

# ISSA Proceedings 2006 - Reforming The Jews, Rejecting Marginalization: The 1799 German Debate On Jewish Emancipation In Its Controversy Context



1799 proved to be an extremely important year in the European history of the controversial issue of Jewish rights; during the 1799 debate it has been proved forcefully that practical and constitutional issues related to Jewish civil rights are clearly associated with the much broader issue of the cultural self-definition of the European subject. During 1799, in Germany, the issue of the Jewish civic condition came to the fore of the public discourse, being articulated in all its ambiguous complexity as a core dimension of the Enlightenment culture of reason. As I will show, this discourse – shaped as a “triangular” controversy between three contemporary opinion leaders, David Friedländer (1750-1834), Wilhelm Abraham Teller (1734-1804) and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), managed to reveal an argumentative pattern that remains as fascinatingly interesting today as it has been misunderstood or misconstrued since its first publication.[i] Between Heinrich Graetz who dismissed the whole affair as an embarrassment and Michael Meyer’s more nuanced assessment, the polemic that brings together Friedländer and Schleiermacher within a unique historical frame, does, in fact, fix a rich constellation of topics, representative for the culture of Enlightenment. In the same time, the formulation of the topics involves a reappraisal by its participants of concepts of reason, religion, politics and philosophy and ultimately requires a new self-understanding of themselves as subjects.

By its very starting point, the question of unconstrained baptism of convenience, the debate defined itself as a controversy of interfaith structure: it presented itself as a controversy in the Jewish-Christian stream that was “meant to end all such controversies”, thus bringing an end to a long tradition of hostility, fight,

rejection and repudiation. As we shall see, while it displayed a civility of interaction, it nevertheless managed to further the cause of oppositional confrontations. While on the surface debating the issue of convenience conversion as a tool of social integration, the controversy does, in reality, encompass a large number of issues of historical extension: deist formulations of universal religion, ever-weakening confessional distinctions, preservation of a (vague) Judaism in this context, goals of an even more obscured Christian theology, validity of opportunistic religious practices, etc. It is the object of this paper to discuss the main elements of this controversy within the broader context of the argumentative history of the Jewish-Christian debates, signaling some of their procedures of refutation, rejection and critique. I will first consider the main lines of the discourse of this controversy of emancipation in 1799, outlining its arguments, after which I will focus on the contradictory and dissuasive stratagems displayed by the three participants. I thus hope to throw a new light on the status of the argument in the controversial structure studied and to review the failure of persuasive effectiveness usually associated with this particular debate.

### 1. *The Debate*

The most important discourse inscribed in this confrontation was articulated by David Friedländer<sup>[ii]</sup>, a pupil and a former protégé of Moses Mendelssohn, at the time leader of the Jewish community and representative of the Jewish mercantile elite in Berlin, in his *Open Letter to His Most Worthy, Supreme Consistorial Counselor and Provost Teller at Berlin, from some Householders of the Jewish Religion* (Sendschreiben an seine Hochwürden Herrn Oberconsistorialrath und Probst Teller zu Berlin, von einigen Hausvätern Jüdischer Religion). In this “letter” Friedländer made the proposal of having Jews convert to Christianity: without fully endorsing the dogmatic content of the Christian (Protestant) religion through a baptismal ceremony that would only carry formal meaning. This sort of “baptism light”, clearly opportunistic, would impose only limited doctrinal restrictions while offering full civic integration into the mainstream Berlin society. The text of this document, published anonymously in April 1799, recovers some of the arguments so well defined in Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem*, using frequently its distinctions, metaphors and analogies and making a similar use of the reasonable language of the religious and the political. But the disciple goes far beyond the boundaries kept by the master: he radically alters Mendelssohn’s integrative project when, in his desire to conform to the perceived expectations in the Berlin

Protestant environment, he shows himself eager to consent to concessions that practically jettison the foundational elements of his own tradition; the possibility of an agreed conversion of convenience becomes thus a logical follow-up to his radical critique of rabbinic Judaism. The answers to this text came from many sides, but among all the opinions expressed at the time two are central to the development of ideas and practices discussed: Teller's, the addressee of the letter and a recognized leader of the Prussian Protestant church, and Schleiermacher's, the most innovative and profound Protestant theologian of the period. Nobody was satisfied with the proposal broached by Friedländer, certainly not his partners in this debate, Teller in the first place and definitely not Schleiermacher. Most probably, not even Friedländer himself, since to this day his true intentions and the real meaning of his text are still objects of puzzlement. What was indeed the meaning of his controversial arguments and how were they rebutted?

## 2. *Friedländer's arguments*

Friedländer's *Open Letter* is composed of two parts: in the first part he criticizes the Jewish religion by scrutinizing the principles of Judaism "within the limits of reason alone", while in the second part he proceeds to build a scheme for a growing Jewish integration into modern society. As an anonymous representative of the Jewish mercantile elite, he positions himself, significantly, as an eager pupil seeking instruction from the Protestant pastor in "the greatest and most holy affair of man, which is religion" (*DJE*, 41); in this particular situation, using a collective "us" all along, Friedländer is nevertheless keeping a meaningful distance, which allows him to draw an "objective" and quite ambivalent sketch of Jewish religious education. His main objects of criticism are the ceremonial law ("empty customs" that "alienated us in the circle of everyday life"), the irrationality of the mystical education engaged by the prevalence of the Talmudic teachings and the incapacity of (classical) Hebrew to communicate modern meanings (*DJE*, 41-45). Acknowledging the arrival of the age of reason as an age of maturity, Friedländer pleads for an "ascent into culture" open to all Jews by an inclusion in the mainstream society. This end, however, is envisioned, by a thorough self-critique of Judaism. Friedländer's discussion of Judaism and its principles is, like Mendelssohn's, constituted as both an apologetic history and a deistic reduction to universal religious principles to be *also* grasped within Jewish traditions. His argumentation is thus paradigmatically articulated as a reevaluation of the historicity of the *Halachah*, its practical suitability to modern life, inquiring persistently into their continuous validity. He thus constitutes a

dialectic of inquiry into legitimacy and validity, seeking to go beyond apparent legitimacy by authority: "it is reasonable to infer which of other commandments are likely to appear to us as purposeless, petty, or even entirely ridiculous" (*Open Letter*, 54).

In principle, the counter-Halachic argument is supported by the idea that the original unity between state and religion, characteristic to scriptural "Mosaic" times, has been lost through a long and troubled history of dispersion. This anti-Halachic stance is consequently taken as basis for the display of radical anti-rabbinic assertions; in Friedländer's depiction, Judaism's history becomes a journey into corruption and delusion, mostly to be blamed on the rabbinic establishment. Accordingly, the loss of meaning associated with the ceremonial law is only matched by delusional messianic expectations of return to Zion. Both are explained by Friedländer as degradations of meaning and concept, deteriorations characteristic to popular religion and leading to further separation and isolation. Thus, ending his brief sketch, he blames a degraded liturgy, mystical Kabala and a language that "ridicules all logic and grammar" for the sorry state of the Jewish masses.

The second part of the letter proceeds to draw a sketch of the moral progress achieved by the Christian society since the Reformation, in the same time comparing all along the cultural tasks to be accomplished by the enlightened ones in both cultures. At this point, Friedländer explicitly refers to the general topic of human betterment (*Verbesserung*) and engages in a critique of equal improvement: insightfully, he argues that "If the better Jew merely needs to shed the husk of his ceremonial law in order to purify religion, the better Christian must subject his basic truth to a new examination" (*Open Letter*, 62). Noting that the great number of Jews still remains painlessly in a backward state, Friedländer raises the question of their progress. Remarkably, he states that social integration is the condition of their moral betterment, not its "reward": "Generally the morality is far less the result of instruction than the fruit of social intercourse, than the example of a parental home, of affiliations, and, in later years, of one's business dealings" (*DJE*, 65). The issue becomes one of equality and as such it will be reinforced all along.

Thus, it is by challenging his addressee, Provost Teller, to confront the conditions of these bettered human beings, that Friedländer arrives at the conclusion that a confessional change *pro forma* would be a speedier solution for the integration of the Jews. Conversion to Christianity would, in his opinion, accomplish a broader

access to the goods of Enlightenment. In his vision, this would be an adherence of the Jews – striped by their observance of an outmoded *Halachah* and deprived of their messianic “prejudice” and mysticism to a Christian religion equally “purified” of senseless ceremonies, and “absurd” (i.e. “paradoxical”) beliefs (like the humanity of Christ, “son of God”).[iii]

As already mentioned, the *Open Letter* has a dialogical relationship with Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem*[iv], reproducing many formulations, paraphrasing others and finally going beyond its general strife to modernize Judaism and to make Jewry a full partner into the *Aufklärung* effort of criticism and adjustment. It is no doubt that Friedländer does, in his *Open Letter*, pretend to continue Mendelssohn’s work; but once this relationship is recognized, it is also striking how far he goes beyond his master’s critique of religious tradition. And, of course, the most striking displacement of argument is in the rejection of his Jewish affiliation, if not commitment, by developing a type of reasonability that – to cite Mendelssohn’s own expression – is of the order of “sophistry” (*Vernünftelei*).

Like Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem*, the *Open Letter* positions itself as a strong argumentative structure that explains Judaism as a religion of reason and submits its traditions and practices to the criterion of reason. Like Mendelssohn, again, Friedländer distinguishes between truths of reason and truth of history, applying this distinction to a diagnostic of obsolescence directed to the ceremonial law. But Mendelssohn uses this same analysis in order to advance the case for the universal validity of the religious principles of Judaism and strongly supports the necessity of the Jew to stick to his/her religious obligations, seen as an essential dimension of the Jewish identity. He calls it the “double burden”, because it is the Jewish lot in the modern world to both keep the traditional law and to adjust it to the current social and political requirements: “today, no wiser advice than this can be given to the House of Jacob. Adapt yourself to the moral and the constitution of the land to which you have been removed; but hold fast to the religion of your fathers too. Bear both burdens as well as you can!” – adamantly and emphatically concluding “I can not see how those born into the House of Jacob can in any conscientious manner disencumber themselves of the law”; in any event, warns Mendelssohn, “no sophistry of ours can free us from the strict obedience we owe to the law” (*Jerusalem*, 133).

### 2.1 *Vernünftelei*: conversion as “sophistic” rejection of religious ceremonies

The obsolescence of the ceremonial law, first predicated by Spinoza on the

destruction of the Jewish state in the first century A.D., was reinterpreted by Mendelssohn as an argument for the careful scrutiny in the reasonability of the Halachic codes and as a “project” of moderate reform, within the frame already existent. But Friedländer, in his haste to adjust faster to a new and already more complex social and political environment, does radically alter the issues when he proposes a “simplified” and “purified” Judaism that would place the “House of Jacob” within the “compound of the Christian state” and its hegemonic culture.

The clear split between state and church achieved by Modernity is thus seen as the fundamental issue that has to be the basis of a new order of reason, both politically and socially. In this context, the nature of legality requires a justification that implies a reassessment of authorization. But while Mendelssohn does not see a serious opposition between the two authorities, that of the state and that of religious institutions, because he thinks that they do indeed operate in two different spheres (the spiritual and the political), Friedländer, on the other hand, considers that this separation of the political and the religious is already instrumental in excluding the Jews from the benefits of civil participation. Giving priority to the political, he thinks that he too can redefine a weakened religious discourse in such a way as to allow the excluded members of his own marginalized community to fully share into the life of the Berlin society. For him, mere toleration is not enough; he seeks to become a full member of society. Or, in his view, this aim can only be reached by a formal concession in the religious domain. In many ways, his *Open Letter* is an expression of frustration in face of the many political disabilities that confronted the Prussian Jews; his proposal of conversion is nevertheless quite ambiguous, because it also comprises a veiled critique of the Christianity he would consider joining. As has been noticed, this is in fact a sort of “Christianity without Christ”, with ceremonial (liturgical practice) stripped of its Christological meaning (Tomasoni, 102, citing Schleiermacher’s expression *Christentum ohne Christus*) and preserved only as a stark shell of conventions. Hence he explains that “If the Protestant religion does indeed prescribe certain ceremonies, we can certainly resign ourselves to these as mere necessary *forms* that are required for acceptance as a member into a society” (*Open Letter*, 78) and shows that, in his mind, the Jewish question and the religious question have already been reinterpreted according to a double level, one public or civil and one private and individual. Public religion and its practice might be an institutional and political affair, personal beliefs are not.

By considering religion as simply an index of public manifestation, expressing political affiliation and social assignations, in clear opposition and distinct

existence from a personal and private “inner” religious belief, Friedländer voids the content of confessional and congregational differentiations, in the same time creating a space of *indifference* towards the authenticity of religious commitment. As the history of the Nineteenth century has shown, indifference (i.e. rejection of commitment) in the realm of religion was becoming a growing concern and a spreading attitude; but at the time, in the Jewish context, this was indeed a radical and extreme solution – casting a shadow of doubt as to the real meaning of the whole *Open Letter*, foregrounding its ambiguity. It is only the unacceptability of its literal sense- thematized in its rejection – that fixes this meaning through its historical context (the Berlin *Taufepidemie*)[v] and its cultural environment.

### 3. Teller's answer: a polite rebuttal

That the formal conversion proposed by Friedländer was also raising theological issues, was noticed by Wilhelm Abraham Teller, a liberal Protestant thinker[vi] and leader of the Prussian church. Under the circumstances, his answer to Friedländer seems rather moderate and balanced, quite careful in its civil approach. He agrees with Friedländer in his main points of reassessment of Judaism, employing the same rhetorical “idiolect” in construing his own reading of the Jewish discourse in terms of natural religion. He considers with great sympathy the plight of the Jews through their diasporic history, submitted to persecution, oppression and systematic injustice and he agrees with Friedländer in his analysis of the “corruption” of the tradition through the Talmudic influences and misinterpretations. Furthermore, as a learned theologian he is also able to agree with the author of the proposal when he argues that a big hindrance is represented by the use of (*Biblical*) Hebrew, considered a “dead language”, unable to express the complex meanings required by the new age of reason. But once he lists his points of agreement, Teller uses this basic sharing of critical ground in order to build his own interpretation of Jewish history and to give his reasons for the rejection of Friedländer's proposal, considered by him an extreme and unwarranted development. Citing the great steps already achieved in the social integration of the Jewish intellectuals (like Mendelssohn, Herz-Wessely, Euchel, Bloch, Bendavid, etc), Teller rebuffs the *Open Letter* and its offer of conversion by using two main arguments. First, based on the universality of religion, there is no need of joining one particular “ecclesiastical” organization in order to be integrated socially and he supports this first argument by bringing the example of the American states (*DJE* 141). This example proves that in the fully executed separation of church from state there is no precedence of one particular

religion and thus conversion to a “mainstream” confession in order to gain civic rights is unnecessary. Secondly, sustains Teller, if the issue of Jewish moral progress and reform is to be successfully resolved, this should be dealt with within the Jewish community and not within a newly created Christian sect.

In rejecting formal conversion as an unnecessary and actually inauthentic solution to the social integration of the Jews, Teller uses a series of procedures and stratagems of argumentation that subtly suggest not only the enormity of the proposal but ultimately its “perplexing” and *illogic* nature. Appropriately, he shows that Friedländer’s text, in its extreme reasonability, is in fact failing exactly its own standards of reasonability: if ceremonial formalities are historically compromised in Judaism and if the Christian ceremonial requirements are no more valid, then there is no reason for shifting ritual allegiance.

At this point, one can note that Teller’s refutation follows a classical strategy, well polished since Aristotle first explained it in the *Sophistical Refutations*: to show that the premises of the opponent, apparently probable are in fact invalid. This strategy is reinforced, because Teller not only shows that the premises (the universal corruption of religious ceremonies) are invalid, he is also able to show that many of the inferential arguments construed by Friedländer are also invalid.

In the postscript to his letter of answer, remarking that discussing a difference of opinions “is always a gain for truth, as long as stormy passions do not interfere with it” (*DJE* 143), Teller welcomes the extension of the debate, by inviting other contributions. Without any doubt, the most interesting and highly controversial contribution to this debate is that of Friedrich Schleiermacher, brought in a series of six short letters composed soon after his masterpiece *On Religion*.**[vii]**

#### 4. *Schleiermacher’s refutation*

If Teller’s rejection was couched in moderate and carefully balanced terms, it is, however, Schleiermacher’s repudiation of Friedländer’s “modest proposal” that does bring forth a structure of argumentation that dismisses many assumptions in the text and, as it is, also displays the divergences between a rationalist theological approach such as Teller’s and his own, already announcing a romantic viewpoint and thus more emotional stance in religious philosophy. Furthermore, the whole scheme of a radical split between the public and the private is shown by the Prussian theologian to be impossible in moral and practical terms.

Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *Letters* of answer continue some of the most famous assertions of the freshly finished *On Religion* and develop an argumentation that



displaces the issue in several ways. Schleiermacher's refutation is more daring and more severe than the one already published by Teller; it is also broader and all-encompassing, since it takes into account the many documents already published as contributions to this public debate on Jewish rights and the potential of conversion. While directly focusing on an answer to the *Open Letter*, Schleiermacher's own *Letters* efficiently move the whole debate on a different new level, making its topic an issue of existential anxiety and personal inquiry. Identifying his debating *persona* as "a preacher outside Berlin" he confesses to his puzzlement at being granted rights that "can't be granted to the Jews" (*DJE*, 81). For which reason, in the first of these six letters, Schleiermacher sets forth a very good question: is the proposal real or just a rhetorical ploy for attracting attention to the plight of the Jews? He recognizes that a fictive character of the text means that the letter is only a loud cry of despair and deceived hopes.

In any event, Schleiermacher then states clearly the basic principle of his thought on the issue: "Reason demands that all should be citizens, but it does not require that all must be Christians, and thus it must be possible in many ways to be a citizen and a non-Christian" (*DJE*, 85). This is already a shift in argument, because by fully endorsing the separation of church and state, Schleiermacher also implies that the closeness between the two (justifying the moral power of religion as a political force, as assumed by Mendelssohn), is not a valid argument for social and religious integration.

Furthermore, Schleiermacher proceeds to a more extensive and incisive critique of the *Open Letter*, regarding its perceived anti-Christian content. The full extent of Schleiermacher's apologetic reasoning in these *Letters* is beyond the scope of this short intervention, remaining to be further explored in a different study; but since Schleiermacher's position has been often misunderstood, I will continue this analysis by discussing only one of his claims during this debate, that of the death of Judaism. **[viii]**

#### 4.1 *The Death of Judaism*

Probably the best known assertion uttered by Schleiermacher is the one according to which "Judaism is long since a dead religion" (*On Religion*, 211). It is this idea that, in his Fifth Speech of *On Religion* opens the discussion of Judaism in what have been considered very unflattering terms. Analogical formulations reappear in the *Letters* written shortly afterwards as part of the controversy with Friedländer and used to support some of the arguments refuting Friedländer. The statement dramatizes the critique of Judaism on historical criteria, a critique

already present in Mendelssohn and, as already discussed, radicalized by Friedländer and his deist Jewish friends; as Pickle has shown, the whole formulation of the issues is consistent with Schleiermacher's frequent contacts with the members of the Berlin Haskalah and is based on their development of a discourse of historical critique of Judaism (1980 115-117). However, by couching his thought in that particular formulation, Schleiermacher did echo a long tradition of church authors who, from Luther to Michaelis and Herder, identify the death of Judaism with the successful arrival of Christianity on the scene of history (Newton 455-7). Mendelssohn himself, in his *Jerusalem*, identified the moment of stagnation and sclerosis in the moment of the destruction of the Temple: the writing down of the Oral Law - necessary for survival and dissemination in diasporic conditions - caused the lack of adaptation of the ceremonial law to the ever changing realities of communal life. As M. Pelli has shown in his studies of the first *maskilim* the range of attitudes regarding the place of the *halachic* codes in Judaism is fairly large and so is the range of reasoning procedures in the validation of the legal codes[**ix**]. Among these fairly rich range of argumentation practices, the exercise of the controversial and dialogical genres, illustrated by Isaac Satanow in Hebrew and by Friedländer in German, introduce fundamental differentiations, many of which are related to the definition of the audience through language and rhetoric of address (Pelli, 2006, p.264-266).

Both Teller and Schleiermacher support their refutations of Friedländer's proposal of opportunistic conversion by developing the argument of choice: according to this argument, religious freedom is a distinct expression of the freedom of choice: religious affiliation and therefore conversion (i.e. change of affiliation) could only be conceived as free choice. But in the case of faith, commitment to a religious ideology is also supposed to be a purely existential option. Both deny that in a tolerant society baptism - in any form - could be used as a modality of access into civil society. Their refusal of a convenience conversion is motivated by their symptomatic assessment of the new social reality that, in their experience, already grants tacitly to the "Enlightened Jews" the enjoyment of equal rights.

Schleiermacher clearly opposed the honesty of the *Open Letter's* author with what he perceived as a "desperate means to gain equality" (*Letters*, 84). And he goes on to depict the convert as primarily an unworthy human being, since he accepts to submit to an opportunistic practice and thus knowingly agrees to a lie

in the hope of a benefit. But it seems that the type of compromise envisioned by Friedländer was not as extraordinary as it seems; almost a century earlier, in England, “*occasional conformity*” became an accepted practice of conventionally integrating dissenters into institutions and communities that were otherwise exclusively accepting Anglican congregants. The arguments opposing the adepts and the adversaries of this practice – also considered at that time utterly dishonest[x] – found their way into Locke’s *Letters concerning Toleration* (1689-93) and were articulated into a big number of contemporary documents, configuring a landmark controversy in the British history of religion. They were certainly known to Mendelssohn, who refers to them in his essay on the Anglican Church and the “*non-jurancy controversies*”[xi], to Kant and to Friedländer.

## 5. Conclusion

In his recent analysis of the *German Haskalah*, *The Berlin Haskalah and German Religious Thought*, that approaches comparatively the religious Enlightenment(s) in central Europe, David Sorkin identifies a generational shift between the older group of Jewish reformers (*maskilim*), like Mendelssohn and Wessely, and the younger generation, born after 1750: the first tended to be “more moderate”, being “primarily concerned with the religious and intellectual renewing of Judaism” (Sorkin, 9), while the last, the younger generation, “were more in the nature of lay Enlighteners who functioned in the penumbra of the state” (*idem*). Within this general frame, the Friedländer proposal can be seen as a radicalization of an extreme Jewish political shift towards concessions in the fight for social and cultural integration. That it met a definite and diversified rejection suggests that its real dimension might have been sheer provocation! This, in turn, raises the question of the degree of reasonability of the controversy itself: conducted as a debate on the limits of religious reason as defining the extent of the freedom of religious choice, the controversy between Friedländer and Schleiermacher ends in a powerful reassertion of the subjective endorsement of religious affiliation, and, as such, it is situated *beyond* the limits of “reason alone”, in the validating realm of social practice.

Despite Schleiermacher’s incisive style of crisp reasoning, the 1799 controversy engaged less theological principles and more practical considerations, being steeped as much in ideology as it was in history[xii]. It accurately represents a critical moment in the history of Prussian Jews, the “crisis of baptism” (Lowenstein,18) and its challenges. On the more comprehensive level of historical assessment, the 1799 controversy is also a very public display of an age of

dramatic Jewish searches for a solution that will lead to a middle way between assimilation and orthodoxy, between utter separation and utter isolation. From this point of view it can be said to announce the birth of Reform Judaism.

In spite its ultimately utopian projections, Friedländer's *Open Letter* was nevertheless inspired by the search for a fast practical solution and by a great desire to explore all the possibilities, no matter how extreme or unlikely. It is this very extension of the topics that ultimately gives it ambivalence and ambiguity, lending the wording to imply opposed meanings. As such, it carries all the signs of *a discussion and a debate* in the same time, qualifying as a controversy: it started as a specific discussion on the topic of convenience conversion, but it quickly revealed that the disagreements were deeper and larger and need to be considered in a broader context (Dascal, 6).**[xiii]**

The resolution of this controversy was given by history: the acquisition of the Prussian Jewish civic rights received its proper answer from history with the Imperial Citizenship Law of 1812 that grants citizenship rights and status to the Jews of Germany. The moment of exasperate frustration and profound despair marked by the 1799 Berlin debate was certainly an influencing factor in this history, providing a powerful link between thought and action, between words and deeds, between issues of faith and issues of reason.

## NOTES

**[i]** In this paper I will use the recent English edition of the documents of this controversy: *A Debate on Jewish Emancipation and Christian Theology in Old Berlin*, Edited and translated by Richard Crouter and Julie Klassen, hereafter DJE. Consequently, Friedländer's text will be cited abbreviated as *Open Letter* and Schleiermacher's answer as *Letters*.

**[ii]** The whole decade is full of pamphlets and publications debating the opportunity and the modalities of "Jewish improvement" or "betterment", raising issues of education, acculturation and status. Furthermore, a growing number of Prussian Jews were also choosing conversion to Christianity (Mosse, 1995; Sorkin, 2000).

**[iii]** DJE, 68-71.

**[iv]** *Jerusalem or on Religious Power and Judaism* (Berlin, 1783); cited here in the translation of Allan Arkush; referred hereafter as *Jerusalem*.

**[v]** The expression „epidemic of baptisms“, *Taufepidemie*, refers to the large number of conversions to Christianity among the children and grandchildren of the first generation of maskilim. Lowenstein, 1992, 35-41).

**[vi]** It was with Teller's support that Dohm's seminal *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* was published in 1781. And it was also with Teller's approval that the Oppen Letter was published.

**[vii]** *Letters on the Occasion of the Political Theological Task and the Open Letter of Jewish Householders* (Berlin, 1799).

**[viii]** An excellent assessment of the complexities of Schleiermacher's thought on Judaism is given by J. W. Pickle in "Schleiermacher on Judaism" (1980); some of my arguments follow his. Another resource for the discussion here is in Newman 1993 (that does not discuss the texts of the Letters).

**[ix]** M. Pelli, who developed a thorough comparative analysis between the deist Enlightenment and the Haskalah, lists a number of arguments that show that, Mendelssohn, like Wessely, was not willing to jettison the Talmudic heritage, but sought to integrate it in his vision of a modernized Judaism (Pelli, 2006).

**[x]** The controversy on occasional conformity was an important and complex discourse that took place in England between 1698-1713; the argumentative development of this polemic engaged the satirical genius of Daniel Defoe, although its particular rhetorical register has never been fully examined.

**[xi]** The essay, "Thirty Nine articles of the English church and their adjuration", was published in 1784 in *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, 2, 24-43 (Bourel, 2004, 339).

**[xii]** I am currently working on an expanded analysis of the fallacies in this controversy, to be correlated and compared with the theological reasoning in Locke, Lessing, Kant, and Schleiermacher.

**[xiii]** I am using here the typology proposed by Marcelo Dascal in his "Theological Controversies" paper included in the series "Controversies in the Republic of Letters" (2001), further developed in "On the Uses of Argumentative Reason in Religious Polemics".

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