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Jehova-Isis: The Mysteries of Egypt and the Quest for Natural Religion in the Age of Enlightenment

Jan Assmann

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Leibniz
The Mystery of Experience
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Natural Religion in the
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Jon Assayag

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The second inscription relates to a framed sheet that stood on the desk of Ludwig van Beethoven, dating from about the same time period as the watch. The inscription, written in Beethoven's own hand, read as follows: "I am all that is. I am all that is, was and will be and no mortal has lifted my veil. He originated by himself and to him all things owe their being."¹

The third inscription was written by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the German poet, playwright, essayist and one of the most brilliant minds of German Enlightenment, on the wallpaper of Gleim's garden-house near Halberstadt when he visited Gleim on August 15, 1780. It was in Greek letters and read Hen kai pan, "One and All."²

The inscription on the watch is an encoded form of a Spinozistic manifesto. The three alephs, according to Moshe Barasch's explanation, stand for the name of God as revealed - or withheld - in Exodus 3:14: 'æhyæh 'asher 'æhyæh "I am

who I am/will be." The letters in the center - o and a - mean *omnia animata* ("all is animated") and render the Spinozistic concept of immanence. The sentences that Beethoven put in a frame and on his desk refer to a very similar concept. They were believed to derive from ancient Egypt. We may safely assume that these three sentences expressed Beethoven's personal motto, his concept of a Supreme Being. Lessing's inscription combined Spinoza and Egypt. He meant it as declaration of Spinozism and took it from a tradition that ultimately related it to Hermes Trismegistus.

What I want to illustrate by these inscriptions is how widespread was the conviction that they convey. They belong to an Enlightenment religion of reason and nature that was shared by all those whose project it was to form a concept of god that reached beyond the differences between revelation and reason. In the 18th century, Hermes Trismegistus is not the secret of esoteric circles of Alchemists, Rosicrucians, and other occultists. Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and Spinozism, believed to be ultimately derived from ancient Egyptian wisdom, have reached major parts of the cultural elite and have turned into the religion of the educated. What interests the Egyptologist is the enormous importance that is attributed to Egypt in this context. Lessing's motto and Beethoven's sentences were held to be Egyptian wisdom which was constantly asso-

ciated with Spinoza's concept of God. Egypt came to be viewed as the origin and homeland of natural religion. This widely shared conviction fuelled an interest in Egypt that eventually led to Napoleon's Egyptian expedition and the rise of Egyptology as an academic discipline. The deistic quest for a universal and natural monotheistic religion before and beyond revelation might still continue to belong to the hidden agenda of Egyptology. At least I myself experienced a shock of recognition when I came to read some of the English Deists during the preparation of this paper.

Beethoven found the three sentences which he put on his desk in an essay by Friedrich Schiller entitled "Die Sendung Moses" (1790).³ Schiller's essay was in turn based on the masonic book Die Hebräischen Mysterien by Karl Leonhard Reinhold.⁴ Reinhold was a philosopher who is still well known as one of the earliest and most influential adherents and propagators of Kantian philosophy.⁵ He entered the famous lodge *Zur Wahren Eintracht* ("True Concord") at Vienna in 1783⁶ when he was still a Jesuit, at the age of 25, passed all three grades, but flew in the same year from the Jesuit order to Leipzig, where he continued his philosophical studies. He married a daughter of Christoph Martin Wieland, joined him in editing the journal Teutscher Merkur, became well known by his Letters on Kant's phi-

losophy, and became professor extraordinarius of philosophy at Jena in 1787. His book on the Hebrew Mysteries was first published in 1786 in two issues of the Journal für Freymaurer and then as a monograph in 1788 at Leipzig. In this book, Reinhold interpreted the Mosaic legislation as a faithful copy or translation of what he calls “the Egyptian mysteries.”⁷ His interpretation is based on two voluminous works of English scholarship. One is John Spencer’s De Legibus Hebraeorum Ritualibus.⁸ The other is William Warburton’s The Divine Legation of Moses (1738-42).⁹ These two books, written by theologians, represented the best standard of Egyptology that was available at the time.

Ritual and Secrecy: Spencer

Spencer’s project was to demonstrate the Egyptian origin of the ritual laws of the Hebrews.¹⁰ In order to understand the novelty and the boldness of this undertaking, we must briefly consider how Spencer dislodged two crucial tenets of Christian theology. The first is the traditional Christian distinction between moral Law and ritual Law within the body of 613 prescriptions and prohibitions contained in the Torah. Moral Law is the decalogue, ritual Law is all the rest. Moral Law is eternal, ritual Law is temporal. Its validity is limited to the time-span between Moses and Jesus. The second presupposition is the ortho-

dox view that every coincidence between a Biblical Law and a pagan rite is a work of the devil, who is an ape of God. The Hebrew Law is the original model, and the pagan religions are diabolic institutions imitating this model. Spencer contradicted the second presupposition in showing Egypt to be the origin and the model for the ritual Law. He modified the first presupposition in introducing a distinction within the ritual Law and its dependence on pagan religion. One part of the Law is based on the principle of ‘normative inversion’ and is directed against its pagan model.¹¹ The other part is based on the principle of translation and is to be understood as a borrowing from Egypt.

Under the pretext of writing a work of orthodox scholarship, Spencer did quite a revolutionary thing: he shifted the focus from the timeless Moral Law to the long abolished Ritual Law, and, what was more, he tried to get access through this body of prescriptions and institutions to the rejected atrocities of Egyptian idolatry. Notwithstanding his strategic professions of Egyptophobia, his extremely diligent and well documented representation of Egyptian rites became one of the most important reference books for the Egyptomania of the 18th century.

The key term for Spencer’s book is “translation.” “Translation” refers not to texts but to rites and customs that are received from Egypt

not always in order to be supplanted and eventually overcome, but partly also to be preserved as something valuable. It is in this context that traditions about an Egyptian education of Moses become important. Spencer's Moses certainly knew Hieroglyphic writing which Spencer takes to be a secret code by which the Egyptian priests transmitted their wisdom to the initiated. His sources are Philo of Alexandria, De Vita Mosis lib 1, and for the nature of the hieroglyphic script, Porphyrius and Clemens Alexandrinus. In conformity with the usage of the time, Spencer uses the term hieroglyphics in a large sense comprising not only writing but all kinds of symbolism including iconography, ritual, sacred objects, taboos and prescriptions.¹² In the eight dissertations that form the third book of *De Legibus*, Spencer tries to prove the Egyptian origin of rituals such as the sacrifices, the scapegoat, lustrations, and lunar feasts, as well as tracing the Egyptian foundations for the tabernacle ceremonies including the ark and the Cherubim, the temple, and Urim and Thummim (the pectoral worn by the high-priest). The point of Spencer's theories of Egyptian influence is not whether they uncover the historical truth, but how much of Ancient Egyptian culture they are able to make visible and accessible. Spencer's historical explanation of the Mosaic legislation led to a second rediscovery of Egypt, the first being the Her-

metic tradition that started at the end of the 15th century with Marsilio Ficino. It opened a new and different window on ancient Egypt.

Of particular importance was Spencer's concept of secrecy: of transmitting a veiled truth, which he believed Moses to have learned in Egypt and translated into his law-code. Spencer subscribed to the conventional theory about Hieroglyphic writing that was based on Horapollon's two books on Hieroglyphs¹³ and especially on Athanasius Kircher's "decipherments."¹⁴ According to this theory, hieroglyphs were iconic symbols that referred to concepts. They were used exclusively for religious purposes such as transmitting "mystic" ideas that were to be kept secret from the common people. Also, a good many of the laws, rites, and institutions which God, by mediation of Moses, gave to his people, show this hieroglyphic character.¹⁵ The Law appears here as a "veil" (velum), a "cover" (involucrum), a shell (cortex) which transmits a truth by hiding it.

The distinction between a literal and a mystical or spiritual meaning of the Biblical text is, of course, not Spencer's invention. It goes back to Philo of Alexandria and plays a great role in Maimonides' explanation of the Law, the immediate model of Spencer's project. Spencer refers to Maimonides' concept of "verba duplicata" as drawing the distinction between *sensus literalis*

and *sensus mysticus*.¹⁶ For Spencer and Maimonides, the Law has to have a double meaning, because it has to fulfill a double function. Its primary or “carnal” function¹⁷ is to cure the people from their idolatric addiction and to educate them in their rudeness. Its secondary or “spiritual” function is to transmit higher truths to those who are capable of higher understanding.¹⁸ According to Philo, Moses learned this principle of double encoding—ten dia symbolon philosophias, the philosophy through symbols—from his Egyptian masters. It is for this reason that God chose Moses as his first prophet, a man “nourished with the hieroglyphic literature of Egypt” (*hieroglyphicis Aegypti literis innutritum*). “God wished, that Moses should write the mystic images of the more sublime things, for which purpose the hieroglyphic literature, in which Moses was educated, was fairly convenient.”¹⁹

It is probable, Spencer continues, that God transmitted certain sacred truths (*sacratiora quaedam*) in the Law under the veil of symbols and types (*symbolorum & typorum velis obducta*) in corresponding to the practice of the pagan, especially Egyptian, sages. He refers to the “ancients” (*Veteres*) and to “the entire book on Hieroglyphs” by Horapollon to substantiate his thesis that the practice to indicate everything of a more sublime character “in a mystic and, as it

were, nebulous way” was very much in vigour among the Egyptians.²⁰ It is therefore in order, Spencer concludes, “to hold that God gave the Jews a religion that was carnal only in frontispiece, but divine and wonderful in its interior, in order to accomodate his institutions to the taste and usage of the time lest his Law and cult should seem deficient in anything transmitted in the name of wisdom.”²¹

In this same context Spencer adduces one of those passages from Clement of Alexandria that are to gain a crucial importance for Reinhold’s and Schiller’s view of Egypt: *In adyto veritatis repositum sermonem revera sacrum, Aegyptii quidem per ea, quae apud ipsos vocantur adyta, Hebraei autem per velum significarunt.* “The Egyptians indicated the really sacred logos, which they kept in the innermost sanctuary of Truth, by what they called Adyta, and the Hebrews by means of the curtain (in the temple). Therefore, as far as concealment is concerned, the secrets (*ainigmata*) of the Hebrews and those of the Egyptians are very similar to each other.”²² These sentences open the door to a totally different understanding of the relationship between Egypt and Israel. Spencer does not yet enter through this door, but in the course of the 18th century it will become more and more important and eventually lead to a new and positive imaging of Egypt. Egyptian religion is seen as the

source of the same truth as Moses' monotheism. What Egypt kept secret under the veil of its hieroglyphs, Moses promulgated in form—but also under the veil—of legislation.

Arcane Theology, Mystery, and Initiation: Cudworth and Warburton

At the same time and even at the same place when and where Spencer did his research on Egyptian rites, another Hebraist at Cambridge wrote about Egyptian theology. Ralph Cudworth, professor regius of Hebrew, published his True Intellectual System of the Universe in 1678.²³ There is every reason to suppose that Spencer and Cudworth knew each other well. But their books are worlds apart. Spencer worked on the Mosaic Law as a historian. He wanted to show that everything is derived from Egypt and by doing so, he reduced revelation to translation. Cudworth was a Neoplatonist and belonged to the circle of Cambridge platonists. As such, he was beyond the Mosaic distinction between revelation and reason. His god was the god of the philosophers, and his enemy was not idolatry but atheism or materialism which, at the time, was commonly associated with the names of Thomas Hobbes and Baruch de Spinoza.

Cudworth wanted to confute atheism by proving that the recognition of One Supreme Being constitutes “the true intellectual system of

the universe," because—as Lord Herbert of Cherbury had already shown in 1624—the assertion "That there is a Supreme God" is the most common notion of all and what is common to all must be true.²⁴ Even atheism conforms with this common notion because the god whose existence it negates is precisely this one Supreme God and not one or all of the gods of polytheism. This common notion of theists and atheists alike can be defined as "*A Perfect Conscious Understanding Being (or Mind) Existing of it self from Eternity, and the Cause of all other things.*"²⁵

Especially interesting for our concern here is his claim that the idea of One Supreme Being is also shared by polytheism. In this context, Egypt becomes important, because it was generally held to have the most ancient and best known polytheistic religion. Cudworth distinguishes between self-existing gods and gods whose existence is dependent on other gods. No polytheism, he concludes, ever believed in the existence of several self-existent gods. There is always only one, from whom all the other gods derive. Every polytheism thus includes a latent monotheism. The form of inclusion is mystery or secrecy: polytheism for the many, monotheism for the few. This is what Cudworth shows with regard to Egypt. Cudworth reconstructs what he calls the "arcane theology" of ancient Egypt and shows that it is the theology of the One and

the All, *Hen kai Pan*. It is from this well known book that Lessing's motto must have derived. Cudworth takes his evidence from a number of sources, but especially from the *Corpus Hermeticum* which he held to be a late but authentic codification of ancient Egyptian wisdom and theology.

This chapter seemed closed once and forever since 1614 when Isaac Casaubon had exposed the *Corpus Hermeticum* as a late compilation and a Christian forgery.²⁶ Since then, the Hermetic tradition seemed to survive only in the form of occult under-currents such as the Rosicrucians, alchemy, theosophy, and so forth. This, at least, is the picture which Frances Yates has drawn of the Hermetic tradition.²⁷ But Frances Yates closed the chapter of Hermeticism much too early. Hermes Trismegistus had a triumphant comeback in the 18th century, and this was due to Cudworth's rehabilitation. In rescuing Hermes Trismegistus from Casaubon's devastating critique, Cudworth inaugurated a new phase of the Hermetic tradition which, in Germany, coincided with a wave of Spinozism. Cudworth showed that Casaubon made two mistakes. First, he was wrong in treating the whole corpus as one coherent text. His criticism affected only 3 of the 16 independent treatises. His verdict of forgery applies at most to these 3, but not to the corpus at a whole. Second, he was wrong

in equating text and tradition. The text is late, that much Cudworth is ready to admit. But according to him, this must be taken as a terminus ad quem and not a quo; it shows only how long this tradition was alive and not how late it came into being. And even the three "forgeries" must contain a kernel of truth otherwise they would not have worked. In this way, Cudworth was able to represent the doctrine of All-Oneness or Hen kai pan as the quintessence of Egyptian arcane theology. Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, and others who were initiated into the Egyptian mysteries brought this doctrine to Greece; Stoic and Neoplatonic philosophy transmitted it to the occident.

The concept of a mystery religion based on the arcane theology of "the One" was explained and illustrated by an incredible wealth of ancient quotations in William Warburton's Divine Legation of Moses. Like Spencer's book some 60 years earlier, Warburton's treatise represented the height of contemporary Egyptology. Under the guise of an apologetic refutation of Deism, Spinozism and free-thought, he appropriated all the arguments of his adversaries and did much for their dissemination. His book, notwithstanding its orthodox intentions, became a milestone in the development of Deism and contributed a wealth of material and arguments to its cause. In the footsteps of Spencer, Warburton

helped to construct the famous “double doctrine” hypothesis to establish a sharp antagonism between the so-called “overt” and “secret” rituals of pagan religion.

From Clement of Alexandria, Warburton took the distinction between “lesser” and “greater” mysteries. The lesser mysteries were equivalent to Egyptian religion in general. They were essentially a hieroglyphic encasement, designed to address the populace at large through symbolic icons, sensual rituals, and sacred animals; but they disclosed their signification only to those who proved able to understand their secret meaning, which generally consisted of teachings about the immortality of the soul and a future life where virtue would be rewarded and vice would be punished. The greater mysteries were administered only to the very few among the initiates whose minds and virtues were strong enough to stand the truth. This truth was essentially negative: it consisted in abolishing the illusionary scenery of polytheism. Initiation constitutes a process of disillusionment. By passing the threshold between the lesser and the greater mysteries, the initiate is supposed to abrogate his former beliefs, to recognize their erroneous and fictitious nature, and “to see things as they are.”²⁸ The disillusionment of the initiate is brought about by telling him, that the gods are just deified mortals and that there is only one invisible



and anonymous god, the ultimate cause and foundation of Being, "who originated all by himself, and to him all things owe their being." Here, we meet with the third of the three sentences which Beethoven put on his desk. It is taken from Eusebius and Clement of Alexandria who both quote an orphic hymn which Warburton interprets as the words by which the hierophant in the Eleusinian mysteries addresses the initiate (in Warburton's translation):

I will declare a secret to the initiated; but let the doors be shut against the profane. But thou, O Musaeus, the offspring of bright Selene, attend carefully to my song; for I shall deliver the truth without disguise. Suffer not, therefore, thy former prejudices to debar thee of that happy life, which the knowledge of these sublime truths will procure unto thee: but carefully contemplate this divine Oracle, and preserve it in purity of mind and heart. Go on, in the right way, and contemplate THE SOLE GOVERNOR OF THE WORLD: HE IS ONE, AND OF HIMSELF ALONE; AND TO THAT ONE ALL THINGS OWE THEIR BEING. HE OPERATES THROUGH ALL, WAS NEVER SEEN BY MORTAL EYES, BUT DOES HIMSELF SEE EVERYONE.²⁹

As the Eleusinian mysteries are, according to Diodorus and others, of Egyptian origin,³⁰ this Orphic hymn must also be based on an Egyptian model. According to Clement of Alexandria this last and highest initiation led to a point where all teaching ends, discursive instruction stops, and immediate vision takes over. "The doctrines delivered in the Greater Mysteries are concerning the universe. Here all instruction ends. Things are seen as they are; and Nature, and the workings of Nature, are to be seen and comprehended."³¹ On the last step of initiation, the adept is speechlessly confronted with Nature.

Warburton made great efforts to keep the god of the mysteries apart from the god of the philosophers, especially from Spinoza's *deus sive natura*.³² He did not want to associate the notion of high antiquity and original wisdom, which he attributed to the mysteries, with these 'materialistic' ideas. But this was exactly the effect of his book. His readers understood him to have shown that the original esoteric wisdom of the Egyptians taught the tenets of Spinozism and worshiped Nature as God. A typical example of this reception is P. A. d'Origny's book, L'Egypte ancienne (1762). Here, d'Origny argued that the ancient Egyptians, freed from agricultural labor by the productivity of their soil, were able to pursue the development of higher theology, and hence to arrive at an esoteric worship of Nature.

While the people worshiped nature in the shape of many local deities, the elite revered “The One infinite Being, Creator and Preserver of All.”³³ D’Origny explicitly defends the Egyptians against the accusation of atheism or materialism and refers to Spinoza in this context: “*S’il suffisait de s’être fait une chimère de divinité pour n’être point Athée, les Egyptiens qui adoraient la nature en general & même en détail dans leur sept dieux immortels, & dans un grand nombre de dieux terrestres et animaux, n’étoient point Athées: si au contraire l’ont doit regarder comme tels ceux qui, ainsi Spinoza, ne reconnoissent pour dieux que la nature ou la vertu de la nature répandue dans tous les êtres, les Egyptiens en general l’étoient certainement.*”³⁴ The Deists and Spinozists of the 18th century looked toward Egypt as the origin and homeland of their concept of god, and they drew their evidence from Warburton. The idea of a complete antagonism between official religion and mystery cult was especially influential. This was small wonder at a time when the ideas of Spinozism and Deism were disseminated in similar forms of esotericism and concealment.³⁵

Warburton constructed the relation of (“greater”) mystery to official religion in terms of contradiction. One was the negation of the other. The mystery cults were counter-religions; they would have destroyed the official religion if

their Greater Mysteries were made public. Official polytheism, however, was indispensable for the political order of the society. Warburton did not fully subscribe to the Deists' concept of pious fraud.³⁶ The official religion was not an imposture but inevitable, and as such it was a legitimate institution. It was coexistent and coextensive with the state. Only those who were chosen to rule the state were admitted to the Greater mysteries. For them it was necessary to know the full unveiled truth. For those who were to be ruled, the veiled truth was much more becoming. This was not fraud, but just human necessity. Only a divinely founded community could do without polytheism and mystery. This was what Warburton wanted to demonstrate with regard to Moses' community. Israel was the only divinely founded community. However, it was not by this demonstration that Warburton became influential, but by his complex and antagonistic construction of paganism. The idea that pagan religions developed and degenerated around a nucleus of original wisdom, which they enshrined and sheltered in a complex architecture of hieroglyphs and ceremonies, appealed to the age of enlightenment when the most advanced ideas were communicated within the esoteric circles of secret communities.³⁷

Nature and Revelation: Reinholt

Reinholt, who was a mason and an illuminist, belonged to two of these secret communities. His book on the Hebrew Mysteries closely follows Warburton but differs on one decisive point: he abolishes the distinction between Mosaic monotheism and pagan mystery religions that Warburton had so carefully constructed. He interpreted the Hebrew religion as a mystery religion as well. No religion can boast itself of possessing the unveiled truth. There is truth on both sides, and on both sides the truth is veiled. Reinholt thus equated the god of the Egyptian mysteries and of Moses' revelation. According to Reinholt, what Moses taught the Hebrews was nothing other than the secret counter-religion of the Egyptians. Moses was initiated because he belonged to the innermost circle of those chosen to rule instead of being ruled. Reinholt does not see any difference between the Egyptian, that is, Hermetic idea of the One, and Biblical monotheism. For him, Mosaic religion was mere enlightenment. Moses held God to be the God of the philosophers; he instituted a religion of reason, but gave it the outward appearance of mysteries which, therefore, can be interpreted as the oldest freemasonry.

Reinholt's personal and most important contribution to this discourse is his explanation of the Tetragrammaton. In this passage he is bas-

ing himself on Voltaire's account of the "rites égyptiens." But whereas Voltaire maintains that the Egyptians called the Supreme Being by a similar or even the same name as did the Jews, namely "I-ha-ho" or Iao, Reinhold bases his equation not on the sound but on the meaning.³⁸ He accepts the Hebrew etymology from hayah, translates the name quite traditionally as "I am who I am," but equates this formula with the inscription on the veiled statue at Sais: "I am all that is." This equation is the climax of his demonstration. He stages it as a mystical performance and revelation, appearing as a hierophant: "Brethren! Who among us does not know the ancient Egyptian inscriptions: the one on the pyramid at Sais: "I am all that is, was, and will be, and no mortal has ever lifted my veil," and that other on the statue of Isis: "I am all that is?" Who among us does not understand the meaning of these words, as well as in those days of the Egyptian initiate, and who does not know that they express the essential Being, the meaning of the name Jehova?"³⁹

Plutarch tells the story of the veiled image in Sais in the 9th chapter of his treatise *On Isis and Osiris*. He wants to show that the Egyptians were acting upon the principle that the truth can only be indirectly transmitted by means of riddles and symbols⁴⁰ and illustrates this point by three examples. The first is the custom to put Sphinxes at the doorways of the temples in order to insinu-

ate that their theology contained an enigmatic wisdom. The second is the veiled statue at Sais. The third example is the name of Amun, the highest Egyptian god, meaning “the hidden one.” At Sais, Plutarch writes, “the seated statue of Athena, whom they consider to be Isis also, bore the following inscription: ‘I am all that has been and is and will be; and no mortal has ever lifted my mantle.’”⁴¹ Nowhere does he speak of a pyramid, nor of another inscription. I do not know where Voltaire could have found or invented the shorter inscription “I am all that is.” Since Proclus quotes the same inscription in a more complete version which cannot be taken from Plutarch, there must be a common and possibly Egyptian source. In Proclus’ version, the additional sentence reads: “the fruit of my womb is the sun.”⁴² This corresponds precisely to Saite theology, because Neith was believed to have given birth to the sun. It is very improbable that in Egypt there ever was such a thing as a veiled statue, because the Egyptian cult images were hidden anyway in wooden shrines, and only made visible to the priest who opened the shrine during the daily ritual. But it is very possible that a statue in a hall or court yard that was open to visitors bore a Hieroglyphic inscription that could be interpreted in that way.⁴³

It is easy to relate Plutarch’s and Proclus’ renderings of the Saite inscription to authentic

Egyptian texts and theology. But it seems far more difficult to equate it with Yahveh's name and self-representation 'æhyæh 'asher 'æhyæh "I am who I am/will be." Reinhold does not even mention the obvious difference between the two propositions "I am all that is" and "I am who I am." In the first case, the deity points to the visible world or "nature" in a gesture of identification. In the second case, God points to nothing outside himself and thus withdraws the fundament of all cosmic identifications.⁴⁴ The Hebrew formula 'æhyæh 'asher 'æhyæh is the negation and refusal of every cosmic reference or "Cosmotheism." Cosmotheism means the abolition of the distinction between God and world. The term "cosmotheism" had been coined by Lamignon de Malesherbes with reference to the antique, especially Stoic worship of cosmos or mundus as Supreme Being. In his edition of Pliny the Elder's Natural History (1782) he commented on one of the most typical passages of this religion — *mundum, et hoc quocumque nomine alio coelum appellare libuit, cuius circumflexu teguntur cuncta, numen esse credi par est* — with the proposal to call Pliny "non un Athée, mais un *Cosmo-théiste*, c'est à dire quelqu'un qui croit que l'univers est Dieu."⁴⁵

Malesherbes could not have found a better term for what seems to be the common denominator of Egyptian religion, Alexandrinian

(Neoplatonic, Stoic, Hermetic) philosophy, and Spinozism, including the medieval traditions such as alchemy and Cabala that might have served as intermediaries. Jacobi applied the term to Spinoza's *deus sive natura* and to Lessing's *Hen kai pan*.⁴⁶ It is the difference between cosmotheism and monotheism, immanence and transcendence that is at stake. But Reinhold was not the first one to give the Hebrew Tetragrammaton a cosmotheistic reading. He was, in fact, following an antique tradition based on the Septuagint which renders the Hebrew formula "I am who I am" ('æhyæh 'asher 'æhyæh) as *Ego eimi ho on* "I am the being one."⁴⁷ Reinhold takes "I am the Being One" as meaning the same as "I am all that is." Vico already paraphrased 'asher 'æhyæh as "what I am" and "what is."⁴⁸ Here, we meet with the first of our inscriptions, the Spinozistic interpretation of Ex 3:14 as *omnia animata* on Moshe Barasch's bar mizva watch.

Reinhold does not merely take the Saitic formula to be the exact paraphrase of the Hebrew deity's name. He also interprets both, not as the revelation of a name, but rather as its withholding, or as the revelation of anonymity. The essence of the deity is too all-encompassing to be referred to by a name, and this kind of anonymity forms the common denominator of both formulae. For this idea of a Deus Anonymous he very aptly refers to Lactantius who, in his turn, quotes Hermes

Trismegistus: “*Hic (Trismegistus) scripsit libros, ... in quibus majestatem summi ac singularis Dei asserit, iisdemque nominibus appellat, quibus nos, Deum et patrem, ac ne quis NOMEN ejus requireret, ANONIMON esse dixit, eo quod Nominis proprietate non egeat, ob ipsam scilicet UNITATEM. Ipsius verba sunt: Deo igitur Nomen non est, quia solus est: nec opus est proprio vocabulo nisi cum discrimen exigit MULTITUDO, ut unamquamque personam sua nota et appellatione designes.*”⁴⁹ This is the anonymous god who will be so important for Schiller and Goethe and to whom we will revert later.

The closest parallel to Reinholt’s interpretation of the tetragrammaton and its equation to the Hermetic idea of God’s anonymity occurs in a text which was written more than two-hundred years before the publication of Spinoza’s Ethica (1677) and even some years before Marsilio Ficino’s translation of the Corpus Hermeticum (1471). I am referring to De docta ignorantia by Nicolaus of Cues.⁵⁰ “It is obvious,” Cusanus writes, “that no name can be appropriate to the Greatest one, because nothing can be distinguished from him. All names are imposed by distinguishing one from the other. Where all is one, there cannot be a proper name. Therefore, Hermes Trismegistus is right saying: ‘because God is the totality of things (*universitas*

rerum), he has no proper name, otherwise he should be called by every name or everything should bear his name. For he comprises in his simplicity the totality of all things. Conforming with his proper name—which for us is deemed ineffable and which is the tetragrammaton...—his name should be interpreted as ‘one and all’ or ‘all in one’ which is even better (*‘unus et omnia’ sive ‘omnia uniter’, quod melius est*).⁵¹ In this text, we already find the equation of the Hebrew tetragrammaton with Hermes Trismegistus’ anonymous god who is *unus et omnium*, “One and All” or *Hen kai pan*, as this ides is referred to by Lessing.

According to Reinhold, the Sinai revelation was nothing other than the open air performance of an Egyptian initiation ritual, administered not to the few select, but to a whole people. But there was a problem, and this problem forms the starting point for Reinhold’s ingenious explanation of the ritual laws of Moses as a mystery cult. The truth had to be revealed to a people unable to grasp it. According to Clement of Alexandria the identity of god and nature formed the last and decisive instruction in the mysteries. This threshold, however, was to be passed only by the very few who by strength of reason, learning, and virtue, could stand the truth they were to behold. This was nothing for weak minds and it was certainly nothing to be expected from a

whole people like the Hebrews, uncultured, coarse, and primitive as they were after 400 years of suppression and forced labor. Moses had to transform a deistic conception of the divine, patterned on the initiations of the Egyptian mysteries, into a theistic, personal, and "national" god, who became the object of blind belief and obedience. All Moses could save of his philosophical concept of God was the idea of unity. He declared his national god to be the only one and consequently designated his people as the chosen people. Moses, not being able to appeal to their understanding, had to appeal to their senses. He had to rely on miracles and bodily discipline. And as he could not possibly perform miracles every-day, he had to transform his new religion into a matter of the body instead of the soul. In this task, he could rely on his Egyptian culture. He translated the "hieroglyphic" surface, the outside structure of the Egyptian mysteries, into ritual prescriptions. The ritual Law of the Hebrews is the Mosaic equivalent of the Egyptian "lesser" mysteries. Faith or belief on the one hand, and bodily ("carnal") discipline (such as dietary laws) or halakha on the other, are nothing other than indispensable substitutes for reason and understanding.

To convey the notion of mystery in Hebrew religion, Reinhold's analysis focuses almost exclusively on the "hieroglyphic" decorations

surrounding the ark of the covenant and the veil conceiling the holy of holies in the Salomonic temple. As we have indicated earlier, Spencer had already claimed that all these details were taken from Egypt. According to the older patristic tradition established by Clement of Alexandria, the curtain is the equivalent of what in Egypt is called the “adyton” of the temple.⁵² But Reinhold dispenses with Spencer’s concept of condescension and accommodation. Jehova did not accommodate his truth to the erroneous customs and concepts of the time. The truth was already with the Egyptians. The truth is on both sides of the borderline, or rather, it is on neither of them. Both sides are only approaching truth in its ‘veiled’ form. The Mosaic revelation is a veil as well. Revelation dissolves into translation. The prevalent opposition of revelation and reason is immaterial in view of the equation of Jehova and Isis/Nature.

Nature and the Sublime: Schiller

It was by mere coincidence that Reinhold’s small book, published under a pseudonym, became known outside the esoteric circle of freemasonry. Friedrich Schiller taught history at the same university as Reinhold. He was acquainted with Christoph Martin Wieland and his daughter Sophie Wieland, who married Karl Leonhard Reinhold. He frequently met with the two and

mentions them in his letters. Reinhold's book inspired both Schiller's famous ballad, "Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais" (1795), and his essay, "Die Sendung Moses" ("The Legation of Moses," 1790).⁵³ For Schiller, the decisive discovery was the identification of the god of the philosophers and the god of reason and enlightenment with the deepest and most sublime secret of the Egyptian mysteries. Further, it was the demonstration that Moses learned about this sublime and abstract notion of God in the course of his Egyptian initiation and that he dared to—at least partly—reveal this knowledge to his people.

Schiller's essay on Moses is a close paraphrase of Reinhold's book. He adds nothing to Reinhold's arguments but just highlights those points which to his mind were most important. Schiller follows Reinhold and Warburton in the idea of an original monotheism, but unlike them, he views polytheism and mystery cults as later developments. Warburton and Reinhold stressed the political inevitability of both polytheism and of secrecy. The people had to be kept in awe in order to be governed. The institution of the state, of an official polytheistic cult, and of a belief in the immortality of the soul and a hereafter, were co-dependent, correlative, and contemporary achievements.

Schiller held a somewhat different view concerning these temporal developments. He ar-

gues the priority of ancient Egypt as the first society in history to build a state. The state subsequently brought about the division of labor and fostered a group of professional priests whose exclusive task was “the attention paid to things divine.”⁵⁴ It is only in this context that “the first idea of the unity of the supreme being could be formed in a human brain.” But this “soul-elevating idea” had to remain the exclusive property of a small group of initiates. It was impossible to communicate this to the people, because polytheism had long since become the prevailing tradition. The state was based on its institutions and nobody knew whether the new religion could support the political order.

Schiller, like Warburton and Reinhold, emphasizes the antagonistic relationship between official religion and mystery cult. But he does not explain polytheism as a strategic fiction necessary for civil society and political order, but as a consequence of natural decline. Secrecy was in Schiller’s opinion only a later development, necessary to protect the political order from a possibly dangerous truth and to protect the truth from vulgar abuse and misunderstanding. For this reason, the hieroglyphs were invented. Schiller thus recurs to the old misunderstanding concerning hieroglyphic writing which Warburton had taken such great pains to refute. Warburton wanted to show that hieroglyphic writing was originally a

completely normal script made for the regular uses of communication and storage, and only later developed into a kind of mystical cryptography and symbolism. This was because he wanted to keep hieroglyphs apart from the Hermetic Writings and to contradict Kircher who postulated that the hieroglyphic inscriptions contained the secrets of Hermetic philosophy. Warburton was right, but neither Reinhold nor Schiller paid any attention to this part of his detailed demonstration. According to Schiller, hieroglyphic writing and a complex ritual of cultic ceremonies and prescriptions were invented to form the exterior side of the mysteries. They were devised so as to create a "sensual solemnity" (*sinnliche Feierlichkeit*) as well as to prepare the soul of the initiate by emotional arousal to receive the truth.

The truth was to be revealed to the initiate only at the final climax of a very long period of instruction and preparation and consisted in the recognition of the "single supreme cause of all things" (*Die einzige höchste Ursache aller Dinge*). Like Reinhold, Schiller takes the Saitic formula "I am all that is, that was and that will be" to be the negation of a name and the proclamation of an anonymous god. He follows Reinhold in identifying the anonymous god of the mysteries with the god of Moses. Moses went through all the stages of initiation (which Schiller estimates as a matter of 20 years) until he was

brought to contemplate anonymous nature in its speechless sublimity.

At this point, Schiller introduces the notion of the “sublime,” which he links with the problem of naming and denomination: “Nothing is more sublime as the simple greatness with which the sages speak of the creator. In order to distinguish him in a truly defining form, they refrained from giving him a name at all.”⁵⁵ This is the sublime deity of the mysteries: abstract, anonymous, impersonal, invisible, and almost beyond the reach of human reason. In transcending the realm of human cognition, this unknowable deity would increasingly become identified with the sublimity of “Nature.”⁵⁶ In the same year (1790) Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft* appeared in which he mentions the veiled image at Sais and its inscription as the highest expression of the sublime: “Perhaps nothing more sublime was ever said or no sublimer thought ever expressed than the famous inscription on the temple of Isis (mother nature): ‘I am all that is and that shall be, and no mortal has lifted my veil.’ Segner availed himself of this idea in a suggestive vignette prefixed to his *Natural Philosophy*, in order to inspire beforehand the apprentice whom he was about to lead into the temple with a holy awe, which should dispose his mind to serious attention.”⁵⁷

Reinhold had doubtlessly sent his book

to Kant whom he admired. Kant uses Schiller's language of initiation in describing Segner's Vignette: "heiliger Schauer" (sacred awe), "feierliche Aufmerksamkeit" (solemn attention). All this is the more striking as the image Kant is referring to shows nothing of the sort. We see not a statue but a broken vase on a socle, and no inscription but a geometrical drawing. Before the socle, Isis is striding, accompanied by three putti who seem to measure her footsteps and movement with geometrical instruments. She wears a mantle, but she is not completely covered. The putti personify the natural sciences. But the veiled image of Sais was obviously not what the artist had in mind in creating this illustration.⁵⁸ The vignette renders the idea that Nature/Isis cannot be looked at upon her face, but only be studied a posteriori. The footsteps of Nature are mentioned in an Orphic hymn on Nature:

Thy feet's still traces in a circling course,
By thee are turn'd, with unremitting force.⁵⁹

One of the images in Michael Maier's Atalanta Fugiens illustrates the same motif. Nature is represented as a young woman, not veiled but wearing a veil that is dragging behind like a sail in order to render her swift motion.⁶⁰ A philosopher with a lantern is studying her footprints from afar.⁶¹

However, Kant is right insofar as the motif of the veiled image and its unveiling actually occurs as a favorite subject in title-pages of scientific and alchemistic books such as v. Segner's. The most famous example, though much later, is Thorwaldsen's engraving in Alexander von Humboldt's Geographie der Pflanzen with a dedication to Goethe, dating from 1817.⁶² Early examples are the frontispieces to Gerard Blasius, Anatome Animalium (1681)⁶³ and J.J. Kunkelius, Der Curieusen Kunst- und Werckschul Erster und Anderer Theil (1705),⁶⁴ where we not only see the unveiling of the veiled Isis, but also the sun as the fruit of her womb as rendered by Proclus. Of particular interest in this context is the extraordinary frontispiece that the Swiss-English artist Heinrich/Henry Fuseli contributed to Erasmus Darwin's poem The Temple of Nature (1803). It shows the unveiling of a statue of Isis (in the shape of the Ephesian *Diana multimammia*) by a priestess-hierophant with face averted and a female initiate, seen from the back, who kneels before the statue with gestures of rapture and terror. This engraving tries to capture the moment of the last initiation when the initiate is confronted with nature herself. Darwin's poem is largely based on Warburton's interpretation of the ancient mystery cults as esoteric and monotheistic nature worship.⁶⁵

Reinhold's ingenious equation of Isis and

Jehova amounts to much the same as Spinoza's famous formula "deus sive natura."⁶⁶ In the worship of nature, Deism, Spinozism, and Egyptomania met in a new religion or rather religiosity, to which Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi in 1785 applied Malesherbes' term "cosmo-theism." Cosmotheism appeared as an exit out of the antagonisms of revealed religion, out of truth and error, sin and redemption, faith and doubt, into a realm of evidence and innocence. The "cosmotheism" of early German romanticism is a return of Ancient Egypt. If the anonymous cosmic god or divine "nature" were given a name or a personification in the writings and engravings of the 18th and early 19th century, it was an Egyptian one: Isis.⁶⁷ Deus sive natura sive Isis: this is the way that Egypt returned in the religious climate of preromantic Spinozism. Egypt was imagined to be the historical incorporation of this Utopia,⁶⁸ the homeland of religio prisca or religio naturalis, "l'origine de tous le cultes."⁶⁹ In these years, European Egyptomania reached its climax. It is certainly not mere coincidence that in these same years Napoleon embarked for his Egyptian expedition, equipped with a staff of scholars, engineers, and artists, and that the results of this expedition led to the establishment of egyptology as an academic discipline. But it is one of the ironies of history that this same discipline contributed more than anything else to a

demystification of Egypt and to a total destruction of the dream that brought it into being.

NOTES

¹ Cf. A.F.Schindler, The Life of Beethoven, trans. et ed. by I. Moscheles, Mattapan: Gamut Music Company 1966 (1st ed. 1841), vol 2, p.163. "If my observation entitles me to form an opinion on the subject, I should say he (Sc. Beethoven) inclined to Deism; in so far as that term might be understood to imply natural religion. He had written with his own hand two inscriptions, said to be taken from a temple of Isis. These inscriptions, which were framed, and for many years constantly lay before him on his writing table, were as follows: -

I. I AM THAT WHICH IS: _ I AM ALL THAT IS; ALL THAT WAS; AND ALL THAT SHALL BE. - NO MORTAL HATH MY VEIL UPLIFTED!"

II. HE IS ONE; SELF-EXISTENT; AND TO THAT ONE ALL THINGS OWE THEIR EXISTENCE."

Beethoven's German text is shown in facsimile and reads: "Ich bin, was da ist //

// Ich bin alles, was ist, was war, und was seyn wird, kein sterblicher Mensch hat meinen Schleyer aufgehoben //

// Er ist einzig von ihm selbst, u. diesem Einzigen sind alle Dinge ihr Daseyn schuldig//"

The sentences are separated from each other by double slashes. The third seems to be added later; the writing is smaller and more developed.

See also E. Graefe, "Beethoven und die ägyptische Weisheit", in: Göttinger Miszellen 2 (1971) 19-21.

² The inscription, which is now lost, has been seen by Herder: cf. Erich Schmidt, Lessing. Geschichte seines Lebens und seiner Schriften, 2 vols., (Berlin, 1884-86) vol.2, p.804; Gotthold Ephraim Lessings Sämtliche Schriften ed. Karl Lachmann, 3rd. ed. (Berlin/Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1915), vol.22.1, p.IX; Karl Christ, Jacobi und Mendelssohn. Eine Analyse des Spinozastreits, Würzburg 1988, 59f.

³ Beethoven knew Schiller's essay "Die Sendung Moses"; in a conversation book from 1825 there is an entry by Matthias Artaria: "Have you read 'Ueber die Sendung Moses' by Schiller?" See Maynard Solomon, Beethoven Essays (Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1988) 347 n. 24. Solomon also very justly points out that these

sentences "were known to most educated persons in Beethoven's time and even found their way into the ritual of Freemasonry. I owe this reference to Annette Richards.

⁴ Decius, Br[uder] = [Karl Leonhard Reinhold], Die Hebräischen Mysterien oder die älteste religiöse Freymaurerey. In zwey Vorlesungen gehalten in der ... zu (Leipzig: Göschen, 1788). Decius was Reinhold's secret name as a member of the Illuminates (Fuchs 25).

⁵ On Reinhold cf. Gerhard W. Fuchs, Karl Leonhard Reinhold - Illuminat und Philosoph. Eine Studie über den Zusammenhang seines Engagements als Freimaurer und Illuminat mit seinem Leben und philosophischen Wirken (Frankfurt-Berlin-Bern-New York-Paris-Wien: P.Lang, 1994) where, however, this book by Reinhold is not mentioned.

⁶ Ignaz von Born, the Grand Master of True Concord, is the author of a book-length manuscript "Über die Mysterien der Ägypter", Journal für Freymaurer, 1.Jg., 1784, 17-132 (the mysteries of Egypt) based mostly on Diodorus and on Abbé Jean Terrasson's novel Séthos, see the following note. On von Born see Helmut Reinalter (ed.), Die Aufklärung in Österreich. Ignaz von Born und seine Zeit (Frankfurt/Bern/New York/Paris: P.Lang, 1991).

⁷ By 'Egyptian mysteries' is simply meant Egyptian religion in texts of the eighteenth century. The initiates are priests and form an 'order.' The general idea about Egyptian religion in the eighteenth century was informed by the novel by Abbé Terrasson, Séthos. Histoire ou vie, tirée des monuments, Anecdotes de l'ancienne Égypte; Ouvrage dans lequel on trouve la description des Initiations aux Mystères Égyptiens, traduit d'un manuscrit Grec, 1731, nouvelle édition, corrigée sur l'exemplaire de l'auteur, Paris: Desaint, 1767.

⁸ John Spencer, De Legibus Hebraeorum Ritualibus et Earum Rationibus, Libri Tres. Many editions: Cambridge 1685, The Hague 1686; Leipzig 1705; Tübingen 1732 in 2 vols.

⁹ William Warburton, The divine legation of Moses demonstrated on the principles of a religious deist, from the omission of the doctrine of a future state of reward and punishment in the Jewish

dispensation (London, 1738-1741; 2nd ed. London, 1778).

¹⁰ On Spencer cf. Francis Schmidt, "Des inepties tolérables. La raison des rites de John Spencer (1685) à W. Robertson Smith (1889), in: Archive de Sciences sociales des Religions 85 (1994) 121-136.

¹¹ By 'normative inversion' I understand the principle to prescribe what another society forbids and vice-versa. In antiquity, this principle had often been claimed to be the basis of Moses' institutions which were nothing other but merely an inversion of Egyptian customs. Tacitus found the most concise formulation of this principle: the Jews consider everything that we keep sacred as profane and permit everything that for us is taboo (*profana illic omnia quae apud nos sacra, rursum concessa apud illos quae nobis incesta*). This principle is commonly held to be an anti-semitic distortion, but even a Jewish interpreter such as Maimonides applies it to a very large extent to his interpretation of the Law. Spencer is certainly not an anti-semitic but just following Maimonides whom he greatly admires. See Moses Maimonides, Dalat al-ha'irin (Moreh Nebukhim). Trans. Shlomo Pines: The Guide of the Perplexed. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1963.

¹² For the extended meaning of "hieroglyphics" in Western tradition see the excellent study by L. Dieckmann, Hieroglyphics. The History of a Literary Symbol (St.Louis: Washington UP, 1970).

¹³ G. Boas, The Hieroglyphics of Horapollon, Bollingen series XXIII, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1950); E. Iversen, The Myth of Egypt and its Hieroglyphs (Copenhagen: Gad, 1961), 47-49.

¹⁴ On A. Kircher see E. Iversen, The Myth of Egypt, 92-100.

¹⁵ Spencer took the fascinating idea that some of the laws are in fact hieroglyphs because they relate to the symbolic value of things, from Clement of Alexandria see Spencer, De legibus lib III, p.255 with reference to Clement of Alexandria, Stromata lib.5, p.m.571.

¹⁶ Spencer, 154 with reference to Maimonides and to the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Berakhot, cap. 5 sub fin.

¹⁷ *sarkikos*: in Greek, p.161.

¹⁸ Eusebius already made the same distinction: “Moses ordered the Jewish plebs to be committed to all the rites which were included in the words of their laws. But he wished that the others, whose mind and virtue were stronger, as they were liberated from this exterior shell, should accustom themselves to a philosophy more divine and superior to common man, and should penetrate with the eye of the mind into the higher meaning of the laws.” (*Judaeorum plebem quidem, ritibus omnibus quomodo Legum ipsarum verbis concepti erant, Moses obstrictam, teneri iussit. Caeteros autem, quorum mens esset virtusque firmior, cùm eo cortice liberatos esse, tum ad diviniorem aliquam et homini vulgo superiorem Philosophiam assuescere, & in altiorem Legum earum sensum mentis oculo penetrare, voluit.*) Praep. Evang. I. 7 cap. 10, p.m. 378. Spencer, p. 156.

¹⁹ ... *Deum voluisse ut Moses mystica rerum sublimiorum simulacra scribebat, eo quod huiusmodi scribendi ratio, literaturae, qua Moses institutus erat, hieroglyphicae non parùm conveniret* (p.157).

²⁰ Origen is quoted who attributes the same “mystical mode of philosophizing” to the Persians (Contra Cels., lib.1, p.11.) and Clement of Alexandria, who holds that “all theologians (*pantes theologisantes*), Barbarians and Greeks, concealed the principles of reality and transmitted the truth only by means of riddles, symbols, allegories, metaphors and similar tropes and figures: Clem.Alex., Strom., lib.5, p.m.556.

²¹ p. 157: *aequum est opinari, Deum religionem, carnalem quidem in frontispicio, sed divinam et mirandam in penetrali, Judaeis tradidisse, ut instituta sua ad seculi gustum et usum accomodaret, nec quicquam sapientiae nomina commandatum, Legi vel cultui suo deesse videatur.*

²² Spencer combines two distant passages from Clement’s stromata: 19.3 and 41.2; Reinhold quotes the same sentences, obviously after Spencer, on p.83.

²³ Ralph Cudworth, The true Intellectual System of the Universe: the first part, wherein All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is confuted and its Impossibility demonstrated (London, 1678. 2nd

ed. London, 1743).

²⁴ Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, De veritate (Paris, 1624).

²⁵ Cudworth, 195.

²⁶ De rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes XVI. Ad Cardinalis Baronii Prolegomena in Annales, London 1614, p.70ff.
Cf. Frances A. Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition (Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 1964) 398-403.

²⁷ See F. Yates, Giordano Bruno, and id., The Rosicrucian Enlightenment (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

²⁸ Warburton 1:190 quoting Clement of Alexandria.

²⁹ Warburton 1:202 quoting Clement of Alexandria, Admonitio ad gentes, ed. Sylburgh p.36B and Eusebius, Praep. Evang. lib. xiii.
The capitalization is Warburton's.

³⁰ Warburton, 223 and passim, cf. esp. 201.

³¹ Clem. Alex. Strom., I.5 p.424C ed. Sylburgh. Warburton I, 191.

³² The question as to whether Spinoza's famous equation of God and nature was derived from Qabbalistic sources, especially from Herrera's puerta del cielo, was much debated during the eighteenth century: cf. Gershon Scholem, "Die Wachtersche Kontroverse über den Spinozismus und ihre Folgen," Spinoza in der Frühzeit seiner religiösen Wirkung, Wolfenbütteler Studien zur Aufklärung 12, eds. Karlfried Gründer and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1984), 15-25. On other possible Jewish sources of Spinoza's famous equation "deus sive natura" cf. Moshe Idel, "Deus sive natura — les métamorphoses d'une formule e Maimonide à Spinoza," Maimonide et la mystique juive, Paris: 1991) 105-136. Closer to Spinoza is Giulio Cesare Vanini who wrote in his De admirandis Naturae reginae deaeque mortaliū arcanis Dialogus L, De Deo, ed. L. Corvaglia, Le opere di Giulio Cesare Vanini e le loro fonti (Milan etc., 1934), vol. II, 276: "Man should live according to natural law alone, because *nature, which is God* (because it is the principle of movement), has engraved this law in the hearts of all men (*In unica Naturae Lege, quam ipsa*

Natura, quae Deus est (est enim principium motus) in omnium gentium animis inscripsit” (quoted after S. Berti, Il Trattato dei tre impostori (Milan: Einaudi, 1994), 272 cf. M. Jacob, Radical Enlightenment, 39. In the older treatise De tribus Impostoribus (beginning with the words “Deum esse”) we read “*hoc Ens ... alii naturam vocant, alii Deum*”, see Wolfgang Gericke, Das Buch “De Tribus Impostoribus” (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1982), 61 §7. Cf. also Giordano Bruno, The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast, ed. and trans. Arthur D. Imerti (Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1964), p. 240: “So, then, that God, as absolute, has nothing to do with us except insofar as he communicates with the effects of Nature and is more intimate with them than Nature herself. Therefore, *if he is not Nature herself, he is certainly the nature of Nature*, and is the soul of the Soul of the world, if he is not the Soul herself.” A similar idea that has, as far as I can see, not yet been taken into account is the Renaissance theory of art as an imitation of “*nature, that is, God*” which, as Jan Bialostocki has pointed out occurs already with Alberti, cf. “The Renaissance Concept of Nature and Antiquity,” The Message of Images. Studies in the history of Art (Vienna: IRSA Verlag, 1988) 64-68, esp. 68 with n. 51-54.

³³ Pierre-Adam d’Origny, L’Egypte ancienne ou mémoires historiques et critiques sur les objects les plus importantes de l’histoire du grand empire des Egyptiens, 2 vols., Paris 1762, vol. II, 148f., after D. Syndram, Ägypten-Faszinationen. Untersuchungen zum Ägyptenbild im europäischen Klassizismus bis 1800, Frankfurt/Bern/New York/Paris 1990, 61.

³⁴ loc. cit., 195, after Syndram, Ägypten-Faszinationen, 322 n.179.

³⁵ See especially Margaret C. Jacob, The Radical Enlightenment. Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans (London: Allen, 1981).

³⁶ The most influential advocate of the fraud theory of religion was Fontenelle, cf. F.E. Manuel, The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods, Cambridge Mass., 1959, ch. 2 (“The Grand Subterfuge”). The basic idea of this theogico-political theory which goes back to Greek (Kritias) and Latin authors (Livius, Cicero, Lucretius) is, that religion was invented to keep people in awe in order to force them into keeping the Law.

³⁷ Cf. Karl F.H. Frick, Licht und Finsternis, part 2, Graz 1978; Rolf Christian Zimmermann, Das Weltbild des jungen Goethe. Studien zur hermetischen Tradition des deutschen 18.Jahrhunderts, 2 vols., Munich: W. Fink, 1969-1979; P.Chr. Ludz (ed.), Geheime Gesellschaften, Wolfenbütteler Studien zur Aufklärung vol V/1, Heidelberg 1979.

³⁸ De rites égyptiens, in: Essay sur le moeurs des peuples §XXII (Oeuvres de Voltaire, ed. M. Beuchot, Paris 1829, vol. XV, 102-106, cf. p.103: "Le nom même le plus sacré parmi les Egyptiens était celui que les Hébreux adoptèrent, I ha ho. On le prononce diversement: mais Clément d'Alexandrie assure dans les Stromates, que ceux qui entraient dans le temple de Sérapis étaient obligés de porter sur eux le nom de I ha ho, ou bien de I ha hou, qui signifie le Dieu éternel."

³⁹ Reinhold, 54. The passage is almost a translation of Voltaire, loc.cit., 193: "Il se serait fondé sur l'ancienne inscription de la statue d'Isis, "Je suis ce qui est"; et cette autre, "Je suis tout ce qui a été et qui sera; nul mortel ne pourra lever mon voile". Is Voltaire the author of this curious duplication of the Saitic inscription?

⁴⁰ Clem.Alex., Strom., lib.5, p.m.556.

⁴¹ egw eimi pan to gegonos kai on kai esomenon - Plutarch, De Iside et Osiride, ch.9 (354C) ed. J.Gw. Griffiths (Swansea: University of Wales Press 1970) 130f., 283f. J. Hani, La religion égyptienne dans la pensée de Plutarque (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1976) 244f.

⁴² Proclus, In Tim. 30, s. Griffiths, loc.cit. 283. Proclus quotes the image at Sais and its inscription in his commentary on Timaios and in the context of Solon's vivit to the priests of Sais.

⁴³ If retranslated into Egyptian, the last part of the Saitic formula may read something like *nn kjj wp hr:j " which can be translated in two different ways. The correct translation would be "there is nobody except me," a monotheistic formula that occurs twice in Akhenaten's hymns and which would be perfectly fitting in the context of a phrase like "I am all that was, is, and will be" (which, in Egyptian, would be something like "I am yesterday, I am today, I am tomorrow" for which there can be quoted several parallels (Pap.

Turin 1993 [10] vso. 2 = J.F.Borghouts, Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts, Nisaba 9 [Leiden: Brill, 1978] Nr. 102, S.74). But a priest or dragoman who was not absolutely fluent in the Classical language could understand the words *wp hr* which mean “except” in their literal meaning “open the face” and render the whole phrase as “there is nobody who opened, or: uncovered my face.” Very possibly, the priests were neoplatonists themselves and discovered the other reading as a secret meaning. In a greco-egyptian magical text, however, Isis is summoned to lift her sacred cloth: Papyrus Graecae Magicae ed. Preisendanz, no. LVII, 16-18. In his dissertation Le culte de Neith à Sais (Paris, 1888), Dominique Mallet proposed a passage from pap. Louvre 3148 for the Egyptian prototype of Plutarch’s and Proclus’ inscription. This is an invocation of the mother-goddess personifying the realm of the dead: “Oh great goddess whose mummy-clothes can not be loosened, whose bandages are not to be loosened.” The identification of Schiller’s veiled image of Sais with the deity of death as a mother-goddess opens very interesting perspectives, but does certainly not correspond to what Schiller had in mind.

⁴⁴ Concerning Ex 3,14 cf. O. Grether, Name und Wort Gottes im Alten Testament (Gießen: A.Töplemann, 1934, 3ff.); W. v. Soden, Bibel und Alter Orient (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985), 78-88; G. Fohrer, Geschichte der israelitischen Religion (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969) 63ff.; J.C. de Moor, The Rise of Yahwism, (Leuven: Leuven UP, 1990) 175; 237ff.

⁴⁵ Emmanuel J. Bauer, Das Denken Spinozas und seine Interpretation durch Jacobi (Frankfurt/Bern/New York/Paris: P.Lang, 1989) 234ff.

⁴⁶ Jacobi refers to Malesherbes as the author of the term. He rejects it as being an “insincere euphemism” for atheism cf. Hermann Timm, Gott und die Freiheit, Bd.I: Die Spinoza-Renaissance, (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1974) 226ff. But as early as 1699, Johann Georg Wachter used the somewhat similar term “vergötterte Welt” (idolized world) with regard to Spinoza. Cf. Gershom Scholem, “Die Wachtersche Kontroverse” 15-25, esp. p.15.

⁴⁷ Cf. W. Beierwaltes, “Reuchlin und Pico della Mirandola”, in: Tijdschrift voor Filosofie, 56, 1994, 313-336, esp. 330-334. In one of the so-called “Sibyllinian Oracles” this self-presentation of the

Biblical god is interpreted in the sense of the universal God, le dieu cosmique:

"I am the being one (eimì d'égw-ge o wn), recognize this in your spirit: I donned heaven as my garment, I clothed myself with the ocean, the earth is the ground for my feet, air covers me as my body and the stars revolve around me," see R.Merkelbach, M.Totti, Abrasax. Ausgewählte Papyri religiösen und magischen Inhalts, Bd. 2, Gebete (Abh. der rhein.-westf. Akad. d.Wiss., Sonderreihe Papyrologica Coloniensis, Opladen 1991, 131.

⁴⁸ Leon Pompa, ed. and trans., Vico: Selected Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), 53 (from On the ancient Wisdom of the Italians).

⁴⁹ "He wrote books in which he confirmed the majesty of the highest and sole god, calling him by the same names as we do such as 'God' and 'Father', but (lest anyone should require a proper name of him) and he said that God was anonymous lest there was anybody to inquire about his proper name affirming him to be anonymous; God did not need a name because of his unity. These are his own words: 'God has, therefore, no name, because he is unique': there is no need for a proper name except for the sake of distinction among a plurality, in order to designate one and the same person by its proper appellation." Reinhold, p.54; Lact., Div.Inst. i.6. Capitals and Italics are Reinhold's. Reinhold found the quote from Lactantius in Warburton, II, 568/9. However, there are worlds of difference between Reinhold's interpretation of this passage and Warburton's pedestrian argumentation. Warburton wants to show that the Hebrews were so much addicted to Egyptian idolatry that they forgot about the unity of God and thought of asking for his name. "Out of indulgence therefore to this weakness, God was pleased to give himself a name.

⁵⁰ Aleida Assmann drew my attention to this important text.

⁵¹ Nicolaus Cusanus, De docta ignorantia I, cap. xxiv.

⁵² Cf. supra, n. 20.

⁵³ Friedrich von Schiller, Die Sendung Moses' ed. H. Koopmann, Sämtliche Werke IV: Historische Schriften. (München: Winkler, 1968) 737-757.

⁵⁴ “die Sorge für die göttlichen Dinge,” Schiller, Die Sendung Moses, 743)

⁵⁵ “Nichts ist erhabener, als die einfache Größe, mit der sie von dem Weltschöpfer sprachen. Um ihn auf eine recht entscheidende Art auszuzeichnen, gaben sie ihm gar keinen Namen” (Schiller, p. 745).

⁵⁶ On Isis as a personification of “mother Nature” cf. P. Hadot, Zur Idee des Naturgeheimnisses. Beim Betrachten des Widmungsblattes in den Humboldtschen ‘Ideen zu einer Geographie der Pflanzen’, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz, geistes- und sozialwissenschaftliche Klasse Abh.8, Wiesbaden 1982. In the iconological tradition of the 18th c., the Sphinx came to denote the same idea of “the secrets of nature”, cf. Syndram, Ägypten-Faszinationen, 216-219. The sphinx, for this reason, played an important role in the decorations of gardens. The comte de Caylus gives an ingenious explanation: the Sphinx, being a combination of virgin and lion, symbolizes the two signs of the zodiac during which the annual inundation of the Nile is taking place (Syndram, 217 with n.873).

⁵⁷ “vielleicht ist nie etwas Erhabeneres gesagt oder ein Gedanke erhabener ausgedrückt worden als in jener Aufschrift über dem Tempel der Isis (der Mutter Natur): “Ich bin alles was da ist, was da war und was da sein wird, und meinen Schleier hat kein Sterblicher aufgedeckt”. Segner benutzte diese Idee, durch eine sinnreiche, seiner Naturlehre vorgesetzte Vignette, um seinen Lehrling, den er in diesen Tempel einzuführen bereit war, vorher mit dem heiligen Schauer zu erfüllen, der das Gemüth zu feierlicher Aufmerksamkeit stimmen soll” (transl. after J.H.Bernard, trans., Kant, Critique of Judgment [New York: Hafner Press, 1951], with slight alterations).

⁵⁸ Johann Andreas von Segner, Einleitung in die Natur=Lehre (Göttingen 31770), quoted after Adolf Weis, Die Madonna Platytera. Entwurf für ein Christentum als Bildoffenbarung anhand der Geschichte eines Madonnenthemas (Königstein i.T.: Langewiesche, 1985) 9-10 and P. Hadot, Zur Idee des Naturgeheimnisses, 9-10.

⁵⁹ Transl. T. Taylor, "The Hymns to Orpheus" = Kathleen Raine, George Mills Harper, eds., Thomas Taylor the Platonist, Bollingen ser. LXXXVIII (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969) 222.

⁶⁰ This form of veil is called 'aura velificans' (veil-forming breeze) in Roman art.

⁶¹ Frances A. Yates, The Rosicrucian Enlightenment, 82 fig. 23 facing p. 96. F. Yates refers in a footnote to G. Bruno, Articuli adversus mathematicos (Prague, 1588) preface, and to her book Giordano Bruno, 314-5 for the history of this motif.

⁶² Ideen zu einer Geographie der Pflanzen (1817) with the subtitle: "Der Genius der Poesie entschleiert das Bild der Natur". Cf. Hadot, loc.cit.

⁶³ Amsterdam; see Hadot, loc.cit., fig.2.

⁶⁴ Nürnberg, see Weis, loc. cit., 12 fig. 3.

⁶⁵ Irwin Primer, "Erasmus Darwin's Temple of Nature: Progress, Evolution, and the Eleusinian Mysteries," in Journal of the History of Ideas vol. xxv.1 (1964) 58-76. I owe this reference to Stuart Harten. Primer compares this engraving with the frontispiece to Peyrard's essay De la nature et de ses Lois (Paris, 1793), where not a statue, but the Ephesian Diana herself is shown to be unveiled by the sitting figure of a bearded, elderly man, probably Chronos/Kronos, the personification of time. This picture seems more in the tradition of "veritas filia temporis": the unveiling of secrets and the development of learning and knowledge by the progress of time.

⁶⁶ At the time of his writing Die Hebräischen Mysterien, Reinhold was in fact planning a dissertation on Spinoza and Spinozism, cf. Fuchs, Reinhold, 155 n. 115.

⁶⁷ Cf. Hadot, loc.cit.

⁶⁸ On the image of Egypt as the "Golden Age" of humanity cf. D. Syndram, Ägypten-Faszinationen, 54-61. Egypt was widely held to be the origin of civilization, of the arts and sciences as well as of legislation, political and social organization. According to

Syndram, the most influential promoters of this extremely positive image of Egypt were Bossuet, de Goguet and the Comte de Caylus, to which list one must add the name of Abbé Jean Terrasson.

Bossuet published his *Histoire universelle* in 1681. Antoine-Yves de Goguet's book De l'origine des loix, des arts et des sciences et leur progrès chez les anciens peuples appeared in Paris 1758 in three vols. The 7 vols. of Anne Claude Philippe Comte de Caylus, Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques et romaines appeared between 1752 and 1767 in Paris. Bossuet and d'Origny explicitly addressed their reconstruction of Egyptian history and civilization to Louis XIV and XV respectively as a model of tolerant and enlightened absolutism (d'Origny: Syndram, 58).

Exaggerated as this praise of Egypt appeared to many of the less conservative contemporaries, it met with strong opposition especially in the circles of the Encyclopédie, cf. Syndram, loc.cit., 68-72. Ignaz von Born devised his "Egyptian Mysteries" (cf. n.2), which were the base of Mozart's and Schikaneder's opera "The Magic Flute" as a model of enlightened statemanship for emperor Joseph II who was himself a mason. Cf. Syndram, pp.273-74 with interesting quotations.

⁶⁹ C.F.Dupuis, Origine de tous les cultes, ou la religion universelle, 12 Bde. in 7, Paris 1795; 1822, cf. M. Bernal, Black Athena I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP 1987) 181-183.