

Abelard and the Jews

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As a number of scholars have noted, there is a great deal of complexity and ambivalence in Christian views about Jews and Judaism in the Middle Ages. On the one hand, Christians worship the same God as the Jews; God's revelation had been to the Jews and salvation had come through the Jews in Jesus. Moreover, as Jeremy Cohen points out, the survival of the Jews is a proof of the truth of Christianity because a proof of its roots, of the law given to Moses which Jesus lived by and interpreted.¹ On the other hand, Jews reject Jesus as divine, God as triune, and the 'new law' in the gospels. In terms of complexity and ambivalence on the Jews, Abelard is no exception and, true to his way of dealing with other issues, he tends toward extremes. While working on other aspects of Abelard's works over the years, I had been struck, even shocked, by the coexistence of seemingly contradictory attitudes toward the Jews in his theologies. For, on the one hand, Abelard enthusiastically cites evidence on the ways in which the triune nature of God is clearly, even indisputably, laid out in Hebrew scripture, thus including Jews in those with natural knowledge of the Trinity. On the other hand, however, Abelard moves directly from this observation to invective against the Jews, excoriating them for failing to recognize the truth so clearly laid out for them.² Cohen's work sent me back to Abelard and to works beyond the theologies in order to understand the particular kind of complexity and ambivalence in Abelard's attitude toward Jews and Judaism. My topic, like Cohen's, is the 'hermeneutical Jew,' that is, "the Jew as constructed in the discourse of Christian theology" in Abelard's work rather than any actual encounter with Jews or any concrete effects from Abelard's work on Jews in the period.³

I begin with Abelard's theologies, where Abelard compares the Jews to the philosophers both in knowledge of the divine nature and the Trinity, as well as

1 Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

2 *TSB*, 1.24, ed. Buytaert and Mews (1987); *TSch*, 1.86; and *TC*, 1.46, ed. Buytaert (1969a), 69–372, here book 1, 46. Reference is specifically to the eternal generation of the Word in Micah 5:2. See more detailed discussion of this passage below.

3 Cohen, *Living Letters*, 2–3.

in their ethical principles and behavior.⁴ I turn next to Abelard's *Collationes* in the dialogue between the Philosopher and the Jew, connecting and comparing it to the *Commentary on Romans*; both these texts are concerned as well with the comparison between Jews and gentiles in relation to reason and righteousness. An examination of these texts and the role of Jews and Judaism as Abelard understands them show, first, that Abelard's reflections on the Jews are reflections of his own thought and, second, that they have a role to play in the shifting ground of Christian anti-Jewish polemic in the twelfth century. Abelard's *Commentary on Romans* and his *Collationes* are struggling with the same issues and with the same ambivalence about the Jews and their relative goodness compared to the gentiles, the same problematic that motivates the discussion of the Jews in his theologies. Paul's letter to the Romans compares the situation of the Jews and gentiles on the gap between their knowledge of and righteousness toward God.

I will argue, first, that the different versions of the theology show some changes of tone and emphasis and that it is the drive to use and defend reason, dialectic, and pre-Christian philosophical sources that shifts Abelard's view of the Jews. Abelard moves between equating the position of the Jews and the philosophers and *ethnics* and fairly clearly downgrading the Jewish position vis-à-vis that of the philosophers in ways that are more negative toward the Jews than some of his sources, like Augustine and Origen. In the *Collationes*, I concentrate on Abelard's presentation of the Jew, in which the most fascinating and original part is Abelard's attempt to inhabit the point of view of a Jewish thinker responding to the Philosopher's criticisms. Abelard has been assessed as remarkably tolerant, even pluralist in these passages. I argue that, on the one hand, Abelard does attempt to give a sympathetic picture of the Jewish perspective but that, on the other hand, he presents the Jew as holding views that place him in dialogue with Abelard's own views and criticizing him in terms of his own moral theory. What is perhaps more interesting about the *Collationes*, I want to suggest, is that all three participants are largely Pauline; it is as if Abelard has taken Paul's letter to the Romans and imagined it as a dialogue. By this I don't mean that the Jew and Philosopher agree with Paul's conclusions but that they, along with the Christian, operate in an orbit of

4 Abelard essentially rewrote and reworked his work of systematic theology a number of times in response to condemnations and criticisms. I refer here to the three main rewritings, known as the *Theologia 'Summi Boni'* [TSB], *Theologia Christiana* [TC], and *Theologia 'scholarium'* [TSch]. Buytaert's critical edition notes the passages in common between the different versions. For their dates of composition, see Mews, "On Dating the Works of Peter Abelard," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 52 (1985), 73–134.

questions and issues which are defined by the issues and values Paul expresses in Romans. I will conclude with some thoughts about how Abelard's commitments to reason and philosophy both broaden his appreciation of the Jews and yet move him toward devaluing their tradition.

The Theologies

Early in the first version of his theology Abelard expresses his frustration with the Jews who, he says, say the right words but don't know what they mean. This, of course, is not a view unique to Abelard and goes back at least to Augustine, who characterizes the Jews as having the signs but not knowing how to interpret them.⁵ Abelard's version of this view is, however, more extremely stated, as a result of his tremendous optimism about the accessibility of the divine nature as triune to Jews and philosophers alike. Like Peter Alfonsi, Abelard compiles a list of texts from Hebrew scripture (supposedly) showing that God is three. Compared to Peter Alfonsi's *Dialogos*, Abelard's list of texts from Hebrew scripture naming the persons of the Trinity is much longer and more elaborately glossed.⁶ Just as he does to defend Plato's account of the world soul as plausible analogue to the Holy Spirit, he asks pointed and rhetorical questions to show the absurdity of non-trinitarian readings.⁷ He presents the Trinitarian reading as the only one possible. How, he asks, can the word by which God creates be anything but co-equal and co-eternal? Why would God need a word if only he existed before creation with no one to hear him? How could "the spirit of God carried over the waters" (Gen 1. 2) mean merely the breath or wind of God since God has neither mouth nor parts?⁸ Abelard includes a special excoriation of the Jews: "they read what is written, and on reading they proclaim it, and on proclaiming it, they do not believe it." The remark is retained in all three versions of his theology.⁹ No man of sane mind, whether Jew or Gentile, Abelard concludes, doubts that God is powerful, wise and good, and

5 See, for example, Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 3.6.10.

6 *TSB*, 1.24–1.29, ed. Buytaert and Mews (1987). Cf. Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogue Against the Jews*, trans. Irven Resnick (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006). Titulus Six is on the Trinity. For the arguments based on scripture, see 167–176.

7 *TSB*, 1.100–1.104.

8 *Ibid.*, 1.27.

9 *Ibid.*, 1.24; *TC*, 1.46, ed. Buytaert (1969a); *TSch*, 1.86. '[...] quam et scriptam legunt et legendi profitentur et profitentes non credunt.'

thus, instructed by natural reason, no one lacks faith in the Trinity.¹⁰ Jew and Gentile, to whom God has announced so much of the Catholic faith, he says, are without excuse, if they do not hear the rest of those teachings pertaining to the salvation of the soul.¹¹

On the surface, Abelard maintains the equivalence of the gentiles and the Jews on their knowledge of God and on their stubborn refusal of the truth and salvation. As Constant Mews points out, Abelard uses the image of the four wheeled chariot of Dindimus, under the authority of the four kings, two Jewish, David and Solomon, and two pagan, Nebuchanezzar and Dindimus, indicating equal reliance on Jewish and Pagan sources.¹² But, as Cohen has shown, equivalence is already a downgrading of the status of the Jews in comparison to the gentiles or pagans in relation to the patristic tradition, for whom by and large Jews are a different 'other', one whose past and continued existence is necessary as testimony to Christian revelation. Second, explicit statements of equivalence notwithstanding, Abelard's tone and level of interest in non-Jews as pre-Christian examples of virtue and faith show where his sympathies lie. "Many (*multi*) among the gentiles and some (*nonnulli*) among the Jews", Abelard writes, "instructed by their teachers, have expressed their belief in the Trinity."¹³ However, Abelard goes on to mention only the Greek and Roman philosophers who accepted the faith when they heard it because of their subtle intelligence (*ingeniorum*) and having been 'armed (*armatos*)' with philosophical reasons accepted the faith when they heard it.¹⁴

In the *Theologia 'Scholarium'*, Abelard seems to begin a parallel invective against the philosophers (to match that against the Jews). But after quoting Paul on how the gentiles, even given their great wisdom, will be given up to shameful vices (Rom. 1, 26–7), Abelard immediately counters with the well known reputation of the philosophers for continence. Nor can they be criticized for not believing in or anticipating the Incarnation, he argues, for not even the writings of the prophets announced this clearly. Abelard also quotes Augustine on Socrates' rejection of Greek popular religion as evidence that philosophers, no matter their outward conformity to pagan beliefs, had different beliefs and practice in private. Instead of moving, as Augustine does, from

10 *TSB*, 3.100; *TC*, 4.159; *TSch*, 2.183–184.

11 *TSB*, 1.62–1.63; *TC*, 1.136.

12 *TSch*, 1.195; *TC*, 1.131. Constant J. Mews, "Abelard and Heloise on Jews and *Hebraica Veritas*," in *Christian Attitudes Toward the Jews in the Middle Ages: A Casebook* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 83–108.

13 *TSB*, 1.63; *TC*, 1.136; *TSch*, 1.201.

14 *TSB*, 1.64; *TC*, 1.136; *TSch*, 1.201.

the example of Socrates to the need for Christ, Abelard uses Augustine's claim as the occasion to differentiate between the religious beliefs and practices of the masses of people as opposed to the philosophers and as the introduction to the exposition of the "testimony of the philosophers" on the Trinity.¹⁵ That testimony is what is needed to refute the unbelief of the people, refuting the Jews from the prophets and the pagans from the philosophers.¹⁶

The theologies also take up the comparison of the pagans and philosophers versus the Jews in ethical terms. In the *Theologia 'Summi Boni'*, Abelard transitions from the topic of belief in the Trinity before Christ to ethical matters by noting that God, before transmitting the written law or doing miracles, wanted to present among the two peoples certain examples of virtuous men.¹⁷ In the *Theologia christiana*, Abelard greatly expands this topic, adding an entire book devoted to the virtuous pagans. In order to make this case, Abelard makes a number of questionable claims. Amongst them is an association of the life of philosophers in Plato's *Republic*, in which there is no traditional marriage and children are raised communally, with monastic life. Abelard also asserts that the Jews paid less attention to the end or goal of eternal life than Plotinus or Macrobius, instead fixing their attention on early happiness and success.¹⁸ After he gives a long list of examples of virtuous philosophers, Abelard mentions only one example from Hebrew scripture: that of Samson. However, he does so only to raise questions about Samson's final acts, his suicide, normally a sin, and his acting on what he thought was divine command.¹⁹ Abelard also professes himself 'confused' (*in confusionem*) by the way in which the abstinence and magnanimity of the philosophers, praised in the book of Wisdom and recommended by the epistles of Paul, is not understood by the Jews.²⁰ His contribution is to contrast the stories of David, Solomon, and Samson, all brought down by concupiscence, to the virtuous lives of Roman emperors like Titus, Trajan, Vespasian and Valentinian.

I am somewhat surprised by Abelard's willingness to embrace Rome and its rulers as positive role models. Though Abelard is sometimes supportive of kings and nobles, at least certain ones, he has a consistent and instinctive opposition to established power, always taking the position of underdog and

15 *TSch*, 1.111–113; cf. Augustine, *De vera religione*, trans., LCC 6 (1953), 1.1–1.2.

16 *TSch*, 1.114.

17 *TSB*, 1.63.

18 *TC*, 1.64.

19 *Ibid.*, 2.79–2.80. Cf. Augustine's discussion of this in *De civitate Dei*, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCL 47–48 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), 1.26.

20 *TC*, 2.87.

those under siege. Nonetheless, Abelard is not breaking new ground here but following both Christian and pre-Christian authors. Abelard cites Jerome's praise of Titus in his commentary on Galatians and positive story about Trajan from the *Life of St Gregory* and Ambrose on Valentinian, and he also borrows liberally from Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars* to find instances of virtues among the rulers of Roman empire.²¹

Yet there is something striking and perhaps new in Abelard's recounting of the stories of just and virtuous emperors in the way they are juxtaposed to stories from Hebrew scripture showing the *lack* of virtue exemplified by Jews. He has no even hand-no stories of pagan vice to balance Jewish vice, no stories of Jewish virtue to balance pagan virtue. Abelard's praise of Roman emperors shows how far he is willing to go in his determination to use all the means in his power to put philosophy and the Greco-Roman culture from which it sprang in a positive light.²² As many have noted, Abelard is not so much here engaging in anti-Jewish polemic as he is in pro-philosophy, pro-liberal arts polemic.²³ Directly if somewhat awkwardly Abelard moves from praise of the virtuous pagans, saved without baptism after the coming of Christ, to the claim that even more must God's mercy find a way to save the philosophers who lived before the time of Christ but with faith and lives of the most gleaming virtue, and from there to the notion that we stand in need not only of their example of virtue and faith but also whatever they might offer as an aid to all questions of reason.²⁴

While Constant Mews suggests that Abelard's strongest anti-Jewish claims might be in the *Theologia 'Summi Boni'*, a case could be made that it is the *Theologia Christiana* because in this version of his theology, Abelard is most concerned to defend his use of philosophical texts to understand and explain scripture.²⁵ He pulls out all the rhetorical stops in order to make the case for the value of this material and its legitimate use in theology. In order to *increase* the acceptance and esteem for Greek/Roman/Gentile culture, Abelard *decreases*

21 Ibid., 2.109–2.114.

22 Cf. Marenbon, "Introduction," xxxiv–xxxv. As Marenbon notes, this long section does not reappear in the later revision, *TSch*, and he also argues for some shift away from this extremely positive attitude toward antiquity evident in Abelard's more ambivalent remarks in *Ep*, 7. See also Jean Jolivet, "Doctrines et figures des philosophes chez Abélard," in *Petrus Abaelardus (1079–1142): Person, Werk und Wirkung*, ed. Rudolf Thomas, Trier Theologische Studien 38 (Trier: Paulinus, 1980), 103–120.

23 Mews, "Abelard and Heloise," 88–89, 99, 101. Peter von Moos, "Les *Collationes* d'Abélard et la 'question juive' au XII^e siècle," *Journal des savants* 2 (1999), 459, 484.

24 *TC*, 1.115–1.116.

25 Mews, "Abelard and Heloise," 87–88, 99.

and places in an unfavorable light that of the Jews. The result is that Abelard's positive views about the philosophers and virtuous Romans cause Jews to be demoted from their special status compared to other non-Christians as living witness to the truth of Biblical Christianity and its origins.²⁶

The *Collationes*

What many readers have been most struck by in this dialogue (or double dialogue) is Abelard's portrayal of the Jew who speaks in defense of Judaism to the philosopher. While I fully concede that some of this interest is anachronistic, stemming from contemporary interest in interreligious dialogue and religious tolerance, it is clear from a comparison to other texts that Abelard's Jew and the Philosopher's treatment of him are outliers in the literature of the period. Some have argued that Abelard's dialogue does not really belong in the genre of *aversus Judeos* literature because there is no confrontation between Judaism and Christianity (the Philosopher moves on from his conversation with the Jew to a separate conversation with the Christian) and no conversion to Christianity.²⁷ Karl-Wilhelm Merk and Ursula Niggli have gone further, finding in Abelard's text open-minded humanism and even hints of religious tolerance and the finding of common ground.²⁸ Merk and Peter von Moos have noted that the core of Abelard's interest is the role of reason in morality and religion rather than the opposition between Judaism and Christianity directly.²⁹ But of course, even if Abelard's interest is more directly focused elsewhere, the encounter between the Jew and the Philosopher is his chosen instrument for getting to the questions he cares most deeply about. And, of course, his deployment of the topic of the Jews to pursue issues of reason, religion, and ethics,

26 The thesis of Cohen's *Living Letters of the Law* is that over the course of the Middle Ages, this status, which afforded them protection and a certain amount of tolerance, was whittled away. For his account of Augustine's views on the special place of the Jews, see 23–65. The epithet for Jews, 'living letters of the law,' comes from a letter written by Bernard of Clairvaux, exhorting participation in the Second Crusade. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, vol. 8, Letter 363, 311–317.

27 See, for example, Cohen, *Living Letters*, 285.

28 Karl-Wilhelm Merks, trans., "Peter Abelard: Dialogue Between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian [Coll.]," in *The Three Rings: Textual Studies in the Historical Trialogue of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Barbara Roggema, Marcel Poorthuis, and Pim Valkenberg (Leuven and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005), 123, 137–140.

29 Mews, "Abelard and Heloise," 88–89, 99, 101; von Moos, "Les *Collationes* d'Abélard," 459, 484; Merks, "Peter Abelard: Dialogue," 137.

tells us something about his notions of Judaism and in turn becomes part of the larger discourse about Jews.

Abelard's conversation between the Jew and the Philosopher focuses on three main issues: the relationship of Mosaic to natural law, the meaning and value of circumcision, and the end of ethical life as centered in this life or the hereafter. It has been noted that the Jew has an advantage in Abelard's dialogue because he is never directly confronted by the Christian, but it is also true that Abelard's Philosopher has a freedom Abelard does not have when he writes treatises or commentaries. The understanding and critique of Judaism is a complex problem for Medieval Christians, who are simultaneously committed to the truth of Hebrew scripture and to the invalidity of Judaism after Christ. The Philosopher has no need to save the truth of Hebrew scripture and is free to criticize it as irrational. The Philosopher finds circumcision both irrational and distasteful and argues that whatever overlap there is between natural and Mosaic law, for the rest Mosaic law is superfluous, having no positive moral value whatever. His most important and basic criticism is that natural law alone is sufficient for salvation, even according to Hebrew scripture, in which the pagan Job and the patriarchs before the Mosaic law are judged righteous, a view echoed, he argues, by the prophets' emphasis on justice over sacrifice.³⁰ The Philosopher claims that Hebrew scripture promises only earthly rewards for the fulfillment of the law, which shows, first, the low moral standards of this moral system (they are a 'carnal people' 'who thirst for nothing except earthly things') and, second, that since those earthly rewards have clearly not been forthcoming, something is wrong with the law itself.³¹ The Philosopher's most emphatic point is that many others, notably Job, Enoch, Noah and Abraham were all judged righteous without knowing or keeping Mosaic law, and that other passages, from Proverbs or the prophets, make it clear that justice is what is required, not the keeping of laws governing external action.³² The Philosopher argues as well that the only 'reward (*remuneratio*)' given to the Jews has been loss of the promised land, a loss which makes impossible the full observance of the law.³³ The Philosopher can and does conclude by condemning Mosaic law as a burden and a curse.

30 *Coll.*, 25–27, ed. and trans. Orlandi and Marenbon (2001).

31 *Ibid.*, 53, 27, 49: '[...] tam carnalis populi, quo non nisi terrena sitiebat [...]']

32 *Ibid.*, 20, 25.

33 *Ibid.*, 27. The point is that the law requires that certain practices and sacrifices be performed in the temple in Jerusalem and in Israel; in the diaspora they lack even 'earthly dignity' (*terrene dignitates*), the Philosopher concludes.

The Philosopher's criticisms are grounded in scripture, using one scripture passage to disprove the Jew's interpretation of others and showing contradictions in the Jew's interpretation of the way in which they hang together.³⁴ For Merks, the Philosopher's citation of scripture is an ironic device used by Abelard to show the Philosopher's arrogance. This would be difficult to show since neither the judge nor the Jew in the dialogue make any comment about the Philosopher's argument as unusual in any way. On its own terms and without assuming an editorial perspective, we can say that there is something of a tour de force in this mode of argument by the Philosopher; his point is that he can prove the irrationality of the Jew's religion even if he only takes the premises accepted by the Jew, that is, those from scripture. This is a recognizably Abelardian strategy: his theologies argue analogously, that he can prove the Christian position using only the premises of the Philosopher. But in this context, it is the Jew whose argument is more speculative, a more broad ranging interpretation, explaining the *meaning* behind the giving of the law, and in particular the practice of circumcision, the dietary laws, etc. Though it may be entirely anachronistic—it is impossible to measure how this would have seemed to medieval readers—the Jew comes off as more sympathetic because less arrogant and more thoughtful, and the Philosopher as more literalist and nitpicking, lining up passage against passage without regard for context or spirit.

Abelard's Jew recognizes and values the category of natural law, and he accepts the distinction between the elements of Jewish law which overlap natural law and the other rites, ceremonies, and prohibitions (like those dealing with food and circumcision) as binding and valuable but as somehow extra, over and above what is essential for the moral life.³⁵ He argues that these "corporal works of the law" were instituted by God in order to separate the Jews from other peoples.³⁶ But these practices have more value than merely the control of the people; they enjoin a stricter (*artiozem*) way of life which strengthens and makes more secure the holy life, which consists in "the true love of God and man." He even argues that since perfect love (*dilectio*) is enough for happiness (*beatitudo*), then the added rituals acts should by rights gain some additional benefit in this life, such the comfort of greater earthly

34 See Merks, "Peter Abelard: Dialogue," 130.

35 *Coll.*, 28, 43, 45.

36 *Ibid.*, 29: '[...] corporalibus quoque legis operibus eos penitus separare decreuit [...].'

benefits leading to greater confidence and devotion, in turn bringing other unbelievers more easily into the worship of God.³⁷

On circumcision, Abelard's Jew argues that male circumcision is postponed male punishment for the Fall; because Eve sinned first, she gets her punishment right away in the pain of child birth, but that the male punishment comes later. He argues for the fittingness of circumcision—it uses the very instrument that gives life to make the Jews hold to God by inwardly circumcising their hearts from vices, just as they have outwardly circumcised the flesh.³⁸ He also argues that the function of circumcision and the dietary laws is to separate the Jewish people from others by means of the two areas of marriage and food by which different peoples become friends; the point is to cut them off from the Chaldeans, so that they avoid the temptation of mixing with and becoming like the nations.³⁹

John Marenbon points out that the basic outlines of Abelard's view of natural law and its relationship to the Old and New Law shares much of the same ground as the school of Anselm of Laon.⁴⁰ A great deal (though not all) of Abelard's account of circumcision relies on Origen, through the latter's *Commentary on Romans*.⁴¹ With the exception of Abelard's argument that circumcision is delayed male punishment for the Fall, Abelard's arguments, either those given to the Philosopher or the Jew, are not notable, then, for their originality.⁴²

37 *Coll.*, 45. Very early in the conversation, *ibid.*, 17, the Jew lists in some detail the particular elements of Jewish law, which, he says, are as oppressive as their maltreatment at the hands of non-Jews. The Jew lists just those aspects non-Jews, especially Christians, would see as the most difficult and distasteful, rather than what Jews might say about their own practices. I suspect (or at least hope) that Abelard intends the Jew to speak ironically here, articulating his burdens not so much per se, as how they would be seen by Christians.

38 *Ibid.*, 36.

39 *Ibid.*, 34.

40 See Marenbon's "Introduction," in *ibid.*, lviii–lix. Marenbon also refers readers to his "Abelard's Concept of Natural Law," in *Mensch und Natur im Mittelalter*, ed. Albert Zimmermann and Andreas Speer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992), 609–621. Anselm of Laon argued that the Old Law applied only to the Jews, distinguished between the elements of the Old Law which overlap with natural law and the gospel teachings, and argued that the reward for following the Old Law was merely earthly, a view expressed by the Philosopher (§24), a claim the Jew very ably argues against (§§40–42). For the Anselm of Laon texts, see Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, 48–50.

41 See below, section 3 for discussion of Abelard's *Commentary on Romans* and his use of Origen's commentary compared to the *Coll.*

42 See the discussion of this argument in Abelard in Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California

What is notable and surprising about the views expressed by both the Philosopher and the Jew is not that the Philosopher's views overlap Abelard's but that those of the Jew as well have much in common with Abelard's own ethical views. As the dialogue opens, the Jew accepts readily the Philosopher's notion that one should not simply accept the faith of one's fathers but, on reaching adulthood, not follow opinion but seek the truth.⁴³ Abelard's Jew refers to conscience as binding, calling to mind Abelard's view in the *Ethics* that acting against one's judgment of what is right is a greater sin than following it, even if that judgment is misguided.⁴⁴

Moreover, Abelard's Jew gives an Abelardian justification for Jewish practice/belief. One of the Jew's most important defenses of circumcision is to argue that outward circumcision is an outward sign of the inner circumcision of the heart mentioned in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah.⁴⁵ The scriptural references to 'circumcision of the heart' were regularly used to criticize Jewish observance, accusing the Jews of neglecting the spiritual 'inner circumcision' for the external practice. This is exactly what Origen does in his *Commentary on Romans*, a text Abelard refers to in great detail in his own *Commentary on Romans*. Origen argues that it is only inner circumcision, circumcision of the heart, which Paul in Romans says has value.⁴⁶ Unlike Origen, then, who does away with physical circumcision for the spiritual version, Abelard has the Jew give a quasi-sacramental justification for physical circumcision as the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual reality.

Abelard's Jew also insists that the observation of the law 'sanctifies' (*sanc-tificat*), and quotes a number of passages exhorting the Israelites to holiness through following God's commands.⁴⁷ In other words, the Jew argues that it is not mere earthly reward, the literal milk and honey, that Jews seek by fidelity to the law, but the higher spiritual goods of holiness and justice. The law is, he argues, an everlasting covenant, an everlasting relationship, not one merely located at a certain time or space.⁴⁸ What the law elaborates is love of God and

Press, 2005), 88–90. Cohen's thorough study has not found this particular account in any other sources, Jewish or Christian.

43 *Coll.*, 12, ed. Orlandi and Marenbon (2001).

44 *Ibid.*, 14. Cf. *Sc.*, 54–56.

45 *Coll.*, 33. The Jew does not directly quote Deuteronomy 10,16; Deuteronomy 30,6; Jeremiah 9,26 but uses the notion of circumcision of the heart to justify circumcision. See Marenbon, "Introduction," 43, n. 79.

46 Origen, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), vol. 1, 2.12, 140–143.

47 *Coll.*, 41.

48 *Ibid.*, 40.

neighbor, a love beyond measure.⁴⁹ The Jew defends himself ably against the Philosopher's charge that the Mosaic laws do not describe universal justice but only preferential treatment of fellow Jews, quoting a number of passages citing Jewish obligation to help the stranger, the enemy, the poor, and to refrain from revenge.⁵⁰

The Philosopher and the Jew have a real difference of opinion about the relationship of inner and outer observance, but they agree that it is the inner observance and the core of the law—love of God and neighbor—that matters.⁵¹ The Jew justifies the laws prescribing practices beyond this core in a couple of different ways. First, he argues that God's gives the law—in all its explicit prohibitions and prescriptions—in order to restrain evil and show his concern for human affairs.⁵² His claim is that people benefit from specific and explicit guidance. Later he adds a more substantive account. The 'added laws,' those over and above the requirements of natural law, while they do not constitute a holy life, they do help to secure and protect it.⁵³ Observance of the prescribed rituals and rules make the people more able to keep the principles of natural law.

In this way, we see Abelard has not made the Jewish perspective a mere straw man or caricature; he has moderated the standard criticism of the Jews as concerned only with difficult and arcane practices without reason. Instead he has articulated the Jewish view as placing love and justice as the center of the law and given pragmatic reasons for its specific practices. Where they differ is that the Jew argues that the outer observances are signs of and aids in the development of justice and love. For the Philosopher, outer observances can only have an outer effect and can only have for their reward other outer or worldly benefits; they can not serve one's true moral development but only in the burnishing of one's outer reputation.⁵⁴

The Jew's view of the relationship of the commitments of the heart and outer action is certainly not Abelard's, but neither is it the view he usually critiques. What Abelard objects to most in the *Historia calamitatum* is those who have no interest in the intention or interior of the heart, who are only

49 Ibid., 41. On Abelard's notion of love as the ground of moral action, see also Marenbon, *The Philosophy*, 289–291.

50 *Coll.*, 44.

51 Ibid., 43, 45.

52 Ibid., 14.

53 Ibid., 45.

54 Ibid., 59.

concerned with outward form and observable behavior.⁵⁵ It is true, as I just noted, that the Philosopher is skeptical about whether there is any relationship between inner and outer, any way in which a mere outward practice could affect one's interior state, but the Jew's view is, as Abelard lays it out, a view that is, at least from Abelard's point of view, a respectable alternative, even a kind of 'Catholic' alternative to Abelard's own more 'Protestant' sounding view. To put it less anachronistically, the alternative adumbrated by the Jew is more sacramental, in which the outward practices mirror and even help form inner realities. This kind of view is, of course, expressed in the twelfth century by Hugh of Saint Victor's *De sacramentis* but becomes more central in the thirteenth century.

This raises the question of whether there is anything truly Jewish in the view Abelard ascribes to the Jew. While some have argued that Abelard's presentation of the Jew sprang from real interactions with contemporary Jews, others have demurred.⁵⁶ For Cohen, the Jew is not at all plausible as a contemporary. Abelard, Cohen argues, presents the Jew as the Jew of the Bible "bound to the letter of the law" who "deviates from this antiquated mold" only "to anticipate the teachings of Christianity," as he does, for example, in his connecting of circumcision and original sin.⁵⁷ But whatever the facts of the origin of the views expressed by the Jew in the dialogue, clearly Abelard has given the Jew a defense that would be intelligible to Christians, in part because the rationales he gives are or could be Christian. Abelard presents the Jew as working to achieve the same moral end—love of God and neighbor, and with the same moral standard—the inner state or intention, but simply doing so by different means. We can think of Abelard's as finding common ground, as Aryeh Grabois does when he sees analogies between Judah Halevi's dialogue and Abelard's,

55 See Eileen C. Sweeney, "Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* and Letters: Self as Search and Struggle," *Poetics Today* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2007), 303–336.

56 For an argument for Abelard's contact with contemporary Jews who may have influenced his depiction of the Jew, see Aryeh Grabois, "The *Hebraica veritas* and Jewish-Christian Intellectual Relations in the Twelfth Century," *Speculum* 50 (1975), 617. See below for J. Cohen's dissent. According to Mews, there are some historians working on showing contacts between Abelard and contemporary learned Jews at Paris whose work should be forthcoming. According to Daniel Lasker, however, there are no parallel Jewish anti-Christian polemics early enough that would have been available for Abelard to draw from. See Daniel J. Lasker, "Jewish-Christian Polemics at the Turning Point: Jewish Evidence from the Twelfth Century," *The Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996), 161–173. I am grateful to Lasker for discussing possible Jewish sources for Abelard's portrayal of the Jew with me; in his work, he does not find evidence that Abelard could have drawn from such sources.

57 Cohen, *Living Letters*, 286.

even though Abelard cannot have known Halevi's work.⁵⁸ Or, more negatively, like Cohen, we can see Abelard, insofar as he portrays a positive image of the Jew, as creating the 'other' in his own image.

The *Collationes* and *Commentary on Romans*

Ursula Niggli has pointed out that many of the Philosopher's arguments are Paul's arguments from Romans, and, as we have just seen, the issues taken up by the Jew and the Philosopher also turn around topics taken up in Romans.⁵⁹ A closer look at Abelard's own *Commentary on Romans* shows that it reserves its longest digressions and *quaestiones* to natural law versus written law and circumcision. Thus we have two different discussions in two literary forms of these same issues.

When we compare the views he attributes to the Jew in the *Collationes* and the positions Abelard takes in the *Commentary on Romans*, we can see that Abelard gives more ground to the Jew in the *Collationes* than the *Commentary*. While Abelard's Jew argues that love of God and neighbor (broadly understood to include the foreigner and the unfortunate) are the core of the law, Abelard's commentary makes the more standard Christian anti-Jewish (and false) claim that the Mosaic law only commands love of one's friends or benefactor; thus, Abelard argues, Mosaic law is imperfect, awaiting completion in Jesus' version of the law.⁶⁰ Moreover, in the commentary, Abelard describes the transgression of written law by the Jews as more egregious than the Greeks' transgression of natural law.⁶¹ And, echoing the *Theologiae Christiani*, after cataloging the 'disgraceful passions' to which the gentiles descended, Abelard carves out an exception for "the philosophers or users of natural law," since, he argues, "they stood out as much by their faith as by their morals as acceptable to God,

58 Aryeh Grabois, "Un chapitre de tolerance intellectuelle dans la société occidentale du XII^e siècle: Le 'Dialogus' de Pierre Abélard et le 'Kuzari' d'Yehudah Halévi," in *Pierre Abélard, Pierre le Vénérable: Les courants philosophiques, littéraire et artistiques en Occident au milieu du XII^e* (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1975), 641–654.

59 Ursula Niggli, "Abaelards Ideen über die jüdische Religion und seine Hermeneutik im Dialogus," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie* 26 (1994), 58.

60 See Peter Abelard, *Commentaria in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos [Comm. Rom.]*, 3.7.6, 191–192.

61 *Ibid.*, 1.2.12, 83–84. For the translation see *Comm. Rom.*, available in Steven Cartwright, trans., *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 132.

as the gentile Job and perhaps some of the philosophers who led a perfectly continent life before the coming of the Lord.”⁶² Abelard also adds a gloss to Paul’s claim that the “doers of the law” rather than the mere “hearers” who will be saved, arguing that since Paul has said earlier that the works of the law do not justify, what he must mean here by ‘doing’ the law is acting spontaneously by the love of God, in which this ‘good will (*bona voluntas*)’ is itself the work done, not the exterior action.⁶³ This is the insertion of Abelard’s own ethical view—that the moral character of an act derives completely from the will (specifically its consent)—into Romans, but at the same time he is further guaranteeing the impossibility of Jewish righteousness.

In the *Commentary* Abelard takes a different perspective on circumcision, neither that of the Philosopher or the Jew in the *Collationes*, though incorporating some of the account articulated by the Jew. The commentary follows Origen and a more standard Christian view of circumcision, both undermining its claim as universal command and understanding its significance allegorically. Abelard insists (as does the Philosopher) that the command to be circumcised pertains only to Abraham and his seed, and thus not to the foreigner or the convert and not to others, like Job, who were nonetheless saved.⁶⁴ In addition and without any sense that it stands in tension with a narrow interpretation of the command of circumcision, Abelard argues that when Paul writes, “circumcision indeed is useful if you observe the law . . .” what he means is that circumcision is useful if it is spiritual—circumcision of the heart—rather than carnal. As useful (i.e., spiritual), circumcision is equally common to Jew and Gentile.⁶⁵ This is a contrary tactic because it makes circumcision *more* rather than *less* common, common to both Jew and Gentile who keep the law that is, Abelard writes, ultimately love.⁶⁶ In both ways, however, Abelard manages to downplay the importance of literal, physical circumcision—in other words, the real practice of circumcision by the Jews.

Like Origen, Abelard interprets Paul’s address to “you who call yourself a Jew” (Romans 2. 17) to draw a distinction between those who are ‘called’ but are

62 *Comm. Rom.*, 1.1.32, 74: ‘de omnibus philosophis vel naturali lege utentibus [...] cum plerique illorum tam fide quam moribus Deo acceptabiles [...]’ See also *Comm. Rom.*, trans. Cartwright (2012), 122.

63 *Comm. Rom.*, 1.2.13, 84; *Comm. Rom.*, trans. Cartwright (2012), 132–133.

64 *Comm. Rom.*, 1.2.15, 87–88; *Comm. Rom.*, trans. Cartwright (2012), 134–135. The long passage from Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* on Romans 2:13 Abelard cites here goes on to argue that the command to offer burnt sacrifice is only a command on *how* to do it rather than *to* do it, should one wish. Abelard cites a paraphrase of Origen’s commentary.

65 *Comm. Rom.*, 1.2.25, 93; *Comm. Rom.* trans. Cartwright (2012), 142–143.

66 *Comm. Rom.*, 1.2.27, 95; *Comm. Rom.* trans. Cartwright (2012), 144.

not really Jews; however, Origen's account of this distinction, though clearly an influence on Abelard, is somewhat different. Origen takes the distinction in an allegorical direction, as distinguishing between those who "possess merely the name of religion and piety but in whom works, knowledge and faith are missing."⁶⁷ He is not interested in the literal matter of who calls themselves a Jew but rather advises that "we discuss these things with greater concern for ourselves than for those who do not come to faith in Christ." The reader is exhorted to become a "true Jew" through "the circumcision given in baptism" who "rests in the law of Christ," rather than the outward but false Jew. The false Jew Origen glosses as the hypocritical Christian who teaches discipline and chastity but is driven by greed and lust. Heretics, those who misinterpret and misappropriate scripture are also false Jews; they steal and commit adultery, with an adulterous understanding of scripture and by stealing "the pearls of the true faith from the Holy Scriptures."⁶⁸

Abelard takes the meaning of the 'outward Jew' more literally than Origen: "they are called outward (*manifesti*) Jews who only in name and by the nation of Judah are named Jews, acknowledging God with the voice outwardly (*foris*) and withdrawing from him in the mind."⁶⁹ Those who are Jews secretly are not outwardly circumcised by a cutting off of the flesh but inwardly but a cutting off of vice and lust. While the Jew of the *Collationes* unites outer and inner, with outward circumcision mirroring the inner circumcision of the heart almost sacramentally, Abelard's commentary sets them up as opposites, describing the secret Jew and his spiritual circumcision in a way that, again, supports his own ethical views, which locate moral action only in the inward act of the will, not in the external action.

Unlike the Philosopher from the dialogue who has no need to explain and justify the events in Hebrew scripture, Abelard in his commentary, like Paul in Romans, must explain why circumcision was instituted for Abraham and his seed. It is, Paul wrote a 'sign (*signum*)' and a 'seal (*signaculum*):'⁷⁰ For Abelard the 'seal' of circumcision as opposed to the (outward) sign signifies the spiritual sons of Abraham (the gentiles) as opposed to the carnal sons of Abraham (the Jews), and the interior righteousness of faith as opposed to the exterior administration of what is called justice (a combination of vengeance

67 Origen, *Commentary on Romans*, 2.11.9, 139.

68 *Ibid.*, 2.11.11, 140.

69 *Comm. Rom.*, 1.2.28–1.2.29, 95: 'Manifesti Iudaei dicuntur quo solo nomine et natione Iudae Iudaei nuncupantur foris Deum uoce confitentis et mente ab eo recedentes.' See also *Comm. Rom.*, trans. Cartwright (2012), 145.

70 Romans 4:11.

and favors).⁷¹ Abelard goes beyond this gloss on the text to consider some questions about circumcision. He asks what circumcision confers or signifies, why it was ordained for male rather than female genitalia, and why on the eighth day. His answers are a combination of allegorical readings of circumcision, and accounts put in the mouth of the Jew in the *Collationes*. From Augustine and Gregory he cites and independently expresses the view that circumcision is the equivalent of baptism, a sacrament of cleansing and forgiveness of sins.⁷² Although he has separated interior and exterior circumcision, one characterizing the false but outward Jew, and the other the secret but inner Jew, here he engages in an allegorical reading of circumcision, making it parallel to baptism; just as exterior circumcision signifies the inner circumcision of the heart, the exterior washing of baptism signifies the interior cleansing of the soul.⁷³ This claim and the one that follows it, the account of why only the male is circumcised, are the same defenses of circumcision offered by the Jew to the Philosopher in the *Collationes*. What Abelard gives in the context of Romans are additional reasons that make reference to Christ. Just as the efficacy of baptism itself does not save without the sacrifice of Christ, so there was no passage to the promised land without the spilling of blood in circumcision. Circumcision itself signifies Christ as conceived without concupiscence, that is without the “uncircumcision of uncleanness.”⁷⁴

Abelard also quotes long sections of Origen’s discussion of circumcision. For example, he paraphrases Origen’s view that circumcision signifies allegorically the cutting of impure flesh from the soul and that the eighth day is proscribed in order to signify not earthly present time (the week) but the kingdom of heaven.⁷⁵ Abelard also cites Origen’s defense of circumcision against ‘Stoic’ critics who voice many of the same objections to circumcision as Abelard’s Philosopher: that it does not seem necessary to signify something mystical by an act that injures children, that involves the shameful parts of the body, and that is an obstacle for belief, and is rejected both because of the pain and shame involved. Origen responds in several ways,

71 *Comm. Rom.*, 2.4.11, 127–128; *Comm. Rom.* trans. Cartwright (2012), 178; cf. *Sc.*, 38–44 where Abelard contrasts divine as opposed to human justice. See also, Eileen C. Sweeney, *Logic, Theology and Poetry in Boethius, Abelard and Alan of Lille: Words in the Absence of Things* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 116–117.

72 *Comm. Rom.*, 2.4.11, 129–130; *Comm. Rom.*, trans. Cartwright (2012), 180. Cf. Augustine, *Nupt. et conc.*, 2.2.24 (not book 1 as Abelard says), Gregory, *Moralia*, 4, 3, PG 75:635B.

73 *Comm. Rom.*, 2.4.11, 130; *Comm. Rom.*, trans. Cartwright (2012), 181.

74 *Comm. Rom.*, 2.4.11, 130–131; *Comm. Rom.*, trans. Cartwright (2012), 181–182.

75 *Comm. Rom.*, 2.4.11, 137–138; *Comm. Rom.*, trans. Cartwright (2012), 188–189.

first noting that the priests, the most excellent and elite of the Egyptians, were also circumcised; he defends the difficulty of circumcision by comparing it with martyrdom, and with it as the offering of only one part of the body is offered, as opposed to the Gospel which asks for one's life.⁷⁶

However, Abelard goes out of his way to cite but disagree with Origen's allegorical reading of the 'second circumcision' of the sons of Israel by the son of Nun. Origen argues that the first circumcision was a cutting off from the worship of idols and the second, from vices of the flesh.⁷⁷ Instead Abelard sides strongly with a pseudo-Augustinian non-allegorical reading; it asserts that the 'second circumcision' was necessary after the wandering in the desert because there were many who had been born after the exodus who had not been circumcised.⁷⁸

In the end, Abelard's *Commentary on Romans* is more literal and more anti-Jewish than Origen's but it is also more allegorical than the *Collationes*. In this latter, the commentary is more traditional than either the dialogues or the theologies. Nonetheless, within the commentary Abelard still manages to interpret Paul's letter and its reflections on the Jews so that Paul expresses Abelard's ethical views.

Putting the Pieces Together

Why would Abelard want to consider the same issues in his dialogue as in his Romans commentary but in such a different way? Maurice de Gandillac made the intriguing suggestion that Abelard was look trying for a harmony in himself—between the Nazarene, the Greek, and the Hebraic.⁷⁹ However, the Romans commentary, one could argue, *has* a unified position or at least combines into one voice many of the positions taken by different figures in the *Collationes*. In the *Collationes* Abelard is exploring alternate possibilities as independent, mutually exclusive views. If we knew definitively that the *Collationes* was written first, we could make the argument that its task is to explore the issue as Abelard in effect argues with and against himself, and that the *Commentary on Romans* represents his more fully worked out view. But the

76 Origen, *Commentary on Romans*, 2.13.27–2.13.28, 159–160.

77 *Ibid.*, 2.13.26, 158; Joshua 5:2–9.

78 *Comm. Rom.*, 2.4.11, 142–143; *Comm. Rom.*, trans. Cartwright (2012), 193; cf. Ambrosiaster, *Questiones veteris et novi testamenti*, q. 81, PL 35, 2274.

79 Maurice de Gandillac, "Juif et judéité dans le Dialogue d'Abélard," in *Pour Léon Poliakov: Le racisme, mythes et sciences* (Brussels: Complexe, 1981), 398.

evidence on dating the two texts is neither exact nor undisputed enough to make this argument.⁸⁰ And even if the *Collationes* were written first, it is clearly more than a mere draft or early version of the *Commentary*; it is too elaborate a literary and rhetorical work, too different in its form, tone, and structure from the *Commentary* to be subsumed into it. And even if the *Commentary* represents Abelard's final views more than any of the characters of the *Collationes* or the dialectic of the dialogues as a whole, the *Collationes* in their unusual structure and the daringness of the arguments put in the mouths of the Philosopher and the Jew, is, we can argue, more radical than the *Commentary* and more in tune with the groundbreaking *Ethics*, *Sic et non*, and theologies. In all these works, as in the *Collationes*, Abelard takes more daring positions, submits more questions to the bar of reason, and exposes conflicts and contradictions in the tradition for reason to consider.

Like the *Sic et non*, the *Collationes* is a kind of virtuoso performance; in this case Abelard does not set sources from the tradition against each other, but sets three worked out positions against each other, defending not just one position but three. Moreover, its neutrality is both a tour de force and a challenge to Christian readers. It seems to me that if the dialogue is incomplete and Abelard intended to add a final judgment in favor of Christianity, the tone of neutrality would remain. It has already been set in the formal structure: in that the Philosopher (and, thus, reason) confronts each of the two religions rather than the religions each other. And it has also been set in the Philosopher's opening speech arguing for the need to examine critically one's beliefs rather than accept them on faith and believe without understanding. This stance is explicitly accepted by both Jew and Christian as they begin their defense and puts the emphasis on this examination rather than on any final determination. The need to examine and critique one's beliefs by means of reason fits with Abelard's stated pedagogy in the *Sic et non*, *Historia calamitatum*, and letters in which the emphasis is on the individual working out their own interpretation, digging their own wells rather than drawing water from those dug by others.⁸¹

80 See Mews, "On Dating," 104–126. See Marenbon, "Introduction," xxvii–xxxii. The *Commentary on Romans* was likely written before 1134. Mews now argues the *Coll.* was written between 1130 and 1137 and Marenbon argues that it must have been composed in the middle or second half of the 1123–1135 period, but more speculatively suggests that the most likely date is between 1127–1132.

81 *HC*, 69, 83–85; *Ep.*, 7, 285, 291–292; and the prologue in *Sic et non*, ed. Boyer and McKeon (1976–1977), 91–97. See also Sweeney, *Boethius, Abelard and Alan of Lille*, 64–65, 122–123 and Eileen C. Sweeney, "Rewriting the Narrative of Scripture: 12th-Century Debates Over Reason and Theological Form," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 3 (1993), 13–16.

Many have noted the detail with which Abelard describes the suffering of the Jews, and a few have also noted his parallel description of his own situation as marginal, as persecuted outsider.⁸² But it is not simply the accident of Abelard's experience or even his psychological make up (both of which seem to incline him to see himself as martyr) that stands behind this sympathy with and apparent affirmation of the validity of the position of the Jews. Abelard often, as I have argued elsewhere, takes a stance undermining the apparent and obvious surface appearance of things and shows a willingness, even a compulsion for viewing *le monde à l'envers*.⁸³ In the *Historia calamitatum*, he argues that persecution is a sign of God's grace—rather than the contrary, which is what the Philosopher of the dialogue says; in the *Ethics* he argues that Judas is not culpable for turning Jesus over to the authorities.⁸⁴ So too in the dialogue he confounds expectations in composing a defense for the Jew.

For all his combativeness, Abelard has a gift for empathy, the sort of emotional and imaginative equivalent of his intellectual ability to take different positions. In his laments he takes on the perspective of David and Samson (whom, as I noted earlier, he rather strongly criticizes in the *Theologia Christiana*). Abelard presents them, along with and the other figures from Hebrew scripture in his series of six laments, with great emotional depth and sympathy as those who are part of the long arc of providence, but who, in the meantime, experience loss, suffering, and persecution without knowing how it is that all things will work to the good.⁸⁵ So too Abelard takes up the perspective of the contemporary Jew, describing both his plight and his commitments with depth and dignity.

This does not seem to have been a successful strategy in gaining Abelard readers. There are apparently very few manuscript copies of the *Collationes*, compared with many times more for Peter Alfonsi's dialogue. Christians of the Middle Ages, like today's political partisans, preferred, it seems, the kind of debate that offers as many opportunities as possible for whistles of approval and catcalls of disdain.

There are limits, of course, to Abelard's willingness and ability to take on the perspective of the Jew. I have already noted that in the places where Abelard

82 Gandillac, "Juif et judéité," 391; von Moos, "Les *Collationes* d'Abélard," 468–469. Von Moos goes even further to make the connection between the suffering of the Jews and Jesus' suffering, and on Abelard himself as persecuted, exiled from his Parisian school by a kind of stupid and cruel orthodoxy.

83 Sweeney, "Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum*," 303–336.

84 HC, 108; Sc., 66.

85 Sweeney, *Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille*, 95–114.

gives to the Jew a reasonable defense of his practices, those defenses seem constructed to satisfy Christian sensibilities rather than truly to outline and gain sympathy for a genuine other. And while many commentators have noted the speech Abelard puts in the Jew's mouth about how Jews continue to suffer, I think it is too much to say, as some have, that it is offered as a critique of Christian persecution of the Jews. Abelard only places in the mouth of the Jew a view like that of the Greeks' toward slavery: it is a brute fact about the universe; it is, as Michael Walzer describes Euripedes' view of slavery, oppressive but not unjust; it calls for resignation rather than rebellion.⁸⁶ The reader or audience isn't called upon for more than a kind of vague and disinterested pity. Analogously, Abelard presents the condition of the Jews as somehow lamentable, but, as Bernard Williams notes about the Greeks on slavery, necessary.⁸⁷ Unlike the Greeks and Abelard, what Hebrew scripture describes, the insight that founds Judaism itself, is of the injustice of slavery, imagining the possibility of a different order along with the obligation to create it. Abelard calls on no one to imagine a different order or acknowledge any active part in creating the order of persecution the Jew describes.

Though the attitude, content, and method of Abelard's reflections on the Jews in theologies, the *Commentary on Romans* and the *Collationes* are very different, they do share something important: arguments based on and in defense of reason, a standard on which Jews are found (more or less) wanting. Abelard in this way confirms the thesis of Amos Funkenstein about the way in which the use of rational arguments (and not just the use of scripture texts) to argue against the Jews came to dominate Christian anti-Jewish literature in the twelfth century.⁸⁸ What I have explored in this essay is how Abelard's particular relationship to reason and philosophy shapes his placement of the Jews, his views in turn contributing to the shifting place of the Jew in twelfth century Christendom. Abelard's 'contribution' to this transformation is that his desire to legitimize reason and raise the status of pre-Christian philosophy expressed directly in the theologies and *Commentary on Romans* and expressed through the form of the *Collationes* leads him to downgrade the status of Jews and Judaism. We certainly see in Abelard's taking on the perspective of neutral reason in the *Collationes* the erosion of any special relationship between Judaism

86 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 23.

87 Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 116–117, 124.

88 Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 172–201. See also Anna Sapir Abulafia, "Jewish-Christian Disputations and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance," *Journal of Medieval History* 15 (1989), 105–125.

and Christianity; it is just another alternative to be evaluated by reason. Thus we see in Abelard what Jeremy Cohen has noted is in the process of transformation during this period: the placement of Jews as on the same level as pagans, Muslims, and heretics. Abelard's dialogue and Romans commentary also sound a cautionary note about the virtues of natural law: its development owes as much to its status as competitor to the Old Law (and as a means of downgrading it) as it does to the virtues of pure reason. In Abelard to a large degree, Paul's point in making the law of Hebrew scripture and natural law parallel—to show that *all* are sinners—is muted.⁸⁹ Instead, in Abelard, the emphasis is on the laws themselves, rather than their sinful adherents, as laid out side by side for comparison with the Old and New Law.

In all these texts, Abelard thinks of the question of the Jews as linked to the question of the gentiles—which means, for Abelard, the question of their relationship to philosophy and to reason. For Abelard, the status of the Jews is bound up with his drive to expand and defend the use of reason and Greek philosophy in theology, with his position on reason and philosophy driving his position on the Jews rather than vice versa. Moreover, the particular issues on which the Jews are weighed in the balance and found wanting are those on which Abelard himself charts a distinctive course; thus the Jews become means used to further his own philosophical ends. But my argument is not that since the Jews are not Abelard's ultimate concern, we cannot make much of his role in the larger movement from tolerance toward persecution of Jews traced by Cohen and Funkenstein. Abelard's construction of the Jew reflects his larger theological project, but it is exactly those larger concerns—the role of reason and philosophy in theology, the nature of moral action—that help to drive the changes in the position of the Jew in Christian theology, a larger narrative in which Abelard does play a role. In the theologies, Abelard constructs his support of pagan virtue and learning as a zero-sum game; for pagan culture to become more valued, Jewish virtue and learning must become less so. In the *Commentary on Romans* and in the Philosopher's position in the *Collationes*, Abelard constructs his moral theory by locating it over against the negative model provided by Jewish practice. Though Abelard is clearly feeding already established lines of anti-Jewish thought, he need not have used the Jews as

89 Abelard does note in the prologue that Paul's intention is to combat pride and bring about true humility among both Romans and Jews, who are each claiming superiority over the other. However, as I have noted above, more of Abelard's energy in his own commentary seems focused on the relative merits of Jews versus gentiles, in many cases giving the palm to the gentiles. See *Comm. Rom.*, Prol., 43; and *Comm. Rom.*, trans. Cartwright (2012), 87.

the negative touchstone against which to sharpen his own views. The proof of this is the exception to this strategy in the Jew's self defense and justification of Jewish law. In the latter case, I can imagine Abelard being unwilling to allow any perspective—even that of the Jew—go without the strongest arguments he could muster. That is the positive side of Abelard's intense commitment to reason—it can lead to a search for reasons for other perspectives than his own, to the examinations of the reasons both for one's own beliefs and those of others. The negative side we can also see clearly, however, in Abelard's combative reasoning, in his desire to convince his coreligionists of his view by casting the opposing view as 'judaizing'. Thus, we must conclude, not only is natural law related to Medieval Christian ambivalence about Jews and Judaism, so is Medieval speculative thought's most honored achievement: the ethos of rational examination of one's values and beliefs.