

## **The Problem of Paganism and its Solution in the Theology of David Einhorn**

Philip Cohen

As very little is generally known about David Einhorn, I will begin this paper with a brief overview of Einhorn's life and work.

David Einhorn (1809-1879) was among the first generation of rabbis, all yeshiva trained, who participated in the development of the Reform Movement. In Europe he held three Reform pulpits, wrote a number of important articles, actively participated in the Reform rabbinical conferences in German in the 1840's for which he wrote papers on kashrut, women's issues, and messianism. He wrote one volume of a theology that was intended eventually to be a three volume work. This work is titled *Das Princip des Mosaismus und dessen Verbealtnis zum Heidentum und Rabbinischen Judentum*, *The Principle of Mosaism and its relation to paganism and rabbinical Judaism*,<sup>1</sup> The second half of the book's title gives ample notification to the reader who Einhorn's intellectual opponents are. For our purposes in this paper, I will focus on his pagan opponents. As for the word Mosaism, it was a common 19th century German, and indeed European, term applied either to Judaism in general or to biblical Judaism in particular. Einhorn uses the term technically in reference to his own theory of biblical Judaism which is what he is largely occupied with in this book. As a member of the first generation of Reform rabbis, he was in general agreement with his peers that the split from traditional Judaism entailed a critical break, in his case a complete rejection, of talmudic Judaism. *Das Princip* was Einhorn's attempt to build a theology of Judaism based entirely on his understanding of the Bible and his rejection of talmudic Judaism.

Immigrating to the United States in the mid-1850's, Einhorn served three Reform pulpits on these shores, in Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York. He edited and largely wrote the journal *Sinai* which appeared for seven years,<sup>2</sup> and in the 1870's contributed regularly to the New York based newspaper *The Jewish Times*. Among his other literary accomplishments was his prayer book, *Olat Tamid*,<sup>3</sup> which is distinguished among all other similar efforts both in America and Europe by consisting approximately of 50 percent original liturgical material.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately the second and third volume of the intended theological study *The Principle of Mosaism* never materialized, though throughout the remainder of Einhorn's career certain articles published in both the *Sinai* and *The Jewish Times* were given the title *Das Princip des Mosaismus*, with the obvious indication that these articles were intended as continuations of the European project.

Einhorn finished his rabbinical studies at age 17, in 1825, receiving *morenu* ordination from the yeshiva at Fuerth. Upon completion of his rabbinical studies, he pursued university studies. He attended classes at the University of Wuerzburg until 1831. Thereafter he attended the University of Munich and possibly the University of Erlangen. Documentation

held at the American Jewish Archives suggests that he may have received a doctorate from Erlangen, writing a dissertation on *The Guide of the Perplexed*, and it is true that his writing gives ample evidence of a good working knowledge of medieval Jewish philosophy in general and Maimonides in particular. However, the dissertation does not appear to exist, and there is little corroborating evidence of his receiving a doctorate.

Yet in the United States Einhorn would sign his name 'Dr. David Einhorn', and was so referred to in every possible circumstance. The Wuerzburg and Erlangen archives do not have records of granting a degree; indeed, Erlangen has no record at all of Einhorn's attendance. Neither of Einhorn's well-known sons-in-law, neither Kaufmann Kohler (in both his biography in the *Memorial Volume* and his article on Einhorn in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*), nor Emil G. Hirsch in his article in the *Memorial Volume*, mentions a Ph.D.

However, in an article for *Der Israelitsche Volkslehrer*, a German journal, Einhorn is also referred to as 'Dr. David Einhorn.'<sup>5</sup> In the matter at hand, the European context is more crucial than the American, because in Europe, at least in Germany, fraudulent assumption of the status of doctor of philosophy carried serious legal penalties. It is less likely that one would assume such a title than might be the case in America at a time when heavy immigration might allow for such a fraud to occur, and where such fraud carried no legal penalties. According to conversations I had with Dr. Jacob Marcus z"l on this subject, this kind of fraud was frequently committed by German rabbis immigrating to the United States for the sake of self-aggrandizement. Thus, whether Einhorn held a terminal degree remains a mystery.

### **Einhorn's theological concerns.**

From Einhorn's mid-19th century view, paganism was a critical philosophical issue. This is so partly because paganism was viewed by European religious thinkers as an issue of concern, possibly stemming from knowledge of various instances of the phenomenon arising from the European colonial experience. However, Einhorn was not concerned with paganism in the form of a foreign polytheist or nature worshipping cult. Rather, for Einhorn's purposes, paganism was found in the European philosophical context and was divisible into two categories, what he refers to as pantheism and idealism. These two form an important opposition to his thought. To him, pantheism and idealism are two views of the world whose errors lie in their tendency to resolve the difficult issue of the apparent duality of existence. If we understand that there exists a concrete, material reality, yet we understand as well that incorporeal entities such as the mind and God (and perhaps other entities as well) exist, then how, and on what grounds, do we understand the interaction of these two aspects of existence? Among the problems raised by this dualism are the problem of the interaction of mind and body, the relation between God and the world, the relation between God and humanity, relations between human beings themselves, and a host of other complex epistemological problems centering on the issue of what the mind knows and can know of the material world

Einhorn does not treat the problem of the duality of reality primarily as an epistemological one; rather he understands the issue of the difficulties posed by idealism and pantheism and perceives their errors, and forms his solution, primarily through a theological lens, i.e., he is not concerned so much with the problem of knowing per se as he is with the ontological structure of reality. For Einhorn the theologian, the critical aspect of this problem centers on the relationship between an incorporeal God, the human mind and material reality, in particular the human body, and the concomitant issue of resolving the perceived conflict between body and spirit, as the two potentially contrasting poles of the human being.<sup>6</sup>

In Chapter II of *Das Princip*, Einhorn states that pantheism is a view of the world in which there is no creator God, which therefore knows no conception of the universe prior to its current state, nor does pantheism recognize a spiritual realm which transcends the world's observable state. God and the world are collapsed into one entity, leading to a concept of God which denudes God of the traditional roles of law giver and ground of morality.

In pantheism, reality is understood as essentially physical. God in some way is identified with nature, and is thereby impersonal, diffuse and tinged with materiality. Being part of this order, human beings have no special place in the overall scheme of things and are therefore undifferentiated from the other entities of the world. This form of pantheism leads to a physics that is mechanistic and a universe that lacks a teleology. Everything in material reality is subsumed into the absolute, and *vice versa*, at the cost of any differentiated relationship between any elements of the physical world and God. Indeed, all individuals, including human beings, are swallowed up into the whole. With reality grounded in the absolute, pantheism denies to the human will any freedom. Human action is set by a deterministic reality influenced by an immanent God. The God of pantheism appears unable to be involved within the immaterial aspect of humanity, and might preclude the possibility of the existence of the human soul. Spinoza, presumably one of the pantheist philosophers Einhorn has in mind, does posit the existence of a human soul which survives the death of the body, but even there, the human soul is not understood to possess any individual consciousness upon death.

To Einhorn, the pantheist view has serious moral consequences. A world without a transcendent and hence separate God, a world in which God and nature are collapsed into each other, leads to a state of affairs in which human existence finds neither protection nor sanctification for existence. It is Einhorn's contention that pantheism precludes the possibility of human beings having moral regard for one another. Rather, paganism, by virtue of its lack of a moral center, sets human beings against each other in a cruel and violent manner.

Blind arbitrariness alone operates and rules. There is no other choice than either to crush or be crushed. Self-preservation and tyranny are one and the same. The individual [*die Einzel-Existenz*] can only hold its ground above the other [*ueber der andern*], and not next to the other [*nicht aber neben dieser sich*]. One struggles therefore necessarily to subjugate all, to elevate oneself to God.<sup>7</sup>

Einhorn's second form of paganism is idealism. He says of idealism:

Idealism seeks the divine essence prior to and beyond the world. The world, however, itself lacks any reality. Therefore idealism claims to grasp non-Being, or absolute Being, which, in order to bring the world into existence, protruding from itself, must emanate itself from itself. This self-emanation calls forth the world. Here is indeed a governance [*Lenkung*], a subordination of created being. Material [being] is impure, having fallen away from God [i.e., no longer part of the divine essence].<sup>8</sup>

Idealism, being the dialectical opposite of paganism, removes totally the absolute from the physical world and thereby denies meaningful existence to the world. Everything of value is grounded in a completely idealized, i.e., transcendental, absolute. In idealism, material reality is completely empty of the absolute. Even if material reality were understood as having emanated from the absolute, this existent is viewed as corrupt and inferior to transcendental reality. God is impersonal. Here God is set at a great remove from the world. As with pantheism, the individual qua individual appears to have no value. The only way to have knowledge of the absolute is by way of transcending material reality, i.e., by losing one's individuality.

What Einhorn calls paganism is not what one normally imagines paganism to be. Whether or not his descriptions fit precisely any extant versions of pantheism or idealism, what one normally thinks of when conceiving paganism has to do with religious systems describing many gods than with a world view which misconceives God. To Einhorn, then, interestingly and somewhat surprisingly, the forms of paganism with which he is concerned are in fact misguided forms of monotheism. In the manner in which he describes it, then, a monotheism which places God either totally in the world or totally out of the world is to be labeled 'pagan.'

Einhorn's presentation of the God concepts of both pantheism and idealism asserts that both lack the dynamism of a God who mediates between the realm of the ideal and the realm of the real. Rather, both versions of paganism present ideas of reality which solve the dualist problem essentially by denying the existence of one of the two parts, or by reducing one to the other.

Neither elimination nor reduction of these realms is acceptable to Einhorn. To him, and here I anticipate Einhorn's synthesis, the proper understanding of being entails that existence is where the real and the ideal meet, where physical reality and ideal reality can have, as it were, meaningful co-existence. This is stated with the caveat that to Einhorn the creator God, having granted real status to the entities of the physical plane, and who

apparently creates matter *ex nihilo*, nonetheless transcends human and the world, governs them and is the ultimate source for all of them.

Thus we can say at this point that Einhorn's theological objective is to overcome the tensions inherent both in pantheism and idealism. He resolves this tension by positing a view of Judaism which consists in a unity, indeed a "Centralization" between the physical and incorporeal planes of existence in which God's incorporeal being transcends all other existent beings. The concept of "Centralization" unites all existing beings and, therefore, all parts of all existing things, into a whole. All existing things are therefore dependent upon God.

To address this problem and by addressing it to identify Judaism as the only source by which to address this problem, Einhorn offers a principle which he believes serves as the solution to both elements of the pagan fallacy. This he does at the end of the first chapter of the book, a chapter entitled 'What is Judaism?' There he says:

Our task...is the determination of the essence of the Mosaic doctrine, the assertion of a principle that will be established as the innermost soul and mainspring of all the variegated forms of Mosaism without exception. That principle is: CENTRALIZATION OF VARIOUS ENTITIES WITHOUT ARBITRARILY LIMITING [WILLKUERLICHE BEEINTRAECHTIGUNG] ONE OF THE INDIVIDUAL ENTITIES<sup>9</sup>. That is the law [*das Gesetz*] which penetrates all representations of Mosaism, and, moreover, which also appears as the foundation of all natural forms in the physical and spiritual world. The physical and spiritual world constitute an organic whole from the point of view of this law, within which are united different essences by virtue of their narrow relationship to particular organic forms.

Both moments of this principle, the positive and the negative, that is to say, the reduction of various powers to a common middle, and then the exclusion of every arbitrary limitation of individual potencies [*der einzelnen Potenz*]; these two moments, which in their deeper meaning [*Erfassung*] imply mutuality, in their unity form the discerning mark of biblical Judaism. This mark stands in contradistinction to paganism and that which emerges from it [*Ausflüssen*], which takes now one and now the other moment as its guiding principle, and which necessarily degenerates either into crude materialism or morbid spiritualism.<sup>10</sup>

Judaism represents to Einhorn that view of the world which by its very nature mediates between the two extremes of paganism represented by pantheism and idealism. The term he applies to Judaism in this way is "Centralization."

It remains for us to consider what Einhorn meant by this term 'Centralization', to ask from what source he might have acquired the concept, and to what broad purpose he puts the borrowed concept.

Einhorn's concept of "Centralization" may be understood as follows: There exist in physical and spiritual reality contrasting entities. They are dyads, identified by terms designating objects assumed to exist in tension with each other as polar opposites, as contrasts in which one could conceptually formulate one of the poles as dominating or even

entirely enveloping the other. These contrasts, or antinomies, include the corporeal world and God, man and God, body and soul. In the effort to understand the relationship between these antinomies, one might, for a number of philosophical reasons, be tempted to place the importance of one realm, or even the very existence of one realm, above the other. As we have seen, this is clearly the case with the contrasting views of pantheism and idealism.

Einhorn's theory of Centralization, which constitutes the core of his theory of Judaism, asserts instead the existence of both realms as well as the mutuality which exists between each of the contrasting dyads, each of which meets in a conceptual middle ground. Specifically, it is this conceptual middle ground which Einhorn terms Centralization. Thus according to Einhorn, it is the case: 1) That Judaism understands these entities to exist respectively either in corporeal or incorporeal form (and that therefore Einhorn's understanding of Judaism presupposes an ontology in which both elements together constitute the totality of reality); 2) that these entities possess a dynamic, mutual relationship with their polar opposite which meets in a kind of conceptual, i.e., mutually relative, middle; 3) it is assumed a priori that none of these polar opposites overwhelms its antithesis; 4) that the most morally advantageous schema of any religious view of reality results from this understanding; 5) that this view addresses and resolves the difficulties posed by paganism; and 6) that this religious view is equated with biblical Judaism.

### **Einhorn and Schelling**

Einhorn developed his concept of Centralization from F.W.J. Schelling's Identity Principle. I have found no document from Einhorn's corpus in which he credits Schelling with having had an influence on his thought. Indeed, as far as I have been able to determine, Einhorn never mentions Schelling in his writing at all. However, Kaufmann Kohler and Emil G. Hirsch in separate statements, attest to the fact that their father-in-law credited Schelling with such influence. According to Kohler:

Schelling was the leader and the idol of the schools...For [Einhorn]...Schelling's wide grasp of the world's thought and purpose must needs have had keen fascination...David Einhorn was too clear-headed and resourceful to simply adopt these ideas without testing and modifying them. [Schelling's] fundamental ideas, however, of an original monotheism and of the symbolic nature of the ancient forms of worship appealed to him as being in accord with the spirit of Mosaism. He discarded the mystic, the pagan and Christian elements of Schelling's philosophy and accentuated all the more the intellectual and ethical superiority of Mosaism...<sup>11</sup>

According to Hirsch:

At Munich and Wuerzburg he pursued in the main philosophical studies. He came under the spell of Schelling's system.<sup>12</sup>

Schelling taught at all of the universities at which Einhorn studied, but before Einhorn arrived at them. Despite the fact that Schelling was never at any of these

universities at the same time as Einhorn, certainly a thinker as powerful as Schelling cast a lengthy shadow, indeed quite likely the dominant philosophical shadow of the day, across the academic scene at these Bavarian universities. In addition, and perhaps more important, while Einhorn lived in Munich from 1832-1842, he would have had ample opportunity to have attended Schelling's public lectures. Thus, though I have no conclusive evidence, it is likely that Einhorn at some point had direct contact with Schelling. But even if that were to turn out not to have been the case, Schelling's influence throughout Bavarian academic life was exceedingly powerful during Einhorn's career as a university student and well beyond. Schelling's thought would have constituted the dominant philosophical mood in Bavaria.

Schelling spent the bulk of his prodigious career attempting to articulate a vision of the true nature of the relation of God, nature and self-consciousness through his philosophy of Identity. This principle was called "Identity" because the relation between these three was to be one of identity, a basically simple design trying to hold together a manifold composition. A brief description of the outlines of Schelling's identity principle will reveal the similarities between it and Einhorn's concept of Centralization.

The identity principle aimed at overcoming and bringing into systematic unity the basic conceptual antinomies that had evolved in modern metaphysics concerning the relation between the infinite and the finite, i.e., between God and God's creation, between the person and nature, the knower and the known. The basic claim of Schelling's philosophy of identity is that there exists nothing that is purely ideal, nothing that is purely real. Everything that we distinguish in phenomena is but an instance of indifference or subject-object identity. These instances of indifference are relatively differentiated from others by whether each exists in a finite sense, like bodies, or infinitely, like minds. Thus no body lacks an infinite or mental dimension of some sort, nor are conscious minds ever found apart from organic bodies.<sup>13</sup>

Most important for our purposes in understanding Einhorn is that Schelling sees in nature a set of antinomies which find their resolution, the dissolution of their apparent contradictory relationships, in the fact that they share a common grounding. Organic and inorganic matter are united ultimately by virtue of their common source in energy. Freedom and necessity find their unity in their common grounding in the absolute. Indeed, all polar opposites find their unity in the absolute, in what Schelling eventually calls God. This is so because all things have their share in spirit. All things, even things which apparently are in tension with one another, indeed, especially those apparent antinomies, are ultimately united from the perspective of the absolute.

It is clear that Schelling's Identity Principle is deeply reflected in Einhorn's Centralization principle. In his introduction to *Bruno*, Vater chooses to translate the German *Indifferenz* as 'indifference,' although 'non-difference' might be more felicitous. He does this to keep with Schelling's intent that the German term be recognized as a foreign word. Vater notes that Schelling uses this term synonymously with the German *Gleichgewicht*, meaning balance or equilibrium. It is a term he uses to designate the identity of the "ultimate

nondifference or togetherness of irreducibly different aspects of one and the same thing”<sup>14</sup> of various phenomena such as the absolute’s form and essence or body and soul. In Schelling’s use of the term, the point of indifference between two terms constitutes the point of balance or reflection between them, the point at which they are said to be in some kind of equal correspondence.

It should be added here that although this philosophical talk is abstract, it is possible, as it was for the young Hegel for example, who began his philosophical career as a student of Schelling, to see in the problem of understanding the relation of these numerous entities the possibility of the resolution of the alienation of human consciousness. Thus, the problem of dualism, which Schelling solves with his identity principle, can be seen by someone with a philosophical mind as being of significant concern.

Similarly, it is quite possible that a young rabbi attempting to find the means to clarify his intuition that Judaism resolves the pagan dilemma, could find in Schelling the solution to his problem. Einhorn's concern has less to do with epistemology and formal metaphysics than it has to do with theology and ethics. And though Schelling's concerns included the theological, it is less than clear that he was interested in utilizing the identity principle to solve ethical concerns.

For Einhorn, however, the problem Judaism addresses is one of human wholeness: Judaism's understanding of the divine-human relationship, and the relationship of the body to the soul, as we have seen, allows for a centralized point of meeting between each of the pairs, such that the disparate aspects of the individual are unified. To express this view, Einhorn has recourse to Genesis 17:1, as seen in the following passage from *Das Princip*:

Mosaism finds the nobility of the human being in his similarity to God [*Gottaehnlichkeit*], and bases its noble task on it. That task is to unite body and spirit as the protection and defense against their common enemies, instead of being pushed by their common enemies into mutual, endless quarreling and discord, and instead of both becoming enslaved by virtue of that well proven dictum *divida et impera*. God's covenant with Abraham is introduced through the command *hithalech lifanei v'beye tamim*, wander [*wandel*] before me and be whole (Genesis 17:1)! ...What does all of this prove? That the Mosaic Law in its entire circumference is a living expression of the reconciliation between two conflicting powers [that lie] within human beings. Mosaism views man throughout as united and inseparable, encouraged on the one hand to engage in sensual enjoyment, and repeatedly ordered to esteem corporeal elements, as on the other hand it warns energetically against gluttony and forgetting God [*Fettwerden und Gottvergessen*], of the enjoyment of life without the transfiguring sanctification to the Giver of all goodness, and enjoins prudent abstinence and self-control, mildness toward every created being, love for God and man...The totality of different moments of human nature is brought back to a center, to a *lev*. And thus then the Mosaic basic idea confronts us here too: *Centralization* of various entities [*Existenzen*] without arbitrarily limiting the individual entity [*der Einzel-Existenz*]...<sup>15</sup>

This application of the Centralization notion carries within it Einhorn's Jewish move, that is, he finds the seeds of this principle in the biblical text and utilizes the concept of Centralization to assert a moral principle. In the unity of body and spirit, the entire

human person is addressed and considered. Without this unity, the human person would be tempted to move to one extreme or the other of human behavior, either to an entirely sensuous existence or to an entirely ascetic existence. The Centralization notion, by contrast, in that it recognizes the existence of both realms, leads one to a holistic human behavior, in which a balance between the extremes is struck. This development in Einhorn's thought amounts to a 19th century articulation of the Maimonidean concept of the Golden Mean, an idea which Maimonides himself adapted from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is a concept Maimonides wrote about in the *Mishneh Torah* and *The Eight Chapters*, and with which Einhorn was undoubtedly familiar.

Einhorn's principle of Centralization has a distinctive purpose. That purpose, as we have seen, is the contrast of Judaism to paganism. Paganism for Einhorn, as we have seen, however, does not refer to foreign or antiquated religions. It refers to philosophies, and hence philosophers, of his day. It should be added that the philosophical giants of Einhorn's day wrote largely from a religious, i.e., a Christian perspective. This is certainly true for Hegel and for Schelling. Spinoza, a Jew, held a pantheist view of God. Who specifically Einhorn had in mind one can only speculate, as he mentions no particular thinker. But it takes little speculation to claim that the pagans Einhorn had in mind, practitioners of either idealism or pantheism, are religious thinkers. His critique of philosophy then is a critique of religious philosophy, and, though Spinoza may be his pantheist opponent, or at least one of them, his idealist opponent(s) may be Christian. Thus, in part, the concept of Centralization may be a critique of Christianity.

With Einhorn's concept of Centralization we have the repetition of a time-honored Jewish technique of analysis of Judaism in which a Jewish thinker adopts the philosophical views of a contemporary philosopher as a tool for explicating Judaism. In the case at hand, David Einhorn borrowed a sophisticated metaphysics from F.W.J. Schelling and adapted it as the means of exploring Jewish theological/moral concerns. In the end, this borrowing assists in the emergence of moral claims. These two aspects, and especially the moral aspect, make Einhorn's analysis at root Jewish and thus serve as one means of differentiating his thought from that of his teacher.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> *Das Princip des Mosaismus und dessen Verhaeltniss zum Heidenthum und Rabbinischen Judentum*, (Leipzig: Frstzche, 1854), hereafter PoM (Principal of Mosaism). All translations are the author's.

<sup>2</sup> *Sinai—A Voice for Understanding and Refinement of Judaism, 1856-63.*

<sup>3</sup> David Einhorn, *Olat Tamid: Gebetbuch fuer Israelitische Reform-Gemeinden* (Baltimore, 1858).

<sup>4</sup> Jakob J. Petuchowski, *Prayerbook Reform in Europe* (WUPJ: 1968), p.308. “It was in America, and not in Europe, that the serous attempt was first made to strike a balance between the old and the new. David Einhorn's prayerbook *Olatb Tamid*...was the first ritual to combine the old and new in about equal proportions.”

<sup>5</sup> David Einhorn, “Das Physische Uebel,” *Der Israelitische Volkslehrer*, vol. 5, 1855.

<sup>6</sup> Body and spirit are the two poles of the human being, two potentialities, which the rejection of nature [*Unnatur*] on the one side and the rejection of reason [*Unvernunft*] on the other propel each other at all times toward a true war of annihilation. Reason wants to enrich spirit at the expense of body; body wants to enrich nature at the expense of spirit. That human nature bears in itself the seed for such discord...cannot be doubted, given the unending struggles of the millennia... *PoM*, p.33.

<sup>7</sup> *PoM*, p.15.

<sup>8</sup> *PoM*, p.15.

<sup>9</sup> Capitalization is Einhorn's

<sup>10</sup> *PoM*, p.13-14

<sup>11</sup> Kaufmann Kohler (ed.), *David Einhorn Memorial Volume* (Bloch: 1911), 407-408.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.475.

<sup>13</sup> See F.W.J. Schelling, *Bruno or on the Natural and the Divine Principles of Things*, edited and translated with an introduction by Michael G. Vater (SUNY Press, Albany: 1984)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100.

<sup>15</sup> *PoM*, p.33.