

Article

Marranism as Judaism as Universalism: Reconsidering Spinoza

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Abstract: This essay seeks to reconsider the relation of the universal-rational ethos of Spinoza's thought to the Jewish tradition and culture in which he was raised and socially situated. In particular, I seek to engage with two previous portrayals—specifically, those of Isaac Deutscher and Yirmiyahu Yovel—that present Spinoza's universalism as arising from his break from or transcendence of Judaism, where the latter is cast primarily (along with Christianity) as a historical-particular and therefore non-universal tradition. In seeking a potential source of Spinoza's orientation, Yovel points to Marrano culture, as a sub-group that was already alienated from both mainstream Judaism and mainstream Christianity. By contrast, I argue that there are key elements of pre-Spinoza Jewish-rabbinic conceptuality and material culture that already enact a profoundly universalist ethos, specifically in contrast to more parochialist or particularist ethical dynamics prevalent in the culture of Christendom at the time. We will see, furthermore, that the Marrano dynamics that Yovel fruitfully highlights in fact have much in common with dynamics that were already in place in non-Marrano Jewish tradition and culture. As such, we will see that Spinoza's thought can be understood not only as manifesting a Marrano-like dynamic in the context of rational-philosophical discourse, but also as preserving a not dissimilar Jewish-rabbinic dynamic at the same time. This, in turn, will point to new possibilities for tracing this latter dynamic through the subsequent history of modern philosophy and modern Jewish thought.

Keywords: Spinoza; universalism; Marranos; Judaism; rabbinic; exile; ethics; philosophy; reason; Christianity; Christendom

1. Introduction

The present essay seeks to reconsider the relation of the universal-rational ethos of Spinoza's thought to the Jewish tradition and culture in which he was raised and socially situated. In particular, I seek to engage with two previous portrayals—specifically, those of Isaac Deutscher and Yirmiyahu Yovel—that present Spinoza's universalism as arising from his break from or transcendence of Judaism, where the latter is cast primarily (along with Christianity) as a historical-particular and therefore non-universal tradition. In seeking a potential source of Spinoza's orientation, Yovel points to Marrano culture, as a sub-group that was already alienated from both mainstream Judaism and mainstream Christianity. By contrast, I argue that there are key elements of pre-Spinoza Jewish-rabbinic conceptuality and material culture that already enact a profoundly universalist ethos, specifically in contrast to more parochialist or particularist ethical dynamics prevalent in the culture of Christendom at the time. We will see, furthermore, that the Marrano dynamics that Yovel fruitfully highlights, in fact, have much in common with dynamics that were already in place in non-Marrano Jewish tradition

and culture.¹ As such, we will see that Spinoza's thought can be understood not only as manifesting a Marrano-like dynamic in the context of rational-philosophical discourse, but also as preserving a not dissimilar Jewish-rabbinic dynamic at the same time. This, in turn, will point to new possibilities for tracing this latter dynamic through the subsequent history of modern philosophy and modern Jewish thought.

While there have been various scholarly attempts in recent decades to identify ways in which Spinoza's thought can be understood in connection with earlier Jewish tradition, most of these studies classify the 'Jewish' elements in Spinoza by drawing links to Maimonides and to medieval Jewish philosophy more broadly, or, conversely, to kabbalistic thought.² By contrast, the historical Jewish-rabbinic elements that I seek to highlight, with their focus on aspects of material social structures, constitute a distinctly different type of correlation between Spinoza and Judaism, a type, moreover, which has not received much recognition in scholarship. While Deutscher and Yovel may in certain ways be less representative of contemporary research on Spinoza, their assumptions concerning the non-universalist ethos of previous Jewish tradition may be more widely held; thus, engagement with their portrayal of Spinoza helps to bring these assumptions to the surface in order to call them into question more clearly and directly.

Moreover, the non-association of Spinoza's universalism with the ethos of Judaism may be an assumption of a distinctly more recent provenance: as Willi Goetschel has emphasized, many earlier Jewish voices, from Moses Mendelssohn and Heinrich Heine, to Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, and Margarete Susman, saw important connections between Spinoza's thought and their own assertion of Judaism's universalistic dimensions.³ However, recent scholarship has echoed and corroborated these positions only infrequently; as such, a more concrete spelling-out of historical, textual, and material dimensions of Jewish culture and thought prior to Spinoza can help to revive and illuminate some of the potential bases for these earlier intuitions.⁴

Methodologically, in arguing for the significance of previous Jewish-rabbinic culture and conceptuality for understanding Spinoza's universalism, I follow an approach similar to the one that Yovel in his argument for a 'Marrano' influence on Spinoza's thought.⁵ Specifically, I do not seek to claim that the Jewish-rabbinic dynamics that I highlight constitute the sole historical-explanatory source for Spinoza's universalism; rather, I posit it as one factor alongside other factors, such as his engagement with thinkers such as Hobbes or Descartes. However, because many scholars who have discussed the relation of Spinoza's thought to Jewish tradition have associated the latter primarily with particularity rather than with universalism, it remains an understudied and overlooked factor that deserves greater attention.⁶

Likewise, my argument does not require a claim that Spinoza himself consciously viewed Jewish tradition as a source for his own universalism. Indeed, my argument does not focus on how Spinoza viewed Judaism vis-à-vis universalism, but rather on the ways in which modern scholars have understood the relation between Spinoza's universalism and previous Jewish tradition, that is to say,

¹ While in one sense this analysis criticizes Yovel, it also helps to uphold the legitimacy of Yovel's discernment of Marrano-like dynamics in Spinoza's thought, since such dynamics *also* turn out to be similar to 'mainstream' Jewish dynamics. This connection aids in defending Yovel's basic analysis from critics who (insofar as Spinoza himself grew up in an openly Jewish community) discount the likelihood of Marrano influence. For such criticisms, see, e.g., (Nadler 2009, pp. 502–3).

² For a good overview of such studies, see (Nadler 2009, pp. 494–98); for an example of a recent collection of essays that generally take such an approach, see (Ravven and Goodman 2002).

³ See (Goetschel 2013, p. 159), as well as the scholarly references on pp. 254–55.

⁴ Goetschel himself, although he does not delve into the details of previous Jewish tradition, presents Spinoza's Jewishness in relation to his universalism in a manner broadly similar to my analysis in the present essay; see (Goetschel 2004, pp. 4–7; Goetschel 2013, pp. 150–51).

⁵ (Yovel 1992, pp. 205–8).

⁶ By contrast, outside of scholarship on Spinoza, a number of scholars have highlighted ways in which Jewish tradition can and should be understood as containing important universalist elements, intertwined with and not simply despite the historical-particular elements of the tradition, in ways that resonate with the argument that I put forth here. See, for instance, (Levenson 1996; Schwarzschild 1990; Runesson 2000).

on scholarship's *image* of this relationship and of its two component parts. The assumption that the universal elements in Spinoza's thought must be attributed to something *other than* Jewish cultural and theological dynamics prevents a clear understanding of both Judaism and Spinoza's relation to it, and it is this assumption that I seek to challenge. Once this unwarranted assumption has been criticized, and the potential and actual universalism in pre-Spinoza Jewish tradition more recognized, it will be more possible for future scholarship to assess the degree to which Spinoza himself was aware of these connections. To be sure, it may be the case that Spinoza himself did not perceive his own universalism as stemming from the Jewish cultural dynamics that I describe below. Yet, even if Spinoza himself were to have viewed 'Judaism' largely as representing a non-universalist ethos, it may still be possible that the material-cultural and theological dynamics that I highlight played a role in shaping Spinoza's thought, regardless of Spinoza's own awareness or non-awareness thereof. In addition, shedding light on ways in which Spinoza's universalism may have roots in previous Jewish tradition can enable greater insight into underrecognized Jewish cultural dimensions of similar 'universalistic' thinkers, as well as into hitherto underrecognized universalistic dimensions of authors who wrote in a more traditional Jewish idiom.

Finally, my argument likewise does not depend on a claim that previous Jewish tradition is wholly or purely characterized by universalism; rather, there are also various 'particular' or 'particularist' elements in Jewish texts and culture. However, I argue that even when these elements are acknowledged, they can nevertheless be seen as simultaneously sitting alongside significant and practically-enacted universalist elements, without the former undermining or gainsaying the latter. Likewise, when I highlight the universalistic potential of certain aspects of the material conditions of Jewish culture, these material conditions should not be seen as necessarily or automatically giving rise to universalistic thought. Yet, I argue that these conditions can be understood as creating cultural space for a distinctive type of universalism *potentially* to arise, and furthermore, that one can find actualizations of this potential in various streams of pre-Spinoza Jewish thought and theology. Even if not all Jewish individuals actualized this potential in the same ways or to the same degree, the structures and traditions that I highlight make it possible to view the universalism of at least one individual—namely, Spinoza—in relation to these earlier cultural dynamics.

2. Deutscher and Yovel

Deutscher and Yovel both discuss the relation of Spinoza to universalism and to Judaism in similar ways, although, notably, Yovel does not cite or refer to Deutscher's earlier essay at all. Yovel does acknowledge some connections between Spinoza's ideas and previous Jewish tradition, whereas Deutscher provides less attention to such connections. By contrast, Deutscher places a focus on the lack of geographic boundedness in relation to the Jewish social-political situation out of which Spinoza emerged, while Yovel does not highlight this element. Both writers, however, treat Spinoza as drawing upon aspects of his Jewish background and as extrapolating a rational and universal outlook by taking Judaism 'to its logical conclusion'. Yet, in putting forth this portrayal, Deutscher and Yovel appear to be operating with the assumption that Judaism itself is not rational or universal, that these elements emerge specifically in the process of Spinoza's divergence from the particularity of Judaism.

Thus, Deutscher presents Spinoza as an exemplar of the pattern of "[t]he Jewish heretic who transcends Judaism" and as falling within a line of Jewish thinkers who "found Jewry too narrow, too archaic, and too constricting."⁷ Here, the breadth and universalism of Spinoza's thought is achieved specifically by transcending the narrowness and particularity of Judaism. Yet, Deutscher emphasizes that Spinoza transcends not only Judaism, but Christianity as well, so that he was "not bound by the dogmas of the Christian churches, Catholic and Protestant, nor by those of the faith in which

⁷ (Deutscher 1968, p. 26).

he had been born.”⁸ While Deutscher sees the roots of Spinoza’s notion of a “universal God” as stemming from Jewish tradition, he views Spinoza’s resistance to the notion of linking this God to one particular community as generating a tension that ultimately led to Spinoza’s break from the Jewish community.⁹ Thus, he sees the unfettered universalism of Spinoza’s thought, even though it has a connection to Judaism, as ultimately constituting an attitude qualitatively different from that of the Jewish tradition: “Spinoza’s ethics were no longer the Jewish ethics, but the ethics of man at large—just as his God was no longer the Jewish God: his God, merged with nature, shed his separate and distinctive divine identity. Yet, in a way, Spinoza’s God and ethics were still Jewish, only that his was the Jewish monotheism carried to its logical conclusion and the Jewish universal God thought out to the end; and once he had been thought out to the end, he ceased to be Jewish.”¹⁰

In my discussion below, I will challenge the notion that Spinoza’s thought is best understood as ‘no longer the Jewish ethics’ and that Spinoza’s thinking out of Jewish monotheism ‘to its logical conclusion’ leads to a stance that is best understood as having ‘ceased to be Jewish.’ Rather, I will argue that there are elements in previous Jewish tradition that can be seen as *already* corresponding to Spinoza’s rational-universalistic ethics, such that Spinoza’s stance can be understood as resulting not from having ‘transcended’ Judaism (along with Christianity), but rather from reformulating pre-existing Jewish attitudes and orientations in a philosophical idiom. While this reformulation may differ in certain ways from some elements of earlier Jewish thought, the relation between the two will be shown to be much more complex than the sharper caesura that Deutscher presents.

Deutscher himself points to a key component of Jewish existence in Spinoza’s cultural context, although he does not fully draw out its implications for understanding the relation between Jewish conceptuality and Spinoza’s universalism.¹¹ In describing Spinoza and the other ‘non-Jewish’ Jewish thinkers that he highlights, Deutscher writes:

Yet I think that in some ways they were very Jewish indeed. They had in themselves something of the quintessence of Jewish life and of the Jewish intellect. They were *a priori* exceptional in that as Jews they dwelt on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions, and national cultures. They were born and brought up on the borderlines of various epochs. Their minds matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilized each other. They lived on the margins or in the nooks and crannies of their respective nations. They were each in society and yet not in it, of it and yet not of it. It was this that enabled them to rise in thought above their societies, above their nations, above their times and generations, and to strike out mentally into wide new horizons and far into the future.¹²

In other words, while Deutscher presents Spinoza as living on the borderlines of Jewish and Christian cultures, his statement points to the fact that *Jews in general already* lived at the borderlines of different social groupings. Jews, in their specific situation as the archetypal minority group in Christian Europe, were both part of and not part of the Christian-majority cultures in which they lived. While Deutscher emphasizes the interstitial aspect of borderline-living within a given society, we will see below that this same social situation also corresponds to a type of geographic universalism when considering the ways in which Jewish communities in different countries related to and identified with other Jewish communities, across the national boundaries and borderlines of the specific Christian-majority society in which each community lived.

Like Deutscher, Yovel also presents key aspects of Spinoza’s thought, particularly his emphasis on tolerance, as arising from his going beyond both Judaism and Christianity, in relation to “leaving one

⁸ (Deutscher 1968, p. 27).

⁹ (Deutscher 1968, p. 28).

¹⁰ (Deutscher 1968, p. 30).

¹¹ For analysis of ways in which Deutscher’s personally conflicted relation to Jewish tradition may have contributed to this lack of drawing-out, see (Farber 2017).

¹² (Deutscher 1968, p. 27).

religious community without joining another.”¹³ He sees Spinoza, in being part of neither community, as adopting an identity “marked only by his rational powers—a universalist capacity, with no root or affiliation in a particular religious community.”¹⁴ In Yovel’s presentation, it is the absence of root or affiliation in a particular religious community that makes possible the universalist capacity, with the implication that a true universalist capacity could not be found within Judaism, but only by going beyond it. To be sure, Yovel also states that certain ‘Jewish motifs’ such as the eternity of Israel, redemption, and covenant with God can be seen as playing a role in Spinoza’s thought; but he also emphasizes that they are preserved in a specifically ‘secular form’, and that the universalism of Spinoza’s thought is to be seen as stemming from these transformed ‘secular’ iterations rather than from their starting ‘Jewish’ forms.¹⁵ Thus, Yovel states, “For Spinoza . . . the universalization of Judaism must result in the rule of reason, that will displace *all* historical religions, those of persecutors and persecuted alike, and will abolish religious persecution altogether by granting equality and tolerance to all (including Jews who wish to remain as such).”¹⁶ Here, Spinoza’s thought arises from the universalization of Judaism: the transformation that starts from the non-universal stance of Judaism and arrives at the universal stance of reason. This universal orientation conceptually negates the ‘historically particular’ stance of Judaism, as well as Christianity, even though this conceptual negation is accompanied by a practical tolerance in the envisioned society that allows Jews to practice their historically particular traditions should they choose to continue to do so. Against Yovel’s presentation, I will call into question the notion that the ‘rational’ affirmation of tolerance and opposition to religious persecution should be seen primarily as the result of moving beyond Judaism; rather, Spinoza’s rational tolerance can be seen as linked to elements already present in the tradition of Jewish thought itself.

In Yovel’s account, a key intermediary category for understanding Spinoza’s transition from Judaism to rational universalism is the phenomenon of Marranism.¹⁷ As Jews who had converted to Christianity but continued to preserve a ‘hidden’ Jewish identity, Marranos were, as outward Christians, distanced from their previous Jewish community, and yet, in upholding an inward existential commitment to Judaism, also remained alienated from the Christian community that they had joined.¹⁸ In this sense, the Marrano orientation prefigured Spinoza’s later stance of being distanced (whether by force of excommunication or by choice) from both the Jewish and the Christian communities. As Yovel argues, the neither/nor position of the Marranos gave rise to a dynamic in which a significant number of them “were led by the confusion of both religions to skepticism and secularism, preferring the life of this world, or even (as happened to some) arriving at a positive rationalist philosophy.”¹⁹ Thus, he presents the alienated Marrano stance as containing an internal dynamic leading to rationalism. Without rejecting his analysis of the Marranos, I will argue that Yovel overlooks ways in which Judaism’s exilic self-conception can also be seen as displaying a similar dynamic, such that the Jewish stance can itself be viewed as a type of Marranism *avant la lettre*.

Similarly, Yovel links Spinoza’s emphasis on tolerance as stemming from a Marrano sensitivity to persecution. Spinoza’s “rejection of all forms of fanatic imposition of beliefs” can be seen as stemming from his familial cultural inheritance of the Marrano experience, as Marranos were “the community that suffered most from the Inquisition.”²⁰ Insofar as Spinoza’s family background would have attuned him the harms and evils of religious persecution, we can understand his desire to move beyond all forms of religious persecution and philosophically to promote a social structure based upon religious

¹³ (Yovel 1992, p. 34).

¹⁴ (Yovel 1992, p. 34).

¹⁵ (Yovel 1992, pp. 194–95).

¹⁶ (Yovel 1992, p. 195, italics in the original).

¹⁷ Deutscher also notes a link between Spinoza and the Marranos, but mentions this only briefly (Deutscher 1968, p. 28).

¹⁸ (Yovel 1992, pp. 22–23)

¹⁹ (Yovel 1992, p. 24). For an argument that it makes more sense to view the Marrano phenomenon in terms of both/and rather than in terms of neither/nor, see (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 8).

²⁰ (Yovel 1992, p. 32).

tolerance. Likewise, Yovel argues that Spinoza upholds a stance in which truth may be unique, but in which the one who possesses this truth should not seek to impose it on others, but should generally tolerate the erroneous positions that others may hold. This stance entails that “[r]ational wisdom thus becomes esoteric”: a person can hold to rational truth without needing to proclaim it to others or insist that all must affirm it.²¹ Yovel sees this as reflecting a Marrano orientation, insofar as the Marranos lived among mainstream Christians while keeping their Jewish commitments hidden, accepting a gap between their inner convictions and the dominant practices of the society in which they participated.²² Again, while Yovel provides insightful analysis into potential connections between Spinoza and the Marrano experience, we will see that he may overlook ways in which these elements of tolerance and hiddenness may also have links to important elements in previous Jewish tradition.

3. Universalism and Jewish Conceptuality

In what follows, I seek to highlight ways in which the rational-universal elements of Spinoza’s thought that Deutscher and Yovel associate with a transcendence of Judaism can instead be understood as having deeper roots in previous Jewish conceptuality and experience. To the extent that this analysis is correct, it will call into question the assumption that universalist capacity is to be found only by going beyond every particular-historical religious tradition.²³ Rather, it may be that Spinoza’s type of universality can potentially also be identified in some, even if not in all, particular-historical streams of thought. To the extent that this is the case, we can view Spinoza as bringing a type of ‘Jewish’ rational-universal thought *into* the discourse of Western philosophy, in a context in which this type of rational-universal conceptuality may previously have been more lacking within the Western philosophical tradition. As such, rather than viewing Spinoza as achieving universalism by going beyond the narrowness of Judaism, we can view him as going beyond the narrowness of previous Western thought by bringing a ‘Jewish’ universalism into the philosophical idiom. We will see that certain types of historical-religious particularity, far from undermining universality, may in fact function as a foundation for the generation of certain types of universality, especially ethical-rational universality.

Let us first consider ways in which the material factors of the pre-Spinoza Jewish geographic-social situation can be understood as challenging certain forms of particularistic conceptuality. As Deutscher points out, Jews in Europe lived at the ‘borderlines’ of majority-Christian societies, being both part of the society and culture in which they lived, and yet also separate from it. They were thus simultaneously at home and distanced from the place where they lived.²⁴ For Deutscher, this interstitial stance enabled a simultaneous familiarity with the broader society and a critical distance from it. At the same time, a related aspect of Jewish positionality can be discerned by considering the ways in which a Jewish community in one geographic location maintained a sense of shared identity and connection with Jewish communities in other geographic locations. These bonds of communal connection cut across the boundary lines of the various particular kingdoms and principalities of Europe and beyond, thus rendering Jews existentially positioned as members of a *geographically universal* community.²⁵

By contrast, the social situation of Christians in Europe, as the dominant majority group in each country, led to a situation in which Christians were more closely bound with a geographically-particular sense of identity. While in principle Christians were spiritually connected to Christians in other geographic locations, the closer identification of Christians with their ‘home country’ constituted

²¹ (Yovel 1992, p. 31, see also p. 35).

²² (Yovel 1992, p. 35).

²³ For analysis of ways in which later Jewish thinkers, particularly Moses Mendelssohn and Hermann Cohen, seek to present philosophies in which they affirm universalism yet without seeking to ‘go beyond’ Judaism, and indeed in which they present not only their ‘Jewish’ universalism, but also Western universalism more generally, as arising precisely from the Jewish tradition and sources, see (Fogel 2019, pp. 41–43); see also (Erlewine 2010; Hess 2002; Goetschel 2004, 2013).

²⁴ Cf. (Yerushalmi 1997).

²⁵ Cf. (Weiss 2016).

a material factor of existential particularism. That is to say, while Jews may have been simultaneously ‘at home and not at home’ in the place where they lived, Christians’ less-alienated relation to the dominant social structures meant that they were more univocally ‘at home’ in relation to the place where they lived, and accordingly their sense of identity would have been proportionally more distanced from Christians living in other countries. In this sense, it was the higher degree of Jewish social-material alienation and exclusion from the dominant culture of the specific places where they lived that *enabled* a more materially universalistic sense of community and identity. While such structures of geographic universality are not in themselves sufficient for generating an attitude of ethical or existential universalism (it is still possible to hold to an ethically particularist stance even in such a situation), they nevertheless constitute an important material condition for the formation of the latter.

The potential ethical significance of Jewish geographic universality stands out even more clearly when considered alongside the phenomenon of warfare. Historically, the elements of international warfare can be seen as playing a strongly significant role in shaping a mindset of ethical particularism—and this factor would have been particularly prominent in the decades leading up to Spinoza’s lifetime. To the extent that one country or kingdom, with the approval of political and religious authorities, fights in wars against other countries or kingdoms, and in so doing engages in the physical negation of individuals from those other groups, the subjects or citizens of the first country or kingdom will tend to develop an oppositional sense of communal self-conception—a dynamic that ultimately contributed to the rise of modern nationalism. That is to say, the sense of ‘us’ (versus ‘them’) will form in relation to a geographically-bounded structure, and will likewise involve carrying out acts of killing and physical destruction against inhabitants of other locations, while simultaneously rejecting the legitimacy of outwardly-similar acts of killing and physical destruction carried out against one’s own group. In structural terms, engaging in warfare and seeking to gain dominance over other countries or kingdoms will go along with a practical-material enactment of a particularist ethic vis-à-vis other groups. Thus, these material structures and practices militate against the development of a properly universal ethic and orientation, wherein one would respect the life and existence of all human beings equally, regardless of national borderlines and boundaries.

By contrast, because Jews were in the position of an excluded minority in the various European countries, and were accordingly more distanced from the material practices of military competition and combat against people in other countries, they were less subject to the ethically particularistic cultural mindset generated by those practices. Moreover, whereas Christians engaged in lethal combat against Christians in other countries, thus undermining the practical weight of the in-principle spiritual universalism among Christians, the exclusion of Jews from the military institutions of Christian-majority society meant that Jews did not engage in physical acts of lethal combat against Jews (or Christians) in other societies.²⁶ As such, the geographic universalism that characterized Jewish identity functioned not only on a spiritual or theoretical level, but also on a significant material and practical level, marked by the absence of acts of organized physical killing and destruction across geographic boundaries. As one noteworthy cultural-legal manifestation of this orientation, Joseph Karo, in his influential *Shulchan Arukh*, includes (in a list of problematic genres of texts to be avoided by Jews) a prohibition on reading “books of wars” (*sifrei milchamot*), an activity that he presents as prohibited both for the Sabbath and for the weekday.²⁷ Such military exploits are understood as characteristic of the gentile ‘nations of the world’, specifically in contrast to Israel’s calling to a holy life. Again, while ideological and practical opposition to geographically-particularistic militarism does not in itself automatically give rise to ethical universalism, it nevertheless creates cultural space for the

²⁶ For a twentieth-century literary rendition of this dynamic see (Reisen 1917). English translation: “His Brother’s Bullets,” translated by Max Rosenfeld, in *“Jewish Life” Anthology*, 1946–1956, Edited by Louis Harap (New York: Jewish Life, 1956), pp. 71–74.

²⁷ Joseph Karo, *Shulchan Arukh*, *Orach Chayyim* 307:16. I thank David Pruwer for this reference.

latter to arise, whereas cultural affirmation of geographically-particularistic militarism ‘salts the earth’ and makes it more difficult for such ethical universalism to germinate.²⁸

In addition, even if Jewish communities may often had a level of particularistic ‘us versus them’ orientation towards the members of the Christian majority in the society in which they lived, in which Jews may more often have acted with more care and concern for members of their own Jewish community than towards members of the Christian community, this dynamic still differed in important ways from the particularistic ethic in which Christians were shaped. First of all, the ‘us versus them’ orientation of Jews in relation to Christians was also found, in a reversed form, in the orientation of Christians in relation to Jews. And, in material terms, Christians, being in a position of greater power, were more able to physically-materially *enact* ethical particularism in their relation to Jews than Jews were able to do in relation to Christians. Thus, even if both Jewish and Christian *texts* of the time displayed ‘particularistic’ hostility towards the competing religious group, the power differential meant that Jewish life would have been, in practice, less structurally marked by the physical enactment of material harm or oppression to Christians, in contrast to *vice-versa*. In other words, by refraining from physical acts of warfare, and by refraining from physical oppression of other religious groups, Jewish existence in this historical context can be viewed as characterized (in practical terms, even if not always in textual-conceptual-theoretical terms) by a *significantly universal* ethic. That is to say, Jewish dynamics of thought were less shaped, culturally speaking, by the material need to justify, ideologically or theologically, acts of killing and destruction carried out against ‘others’.

Thus, in order for a Christian writer of the time to put forth a truly universal ethic, that writer would need to distance himself or herself from the inherently ethically-particularist social structures of the dominant society. Yet, such a task would carry a greater social-cultural penalty for such a writer, as this writer would functionally be negating key practical values of community of which he or she was a part. By contrast, a Jewish writer would have been more in a position to put forth a universal ethic without having to cease from support of major practices that structurally shaped his or her community. While this universalistic stance would place a writer in tension with the structures of dominant Christian society, the Jewish writer would *already* have been in a position of alienation from these structures, and so putting forth a universalistic stance would not create the same risk of cultural loss. Thus, the position of Jewish alienation from the dominant institutions of Christian society, and the corresponding daily Jewish physical enactment of non-killing and non-warfare, can be seen as forming a material basis for the formulation of a conceptually universalistic ethic. To be sure,

²⁸ For an expression, from an internal Jewish theological perspective, of a related view, see Eliezer Berkovits’s statement in his 1943 essay “On the Return to Jewish National Life” (Berkovits 2002, pp. 169–71):

It has been said in modern times that the world cannot exist half-free and half-slave; far less is it possible to create a state of God in one corner of the earth amidst a world of imperial Caesars and power politics Thus we went into exile to bide our time there, to wait, however long it might be, until the time when the establishment of the state of God on earth might be attempted once more Might and pomp, national honor and “greatness,” imperial majesty and power politics, are conceived in guilt and maintained in guilt. From the beginning of recorded history, collective or national existence has always been bound up with crime. Consequently, taking part in national life meant living in sin; Political transactions became synonymous with iniquity and corruption. There has been no place for us as Jews in international life. Our national history in exile has always been passive. We have had to accept the crumbs which “great civilizations” have graciously thrown out to us.

All this has been unpleasant, but thank God for it. Let us thank God that it was not we who were throwing out these soiled crumbs to others. Let us thank God that we were not the masters but only the pariahs of these great civilizations; that we had no share in their criminal inhumanities. We have often been trampled on, but let us thank God that it was not we who have trampled upon justice, decency, freedom, and human dignity whenever it suited our selfish purposes. Let us be grateful to the exile; it has freed us from the guilt of national existence in a world in which national existence meant guilt. We have been oppressed, but we were not oppressors. We have been killed and slaughtered, but we were not among the killers and slaughterers. We have been hunted from country to country, but there were no fugitives fleeing from their homes because of fear of us Not every form of *eretz yisrael* is worth the trouble, and many a form could be unworthy of Judaism.

some individuals within an oppressed minority group may also respond to such exclusion by adopting a more defensive stance of ethical particularism, and such a stance could also be compatible with the structures of their material conditions. Yet, the dynamics of exclusion from dominant power structures that I have sketched out can simultaneously give rise, in other individuals, to different type of response, opposing and resisting the oppressive imposition of particularist power by willfully upholding a non-particularist ethical stance.

In light of this analysis, we can reconsider Deutscher's assertion that "Spinoza's ethics were no longer the Jewish ethics, but the ethics of man at large." Instead of setting up this contrast, we can instead assert that in important senses, the universalistic aspects of Spinoza's ethics may have a material grounding in social-cultural orientation of the Jewish culture in which Spinoza was raised. This Jewish cultural context involved a basic stance of not engaging in the physical negation of others, regardless of religious or national groupings or borders. This stance would have stood out all the more notably in the context of sixteenth and seventeenth century 'wars of religion', which did involve killing on the basis of geographically and culturally particularist causes. In opposing such forms of ethical particularism, Spinoza can be seen as translating into philosophical terms a Jewish view of such behavior as characteristic of 'the wars of the nations' and as standing in contrast to the true service of God. As such, in practical terms, Jewish ethics can be seen as closely approximating a refusal of ethically particularistic forms of killing, so that, in a significant sense, we can correct Deutscher's statement to: "Spinoza's ethics were the Jewish ethics: the ethics of man at large."

Deutscher's formulation was likely unduly shaped by a focus on certain textual formulations, insofar as Jewish texts often did not express themselves in the explicitly universalistic phrasings that one finds in Spinoza's texts. He may thus have been misled by 'narrow' textual formulations, and may have neglected the ways in which the practical-material forms of Jewish cultural praxis may have provided a basis for Spinoza's formulations of ethical universalism. Moreover, the practical absence of engagement in ethically particularistic warfare and killing was not simply imposed on Jewish communities by force of circumstances, but also had a significant theological and ideological basis in the Jewish textual tradition itself. In rabbinic conceptuality, the community of Israel as a whole was viewed as in a state of exile imposed not simply by more powerful other nations, but by God's divine will and decree. In this condition, the dominant rabbinic theological understanding held, Israel is to accept the situation of subservience to the nations and is not to seek to engage in warfare against them. Thus, if subservience to the nations is willed by God in the present era of exile, then Jewish refraining from engagement in particularistic warfare against other nations is likewise willed by God. Even if on various levels rabbinic texts may provide a basis for Israel to 'dislike' the other nations who oppress them, they are nevertheless to uphold a practice of non-warfare in relation to them, thus establishing a universal ethic as God's present will for Israel. By contrast, while post-Constantinian and medieval Christian traditions generally upheld the prohibition on killing on the level of the individual, they left a much wider scope for killing on the political and collective levels. Thus, while Christian texts may in some cases have displayed more outwardly universal formulations in their discourse, the material praxis of Christian societies corresponded to a more ethically particularistic stance in these regards.

Likewise, on the level of individual ethics, rabbinic law held that Israel is prohibited from engaging in acts of killing against both Jews and non-Jews. While the positive attitude of providing active care and concern may have been directed more prominently to 'insiders' than to 'outsiders', the basic negative prohibition of 'thou shalt not kill' was upheld by prominent halakhic authors in Spinoza's cultural context, in relation to both insiders and outsiders, tracing back to the rabbinic notion of all humanity as constituting the 'image of God'.²⁹ Thus, while Jewish texts may have displayed

²⁹ Cf. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Mishpatim 4, to Ex. 21:14, on the prohibition of murdering non-Jews as well as Jews, and the ways in which this prohibition was understood by major commentators (including Rashi, Maimonides, and Joseph Karo) in the centuries prior to Spinoza. See (Bleich 1989, pp. 15–17). On elements of classical Jewish sources in Spinoza's educational context, see (Nadler 1999, pp. 63–65).

various particularistic formulations, those same texts, when examined more closely, can be understood as enjoining a practical orientation marked by a fundamentally universalistic ethic with regard to physical harm and oppression. Thus, in addition to the Jewish social circumstances in which Spinoza was acculturated, Spinoza's engagement with the Jewish textual tradition may also have contributed to his development of a universal ethical orientation, regardless of whether Deutscher—or Spinoza himself, for that matter—consciously recognized these dynamics of universalism within Jewish culture, texts, and praxis.

In a similar manner, we can consider the ways in which the Marrano dynamics that Yovel sees as contributing to Spinoza's attitude towards tolerance and against religious persecution may also have correlates in broader Jewish tradition and cultural situatedness. Yovel presents Marranos as living according to laws of the dominant society that are at odds with the Marrano's own inner convictions. Yet, this notion of a gap perceived truth and outward circumstances also corresponds to the rabbinic notion of *dina de-malkhuta dina*, 'the law of the (gentile) kingdom is the law'.³⁰ In rabbinic conceptuality, the 'true law' is found in the commandments of the Torah—but, the theological and practical conditions of Israel's exile means that Israel is not in a position to enact all the laws of the Torah as the fully determining factor of their outward practical life, and must instead submit to the laws of the gentile kingdoms in which they live. While Israel may continue to study all the laws of the Torah and thus to identify itself with those laws in terms of inner identification, the rabbinic stance holds that Israel's outward life is to be shaped to a significant degree by the legal regimes that presently hold sway, despite the false or idolatrous basis of such political-power structures. While God will one day overturn these 'false' structures, God's current will for Israel is to 'tolerate' and adapt important aspects of its practical life (although not all aspects) to these erroneous regimes in this pre-messianic and pre-redemption era.

In this framework, Israel does not impose the 'true law' on others, and indeed even submits to the 'false laws' of others in Israel's own daily life. This stance of 'tolerance' thus corresponds both to the material circumstances of Jews in Europe as well as to an inner rabbinic theological attitude.³¹ We can accordingly discern a close parallel to Spinoza's attitude in which the wise person may be in possession of the unique truth, but does not inherently seek to impose it on all others, and will instead live with a tolerant stance towards the errors of those who lack the truth.

By contrast, the dominant practical and theological stance in Christendom was that 'religious truth' is something to be imposed by force on society as a whole. To take one prominent example, Thomas Aquinas, in relation to the question, "Should heretics be tolerated?," held that heretics who do not repent should not only be excommunicated, but should also be put to death.³² Such attitudes not only played a role in giving rise to the Inquisition's use of physical force against recalcitrant theological deviants, but also contributed to a more general sense that it is normal and proper to combat 'departure from the truth' by means of coercion.

Thus, when Spinoza opposes the tendency of the Inquisition and of Christendom more broadly to impose 'religious truth' by force, he can be viewed as enacting a stance derived not only from a Marrano orientation but also from core Jewish-rabbinic theological and practical sensibilities. Even if Spinoza was himself excommunicated from the Jewish community (thus pointing to certain dynamics of internal intolerance within early modern Judaism), the basic ideological and material stance of that community was nevertheless one that held that truth is to be affirmed by the minority community

³⁰ See (Schwarzschild 1970; Shilo 1974; Graff 1985).

³¹ Moreover, while there may have been elements of imposed coercion *within* Jewish communities in the Middle Ages, previous classical rabbinic texts themselves were likely written in a context in which rabbinic authority was enacted primarily in a context of 'voluntary adjudication.' See, e.g., (Lapin 2012, p. 113ff). This earlier historical context may also have contributed materially to the shaping of the theological trends that I describe.

³² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 11, a.3.

that acknowledges it, but is not to be imposed on broader society as a whole.³³ Just as Israel, in this unredeemed world, is to live alongside the dominant Christians whom it views as holding false or heretical views, so too Spinoza can be understood as rendering this stance into a philosophical principle wherein the wise person is to live alongside those who hold false views concerning the truth. Thus, while Spinoza may oppose the Jewish community's practices of excommunication vis-à-vis 'heretics' within its own minority community, his stance can simultaneously be seen as recapitulating the Jewish community's stance of 'toleration of error' in relation to the dominant Christian culture.

Likewise, the basic Marrano sense of the 'hiddenness of the truth' can also be understood as having already been conceptualized within previous Jewish tradition. Commenting on Gen. 1:16, Genesis Rabbah links the moon with Jacob (and thus with the community of Israel), and the sun with Esau (and thus with the dominant Roman Empire, including its transformation into Christendom), stating, "Rabbi Nahman said: as long as the light of the bigger one [i.e., the sun] is present [*qayyam*], the light of the smaller one [i.e., the moon] is not publicly visible [*mitparsem*], but when the light of the bigger one sets, the light of the smaller one is publicly visible. Likewise, as long as the light of Esau is present, the light of Jacob is not publicly visible, but when the light of Esau sets, the light of Jacob will be publicly visible, as it is said, 'Arise, shine, for thy light is come, [and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee]. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth [and gross darkness the peoples; but upon thee the Lord will arise, and his glory shall be seen upon thee]' (Is. 60:1–2)."³⁴ Here, while the 'light' of Jacob/Israel is expected to shine forth in the messianic future, the operating assumption is that it is expected *not* to be shining forth in the pre-messianic era. Rather, in the unredeemed present, it is the light of Esau/Rome/Christendom/'the nations' that is expected to be prominent and visible. Thus, from an uninformed outsider perspective, it could easily appear that Israel has been cut off from truth and divine glory. The midrash seems to be associating public visibility with the current 'victorious' imperial stance of Rome/Esau, in contrast to the defeated and oppressed stance of Israel. However, the midrash asserts that in reality Israel retains its 'light', but that this light is not able to be *perceived publicly* at present. In this portrayal, Israel as a community should persist in its inner, non-public knowledge of its light, even though it must do so in a context in which public appearances seem to indicate that it is Esau that possesses the light. Thus, even beyond the question of imposing truth on others or tolerating error, this orientation points to a Jewish self-understanding that sees its own 'truth' not only as lacking coercive power, but as functionally 'invisible' and hidden, with no expectation that it would be able to be perceived by others.

In this sense, when the Marranos were compelled to preserve their sense of Jewishness 'in secret,' and so developed a hidden or esoteric conception of truth, they can be understood as adapting an already-prevalent Jewish stance. It may that scholars like Yovel fail to highlight this continuity due to the fact that 'regular' Jewish communities were allowed to practice their religion more openly, whereas Marranos, due to persecution, were compelled to hide their rituals and beliefs more actively. However, this difference, while important, should not distract from the fact that Jews in Europe, while permitted to carry out the outward forms of their religion, were nevertheless theologically and materially cast by dominant society in a position of subordinated untruth. While Jewish practices were not forced into an 'invisible' position, Jewish truth, ideologically speaking, most certainly was. Jewish communities thus had to operate in a material context in which, however much they might affirm their 'truth' within their communities, that truth was officially invisible and hidden in relation to the broader cultural context. Jewish communities accordingly had to develop a self-perception that took into account the fact that the truth that they affirmed had no visible public status, and indeed would have been treated publicly as having a status of non-truth and falsehood. Thus, while Yovel may be

³³ Michael Broyde notes that, apart from Maimonides, most of the rishonim held that Noahide law is not to be imposed by force on non-Jews even in the theoretical circumstance of Jews being in a position of power. See (Broyde 1997, pp. 124–29). For an early rabbinic theological formulation of non-imposition of religious truth by force, see Mishnah Avodah Zarah 4:7.

³⁴ Genesis Rabbah 6:3.

correct in drawing a connection between Marrano ‘esotericism of truth’ and Spinoza’s ‘esotericism of truth’, one can also draw a connection between Marrano ‘esotericism of truth’ and a more basic Jewish-rabbinic ‘esotericism of truth.’ As such, while Spinoza’s orientation to the public hiddenness of truth may stem in part from his Marrano familial-cultural connections, it may also have an important material and theological basis in the Jewish-rabbinic context in which he was raised.

4. Spinoza and Jewish Universalism

Let us now reconsider Spinoza’s thought in light of these Jewish religious and cultural dynamics. We have seen that previous Jewish tradition can be understood as affirming and enacting a practical ‘universal ethic,’ which refrained from engaging in forms of ethically-particularistic killing and warfare across geographic-national boundaries and which thus functionally enacted an ethical ‘unity of humanity’. This stood in contrast to the dominant material-cultural structures of European Christian countries and kingdoms, in which each country considered it to be ethically normal and proper to carry out forms of killing and warfare against human beings in other countries, even when that same country would view the other countries as ethically unjust and unwarranted in waging war against *it*. Likewise, in terms of truth and tolerance, the Jewish cultural orientation related to truth, in both practical and theological terms, as something to be affirmed by oneself (as a minority community) but not as something to be imposed on society as a whole. By contrast, the theological and political structures of Christendom tended to view it as a matter of importance that theological truth be imposed on society more broadly, and through the use of physical force and coercion if necessary.

To be sure, the Jewish tradition also contains various aspects that stand out as ‘particular’, and these may be the elements that could strike some observers as more prominent, particularly if one thinks of Judaism in relation to the Hebrew Bible alone, considered apart from the way this text was understood and interpreted in rabbinic literature. Thus, a reader of the Hebrew Bible could remark upon the ways in which the text could seem to encourage the violent destruction those who engage in idolatry and ‘false worship’ within Israelite society, or upon the ways in which the Israelites are encouraged to wage violent warfare against other nations. When these are combined with the biblical range of distinctive ‘ritual’ practices (such as circumcision and dietary restrictions), a reader could (and readers have) come away with a sense of ‘Judaism’ as quite distanced from the type of ‘universalism’ that one associates with Spinoza.

Yet, when we consider the theological and material aspects of rabbinic-Jewish tradition considered above, a different picture may emerge, which may contain elements of ritual particularity and cultural separation, but which simultaneously operates on a fundamental basis that rejects particularistic inter-group oppression and warfare and which also shuns coercive imposition of ‘religious truth’ on society as a whole. To the extent that these latter dynamics *are* preserved in the tradition, the dominant rabbinic tendency either restricts them to the biblical past or suspends them until the future messianic redemption, instead affirming a norm for the present according to which these elements are specifically removed from Israel’s ethical-practical activities and interactions with other groups.³⁵ Thus, the rabbinic tradition can already be seen as actively recasting the tradition in a manner that removes these elements and leaves in place a functionally universalistic existential ethos in these regards.

Thus, Spinoza can be viewed as having been acculturated into this existential ethos, and as reformulating its practical-theological universalism in the language of a philosophical-theoretical universalism. Instead of a norm in which *Israel’s special calling from God for the present* entails enacting a stance that rejects imposition of truth and geographically-particular ethics, Spinoza presents a norm in which it is *atemporal reason* that entails enacting a stance that rejects imposition of truth and geographically-particular ethics. Spinoza’s immersion in the Jewish material and theological context can be understood as having made it more existentially ‘intuitive’ for him to imagine a society without

³⁵ See (Berger 2007; Neusner 1987; Weiss 2015).

the enactment of ethically particularistic violence and without forced imposition of religious truth. While the form in which he presents this ethos is new and different in various regards, the basic substance of his stance can be seen as standing in practical continuity with the Jewish tradition out of which he emerged. He can therefore be understood as taking the Jewish existential stance and philosophically extending it to society as a whole in the name of reason.

At the same time, when Spinoza himself puts forth his universalism in the name of ‘reason,’ he asserts the latter to be specifically separated from all historical-particular elements. Such a notion may appear to differ from the Jewish universalism put forth in the name of an historical-particular-revealed ‘Torah.’ And indeed, Spinoza’s own presentation of Jews and Judaism presents a sharp contrast between his reason-based universalism and the historically-bound (and thus historically-outmoded, after the destruction of the ancient Israelite state) status of “the Law of Moses.”³⁶ Similarly, he sees the election of “the Hebrew nation” as presently having lapsed.³⁷ To be sure, in rejecting the continuing validity of the historically-particular dimensions of the Hebrew Bible, Spinoza simultaneously sees the same Hebrew Bible itself as proclaiming a “divine universal law,” which still remains valid even after the destruction of the ancient Hebrew commonwealth.³⁸ In this sense, Spinoza can be seen as indicating an awareness of a potential relation between universalism and Jewish tradition. Yet, by portraying the Bible’s universal elements as fully separable from the historical-particular aspects of Judaism, he presents a picture in which there is no apparent positive role to be played by Jewish particularity in relation to the task of promoting or upholding the divine universal law. Indeed, he criticizes “the Jews” as failing to recognize the properly universal dimensions of their own scriptural tradition.³⁹ In this presentation, it would seem that any universal dimensions might that still be found among ‘the Jews’ would be present in spite of, and not in substantive relation to, the specifics of Jewish tradition.

As such, it could appear that whatever the functional universalism of the Jewish ethos, in connection with its material circumstances, it cannot properly be described as a ‘rational’ universalism, to the extent that Jewish tradition still upholds the divine normativity of historically-particular practice and identity. However, such an assertion may overlook the crucial distinction between a form of reason that strives to separate itself from all historical-temporal traditions, and a form of reason that can be understood as operating within a historical-temporal tradition. If Jewish tradition operates with concepts of a ‘God of all the world’ in a manner that enacts an ethical oneness of humanity, cutting across geographic borders and boundaries, and which, while holding to historical-particular norms, theologically rejects the imposition of these on society as a whole, then one can posit—in order to account for the possibility of the phenomena observed—a dynamic of reason at play as that which gives rise to these universal orientations. By contrast, to the degree that the culture of Christendom enacted ethically-particular forms of violence or coercion, we can posit a dynamic of parochial unreason as that which gives rise to these non-universal orientations. Indeed, the Jewish tradition may point to a specific conception of reason, understood not in terms of *imposing upon all people* that which is claimed to be rationally true (an imperialistic notion of reason), but rather in terms of *rejecting the imposition on others* of that which is historical-particular and thus not rationally-universally true. Far from existing in spite of cleaving to historical-particular practices, this alternative mode of reason may in fact be closely bound up with the double dynamic of strongly asserting of the value of historical-particular elements for one’s own community while simultaneously

³⁶ For Spinoza’s assertion of the outmodedness of the ‘Law of Moses,’ see (Spinoza 2007, p. 71 [5:5]).

³⁷ (Spinoza 2007, p. 54 [3:11]).

³⁸ (Spinoza 2007, pp. 70–71 [5:5]).

³⁹ See (Spinoza 2007, p. 79 [5:19]), where Spinoza asserts that ‘the Jews’ (and particularly Maimonides) view salvation as achievable (even in connection to the Noahide laws) only through the divinely revealed Torah and specifically not through universal natural reason. Again, particularly in relation to the latter accusation, even if there do exist certain particularist streams or dynamics within certain Jewish texts or figures, this does not in itself rule out the possibility of universalist streams or dynamics alongside them, and so Spinoza’s picture is misleadingly one-sided.

rejecting the imposition of those particularities on others. We can thus view not only the universalism but also the rationalism that Spinoza champions as present in important ways in previous Jewish tradition and practical ethos. While Spinoza himself may not necessarily have fully recognized these dynamics, and while his account of rational universalism may enact certain changes to the previous Jewish dynamics of rational universalism, it is highly misleading to say that his construction of a universal and rational philosophy is accomplished by moving beyond the supposedly non-universal and non-rational structures of traditional Judaism. Again, as stated in the introduction to the present essay, this latter assumption may be more characteristic of recent scholarship on Spinoza than of portrayals of Spinoza in eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century Jewish thought, but it remains an assumption that stands in need of being challenged today.

5. Jewish Conceptuality as Marrano Conceptuality, Marrano Conceptuality as Jewish Conceptuality

In light of the above analysis, we can reconsider Yovel's construal of Spinoza as "a Marrano of reason, rather than of some revealed religion."⁴⁰ By this, Yovel intends to distinguish Spinoza from the historical Marranos, who kept their Jewish belief and identity secret while outwardly living within a Christian societal context in which such views were disallowed. By contrast, Yovel holds that while Spinoza likewise holds a 'Marrano-shaped' inner commitment at odds with the dominant view of the society in which he lived and wrote, it is an inner commitment to universal reason, and not to a historical-particular 'revealed religion' such as Judaism. While this description may indeed illuminate Spinoza in important ways, both components of the phrase 'Marrano of reason' can lead to a problematic understanding Spinoza's relation to Jewish tradition. First of all, we have seen that Jewish tradition itself shares key elements with a Marrano orientation, including attitudes towards imposition of truth by force and towards expectations of truth's hiddenness. Thus, when Yovel says that Spinoza enacts 'Marrano' dynamics, but in the name of reason, one could, in many regards, likewise view those same Spinozan data points as enacting 'Jewish' dynamics in the name of reason. Similarly, we have seen that many aspects of Spinoza's rational-universal approach have important resonances with previous Jewish tradition and ethos. Thus, just as Jewish tradition may be 'Marrano' *avant la lettre*, it may also 'rational-universal' *avant la lettre*. At a minimum, treating 'Marrano' versus 'Jewish' or 'universal-rational' versus 'Jewish' as contrast-pairs rather than as overlapping family-resemblance-pairs may obscure more than it clarifies. As such, while Spinoza may indeed be a 'Marrano of reason,' he may also be a 'Marrano of Judaism', as well as a 'Judaizer of reason'—or even a 'Judaizer of Judaism'.

In this sense, while Yovel, as well as Deutscher, may be correct in asserting that Spinoza engages in a rational-universal critique of particularity, they may fail to recognize the extent to which Jewish conceptuality and social-cultural context had already been functionally enacting a universal-rational critique of particularity, and that this may have played a material role in giving rise to Spinoza's ideas. It may be that they, as well as other scholars, take their cue about the relation between Judaism and universalism from some of Spinoza's own explicit (but misleading) statements, and consequently turn instead to 'Marranism' (or other forms of 'marginal Judaism', such as Sabbateanism) as constituting potential sources for or parallels to Spinoza's critique. Instead, it may be that many of Spinoza's universalist dynamics may already have been present, quite close to the surface (even if not fully *on* the surface), in 'mainstream' rabbinic culture and material circumstances, and may not have required all that much of a push for them to be activated in the way that Spinoza does.

A key difference between Spinoza and previous Judaism may be found not in the ethos of his writing but in its implied audience. If universalist dynamics were already enacted in a Jewish context, they were primarily aimed only at the Jewish community itself, whereas Spinoza's reformulation in terms of philosophical reason now enjoins that ethos 'for all,' or at least all students or lovers of reason.

⁴⁰ (Yovel 1992, p. 37, italics in the original; see also pp. 31, 215).

In this sense, rather than viewing him as going ‘beyond both Judaism and Christianity,’ he can be seen as transferring the universalist ethos of rabbinic Judaism into a context of Christendom that had been marked, at least since the merging of Christianity with the Roman Empire, by a more particularist and parochialist ethos, linked to ethical differentiation dependent on geographic borders and to imposition of religious truth on general society.⁴¹

Finally, if Spinoza’s approach can be understood as coming not only from his Marrano cultural background, but also, or even more so, from his Jewish background in a more basic sense, this can afford us a similarly broadened perspective on the history of Jewish thought and philosophy after Spinoza as well. It may well be the case that dynamics of universalism akin to those found in Spinoza can also be found in thinkers who engaged in philosophical discourse from out of a Jewish cultural background, even when those thinkers did *not* reject affiliation with Judaism—as in the case of Moses Mendelssohn and Hermann Cohen, to take two especially notable examples.⁴² If the wider history of Jewish philosophy in modernity can be interpreted in terms of ‘Marranism,’ as Agata Bielik-Robson has fruitfully done,⁴³ then it may also be possible to narrate a history of universalism and rationalism in modern Jewish thought in terms of a related dynamic of ‘rabbinism,’ as the present article attempts to gesture towards. If Deutscher cast Spinoza within a modern intellectual chain of tradition of the ‘non-Jewish Jew,’ then recasting Spinoza more specifically as a ‘Jewishly non-Jewish Jew’ can in turn give rise to richer understandings of Spinoza, of Judaism, and of modernity, in which dynamics of universalism and rationalism, in a non-imperialist mode, can be understood as arising precisely from out of, rather than in spite of, the historical-particular dynamics of previous Jewish thought and material culture.

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⁴¹ On rabbinic views of the ‘parochialization’ entailed by the Christianization of the Roman Empire, see (Weiss 2018). By contrast, the pre-Constantinian Christian ethic (and thus the ethic displayed in the New Testament) may have had more in common with the rabbinic ethic described in the present essay.

⁴² See footnote 23 above.

⁴³ (Bielik-Robson 2014).

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