

There has always been a special connection between Judaism and German culture. Nowhere else has the assimilation and acculturation of the Jews to the social majority reached a higher degree and intensity than in Germany. Nowhere else have there been more ruthless means undertaken in order to eradicate the Jewish population. This project captures one of the deepest and most intimate connections between Jewishness and Germanness, namely the two-century-long dialog between the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and Jewish thought.

The main objective of the project is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the connections between Kant and Judaism in their philosophical – but also historical – complexity. Kant was popular among the Jewish student community and was considered a role-model by the younger generation of Jewish enlighteners when he was still alive. However, the stories describing this are well-known and exhaustively discussed in the literature, so in this regard the project synthesises the existing body of knowledge and enters into polemics only with several minor issues.

Drawing from the history of philosophy, the project discusses Kant's notion of Judaism in its most immediate ideological context. It analyses Kant's attitude toward the precursor of the Jewish Enlightenment, Moses Mendelssohn, and the shift from Kant's initial approval of Mendelssohn's politico-religious views to later disappointment with his unwillingness to abandon the Jewish law. Saul Ascher is another Jewish philosopher of the period significant in this context. His attitude toward Kant is ambivalent – on the one hand, he is a self-proclaimed Kantian, but on the other, he does not hesitate to severely criticize his teacher, for example by opposing the emphasis Kant puts on the discontinuity between Judaism and Christianity. The project treats this criticism as occasioning a reflection on Kant's authentic view of the commensurability of the Testaments. Kant's claims concerning Judaism are also juxtaposed with relevant ideas of J.G. Hamann and J.G. Herder – also Kant's contemporaries, who formulated coherent theories of Judaism critical of Mendelssohn's and Kant's theories. Another key issue is the formative role of Spinoza and Protestantism in the development of the Enlightenment discourse on the Jewish religion.

In its second major philosophical step, the project describes the posthumous reception of Kant among the Jewish thinkers who have been drawn to Kant's thought for its Jewish – and later anti-Jewish – overtones. As an original contribution to this discussion – which at the same time is a response to the Isaac Breuer's interpretation of Kant's works – a proposal is formulated to conceive of Kant's notion of freedom to be best realized by a system of ritual practices, the Jewish law being a primary example.

The turning point in the efforts to unite Kant's philosophy with Judaism was the Second World War. Since then, Jewish thought has been striving to separate Kant and Judaism. The project joins the debate about Kant's place in the German intellectual tradition which preceded the Holocaust. In this context, some commentators point to a direct path “from Kant to Auschwitz”, while others focus on the groundlessness of perceiving the Shoah as sanctioned by Kantian ethics. The project agrees with the latter view, but nevertheless stresses the point that Kant's moral theory overlooks – and hence cannot pre-empt – the possibility of the disinterested evil which characterizes the executors of Hitler's will like Adolf Eichmann, as described in Hannah Arendt famous book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

This notwithstanding, the project supports the existence of strong connections between the core of Kant's moral philosophy and Judaism, and therefore stands in direct opposition to authors such as Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who argue for the extraction of Kant from the Jewish intellectual tradition.