig maker, a hatter, and a poet. In the third plate, Hogarth depicted his hero's nighttime diversions: he is sitting in a tavern, drunk and gaping, in the company of a bare-breasted prostitute and intoxicated men and women. Shattered furniture and dishes are strewn about, attesting to quarrels and violence. In the remaining plates, Rakewell continues his decline. He spends time in gambling halls, loses his money, tries to save himself by making a good marriage, and finally finds himself in prison, soon to end his life at its lowest ebb, his legs shackled in irons in the famous London madhouse, Bedlam. Thus Hogarth presented a caricature of some of the entertainments and physical pleasures that the bustling European city offered its inhabitants. But Hogarth also showed himself to be a moralizing artist who expected his spectators to learn a lesson and to be shocked by the maladies of the boundless hedonism that, in his view, was corrupting English society.³²

An amazingly similar social and moral position was presented by Hogarth's Jewish contemporary, Rabbi Jacob Emden of Altona. In the commentary on the tractate Avot that he wrote, with admirable literary skill, Emden satirized the Jewish hedonistic type as if he had just emerged from one of the plates in Hogarth's series:

When a man who has caused his own death through his vices dies . . . , certainly his money and his gold cannot save him on the day of God's wrath. . . . He will pay all the prostitutes [at the time of his death]. He will be accompanied at his funeral by the tailor who knows the latest fine fashion, the barber who shaves off his sidelocks and cuts his beard to make him look like a female, and the wig maker who shamelessly fashions curls for him in front and back, whitened with perfumed powder; he will be mourned by the adept artist in a painting of amorous play and flirtation with beautiful naked women dancing to the music of drums or skillfully playing violin and organ. Dread will fill the hearts of the lovely buxom harlots with whom he frolicked in pleas-

ant pastures and to whom he had paid a harlot's wage. On the floor will sit the card sellers, the wine shops will sorrowfully shut down, and the merchants of fine jewels, and the peddlers of precious stones will be deserted. The clowns will eulogize him, and those strumming on the harp will wail. They will set a table for Fortune filled with vomit and excrement as they recline on their couches, and they will lament for him. But when the wicked perish, there is jubilation among the righteous. This is a funeral and eulogy for a man who has brought his own death upon himself; it is the death of a fool who dies prematurely without knowledge.³³

While the moral tale in Hogarth's pictures is primarily secular and based on the values of human ethics and the interests of society, Emden's preaching is primarily religious. He warns the foolish or wicked man who is seduced by his drives and the rich man who submits to everything that money can buy that his punishment will be meted out by the Almighty. Yet both Hogarth's visual artistic medium and Emden's literary-sermonizing medium reveal the eighteenth-century world of pleasures and the range of possibilities it offered.

The tendency to enjoy the pleasures of the body and the soul is built in to human society and culture; but in the premodern age, it was the object of philosophical and Christian religious criticism and regarded as a human weakness. "What marks the innovativeness of the eighteenth century," wrote Roy Porter, scholar of English Enlightenment and culture, "is its new accent upon the legitimacy of pleasure, not as occasional release, aristocratic paganism or heavenly bliss, but as the routine entitlement of people at large to seek fulfillment in this world rather than only in heavenly salvation, to achieve the gratification of the senses, not just the purification of the soul."³⁴ The culture of Enlightenment, which, in contrast to the Christian ethos, turned its face toward man and his world, acknowledged the instinctive drives of human beings. Other thinkers also claimed that man is controlled by his tendency to try to acquire happiness and pleasure and to avoid pain and suffering. Robert Darnton, interpreting the essence of the cultural and philosophical revolution that occurred in the eighteenth century, wrote that "public opinion in the large cities converged around one idea that resonated everywhere, happiness. Europeans came to believe that they should enjoy life on earth instead of enduring it in order to win a place in paradise after death."³⁵ Those who believed in God explained that the Creator of the world created all of nature for man's use and pleasure; those who did not believe in God explained the human being's feelings of pleasure in materialistic-physiological terms. As the modernist ethos took shape, the individualistic consciousness grew stronger, along with the aspiration for independence, autonomy, self-definition, improvement of the character and life, and the acquisition of happiness. The theory of utilitarianism developed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and the slogan "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" will

later epitomize this approach and present man as a creature who, by his very nature, was meant to obtain the pleasures of life.³⁶

Eighteenth-century European society, particularly the inhabitants of London, Amsterdam, Vienna, Paris, Berlin, and Hamburg, had no need of philosophers to justify their passion for entertainments, pleasures, and happiness. The range of possibilities was dizzying: cafés and restaurants; chess and card games, dice and other betting games; smoking tobacco; shopping for fashionable clothes, fabrics, and books; dressing up in impressive, expensive clothes, hairstyles, and wigs; dancing at balls; reading the newspapers; looking at caricatures; becoming swept up in a world of adventure, intrigues, and romance by reading novels; furnishing and decorating the home with objets d'art; taking a stroll or riding in a carriage through the parks and boulevards; traveling to spas; and attending the theater, the opera, and concerts.³⁷ Sexual pleasures were among the tempting consumer products offered by the European city. London, for example, which, during the eighteenth century, grew with dizzying speed until its population numbered nearly a million, was known not only as a capital of trade and commerce but also as the sex capital of Europe.³⁸

The types of pleasure and places of entertainment were broken down by class, gender, and economic status in European society, but it was primarily the bourgeoisie that became the consumer of culture and the purchaser of amusements and entertainments. There are numerous explanations for the intensity and the widening scope and diversity of the pleasures during this period: the development of the city and the continual increase in the number of its inhabitants; the growing strength of the bourgeoisie and its purchasing power; the enormous improvement in health (the gradual disappearance of epidemics); better nighttime street lighting for personal safety; the rise in literacy and improved means of communication (speedier carriages, an efficient postal system, more newspapers). Happiness became a major value in the lives of many of the sons and daughters of Europe and was identified mainly with pleasures.³⁹ Moreover, high culture was no longer the monopoly of the aristocracy, and a new audience was created—the “public”—which was made up of many individuals but remained anonymous in its collective facial features. Members of that public read newspapers and books, attended exhibitions and museums, concerts and the theater, conversed with one another freely in cafés, and established what was called by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas “the public sphere.”⁴⁰ This was nothing less than a cultural revolution. More men and women who could afford to acquire consumer and entertainment products aspired to dress, to furnish their homes, to listen to music, and to speak, read, and conduct their lives according to the latest fashion, refined taste, and style.

The debaucher and the pursuer of pleasures was also suspected of reli-

gious skepticism and heresy. But apparently, the secular public sphere, in which less importance was attributed to the instructions of the representatives of religion, constantly expanded. In the public debate over the culture of luxury, the eager well-to-do consumers voted in favor of a life of extravagance. The free atmosphere that went hand in hand with leisure time spent in pleasure also implied a certain degree of liberation from the intervention of the state's institutions, as, for example, James Melton claimed when writing about the historical significance of coffeehouses: "Coffeehouse conversation was free and unregulated. . . . Unlike taverns, coffeehouses were not associated with crime and violence. . . . In this respect the coffeehouse anticipated the liberal faith that society could function in an orderly way without the constant need for intervention by an authoritarian state."⁴¹

The rabbinical elite did its utmost to divert the natural tendency to seek pleasures and social amusement into religious channels. From its perspective, the right to enjoy pleasure, to play, to stroll, to dance, or to find social gratification in a group was not recognized. Anyone who indulged in such behavior was suspect of being permissive, partly because of the fear of a forbidden contact between men and women. Jacob Katz expressed this:

Social activity for its own sake, that is, the coming together of people to enjoy themselves simply by being together, was regarded as a religious and moral hazard. If the group included men and women, the risk was of an erotic nature. . . . Even social intercourse between persons of the same sex was viewed with misgivings. It was believed to open the door to such transgressions as gossip, slander, and bickering. In addition, the requirement underpinning traditional culture demanded of men no less than total dedication to the study of Torah and thus negated any acknowledgment of the need for "leisure time." Even when the bylaws of the various communities became reconciled to some of the entertainments acceptable for Jews as well, they restricted them to special days and never granted them legitimacy.⁴²

When Jacob Katz attempted to assess the growing strength of the tendency toward worldly pleasures, the aspiration of the wealthy for a life of luxury, religious permissiveness, and the many testimonies about indifference toward religious obligations, he denied that they indicated a historically significant "real shift." In his view, as long as these new patterns of behavior were not accompanied by a new principled justification and a conscious, declared defiance of the religious norms, so long as no fundamental change had taken place in relations between Jews and Christians and no worldview of Enlightenment had appeared, one could still see these innovations in lifestyle as deviations or variations within the framework of the "old fabric."⁴³ But Katz's argument becomes less valid as acculturation unattended by ideological justification exerts a greater influence on the modernization of Jewish communi-

ties in Europe and as we come across more test cases of Jewish communities and new Jewish types whose world and lifestyle were interwoven into the secular cultural fabric of contemporary Europe and for whom halakhah and religious institutions were no longer the main substance of all their life cycles. In the eighteenth century, more Jews in Western and Central Europe found that their desire for pleasure was no longer being satisfied through traditional channels. Their longing for physical gratification and pleasure was attended by temptations, drives, extravagance, and the emulation of current fashion but also was not neutral insofar as their attitude toward the religion and its commandments was concerned. In the eighteenth century, modern acculturation began to take shape in a manner unlike the traditional acculturation that typified premodern Jewish societies like those in Muslim Spain and Renaissance Italy, which assimilated many elements from the Muslim or Christian majority culture into their culture.⁴⁴

The passion for pleasures that was part of modern acculturation was significant in the process of Jewish secularization. It expressed the desire to ignore the intimidation and rebukes of the religious elite, to wrest free of its supervision, restrictions, and patronizing attitude, and to imbibe the life of this world and achieve a certain degree of personal independence even if this meant being religiously lax and having their behavior denounced as a religious sin. "If laxity in observance and perhaps even gross offenses against the religious law became more recurrent," Katz argued, "it did not mean that the transgressor had a quiet conscience. . . . There is no reason for assuming that another attitude existed below the surface of public opinion."⁴⁵ But rereading this chapter in the history of European Jewry shows that although there may have been guilty consciences among these offenders, concealed, implicit defiance in deed and speech of the instructions and representatives of the religion did exist. And the desire to gain personal gratification and enjoy the pleasures of life was increasingly perceived as legitimate and no longer subject to religious supervision. As we trace modern acculturation, therefore, one of the most significant chapters in the story of the secularization of European Jewry unfolds.

In the early eighteenth century, Moshe Hagiz wrote one of the most precise observations on religious permissiveness in European cities. He described the Jews in Amsterdam who were behaving according to the latest fashion and spending their leisure time with Christians ("clean-shaven and wigged, befriending Christians and riding in carriages"). He explained that their behavior resulted from a combination of wealth, freedom, and temptation, from succumbing to desire and exploiting their economic well-being and the liberal atmosphere of the city, and that this was not necessarily an act stemming from skeptical thought:

To our great sorrow, there are many of this type who are not talmudic scholars, and because they live in countries where they have freedom together with wealth, kept for their ill deeds, they cast off the yoke imposed by our Sages, not because they in their hearts think that the yoke of the Torah placed upon them by the Sages is bad for them but because of their aim and desire to be free to transgress in licentiousness and the like. They know that if they allow the true Jewish scholars to restrain the people by admonishing them for this sin and others like it, they surely will have to take upon themselves the burden of the Torah, and hence they cast off the yoke of the Sages with fallacious claims so that the yoke will of itself fall off their necks.⁴⁶

Yosef Kaplan has shown that with these words, Hagiz was referring to the deeply rooted phenomenon of “intentional deviants and sinners” in this community.⁴⁷ But Hagiz’s keen observation also applies to the testimonies collected elsewhere. From London, Metz, Hamburg, the Hague, Vienna, Bordeaux, Berlin, and other communities, we get descriptions of the glittering, sophisticated lives of the members of the Jewish “aristocracy”—the court Jews and wealthy merchants and financiers and their families who took advantage of the best opportunities that money could buy, and about the sons and daughters of the lower classes who were enjoying themselves in cheap, relatively coarse ways.

The high standard of living of the affluent elite of merchants, economic entrepreneurs, and the agents of kings and princes enabled them to take advantage of a variety of pleasures that were available to rich Europeans. Looking out at us from the portraits of families of Jewish court Jews in Germany and Austria, bourgeois city merchants in London or the Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam and the Hague, are men and women splendidly attired in stylish clothing and precious jewels. They purchased high-quality fabrics, fine furniture, porcelain, precious jewels, gold watches, silver tea sets and imported gourmet food. Visitors to their grand homes were impressed by their size, their fashionable furnishings, the Dutch, German, and Italian works of art, their fine libraries and staff of servants.⁴⁸ Families of wealthy Jews in Holland were among the patrons of music, and supported, for example, the performances of the gifted prodigy Mozart.⁴⁹ The inventory of the contents of the home of Joseph Oppenheimer (“Jew Süß”) in Frankfurt, prepared in 1737 after the owner was arrested and his house expropriated, contains hundreds of items attesting to the aristocratic lifestyle led by the court Jew of Duke Karl Alexander of Württemberg: closets packed with velvet and silk clothing, a large selection of shoes, hats, and a collection of no fewer than 166 wigs in various styles. In addition, there are jewels, crystal, porcelain, silver and gold dinner sets, and dozens of paintings; the shelves were lined with many expensively bound books in German, Latin, Italian, and French on history, the arts, the classics, law, literature, and travel.⁵⁰

Oppenheimer was not typical of the Jewish wealthy class. While the majority became moderately acculturated and invested money to foster the Jewish community, its religious institutions, and expensive ritual objects, Oppenheimer led a hedonistic life and was indifferent to the religion whose commandments he no longer observed. Selma Stern, an eminent historian of the court Jews, justly defined him as an individualistic free spirit. Oppenheimer ignored the restrictions of kashrut, had several lovers, and did not visit the synagogue or observe the Sabbath and holidays. His attitude toward religion and the clergy was cynical, and, in his worldview, at least very near to the time of his execution, Oppenheimer was a deist.⁵¹ But many others in the wealthy elite, who did not cut themselves off so drastically from the community and to Judaism, relegated religion to the synagogue, to the holidays and the Sabbaths, to philanthropic activity and to the support of talmudic scholars, while in other places and on other days, they led the secular life of Jewish aristocracy. Rabbi Statthagen, early in the century, expresses the objection of the guardians of tradition to these lifestyles: “Who pursue luxuries and property, and make gods of their bellies to eat and drink in violation of the laws of the Torah, and dress proudly in the style of ministers, filled to the brim with craving to satisfy their lust, to lie with many women, and to glorify their dwellings and palaces which they build for their reveling and merrymaking.”⁵²

The sources of the period attest to the link between money and property and the temptation to disregard halakhic prohibitions and the tendency to evade religious supervision. Merchants and financiers, for example, found it hard to resist slipping out for a few minutes, even on the Sabbath, to go to the post office or the stock exchange, to read the business letters sent to them or to keep abreast of stock market activity. “Is there any trace of wrongdoing in walking to the stock exchange on the holy Sabbath,” Rabbi Emden was asked, “without engaging in business or talking of profane matters—just strolling over to hear news or exciting events?”⁵³ In 1746, London physician Meyer Schomberg protested the hypocrisy of Jewish stock-exchange traders and angrily described their religious laxity: “On the day of rest, they go first to the market known as Exchange Alley to question the merchants and agents to find out whether the trade in Indian shares has gone up or down . . . and they lose money if it does, and so they mix the joy and rest of the Sabbath day with endless sorrow and despair. Moreover, if one day a trader goes over to Fleet Street because he has declared bankruptcy, then they all dash, running like deer, to put a hold on their funds in the bank.”⁵⁴

Indeed, financial commerce and the stock exchange were channels of secularization and religious tolerance, just as the cynical but sharp-eyed Voltaire noted on his visit to England in the 1720s:

Take a view of the Royal Exchange in London, a place more venerable than many courts of justice, where the representatives of all nations meet for the benefit of mankind. There the Jew, the Mahometan, and the Christian transact together as tho' they all profess'd the same religion, and give the name of Infidel to none but bankrupts. . . . At the breaking up of this pacific and free assembly, some withdraw to the synagogue, and others to take a glass. This man goes and is baptiz'd in a great tub, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. That man has his son's foreskin cut off, whilst a set of Hebrew words (quite unintelligible to him) are mumbled over his child. Others retire to their churches, and there wait for inspiration of heaven with their hats on, and all are satisfied.⁵⁵

In any event, rabbis and preachers in charge of maintaining the boundaries of the exclusive Jewish space and the codes of proper behavior refused to recognize the legitimacy of the connection between commercial and financial activity and modern acculturation and religious laxity, or the clear-cut division between life in the urban economic and cultural sphere and life in the Jewish religious sphere. "The affluent members of our people," Rabbi Emden said, "squander their wealth to teach their sons and daughters the French language, to accustom them to laughter, frivolity, coarse vulgarities, which, as everyone knows, are the fruit of that language, all the more so when music is added to it, two panderers of transgression."⁵⁶ As far as he was concerned, this French acculturation was meant not merely to prepare the children of the Jewish merchants to engage in business and social contacts with their counterparts among the Christians, but signified the breakdown of moral and religious boundaries and encouraged forbidden passions and a "life of licentiousness."⁵⁷

The amusements that were available in Hamburg at the beginning of the century were numerous and diverse: from taverns and coffeehouses to the opera, which was one of the first established in the cities of Germany. However, the 1706 bylaws of the unified Altona-Hamburg-Wandsbek communities were explicit and unyielding: "Every man, woman, boy or girl, whoever they may be, is forbidden to attend the opera, comedies, puppet shows, both on weekdays and on the Sabbath and festivals." In addition, it was forbidden to ride in carriages on Christian holidays, to frequent their taverns, to play cards or other games (except for chess) there or in coffeehouses, and it was forbidden to send children to study with dance teachers. These prohibitions apparently did not constitute a real barrier for those Jews who indulged in such pleasures. The restrictions, which were backed up by threats of penalties, excommunication, and the denial of communal appointments, actually became more moderate during those years. In 1715, the bylaws permitted visits to the opera, although only during the week of Hanukkah or Purim.⁵⁸ But when Jonathan Eybeschütz came there to serve as the rabbi, he vehemently rebuked Jews who were attending the theater or the opera.⁵⁹ The lay leaders of

the Amsterdam community were disturbed by the increase of betting games held in inns and coffeehouses, many of which were owned by Jews.⁶⁰ In 1737, a special clause was inserted into the bylaws of the Amsterdam community, forbidding Jews to own places of amusement and dance halls; apparently, this had little effect and was unable to stop those who indulged in this mode of entertainment. Sixteen years later, a declaration was issued in the hope that this time, the breaches of discipline could be halted. The community leaders noted that for several consecutive years, they had issued a notice forbidding the maintenance of dance and gaming halls and declared once again that no one was entitled to visit such places, which lead to sin.⁶¹

Wealthy Jews dictated the fashion and served as models to be emulated. Their lifestyle represented religious laxity. Although they constituted a very thin layer, their influence was strongly felt by the public. The number of Jews undergoing modern acculturation was increasing in the first half of the eighteenth century. By then, the expansion of the cycles of secular life had eroded the presence of religion in daily life and thought. Moses Hagiz believed that the behavior of the fashionable Jews encouraged criticism of the religion. In his view, they wanted to justify their behavior and consequently rebelled against the authority of the rabbinical elite. He cautioned: "Do not permit your mouth to speak or your heart to think anything against the words of our Sages, for if you have come thus far, then, heaven forbid, you will end up . . . mocking the words of the Almighty and become an epicurean."⁶² Thus, even before Jewish intellectuals and maskilim had formulated their criticism of the limitations of Jewish culture and the narrow-mindedness of Jewish society, an alternative had begun to take shape. It was in a way of life that was in keeping with European fashion and embraced the individualistic ethos of personal gratification in this world.

Chapter 2

Temptations of Fashion and Passion

Rabbi Jacob Emden was a sensitive seismograph of the emergence of secularization in Western and Central Europe. His writings, as we have seen, contain numerous testimonies to the contemporary pursuit of pleasures and harsh criticism of those Jews who were attracted to the temptations of the European city. In defense of religion, he denounced the submission to one's passions and viewed the sins of fashion and the sins of sexuality as equally heinous. "I will mention some of the customs of these epicureans," said Emden in his 1731 sermon: "When the Jews enter into the synagogue to pray and worship . . . then those go to the circuses and the theaters, sacrifice their bodies and their souls to their basic drives to obstinately fulfill their passions, and when the Sabbath and the festivals arrive, their homes are filled with sorrow and darkness."¹

Life à la Mode: Temptations of the City

But Emden himself could not resist one of the temptations of the eighteenth century: the coffeehouse. This bitter, hot, stimulating beverage that arrived in Europe in the sixteenth century from the Muslim East had become very popular, and the coffeehouse was one of the social, cultural, and even economic focal points of the European city. Coffee became popular among Jews as well, and in the early modern era, rabbinical literature grappled with halakhic questions relating to how it was brewed, whether it could be drunk on the Sabbath, with the addition of milk from non-Jews, or in the home of non-Jews.² In his halakhic book *She'ilat yavets*, Emden told about his visit to the coffeehouse in the language of confession: "I have heard reproach saying I have imbibed coffee in the well-known houses of Gentiles. . . . As far as I can recall, on one occasion when I was so rushed, I did forget myself and told them to bring me a cup of coffee as is the custom in those houses." In his view, he had succumbed to temptation and committed an offense that called for remorse. His two main problems were the fear that he might have drunk nonkosher milk and a lapse in fulfilling his public duty as a rabbi representing the Jewish reli-

gion, by giving false impressions: “I confess that while I was still there I knew what I did was not proper and as I left that house, I realized that and felt very bad. And perhaps this was a reason to think critically about myself after they erred in considering me an important man, and to say that it would have been appropriate to forbid myself even that which is permitted and to keep my distance from that which resembles the unseemly.”³

The rabbinical elite, then, regarded the coffeehouse as a dangerous place not because it objected to the beverage itself but because it perceived it as a refuge for religious permissiveness. Rabbi Jacob Reischer, for example, stated unequivocally that believing and observant Jews ought to avoid such places: “Anyone who is God-fearing does not go to their house to drink, even on weekdays. Although there is no nonkosher cooked food, there is much else to fear . . . because of the frivolous company there and he who guards his soul shall keep his distance.”⁴ London rabbi Zevi Hirsch Levin went even further and threatened those who frequented coffeehouses—calling them *posh’ei israel* (Jewish rebels) who “gather in the coffeehouses”—that he would ask the London police to throw them out of there.⁵

The most obvious evidence of acculturation and the early breakdown of religious-communal supervision was the way in which men and women publicly showed themselves—in their dress and hairstyles. In the eighteenth century, both sexes attributed enormous importance to their appearance. In this way, they sent society messages in the language of fashionable ostentation that proclaimed their self-definition and true status or their aspirations to acquire a certain status in society.⁶ The fashions of dress, complicated hairstyles, and expensive wigs that required much time to arrange in various styles and necessitated much care were central to their lives, and their quality depended on their ability to afford them. The desire of men and women to live according to the demands of fashion, and the adoption of foppish powdered wigs, braids, and hairpieces tied by ribbons (for men), expensive fabrics, dresses with wide hoop skirts, cleavage, jewels, glittering golden ornaments, velvet suits, and elegant shoes were at the time a declaration by each individual of the personal identity he or she wished to project as well as his or her willingness to submit to the whims of collective taste.⁷ The Jewish men and women who strolled through the city streets wearing the latest fashions and hairstyles were showing their desire to live in the finest way. The pleasure they found in showing their bodies was in keeping with the social conventions of the time. Without feeling a need for any ideological justification, they were exhibiting their singularity and independence as individuals in Jewish society and the European street, and signaling to their environment their strong desire to be thought of as people of the time—men and women of the eighteenth century.

But from the standpoint of the guardians of religion, the fashionable

dresses, wigs, and clean-shaven faces of men became obvious indicators of recklessness—the intention to ignore the social and religious conformism that the rabbinical elite demanded. Glikl of Hameln, for example, complained about the changes in the Metz community, and in her memoirs compared bygone days (1700) to the present time (close to 1720) and associated the fashion of wigs with the erosion of traditional norms:

When I first came here, Metz was a very beautiful and pious community. . . . In those days not a man who sat in the council-room wore a *perruque*, and no one heard of a man going out of the Judengasse to bring a case before a Gentile tribunal. . . . No such arrogance reigned in the old days as now, and people were not wont to eat such costly meals. The children applied themselves to learning and the elders time and again had the ablest known rabbis serve the community.⁸

Several years later, the bylaws of the Fürth community forbade worshippers in the synagogue to wear powdered wigs.⁹ When a wealthy merchant of the Berlin community, Jeremiah Aaron Cohen, insisted on coming to the synagogue shaven and wearing a wig, and even going up to the Torah and reciting the priestly blessing on the holidays, a special bylaw was passed in 1738 restricting his rights to any public honor:

Since Jeremiah Cohen has transgressed and acted contrary to the laws of our Torah and the Jewish custom by shaving his beard, and has also violated the rule accepted by all those of priestly descent that they will not go up to the podium wearing wigs, hence in order to prevent such transgressions in our community, it has been decided that as long as he does not allow his beard to grow . . . he will not be called up to the Torah at all on the High Holidays and on festival days, but on the Sabbath and on weekdays he is entitled to be called up to the Torah and to carry out his religious duties at any time he wishes.¹⁰

The traditional communities had placed restrictions on extravagant clothing long before the emergence of secularization, to avoid the danger of ostentatiously dressed Jews arousing envy outside the community and to reduce social gaps inside it. Long before the eighteenth century, religious leaders had been warning men not to violate religious prohibitions by shaving with a razor or wearing wigs. Jews and non-Jews alike regarded the beard as one of the physiognomic features of the Jewish man and as evidence of his being alien and “other.” The Austrian emperor Joseph II regarded the abolition of the duty to wear a beard in 1782 as a gesture of tolerance.¹¹ In the eighteenth century, the beard was viewed as a barbaric feature, and a shaven face was the prevalent fashion in Europe and hence an expression of modern acculturation for the Jewish male. One manifestation of the negative attitude toward the fashionable Jew was a drawing of the “wicked” son in the Passover Haggadah,

illustrated by Joseph ben David of Leipnik: clean-shaven, wearing an elegant suit, on his head a three-cornered hat atop a powdered, flowing wig, holding a sword and haughtily posed next to the “wise” son, who is bearded and wearing traditional clothing, his finger pointing to the skeptic question of the “wicked” son in the Haggadah, who disassociated himself from his brothers.¹²

Testimonies come from other communities telling about more Jews like Jeremiah Cohen of Berlin. Some, like him, wanted to continue taking part in the life of the synagogue, while others were indifferent to the dictates of tradition and the instructions of the rabbis. The European fashionable appearance was adopted by court Jews, financiers, Portuguese and Ashkenazic merchants, and agents and physicians in Metz, Hamburg, London, Amsterdam, and Frankfurt. By the end of the 1720s, a bearded Jew had become a rare sight in London, and he would have been identified as a rabbi or a newcomer to the city.¹³

Fashion was increasingly regarded as a threat because the rabbinical elite had banned many of its manifestations and labeled them as sins and because it blurred Jewish exclusivity and broke down the boundaries of the Jewish group. To wear a wig, fashionable men had to shave off their sidelocks so that they wouldn’t stick out; this enraged Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz, all the more so because of the public nature of the sin: “There is no more severe punishment [than that of] one who desecrates the name of the Almighty in public or rebels against the Torah of Moses in public . . . and much to our distress, in our generations, the custom of appearing in public without their beard and hair at the temples has spread. So that no hairs shall protrude from the wig, men shave off their sidelocks.”¹⁴

Eybeschütz’s contemporary and bitter rival Jacob Emden was no less sarcastic in attacking the sins entailed in this new yearning for a fashionable appearance. As we saw in the previous chapter, Emden identified the eagerness for fashion as one of the most striking changes of his time. “Many people are casting off their religious duties, envying [the non-Jews] and dressing up ostentatiously,” Emden said. “They and their wives, sons, and daughters wear the latest fashion, down to the smallest detail, precisely following the dictates of the new vogue, even more than those who contrive them, and one can see even a Jewish servant dressing à la mode as soon as the fashion comes out, before it has spread among the masses, and the newest gaudiest clothing hardly satisfies their desire to catch the looks of all who see them.” According to Emden, this sin goes far beyond ignoring the prohibitions of halakhah: “They are marked by three features that do not belong to the Jewish nation: they shave their sidelocks and remove their beards . . . and in place of the *tsitsit* and *tefillin*, they grow forelocks and wear wigs on their heads, and in place of the cord of blue, a black thread attached to a large pocket tied with ribbons . . .

dangling over their shoulder.” In his view, these fashionable men have gone so far in defying the unique look of the “Jewish nation,” that their Jewish identity is doubtful and they do not deserve to be given a Jewish burial.¹⁵

Temptations of Eros

Emden did not only denounce the fashionable Jews who, by following the dictates of fashion, were declaring their desire to differ from the Jewish community. He also pointed out that the new fashion had a gender implication. In his own way, this rabbi from northern Germany concurred with the apprehensions then voiced in general European culture that fashion was blurring the gender difference between men and women. He based his disapproval on the biblical prohibition “neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment” and was enraged by the “feminine appearance” of the fashionable men, particularly the clean-shaven faces of “the males, called Jews, who shave their sidelocks to look like females.”¹⁶

Changes in the fashion of women’s clothing also did not escape his notice. Emden related to them with recriminations and even more severe threats than he had hurled at the men. He warned that because of their revealing clothing (“women’s short-sleeved and low-necked dresses made in keeping with the new fashion”), they were likely to die in childbirth.¹⁷ Rabbis and preachers responsible for religious supervision declared war against low-necked dresses. Zevi Hirsch Levin was appalled to see Jewish women in London “walking about nude down to their breasts,” and in Metz, Rabbi Eybeschütz protested that women “were walking about at home naked in most parts of their body and in the market, too, their necks and other parts of flesh were seen.” But they were less concerned about women’s modesty and far more worried that the men might be sexually stimulated. Women’s fashion was regarded as dangerous, arousing the sexual drive and leading to the grave sin of emission of semen in vain. Eybeschütz, for example, recommended modest clothing that would cover every part of a woman’s body except her face, as is the custom, he said, in Islamic countries: because nowadays “women are exposed more than hidden and they arouse the young men of Israel to transgress or think of transgressions and lead to intentional erection.”¹⁸ And Emden cautioned women: “They shall not go out perfumed, for their scent will lead men to become sexually passionate and to consider transgression.” Regarding their seductive bodies, he added more words of reproof: “The women here invite whoring, their eyes, head, eyelids, jaws, temples, and cheeks all revealed, here a tongue and teeth, a neck and ears, arms and hands, chest and breasts, nearly all there to be seen; perhaps they think of themselves as the

angel of death who is full of eyes, for all of her body is as important to her as her eyes, and according to the Torah it is she who brought the angel of death into the world, so it is forbidden to look at a woman's little finger. . . . They seduce and encourage lust; he who guards his soul should keep his distance from them."¹⁹

However, Emden himself had several erotic experiences that led to a conflict between his sexual passion and his religious devoutness. In his memoirs *Megillat sefer*, Emden writes about one of these. With astonishing candor, he reveals an incident in Prague from his youth, when he resisted the temptation to indulge in extramarital sex and, like the biblical Joseph facing Potiphar's wife, managed to subdue his aroused lust:

I was then a tender youth, a hot-blooded young man. I had been away from home for a long time and was very hungry for a woman. And there I came across an unattached woman who showed me much affection, drew near to me, almost kissed me. And when I was lying in bed, came to cover me well, namely, in a tender way. And truly, had I listened to the advice of my arousal, she would not have shunned my desire at all. Several times, it was so close to really happening, like a fire in straw. . . . If the Almighty, blessed be his name, had not given me a greater measure of strength and power to overcome my impassioned urge, which almost forced me once to fulfill its need . . . for I was a man in all my force and passion and here a beautiful, pleasant woman was there showing me all manner of affection on many occasions. And she was unattached, a tender young woman, recently widowed, and perhaps pure or purified [having visited the ritual bath] if I had but wanted, and I was certain she would not have divulged my secret had I wanted to gratify my passion with her.²⁰

This was not the only time that Emden grappled with forbidden sexual attraction and managed to restrain his desire. Earlier, when he came to the home of the customs official in charge of issuing transit papers in the forest near Eger in Bohemia, the Christian servant tried to seduce him in her master's absence, but he fled from her, yelling, until his passion cooled. "I loathed that lovesick woman," Emden wrote, "although emotion was not lacking, my desire was strong, my senses were aroused, and passion was not wanting. . . . I remained, thank the Lord, free to restrain my lust."²¹

Sexual pleasures were indeed the hardest trial for religious discipline. On the one hand, supervisors of religious norms issued strict warnings against sexual transgressions; on the other, it was relatively easy to hide the sin in the privacy of the bedroom. Emden certainly would not have divulged these cases of seduction had he not been able to describe his power to restrain his passion and to show that he was not transgressing as others did: "I shall never give in to the dictates of my lust, to be in the company of prostitutes and then lose the riches of the Torah . . . for I am not frivolous by nature, blessed be the Almighty, like chaff driven away by an evil wind."²² The religious norms were

stringent and attempted to curb any erotic temptations, as Jacob Katz argued: “Although, as we have noted, the power of sexual urge was clearly recognized and openly acknowledged, there was never any deliberate cultivation of the erotic life in which individuals might find release from tension or even room for self-expression. Sexuality—indeed, any form of eroticism—belonged exclusively within the strict confines of married life.”²³ The popular *musar* literature provided endless warnings: from severe admonishment against looking at women and against the most intimate sin of masturbation and up to the avoidance of sexual stimulation that results from men spending time in public in the company of women. In 1747, Rabbi Eybeschütz warned the young men of the Metz community: “Transgression results from men and women dancing together . . . for they will transgress by reflecting [on sex]. And one transgression will lead to another, to caressing and kissing, and, needless to say, when men and women mingle, and also at night men and women will laugh together, speak in coarse language and frivolity, all this leading to intentional erection and the emission of semen in vain.”²⁴

Of course, the tension between the erotic passion of men and women and the social norms did not occur for the first time in the eighteenth century, but during that period, erotic gratification was certainly perceived as one of the fashionable pleasures of life. Nearly every description of hedonism included erotica, and its most extreme form was known as libertinism—exaggerated permissiveness and giving free rein to drives contrary to social conventions and religious restrictions. The new science revealed the sexuality of all creatures in nature and gave it legitimacy, while the theories advocating utilitarianism and hedonism supported the indulgence of bodily pleasures. The individualism of the time was also expressed in various shades of libertinism, some of whose literary representations were the memoirs of the libertine Casanova; the exploits of “the woman of pleasure,” Fanny Hill; the daring, wicked sexual experiments of the Marquis de Sade, and underground pornographic writings, which described, in an anticlerical vein, the passions of clerics, monks, and nuns. These trends supporting the body’s release from all the shackles of religious supervision were opposed not only by the conservative and clerical forces that viewed erotic pleasures as a danger to religious faith, but also by moderate writers and thinkers of the Enlightenment who feared that public order would be undermined, and that disease, physical weakness, and vice would abound.²⁵

Azriel Shohet was one of the first to take note of a detailed catalog of sexual transgressions among Jews in Germany in the eighteenth century, and to find that they had historical significance. Was Shohet right when he claimed that it was no longer a question of widespread deviations in the traditional society but also of the emergence of a new, free mode of relations between the

sexes?²⁶ The spokesmen of the religious elite in Western and Central Europe did, in fact, discern an increase in religious permissiveness. Moses Hagiz, for example, who regarded erotic passion as the greatest danger in his time likely to induce Jews to ignore halakhic prohibitions, believed that in previous generations, “there were not so many who were lustful and loose in moral conduct as we see in this generation, boys and men and young women, too.”²⁷

His words of reproof are supported by testimonies from other quarters. Another look at Hogarth’s engravings, this time a 1732 series, *A Harlot’s Progress*, describes how an innocent village girl arrives in London, is driven to prostitution, is arrested, and finally dies from venereal disease. In the second plate out of six, she is depicted in the company of her Jewish patron during an angry quarrel. He is clean-shaven, dressed in fashionable clothing, wearing a wig, and holding a coffee cup. Her clothes are provocative, revealing one breast, and she is kicking furiously at the coffee table, demanding her release from his patronage.²⁸ Is this association that Hogarth created between Jews and sexual hedonism exceptional? Endelman shows that the fashionable lifestyle of the Jewish upper class in England also included the acceptance of a sexual code radically freer than the halakhah. Jewish men from this class visited houses of prostitution and spent large sums of money to keep their lovers and mistresses.²⁹

On his visit to London in 1741, Moses Cassuto, a diamond merchant from Florence, was astonished by the numerous mixed marriages and the open relationships between “Hebrews” and “Protestants.” In his travel journal, he relates that when the lay leaders of the community visited the home of the bishop, they were asked whether there was such a serious shortage of Jewish women that Jewish men were compelled to marry Protestant women.³⁰ And the physician Meyer Schomberg, in his harsh criticism of wealthy Jews and merchants in London, was appalled by the numerous relationships between them and their Christian lovers: “For they are filled with lust and promiscuity; not only do they lie with the daughters of non-Jews as if they are carrying out a religious duty, without any shame, but they also dwell together with their mistresses and shun kosher Jewish maidens.”³¹

Testimonies about libertinism among Jews in Western Europe did not come only from London.³² In *Candide* (1759), Voltaire introduced a character who seemed to emerge straight out of a Hogarth engraving: “a Jew named Don Issachar who traded in Holland and Portugal and was passionately fond of women,” who kept a Christian mistress whom he was forced to share with an Inquisitor from Lisbon.³³ And in his satirical eulogy of the Jewish rake, Emden did not leave out the women who were living at his expense: “Dread will fill the hearts of the lovely buxom harlots with whom he frolicked in pleasant pastures and to whom he had paid a harlot’s wage.”³⁴ But unquestionably,

the most well-known figure of a Jewish libertine at the time was that of the Jew Süß, during whose trial the many relations he maintained with Christian women were exposed. In a colorful engraving printed in 1738, his lovers are depicted wearing elegant dresses with hoop skirts, mourning his death. At the top of the engraving is a medallion with a portrait of Henriette Luciane Fischer, a young woman of twenty-three years who is described as his most favored lover, and underneath three other women, who are quarreling over who loves Süß more and who deserves a share of his inheritance, until the madam standing next to them informs them disappointedly that none of them will receive any of the money of their Jewish lover and patron.³⁵

As the number of wealthy families grew, so did the number of Jewish and Christian servants, of both sexes, that they hired, and the resulting erotic tension between members of the household and the young, unmarried female servants led to occasional forbidden relations.³⁶ Testimonies as to acts of seduction, rape, and impregnation by the head of the household or one of his sons are scattered throughout the responsa books of the period. Rabbis were called upon to determine the paternity of infants born from these relations, to denounce the sexual permissiveness of the men and the maidservants, and often to protect the head of the family from the temptations of the servant girl: "It is wise to lock the door against wanton whores who would seduce the sons of the wealthy to needlessly shame them."³⁷ A pamphlet published in the Altona-Hamburg community in winter 1723 cautioned: "If any harlot should become pregnant through adultery or is known to be promiscuous, it is incumbent upon the head of the *beit din* to loudly proclaim in all the synagogues that she is excommunicated and removed from the holy community of Israel." A woman who has been excommunicated, the bylaw stated, would be immediately expelled, it would be forbidden to hire her as a servant, "and her name will be recorded in the congregation book as an impudent prostitute."³⁸ In 1739, Rabbi David Fraenkel published a pamphlet in the Dessau community in which he denounced the promiscuity of servants who were undermining domestic harmony, and noted the names of men and women who seduced their male and female servants.³⁹ And Rabbi Jacob Reischer considered the halakhic question that came to him from Paris regarding "a male and female servant who came here and during their whole journey pretended for more than fifty days that they were brother and sister, and did the same when they were in the Metz community, and now she is with child and they both admit that he is not her brother but that they traveled together and during all that time, had sexual relations." The rabbi angrily ruled that this was the case of a cunning, rebellious couple, who willfully sinned to gratify their passion.⁴⁰

Out-of-wedlock pregnancies and single or married women who engaged

in forbidden relations were a religious and moral problem for community leaders, rabbis, and preachers.⁴¹ In 1708, Rabbi Jacob Katz was asked to clarify issues of paternity that came from Öttingen: “In the matter of the unmarried woman who gave birth to a child and said it was from a young man named Reuven, but since that young fellow was involved with another woman, he denied the claims and maintained he had never done anything wrong with her. Then a Jewish witness came forward and said he saw the young man and that woman together in the month of Sivan in the year 5468 (1708) in a park outside the city, behaving in an improper manner as would illicit lovers. Then the young man confessed before the same witness that he had had sexual intercourse with her there in the park.”⁴² And Rabbi Reischer of Worms was shocked by the confession of a woman who had failed to restrain her sexual urge, had betrayed her husband, and given birth to a daughter by her lover: “She said she transgressed twice with the adulterer, who seduced her so that her evil inclination overcame her until . . . she was seduced and twice willingly gave herself to another man who was not her husband.”⁴³ The *dayyan* Gershon Koblenz from Metz grappled with a question relating to a man who had intercourse with another man’s wife and threatened that if he were not left alone and allowed the freedom of his body, he would convert to Christianity. The man, who was rebelling against religious authority, demanded that “he be permitted licentious behavior in public, and [said] if he should be so inclined, he would do whatever his heart desired.”⁴⁴

But perhaps one can learn more about how difficult it was to cope with erotic temptation from Jacob Emden’s astonishing suggestion that married men be allowed to have sexual relations with a permanent mistress. Emden looked at the members of his generation from the double vantage point of a representative of the religious elite responsible for curbing permissive trends, and of an eyewitness to the fluctuations in desires, patterns of conduct, and values of eighteenth-century Jews. He raised this suggestion as a solution to the erotic tension among men and the growing tendency to ignore religious prohibitions. In the second part of his *She’ilat yavets* (1739), Emden explained why he thought it proper to permit a man to maintain extramarital sexual relations with another woman, whose status is that of a permanent mistress living in his home, attending the *mikveh*, giving birth to his children, and forbidden to any other man. He added a waiver to his proposal, asking that it not be turned into a practical ruling until it was sanctioned by other rabbis; but in Emden’s opinion, this was an appropriate way to legitimately cope with the libertinism of the generation and the growing number of sexual stimuli and temptations. In his own words: “to banish offenses, licentiousness, and prostitution and to reduce lust.”⁴⁵

Hedonism and Abandoning God

While Emden was mulling over his audacious idea of permitting a mistress as a release for the erotic tensions that were leading more and more men into sin, a couple accused of sexual licentiousness caused a furor in the Altona community. Rochele, the wife of Yossel Halberstadt, was declared a whore and an adulteress who was maintaining sexual relations outside of her marriage, and her husband was required to divorce her. But in this case, the leaders and rabbis of Altona were more infuriated by Yossel's refusal to comply with the ruling than with his wife's sins. His blatant violation of discipline and his desire to go on living with his wife infuriated them. In 1733, the community rabbi, Ezekiel Katzenellenbogen, and the rabbi Moshe Hagiz, who had jointly issued the ruling, decided to punish the two with the severest penalty they had at their disposal: "We have ruled that the accursed husband Yossel will divorce her, but for the past two years he has obstinately refused to obey the words of the Torah and the commandment . . . and we have done what was necessary in order to separate them from the congregation of Israel and to curse them in the name of the Almighty along with all the other recalcitrant members of our people who rebel against the Jewish religion to which they were born and adhered."

We cannot hear the voices of Rochele and Yossel in the sources of the period, but the voices that deride the prohibitions of the halakhah and mock the rabbinical supervision of the intimate pleasures of the body resonate loudly. Even if this man and woman left no testimony of their worldview, their behavior amounted to a declaration of personal liberation and their desire to keep their bedroom to themselves and not allow the religious norms and representatives of the religion to intrude into it. As far as Moshe Hagiz was concerned, this affair was no less than a case of public heresy manifested in the forbidden sexual act and the refusal to accept a rabbinical ruling. He did not regard the couple merely as individual sinners but rather as members of a well-known group that rebelled against the religion: those "heretics who bring sorrow and pain upon Israel." In his eyes, this was but one more example of the prevalence in his generation of epicureans who show contempt for the rabbinical elite, flout its authority, and behave freely, contrary to the Jewish religion.⁴⁶

The Yossel and Rochele Halberstadt affair was not merely another case attesting to what Azriel Shohet termed "a breakdown of the fences of modesty" but rather another indication of the emergence of secularization: the undermining of religious restrictions, skepticism regarding the instructions of the representatives of the religion, and the expanded autonomy of individual life. Though there is nothing new about sinners and sins, a sensitive finger on

the pulse of history can discern signs of the transition from a life relatively filled with religion to one moving toward secularization and indications that religion is losing its grip on people's lives. In the eighteenth century, a number of such signs were evident in the fabric of Jewish life: the craving for pleasure; the conduct of life according to the prevailing fashions; implied or blatant defiance of religious prohibitions; the reduced diffusion of religion into the personal lives of men and women; and the delimitation of a private space sealed off from religious supervision.

It is, of course, impossible to accept the rhetoric of the preachers as a precise picture of the reality, but their distressed reactions are also a good yardstick of growing secularization. The rabbinical elite of the time began to worry about the changed image of the Jews in the eyes of their Christian neighbors, who clearly saw the new trends of religious laxity. Gershon Koblenz, for example, was concerned about the perception of the Jewish sexual code: "Even the Gentiles turn to the Jews and rebuke them by saying, 'It is well known that you are fenced off from loose morals, so why are you breaking down your fences?'"⁴⁷ Another representative of the Ashkenazic religious elite, Joseph Kosman of Frankfurt, regarded the Jew's beard, which gives him an alien, repellent appearance, as the barrier that protects him from the temptations of sexual permissiveness and from spending leisure time in the company of non-Jews: "When a bearded Jew approaches a gentile woman for sexual purposes, she will not consent to lie with him, will not desire to be with him."⁴⁸

Obviously, the initial emergence of secularization was intensely felt because the majority of Jews at the time still adhered to religious norms and practices. Secularization was particularly entrenched in those communities with a large number of merchants and financial entrepreneurs who were exposed earlier than others to the new fashions and the accessible pleasures. In London, for example, there was a relatively large number of wealthy Jews, to whom the large city offered a vast variety of pleasures; in addition, the communal organization was weak, the state was tolerant, the society was open, and Jews who emigrated there during the century aspired to live *à la mode*. Against this background, Endelman claims that religious laxity among London Jews was unprecedented and filtered down to Jews who were not men of means.⁴⁹ When Aaron Polack was testifying in April 1732 in a London court in the case of an armed robbery, he was asked how he came to be doing business on the Sabbath and also violating the prohibition of walking out of the Sabbath *eruv*, he replied, "There are some good Jews, and some bad ones. I can't say that I am one of the best."⁵⁰ In London, there were quite a few Jews like him, who violated religious discipline; in the communities of Poland-Lithuania, the largest in Europe, there are scant testimonies to modern acculturation. But even from there, we can hear the voices of a physician called Isaac and his wife,

who drew closer to the lifestyle of the Polish aristocracy and joined them in dancing at balls. The couple, from the Mstislavl community, were excommunicated after they became embroiled in a sharp conflict with the leaders of the community, insulted the elders, and refused to accept their authority.⁵¹

Indeed, the erosion of the overall supervision of the lives of individuals and the limited diffusion of the religion were among the major manifestations of the emergence of secularization among the Jews. Endelman's claim about English Jewry that "Jews who embraced European modes of thought and behavior no longer defined their lives in exclusively Jewish terms"⁵² could apply equally well to other places. The overall picture suggests that the process may have been sparked primarily by the desire of an increasing number of Jews to realize their individuality in lives as free and pleasurable as possible. This desire had no need of a well-elucidated doctrine or an ideological justification. It was declared in the intimacy of the home or publicly in the street, the coffeehouse, or the theater in the way that these Jews conducted their lives, or occasionally in an open clash with the representatives of the religion.

The supervisory rabbinical elite continued to interpret the desire for pleasure as heresy. "The more a man accumulates money, drinks, and eats well," a popular eighteenth-century *musar* book declared, "the more he forgets God."⁵³ The Polish rabbi Judah ben Ezekiel Katz from Lissa, who lived in Altona in the 1740s, despairingly denounced the current hedonism. In a tone that reflected his consciousness of the approaching day of death, the rabbi grouped together all the pleasures of life and inveighed against them:

Now heed me, my son, spend no time in the company of fools, in all manner of frolic . . . for the Almighty will demand to be paid the debt of the man who spends his time on vanities, laughter, and folly . . . and truly has only contempt for the holy Torah. . . . And do not behave like those of other nations whom God did not choose. . . . And Rabbi Jonah [Gironi, 1210–68], may his memory be blessed, wrote in *Sha'ar hayirah* about the man who spends his time idly, saying that he is a heretic who does not believe that the land is filled with his glory because the believer who stands before the Almighty will do nothing against his will. And to me, this transgression is weightier than all the rest, for if someone should suddenly commit another transgression because his evil inclination misled him so that he was not guided by the fear of God, his punishment will not be so severe, as that of the one who maliciously sits idly all day long, does not have God in his heart or remember before whom he stands, but only laughs and angers and violates the command "beware lest you forget the Lord."⁵⁴

What may have seemed to an outside observer as adaptation to fashion and addiction to pleasures was rigidly interpreted as religious laxity—"denying the Torah of Moses and eradicating one of the 613 commandments"—and as blatant defiance of divine providence.⁵⁵ Behind the hedonists' breach of religious discipline, the rabbinical elite identified a passion for a life

of freedom. Moses Hagiz in two chapters of his book *Mishnat hakhamim*, formulated at length the doctrine of suppressing pleasures. On the basis of the religious sources and keeping in mind the changes among Jews in Western Europe, Hagiz marshaled his finest preaching skills in an effort to block the gates against those fleeing from religious supervision. Life, he explained, is far too serious to permit oneself to succumb to drives and passions or to pursue bodily pleasures and entertainment. The day of death awaits around the corner, when God will demand a reckoning of every man. Pleasures erode proper commitment to the Torah. Men must suppress their passions, avoid looking at attractive women and their clothing, and must not think lustful thoughts. "If a man lives simply, grows a beard, and wears black clothing, he will not invite any harlots to entice him." In general, a life of pleasure amounts to heresy in the Jews' situation of exile. "Who has ever seen or heard of such a thing," Hagiz rebuked his readers, "a Jew who knows that the *Shekhinah* is in exile because of our many sins and yet walks erect in his finery and frequents taverns and inns?"⁵⁶

In the mid-eighteenth century, an alternative theory was formulated that legitimized pleasure in Jewish culture. It was the new attitude of the young Moses Mendelssohn, who had been destined to pursue a career as a talmudic scholar, but from an early age had been attracted by the intellectual pleasures of philosophy. In a fictional letter, putatively sent to the editor of the Hebrew periodical *Kohelet musar* (1755), Mendelssohn described a typical group of contemporary hedonists. The friends tell how they enjoyed themselves, carrying on rowdily in nature, drinking wine, and singing loudly. But in the editor's response, there is no trace of the sweeping traditional denunciation or any accusation of heresy. Instead, the editor (who was also Mendelssohn) drew a distinction between the lesser and the higher passions and offered the debauchers a more refined enjoyment—the "sweet honey of true pleasure."⁵⁷

In his early philosophical writings, Mendelssohn shared with his readers his intimate experiences as a young man from Dessau, a bachelor in his twenties who lived the life of a scholar in Berlin and replaced sensual passion with intellectual passion. "How do I gain the satisfaction of pleasure?" Mendelssohn asked in "On Sentiments" (1755), and replied: "The contemplation of the structure of the world thus remains an inexhaustible source of pleasure for the philosopher. It sweetens his lonely hours, it fills his soul with the sublimest sentiments, withdrawing his thoughts from the dust of the earth and bringing them nearer to the throne of divinity. Because of his contemplations he must perhaps dispense with honor, sensual ecstasy, and riches; for him they are but dust upon which he treads his feet." The philosopher undergoes intense emotional experiences. He feels that he is soaring to the heavens, nearly swooning: "Ascend the chain that binds all entities to the throne of the divinity; then

in bold flight swing over to the universal proportion of all these parts to the immeasurable whole. What heavenly rapture will suddenly surprise you! In the numbing ecstasy, you will scarcely be able to maintain your composure.” Philosophical contemplation, especially the aspiration for perfection, inspires the philosopher and stirs his emotions: “Your soul will become intoxicated from the ecstasy.” It is a sublime pleasure that does not depend on man’s weaknesses or his lower drives. Mendelssohn objected to the fashion of frivolous pleasures, which he believed was spreading from France, and its superficial culture throughout all Europe. Sensual pleasures are dangerous to those who are swept up by them without the restraint of reason: “Every sensuous rapture agrees in this alone, that the present moment of savoring it is combined with the feeling of an improved state of the body. Yet the consequences of this can be terrifying. Once the sweet savoring is over, many a base rapture can gnaw away at the bones of its venerators and consume all vital spirits. . . . This is the madness of the libertine; he does not hear the voice of the future and its stern warning. . . . The human being who arms himself with the weapons of reason against this seductress acts wisely.”⁵⁸

Mendelssohn espoused the view that legitimate pleasures stem from man’s aspiration to perfection, from the awareness of his lofty status in the creation, from rational contemplation, and from the preservation of his honor as a human being. It is the correlation between the multiplicity and diversity in nature that stimulates man’s sensual perceptions. The aspiration to gain pleasure from everything in the universe, which draws man closer to God, cannot possibly serve “indecent passions.” Indeed, Mendelssohn did not wish to suppress passions or to curb pleasure but rather to divert them into channels that he regarded as positive. He himself did not abstain from the pleasures of the European city. His life was conducted in the social and cultural space of the European elites and the contemporary elite of Jewish merchants and financiers. He wore wigs, frequented coffeehouses, visited health spas, appreciated music, led a busy social life, and attended concerts and the theater.⁵⁹ But the restraint of reason and the acknowledgment of the Almighty were, in his eyes, the solution to the problem of frivolous and indecent hedonism.

In *Kohelet musar*, Mendelssohn challenged the traditional world picture nurtured by the Ashkenazic religious elite by opening a window in the walls of the *beit midrash*, from which to observe man, nature, the pleasures of life, beauty, and God as the Creator of all these. Man is the crown of Creation, and by God’s grace he is able to take pleasure in the goodness and beauty of a harmonious, perfect, awe-inspiring world—the best of all possible worlds. From this standpoint, Mendelssohn was a secular moral preacher. He was not guided by the religious ethos but by the humanistic ethos. Go out into nature—the secular preacher called out to his Jewish brethren confined within

the boundaries of the world of study and books, with the pathos of the ancient prophets of Israel interspersed with erotic images—and look at the greenery and the animate world, take a deep breath, smell the flowers of spring, and enjoy: “And listen, for your sake God has done his deeds. For your sake, meadows are clothed with grain, and under your feet every growing thing buds and blossoms. Lift your eyes and see how all about you, the entire plain becomes beautiful for your sake like the wife of your youth, a graceful doe, who enlarges her eyes with paint, and wears fine ornaments, to meet the love of her soul.”⁶⁰

The path to God does not pass only through the study of sacred texts and the observance of commandments, but first through the observation and admiration of the perfection of Creation. By perusing the “book of nature,” which is open to everyone, a man may arrive at belief in God no less than by learning by rote the instructions of the “book of God” given to the Jewish people in a revelation. Mendelssohn’s doctrine of enjoyment aspired to sever the link created by rabbis and preachers between pleasure and heresy. Mendelssohn separated the “despicable sensual pleasures” from the “true pleasure” and also connected man’s bodily pleasures to God, the Creator of nature and man: “I will rejoice in the Lord for he has made me the choicest of all living creatures and has seated me in the center between naught and the children of God,” Mendelssohn replied to the hedonist, “and you whom he placed above all riches have descended from the highest point and are likened to the beasts of the field. . . . Not for your passions will I rebuke you, for I know these came from God so that you might experience the sweetness of true pleasure and despise the bitter taste of the lesser passions.”⁶¹

But Mendelssohn, as a consummate humanist and devotee of natural reason, also wanted to subvert the world that the religious elite was trying to supervise. He posited a less gloomy image of life, advocated sensuality, longed for beauty, and was the one of the first to legitimize pleasure. In this sense, he was a part of those eighteenth-century intellectual forces that vigorously fostered the secularization of life.

Chapter 3

The Mystical Sect: Subversive Sabbateans

The goings-on in the home of Leibush and Liba Shabbetai in the small Podolian community of Lanckorona on the winter night of January 27, 1756, were like a scene taken from the libertine literature of the time. Behind windows covered by heavy curtains, the sounds of “drinking, rejoicing, and dancing” were heard, arousing the suspicions of local Christians and Jews. A servant lad sent to peek through a crack in the wall saw men and women dancing ecstatically. Others who also took a peek reported that the followers of Jacob Frank were having an orgy: “Nude men and women frolicking and singing aloud . . . crying aloud the praises of Shabbetai Zevi.” Chaya Shorr of Rohatin, the sister-in-law of the owner of the house, was prancing in the nude surrounded by men who were caressing and kissing her body. Several heads of the community, with the assistance of the local senior Polish official, broke into the house and arrested eight members of the group, including Frank himself. In an investigation conducted before the Satanow rabbinical court, additional witnesses provided astonishing testimonies about the extreme, antinomian ritual and, in particular, the libertinism of the Frankist sect.¹

Only a few months had elapsed between Mendelssohn’s “On Sentiments,” in which he formulated his doctrine of “true pleasure” in Prussia at the end of 1755, and the Frankist orgy that took place in Poland, but there was an immense cultural divide between the two. Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86) and Jacob Frank (1726–91) were men of the same generation, but while the former was then beginning his rise as a philosopher and respected citizen of the Jewish community in one of the emerging cities of culture in Europe, Frank, who belonged to the margins of Jewish society, was wandering through the Balkans and the outlying areas of Europe between southeastern Poland and Turkey.

The two men were separated not merely by the political and geographical border between the Prussian kingdom, then growing in strength, and the Polish kingdom, then undergoing a decline; the unrestrained sensuality that Frank displayed along with his preaching that called for the total violation of the strictest halakhic prohibitions was alien to Mendelssohn’s cultural and reli-

gious values. In his youth, Mendelssohn also went through a phase of religious doubt that might have led him to turn to the “indecent pleasures.” In the philosophical dialogues “On Sentiments,” Mendelssohn had one of the participants speak some lines that may have been autobiographical: “How near I once came to being completely ruined. . . . Like hellish furies, cruel doubts about providence tortured me; indeed, I can confess, without skittishness, that they were doubts about the existence of God. . . . At that point, I was prepared to give rein to all vile desires.”² But against these deistic doubts and libertine passions, he built high dams of reason and morality of the kind that Frank ignored and even strove to destroy. Mendelssohn’s skepticism was philosophical. It appeared as a passing crisis of faith in his life and never affected the lifestyle of that decent, bourgeois Jew, while Jacob Frank represented the most radical manifestation of the Sabbatean underground in the eighteenth century. From the perspective of contemporary Jewish society and religion, he had rebelled totally, created an upside-down, unrestrained world that broke down all boundaries of discipline and supervision, and denied the instructions of the rabbinical elite, the laws of the Torah, and moral norms.

The Sabbatean movement began with messianic tension, which was becoming acute in the broad Jewish public. After Shabbetai Zevi’s colossal failure, Sabbateanism became less a messianic movement and more a movement of heresy that challenged the Jewish religion and rabbinical authority and can justifiably be regarded as a Jewish manifestation of the crisis of religious skepticism.³ Again, it was Jacob Emden, the avowed enemy of Sabbateanism and its major documenter, who pointed to what he viewed as the double problem of his generation. He noted two major bitter enemies, who, despite the disparity in the sources of their inspiration (“Greek wisdom” for one and “esoteric doctrines” for the other), exerted a similar influence. These two were rationalist heresy and mystical heresy. Emden presented his picture of the reality to his listeners: two camps of “accursed sects” were attempting to undermine the foundations of the religion and to oust God from the world. The rationalists were denying anything that was not consistent with reason and the laws of nature. The deists believed in a hidden, distant God who did not intervene in the world: “They make the world a lawless place, think it exists without a leader, and do not believe in divine Providence.” On the other hand, the barriers that had safeguarded the esotericism of the kabbalah had been overthrown, and the followers of Shabbetai Zevi were endangering faith: “Several accursed sects are inciting the Jews to oust God and to eradicate His Torah and faith from their hearts. They have committed the worst transgressions and have breached the most important commandments. All in all, they have denied the very existence of God.”⁴

A New Torah to Permit the Forbidden: From Hayon to Eybeschütz

The insight arrived at by Emden, who singled out of the Sabbatean world the paradoxical principle of “redemption through sin” as the justification of heresy, was adopted by the most influential scholar of Jewish mysticism, Gershom Scholem. He used it to explain the historical significance of Sabbateanism and attributed to Sabbateanism an important role in bringing about the changes that gave birth to the modern era. “The world of rabbinic Judaism,” Scholem stated, “was completely destroyed from within, quite independently of the efforts of secularist criticism.”⁵

According to Scholem, the historical process that Sabbateanism underwent was paradoxical and dialectical. The faith in Shabbetai Zevi led to the religious nihilism of the Sabbatean movement and reached its apogee in Frankism, and then the modern trends emerged: “The nihilism of the Sabbatean and Frankist movements, with its doctrine so profoundly shocking to the Jewish conception of things that the violation of the Torah would become its true fulfillment, was a dialectical outgrowth of belief in Shabbetai Zevi’s messiahship, and this nihilism in turn helped pave the way for the Haskalah and the reform movement of the nineteenth century.”⁶ However, most of Scholem’s far-reaching conclusions did not stand up to the test of criticism.⁷ The world of rabbinical Judaism was not totally destroyed, the Sabbateans did not plot the revolution of modernity, nor did they join the Haskalah movement. And it is very hard to discern any “powerful constructive impulses” beneath the surface of their acts of abomination and licentiousness. Nonetheless, Scholem was adept at penetrating the mind-set of eighteenth-century Jews to expose forces of secularization—an aspiration for autonomy and freedom, rebellion against the authority of the rabbinical elite, and subversion of the foundations of normative Judaism—in what seemed to be a saliently religious and messianic movement. As a scholar who knew how to listen to the whispers that accompanied the outbreak of the “nihilistic conflagration,” Scholem must have suspected the hidden motives behind the Sabbatean apostasy. In relating to the Sabbatean sect in Podolia, whose members included several members of the rabbinical elite, he asked:

What has happened here? Is it the self-hatred of people who have become disgusted with their tradition, which, in their view, now lacks all content? A rebellion against the mechanization of a rational culture, and the furtive, nearly satanic pleasure gained . . . in trampling upon everything that had taken control of their spiritual and physical lives each and every day? . . . Or perhaps more positive yearnings have joined together here, of the kind that found no outlet in that way of life, cravings for human liberty and the release of tension, which took the form of a doctrine of liberation from the yoke of the commandments.⁸

In Sabbateanism, religious enthusiasm and kabbalistic doctrines were also intertwined with religious laxity, libertinism, and heresy. A historian attempting to tell the story of Jewish secularization cannot ignore them. Throughout the century, the Sabbateans were the cause of the most outrageous scandals within Jewry. The rabbinical elite and the community leadership of European Jewry fought against Sabbatean subversion and resorted to investigations and excommunications in this struggle.⁹

A good example is the affair of Nehemiah Hayon, which erupted in the second decade of the eighteenth century. Hayon, a kabbalist who throughout his life wandered in the Balkan communities, Erets Israel, Italy, and Central Europe, arrived in Amsterdam in summer 1713. He brought with him his book *Oz le'elohim*, which had recently been printed in Berlin.¹⁰ The rabbis Moses Hagiz and Zevi Ashkenazi sounded an alarm. They identified Hayon as a covert Sabbatean, to be shunned by the Jewish community. Upon examining his book, they found in it many heretical ideas. The Portuguese community rabbi, Solomon Ayllon, himself a supporter of Sabbateanism, defended Hayon, claiming that there was nothing offensive in the book. The controversy, which began to cause a schism in Amsterdam Jewry, rapidly spread beyond its confines. How was Hayon able to deceive leading rabbis and obtain approbations for the publication of his book? What was the nature of his heresy? Was he a dissolute rake and charlatan who wanted to undermine the Jewish world, or a serious kabbalist? How should he be treated?¹¹ Apparently, a heretical text that endangered the pure faith had succeeded in passing through the filter of the rabbinical elite. Several ideas in the book, particularly the statement that God, called the “first cause,” does not descend to the worlds of Creation because “he has no interest in the created creatures,” were suspect and thought to be an attempt to subvert the accepted religious faith.¹² The separation between the “first cause,” which is distant, mysterious, and inaccessible (the *Ein sof* [infinite being] in kabbalist terminology), and the God of Israel who emanates from it and is the Creator of the world, the giver of the Torah, was regarded as the gravest heresy of all.¹³

One of the most clearly formulated responses to Hayon was published by Moses Hagiz in London in 1714 in a polemical work, *Shever posh'im*.¹⁴ As Elisheva Carlebach has shown, it was Hagiz who deliberately stirred up the Hayon affair for the purpose of defending the faith and the rabbinical elite against the subversive Sabbatean threat. Hagiz pointed out that Hayon was distorting the true doctrine of kabbalah and that his Sabbatean theology was extremely harmful: “To believe that the God of Israel is not supreme over all others, called *Ein sof* and first cause, but that there are two causes, that he has an end, is finite and has an essence arising from flesh and blood, and that God is masculine and feminine [*Shekhinah*].”¹⁵

Such a dualistic belief, Hagiz argued, is not only a false belief, but anyone adhering to it “has said in his heart that there is no God.” In his view, Hayon and other heretics like him were no less than deists:

Who still persists in his rebellion and adheres to his heresy with contempt, we need no more incontrovertible proof, he is so audacious in such a grave matter, against all the Sages of Israel and against the belief in the oneness of God, which not a single sage of the Gentiles would deny, but only those apostate converts who have emerged during the time of Shabbetai Zevi, and his licentious, heretic sect is deistic. . . . We cannot rely on anything they say, and once their testimony is proved to be fraudulent, none of the Jews, thank the Lord, will believe in these heresies that those insolent men have dreamed up.¹⁶

Hagiz’s use of the term “deism” in Hebrew and in this context is no doubt unusual and surprising. Was Hagiz taking a term then fashionable in Europe and using the epithet “deistic sect” freely, as a derogatory term for heresy, a term that was available to him in the discourse of his generation? Or was he perhaps trying to be precise and deliberately attempting to identify Hayon’s heresy as “Sabbatean deism”? Just as the rationalist deists believed in a God removed from the world, so Hayon believed that the “first cause” is not a God who reveals himself, creates, and oversees, to whom one can pray and worship. His statement about the indifference of the “first cause” to the world is suspect as being deistic: “He has no interest in created creatures.” Hagiz believed that “Sabbatean deism” is dangerous not only because it sullies the purity of religious faith but also because it legitimizes religious laxity. According to this view, the Sabbatean theology of Hayon and his supporters provided every “heretic” with an ostensible religious justification to sin: “They secretly despise the laws and the beliefs and allow themselves all manner of sexual excesses, . . . and on this unsound basis, every abominable, filthy, vile heretic has patched together a justification of his shameful way of life.”¹⁷ The hedonists and libertines who sought legitimation of their transgressions and religious and sexual permissiveness would jump with joy upon reading Hayon’s book. In his view, it would fulfill the true aims of the Sabbatean sect: “To incite the Jews to abandon the faith of their forefathers, and to excuse their serious offenses, idolatry, sexual excesses, and violation of the laws of the Written and Oral Law.”¹⁸

In 1715, Rabbi David Nieto of London added similar, no less harsh, comments. The Sabbatean theology that permits transgressions would, in his view, tear apart the civic and moral fabric of the society. Relations based on fidelity between men and women and on students’ discipline and respect for their teachers would be undermined. The anarchic libertinism that rebels against religion and morality would be given religious justification. When this doc-

trine is revealed to the Christians, the Jews will be in real danger. They will denounce us, Nieto warned, as an inferior nation of prevaricators and licentious rebels, and in their eyes we will become no less than “teachers of heresy, masters of licence and exponents of Atheism.”¹⁹

The images of Hayon as a dangerous heretic, “Satan,” “snake,” and “abominable man” closed before him all the gates of the Jewish communities that feared they might be contaminated by the Sabbatean stain. For nearly ten years, Hayon wandered from one community to another in the East and the Balkans, and then returned to Central Europe to attempt to clear his name. In his assessment, he was not a subversive man, as his enemies depicted him, but rather a kind of martyr prepared to suffer greatly and pay a heavy personal price for his belief.²⁰ “He found no rest anywhere,” Jacob Emden wrote about Hayon. “Wherever he went, he was rejected and called an impure wrongdoer.”²¹ But I never violated any of the commandments of the halakhah, Hayon replied to those who persecuted him; I never desecrated the Sabbath, I never breached the fast of Yom Kippur, as my enemies falsely accuse me of doing. When Hayon came to Amsterdam early in 1726, he printed several words of support that he had finally managed to obtain and sincerely expected that now the attitude toward him would improve. But his desperate struggle for acknowledgment and respite failed utterly.

At the same time, Sabbatean prophets from Moravia (Judah Leib Prosnitz, who claimed he was the messiah, son of Joseph) and Poland (Isaiah Hasid and Moshe Meir Kaminka) were exposed in Central and Western Europe. Hayon’s enemies soon linked him with them, too. In 1725–26, suspicions again arose that the Sabbatean underground was threatening. A search of the belongings of the Sabbatean prophet Moshe Meir of Zolkiew, who was staying in the Frankfurt community, uncovered Sabbatean writings. One of the antinomian instructions found in his possessions stated: “He who has fasted on the Ninth of Av will not be redeemed unless he lies with another man’s wife and, if possible, does so on Yom Kippur, all the better.”²² Several Jews in Germany testified before Christian missionaries that the Sabbateans in Central Europe “do not mourn the destruction of Jerusalem, do not observe the commandments, and some even violate the prohibitions against incest.”²³

Moshe Meir himself was expelled from Frankfurt, and as he left, boys threw stones at him. The awareness of heresy rose, suspects were interrogated, many testimonies were taken, and letters and handbills in connection with them were dispatched from place to place in the territory between England and Poland.²⁴ They all warned against a “plague passing through the land of Ashkenaz” in the shape of “a company of wicked men, committing great transgressions and sins, woe to them and their souls.” The pamphlets that came from Amsterdam, Altona, and Frankfurt called for a large-scale hunt for

the prophets of this sect and all those aiding them.²⁵ Moshe Hagiz tried to mobilize leaders of Polish Jewry in the struggle and wrote an urgent letter to them: "Let us go together and draw near the war, a war of the Almighty, a war that must be waged, to hunt down and repel all the rebellious criminals, those dead dogs . . . those who came from our midst and would destroy us, wicked men. And why do we remain silent, and if not now, when. . . . These evil men, they do not have God in their minds or hearts . . . for if in their hearts, there was the slightest spark of belief that there is God in the world, they would not open their mouths in vain and be such unbelievers."²⁶

The threats posed by disbelief in the oneness of God and by antinomian behavior led to the demonization of all those suspected of having ties to the Sabbatean sect. This heightened awareness adversely affected Jews both on the margins and in the center of Jewish society. It was relatively easy, for example, to strictly apply the law and demand a heavy penalty from Haim Mannheim of Frankfurt, who was suspected of Sabbateanism because he chose by chance to hold a joyous wedding for one of his servants on a day that was one of the Sabbatean festival days, and because during the investigation following the event, it turned out that he had supplied food to the Sabbatean prophet Judah Leib Prosnitz when he was staying outside the city walls.²⁷ It was more difficult to find grounds for the suspicions that began to arise in the 1720s, according to which Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz, then in Prague and a pillar of the rabbinical elite, was a secret Sabbatean. The book *Va'avo hayom el ha'ayin*, attributed to him, was interpreted by Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, another major rabbi who would later play an important role in the Jewish public sphere, as a deist type of heresy. In his eyes, the "Sabbatean deism," which claimed that God's power was declining, was worse than "philosophical deism," which claimed that God was indifferent to the world: "The heresy of he who denies the providence of the infinite being is worse than the heresy of Aristotle and his friends. They were heretical in speaking of his majesty, that it is beneath his honor to watch over the lower worlds, but the writer of this book is denying his Providence by saying that his power is declining. Not even the ancients were ever guilty of this kind of heresy."²⁸

Sabbatean theology was understood as an imaginary, false kabbalist system, whose sole purpose was to provide legitimation for a hedonist, libertine way of life and release from the obligation to observe the commandments. It is no wonder, Emden claimed, that some wealthy Jews in Vienna and Mannheim were supporting Sabbatean prophets, since "they were very happy to receive a new doctrine that permitted prohibitions, gratified their indecent passions, and gave free sway to the most despicable acts."²⁹ Particularly flagrant sexual sins were ascribed to the Sabbateans, and the libertine, orgiastic behavior of the radical believers attracted much attention. In 1718, Leib ben

Ozer in Amsterdam heard that in the sect of Sabbatean converts to Islam in Salonika led by Baruchya Russo (1677–1720), “they were lying with menstruating women, with other men’s wives as well as with other men, publicly desecrating the Sabbath, and saying they were doing so in order to satisfy the *kelipah* [demonic power] and impurity so that redemption will come.”³⁰ Testimonies were collected, telling about the erotic freedom and enormous sexual appetites of the Sabbateans. They often obtained this evidence by invading people’s privacy by peeping through the keyhole into their bedrooms:

It is very well known what happened to one of those hypocritical members of the sect who wandered about, along with a manservant, in the land of Ashkenaz purporting to be a preacher. They were given lodgings in an inn by the elder in Fürth, who prepared a room with two made-up beds, and here the female servant of the house who made the beds each day noticed that one bed was being slept in while the other remained unused. Nonetheless, the girl did not say anything nor did she think any evil of them, because she said perhaps the male servant sleeps in one bed with his master, so they will be warm. But when she found blood in the bed, she told the innkeeper what happened when she made up the guests’ bed . . . [and he] looked through the keyhole into the room he had assigned his guest, and saw that the servant lad undressed and that he was a girl.³¹

The practical kabbalist Elijah Olianow was described as an adulterer who regularly cheated on his wife, lived with a prostitute, pretended to be an ascetic, but “caroused and laughed” with maidservants and other women. People also said that he “engaged in foolishness with the wife of the innkeeper who is known to be a debauched whore.”³² The rabbi of Frankfurt told Hagiz about “a wicked man called Wolf Lisa . . . , who wanted to lie with a married woman who was menstruating,” claiming that this act has a religious meaning of restoration [*tikkun*].” And in an investigation conducted in Mannheim, the court took the testimony of a man who peeked into the house of study and saw there a man suspected of Sabbateanism: “I saw through a crack in the door, woe to the eyes that saw, that R. Hertz Cohen was holding his organ, spilling his seed in masturbation.”³³

These testimonies about Sabbateans who were violating strict sexual prohibitions related to local cases that occurred on the margins of Jewish life. In contrast, in the 1750s, two scandals erupted that resonated strongly throughout the Jewish world in Europe between England and Poland and Lithuania and also were known to Christians at the time. In those years, the cultural, religious, and political map of the Jews was undergoing a change. The Baal Shem Tov and his associates and disciples in Poland were preparing the ground for what would later develop into the Hasidic movement. The Gaon of Vilna had gained his status as the greatest scholar, and Mendelssohn was taking his first

steps toward renown as a philosopher. In London, much furor was aroused by the political and public debate on the rights of Jews to citizenship (the “Jew Bill”), while in Poland, there were frequent allegations of blood libels. At the same time, Jewish public opinion, the traditional channels of communication, as well as the European press were stirred up by the polemic involving the Sabbatean amulets ascribed to Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz and the sensations provoked by the Frankist sect that was then uncovered in Poland.

Again, it was Jacob Emden, who, from his home in Altona, sounded the first alarm in the winter of 1751, this time against the rabbi of his community—Jonathan Eybeschütz, whose enemies claimed that he was no less than the covert leader of all the Sabbateans. Rabbi Jacob Joshua Falk stated that “there is no worse heretic or epicurean than he.”³⁴ In their eyes, the suspicions from the 1720s were incontestably confirmed following the deciphering of the amulets that Eybeschütz had given as protection (particularly to pregnant women), which had the name of Shabbetai Zevi encoded in them. The Council of Four Lands in Poland was called upon to intervene to remove Eybeschütz from his position, but at the same time his close associates and students brought heavy and effective pressure to bear to clear the rabbi’s name. It soon became evident that those who believed in Eybeschütz’s innocence were more powerful; although in addition to Emden, those suspecting Eybeschütz of Sabbatean heresy included important figures such as Rabbi Ezekiel Landau from Yampol, Ukraine (later the Rabbi of Prague), Jacob Joshua Falk of Frankfurt and Worms, and Samuel Hilman of Metz. The accusers now became the persecuted and paid a heavy personal price for their campaign against Eybeschütz. Emden, who fled in the darkness of night from Altona to Amsterdam to evade possible arrest by the authorities, recalled that as a particularly traumatic experience.³⁵

In its intensity and the degree to which it spread, the Eybeschütz affair resembled the Hayon affair. In both cases, it was not possible to prove that those suspected of Sabbateanism were religiously lax or that they displayed antinomianism or lived libertine lives. The heresy attributed to Eybeschütz was chiefly theological—belief in the false messiah, Shabbetai Zevi, and adherence to a Sabbatean doctrine that challenged the idea of the oneness of God. Although Emden’s uncompromising war against a man whom he called, among other things, “the bitter enemy Eybeschütz, the name of the wicked shall rot,” was personal and obsessive, in one of his polemical letters he recorded a list of no fewer than 158 different transgressions committed by Eybeschütz.³⁶ Emden was convinced that his enemy “was plotting against God,” but most of the transgressions in the list were groundless while others were based on testimonies and gossip about negligence or a relatively marginal halakhic ruling that Emden disagreed with.³⁷ But the accusations against a key

rabbi, the harsh controversies, and the vitriolic rhetoric in the battle waged between Eybeschütz's supporters and his opponents created the sense that the rabbinical elite was weakening and that its supervisory authority was being impaired. Because it feared that rabbinical authority was being undermined, in 1753 the leaders of the Council of Four Lands in Poland attacked Eybeschütz's critics and called for the "justification of the just man" because "no one should speak ill of him, for whoever does, speaks ill of the *Shekhinah*."³⁸ This fundamentalist strategy of defending a rabbi who is in the eye of the storm as a campaign to defend the honor of God reflected the general anxiety that the barriers of respect for talmudic scholars might collapse. The key question was, therefore, what would best protect the Jewish *ancien régime* and help stabilize it: Would it be best to denounce the rabbi and demand that he confess to heresy and then repent? Or perhaps it would be preferable to defend him and deny the accusations hurled against a leading rabbi.

"I Will Trample on All the Laws": Antinomianism and Libertinism

The Frankist affair, which became a major issue in Jewish public opinion amid the Eybeschütz controversy, was a different matter altogether. Following the orgiastic ceremony uncovered in Lanckorona in early 1756, several hard-core members of the sect found refuge with the bishop in Kamieniec, and others chose to confess their sins before the rabbinical court set up to take testimony in Satanow. In these testimonies, much was revealed about the lifestyle of the men and women in the sect, but very little was said about their beliefs. An astonishing picture emerged: even before the arrival of Jacob Frank, who assumed the leadership of the Sabbatean sect in the area, underground groups of Jews living libertine lives existed in southeastern Poland. They were merchants and peddlers from villages and small towns who were related to one another and committed to believing in Shabbetai Zevi. Men and women testified before the rabbinical court to free sexual relations, exchanging wives, incest, sexual intercourse with menstruating women and Christians, and masturbation. For example, Chaya bat Elisha Shorr, the libertine wife of Zevi Hirsch Shabbetai, who behaved like an ecstatic prophetess, chose her partners at will; she even slept with her brother Leib Shprinzes, and became pregnant from him. This libertinism of the sect members became a test of faith, as Shmuel Segal testified before the court. He described in detail how he and his wife, Reisel, maintained forbidden erotic relations with men and women from the Shabbetai and Shorr families:

I hereby confess before you that I denied the entire Torah. I did not observe the Sabbath. I inhaled tobacco smoke on the Sabbath day. I ate nonkosher food. I did not

violate the prohibition against adultery but was guilty of thoughts about it. Chaya, the wife of Hirsch Shabbetai, I embraced and kissed about six times. In actual fact, I did nothing with her. She told me: you are not fit to do anything with me for I believe in Shabbetai Zevi and so does my father and my uncles; they are all believers. You have not learned much Torah and you have not earned the right. Once I demanded that she transgress with me. She replied: have you today studied the Song of Songs, as I have? How are you entitled to carry out such a sacred act? Once her husband Hirsch heard from me that his wife Chaya had sex with his brother Leibush when they traveled to the fair in Tarnapol. He was angry with her for doing that without his knowledge. He told me I would not have protested for you know this mitzvah is actually permitted. Hirsch also told me and his brother-in-law Joseph how she had sex with his brother-in-law. . . . But that was not her desire, and then her husband wanted to beat her until she finally agreed. Hirsch Shabbetai himself had sex with my wife several times in front of me. She was unwilling, so it is really my fault.³⁹

The men and women of the Sabbatean sect breached the wall of supervision by the halakhah and the rabbinical elite, particularly in those places where the wall was at its highest: desecration of the Sabbath, nonkosher food, *hamets* during Passover, breaking fasts, and adultery. Libertine behavior was justified by the claim that the transgressions have a secret religious meaning and that by unhesitatingly committing them, a person proves his absolute loyalty to the sect. But in the testimonies given in Satanow, the voices of those with second thoughts were also heard—men and women whose consciences were troubling them. Although several of the women were dominant and gave free rein to their impulses, there were also others: married women who were forced against their will to have sexual relations or were compelled to engage in various types of forbidden practices with strange men under the threat of violence if they failed to accept the pretext that “this is a mitzvah” and submit.

Some of the men also shrank back from so flagrantly crossing the boundaries of morality. Isaac Breshtitzker testified: “Once Joseph said to me, kiss my wife; then I will know truly that you believe. I did not want to and said I cannot because it is against my nature.”⁴⁰ But in the sect, antinomianism became a test of faith. New members, especially, were compelled to prove their faith by committing a transgression. Chaya Shorr, for example, tested the son-in-law of the Sabbatean Solomon Segal: “And so she said to me, pass the test that I will put you to, and then you will be fit to be with us. She took a knife and cut a piece of wax [made from animal fat] from the candle and ate it, and ordered me to do the same. I cut a piece of the candle wax and ate it too.”⁴¹

Although these were secondhand testimonies, cited and adapted by the avowed enemy of Sabbateanism Jacob Emden, the rich documentation he provided proved reliable, and the names of the men and women and the place names he gave in detail also substantiate their authenticity. Moreover, additional sources confirm the picture of the libertine lifestyle of this sect in

Podolia. The wine merchant Dov Ber Birkenthal knew, for example, that the men were in the habit of exchanging wives among themselves and that the eating of candle wax was their sign of recognition. "If one of them comes to a friend's home and does not find him there," Birkenthal wrote, "then he tells his wife he is a member of their camp, and she gives him a piece of wax from a candle, and if he eats it and has no fear of the punishment of *karet* [divine punishment by untimely death] for eating the fat of an animal, then she is prepared to let him have his way with her."⁴²

What came first and what gained the upper hand in this dissolute situation of the Sabbatean sect in Podolia? Was it adherence to the paradoxical idea of turning sin into a mitzvah, derived from the radical Sabbatean doctrine, that was the motivation for permissive behavior and overstepping the boundaries of religion and morality? Or was it the possibility to satisfy the desire for the pleasures and freedom of the body under the pretext of fulfilling a mitzvah?

The underground anticlerical literature disseminated in Europe, which attacked the hypocrisy of the clergy, can provide a certain background for answering this question. For example, the underground erotic book *Thérèse Philosophe* (the author was apparently the deist Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, the Marquis d'Argens), printed eight years before the investigation in Satanow, describes a priest who takes advantage of a girl who wants to achieve a higher degree of sanctity. The story, based on a well-known scandal during which a female novice in a Jesuit seminary in Toulon accused her priest-confessor of having seduced her, combined the sensational material of religious fanaticism and sexual pleasures to convey a piercing anticlerical message.

In *Thérèse Philosophe*, the priest exploits the novice's religious piety and tempts her to enjoy the ecstatic religious experience of sexual release. Thérèse tells about her friend, exploited by the priest who instructs her on how to attain sanctity: he promised her that she was but a few steps away from the sacred, that God had revealed to him in a dream that she was on the verge of performing great miracles if only she would surrender her body to him with complete trust, with closed eyes, enabling him to satisfy his libidinous desires. All that was demanded of her, the cunning priest explained, was to dedicate her body to him and consciously release her spirit from her flesh. The sexual act was attended by prayers, and at its peak, the priest convinced her that she was undergoing an experience of total religious devotion. After the act, the satisfied priest preached a deist sermon to the girl. He examined religion in the light of reason and turned out to be a heretic. In the end, Thérèse herself was swept up by her sexual passions and adopted a worldview that justified a libertine life. This erotic-philosophical story concludes with deist criticism: "All religions without exception are the work of men."⁴³

When men and women in the Sabbatean sect seduced one another and formed relationships based on forbidden acts, they used religious reasons. Sexual permissiveness was presented as the fulfillment of a religious commandment, they claimed, and only those worthy believers could attain sanctity through sin, as Chaya Shorr replied to Shmuel Segal when he tried to seduce her: “Have you today studied the Song of Songs, as I have? How are you entitled to carry out such a sacred act?”⁴⁴ *Thérèse Philosophe* was, first of all, a critical literary text of the radical Enlightenment that attempted to expose the manipulateness and hypocrisy of the Catholic clergy. But it also conveyed the message that the body had been liberated from the restrictions of religion and that the desire for happiness and gratification was justified. The Frankists liberated the body in the name of an alternative religious consciousness, of an already redeemed world, but it also defied prohibition and rabbinical supervision. Most of the men and women who participated in the orgiastic ritual in Lanckorona and gave their testimony in Satanow were not scholars or kabbalists who could defend their behavior on the basis of a well-developed subversive religious ideology, and it is doubtful whether any of them had been directly exposed to the anticlerical criticism of the radical Enlightenment. But overall, they seemed to be part of the libertine world that sprang up in different parts of Europe.

When Jacob Frank returned from Salonika to Poland at the end of 1755 and became the adored, autocratic leader of the Sabbateans, all these forms of behavior reached far more radical heights.⁴⁵ For four consecutive years, until the group conversion of many members of the hard-core of the sect in 1757, this libertine Jewish group lived in constant defiance of everything that was accepted and sanctified in Jewish society. “I came to Poland only to nullify all the laws and all the religions,” Frank announced to his believers, and his words were recorded by them in the “Chronicles of the Words of the Lord.”⁴⁶ His doctrine took to extremes the Sabbatean faith that challenged religious prohibitions. As Rachel Elior argues: “Frank externalized the sense of revulsion aroused by the burden of the law and the shackles of tradition imposed by rabbinical Judaism.”⁴⁷

Frank declared his intent to replace death with life and enslavement with freedom, and proclaimed the end of the era of the law and religious ritual: “When that secret faith was revealed to me and I was told that it was not necessary to pray, I felt great bitterness about it, for I was always accustomed to pray. . . . But when I came to Poland, I called all the law by a filthy name. . . . For all the laws and prayers were only from the side of death. . . . All that has been only to the present, so that all of the Jewish breed would survive, so that the name of Israel wouldn’t be forgotten; but now it is not necessary, neither law nor prayer.”⁴⁸

It seems that this Sabbatean doctrine contains a hidden deist, perhaps even a Spinozist, statement: the religious commandments filled only a national and political function (the preservation of the Jewish group) and became a didactic tool that taught the existence of God (“so his name will not be forgotten”), but this function has ended, and there is no longer any need for the commandments.

From then on, Frank enlisted his disciples in an all-out campaign to wreak vengeance on his society of origin. Finally, he also demanded that they join him in leaving it completely: “It was proper for you to have leaped first into the sea, that is, to trample all laws and religions.”⁴⁹ He persuaded his followers to cast off all inhibitions, to desecrate everything holy, to violate every prohibition. Gershom Scholem wrote: “Jacob Frank will always be remembered as one of the most frightening phenomena in the whole of Jewish history: a religious leader who, whether for purely self-interested motives or otherwise, was in all actions a truly corrupt and degenerate individual . . . a powerful and tyrannical soul living in the middle of the eighteenth century and yet immersed entirely in a mythological world. . . . Out of the ideas of Sabbateanism. . . . Frank was able to weave a complete myth of religious nihilism.”⁵⁰

Among the many stories that Frank told his believers was a series of tales about the period 1753–55, when he lived in Salonika, before moving to Poland. He described his deliberate provocations of talmudic scholars, his blasphemy in public, and the violent scandals he provoked in the synagogue to demonstrate how he was trampling on the religious laws. Before hundreds of worshipers in the synagogue, Frank related, “having taken the [scroll of the] Laws of Moses, I put them on the bare ground, and having lowered my pants, I sat on them with my bare behind.”⁵¹ Jewish women who lurked in waiting for him on the street to throw stones at him after his blasphemous act were met with a counterattack, which he described with sadistic glee: “I picked up those very rocks and began to throw [them] at [the women]. Some miscarried right away, many fainted, many became wounded, groaning and screams were heard all over, and I went quietly home.”⁵² On another occasion, he boasted about having enticed a talmudic scholar to commit a transgression in public:

One time on the Sabbath, having come upon a certain highly learned Jew in the streets in Salonika. . . . [I said] let us go into the Turkish coffeehouse. . . . I winked at the servant in the coffeehouse of the Turk to serve us two cups of coffee. This one brought them right away, together with two pipes, according to their custom. How can that be? shouted the surprised scholar. Don’t you know that today is the Sabbath and that it is not proper for us to drink or eat at a Turk’s? I didn’t answer him but said to the Turk, did you mix pork fat in that coffee, so that he cannot drink it? Angered by these words, the Turk (because God forbids them to use pork fat) threw himself headlong upon the

Jew and sought to stab him with a knife. So I said, but your own laws exempt you from prohibition when you find that your soul is in mortal danger. You know what, let's better drink. What's to be done! And so we drank and smoked pipes and, since by their customs, the coffeehouses were open onto the street, all the passersby could not get over the surprise at seeing such a scholar break his laws on the Sabbath. Finally, the time came to pay. The Jew didn't have anything on him to pay with on the Sabbath. I didn't, either. . . . I took the turban from the Jew and left it as a pledge, and the Jew had to go back to his own home without his turban, with an uncovered head. And I did that every Saturday always on different streets, and always with a different learned Jew.⁵³

The libertine Jacob Frank was remarkably creative in the diverse ways he found to show contempt for religion. He was able to release his libertine energy within the group of believers that formed around him and placed their trust in him. The orgy in Lanckorona early in 1756 was merely one of several about which testimonies remained. In Lvov, one of his first stops on his move from Salonika to Poland, the Frankists had already convened in "a house of darkness in the home of a Jew. . . . They had rowdy drinking parties for several months in that house that contained the room of darkness, and during the entire time they were carousing they had two women, one a married woman and the other a maiden."⁵⁴ Frank behaved like a sadistic tyrant who exploited the bodies of the women in the sect; he demanded their absolute obedience and forced them to participate in humiliating erotic acts. About the women's enslavement, Frank said: "You also heard that I admonished the women who were preparing some broth for me that they not turn away their face even for a moment from the pot. I did that so that you would be careful in my every commandment."⁵⁵ Frank told his believers that he expected them to be as submissive as the woman who was humiliated and brutally beaten:

There was a certain man in Jassy who bought a lovely dress for his wife for the holiday. Men and women come and greatly praise the woman before her husband, saying that she was so lovely and that the dress was so fitting. He replied: because you have praised her, I took her and had dealings with her in the presence of everyone. His wife became very angry with him. I, too, came along at the time as a guest. He recognized me, that I had been at their wedding and received me kindly, saying to his wife, here is our dear Jacob come to us. Go, my wife, and bring some of that fine confiture for such a dear guest. She didn't want to go, because she was powerfully angry at how he had disgraced her. He asked her several times; she didn't want to. So he gave her one in the mouth so that blood poured out and she fell on the ground. Then he started to kiss her and ask her again: My dear, go bring some confiture for such a dear guest. Finally, she got up, wiped her face clean of the blood, went and brought the good confiture. So are you; you are compelled to bring the good confiture.⁵⁶

The radical sexual license that he permitted himself with women, his insistence on obedience, his domineering approach, and his hints about intim-

idation, humiliation, and violence mark Frank as a sadist not merely in the metaphorical sense of the word. He was, to a great extent, the Jewish version of the ignominious French aristocrat the Marquis Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade (1740–1814), the infamous libertine of eighteenth-century Europe. In his personal life and his radical writings, de Sade was the definitive prophet of personal freedom and total abandonment of all the shackles and prohibitions of society, religion, and morality. In his flagrantly pornographic books, he describes an endless series of unrestrained sexual abuses. De Sade found justification for libertinism in the atheistic philosophy of materialism and by taking the utilitarian hedonistic ideal to great extremes. The world he constructed was godless, a kind of counter-world that consisted entirely of the devastation of everything sacred, vitriolic anticlerical defiance of priests and nuns, and contempt for the Church and Christian faith.⁵⁷ In his book *The Misfortunes of Virtue*, for example, a young girl, Sophie, is the victim of ongoing, violent abuse. The principles underpinning this abuse are the gratification of sexual passion and the absolute autonomy of the libertine to give free rein to his natural impulses and to show his utter contempt for his victims. As the tormented girl vainly attempts to hold on to her faith as her last consolation, the man who is sexually abusing her also demolishes the foundations of religion, in an atheistic speech:

“All religions start from a false premise, Sophie,” he would say. “Each one assumes the need for belief in a creator. Now if this everlasting world of ours, like all the others that hang in the infinite plains of space, had no beginning and can never have an end; if all the products of Nature are the consequential effects of laws by which Nature herself is bound . . . then what role is left for the prime mover that you gratuitously impute to it? Believe me, Sophie, the God you admit to is nothing but the fruit, on the one hand, of ignorance, and on the other, of tyranny. When the strong first set out to enslave the weak, they convinced their victims that God sanctified the chains that bound them, and the weak, their wits crushed by poverty, believed what they were told. All religions are the destructive consequences of this first fiction and merit the same contempt as its source deserves. There is not one of these fairy tales which does not march under the banner of imposture and stupidity. In all these mysteries which stagger human reason, I see only dogmas that outrage Nature and grotesque ceremonials that warrant nothing but derision. From the moment my eyes were opened, Sophie, I loathed all these disgusting shams. I vowed I should trample them beneath my feet. . . . If you wish to be a rational being, follow my lead.”⁵⁸

In the sensual, materialistic world of de Sade, nothing can restrict sexual freedom. Women are educated to cast off all moral inhibitions, to succumb to the appetites of the men who rule over them, and to understand that they exist only to give pleasure to men.

De Sade and Frank lived in the same generation, and there were only

fourteen years between the two. But the life contexts of the infamous French aristocrat and the Polish leader of the Jewish sect were, of course, totally disparate. It is extremely unlikely that the two ever met, and there is no proof of any mutual influence. But Frank's behavior was nonetheless characterized by Sadeian libertinism. As Rachel Elior explains:

Jacob Frank allowed himself and the members of his group to violate all the prohibitions accepted in the tradition, to deviate from the sanctified divisions of private life and the public domain, from the distinctions and barriers between Jews and non-Jews, between marriage and sins of the flesh, between modesty and promiscuity. He imposed on members of the sect, against their will, norms antithetical to sexual morals and demanded that they take part in profaning the rituals of the religion and publicly breach cardinal prohibitions. He demanded that they engage in sexual licentiousness, which included exchanging wives, sexual intercourse in public, promiscuity, and incest.⁵⁹

De Sade covered his libertinism with an atheist rationalist and materialist philosophy: nature is indifferent to morality, law, and religion, and operates mechanically.⁶⁰ Frank, in contrast, explained that the conduct he expounded was ritual behavior of a mystic, religious nature, and drew legitimacy from the Sabbatean and kabbalistic myths. But in the case of both these "lords," the boundaries of human culture and morality were broken down. The autonomy of the individual released from every restriction reached its destructive apogee in sexual freedom, tyranny, intimidation, and debasement. Both men declared that it was their aim to trample the laws in general and the laws of religion in particular.

As soon as the Frankist orgy in Lanckorona was exposed in 1756, a relatively rapid process ensued, at the end of which the Frankist sect was pushed outside the Jewish fold. Violent persecutions in the streets of Jewish communities, investigations, and severe proclamations of excommunication isolated the heretic sect. The rabbinical elite hastened to protect the purity of Jewish faith. Jacob Emden demanded that the heads of the Council of Four Lands in Poland intervene and take steps against "the wicked sect" because "those epicureans of Shabbetai Zevi, may the name of the wicked rot, are more disturbing to the world than the generation of the Flood. They swear and lie, steal, and commit adultery; destroyers of the world, they break all bounds."⁶¹ The excommunication announced in Brody and affirmed by the Council of Four Lands denounced them as "perverters of the words of God, who ridicule the Torah and the Talmud, and are liable to [all] the death penalties administered by the *beit din* and to *karet*." Since the Frankists had used the kabbalah as justification for their antinomian behavior, the rabbis attempted to restrict the study of kabbalah and to exclude young people from engaging in it. The sexual excesses

testified to in the courts also led to a decision: “Declare their wives and daughters whores and their sons and daughters bastards.”⁶²

Now it was scarcely possible for the Frankists to exist within the boundaries of the Jewish space. They presented themselves as a sect opposed to the Talmud (“contra-talmudists”), adopted Christian dogmas that denied the exclusivity of the chosenness of the Jewish people, and negated the messianic belief of the Jews. As “contra-talmudist” Jews, the Frankists participated in two religious disputations with a series of rabbis in Kamieniec (1757) and Lvov (1759) under the auspices of the Church. When the Talmud was discussed, the representatives of the Frankists presented various excerpts as ridiculous or fantastic. Finally, the lines were crossed when, in the Lvov dispute, they testified to the alleged truth of the blood libel; by doing so, they cut the last thread that connected them to Jewish solidarity. By the beginning of 1760, several hundred believers had converted, including Jacob Frank and his family.⁶³ Although this drastic step did not bring an end to Frankism in Europe, the rabbis now believed that they could overthrow the subversive heresy that had emerged from the Jewish community, block the flood of defiance of autonomous individuals, and continue to maintain control over religious behavior. Once the Frankists crossed the boundaries by converting, that precluded any possibility that Frankism might exist as subversive opponents of the Talmud, the halakhah, and the rabbis within Judaism.⁶⁴

What was the historical significance of Sabbatean libertinism in the eighteenth century? Many scholars of Sabbateanism have discerned in it trends that eroded traditional religion, particularly the radical release from the authority of the laws and the rabbis.⁶⁵ However, from the standpoint of the development of Jewish mysticism and Jewish messianic movements, those trends were linked to the religious system of Sabbateanism. Gershom Scholem pointed to the kabbalistic and messianic formulas that dictated Sabbatean antinomianism and stated that it was the Sabbatean doctrine of “sanctification of sin” that enabled its followers to rebel against rabbis and the halakhah.⁶⁶ Rachel Elijor, who described Frankist libertinism at its peak, found that “it was not merely licentiousness, prostitution, lawlessness, and depravity in themselves, but rather rituals of a deliberately religious nature that were intended to symbolize the reversal between eternity and extinction, between life and death, and to express a redeemed reality. . . . Hence these were ceremonies that were obligatory and had meaning and purpose in the framework of a complete worldview.”⁶⁷ In a similar vein, Ada Rapoport-Albert argued that the libertine experience actually symbolized an orderly, well-thought-out system of religious beliefs and views: “The sexual licentiousness that Frank advocated among his followers should not be defined as an anarchic life of debauchery, devoid of any restraints or boundaries. On the contrary, he always arbitrarily

determined that these acts of transgression would take place at specific times, in specific places, and in specific formats, and attributed to them specific symbolic meanings. . . . It is clear at any rate that these acts—distinctly antinomian acts—actually drew their strength from the validity of the system of laws they were violating, and in themselves became a subversive but formal ritual of ‘other gods.’”⁶⁸

But from the historical perspective of Jewish secularization, we can dismiss the declared religious arguments and view the Sabbatean phenomenon beyond its theological-ritual interpretation as an expression of paradoxical religiosity. Observing it in this way, we would see the libertine behavior and religious laxity, a theology with deistic elements (a God distant from the world or indifferent to it), and defiance of the religious laws and rabbinical authority. Although various rituals were justified by a religious ideology, this was apparently the first group of Jewish men and women who consciously and deliberately lived in an “upside-down” world without any of the religious restrictions and prohibitions that were intended to restrain the male and female body. In eighteenth-century Sabbateanism, particularly in its radical Frankist form in southeastern Poland in the middle of the century, sin was unashamedly flagrant, predominantly in relation to the most inviolable prohibitions: desecration of the Sabbath, nonkosher food, the abolition of fasts, and a variety of sexual sins. Although Sabbateanism had at its center religious doctrines, ceremonies, rituals, and kabbalistic ideas, in its social manifestation it was chiefly a revolt against religion through permissive and libertine behavior. From a broader viewpoint, and as far as its cultural significance is concerned, the Frankist group also fit into the libertine world that existed on the margins of Europe society at the time.

In view of the broad scope of the Sabbatean phenomenon, its geographical spread, the intensity of the controversies it aroused in the long period during which it was perceived as a threat to the intactness of the religion, it undoubtedly had a strong impact on the processes of change in modern Jewish history.⁶⁹ Radical Sabbateanism expressed the desire for freedom and autonomy of individuals who evaded communal supervision and behaved in opposition to religious laws and moral norms. At the same time, it could arouse peril among traditional elites and cause them to prepare new strategies to cope with the threats and to set up barriers against all manifestations of secularization.⁷⁰ Those who considered themselves responsible for religious supervision and for imparting Jewish tradition felt threatened. The traumatic Frankist affair left a strong imprint for a long time. This was particularly true insofar as sexual permissiveness was concerned, as Ada Rapoport-Albert stated: “The Sabbatean experience left a deep deposit of fear that the taboo against incest might be breached—sexual licentiousness was associated in the consciousness with

giving free rein to the feminine spiritual forces.⁷¹ Even beyond the rabbinical elite's need to grapple with this radical sect, it began to have growing doubts and suspicions about other religious phenomena such as religious enthusiasm, messianism, and charismatic leaders. From all these standpoints, Sabbateanism directly and indirectly made a significant contribution to the Jews' process of secularization.

Chapter 4

The Rationalist Sect: Neo-Karaites and Deists

The rabbinical elite viewed the threat of heresy as a two-headed monster: the Sabbatean sect and the rationalist sect. The boundaries between the mystic, libertine heresy of the Sabbateans and the philosophical heresy of the critics of religion were blurred to emphasize the intensity of the double threat. Jacob Emden observed these occurrences with frazzled nerves, his body shaken repeatedly by tremors as he gathered information on the underground streams of contemporary heresy. He also thought that there were contacts and similarities between the two sects. For example, he cited testimony about the physician Yekutiel Gordon from Shklov in White Russia, who, as a medical student in Padua, belonged to the mystical group of Moses Hayim Luzzatto, who was suspected of Sabbateanism. Gordon “tried to incite me to a new alien faith, may the good Lord protect me,” the witness said, “to reveal to me in secret that the *Shekhinah* is no longer in exile, and to explain to me that what the Sages say is not really true, particularly in their exaggerated threats of the punishment of hell . . . which is only meant to frighten and mislead the masses. . . . And he [explained to me] that there is no cause to shrink from sins and transgressions.”¹ In Gordon’s alleged words, there is an echo of the deist rhetoric of rebellion against the rabbinical elite blended with the Sabbatean doctrine that heralds the era of liberation from the burden of the commandments.

Jacob Emden believed that the Sabbatean sect was responsible for the spread of religious skepticism and the laxity that went with it. This historical dynamic of a transition from Sabbatean heresy to rationalist heresy he blamed on his bitter enemy Jonathan Eybeschütz: “For from [Eybeschütz] and through him another sect of philosophizing heretics has emerged that has heretofore been unknown in this place. . . . The Torah has become a light matter to him and the followers in his sect, they have cheapened it, removed its glory and its truth is lacking. . . . And in this way, the other wanton heretics have found a reason also to show contempt for the prohibitions of the Torah and to treat them lightly in public. . . . To choose a free life of laxity, . . . this is increasing day by day, to our great sorrow.”²

In his view, the Sabbatean sect was mocking the religion, and through the cracks caused by this crisis had come those same “philosophizing heretics” who combined a desire for freedom and rational criticism of the religion that justifies religious laxity.

Freethinkers and the Threat of Reason

What did Emden and others know about rationalistic skepticism among the Jews? In contrast to the Sabbatean groups, until 1780s there was no organized “sect of philosophers” whose leader could be identified, whose doctrines could be read, or whose goals could be heard. But the sensors of the suspicious guardians of religion were attuned to the echoes resonating from the voices and behavior of those Jews who were criticizing the religion and adopting deist worldviews, or those who believed in a neo-Karaite approach that deviated from the rabbinical tradition. From his vantage point in Italy and Central Europe at the start of the century, the physician Tuviah Cohen warned against individual Jews who “totally deny the existence of God in their hearts and believe that there has never been a creator or leader in the world but that everything in life is conducted according to Nature,” and others who “doubt [the existence of God] and waver between belief and disbelief.”³ A generation later, Emden described a deist group: “The hair on my flesh stands up, I am terrified, and my eyes grow dark from anger when I hear this bad news, that among our people vipers have emerged, ungodly men. They deny God in his heaven. They say to God, leave us. Who is the Almighty that he should enslave us? And what good will it do if we pray to him, while he is hidden by the dark clouds? And some deny his very existence and make the world a lawless place. They think the world has no leader . . . and they argue that everything happens by chance. They do not believe in divine providence.”⁴

We can hear, behind this rhetoric of demonization, the voices of Jews who no longer believe in the intervention of God in the world or the effectiveness of prayer. In their view, God is hidden, remote from the world, does not hear the prayers of human beings, and is indifferent to their fate. Although there were no written texts elucidating these deistic views that the rabbis could contend with, they had no difficulty in picking up the echoes of heresy. Statthagen, Emden, and others who equated trends of secularization with religious laxity, also cautioned against the philosophers, who examined every truth according to the criterion of nature, “and everything that is not rational . . . they will not believe in it.”⁵ They denounced all those who denied the existence of God or his providence and urged their students to adhere strictly to the discipline of the commandments and to avoid being seduced by the voice of

reason that whispers to them various excuses to “ease the burden of the prohibitions.”⁶ They insisted that philosophy and religion cannot coexist: “Philosophy is truly a substitute for Torah.”⁷

On this subject, too, Emden was uncompromising: philosophy inevitably leads to deist heresy (“the heretics deny [God’s] providence over the lower worlds”) and will lead men to replace faith in God’s leadership and providence over the world with faith in the laws of nature. He was convinced that philosophy was a serious obstacle at various junctures in Jewish history: “Greek wisdom, which was our downfall, destroyed our Temple and took over the Land of Israel. It was embraced by the exiled Jews in Spain, leading to their expulsion from Spain, uprooting them from that country . . . until they became so arrogant as to exchange the honor of their illustrious, plentiful, delightful Torah for the naked lowly whore, philosophy.”⁸ Fear of the bad influence of philosophy led him even to criticize such a prominent figure as Maimonides: “And see what happened to him because he dove into perilous waters and came up with naught. In his book *Moreh nevukhim*, he walked in darkness, did not broaden his steps, his ankles stumbled in the fields of alien beliefs he tended toward, but then he learned they posed a great danger. For is it a light matter that the Sages have taught us that a man who studies external books has no share in the next world?”⁹

In addition to the challenge of philosophy, Emden had to contend with the challenge of the new science and the Enlightenment belief that science explains the world better than the Holy Scriptures do. To counter the deist views, based on Newtonian science, that revealed the unchanging laws of nature and depicted a remote God who does not intervene in the world, the Jewish defender of faith in divine providence cited a litany of evidence to show the limitations of human reason. The laws of nature are not blind but are directed and mysterious. There is no way to understand, for example, how gravity operates on the globe (“let them tell us who hangs the earth upon nothing in the air so that it does not move from its center”), how the bee and the spider build with such impressive geometrical precision, how volcanoes erupt, or even how the Jewish people has survived all the ordeals of history and existed for thousands of years, without taking into account the constant intervention of God in nature and in history.¹⁰

Emden did not identify the Jewish deist group that he attacked. He did not mention them by name nor did he point his finger at a specific location where they might be found, but he did characterize them as a new group whose members belonged mainly to the mercantile elite. He attributed their views to their exposure to rational philosophy, the new science, and contemporary European novels. They did not observe the commandments, did not study Torah, were skeptical about the miracles mentioned in the Torah, did

not believe in redemption and the return to Zion, showed contempt for the rabbinical elite, and denied its authority.

Against this background, one can also find a historical basis for the Jewish critics of religion, who are described in the fictional book written by the Marquis d'Argens, of Emden's generation, and observe this trend from outside the Jewish community. Between 1736 and 1738, this French deist published the six volumes of *The Jewish Spy* in the Hague.¹¹ He depicted six Jewish characters from Constantinople in the Ottoman Empire in order to present a satirical picture of the society, politics, and religion of Europe, through the eyes of the "others." Argens uses the three—Aaron Monceca and Jacob Brito, who visit Paris, London, Amsterdam, Brussels, Torino, Barcelona, Lisbon, and other cities, and Rabbi Isaac Onis, who remained in Constantinople—to level criticism at Christian Europe.

D'Argens believed that there was a deistic potential in Judaism because the Jewish faith did not depend on observance of the commandments. The religion of the conversos in Spain, preserved for many years as an internal faith only, was, in his eyes, the best evidence of this. When Aaron Monceca reports on the weakening of faith and religious practice among men and women from the Christian elite in Paris, he writes: "I have discovered a vast number of Jews in Paris who do not believe they are Jews, or know anything at all of the matter. . . . They believe in a God who created the world, rewards the good, and punishes the bad. What more do we believe? Is not that the whole of our religion except a few ceremonies that have been enjoined us by our Doctors and Priests? But the ceremonies are not indispensably necessary, of which it is easy for me to give thee convincing proofs."¹²

In letter 36, Monceca reveals his doubts to Rabbi Onis. It turns out that he himself is a deist who denies the exclusivity of God's choice of the Jews, has cast off the beliefs on which he was educated, and defies the rabbi: "I give credit to the Rabbis no farther than as their decisions agree with the clear and distinct ideas which I have received immediately from God. I laugh heartily at the ridiculous attachment which the Jews have to the fiction of the Talmud; and satisfied with the substance of our religion, I condemn its superstitions."¹³

The anti-talmudic trend reaches its peak in this fictional narrative when the rabbi himself becomes convinced of the truth of the Karaite position and decides to leave the rabbinate in Constantinople and join the Karaite community in Egypt. The true, pure Judaism is only that of the written Torah, while rabbinical Judaism is still held in thrall by the fictions and superstitions of the Talmud. "Endeavor to imitate my example," Rabbi Onis urged Aaron Monceca in Paris. "Abandon thy prejudices. . . . Make use of thy reason to combat them; and consider that if there is a God, he cannot be such as the Talmud represents him to us."¹⁴

Were the words that Argens placed in the mouths of his fictional Jews cut off from reality? It would be more precise to say that his *Jewish Spy* was a mixture of the imaginary and the real, wishful thinking, an idealized image of Karaism, a movement liberated from the Talmud and the rabbis, and his impressions from his meetings with contemporary Jews.¹⁵ As Jonathan Israel asserts, it was his familiarity with trends of secularization among European Jews that led him to the notion that Judaism in its purified, reformed version contains an inner rationalist and deist core.¹⁶ He also may have heard about the event that aroused a furor in the Amsterdam community in the second decade of the century, when a group accused of “Karaism” was uncovered there. The resemblance between the name of Aaron Fonseca, one of the three Portuguese Jews excommunicated in Amsterdam in 1712 for neo-Karaite views (“they totally deny the acceptance of the Oral Law, which is the very foundation of our holy Torah”), and Aaron Monceca is not a coincidence.¹⁷ Yosef Kaplan, who reconstructed this affair in detail, estimated that the three men suspected of religious laxity and rejection of the Oral Law represented a far more extensive phenomenon, that of a group attempting to formulate an ideology of a new Judaism. Their interpretation of historical Karaism as a rational, anti-talmudic movement devoid of superstition and faithful to pure Judaism served as a basis for their neo-Karaite worldview and as a source of legitimacy for wresting free from traditional Judaism and the obligation to observe the commandments.¹⁸

The “Karaites” of Amsterdam vanished rapidly, and the speedy, drastic reaction of the community establishment removed the threat. One of the three publicly atoned and returned to Judaism, and two chose to sever all ties to Judaism and convert to Christianity. In Kaplan’s words: “This was perhaps the first, and possibly also the only, effort by Jews in all of Western Europe during early modern times to form a sectarian organization challenging traditional rabbinic Judaism.”¹⁹ The rabbis were still left with the impression of a fierce attack on the Oral Law and a danger to the authority of the rabbinical elite: Anyone who does not believe in the authority of the Sages also denies the authority of the contemporary rabbis to represent the words of God. “Those are evil, criminal men,” Benjamin Raphael Brandon bitterly said in Amsterdam in the early 1730s, “for not only do they refuse to accept the yoke of the sovereignty of rabbinical authority, saying we accept nothing but what is written in the Torah, written by the finger of God, adding transgressions to their sins, for they do not even accept the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to heed the words of the Sages.”²⁰

Rabbi Moshe Hagiz was furious again. In 1733 in *Mishnat hakhamim*, he identified the heresy in the neo-Karaite position: denial of belief in the next

world and the resurrection of the dead; contempt for the rabbinical elite throughout the generations (“who are flesh and blood just like us”); and accusations, in the spirit of the popular anticlerical slogans, that the rabbis were aspiring to power and manipulateness: “They speak things they have invented . . . to exaggerate and threaten the people and to prevail over them.”²¹ The only response ought to be complete faith in everything the rabbis say:

We must believe that the words [of the Sages] who judge between right and wrong, who purify and declare impure, who prohibit and permit, have a tradition going back to Moses from the mouth of the Almighty. . . . And if, Heaven forbid, one should come to deny the words of one of them and to mock them, we, the believers, will call him one who strays from the path of the true tradition, and what have we to do with his belief. . . . There is no difference between he who denies the Written Torah and he who denies the Oral Torah . . . for both have been uttered by the Almighty to Moses.²²

Rational skepticism and anticlerical defiance were met with an uncompromising demand for absolute obedience to the entire chain of tradition of the Oral Law from Mount Sinai until the contemporary rabbi: “faith in the Sages.”²³ In the large city of Amsterdam, the entire spectrum of heresy was under suspicion, not only the neo-Karaites, and from this standpoint at the beginning of the eighteenth century, it was evident that the heterodox unrest was continuing from the previous century. Throughout the eighteenth century, ties to Judaism of many members of the Portuguese community became more tenuous, and an orthodox rabbinical front began to take shape to combat this religious indifference.²⁴ Hagiz identified them in his early years in the community and, with his keen eye, distinguished between those whose skepticism bred their sin and those pursuing freedom and pleasures, whose sin bred their skepticism.²⁵ Regarding deist groups in Amsterdam who believed in a god distant from the world, Benjamin Raphael Brandon commented in 1735: “There are evil sects who think alien thoughts, thinking that God does not extend his providence at all over matters of the lower world, whether among men or beasts, and that is a view of the heretics.”²⁶

Early in the century, some Jews in the London community showed similar sensitivity to philosophical heresy. Rabbi David Nieto, who was familiar with science and philosophical thought, marshaled his finest rhetorical talents in a series of writings to try to refute deist heresy and neo-Karaite criticism. To counter criticism of the Talmud and the neo-Karaite attempt to question the validity of the Oral Law, Nieto published his book *Mateh dan* in 1714.²⁷ The challenge in the theological debate was to prove the fundamental truths of the Jewish religion with convincing arguments. David Ruderman showed how involved Nieto was in the attempt to arrive at a synthesis between science and religion, which Christian scientists and philosophers in England had succeeded

in doing at the time.²⁸ Nieto's broad knowledge enabled him to suggest as a solution for skepticism and criticism of religion, not the dogmatic "faith in the Sages" but rather a series of rational proofs that, in his view, supported faith in divine providence and in the truth and antiquity of the Oral Law. Nieto grappled with this challenge at the opening of his book:

Not a one of our last sages has proved this principle that everything depends upon, namely that the Sages' interpretation of the Torah and the commandments is the Oral Law received by Moses at Sinai. And the reason is that all the Jews rely upon faith in the Sages, a faith they have inherited from their fathers and forefathers, generation after generation of believers and sons of believers. Hence we sought no advice about how to respond to the Karaites who uttered falsehoods against the Sages, and so the heretics and those who speak rebellion against the tradition have multiplied in these times. Hence we must proclaim that [the Sages] are truth and their words are truth.²⁹

Mateh dan was written very near the time of the affair of the neo-Karaite sect in Amsterdam, and the book reveals a sense of urgency throughout. Nieto was particularly vexed by the anticlerical blatancy of the adversaries of traditional faith, and he angrily cited the slogans that were intended to undercut the rabbinical elite: "They have made up all of this [the commandments] for no good reason or any other basis but merely to prevail over the public," or "because by doing so, they expand their control and cast terror upon the public so they will be honored all the days of their lives."³⁰ Against these, Nieto tried to prove that the Sages' tradition has a divine source and that it began with the revelation to Moses, and is not a later, malicious invention by the rabbis.

Among the disciples of Newtonian science were those who reached the deist conclusion that the world ran on its own and that God did not interfere. About ten years after he wrote *Mateh dan*, Nieto had the opportunity to become acquainted with at least two members of his community who held such views. Isaac Baryntes' outburst in Nieto's house of study in London and the deist words he uttered have already been mentioned. The other was Jacob de Castro Sarmiento, a former converso and a physician with an academic and a Catholic education who was one of Nieto's students when he first joined the London community as a Jew. After a short while, he grew lax about observing the commandments, became excited about Newtonian science and alienated from rabbinical Judaism, and finally left the community.³¹ In 1758, after Nieto was no longer alive, Sarmiento informed the Portuguese Jewish community of London: "Gentlemen, the different opinions and sentiments I have entertained long ago, entirely dissenting from those of the synagogue, do not permit me any longer to keep the appearance of a member of your body; I now therefore

take my leave of you, hereby renouncing expressly that communion in which I have been considered with yourselves.”³²

The Fool Says in His Heart That There Is No God: Skepticism and Jewish Identity

The cases of Jews who cut themselves off from the Jewish community because of religious skepticism were not limited to former conversos in London, whose Christian education and exposure to the radical views of the Enlightenment induced them to criticize the Jewish religion. Only one year after Sarmento’s declaration, another doctor, Meyer Schomberg, a native of Germany and a member of the Ashkenazic community, and Sarmento’s personal and professional rival, requested in his will not to be buried as a Jew but rather in an Anglican ceremony. His family was then almost totally assimilated, some of his children had converted to Christianity, and he himself was a deist in his views.³³ Thirteen years earlier, when Schomberg wrote his indictment of the Jews of London, “Emunat omen,” he was troubled by the hypocrisy of the Jews who outwardly proclaimed their devotion to the Jewish religion but in their hearts were heretics and sinners: “Those hypocrites violate the Ten Commandments with open contempt, and everything they do is only outwardly. They boast that they believe in the existence of God, blessed be his name, but that is not so, for inwardly they deny his existence and oneness. The fool says in his heart that there is no God. For they do not believe in he who has said I am the Lord your God.”³⁴

Schomberg himself was one of the religiously lax in London, but he directed his complaints against the merchant elite, who allegedly covered up their transgressions with a false show of piety, and against those who dared criticize his way of life as a dedicated Jewish physician who no longer stringently observed the commandments. Moral behavior, in the eyes of the deist Schomberg, was preferable to obedience to the halakhah. A man like him, who lives an honest life, shows social sensitivity and compassion, and helps others, fulfills God’s will even if he no longer observes the commandments. At the beginning of his book, Schomberg listed his seven articles of faith, from which he omitted some that Maimonides had included in his list of the thirteen articles of his faith. These included the obligation to observe the commandments, recognition of the authority of the Torah, and faith in the coming of the Messiah. Although “Emunat omen” remained in manuscript form, it is significant because it is one of the clear deist voices to come to us directly from this early period, not via the polemic against heresy. The text gives voice to a Jew whose

deist humanistic views alienated him from his Jewish environment and created identity problems for him.

Schomberg found himself alone between two large groups, both of which were flawed, in his view: the conservative Jews who were faithful to the commandments, and the acculturated Jews who aspired to wealth and the pleasures of life. A moment before he severed his ties with the Jewish collective, and before he wrote his will asking not to be buried with his Jewish brethren, he made one last attempt to defend his lifestyle and values, to utter his protest and express his pain in the face of the flaws he found in Jewish life in London, and to propose a Jewish deist formula that, in his view, was commensurate with a correct understanding of the principles of the Jewish religion and the perception of God as a model for a life of integrity and morality.

Moses Mendelssohn, the most influential Jewish philosopher of the eighteenth century, entered the public sphere only in the 1750s, about ten years after Schomberg wrote his relatively marginal protest. Although he believed in the power of human reason to arrive at the most important truths of the world, including the existence and providence of God, and although he promoted the idea of religious tolerance and resembled Schomberg in his humanistic approach, the young Mendelssohn enlisted philosophy to defend religion, faith in God, and revelation. In his early works in 1755, he rejected the radical meanings of Enlightenment philosophy.

Spinoza's shadow then loomed as the greatest threat posed by rational philosophy to religion. Mendelssohn, whose friend Lessing regarded him as a "second Spinoza" but without "his errors," did not conceal his admiration for the Jewish philosopher from Amsterdam who preceded him by a century, but he distinguished between Spinoza's immense contribution to the advancement of philosophy and the implications of his ideas. In his opinion, Spinoza's doctrine enabled immoral, conscienceless heretics and libertines to avail themselves of it as a respectable philosophical justification for their views and behavior. Mendelssohn endeavored to clear Spinoza of the charge of atheism and to show how he could be understood as the herald of Leibniz's theory of a predetermined harmony of the world.

But Mendelssohn refused to accept Spinoza's view that questioned the existence of God beyond the material world and identified him with nature. In a 1755 dialogue, Mendelssohn placed in the mouth of one of the interlocutors the following words about Spinoza, which were both empathetic and critical: "The misfortune of this man has always touched me in an extraordinary way. He lived in moderation, alone and irreproachable; he renounced all human idols and devoted his entire life to reflection, and look what happened! In the labyrinth of his meditations, he goes astray and, out of error, maintains much that agrees very little with his innocent way of life and that the most

depraved scoundrel might wish for in order to indulge his evil desires with impunity. How unjust is the irreconcilable hatred of scholars toward someone so unfortunate!”³⁵

Throughout his life, Mendelssohn was acutely aware of Spinoza’s fate. In contrast to him, he took care to tread the same paths of philosophical tradition walked by those philosophers whose doctrines were underpinned by a combination of reason and religious faith. He also disagreed entirely with the “enfant terrible of Europe”—Voltaire. To Mendelssohn, Voltaire was the ultimate representative of the radical and frivolous philosophy that characterized the French Enlightenment. Mendelssohn also found it difficult to accept the bitter message of Voltaire’s *Candide*, in which he accused religious establishments, corrupt clergy, and a cruel Inquisition. Mendelssohn believed that Voltaire’s criticism was unjust and that his descriptions of the horrors that people visit upon one another were greatly exaggerated. Moreover, in his view, Voltaire, who had evaded a serious discussion of Leibniz’s optimistic philosophy, did not succeed in undermining his fundamental insight that this is the best of all possible worlds.³⁶ Mendelssohn admired Spinoza and even laughed as he read Voltaire’s satire, but he sided with the moderate Enlightenment, which was optimistic about the possibility of man’s happiness and believed in God as the absolute good. And, in contrast to the London physician Schomberg, Mendelssohn’s humanistic and rationalistic philosophical worldview did not lead him to sever ties with Judaism and Jewry.

Schomberg was an exceptional case in that he left a Hebrew text elucidating his critical views. About other Jews who challenged the religion, we have only indirect, fragmented testimonies, which are reflected from only a few windows that allow us a restricted view. One of these windows was opened in the 1730s by an Ashkenazic woman who immigrated with her husband from London to New York and corresponded from there with her son who remained in England. Abigaill Levy Franks (1696–1756) did her best to continue supervising her son Naphtali’s conduct. Do not be so free in talking about religion, she cautioned him; do not be lax in observing the commandments, and be sure to recite the morning prayer each day. My brother, who lives in London, is no longer scrupulous about the commandments, she noted, and hence: “I desire you will never eat anything with him unless it be bread and butter, nor no where else there is the least doubt of things not done after our strict judaical method [*sic*].”³⁷ But she herself underwent profound modern acculturation, read European literature, admired Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, and adopted some of its criticism of religion.³⁸

However, she demanded of herself and her son a clear separation between criticism of the religion and preservation of the rituals, the festivals, and the religious practices. For Abigaill Franks, skeptical thought was one thing, and

preservation of the boundaries and identity of the Jewish group was another: “For whatever my thoughts may be concerning some fables, this and some other fundamentalls I look upon the observance conscientiously [*sic*].”³⁹ In another letter, still under the influence of a book whose name she does not mention, Abigaill wrote to her son an astonishing sentence that reveals her strong desire for change in the religious norms: “I cant help condemning the many superstitions wee are clog’d with and heartly wish a Calvin or Luther would rise amongst us. I answer for my Self, I would be the first of there followers, for I dont think religeon consist in idle cerimonies and works of superoregations, which if they send people to heaven, wee and the papist have the greatest title too [*sic*].”⁴⁰

Although she and her family had been accepted into the social circles of wealthy Christian merchants in London and New York, Abigaill wanted to preserve her Jewish identity and maintain the family and social relationships that tied her to the Jewish group. It seems that her fears were justified: about a year after her death, the leaders of the She’erit Israel congregation threatened religiously lax Jews who traded on the Sabbath and ate nonkosher food that if they did not mend their ways, they would be expelled from the community and would not be given a Jewish burial.⁴¹ Abigaill’s religious criticism, from which an echo of deist views resonated, remained within the bounds of intimate thought, surfacing only in letters to her son, and never found concrete expression in the open neglect of “idle cerimonies” or abandonment of the Jewish community.

In the mid-eighteenth century, a young Jewish adventurer named Simeon van Geldern (1720–88) moved from one European city to another, seeking entertainment. The scion of a family of court Jews, he wanted to mingle with members of high society, amuse himself, and learn about the big world and observe it and the people in it from the skeptical vantage point of a freethinker. In 1761, he was even invited to visit Voltaire in his home near Geneva.⁴² His diary, written in Hebrew, was one of the sources used by Fritz Heymann in writing a historical novel about Geldern, who was the great-uncle of the Jewish German poet Heinrich Heine. In 1749, he entered in his diary a list of his expenses during his stay in Vienna: powder for his wig, payment to a hair-dresser, a ticket to the opera, a black tie, a ticket to a comedy, colored silk stockings, a ride in a carriage, drinks in cafés, games of chance, milk and almonds every day at the health baths, a donation to a poor man, and Hanukkah candles. Next to the expenses he entered for entertainment and gambling, Geldern repeatedly wrote comments of repentance and self-flagellation: “I have sinned, I’ll never do that again,” or “I’ve lost, woe to me!”⁴³ Geldern’s identity was indeed an open question. A letter he received from a friend during his stay in Amsterdam reported to him that the religious leaders regarded him

as a deist who did not believe in divine providence. Others viewed him as a hypocrite who did not dare cross the lines of his Jewish identity, and some religiously lax Jews actually thought of him as a “pious” Jew.⁴⁴ It seems that, like Abigaill Franks in New York, the freethinker Simeon Geldern maintained his ties with the Jews in every community he visited. He did not forget to buy Hanukkah candles in Vienna, nor did he wish to cut himself off from the Jewish group.

From other small windows, only a fragmented picture of freethinking Jews is reflected. In the third and fourth decades of the century in southern Germany, the energetic court Jew Joseph (Süss) Oppenheimer led a tumultuous life. Oppenheimer had libertine tendencies and was also a skeptic and a cynic regarding the different religions and conducted most of his life outside of the Jewish group. And in Berlin and in Breslau, Prussia, in the 1740s, rumors were rife about a young *melamed* who was disseminating deist views. He had arrived from Poland after having lost his faith, was studying philosophy, criticizing superstition, and failing to observe the commandments. He had even succeeded in influencing some of his pupils in this spirit, including one who would later become the Jewish German poet Ephraim Kuh.⁴⁵ Some *melamdim* chose to vent their religious skepticism by converting to Christianity. One such *melamed* was Joshua ben Abraham Hirschel, who had stored much anger in his heart at what he viewed as the arrogance of the rabbinical elite; after his conversion in Dessau in 1720, he took the name Friedrich Albrecht Augusti.⁴⁶

Conversion would seem to lie outside the bounds of the story of secularization. The converts chose to cut themselves off from their Jewish origin, and by doing so they cast off their Jewish identity and severed social and family ties; and they joined a different religion, proclaimed their loyalty to it on more than one occasion, and slandered Judaism in their confessions of conversion. However, studies on conversion in the early eighteenth century have convincingly shown that religious piety was a marginal factor for those Jews who chose to convert, and that, in most cases, they were driven to take such a radical decision mainly by the material benefits they would gain. “Among ninety-nine Jews, there is not one who converted out of conviction,” a missionary in Germany quoted a Jew as saying, “They all do that after having committed a crime or to acquire a great deal of money or honor.”⁴⁷

But for many people who chose to change their fate, conversion also entailed the crossing of boundaries and open defiance of the Jewish religion and its demands. Offenders from the margins of society often crossed these boundaries to gain profit or to take revenge against their enemies. One example is that of the young man from Prague, Itzik Sosel, who converted to Christianity several times in order to receive monetary gifts, and in the end was nearly the cause of a catastrophe to the Jews in northern Germany when, in

1715, he instigated a blood libel against them.⁴⁸ But often, conversion was also an extreme option chosen by religious skeptics: those Jews who felt uncomfortable in the Jewish community and the synagogue, who were critical of the commandments and the rabbis, and sought a way to be free of them. Even though conversion was not widespread, it heightened fears that the old order might be undermined. In her study, Elisheva Carlebach was less interested in the statistical details of conversion in Germany by the mid-eighteenth century, but rather sought to listen to the life stories of the converts, although most of them came down through the filter of the missionaries' accounts. A study of this kind is advantageous to anyone attempting to incorporate this phenomenon into the fabric of Jewish life and to understand its subversive significance. Carlebach stresses how drastic a step it was for a Jew to sever his ties to the Jewish community, a step that was often attended by radical antinomian acts. Joseph Samuel Frey, for example, wrote a letter to a missionary on the Sabbath: "My conscience was now awakened, and it loudly told me that I was no longer a Jew, for I had broken the Sabbath." Or the Talmud teacher Nathan of Altona, who left the community in 1750 riding in a carriage on the Sabbath. When he drove out of the community near the end of the Sabbath, Carlebach states, it was a defiant act that reverberated far and wide: "The rumble of wheels on the cobblestones of the Jewish quarter on the Sabbath informed his people that he was departing from them forever."⁴⁹ But even a convert from the lowest rung on the social ladder, like the wandering crook Itzik Sosel, in his manipulations of the clergy by repeatedly converting for money, was demonstrating his contempt for religion in general. Menahem Amelander, the chronicler from Amsterdam, said that "to him religion was a mockery." His unlawful behavior, which also tore off the veil of sanctity that religion had taken care to wrap around itself, was a declaration that he was abandoning the religious set of prohibitions that obligated the Jews and also expressing popular anticlerical sentiments.⁵⁰

Jacob Emden proposed that conversion to Christianity should not be considered a victory for the rival religion and proof of the weakness of the Jewish religion. Rather, he viewed it as a manifestation of the desire for a life of freedom. In his opinion, it was the passion for a libertine life, free of the restrictions of halakhah, that had driven most of the converts in his generation to cross the border into Christian territory.⁵¹ But the group of former talmudic scholars among the converts, who were ostensibly destined to become members of the rabbinical elite, placed greater stress on criticism of the Jewish faith and the commandments. Moshe Gershon Cohen (who took the name Carl Anton after his conversion), a native of Lithuania and a student of Rabbi Eybeschütz in Prague, and Joshua ben Abraham Hirschel, mentioned above, found flaws in the Jewish religion prior to their conversion.⁵² In a book he wrote in

1724, Moshe Hamburger (Moses Marcus), a grandson of Glikl's who studied at the yeshiva in Altona and converted to Anglicanism in London, mainly attacked the Oral Law. He leveled his criticism at Rabbi David Nieto, arguing that there was no real basis for his defense of the divine origin of the Oral Torah. Anyone who scrutinizes it, he claimed, would, like him, see the error, arbitrariness, and absurdity of the halakhah in general and of the Talmud in particular. In his view, there was, therefore, no truth in the rabbis' claim that they possessed the true tradition whose source was the revelation on Mount Sinai.⁵³

Gütgen Steinhardin, a Jewish woman whose suppressed views were given a voice in Carlebach's comprehensive study of the life of converts in Germany, objected to the shameful neglect in the education of Jewish women and the discrimination against them in the halakhah, which commanded them to observe religious precepts, including "many ridiculous and stupid ceremonies." Her conversion, it seems, was motivated not only by a desire to improve her material situation but also because she was severely critical of the discrimination against women and their exclusion from the world of the Jewish religion. In her autobiography, she protested: "Dear God, why didn't you give the female sex precepts by which to honor you? Our entire practice is more like beasts than human."⁵⁴ Heinrich Callenberg's missionaries from the Institute for Conversion of the Jews, established in Halle in 1728, reported on Jews whose faith was already shaky and who were marked as possible targets for conversion. Among these Jews were those who were disillusioned with Sabbatean messianism and skeptical about redemption or the next world; and anticlericals who had internalized the Christians' denunciation of "rabbinismus" as well as "Karaites" who rejected the Talmud. At least one of them was apparently a deist: "Among the Jews we met was one *Epicuraer* who refused to believe in any hope or life in the next world," was noted in a 1745 report. In another report, a *melamed* told the missionaries, "I do not believe in the Talmud at all."⁵⁵

Perhaps most symbolic was the fate of a Jew from Italy who died without any religious belief, totally alienated from and rejected by Jewish society. When the young businessman from Amsterdam, Abraham Levie, visited the faculty of medicine at the University of Padua in 1719, he was shown in the apothecary of the hospital a skeleton in a large glass cabinet. Who was that man in his lifetime, and why didn't he deserve a proper burial, Levie asked his hosts. "That same whole man without flesh, but only bones," he was told, "was in his lifetime a Jew who abandoned his religion." Since on his deathbed, he also denied the Christian religion, to which he had apparently converted, Christians as well as Jews refused to see to his burial. His remains ended up in the faculty of medicine, where they found their last resting place as a scientific

display. In the eighteenth century, the skeleton of that faithless anonymous Jew was on public display in Padua, and his tragic tale was told to curious visitors, perhaps also as a lesson to all who might dare cross the boundaries of religion or who adhered to the deist belief that rejects affiliation with any of the traditional religions.⁵⁶

Despite recurrent declarations by some leaders of the rabbinical elite who warned against the danger of heresy, resorting to impassioned, even hysterical, rhetoric to denounce the “two accursed sects” of Sabbateans and the “philosophizing heretics,” it is still impossible to see a threatening rise of heresy in the first half of the eighteenth century that swept up the masses. Nonetheless, from the perspective of the history of Jewish secularization, a number of significant processes did take place. The anxiety of the rabbis, who were the main spokesmen in the polemic against the erosion of religion, may have been exaggerated, but their sensors were receptive enough to pick up new trends that threatened their world. Many warning signs alerted the rabbinical elite, and at this early stage in their battle against heresy, they employed weapons that later generations would perfect whenever this elite found itself under siege. These were to demonize heresy and religious laxity, to enlist the rabbinical elite’s networks in the struggle, and to rigidly entrench themselves in belief in the Oral Law and total, unquestionable “faith in the Sages.”

Sabbateanism astounded them when it took to extremes the aspirations to cast off the burden of the commandments and the restrictions of the system of prohibitions, and moreover, did so in the name of an alternative religious truth. It was impossible to locate a “deistic sect,” but neither was there any doubt about the presence of Jewish deists who believed that science provided sufficient reason for the conduct of nature according to permanent, unchanging laws, and that there was no need for God to explain or interpret the mysteries of nature. Most testimonies about rationalist heresy come from those communities in Western and Central Europe where the desire to enjoy the pleasures of life and to take part in the amusements and refined life of the city intensified, contrary to the restrictions laid down by rabbis and preachers. Schomberg, for example, believed that rich merchants and Jews in pursuit of money and pleasures in London were atheists at heart.

Religious skepticism also began to arouse the question of Jewish identity. Could religious criticism and laxity exist within the boundaries of the Jewish group? Was there room in it for freethinking Jews and deists? Contemporary Jews had not yet conceived of the image of a secular Jewish society in its modern sense—a society in which Jews faithful to the religion live side by side with Jews who are religiously lax, are indifferent to or reject religion, and whose Jewish identity is not based specifically on the obligations of the religion. Converts to Christianity proclaimed in their act of conversion that religion offered

an alternative to life under the domination of the rabbis and the obligations of the commandments. There were deists who chose to sever their moral and social ties to the Jewish community. But other freethinkers either remained on the fringes of the society, vulnerable to constant criticism, or chose the path recommended by Abigail Franks—separation between skepticism and preservation of the religious customs that still marked the boundaries of affiliation with the Jewish group.

From the perspective of the 1750s, it is possible to sum up the four chapters that traced the origins of secularization in the first half of the century and to state that deist criticism, libertine desires, religious laxity, contempt for the commandments, neo-Karaite and anticlerical criticism, and radical antinomianism existed among the Jews in Western and Central Europe, albeit in diffusion and in relatively small doses. But, as in the case of many non-Jews in this generation, skeptical thoughts about God and the demands he makes on humans vexed more and more individuals in the Jewish communities. This, of course, heightened internal tensions within European Jewry and alerted the “guardians of religion” in its defense. As we shall see, all these trends would proliferate in the coming decades of the eighteenth century and rise to the surface of Jewish life.

PART II

A New World, 1760–80

Chapter 5

Providence Is Tested: Secularization on the Rise in the 1760s

On Saturday morning, November 1, 1755, a tremendous earthquake struck Lisbon, and tens of thousands were killed, buried under the ruins, burned in the great fire, or swept away in the tsunami. That disaster shook the religious faith of many in Christian Europe. Where was divine providence? Why were innocent people killed? Was there no other choice but to assume that God, if he existed at all, was a cruel, tyrannical ruler, indifferent to human suffering? Goethe, who at the time was a seven-year-old child in Frankfurt, wrote in his memoirs: “Perhaps the demon of terror had never so speedily and powerfully diffused his terror over the earth,” and added that “God, the creator and preserver of heaven and earth, whom the explanation of the first article of the creed declared so wise and benignant, having given both the just and the unjust a prey to the same destruction, had not manifested himself by any means in a fatherly character.”¹ This was one of those historical times when God seemed to be distancing himself from the world of human beings.

Warning Bells Toll in Europe

Voltaire’s pessimistic and skeptical remarks were the strongest, most caustic then voiced in the enlightened public sphere. He challenged God’s status as a just ruler involved in the lives of his creatures, and in the “Poem on the Lisbon Disaster” (1756), he posed a series of thorny questions that defied the notion of God’s goodness and shook the religious faith of many in his generation:

What Crime, what sin, had those young hearts conceived
That lie, bleeding and torn, on mother’s breast?
Did fallen Lisbon deeper drink of vice
Than London, Paris or sunlit Madrid? . . .
But how conceive a God supremely good,
Who heaps his favours on the sons he loves
Yet scatters evil with as large a hand? . . .
God either smites the inborn guilt of man,

Or arbitrary lord of space and time,
Devoid alike of pity and of warmth.²

Three years later, still under the impression of the earthquake, Voltaire, in his *Candide, or Optimism* (1759), called upon his readers to acknowledge the existence of evil in the world and to repudiate optimistic philosophy. The old Dutch scholar says, for example, “When I look around at this globe . . . I think that God has indeed abandoned us all to some malign being.” Voltaire’s anticlerical rage reached its apogee when he described how the Portuguese Inquisition decided to burn heretics at the stake. “They could think of no more effective means of averting further destruction than to give the people a fine auto-da-fé. . . . The spectacle of a few individuals being ceremonially roasted over a slow fire was the infallible secret recipe for preventing the earth from quaking.” But after that horrific ceremony, Voltaire states: “That same day, the earth quaked once more with a terrifying din.”³

Not all Enlightenment thinkers of the time drew similar conclusions from the Lisbon earthquake. Rousseau argued against Voltaire that the general laws of nature that are responsible for earthquakes should not be linked with faith in divine providence or criticism of the terrible acts men carry out in God’s name. But even if the lessons that were derived differed, the shock marked a further stage in the secularization process that Christian Europe was undergoing. Until the 1750s, the hold of Christianity over Europeans was still strong, and the various churches maintained their power and influence over the lives of men; from the middle of the century, the situation changed, and a reversal began. Obviously, one cannot generalize and say that, at the time, Europe cut itself off from religion and relegated God to the sidelines. Religious values were still engraved on the hearts of many, and early education in the family and the community was saturated with these values; and movements of religious revival, such as the Pietists in Germany, the Methodists in England, the Evangelists in American colonies in the decades prior to independence (“the Great Awakening”), and the enthusiastic followers of Hasidism in Poland, enjoyed considerable success.⁴ But other developments indicate a relative regression and the weakening hold of religion on life. Fewer churches and monasteries were built, the number of clergy decreased, the church’s ability to control people’s behavior in keeping with religious requirements was diminished, and people were growing indifferent to it.⁵

The clergy found themselves on the defensive against the assault on what was then derisively known in the anticlerical code as “priestcraft.” Deism, a fashionable worldview rather than a systematic philosophical approach, infiltrated broad circles of intellectuals, men of commerce and finance, state officials, and aristocrats. Beginning in the 1760s, the religious establishments of

Christianity sensed that they were losing control. In France, voices of anxiety were raised: “We speak of irreligion, which for some years now has spread in all directions like a torrent and does the gravest damage among us. This terrible fire consumes everything, and if we don’t hurry to stop its progress, the malady will be beyond all remedies.”⁶ “The enemies of the Enlightenment,” as Darrin McMahon defined them, warned against the heretic philosophers, who were mocking the sacred tenets of religion, and the anarchy that would destroy the values of society, family, and religion and overturn the stable, familiar world.⁷

In his study of secularization in England, Roy Porter points to a series of measures that could be used to evaluate the growing erosion of the Christian religion: in the big cities, churches were no longer major places of assembly, and the clergy no longer served as the main sources of authority. The pace of life in England quickened, and business, which dictated the pulse of urban life, increased the influence of practical, rational, and earthly considerations in life. In addition, physicians demonstrated that human intervention could help people with their problems no less than the clergy, and they opposed folk medicine and superstition, albeit not always with success. Despite the competition between the concept of Christian providence as a worldview and the scientific view, faith did not disappear, as a statement from that period revealed: “Superstition is said to be driven out of the world; no such thing, it is only driven out of books and talk.”⁸ At the same time, the rise in the consumption of pleasures and the leisure culture contributed to secularization in England and elsewhere in Western and Central Europe. Jeremy Bentham asserted that if man were to choose the ascetic way of life proposed by religion, the world would turn into hell because man is a creature meant to enjoy life. As a result of the expansion of literacy in Europe and the publication of numerous periodicals, information about the earthly world and critical ideas became available to more people. But secularization did not depend on the adoption of a secular worldview. As John McManners argues, this trend was also a protest against the constant demands of the Christian religion and an expression of people’s desire to cast off the burden of religion: “Secularization was the inevitable counterpart, the opposite side of the coin, the reaction of human nature to a demand almost too intense to bear.”⁹

To Remove the Shackles of the Commandments: Indifference and Laxity

Beginning in the 1760s, religious laxity among the Jewish minority in Europe gained momentum. In this decade, secularization expanded and deepened relative to the past; this process would grow in intensity in the coming decades

and reach its peak toward the end of the century in several communities in Central and Western Europe. It was not the result of an earthquake that raised questions about divine providence, nor was it the Haskalah's criticism of religion. But McManners's remark about secularization as the individual's reaction to the increasingly unbearable burden of religion can provide an insight into Jewish secularization. At a time when halakhic literature and moral sermons were posing severe demands, individuals were attempting to throw off religious prohibitions. To understand the traditional position that preceded secularization, the point of departure need not be the normative system for which the rabbinical elite was responsible, but rather the more widespread popular understanding of religion in terms of obligations and discipline. What is the meaning of loyalty to religion? When, for example, a London Jew was asked to testify in court as to the character of Michael Levy, a young man accused of a terrible act of sodomy, and to depict him as honest and moral, he said the following: "[Levy] always resorted to the hours of prayer, minded his religion, and was timorous of God. My servant was acquainted with him, and told me he was one that observed the Sabbath."¹⁰

As we have seen, to understand the historical process that took place in the first half of the century and distanced European Jews from religion as a worldview and a way of life, we need to listen to the relatively obscure voices that tell us that dissatisfaction with religious tradition, faith, and obligations increased particularly among the younger generation, those born at the end of the forties, fifties, or the early sixties. Some of them, spurred by their desire to embark on an independent path and to cast off the burden of religion, also took more radical steps of rebellion against the religion.

The subversive rebellion of Salomon Maimon and Moshe Lapidoth, who decided in 1768 to stop praying and scoffed at the superstitions of their coreligionists, was not exceptional. Their behavior, a combination of subversive action, skepticism, and implied defiance, had parallels among Jews of their generation. Azriel Shohet was correct in estimating that from the 1760s, the process of secularization moved one step forward, making it possible to discern what he called the "decisive shift."¹¹ Jacob Katz disagreed with Shohet's view that significant signs of secularization were evident prior to the Haskalah, and he argued that, as long as an ideology justifying indifference to religion had not yet been formulated, no real historical change had taken place. Katz also discerned the emergence of new types in that generation who were disdainful of religious instructions. Indifference toward religion took the form of partial religious laxity and was motivated by economic and social temptations and the accessible pleasures of European culture: "A factory owner operates his plant on Sabbaths and holidays, in opposition to the instructions of the halakhic authorities; the social climber aspires to join a group of non-Jews,

such as the Freemasons; the commercial agent, on his travels no longer observes the rules of *kashrut*.”¹² Shohet and Katz were primarily focused on the Jews of Germany, but the historical picture was far broader. The accelerated secularization in Europe in the 1760s was attended by a similar trend among the Jews of Europe. Although it may be wrong to argue that secularization was sweeping and all-embracing, numerous signs and testimonies make it possible to depict that decade as a significant turning point.

A letter sent to Jacob Emden in Altona by one of his students—probably the very same year that Maimon and Lapidoth first proclaimed, although secretly, their release from the burden of the commandments—described the religious laxity, hedonism, and free thought of a group of “philosophizing sinners” in a Prussian community:

In their eyes, the Oral Law is a subject of mirth. At the hour when all are going to the synagogue and the holy Sabbath is entering in, when every Jew is lighting candles and sanctifying the Sabbath with a glass of wine, enjoying a Sabbath meal to take pleasure in the Almighty, they go to the theaters, where they imbibe forbidden wine and liquor, revel with Gentile men and women. . . . A married woman carouses with a callous youth, they embrace in public in the streets, and in the brothels, they make merry throughout the night, sleep in the morning more than the princes do, until the time for the morning prayer passes; they cast away their phylacteries and the fringes of their garments, and they do not even glance at the holy books.¹³

The author of the letter was eager to share his concerns with Emden. In his view, this deviant behavior was becoming widespread among young Jews while the religious leadership was displaying its weakness and its inability to bring them back into line. He did not identify the members of this group in his complaint, but further evidence attests to the thoughts about religion that were prevalent among adolescents in the Prussian communities of Königsberg and Berlin. These were revealed in retrospect by the Jewish deist par excellence, David Friedländer. In an open (anonymous) letter (whose significance as a deist text we will deal with later) that he sent in 1799 to the Protestant clergyman Wilhelm Abraham Teller, Friedländer revealed the frustrations of a group of Jewish youths in 1760s Prussia, the sons of wealthy merchant families. Then a teenager himself, Friedländer was well aware of the gap between the traditional education he had received and the demands of the *halakhah*, on the one hand, and what he called “the circle of everyday life,” on the other.¹⁴

For those men and women who grew up in a world dominated by economic considerations and interests, aspirations to climb the social ladder, modern acculturation, and the fostering of strong links to European culture, languages, and values, the demands of the *halakhah* were intolerably harsh, and the religious world picture was foreign and meaningless. The sharp con-

tradition between traditional religion and life in the European city was for them unbearable, even humiliating: “The religion that was taught to us, then, was full of mystical principles. The story of the primeval world was full of secrets, dark, incoherent; the events were foreign and, down to the last shades of meaning, so dissimilar to the occurrences of the world in which we lived that they seemed almost unbelievable. Characters, states of mind, and feelings of people who emerge in sacred scriptures not only were puzzling for us in matters of expression but also, for the most part, stood in contrast to our feelings, expressions, and ways of acting.”

The prayers were incomprehensible and meaningless, and the religion in its traditional form was at odds with their aesthetic sensibility; to them, the commandments were embarrassing customs devoid of content, which “do injury to sense and spirit.” Traditional education may have kept young men from falling into moral degeneration and atheism, but in Friedländer’s view, it led to a counterreaction—to hostility toward religious practice, alienation, skepticism, and a desire for release: “Who can describe the passage from the slavery of the spirit into freedom! Who can calculate the delight, and thus the strengthened energy of the soul, of a man who rises from the feeling that he has shackles to the decision to throw them off!”¹⁵

Additional evidence relating to 1760s Berlin indicates that secularization was gaining momentum there. As a result of the astonishing amassing of wealth by several merchant families during the Seven Years’ War (1756–63), a Jewish elite emerged that was similar in every way—in lifestyle, languages, home furnishings, dress, and consumption of works of art—to the haute bourgeoisie of Europe. Although the community institutions continued to function in keeping with traditional norms, the sons and daughters of this elite began to feel alienated from them.¹⁶ Lazarus Bendavid, who was born in Berlin in 1762 to a family of merchants, was, like Friedländer, a deist and one of the harshest critics of the observance of the commandments. He wrote in his memoirs that in their home, his parents had gained a relative degree of freedom from religious obligations, and he recalled that, unlike other parents, they never threatened that God would punish him if he failed to do something.¹⁷ At the time, the status of the rabbinical elite was weakening in Berlin, along with the power of the traditional ideal of Talmud study to attract young men. In 1765, when a new rabbi had to be appointed, a notation was made in the community records that the study of Torah was dwindling and that it was difficult for anyone desirous of religious study to find yeshivot and teachers. The new rabbi’s task was to save the day: “In these times, when esteemed yeshivot have unfortunately been shut down . . . and the study of Torah is decreasing, we have roused the spirit of the Lord to restore the Torah to its former glory and to exalt it as it once was.”¹⁸

It did not take long for the rabbinical elite to become aware of these trends and attack them. Although at this stage, they may have regarded it as a relatively marginal phenomenon, they nonetheless made a huge effort to bolster their control. Early in 1767, Rabbi Ezekiel Landau in Prague heard rumors about a group of deists uncovered in a certain community. He hastened to apply pressure to its rabbis to urge the leaders of the community to take immediate action. Although his sharp words of rebuke emphasize mainly their moral depravity, there is no mistaking the marks of their deist conviction:

A few Jews in your community have strayed from the Torah of Moses . . . [and] have chosen the path of epicureans and heretics, the way of the ancient philosophers like Aristotle and his heretic fellows. They adhere to their religions and say amen to all their words, while the Torah of Moses and the tradition of our rabbis and talmudic scholars are to them a thorn in their flesh; they do not believe in the wonders and miracles in the Torah; they learn the external teachings that are likened to evil waters, and mingle with Gentiles to refute the basic laws of the Torah. They desecrate the Sabbath and commit sins of the flesh; they have removed every veil of shame from their faces; a man and his father will go in unto the same maid and their souls will not be purified. They have denied the existence of God by saying that the world is lawless. . . . There is no divine providence over the lower worlds, and he shall not mind who is good and who is bad.¹⁹

This letter, whose author sounded the alarm regarding an anonymous group identified as deists, goes beyond a general moral reproach. The traits that Landau enumerates in his letter are distinctly deist: rejection of the Talmud, denial of miracles, disbelief in providence, and belief in a remote God who is indifferent to justice and does not intervene in the world.

Beginning in the 1760s, religiously lax and deist Jews cast their shadows in various places in Europe. In some cases, all that remains of their historical image is rumor and slander; in others, they can be clearly identified. For example, Oluf Tychsel, the Orientalist and Hebraist and professor at the University of Bützow in Mecklenburg, used a network of informers to trace the conduct of nonnormative types in Jewish communities, including Sabbateans and deists. In 1769, Tychsel reported on news he had received, which he believed referred to the persecution of Judah Hurwitz because of deviant opinions contained in his book *Amudei beit yehudah* (1766).²⁰ That physician, a native of Vilna and a graduate of the University of Padua, was then traveling between Eastern and Western Europe, and apparently was suspected of voicing religious skepticism.²¹ Those who slandered him in the streets of the Schwerin community in Mecklenburg had this to say: “He looks like a Catholic priest, clean-shaven with short hair. . . . He is neither cat nor fish, neither Jew nor Christian. . . . Soon he will travel to Berlin, where there are many like him. It

is forbidden to read his book for it contains words of heresy . . . and he smokes tobacco on the Sabbath.”²²

Tychsen received a letter from a Polish rabbi that contained even harsher words: Hurwitz grew only a short beard, wore fashionable clothing, did not pray or lay phylacteries, and hence was “considered by religious Jews to be one of the naturalists and *Freidenker*.”²³ Hurwitz tried to clear himself of these suspicions. He printed a special statement against his persecutors and slanderers, in which he denied having had any intention to offend the faith. On the contrary, his aim was to stir up the public against the epicureans.²⁴ However, it was Tychsen’s impression that even if the information about Hurwitz’s beliefs were far-fetched, the book made it clear that “the author is not an orthodox Jew.” Straight from the Jewish street, Tychsen heard similar suspicions relating to another Jew, Menahem Mendel Herz Wolf from Halle, who was known to be a member of the Freemasons.²⁵

There was far more basis for identifying Heikel Hurwitz as a deist. This wealthy lumber merchant from Uman in the Ukraine, who was born in 1749, was deeply acculturated and in his youth was influenced by religious criticism. His own words depict in retrospect the cultural conversion he underwent when he adopted a skeptical worldview: “As soon as the veil of stupidity was removed from my face, my eyes were opened to see the light of truth, after having been blinded by religion and burdened with falsehood and deceit. They put on the mantle of faith, but I do not believe in them. When the heavens revealed their wickedness and duplicity to me, I asked myself when this religious fanaticism will cease.”²⁶

Heikel Hurwitz’s memory is preserved in eternal shame in the folklore of the Uman community as “Heikel the Epicurean.” The community elders reported that columns of smoke always rose from the grave of that “wicked man.”²⁷

Traditions preserved in the memories of London Jews told of the lax conduct and skeptical views of the physician and poet Ephraim Luzzatto (born in 1730). An Italian Jew, who, like Judah Hurwitz, was a graduate of the University of Padua (1751), he resided from the early sixties onward in London. Once, on a Sabbath, when he was called to the bedside of the rabbi of the Sephardic community, he asked for a pen, ink, and paper so that he could write a prescription. The rabbi and his family refused to desecrate the Sabbath since it was not a matter of life or death. But Luzzatto defiantly tore a piece of paper from a notebook and wrote: “Today on the holy Sabbath in the month of Shevat in the year 1740, may he be thoroughly healed, and full recovery come to this wise and pious person.”²⁸

Another physician, Leon Elias Hirschel (1741–72), a native of Berlin and a physician in that community in the sixties, was also a scholar who published

studies on melancholy and manic-depression. His deist views resonate in his mockery of those people who still lived in obscurantism and believed that by tormenting the body and abstaining from eating and drinking, as they do on Yom Kippur, they were worshipping God.²⁹ Those acculturated Jewish doctors who studied science in European academia and whose profession brought them into contact with the elite of European society apparently tended more often to adopt the deist position. At times, this view led them to try to gain freedom from the community and religious supervision. One such physician, Abraham Meir, upon arriving in Hanover from Altona in 1765 to practice medicine, asked not to be subject to the community's authority.³⁰

Businessmen and industrialists were also apt to rebel openly against religious supervision and to seek release from halakhic restrictions that adversely affected their economic ventures. This was the case of the merchant Israel Poppert, also from Altona, who in 1768 was released, at his request (and against payment of a fee), from subjugation to the community and its court of law. Poppert employed many Christians in his textile factory and refused to comply with the rabbis' prohibition regarding work there on the Sabbath.³¹

Ephraim Luzzatto was not only a critical deist but also a London hedonist. His profession was that of a physician, but he spent his leisure time frequenting gambling halls in Soho, conducting love affairs, drinking, and playing cards. Some of his poems, collected and published in London in 1768, are libertine; they describe sexual passions, falling in love, the imbibing of alcohol, and parties. In one poem, he describes himself, drunk, dashing nude through the city streets, and in another erotic poem he writes about physicians who exploit medical examinations to touch a woman's body.³² The tradition of the Jewish Italian culture, including the erotic and frivolous poetry of the fourteenth-century poet Immanuel HaRomi, can largely explain the openness displayed by Luzzatto in relation to erotica, but life in the English city and its temptations undoubtedly also left their imprint on him.

In the very same years that Luzzatto was taking his pleasure in dark London clubs, the Amsterdam community was contending with local hedonists.³³ The Ashkenazic leadership was greatly troubled by the nighttime entertainments indulged in by Jewish men—in taverns and gambling and dance halls, where “morals-corrupting” acts were common. Particularly disturbing were the violation of discipline and the disregard for the explicit bylaws of the leaders and rabbis (who had forbidden such behavior many times in the past), which reached their height in 1769.³⁴ The Sephardic leadership in Amsterdam was then facing what Yosef Kaplan called “the threat of Eros.” Six men and women from that community, who were accused of adultery and excommunicated between 1765 and 1768, apparently represented a far broader phenomenon. There had, of course, been cases of adultery and out-of-wedlock births

in the past, but during 1765–68, they were regarded not only as offenses by individuals but as part of the breakdown of religious morals and as a manifestation of libertinism. In the *hakham* Solomon Shalem's reprimands against the hedonistic nightlife of young men and women of the community who "stroll about, behaving licentiously," we can detect an echo of similar anxieties expressed there back in the 1730s by Moshe Hagiz. While the sexual drive and its social manifestations had existed in every human society in the past, the passionate desire of individuals for physical pleasure and erotic gratification was, as we have seen, a new value in the eighteenth century and a means of expressing individual autonomy.³⁵

Such patterns of conduct spread in the 1760s beyond communities such as Amsterdam and London, bustling cosmopolitan cities that offered numerous temptations. They also became evident in the large community of Prague, where the rabbinical leaders who supervised norms of religious behavior identified "new sins" and the increase of "old sins." Some Jews never attended synagogue, and others came late to the morning service; the theater, coffee-houses, taverns, and gambling halls were attracting more and more Jews who yearned to partake in the pleasures of the city.³⁶ In a sermon delivered in Prague in the summer of 1769, the preacher Zerah Eidlitz revealed the following facts to the congregation: in the past year, ten infants born to unmarried mothers had been circumcised in the synagogue. The number of males born was known, owing to the circumcision ceremony, the preacher complained, "but the number of females is not. Woe to us that in the past year, the generation has become licentious to a heretofore unknown degree."³⁷ He believed, and other community leaders concurred, that from that time forward, contact between the sexes should be more firmly prevented, mixed dancing at weddings should be forbidden, and the laws of family purity should be strictly enforced. Special regulations passed by the Prague community two years earlier restricted, among other things, fashionable clothing (for example, silk dresses, powdered wigs) and threatened to levy severe penalties on offenders.³⁸

In northern Germany and in communities in Austria and Moravia, the Jewish hedonist and libertine Wolf Eybeschütz was the subject of much gossip. Born in Prague in 1740, he was the youngest son of Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz, and himself the charismatic leader of a Sabbatean group that regarded him as the Messiah.³⁹ In contrast to the coarse, aggressive behavior of Jacob Frank, Wolf Eybeschütz adopted refined manners and aspired to live as an aristocrat. His personality featured two contrasting elements: the zeal of ecstatic kabbalist religiosity expressed in fervent, often ecstatic, prayer; and an urge for adventure and a desire to mingle with the upper class. While Frank's group assembled in dark rooms to hold their antinomian rituals, Wolf summoned his followers to courts that he had established in Altona and Dresden.

In his life, dubious business affairs, connections with rulers and aristocrats, fashion, pleasures, and, after 1776, a noble title, Baron von Adlersthal, that he boasted of on every occasion, were combined with messianism and pretensions to having experienced mystic visions.⁴⁰

The historical figure of this Sabbatean aristocrat has, to a great extent, remained an enigma, but testimonies about his lifestyle shed light on his ambitious, libertine character. The Jewish world was too narrow and limited for him. He wanted to live in the glittering world of rococo and to flaunt this desire publicly. As a fashionable man of the eighteenth century, he knew how to make an impression with his mode of dress and refined manners and thus to acquire a status far beyond that of a mere Jew in Central Europe. He dressed in the latest fashion, wore a three-cornered hat and a hair bag tied with a ribbon, spoke German and French, rode in gaudy gilded carriages harnessed to fine horses, accompanied by servants in fancy uniforms, all attesting to their master's wealth and high position. Wolf Eybeschütz spent extravagantly, attended balls, went hunting, had love affairs, and boasted of his connections with Danish and Austrian officials and the special esteem in which they held him. He was fond of music, frequented the theater, imbibed alcohol, and did not observe the Sabbath or fast days.⁴¹ Jacob Emden reported what Wolf Eybeschütz reputedly purchased for his splendid home in Altona:

Miscellaneous objets d'art, including a clock ornamented with Christ on the cross and a picture of Mary nursing the infant Jesus. People urged him to remove it, but the lad refused to heed them and placed the clock at the gate of his home, and for almost a year placed no mezuzah anywhere in the house. . . . It was also well known in Altona that he had purchased . . . sculptures carved of marble for an exorbitant price and placed them in the garden of his home and that he had there statues of bare-breasted women. . . . Rumor also had it that on the ceiling of his room he had figures of nude women painted in red, as is the custom among the Gentiles.⁴²

On the intermediate days of Passover 1761, Emden had an opportunity to see Wolf Eybeschütz's home and belongings with his own eyes and to gain an impression of his lifestyle and taste in art, painting and sculpture, music, splendid timepieces, and other objects typical of rococo furnishings: Eybeschütz had been forced to leave Altona because of his debts, so his property was placed on sale and displayed to the public. Not wanting to miss the opportunity, Emden hastened to visit the home, and took in the sight with great curiosity and delight, rejoicing at the downfall of the Eybeschütz family. He described the erotic motifs that he found in the decorations: paintings "depicting all manner of men and bare-breasted women entwined and embracing, holding various musical instruments in their hands."⁴³ Rumors were rife about Eybeschütz's amorous exploits. His enemies reported his escapades in Mora-

via: “When he would pass through and spend the night in Hotzenplotz, he slept with the Gentile woman who owned the inn there, and she took from his trouser pocket a gold watch and a purse with gold dinars. . . . They also said that on his travels, he had with him a whore . . . wearing a man’s clothing as if she were his male servant.”⁴⁴ Wolf Eybeschütz’s Sabbateanism was a cover for his libertine life, and in the eyes of his followers, his messianic pretensions justified his regal affectations and his life as a fashionable hedonist in the style of upper-class Europeans.

Counterreaction: The Early Maskilim

Rabbis and early maskilim of that generation carefully observed the various groups of Sabbateans, hedonists, libertines, and deists, and drew one large tableau of heresy. Even those capable of discerning subtle differences in the behavior and views of these types attempted to discover some affinity between them. Jacob Emden was not the only one to make repeated warnings against the two sects of heretics. In the 1760s, the physician and early maskil Judah Hurwitz viewed the religious enthusiasm of the kabbalists and the radicalism of the Sabbateans as one of the major threats confronting Jewish society in Europe at the time. In the same breath, he criticized the “sect of epicurean philosophers” that was misusing science and reason.⁴⁵ In 1765, at the very time that Solomon Shalem was attacking rakes and adulterers in the Amsterdam community, Judah Hurwitz came to that city with the manuscript of his book *Amudei beit yehudah*. In the approbation that Shalem wrote, he revealed how troubled he was by heretics: “And recently, new men have arrived who do not follow the majority. . . . They have cast off the study of the Holy Torah, its radiance and glory, they have abandoned the waters of life and have chosen to draw upon the external books, from the philosophy of the Gentiles, and they know not how to tell falsehood from truth.”

The approbations given to the book by two rabbis from Germany were written in the same vein: Rabbi Zevi Auerbach from Worms expressed his apprehensions about those “philosophers” who searched for contradictions in the Talmud, and Rabbi Joseph Steinhardt of Fürth praised Hurwitz for having persecuted the deists who denied the existence of divine providence.⁴⁶

Judah Hurwitz, who was wrongly known as a *Freidenker*, actually combated heresy. In the 1760s, the early maskilim attempted to carve out a unique path on the map of the Jewish culture of their generation—on the one hand, to foster rationalism and encourage Jewish philosophy and science, while criticizing the narrowness and rigidity of the traditional Jewish culture, and, on the other, to employ reason to prove the validity and veracity of the articles of

the Jewish religion and to oppose heresy. When their opponents from the Jewish community denounced them as heretics, they were deeply offended, and argued that their accusers were misled, failing to properly distinguish between those who banished God from the world and questioned the validity of his commandments and those who had the very opposite intention. The early maskilim, it seems, were walking a very narrow, unclear line, and it is no wonder that their contemporaries found it hard to fathom what their true nature was.⁴⁷ In reality, they were as capable of identifying the trends that threatened religion in the eighteenth century as the rabbis were. In 1766, the physician Asher Anshel Worms of Frankfurt related to this threat with the following words: “They mock every circumcised and uncircumcised Jew who believes in the words written by the finger of God rather than in his own reason, and hold that the intellect must submit to the living words of God, king of the world; they jeer at them and speak arrogantly.”⁴⁸

Worms, like other early maskilim, represented a new intellectual elite that believed that it could cope with the challenges of the Enlightenment and rescue Jewish culture from its intolerable state of inferiority compared with European culture, while at the same time defending religious faith. The early maskilim maintained close ties with one another. Many of them met personally, read their fellow members’ manuscripts, and composed poems of friendship in praise of their printed works. Three of the main representatives of this group—Judah Hurwitz from Vilna, Naphthali Herz Wessely from Amsterdam, and Moses Mendelssohn from Berlin—were from the same generation and shared the same ideals. They participated in a two-pronged struggle—against the insular attitude of traditional Ashkenazic culture toward science and philosophy, and against rationalist heresy. Their concern about heresy increased in the mid-1760s.

Hurwitz, under the impression that the “sect of epicureans”—the “false” philosophers who denied providence and cursed the Torah—was gaining strength, wrote his book *Amudei beit yehudah*.⁴⁹ When Hurwitz met Wessely in Amsterdam, the latter belonged to a circle of local Ashkenazic and Sephardic writers and intellectuals, and debated with his fellow intellectuals who expressed religious skepticism.⁵⁰ Wessely’s personal experience and his acquaintance with Jewish communities in Western Europe (Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen) also led him to fear the spread of heresy. In two early works from the mid-1760s (*Gan na’ul* and *Ya’in levanon*), Wessely contended with the group that mocked religion and believers: “A sect of men who scorn the word of God and malign him, who are wise in their own eyes. . . . This is their way in their folly, to mock the Sages of the Torah.”⁵¹ He depicted religious laxity as a widespread phenomenon and, like others, distinguished between sins of passion and sins of thought: “There are two types of

sinners: those who belong to the first act out of passion, and transgress deliberately as their drives impel them, and although they know they are sinning against God, they are unable to resist the force of their drives. The other type are those who sin out of epicurean beliefs and see no evil in their transgressions.”⁵² His declaration of war was directed at the “sect of epicureans” that rebelled against God intentionally, based on their thought, and not because of any passion or drives:

He who is wise in his own eyes speaks ill of God and maligns the Torah and the Sages. He has no fear of God, nor does he pay honor to the Torah, and hence he makes no distinction between a minor offense or a serious one, for to him all is permitted. . . . Moreover, they are a sect that vilifies God, and are worse than idolaters, and in every wicked act they do they desecrate the Holy Name. Some of them deny the very existence of God; some claim there is no supreme guidance and everything occurs by accident; some say there is no Torah or prophecy from the heavens, and some say man is in no way superior to the beasts.⁵³

Wessely was familiar with various contemporary schools of religious criticism, including deism and materialism.⁵⁴ There is no way of knowing whom he had in mind when he wrote these harsh words against the “sect that vilifies God,” but he undoubtedly was adept at depicting positions and slogans that were prevalent in Europe in general and among the Jewish skeptics in particular.⁵⁵ He believed that the divine truth is implanted in the human soul and that it is not necessary to philosophize to arrive at belief in God. Philosophy, he believed, should be at the service of religion only to verify and affirm the truths of faith by means of rational evidence. He was most suspicious of the philosophers’ motivation. In his *Gan na’ul*, he tried to isolate himself from them: “I am not a philosopher nor am I a scientist, and I have never studied the books of the philosophers, for they will all be gone with the wind.”⁵⁶

Moses Mendelssohn, himself an eminent philosopher, found it hard to decide whether to regard Wessely as an ally in the early Haskalah’s attempt to revive philosophy, which had been neglected in Ashkenazic Jewish culture. But Mendelssohn, Wessely, Hurwitz, and others found themselves in one camp that denounced heresy. I am in favor of “true [rational] inquiry” that makes it possible to prove the rightness of faith, Wessely explained to Mendelssohn, but he did not regard rationalism as the be-all and end-all: “My words are like a fiery blast against the deniers of religion, the slanderers of God, who rely only on their misled intellect, who say to God, depart from us, we have no desire to know your ways, for there is no wisdom and religion other than what we learn from our intelligence and will.”⁵⁷

Mendelssohn certainly did not condone religious laxity. Immanuel Kant was also well aware of that. In a letter to Mendelssohn in winter 1766, Kant

reported to him that the Jewish student Leon (probably Leon Baer from Vilna), who had come to the University of Königsberg to continue his studies, armed with a letter of recommendation from Mendelssohn, was making a bad impression on the local Jews. They complained to Kant that Leon had begun to neglect observance of the commandments, and perhaps, my dear friend Mendelssohn, Kant wrote to him, you can set the limits of proper behavior in Jewish society for him.⁵⁸

Like other moderate intellectuals in contemporary Germany, Mendelssohn objected to the radical Enlightenment that opposed religion and joined in the struggle against the radical French Enlightenment and its materialistic trends. In 1765, Mendelssohn mobilized philosophy in the service of religious faith, as Wessely had expected him to do. He then began to write his most successful work, *Phädon, or on the Immortality of the Soul* (1767), in which his major purpose was to refute the materialistic claim that the human soul was material that perished when the body died.⁵⁹ It is unthinkable, he asserted, that a man's entity is totally lost when he dies. Whoever believes that denies the existence of God and eliminates the basis for justice and human morality. If one does not believe in reward and punishment, what can ensure proper behavior? A person who believes in God as the merciful, perfect Creator who wants only good for his creatures and who also believes in the unique value of man in comparison with other living creatures and in man's destiny to achieve perfection, must prove to himself that the soul continues to exist after death. It is unbelievable that man's life is nothing more than froth upon the waters that appears for a brief time and disappears. It is simply inconceivable, Mendelssohn wrote with the encouraging optimism that inspired his thousands of readers, that God who planted in men's heart the desire to progress, to rise higher and higher, and endowed them with the lofty values that motivate them, would nip their ascent to perfection in the bud, thus mocking all their efforts. It is impossible to ascribe to a perfect God enmity to human beings, Mendelssohn argued, as if these words were a rejoinder to the bleak conclusions that Voltaire had drawn from the earthquake in Lisbon. The very definition of God precludes any possibility that he would want to cause harm to humans or to dismiss them as empty vessels whose hopes are all in vain. Nor is it conceivable that the same fate awaits the righteous and the wicked. Man's endeavors in life must have a continuation after his death. In a letter to Wessely, Mendelssohn wrote about his optimistic faith: "In my view, it is impossible that God would destroy what he has created with his own hands through wonders and miracles and return it to dust."⁶⁰

To recognize that the soul is eternal, there is no need to rely on doctrines that emerge from a divine revelation. It suffices to use simple logic, to activate human reason, and to observe the world of nature. The conviction that the

soul is eternal should be universal, and every human being can accept it, regardless of his specific religious doctrine. Mendelssohn believed in the God who revealed himself to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai and gave them laws and commandments that obligated them for all generations; but, like a deist, he did not think that a divine revelation was essential to impart the articles of faith to people. The principles of natural religion, including the very existence of God, can also be arrived at by reason, he stated, and are not the exclusive province of the believers of any particular religion.

Shortly after the publication of *Phädon*, Mendelssohn addressed his Jewish readers directly. In his Hebrew commentary on Ecclesiastes (1769), he included his proofs on the immortality of the soul and argued that they are at the core of the theological debate conducted in that scroll. In his introduction, he made it clear that this was a crucial existential issue: "He who believes in the existence and providence of God cannot evade either of these. For he believes either that the soul remains immortal after death and that every action, good or bad, will later be judged, or he, heaven forbid, ascribes injustice and evildoing to the holy God."⁶¹ The issue of the immortality of the soul was indeed threatening, even greatly alarming, to Mendelssohn and others of his generation who witnessed the advance of deism and atheism. God himself was put to the test here: "Where, then, is the honor of God for the sake of which he created all the creatures? Where is his great mercy and compassion for all of his works if he created the finest of all creatures only to their detriment?"⁶² Without faith in God and in the immortality of the soul, a man had better put an end to his life rather than live in the threatening shadow of death and the awareness of his absolute annihilation.

Twelve years after the crisis of faith engendered by the earthquake in Lisbon and eight years after Voltaire's attempt in *Candide* to expose the bitter truth behind religion's promises of a better life and Enlightenment's optimism and to reveal the world in all its brutality and naked arbitrariness, Mendelssohn's *Phädon* offered a philosophical consolation to believers. In opposition to the heretics, he attempted to rationally prove that the heavens are not empty and that God is not the enemy of human beings, nor does he desire their destruction.

Chapter 6
*The Supremacy of Nature:
Deists on the Margins*

While Mendelssohn's *Phädon* was translated into European languages and numerous copies were distributed, raising the spirits of enlightened believers, *The System of Nature*, by the German atheist and materialist Baron d'Holbach, who endorsed the counter-position, was published in 1770. The believers apparently had very good cause for alarm. In Holbach's view, religion blocked man's way to happiness, enslaved him, filled his mind with superstition, contradicted reason, and—as Spinoza had asserted a century earlier—exploited his archaic fears. Man created the illusion of God for himself, but in truth, he himself is a product of Nature, and even his thought is merely an outcome of chemical and physical processes. In contrast to Isaac Newton, the most admired British scientist in the eighteenth century, who believed that only God, who was behind the laws of Nature, could operate the vast, wondrous mechanics of the universe, the materialists held that material substance needs no force outside itself in order to move. In the stormy debate that ensued among scientists, philosophers, and theologians on the question of the existence of the soul, its essence (material or spiritual) and its immortality, Holbach held the most extreme views. He stated that it was the physiological nervous system that was mistakenly regarded as the soul. Moral and humanistic values are naturally inherent in humans, and one need not look to the guidance of Holy Scriptures or to shrewd clergy to instill them. At that time in history, established religion and the religious worldview were indeed under attack.¹

A Generation without Religion: The 1770s

Among the followers of the radical Enlightenment in Europe, faith in Nature as a substitute for all metaphysical truths grew stronger. In Germany, where materialistic atheism scarcely left its mark, the deist and anticlerical criticism was no less explosive, but far more moderate and less evident than that of their

neighbors in France. In 1778, when a clandestine deist was uncovered, a major scandal erupted. A furor arose after excerpts from Hermann Samuel Reimarus's book *Fragmente eines Ungenannten* (Fragments of the unnamed) were discovered by Lessing and published after the author's death. When Reimarus's identity was revealed, everyone was surprised because he was not known to be a radical philosopher. In that work, however, he criticized the moral values of Judaism and Christianity, cast doubt on the veracity of the events related in the Holy Scriptures, and questioned the divine traits attributed to Jesus. This exposed the existence of covert deism in Germany, and, as a result of the book's publication, Lessing was denounced as a blasphemer.² The atmosphere of suspicion toward *Freidenker* who abjured religious discipline and beliefs was particularly oppressive at that time. But Lessing did not retreat; in 1779, he published his play on religious tolerance, *Nathan the Wise*, one of the most successful works of the German Enlightenment, which strongly objected to religious fanaticism. Lessing's battle for the abolition of discrimination against the Jews was mixed with criticism of Christianity. For example, it implied the radical deist idea that the three monotheistic religions originated in deception and that none of them could claim to possess the truth and superiority over the others. One character in the play is a much-ridiculed Christian priest—the patriarch of Jerusalem during the Crusades, who could have come straight out of a deist caricature. He scorns reason and humanism, displays murderous fanaticism toward the Jewish protagonist of the play (“He must burn, and were indeed, on this one count worthy to burn three times”), and declares lack of faith a crime.³

Toward the end of the 1780s, when *Nathan the Wise* was published, an important book of religious skepticism caused a storm: *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, by the Scottish philosopher David Hume. Even if Hume was wrongly considered an atheist, the book raises questions that cast doubt on any possibility of proving that God exists. One speaker in Hume's dialogues makes harsh comments about religion and the clergy, who, in his view, cause harm to civil society, human happiness, and morality:

Factions, civil wars, persecutions, subversions of government, oppression, slavery; these are the dismal consequences which always attend its prevalency over the minds of men. If the religious spirit be ever mentioned in any historical narration, we are sure to meet afterwards with a detail of the miseries which attend it. And no period of time can be happier or more prosperous, than those in which it is never regarded or heard of. . . . Where the interests of religion are concerned, no morality can be forcible enough to bind the enthusiastic zealot. The sacredness of the cause sanctifies every measure which can be made use of to promote it. . . . The steady attention alone to so important an interest as that of eternal salvation, is apt to extinguish the benevolent affections, and beget a narrow, contracted selfishness. And when such a temper is

encouraged, it easily eludes all the general precepts of charity and benevolence. . . . But still it must be acknowledged, that, as terror is the primary principle of religion, it is the passion which always predominates in it, and admits but of short intervals of pleasure.⁴

Moreover, in complete opposition to Moses Mendelssohn's *Phädon*, in the 1750s Hume had asserted that there were no grounds for belief in the immortality of the soul—a belief that is difficult to prove by reason and that is probably an invention of greedy clergy who aspire to dominate the believers. Apparently Nature itself, which does nothing in vain, has planted in the hearts of all human beings the terror of absolute annihilation; in Hume's view, it is this powerful emotion that proves the annihilation of the soul.⁵

Conservatives and the religiously faithful became increasingly concerned about the erosion of belief.⁶ We can, for example, listen to the fearful voice of Leopold Mozart, writing from Salzburg to his son Wolfgang, urging him never to abandon religion, not to succumb to the temptations of hedonist life, but rather to live as a good Catholic and pray devoutly to God. Mozart assured his father that he need not worry. From Paris in 1778, he sent him news of Voltaire's death: "The ungodly arch-villain Voltaire has died miserably like a dog—just like a brute. This is his reward!"⁷ Several years earlier, Judah Leib Margolioth, a talmudic scholar and early maskil, recorded his impressions about the spread of deist fashion: "There are many servants nowadays breaking away from their master, the Lord of the earth and the heavens, saying that the Creator has risen to the heights; his majesty has left the earth and its inhabitants and no longer watches over them, and some have said that good and bad do not come from the Lord. . . . Man does not differ from the beasts insofar as the immortality of the soul is concerned, and the Torah that was given by Moses is, God forbid, merely a constitution aiming to keep man honest in this world and nothing more than that."⁸

Margolioth, like other early maskilim Wessely, Hurwitz, and Mendelssohn, wanted to encourage the study of science and philosophy; but his fear of the deist revolt against God caused him to be cautious, lest he himself expose his students to heresy. The rabbinical elite needed to close ranks in face of the threat, and Margolioth was a member of that elite. Around the time of publication of his book *Tov veyafeh*, which contained his warning against deism, Margolioth visited the community of Prague, where he delivered a sermon in the renowned synagogue Altneushul and met its rabbi, Ezekiel Landau. The threat to religion was undoubtedly one of the main subjects of their conversation. We will recall that Landau had attempted to block an anonymous group of deists three years earlier, and when he delivered a sermon to the Prague community against "the sect of philosophers" in 1770, what he said was

similar to what Margolioth wrote, and his rhetoric was even sharper. Landau declared that the order of the world had changed dramatically. The new world that was then emerging was an “upside-down world,” and the “darkness of epicureanism” was taking over:

Here, to our great sorrow, we are seeing an upside-down world, all things are being overturned, and the epicureans who believe in Nature and deny providence are growing in number, and they are heretics of various sorts. . . . What is common to them all is the harm they do by the words they speak and the hatred they sow in the hearts of men in relation to faith. They deny there is providence and assume that everything is ruled by Nature and assert that men are no better than the beasts. Just as one dies, so does the other, and there is no life after death. . . . Our main belief in the Creation ex nihilo is as naught . . . and the philosophers who are called in foreign tongues *Materia-listen* overturn everything, and they say there is no Creation from nothing but that that is the way of the world, for all eternity everything comes from everything, and in the end, all men are annihilated when they die.⁹

Landau’s knowledge about the various shades of heresy prevalent in the eighteenth century was impressive. He distinguished between the materialists who denied Creation and the existence of the soul and the mainstream of deism: “The present-day philosophers who say that the ways of the Creator are greatly elevated, high and lifted up, and he does not watch over the lower worlds, and to them everything is in the hands of Nature.” But this was nothing other than a relatively respectable cover for atheism, and the fine distinctions among the different trends of disbelief were of no true significance: “In our time, there is a growing number of epicureans who cover themselves out of shame, admit that the world has a Creator but deny there is true providence and ascribe everything to Nature; they believe in none of the wonders and miracles that are in the Torah.” And this heretical view permeated from the “philosophers” down to the less educated: “In the Jewish street, too, the ignorant man lacking in any knowledge, who has read only a little in these books, speaks ill of personal providence and faith, and the belief in the Torah from the heavens and the other articles of faith have little meaning for him.”¹⁰

In 1775, in another part of Europe, Rabbi Jacob Emden of Altona delivered a similar polemical sermon against the heretics. The rebellious call of the deists that Emden quoted: “God has left the earth, and he does not see this world nor does he supervise it,” constantly rang in the ears of the rabbinical elite.¹¹ Three years earlier, Emden had carried on a halakhic discussion with Moses Mendelssohn on the question of early burial. They dealt with the practical question of whether it was correct to accept the government’s ruling prohibiting the burial of the dead on the same day, in keeping with the traditional custom, and requiring that the burial be delayed until death was definitely

determined based on a medical criterion. Mendelssohn's proposals about a way of reconciling the Jewish tradition and the conclusions of contemporary science caused Emden to suspect that he, like other naturalists, was placing more trust in science than in religion. Emden categorically insisted that "there is nothing of substance in the words of a physician bereft of Torah" and called on Mendelssohn to subject himself to religious discipline with the warning: If you continue to persist in your position, which smacks of contempt of rabbinical authority, you will end up exposing yourself to your enemies, who suspect the weakness of your faith and have been lying in wait for a long time.¹²

This was neither the first nor the last time that Mendelssohn was suspected of religious skepticism. In 1772, the year that Mendelssohn and Emden disputed the question of early burial, the public polemic between Mendelssohn and the Swiss clergyman Lavater still resonated. Only two years earlier, Lavater had demanded with missionary zeal that Mendelssohn present to an enlightened public a well-reasoned, written defense of Judaism, or choose to convert to Christianity. In his reply to Lavater, Mendelssohn formulated the fundamental lines of his religious view. He adhered to the Jewish religion as the sole true religion and believed in the obligation to observe the commandments. But he also interpreted Judaism as a religion that is compatible with natural religion and is not antithetical to reason. A major argument with which he rebutted Lavater was also the deist claim that challenged divine revelation: it is impossible that the benevolent God who loves all of his creatures would leave aside the majority of the human species and reveal only to a specific group the right path to the redemption of the soul. This path is open to all human beings, and hence an exclusive religion like Christianity is opposed to natural religion.

"The religion of my fathers does not desire to spread. We are not to send missions to the Indies or to Greenland to preach our religion to those distant nations. In particular, it is the latter nation, according to all the descriptions we possess, that properly observes the religion of Nature."¹³ Mendelssohn did not deny providence, and he rejected atheism and refuted materialism. But he believed that every man could arrive at the principles of religion through his reason, without a divine revelation or supernatural miracles. For Johann Kölbele, one of Mendelssohn's rudest critics in the Lavater polemic, this religious position was sufficient for accusing Mendelssohn of being a clandestine deist who was concealing his views. Mendelssohn, so agitated by the Lavater affair that he became physically ill, was very disturbed by this accusation. And if that were not enough, he heard whispers that some Jews in Berlin believed that the suspicions raised by Kölbele were not unfounded.¹⁴ He refuted this accusation: Kölbele, who is so adept at sniffing out epicureanism, has uncovered concealed signs of deism (*Spuren der Deisterei*) in my books, but "since one can assume

that Jews and deists are equally accursed in the eyes of Mr. Kölbele, I wonder why he particularly wishes to make me a deist rather than to leave me to be a Jew.”¹⁵

In 1771, in a letter to his relative and friend Elkan Herz of Leipzig, to whom he was in the custom of speaking frankly, Mendelssohn formulated his religious views with greater clarity—severe criticism of Christianity and its doctrines, which are inconsistent with reason, on the one hand, and pride in his Jewishness and his religion, which is free of any illogical beliefs and relatively tolerant, on the other. About Kölbele, he said: “His accusations are so impudent and his proofs so stupid that I would feel ashamed to answer them.” And as for those “Kölbele-minded of our own people” who suspected him and his beliefs, he declared himself amused. To his question as to why many Christian theologians are inclined to raise accusations of deism, he replied, “Because their revealed religion has to add to natural religion a tremendous lot that is above and contrary to reason.” Mendelssohn did not regard naturalism or deism as heresy but as the attributes of religion whose universal principles were deduced from human reason. In contrast to Christianity, which is far removed from the natural religion, Judaism is actually consistent with it:

But blessed be he Lord, who gave us the Torah of Truth. We have no principles that are contrary to, or above, reason. Thank God, we add to natural religion nothing except commandments, statutes, and righteous ordinances. As for the principles and fundamental tenets of our religion, they are based on reason and agree in every respect and without any contradiction or conflict whatever with the results of inquiry and true speculation. Herein lies the superiority of our true, divine religion over all other false religions. The Christians will accuse all our principles of deism or naturalism. . . . Our people ought, in fairness, to understand this by themselves, for here lies our praise and our glory, and all the books of our philosophers are full of it.¹⁶

As Allan Arkush showed, Mendelssohn’s attempt to harmonize traditional Jewish norms and faith in the revelation of the Torah with natural religion was rather feeble. At the very least, it was difficult to understand and aroused suspicion.¹⁷ Was he, in fact, a clandestine deist? Although Mendelssohn casually dismissed these suspicions, they did not disappear. In light of this, one can understand the cautious attitude of the Danish government officials, who, in 1779, before agreeing to subscribe to Mendelssohn’s German translation of the Bible, wanted to ascertain that it was not a scandalous work that might offend the religion and that its author was not one of those Jews who belonged to the “religion of Berlin,” that is, deism.¹⁸ A year earlier, he also had been suspected of having been the author of the deist *Fragments*, actually written by Reimarus. Mendelssohn hastened to reassure his friends: “In Berlin, as in all large cities, faith and lack of faith, fantasies and reason, reli-

gious enthusiasm and religious indifference, are intertwined.” At the same time, he wrote about the fate of any suspected of religious criticism in Berlin:

He will perhaps not be persecuted; he will be permitted to breathe the air, to drink water gratis and eat bread for money; but like [Johann Christian] Edelmann, [Christian Tobias] Damm, and others who were innocent victims of their old-time German outspokenness, he will walk like a shadow, misunderstood and abandoned among his fellow men and eventually forgotten. I still saw and talked to Edelmann, who had lived here under a false name. I have known no more miserable figure than his, as he timidly sneaked into the room for fear of being recognized.¹⁹

Was Mendelssohn, who knew that Edelmann had been persecuted as a deist and his books burned, also thinking about his own fate and the clouds of suspicion that hung over his head and refused to disappear, despite his efforts? Did he feel a sense of identification with the deists, or did he fear that he might be identified with them? In any case, this existential situation encouraged him in his war against religious fanaticism and the abuses of religious punishment, particularly the sanction of excommunication. However, in Mendelssohn’s environment, the rabbinical elite was becoming intensely aware of any hint of a naturalist or rationalist approach, which unsettled its members. At a time when religion was in danger, there was no room for tolerance, and the conservatives found it prudent to redouble their efforts in the struggle against religious skeptics.

From the Second Spinoza to the Biological Epicurean

In 1773, the danger of expulsion from Berlin hung over a Jewish deist named Raphael. Not much is known about him: for twenty-six years, from the time he had arrived from a small village in Poland, he earned his living as a teacher of European languages at the margins of the community, and he maintained a low profile. During his stay in Berlin, he was sustained by his patron, none other than the Marquis d’Argens, the French deist, to whom he taught Hebrew. Immediately after his patron’s death, Raphael was more harshly persecuted. His voice was first heard in an emotional letter in French addressed to Friedrich II, in which he asked for his protection. For some time now, he wrote, I have no longer been adhering to the views of the Jews and disagree with them on fundamental issues relating to religion. In the past, the Jews wanted to expel me from Berlin because of my views, but d’Argens managed to prevent that.

The anonymous deist Raphael wanted to live as a “true philosopher,” far from the Jewish world of commerce, society, and religion, and he had never

established a family of his own. A senior official in the Prussian government called him the “second Spinoza.” It was said that, in all the years he lived in Berlin, he was cut off from religion and the synagogue. He apparently never published anything nor did he have any ties to the circles of Jewish maskilim that had begun to form. He expressed his views only in conversations, but his aspersions against superstitions in the Jewish religion and his remarks in favor of natural religion isolated him and marked him as a heretic. Will I be able to breathe free air in your state? Raphael asked the Prussian king. Will Berlin serve as a city of refuge for freethinking men like me?²⁰

There is no way of knowing Raphael’s fate or whether he was given the king’s protection, but his voice, which sounded for a moment out of the darkness that enveloped his life, exposed the clandestine existence of Jewish deists in 1770s Europe. When rabbis and preachers like Landau, Emden, and Margolioth impugned the “naturalists” and expressed their suspicions of Jews who were distancing God from the world, they probably also knew types like Raphael.

In the 1770s, Berlin attracted Jews seeking freedom and escape from the traditional way of life. Salomon Maimon, for example, knocked at the gates of Berlin and there, far from the Jewish Polish world he had abandoned, sought redemption for his soul and an outlet for his religious doubts. He wrote about young teachers who came to Berlin, where they lost their moral restrictions and some, their faith as well. According to Maimon, these young Jews hungrily pounced upon the temptations of the new world: “True of the Polish rabbis, who having by some lucky accident been delivered from the bondage of superstition, suddenly catch a gleam of the light of reason, and set themselves free from their chains. And this belief is to some extent well-founded. Persons in such a position may be compared to a man, who, after being famished for a long time, suddenly comes upon a well-spread table, and attacks the food with violent greed, and fills himself even to surfeiting.”²¹

Although Maimon greatly exaggerated his description, his words reflect the image of Berlin in the eyes of those freethinkers who tried to escape a hostile Jewish environment. Friedrich Nicolai, who documented events in the city in his time, exposed one of them in the detailed story that he published three decades later, about a Polish Jew called Abba Glosk. He depicted him as a wandering Polish talmudist who arrived in Berlin, where he hurled a challenge at the Talmud. “Rabbi Abba,” Nicolai wrote, “sought out the famous talmudists in Berlin in order to dispute with them and to emerge victorious from the argument, using free views and offensive jokes. He frequently jeered at the complicated halakhic debates and the strange tales in the Talmud, thereby angering the orthodox in the city. They were hostile toward him and perse-

cuted him more harshly when they had no rebuttal in the debates and he gained the upper hand.”²²

Abba Glosk was born in the second decade of the eighteenth century and came to Berlin when he was in his sixties. So, unlike Raphael, he was not exposed to European culture, knew no other language except Hebrew, and did not establish contacts with Christian scholars. He was eager to become embroiled in conflicts and was prepared to pay the price of facing persecution nearly everywhere he went: in the communities of Poland, in Berlin, and even in Amsterdam and London, where he hoped to encounter more tolerance. While Raphael was called a “second Spinoza,” Abba Glosk was depicted by Nicolai as a modern Diogenes and a “martyr of the truth.” This depiction was the basis for the myth that grew up around Glosk as a victim in the cause of free thought. Unquestionably, there is a historical core in the figure of Abba Glosk, and Nicolai drew his information, as in other cases when he documented people and events in Jewish life in Berlin, from his close Jewish friends, including Mendelssohn and David Friedländer. Nonetheless, the historical figure of Glosk remains rather hazy, and legends grew around him. It is doubtful whether Berlin was really a paradise for critics of religion. Abba Glosk walked that city’s streets in the early 1770s like a pitiful old beggar, and very few people took him seriously. Subversive Jews who showed contempt for the religion (*Religionsspötters*) were unwanted.

The sickly, melancholy poet, idealist, skeptic, and deist from Breslau, Ephraim Kuh (1731–90), was also the subject of various traditions about the fate of a persecuted heretic. Years after his death, the Jewish German writer Berthold Auerbach wrote a historical novel about him: *Poet and Merchant*.²³ Was Kuh’s worldview shaped under the guidance of an anonymous Polish *melamed*, who was hired to teach him Talmud but was actually a clandestine heretic? Or perhaps it was his exposure to the European Enlightenment, the books he read by eminent philosophers and his travels in the cities of Europe. It was Moses Hirschel, the biographer and Kuh’s close friend, who told about that mysterious Polish teacher who lived first in Berlin and later, after being persecuted, moved to Breslau, portraying him as the precursor of Raphael, who enjoyed d’Argens’s patronage.²⁴ Unlike Raphael and Abba Glosk, Kuh did not live on the margins of society but was the son of a distinguished merchant family. When, in the 1760s, he arrived in Berlin, he stayed with Veitel Heine Ephraim, his uncle and one of the wealthiest Jews in Berlin. His literary work in German was intended for the general reading public and was not written in the context of the Haskalah’s modernization project for the purpose of contributing to the revival of Jewish culture. German was his language of culture, and his poetry reflected his deep modern acculturation. It was poetry written by a Jew but not for Jews.

Kuh was not a philosopher and never clearly expressed his views about Judaism. In his surroundings, particularly in Breslau, to which he returned in 1771, he was regarded as a freethinker who led a permissive lifestyle, did not attend synagogue, did not observe the commandments, and strongly objected to superstition and religious coercion. When it was discovered that he did not fast on the Ninth of Av and vigorously defended that position, he was even more forcefully isolated from other Jews in the community. His religious skepticism was not at the expense of his Judaism. His poems reveal his pride in his Jewishness, rage at the humiliation and oppression of the Jews in Germany, and derision of Jews who converted to Christianity. One of his well-known and much quoted poems criticizes the discriminatory tax (*Leibzoll*) levied on the Jews. This poem gives bitter expression to one of the most traumatic experiences in his life. When he crossed the border on his return to Germany from Italy, he concealed his Jewish identity to avoid paying the debasing tax that applied only to animals and Jews. When his identity was revealed, he was punished by having all his money and property confiscated. This incident made him the enemy of all forms of tyranny and orthodoxy. It fueled not only his sense of humiliation as a Jew but also his hostile attitude toward Jewish orthodoxy, which to him represented oppression from within.²⁵ On the other hand, Kuh was far removed from atheistic heresy, expressed in his poetry and in conversations with his friends. But his faith in God and his prayers were personal and deistic. This is how he explained the nature of his religious feelings to his friend Hirschel:

I do not like to pray in keeping with the predetermined formulas or to the scholarly words, that the mouth murmurs without thinking, while the heart feels nothing. I do not link my prayer to a specific time or place, but pray whenever an inner desire awakens in me to express love and gratitude to the good universal Father. The whole good divine world is my altar, and the entire globe is my temple. It is here that I can know in the very best way God, the supreme power, who created everything in his infinite wisdom and grace for the sake of millions of his creatures, who are happy [in his creation] and through it know his endless love.²⁶

When Kuh was on his deathbed, it was suggested to him that he should confess his sins. Kuh refused, stating that only God knew the recesses of his heart, and only to him, and not to human beings, would he expose his deepest thoughts. This only further underscored Kuh's image as a radical heretic.²⁷

Ephraim Kuh was not the only Jewish German poet in the 1770s nor the only skeptic in the Breslau community who was harassed. In October 1775, the Danish diplomat August Hennings brought Mendelssohn the latest news: he had heard that the author of *Poems by a Polish Jew* (*Gedichte von einem polnischen Jude*) was being kept in isolation by the Jews in the Breslau community

because they feared he might convert to Christianity. Is such coercion possible? he wondered. How is it possible to deprive a freethinking Jew of his freedom in Frederick the Great's kingdom?²⁸ Mendelssohn knew that poet—Isachar Behr Falkensohn (1746–1814), another Jewish deist who came to Berlin from Poland-Lithuania in the early 1770s and found there like-minded Jews and Christians. But there is no way of knowing whether Mendelssohn did, in fact, intervene at Hennings's request to prevent Falkensohn's persecution in Breslau.²⁹

After Falkensohn failed as a merchant, he devoted himself to his studies. With the diligence and zeal characteristic of the early maskilim in the eighteenth century, the young native of Lithuania, who lived in Hasenpöth in Baltic Kurland, studied European languages, spent a short time at the University of Königsberg, moved to Berlin, and in 1772 published his book of poems in German. In the German literary republic, its title was both sensational and surprising. A book of poetry in German by a Polish Jew undercut the image of Jews in general and of Polish Jews in particular as culturally backward, and reinforced the Enlightenment belief in the ability of every man to rise above the environment in which he was born through his own efforts.³⁰ The book, which aroused people's curiosity, drew much attention, and Goethe even wrote a review of it. That same year, Falkensohn left Berlin to study medicine at universities in Leipzig and Halle, and then returned as a physician to the Jewish communities in Kurland and White Russia.

In the introduction to his book of poems, published when he was only twenty-five, Falkensohn portrayed in rhyme a fashionable young man who had undergone rapid modern acculturation: do not think I look like a savage (namely, because I am dressed like a Polish Jew); my face is clean-shaven, my clothing is of the latest fashion, and on my head I wear a powdered wig with a braid.³¹ Goethe searched in vain to find in these poems any trace of the poet's Jewish Polish origin, or, for that matter, much originality. It was important for being the first book of poetry published by a Jew in German; but for Falkensohn, the book was only one further step in his personal process of modern acculturation and secularization, after the transformation he had undergone when he replaced his Jewish Polish garb with clothing in the European fashion. Like Kuh, he did not intend his poems for his coreligionists, nor were they part of the Enlightenment project of the Haskalah. He was one of those *Freidenker* Jews who aspired to obtain European identity. Like Kuh, Falkensohn was not an atheist; this is evident, for example, from his poem on Mendelssohn, in which he praises Mendelssohn's greatest achievement—the release of human beings from the fear of annihilation in death by the excellent, rational proofs he cited in his *Phädon*, on the immortality of the soul. But deistic criticism of religion as a folly and superstition also resonates in that poem. Although

Falkensohn did not want to be a tormented victim of religious persecution, any affiliation with the Jewish group had lost all meaning for him. It was more important for him to succeed in his medical career and to acquire a government post, and in 1781 he converted to the Eastern Orthodox Church. After a delay of six years, the suspicions of the heads of the Breslau community were confirmed, and Isachar Behr Falkensohn became Gabriel Grigorowitch, a Russian military physician in Mohilev on the Dnieper.³²

The new, relatively small Jewish community in Breslau was particularly attentive when it came to suspected heretics. Jacob ben Moses Aharon of Jaroslau, who, for many years, was a leader of the congregation, declared it a duty to expose the heretics and to combat “the destructive theories of Voltaire and his ilk.”³³ A contemporary of Falkensohn’s, also suspected of heresy in Breslau, was Mordechai Gumpel Schnaber-Levison (1741–97). A fair amount of information is available about his life, from his birth in Berlin to a prestigious family of rabbis and scholars, the time he spent as a student of the community’s chief rabbi David Fraenckel and of Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz in Altona, to when he became a well-known physician in London, Stockholm, and Hamburg. We also know about the many books he wrote in English and Hebrew on medicine and theology. Nonetheless, Levison remains an enigmatic figure.³⁴ On the one hand, from his life story and his books, he emerges as a man of science, well versed in the contemporary culture of science and philosophy, who understands the world and religion from a naturalist viewpoint. On the other hand, Levison always declared that his intention was to defend the Jewish religion against its critics and enemies and to fortify it on the basis of science. The fundamental issue that interested him was the connection between science and religion. While still a student in London, Levison published *Ma’amar hatorah vehahokhmah* (1771).³⁵ His position was apologetic: to refute those Torah scholars who besmirch men like him, who engage in science “with the filth of epicureanism and heresy to make them loathsome in the eyes of the masses.”³⁶ In fact, Levison asserted, science supports religion and affirms its principles, and there is no real contradiction between them.

But the more we delve into Levison’s defense of religion and peruse this early work of his as well as his later works, it turns out that a deist type of subversive view is concealed between the lines.³⁷ Was this a well-planned tactic on Levison’s part, or did he find himself torn between his scientific thought and his religious commitment? It is hard to say. In his in-depth analysis, David Ruderman concludes that all that was left of Levison’s Jewish faith was his acknowledgment of God’s existence. But this deist faith had no need of a revelation or Holy Scriptures. Levison, Ruderman argues, “demonstrates the one principle of God’s existence from the purposeful order of Nature verified by the senses.”³⁸ The superiority of scientific and experimental thought and

knowledge of the world through the observation of Nature was the thread that ran through Levison's views on the relationship between religion and science. For example, he held that one should search for natural explanations for all miracles, since it is impossible for anything to occur outside of Nature. This was a subversive thought, primarily because it attempted to equate God with Nature, based on a principle that Levison called "Nature's intention by the will of its Creator."³⁹ He said these things openly in his explanation of the seven Noahide commandments, "which are derived through reason; and . . . if we take care always to observe Nature and act according to it, we will never sin, for everything that is necessary in Nature reflects the will of the Creator."⁴⁰ Levison, who had received a solid rabbinical education and could swim like a fish in water through the Jewish sources, frequently quoted various Jewish thinkers, especially Maimonides, attacked atheism, denounced Spinoza, and presented himself as a defender of the religion; but when all is said and done, he was a deist.

In the mid-1770s, at the start of his career as a physician in London, he was persecuted by the congregation of the Ashkenazic Great Synagogue and then banned from it. A Jew from Breslau recognized Levison, exposed his past as a young adventurer, and pointed him out as a heretic. He told the members and leaders of the synagogue an amazing story—that six years earlier, Levison had been accused of murdering his landlord in Breslau and of having maintained sexual relations with the landlord's wife, and that he had been imprisoned there. A commotion ensued in the London synagogue, and a decision was taken to demand that Levison leave. The trauma that Levison experienced in Breslau on the banks of the Oder River resurfaced in his city of refuge, London on the Thames River. Levison was grievously hurt. In 1775, to defend his name, he printed an apologetic pamphlet, *Tokhaha megulah*. He did not deny the fact that he had been imprisoned in Breslau (according to him, all the tenants of the house in which the murder was committed were arrested for interrogation), but he cited evidence showing that he had been released from prison after being found innocent. He also quoted a letter from the rabbinical court of Berlin clearing him of any wrongdoing. In the conclusion of the pamphlet, Levison's fury at the humiliation he had suffered erupted, and he made a distinctly deist admission. You are expelling me from the great synagogue that has become a "den of evil," Levison contended, but I am indifferent to this banishment. I do not need the synagogue, "for God is close by and the whole earth is full of his glory, and wherever I mention his name, he will come to me and bless me."⁴¹

But Levison did not manage to convince his persecutors that no libertine heretic was hiding behind his respectable front as a physician. Very soon, a head of the Great Synagogue printed a counter-pamphlet in which he cited

testimonies about what had taken place in Breslau: Levison had committed adultery with another man's wife and poisoned her husband. According to the pamphlet, Levison was arrested and released because of insufficient evidence and under the pressure brought to bear by the heads of the Berlin community. The author of the pamphlet also claimed that leaders of the Breslau community had turned down the request that arrived from London to support Levison's version of the affair.⁴² Another claim was added—that in London, too, Levison was suspected of being a frivolous freethinking epicurean, a bachelor who pursued women, walked about the streets wearing a fashionable wig and carrying a sword, and hardly ever attended the synagogue.⁴³ The writer of the pamphlet also knew about another anonymous heretic: Levison's deist friend in London, who "openly and loudly says there is no Torah from the heavens, no reward or punishment, denies the resurrection of the dead, eats nonkosher food, and does not lay phylacteries." And these two epicureans were plotting no less than to "abandon, shatter, destroy, and forfeit the religion of our holy Torah."⁴⁴ It is difficult to know what actually happened in Breslau at the end of the 1760s, and the accusations against Levison and his behavior in London were probably also greatly exaggerated, but they reflect his image at the time of his bitter conflict with the guardians of religion in London.

For the anonymous author of the counter-pamphlet, it was an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of heresy. Surprisingly, his orthodox explanation was given in the spirit of Levison's scientific thought. Epicureanism, he argued, is not an acquired attribute but a natural, innate one. It is not just a matter of adopting a mode of thought, a worldview, and an idea; rather, these are biological traits that predetermine the character of the heretic and the patterns of his behavior. The epicurean is a pleasure-seeking hedonist, a libertine lacking in any sexual restrictions, whose passions cause him to cast off the burden of religion and to deny God. Men who are easily angered become violent murderers, and those with powerful drives become adulterers and rapists: "He who is hotheaded by nature, who cannot control his anger, is very potent sexually, and whose strong sexual organ produces a large quantity of sperm will be far from being a God-fearing man."⁴⁵ Their extreme temperament largely stems from the unrestrained sexual passion that is inherent in their bodies and that arouses them to behave like incorrigible serial sinners. Their evil instincts prevent them from repenting, and they will seek through heretic arguments to justify their sins: "Their conscience torments them, urging them to find justification for their bad deeds until their drives overcome their faith, and then they say there is no Torah from the heavens and deny there is any reward and punishment."⁴⁶

This "scientific" theory of heresy served to demonize Levison and to justify his banishment from the synagogue. It was intended to link the accusation

that he was a murderer and adulterer and the accusation that he was a deist and religiously and sexually permissive. But it seems that in the heat of the argument, and out of his desire to display his own scientific knowledge, the anonymous defender of the Jewish faith did not realize that this theory of his was, in fact, justifying epicureanism by asserting that the epicurean was incapable of overcoming his drives. Levison did not reply to this slanderous pamphlet but may have found much irony in it. The claim that he represented the “biological epicurean” and was a natural epicurean from birth was hurled at, of all people, Levison, a physician, who believed in the superiority of scientific thought. According to this orthodox theory, his heresy was not the outcome of his philosophical view on the principles of religion but rather the result of a warm heart, especially strong reproductive organs, a natural tendency toward violence, and sexual passion.

Religious Skeptics: The “Primitive Ebrew” and the Blasphemer

In autumn 1777, during his travels in France, Rabbi Azulai visited the Western Sephardic Jews in Bordeaux and in Paris. In his travel diary, he recorded his meetings with religious skeptics. He did not come across any marginal, persecuted Jews like Raphael or Abba Glosk, or poets who tried to integrate into German society, like the melancholy Kuh or the ambitious Falkensohn, nor men of science like Levison. Rather, he met with the sons of wealthy aristocratic families who did not conceal their criticism of religion. In his journal, the shadowy figures of miserable, concealed heretics were not documented, but rather Jews for whom religious permissiveness and skepticism were part of their modern European acculturation.

The first one he met in Bordeaux held a position in the community: “After the prayer service, I went to the *gabai* [community official], Solomon Lopes, who does not believe in our talmudic sages of blessed memory, and I believe he is a philosopher.” Ten days later, Azulai mentioned him again: “That wicked man Solomon Lopes, whose wife has never immersed herself [in the *mikveh*] . . . and now we find he is obliged to suffer the divine punishment by untimely death a thousand times for all the times he has had sexual relations with that impure woman, nor does he believe at all in our talmudic sages of blessed memory.” Azulai also visited the home of the wealthy merchant Abraham Gradis (1695–1780) and wrote in his travel diary: “And he is one of those great apostates who do not believe in the Oral Law and who eat forbidden food in public.” And on a visit to Paris, he was told about Mordechai Tama, who, unlike Lopes and Gradis, who denied the Oral Law, was appar-

ently a deist: “Who is not a kosher [honest, observant] Jew . . . who has studied the books of Voltaire and does not believe in anything.”⁴⁷

While the Ashkenazic rabbinical elite became fierce whenever they encountered instances of heresy, it seems that although Azulai deplored sinners and skeptics, he found a challenge in the debates he conducted as a believing rabbi with skeptical philosophers. From his acquaintance with the Western Sephardic world, he probably also understood that it was no longer possible to halt modern acculturation. Even when he was repelled by deviant Jews, he himself was quite gratified by the earthly aspects of modern acculturation. For example, soon after he stated that Abraham Gradis was “one of the greatest apostates . . . and his name is linked with abominations,” he wrote enthusiastically in his diary about the respect shown him when he was Gradis’s guest and about the splendid park next to his home: “There is a large freshwater pond there full of fish, and the pleasures of this world, flowers, and myrica trees and a variety of seeds and roses.”⁴⁸

This Sephardic and Portuguese world was characterized by diverse identities—modern European acculturation, skepticism, religious laxity, and pride in belonging to the exclusive “nation.” In it, one man stood out: a wealthy merchant and businessman, philosopher, and economic theoretician named Isaac de Pinto (1717–87). He lived as a European cosmopolitan of the eighteenth century: a scholarly native of Amsterdam whose business affairs and positions took him to Paris and London, and who maintained an impressive network of connections with the economic, political, and intellectual elite of his time. The questions that preoccupied him as a philosopher were also general in nature, such as his attempt as a political economist to explain the conduct of the financial and credit systems in Europe. On the basis of all this, Richard Popkin, scholar of religious skepticism in the modern era, reached a rather daring conclusion: that Pinto was “probably the first really secular Jew, for he functioned in the secular society without his Judaism in any way interfering.”⁴⁹

Pinto’s dispute with Voltaire in the 1760s, when he criticized his hostile, disparaging attitude toward Jews, could ostensibly contradict this statement and underscore his sensitivity in regard to his Jewish identity. Indeed, in this well-known polemic, Pinto demonstrated pride in his origin, particularly his belonging to the Portuguese Jews, whose deep acculturation distinguished them significantly, in his view, from the Ashkenazic Jews. On the other hand, Pinto’s polemic with Voltaire was based on their common worldview and values: religious tolerance, universal humanism, struggle against prejudice and religious fanaticism, rationalism, and a deist criticism of revelatory religions. Pinto represented himself as a great admirer of Voltaire, and this admiration was not diminished by Voltaire’s anti-Jewish prejudices.⁵⁰

Pinto enlisted Voltaire in one of the fiercest struggles he conducted as a philosopher in the cultural discourse of the 1770s in Europe. In 1774, as a sharp polemical response to d'Holbach's *The System of Nature*, Pinto published in the Hague his book against the materialists. Two years later, the book was printed in a German translation and presented as the work of a Jew of the Portuguese Jewish community.⁵¹ Pinto's aim was to mock materialism as a form of heresy that is destructive to society and morality and also contradictory to human reason. Materialism was rejected not in the name of faith and traditional religion but rather in the name of "the deist philosopher," who, based on Nature and logical arguments, proves the existence of God and of the soul, thus saving religion from its enemies. The materialists, in his view, were tainting the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. "Even if it is true that God does not exist," Pinto wrote in the introduction, "their crime against humanity is no less significant."⁵²

Pinto's book was one of the first mature, coherent works that expressed the deist conviction of a contemporary Jew. His views are clearly stated, not merely implied or so veiled that they emit only an echo in some denunciatory or defiant statements. Pinto called for a general mobilization to combat the atheists who were denying the existence of God and poisoning the minds of a growing number of weak people, so much so that he believed that humanity was facing an epidemic of heresy. To him, then, the deist is not a religious heretic, but—and here, his view is similar to Mendelssohn's—rather the true believer.⁵³ Pinto undertook a task similar to the one Mendelssohn had taken upon himself seven years earlier in his *Phädon*, in which he attempted to prove the immortality of the soul by rational arguments. Indeed, Pinto notes his appreciation of Mendelssohn's marvelous proofs and refers his readers to that work, which was resonating strongly in the Enlightenment discourse of the generation.⁵⁴

But unlike Pinto, Mendelssohn did not deny divine revelation and providence. When Pinto wrote about religion in his book, he clarified for his readers: "It is not my intent to speak about the religions of revelation. For various reasons, I have to avoid that. However, I dare to freely state that there is a constant, general revelation that every person can consult, if he only makes sincere, direct use of his reason; this is a revelation that exists within his heart."⁵⁵ This notion of a constant revelation of God that takes place within each individual implies that there is meaning to a dialogue with God, who speaks to a person from his heart and reason, and that a person can address him in his prayers. But Pinto is not referring to prayer in the accepted sense, which he believes is merely superstition, but to deist prayer to a universal, not a personal, God—a "father" in the broadest sense of the word. This father is a God from whom one cannot expect a reply or the fulfillment of immediate

requests, but rather a God who exists within man, is reflected from Nature, and is perceived through reason: “The spark of reason within us gives us the right to turn to God as a source of our essence and happiness. In this sense, God is our father, our heart, and our friend.”⁵⁶

Was Isaac de Pinto really “the first true secular Jew,” as Popkin defined him? This statement is certainly an exaggeration and ignores diverse trends of secularization that existed throughout the eighteenth century. As with many of his brethren in the Western Sephardic and Portuguese communities, Pinto’s life was marked by a separation between the secular world of business affairs and European culture, on the one hand, and the synagogue in which they continued to foster their unique Jewish identity, on the other. He defined himself both as a cosmopolitan whose love embraced all peoples and all humans and as a Portuguese Jew. He explained to Voltaire the huge gap between Portuguese Jews, like those living in Bordeaux (he apparently had in mind exactly what Rabbi Azulai saw there), and Ashkenazic Jews faithful to religious tradition, like those living in Metz. Although the two Jewish groups live in France, they are “two beings of a different nature!”⁵⁷ From the perspective of modern acculturation, Pinto undoubtedly identified with the processes of secularization in Bordeaux and in the Western Sephardic diaspora in general. Nothing in this anti-atheist text alluded to his Jewish identity, but at least the readers of the German edition were aware of it: the front page of the German edition of his book states that it is a work by a “Jew in favor of the religion” and that Pinto is a member of the Portuguese community.

Isaac de Pinto, like Mordechai Tama, whom Azulai met in Paris, was a disciple of Voltaire. In the 1770s, that sufficed to mark the deist heretics, the enemies of the religion. For example, the philosopher and early maskil Naphtali Herz Ullman, who lived in the Hague, wrote: “the Jewish students of Voltaire” are “the haters of faith in our generation.”⁵⁸ At the time, a Voltairean Jewish deist was living in London. Only recently, as a result of David Ruderman’s studies, information about him has been revealed, and many of his original and varied writings have been discovered: Abraham ben Naphtali Tang (1740?-92).⁵⁹ This Ashkenazic Jew, whose family originated in Prague in Bohemia and in Opatow in Poland, scarcely influenced his contemporaries. Although he wanted his voice to be heard in the English public sphere and his criticism to be heeded by his Jewish brethren, very few knew of him or his views, and most of his writings remained in manuscript form. Very little is known about his life, and he was probably an isolated Jewish thinker and scholar, who lived and wrote, like other Jewish deists whose lives in the eighteenth century remain obscure, on the margins of Jewish society. His cultural world was composed of the religious tradition in which he was raised and toward which he was sharply critical, and of the scientific, philosophical, reli-

gious, and political culture that was the province of intellectuals in England at the time.

Tang chose to introduce himself to his readers under a particularly original name: he signed his two books printed in English with the pseudonym "A Primitive Ebrew."⁶⁰ This was an audacious statement that expressed Tang's desire to set himself apart from traditional rabbinical Judaism of his time and to represent the authentic naturalist Jew whose thought and behavior had not been distorted by late Judaism. It would not be wrong to assume that his signature as "A Primitive Ebrew" was the original signature of a "deist Jew." The two books that Tang published, which he signed with this pseudonym, opened with a declaration of his belief. In the first, a radical political work from 1770, he addressed the reader: "I pray that when you come to peruse this small pamphlet, that ye divest yourself from all prejudices, a grand and necessary object in religion, as well as politics. . . . Let me therefore tell you my creed. I believe in one Omnipotent supreme being, that knoweth the secrets of the heart, and to him all mysteries are open. . . . I earnestly wish and pray, that the word Religion may not be impiously and craftily converted to destroy the tranquillity of men."

Elsewhere in this book, he presented the major deist argument that the universal God would not have revealed himself only to a specific group in order to bestow upon it the keys to redemption, leaving the rest of his creatures in the dark: "Know that God judges men simply, without ceremonial or dogmatical laws. What would become of the major part of the known world else?"⁶¹ In his second book, an English translation in 1772 of the *Pirkei avot* (Ethics of the fathers), Tang wrote in his introduction: "The omnipotent and omniscient God hath given one law and one faith to all his rational creatures," and the correct ritual is not ceremonial and external commandments, because the worship of God is chiefly the moral and inward duty, that is, "the duties of the mind." For example, when the author of the Book of Psalms used the word "precepts," he was referring to the duties of the mind, "for it would be absurd to suppose that the divine songster did allude to the ceremonial precepts only, which are limited and a fixed duty, and to be observed at certain periods and seasons only; but the divine Psalmist soar'd to those magnified exalted matters that unite men."⁶²

In 1764, Voltaire published his *Philosophical Dictionary*, which contained explosive criticism. In one of the most subversive entries, on God, Voltaire chose not to propose a theological doctrine or to philosophically criticize the concept of God in the revelatory religions. Instead, he presented a dialogue between a Greek theologian and a shepherd from Scythia, a well-known literary strategy of the Enlightenment, for the purpose of placing words of criticism in the mouths of people far removed from the Christian discourse.⁶³ The

“barbarian,” who is simply grateful to the “supreme being” who created the world, is not troubled by the question of God’s essence and wishes merely to live his life with honesty and integrity, and his natural approach is the recommended one. On the question of whether God is spiritual or corporeal, the Scythian “Dondindac” replies: “I have no idea at all as to what is spiritual. How should I know? And if I did, of what use would it be to me? Should I be more moral? Should I be a better husband, a better father, a better master, a better citizen, than if I did not know at all?” Morality is preferable to theology, and man should build his world and act in keeping with the moral norms inherent in him. This is how that same “Primitive Ebrew” translated this part of Voltaire’s entry on God into Hebrew and included it in one of his major works, *Behinat adam* (An examination of man), which remained in manuscript form.⁶⁴ This was probably the first translation into Hebrew of a text by Voltaire, and Tang (who translated it from the English) chose the entry in which Voltaire astutely argued that the deist worldview was worthier.

This was not the only text by Voltaire that Tang wanted to acquaint the Hebrew reader with. He also translated in full the entry “Chinese Catechism,” in which Voltaire presented a long dialogue that attempted to demonstrate that morality was superior to religion, to point out the superstitions of the believers, to mock the various rituals, to encourage religious tolerance, and to bolster deism. God is universal and speaks to the hearts of all human beings (and does not reveal himself to them). Hence the historical religions that insist that their God is exclusive represent merely the pride and stupidity of men and encourage atrocities committed in the name of their unique God.⁶⁵ Although Tang’s attitude toward Voltaire was ambivalent—admiration coupled with the fear that he might influence the spread of atheism—these two entries by Voltaire served Tang’s purposes to fundamentally change the religious thought of the Jews.⁶⁶

However, a huge gap remained between Tang’s enormous efforts in his unpublished writings for the purpose of engendering a revision and his marginal place in Jewish society and culture. From the little he wrote about himself, it is clear that, like other deists in his time, he was a solitary figure in his environment and was persecuted. At an early stage of Tang’s intellectual development, as in the case of Ephraim Kuh in Breslau, a mysterious Polish talmudic scholar came into his life. That scholar evidently gathered several young students around him and instructed them in the study of Torah with an unusual, critical approach. He was Rabbi Moses Minsk, founder of a small congregation called Hevrat Sha’arei Zion, about which very little is known.⁶⁷ But Tang was influenced even more by the new world that was opened to him through the books of European culture. His curiosity was aroused by the historical knowledge, ancient mythology, distant cultures, and scientific discover-

ies he read about, and he developed critical thought, which soon embroiled him in conflict with scholars in the traditional house of study. At least a few of them may have read Tang's writings or heard his views. The introduction to his 1772 *Kol sinai* gave voice to the critic who is innocent of wrongdoing but is persecuted for his views. He addressed his opponents: "Let us speak together, and you will tell me what your quarrel is with me. With mere words, you gather to destroy me, but neither your rods nor your blows frighten me . . . for my mouth will be filled with laughter and my lips with rejoicing. . . . Tell me, is there any wickedness in my tongue? Look at me to see if I lie to you. Is there any point in your long-winded debates?"⁶⁸

His criticism of the elite of Talmud students in Ashkenazic Jewish society was harsh. In the introduction to his *Besabei ta'ama*, which also remained in manuscript form, Tang depicted contemporary rabbis and scholars as men who were cut off from the experiences of this world and unfit to be leaders.⁶⁹ He himself came from this group, and since he was well-versed in methods of talmudic learning, he was able to make subversive use of it. In no instance does he come out against the obligation to observe the commandments, but his interpretation of a commandment actually undermines their validity. Thus, for example, in a discussion on circumcision, Tang cites Voltaire's entry on this subject in the *Philosophical Dictionary*, to show that the custom of circumcision is not unique to the Jews and that it apparently has a pagan origin. In relating to the precept of prayer, he inserted a subversive deist comment: prayer need not be fixed in the accepted ritual but "according to each soul, independent of time or place or order."⁷⁰

In *Besabei ta'ama*, we can clearly hear the voice of an anticlerical deist explaining in a blend of cynicism and rage how the clergy and political rulers behave manipulatively to gain sympathy of the masses. Religion, Tang asserted, is only for the ignorant masses, and the ruling elites exploit it for political purposes:

Know that religious faith has always held the masses together, so those ruling over them wanted it, and the ministers of state did not want to disagree with the clergy, for they are highly thought of by the masses, and [they tell them] that the conqueror will force them to convert and prevent them from practicing their religion . . . So they persuade the people to sacrifice themselves in the face of the enemy, for they tell them the wars are the wars of God. And the kings bribe the clergy . . . and all these manipulations are carried out on the people by their clergy, for the fools believe in them.⁷¹

In the sphere of Jewish culture, this was the most profound deist criticism of religion written until then. Tang depicted religions in general and their ties to the ruling regime in the framework of political forces and interests that exploit the hold of religion on the broad, uneducated classes of the society.

The alliance usually entered into by the secular government and the religious leadership is imperative. The political leadership needs the support of the clergy to control the masses and advance their aims, so they shower them with money and honor. To mobilize the masses for a war, the clergy deviously depict it as a “holy war” against an enemy that wishes to harm religion.

Tang wrote his main works, several hundred pages each, most of them manuscripts, in an outburst of enthusiasm in the first two or three years of the 1770s, and then he stopped. There is no way of knowing what happened to him after that. He left behind an echo of the cries of “A Primitive Ebrew,” a student of the old Ashkenazic *beit midrash*, who was exposed to the cultural wealth and enormous religious and intellectual challenges of the new world, internalized a critical approach, and attempted to change the religious thought of his fellow Jews. He tried to persuade them to take a comparative view of the Jewish religion, based on scientific and philosophical knowledge, but to no avail. Perhaps he was silenced, or perhaps he despaired and remained frustrated until his last day. His legacy is the voice of a unique Jewish deist who lived in the 1770s and, despite the antagonism of the rabbinical elite, chose in his religious criticism to stress what he regarded as the correspondence between natural religion and the original Jewish religion. The “Primitive Ebrew” asserted that “there was never a prophecy that contradicted reason . . . for the Torah does not require us to believe in anything unsubstantiated by reason.”⁷²

A much more radical man was Salomon Maimon, whom we met at an early stage of his rebellion, before he left Lithuania and his family for Western and Central Europe, spurred by his passion for knowledge and freedom. In the last two years of the 1770s, the young Maimon lived in the Posen community, where he earned his living as a Talmud teacher and was highly thought of as “a God-fearing man who devoutly observes the commandments.” But he was not able to conceal his true views for long.

When he mocked the superstitions he discerned in the community, he was exposed as a heretic. In one instance, the community rabbi ordered that a fish be wrapped in a burial garment and buried because the Jew who was getting ready to cook the fish claimed that it had uttered human speech when he cut into it, so it must have been a reincarnation of a human being. “Having by this time emancipated myself pretty thoroughly from superstitions of this sort by diligent study of the *Moreh nevukhim* [Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*],” Maimon wrote in his autobiography, “I laughed heartily over the story, and said that, if instead of burying the carp, they had sent it to me, I should have tried how such an inspired carp would taste.”⁷³

Maimon’s contempt for prayer further aroused suspicions about him: “I began to push matters a little further, frequently slept through the time of

prayer, went seldom to the synagogue, and so on.” Indeed, finally, “the learned men fell into a passion about [my conduct], denounced me as a heretic, and sought to persecute me in every way.” So Maimon was forced to leave and continue his wandering.⁷⁴ When he arrived in Grafenhagen, Holland, he stayed in the home of a certain Jewish family. At dinner, everyone was talking about the kabbalah, enthusiastically relating tales about the magical powers of the “Baal Shem of London” (Samuel Falk). Maimon then interrupted and expressed his doubts: “I must regard with skepticism the effect of the kabbalah in general, until it is shown that that effect is of such a kind as cannot be explained in accordance with the known laws of Nature.” After the meal, when the wine cup was passed to him to recite the blessing, he did not hold back but boldly stated that he could not act contrary to his beliefs:

This, however, I declined with the explanation that I did not do so from any false shame of speaking before a number of men, because in Poland I had been a rabbi. . . . It was merely, I explained further, the love of truth and the reluctance to do anything inconsistent that made it impossible for me, without manifest aversion, to say prayers that I regarded as a result of an anthropomorphic system of theology. . . . At this, their patience was completely exhausted; they reviled me as a damnable heretic.⁷⁵

Unlike Raphael, the “second Spinoza” from Berlin, or Tang, the “Primitive Ebrew” from London, Maimon did not control his anger at those beliefs and practices that did not meet the test of reason. He sought conflict and wanted to provoke and shock his Jewish environment, although he paid the heavy price of hostility and isolation. At this early stage of his life, as a young man in his twenties, in the throes of his cultural conversion from a Lithuanian talmudic scholar to a German philosopher, his heresy was of the rebellious brand. It was then aimed at tearing the sacred outer cover off the religion and undermining faith in the rabbinical leadership. His religious criticism erupted in an emotional, spontaneous reaction, as “disgust” at the “vanities,” as mockery and a public cry to unsettle naïve believers and expose the real face of the religion. The epithets “out-and-out epicurean” or “accursed heretic” that people hurled at him in the streets Maimon bore not as marks of disgrace but rather with a sense of pride. From this perspective, he represented in European Jewry of that period the most overt, self-confessed heretic about whom we have firsthand information.

Chapter 7

The Emergence of the New World

In the 1770s, stormy anticlerical winds that blew from the salon of Baron d'Holbach in Paris shook the religious establishments in Europe. D'Holbach wanted not only to free human beings from their dependence on faith in God and the clergy, but also, as an inevitable conclusion from materialistic philosophy, to free them from the shackles that prevented them from finding satisfaction and happiness in this world. In his "Common Sense," he wrote:

Religion, occupied with its gloomy reveries, considers man merely as a pilgrim upon earth, and therefore supposes that, in order to travel them more securely, he must forsake company and deprive himself of the pleasures and amusements, which might console him for the tediousness and fatigue of the road. . . . A more rational philosophy invites us to spread flowers in the way of life, to dispel melancholy and panic terrors, to connect our interest with that of our fellow travelers, and by gaiety and lawful pleasures, to divert our attention from the difficulties and cross accidents, to which we are often exposed.¹

In the process of secularization, the modern ideal of cultural refinement took shape, and the aspiration to derive the pleasures of earthly existence overpowered the religious ideals that rejected physical gratification. The attitude toward the body underwent a significant change. Even earlier, most men and women had not abstained from indulging in worldly pleasures, but the new values released them from feelings of guilt and legitimized these pleasures. As Roy Porter shows, the "flesh" took on a new cultural meaning. The stressing religious-existential question about the fate awaiting men after their death—Will I be redeemed?—was replaced by the earthly, physical question: How can I be happy in this world?²

The freethinkers among the Jews of Western and Central Europe were not only the same deists whose repressed voices we tried to listen to and understand in the previous chapter. In this decade, a new aspiration emerged: to release the body from religious control. While Salomon Maimon was among the few who gave vent to their religious criticism in rebellious blatant defiance, many more—as we noticed in earlier decades—expressed their desire to gain release from religious norms in permissive behavior. It was to them

that the convert Gottfried Selig referred when he wrote about broad circles of *Freigeister*, “who no longer want to be shackled by the doctrines of their fathers and feel contempt for them in their hearts.” In Jewish communities in Germany, according to Selig, these men and women were regarded as licentious, rebellious individuals and labeled as “detestable and frivolous transgressors.”³

Those rabbis who were attentive to the spread of skepticism and religious laxity were capable of distinguishing between the various brands of freethinkers, but they deliberately conjoined the deists and the religiously permissive. Religious skepticism and modern acculturation, in the center of which a new ethos of deriving worldly pleasure took shape, were presented as both cause and effect, or as two sides of the same coin. The new world was depicted as a boisterous world of sin, in which free rein was given to physical drives, Jews rebelled against the religion, and the existing, proper order was being dramatically undermined.

For We Are All Made of Flesh: Fashionable Jews in Amsterdam and Hamburg

What was actually going on in the Jewish streets in the 1770s? The voices of fashionable Jews were not given a direct textual expression, so it is impossible to fully reconstruct a picture of the time. But four exceptional texts written during this decade, which remained unpublished, open windows through which we can get a close look at the process of modern acculturation experienced by Jews in the new world. They document life in two vibrant cities in northern Europe—Amsterdam and Hamburg—cities that also provided many testimonies about secularization among Jews in earlier decades. The two writers of the texts, Israel ben Issachar Baer in Amsterdam and Shimshon Friedburg in Altona-Hamburg, were extremely hostile to the modern way of Jewish life and satirically critical, and they went so far as to demonize the sinners against religion. They reflect the grave concerns of the Ashkenazic rabbinical elite vis-à-vis trends of secularization. Nonetheless, the yearning of citizens of the new world for the body’s release from the shackles of religion is evident from the pages of these books. The historian is able to feel the pulse of the lives of Jewish individuals and groups who craved the pleasures of life and were prepared, sometimes even defiantly, to give up observing the religious laws and accepting rabbinical authority. These were Jews for whom living according to the latest fashion was an inseparable part of their identity.

On the night of May 11, 1772, a fire broke out in the middle of the second act of a play in the Amsterdam theater. The curtain caught on fire, and the

wooden hall was soon destroyed. In the flames and the audience's mad rush to escape, dozens were killed, among them a number of Jews.⁴ Christians and Jews alike regarded the disaster as divine punishment for the sin of attending the theater. For Israel ben Issachar Baer, an acute observer of the vicissitudes that the Jews of his city were undergoing, this was an appropriate opportunity to settle accounts with the Jewish hedonists. The protagonists of his book, *Olam hadash* (New world), written under the influence of the disaster in the theater, were Ashkenazic and Portuguese men and women who, passionate about the tastes of the time, were flocking to partake in its pleasures and entertainments.⁵ The conduct of the Jews there had a considerable influence, since the Amsterdam community was one of the largest Jewish communities in Europe, with more than 20,000 members, about 80 percent of them Ashkenazim. Many Jews passed through Amsterdam on their travels throughout Europe, and many took advantage of its fine Hebrew printing houses. Rabbi Azulai, who visited Amsterdam from Palestine at the end of the 1770s, was surprised to see there a festive Purim carnival, with parades, music, and costumes, and wrote in his diary that the freedom the Jews enjoyed in that city had no parallel elsewhere in the contemporary Jewish world. He rebuked the Sephardic Jews, who, even when their businesses were not faring well, did not cut down on their entertainment expenses: You say that "the times go against you? Then why do you not economize on theater performances and other pleasures?"⁶

In the colorful, vibrant picture of the new world in Amsterdam that Baer drew, everyone is occupied with one concern: "chasing after the fashion."⁷ European fashion was undergoing many changes, and, influenced by fashion magazines and the latest dictates from London and Paris, men and women in the cities of Europe competed over who would be the first to adopt the latest fads in clothing and hairstyles. Fashionable clothing signified that those wearing it were free to shape their identity as they wished and to publicly display their wealth.⁸ As sociologist Erving Goffman points out, the clothing and accessories that an individual wears function as the facade that he chooses to present to the society.⁹ Israel Baer did not leave out a single detail in describing the extremes that the Amsterdam Jews went to in their efforts to look like dandies. Their frequent strolls through the city streets were the best opportunity to demonstrate their good taste and the fact that they were people of the new world. Baer described a man walking along the street in the most fashionable clothing, having given the utmost care to each detail of his fancy outfit: "His breeches are of silk from Italy, a bright red waistcoat is from England, and a periwig from Spain, a small hat from France, and a shirt from Holland, embroidered shoes from Surinam, an earring and a ring from eastern India . . . dressed in this fine clothing, . . . with a sword, a hair bag, and a

pigtail, and speaking in [the Gentiles'] languages . . . their heads uncovered, wearing a high pompadour, and potato flour sprinkled on their faces."¹⁰

As for the women's fashions, Baer emphasized their deep décolleté and uncovered hair: "They walk about with unconcealed bosoms, lined with the finest silk, as is the custom among the whores. Their hair, in curls black as a raven, like the wings of a dove."¹¹ In a series of colorful caricatures on the front page, men are depicted in fashionable clothing, with swords, wigs, braids, and hair bags, and women dressed à la mode appear with bare breasts holding fans, arm in arm with men. Drawings of two men displaying with ridiculous pride the details of their fashionable clothing appear at the top of the page, upside down, and between them, the author wrote his comment about the new world: "I have seen an upside-down world."

Amsterdam offered plenty of opportunities and temptations for night-time entertainments—dance halls, theater, opera, concerts, coffeehouses, and taverns. Although Israel Baer's criticism, which presents these pleasures as an expression of religious indifference, may be exaggerated, there is no doubt that he foresaw a rebellion against the obligations of religion and the restrictions it posed. Pointing an accusing finger, he said: "There are no mezuzot in your homes, to you the *sukkah* and *lulav* are loathsome, nor do you observe the rules of *nidah*, you jest at the Passover Haggadah, and you teach your sons nothing other than how to behave with your maidservants." One of these "sinners" confessed: "I ate at the tables of Gentiles and drank in their taverns, meat fried in milk and butter. I ate to my full, imbibed white and red wine tasty to my palate. In all my body I felt the pleasure. I never went to the synagogue, nor did I lay phylacteries, I wore cloth made of wool and linen, lusted after menstruating women, Gentile women, and whores, anything I desired I indulged in, and certainly never wore *tsitsit* on the corners of my clothes . . . and I mocked the religion and customs of the Jews."¹²

At the top of the catalog of sin was the one that most offended Baer: the mockery of Polish Jews who walked through the streets of Amsterdam in traditional dress, including Talmud teachers and rabbis, whose services were scarcely in demand and who looked wretched compared with the fashionable Jews. He was distressed by the insults hurled at traditional-looking Jews that he heard in the streets. Some of these insolent comments expressed rebellion against the rabbis' authority: "What need do we have of the words of our Sages, to suffer the yoke of the Torah on our necks?"¹³ The "epicureans" explained to him that religious laxity was an extreme manifestation of release from the pressure of rabbinical supervision and the burden of the commandments but also an outcome of religious skepticism:

As long as we were small children, we were beaten by the teachers and the rabbis. We could not mingle with the Gentiles and were forced to pray. We had to learn the pray-

ers, the Torah, the Talmud, and methods of talmudic disputation, and our tender minds were confused by all that, but now that we are grown . . . and our minds are clear . . . we have cast the yoke off our necks, and no one can protest to us. What need have we of this nuisance to be God-fearing. . . . And we are not content with that, for we would rather spend our days pleasurably in joy. . . . We have no need of restrictions and limits, and we are also exempt from many commandments and, in particular, from prayer. . . . Why would you wish to suffer the yoke of Torah, in particular, the Oral Law, for who knows who said it, and if [the Babylonian Talmud scholars] Ravina and Rav Ashi really wrote it? They drew assumptions from their hearts. Then we, too, have hearts like them, and we say that things are turned about; what they forbid, we permit.¹⁴

For Baer, the fact that these Jews refused to fast on the Ninth of Av was also a significant test of their abandonment of the religious norms. From his words, it is clear that not only Sabbateans turned the violation of the fast into a test of faith but also the hedonists, who were indifferent to religion: “And on the Ninth of Av, the day when the Temple was destroyed, they rejoiced as if it were Simhat Torah . . . for [they say] we see no need to recall it. What do we care what happened more than a thousand years ago, and the place here surpasses that glory, so why should we lament with sobs and bitter weeping. . . . And what do we care about what happened to our forefathers? We have already forgotten that, for our lives are good, we rejoice in our happiness.”¹⁵

An entire decade before the maskilim from Berlin and Königsberg began to disseminate their belief in the emergence of the modern age, and before they launched their campaign to enlist more Jews in the cultural rejuvenation based on this belief, the fashionable Jews had discovered the variety of opportunities offered by the new world. Their rejection of the obligation to fast on the Ninth of Av because the historical catastrophe had become obsolete was no longer relevant to life in the new world and, contrary to the ethos of joy in life, was only one of the most intense expressions of this new trend.

A similar window through which we can observe these trends in the Altona-Hamburg community was opened in the 1770s by Shimshon Friedburg. Hamburg, the northern port city on the banks of the River Elba, was a large, bustling city. It attracted many people and provided sources of livelihood and varied places of entertainment (for example, the first German national theater). But it also suffered, as London did, from typical urban problems, such as poverty, overcrowded conditions, drunkenness, and prostitution.¹⁶ At the end of the century, more than six thousand Jews (130 of whom were Portuguese and the remainder Ashkenazim) lived in the united Jewish community of Altona-Hamburg, which has already been mentioned as one that had undergone relatively deep modern acculturation. It was the largest Jewish

community in the states of Germany and, along with Prague, Amsterdam, and London, one of the four largest communities in Western and Central Europe.¹⁷ Friedburg, then in his thirties (born in 1745), lived in Altona and, like Israel Baer in Amsterdam, represented the lower ranks of the rabbinical elite. Most of his writings have remained in manuscript form, and his influence on contemporary public discourse was scant.¹⁸ But three of the texts he wrote offer a glimpse of the streets of Altona and Hamburg of the 1770s.

In *Shemesh hasharon*, Friedburg invites the reader to accompany four excited young Jews who are sneaking out of their homes to embark on a lengthy journey of pleasure-taking to indulge in all the entertaining pastimes that the city offers. They meet in the afternoon at a tavern on the edge of the city to dine and drink alcohol, after which they plan to attend the opera.¹⁹ When one of them hesitantly suggests that they recite the afternoon prayer before continuing their pursuit of entertainment, the others jeer at him—for we have been drinking, they say, and “a drunken man is forbidden to pray, for God forbid he may profane the Lord’s name.”²⁰ The religious norms have not been forgotten, and their conscience still tries to make itself heard, but the demands of the body that craves satisfaction has the upper hand.

Friedburg, who reports like a contemporary journalist, included in his descriptions every last detail of their visit to the opera, down to the finest points of etiquette. He even explains the scale of social significance reflected in the location of the spectators’ seats and the prices of the tickets, as well as the importance of the opera as a splendid urban institution. He shared with his readers the pleasure of rubbing shoulders with the who’s who of society, the experience of enjoying the company of beautiful women, details about the plot of the opera, and words of praise for the talent displayed by the orchestra and singers.²¹

After the opera, the four return to the tavern and continue drinking until they are intoxicated, and then go to the home of one of their group, where they play cards for four hours. The game soon degenerates into a quarrel that verges on violence. One of the four suggests that they end the quarrel and spend the rest of the night in the company of whores: “Brothers, let us go outside, and venture into the streets and markets, like those wanton fellows, for that is what I crave, until the money runs out, and our hearts are filled with joyfulness. . . . We shall go to seek out prostitutes, lust burns in my heart, for we are all made of flesh, and I am accustomed to a whore, who sits somewhere near here, none is as beautiful as her. In her body there is no flaw, her eyes are painted, and she walks haughtily.”²²

One of the friends explains that in the evening, married Jewish men come to the brothel, but they return to their homes at a relatively early hour: “These fine men who come there will not be there now, for they have already returned

to their homes, so that their wives will have no suspicions and will think of them as decent men who do not frequent brothels, rise with the first light to recite their prayers . . . and in the evening like undercover thieves they steal off to the prostitutes. When with our own eyes, we shall see some of the members of our congregation, their eyes are closed in prayer and supplication, but their hearts are filled with adulterous thoughts.”²³

Late at night, the four young men come there, and Friedburg does not spare the reader any of the details: “For our lust burned hot. . . . We climb up quickly and we are warmly welcomed, as their arms embrace us, they crouch on the floor to satisfy our passions. My friend who already knew one of the whores chose to revel with her, and had his way with her for he sorely desired her. We danced on the table like calves, and next to us was the whore, and so we ate and drank . . . and emptied a fortune from our pockets to fill the whores’ hands.”²⁴

Only at dawn, exhausted, drunk, and with empty pockets, these lads from good families returned home. Although Friedburg was a hostile witness to what he considered the addiction of fashionable Jews to pleasures, he documented the signs of indifference to religious norms. One of the revelers in *Shemesh hasharon* confesses: “Lust burns in my heart, for we are all made of flesh.” It seems that Friedburg discerned the new attitude in contemporary Europe in relation to the body—physical gratification was becoming legitimate and considered natural human behavior. Friedburg depicted a wide-ranging repertoire of pleasures (or, according to the supervisors of the religion, sins), and it is similar to the diversions reported by Israel Baer of Amsterdam: nighttime entertainment at the theater, concerts, and coffeehouses (“recently newcomers have made their appearance; they desecrate the Sabbath, go outside the permitted area, and some wicked ones spend money in public; they drink tea and coffee in the taverns. . . . They have freely cast off the commandments”),²⁵ card games and gambling, time spent in the company of women: “Sometimes they sit and joke in the company of several women, which, to our sorrow, has become the custom in our generation, and anyone who looks at a woman’s little finger, it is as if he looked at her private parts, and those who join hands for wicked ends shall not go unpunished.”²⁶ The fashionable woman who desires entertainment and dances is sharply denounced: “Her hair loose, her bosom exposed. . . . She excites men’s evil instincts, walks among other men. . . . Together they rise, laugh, and join in dances, men and women, young men and maidens, and the more often a man’s hand casually touches a woman, the better.”²⁷

Like other supervisors of traditional norms, Friedburg revealed his curiosity about how fashionable Jews used clothing and appearance to publicly proclaim that they belonged to the new world. He described a man’s visit to a

barber: "Today, I saw two young men going into a barbershop to have their hair shaved off. One said, shave me well with a razor like a mercenary's sword so not even one hair will be left, and make my head smooth . . . suitable for a wig known as a peruke. . . . And the other said, twist and turn my hair into curls, and place some fragrant oils upon it, braid it . . . and hang a tail behind, as the aristocrats do. . . . We go among the Gentiles and must make ourselves attractive, so no hair should show on our face, and remove the beard as well."²⁸

Friedburg went into the homes of rich merchants and documented their religious laxity: "On this very day, I have found several wealthy Jews who behave as the Gentiles do in their manners and clothing. They sit at the table and eat with their heads uncovered, and speak in a foreign tongue. Their wives are like them; they carry themselves haughtily with high, ornate hairpieces. Their sons and daughters prance about proudly in elaborate hairdos."²⁹ The homes of the Jewish bourgeoisie families of the new world are furnished in the latest, finest taste and contain a variety of stylish furniture, mirrors, glass objects, paintings, musical instruments, and a European library: "They build a beautiful cabinet for books and fill it with foreign books from which they learn heresy, and want to gain knowledge to make them wise among the Gentiles."³⁰ While they made a great show of their ties to European culture, the mezuzot on the doors of their home were well hidden. Friedburg believed that was to obscure the Jewish character of the house and its inhabitants: "They make a hole in the door in which to place the mezuzah, but then they cover it up and conceal it, so that a visitor coming to the house will not discover it."³¹ Their children, Friedburg reported, were educated according to the manners of polite European society: "They teach them to call them by foreign names: Papa, Mama, Monsieur, and Madam."³²

Among the fashionable Jews, he also singled out a smaller group that openly rebelled against religion and the rabbinical elite. In *Viku'ah hasherasim*, Friedburg described how the voice of deist defiance resonated within this group of "philosophers":

Today the rebels have grown in number, and since they place their faith in philosophy, they deny the Torah of the Almighty, and say that everything comes from Nature. . . . They believe in this false philosophy and become apostates and wicked men, pollute their souls, and forget the God of their fathers, and think that God has left the land and all that is in it, and Nature will do everything and rule over all. They abandon the study of the holy Torah, and the books of foreigners become their heritage. . . . They ridicule the rabbis and the *melamdin*, hurl invective at them, and say that the talmudic scholars know nothing about us and do not know the ways of our [new] world.³³

This is one of the most coherent formulations of the deist view among Jews in the 1770s: the removal of God from the world, faith in nature, the chal-

lunge to the authority of the Torah, religious laxity, an aspiration for a free life devoid of religious restrictions and commandments, and anticlerical mockery. But this does not refer to a group that broke off from Jewish society and attempted to assimilate into Christian culture and society, or even to a separatist sect or to intellectuals who formulated a well-thought-out doctrine as an alternative to the traditional religious worldview.

Instead, what Friedburg was describing is more like an internal protest group that emerged in the context of the “new world.” It was not a uniform group, and it comprised at least two subgroups. The first had been given a European education by their wealthy parents and was exposed through books to critical deist ideas that undermined the conventions of religious faith, and in this sense did not differ from the deists whose voices we heard in the previous chapter. The second is a popular group, which was expressing its anger at the ruling elites in Jewish society. Neither of these groups, however, crossed the lines that separated Jews and non-Jews. Although “they commit a number of transgressions, cast off the yoke of commandments so they may be free, jeer at the Almighty, and keep their distance from his Torah, they reject religious customs and desecrate the Sabbath and the festivals,” they do attend the synagogue, where they quarrel with their brethren: “Sometimes they suddenly have a desire to go have a look inside the synagogue. . . . Not only do they fail to pray there but only commit transgressions. . . . They laugh so loudly it is heard from a distance . . . and ridicule the rabbi and the cantor.”³⁴

One can quite easily imagine Shimshon Friedburg as a young Jew in his teens or early twenties in Altona-Hamburg who experienced some of these things himself, or at least was in the company of others who did. So he was able to learn firsthand all the details of a life of pleasure in the big city and to hear words of defiance and derision hurled at the rabbis. Now, in his thirties, he tried to gain a place in the rabbinical elite by writing harsh rebukes against hedonism and deism. These experiences left an enormous impression on him, one that was simultaneously tempting and repellent. Like Israel Baer, who served as a hostile witness to events occurring in the new world in Amsterdam, Friedburg understood secularization as a result of the absorption of deist ideas from rationalist philosophy, the opportunities for religious laxity in the urban environment, the urge for freedom, addiction to the pleasures of the body, and antagonism toward rabbinical supervision.

In both cases, based on these contemporary comments from Altona-Hamburg and Amsterdam, one cannot categorically state whether “sin” preceded doubt, or whether it was the new atmosphere, in which slogans and ideas critical of religion and the clergy were rampant, that gave legitimacy to religious indifference from the outset or only in hindsight. Shimshon Friedburg, it appears, did not give in to the demands of the flesh and managed to

evade the temptations of the city, but his texts from the 1770s help us become closely acquainted with various paths of secularization.

The Autonomous Individual: Fanny's and Henriette's Hairstyles

What was the historical significance of this process? To what extent did the appearance of freethinking Jews in the cities of Europe indicate that secularization was deepening? Do descriptions of the new world really reflect the rebellion against religion, and was the deistic worldview constantly penetrating Jewish society? On the basis of the testimonies about the emergence of the new world from various texts, one can argue that, among the Jews in several European communities, the conviction that religion was being eroded by the attractions of the new world was growing. It was no longer the problem of the pursuit of luxuries that was undermining the social hierarchy in the community, or of hedonism that was unacceptable by any moral standards but rather the expression of a dramatic change in Jewish life. Moreover, it was clear that fashionable Jews were posing a major challenge to religious values and norms. "Not only had the transgression undergone change," Jacob Katz stated to explain the anxiety that spread through the rabbinical elite, "but also the transgressor. The old type of sinner accepted rebuke and was prepared to make amends by repentance; the new type of sinner refused to repent."³⁵ As this process expanded, the power of the supervisors of religion to enforce discipline weakened. Two generations later, the onset of the process of secularization was still engraved in the collective orthodox memory of the Hamburg community. As a member of that city's rabbinical court said in 1819, when plans were afoot to establish a reform synagogue: "For many years now, heresy has become the norm among some leaders of the community, those same men who do not observe the commandments and who desecrate the Sabbath in public, and we are helpless to stem this trend."³⁶

Hamburg and Amsterdam were not the only places where it was possible in the 1770s to observe and experience the new world. Azulai's travel diary contains numerous comments about various types of religious laxity that he encountered on his tour of communities in Holland and France in 1777–78.³⁷ In summer 1778, Azulai met a fashionable young Jew from Italy in a community in the south of France. He portrayed him thus: "He strode about proudly in an embroidered waistcoat, his hair in curls in a powdered peruke, in the style of important gentlemen, scant Judaism, much debauchery, stingy with the commandments but generous with transgressions, contemptuous of Torah scholars, respectful of the ladies, and spends all of his virility and wealth on women."³⁸ From all he learned about the new world on his travels, Azulai

arrived at the sweeping conclusion that “the generation is totally lax and careless and will boldly flout many prohibitions, as any traveler through the cities of Europe can see for himself.”³⁹

Indeed, apprehension about what Azulai termed “scant Judaism, much debauchery” or the type that was “stingy with the commandments but generous with transgressions” existed in a few places: the Ashkenazic communities of France, the villages of the Alsace region, and the Metz community. The communal leadership and rabbis did their utmost to uphold religious supervision and to impede young men who sought an outlet for their sexual drives. They forbade mixed dances and too close contact between the sexes. As Jay Berkovitz has shown, the leaders of Metz were forced to admit that all their efforts to moderate external acculturation (stylish clothing, wigs, time spent in coffeehouses and the theater) or extramarital sexual relations were to no avail, and the religious values and the authority of the religious leadership were being further eroded. Although they tried to encourage faithfulness to the Jewish tradition, religious life had already been eroded in the decades prior to the French Revolution.⁴⁰

The Galician wine merchant Dov Ber Birkenthal from Bolechow, who traveled extensively throughout Europe, left behind a portrait of fashionable, religiously lax Jews whom he met in the 1770s: “Now among our people, there are those who have learned from the clean-shaven Ashkenazic lads who from their youth have tasted of the pleasures of this world and have decided to give up observing some of the commandments. Many of them keep the company of Gentiles and have learned from them to deny everything.” He had no doubts about their deistic views: “These freethinkers believe the world operates on its own without any supervision, heaven forbid.”⁴¹

In 1772, the libertine adventurer and womanizer Giacomo Casanova had a stormy love affair with the daughter of a wealthy Jewish merchant from Ancona. Casanova soon learned that the girl, whom he called “the beautiful Jewess Leah,” was as eager as he was to enjoy pleasures of the flesh. He devoted many pages to her in his memoirs and described how she associated the temptations of forbidden sex with forbidden food. In my company, she ate shellfish, Casanova wrote, “assuring me that it was the first time in her life that she had enjoyed the pleasure.” He added that “this girl who breaks the laws of her religion so easily and is passionately fond of pleasure” also cast off the restrictions of her religion in the erotic realm: “We went to bed together every night, even on those on which the Jewish law excommunicates the woman who indulges in love.”⁴²

And about religious indifference in Jewish high society in London, we can learn from the case of Joshua Lara and Sarah Ximenes, who fell in love and eloped to Paris despite her family’s objection to the marriage. The Sephardic

leadership of London excommunicated the couple, but, as Todd Endelman has shown, supervision over intimate life had no effective authority in England. He quotes from an anonymous 1772 pamphlet that supports the step taken by the young couple in achieving their freedom, defies the excommunicators, and points out that they are helpless and have no power in a tolerant country like England: “Your anathemas may frighten old women and children, and very probably alarm the weak and bigoted of your society; but men of common understanding regard them with the most perfect indifference.” In regard to the most menacing weapon left in the hands of the rabbis of London—the authority to allow Jews to be buried in a Jewish cemetery or to deny heretics and rebels that right—the writer of the pamphlet stated that it mattered little whether “the inanimate carcass of a man rots in your ground or in that of Saint Paul’s.”⁴³

Wealthy Jewish families who received a permit to live in the Habsburgian capital of Vienna also became deeply acculturated. The aristocrats and heads of the Church, who saw how involved these Jews were in the life of the city, feared that class differences might be blurred or that signs of Jewish inferiority might be expunged. In 1778, they submitted a complaint to Empress Maria Theresa stating that the Jews were wearing the modish clothing of the nobility, were attending coffeehouses and dance halls like upper-class Christians, and were even purchasing the best seats in the theater. Their demand that the empress restore proper boundaries between Jews and Christians appealed to her Christian sentiments but was not fulfilled. The presence of affluent Jews, such as the Arnstein and Eskeles families, was an integral part of life in the bustling city and its cultural activity, and they played an important role in its economy. The officials of the royal court replied that they were not actually interested in seeing these upper-class Jews leave Vienna because restrictions were placed upon them. And, they added, in general, the state of religion and morality will be neither better nor worse if the Jews wear fashionable wigs with braids (*Haarzopf*) or a hair bag (*Haarbeutel*).⁴⁴

When Maria Theresa died in 1780, the rabbi of Prague, Ezekiel Landau, greatly lauded her in his eulogy, for having refrained from partaking in the hedonist lifestyle of her time, despite her royal status: “She was modest and withdrawn, abstaining from all the physical desires and lusts. For many years, she did not participate in games or listen to music, either vocal or instrumental; she did not attend the comedy or the operas. Has such a thing ever been heard or seen: that a queen as powerful as she was, raised from birth in royal luxury, should totally spurn all temporal pleasures?”⁴⁵

These words were intended mainly for the ears of those Jews in his community who were eager to pursue the pleasures of life. He and other rabbis had repeatedly warned against violating religious norms in games of cards and

billiards and attending the theater and the opera, behavior that the rabbinical elite in Prague strongly objected to, as we saw in earlier decades, but apparently with no success.⁴⁶ In a footnote in his *Tradition and Crisis*, Jacob Katz, relating to these recriminations against modern acculturation, hedonism, and sexual sins, suggests that “the situation in Prague of 1770 may already reflect a degree of secularization.”⁴⁷

In the 1770s, modern acculturation and religious laxity were particularly evident in Prussia. There is enough evidence about Berlin Jewry to support Azriel Shohet’s argument: “At the end of the 1760s or the beginning of the 1770s, the breakdown of religion was manifested in both open actions and omissions. Women stopped lighting Sabbath candles, and on the eve of the Sabbath they went to theaters; their sons stopped praying and laying phylacteries. . . . Quite a few did not refrain from eating nonkosher food and pork.”⁴⁸ That “breakdown of religion” was particularly conspicuous among families of merchants from the economic elite who led aristocratic lives in every sense of the term. Processes that had begun among them in the middle of the century became more evident in the 1770s. The period after the end of the Seven Years’ War (1756–63) was a good time for the Itzig and Ephraim families, for example, who grew very rich during the war. They and other families internalized the new modern ethos of the centralized state whose economy is based on widespread commerce. Through modern education (private tutors), well-stocked libraries, the latest fashion in clothing, and intense involvement in the cultural life of the city, they displayed an extensive degree of modern acculturation.

As Miriam Bodian asserts in her study on the Jewish entrepreneurs of Berlin, secularization in the life of that elite was also a product of its identification with the aims and ideals of the state. In the second half of the eighteenth century, they embraced a “view that regarded the enlightened conduct of the state as an aim in itself—a fundamentally Christian view, but one that was secular in its spirit. . . . Thus, for the Jewish entrepreneur, the separation that had existed in the past between the alien world in which he conducted his business and the world from which he drew his system of values, was gradually eliminated.”⁴⁹

On his visit to Berlin in 1772, the Danish politician and philosopher August Hennings was greatly impressed by that small but remarkable, glittering elite of Jews. He spoke about the luxurious homes of these wealthy Jews, the beauty of their wives and daughters, their musical accomplishments, their close acquaintance with contemporary literature, and the “spirit of culture” that prevailed among them.⁵⁰ The sons and daughters of the younger generation were not only deeply acculturated but also felt no commitment to Jewish religious obligations, as we have seen, for example, in the case of David Fried-

länder. Steven Lowenstein, social historian of the Berlin Jewish community, depicted the typical stages of development in the families of this economic elite over three generations: the first generation acquired wealth and influence but was linked to the community and preserved religious norms; the second generation grew up in an environment of wealth, luxury, and refined culture, and identified with the Enlightenment; the third generation was totally cut off from religion, and a relatively large percentage either assimilated or converted to Christianity.⁵¹ The Jewish community in Berlin was so concerned about this trend among the younger generation that one of its wealthy members, Moses Isaacs-Fliess, added a clause in his will in 1776, stipulating that if any of his sons or daughters converted, they would be disinherited. Within a few years, two of his daughters, Rivka and Blimchen, did convert in order to marry Gentiles, and the validity of the will was tested in court and approved by the king.⁵²

Although Lowenstein's study balances the picture and points out that during the eighteenth century, alongside trends of secularization, traditional institutions were also preserved and many remained faithful to the traditional norms, Berlin did provide numerous opportunities for modern acculturation that its Jewish residents took ample advantage of. The fashionable lifestyle there was manifest—the adoption of German and French, the love of theater and other entertainments, and the *à la mode* clothing. Jewish traditional garb was disappearing. Looking out at us from the portraits of men and women of the wealthy elite are Jews of the new world. A 1777 portrait of Isaac Daniel Itzig, for example, shows a young man of twenty-seven, projecting self-satisfaction with his accomplishments and his status. He is clean-shaven, wears a short, fashionable wig with curls on the back of his neck, and a waistcoat with an expensive fur collar. Richard Cohen, who studied the development of portraits of “court Jews” and other wealthy Jews, rightly identified in this painting and others an expression of deep European acculturation and an aristocratic appearance, devoid of any hallmark of Jewish identity, as well as a striking depiction of an individual who is all too aware of his self-worth.⁵³

The Jewish women who belonged to this elite group were accomplished consumers of fashion and culture. The younger ones had European names—Cécile, Fanny, Henriette, or Francesca—that replaced traditional names. They devoted enormous attention to their dress and hairstyles and spent much time reading books, playing music, and attending the theater.⁵⁴ A short play written in 1771 by Marcus Herz (1747–1803), later a physician and philosopher who played a key role in the cultured elite of Berlin, reflected these young women's love of theater. Two Jewish women, avid theatergoers, meet over coffee. The theater, it seems, fills their lives, and they demonstrate impressive knowledge about the repertoire of plays being mounted in London and Paris. Just as Isaac Daniel Itzig's portrait gave no intimation of his Jewishness, there was nothing

in Herz's play that identified the two women engrossed in conversation as Jews. Apparently, their remarkable enthusiasm for the theater was also their most "Jewish" trait. Madam A. says, "To me, a theater performance . . . has always been one of the purest, most innocent pleasures, and for our sex, one of the most essential, too." Madam B. responds, "Indeed, what pastime is more appropriate than the comedy to improve morals, and what maintains the heat of our emotions and enables us to know the range of storms that stir the human soul more than the tragedy."⁵⁵

The theater also excited young Henriette de Lemos (1764–1847), daughter of Berlin physician Benjamin de Lemos, who would later become the wife of Marcus Herz and a prominent hostess in the salon circles of the city. Her parents led the fashionable lifestyle of the haute bourgeoisie, but they also observed the halakhah and, in their daughter's estimation, meticulously adhered to the Jewish customs. My father, Henriette wrote in her memoirs, "lives a devout life, in keeping with the laws of his faith," but he was tolerant toward those who behaved otherwise. Her father's modern acculturation was part of his Jewish identity, but in his daughter's case, it led to secular conversion. Her education in music, dance, and theater nurtured her taste for high European culture. Although her parents made sure that along with her European education, she was taught to read the Bible and pray in Hebrew, Henriette grew up as a girl who felt totally alienated from the Jewish religion. Not only did the charm of European culture accessible in Berlin fill her entire world, but she felt sorely frustrated at being unable to express her religious feelings within Judaism. Henriette Herz described the Judaism of her youth as comprising no end of meaningless customs and commandments. The prayers were also lacking in any content, she complained: "A girl had to pray in Hebrew without understanding what she was praying."⁵⁶

When Henriette was nine, she was invited to participate in a play being put on by a group of Jews in the home of a wealthy Jew in Berlin. However, an instruction issued by the community leaders forbade the performance of comedies, so the event for which Henriette had so excitedly prepared herself was canceled. Years later, she wrote that "to ignore the prohibition or to fight it was not done in those times."⁵⁷ Nonetheless, she did take a daring, remarkable step when she appeared in the conference room of the community leadership and asked the astonished leaders not to interfere with an innocent performance by children. She was successful in her appeal; it was her first confrontation with traditional Jewish authority and an early step in the course of her drifting out of Judaism. This minor incident shows, contrary to the assumption that in the 1770s, the upper classes could proceed with their modern acculturation in coexistence with the conservative leadership without any

conflicts, that even a private theater performance was perceived as an act of defiance against religion and had to be nipped in the bud.⁵⁸

Attending the theater, as well as public music performances or dancing in ballrooms, enabled Henriette to flaunt her beauty. The sight of an attractive, fair-skinned woman with dark eyes and flowing black tresses turned all heads. Based on this image of the beautiful Jewish woman and the goddess of youth, the scholar of German literature and culture Liliane Weissberg traces the path along which Henriette Herz climbed from the relatively inferior status of a Jew devoid of any rights to that of a “beauty” greatly esteemed in the high society of Berlin.⁵⁹ In 1778, when she was only fourteen, Henriette’s portrait was painted by the fashionable painter of aristocrats Anna Therbusch. Therbusch depicted her in the erotic form of the Greek goddess of spring, Hebe, daughter of Hera and Zeus, who was cupbearer for the gods. Her black hair is adorned with a colorful garland of flowers, and she holds a golden goblet in her hand; her arm, shoulder, and the top of one breast are bare.⁶⁰ This was another salient manifestation of secular modern acculturation: the exposure of the body that, without words, expresses the aspiration to be freed from the shackles of religion that supervise the body in general and a woman’s body in particular.

Only a few months later, a time came in Henriette’s life when she had to conceal her body and cover her hair. In 1779, she married Marcus Herz and was expected to behave according to traditional norms. Immediately, the conflict that revealed the tension between the traditional and the secular cultural codes came to a head. But Henriette’s desire to display her femininity and beauty triumphed over tradition, which, in any case, no longer meant anything to her. On the day after the wedding, she wrote in her memoirs that she had to make her first public appearance as a married woman at a ball: “I dressed—was not pleased with myself—fussed with my finery many times, but still was not any more pleased with myself—the reason was that, according to Jewish custom, as a married woman I had to cover my hair completely, and the headdress, decorated with pearls and flowers, did not suit me at all.”⁶¹

Her mother urged her to conceal some hairs that were still visible under her headdress. In her study of Jewish women’s salons, Natalie Goldberg-Neimark rightly argues that this intimate, highly charged incident, which repulsed Henriette, was one of the factors that alienated her even more from Judaism.⁶² In the end, Henriette Herz chose to rebel against traditional custom and religious supervision over the female body and its appearance. At first, she tried to wear a wig but soon removed it, and by showing her natural black hair, she declared that from then on, her independent will would defeat the requirements of the religion.

This was not the only case in which acculturated young women

demanded release of their bodies from religious supervision. In those years, an incident occurred in the home of Adam Arnstein, a wealthy Jew with connections to the Habsburg court. Beginning in 1776, Adam's son Nathan and his wife, Fanny (1758–1818), daughter of Daniel Itzig of Berlin, the most prominent man in the wealthy Prussian elite, lived in an apartment in the Arnstein mansion, on the elegant street Auf dem Graben in Vienna. On the eve of Passover, a rabbi and his student were staying in one of the ninety rooms in the house. The student walked about the many rooms, and when, by mistake, he opened the door of Fanny's room, he saw her sitting in front of the mirror, her head uncovered while a hairdresser combed and arranged her long black hair.

In a fit of religious zeal, the student, thinking that he represented the values of the rabbinical elite that no one was permitted to evade, commented to Fanny that her behavior was contrary to what was required of married women, who were obliged to cover their hair. Fanny, who, like Henriette Herz, had abandoned any commitment to religious norms and who would later become an outstanding figure in the glittering high society of Vienna, was deeply offended by this invasion into her private world. Furious, she told her father-in-law that he if did not immediately oust the two from the house, she would leave for her father's home in Berlin. Adam Arnstein, a Jew faithful to the tradition who respected Torah scholars, found himself in an embarrassing position but acceded to Fanny's demand and suggested to his guests that they move to another house. Otherwise, he said, he feared the young woman would carry out her threat and would desecrate the holiday by traveling to Berlin. Fanny Arnstein thus proclaimed the rebellion of the Jews of the new world against religious norms and demanded her natural right over her body. The overzealous student, who was five years younger than Fanny, later became the ideologue of radical orthodoxy that battled against the increasing secularization among the Jews of Europe: Rabbi Moses Sofer.⁶³

"An individualistic worldview," Jacob Katz wrote, regarding new trends in the communities of Central Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century, "takes shape when the world is observed from the vantage point of the individual, whose fundamental experience is one of withdrawal, escape, and seclusion."⁶⁴ Indeed, in the cultural context of the new world, that defiant act of loosening female hair symbolizes the rebellion of individuals against religious supervision. In the eyes of these two young women, Henriette and Fanny, this supervision and the other religious norms stood in total contradiction to their lives. Comments about religious laxity that are expressed in the public display of a woman's hair were perceived as unsupportable attempts to enslave their free, independent personalities. It was more than an objection to control over a woman's body; it was also an expression of the widening abyss between the religious norms and the rabbinical elite and the freethinking, indi-

vidualistic norms of the new Jewish European elite that was cut off from the old world.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, upon his arrival in Vienna in 1781, lived in one of the apartments on the third floor of Fanny Arnstein's home, along with the Arnstein servants. Music was one of the loves of Fanny's life, and she played the piano for Mozart in her salon. With the cream of Vienna society, she regularly attended the concerts that he performed in that city.⁶⁵

Henriette Herz and other young men and women played an active role in the rococo culture. In her memoirs, she describes her world, immersed in sounds and sights, music, novels in French and German, minuets danced in ballrooms, theater, and Italian opera. This European acculturation enabled her to cross the boundaries that separated Jews and non-Jews, and in her mind, it was linked to the considerable weakening of any commitment to the Jewish religion on the part of others of her generation. Henriette was a frequent visitor in the home of Moses Mendelssohn and was a childhood friend of his daughter Brendel (who later became Dorothea von Schlegel), and at the end of the seventies, was clearly able to discern the generational shift. Mendelssohn adhered to faith in God and observance of the commandments and believed that they were consistent with his tolerant, liberal approach; the younger guests, Christians and Jews who frequently visited his home in the late eighties, were citizens of the new world, among them freethinkers and deists. Although Mendelssohn educated his children to keep religious faith and lead a normative lifestyle, Henriette believed that education could not succeed because it was overcome by the counter-winds of the time; in her view, it was the age of religious indifference.⁶⁶

Henriette deplored the arrogance of those "New Israelites" (*Neuisraeliten*), as she called them, who asserted that rationalist deism justified their abandonment of all religious obligations, but at the same time did not abandon their Jewish identity. She found it hard to understand why they insisted on remaining Jews if they felt no commitment to the religion, and how they could unashamedly declare that "we have been Jews and remain Jews."⁶⁷ It is true that she was speaking from the standpoint of a woman who had converted to Christianity out of deep conviction, in an attempt to fill the void that resulted from rationalist deist heresy. Nonetheless, she is a good eyewitness to the accelerated process of secularization in Berlin. From the 1770s, deism became one of the fashions of that city, so much so that at times it was called "the religion of Berlin." Clothing, hairstyles, theater, music, and dance signified the secular culture of the new world that existed outside the boundaries of religious supervision. Deism became a contemporary worldview that offered a rationalist justification for casting off the burden of religion. The deism of

those upper-class Jews of Berlin who did not openly declare that they denied God's existence (so that they would not be perceived as having dubious morals) and did not convert to Christianity (to avoid betraying their origin group or families) became, in Henriette's eyes, a modern expression of the fashionable secular Jewish identity of the "New Israelites."

PART III

The Overturned World, 1780–90

Chapter 8

Scandals and Rebellions

In his 1781 drama *The Robbers*, Friedrich Schiller, then a twenty-one-year-old officer cadet in Stuttgart, exposed the depths of sin and heresy in the minds and hearts of men of his generation. The play caused a scandal in Germany, and in several places the authorities forbade its performance. The audience was particularly shocked by the character of Franz, the atheist, libertine, and blasphemer. He shouted his materialistic worldview at the audience in the theater: “There is no God! . . . Our whole body is nothing more than a blood-spring, and with its last drop, mind and thought dissolve into nothing.”¹ Another character, the relentless robber Charles von Moor, delivered an anticlerical speech that slandered the Christian clergy:

They thunder forth from their clouds about gentleness and forbearance, while they sacrifice human victims to the God of love as if he were the fiery Moloch. They preach the love of one’s neighbour, while they drive the aged and blind with curses from their door. They rave against covetousness; yet for the sake of gold, they have depopulated Peru and yoked the natives, like cattle, to their chariots. . . . Out upon you, Pharisees! Ye falsifiers of truth! Ye apes of Deity! You are not ashamed to kneel before crucifixes and altars; you lacerate your backs with thongs, and mortify your flesh with fasting; and with these pitiful mummeries, you think, fools as you are, to veil the eyes of him whom, with the same breath, you address as the Omniscient.²

Although the goal of the play was to denounce atheism, it also revealed how deeply irreligion had permeated German society. In his introduction, Schiller stated: “It is nowadays so much the fashion to be witty at the expense of religion that a man will hardly pass for a genius if he does not allow his impious satire to run atilt at its most sacred truths.”³

Religious Tolerance and Skepticism in Europe

The French count Mirabeau, a contemporary of Schiller’s, believed that religious skepticism in 1787 Germany was relatively weak and limited to a small group of intellectuals. “A vulgar error prevails in Germany to the effect that

the Prussian provinces are full of atheists. . . . The truth is, that, if there are a few freethinkers here and there, the people are as religious as any nation in the world, and among them fanatics are quite common.” But his homeland was being assailed by a wave of heresy such as no other country was experiencing: “In France, irreligion had become a passion, general, ardent, oppressive.” It was the historian and statesman Alexis de Tocqueville who quoted Mirabeau’s comments in the mid-nineteenth century in order to explain the intensity of the fierce attack on religion in France on the eve of the 1789 revolution: “It may be said generally that in the Eighteenth Century Christianity had lost a large portion of its power all over Europe.” However, irreligion in general was more a result of indifference toward religion less than a resolute struggle against it, and it largely remained within the circles of the elite. Only in France, where it was ideological, did it permeate the lower and middle classes, become an issue of public opinion, and take on a militant, radical character.⁴

Roger Chartier added other measures to examine the depth of secularization in Catholic France: a significant decline in the number of new priests and of those attending church on Sunday; a rise in the number of out-of-wedlock births; a change in the nature of wills, which left fewer donations for religious purposes; and a revolution in the book market, expressed in a considerable decrease in the relative proportion of religious books among the printed works.⁵ An overall view of Europe shows that the 1780s were the decade in which religion grew weaker in the society, the state, the system of values, and personal behavior: “By the 1780s, at least among the upper classes, dogmatic religion seemed to be giving way among both Catholics and Protestants—as even among practicing Jews—to a generalized and tolerant benevolence uninterested either in the ancient ideal of asceticism or in doctrinal precision. . . . Overall baroque piety, monasticism, clergy numbers, dogmatism, religious intolerance, and the respect of rulers and laymen for ecclesiastical authority . . . were all declining.”⁶

From the standpoint of European politics, the 1780s opened with the coronation in Vienna of the young, ambitious king Joseph II as Holy Roman Emperor. The new emperor introduced a series of reforms that weakened the link between religion and state and culminated with the French Revolution and a direct confrontation with the Church. Joseph II realized the necessity of integrating non-Catholic subjects into the economic and educational institutions of the Habsburg Empire. For this purpose, he passed the Edicts of Tolerance, including some intended for the Jewish communities, which declared the government’s desire to enable Jews to participate in the common public welfare and to become happier and better members of civil society.⁷ Public opinion increasingly focused on the rights of citizens, especially religious tolerance. A prominent figure who criticized the religious discourse that classified people

based on their faith was the Prussian intellectual and statesman Christian Wilhelm von Dohm. In his 1781 *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (On the civil improvement of the Jews), he demanded the elimination of the historical and moral injustice done to the Jews in Europe, which, in his view, was the shameful outcome of the centuries-long religious fanaticism of Christian rule.⁸

Even Moses Mendelssohn, a reserved man who exhibited only cautious optimism vis-à-vis the changes in contemporary Europe, could not restrain his enthusiasm. “Thank kind providence,” he wrote at the end of the winter of 1782, “that I live to see yet, in my old days, the happy period, when the rights of man are beginning to be taken to heart in their true extent.”⁹ As a philosopher of religion, he was a harsh critic of atheism and was alarmed by the thought of a godless society. In his most important book, *Jerusalem* (1783), he emphasized the urgent need to purge all religions, including Judaism, of superstition, a sense of exclusivity, and missionary impulses, and to base them upon the universal, rational foundations of natural religion. He was also confident that even without the Holy Scriptures or the guidance of the clergy, human reason sufficed to demonstrate God’s existence and his mercy to all his creatures.

But in the same breath, he also affirmed his belief in God’s revelation to the Israelites at Mount Sinai and his view that all those born as Jews were obliged to observe the commandments. He inveighed against religious coercion by threats of punishment and opposed the excommunication of deviants. But at the same time, he demanded that the state play a role in the religious and moral supervision of its subjects: “to see to it from afar that no doctrines are propagated that are inconsistent with the public welfare; doctrines that, like atheism and epicureanism, undermine the foundation on which the felicity of social life is based.”¹⁰ He held that atheists were a danger to the well-being of society; since they had no fear of God, there was no limit to the moral freedom that they assumed for themselves: “Zeal is frightful when it takes the possession of an avowed atheist, when innocence falls into the hands of a tyrant who fears all things but no God.”¹¹

Deists like Salomon Maimon, whose religious skepticism actually intensified in the 1780s (“For at that time, as an incipient freethinker, I explained all revealed religion as in itself false”), regarded Mendelssohn’s view as a hypocritical philosophy that tried to appeal to the masses.¹² But ironically enough, in the two years between the publication of *Jerusalem* and his premature death in early 1786, Mendelssohn had to exert an effort to refute the claim that he was a clandestine heretic himself. He was the object of harsh accusations: of being a “systematic atheist” and an active, leading participant in a circle of religious skeptics living in the “new Babylon,” namely, Berlin. In an affair

known as the *Pantheismus-Streit* (“pantheism quarrel”), Mendelssohn was compelled to defend himself against the claim made by Friedrich Heinrich Jacoby that Lessing, at the end of his life, had become a Spinozist. This accusation, with which Johann Georg Hamann eagerly concurred, was an attempt to prove with counter-Enlightenment zeal that confidence in human reason would inevitably lead to atheism. Confronted by this slander, Mendelssohn made his last intellectual efforts before his death to clear his friend Lessing of this accusation and once again to prove the feasibility of a natural, rational religion that rejects both blind faith and heresy.¹³

On the other hand, as a fierce opponent of punishment meted out by religious authorities to religious offenders, Mendelssohn portrayed religious tolerance as the loftiest vision of human society. He anticipated that in the age of religious tolerance, the civil restrictions applying to the Jews would be abolished, and—in contrast to the proposals of his friend Dohm—along with them the rabbinical elite’s authority: “I have the confidence in the more enlightened amongst the Rabbis and elders of my nation, that they will be glad to relinquish so pernicious a prerogative, that they will cheerfully do away with all church and synagogue discipline.” There is no more idiotic idea, Mendelssohn believed, than that “religion can be maintained by iron force—doctrines of blessedness inculcated by unblest persecution—and true notions of God . . . communicated by the working of hatred and ill-will only.”¹⁴

Humanistic faith in religious tolerance and the emergence of new discourse on human rights eroded the traditional demands of the clergy for discipline and the supremacy of the religion. At the same time, across the ocean, leaders of the American Revolution were arguing about the relation between religion and state. Mendelssohn, who followed events there after he completed his *Jerusalem*, expressed his concern: “Alas, we already hear the Congress in America striking up the old tune and speaking of a dominant religion.” To the Jewish philosopher from Berlin, there was nothing more damaging to human values than “to transform . . . some religious opinion, which is a matter of indifference to the state, into an ordinance of the land.”¹⁵ But his concerns were unfounded: the wording of Virginia’s religious freedom act was clear and unambiguous: “All men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no way diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.” The law was ratified at the end of 1785, several months before Mendelssohn’s death, and it left its imprint on Europe. It is good to see, Thomas Jefferson then stated, “the standard of reason, at length erected, after so many ages, during which the human mind has been held in vassalage by kings, priests, and nobles.”¹⁶

The Sect of the Wicked Reveals Its Face

In the cultural climate of the 1780s, the features of the freethinking Jew were becoming clearer. In the course of several scandals raging in the Jewish communities of Altona-Hamburg, Breslau, and Berlin, Jews who rebelled against religious supervision did not hesitate to openly conflict with the rabbinical elite. The same year that Schiller mounted *The Robbers*, a “sect of wicked men” was discovered in Altona-Hamburg: “frivolous men who desecrate the Sabbath and mock the words of our holy Torah with their heresy and epicureanism.” For the community rabbi Raphael Kohen, this sect posed an existential danger to the religion. Members of the community were called upon to testify to every digression from normative religious behavior and to support measures of religious coercion taken against the offenders. As we saw earlier, the struggles to block modern acculturation had been going on for several decades. In the early 1780s, it became clear that this was not a case of individuals but rather an entire group of religiously lax Jews. Thus, for example, in a testimony given to the *dayyanim* (rabbinical court judges) of Altona, witnesses gave the names of Abraham ben Michal and Hirsch Frankel from Fürth, who were behaving licentiously in the nearby community of Wismar. In their complaint, the witnesses stated that the two men “were desecrating the Sabbath in public in Wismar, eating nonkosher food, committing wicked, revolting deeds, and making heretic statements rejecting God’s commandments.”¹⁷

In 1781, it was not one of these young Jews who created a more serious scandal but rather a well-established member of the community: Netanel Posner, a businessman from Altona. His own attempts to cast off religious supervision, the attempts of others to disapprove of his lifestyle as a fashionable Jew, and a description of Rabbi Raphael Kohen’s efforts to compel him to buckle under to religious authority—all these made it an intriguing subject that was reported in the press, discussed by the German public, and regarded as a test of the power of the religious establishment.¹⁸ In the dispute that broke out between him and the community, he rejected the jurisdiction of the *beit din* and showed contempt for the ban imposed on him. As the dispute intensified, his reactions became increasingly rebellious. When some men came to wake him to join the other members of the community in the *selihot* service at the synagogue, he scoffed at them: “Yesterday I went to a comedy and then to a ball, and today you are waking me from my sleep for such nonsense.”¹⁹

A public confrontation took place in the Altona synagogue in summer 1781. Posner stood before the community administrator Herz Hildesheim, opened a Bible, and declared: “Torah, you are good, but you have fallen into the hands of thieves, deceivers, and scoundrels, and now you are in the hands

of false interpreters who have distorted you.” That same popular anticlerical and provocative statement, which Isaac Wetzlar, author of *Libes briv*, had heard almost verbatim from simple Jews as far back as the 1740s, now was heard again.²⁰ All those present in the synagogue were appalled by Posner’s public outcry that revealed his deist views, and some hastened to testify before the *beit din*. Posner was not content to express his general criticism of the rabbis’ falsification of the Torah. He used the laws of *nidah* to demonstrate this. There is no source in the Torah, he argued, for the additional seven days that a man is obliged to abstain from relations with his wife after her menstrual period; that is an invention of the Sages. This public dispute in the Altona synagogue, where Posner presented a neo-Karaite form of heresy that was prepared to accept only the literal word of the Torah but not the Oral Law, ended with a shockingly vulgar blasphemy. Hildesheim asked Posner how, since he did not believe in the words of the Sages, he could explain the practice of the commandment of the phylacteries, when it was only written in the Torah: “And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand.” Without hesitation, Posner replied: “You take the belt of your trousers and tie it on your hand.”²¹

The clash with Posner was exacerbated in no small measure by Rabbi Kohen’s hostile attitude toward modern acculturation. He regarded himself as one of the last protectors of the walls of the religion that were threatening to collapse. In a memorandum he sent to the Danish government that ruled Altona, Raphael Kohen claimed that the law was on his side and that he had the authority to punish offenders. He also stressed the need to halt the wave of heresy: “In view of my religious position, I see it as my main function to guide the community under my care in the ways of worshiping and loving God, and to thwart any freethinking and irreligion, which regrettably is spreading through our nation as it is among others. The new views are endangering all religions and morals, and the civil society . . . and they are exerting a bad influence particularly on the youth, who are being seduced by freethinking [people] to commit all manner of sins.”²²

For Kohen, the decision to use coercion and excommunication in Neta-nel Posner’s case could not have come at a worse time. Religious tolerance was then a key topic in German public opinion, and Dohm’s proposal to allow the right of punishment to remain in the hands of the community was arousing controversy. The scandal in Altona provided sharp-tongued writers a good example with which to attack the religious fanaticism of the rabbinical elite, to depict Rabbi Kohen as a merciless inquisitor, and to protest the abuse of religious power. Moses Mendelssohn joined this discussion and expressed his concern about rabbis such as Kohen, who insisted on maintaining their power of religious coercion at a time when human freedoms were gaining recognition.²³

The Posner affair highlighted the distressing situation of the freethinking Jew. In a letter to Dohm, one of the participants in the public debate contended that urgent conclusions should be drawn from the affair. Like Mendelssohn, the unidentified writer of the letter demanded that sinners should not be excommunicated because “it is the duty of the secular authorities to punish the perpetrators of wicked deeds that are injurious to human society, the state, and the citizens, and the clergy are forbidden from dealing with them.” But more important, he added, it is now necessary to assist the freethinking Jews:

If there is such a rational, wise Jew who has no need of a rabbi to salve his conscience, who does not desire to visit any synagogue, wishes to eat the flesh of pigs, writes letters on the Sabbath, and commits other such deadly sins, but does not want to abandon his people, the way should be open for him to count himself among them, if he merely contributes to the maintenance of the synagogue and the rabbi of the [Jewish] sect, and fulfills his civic duties, as a decent man, toward Jews, Christians, and pagans. . . . The circumcision should remain, since that satisfies the Jewish parents, just as the baptism is a source of satisfaction for Christian parents. . . . The freethinking Jew should enjoy particular protection, so that he is not exposed to the persecution of the rabbis and will not be compelled to replace one superstition with another.²⁴

The aim of this revolutionary proposal, which anticipated by many years what would happen in Jewish life in Europe after the collapse of the traditional community and the completion of the emancipation process, was to lay the foundations for secular Jewish existence in the civil modern state. From the writer’s perspective, the freethinking deist was a “man without a religion” who accepted the principles of natural religion. If he were a Jew, he was committed only to the ritual of circumcision; and if he were a Christian, he was committed only to baptism—rites of passage in which the group identity is accepted. The communal framework would not be demolished but would become a pluralistic one that would incorporate the freethinkers as well as those faithful to the religion. The secular Jew would continue to contribute to the Jewish community and would also, with the taxes he paid, finance the rabbi’s salary and the expenses of the synagogue, but he would not be subject to the rulings of that rabbi.

In the 1780s, much of the genetic baggage of the Jewish secularization experience was subsumed in the Posner scandal. Posner—a freethinking Jew—was a fashionable, religiously lax Jew who was fed up with religious supervision and disgusted by religious fanaticism. Like Henriette Herz in Berlin and Fanny Arnstein in Vienna, Posner in Altona defended the intimate space of the individual against the infiltration of religion. He did not wish to abandon the community or to convert to Christianity. But he was not one of those maskilim who at the time were launching a project of renewing Jewish culture,

although he did later support them. The conflict he became involved in with the leaders of his community reflected his confidence as an acculturated deist and their nearly desperate attempt to retain their religious authority and impose it on Jews like him.

In this case, it would have been necessary to separate civil life from religious life and recognize that Jews rebelling against the religious commandments had a legitimate right to go on living in Jewish society. In Danish Altona and in the traditional Jewish community, such a reality did not yet exist. Posner was thus compelled to carry out a series of actions to remove the threat of excommunication: "He will fast every Monday and Thursday and will not eat meat or drink wine for a whole year, and he will confess to his sins every Monday and Thursday. . . . He will describe in his confession how he mocked the words of the Sages. Every day, he will attend a lesson on the book [of ethics] *Menorat hama'or*. He will not go anywhere where musical instruments are played unless it be the joy of a mitzvah. He will never in his lifetime wear a *Haarbeutel* [hair bag] or a *Zopf* [braid]. He will always leave traces of a beard on his face."²⁵

Even after this serious confrontation in the synagogue, when he protested the distortion of the religion, blasphemed, and mocked the commandment of the phylacteries, Posner did not want to burn the bridges that connected him to his Jewish brethren. But he refused to fulfill the conditions stipulated by the rabbi, so he appealed to the Danish authorities to free him from the authority of the rabbi who was persecuting him. Since there was not yet a political framework that granted individual citizenship independent of a religious group, his request was denied. Rabbi Kohen's power to impose his authority on the Jews of the community was reapproved. Nevertheless, he was forbidden from then on to impose excommunication without approval of the authorities. This step, which in practice neutralized the penalty of excommunication, did amount to some protection for the freethinking Jew.

Posner was not the only Jew of his kind, but others did not arouse scandals that came to the attention of the general educated public. Only a faint echo remained of the clash between the community rabbi in Mannheim and Michael Sintzheim, who came there in the early 1780s and claimed that the Torah was valid and of value only for the past and that in the present, only its ethical values maintained their eternal validity. The community rabbi, Michael Scheuer, who had been conducting a fierce campaign against modern acculturation and trying to combat the waning observance of the commandments, warned all members of the community not to associate with Sintzheim, delivered a sermon against him in the synagogue, and accused him of failing to observe the laws of kashrut and not fasting on the Ninth of Av.²⁶

Another affair drew far more attention and developed into a widespread

scandal. In 1782, before the echoes of the Posner affair had died down, the rabbinical elite mobilized to attack Naphtali Herz Wessely.²⁷ Was Wessely, a member of the community, and a friend and neighbor of Mendelssohn's, also a deist like Posner? The rabbis Ezekiel Landau of Prague and David Tevele of Lissa thought so. In spring 1782, immediately after the publication in Berlin of Wessely's *Divrei shalom ve'emet*, in which he espoused his views on education, criticizing traditional education and supporting Joseph II's plan to oblige the Jews to acquire a modern education, Rabbi Landau wrote to the Jews of Vienna, asking them to denunciate Wessely. To Landau, Wessely's criticism of traditional education and his proposal that universal knowledge ("the teaching of man") be added to the curriculum seemed to be challenging the very importance of Torah study. In his view, Wessely was a deist whose true face was just then being uncovered: "That wicked man belittles all religious people, and from that it is evident that he does not believe in any religion or any doctrine and is one of the naturalists. No enemy such as he has ever arisen among the Jews, who removes the mask of shame from his face and writes and signs and attests that he has no part in God or in his Torah."²⁸

Rabbi Tevele made a similar claim: "Believe me, if he has printed such alien words and such invective as a lawless man and has signed it, then he has no part or share in the God of Israel. He does not believe in the Torah, for he holds to alien views like the naturalists."²⁹

Nothing could be further from the truth. Despite his European clothing, his shaved face, the wig on his head, and his associations with the Jewish elite of merchants and wealthy men in cities marked by a high level of modern European acculturation, Wessely was certainly not a deist. As we have seen, in the 1760s and 1770s, Wessely was one of the early maskilim who fought against philosophical heresy, and in his *Divrei shalom ve'emet*, there is no hint of deism. But the rabbis of Prague and Lissa understood that Wessely wanted to wrest education from the rabbis. In their first intuitive reaction, they perceived in the maskilic threat the embodiment of the fashionable deism that was rebelling against the religion.

Landau and Tevele knew the term "naturalist" and attached it to Wessely to associate him with the broader camp of heretics. The epithet "naturalist" was appropriated for anyone criticizing the tradition and proposing innovations and reforms. In 1782, Landau and Tevele identified a new type of Jew who was violating rabbinical discipline: the Jewish intellectual, or maskil. They challenged the right of this new type to suggest an alternative way of life for Jewish society. *Divrei shalom ve'emet* was a pamphlet aimed at mobilizing public opinion to circumvent the rabbinical elite and to gain backing for the implementation of educational programs and the reshaping of Jewish life by an elite of secular intellectuals. By denouncing Wessely as a naturalist, the rab-

bis drew the boundaries of the battlefield on which they would wage the coming struggles in the Jewish Kulturkampf and defined these struggles as a religious war between the faithful and the heretics.

While Wessely was defending himself, attempting to clear his name and enlist supporters, the anticlerical deism of Salomon Maimon reappeared. This time, the conflict was with Raphael Kohen of Altona. In 1784, thirty-one-year-old Maimon was a second-year student in the *Gymnasium Christianeum*, which, from the middle of the century, had accepted Jewish students.³⁰ Maimon's wife, abandoned in Lithuania, discovered his location and sent a messenger to demand a divorce. When Maimon refused, Rabbi Kohen sent a representative of the *beit din* to summon him to appear before him. Like Posner two years earlier, Maimon replied that he was not under the jurisdiction of the Jewish court. As a student enrolled in a *Gymnasium*, only the jurisdiction of that institution applied to him. Finally, Maimon agreed to meet with the rabbi. In his memoirs, Maimon reported on their conversation. This was not their first meeting; Rabbi Kohen had met the young Maimon in Poland and now was astonished to see how the gifted talmudic scholar had turned into an epicurean: "When I made known to him my birthplace and family in Poland, he began to lament and wring his hands. 'Alas,' said he, 'you are the son of the famous Rabbi Joshua? I know your father well; he is a pious and learned man. You also are not unknown to me; I have examined you as a boy several times, and formed high expectations of you. Oh, is it possible that you have altered so?' (Here he pointed to my shaven face). . . . 'You do not wear a beard, you do not go to the synagogue; is that not contrary to religion?'"³¹

Maimon explained that he felt his actions were not contrary either to religion or to reason, but Rabbi Raphael Kohen began to cry aloud, "Shofar, shofar!" Perhaps he thought he could remind Maimon of the dread of the High Holidays and cause him to repent. Or perhaps he regarded the shofar as a magic object capable of placing obstacles in Satan's way. In any event, he flew into a rage: "He pointed to the shofar that lay before him on the table, and asked me, 'Do you know what that is?' I replied quite boldly, 'Oh, yes, it is a ram's horn.' At these words, the chief rabbi fell back upon his chair, and began to lament over my lost soul."³²

This was neither the first nor the last time that Salomon Maimon clashed with the rabbis. His restless, impoverished, solitary life, his tendency to drink to excess, his depressive moods, and his growing alienation from his coreligionists inveigled him in other conflicts. In 1785–86, he arrived at another station in his wanderings, this time to Breslau, in Prussia. His friend Ephraim Kuh, the deist and skeptical poet, tried to help him, but he himself was stamped as a freethinker. It also turned out that Maimon's tarnished reputa-

tion had preceded him, and letters of warning had been sent to Breslau from Berlin, stating that Maimon was spreading heretic ideas.

After her attempt in Altona failed, Maimon's wife nevertheless did not despair of locating him and either returning him to Lithuania or getting a divorce. She and her son found out his new place of residence and went there. But, Maimon asked himself, could he go back to Poland, as she asked him to? "I had now lived some years in Germany, had happily emancipated myself from the fetters of superstition and religious prejudice. . . . I could not therefore return to my former barbarous and miserable condition . . . [or] expose myself to rabbinical rage at the slightest deviation from the ceremonial law, or the utterance of a liberal opinion."³³ Since he chose to have the *beit din* in Breslau compel him to divorce his wife, he once again found himself standing before a representative of the rabbinical elite he so detested. Once again, Maimon did not hold back: he insulted the rabbi and mocked the other judges until "the presiding judge became furious, began to call me names, pronounced me a damnable heretic, and cursed me in the name of the lord."³⁴

In the end, Maimon yielded and gave his wife the divorce she sought. But beyond his personal suffering and that of his wife (whose name he does not even mention in his memoirs), this family rift signifies the social and cultural barriers that were growing higher and separating Jews of the old world from the freethinking Jews who were rebelling against religious supervision.

Trash Heap of the Ceremonial Laws: The Heterodox in Breslau and Berlin

In Breslau, Maimon's clash with the rabbis in the *beit din* was not the only scandal. In this community near the Polish border, the rabbinical leadership still enjoyed the support of the majority of the Jews. One of the supervisors of religion there was a rabbi named Leibush, a man highly attuned to any manifestations of religious laxity, particularly fashionable clothing and hairstyles. While delivering a sermon in a Breslau synagogue on Rosh Hashanah (September 1787), he noticed a clean-shaven man among the worshippers. He immediately assailed him with severe recriminations, denounced him as a heretic, and demanded that he leave the synagogue. After his orders were carried out, Leibush continued to preach, condemning the weakening observance of the commandments and blaming Moses Mendelssohn, who was no longer alive, for that abhorrent trend. "May his name be wiped out and his memory be eradicated!" the rabbi shouted before the astonished public in the synagogue.³⁵

At that moment, when it was evident that religious commitment was declining, the Ashkenazic rabbinical elite was gripped with anxiety. As in the

Wessely and Posner affairs, this case in Breslau did not remain within the walls of the synagogue. When Rabbi Leibush lashed out at the clean-shaven man and at Mendelssohn, Moses Hirschel was present. An educated Jew in his thirties (born in 1754) and a chess expert, Hirschel admired Voltaire and Rousseau and adhered to a deist worldview. He was a friend of Ephraim Kuh, whose biography he wrote and whom he depicted him as one of the most prominent “heterodox” Jews of his time.³⁶ He apparently also had met Salomon Maimon when he visited Breslau in the 1780s, and found that they shared similar views. Hirschel, enraged and shocked by the disgraceful incident in the synagogue of his community, was also disappointed by the congregation’s silence, none of whom stood up to the rabbi to defend Mendelssohn’s honor.

Afterward, Hirschel described the affair to the German public in an article titled “Jewish Intolerance and Fanaticism in Breslau.” How is it possible, he asked, that such a thing could happen in this enlightened age, in Prussia, in the capital city of the Silesia and under the tolerant rule of Friedrich Wilhelm II? How could an ignorant rabbi, for whom the writings of the “German Socrates” were a sealed book, dare to publicly condemn a man whom the entire world, including the rulers of Prussia, extols as the very embodiment of wisdom and virtue? And who will now protect those freethinking Jews who belong to the enlightened minority in Jewish society?

Hirschel portrayed a dichotomous picture of a world in which a fierce struggle was being waged between the advocates of Enlightenment, engaged in the huge project of improving Jewish life and purifying religious concepts, on the one hand, and the counterforces of religious fanaticism, on the other. While tolerance was triumphing in Europe, the Jewish nation was still dominated by the old intolerance, demonstrated, in his view, by a long list of scandals and injuries to freethinking Jews, from the Posner affair in Altona to Rabbi Leibush’s outburst in Breslau. The purpose of Hirschel’s article was to combat the religious fanaticism of the Jews and to expose the true face of the “Jewish hierarchy,” namely, the rabbinical elite, which still possessed much power and behaved tyrannically, although the laws of the Prussian state had divested it of the right to impose excommunication as a punishment. He asserted that all the religious fanatics were trembling with fear at the thought of public exposure in the press, and hence he expected his article to evoke a move to suppress the rabbis’ power.

Hirschel described Rabbi Leibush as a “hunter of the heterodox,” determined to uncover any trace of religious deviance and to mercilessly persecute his victims. “God will take mercy on that unfortunate merchant,” Hirschel wrote, “whose hair is styled and powdered, his beard shaven and his clothing fashionable, when he falls as prey into the rabbi’s jaws.” He related that a few years earlier, “a recently married young woman became the victim of his holy

rage.” Rabbi Leibush thought that he had seen a fire lit in her kitchen stove on the Sabbath, and immediately left his nearby home, berated the terrified young woman with such vehement recriminations that she suffered an attack of spasms.³⁷ But his article was also a desperate call for help for every free-thinking Jew who felt threatened. About himself, he said: “For a long time, I sought—and have found—by striving mightily to arrive at the truth, the way to free myself of the shackles of the accepted superstitions and prejudices that make the trash heap of ceremonial laws into the laws of God, while they render the true religion and true fear of God negligible.”³⁸

Because he openly declared that he belonged to the persecuted camp of the “heterodox” Jews in Breslau, Hirschel was beset by many troubles. Although the abolition of the rabbis’ right to impose excommunication provided him and his fellow freethinkers a certain degree of protection, the communal leadership was still in the hands of the “orthodox,” and he was the victim of economic extortion and was charged an inflated rate of taxes that he could not pay. In the past, he apparently had been a successful merchant, but after his business failed, he earned his entire livelihood from his writing and from giving private chess lessons.³⁹ Moses Hirschel’s testimony and his cry of distress in 1787 to the German public were among the first expressions that sharply delineated the walls and boundaries that separated the camps, which Hirschel clearly labeled: “On the one side, there are the orthodox,” those “who regularly attend synagogue and devoutly observe the rituals invented by human beings”; and on the other side, are the heterodox, or the freethinkers.⁴⁰ He estimated that a quarter of Prussian Jews in the 1780s were no longer orthodox and that this process of secularization was gradually moving forward.

Hirschel believed that he was meant to be not only a harbinger of secularization but also a leader of a rebellion against religion. In an article he published in 1788 in Breslau, he declared with greater self-confidence that it was necessary to enlist in a struggle to block control of the clergy and the halakhah over the lives of the Jews.⁴¹ His book *The Struggle of the Jewish Hierarchy against Reason* was replete with militant anticlerical rhetoric directed particularly against the rabbis, “the makers of shackles.” According to his deist approach, all established religions were merely the manipulative invention of “selfish men, seeking power, thirsty for blood and satanic evil, who created all manner of laws, customs, and rituals that caused catastrophes and endless suffering for entire peoples.”⁴²

After the death of Frederick the Great (1786), when the wealthy elite in Prussia, led by the merchant and maskil David Friedländer of Berlin, launched a struggle to achieve political rights and the abolition of civil restrictions, Moses Hirschel adopted a more radical position. He argued that the rabbis were to blame for the isolation, restriction, and humiliation of the Jews, who,

for generations, had been treated like people infected by the plague. "I say to you before the omnipresent God and, from my powers of inner persuasion and those of anyone endowed with reason," he wrote, "that it is those makers of shackles, who, with their doctrines that furiously reject the Enlightenment to this very day, have been responsible for the unspeakable suffering of our people. . . . My brethren, please consider the fact that all of the laws of halakhah by which we have lived for thousands of years and that are still valid today, are solely motivated by the passion for power and the egoistical desire for benefit."⁴³

Furthermore, it was the halakhah that caused the isolation of the Jews and deprived them of the ability to function in the society at large:

They offer us laws adapted to their passion for power and their self-interests, that hold the honor of all other nations in contempt, and turn the all-embracing love of the omnipotent father toward his creatures into a monopoly that belongs only to us, in order to distance us from all other peoples, who could enlighten us and teach us many useful insights. They have entangled us into such a maze of laws, customs, rituals, and groundless views, which render us unfit to be useful citizens, possessed of rights and duties in any state. This is the source of the contempt, hatred, and scorn that all the other peoples feel for us. . . . Since it is unthinkable that this be the desire of God, that we should not enjoy happiness in our lives on this earth, then only the halakhah that dictates our way of life and those men who have tried with all their force to impose it upon us, are to blame for all of our suffering, for the hatred and contempt of others and the denial of our civil rights and freedom.⁴⁴

Hirschel, who observed the first steps taken by the Haskalah movement from the outside, was well acquainted with Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* and knew that it strongly advocated the observance of the commandments. Nonetheless, he regarded Mendelssohn as the role model of the freethinking Jew, and hence he was offended by the public invective heaped upon him by Rabbi Leibush. Mendelssohn's statement in *Jerusalem* that as long as God had not replaced the Torah he had handed down at Mount Sinai, there was no possibility of casting off the yoke of the commandments, contradicted the deistic worldview. It is no wonder that Hirschel refuted this statement and regarded Mendelssohn's theology as problematic as orthodox dogmatism. Reason is the supreme judge, he asserted, and the theologians have every cause to be threatened by it, as the fictitious "theologian" argues in Hirschel's book:

The God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, have mercy upon us, if reason is our judge! . . . Reason is our avowed enemy, accused reason has triumphed over us since time immemorial whenever we gave it permission to speak; it destroys religion, scorns our honor, and tries to distance our congregation from God. Thus it has always done, when we have not strangled it or opposed it by force of the sword, the bayonet, the cross, the stake, and imprisonment in fetters. And now, when reason

disrupts the course of our lives, stirs up a commotion, and gains control over various peoples, this poison begins to spread in the domain of our holy religion, too. . . . Hence our prestige is diminished from one day to the next.⁴⁵

In the second part of *The Struggle of the Jewish Hierarchy against Reason*, Hirschel joined the campaign launched by David Friedländer, a deist who, like Hirschel, did not concur with Mendelssohn's insistence on the obligation to observe the commandments. Friedländer sharply attacked the rabbinical elite and foresaw the imminent collapse of the rabbis' authority. In his view, at least in Berlin, the Talmud and the halakhah were objects of derision among broad circles of Jews. In a personal letter of 1789, he expressed his wish that very soon "we will remove the reins of the rabbis from our necks."⁴⁶ In another letter that same year, he scoffed at the belief in a particular providence only for Jews, a notion that was contrary to the deistic view of universal divine justice. When his friend Meir Eger from the Glogau community in Silesia told him excitedly that the synagogue and homes of Jews had emerged unscathed from the fire that broke out in the town and that he viewed that as a divine omen, Friedländer replied that he had had a different experience. A fire in his native city of Königsberg had destroyed entire streets, and it was the home of a Jewish convert to Christianity that was unharmed. He concluded with an even more caustic comment: perhaps it would have been better if the synagogue had not survived the fire, for "since it was built, not a single worshiper knows what he is praying, and three-quarters of the prayers are full of blasphemy and idolatry."⁴⁷

In 1786–88, the debate about early burial was at the center of controversy. David Friedländer informed the readers of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* that the rabbi Ezekiel Landau of Prague had, for religious reasons, refused to accept the demand that early burial be avoided, and was prepared to risk burying a man alive. In Hirschel's view, the rabbis' adamant refusal to come to terms with the opinion of scientists and physicians that the time of death could not be positively determined for at least three days and hence hasty burials should be eschewed was a bulwark of the "Jewish hierarchy" so lacking in human sensitivity.⁴⁸ When this scandal first broke in 1772, Mendelssohn and Jacob Emden argued about it in an internal correspondence, which was not published until years later. Then Friedländer and Hirschel turned the controversial issue into a public debate.⁴⁹ The loudest, most authoritative voice heard on this subject for the German and Hebrew public was that of Marcus Herz, the Berlin physician and a former student at the University of Königsberg (where he studied philosophy under Kant), and the husband of Henriette Herz.⁵⁰ His suggestion for solving the problem was to keep the corpse in a special "purification house" in the cemetery. He also wrote precise instructions for the construction of the building and arrangements for guarding the body.

Unlike the rebels against religion such as Hirschel or Friedländer, Herz was a different kind of adversary. To his war against what he viewed as the superstitions, wrongdoing, and moral insensibility of the rabbis, he brought to bear his professional authority as a physician, his official role as the man responsible for the community hospital, his experience, and scientific knowledge, as well as his academic title. In 1787, in an unprecedented move, the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm II bestowed upon him the title of professor of philosophy. Science and medicine were, in his eyes, distinctly secular fields, conducted on the basis of the laws of nature and dedicated to man's well-being. In the 1780s, Herz delivered a series of lectures on physics at his home, in which he also did scientific experiments. Many Berlin Jews attended these lectures, and, according to one testimony, quite a few left with the seeds of skepticism about miracles planted in their minds.⁵¹ They were convinced by the scientist that there is a natural explanation for every phenomenon, that there is no need for the intervention of a higher power, and that the scientist can provide more correct information, better advice, and guidelines for living than the rabbi.

When Marcus Herz made his stance on early burial known and disputed with the rabbis who adhered to the Jewish custom and denied that science was a reliable guide for life, he emphasized this fundamental difference between the scientist and the rabbi.⁵² Not only did he express physicians' doubts about the certain signs of death and frighten his readers by depicting cases of people buried alive because of compliance with this religious custom; he also declared it a basic right of the scientist to disagree with the clergy. How could the rabbis put forth a position so impervious to human intelligence and feeling? After all, "human reason and the hearts of all men will judge between us and them, whether God, the lover of justice, would not deem it better to keep a thousand corpses above the ground . . . rather than, heaven forbid, burying one of those thousands while he is still alive!"⁵³ The rabbis lack the knowledge to enable them to decide on such an issue. They must, therefore, know their place, move aside, and make room for secular and rational considerations of Jewish life. This is a test that represents the great advantage of scientists over men of religion: "The physicians testify on the basis of the evidence, their experience, and knowledge of the nature of man that they have studied all their lives. They base their words on science, their opinions are sound, and hence we are obliged to heed their voices, but these rabbis, on what are their words based?"⁵⁴ On this point, Herz, unable to restrain himself, rebuked the rabbis: "The truly wise man would not dare say that our forefathers had knowledge of all these matters before they came to be known. Only quarrelsome fools whose pride exceeds their knowledge will assert that every wisdom that is not found in the Talmud shall be poured upon the ground like water. And as for the knowledge

of others, they say: it is an abomination, a criminal wrongdoing that leads men into sin, and whatever they know not or fail to understand is ridiculous in their eyes.”⁵⁵

The Talmud, Herz argued, cannot be the basis for a decision on the subject because scientific knowledge in that long-ago time was meager. The rabbis’ presumption to rely upon it and to rule against science and medicine amounts to an act of cruelty toward the Jews under their supervision, a display of ignorance, and intolerable arrogance. Shouldn’t this fiasco suffice to end the rabbis’ control over the lives of the Jews?

Chapter 9
Replacing Mosaic Laws
with Laws of Freedom

In the Berlin of the 1780s, where Marcus Herz wrote the sharp comments that closed our previous chapter, the rebellion against the rabbinical elite and religious norms caused an open rift. In 1789, during the morning service at a Berlin synagogue, at least one young educated Jew learned that his deistic views were distancing him not only from religious faith and practices but also from the society of his coreligionists. Lazarus Bendavid (1762–1832), son of an established Jewish family of silk merchants and manufacturers in Berlin, was a philosopher, mathematician, and member of the literary republic of the German and Austrian Enlightenment. In his case, unlike that of Posner at the beginning of the decade, the clash did not develop into a scandal but was still significant.¹

Bendavid's father died, so he came to the synagogue during the mourning period to say Kaddish. Since he had received a traditional education, he also led the prayers. Two days later, when it turned out that he was no longer observing the commandments, three men came up to him as soon as the morning service had begun, and demanded that he leave the pulpit. A man who does not observe the commandments cannot serve as prayer leader, they told him. But we are not ousting you from the synagogue; we will allow you to say Kaddish. According to his own testimony, Bendavid was reared in a tolerant home. His parents had undergone modern acculturation but gave their son a traditional education and insisted that he recite the prayers regularly.

Bendavid had adopted a deist worldview, and the commandments had lost all value for him. In his teens, as an avid reader, he was exposed to ideas of the Enlightenment. After reading a book of Greek and Roman mythology, he decided that all religions were founded in lies. "At one stroke, I stopped reciting the Jewish prayers," Bendavid wrote in his memoirs. "I stopped observing the commandments and attended synagogue only when my parents insisted that I do so."²

For Bendavid, saying Kaddish in the Berlin synagogue was his last com-

mitment to his parents' heritage, a kind of secular choice to preserve one aspect of the tradition to express his identity and affiliation with the Jewish group. But his humiliating removal from the function of prayer leader put an end even to that. Does that mean, Bendavid asked them, "that you do not acknowledge me as a member of your faith and that you wish to distance me from the community?" In that case, there was no need for the threat of excommunication. For him, this was an act of expelling him from society. Deeply offended, Bendavid cut himself off from the congregation of worshipers in Berlin and from the group that was faithful to religious tradition: "I then folded my phylacteries and left the synagogue. I never entered it again."³

The Sect of Germans Grows Stronger in Prussia

Testimonies about the violation of religious norms in Berlin in the 1780s are far more numerous than in earlier decades, and the number of Jews who no longer observed the most basic laws of *kashrut* and the Sabbath increased.⁴ It became well known that Berlin was the spearhead of Jewish secularization. In a book published in 1786 in Warsaw, the Polish deist physician Elias Ackord remarked that even children in the Jewish school in Berlin understood that there was nothing in the Talmud that would benefit their future, and they were refusing to study it. Ackord had returned to Berlin from Eastern Europe and joined the struggle for the reform of Polish Jewry, and he hoped that rejection of the Talmud would soon become popular among Jews.⁵ The rebellion against religion and the rabbis also resonated throughout the public at large. German scholars and journalists reported astonishing news to their readers: among the Jews in Prussia, especially in Berlin, a historical revolution was taking place, concrete proof of the triumph of the Enlightenment.

"It seems that in your region [Bohemia], the Jews are still orthodox," Berlin artist Daniel Chodowiecki wrote in a letter in 1783, "but here those who do not belong to the common masses are not; they buy and sell on the Sabbath, eat all manner of nonkosher food, and do not observe the fast days."⁶ In another letter, he wrote about a deist Jew who was caught between two worlds: "I once spoke with an intelligent Jew who is still a Jew in name only, while in practice he is a naturalist." That man, he said, bewailed his fate, saying that the Jews hate him and the Christians hold him in contempt and do not believe that he is an honest man.⁷ Also in 1783, a theologian from Göttingen, Johann David Michaelis, who participated in the public discussion on Dohm's proposed program to reform the Jews, expressed his reservations: Is it possible to grant civil rights to a group with such a large number of members who do not believe in religion? Who will guarantee that their oath is valid? It is known that

many of the Jews today “who are Jews only in name and by birth do not believe in any part of the Jewish religion and are, as they define themselves, deists, and perhaps not even that. . . . When I see a Jew violating the commandments of the religion and eating pork, I am incapable of relying on his oath without searching his heart. . . . Is he convinced at all that God accepts the oath, and in some world, this one or the next, will punish him for a false oath?”⁸

Friedrich Gedike, editor of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, wrote with both admiration and criticism: “We also see here the offspring of the Jewish people often indulging in all the sensual entertainments, all the delights of the capital city, and all the foolery that is now in fashion. Some of them even abandon the Torah of their forefathers, so that they may, among the Christians, more readily avail themselves of their vanities.”⁹ Johann Georg Krünitz, who in 1784 wrote a detailed entry about the Jews in his monumental encyclopedia, expressed his unreserved enthusiasm: “If we look into the matter and ask what, in fact, is the religion of the enlightened group among the Jews . . . then we are unable to give any other answer than that it is deism and natural religion . . . and the number of such Jews is by no means insignificant.”¹⁰

A Christian traveler who wrote of his journey through Prussia in the 1780s and devoted an entire section in his book to the Jews of Berlin was impressed by their modern acculturation, which he thought was so successful that “only occasionally does one take note of the fact that they are Jews.” Like other eyewitnesses, he told about the Jews’ great involvement in cultural life—the reading of books, especially novels, subscriptions to periodicals, visits to the theater (“on the Sabbath, the galleries are filled mainly with Jews”), and ostentatious strolls through the city streets.¹¹ A collection of anecdotes and jokes that were popular among Jews and Christians includes the story of a Christian merchant who, from his seat in the theater, “saw an elegant Jew in the company of a fancily dressed prostitute in one of the boxes.” To his companion seated next to him, he remarked: “Those young Jews have completely become Christians, and they are as licentious and libertine as Satan.”¹²

From the non-Jewish perspective, Jewish acculturation tremendously affected the public space in Berlin. The intense preoccupation with the secularization of the Jews also reflected the sense that there was something irksome about the change that was taking place in the Jewish minority and that their ostentatious presence called for the imposition of boundaries. Various witnesses asked themselves whether the Jews’ extremely free behavior and their contempt for religion was not damaging to morals and besmirching the capital of Prussia. An anonymous article published in 1783 with the title “Deism among the Jews of Berlin” provides the best insight into both the depth of Berlin Jewry’s secularization and the fear that the boundaries between Jews

and Christians might disappear.¹³ Were the Jews there violating the respectable social norm and being carried toward a radical form of Enlightenment that endangered the basic ethical values required of a decent citizen? And who are those Jewish men and women who are giving Berlin the reputation of a licentious city?

The anonymous writer was amazed by the very existence of Jewish deists, considering that they had to somehow extricate themselves from such a rigid, confining religion, evade the threats of persecution and excommunication, and cast off the yoke of the commandments: "They hold their religion in contempt, deride the stupidity of the Talmud, and denounce it as legends full of superstition and foolish fantasies that confuse the mind."¹⁴ But that "philosophical spirit" is accompanied by what he regards as a deplorable and exaggerated tendency to pursue luxuries and fashion and to cast off moral restraints. Fashion is sweeping up the entire world and is the main cause of weakening religion: "Now we see a large number of young Jews who outwardly behave according to the French fashion and whose ways of thinking are also shaped according to it, so much so that one can hardly differentiate between the Jewish and the Christian dandy."¹⁵ The writer of the article also observed the life of a marginal group of Jewish libertines, who scorned not only the commandments and the observant Jews but also the Jewish deists. It seems that deism among the Jews also carried a class label: it was identified mainly with the worldview of the wealthy merchant families.

But there were also libertines in the lower classes, who, according to this anonymous observer, exceeded the bounds of morality and religious norms out of distress and desperation. "Bad habits, corruption, and depravity are sometimes displayed so publicly," the writer said, that in every "temple of Venus" the bodies of Jewish women can be bought and every passion gratified. He believes that these women are spinsters whose poor families could not afford to pay a dowry and the cost of a wedding. In particular, he heaped criticism on the humiliating "porcelain tax" that obligated Jewish couples about to marry to purchase porcelain items in the high sum of three hundred taler from the royal Prussian factory. Many lower-class women have scarcely any hope of marrying, and hence they naturally maintain nonmarital relations: "A woman of meager means has but a faint chance of marrying and through prostitution she seeks an outlet for her [sexual] passion to satisfy her inherent natural drive."¹⁶ Figures on the growing number of infants born in Berlin to mixed couples in the quarter century between the 1780s and the early nineteenth century, who were baptized as Christians, reinforce this description: ninety illegitimate infants were born to Jewish men and Christian women, and fifty-three from relations between Christian men and Jewish women.¹⁷

The writer of "Deism among the Jews of Berlin" argued that the "party

of the fanatics” still possessed much force and that its members were crying out against religious laxity. But the camp opposing them was gradually growing in number. Now these two camps were facing one another in a decisive Kulturkampf, which the anonymous author also viewed as a struggle between the two major communities of Ashkenazic Jewry in Europe: “the sect of Poles or the piously religious . . . who cling ferociously to the laws of their forefathers,” on the one hand, and the sect of “Germans or those known as free-thinkers whose concepts of religion are clearer,” on the other.¹⁸ He believed that this campaign would lead to the defeat of religion among Berlin Jewry. Even now, he noted, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of them had abandoned religious norms and the rabbis’ discipline and were merely waiting for the decisive shift that would bring about the collapse of rabbinical control over the lives of the Jews. Once they were released from the “Polish” brand of Judaism that signified a stubborn adherence to religious tradition, the “German” kind of Judaism would gain the upper hand.¹⁹

Publisher Friedrich Nicolai, one of Mendelssohn’s friends, described the Berlin he knew before the radical secularization. Relating to the end of the 1780s, he wrote that, until then, Polish preachers came to the city, were received with open arms, invited to spend the Sabbath in the homes of the Jews, and earned their livelihood from the gifts that they were given for their sermons. But, he went on to say, “for about twenty years now, these wandering preachers have stopped coming, and only one or two have arrived in Berlin.”²⁰ The *Chronic von Berlin*, which was mainly filled with sensational stories and gossip, printed an article sent to the editor by a local Jew that contained not only a declaration that the “burden of the superstitions that until now have lain heavily upon the shoulders of the Jews” had now been cast off, but also an extreme proposal: to expel from the city the Polish Jews who were obstructing the process of secularization.²¹

These developments were also evident in the 1780s in other communities in Prussia, especially Königsberg. In a 1789 article, the Orientalist Johann Bernhard Köhler reported the dramatic change in the lifestyle of several Jewish families, who insofar as their social circle, fashionable dress, cultural tastes, knowledge of literature and science, and manners were concerned, were no different from their Christian neighbors. He enthusiastically described the first steps of the Haskalah movement that was beginning in Königsberg with the support of the wealthy elite, headed by the Friedländer family. But like other Christian observers, he added his reservations: the Jewish Enlightenment was moving in the negative direction of immorality and heresy. Only a few years had passed since Mendelssohn’s death, and his legacy, a combination of religious faith and Enlightenment, was no longer being preserved. The Mosaic laws were scornfully rejected, and members of the younger generation pre-

ferred the laws of freedom. They were adopting a deist and atheist worldview and pursuing what he regarded as a life of licentiousness. Now, he wrote with sorrow, “new prophets were emerging among the Jews, who claimed that Moses and the prophets, as well as the Holy Scriptures and the oral traditions, no longer bore any validity,” and the laws of the Patriarchs were being publicly trampled on with scorn.²²

A Peep into Jewish Life in London

In the 1780s, the voices of those “new prophets” who preached the overthrow of the rabbinical elite’s authority were also heard in other parts of Europe. On the eve of the revolution in Paris, which would soon draw the attention of the entire world, the Jewish community consisted of seven hundred Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews. Among them was the solitary, impoverished teacher Zalkind Hourwitz (1751–1812).²³ He was, to a great extent, the Polish French version of Salomon Maimon. Like him, Hourwitz followed his personal road to secularization through cultural conversion, from the Talmud to the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and emigration from East to West—in his case, from a small village near Lublin through Prussian Berlin to Metz in Alsace and to Paris. And like Maimon, Hourwitz was a poor Jewish scholar, a deist who craved knowledge and who was critical of his society of origin, traditional religious customs, and the rabbis. Frances Malino, his biographer, argued that Hourwitz’s anticlerical sentiments were no less stormy than Voltaire’s.²⁴ On the eve of the revolution and during it, Hourwitz spoke out on behalf of his Jewish brethren and demanded their rights; he also strove to end the control of the rabbis. In his “Vindication of the Jews” (*Apologie des Juifs*, 1789), which contained a detailed program for integrating Jews into the state, he protested religious control over the lives of Jews and advocated the release of the religiously lax and fashionable Jews from subjugation to the rabbis.²⁵ In a letter to the National Assembly, several months after the outbreak of the revolution, he wrote in a similar vein against the preservation of the rabbis’ authority and communal autonomy: Jews can exist and even maintain their religion without the “tyrannizing of the conscience” by the “rabbinical inquisition.”²⁶

Another Ashkenazic Jew with a deist worldview who lived in the British capital of London voiced his subversive aim to expose what was really going on inside the synagogue. At the end of the 1780s, he printed an anonymous critical pamphlet in London called *A Peep into the Synagogue*.²⁷ It took the reader into the Ashkenazic synagogue to point out the ridiculous customs and the superstition, corruption, commotion, and indecorous atmosphere. London then differed from the Paris of Zalkind Hourwitz’s time, where only a few

hundred Jews lived, without a communal establishment. In London, nearly ten thousand Jews, most of them Ashkenazim and the rest Sephardim, led bustling lives.

A Peep into the Synagogue revealed much about this restless Jewish world—many Jews, mainly immigrants from Germany, Holland, and Poland, earned their livelihood in the markets, shops, and stock market, taking advantage of the many opportunities offered by the dynamic capital, sitting in coffeehouses and undergoing deep acculturation in language, fashion, and other patterns of life. They maintained their Jewish identity and Ashkenazic tradition strictly within the bounds of the synagogue, where they convened on the Sabbath and holidays. The writer had a double vantage point: as a deist, observing from without, disgusted by the absurdity of the religious ritual; and as a Jew, concerned about the flawed ecology of the synagogue, who proposed ways to improve the situation. From the perspective of reason, humanism, and suspicion of “priestcraft,” the secret observer who peeked into Jewish life criticized the vulgarization of the synagogue—the public sale of honors, frequent quarrels, small talk and gossip, extra rights to the wealthy, beggars walking through the congregation—as well as the ignorance of most of the worshipers, who do not understand the content of the Hebrew prayers. Although he himself was a deist, he expected the synagogue to function as a place of sanctity and devotion to God, and he demanded that it be set apart from the influences of everyday life: “The Holy Sanctuary is transmuted into a Sale-Room. . . . The men repair to the place of worship, not to pay their devoirs to God, but to mock him, by dedicating that time to frivolous chitchat, which ought to be devoted in the most solemn manner to him.”²⁸

The ceremony becomes a farce and reflects the hypocrisy of London Jewry. Like Meyer Schomberg forty years earlier, this writer asks, how is the opening of shops on the Sabbath consistent with the fulfillment of religious obligations?²⁹ He conducted an anticlerical attack against the “Jewish church,” the rabbis (“priests”), and other officials of the synagogue, but he also suggested that their salaries be increased so that they would not be dependent upon the generosity of the congregation and that they be taught to conduct the prayers in the language of the state. Perhaps then, Jewish women would see some point in attending the synagogue and would not have to listen to “a man reading in a language they are ignorant of.”³⁰ But the most scathing criticism voiced by that Jewish deist in London was toward circumcision: “In the extravagant Catalogue of Jewish absurdities, there is not one more shameful than that of Circumsition [*sic*], it is a barbarous violation of the principles of Nature. For what can be more unhuman, than to punish an Infant by a cruel operation on a part of its body, done by a bungling Butcher of a Priest! Or what can be more insulting to all-wise Creator, than for a stupid Fool of a

Fellow, to presume to correct His workmanship, by finding one superfluous part, and taking that away to reduce the subject to perfection?"

He went on to ask how it was possible to understand that, after the performance of this horrible rite, everyone sits down to celebrate at a rich meal? It is true that the commandment of the circumcision is written in the Torah and originated with Moses, but who was Moses, the anticlerical "voyeur" defiantly asked, other than just another "priest," and no less cruel than the priests of our own times?³¹

However, the anonymous author expressed some reservations. Besides those Ashkenazic Jews who are subject to the whims of the clergy, there are quite a few respectable Jews in London, either "cultivated and polished" native Englishmen or immigrants who are not from the provincial towns and villages of Germany, Holland, or Poland but from large cities such as Venice, Frankfurt, and Leiden.³² Jewish society, he stressed, is no longer uniform but is split between the observant Jews ("Poles" or the "orthodox") and those who are indifferent to religion and critical of it. Todd Endelman argued that nowhere at that time were there such deep, rapid, and successful processes of acculturation as those among the thousands of Jews who lived in London, and the most striking characteristics of the religious life of British Jewry in the eighteenth century were religious laxity, ignorance, and indifference. From the middle of the century, it was clear that observant Jews were a minority among the Jews living in England. The temptations of the big city, the aspiration to be economically successful, the relative tolerance, involvement in the society at large, and the general indifference of the British to religion had a significant influence on London Jewry. Among the very affluent and the miserably poor, religious observance was particularly weak, and it was mainly the lower middle class that still clung to tradition. "The decline in Orthodoxy among the Anglo-Jewish elite," Endelman explains, "was as much a compromise with the social and economic demands of English life as it was a rejection of the Jewish past." Consequently, in this tolerant, secular climate, many religiously lax Jews maintained close contact with Jewish institutions, contributed to the synagogues, and filled leading positions in them.³³

At this point, the historian is well advised to alter his perspective again and listen intently to the anxious voices of religiously observant Jews who were on the defensive. Just when *A Peep into the Synagogue* was printed, an anguished cry arose. Those rebelling against the religious tradition were so self-confident that they publicly mocked the religious Jews: "They point their fingers at the God-fearing men who follow in the paths of their forefathers, saying: look at that fool, he lacks all human intelligence, for he belongs to the old world."³⁴ This testimony is contained in another anonymous small book printed in London in 1789, whose title powerfully expresses the sense of a

topsy-turvy world: *Olam hadash: Zeh hakontres nikra olam hadash venikra olam hafukh al shem ma'asei hahadashim vehafukhim hanimtsa'im venire'im bizemaneinu* (New world: This booklet, called a “new world” and an “overturned world,” based on the deeds of the new and overturned people who are common in our time). The writer’s identity never became known, but he apparently belonged to the lower middle class and had a religious education, although he was not a member of the rabbinical elite. His business affairs brought him into many homes, where he witnessed declining religious practices and heard growing criticism of religion: “From morning to evening, I must move through the streets and the markets and into the homes of people who hold different opinions . . . and each and every day they speak to me, uttering invective and laughter at the customs of our religion. This in addition to what is clear to the eye, the baseness of their behavior and the wickedness of their deeds.”³⁵

He was filled with a sense of danger in view of the rising power of that group: “The heretics and apostates and the new hypocrites who have recently made their appearance, unforeseen by our forefathers, called by all a new world. They strive to destroy us and to abolish our holy, pure Torah, both the written and the oral, in a number of ways.”³⁶

What did this man who, at the end of the eighteenth century, wandered through the streets of the city and entered the inner rooms of Jewish London see and hear? First, like many others, he saw the patterns of fashionable life: “Each day, the fashion in clothing and in hairstyles of men and women change, and even their tongues change, for the Jewish language is a great embarrassment to them. Only the language of the Gentiles befits them, sometimes French, which is the finest, or, at other times, high German.”³⁷ The urban social code alters the norms of modesty, and men and women rub shoulders more frequently than ever before. A woman who does not desire that contact encounters social pressure: “And now, to our great sorrow, men and women mix together in dances and at comedies, and in public reach out to touch one another with love and affection without the slightest sign of shame. . . . And the modest women who do not behave in such a manner are thought of as stupid cows, and their friends rebuke them, saying, ‘Until when will you refuse to leave aside your foolish ways? For in this manner, you have shunned love and friendship.’”³⁸

No man or woman wants to be labeled as belonging to the old world, outside of the accepted fashions and manners of the society. Attendance at the synagogue was becoming less and less frequent, and religious practices, such as the laying of phylacteries, was a source of embarrassment:

Those from the new world, the heretics and apostates, lie asleep on their beds until the time of the morning prayer has passed. And after such a man has arisen from his bed,

he does not hasten to do the work of the Lord, but only after seeing to the needs of his home and partaking of other pleasures. Then he lays phylacteries to keep up appearances before the members of his household. And he takes care not to leave the phylacteries on too long, for fear they might leave a mark on his forehead. Or that someone from his crowd might come and find him wearing the phylacteries, and that would cause him great shame.

A plethora of skeptical arguments and defiant slogans from the deist repertoire also reached the author's ears. He heard deists such as the author of *A Peep into the Synagogue* who "refrain from attending the synagogue, saying they cannot tolerate our custom, which was that of our forefathers, for it is a ridiculous custom."³⁹ He listened to them speaking in the street and in the synagogue, uttering harsh anticlerical statements and showing their disrespect for the Sages all the way back to Moses: "And they scoff at the words of the Sages, saying all they do is for their own honor, and even scorn the prophets and the ancient Sages whose wisdom and knowledge came from the Almighty." The skeptics say that "the Sages were merely human beings like us, and if Moses was living among us today, he would not be considered so wise."⁴⁰ Others claimed that Moses was a legislator in his own right and not an emissary of God: "Another false and rebellious sect denies the Torah by stating that Moses, of blessed name, was a legislator who invented a religion like those kings and scholars who invented religions and composed constitutions based on the custom of their states."⁴¹ Members of this sect are, in his view, seeking the defeat of the God-fearing Jews so that they can disprove divine providence: "They say there is no law, nor any judge; God has left the earth and does not oversee it. Evidence of this is that he has even abandoned those who are following God's commandments, for several evil things have happened to them, and there is no one to save them."⁴² Other Jewish deists whom he exposed ridiculed the halakhah:

They do not lay phylacteries, saying it is a mere restrictive measure of the Sages . . . and they deny any personal divine providence and say God's will is only that we ought not to do harm to any man either in negotiations or in any other affairs, and we may eat and drink whatever we desire, meat and milk and nonkosher food, for in doing so, we do not offend the Almighty. They scoff at the Sages in regard to the fasts and the leavened food [that you must stop eating] six hours before the eve of Passover, saying what will the Almighty, blessed be his name, gain or lose if we do or do not do all these things.⁴³

The author of "New World" regarded himself as the spokesman of the silent group known as the "old world"—"those who have complete, innocent faith in the Almighty and rely on what they have received from their forefathers and believe in the Torah of Moses and in the words of the Sages."⁴⁴ His

tone was militant: "It is because of the conflagration burning in my heart and reaching to the heights of heaven, that I have done all of this," and he declared war against the epicureans in order to "do the Lord's vengeance." He did not, however, believe it was possible to turn back the wheel of time. The most he could do was to point to the boundaries being drawn between the camps and to suggest to traditional Jews that they not be swept up by fashion. He strongly objected to religious skepticism and advocated the prohibition of all philosophical inquiry. He tried to reply to the claims put forward by the deists against religious faith. To console those who shared his views, he spread throughout his new world voices of lament and supplication: "Upon what we hear, our souls grieve, the Lord, may his name be blessed, will take pity upon us . . . and take revenge upon our enemies who rise up against us with all manner of ruses and deceits to remove from us the yoke of the Torah and the commandments, which protect us in all our troubles."⁴⁵ To those who heeded his words, he suggested that they avoid the company of epicureans, listen to the guidance of the rabbis, and await salvation from the heavens.⁴⁶

Although the immediate background of "New World," a pamphlet of fourteen dense pages, was London at the end of the 1780s, it seems to have contained testimonies about events in various places in the Jewish world. Indeed, "New World" is a unique, valuable historical source that can acquaint the historian with trends of secularization from the contemporary vantage point of religiously observant Jews. It also provides the reader a glimpse into the confusion and emotions that engulfed the camp that felt itself to be under serious threat. For the rabbinical elite and the social group that supported it, the new world was not only one in which the old order had been so greatly altered that it had become an upside-down world. It was also an aggressive world that jeeringly relegated the old world to the margins. In London, similar to what we have seen in Berlin, the split between the Jews of the old world and those of the new world seemed to these two groups to be a firmly established social and cultural reality.

How to Reply to an Epicurean: Fears of Conservatives from Virginia to Lithuania

Once again, the religiously traditional Jews raised the alarm. Their agitated voices, which came from different parts of the Jewish world between England and Lithuania, from old, established communities such as Prague, to new, smaller ones such as Copenhagen, gave powerful expression to the deep concerns aroused by secularization. Even immigrants to the new world of America expressed their fears that religious faith and obligations might become greatly

eroded. In Altona-Hamburg, Rabbi Raphael Kohen continued to defend the right of the rabbinical leadership to impose its authority on deists and the religiously lax like Netanel Posner.

Meanwhile, Rivka Samuel, wife of the gifted watchmaker Heiman Samuel from Petersburg, Virginia, sent cries of distress to her parents in her home community of Hamburg. In her Yiddish letters, she wrote that while she and her young family wished to continue living according to religious tradition, many of the Ashkenazic and Sephardic immigrants who had arrived in America from Europe were becoming deeply acculturated. In a country that offered far better economic opportunities than those in Europe, in a climate of religious freedom and cosmopolitanism, and in the absence of a stable, organized community and rabbinical authority, religious practices were being neglected: "Anyone can do what he wants. There is no rabbi in all of America to excommunicate anyone." Rivka Samuel complained to her parents that "Jewish stores were open on the Sabbath, prayer services were not held, the ritual slaughterer bought nonkosher meat in the market, and, in general, there is no *Yiddishkeit* [Jewishness] in Petersburg. We are leaving for Charleston in South Carolina so that we can live in a larger Jewish community where there is a synagogue and traditional Jews," she wrote in her last extant letter.⁴⁷

A similar concern about the preservation of religion in North America was voiced in a 1783 letter sent by the successful businessman Hayim Solomon from Philadelphia to a relative: "The nature of this country is little Jewishness."⁴⁸

Two years later, the observant Jews of Philadelphia complained to the Ashkenazic rabbi of Amsterdam that "the profligacy of the generation is very widespread" and that they are helpless, unable to enforce religious discipline.⁴⁹ As Jonathan Sarna wrote in his study on the history of the Jewish religion in America, "the challenge of freedom" undermined the religious world of many of the immigrants from Europe to the new world, and in the last decades of the eighteenth century, a wide spectrum of commitment to the tradition existed. This spectrum ranged from men and women like Rivka and Heiman Samuel, who wished to strictly preserve the tradition that they brought with them from Europe, to those who abandoned the commandments or married Gentiles but did not give up their right to occasionally attend the synagogue or maintain their secular Jewish identity without being committed to the dictates of the religion.⁵⁰

Jacob Marcus, historian of American Jewry, noted that in the absence of established institutions such as a rabbinate and yeshivot, when religious practice was waning and religious supervision was less feasible, Jewish immigrants acculturated rapidly. In Hayim Solomon's generation, religious laxity was bolstered by the deist worldview acquired mainly through the reading of books

written by English deists.⁵¹ *Truth and Faith*, by Joshua Hezkiah DeCordova, a Sephardic rabbi and an Amsterdam native who lived and worked in the British colony of Jamaica, was first printed in 1788 in Kingston, capital of Jamaica, and three years later in Philadelphia. It contains a sharp counterreaction to the spread of deist views in the new world.⁵² The urgent problem that the book dealt with was the fact that so many young Jews were falling into the trap of “modern Philosophers who destroy all principles of faith and virtue,” such as David Hume, Anthony Collins, Matthew Tindal, and, worst of all, Voltaire. Rabbi DeCordova had acquired a broad, up-to-date education in philosophy and science, which he took advantage of to denounce what he termed “philosophical absurdities”—the abject and unconvincing attempt to legitimize heresy. “A philosopher now-a-days is he who declares that a man ought to believe nothing but what he sees . . . who denies providence and laughs at faith and revelation.”⁵³

Under the epigram “How to Reply to an Epicurean,” which appeared in Hebrew on the front page, and with the pen name “One of the Sons of Abraham,” Rabbi DeCordova wrote an anti-deist theological book that was remarkable in its time. In it, he challenged each of the deist arguments. He rejected their denial of providence, defended the obligation to observe the commandments as an instrument through which the Jewish people had preserved its existence throughout the generations, replied to Voltaire’s claims that ancient Judaism was barbaric by nature, and attempted to refute other rationalist philosophers’ disbelief in miracles. In a long series of polemical arguments, the rabbi from Jamaica tried to prove the fundamental truths of religious faith, to persuade his readers to believe in the existence of God and his providence, his revelation to the Jews and the immortality of the soul, and, especially, to fully observe the commandments.

Like the anonymous London author of “New World,” the Sephardic *hakhm*, an inhabitant of the new world, was particularly concerned about the exposure of youth to the fashionable “philosophical absurdities.” It was his attempt to save a young man of his acquaintance from becoming a devotee of this fashion that moved him to write his book of polemics and apologetics. In many communities in Western and Central Europe, as well as in America, religious faith and the observance of religious practices were no longer self-evident, and the concern about the education of children in the Jewish faith and the observance of the commandments was greatly heightened. In another part of the Jewish world, the educator and scholar Eliakim Zoldin, from the Copenhagen community, expressed his anxiety: “Now to our great sorrow, Torah has nearly been forgotten among the Jews, every man turns his attention to the affairs of the day, and to life in the next world, there is neither voice nor any answer. Faith is lacking, and the lovers of morality and the guardians

of the Torah are growing fewer day by day.” In 1787, in an effort to combat this erosion of religion, he published a catechism, a book of the articles of faith, intended for young people to refute the arguments of heresy: “In all parts of the world, there are some men who deny his existence and say that the world came into being by chance.” Zoldin suggested that students memorize coherent answers that for him verified the existence of God, his creation of the world *ex nihilo*, the divine origin of the Torah, and the obligation to observe the commandments. The title of his work, *Shomer emunim lehinukh habanim* (Faithful to the [traditional] education of the children), reflected Zoldin’s defensive stance, and he viewed himself as a guardian of religion, struggling against the current.⁵⁴

In a sample letter contained in a letter-writing manual printed in 1789 in Frankfurt an der Oder, there was an echo of the anxiety of those fathers whose sons were sent to the big city, apparently to study at the university, where they joined “young men who abandoned all fear of God.” I have heard rumors, the father wrote, “that you have cast off the burden of Torah . . . that you have followed in the path of young men who pursue women and play with dice, who deny the existence of God and waste their strength on strangers.”⁵⁵ A tense intergenerational situation was depicted by a founder of the Haskalah movement, Isaac Euchel, in his *Igerot meshulam* (Letters of Meshulam), which was published at the end of the 1780s in *Hame’asef*, the periodical he edited in Berlin.⁵⁶ The fictitious Meshulam goes on a journey in the big world and moves far from the traditional community. His father had guided him in the direction of natural religion by telling him that in worshiping God, the intention is more important than the ritual act of the commandments, but his grandfather was worried about his grandson’s exposure to secular life. He sends him on his way with a series of recommendations to reinforce his faith and religious practice:

First and foremost, fear God, and may all of your actions be for his sake. Rise each morning to pray, and afterward divide your time into three—a third for the Bible, a third for the Mishnah, and a third for the Talmud. . . . Be strict about washing your hands, for a man who eats without washing his hands is likened to a man who comes to a whore. . . . Keep the Sabbath holy and speak no idle talk during it. . . . Fast at least once a month, for the abstinence from food and drink drain the strength of the evil instinct and weaken material passions.⁵⁷

Euchel, an astute observer of the family changes in the urban Jewish communities of Central Europe, was aggrieved by the young people who were undergoing modern acculturation beyond the boundaries of the Jewish group. For his protagonist Meshulam, he chose a series of improved alternatives that look favorably upon religious tradition: belief in a merciful God who does not

threaten and frighten, piety that combines humanism, moral virtues, and flexibility in the commitment to customs and commandments. Although Euchel mocks the world of the grandfather in his book, he is careful not to recommend religious skepticism. In one of his first publications, Euchel tried to provide the “new Jew” with tools that would enable him to cope with religious criticism. He pointed to those “wicked men,” the deists who question “the fundamentals of faith, such as the divine source of the Torah, the division of the Red Sea, the manna that fell from the heavens, and the like,” and considered what the best ways were to contradict them. He believed that knowledge of history was essential in that struggle for religious faith: “So you may know how to reply to the epicurean, for to triumph over him, words of faith only will not do; he will ask for evidence and proofs.”⁵⁸ The revolution in education that the maskilim proposed in the 1780s stemmed largely from the sense of intergenerational tension, the crisis of traditional education, and the threat of the skeptical worldview. The maskilim tried to carve out a place between the “old world” and its values and the sweeping rebellion against God and traditional religion among the young people of the “new world.” As an alternative, they suggested a revival of Jewish culture and the comprehensive modernization of Jewish education, to be carried out by the new elite of maskilim.

Naphtali Herz Wessely, a key figure in shaping the new educational ideals of the Haskalah, was among those concerned educators who saw how young people were slipping outside the boundaries of religious tradition. In his unpublished draft of *Divrei shalom ve’emet*, in which he suggested a fundamental change in the structure and content of Jewish education, Wessely defended Mendelssohn’s translation of the Torah into German. That recently published translation had aroused the suspicions of the rabbinical elite, but Wessely believed that it was a means of preventing the abandonment of religion: “For through this translation, there will be a high wall around the young men, so they will not strike out against the Torah of God when they grow up.”⁵⁹ Wessely depicted the Haskalah’s educational project as one that would save the day rather than undermine tradition. The Torah in the German language and under the aegis of the eminent philosopher Moses Mendelssohn would take on new appeal and would stem the criticism and derision provoked by religious skepticism. “To our great sorrow,” Wessely went on to say, “many Jewish children, after having completed their studies of the Torah and the Talmud, and going out into the world, see nothing pleasing or fine in the words of the Torah, since their teachers translated the foreign parts into a ridiculous tongue [Yiddish], and moreover since they did not hear from those teachers an explanation of the real meaning of the text, they had no joy from it.”⁶⁰ In the existing situation, after these young men complete their religious studies and go out into the world to earn their livelihood, they join the company of

men “who have forgotten God and read to them from books of fools and rebels written in a high-flown language, so that they admire the clarity of the language and the beauty of its arrangement. They are taken in by these words, for based on the lucidity of the language they have judged the integrity of its contents.”⁶¹

Wessely consistently identified secularization as a major challenge for his generation and the Haskalah project as a defensive strategy against “those who have forgotten God.” He had warned against religious skepticism in the 1760s; in the 1780s, when the Haskalah movement became established, he demanded that its initiators, a whole generation younger than he, impose restrictions on themselves to avoid being swept up by religious skepticism.⁶² In his works in the 1780s, Wessely adopted the position of a moderate rationalist and cautioned against the radical Enlightenment, which took reason to the extreme of heresy.⁶³ The revival of the Hebrew language, rationalization of the curriculum, and the expropriation of education from traditional teachers and its transfer to teachers with pedagogical training—all these would provide a suitable response to the crisis of secularization among the youth. However, that was not how the rabbinical elite understood the maskilic challenge. It was so threatened by the rampant and irrepressible heresy that it was incapable of approaching these issues rationally. It is no wonder that the counterreaction of rabbis such as Ezekiel Landau of Prague and David Tevele of Lissa was, as we have seen, so ironic and so offensive toward Wessely—accusing him of trying, like the deists, to undermine the foundations of the Jewish religion.

The attempt to respond to secularization by introducing educational reforms was relatively rare; the louder voices were those of the rabbis and preachers who expressed their protest, denunciation, pain, and hostility. When Shimon ben Ya’akov Abraham from Copenhagen, then a resident of the Bonn community, presented his testimony as a Jew who had survived the disastrous flood along the Rhine in the spring of 1784, he took the opportunity to vent his anxiety in face of the rising strength of the “heretics and epicureans.” He urged the “believers and sons of believers” to heed his words and, as far as possible, to avoid contact with those deists. He told about a man known to him and apparently to his readers as well, whose identity he only hinted at, “who came forth to oust divine providence and . . . who wishes to cast off the burden of the Oral Law,” and attempts to persuade others to accept his views. “Be strong and have faith in your holy fathers. . . . Do not heed the words of the apostates,” Shimon ben Ya’akov urged his readers. His advice to them would from then on become a worldview and a widely used strategy among those faithful to the tradition: reinforcement of the walls around the group hiding it from secularization, on the one hand, and faith that suppresses criticism and skepticism, on the other.⁶⁴

The communities of Altona and Prague were major centers of protest against the epicureans. In Altona, Rabbi Raphael Kohen went on the defensive in face of the attack initiated by Saul Levin, the deist son of the rabbi of the Berlin community, who challenged Kohen's reputation as a talmudic scholar. Several leaders of the rabbinical elite in Central, Western, and Eastern Europe were asked to state their opinions of Kohen's scholarship based on his book *Torat yekutiel* and to acknowledge that Levin's criticism was justified.⁶⁵ These rabbis realized that this was a threat to the rabbinical elite as a whole.

Saul Levin's provocative book *Mitspeh yokte'el* and its author were banned in 1789. A special pamphlet denounced Levin, who, it stated, intended "to destroy the wall of the Torah and show contempt for the honor of the heavens and of the talmudic scholars." A handbill was distributed calling for a ban on all books of the subversive printing house in Berlin that was offending the rabbis. Rabbi Tevele of Lissa even ordered that *Mitspeh yokte'el* be burned, since it had dared cast doubt on the eminence and scholarship of a leading member of the rabbinical elite.⁶⁶

An anonymous letter of protest printed in Altona denounced Saul Levin as the demonic embodiment of the epicurean. Not only had he dared level criticism at the rabbinical elite but had "mixed the holy and the profane" and made use of "philosophical" arguments in relation to matters of Torah and halakhah. The gap between the scientists and the talmudists cannot be bridged because the Torah is not "of nature but of tradition," and a rationalist approach to it is heresy. The anonymous scholar called upon his coreligionists, "the heirs of true religion," to "be strong for the sake of the religion of the holy Torah in order to close the breach opened by that evil man through his deeds."⁶⁷

Rabbi Ezekiel Landau of Prague, who, two decades before the anonymous author wrote his "New World" in London, had identified the signs of an "overtured world," warned again that deists were emerging among the Jews of Europe: "I have seen an upside-down world, there are Jews who deny the existence of God, and in our generation there is a burgeoning number of epicureans who believe in nature and deny providence."⁶⁸ When Landau attacked Wessely in spring 1782, he included him among them: "Now, to our great sorrow, I have seen an upside-down world . . . and now one of our people has arisen, a wicked man who has dared to say that the Torah is worth nothing, and a carcass is better than learners of Torah."⁶⁹ But Landau was lifting his gaze far beyond the case of Wessely and the maskilim's program to reform Jewish education. He was grappling with a pressing problem: How would the rabbinical elite guide its flock from then on, and how would it prevent further erosion of the religion? Landau did not choose to engage in a polemic but rather to fortify faith and separatism. "We are not permitted to inquire into

the reasons for the commandments,” Landau proclaimed in the Prague synagogue, but to observe every letter of the law. If someone interprets the faith according to reason, his faith is flawed. In our time, the rabbi warned members of his congregation, the whole world is full of deists: “There are Jews, or men from other nations, who deny personal providence over all the ways of men and who do not believe in the giving of the Torah or in miracles and wonders, but rather in Nature, and say that the source of religion is not the Creator.” The only solution is to reinforce the barriers between those faithful to religious tradition and those who criticize it, and to strengthen the self-confidence of believers who are the objects of the scorn and derision of the “sect of epicureans”: “And if this sect mock us, we care not and will walk in the path of the Almighty.” Alarmed by the deist threat, Landau found it fit to reiterate the articles of faith to his listeners and to mark the red line that the heretic was crossing:

The main principle in faith is the belief in the Creator, who created everything according to his will; he watches over us constantly and rewards those who do his will, punishes those who transgress, and oversees everything we do, and it is he who gave us the Torah in the presence of all the children of Israel and commanded Moses orally, and from Moses it was handed down until it reached the Sages of the Mishnah and the Talmud. . . . And he who doubts a single one of the laws of the Torah set forth in the Talmud is a heretic who denies the Torah of Moses.⁷⁰

In the 1780s, Rabbi Eleazar Fleckeles (1754–1826), an admiring student of Ezekiel Landau in Prague and his successor, entrenched himself in fundamentalist faith. As Jacob Katz showed, Fleckeles was an outstanding member of the rabbinical elite who were brought to the verge of despair by the “new sins,” the laxity, and the defiance of the rabbis’ authority.⁷¹ Fleckeles’ rhetoric in his sermons against the epicureans was even sharper than that of his predecessors. While Landau delivered his sermons orally or in letters, Fleckeles published his in a lengthy, two-part book, *Olat hodesh*, printed in Prague in 1785–87. He was then only in his thirties but already committed to the rabbinical elite.⁷² In his sermons, he extolled the basic values of this elite—the major aim is to study halakhah, to teach halakhah, to maintain yeshivot, and to preach to the public. His belief that “we were created only for the Torah, for it is our lives” left no room for knowledge outside the boundaries of Judaism.⁷³

In a 1783 sermon in a Prague synagogue several days before Rosh Hashanah, Fleckeles depicted a gloomy picture of the annual “balance sheet” of religious observance. The future economic considerations of young people were causing their parents to remove them from the settings of Torah study so that they could learn a trade or profession.⁷⁴ Sexual permissiveness was again leading to an increase in the number of children born out of wedlock.⁷⁵ The reper-

toire of offenses was lengthy: “We have committed many transgressions against the Almighty, by eating forbidden food, desecrating the Sabbath, consorting with prostitutes, cutting off sidelocks, drinking the wine of Gentiles, and others.” But what he found particularly astonishing was the fact that the Jews of the “new world” were gaining the upper hand. Not only in the nascent community of immigrants in London, but even in an old, well-established community like Prague, those Jews who desired to preserve the tradition and to reject modern acculturation were becoming an object of derision: “Now in this sorry turn of the wheel, there is something new, never seen before. . . . How audacious this generation has become. . . . They all have cut off their sidelocks, not a hint of a beard, nor any sign that they are Jews. . . . The name of Israel is a laughingstock to them. . . . Anyone who grows a beard and does not shave his sidelocks, wears the clothing of a Jew and does not spend his time in the company of bawdy fools and is no lecher . . . they will treat him with contempt and disgrace.”⁷⁶

In 1784, Fleckeles stood again before the members of his community to speak out against the secular trend in Europe—the desire to enjoy the pleasures and entertainments that life had to offer. He denounced the pleasures of the world because he thought that they were contrary to religious norms and because they weaken the fitting distinction between Jew and non-Jew; moreover, they blur the sense of exile: “You teach your sons and daughters the skill of dancing as the Gentiles around you do, while this is a time for mourning, not a time for dance. But despite the long exile, they go to the theaters to rejoice like the non-Jews.”⁷⁷ Fleckeles, who supervised the religious practices of his community, was disturbed mainly by the laxity in everyday life but, like other rabbis, was acquainted with the deist worldview and blamed it for spreading religious laxity. Rabbi Zevi Hirsch Levin of Berlin kept him informed of details surrounding the fashionable heresy:

In the opinion of the epicureans, may their names be blotted out, it is beneath God’s dignity to watch over the earth. . . . While the earth is gloomy, and the people walk in the darkness in the shadow of death, his glory is over the heavens, and the earth was given to men, and each man will do what is right in his eyes. . . . Hence they have turned their backs on faithful worship, and they cut themselves off from the Torah and the commandments, for in their misguided view, he does not see them or their homes. [They say that] God has left the earth and those inhabiting it and has given his glory unto the heavens.⁷⁸

In his 1785 sermon for the Sabbath of Repentance, once again Fleckeles lamented the vilification of the rabbinical elite and addressed how the new epicureans differed from the old-type religious offenders. Until then, even the sinners believed in the Torah and were God-fearing, but they succumbed to

their base drives and transgressed. But today, he said, the sin is the outcome of a critical worldview and revulsion toward the rabbis. The deist threat was unprecedented, and the insult to the rabbis was biting:

For those who violated the commandments of the Almighty and the decrees of his Sages and prophets did not do so because they held his words in contempt, distrusted his Sages, or scoffed at his prophets. . . . It was the passion that burned in them and their desires that overwhelmed them each day like a fountainhead. . . . But in our time, the epicureans have grown in number, and wicked men have greatly increased in strength and fill the land, and the stormy waters cover all from sea to sea. . . . For those have denied God, loath his righteous words, and despise his virtuous laws. And the Sages of the Torah are fools in their eyes, and they mock them. To them, the customs of Israel are a disgrace, objects of scorn and derision. Woe to their souls and spirits, for they are the destroyers of the world and all that is in it.⁷⁹

In Fleckeles' rhetoric of demonization, the new world was not only a deceitful world but one on the verge of destruction, and the new epicureans were those who were destroying it. In the 1780s, rumors about this historical development crossed borders and reached the centers of the large Jewish concentration in Poland-Lithuania at the very time when a struggle was being waged between the two competing religious groups: the Mitnagdim and the Hasidim. The anti-Hasidic rhetoric included an accusation of epicureanism, since this movement was suspect of being an offshoot of Sabbatean heresy, a suspicion fueled by news arriving from Central Europe about the "new philosophers." Thus, the collection of anti-Hasidic texts written and edited at the end of the 1780s by the Polish rabbi David of Makov claims that, by professing to possess the sole truth, the Hasidim are behaving "like the philosophers who say their path is better than the path of the Torah and the tradition of the Sages, and incite people by saying our way is unquestionably the best, for it is based on the conclusions of reason and science."⁸⁰ In his view, the Hasidim were apparently only one of many camps that were rising up against the Torah.

We cannot be certain that there was any truth in the rumors coming from Berlin that the Gaon of Vilna, the uncrowned leader of the Mitnagdim, ordered that Wessely's *Divrei shalom ve'emet* be burned, but there is no doubt that some Jews in Lithuania and White Russia were aware of the emergence of the maskilic elite.⁸¹ One of the early and most interesting counterreactions was the publication of the book *Keter torah*, by the *maggid* Phinehas of Polotsk, a disciple of the Vilna Gaon.⁸² This book, printed in Shklov in 1788, sets forth the myriad threats to the rabbinical elite of the Lithuanian learners of Torah from the vantage point of those who fear that the houses of study will empty out in favor of the ecstatic religious groups of the Hasidim. It was also one more protest in the campaign against Hasidism and heresy. The *maggid* from

Polotsk's censure of external knowledge and rationalism was unwavering and unambiguous. He mobilized all his preaching skills to demonstrate the grave danger of exposure to European culture: "This scourge has spread throughout our people, and the glory of our Torah has been lost. . . . Our forefathers never foresaw that our people would spawn such depraved men. Epicureanism has multiplied in our times; woe to us, for we have sinned." Rationalist thought was threatening to break down religious faith and put a wedge between "the holy Torah and its commandments," and the challenge facing the rabbinical elite was to abolish its power to seduce the Jews.⁸³

The rabbis were not the only ones to recognize the threat to religion. In the 1760s, Judah Hurwitz, a physician and early maskil from Vilna, suggested that learned men like himself take positions of leadership to help cope with the broad array of challenges to the religion. These included religious fanaticism, the bad influence of the kabbalah, and the danger of philosophical criticism. In the 1780s, he began to think differently. Even earlier, he had been aware of the crisis in religion and had set the plot of his 1766 book *Amudei beit yehudah* in the era in which "epicureanism and apostasy are rampant." But twenty years later, he joined the camp of the guardians of the religion and mobilized all his skills, scientific knowledge, and rationalistic convictions to refute the views of the epicureans. Soon after the publication of Phinehas of Polotsk's *Keter torah*, Hurwitz wrote a polemic work against the deists who denied divine providence and the immortality of the soul. Man, he argued, is not like a clock or an automatic music box moved by cogs and strings, but a creature with free choice. It is also unthinkable, he explained to his readers, using an argument similar to Mendelssohn's in *Phädon*, that God created man as a creature of intelligence and reason only to torment him cruelly, just as it is unthinkable that an artist would burn his paintings for no reason. The Lithuanian physician, who regarded himself as a "God-seeking maskil," appealed to his readers' intelligence. He tried to impart to them the insight that heresy actually stems from ignorance and a tendency toward sin: "The rebellious scoundrel" who denies the immortality of the soul is a "despicable fool who wants to cast off the burden of the religious laws at first and then the commandments and good deeds he is obligated to perform by virtue of his humanity."⁸⁴ For him, anyone adopting the deist worldview was closing his heart and his mind to logic and to his humanist tendency.

Naphtali Herz Wessely did not find this strategy in the defense of religion acceptable. In the 1760s, he and Judah Hurwitz belonged to the same circle of early maskilim in Amsterdam, whose members considered themselves rational scholars and promoted science and philosophy; but toward the end of the 1780s, Wessely chose to join the camp of the "believers." In *Sefer hamidot* (The book of ethics), which was published in Berlin in 1786, he coined a new, origi-

nal description of this group, which from then on turned those who loved God and his commandments into a defined sector in Jewish society and culture—“the congregation of believers” (*Kahal hamaminim*). In opposition to the “sect of epicureans” and in the face of the rise of religious skepticism, Wessely placed restrictions on the philosopher and warned him: “Take care, keep careful watch as you make your rational inquiries, and if you sense that you have gone too far beyond your understanding, take a step back, gain strength through the Almighty and his holy word.”⁸⁵

In several chapters of *Sefer hamidot*, he provided guidelines and detailed advice on how to avoid skepticism. The technique was not particularly complicated: as long as his reason is in keeping with fear of God, the believer is permitted to allow it to guide him, but when doubts begin to crop up and criticism of religion begins to emerge and reason cannot reconcile them, that is the time to impede reason and to remember that the source of faith lies in divine prophecy. Sin, in his view, is a result of man’s emotions and not of his reason that raises skeptical questions. The unemotional rationalist proofs that philosophy provides to reinforce faith cannot gain control over a mind that craves a faith that brings “pleasure to the heart” and joy. The most brilliant philosophical retort cannot prevent sin; only faith engraved on the soul can prevent the believer (whom he calls “man of faith”) from joining the heretics’ rebellion. Even if he should lapse and commit a sin, he will at once have feelings of repentance and shame. In contrast, if doubt should enter his mind, and in his heart he does not find faith to counter that doubt, there will be no obstacle before heresy. In this early critique of the Enlightenment’s trust in reason, Wessely stated the position of the counter-Enlightenment, which rejected the judgment of reason and craved a religious experience that overflows the heart: “The proofs that the scholars of all nations have devised in every generation to demonstrate the existence of the Almighty, his oneness and his providence over his creatures, are proofs based on the art of logic, which the philosophers praise in their books, and their followers believe only that they possess wisdom, and the congregation of believers have no part in it, but this way of thinking is nothing but an illusion.”⁸⁶

In 1786, in one of the first books printed in Berlin in the printing house of the maskilim (*Die orientalische Buchdruckerei*), Wessely presaged the shift from the rationalism of the Enlightenment to early Romanticism and joined the thinkers of the counter-Enlightenment who rejected the ideas of natural religion.⁸⁷ Mendelssohn, we will recall, observed these thinkers (Hamann, Jacobi, and others) with reservations. He believed in natural religion based on reason and was apprehensive about the outburst of romantic religiosity based on emotion and on blind faith that was hostile to skepticism and criticism. But when Wessely’s book appeared, Mendelssohn was no longer among the

living and could not see that his friend had embraced the positions of his Christian enemies. Ironically, it was Wessely, the intellectual who engendered the Haskalah's revolution in education and stirred up the Kulturkampf in the early 1780s, who at the end of the decade proposed the orthodox strategy of the "congregation of believers," united against the threats of secularization. Concerned about the wave of rebellion against God, Wessely reacted with anxiety to the challenges of the "new world" and suggested a doctrine that would protect the "man of faith" from the temptations of heresy.

PART IV

Anxieties and Confrontations,
1790–1800

Chapter 10

On the Decline of Judaism: The Last Decade

Two years after Wessely called for the formation of the congregation of believers, an extreme reaction set in against the Enlightenment in Prussia, then under a new king, Friedrich Wilhelm II, and legal measures were introduced to protect religion. In August 1788, the minister for religious affairs, Johann Christoph von Wöllner, issued an edict against religious and moral permissiveness, depravity, and deist heresy. It was no longer permissible, the spokesman for the Prussian government announced, to nurture deists under the flag of the Enlightenment, who deny the divine validity of the Holy Scriptures and challenge the existence of divine providence. “Christianity looks ridiculous everywhere in the land,” he stated, and the Protestant establishment should be purged of skeptics and defend the foundations of the monarchy and society. Wöllner, himself a member of Rosenkreuzer, a secret mystic order, introduced a rigid policy in his Berlin office. One of its features was the considerable expansion of the censorship laws in Prussia.¹ In 1794, he sent a warning in the name of the king to Immanuel Kant: “Our most high person has long observed with great displeasure how you misuse your philosophy to distort and disparage many of the cardinal and basic teachings of the Holy Scriptures and Christianity. . . . We demand that you apply your talents to the progressive realization of our paternal purposes. Failing this, you must expect unpleasant measures for your continuing obstinacy.”²

Only after the king’s death, his succession by Friedrich Wilhelm III, and the collapse of the supervisory system built by Wöllner was Kant able to openly tell anyone about this incident and speak out against “orthodoxy, which has no soul, and mysticism, which kills reason.”³

Between Linitz and London: Irreligion and the Mysteries of Religion

At the same time, toward the end of the 1790s, Dov Baer ben Shmuel from Linitz completed his work of compiling and editing “the writings,” which later were the basis for his hagiographical work *Shivhei habesht* (In praise of the Baal Shem Tov). Like many others of his generation, Dov Baer regarded the

weakness of religion as an urgent problem. During his lifetime, he witnessed the growing decline of “magic” in the world: “Since my adulthood and up to my old age, I have seen, to my sorrow, how each day miracles diminish and wonders are gone.”⁴

As a follower of the new kabbalist society characterized by religious ecstasy, he told how in his youth, people on the verge of death described their visions from the upper worlds, and how, with his own eyes, he had seen a woman inhabited by a dybbuk. But as the years passed, these mysterious phenomena disappeared, and, with them, faith was weakening. “Science,” in the form of academically trained physicians and the medicines they prescribed, had replaced the advice and amulets of the *tsadikim*, who were endowed with knowledge outside of science. Dov Baer was apprehensive about the triumph of reason and the loss of simple faith. His anthology of the writings about the wondrous deeds of the Baal Shem Tov served as a polemical tool with which he hoped to strengthen faith in those religious persons who were possessed of magic powers. He therefore wrote in his introduction: “In our generation there were righteous men who could foresee the future, and, in this way, faith in the Almighty and in the Torah was reinforced, and now the *tsadikim* are few in number. . . . Faith has greatly declined, and much heresy has been cast into the world.”⁵ With this in mind, he collected stories to show that magic medicine is superior to scientific medicine, and the miracle makers and their remedies and talismans are superior to physicians with diplomas from European universities.⁶ Dov Baer’s writings can be seen not only as an effort to preserve the image of the Baal Shem Tov in the religious consciousness of the Hasidism but also as a book offering counterarguments, written to grapple with the crisis in religion.

What gave Dov Baer of Linitz the impression that “faith has greatly declined, and much heresy has been cast into the world”? What information reached him at the time he was writing his introduction to the book about the Baal Shem Tov in the eastern lands of European Jewry, relatively far from the epicenters of secularization? Did he know something about the religious reaction led by Wöllner in Prussia? Did he hear about the unprecedented campaign of oppression of the Church in France during the Revolution or about the expulsion of Pope Pius VI from Rome in 1797? Perhaps he heard through the Jewish networks of communication about persecutions against the Jewish religion in the communities of Alsace during the Terror (1793–94), about the Jacobean prohibition against observance of the Sabbath and the festivals, kosher food, and even circumcision, about the closing down of yeshivot and synagogues? Did faint echoes of the controversy aroused in 1794 by *The Age of Reason* by the English deist Thomas Paine, with its public declaration of denial of all religions of revelation, reach his ears? Perhaps closer to home, he heard

about the rich timber merchant from Uman, Heikel Hurwitz, and his religious skepticism? Or perhaps he had an opportunity to look at the book *Sefer haberit* (1797), by Pinhas Hurwitz of Vilna, which contained much information about philosophical heresy in Europe and denounced the epicureans? He may even have heard that the *Freidenker* Jews of Berlin had become overly self-confident and that one of their spokesmen, Joseph Mendelssohn, had declared in 1792 that they numbered more than half of all the Jews of Prussia.⁷

All these are only assumptions, but Dov Baer of Linitz lived in a particularly turbulent era. The reverberations of the French Revolution that set off a series of wars and mounted a spectacle of terror and bloodshed shook all of Europe. Although secularization was making progress, no one had dreamed of the earthquake caused by the Revolution in the drastic measures that it took against the Church. Not only did it proclaim freedom of religion; it also introduced a policy of release from religion—the Church's property was confiscated, and it was made subject to the authority of the state; monasteries and churches were dismantled, and priests fled for their lives. During the years of the Terror, deism became a policy rather than just a worldview of freethinkers. When the Revolution began to spread in Europe via the French army, some of these principles of state control of the Church and the clergy were also applied in other countries. Insofar as secularization was concerned, the revolution had two major implications: it considerably accelerated the trends hostile to religion and provided a model for any state desiring to be secular; and it aroused sharp counterreactions. Religious feelings began to revive among many whose faith had been dwindling; skepticism about reason became a Romantic philosophy that gained many supporters, and philosophers were accused of bearing the responsibility for the anarchy and bloodshed that the Revolution had caused in Europe. Fears of chaos and the ruin of all things sacred, on the one hand, and faith in the secular state, on the other, created an even sharper division between liberals and conservatives, and between the secular and the religious.⁸

This twofold effect of the Revolution on the process of secularization was evident in the dramatic changes undergone by Jews then living in France, mostly Ashkenazim from Alsace communities. In September 1791, secular principles adopted by the revolutionaries led to the enactment of the first law of emancipation in the world, which enabled Jews to become citizens of the state. But in light of the desire to create a civil state with uniform features, and due to the suspicion that religions were potentially subversive, the Jews were compelled to dismantle their autonomous communities. During their struggle against the Church, the revolutionaries also fought against the Jewish religion and its institutions. Nearly every aspect of religious life during the Reign of Terror was attacked, suppressed, and declared illegal or unpatriotic. In the

deist rhetoric of the revolutionaries, Moses and Jesus were dreamers, and priests and rabbis were dangerous to the state. When it was said about the Jews of Strasbourg, for example, that they adhered to the Talmud more than to the constitution, these words intimated that the Jews were guilty of treason against the secular state.⁹

The Revolution's war against religion was only one of the events that shook Europe at the end of the century. Dov Baer of Linitz would have been able to discern, in his immediate environment, the dramatic change that occurred after the last two partitions of Poland in 1793–95. Poland and Lithuania disappeared from the political map; overnight, hundreds of thousands of Jews became subjects of the absolutist states of Russia, Austria, and Prussia under a policy of a new kind of control and reform. Their autonomy, occupations, traditional education, and rabbinical leadership were all reexamined by the state administration that proposed or imposed frequent reforms that, among other results, weakened the rabbinate and introduced modern education.¹⁰

The Jews in the cities of Central and Western Europe continued to undergo modern acculturation, and the gap between the generations grew. Young Jewish men and women in London, Amsterdam, Vienna, and Berlin were consumers of European culture and developed a taste for a life of pleasure. To their parents' great distress, they also began to feel alienated from religious obligations and prohibitions. The Haskalah movement that emerged in the 1780s with the aim of reviving Jewish culture, fostering the Hebrew language, and encouraging modern education began to decline at the end of the century. It had become clear that it was not attracting young Jews, who did not need education to culturally convert from the old world to the new world, and whose aspirations lay outside the boundaries of the Jewish group. Several of the Haskalah's last adherents protested against what they called the "pseudo-Haskalah," which was understood as hedonism and religious and sexual permissiveness. They denounced the rabbis who did not know how to distinguish between maskilim and epicureans and blamed traditional education for the erosion of Jewish identity and hostility toward religion. Jews reared on a threatening, demanding religion abandoned it as soon as they reached adulthood. Mendel Breslau, an editor of *Hame'asef*, explained the mechanism through which Jews abandoned religion: "They understand that many of the things they heard when still little were based on nothing, and they grow angry at their teachers and cry woe is to us, for we have lost much time, and they say we have been misled. So everything they learned then they now detest. They throw it all behind their backs and no longer strive to differentiate good from bad, but believe that everyone has lied to them."¹¹

In contrast, maskilic criticism had only taken its first steps in Eastern

European Jewry. It primarily criticized the growing Hasidic movement, which was depicted as antithetical to the Enlightenment and an obstacle to the reform of Jewish society and its integration into the state. Those fearing the demise of faith may have taken note of the deist attack by the Jewish Polish physician Jacques Calmanson of Warsaw. In his 1796 pamphlet, Calmanson argued that bringing down Hasidism was a mandatory first step in suppressing the control of religion over Jewish life. Utilizing the repertoire of concepts and arguments with which deists in Europe attacked religion, Calmanson described Hasidism as a fanatical religious sect full of superstition that was poisoning the true Judaism, and whose tyrannical rabbis were misleading the ignorant masses and trying to control them.¹²

Dov Baer of Linitz waged a battle to preserve faith in the *tsadikim* and miracles. His compilation of the Baal Shem's stories was an orthodox defensive action in the hope that members of the Hasidic camp would unite against the decline of faith. From a historical perspective, it seems that Hasidism in Eastern Europe, as a successful movement of religious awakening, did raise a high dam to stave off the rising waves of secularization.¹³

The situation was totally different in other parts of Europe. If we skip to London, we can listen to the concerned voice of Eliakim ben Abraham (Jacob Hart, 1756–1814). While Dov Baer was editing “In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov,” Hart was printing his militant book *Milhamot hashem* (Wars of the Lord, 1794) to combat heresy. But the gap between the two men was as great as the distance between Ukraine and England. Dov Baer was immersed in the “old world” and the tales of miracles worked by *tsadikim* that aroused his religious sentiments. Jacob Hart was a man of the “new world,” whose enthusiasm was aroused by new innovations in science and cosmological theories such as Newton's theories of physics. Hart was a wealthy jeweler, active in the Ashkenazic community in England and an astute intellectual. As a believing Jew, he was pained by what he regarded as the exploitation of science and philosophy to spread epicurean ideas. As far as he was concerned, the culture of European Enlightenment was endangering faith in God, in revelation, providence, the divine Creation, and the credibility of the Bible.¹⁴ Gripped by anxiety, Hart joined the struggle: “My heart told me it was time to wage the war of the Lord, to grasp a two-edged sword. . . . We are obligated to take up the shield and buckler and fight for our true Torah.”¹⁵ In his own eyes, he was continuing the tradition of a Jewish polemic against the epicureans. The polemic of Maimonides, Judah Halevi, or Abravanel, however, was no longer suitable, since the methods of thought had, in his view, changed radically since Descartes and Newton. He castigated Descartes' atheistic followers (whom he called “a sect of wicked men called atheists who say that everything occurs by accident, not by the hand of God”), including Spinoza, Pierre Bayle, John

Locke, and Hobbes, and next to their names he wrote: “May the name of the wicked rot.” To argue against “another sect of epicureans called deists, who admit the existence of the Creator but deny prophecy,” he cited scientific proofs that, in his view, defended the articles of faith and substantiated the miracles described in the Bible.¹⁶ Some members of that sect were Hume, Bolingbroke, and, most dangerous of all, Voltaire.

For Hart, a great threat to religion lay in the atomistic theory of the universe (the world is composed of particles that drive nature without divine intervention) and in Newton’s mechanistic theory, which he held had been wrongly thought to be a view that made nature autonomous and self-directing. The epicureans based their central deist argument—“God left the earth to the coincidence of movements and forces”—on these scientific theories.¹⁷ He did not totally reject science but actually adopted quite a few of its conclusions, and with unconcealed enthusiasm acquainted the Hebrew reader with the latest innovations.

But for the Jewish believer of Hart’s type, what remained of all the magic and mystery in the world? It was not the miracles that reveal the awe-inspiring presence of God but rather the limitations of science, namely, recognition that God is inconceivable and remains a mystery. In his view, none of the best scientists had succeeded or would ever succeed in truly unraveling God’s secret or the secret of Creation. “Human intellect is incapable of achieving true faith other than with the help of God and prophecy,” Hart asserted, because the Creation is still within the realm of “God’s mysteries,” the realm of “God’s wondrous deeds” that are concealed from the eyes of men.¹⁸ Hart believed that science and philosophy would never be able to penetrate that realm, which is the great, defined corner of the believer—the sacred space that Hart called “faith without inquiry.” And what is it that leaves “awe of the exalted” in place even within the modern scientific context? Hart suggested that mystery could be found in nature, leaving a strong impression of the vast, wonderful power of the Creator, as it was uncovered by the scientists, “according to whom, the Creator, blessed be He, who does unfathomable, mighty deeds, shall be praised and exalted.”¹⁹

Milhamot hashem was written to counter Thomas Paine’s *Age of Reason*, which appeared in the same year, 1794: “Recently, I have seen a book written by Thomas Paine, and he begins with words of stupidity that he took from that Voltaire, who said that the Jewish people know nothing of their Torah except what they heard from the mouth of Moses.”²⁰ With these words, Hart exposed his particular concern. Deism was not only a challenge to believers in God and his constant intervention in the world but also a challenge to the self-respect of the Jews. The deists say about us, Hart wrote, that Moses learned the principles and commandments of the Jewish religion from the Egyptians

and that the Torah is not divine but was written by the lawmaker Moses.²¹ From this standpoint, *Milhamot hashem* was also an apologetic work by an offended English Jew attempting to defend the sullied honor of his religion and to provide his coreligionists with counterarguments.

Deism reached its peak and its definitive formulation in Paine's influential book, printed in Paris in 1794, at the height of the Terror. This English intellectual and revolutionary, who played an active role in the French Revolution and succeeded in arousing the colonists in North America in the 1770s to rebel against the British, regarded himself as continuing the campaign against all types of tyranny and believed that worst of all was the tyranny of religion. After political successes in America and France, the time had come, in his view, to rebel against religious dominance but also to raise a barrier against the danger posed by atheism. Paine declared that his aim was to keep the revolution from deteriorating into atheist and hedonist anarchy. But his deist work, which aroused an enormous furor, was not understood as a conservative book, and it even cost him a heavy personal price. After having gained renown among the patriots in America, he was ostracized there overnight and denounced as a heretic who blasphemed Christianity. His *Age of Reason* summed up well-known deist ideas about God, the monotheistic religions, revelation, and the Bible. But it was not a text for scholars only, and perhaps because it was so coherent and comprehensible, and owing to the author's reputation, no one remained indifferent to it. This is what Paine wrote in the opening pages:

I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life. I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy. . . . I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish Church, by the Roman Church, by the Greek Church, by the Turkish Church, by the Protestant Church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church. All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human invention, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.²²

Paine's criticism of the established religions and their clergy could not have been more explicit. The title he chose for his book painted the entire eighteenth century as a century of deism. Not much was left of the mystery of the Christian religion. The things that Paine wrote about the absurdity of the stories of the virgin birth or Jesus' ascent to the heavens, which contradict reason and are based on ancient rumors for which there is no real evidence, provoked angry reactions by believers in America and Europe.²³ The Jewish reader found in the book Paine's harsh criticism of the Bible's reliability, his diminution of Moses, and denial of the divine source of the Torah. When I read the Old

Testament, Paine wrote, I discover “a history of the grossest vices and a collection of the most paltry and contemptible tales, I cannot dishonor my Creator by calling it by His name.”²⁴

In 1797, David Levi (1740–1801), a Londoner, joined the apologetic campaign against the deists in general and Thomas Paine in particular. Levi was unquestionably the central figure in the circle of Jewish intellectuals in England at the end of the century. Levi, who began as a tradesman and became a book merchant and printer, wrote many books, translated the prayer book and Torah into English, and regarded himself as spokesman for Judaism vis-à-vis its critics.²⁵ David Ruderman wrote that Levi “rightfully deserves to be considered one of the earliest, if not the first, major ‘public Jewish intellectual’ in modern Europe who saw the larger community of Jewish and Christian readers as his primary target and essential constituency.”²⁶ In 1797, Levi published a book, on behalf of Jews faithful to the religious tradition, with the intent of refuting Paine’s criticism of the reliability of the Bible and the prophecies of redemption.²⁷ Like Hart, Levi had vast knowledge of European culture; he did not defend the Jewish religion from the vantage point of a student of Talmud but rather from the vibrant world of the scientific, literary, and philosophical culture of England. But unlike Hart, Levi wrote only in English and addressed mainly Jews in the financial world and others whose major language was English. For the first time since Isaac de Pinto inveighed against Voltaire’s deist views, a Jew responded directly in the public sphere to one of the outstanding deists of his time. Your book, Sir, Levi wrote, addressing Thomas Paine, is “one of the most violent and systematic attacks on the word of God that ever was made.”²⁸ I would not have expected that a man who played such an impressive role in world politics would write such invective. I do not know what motivated you, whether the pursuit of truth, the hope to gain fame or some ill intention, but if in a book defending the Old Testament, I can save even one person from the poison you are spreading, Levi wrote to Paine, that will be my reward.

Chapter after chapter, David Levi contended with the arguments of *The Age of Reason* and rejected the severe criticism of Judaism. “The modern philosophers, such as Voltaire . . . take pride in representing the Jews as an ignorant, stupid, and barbarous nation compared with the most polished nations of antiquity,” but how to understand that such an inferior nation produced such lofty doctrines and demonstrated such fine sentiments? Any comparison, after all, with other ancient peoples and their rituals will show who the civilized people were and who were barbarians. Everything in the Bible is the absolute truth, and the most militant deist cannot expect that his criticism will overthrow the Torah that the Jewish people have cherished for centuries.²⁹

Levi was concerned not only about the image of Judaism in the eyes of

European scholars, but even more about the growing number of Jews who were deists or religiously lax. The prophets, Levi argued, had foreseen “the great number of unbelievers that will then be in the nation; who laugh at the idea of future redemption, these the prophet call rebels and transgressors, for they willfully rebel against the word of God; not by committing idolatry, nor by apostatizing to Christianity; but by not believing in revelation and fighting the prophecies which speak of their future.”³⁰ In the picture that Levi depicted of London at the end of the 1790s, we can discern two groups of Jewish heretics: “The one, consisting of such, as call themselves philosophers; enlightened men, who live in the enlightened age of the eighteenth century. These are perfect Deists, not believing a syllable of Revelation. . . . They say if God spoke to the Prophets formerly, why should we not have prophets now? If God performed miracles then, why not perform miracles now? Is the hand of the Lord shortened?”³¹

While this group was fueled by the deism disseminated by the “leaders of the heretics,” Hume, Voltaire, and others, the second group, according to Levi, was composed of Jews indifferent to religion, who, either because of the length of the exile or their aspiration to live freely, had relinquished their hopes of redemption. The surprising aspect of Levi’s analysis of secularization among English Jews was that he employed the crisis in religion to prove the fulfillment of the biblical prophecies. Did not the prophets foresee that the abandonment of religion would precede the days of the Messiah? However, in the wake of this analysis, he revealed a complex dimension of Jewish secularization: There are “those of the nation that are deists and who consequently do not believe in revelation, as also those who are so indifferent about the truth of prophecy and who neither care for, nor desire, a restoration, and in consequence laugh at the idea of Messiah coming to redeem them, yet nevertheless adhere to the body of the nation and outwardly conform to the rites of the nation, they thus remain Jews, are denominated God’s people, the same as the true believers of the nation.”

In their physical existence, Levi asserted, they fulfill God’s covenant with his people: “They are still united to the body of the nation, they involuntarily remain within the pale of Judaism, for they have not the courage to secede from it. They are, as it were, withheld by some invisible power, they wish not to be shackled with the burden of the ceremonial Law because it lays them under such great restraints in the pursuit of pleasure; yet, have they not fortitude sufficient to renounce it entirely.”³²

Levi concluded his argument about this invisible power that preserves Jewish identity even among the unbelievers by asking the deists and modern philosophers whether there was any more forceful proof of the truth of the prophecies about the End of Days. The Jewish identity exists even in the time

of secularization, since “even those of the nation that have not the least grain of religion in them, would yet be highly offended at being called *goy*, a Christian or a Gentile, or a *meshumad*, an apostate.”³³

The conclusion that Levi drew was orthodox in nature: if the Jewish identity is not disappearing, those irreligious Jews should atone before it is too late. The redemption will surely come, and those heretics will be severely punished. However, he used the tools of modern thought to make this analysis of secularization. Levi knew how to distinguish between the loss of faith and the neglect of religious practice, on the one hand, and the desire to maintain close connections with the people and Jewish identity even without any religion, on the other hand. Like Dov Baer of Linitz and Jacob Hart, he tried to extract a mysterious and wondrous dimension from a world becoming increasingly secularized, and believed that he had found it in the way that providence was conducting history on its way to redemption. In a kind of Jewish variation on Adam Smith’s theory of the hidden hand, he pointed to the mysterious force that prevents the severance of the freethinkers from the body of the nation.

As living proof that his interpretation was correct, Levi could point to John King (1753–1824), a colorful assimilated Jewish deist in London. Todd Endelman’s study, describes the adventurous life of the Spanish boy Jacob Rey, who transformed himself into a wealthy moneylender with close connections to British aristocracy. He wrote that he was “English in his dress, speech and tastes, he sought to make a place for himself in a non-Jewish world far removed from the society of street traders unto which he had been born.”³⁴ Although he did not observe religion, lived out of wedlock with an English countess, and was cut off from the Jewish community, he never converted to Christianity and was known as “Jew King.” In his dealings in the financial market, King acquired enemies and was involved in several affairs that ended up in the law courts. In 1798, in a pamphlet he wrote against his defamers, King also revealed his well-reasoned deist worldview to the English public.³⁵ Thomas Paine had been a childhood friend of King’s, and King was probably familiar with his writings and concurred with his criticism of the established religions.

King abhorred atheists who believed that blind coincidence governed the world. He declared his belief in “one supreme and perfect being,”³⁶ but in the same breath, he attacked the absurd faiths, the fantasies of theology, the schemes of hypocritical clergy, and the belief in horrible punishments awaiting sinners in hell: “Who will believe that for a crime committed in an instant, for a momentary gratification, God will doom his creatures to eternal damnation.”³⁷ Like other deists, he believed that religions contradict one another and therefore their pretension as the only one to which God revealed himself is absurd. In general, the world operates according to the laws of nature, even

without God's intervention. But in the case of a contest between religions, King suggested that priority should be given to the most ancient one: Judaism. On this point, despite the vast difference between the way the two men understood religious commitment, King's ideas coincided with those expressed by David Levi only one year earlier. They both asserted that the fact that the Jewish people and its religion had managed to survive a history of persecutions and brutal actions testified to its superiority. For this deist, identification with the Jewish fate and a sense of a shared history were basic elements in his secular Jewish identity. King even believed that Judaism "divested of its ceremonies is but a religion of deism." Like Abraham Tang, the "Primitive Ebrew," he believed that pure Judaism, devoid of its practical dimension, is consistent with the principles of deism, and added that that was also the religion preached by the "Israelite" Jesus. I myself, King wrote, "am obliged to follow the dictates of reason and square my life by natural instruction."³⁸

Between Observance and Laxity: Rifts and Tensions

At the end of the eighteenth century, the cultural and social map of European Jewry had been drawn in several places along the lines suggested by David Levi, who discerned the existence of three camps: those faithful to the religious tradition, those indifferent to religion, and the deists. In the 1790s, two Jewish deists familiar with Jewish life in the urban communities of Germany and Austria suggested a similar division. Lazarus Bendavid related to three groups: the "religious" (still the majority group), the hedonists and religiously lax ("a rabble of revelers, who neglect the commandments because they are burdensome and prevent them from giving themselves over completely to their wild pleasures"), and the deist "enlightened."³⁹ A Berlin physician, Sabbatia Wolf (1757–1832), distinguished between two major groups of contemporary Jews: the "orthodox" (who are divided between the scholars and ordinary Jews) and the "heterodox" (also divided into two—the deists, who are the "true enlightened" and those indifferent to religion, or the "pseudo-enlightened").⁴⁰ What was true for London was certainly true for the bustling community of Berlin, as well as for communities such as Vienna, Altona-Hamburg, and Prague. In Amsterdam, as we shall see, the cultural divide between the old and new took on the character of a harsh political struggle over dominance in the community. This picture of a split Jewish community, no matter how partial or at times artificially exaggerated for purposes of an internal polemic, reflects a striking characteristic of secularization. We have seen how, from the 1780s, these distinctions and cross-sections emerged and were assigned various terms: the distinction between "Poles" and "Germans," between "orthodox" and "heterodox," the "congregation of believ-

ers” and the “sect of epicureans.” As a result of these classifications, boundaries were drawn between the Jews of the old world and Jews of the new world, between the religiously observant and the freethinkers, and the members of the various camps were given a new modern identity. This identity labeled the individual according to his place on the spectrum that extended from faith to heresy, from devoutness in religious practice to laxity and indifference. A person’s clothing or hairstyle became his representative uniform, defining his affiliation with a group—the old-world (or “Polish”) look or the new-world look. The sectarian identity shaped the self-consciousness of the members of each group and bolstered their confidence in their way of life and faith, but it also functioned as a counter-identity that raised the walls around the camp even higher and instilled in each group feelings of antagonism, suspicion, and even contempt toward other groups.

Outside observers were aware of secularization among the Jews of Central and Western Europe. Articles in the German press and special publications noted the rapid pace of secularization and the signs of a schism. Prejudiced and hostile eyewitnesses stressed the differences between the Jewish groups according to the extent of their acculturation and liberation from the religion. From the vantage point of the anti-Jewish German writer Karl Friedrich Grattenauer in the early 1790s: “In the large cities like Berlin, Vienna, and Prague, [the Jews] are drawing close to the Christians from the standpoint of luxuries, elaborate dress, and home furnishings—the opulence and luxuries of life. . . . Among them are also freethinkers who have purged themselves of the filth of the Jews, have refined their traits by spending time in the company of Christians and have reshaped their religion and morals based on reason, and whose minds and hearts have been cultivated by the sciences.” Grattenauer believed that Jewish deists were an increasingly large group of the young generation that had left Judaism in practice, while their parents were still orthodox, who adhered to all the reprehensible customs, in his eyes, of the old religion, with its restrictive commandments and mystical beliefs. The tension between the generations was fueled by the different attitude toward religion and the huge gap in commitment to the practical requirements of the religion.⁴¹

Other witnesses wrote about the revolution in education—the Polish *mel-amdin* had totally disappeared from the homes of Jewish families in the big cities of Germany and were replaced by modern tutors committed to Enlightenment. August Cranz, another German writer who closely followed the changes in Jewish life, described what was happening in Hamburg: private tutors who came from Prussia bringing with them books by Voltaire and Rousseau were hired to teach the sons and daughters of wealthy Jews while “the Polish teachers who taught only Talmud had vanished.”⁴² The physician Wolf Davidson, from Berlin, reported the situation in Prussia: “Education of

the youth that until now had generally been in the hands of gross, uneducated Poles is now in the hands of capable Jewish and Christian tutors.”⁴³ The Polish *melamed*, who signified the old world, was ousted. For freethinking Jews, the knowledge and values he taught had lost all meaning.

Was “old” Judaism collapsing? The anonymous author of an article printed in 1792 in a marginal, subversive periodical depicted for his German readers what he viewed as the decline of the Jewish religion. In the second volume of the periodical *Der Weltbürger* (The citizen of the world), whose declared purpose was to disseminate the Enlightenment, a forty-page letter, written by an alleged anonymous rabbi to his friend “Solomon,” was printed along with a German translation. Was this an internal testimony that revealed the views and anxieties of an orthodox rabbi admitting his defeat? More likely, it was a fictional letter, in which the author (perhaps a deist Jew) combined broad knowledge of changes in Jewish society, with which he was familiar, and the wishful thinking of a harsh critic of religion. The fictitious rabbi offers ideas about how to respond to the hard blows suffered by the rabbinical elite.⁴⁴ In the name of “the true believers” (*rechtgläubige Juden*) and “religious piety” (*Frömmigkeit*), the “rabbi” bewails the “new times” that have led to the crisis in religion. According to his report, the geographical boundaries of secularization were also defined: in England, the Jewish religion had completely collapsed; and in many parts of France and Germany, it was in a state of decline; only in Hungary, Poland, and the Islamic countries was it still holding on. The state of talmudic study was at its lowest ebb: “Our young students are abandoning the places where our wisest rabbis are—the houses of study in Halberstadt, Metz, Frankfurt, and other cities stand empty because everyone is going to Berlin.”⁴⁵

What caused this crisis? The anonymous “rabbi” blames it on the damaging influence of Sephardic Jews from Western Europe, whose religious view is so far from that of the Ashkenazim and whose laxity in observing the commandments and affinity to deist ideas (God wants a pure heart, not rituals and commandments) galvanized the process of secularization. This key factor was joined by others: the authority to punish and excommunicate had been abolished, and it was no longer possible to pressure the “deviants” to toe the line. The “sect of Moses Mendelssohn,” he believed, had triumphed in the struggle over education and the hearts of youth, and the adoption of fashionable dress had broken down the barriers between Jews and Christians. What was the future holding for us? he asked. If we do not restore the authority of religious supervision to the rabbinical elite, the decline of religion will become an irreversible fact: “That is so frightening, that in another one hundred years our grandchildren will know nothing about the Jewish religion, and Heaven forbid, will have forgotten the Talmud forever, and what will remain will be only

the simple doctrines of Moses, and the study of Talmud will dwindle to naught.”⁴⁶

How reliable is this testimony? The editor’s comment simply said: the facts that are known today to everyone speak for themselves. In that same year (1792), Joseph Teomim, an outstanding rabbi of his generation, who spent most of his life in Prussia—Berlin and Frankfurt an der Oder—died, and in his halakhic book, *Peri megadim*, he deplored the crisis: “To our very great sorrow, the yeshivot in Poland have closed and in Germany, too, they have grown few in number, God have mercy on us.”⁴⁷

The turnabout in the 1790s was so rapid and intense that in the public discourse in Germany, admiration for the Jews’ acculturation was replaced by criticism of the men and women who were so conspicuous in their consumption of fashionable products of the culture— theater, opera, concerts, strolls in the parks and streets, and expensive clothing. The Jewish “dandies” became a cultural motif that appeared in plays, literature, and caricatures, generally in mockery.⁴⁸ This criticism greatly disturbed the Jewish intelligentsia. Some tried to explain the background for this “assault” by Jews on the luxury culture, and to separate those fashionable Jews from themselves—the intellectual Jews. David Friedländer, a wealthy man and an enlightened scholar, was critical of “the life of pleasures, indulgence, those wild weeds that have sprung up from the misuse of Enlightenment and culture. . . . In the big cities in particular, we are in great danger because of luxury and coarse manners.”⁴⁹ Wolf Davidson wrote that when people in the theater notice “a certain Jewish woman known to everyone by her special, ostentatious clothes and tall feathers in her hat . . . who always sits in the first row of the front balcony,” they point her out at once as a Jew. Isn’t this enough to arouse prejudice against all Jews? And there are many such women among the wives and daughters of the merchants who want to flaunt their status and to translate the family fortune into social prestige. It is only a matter of class, and the ethnic-religious Jewish or Christian identity, in his view, plays no role in this matter. The luxury culture is consumed by the rising class of merchants who want to lead glittering lives. To separate himself and his friends from a superficial culture that was becoming an object of derision, and to balance the picture, Davidson presented a long list of Jews who were outstanding physicians, writers, philosophers, artists, musicians, and teachers. These were freethinking Jews who had moved away from old Judaism and were for him a source of pride.⁵⁰

Steven Lowenstein describes a multifaceted crisis in this decade among Berlin Jews, marked by laxity in observing the commandments and a relatively high incidence of conversion to Christianity and family breakdown.⁵¹ Azriel Shohet notes the distress of Jewish intellectuals who were afraid that Jewish society would crumble and that there would be a large wave of conversion

unless a halt was brought to the improvements in the Jews' legal status from without and reforms in the religious ritual from within.⁵² Men and, particularly, young women from families of rich merchants or physicians sought self-gratification and happiness in life. Dorothea Veit (Mendelssohn's daughter), Rahel Levin, and Henriette Herz, who were among the outstanding salon women in Berlin, found satisfaction mainly from European literature and philosophy and from the society in which Christians and cultured fashionable Jews like themselves participated.⁵³ The Jewish education they received left only a faint impression on them. When Rahel Levin witnessed Jewish worship on her visit to Breslau, she was repulsed at what she described as a mystic, vulgar, and mostly incomprehensible ceremony.⁵⁴

Jewish identity was important for only a few of these women, while others found spiritual satisfaction in the Christian religion and personal satisfaction in the arms of a Christian lover or husband. We have already met one of these women, Fanny Arnstein (Daniel Itzig's daughter), in Vienna, where she resisted an attempt to impose religious control over her hairstyle. But unlike some others, she was concerned about the effects of assimilation and rejected the option of conversion to Christianity. In a 1793 draft of her will, Arnstein asked her daughter "to remain true to the laws of her forefathers, as one can have no good opinion of the manner of thinking of a person who changes the religion into which chance has allowed her to be born. . . . It is not prejudice that allows me to make this request to her, but rather the intention that she should not lose the esteem of the thinking world."⁵⁵ When forced to decide between faithfulness to a religion she regarded as superstition and abandonment of affiliation with the Jewish group and loss of identity, she chose to remain within the bounds of Judaism.

Two prominent maskilim in Germany at the end of the century, Isaac Euchel and Aaron Wolfsohn, wrote comedies (*Reb Henoch, oder: Woss tut me damit* and *Leichtsinn und Frömmerei*, respectively) that gave their audiences a glimpse into the homes of merchant families in Germany. They reconstructed the tense relationships between parents clinging to the religious tradition and their sons and daughters rebelling against it. The moral was clear: children of those who reject the Haskalah's project of Jewish cultural revival will lose their Jewish identity. Wolfsohn, then principal of a modern Jewish school in Breslau, asserted that "apostasy is like maggots" and that "frivolity" is no less dangerous than religious fanaticism.

Jettchen, the young daughter of Henoch, no longer observes the commandments, and Wolfsohn caricatures the life she leads reading romantic novels, having her hair styled in the latest fashion, playing the piano, attending the theater, and dreaming of a Christian lover. The bourgeois family of Henoch in Euchel's comedy falls apart as the sons and daughters grow increasingly

disgusted with their insensitive father's attempt to force them to live according to traditional norms. They seek escape in balls, brothels, gambling houses, and secret liaisons. "That orthodox man!" Hedwig says about her father, who is busy persecuting the religiously lax Jews in his community, "How disgusting he is to me!"⁵⁶

Jews who chose a life free of the obligations and restrictions of religion were becoming increasingly self-confident and proclaiming their victory. But even in Berlin, permissive behavior was not yet completely acceptable. Davidson wrote that many Jews in Berlin were no longer observing the Sabbath,⁵⁷ but when the young, independent woman Rahel Levin wrote in a letter to her friend David Veit that she had traveled on the Sabbath in a carriage to the opera, there is no mistaking the sense of sin that accompanied her act.⁵⁸ That was in winter 1793, when Rahel Levin was only twenty-two and had not yet joined the glittering society of the "salon" women nor did she imagine that she would convert twenty years later and marry a Christian. "Yesterday, on the Sabbath, in broad daylight," she wrote, "I traveled in a royal carriage to the rehearsals of the opera at 2:30. No one saw me; I would and shall deny it to anyone's face." The young woman was afraid that if her religious laxity became public knowledge, it would cost her a social price that she did not want to pay. Veit's reply is no less interesting. He was quite disappointed by what she had told him, he wrote his friend, "If you travel on the Sabbath you should not deny it; otherwise I will believe that you do not want to contribute anything to the reform of the Jews."⁵⁹ He would have expected the violation of halakhic norms to be not a private act, expressing indifference, but rather a declarative act, expressing the release of young freethinkers from religious restrictions.

Epicureans on the Offensive: Provocations and Conflicts

David Veit introduced himself to Rahel Levin as a young man, a freethinking Jew who did not hesitate to antagonize religiously observant Jews. He wanted to stir up a commotion in the Berlin community and thereby contribute to a rebellion against the "old world." However, in this particular instance, no one saw Rahel Levin riding on the Sabbath, so no scandal was provoked. But there were many scandals in the 1790s that led to tensions in the Jewish community. If a Jewish press had existed in that decade, with correspondents spread throughout the various communities in Europe, they would have printed screaming headlines about provocations, violent incidents, and leaflet wars in synagogues, private homes, and city streets, arousing fierce passions.

In winter 1791, a Berlin court of law heard the complaint of a young man,

originally from Galicia, against a Berlin Jew who had beat him, accused him of heresy, and taken away his papers. The twenty-three-year-old David S. had left his wife and two children in his home in Jaroslaw, and for three years had wandered throughout Europe, armed with letters of recommendation testifying to his religious education, in the hope of finding a rabbinical position. One Sabbath, arriving at noon at the home of a member of the community and giving his name, an incident broke out that led to a police investigation and a trial. The defendant, a forty-six-year-old Jew whose name was not given, had jumped out of his chair as if bitten by a snake, grabbed the young man with both hands, and yelled: "I already know you, you are called David, and you are an epicurean [*Quapecoires* in the German original]. You do not believe in God, in the Talmud and in the Torah, you deceive the Jews, you scoundrel. Now your end is near, for you are in my hands, you will never again mislead the Jews. I am going to tell the whole world about your schemes, and you will be driven out of everyplace!"⁶⁰

According to his testimony, David was surprised and confused. This attacker and others who helped him grabbed him by the hair, nearly choking him, emptied out his pockets, threw him onto the sofa, and cursed him: You do not believe in God and the Talmud, you eat the food of Christians, you ought not to remain alive. Finally, he managed to escape, and filed his complaint. In his defense, the attacker claimed that David was not an innocent victim but a Talmudist who had lost his faith. He had a letter from the rabbi of the Halberstadt community warning him against the young man, who had deceitfully obtained letters of recommendation from rabbis, but was in fact a wanderer who did not observe the commandments and often mocked the rabbis. The letter also exposed the young Galician's deist worldview: "He says that the Torah was written by Moses and not received from God."⁶¹ The court regarded this as a case of religious persecution and convicted the assailant. The Prussian journal on criminal matters reported on the affair as evidence of the distress of freethinking Jews who are abused by their fanatic coreligionists.

In 1792, a few months after this affair, the Society of Friends (*Gesellschaft der Freunde*) was founded in Berlin. Its members numbered about a hundred men who defined themselves as *Freidenker* and who no longer found a place in the existing communal framework. A year later, a branch of the Society of Friends opened in Königsberg, with about fifty members from the wealthy merchants and the intelligentsia of freethinking Jews there. Their first task was to establish self-help institutions and a separate burial society. They decided through that voluntary organization to partially abdicate from the orthodox Jews and to establish their cultural independence.⁶²

Another conflict occurred in summer 1793 in the Frankfurt community; it centered not on a young man from the margins of society, like David S., but

rather on a wealthy, respected member of the community, stockbroker Wolf Wahl, known to be a freethinker. Those faithful to religion—the majority in the community—took their revenge immediately upon Wahl's death. His body was buried in the ignominious part of the cemetery reserved for suicides. No eulogies were given, and, according to the testimony of a furious family member, he was thrown into a grave by street boys like “the carcass of a beast into an open pit.”⁶³ Of what sins was Wolf Wahl guilty? Why did members of the community denounce him as a “wicked man”? The following verdict was signed by three rabbis—Pinhas Hurwitz, Nathan Mass, and Abraham Trier: “The above-mentioned Wolf was regarded in our community as a totally wicked man, who did not attend any synagogue where public prayers were held, neither on weekdays nor on the Sabbath and festivals, either in the evening or in the morning. It is also well known that he desecrated the holy Sabbath and conducted business on it as on a weekday, and that he did not observe the other commandments of the Jews according to our sacred Torah.”⁶⁴

Wahl was called a “godless” man, who had no faith in religion or in divine providence. He did not, however, like some freethinking Jews, wish to cut himself off from his Jewish brethren and from the community. He wanted only to be free of religious supervision. But his behavior was provocative. When, for example, he arrived at the synagogue on Yom Kippur, he deliberately wore the forbidden leather shoes, and on Sukkot, he was apparently the only Jew in Frankfurt who did not observe the custom of sitting in a sukkah. As in the case of David S., the authorities were called upon to protect the freethinking Jew. The family complained about the community's behavior and demanded a more respectable burial place for Wahl. Andreas Gotzmann reconstructed the details of this affair from legal documents in the city archives and showed that this was an opportunity for the Frankfurt city authorities to restrict the community's religious autonomy and to weaken the rabbis' power. A penalty was imposed on the burial society, and they were forced to rebury Wahl. But there were violent skirmishes at the cemetery where the ceremony imposed by the authorities was held, and an additional complaint stated that some members of the community insisted that Wolf Wahl's death should be a cause for celebration.⁶⁵

Also in 1793, a new kind of tempest raged, forcing the rabbinical elite in many communities to go on the defensive. This time, the man at the eye of the storm was not a businessman like Wahl or an anonymous young man like David S. but one of the rabbinical elite's own. In this year, Saul Levin, son of Zevi Hirsch Levin, formerly the London community rabbi and then chief rabbi of Berlin, challenged the rabbinical elite. This scholar and clandestine deist published in Berlin his halakhic book *Besamim rosh*, which contained halakhic

responses that contradicted the accepted halakhah and others that cast it in a ludicrous light.⁶⁶ The supposedly serious discussion in the book about whether the nose of a widow who had had sexual relations with a Christian should be cut off was only one of many such examples. The most provocative response in the book also concealed the deist wish that when the halakhah made life miserable in the future, the Jews would be able to cast off the burden of the commandments. The book provoked a widespread scandal, and many rabbis hastened to denounce Levin. He himself was caught between his desire to criticize the rabbinical culture and his wish to respect his distinguished father, a leading member of the rabbinical elite. It was probably this predicament that induced him to leave Berlin and embark on a journey through several cities, which ended with his death one year later in London.⁶⁷

Early in the spring of 1796, the “epicureans” launched an attack from an unexpected quarter, and the networks of the rabbinical elite in Europe once again rushed to take up defensive positions. A brief news item from an unknown source was printed in a local Altona newspaper, reported from Florence and alleging that rabbis in Italy had given in to the demands of religiously lax Jews:

At a general assembly of Jews held here [in Florence] attended by rabbis from Rome, Mantova, Modena, and other cities, the following decision was taken after ten days of deliberations: in order to promote commerce, the Jewish Sabbath will be moved to Sunday; the obligation in force until now to avoid various types of work on festivals will be abolished; Jews will be permitted to shave their beards with a razor; Jewish women will be exempted from the obligation to shave their heads, and everyone will be allowed to eat pork. All of these reforms, which the majority of the Jews desired, have been submitted [for the approval of] the authorities.⁶⁸

The man who printed this fictitious news item under the very nose of the Altona rabbi Raphael Kohen, informing the German public that many Jews allegedly wanted to cast off religious restrictions, remained anonymous. The news item set off a storm. The rabbis of Italy vehemently denied the news about the rabbis’ conference; in Hamburg, a special pamphlet was printed containing furious counterreactions. All agreed that this was a public provocation by the epicureans (“those who sneer at the angels of God . . . to be free of the commandments”), declared that the orthodox position toward them would become more rigid, and issued emotional declarations of faith, one written by Rabbi Judah Leon of Rome: The rabbis of Rome “never even thought of allowing such violations; heaven forbid, to speak of the holy children of Israel. . . . We have desired the Torah of the Lord all the days of our lives, we and our children and the children of our children. . . . And so it is fitting and proper for us to strengthen our hearts that have never leaned

toward the arrogance and foolish lies that are published in gazettes produced on the printing press, all of which are things of no real substance.”⁶⁹

While that war of pamphlets and news items planted in the German press was being waged between Rome and Altona, a far fiercer battle ensued over the leadership of the twenty thousand Ashkenazic Jews in Amsterdam. For the first time in the history of European Jewry, the cultural gap between the Jews of the “old world” and those of the “new world” led to a political struggle, to the establishment of rival parties, and to a schism. In 1797 and 1798, two communities—the “old community” (Yiddish, *alte kille*) and the “new community” (*naye kille*)—competed over political power and the ability to shape the lives of the Jews based on their worldviews. In the mid-1790s, the new world besieged Amsterdam from the outside. The principles of freedom and equality of the French Revolution arrived in Holland on the bayonets of the French conqueror, who introduced democratic politics and granted civil rights to the Jews of Holland.

The new community developed from Felix Libertati, the patriotic club of Jews who supported the ideas of the Revolution and emancipation that was established in 1795. For their part, the community leaders and rabbis held on to their control over the Ashkenazic community and rejected the values of the Revolution and the new status given to Jews, which to them was a danger to traditional religion. It was impossible in this struggle to separate the political interests, personal issues, and cultural identities that differentiated the two camps. The spokesmen of the new community were not inclined to adopt deist views and, in fact, objected to religious laxity. They chose a rabbi and established a synagogue, a ritual bath, and their own burial arrangements. They represented the Jews who wanted to break away from traditional institutions, which, in their eyes, were faulty, and to replace them with alternative reformed institutions. They were amazed by the new opportunities opened to Jews, including participation in the parliamentary system as voters and as candidates for election. To a great extent, the establishment of the new community reflected the pattern of separation that was given expression in Germany in the Society of Friends, but in the Dutch case, the revolt against the old community was along the entire front and did not focus only on the question of burial.⁷⁰

This split was expressed in the Yiddish vernacular in the pamphlets circulated in these two years in Amsterdam: the *Discursen* (Discourses), slanderous writings printed by anonymous propagandists of the two communities.⁷¹ Unquestionably, the Revolution influenced the use of this medium of street leaflets to level criticism and acquire clout. The new community initiated this measure to persuade as many people as possible to join its ranks. The old community understood that it needed to adopt a similar measure to block the ero-

sion and to deny everything written about it, so it began to publish its own leaflets. These propaganda leaflets attracted a great deal of interest. Fundamental questions were raised in the *Discursen*, and the most important one related to Jewish identity at the end of the eighteenth century: Who is a good Jew? Is he the one faithful to all the values and customs of the old world, thereby fulfilling the will of God? Or, as the “new Jews” claimed, is the good Jew a freethinker attuned to European culture who examines the religion, customs, and rabbis of the community in light of the values of reason and “human and civil rights”?

The old community repudiated the new community as a “congregation of Korah” and its members as epicureans. The new community, on the other hand, viewed its struggle as one for liberation from the intolerable subjugation to the arbitrary wishes of the power-seeking leaders and rabbis. When the new community built a clean ritual bath that provided privacy for women, the old community responded by stating that it was halakhically unfit for use and that men were forbidden to marry the daughters of those women who used it. The new Jews replied that they were as good as any other Jews and added, in keeping with the revolutionary ethos, that even a simple Jew was no less good than the rabbis, who secretly sinned, and the lay leaders who carried on forbidden affairs with prostitutes and Gentile women. The old community collected signatures on a declaration rejecting the revolutionary constitution and the emancipation as an antireligious rebellion. The new Jews countered by claiming that the principles of the Revolution actually bestow freedom of religion and hence ought to be gratefully welcomed by Jews who had, until then, been oppressed in Europe. On many occasions, the anticlerical criticism that the leaders “have to keep us under their thumb, so that they can remain the bosses” was repeated in the *Discursen*. The “human rights” that now guide the shapers of policy, a spokesman of the new community said, would free those who did not want to observe the commandments from the threat of punishment, so that no one could impose them.⁷² The old community, however, had no doubt that these were wicked men and heretics, as we can learn from one of the angry voices heard in the *Discursen* in the streets of Amsterdam:

To the deniers of God, who call themselves the *manhigim* of the New Congregation of Korah, and to the misleaders toward hell! It is certain that I have always known you to be villains and atheists. But I am not the only one who thought you to be so. It is known to our whole nation what evil creatures you are. . . . If your titles were *Impious Heretics, Absolute Sinners*, we could at least see what bad Jews you are. Have you always kept the Sabbath correctly? Or your holidays? Haven't you often eaten meat from the Christian hall? Didn't your children ride horseback on the holy Sabbath? Don't you always eat together with Christians, things you aren't allowed to eat? Haven't you always ridden roughshod over the religion as a whole? . . . You don't think about the

Eternal One or his judgment, since you only need your churches for make-believers, like a theater. . . . You only wanted to break the bands of religion and to destroy a Godly community that had been in existence for 127 years, and ride roughshod over all of our religion.⁷³

The writers of the old community's leaflets linked the new Jews in Amsterdam to the general wave of heresy in Europe. They accused their rabbi of being a freethinker and, in an orthodox satire, "invited" the audience to comedies, operas, ballet performances, and libertine plays mounted by the "congregation of Korah," and promised them refreshments: "meat and milk, capons with butter, sausage with cheese, as well as crabs, oysters, best pork."⁷⁴ Their "bylaws" supposedly included clauses such as: the rabbi must teach a lesson in Talmud followed by one on Voltaire's doctrine, or a man marrying a Christian woman is not banned from praying in the synagogue and can even bring her with him into the men's section, and in order to keep the ritual bath clean, women only need to dip in it once a year.⁷⁵ The "new Jews" mocked the ignorance of the "old Jews" in the languages and culture of Europe and rejected the claim that they were epicureans. Their rebellion against the religious leadership is not a rebellion against God, they asserted.⁷⁶

The new community's rebellion enjoyed temporary success, and in March 1798, the despised lay leaders were ousted with the aid of radical patriots who gained control. But it was a short-lived victory. Four months later, the ratio of political forces changed again; the lay leaders regained their positions, and the leaderships of the two Ashkenazic communities were forced to unite, although the social and cultural split was an existing fact. From a news item in a German periodical, it is clear that an unprecedented divide had taken place in the community of Amsterdam, stemming from a great disparity in the Jews' views about religion. According to this item, more than a hundred families had joined the camp of the "enlightened Jews" who, disgusted with the burden of traditional religious customs, had established a "party" and a new synagogue.⁷⁷

In other parts of Europe, individuals who were in the minority in their communities raised voices of protest. In 1794, the Jewish physician Jacob Eliahu Frank was living in the Vitebsk district in White Russia. During his studies in Vienna and Berlin, he had been a harsh critic of religion; in 1800, he found an opportunity to present his views to representatives of the Russian government and to describe his painful plight as a Jewish deist living in a society ruled by rabbis who were fostering the "absurdities of the Talmud." A special inquiry commission headed by the senator Gavriil Derzhavin examined the relations between the Jews and their neighbors in the former Polish regions that were now under Russian control.

In a memorandum, “Can a Jew Become a Good, Productive Citizen?,” Frank demanded the intervention of the state to end the control of the rabbinical elite. “The Jewish religion in its original form consists of sincere faith in God and pure moral demands,” he wrote, and repeated the anticlerical saying: “Deceitful rabbis have falsified the principles and laws of the Jewish faith through fallacious interpretations and talmudic-mystical commentary . . . guided by the personal benefits they can gain, they have led the blinded people along a dark path of sanctifying superstitions.” In his view, these rabbis had distanced the Jews from life by making the commandments more stringent, by fostering hatred of members of other religions, and corrupting their morals. Instead of guiding them to a life of justice and morality, they taught them meaningless prayers and empty rituals. Perhaps if the Jews were fluent in Hebrew, Frank suggested, they could all understand the “true spirit” of Judaism without the mediation of the rabbis. He believed that this process, first introduced by Mendelssohn in Berlin, was already taking place among the Jews of Europe with great success. “Only because of the darkness of ignorance have the people accepted the vain talmudic illusions as real truth,” and hence if the state were to intervene by opening public schools for Jewish children, this measure might, within one generation, reverse the situation. The Jews “would awake from their religious slumber” and discover the true core of their religion.⁷⁸

The last two years of the eighteenth century were particularly difficult for the family of Arie Löw Enoch Hönig (Edler von Hönigsberg, 1770–1811), in Prague. After Arie, son of two wealthy, well-connected families and the grandson of a Jew given a noble Austrian title, married Deborah, daughter of Jonas Wehle (spiritual leader of the Sabbatean underground in Bohemia), he was branded a heretic.⁷⁹ When I go out to stroll through the streets of Prague with my father-in-law, Hönig said, we always choose to walk on the side streets for fear that we will be attacked and cursed. “Once when we drew near my father-in-law’s home through an alley of a Jewish street,” he wrote, describing one of his painful experiences, “we were met by a Jew with a long beard who shouted at us: ‘*Meshumad* [apostate]! How do you dare come to my street,’ and spat. Another time, another man met us and said: ‘May your name be expunged,’ and he spat, too.”⁸⁰ Besides Hönig’s Sabbatean identity and his connections with Jacob Frank’s court and his daughter Eva in Offenbach, he was also familiar with the Enlightenment and was a supporter of the Haskalah movement and an admirer of Mendelssohn and Wessely. He was a critic of traditional Jewish education and was opposed to the centrality of the practical commandments in the Jewish religion. As an anticlerical, Hönig objected to the rabbis’ control over the Jews; even after Joseph II deprived them of the right to excommunicate, they still maintained, he argued, a tight hold on Jewish life.

His liberal and humanistic worldview was reflected in his essay “Something for the Female Sex,” which demanded that women be freed from their inferior status, and their enslavement to men and traditional sexual mores.⁸¹ Hönig’s surprising awareness of a woman’s need for sexual gratification can be explained by the libertine tendencies of the Frankists. He found his religious identity in the Sabbatean kabbalistic doctrine that he learned from his father-in-law. For Hönig, this was the way to reach the inner core of Judaism without relinquishing his freethinking worldview. As he put it, he was an enlightened Jew for whom the internal aspects of religion and ethics were preferable to the “external religion.”

As far as the Prague community was concerned, Hönig and his family were dangerous heretics. Rabbi Eleazar Fleckeles launched a bitter war against them that reverberated in the city streets. Hönig’s isolation as a pariah was intolerable. He no longer had a place in the synagogue. But he never stopped observing the commandments; he prayed in a private minyan in his father’s home. His links with the community were ostensibly severed, and, like other persecuted freethinkers, he was in the process of leaving his Jewish brethren. But in a long despairing letter that he sent to the Prague chief of police in 1800, furiously attacking his persecutors and asking for the protection of the Austrian authorities, he lamented his bitter fate and complained of his grievous predicament.⁸²

The letter was not merely an attempt to defend the Frankist cell by making references to Enlightenment values that would be pleasing to the government officials; rather, it was an opportunity to vent his frustration and hatred. Because of his forced isolation, he had nowhere else to turn. He criticized the “rabbinical tyranny,” particularly Rabbi Fleckeles, who was his personal enemy. He jeered at the long-bearded men in their black silk coats who were oppressing the masses, inducing them to believe in them and to follow them blindly. But at the same time, he claimed that his denunciation as a heretic was fallacious, that he wanted the good of his coreligionists, and was not interested in living apart from their society.

In Berlin or Königsberg, he might have found a social framework within the community, such as the Society of Friends. In Amsterdam, he could have joined the new community; in London, he could have lived outside any religious supervision. But in Prague, he was isolated. Because of his Sabbatean views, he was not accepted as a member of the local circle of maskilim, and, as he wrote in his memorandum, in Prague there was no room for a Jewish identity other than the normative one, namely, an identity of loyalty to the community, to the rabbi, to the religious way of life, and to the synagogue. An individual seeking a different Jewish identity was left outside, exposed to condemnation and slander.

Chapter 11

Soon Our Faith Will Be Lost: Deists and Believers

The alienation that Hönig felt in Prague might not have been so intolerable if he had lived in a community that included many freethinkers. But in most other European cities, except London, the largest of them all, the Jews did not yet feel free of religious control and were not a sufficiently large proportion of the society to be acknowledged or accepted as secular Jews. We have seen how Rahel Levin tried to conceal that she had traveled on the Sabbath in Berlin and how David S. was attacked there when he was exposed as an epicurean.

In 1799, David Friedländer, in the name of “some householders of the Jewish religion,” proposed a radical step to ameliorate the distressing situation of freethinkers in Berlin, but he chose to remain anonymous when he suggested that they join the Church without converting to Christianity.¹ His open letter to Provost Teller caused an uproar. It was interpreted as a declaration of secession from Judaism not only by the deists, who were alienated from any Jewish religious identity, but also by the wealthy, acculturated elite. Even an anonymous Protestant preacher, who proposed that that group consent to full religious conversion, understood their step as a shameful betrayal of the religion of their forefathers and a public rebellion against a community, many of whose members were still religious Jews who meticulously observed the commandments. From the perspective of an apprehensive Christian, the preacher explained it as a direct outcome of the free spirit (*Freigeisterei*) and the religious permissiveness prevalent in Berlin: “Anyone carefully observing the situation of the Mosaic laws will sadly see how the frivolous winds of the time have also affected the Jews and are fomenting the observable downfall of Jewish religiosity.” Religious laxity had reached its peak, and young Jews in Berlin were no longer observing the Sabbath, the festivals, and many other commandments. What in the past was done in secret and shame had now become an open display of irreligiosity.²

It was not frivolity that motivated Friedländer but an effort to find a way out of his frustrating situation in the Prussian kingdom at the end of the cen-

ture: he was a man who belonged to an acculturated elite and who no longer observed the commandments but continued to be legally linked to the Jewish community. Supposedly, he could have drawn encouragement from his prediction that traditional Judaism was about to collapse. The study of the Talmud would disappear along with the yeshivot and the commitment to the halakhah, and the rabbis would lose their status. The “philosophical religion” of the deists would triumph among the Jews as well. But his failure and that of his associates to gain civil rights in Prussia and thus to strengthen their link to the state led him to despairingly suggest that they cross the line: leave the Jewish community and join the Church. In the end, Friedländer remained within the Jewish society and continued to seek ways to reform it and the religion. Perhaps this was because Teller rejected his proposal, or perhaps his suggestion was only a provocative attempt to shock the German public and raise its awareness of the distress of the freethinkers.

Falsifications of the Rabbis: Deistic Texts

As borders were being drawn between the various types of Jews, frictions grew against the background of their disparate cultural identities and sometimes affected life in the streets. When Hönig was denounced by Jewish passersby on the street as a heretic, the appearance as a traditional Jew in the streets of a modern city could provoke the “epicureans.” In 1799, the Lithuanian preacher Israel Loebel had a similar experience. This great admirer of the Gaon of Vilna, a rabbi in his own right, and a fighter against the Hasidic movement had been attacked in the streets in the past by Hasidim who chased him and cursed him. But in the last two years of the century, his battle against the Hasidim took him from Eastern Europe to the communities of Austria and Prussia; in Berlin, he was publicly humiliated by a different enemy. “As I walked innocently through the streets of a city,” he stated, “a man came toward me, opened his mouth, and, with mockery and laughter, spoke in the melody in which the Talmud is loudly studied, and he did this to jeer at me. And this man looked to me to be one of that sect [of epicureans].”²³

This time, the men who insulted him were not Hasidim but “heretics,” who were “blinded by science” and who have “taken up new ways to satisfy their passions and no longer bear the burden of religion and the divine laws, and do only that which they deem right.”²⁴ Since he was singled out as an “orthodox,” he attracted mockery of the talmudic style of study. By labeling his assailants as deists, he was able to interpret the reason for their attack. At the same time, Friedländer’s open letter was causing a furor, which Loebel had heard about; so he identified his attackers as Berlin deists. “The sect of new

epicureans,” he believed, had surfaced and was revealing its true face. In his 1799 *Even bohan*, the Lithuanian preacher declared he was launching a counter-war: “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this, to overthrow the arguments of every enemy against our holy Torah and to show all who come within his gates that all the words of the epicureans . . . all is vanity, they lack all substance.”⁵

Israel Loebel was exaggerating when he concluded from the invective hurled at him that it was a total attack on the “religion of the Torah” by the “sect of epicureans.” More likely, it was a street provocation against a man whose “Polish” appearance was strikingly at odds with the “German” lifestyle of fashionable Jews of the city. But like his contemporaries Jacob Hart and Dov Baer of Linitz, Loebel discerned that critics of the Jewish religion were becoming more confident in the last decade of the eighteenth century. He was familiar with Friedländer’s open letter, but that was only one of some books and articles written in the 1790s that could be defined as Jewish deist texts. It was preceded by at least three works in German: Saul Ascher’s *Leviathan* (1792); Lazarus Bendavid’s *Etwas zur Charakteristick der Juden* (Something about the characteristics of Jews, 1793), and Salomon Maimon’s *Autobiography* (1792–93), and two in Hebrew: Saul Levin’s *Sefer ktav yosher* (An epistle of righteousness, 1794) and Aaron Wolfsohn’s *Sihah be’erets hahayim* (A conversation in the land of the living, 1794–96). If Loebel had been familiar with these works, he would have felt even more certain that the “new philosophers” were a sect; he would have noticed that nearly all of them belonged to the new Jewish intelligentsia of the German communities.

In *Leviathan*, Saul Ascher (1767–1822), son of a well-established Berlin family of book merchants, suggested a resolution to the crisis of religion that could preserve Jewish identity and save it from collapsing.⁶ “Many people are Jewish in name only,” he warned, “and from day to day, the faith of our coreligionists is crumbling more and more. From day to day, the number of those converting is growing.”⁷ The Haskalah and Mendelssohn’s ideas no longer provided the answer. For Ascher, it was unthinkable to continue observing the commandments and at the same time to believe in man’s autonomy. Religion should contribute to man’s happiness, not obstruct his freedom. It must withdraw, be bounded within one of the spheres of life without any pretensions of filling man’s entire life.

Like Joseph Mendelssohn, one of the founders of the Society of Friends in Berlin in that same year, Saul Ascher was convinced of the need to break the monopoly of the orthodox over the religion. Mendelssohn (then only twenty-one) did this through the Society, which offered an alternative to several of the communal institutions. Ascher (twenty-five years old) tried to do that in his philosophical work *Leviathan* and the program to “purify Judaism”

that it contained. How will faith in God be saved when the law no longer has any value and it contradicts life? “Faith is acquiring open and hidden enemies,” Ascher wrote. “Everyone is beginning to neglect it, and the adults are an example to the young. They neglect the law, and hence faith also disappears.”⁸ As a compromise between orthodoxy and heresy, Ascher suggested a “reformation”: to limit religion to several articles of faith and some basic rituals; only the ritual of circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, and the festivals would be preserved. In its present form, he argued, the Jewish religion is replete with superstition, abandonment of the halakhah is regarded as the abandonment of Judaism, and its flawed form (the commandments) conceal its substance. His regulation of Jewish religion would, in his opinion, resolve all that and construct a dam to hold back the wave of religious conversion. Judaism would be taken away from the orthodox, and the religiously lax would be able to have a Jewish identity of a religious nature.

Lazarus Bendavid, too, was concerned about the rising number of conversions at the end of the century, but his deist text, *Something about the Characteristics of the Jews*, proposed a more radical solution.⁹ His text was a coherent and incisive deist manifesto. Bendavid, writing in Vienna, mocked the group that “accepts the whole immense heap of tradition without questioning it, and holds it a sin to think that . . . perhaps Moses did not receive from God at Mount Sinai the melody of several liturgical poems sung on Yom Kippur.”¹⁰ A religion of “ceremonial laws” was to him an obstacle on the path to the acquisition of civil rights as well as the reason for a decline in morality. He believed that one drastic step was required to reform everything and to open a new era in the life of the Jews: the abolition of the commandments, whether willingly, with consent, or through an initiative taken by the state. This is how Bendavid phrased his deist manifesto, addressed to that group of Jews who hesitated to abandon the commandments for fear they would lose the very anchor of morality:

Open a new page! Now, without doubt, everything has changed: the state treats you well, it wants your good, and to merit this you must abolish all the pointless commandments and tell your children what you know well to be true: that they were introduced only as a fence around the garden, which protected the inner core in previous centuries when the spirit of enslavement prevailed, and is no longer suitable nor is it effective. And [tell them] that you want to relinquish the fence so long as the inner core is not damaged, and you admit that the pure Mosaic code, the doctrine of natural religion, is the basis for your faith. Safeguard the core of the religion by improving man’s inner core. Teach your children to love others; with their mother’s milk, instill in them the greatest principle of our religion, as Hillel said: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Show yourself to the world as God himself wanted you to be: seekers of peace who are content with little, believers in one good, eternal being who created all human beings and sustains them all, who planted in them the sense to know him

and who imbued his wondrous world with the magic that attracts our hearts to pray to him.¹¹

He identified deism with “the pure Mosaic doctrine,” and the required reform, to his mind, was the abolition of the external form (the commandments) and preservation of the inner essence (the principles of natural religion).

The German public took an interest in the Jews’ criticism of their religion. Immanuel Kant thought that Bendavid was not only affirming a moral conception of the religion but also actually issuing “a public call . . . to embrace the religion of Jesus.” He believed that Bendavid shared his vision of the abolition of Judaism in its existing form: “The euthanasia of Judaism is pure moral religion, freed from all the ancient statutory teachings.”¹²

Bendavid had a different intention. If the Jews converted to deism, not to Christianity, they could acquire citizenship and improve their image. If they rejected this solution, the consequences would be disastrous. They would be pushed more and more to the sidelines—some to conversion to Christianity and others to isolation behind the walls of the religion. And the Jewish group of deists that fought against the evils of atheism (“they see the superficial foundations on which human happiness will stand if man is deprived of faith in God, in the immortality of the soul, and in its progress beyond the grave to higher levels of perfection”) would finally leave the Jewish group in despair. The wealthiest and the most educated and respected Jews would abandon Judaism; this would perpetuate the inferior status of Jews, and the state would never take steps to improve their situation. As an avowed deist, Bendavid found it hard to understand why a reasonable man, offered the choice of observance of the commandments or civil freedom, would reject a path that ensured his happiness and would instead choose to adhere to the commandments: “Do you think you can convince me that you wish to and can suffer everything like martyrs of your ceremonial laws? . . . and that you are happier in the freedom given by the observance of the commandments than in the pleasure that is afforded by the joy of being a citizen?”¹³

In 1793, the second and last part of Salomon Maimon’s *Autobiography* appeared in Berlin.¹⁴ It was a significant event that exposed the Jewish deists. From then on, readers of this fascinating work could learn about the mind and soul of this “Polish” Jew who lost his traditional faith, and while wandering and searching for a direction in life, was reborn as a “German” philosopher. Unlike Bendavid, Maimon did not write an orderly manifesto but a collection of life episodes interspersed with philosophical thoughts about religious questions. His autobiography can be read as a distinctly deist text because of his criticism of the Jewish religion on many of its pages and because he presents

himself as the embodiment of the “total epicurean.” Like Voltaire’s *Candide*, he examined everything with common sense and conscience and was unprepared to compromise his truth. He became repeatedly embroiled in conflicts with the rabbinical elite and could not refrain from “desecrating the holy.”

Here are some typical excerpts from his life story as a deist text. He reconstructed his childhood from the view of a philosopher in his forties and depicted it as the childhood of a religious skeptic from birth, who, at the age of six, asked: “Tell me, Papa, who created God?”—and was not satisfied by the reply that God has always existed and was never born. On another occasion, he took exception to God’s judgment in the Torah and asked why all the blessings of this world went only to Esau and not to Jacob, resulting in the exclusion of the Jews from the life of the state and society and the pleasures of the world. Maimon the child believed that “Jacob should not have been a fool; he should have chosen the blessings of this world,” but the father’s response was harsh: “You ungodly rascal!” he cried out, and gave him a box on the ear.¹⁵ As an adult, Maimon replaced the Talmud with science and philosophy. “This was surely natural,” he told his readers, and utilized this decisive stage in his life to satirize rabbinical culture:

Take the subjects of the Talmud, which, with the exception of those relating to jurisprudence, are dry and most unintelligible to a child—the laws of sacrifice, of purification, of forbidden meats, of feasts, and so forth, in which the oddest rabbinical conceits are elaborated through many volumes with the highest efforts of intellectual power; for example, how many white hairs may a red cow have, and yet remain a *red* cow . . . whether a louse or a flea may be killed on the Sabbath—the first being allowed, while the second is a deadly sin—whether the slaughter of an animal ought to be executed at the neck or the tail . . . whether the *jabam*, that is, the brother of a man who died childless, being required by law to marry the widow, is relieved from his obligation if he falls off a roof and sticks in the mire. *Ohe jam satis est!* Compare these glorious disputations, which are served up to young people and forced on them even to disgust, with history, in which natural events are related in an instructive and agreeable manner, with a knowledge of the world’s structure, by which the outlook into nature is widened, and the vast whole is brought into a well-ordered system; surely my preference will be justified.¹⁶

His “abuses of rabbinism” ridicules the culture centered on the fine points of the halakhah:

A Jew dare not eat or drink, lie with his wife, or attend to the wants of nature, without observing an enormous number of laws. With the books on the slaughter of animals alone (the condition of the knife and the examination of entrails), a whole library could be filled, which certainly would come near to the Alexandrian in extent. And what shall I say of the enormous number of books treating those laws that are no longer in use, such as the laws of sacrifice, of purification, etc.? The pen falls from my

hand when I remember that I and others like me were obliged to spend in this soul-killing business the best days of our lives, when the powers are in their full vigor, and to sit up many a night, to try to bring some sense where there was none, to exercise our wits in the discovery of contradictions where none were to be found . . . to hunt after a shadow through a long series of arguments, and to build castles in the air.¹⁷

What, exactly, was Salomon Maimon's religious belief? Behind the label "epicurean," was there a hidden atheist or pantheist inspired by the philosopher Spinoza, whom he greatly admired? How did he conceive of God after he rejected the possibility of proving his existence by means of rational proofs? How did his admiration of Maimonides, the author of the halakhic codex *Mishne Torah*, square with his religious skepticism? We can find answers to these questions by perusing his philosophical writings from the 1790s.¹⁸ But in his *Autobiography*, we hear primarily the voice of the deist criticism of an anticlerical man who is repelled by all manner of clergy. Among the philosophical essays in his autobiographical work is a brief essay that describes how Judaism changed from an ancient, natural, pure religion into the corrupted religion of his time. In the days of the Patriarchs, the Jewish religion was born as a "natural religion . . . whose foundation is the unity of an incomprehensible God." But gradually, Judaism became a religion of laws governed by rigid, ignorant rabbis, one that is contrary to reason. Much like Bendavid, Maimon believed that it is possible to separate the essence of Judaism, which is the pure religion of Moses, from its external form: "The Jewish religion lays at its foundation the unity of God as the *immediate* cause of all existence. . . . Moses, as well as the prophets who followed him, sought constantly to inculcate that the end of the religion is not *external ceremonies*, but the knowledge of the true God as the sole incomprehensible cause of all things, and the practice of virtue in accordance with the prescriptions of reason."¹⁹

Like other deists at the end of the eighteenth century—Bendavid, Ascher, and Friedländer—Maimon was unprepared to view conversion to Christianity as the solution to his growing alienation from the Jewish religion. When he decided to improve his poor living conditions by joining the Lutheran church in Hamburg, he saw that he could not act against his conscience. The pastor said to him, "You are too much a philosopher to be able to become a Christian. Reason has taken the upper hand with you, and faith must accommodate itself to reason. You hold the mysteries of the Christian religion to be mere fables." Maimon replied, "I must therefore remain what I am—a stiff-necked Jew. My religion enjoins me to believe nothing, but to think the truth and to practice goodness."²⁰ But in the final analysis, this "philosophical religion" led him to secede from Judaism and from the Jews without converting. Using Mendelssohn's argument, he reached the following conclusion, rejecting the

option of a collective secular Jewish identity: “The fundamental laws of the Jewish religion are at the same time the fundamental laws of the Jewish state. They must therefore be obeyed by all who acknowledge themselves to be members of this state and who wish to enjoy the rights granted to them under condition of their obedience. But, on the other hand, any man who separates himself from this state, who desires to be considered no longer a member of it . . . is also in his conscience no longer bound to obey those laws.”

For this reason, he declared that he was prepared to pay the price for his deistic view. The philosophical reason for his secession from Judaism was phrased as a question: “But how, if a Jew wishes to be no longer a member of this theocratic state, and goes over to the heathen religion, or to the philosophical, which is nothing more than pure natural religion? How, if, merely as a member of a political state, he submits to its laws, and demands from it his rights in return, without making any declaration whatever about his religion?”

Maimon’s deistic views and his abandonment of religious practices amounted to a declaration of separation from the Jewish group. But his desire to find his place in a secular civil state, in which religious affiliation is a matter of the citizen’s conscience and choice, was a dream that had not yet been realized in the German states at the end of the century. What was left to him was only his cosmopolitan membership in the community of believers in natural religion.²¹ The only identity he was prepared to accept toward the end (1800) of his tortuous life path that crossed old and new cultural worlds and pulled up personal and group roots, was that of a solitary individual who expounds “philosophical religion.”

Saul Levin died a premature death. Following the scandal that developed around his provocative book of halakhah, *Besamim rosh*, he left Berlin to avoid embarrassing his father, the community rabbi. A year later, Saul Levin died in London, where he had hoped to find refuge from his persecutors. He was not a philosopher like Maimon, but the two were linked by their anticlerical zeal and their deist criticism of the rabbinical culture. Unlike Maimon, Levin lived in Berlin as a clandestine deist, so he was not labeled an epicurean. That is why the most radical book he wrote in his lifetime remained in manuscript form and was printed only posthumously. That work was *Ktav yosher*, written as a parody on the rabbinical elite’s reaction to the educational reform proposed by Naphtali Herz Wessely in 1782. When it was printed in 1794, it revived the memory of that first Kulturkampf, which had raged a decade earlier, and provided Hebrew readers with a subversive deist text.²²

In *Ktav yosher*, Levin appeared in the guise of an orthodox Jew—as one of the teachers alarmed by Wessely’s exposure as an epicurean. Levin complained bitterly about the fatal blow to religion but insisted on interpreting *Divrei shalom ve’emet* as a kabbalist text that contains deep secrets. Under this guise, he

fired barbs at the heart of religious culture. His criticism trampled upon the sacred. The Torah scholars' study of the Talmud and the halakhah were depicted as petty, absurd, and contemptible. What form did Wessely's heresy take, according to Levin?

Did he speak ill of the foundations of faith and the Torah and mock the words of the Sages in the Mishnah and the Talmud, or was he so impudent as to deny one of the thirteen articles? . . . Did he, heaven forbid, spurn the good, decent customs, such as tossing a fowl in the air as an expiatory sacrifice on the eve of Yom Kippur, or giving permission to eat nuts before the day of *Hosha'anah* . . . or did he take exception (far be it from me to even mention) to the order in which the *lulav* was waved, or jeer the lesser laws, those that depend on the Almighty, such as putting the shoe on the right foot first . . . and not to urinate in public on the Sabbath. . . . Or perhaps he wished to deprecate well-known remedies, and spoke spurious words, saying that it is impossible to remove an evil eye with dying embers and incantations. If he often condemned these, certainly one should pity him, for he cannot be saved, his home will be eaten by fire, and his books should be burned.²³

There was hardly any sphere in the rabbinical culture that escaped Levin's lash. He regarded not only those customs as founded on superstition, but also the high culture that produced hundreds of books of halakhah and talmudic *pilpul*, books of kabbalah that filled the book market and strengthened people's faith in miracles, and the educational system that left its pupils in a state of ignorance and instilled in them a sense of alienation toward general culture. He accused teachers of using blows and threats to force pupils to fear the rabbi, and claimed that religion was being reduced to the commandments alone: "For this is the main thing, that more and more commandments and customs will be added in every generation, in every year and every day."²⁴ Was hatred of the Jews the natural state of affairs, he asked, so that each edict and each pogrom added more customs of days of fasting and lamentation, and hence they should be welcomed? And, if so, why do the Jews mourn and weep? In the logic of the *melamed*, the ironic answer is clear: "We weep for the death of the great men of Israel . . . for if they lived, they would have added many more commandments that they brilliantly devised from the Talmud and the *posekim*."²⁵ Indeed, Levin believed that the rabbinical elite was engaged in inventing commandments and that to guarantee its existence, it rejected all rational, free, and critical thought. What would happen if the young men also studied science or other "external wisdoms" and used their critical intellect? Here Levin left no doubt that the time had come for the commandments to be abolished, and he places this vision in reverse in the mouth of the *melamed*: "The children are attracted by new ideas through the power of their God-given intellect . . . but if their minds should crave fantasies and the teachers should fail to introduce order into the downpour of information they absorb, we

would become much like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all the commandments and the customs, the yoke upon our necks, all would, like a mollusk, melt and vanish from the world.”²⁶

A similar attack on the rabbinical culture embodied in the “Polish” rabbi is contained in another deist text that appeared in Hebrew in 1794. Aaron Wolfssohn began to publish his play *Sihah be’erets hahayim* (A Conversation in the land of the living) in installments in *Hame’asef*. It centered on a cultural polemic being conducted in heaven between Maimonides, Mendelssohn, and that nameless “Pole,” who represents one of the most zealous fighters against secularization: Rabbi Raphael Kohen of Altona-Hamburg.²⁷ Maimonides was mobilized to defend the rationalist alternative to the “Polish” way. He argued that the rabbinical culture that promotes Talmud and halakhah and rejects philosophy is nothing more than a deviation from the tried and true path of Judaism that he himself paved in the Middle Ages and that Mendelssohn joined in the eighteenth century.²⁸ When the Polish rabbi lauds what he regards as the ideal scholar—“the rabbi of all the Jews in the Diaspora, who lives a life of self-denial and fasting, teaches Torah in his splendid works, and gains much glory for his opinions and disputations . . . who has turned aside from all the pleasures of this world”—Maimonides replies that God demands only a life of moral virtue.²⁹ Many parodies are interspersed in Wolfssohn’s play. He mocks the popular belief in the “angel of death,” the ignorance of the rabbis, and their opposition to anything and everything new. In the margins of the play, he comments:

Until today, we are forbidden to discover, interpret, or say anything new. Hence, the forceful opposition and the loud threats against any innovation, even if it means abolishing absurd customs that are no part of the laws of our religion but have simply been introduced out of habit. Once a “German” said something in the presence of a “Polish” scholar about America. At once, the Pole cried out: What, do you also believe in America? And when the other wanted to prove the truth of his words, the Pole attached to him the derogatory term “epicurean,” which is so much used among our people. And the Pole went on to say: Can you find anything in the whole of the Bible about America? Just imagine how that man would have chastised Columbus! He probably would have excommunicated him.³⁰

In contrast to the “Polish” rabbi, who believes that all natural phenomena are employed by God as a means of reward and punishment, “Maimonides” believes that the laws of nature have not changed since the Creation and that God does not intervene in the world. Is the purpose of thunder “to punish the sinner and to chastise the evildoer”? “Maimonides” totally rejects that notion. Not only does he regard such a belief as alien to Judaism but strives to remove “magic” from the world of natural phenomena and cautions against

it: "Heaven forbid that any Jew should believe that thunder is re-created each time, for good or for evil, and that it exists outside of nature, as the common people think. For [I desire] to remove this false idea from the Jews and to instill in them the right view, which is that thunder and lightning are founded on the laws of nature, and this has been so since the time that God created the earth and the heavens."

He went on to represent Wolfssohn and argued that men knew God not through his revelation but rather through nature: "For how can a human being gain any clear knowledge about the traits and attributes of the blessed Creator except by carefully observing his great, awesome actions, all that he has created in the heavens above and in the earth below and in the waters under the earth."³¹

Early in 1794, Aaron Wolfssohn published a sharp anticlerical text—a poem in honor of David Friedländer's forty-fourth birthday. In it, he crowned him as the successor of the biblical David, a fearless warrior who did not hesitate to take a stand against the religious fanaticism of the rabbis and to triumph over them, using his pen as a weapon. In biblical Hebrew, with allusions to the song about the downfall of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, Wolfssohn fired his barbs:

Those are the priests of the people who sit upon their seats
Who worship worthless idols and practice witchcraft.
They have put Jacob and Israel under a solemn curse
For their eyes are too blind to see, their minds too narrow to discern.
In their arrogance, they presume to be like the Almighty
To search all the inward parts of the belly, to penetrate into the hearts
To condemn a man if his thoughts are unlike theirs.
Theirs is a sword of vengeance dripping with the blood of their ire
For with their anger they have overthrown many victims. . . .
The Lord has appointed no man to judge the thoughts of another.
They are accursed, for they gave their life over to the pestilence.
The waves of these evil waters have risen.
They have flooded lands, destroyed the world.
Who can impose law and limits upon them?
The floods stood upright as a heap, and the depths were congealed in
the heart of the sea.
For you are David, you yourself
Have seen that there is no one but your right hand to save you.
You blew with your blast, and the waters subsided,
They shall not hurt nor destroy any more.³²

In 1799, five years later, David Friedländer felt nothing but repulsion toward the rabbinical elite.³³ His suggestion that the Jews join the Christian community of Berlin without converting was, of course, connected to the

failed attempts to gain political rights from the Prussian government. But it was also a radical protest against the rabbinical culture, a cry that resonated with both the Jewish and Christian public. His open letter to Teller was one of the most coherent Jewish deist texts written at the end of the eighteenth century.³⁴ From his study in his luxurious home in Berlin, he pictured himself overseeing the entire Jewish world—an involved, concerned observer who was writing memoranda, predicting the future of the Jews, and seeking solutions for the crisis.

But Friedländer's alienation and that of the small group behind him reached its peak. Like Bendavid, Friedländer called for the abolition of the commandments as an essential step toward modernization. Like other deists, he believed that this would not be a contradiction to the original Judaism: "According to the plan of the first lawgiver, the sages of each generation would retain a free hand to expand or limit the laws in relation to time and place to give them a more precise interpretation or to cancel them completely, all according to the needs of the time and to the moral customs and the general progress of the nation."³⁵

Today, Friedländer declared: "The ceremonial laws have become inapplicable . . . degenerated into empty actions."³⁶ The most important thing is to preserve the essence of Judaism, whose principles are identical with those of natural religion: the existence and unity of God, the spirituality and immortality of the soul, and man's destiny to live a moral life and to achieve happiness.³⁷ The commandments will no longer fill any function in the lives of the Jews, nor will the Jewish group have any nationalist expectations of a shared future that differs from their existence in the present, for, in his view, belief in the redemption and the return to Zion was disappearing: "Among the majority of Jews, at least in Germany, Holland, and France, this notion receives no support, and the last traces of it will ultimately be eradicated."³⁸ "Moreover, the study of Hebrew and of Talmud declines among us daily. The authority of the rabbis has diminished, and, with the neglect of ceremonial and ritual laws, it must continue to diminish."³⁹

But, Friedländer added, we are freethinking Jews, inhabitants of the large cities of Europe, and cannot wait and exist in the meantime as "a middle thing between Jews and Christians, regarded as a sect that, isolated and without followers, would have great difficulty existing and prospering."⁴⁰ It was this intolerable thought that pushed them toward the Christian community. Perhaps, then, at least their sons would gain civil rights and acquire a clear-cut identity. Apparently, at the time, when the deist assault on the Jewish religion was at its height, Friedländer, like Salomon Maimon, was looking for an escape from the Jewish group. Not until 1873, more than seventy years later, was the right of

Jews in Germany to declare themselves *konfessionslos*, devoid of religious faith, and to leave the Jewish religious community legally recognized.

Transgressions Have Become Permissible: The Counter-War of the Congregation of Believers

As more Jewish deists were exposing their views and as more texts were printed and the freethinkers were released from religious supervision, the “congregation of believers” began to feel threatened. The *Besamim rosh* affair, engendered by Saul Levin in the 1790s in an attempt to mock the system of halakhic rulings and to overthrow it, shocked the rabbinical elite throughout Europe. The rabbis’ response attested to their great confusion. They launched a campaign accompanied by invective against “the father of all abomination famous for its evil,” demonizing Saul Levin; but they also voiced their distress and despair, lamenting the loss of their power. According to Rabbi Mordechai Benet from Nikolsburg: “We are left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain to stand in the breach, but we lack the power to prevail in the war against the enemies of God who abuse us.”⁴¹

The man behind this attack against Saul Levin and other efforts to suppress what looked like a rebellion against religion and the rabbis was Raphael Kohen of Altona-Hamburg, whom we have met. As a Polish rabbi serving in northern Germany, he tried to understand what this surprising and threatening historical development meant.⁴² How had the world turned upside down? What was the meaning of this religious crisis? In a sermon he delivered before his community, he admitted that a new type of sinner had indeed emerged, one who no longer felt shame, and that systems of traditional religious supervision were collapsing:

Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word, for you know and understand that the many great breaches in the wall of halakhah . . . ring in the ears of each who hears of them, and his heart melts like wax in a fire. . . . There is but one reason, for all these serious offenses have been permitted: many among our people have led others astray. . . . They have made them crooked paths; whoever goes in them shall not know peace. Therefore is justice far from them, and hence shame is gone . . . for whoever wishes to know the reason for the grievous breaches that our eyes see and our ears hear each and every day should know that it is the absence of shame that is ruining us and that the most serious transgressions are being permitted.⁴³

No anxious questions were being uttered by conscience-stricken sinners, as Moshe Lapidoth did, one generation earlier, when he turned to his friend Salomon Maimon, and asked: “My friend, what will become of us? We have

stopped praying altogether!” When a man’s soul no longer rises up against transgressions, there is nothing, in Raphael Kohen’s opinion, to stop him from sliding down the slippery slope of heresy. He interpreted that unprecedented religious crisis as a result of the encounter between two new trends: the strengthened self-confidence of the freethinkers and their justification of sin by rationalist criticism. Kohen knew that this development had begun much earlier but had been relatively restrained and limited to individuals. Now, to his sorrow, the sect had come out into the open.⁴⁴ Angered by their audacious attacks on the rabbinical elite, he began to think of strategies for coping with this new adversary. A fighting spirit warred with despair within him. In his sermons in the 1790s, Kohen complained bitterly about the distressing situation and revealed his sense of isolation to his audience.

Kohen viewed himself and his peers in the rabbinical network as an ever-weakening group of scholars: “the surviving remnants of talmudic scholars called upon by the Almighty.”⁴⁵ On one occasion, he publicly expressed the thought that it might only be a divine test, and hence traditional Jews should demonstrate their piety. On another occasion, he declared that he would never relinquish the rabbinical elite’s power of coercion and that the obligation to impose halakhic discipline was the cornerstone of Judaism. But he primarily regarded it as his duty to strengthen the congregation of believers. He continued to build higher and higher walls between the camps and declared, like Dov Baer of Linitz on the other side of the Ashkenazic world: “We, whose hearts are perfect with the Lord our God and his Torah, we shall not discard our simple faith but will reinforce it even more.”⁴⁶ Raphael Kohen swore that he would preserve the power, honor, and authority of the rabbinical elite in the face of all those opposing it. In an appeal to his followers, he enunciated the innovative strategy of orthodoxy: to expend less effort on chastising the religiously lax and bringing them back to the straight path, and more effort on uniting the ranks and fortifying the walls of the camp of those pious Jews “who fear the word of God.”

The struggle against secularization became the modern project of the orthodox. While negating channels of secularization of all sorts, from “soft” acculturation and the adoption of fashionable clothing, through religious indifference and up to anticlerical trends and deist criticism, they united around “simple faith”—meticulous observance of the commandments without any exposure to the “judgment of reason,” under the leadership of rabbis. It was secularization that shaped the orthodox camp that adopted a conflicted position and defined itself as its absolute antithesis.⁴⁷ But that project was the historical mirror in which the significance of secularization was clearly reflected. The orthodox strategy of isolation and denunciation gave secularization the meaning of a serious social and cultural breakdown.

By listening to the voices of three of those “enemies of secularization,” who believed that they were responsible for warning against erosion of religion, we can learn how they related to these trends: Rabbi Eleazar Fleckeles, who, like Rabbi Kohen in Altona-Hamburg, struggled to strengthen the status of the rabbinical elite; Pinhas Eliahu Hurwitz, a native of Vilna (1765–1821), whose life work was his *Sefer haberit*, which grappled with the challenge of the religious skepticism of the philosophers; and Israel Loebel, who, from the time of the humiliating incident in the streets of Berlin, contended with the challenge of the new epicureans.

In Rabbi Fleckeles’ sermons in the synagogues of Prague, he singled out three sects of heretics who were a menace to religion: the maskilim, whose cultural and educational project was a malicious plot to lead the Jews to “forget the Torah of the Almighty”; the Frankist underground, which, at the end of the century, was still subverting the foundations of faith; and the “heretics and epicureans who deny the creation of the world and the existence of God.”⁴⁸ He called them all “epicureans” and regarded them all as dangerous enemies who must be defeated. He shaped the consciousness of the congregation of believers around the narrative of the crisis in religion and described the previous era as an ideal time, when religious life was unblemished: “In every city, Jews studied the Torah; in all the streets of the city, there was not a single house from which the voice of Torah was not heard in the darkness as well as in the light of day.”⁴⁹ At the time, hardly any Jews committed religious offenses, and it was relatively easy to deal with those few because religious discipline was still firmly in place and the “old” sinner was troubled by his conscience: “In earlier generations, the majority were God-fearing, and a worthless scorner was the object of disgrace and contempt if he behaved perversely, taking the wrong path, and he was punished by the rabbinical court. . . . Some, out of shame, behaved in righteous ways and did not seek the company of Gentiles. And those who honored the Torah were respected, and the God-fearing men were precious.”⁵⁰

In contrast, Fleckeles described the crisis of religion of his own time as a dramatic upheaval. In the last year of the century, he was particularly dismayed by the exposure of the Frankist cell in Prague. Hönig’s cry of distress addressed to the chief of the Prague police in 1800 was in reaction to the pressure that Fleckeles brought to bear on him. Sometimes, Fleckeles tended to scoff at those epicureans who believed that their deist worldview justified their religious laxity, probably to understate the seriousness of the problem: “The epicureans who burst forth among our people, one wave after another, and commit transgressions in public—desecrating the Sabbath, eating nonkosher food—their words are not heeded; all those who see them know well that their deeds are preposterous and evil-spirited. God-fearing men of truth will keep

their distance from them . . . and will not learn from their despicable ways. . . . They deny all divine reward and punishment, and it befits them to live a life of lawlessness.”⁵¹

Fleckeles ridiculed those religiously lax Jews and said that when one of them falls ill, he casts off his sins, forgets his heretical views, and his pains induce him quickly to repent. From this standpoint, the Sabbateans pose a far more serious problem. But worst of all, in his view, was the weakened state of the rabbinical elite: “Righteous men and the shields of the earth grow fewer in every generation; how necessary it is, then, to mourn in this generation the death of righteous Jews, for we have remained so few among the many.”⁵² Like other rabbis in Central and Western Europe, he was trapped between his desire to retain religious supervision and his limited ability to enforce it.⁵³ They were conscious of being guardians who nurture the memory of the past era of an intact religion, who bear the burden of leadership in a time of crisis as those rebelling against the religion grow ever stronger. And they waged an all-out war against the epicureans to reestablish religious discipline. It was this self-image that was the fundamental orthodox experience to which Fleckeles gave expression in his sermons in Prague in the 1790s:

But who are the guardians? They are those who never remain silent, by day or by night; they are the talmudic scholars who never cease studying Torah in this world, for they are the guardians of the walls who raise them up and keep them in place. And now, to our sorrow, the righteous guardians of the walls who devote themselves night and day to the Torah of the Almighty diminish in number in every generation . . . and the evil men multiply day by day, grow stronger, and fill the land, and we have remained the losers, in any case. The Torah of the Lord and the wisdom of the Sages are vanishing, and the leprosy of heresy is flourishing.⁵⁴

Similar anxieties were expressed in 1797 in Pinhas Hurwitz’s *Sefer haberit*: “They shall see eye to eye, since the time that studies about the philosophy of the Gentiles have increased, the number of epicureans among the Jews has increased, so much so that they transgress the fundamentals of Judaism and say that, based on empirical proofs, there is no sin in that at all, for they believe only that which can be rationally proved guides them . . . and very soon the faith will be lost.”⁵⁵

Because of the zeal with which Hurwitz defended the faith against its attackers, he ought to have belonged to that group of God-fearing orthodox Jews. But his broad horizons and his up-to-date knowledge in science and philosophy actually made him a suitable candidate for the camp of the maskilim. However, he was suspicious of them and regarded the Haskalah as another brand of heresy. After thoroughly studying the latest trends in philosophy and religious criticism, he decided in favor of the congregation of believers. If he

resembled any other Jew of his generation, that would have been his friend from London, Jacob Hart, who, in his *Milhamot hashem*, combined his knowledge of science with a polemic against atheists and deists. Hurwitz did not conceal his enthusiasm about his role as an agent of culture bringing the latest scientific innovations to the Jews at the end of the century. But the dominant voice in *Sefer haberit* expressed anxiety in the face of the growth of heresy. The major threat to the Jewish religion, in his view, came from rationalist philosophy, and the goal of his “orthodox” project was to prove that the philosophers were wrong and that the Jews had to believe in God and observe his commandments in simple faith based on what was passed down in the tradition and anchored in the halakhic literature, particularly the sixteenth-century codex *Shulhan arukh*. While Fleckeles regarded it as his mission to wage a war to preserve the power of the rabbinical elite, Hurwitz devoted himself to a project aimed at saving faith from the religious skeptics.

Hurwitz categorically recommended: “And you, dear reader, from now on, shun all philosophy, do not draw near it, and in doing so, you will satisfy the will of God, for he wants his people to believe in him only in keeping with the traditions.”⁵⁶ But Hurwitz was, at the same time, enthralled by the enormous achievements of science. He told about the crossing of the channel between France and England in a hot-air balloon, the diving bell, and the inoculation against smallpox; he explained the laws of gravity discovered by Newton and even taught his readers how to install a barometer. Hurwitz admired the skills of the scientists who had succeeded in learning the laws of nature, but he took offense at their arrogant desire to abolish all magic from the world. Thus he suggested that the belief in demons be made subject to the laws of nature, arguing that, just as it was impossible to see all creatures flying about in the air, so one could not see creatures composed of fire and air. But even without this “scientific” claim, based on his view on the writings of the kabbalists, the orthodox author of *Sefer haberit* declared that in the contest between science and faith, he unhesitatingly chose faith: “The philosophers refuse to believe in the existence of demons, and I have chosen the path of faith . . . for the Sages have written about them in the Talmud in several places.” He held that anyone who does not believe in demons does not really believe in God: “We must have trust in the Sages, whose stories about the presence of demons in the world are the truth and the whole truth.”⁵⁷

In “Derekh emunah” (The path of faith) contained in *Sefer haberit*, Hurwitz contended with the most formidable challenges posed by religious skeptics. Before rejecting all their premises as falsehoods, he chose to acquaint his readers with the essence of fashionable theories of heresy. Materialistic atheism claims that the “world has always existed and operates according to nature. . . . It came into being completely by chance, from tiny particles.” Spinozist pan-

theism holds that the divine is an integral part of the world, so much a part of all that exists that everything is interconnected, and there is no divinity that transcends the world. Those who subscribe to the deist worldview say that “the *Ein sof* is far too removed from the world to watch over it and too exalted to know everything that happens under the sun.”⁵⁸ Hurwitz also quoted the claim that Moses invented his own religion:

[They say] that God never descended to Mount Sinai, and that Moses was a very wise man in the ways of nature and politics . . . and he did everything by himself, using his great wisdom, reason, and knowledge. . . . For here I know the thoughts of the philosophers of our generation and the epicureans of our time. Nothing they have said is hidden from me, and for that, may their tongues decay in their mouths. They say that one man, and that man is Moses, misled the entire generation of the desert . . . and after they accepted what they heard from him and considered it the truth, they erred in passing it on to their children after them.⁵⁹

Although Hurwitz brought his readers the latest news from the new world of Europe, he felt so threatened by heresy that he issued dire warnings against its dangers. “There is nothing new that will bring any good and will not sin,” he declared. “Hence, be very, very cautious about anything new.” According to the rigid principles he set down, suspicion of the new and meticulous observance of the halakhah were, from then on, the glue that bonds the camp of those “who revered the word of God.” The determining test was belief in the halakhah as it was set forth in the *Shulhan arukh*, and anyone not faithful to it was declaring that he is not a Jew.⁶⁰ Because he believed that religious laxity does not generally come from philosophical study but rather from the human aspiration for freedom, Hurwitz ensconced himself behind the halakhah and toughened his position vis-à-vis the claim that the burden of the commandments was intolerable:

Be sure to take heed of the rabbis’ restrictions, for the epicureans say that the restrictions and limitation of the Sages lead them to totally cast off the burden of the commandments. They cite a parable, about a horse upon which his owner placed a load in keeping with his strength. But then came his friend and added another small load and then a second and a third came, until the owner had to unload from his horse even what he had placed at first. And I, the author, say that it is truly a parable about a lazy horse who was not accustomed to bearing a load and never wanted to suffer any burdens . . . [but] the Sages never burdened us with more than we can bear.⁶¹

The conflict between the “divine sect” and the “philosophical sect” was for Hurwitz an uncompromising war. He demanded that religion be based on absolute faith in the Torah and the words of the Sages. “Derekh emunah” ends with the desperate cry: “And you, learned reader, try to be a man of faith and

accept the truth from those who spoke it, and do not learn the ways of the Gentiles, do not draw near their house, for none that go there come back, nor do they regain the paths of life. Beware lest you breach any of the prohibitions. Seek not after your own hearts. Your faith should be based only on the tradition of the Fathers and the Torah.”⁶²

The third voice to echo the congregation of believers’ apprehension about secularization arose from the pages of *Even bohan*, a slim pamphlet printed in the last year of the century in Frankfurt an der Oder.⁶³ At the time, its author, Israel Loebel, was devoted to his anti-Hasidic campaign. He waged a personal vendetta against that “sect of Hasidim,” which had not only swept up so many Jews but had even succeeded in capturing his own brother, and all his attempts to gain his release were to no avail. The task he set himself was an ambitious one: to reveal the truth about the Hasidim, to halt the printing of Hasidic literature, and to enlist the support of heads of state in Europe to prevent the sect from recruiting new members. As soon as Loebel came across the sect of epicureans, he warned against the double danger. Now not only the Hasidim were threatening the traditional religion but also the skeptics. While staying in Frankfurt an der Oder, he printed his last two works: *Even bohan*, which exposes the new “sect of epicureans”; and a German work, *Reliable Information about a New, Large Sect among the Jews in Poland and Lithuania, Known as the Hasidim*.⁶⁴

While Raphael Kohen identified the “new sinner” who had lost all sense of guilt; Eleazar Fleckeles defended the power of the rabbinical elite; Pinhas Hurwitz barred men’s minds against philosophy and entrenched himself behind the walls of the “simple faith”; and Israel Loebel uncovered the Jewish deists, who sought a life of freedom from the burden of religion but claimed that they were adhering to the core of the faith and the morals of the Torah—Jews without commandments, or, as he called them, “the new epicureans who pretend to be Jews.”⁶⁵

Even bohan was entirely devoted to the problem of the epicureans. According to Loebel, this term was frequently bandied about as a derogatory label, and too often it was used indiscriminately. In the ongoing conflict between Hasidim and Mitnagdim, “everyone uses the name ‘epicurean.’ The Mitnagdim call the Hasidim epicureans, the Hasidim say that all those who do not accept their way are epicureans.”⁶⁶ So Loebel thought it was time to introduce some order, to categorize and define the various subgroups. His first distinction was based on the degree of consciousness of sin: “One type sins unknowingly, and the other type willingly sins; they know their Sovereign and rebel against him by denying the divine laws. . . . And they have no fear of God in their hearts. . . . Their hearts are empty of any fear, and they lack a conscience.”⁶⁷ Within this second group are various brands of heresy: atheists,

moderate deists who deny that there is divine reward and punishment, and radical deists who deny revelation.

But of all these, Loebel most wished to expose those whom he called the “new epicureans.” He had learned about them from Friedländer’s open letter to Teller, and he regarded them as a sophisticated variety of deists: they denied providence and the divine source of the Torah and Moses’ mission; but they declared that they consented to the rational commandments in the Torah (such as the Ten Commandments), and hence they demanded to be trusted as men of religion. But for Loebel, they posed a greater threat than any of the others: “They are the most dangerous, for they present themselves as men of religion and faith, and they are not such. . . . They pretend to accept the whole Torah, although they do not want its religion. . . . They are the rabble among our people who desire to do what is right in their own eyes.”⁶⁸

Loebel’s *Even bohan* was intended to provide a precise compass with which anyone could identify this heresy and take care not to fall prey to it. It is dangerous because, like Hasidism, it is a digression from the “Torah of Moses” and simultaneously an expression of a life of freedom without moral restrictions. Deists of the new type live not only without faith in the Torah and without any commandments but also without God in their hearts. He regarded their declaration of faith in God as a deception. Is it possible to maintain a moral, proper society without the fear of God? Loebel’s reply, like the arguments of Locke and Mendelssohn, was that he who denies the existence of God poses a moral and social threat. In addition, like the Hasidim, the new epicureans were waging a campaign of propaganda to disseminate their worldview, and if they should succeed, the result would be no less than total anarchy. No one would be safe in his soul or his property: “When a man has no fear of God, what is to stop him from secretly abusing others?”⁶⁹

In Loebel’s agitated rhetoric, the word “danger” recurs again and again. Like his predecessors, the supervisors of religion such as Moshe Hagiz or Jacob Emden, he sounded alarms and tried to instill in his readers a consciousness of the threat that so troubled him. In the final analysis, Loebel’s polemic centered on one crucial point—the validity of the Torah and its commandments: “Those epicureans who refuse to adhere to these beliefs: . . . What led them to fabricate the notion that the holy Torah was given only for past times and is not relevant to our own time?”⁷⁰ This was his immediate reaction to Friedländer’s deist pamphlet and his argument that the laws were “temporary” and could be changed or even abolished.

Can it be true, Loebel asked, that “Moses, of blessed memory, conceived on his own everything written in the holy Torah, and deceived everyone into believing that he was an emissary of the Almighty”? *Even bohan* armed the “congregation of believers” with a weapon that they could use to defend them-

selves against these familiar deist claims. Moses was not a deceiver and did not fabricate the Torah. The divine revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai was a public event, and no one can doubt the testimony of the 600,000 Israelites, which was passed down from generation to generation in a reliable tradition. The miracles that occurred during the exodus from Egypt and in the Sinai desert were not made, as the deists claim, through trickery but were the acts of God. Even today, he argued, not a single man of science can produce such wondrous acts as those that took place according to the testimony of the Torah.⁷¹ There are those who say, in the spirit of Spinoza, that “God’s only intent at Mount Sinai was to hand down laws that would enable the political and social existence of the Jews in a properly run society.” But what God demands of his people is total obedience to his commandments and their full observance, whether or not there is any logical point to them or whether or not it is possible to comprehend their purpose.⁷²

Like most preachers, Israel Loebel used tales and parables. When he contended with the claim that the observance of the commandments was no longer in effect, he wrote:

From now on, the question about these epicureans is a two-part question. What is their evil intent regarding the laws of the Almighty? If they mean to say that Moses enacted these laws for his own time because they seemed right for that time and that generation . . . what did Moses accomplish in enacting them if tomorrow others will rise up and abolish the laws for the same reason? And the other part of the question is: Did those epicureans share in the divine secrets so that they knew for how long these laws were valid? . . . How is it that these epicureans could penetrate the thought of the Creator, blessed be he, which is beyond all searching?

This is tantamount to the subject of a state appropriating the right to violate the king’s law by claiming that it is no longer valid, while the king is still seated on his throne:

Can we imagine that a king would issue a legal ordinance to the people of his state without explaining the reason for it and setting the time until which it will be in effect, and while that king was still on his throne, someone will come forward saying that this order is no longer valid? Obviously, he who violates the king’s command will be put to death. And if we are not permitted to speak out against the command of a king whose flesh and blood is like ours and whose mind is like ours, nor may we find fault with his laws, then how can these epicureans delve into the thought of the Creator, blessed be his name, which is beyond all searching?⁷³

At the end of the eighteenth century, the two extremes of the crisis in Jewish religion in Europe were represented by David Friedländer, as a deist who wanted to construct the identity of the freethinkers based on “the pure

Torah of Moses” and gain release from the commandments; and Israel Loebel, as the protector of the traditional religion and a fighter against epicureans. The processes of secularization that were manifested in religious laxity in practice and in religious skepticism began to mature and expand. In opposition to them, the camp of the orthodox, those “who revere the word of God,” began to take shape.

The big questions that these historical developments raised were encapsulated in the Lithuanian preacher’s parable of the King. Does the King truly exist? Does he still reign? Are his commands still valid, and do they obligate his subjects? The answers, like the different mind-sets that fed them and the ways in which the Jews read the reality, were poles apart. The Jewish subjects of the “new world” aspired to freedom, and many of them, in the spirit of deism, denied the revelation and the ritual obligations. In contrast, the spokesmen of the “congregation of believers,” the Jewish subjects of the upside-down world, argued that the former were rebelling against the Sovereign, incited by their passions, craving a life devoid of any supervision, discipline, or morals, and striving to overthrow the King’s rule. God, Loebel explained, no longer dwells in the hearts of the new epicureans. They believe that “everything was created for their sake, and if this is so, there is no prohibition, no ban nor oath. There is only absolute permission and the finest commandment of all—to satisfy any and all of their desires.”⁷⁴

Summary

Free Jews and the Origins of Secularization

Was the King removed from his throne? Did God abandon the world that he created, leaving it to the laws of nature and man's free will? Or is he still overseeing the world, and is it necessary to restore him as a ruler who demands faith and ritual? Was the rebellion against God so sweeping that fear of God has dissipated and the status of the clergy has crumbled? Have the mechanisms of discipline and religious supervision broken down completely? Will men and women be happier in their lives without the guidance of the Holy Scriptures, whose reliability is dubious and whose morality is flawed? And did the new world free the sons of Europe from the shackles of religion and enable them to live as thinking, autonomous human beings, or did it become an upside-down world, in which hedonists and libertines trampled upon the values of morality and tradition? These were some of the questions that troubled many Jews and Christians alike at the end of the eighteenth century.

The cultural and economic climate in urban and commercial Europe aroused frenzied winds of change. The aspiration for improvement, success, happiness, and pleasure in this world came at the expense of religious faith. The desire to get the most out of life and the criticism of beliefs and views that impeded that desire were expressed in indifference toward religion, in the unwillingness to meet its demands, and sometimes even in open revolt against it. In the same year (1768) in which we initiated our search for the origins of Jewish secularization in Salomon Maimon and Moshe Lapidoth's personal story of rebellion, Leopold Mozart complained in a letter from Vienna about the epidemic of disbelief that was raging in Europe.¹ Four years earlier, at the trial in London's Old Bailey of John Jacob Hart, charged with theft, a Christian witness stated that when the accused was asked why he had accepted ten shillings from him on the Sabbath, adding, "I thought you Jews would not touch money on your Sabbath," the vulgar reply was: "As to money and a pretty girl, they may be touched at any time."²

The term "secularization," in its modern sense, was coined only in the mid-nineteenth century, but eighteenth-century Jews and Christians viewed the weakened hold of religion on life as a sign of the new world. Philosophical,

bourgeois, and vulgar trends of secularization were interconnected. The elites of merchants and financiers adopted the economic ethos that prized benefit and success as well as the bourgeois value of a fashionable life in a consumer society. Intellectuals cultivated critical thinking that reexamined truths that had been passed down in the religious tradition.

But in the lower classes, men and women who had a hard time making ends meet scarcely observed their religious obligations, and they rejected the clergy's control over their lives. In the eighteenth century, McLeod stated, religious practice was "declining at the upper and the lower ends of the social hierarchy: at the upper end, for intellectual reasons [notably deism]; at the lower end, for demographic reasons, notably the growth of poor suburbs with little religious supervision in the large towns."³ Secularization only reached its peak in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, then becoming a mass phenomenon of such proportions that the various churches, including the rabbinical elite, were, in many parts of Europe, pushed to the sidelines, and the state and modern culture provided services, institutions, and values that replaced religion. But in the eighteenth century, the roots of secularization first emerged among both Christians and Jews. Religion still maintained its hold on many people, but rationalist criticism of religions grew, the deist worldview took shape, anticlerical trends were strengthened, and amid conflicts and struggles, the authority of priests and rabbis was weakened.

In the eighteenth century, the culture of the modern city offered a secular substitute for the experience of religious ritual in the form of entertainment, the consumption of luxuries, and fashions that changed with dizzying frequency. Ambitious individuals, seeking to live as free men, unrestrained by religious discipline, became more self-confident. The birth of the "new world" was attended by the repressed voices of the freethinking Jews and the angry voices of the "congregation of believers." A penetrating look into the life of European Jewry, with the help of several perceptive individuals who left behind fascinating testimonies, reveals dramatic changes that occurred in that century. It discerns not only the various channels through which religion was weakened but also identifies religiously lax and skeptical Jews whose existence was not previously known to us.

Those people who observed and became involved in the streams of change were not always able to define the historical course whose beginning they were witnessing. When they attempted to depict secularization in the double sense of sin and doubt, permissiveness and heresy, modern acculturation and skepticism, they used an array of terms, such as *Freigeister*, naturalists, deists, philosophers, heretics, heterodox, new world, enlightened, primitive Hebrews, wicked men, deniers of religion, new epicureans, and even "new Israelites." The religiously observant made frequent use of the pejorative term

“sect of epicureans.” The first freethinking Jews emerged in a climate of suspicion, demonization, and delegitimization. The widespread use of the term “epicureans” reflected the intensity of the encounter with secularization and the confusion bred by the effort to interpret and understand it. Of course, this was not a mass movement that launched an attack on the walls of religion with the aim of bringing them down in a spontaneous or well-planned revolutionary step. In reality, there was no such thing as an organized sect that united all those who rejected religion. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to think that the sect of epicureans was only a demonic phantasm of heresy that lacked real substance. On the contrary, the testimonies collected here prove that a heterogeneous group of skeptical, religiously lax Jews, scattered over many different places, emerged, developed, and spread, and that these Jews launched a historical course that, in the eighteenth century, had considerable public impact.

Indications of this development were numerous: public displays of defiance in the street or the synagogue against religious discipline and belief in divine providence, or toward those who looked like Jews of the old world; claims that the Torah was an invention of Moses or that the existing Jewish religion was a distortion of the pure Mosaic principles of faith; conflicts between the religiously lax and the rabbinical leadership; sermons against all manner of epicureans; violations of Sabbath and kashrut prohibitions; fashionable dress that breached religious restrictions; men’s shaven beards and sidelocks; married women’s uncovered heads; women in low-cut dresses; leisure time spent in taverns, coffeehouses, or the theater; sexual offenses; refusal to obey the rabbis’ rulings; requests to be released from the authority of the community; failure to observe fast days, to lay phylacteries, and to attend prayer services in the synagogue.

Secularization had some vulgar characteristics (popular expressions of defiance, mockery of the rabbi in the synagogue, or provocative clothing) as well as elitist elements (philosophical-deist criticism or the indulgence in art and music). It also had distinct gender-related aspects. Denying Polish teachers control over the education of boys in Central and Western Europe impaired the ideal of the Jewish man as a Talmud scholar and consigned the yeshivot and the study of Torah to Eastern Europe.

The exclusion of women from high religious culture and its world of knowledge and books explains why their voices were hidden, making it nearly impossible to uncover any outspoken skeptical views by them about religion. We did, however, see how attuned Glikl was to the beginning of acculturation; we observed the burgeoning trend of fashionable women and heard the voices of protest of women such as Henriette Herz and Fanny Arnstein vis-à-vis religious supervision. In fact, a relatively large number of women aspired to live in the new world, to conform to its fashions, and to take advantage of oppor-

tunities offered by the modern city. The wives and daughters of merchants and financiers underwent deep modern acculturation and consumed European culture, in the form of private music, dance, and French lessons, visits to the theater and opera, and clothing in the latest style.

The tendency to indulge in new forms of entertainment and wear fashionable clothing was no less strong among women of the lower, poorer class, including servants. Among many of them, the desire to express themselves freely, to experience erotic stimulation, and to enjoy life overcame the prohibitions of religion. As Liliane Weissberg argued, among women, modern acculturation, in all its elements—the desire for the new, the fashionable, the aesthetic, and the pleasurable—was tantamount to a dramatic personal step of “secular conversion.” This step took many of them from the traditional world, which they knew almost solely as a system of oppressive, perverse restrictions, to the seductive, freeing new world.⁴

Secularization had a hold on many European communities, but the major sites of secularization were in Western, Northern, and Central Europe, in communities where the presence of the new world was particularly salient. Among the Jews of London, Amsterdam, Altona-Hamburg, Berlin, and Königsberg, secularization took place in the historical context of the great change in Europe and its culture. The bustling life of commerce, the cosmopolitan diversity of the metropolis, the hubbub of business conducted in coffeehouses, the constant interest in the news provided by the press, the temptations of the big city, the easy access to the latest fashion, popular entertainment, and new modes of thought—all these fueled Jewish secularization in these places. They spurred modern acculturation, sharpened criticism of religion, and intensified aspirations to find release from the burden of religious discipline. The Jewish world of the eighteenth century was dynamic; Jews moved from place to place, and the family, rabbinical, and commercial networks of communication transmitted with relative speed information and rumors from one part of Europe to the other.

In the last third of the century, warnings against “naturalists” were voiced by Ezekiel Landau from Prague in Central Europe, Jacob Emden in Altona in northern Germany, and David Tevele from Lissa in western Poland. The searchlight that looked here for the roots of secularization did not illuminate every site on the map of European Jewry with the same intensity. Thus, only here and there did Italian Jews (such as Ephraim Luzzatto, the London hedonist physician) enter the picture, although for many in Central Europe, they served as successful models of modern acculturation. The map of Jewish secularization extended far beyond the communities of Western Europe and Prussia and encompassed religiously lax, skeptical, and fashionable Jews, and quite a few echoes of concern and anxiety in other communities, old and new, small

and large, including Vienna, Prague, Metz, Bordeaux, Frankfurt, Hanover, Breslau, The Hague, Bonn, Paris, Copenhagen, Vitebsk, Vilna, and even the immigration centers in North America, such as New York and Philadelphia.

Beyond the general climate in European cities, the growth of Jewish secularization was influenced mainly by two models of Jewish acculturation: the Western Sephardic Jews in the new communities of Western Europe, who combined their Jewish religious identity with their European identity long before the eighteenth century and provided a precedent and role model for Ashkenazic Jews who lived near them in London, Amsterdam, or Hamburg; and families of “court Jews” in Central Europe from the mid-seventeenth century, who, in their aristocratic lifestyle, provided a precedent and a reference group for Jews who aspired to economic and social success.

Also contributing to secularization were the changes in attitude of the state in relation to religious tolerance and relative freedom, which first made an impact in England and Holland, and the weakened status of communal and rabbinical leadership as a result of the effort to build a centralized, effective government in the countries of Western Europe in the age of absolutism, which culminated in emancipation in the French Revolution. They aroused among Jewish deists expectations not only for protection against persecution and slander but for the birth of a civil society that would allow them to have a Jewish secular identity outside the boundaries of the community.

Other changes included the shocking breach of boundaries by radical Sabbatean groups through their religious and sexual permissiveness and their revolt against the Talmudists, as well as the significant presence of several hundred Jewish physicians, graduates of universities and medical schools in Germany, Italy, and Holland, some of whom became in their locale the nucleus of an acculturated Jewish intelligentsia open to new science and religious criticism.⁵

Beyond all these historical contexts, we probably should search for the code of secular conversion in the meaningful decision, either hidden or openly declared, of men and women to partially or completely cast off the oppressive burden of religion. The Marquis d’Argens’s protagonist Aaron Monceca offers an explanation for religious permissiveness: “It is the fate of religions that impose an insufferable yoke and a parcel of useless maxims not to be observed. For man, who is born for liberty, at length breaks those chains that keep him in a slavery that deprives him of the use of life and of civil society.”⁶ Later, the radical deist Moses Hirschel of Breslau protested: “It is unthinkable that it is the will of God that we should not enjoy any happiness in our lives on this earth. . . . For all of our suffering, hatred, contempt, and the denial of our rights to citizenship and freedom, are to blame only the halakhah, which dictates our way of life, and those people who have attempted with all their force

to deliberately impose it upon us.”⁷ Eliezer Schweid stated that “secularization . . . is expressed in a strong desire to return to a full natural, earthly life, in contrast to the ‘spirituality,’ which is cut off from natural life, of halakhic Judaism as it has taken shape in the Diaspora.”

Although Schweid had in mind the later phases of Jewish secularization of the twentieth century that accompanied Zionism and its negation of the Diaspora, it is possible to project this insight back to eighteenth-century Europe and to paraphrase Schweid’s words by stating that “secularization is expressed in the rebellious, resolute demand to acknowledge the moral legitimacy of the desire to fully gratify natural human drives in contrast to the halakhah, which abjures them.”⁸ If the maskilim’s rebellion against control of the rabbinical elite over knowledge, education, and culture resulted from the awakened desire for knowledge and new values and frustration in the face of narrow-mindedness in an era of dramatic scientific and philosophical innovations,⁹ here it was triggered by temptations of the flesh and fashion and the desire for happiness and freedom of life and thought. The decision of Jewish men and women in Europe, whether expressed in modern acculturation or in religious skepticism, to ignore or to struggle against religious discipline is a major key to understanding the inception of secularization.

Several special characteristics of Jewish secularization were manifest at this early stage of the historical process. It seems that the appearance of a sect of epicureans engendered—more than it did in Christian Europe—a series of extremely sensitive reactions and raised questions of an existential nature. Since the Jews tested faithfulness to religion mainly on the basis of the observance of commandments, behavior was the criterion for identifying epicureans much more than religious skepticism was. Hence, observant Jews were attuned to modern acculturation, and their system of supervision hastened to warn against even relatively soft acculturation, expressed in adaptation to fashion. Any refusal to accept a rabbi’s ruling was interpreted as total rebellion against the “religion of Israel” and time spent in taverns as the “abandonment of God.”

This was joined by another type of sensitivity peculiar to Jewish secularization: acculturation, religious laxity, and a deist view meant crossing the boundaries that separated the Jewish minority group from the Christian majority society. If men shaved their beards or wore wigs, women revealed their hair, or either sex attended the theater, these acts were denounced not only as sins but as attempts to resemble non-Jews. The guardians of the “walls of the religion” accused fashionable Jews of no longer wanting to publicly be identified as Jews. The desire to live according to fashion was interpreted as an attempt to blur the external features that distinguished Jews from non-Jews. For freethinkers and religious Jews alike, the significance of radical seculariza-

tion was what would later be called assimilation—abandonment of the group of origin, betrayal of the family and tradition of the fathers, and loss of Jewish identity. We need to bear in mind that at that time, conditions did not yet exist that would enable a Jew to have a secular Jewish identity that would be recognized by the state and the law as well as by Jewish society. For this reason, as we have seen, Abigaill Franks demanded of herself in America and of her children in England that they conceal their criticism of religion and observe the commandments to avoid eradicating their Jewish identity, cutting themselves off from the Jewish group, and losing their membership in the community that, among other things, entitled them to a Jewish burial.

The process of secularization gained momentum in the second half of the eighteenth century, and from the 1760s, skepticism was more public, modern acculturation was more sweeping, and the freethinkers gained self-confidence. It is impossible to determine the number of freethinkers among European Jewry, but we can assume that in the overall picture, which also takes into account the hundreds of thousands of Jews living in Poland-Lithuania before the partition, they were in the minority. But in the cities, which were the major sites of Jewish secularization, increasing numbers were becoming secularized. Religious laxity was prevalent in London, and, as far as Germany is concerned, Christian witnesses had the impression that in the 1780s, hundreds, and even thousands, of Jews had abandoned their religion. Secularization created an atmosphere of tension, expectations, and hopes. Through the windows we opened onto the process of secularization among eighteenth-century Jews, we heard diverse voices, some proclaiming release from religious supervision, others lamenting the crisis in religion. The “old world” and the “new world” entered a conflict that reached the level of the street.

Two extreme cries of alarm that reached our ears from two areas of the Jewish world in 1789 illustrate this. From Prussian Breslau, Moses Hirschel proclaimed his conversion to deism: “For a long time, I sought . . . the way to free myself of the shackles of the accepted superstitions and prejudices that make the trash heap of ceremonial laws into the laws of God, while they render the true religion and true fear of God negligible.”¹⁰ And from London, the writer of an anonymous pamphlet attacked “the new hypocritical heretics and epicureans who have recently appeared, whom our forefathers never dreamed of, and are called by all a new world. They stand above us to destroy us, to abolish our holy, pure Torah, the written as well as the oral.”¹¹ Religious behavior, dress, appearance, and degree of observance of the commandments all became signifiers that distinguished between groups and determined boundaries. To counter the “sect of epicureans,” an orthodoxy emerged, whose oppositional identity was shaped from the anxiety aroused by heresy,

on the one hand, and the drive to preserve the group of those faithful to the religion and to reject secularization, on the other.

What did the crisis in religion look like at the turn of the century? If we were to enter a Frankfurt synagogue in the first decade of the nineteenth century and listen to the sermons of Rabbi Zevi Hirsch Horowitz, we would learn that secularization had made such great strides that the heads of the rabbinical elite in Central Europe had raised the white flag of surrender.¹² The laxity was manifested in desecration of the Sabbath, beards shaved with a razor, the failure to observe the prohibitions against the milk and wine of non-Jews, women's uncovered hair, and attendance at masked balls and the theater. The refusal to support the few yeshiva students who still studied with Horowitz, along with the drastic decline in the number of worshippers on weekdays, brought the preacher to despair. As Jacob Katz wrote: "To be at the head of such a community was a new and bewildering experience for a rabbi, who, according to the accepted pattern, was responsible for the religious conduct of his flock. The fashion in which Rabbi Horowitz addressed his community was tantamount to an admission of defeat in the face of deviation that had become a common phenomenon."¹³ The preacher's rhetoric was marked by mockery of the "new Jews" but also by lament over the world that had been destroyed and fear of the "fire of epicureanism." Again and again, Rabbi Horowitz depicted the enemy: "Epicureanism has spread among some men who call themselves a new sect and do not believe in the Almighty, blessed be his name."¹⁴

Like the rabbis Fleckeles and Kohen, several years earlier, Horowitz also understood that a fundamental change had occurred in the status of religion. People no longer felt any shame, and religious offenders suffered no pangs of conscience, so there was no point in expecting them to atone: "To our great sorrow, faith has now been so diminished that in [the epicureans'] eyes, there is no Father, heaven forbid."¹⁵ The French conquest and the opening of a modern Jewish school were signs of change in the balance of forces in the Frankfurt community. It was no longer possible, as it had been in the 1790s, to persecute freethinkers such as the stock-exchange agent Wolf Wahl. Against this background, it is not hard to understand Rabbi Horowitz's bitter disappointment, which he gave vent to in the last sentences of his sermon in winter 1810:

Now, my dear people, we must complain and lament as we recall the earlier days when this city was full of scholars and writers, and the sound of Torah study was heard even at midnight from every house in the Jewish street. To our great sorrow, how our holy Torah given to us at Mount Sinai, the beauty of Israel, has been cast down from heaven to the earth. . . . The honor of our Torah is being reduced from day to day, and it now lies neglected, no one cares for it or seeks it, and every man does what is right in his

own eyes. And how many men are there who speak in scorn and derision about the burden of the Torah and the many commandments. . . . And how greatly is faith in the Oral Torah grown weak, for only a handful now let their sons study the Talmud. . . . If so, my dear people, we have no one to rely on but our Father in heaven, who receives our tears.¹⁶

In Ukraine, relatively far from the sites where the roots of secularization emerged, the Hasidic *tsadik* Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav was not prepared to come to terms even with the rumor that the King had been ousted from the world. During the years when Rabbi Horowitz was preaching to his community in Frankfurt, and a short time before Rabbi Nahman's death in 1810, when he was telling his followers in Bratslav and Uman his tales, he warned against the epicureans, instilled in them the hope that God would be restored to his former status, and demanded of them that they retain their "simple faith," devoid of any doubt or rational criticism. Rabbi Nahman, who regarded himself as the friend, relative, and emissary of the King, agonized over the crisis of faith in God. He tried to convey to his listeners the magnitude of the theological tragedy—it was not God who had abandoned the world, as the deists claimed, but his sons and daughters, and his subjects who had abandoned their Father and their King.

Rabbi Nahman's criticism of the epicureans' rationalism was exceedingly trenchant, but apparently he also had tasted the experience of religious skepticism, as many of his generation had, until he forced himself to shun the temptations of heresy, just as he restrained his desires for sex and food.¹⁷ In his war against rationalism, he was influenced by Pinhas Hurwitz's *Sefer haberit* and used a number of his arguments against "philosophers."¹⁸ But he went much further, even making a paradoxical claim that questioned the certainty of the laws of geometry: "I believe that God can make a triangular rectangle, for God's ways are hidden from us. He is omnipotent, and no deed is beyond him. But such inquiries are completely forbidden. One should rather seek wholeness of faith."¹⁹

In summer 1809, Rabbi Nahman depicted deism as a catastrophic worldview and the Jewish deists as demons with whom only the *tsadik* can cope:

There are certain wicked beasts who trample and gore their prey; these beasts are the natural scientists who show through their distorted "wisdom" that everything occurs by natural causes as though there were, God forbid, no divine will. Even the awesome miracles that the Lord has performed for us are interpreted by them as though they are natural events. These scientists are like wicked beasts, trampling and goring many of our people, those who follow in their way. . . . The defeat of these wicked beasts, the scientists, comes only through the great sage of holiness.²⁰

The anti-intellectual approach became a defensive wall against the temptations of the Enlightenment, and the "holy faith" a place of refuge and the

formative religious ethos of life.²¹ One such believer was the simple ordinary man in Rabbi Nahman's "Story of the Wise Man and the Simple Man." In that story, he tried to convince himself and his followers that in the end, simple faith would triumph over heresy. In it, the wise skeptic and the simple believer engage in an uncompromising existential struggle. On the one side, there is the wise man, who is curious, and wanders through the world guided only by his critical reason, learning various crafts, languages, philosophy, and medicine, but he ends up casting doubt on the very existence of God and mocks all those who believe in the magic powers of the practical kabbalists. On the other side is the simple man, the believer, who leads his simple, modest life with joy, satisfaction, and acceptance, and, most important, free of any doubts. The wise man receives a letter of invitation brought by the messenger of the king, and at once his mind is filled with many questions, until he finally arrives at the skeptical conclusion that either the king has no interest in his subjects (God is distant from the world and does not oversee it), or that he does not exist at all:

The wise man tried to show off his wisdom and his philosophy. He stated: Why should such a king send for such an insignificant person like me? Who am I that the king should send for me? What is the meaning? He is a king who has such power and grandeur, and I am so insignificant compared with such a king. . . . And he said to the messenger: Do you know what I think? It is conclusive that there is no king in the world at all. And the whole world is misled by this nonsense when they think there is a king. Can you understand how it is plausible that the whole world would give itself up and rely on one man? Surely there is no king in the world at all. Tell me, have you ever seen the king? He answered him: No. So the wise man said: Now see that I am right. There is no king at all. Because even you have never seen the king. And he replied: Yes, that is true. Not everyone merits seeing the king, who reveals himself only on very rare occasions. . . . And the wise man said: Come outside with me, and I will prove to you how the whole world is misled and that there surely is no king at all.²²

In Rabbi Nahman's story, it turns out that the skeptic's success is an illusion, and his confidence in his intellect is flimsy. In the final analysis, the wise man is helplessly trapped by the power of the *ba'al shem*. In the victory scene, he is forced to admit not only that the King exists but that the *tsadikim* possess magic powers and can work miracles.²³

The story of the overwhelming victory of faith over heresy and the Hasidic proofs that magic is constantly present in the world seem far removed from the historical reality at the dawn of the nineteenth century. But religion was not preserved only among groups of Hasidim in Eastern Europe, in the yeshivot established by the scholarly Mitnagdim in Lithuania or in the orthodox "congregation of believers" whose spokesman was Rabbi Horowitz. Although secularization continued to spread and deepen from then on among

European Jews, the fears of the orthodox that religion would disappear and rebellion against God would triumph never materialized. Religion did not disappear, not even in the major sites of secularization in Central and Western Europe, but its place in society underwent far-reaching changes.²⁴ The very formation of the congregation of believers into a camp that sealed itself off from freethinking Jews by means of orthodox strategies of struggle and isolation marks one of the striking changes in the status of the religion.²⁵

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, the dialectical results of secularization began to emerge. Its unique meaning for the Jews as a breakdown of their self-identity and the dissolution of the unity of the Jewish group gave rise to new solutions that linked tradition and innovation, religion and modernity. Enlightened educators, thinkers, writers, and rabbis, concerned about the erosion of Jewish identity, from then on searched feverishly for a “third path.” They attempted to shape a middle path that would make Jewish existence possible in a secular climate—a path somewhere between the preservation of the tradition in the form of the old world, and heresy, which was interpreted as moral weakness, and drifting from the group, which was interpreted as assimilation. At the same time, deism gradually fell out of fashion, and religion returned to culture and society in a romantic cast that offered emotion, psychological gratification, and meaning to life. The deist God, withdrawn from the world, no longer provided satisfaction. Young Jewish men and women, influenced by new moods, sought a religion that would fill their lives and found it, on more than one occasion, in Christianity.²⁶

Those who desired to block radical secularization and the temptation of conversion to Christianity regarded irreligiosity as a problem that called for a solution. In modern schools, established mainly in Germany, studies of religion would become a focus around which Jewish identity was shaped and moral values derived. Catechisms, books, and pamphlets of religious guidance, printed in German and in Hebrew, suggested that teachers and students, far removed from the traditional world of Torah study, learn the principles of the Jewish religion and its lessons for the loyal citizen, the good Jew, and the moral person. Concerned educators in Berlin would then say that it was their duty “to see that the youth of this community receive a better religious and civil education. We cannot ignore the fact that some Jews stray from the religion in two directions—some to the path of rabbinism and others to the path of religious indifference—and abandon the correct main road. The middle path is that of the pure religion of Moses and the prophecy.”²⁷

Modern synagogues and a reform theology would present the religion as one that is appropriate for bourgeois German Jews living in the secular sphere. *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the product of a group of Jewish students and scholars who had undergone modern acculturation, would make religion,

along with other components of Jewish tradition and literature, a subject of study to promote the Jews' self-esteem, preserve their identity, and serve as a source of pride. The religion would also be preserved in the demarcated sphere of family and synagogue customs and would undergo secularization itself to become, instead of a living tradition of scholarship and strict observance of the commandments, an element of Jewish culture.²⁸

In Eastern Europe, where that tradition would retain its central role in Jewish life, the Haskalah as a movement of a secular intellectual elite would fill the role of the third path. Its members would push Hasidism and its beliefs and leadership to the sidelines but embrace education, literature, and historical research; they would replace the ideal of Torah scholars with new ideals that combined Jewish identity and involvement in the life of the state and European culture. As religious laxity and radical acculturation increased in the cities of Eastern Europe, the maskilim would be the first to denounce the erosion of Jewish identity, as well as to proclaim the need to shape a modern national identity.²⁹

From the perspective of the social history of secularization, a more diversified picture emerged in the nineteenth century. New factors such as demographic growth and emigration from East to West and from the villages to the cities influenced the pace and nature of secularization. There would be differences between small and large, new and old communities, between Jews living in areas where the inhabitants are greatly acculturated and those where traditional Christianity maintained its hold and power. A greater number of highly educated Jews, deeply involved in European culture and society, would feel alienated from Judaism.

Among the immigrants to the large cities, the struggle to earn a living would be a significant factor in their neglect of the demands of religion. But many would maintain their Jewish identity in new, diverse ways, even in the midst of growing secularization. The family commitment and social pressure would continue to have an impact on the preservation of religion. Even in locations where secularization was extensive, the accepted pattern of socializing only with Jews and marrying Jewish spouses would be maintained. Immigrants from Galicia or Russia to the cities of Central and Western Europe would be split between those who viewed abandonment of the traditional community as an opportunity to cast off the burden of religion and those who tried to meticulously observe the religious way of life, even in the immigrant neighborhoods of Berlin or London. Jewish shopkeepers and tradesmen whose living depended on their working on the Sabbath would live in the cities of England and Germany, a life of negotiations and compromises with their religion: ignoring the religious prohibitions while keeping a kosher home, attending the synagogue on holidays, and lighting Sabbath candles.³⁰

But all this is only a taste of what we will see as we glance into the nineteenth century and gain an overview of the channels through which secularization progressed. The origins of all this lie in the new world that was born in the eighteenth century and first challenged traditional life. The dramatic changes that occurred then awakened the aspiration to gain release from religion and orthodox segregation behind the walls of faith, the halakhah, and the rabbinical leadership. In that same historical hour, secularization defined the arena in which, from then on, many diverse forms of religion and secularism would compete and conflict—the arena in which the variety of modern Jewish identities are constantly tested.

Notes

Preface

1. See C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.
2. Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*.
3. J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 11–12.
4. P. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 106–8. For a modified view, see idem (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World*.
5. McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe*, 13.
6. Feiner, *Haskalah and History*; and idem, *The Jewish Enlightenment*.
7. Shohet, *Changing Eras* (Hebrew); and Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*.
8. Biale, “*Toward a Cultural History*”; and Rosman, *How Jewish Is Jewish History*, 131–53.

Introduction

1. This theological question is linked to the nature of processes of secularization and the way they were represented—as intellectual history that studies the emergence of new ideas and the beginning of the process of declining religious thought among the educated elite (secularization “from above”) or as social history—changes in social and economic history that gave rise to new patterns of behavior among large groups (secularization “from below”) that broke down the religious and clerical norms. On this, see Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind*.
2. See Biale, “Eros and Enlightenment.”
3. In the autobiography that appeared in German in two parts in 1792–93: *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*. The reference here is to the English edition: Maimon, *An Autobiography*, 143.
4. Maimon, *Autobiography*, 139.
5. See Israel, “Was There a Pre-1740 Sephardic Jewish Enlightenment?,” 14.
6. On Salomon Maimon, see Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Solomon Maimon*; and G. Freudenthal (ed.), *Salomon Maimon*.
7. Maimon, *Autobiography*, 143. See Feiner, “Solomon Maimon.”
8. On the pseudo-Haskalah and its importance in documenting processes of secularization, see Feiner, “The Pseudo-Enlightenment.”
9. See Feiner, “Eradicating Wisdom from the World” (Hebrew), 57–83.
10. See, at length, on that culture campaign in the 1780s, Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, part 2.

11. For example, in the theological book by J. Meyer, *Die nährische Welt*, atheists, deists, those indifferent to religion, and naturalists were all grouped under one derogatory heading: *Freigeister*, and sometimes also epicureans. See Liepe, *Der Freigeist*, 9.

12. On the eighteenth century as a turning point, see Jacob Katz, “The Turning Point of Modern Jewish History”; and Abramsky, “The Crisis of Authority.” And cf. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*, 237–74. See also Feiner, “From Renaissance to Revolution.”

13. See Endelman, “The Chequered Career of ‘Jew’ King,” 151–81.

14. See Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, ix–xxiii.

15. Dinur, “Modern Times in the History of the Jews,” 22–23 (Hebrew).

16. Shohet, *Changing Eras* (Hebrew).

17. See Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*.

18. *Ibid.*, 254.

19. Israel, “Was There a Pre-1740 Sephardic Jewish Enlightenment?,” 11.

20. Jacob Katz, “Judaism and Christianity,” 21.

21. P. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 170.

22. There is an enormous amount of literature on the subject, and I will note only Popkin’s classic work, *The History of Skepticism*.

23. On the spread of atheism and the underground radical literature in Europe, see, among others Wade, *The Clandestine Organization*; Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment*; Darnton, *The Literary Underground*; Berman, *A History of Atheism*; Hunter and Wooton (eds.), *Atheism from the Reformation*; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*; and idem, *Enlightenment Contested*.

24. Hazard, *The European Mind*, 119–20.

25. See Hazard, *European Thought*, 44–58, 393–434.

26. See, for example, the collection of articles devoted to the widely circulated work on the “three imposters”: Berti et al. (eds.), *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought*.

27. In Burke, “Religion and Secularization,” 301.

28. See P. Gay, *Deism*; Waring, *Deism and Natural Religion*; and Kors, “A First Being,” 17–68.

29. See Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*.

30. Voltaire, *Candide*, 47.

31. Voltaire, *The Sermon of the Fifty*, 12.

32. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, 58.

33. Based on Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion*.

34. *Ibid.*, 174–96; and Hazard, *The European Mind*, 128–30.

35. See, among others, Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason*; and Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe*.

36. See Jacob, *The Newtonians*; and Emerson, “Latitudinarians.” David Ruderman summed up this challenge and showed how the apologetic claims were used in the Jewish English context: Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, ch. 11. On a parallel dialectic that, as a result of the contention with religious enthusiasm, also led to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, see Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable*.

37. See McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment*.

38. *Ibid.*, 17.

39. Swatos and Olson (eds.), *The Secularization Debate*; Saler, “Modernity and Enchantment”; Black, *Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ch. 6; Wahrman, “God and the

Enlightenment”; Sheehan, “Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization”; Heyd, “Introduction”; and Asad, *Formations of the Secular*.

40. J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 7–17.

41. P. Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World*, 1–18.

42. See C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

43. Jakobsen and Pellegrini (eds.), *Secularisms*.

44. On the reservations regarding the secularization thesis, see, among others, McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe*, 1–30; and Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization*.

45. See, among others, Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century*; Porter, *The Enlightenment*, 32–41; and Wooton, “New Histories of Atheism.”

46. See Orfali, “Faith and Authority in the Struggle over Rabbinical Judaism” (Hebrew).

47. See T. Fishman, *Shaking the Pillars*.

48. In Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, 142.

49. See S. Nadler, *Spinoza*, esp. ch. 6.

50. In Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*.

51. In Spinoza, *Ethics*, 79.

52. See Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*; Popkin, *Spinoza*; and Thomson, “Pantheism.”

53. Quoted in S. Nadler, *Spinoza*, 133.

54. Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity*, ch. 1; idem, *From Christianity to Judaism* (esp. ch. 6); and idem, “The Portuguese Community in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam.”

55. See Kaplan, “The Jewish Profile of the Spanish-Portuguese Community” (in particular, the 1678 regulations against desecration of the Sabbath).

56. See Goldish, “Jews, Christians and Conversos.” On secularization in eighteenth-century Amsterdam and the formation of a minority orthodox group, see Kaplan, “Secularizing the Portuguese Jews.”

57. See Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*; and idem, *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History*.

58. On Nieto and Sarmiento, see Petuchowski, *The Theology of Haham David Nieto*; Goldish, “Newtonian, Converso and Deist”; and Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, ch. 11.

59. On early trends of criticism of the rabbinical culture, see also D. Frank and Goldish (eds.), *Rabbinic Culture and Its Critics*.

60. Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity*, 235–79.

61. See Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*.

62. See Rosenberg, “Emunat hakhamim.”

63. Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity*, 240.

64. See Rapoport-Albert, “The Hasidic Movement after 1772.”

65. Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*; Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn*; and Feiner, *Moses Mendelssohn*.

66. See Liebes, *The Secret of the Sabbatean Faith* (Hebrew).

67. See Rousseau and Porter (eds.), *Sexual Underworld of the Enlightenment*; and Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers*.

68. See Endelman, “The Englishness of Jewish Modernity”; and Zipperstein, “Haskalah, Cultural Change and Nineteenth-Century Russian Jewry.”

69. See Hazard, *The European Mind*, 292–303. Cf. acculturation in the Renaissance period: Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*. For an incisive and useful distinction between premodern internal acculturation, in which the Jewish identity was totally preserved, and modern acculturation as a social and cultural trend that extends beyond the boundaries of traditional Jewish life and diversifies Jewish identity, see I. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, ch. 1.

70. See Endelman, “The Englishness of Jewish Modernity”; idem, *The Jews of Georgian England* (introduction). A correction to Endelman’s sweeping model of secularization appears in a study by David Ruderman that also points to several significant intellectual trends in English Jewry: Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*.

71. Endelman, “Secularization and the Origins of Jewish Modernity,” 156.

72. The term “acculturation” was adopted by Endelman and other American sociologists who traced the integration of various immigrants in America. Milton M. Gordon used the term “acculturation” to explain behavioral assimilation that preserves the self-image and identity of the minority group that integrates into the majority group. See Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, ch. 3. See also Shavit and Reinharz, *Glorious, Accursed Europe*, 86–90 (Hebrew).

73. Scholem, “Redemption through Sin,” 14 (Hebrew). See Werses, *Haskalah and Sabbateanism* (Hebrew), and there the literature that relates to the historiographical discussion on the connection drawn by Scholem between Haskalah and Sabbateanism.

74. See Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets*.

75. Glikl, *Memoirs*, 15–19.

76. Loebel, “The Passion of the Tsadikim,” 340.

77. On secularization in Europe, see Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind*; Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, ch. 1; Burke, “Religion and Secularization”; and McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe*. On the secularization of the Jews, see Schweid, *Judaism and Secular Culture*, ch. 6 (Hebrew).

78. See Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Secularisms*, 5–6, 7, 211.

Chapter 1. Pleasures and Liberation from Religious Supervision

1. Ashkenazi, *Sefer she’elot uteshuvot*, 43–45. Emden tells of the impression left on his generation by the affair: *Megilat sefer*, 55. On David Nieto and the suspicion that he adhered to Spinozist heresy, see Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discoveries*, ch. 11; and Petuchowski, *The Theology of Haham David Nieto*.

2. T. Cohen, *Ma’aseh tuviyah*.

3. *Ibid.*, 1.

4. *Ibid.*, 1–23.

5. *Ibid.*, 19, 2: “They have led the heart of the Jews to despair of redemption.”

6. See Shahaar, *Criticism of the Society* (Hebrew); and Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania*, ch. 6.

7. Koidonover, *Kav hayashar*, chs. 53, 82.

8. See Friedman, “Letters Relating to the Nehemiah Hiya Hayon Controversy” (Hebrew).

9. These figures are based on Dellapergola, “Changing Patterns of Jewish Demography,” 154–79; Hundert, *Jews in Poland and Lithuania*, ch. 1; and Toury, *Prolegomena to the Entrance of Jews*, ch. 1 (Hebrew).

10. See Callenberg, *Relation von einer weitem Bemühung*, Stück 26, 20.
11. Koidonover, *Kav yashar*, ch. 2.
12. Graupe (ed.), *Die Statuten* 2:16, bylaw 34 (1724).
13. Stathagen, *Sefer divrei zikaron*, part 1, 74:2; 65:2. See Shohet, *Changing Eras*, n. 12, 36–38 (Hebrew).
14. See Gilon, *Mendelssohn's Kohelet Musar*, 168–69.
15. Zalman of Dessau, *Igeret shlomo*, 26:1.
16. On the culture of public drinking in eighteenth-century Europe, see Melton, *The Rise of the Public*, ch. 7.
17. Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion*.
18. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, 2, 4, 11, 99.
19. See Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, 142.
20. See Gaster, *History of the Ancient Synagogue*, 128–29; and Petuchowski, *The Theology of Haham David Nieto*, 8–9.
21. Nieto, *Sefer kuzari sheni*, 7:2–9, 1.
22. Getz, *Sefer rapduni batapuhim*, 5:1. The book was written in 1749. See Piekarz, *The Beginning of Hasidism*, 218–19.
23. Brandon, *Sefer emek binyamin*, 21:2. See Rosenberg, “Emunat hakhamim,” 289.
24. Hagiz, *Mishnat hakhamim*, 64:1. See Rosenberg, “Emunat hakhamim,” 289–90; and Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*, 259.
25. Emden, *Derush tefilat yesharim*, 26:2, 27:2.
26. Wetzlar’s manuscript *Libes briv* was printed with an English translation in Faierstein (ed.), *The Libes Briv of Isaac Wetzlar*. The two citations are from pp. 27:1, 28:1–2.
27. *Ibid.*, ch. 13.
28. Glikl, *Memoirs*, 423–25.
29. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 99:1.
30. Reischer, *Shvut ya’akov*, 3:1.
31. Eybeschütz, *Ye’arot devash*, I, 48:2, 19:1, 50:2. See Shohet, *Changing Eras*, ch. 5; and Margolioth, *Sefer beit midot*, 61.
32. See Shesgreen (ed.), *Engravings by Hogarth*, nos. 28–35; and Riding, “The Harlot and the Rake.”
33. Emden, *Ets avot al masekhet avot*, 6:9.
34. See Porter, “Enlightenment and Pleasure,” 3; idem, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*; and Hazard, *The European Mind*, ch. 5.
35. Darnton, *George Washington’s False Teeth*, 84–85.
36. On the shift in the cultural meaning of “happiness” in the eighteenth century and on the roots of Bentham’s concept, see McMahon, *Happiness*, ch. 4.
37. See Porter and Roberts, *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*; Melton, *The Rise of the Public*; J. Blanning, *The Culture of Power*; Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*; Beward, *The History of Fashion*; S. Taylor (ed.), *The Theater of French and German Enlightenment*; Heise, *Kaffee und Kaffeehaus*; and Waller, 1700: *Scenes from London Life*, ch. 7 (Fashion), ch. 8 (Food and Drink), ch. 9 (Coffeehouses, Clubs, Alehouses, and Taverns), and ch. 10 (Amusements).
38. See Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*.
39. McMahon, *Happiness*, ch. 4.

40. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*.
41. Melton, *The Rise of the Public*, 247–48; see also Berg and Eger (eds.), *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*; and Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Georgian Britain*.
42. Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, 162.
43. See Katz, *Out of the Ghetto*, ch. 3. Katz's words were a critical reaction to Shohet's *Changing Eras*.
44. I. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, ch. 1.
45. Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto*, 35.
46. Hagiz, *Sefer sefat emet*, 4:2, 10:1.
47. See Kaplan, "The Portuguese Community in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam," 172–73 (Hebrew); and Israel, "Was There a Pre-1740 Sephardic Jewish Enlightenment?," 11–12.
48. See Stern, *The Court Jew*, ch. 9; Mann and R. Cohen (eds.), *From Court Jews to the Rothschilds*; Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, ch. 4; and Shohet, *Changing Eras*, ch. 2. Also see S. Berger (ed.), *Travels among Jews and Gentiles*, 78–80.
49. See Gans, *Memorbook*, 241; Israel, "Was There a Pre-1740 Sephardic Jewish Enlightenment?," 15–16; and Shatzky, "Drameh un teater bei di sfardim in holland," 141–43.
50. The lists appear in an appendix to Stern, *Jud Süß*, 288–303. See also Mann and R. Cohen (eds.), *From Court Jews to the Rothschilds*, 151–52.
51. Stern, *Jud Süß*, 130–41. See also Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*, 245–46.
52. Statthagen, *Sefer divrei zikaron*, part 2, 8:1. See also Emden, *Ets avot*, 6:9.
53. Emden, *Sefer she'ilat yavets*, item 167.
54. Schomberg, "Emunat omen," 6–8. Also see Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 128–34; and Duschinsky, *The Rabbinate*, 2–19.
55. Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, 30.
56. Emden, "Halon hamitsri," 314:2.
57. Emden, *Mitpahat sefarim*, 75.
58. See Graupe (ed.), *Die Statuten der drei Gemeinden*, 133–35, 241; Shohet, *Changing Eras*, 38–41; and Mahler, *History of the Jewish People*, 2:50–55.
59. Eybeschütz, *Ye'arot devash*, II, 47:1.
60. Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity*, 235–79.
61. See *Takanot dekahal ashkenazim asher beamsterdam 2:2* (clause 72); and Sluys, "Uit den Amsterdamschen Jodenhoek," 136–38, 152–54.
62. Hagiz, *Sefer sefat emet*, 4:2.

Chapter 2. Temptations of Fashion and Passion

1. Emden, *Derush tefilat yesharim*, 26:2.
2. E. Horowitz, "Coffee, Coffeeshouses, and the Nocturnal Rituals of Early Modern Jewry"; and Liberles, "Juden, Kaffee und Kaffeehandel im 18. Jahrhundert."
3. Emden, *Sefer she'ilat yavets*, 2:146. See Liberles, "On the Threshold of Modernity," 82–83.
4. Reischer, *Shvut ya'akov*, 2, 3:2.
5. Sermons of Rabbi Zevi Hirsch Levin, 20:2.
6. See Wyngaard, "Switching Codes."

7. See A. Rosenthal, “Raising Hair”; and Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, 58–69.
8. Glikl, *Memoirs*, 578–79; and Glückel, *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln*, 266–67.
9. See *Historische Nachricht von der Judengemeinde in der Hofmarkt Fürth*, 150.
10. Meisl, *Protokollbuch der Jüdischen Gemeinde Berlin*, 76 (4 Iyar 1748). See Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community*, 21. For example, in 1715, the Frankfurt community forbade bar mitzvah boys to be called up to the Torah wearing a wig (see Shohet, *Changing Eras*, 15).
11. See E. Horowitz, “The Early Eighteenth Century Confronts the Beard.”
12. Leipnik, *The Leipnik Haggadah*.
13. See Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*, 244; Stern, *Jud Süss*, 18 (a description of the appearance of Immanuel Wertheimer in Vienna); Shohet, “The Integration of German Jewry,” 212–19; idem, *Changing Eras*, 52–58; and Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, 122.
14. Eybeschütz, *Ye’arot devash*, 28:2. See Berkovitz, *Rites and Passages*, ch. 2.
15. Emden, “Halon hamitsri,” 314:1–2; idem, *Sefer birat migdal oz*, 94:2; and idem, *Derush tefilat yesharim*, 29:1.
16. Emden, “Halon hamitsri,” 314:1–2; and idem, *Ets avot al masekhet avot*, 134:1. Also see in Eybeschütz, *Ye’arot devash*, II, 2:1; and Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, 48–69.
17. Emden, *Derush tefilet yesharim*, 30:1; and idem, *Sefer birat migdal oz*, 94:2.
18. Sermons of Rabbi Zevi Hirsch Levin in London, 62:1; and Eybeschütz, *Ye’arot devash*, II, 59:2.
19. Emden, *Sefer birat migdal oz*, 69:2.
20. Emden, *Megillat sefer*, 109–10. See Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 151–52; and Moseley, *Being for Myself Alone*, ch. 5.
21. Emden, *Megillat sefer*, 107–8.
22. Ibid. Also see idem, *Sefer migdal oz*, 57:2.
23. Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, 172. Also see Biale, *Eros and the Jews*.
24. Eybeschütz, *Ye’arot devash* II, 2:1.
25. Rousseau and Porter (eds.), *Sexual Underworld of the Enlightenment*; Darn-ton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers*; Hunt (ed.), *The Invention of Pornography*; Braudy, “Fanny Hill”; Laqueur, *Making Sex*; and idem, *Solitary Sex*.
26. Shohet, *Changing Eras*, ch. 8.
27. Hagiz, *Mishnat hakhamim*, 57:2.
28. Shesgreen, ed., *Engravings by Hogarth*, nos. 18–23. See Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, 129.
29. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, 128–31. Also see Waller, 1700, 171.
30. See R. Barnett, “The Travels of Moses Cassuto,” 103–5.
31. Schomberg, “Emunat omen,” 10–11.
32. See Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*, 256.
33. Voltaire, *Candide*, 19.
34. Emden, *Ets avot*.
35. The engraving appears in Mann and R. Cohen (eds.), *From Court Jews to the Rothschilds*, 106.
36. Jacob Katz, “Marriage and Marital Life at the End of the Middle Ages,” 44–46 (Hebrew); E. Horowitz, “Between Masters and Maidservants in the Jewish Society of Europe” (Hebrew); and Shohet, *Changing Eras*, 162–69 (Hebrew).

37. Reischer, *Shvut ya'akov*, item 130.
38. Pamphlet dated 2 Kislev 5484, in Assaf, "Umbevusteh yiddisheh kehileh dokumentn."
39. M. Freudenthal, "R. David Fraenckel," 595–96.
40. Reischer, *Shvut ya'akov*, question 109.
41. Shohet, *Changing Eras*, ch. 8.
42. Katz, *Shav ya'akov*, Part II, items 3, 4:2.
43. Reischer, *Shvut ya'akov*, question 128.
44. Koblenz, *Kiryat hannah*, 12:2–13:1.
45. Emden, *She'ilat yavets*, II, 11:2–15:2.
46. Hagiz, *Mishnat hakhamim*, 65:1 (paragraph 521). For additional sources on the affair, see Assaf, "Umbevusteh yiddisheh kehileh dokumentn," 116 (pamphlet 23 of the Altona community in the year 5484); Emden, *Megillat sefer*, 168–69; and Shohet, *Changing Eras*, 171.
47. Koblenz, *Kiryat hannah*, 12:1; and Shohet, *Changing Eras*, 170.
48. See Kosman, *Noheg ketson yosef*, 13:1–2; and E. Horowitz, "The Early Eighteenth Century Confronts the Beard," 109.
49. See Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, 132.
50. *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, April 19, 1732, 122: "Court: Polack! Does your Religion allow you to walk so far as Highgate on your Sabbath-day? Polack: There are some good Jews and some bad ones, I can't say that I am one of the best. But there are some good Jews that walk out of the Sabbath, tho there are some that will not. Our Priest preach'd the Sabbath-day after I was at Highgate, and told us, that we ought not to go above 5 Miles."
51. Dubnow, "Fun mein archiv." See Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania*, 101.
52. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, 119.
53. Kirchan, *Sefer simhat hanefesh*, 74:1. See Shohet, *Changing Eras*, 36.
54. Judah ben Ezekiel Katz, *Sefer yam tokkehah*, 12–1–2.
55. Hanoch ben Avraham, *Reshit bikurim*, II, 27:2.
56. Hagiz, *Mishnat hakhamim*, 54–2, 58:1 (paragraphs 416–58). Quotation from paragraph 439.
57. Gilon, *Mendelssohn's Kohelet musar*, 168–70; Karp, "The Aesthetic Difference"; and E. Breuer and Sorkin, "Moses Mendelssohn's First Hebrew Publication."
58. Mendelssohn, "On Sentiments," 15–17, 46.
59. Feiner, *Moses Mendelssohn* (Hebrew).
60. Gilon, *Mendelssohn's Kohelet musar*, section 1. See Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, 46.
61. Gilon, *Mendelssohn's Kohelet musar*, 170.

Chapter 3. *The Mystical Sect*

1. See Birkenthal, "Divrei binah"; H. Levin (ed.), *The Chronicle: A Document on the History of Jacob Frank and His Movement*, 36–37; Balaban, *On the History of the Frankist Movement*, part 1, 110–27, 296–305 (Hebrew); and Rapoport-Albert, "On the Position of Women in Sabbateanism," 164–67 (Hebrew).
2. Mendelssohn, "On Sentiments," 27.

3. Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets*, 130–51; Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*, 92–94; and Liebes, “Sabbatean Messianism” (Hebrew).
4. Emden, *Derush tefilat yesharim*, 25:2, 26:1.
5. Scholem, “Redemption through Sin,” 141.
6. *Ibid.*, 84.
7. On the debate regarding Scholem’s thesis, see Werses, *Haskalah and Sabbateanism* (Hebrew).
8. Scholem, “The Sabbatean Movement in Poland,” 106–7 (Hebrew).
9. See Barnai, “Some Social Aspects of the Polemics between Sabbateans and Their Opponents” (Hebrew).
10. Hayon, *Oz le’elohim*.
11. On the Hayon affair, see Friedman, “Letters Relating to the Nehemiah Hiya Hayon Controversy” (Hebrew); Immanuel, “The Nehemiah Hiya Hayon Polemic in Amsterdam”; and Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*, chs. 4–5.
12. Hayon, *Oz le’elohim*, 46:2, 64:2.
13. See Liebes, “The Ideological Element in the Hayon Polemic,” 129–34 (Hebrew).
14. Hagiz, *Sefer shever poshe’im*.
15. *Ibid.*, 48.
16. *Ibid.*, 17.
17. *Ibid.*, 7.
18. *Ibid.*, 39.
19. See Loewe, “The Spanish Supplement to Nieto’s *Esh Dath*,” 295.
20. See Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*, ch. 6.
21. Emden, *Zot torat hakena’ot*, 34:2.
22. *Ibid.*, 36:1–2.
23. See Scholem, “Information about the Sabbateans,” 30 (Hebrew).
24. Many documents on the polemic in 1725–26 are contained in Prager, *Gehalei esh*, vol. 1; and Emden, *Zot torat hakena’ot*, 37–38.
25. Scholem, “Pamphlets against the Shabbetai Zevi Sect.”
26. Moses Hagiz’s Letter to the Council of the Four Lands (1725), in Prager, *Gehalei esh*, 78:2, 83:1.
27. Emden, *Zot torat hakena’ot*, 36:1.
28. Ezekiel Landau’s letter of 1752 in Prager, *Gehalei esh*, 131:1–2. See Perlmutter, *Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz* (Hebrew).
29. Emden, *Zot torat hakena’ot*, 35:1. See Scholem, “Information about the Sabbateans,” 34. And cf. Hagiz, *Sefer shever poshe’im*, 7.
30. Leib ben Ozer, *The Story of Shabbetai Zevi*, 189–90 (Hebrew).
31. Emden, *Zot torat hakena’ot*, 59:1–2.
32. *Ibid.*, 58:2.
33. Prager, *Gehalei esh*, 62:1, 72:2; and Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*, 184. The second case that took place in 1725 is also described by Emden, *Beit yonatan hasofer*, 4:1–2.
34. Falk, *Mikhtav leshalosh kehilot* (letter from Rabbi Falk to the Triple Community AHW), in Prager, *Gehalei esh*, 2:169–73.
35. On the polemic, see Perlmutter, *Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz*; Ettinger, “The Emden- Eybeschütz Polemic” (Hebrew) (also an updated bibliography by Bernai, who edited the article); Scholem, “On the Issue of Eybeschütz’s Attitude toward Sabbatean-

ism” (Hebrew); idem, *Leket margalioi*; M. Cohen, *Jacob Emden*; Leiman, “When a Rabbi Is Accused of Heresy: R. Ezekiel Landau’s Attitude toward R. Jonathan Eibeschütz”; idem, “When a Rabbi Is Accused of Heresy: The Stance of the Gaon of Vilna”; and Maciejko, “The Jew’s Entry into the Public Sphere.”

36. Emden, *Beit yonatan hasofer*. Emden’s intense animosity toward Eybeschütz reverberates throughout his autobiographical book, *Megillat sefer*.

37. Emden, *Akitsat akrav*, 18–19; idem, *Sefer hitavkut*, 109:1–2.

38. The decision of the Council of Four Lands adopted at a meeting in Jaroslaw, Heshvan 5514, printed in Halperin, *The Records of the Council of the Four Lands*, 1:392–93 (Hebrew).

39. Emden, *Sefer shimush*, 5:2, 7:1. Excerpts from the testimonies are also included in Balaban, *The History of the Frankist Movement*, 1:119–24 (Hebrew). See Rapoport-Albert, “On the Position of Women in Sabbateanism,” 164–67; and Scholem, “The Sabbatean Movement in Poland,” 122–23.

40. Emden, *Sefer shimush*, 6:2.

41. *Ibid.*, 20:1–2.

42. Brawer, *Studies in Galician Jewry*, 211–12 (Hebrew).

43. Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers*, 85–114; 249–99 (quotation on 285).

44. Emden, *Sefer shimush*, 5:1.

45. See Scholem, “The Sabbatean Movement in Poland,” 116–40; Elior, “Jacob Frank and His Book *The Sayings of the Lord*” (Hebrew); Balaban, *History of the Frankist Movement*; and Brawer, *Studies in Galician Jewry*, 197–275.

46. “Chronicles of the Words of the Lord,” no. 130. And again after the conversion: “I say to you that I will trample the laws” (no. 890).

47. Elior, “Jacob Frank,” 491.

48. “Chronicles of the Words of the Lord,” no. 513.

49. *Ibid.*, no. 724.

50. Scholem, “Redemption through Sin,” 128–29.

51. “Chronicles of the Words of the Lord,” no. 9. Also see no. 512. See Elior, “Jacob Frank,” 503.

52. “Chronicles of the Words of the Lord,” no. 20.

53. *Ibid.*, no. 16.

54. Birkenthal, “Divrei binah,” 214; and Balaban, *The History of the Frankist Movement*, 114.

55. “Chronicles of the Words of the Lord,” no. 328.

56. *Ibid.*, no. 812.

57. See Hayman, *De Sade: A Critical Biography*; de Sade, *The Misfortunes of Virtue*, introduction; and Feher (ed.), *The Libertine Reader*.

58. De Sade, *The Misfortunes of Virtue*, 37–38.

59. Elior, “Jacob Frank,” 509.

60. See Jacob, “The Materialistic World of Pornography.”

61. Halperin, *The Records of the Council of the Four Lands*, 1:421.

62. *Ibid.*, 417–18.

63. See Balaban, *History of the Frankist Movement*, vol. 1, chs. 16–20; vol. 2, chs. 21–30; and Birkenthal, “Divrei binah,” 210–66.

64. Scholem, “The Sabbatean Movement in Poland,” 134–35; and Elior, “Jacob Frank,” 547–48.

65. See Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets*; and H. Levin, “Frankism as a ‘Cargo Cult.’”

66. Scholem, “The Sabbatean Movement in Poland,” 113–14.
67. Elior, “Jacob Frank,” 509–10.
68. Rapoport-Albert, “On the Position of Women in Sabbateanism,” 257–58.
69. See Barnai, “Some Social Aspects of the Polemics between Sabbateans and Their Opponents.”
70. See Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*.
71. Rapoport-Albert, “On the Position of Women in Sabbateanism,” 327.

Chapter 4. *The Rationalist Sect*

1. Emden, *Zot torat hakena'ot*, 57:1.
2. Emden, *Sefer hitavkut*, 108:1
3. T. Cohen, *Ma'aseh tuviah*, 1.
4. Emden, *Derush tefilat yesharim*, 26:1.
5. *Ibid.*, 25:2.
6. Emden, *Sefer she'ilat yavets*, part 1, item 41.
7. Statthagen, *Sefer divrei zikaron*, part 1, 12:1; part 2, 8:2.
8. Emden, *Sidur hayavets, sha'arei shamayim*, 702–4.
9. Emden, *Ets avot al masekhet avot*, 2:14. See Feiner, “Seductive Knowledge,” 121–35.
10. Emden, *Ets avot al masekhet avot*, 25–26.
11. Based on the English edition published in 1739–40: Argens, *The Jewish Spy*. On it, see Bush, “The Marquis d’Argens,” 586–90; Brav, “Jews and Judaism in ‘The Jewish Spy’ ”; Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment*, 208–12; idem, “Imagining Amsterdam,” 90–92; and Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, 43–46.
12. Argens, *The Jewish Spy*, letter 4.
13. *Ibid.*, letter 36.
14. *Ibid.*, letter 44.
15. *Ibid.*, letter 103.
16. See Israel, “Was There a Pre-1740 Sephardic Jewish Enlightenment?,” 5; and idem, *Enlightenment Contested*, 98–101.
17. See Bush, *The Marquis d’Argens*, 10.
18. See Kaplan, “‘Karaites’ in the Early Eighteenth Century.”
19. Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity*, 20.
20. Brandon, *Sefer emek binyamin*, 21:2; Kaplan, “‘Karaites’ in the Early Eighteenth Century,” 275–76; and Rosenberg, “Emunat hakhamim,” 289.
21. Hagiz, *Mishnat hakhamim*, paragraphs 509, 511, 536–37, and 574–80.
22. Hagiz, *Sefer eleh hamitsvot*, 14–15. Rosenberg, “Emunat hakhamim,” 340–41, calls this stringent religious policy of Hagiz a fideistic position.
23. Hagiz, *Mishnat hakhamim*, paragraph 510: “This is a great rule in our faith, the Jewish faith, a everything depends upon the faith in the Sages.”
24. See Kaplan, “Secularizing the Portuguese Jews.”
25. Hagiz, *Sefer sefat emet*, 5:1.
26. Brandon, *Sefer orot hamitsvot*, 34:1.
27. Nieto, *Mateh dan vekuzari sheni*.
28. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, ch. 11.

29. Nieto, *Match dan*, 7:8. And see Kaplan, “The Karaites in Amsterdam,” 296 (Hebrew); and Petuchowski, *The Theology of Haham David Nieto*.
30. Nieto, *Match dan*, 9:1, 12:2.
31. See Goldish, “Newtonian, Converso and Deist.”
32. *Ibid.*, 657; and Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 330–31.
33. Samuel, “Dr. Meyer Schomberg’s Attack on the Jews of London.”
34. Schomberg, “Emunat omen,” 5.
35. Mendelssohn, *Philosophical Writings*, 106. On the ambivalent attitude toward Spinoza, see Sutcliffe, “Quarreling over Spinoza.”
36. Mendelssohn, *Philosophical Writings*, 112–20.
37. Abigaill Levy Franks’s letter to Naphtali Franks, July 9, 1733, in Franks, *The Letters of Abigaill Levy Franks 1733–1748*, 7.
38. *Ibid.*, Franks’s letter to her son, December 12, 1735, 51.
39. *Ibid.*, letter of July 9, 1733, 7.
40. *Ibid.*, letter of October 17, 1739, 68. See Sarna, *American Judaism*, 26; Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, 132; and Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles in Early America*, 39.
41. See Faber, *A Time for Planting*, 52–53.
42. See L. Rosenthal, “Simeon van Geldern,” 180–203.
43. See Heymann, *Der Chevalier von Geldern*, 269–70.
44. L. Rosenthal, “Simeon van Geldern,” 201–2 (letter from 1750s).
45. See Wooton, “New Histories of Atheism,” 27; Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*, 245–46; Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, 160; Kuh, *Hinterlassene Gedichte*, 45–50; and Kayserling, *Der Dichter Ephraim Kuh*, 5–6.
46. See Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 65–66; *idem*, “Converts and Their Narratives,” 72–73; and Kedar, “Continuity and Innovation in Jewish Conversion,” 163 (Hebrew).
47. Shohet, *Changing Eras*, 192 (Hebrew).
48. The story of the affair is cited in detail in a chronicle from the forties, by Menahem Amelander, *She’erit yisra’el hashalem*, 281–86.
49. Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 103–4.
50. Amelander, *She’erit yisra’el hashalem*, 281.
51. Shohet, *Changing Eras*, 193.
52. See Doktór, “Karl Anton,” 145–57.
53. See Ruderman, *Connecting the Covenants*, 11–19.
54. Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 188–89.
55. Shohet, *Changing Eras*, 240; and Callenberg, *Relation von einer weitem Bemühung . . .*, Stück 23, 19.
56. See S. Berger (ed.), *Travels among Jews and Gentiles*, 94.

Chapter 5. *Providence Is Tested*

1. Goethe, *Truth and Fiction Relating to My Life*, book 1; Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe*, ch. 3; Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*; and Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 43.
2. Voltaire, “Poem on the Lisbon Disaster, or an Examination of the Axiom ‘All Is Well.’” See I. Davidson, *Voltaire in Exile*, chs. 4–5.
3. Voltaire, *Candide, or Optimism*, 56, 15–16.

4. See Outram, *The Enlightenment*, ch. 3.
5. See Beals, “Religion and Culture.”
6. Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe*, 94, 103.
7. See McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment*.
8. See Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World*, ch. 9 (“Secularization”), 229.
9. See McManners, “Enlightenment: Secular and Christian,” 277.
10. See *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, May 23, 1751, 188.
11. Shohet, “Beginnings of the Haskalah among German Jewry” (Hebrew).
12. Jacob Katz, *Halakhah in Straits*, 10 (Hebrew).
13. Emden, “Gat derukhah,” 162:2, 163:1. See also Shohet, “Beginnings of the Haskalah among German Jewry,” 330 (Hebrew).
14. Friedländer, *Sendschreiben an seine Hochwürdigem, Herrn Oberconsistorialrath und Probst Teller*. English trans.: Friedländer, “Open Letter to His Most Worthy, Supreme Consistorial Counselor and Provost Teller at Berlin, from Some Household-ers of the Jewish Religion.”
15. *Ibid.*, 42, 46–47 (English).
16. See Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community*, ch. 3.
17. See Bendavid, “Selbstbiographie.”
18. Meisl (ed.), *Protokollbuch der jüdischen Gemeinde Berlin*, doc. 228, 12 Nissan 5565, 231–32.
19. Ezekiel Landau’s letter from Prague, 6 Shevat 5527, in Heschel, “The Words of the Gaon Nodah Beyehudah” (Hebrew).
20. See the review written by Tychsel on the book *Amudei beit yehudah*, 47–53.
21. See Feiner, “Between the Clouds of Foolishness and the Light of Reason.”
22. Tychsel, review, 54–55.
23. *Ibid.*, 53–54.
24. J. Hurwitz, *Sde tevunah*.
25. See Tychsel, review, 75–77; and Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*.
26. H. Hurwitz, “A Letter from 1807,” 362.
27. Ish, “Mitehom haneshi’ah.”
28. See de Sola, “Nachrichten über Efraimo Luzzatto”; and Mirsky, *The Life and Work of Ephraim Luzzatto*, 40–41 (Hebrew). Obviously, the year was not 1740 but sometime in the 1760s.
29. See M. Freudenthal, “Leon Elias Hirschel,” 426–43.
30. See in Marwedel, *Die Privilegien der Juden in Altona*, 302–3.
31. *Ibid.*, 317–20; Jacob Katz, *The ‘Shabbes Goy’*; and *idem*, *Halakhah in Straits*, 28–29 (Hebrew).
32. E. Luzzatto, *Eleh benei hane’urim*, poems 12, 8, 38, 39, 43.
33. See Kavanagh, “The Libertine’s Bluff.”
34. See Sluys, “Uit den Amsterdamschen Jodenhoek.”
35. Kaplan, “The Threat of Eros in Eighteenth-Century Sephardi Amsterdam,” 280–300.
36. Saperstein, “Sermons and Jewish Society: The Case of Prague,” 127–46.
37. See Eidlitz, *Sefer or layesharim*, 216.
38. See Wachstein, “Di prager takanoth fun 1767 kegn luksus.”
39. See Liebes, “A Work in the Language of the Zohar to R. Wolf, Son of R. Jonathan Eybeschütz” (Hebrew).
40. See Brillling, “Eibenschuetziana.”

41. Bondi, *Mikhtavei sefat kodesh*, 78–82.
42. Emden, *Sefer hitavkut*, 48–49.
43. *Ibid.*, 88:1–2.
44. *Ibid.*, 62:1.
45. See Feiner, “The Clouds of Foolishness” (Hebrew).
46. J. Hurwitz, *Sefer amudei beit yehudah*, approbations.
47. Feiner, “The Early Haskalah in Eighteenth-Century Judaism” (Hebrew); idem, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, chs. 1–3; and Sorkin, “The Early Haskalah.”
48. Worms, *Seyag latorah*, introduction.
49. Hurwitz, *Sefer amudei beit yehudah*, 2:1; and Feiner, “Between the Clouds of Foolishness.”
50. Friedrichsfeld, *Zekher tsadik*, 13.
51. Wessely, *Levanon: Gan na’ul*, part I, 8:1.
52. Wessely, *Levanon: Ya’in levanon*, 49:1. The work was written in the 1760s but not printed until the mid-1770s.
53. Wessely, *Gan na’ul*, part I, 61:1–2.
54. Wessely, *Ya’in levanon*, 45–46.
55. Wessely, *Levanon: Gan na’ul*, part I, 49:1; part II, 141:1, 143:1, 141:2.
56. *Ibid.*, part I, 50:1.
57. Wessely’s letter to Mendelssohn, in Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 19:122.
58. See Immanuel Kant’s letter to Moses Mendelssohn (February 7, 1766), in Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 12/1, 102–3.
59. Mendelssohn, *Phädon*, 3/1.
60. Mendelssohn’s letter to Wessely (August–September 1768), in Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 19, 119.
61. Mendelssohn, *Sefer megilat kohelet*, in Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 14:154.
62. *Ibid.*, 194. See the analysis of Mendelssohn’s commentary on Ecclesiastes in Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, ch. 4.

Chapter 6. *The Supremacy of Nature*

1. See Holbach, *The System of Nature*; Kors, “Atheism”; idem, “The Atheism of d’Holbach and Naigon”; and Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundation*.
2. Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 553–69; and Dücker, “Der Fragmentenstreit als Produktionsform neuen Wissens,” 1–20.
3. Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*, 181–83.
4. Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, part 12.
5. See Hume, “On the Mortality of the Soul.”
6. See Beals, “Religion and Culture”; and Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe*.
7. See Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *A Life in Letters*, ed. Cliff Eisen (letters February 5, 1778 and July 3, 1778), 308.
8. Margolioth, *Sefer tov veyafeh*, 11:2–12, 12:1. See Feiner, “The Dragon Attached to the Beehive,” 48–51.

9. Landau, *Derushei hatslah*, sermon 25.
10. *Ibid.*, sermons 25, 42, 43, 39.
11. Emden, *Derush tefilat yesharim*, 27:2.
12. Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 19:157–68. See Silberstein, “Mendelssohn und Mecklenburg”; and Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 288–93.
13. Mendelssohn, “Schreiben an den Herrn Diaconus Lavater,” in Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 7:17.
14. See M. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew*, 40.
15. Mendelssohn, “Nacherinnerung.”
16. Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 19:150–51; Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 249; and M. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew*, 39.
17. See Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*; and Pelli, “The Impact of Deism on Hebrew Literature,” 19–24.
18. Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 386.
19. Mendelssohn’s letter to August Hennings in Copenhagen, July 29, 1779, in Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 12:158–59; and Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 565.
20. See Stern, *Der preussischer Staat und die Juden*, III/2, 1, 558–61; and Nicolai, *Anekdoten von König Friedrich dem Zweyten*, 1:61–63.
21. Maimon, *An Autobiography*, 194–95.
22. See Nicolai, “Rabbi Abba Glosk Leczeka.” Also printed in Lohmann (ed.), *Chevrat chinuch ne’arim*, 1:578–82. Also see Shoham, “Der Ritter der Wahrheit.”
23. B. Auerbach, *Dichter und Kaufmann*. On Ephraim Kuh, see Kayserling, *Der Dichter Ephraim Kuh*; Rhotert, *Ephraim Moses Kuh*; Galliner, “Ephraim Kuh”; and Och, *Imago Judaica*, 233–37.
24. Hirschel, *Biographie des jüdischen Gelehrten und Dichters*, 39–40.
25. See a historical-psychological analysis of Kuh in Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 114–24.
26. Hirschel, *Biographie des jüdischen Gelehrten und Dichters*, 139–40.
27. *Ibid.*, 147–50.
28. Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 12/2, 78–80. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 335–38.
29. See Alexander, “Isachar Falkensohn Behr”; and Och, *Imago Judaica*, 229–33.
30. Isachar Falkensohn Behr, *Gedichte von einem polnischen Juden*, Mitau und Leipzig, 1772.
31. See Och, *Imago Judaica*, 231; and Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 132–38.
32. See Alexander, “Isachar Falkensohn Behr,” 62–63.
33. See Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 19:lxiii.
34. See Graupe, “Mordechai Shnaber Levison”; Pelli, “Mordechai Gumpel Schnaber”; Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 332–68; and idem, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 129–30.
35. Levison, *Ma’amar hatorah vehahokhmah*.
36. *Ibid.*, introduction by the author.
37. Levison, *Shlosh esre yesodei hatorah*.
38. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 368.
39. Levison, *Shlosh esre yesodei hatorah*, 7.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Levison, *Tokhaha megulah*.
42. *Teshuvat haprushim*.

43. Ibid., 1:1.
44. Ibid., 4:1.
45. Ibid., 2:2, 3:1.
46. Ibid., 3:2.
47. Azulai, *Sefer ma'agal tov*, 114–17, 122. See Lehmann, “Levatinos and Other Jews”; and Menkis, “Patriarchs and Patricians,” 37–38.
48. Azulai, *Ma'agal tov*, 116.
49. See Popkin, “Hume and Isaac de Pinto II,” 120; and Sutcliffe, “Can a Jew Be a Philosoph?,” 40.
50. See Sutcliffe, “Can a Jew Be a Philosoph?.”
51. Pinto, *Der Jude für die Religion*.
52. Ibid., 13–14.
53. Ibid., 49–50.
54. Ibid., 117.
55. Ibid., 118.
56. Ibid., 118–19.
57. Sutcliffe, “Can a Jew Be a Philosoph?,” 45.
58. See Even-Chen, “On Two Messianic Texts in the Early Haskalah,” 95 (Hebrew).
59. See Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 98–127, 139–44; and Leperer, “Abraham ben Naphtali Tang.”
60. Tang, *A Discourse Addressed to the Minority*; idem, *Pirkei Avot*.
61. Tang, *A Discourse Addressed to the Minority*, 1–2, 28–29.
62. Tang, *Pirkei avot*, v–viii.
63. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, 176–78.
64. Tang, *Behinat adam*, 159:1.
65. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, 78–95; and Tang, *Behinat adam*, 128–38.
66. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 102–6.
67. Tang, *Behinat adam*, 3.
68. Tang, “Mikhtav lanevokhim bisdeh bokhim,” 5.
69. Tang, *Besabei ta'ama*, 1–3.
70. Tang, “Mikhtav lanevokhim bisdeh bokhim,” 4.
71. Tang, *Besabei ta'ama*, 10–11.
72. Tang, *Behinat adam*, 38–51.
73. Maimon, *An Autobiography*, 207–8.
74. Ibid., 208.
75. Ibid., 246. On Falk, see Oron, *Samuel Falk* (Hebrew).

Chapter 7. The Emergence of the New World

1. Holbach, “Common Sense, or Natural Ideas Opposed to Supernatural,” 148.
2. See Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, 22–23; and Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*.
3. Selig, *Der Jude*, 5:216; and Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 227–28.
4. Shatzky, “Teater farveilungen bei di ashkenazim in Holland,” 306–7.
5. Baer, *Zeh sefer nikra olam hadash*. The manuscript is in the collection of M. Gans in Amsterdam, and I am grateful to him for the photocopy he gave me and for permission to use it. The photocopy is in the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew MSS,

National and University Library, Jerusalem (MSS 3439). A partial copy is in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York (Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew MSS, National and University Library, Jerusalem, MSS 53227). On the book and the identity of its author, see Gans, *Memorbook*, 210; and Michman, *Dutch Jewry during the Emancipation Period*, 161.

6. Azulai, *Sefer ma'agal tov*, 138–41.
7. Baer, *Zeh sefer nikra olam hadash*, 14:1. See Kaplan, “Secularizing the Portuguese Jews.”
8. Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 207–43.
9. See Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*.
10. Baer, *Zeh sefer nikra olam hadash*, 3:1, 4:1.
11. *Ibid.*, 23:1.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, 16:1, 1:1.
14. *Ibid.*, 27:2–28:1.
15. *Ibid.*, 15:2–16:1.
16. See Schönfeldt, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Pauperism und der Prostitution in Hamburg*.
17. See Krohn, *Die Juden in Hamburg, 1800–1850*.
18. Malachi, “*Viku'ah Hasheratsim: An Anti-Maskilic Allegory by Shimshon Friedburg of Hamburg*” (Hebrew); and idem, “Shimshon Friedburg’s *Shemesh Hasharon: Criticism of Eighteenth-Century Jewish Society*” (Hebrew).
19. Friedburg, *Shemesh hasharon*. The quotations are from the version printed by Malachi, “*Viku'ah Hasheratsim*.”
20. Friedburg, *Shemesh hasharon*, 12.
21. *Ibid.*, 12–15.
22. *Ibid.*, 16.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, 16–17.
25. *Ibid.*, 26.
26. *Ibid.*, 18.
27. Friedburg, *Menakhot kelim*, 7:1.
28. Friedburg, *Shemesh hasharon*, 45.
29. Friedburg, *Viku'ah hasheratsim*; here based Malachi, “*Viku'ah hasheratsim*,” 64.
30. Friedburg, *Menakhot kelim*, 13:1.
31. *Ibid.*, 13:1–2.
32. *Ibid.*, 5:1–2.
33. Friedburg, *Viku'ah hasheratsim*, 62–63.
34. Friedburg, *Menakhot kelim*, 14:1–2.
35. Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto*, 147.
36. Quoted in Katz, “The Polemic of the ‘Temple’ in Hamburg and the Braunschweig Conference,” 44–45.
37. See Azulai, *Sefer ma'agal tov*, 115–16.
38. *Ibid.*, 167.
39. Azulai, *Yosef omets*, paragraph 7.
40. Berkovitz, “Social and Religious Controls in Pre-Revolutionary France.”
41. See Brawer, *Studies in Galician Jewry*, 204 (Hebrew). The text here is from the manuscript of Birkenthal, “*Divrei binah*,” 42–44.

42. G. Casanova, *History of My Life*, 163–85.
43. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, 147.
44. See G. Wolf, *Geschichte der Juden in Wien*, 76; and Fahn, *The Haskalah Period in Vienna*, 10 (Hebrew).
45. Landau, “A Eulogy Sermon,” 466.
46. Saperstein, “*Your Voice Like a Ram’s Horn*,” 130–33.
47. Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, 320 n. 10.
48. Shohet, “Beginnings of the Haskalah among German Jewry,” 330.
49. Bodian, “Jewish Entrepreneurs in Berlin,” 168 (Hebrew).
50. See Spiel, *Fanny von Arnstein*, 32; English edition: Spiel, *Fanny von Arnstein: Daughter of the Enlightenment*, 19–20.
51. Lowenstein, “Jewish Upper Crust and Berlin Jewish Enlightenment,” 200–201.
52. See W. Cohen, “The Moses Isaacs Family Trust.”
53. R. Cohen and Mann, “Melding Worlds,” 101 (portrait of Isaac Daniel Itzig, 1777); and Reade, *Mendelssohn to Mendelsohn: Visual Case Studies of Jewish Life in Berlin*, 29–65.
54. Lowenstein, “Jewish Upper Crust and Berlin Jewish Enlightenment,” 192.
55. See Och, “Freymuethiges Kaffeegespräch Zwoer jüdischen Zuschauerinnen über den Juden Pinkus”; and Goldberg-Neimark, “Jewish Women in Berlin and the Enlightenment Culture,” 104 (Hebrew).
56. See H. Herz, *In Erinnerungen*, 11; English translation: H. Herz, “Memories of a Jewish Girlhood,” 307.
57. *Ibid.*, 13; English, 308; and Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community*, 48.
58. Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community*, 43.
59. See Weissberg, *Life as a Goddess: Henriette Herz Writes Her Autobiography*.
60. See the color painting in R. Gay, *The Jews of Germany*, plate 14.
61. H. Herz, *In Erinnerungen*, 26; English, 319. See Goldberg-Neimark, “Jewish Women in Berlin,” 264.
62. Goldberg-Neimark, “Jewish Women in Berlin.”
63. The story is based on a rabbinical tradition whose reliability is not entirely clear. The rabbi, according to this source, was Nathan Adler of Frankfurt, and his student was Moses Sofer (Hatam Sofer), and their visit to the Arnstein home took place in 1785 on their way to Frankfurt through Vienna. See *Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte der Juden in Österreich*, 11:84; Spiel, *Fanny von Arnstein*, 47–48; and Plat, *Likutei hever ben hayim*, part II, 1:2.
64. Jacob Katz, “Marriage and Married Life at the End of the Middle Ages,” 51 (Hebrew).
65. See Spiel, *Fanny von Arnstein*, 76–78, 95–98.
66. H. Herz, *In Erinnerungen*, 53.
67. See Davis, *Identity or History? Marcus Herz*, 157–58, 276.

Chapter 8. Scandals and Rebellions

1. Schiller, *The Robbers: A Tragedy*, act 5, scene 1.
2. *Ibid.*, act 2, scene 3.
3. *Ibid.*, introduction.
4. Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, 182–83.

5. Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, 92–110.
6. T. C. W. Blanning (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century*, 151.
7. See Scott (ed.), *Enlightened Absolutism*.
8. See Dohm, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*.
9. Mendelssohn, *Menasseh ben Israel Rettung der Juden: Nebst einer Vorrede*, 3.
English translation: Mendelssohn, *The First English Biography and Translations*, 2:77.
10. Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, 130–31; English, 62–63.
11. *Ibid.*, 202; English, 137.
12. Maimon, *An Autobiography*, 228.
13. See Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 603ff.
14. Mendelssohn, *Menasseh ben Israel Rettung der Juden*, 24–25; English trans.:
Mendelssohn, *The First English Biography and Translations*, 2:115–16.
15. Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, 203; English, 139.
16. Jacoby, *Freethinkers*, 24–25.
17. See Jacob Katz, “R. Raphael Kohen,” appendix 2, 262 (Hebrew).
18. *Ibid.*, 243–64; Gotzmann, “‘The Torah Is Good but It Is in the Hands of Thieves and Scoundrels’” (Hebrew); and Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, 135–38.
19. Jacob Katz, “R. Raphael Kohen,” appendix 3, 263.
20. Faierstein (ed.), *The Libes Briv of Isaac Wetzlar*, 71.
21. Katz, “R. Raphael Kohen,” appendix 3, 262–63.
22. *Ibid.*, 258.
23. Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, 137.
24. The letter dated March 10, 1782, and signed Gr.v.S. appears in Dohm, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, 2:125–37.
25. Katz, “R. Raphael Kohen,” appendix 8, 264.
26. See Unna, “Oberrabbiner Michael Scheuer als Kritiker seiner Zeit.”
27. On this affair, see Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, part 2.
28. See Heschel, “Views of the Great Men of the Generation in Their War against the Maskil Naphtali Herz Wessely,” 162–65 (Hebrew).
29. Lewin, “Aus dem jüdischen Kulturkampf,” 188.
30. See Kopitsch, “Die jüdischen Schüler des Christianeum im Zeitalter der Aufklärung.”
31. Maimon, *An Autobiography*, 260.
32. *Ibid.*, 261–62.
33. *Ibid.*, 274–75.
34. *Ibid.*, 277.
35. Hirschel, “Jüdische Intoleranz und Fanatismus in Breslau.”
36. Hirschel, *Biographie des jüdischen Gelehrten und Dichters Ephraim Moses Kuh*.
37. Hirschel, “Jüdische Intoleranz und Fanatismus in Breslau,” 57.
38. *Ibid.*, 62.
39. *Ibid.*, 73.
40. *Ibid.*, 71.
41. See Hirschel, *Kampf der jüdischen Hierarchie mit der Vernunft*.
42. *Ibid.*, 3–4.
43. *Ibid.*, 11.
44. *Ibid.*, 12–13, 15.
45. *Ibid.*, 25, 27–28.
46. See Friedländer, “Brief zu Meir Eger,” 401 (letter dated April 14, 1789).

47. Ibid., 401 (letter dated September 9, 1789).
48. Hirschel, *Kampf der jüdischen Hierarchie mit der Vernunft*, 53.
49. See Samet, “On the History of the Controversy about Determining the Time of Death” (Hebrew); and Heinrich, “Akkulturation und Reformü.”
50. See Davis, *Identity or History? Marcus Herz*.
51. See W. Davidson, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, 94.
52. See M. Herz, *Über die frühe Beerdigung der Juden*; idem, *Mikhtav el mehabrei hame’asef*; Davis, *Identity or History? Marcus Herz*, 200–205; and Ruderman, “Some Jewish Responses to Smallpox Prevention,” esp. 138–40.
53. M. Herz, *Mikhtav el mehabrei hame’asef*, 17.
54. Ibid., 21.
55. Ibid., 22.

Chapter 9. Replacing Mosaic Laws with Laws of Freedom

1. See Bourel, “Eine Generation später”; and Guttmann, “Lazarus Bendavid.”
2. Bendavid, “Selbstbiographie,” 6–7, 21, 33–34.
3. Ibid., 53–54.
4. See Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community*, 53–54.
5. Ackord, *Die Juden, oder die nothwendige Reformation der Juden in der Republik Polen*, 41–42.
6. See A. Wolf, “Daniel Chodowiecki und Moses Mendelssohn,” 832; Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community*, 53; and Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans*, 43–68.
7. A. Wolf, “Daniel Chodowiecki und Moses Mendelssohn,” 831.
8. Dohm, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, 2:37–38.
9. Gedike, “Über Berlin, von einem Fremden.”
10. Krünitz, “Jude,” 371, 482.
11. See *Bemerkungen eines Reisenden durch die königlichen Preussen Staaten*; Jersch-Wenzel, “Die Juden im gesellschaftlichen Gefüge Berlins,” 153–54; and Och, “Jüdische Leser und jüdisches Lesepublikum.”
12. J. Ascher, *Der Judenfreund*, 88.
13. “Deismus unter den Juden in Berlin.”
14. Ibid., 4.
15. Ibid., 6–7.
16. Ibid., 18–19.
17. See Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community*, 162–65.
18. Ibid., 8.
19. Ibid., 14.
20. Nicolai, “Fortsetzung der Berlinische Nachlese,” 26.
21. “Schreiben an den Herausgeber über die Fortschritte der jüdischen Nation und Abschaffung der Polacken.”
22. Köhler, “Über die Aufklärung der jüdischen Nation.”
23. See Malino, *A Jew in the French Revolution*.
24. See Malino, “The Right to Be Equal,” 87–89.
25. In Hunt (ed.), *The French Revolution and Human Rights*, 48–50.
26. Malino, “The Right to Be Equal,” 96.

27. The anonymous undated pamphlet was printed in London in the 1780s: *A Peep into the Synagogue, or A Letter to the Jews*.
28. *Ibid.*, 9, 23.
29. *Ibid.*, 8–9.
30. *Ibid.*, 22–23.
31. *Ibid.*, 32–33. These harsh words are also quoted by Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, 151.
32. *Ibid.*, 39.
33. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, 135–50 (quotation on 135).
34. *Olam hadash: Zeh hakontres nikra olam hadash venikra olam hafukh* (quotation on 2:1).
35. *Ibid.*, “The Writer’s Apology.”
36. *Ibid.*, 1:1.
37. *Ibid.*, 8:1.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*, 2:1.
40. *Ibid.*, 4:2.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, 3:2.
43. *Ibid.*, 2:3, 3:1.
44. *Ibid.*, “The Writer’s Apology.”
45. *Ibid.*, 4:2.
46. *Ibid.*, 7:2.
47. Rivka Samuel’s letters (the first dated January 1791, the last undated), in J. Marcus, *An Introduction to Early American Jewish History*, 262–65 (Hebrew); J. Marcus, *American Jewry: Documents*, 52–54; and Sarna, *American Judaism*, 46.
48. Letter of Hayim Solomon (July 10, 1783), in J. Marcus, *An Introduction to Early American Jewish History*, 247 (Hebrew); and Sarna, *American Judaism*, 45.
49. A letter from the Mikve Israel community of Philadelphia to Rabbi Shaul Halevi Lowenstam in Amsterdam, in J. Marcus, *An Introduction to Early American Jewish History*, 250–51.
50. See Sarna, *American Judaism*, 42–52.
51. See J. Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 1:42–44.
52. Here, based on the Philadelphia edition, DeCordova, *Reason and Faith, or Philosophical Absurdities and the Necessity of Revelation*. On DeCordova, see Korn, “The Haham DeCordova of Jamaica.”
53. DeCordova, *Reason and Faith*, 13.
54. Zoldin, *Sefer shomer emunim lehinukh habanim*, front page and 5.
55. Bashewitz, *Briv shteler*, 21–22. See Zwick Halevi, *The Hebrew Briefsteller*, 77–82 (Hebrew).
56. Euchel, “Igerot meshulam ben uriyah ha’eshtemoi.”
57. *Ibid.*, “a letter from my grandfather.” This letter is Euchel’s satire on religious practice, which for him is tainted with superstition.
58. Euchel, “Davar el hakore mito’elet divrei hayamim hakadmonim,” 26–27.
59. Wessely manuscript, Ginsburg collection, 228–35.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Wessely, *Divrei shalom ve’emet*, ch. 7.
62. Wessely, “Mikhtav lehevrat dorshei leshon ever.”

63. Wessely, *Sefer hamidot*, 69–88; idem, introduction to *Sefer emunot vede'ot*.
64. Shimon ben Ya'akov Abraham of Copenhagen, *Sipur bekhhi hane'arot*, 19–20.
65. S. Levin, *Mitspeh yokte'el*, preface.
66. See Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, 276–85.
67. *Shalom rav le'ohavei toratekha ve'ein lamo mikhshol*.
68. Landau, *Derushei hatselah*, sermon 28, on the Ten Days of Atonement, 77.
69. *Ibid.*, sermon 39 for Shabbat hagadol 5543 (1783).
70. *Ibid.*, 106.
71. See Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto*, 147–50.
72. Lieben, “Rabbi Eleasar Fleckeles.”
73. Fleckeles, *Olat hodesh: Milei deshemaya*, introduction.
74. *Ibid.*, 31:2.
75. *Ibid.*, 39:1.
76. *Ibid.*, 34:2, 35:1.
77. Fleckeles, *Olat hodesh hasheni: Sefer olat tsibur*, 15:1.
78. *Ibid.*, 66:2.
79. *Ibid.*, 93:2.
80. David of Makov, *Shever poshe'im*, 167–68.
81. See D. Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews*.
82. See A. Nadler, *The Faith of the Mithnagdim*.
83. Phinehas ben Judah of Polotsk, *Keter torah*, 1–8.
84. J. Hurwitz, *Sefer hayei hanefesh venitshiyutah*, 9:1. See Feiner, “Between the Clouds of Foolishness and the Light of Reason” (Hebrew).
85. Wessely, *Sefer hamidot*, 72:2.
86. *Ibid.*, 64:2.
87. See Berlin, *Against the Current*.

Chapter 10. On the Decline of Judaism

1. See Ford, “Wöllner and the Prussian Religious Edict of 1788”; Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism*, 142–44; and Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 267–74.
2. Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, 11.
3. *Ibid.*, 107.
4. *Shivhei habesht*, 30–31.
5. *Ibid.* See Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism*, ch. 9.
6. See Rosman, “The History of a Historical Source,” 213–14 (Hebrew).
7. See Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, ch. 13.
8. See T. C. W. Blanning (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century*, 170–77; Burleigh, *Earthly Powers*, chs. 2–3; and Scurr, *Fatal Purity*, 266–68.
9. See Szajkowski, *Jews and the French Revolution*, 398–412, 785–808; Berkovitz, *Rites and Passages*, ch. 2; idem, “The French Revolution and the Jews,” 25–86; and Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*.
10. See Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881*.
11. Breslau, “El rodfei tsedek vedorshei shalom,” 312–13.
12. See Wodzinski, *Haskalah and Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland*, 27–33, 259–60.
13. See Rosman, “Hasidism as a Modern Phenomenon”; and Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century*, ch. 9.

14. See Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 188–200; and A. Barnett, “Eliakim ben Abraham (Jacob Hart).”
15. Eliakim ben Abraham, *Milhamot hashem*.
16. *Ibid.*, 10:2.
17. *Ibid.*, 1:2.
18. *Ibid.*, 18:1–19, 1.
19. *Ibid.*, 33:1.
20. *Ibid.*, 11:2.
21. *Ibid.*, 5, 11.
22. Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 50.
23. See Jacoby, *Freethinkers*, 35–65.
24. Paine, *The Age of Reason*, 63.
25. See Popkin, “The Age of Reason versus the Age of Revelation”; Scrivener, “British-Jewish Writings of the Romantic Era”; and Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, ch. 2.
26. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 59.
27. See Levi, *A Defence of the Old Testament in a Series of Letters, Addressed to Thomas Paine*.
28. *Ibid.*, 1.
29. *Ibid.*, 39, 207–8.
30. David Levi, *Dissertations on the Prophecies of the Old Testament*, 2:236–37.
31. *Ibid.*, 238–37.
32. *Ibid.*, 243–44. See also Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 89.
33. Levi, *Dissertations*, 2:245.
34. See Endelman, “The Chequered Career of ‘Jew’ King,” 165.
35. King, *Mr. King’s Apology, or A Reply to His Calumniators*.
36. *Ibid.*, 38.
37. *Ibid.*, 39.
38. *Ibid.*, 41; and Endelman, “The Chequered Career of ‘Jew’ King,” 175–77.
39. See Bendavid, *Etwas zur Characteristick der Juden*, 45–52.
40. See M. Meyer, “The Orthodox and the Enlightened,” 112.
41. Grattenauer, *Über die physische und moralische Verfassung der heutigen Juden*, 113–16.
42. Cranz, *Die Ehre Hamburgische Staats-Bürger*, 28–30.
43. W. Davidson, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, 110.
44. See “Über den Verfall des Judenthums, und über einige merkwürdigere, neure Vorfälle unter den Juden in Deutschland und Holland.”
45. *Ibid.*, 38–39.
46. *Ibid.*, 43.
47. The quotation is from M. Breuer, *The Tents of Torah*, 45 (Hebrew).
48. See Och, “Die Polemik gegen das akkulturierte Berliner Judentum.”
49. Friedländer, *Akten-Stücke die Reform der jüdischen Kolonien*, 35.
50. W. Davidson, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, 79–119.
51. See Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community*, chs. 7–12.
52. Shohet, “Beginnings of the Haskalah among German Jewry” (Hebrew).
53. See Goldberg-Neimark, “Jewish Women in Berlin and the Enlightenment Culture” (Hebrew); Hertz, *Jewish High Society in Old-Regime Berlin*; and idem, *How Jews Became Germans*.

54. Tewarson, *Rahel Levin Varnhagen*, chs. 1–2.
55. See Spiel, *Fanny von Arnstein*, 130.
56. The new editions of these two plays: Wolfssohn, *Kalut da'at vetsevi'ut* [*Leichtsinn und Frömmelei*]; and Euchel, *Reb Henoch, oder: Woss tut me damit*.
57. See W. Davidson, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, 20.
58. See Goldberg-Neimark, “Jewish Women and the Culture of the Enlightenment,” 263–64; and Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, 8.
59. Goldberg-Neimark, “Jewish Women and the Culture of the Enlightenment,” 264.
60. A detailed report on the affair was printed in the journal on criminal matters: “Beyspiel jüdischer Intoleranz und Strafe derselben,” 212–13.
61. *Ibid.*, 215–16.
62. See W. Davidson, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, 111–13; Lesser, *Chronik der Gesellschaft der Freunde*, 6; and Ajzensztejn, *Die jüdische Gemeinschaft in Königsberg*, 96–102.
63. See Gotzmann, “The Torah Is Indeed Good, but It Is in the Hands of Thieves and Scoundrels,” 25–30 (Hebrew).
64. *Ibid.*, 27 n. 48.
65. *Ibid.*, 28–30.
66. S. Levin, *Sefer she'elot veteshuvot*.
67. See Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, 335–41.
68. See Vaknin, “The Letters of the Italian Rabbis against the German Reforms in 1796,” 63–68 (Hebrew).
69. *Ibid.*, 68.
70. See Michman, *Dutch Jewry during the Emancipation Period*.
71. Pamphlets of “Discursen” preserved in the Rosenthalian Library printed with an introduction and translation: Michman and Aptroot (eds.), *Storm in the Community*.
72. *Naye kille*, in Michman and Aptroot (eds.), *Storm in the Community*, 2, 90; *ibid.*, 3, 106–9.
73. *Alte kille*, in Michman and Aptroot (eds.), *Storm in the Community*, 13, 196–99.
74. *Ibid.*, 15, 274–77.
75. *Ibid.*, 20, 396–97.
76. *Ibid.*, 15, 292–93.
77. See “Die Juden in Amsterdam.”
78. See J. Frank, “Can a Jew Become a Good, Productive Citizen?,” 81–82.
79. See Jacob Katz, “On the Question of the Link between Sabbateanism and the Haskalah and Reform” (Hebrew); Werses, *Haskalah and Sabbateanism*, ch. 4 (Hebrew); and Scholem, “A Frankist Document from Prague.”
80. Scholem, “A Frankist Document,” 805–6.
81. Rapoport-Albert and Hamann, “Something for the Female Sex.”
82. Scholem, “A Frankist Document.”

Chapter 11. *Soon Our Faith Will Be Lost*

1. See Friedländer, *Sendschreiben an . . . Probst Teller . . . von einigen Hausvätern jüdischer Religion*. English translation: Friedländer, “Open Letter to . . . Provost Teller.”

2. See *An einege Hausväter jüdischer Religion über die vorgeschlagene Verbindung mit den protestantischen Christen*, 9–15.
3. Loebel, *Sefer even bohan*, 16:2.
4. *Ibid.*, 2:1.
5. *Ibid.* See A. Nadler, *The Faith of the Mithnagdim*, 140–42.
6. See S. Ascher, *Leviathan, oder über Religion in Rücksicht des Judentums*; Graetz, “Formation of the New Jewish Consciousness” (Hebrew); and Schulte, “Saul Ascher’s *Leviathan*.”
7. S. Ascher, *Leviathan*, 14.
8. *Ibid.*, 225.
9. Bendavid, *Etwas zur Charackteristick der Juden*.
10. *Ibid.*, 45–47.
11. *Ibid.*, 64–66.
12. Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, 95.
13. Bendavid, *Etwas zur Charackteristick der Juden*, 51–58.
14. See Maimon, *An Autobiography*.
15. *Ibid.*, 22, 25.
16. *Ibid.*, 27–28.
17. *Ibid.*, 121.
18. *Ibid.*, 176.
19. *Ibid.*, 182–84.
20. *Ibid.*, 256–57.
21. *Ibid.*, 228–30. See Feiner, “Solomon Maimon and the Haskalah”; Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Solomon Maimon*; and G. Freudenthal (ed.), *Salomon Maimon*.
22. S. Levin, *Sefer ktav yosher*.
23. *Ibid.*, 93–94.
24. *Ibid.*, 95.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, 92.
27. Wolfsohn, *Sihah be’erets hahayim*.
28. *Ibid.*, 147.
29. *Ibid.*, 148–49.
30. *Ibid.*, 183.
31. *Ibid.*, 155–56.
32. Aaron Wolfsohn, “Al yom huledet hehaham david friedländer.”
33. See Lowenstein, *The Jewishness of David Friedländer*; and Hess, *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity*, ch. 5.
34. Friedländer, *Sendschreiben an . . . Probst Teller*.
35. *Ibid.*, 26–27; English, 54–55.
36. *Ibid.*, 30; English, 57.
37. *Ibid.*, 19–20; English, 50–51.
38. *Ibid.*, 39; English, 62.
39. *Ibid.*, 62; English, 75.
40. *Ibid.*, 66; English, 77–78.
41. Rabbi Mordechai Benet’s letter to Jacob Katzenellenbogen (1793), in Berliner, *Vehema baktuvim*, 19–20.
42. See Jacob Katz, “R. Raphael Kohen, Moses Mendelssohn’s Rival” (Hebrew).

43. Kohen, *Sefer da'at kedoshim*, 15:1–2.
44. *Ibid.*, 4:2.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*, and in an additional appeal to the religiously observant: “And you believers, sons of believers, who have inherited the faith . . . strengthen your faith and live” (*ibid.*, 81:2).
47. Jacob Katz, “Orthodoxy in a Historical Perspective” (Hebrew); *idem*, “Orthodoxy as a Response to the Exit from the Ghetto and to the Reform Movement,” 9–20; and Feiner, “Eradicating Wisdom from the World” (Hebrew).
48. Fleckeles, *Olat hodesh hashelishi*, 63–65; and *idem*, *Kontres ahavat david*, 3:1.
49. Fleckeles, *Olat hadesh hashelishi*, 47:2.
50. *Ibid.*, 57:1.
51. Fleckeles, *Kontres ahavat david*, 3:1–2.
52. Fleckeles, *Olat hodesh hashelishi*, 47:2, 57:1, 64:1.
53. *Ibid.*, 66:1.
54. *Ibid.*, 66:1.
55. P. Hurwitz, *Sefer haberit*, 378. See Rosenblum, “The First Hebrew Encyclopedia” (Hebrew).
56. P. Hurwitz, *Sefer haberit*, 323, 349–64.
57. *Ibid.*, 118, 197.
58. *Ibid.*, 322.
59. *Ibid.*, 322–23.
60. *Ibid.*, 375–76.
61. *Ibid.*, 491.
62. *Ibid.*, 363.
63. Loebel, *Sefer even bohan*. See Dubnow, *Toledot hahasidut*, 278–86; Scholem, “On R. Israel Loebel and His Polemic against Hasidism” (Hebrew); Wilensky, *Hasidim and Mitnagdim*, 2:255–342; and Michael, “R. Israel Loebel and His German Pamphlet” (Hebrew).
64. See Loebel, *Glaubwürdige Nachricht von einer neuen und zahlreichen Sekte unter den Juden in Polen und Litthauen*.
65. Loebel, *Sefer even bohan*, 4:2.
66. Loebel, “The Passion of the Tsadikim,” 2:340.
67. Loebel, *Sefer even bohan*, 2:1–2.
68. *Ibid.*, 4:2.
69. *Ibid.*, 2:1.
70. *Ibid.*, 13:1–2.
71. *Ibid.*, 11–12.
72. *Ibid.*, 4:2, 10:1.
73. *Ibid.*, 13:1.
74. *Ibid.*, 4:1.

Summary

1. P. Gay, *Mozart: A Life*, 17.
2. See *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, June 7, 1764, 208–9.

3. See McLeod, “Secular Cities? Berlin, London, and New York in the Later Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” 59–60.
4. See Weissberg, *Life as a Goddess: Henriette Herz*.
5. In the eighteenth century, nearly 500 Jewish students studied at universities in Germany. See Richarz, *Der Eintritt der Juden in die akademische Berufe*.
6. Argens, *The Jewish Spy*, vol. 1, letter 2, 16–17.
7. See Hirschel, *Kampf der jüdischen Hierarchie mit der Vernunft*, 12–13, 15.
8. Schweid, *Judaism and Secular Culture*, 18 (Hebrew).
9. See Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*; idem, “Seductive Science and the Emergence of the Secular Jewish Intellectual”; and Rosman, “Haskalah: A New Paradigm.”
10. See Hirschel, “Jüdische Intoleranz und Fanatismus in Breslau,” 62.
11. *Olam hadash: Zeh hakontres nikra olam hadash venikra olam hafukh*, 1:1.
12. Z. Horowitz, *Sefer lahmei todah*.
13. Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto*, 154; and M. Breuer, *The Tents of Torah* (Hebrew), 44–45.
14. Z. Horowitz, *Sefer lahmei todah*, sermon from 1807, 20a–b.
15. Ibid., sermons from 1809 and 1810, 43b: 63–64. Sermon from 1809, 47a.
16. Ibid., sermon from 1810, 64b.
17. See Green, *Tormented Master*.
18. See Piekarz, *Studies in Braslav Hasidism* 249–52 (Hebrew).
19. Green, *Tormented Master*, 306.
20. Ibid., 250.
21. Feiner, “*Sola fide!* R. Nathan of Nemirov’s Polemic against Atheism and the Haskalah” (Hebrew).
22. Nahman of Bratslav, *The Tales*, 154–56.
23. Ibid., 161.
24. See Jacob Katz, “Judaism and Christianity against the Background of Modern Secularism.”
25. See Jacob Katz, *Halakhah in Straits* (Hebrew).
26. See Ettinger, “The Position of Deists toward Judaism and Its Influence on the Jews” (Hebrew); M. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew*; and Endelman, *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History*.
27. See Feiner, “Educational Programs and Social Ideals,” 281 (Hebrew).
28. See Volkov, *The Magic Circle* (Hebrew); M. Meyer, *Judaism within Modernity*; and Sorkin, *the Transformation of German Jewry*.
29. See Feiner, “Toward a Historical Definition of the Haskalah.”
30. See Frankel and Zipperstein (eds.), *Assimilation and Community*; Endelman, “Gender and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History”; McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe*, 141–46; and idem, “Secular Cities?.”

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